



Figure 1 *The Throckmorton Theatre* by Victoria Mimiaga.

A Portal to the Imaginal: Steve Coleman and the Mill Valley Throckmorton Theatre

Thomas Singer

Everything can happen

Everything is possible and probable.

Time and Space do not exist.

On a flimsy framework of reality

The imagination spins,

Weaving new patterns.

-August Strindberg. A Dream Play.

In the small town of Mill Valley, nestled at the base of Mt. Tamalpais and just north of San Francisco, sits the Throckmorton Theatre (Figure 1). It has served as a community center for film and a variety of performing arts for over one hundred years. It first opened showing Charlie Chaplin movies in 1915 and more recently has witnessed a spirited renaissance under the direction of Lucy Mercer. It has attracted artists, musicians and performers from around the globe, offering music concerts and festivals, comedy, youth theatre productions, salons, classes and art exhibitions. Musicians including Carlos Santana, Norah Jones, Huey Lewis and Sammy Hagar; comedians like Robin Williams, Mort Sahl, and Dana Carvey; actors such as Ed Asner, Diane Wiest, and Tony Shalhoub; and community members from diverse parts of the area have all felt at home and creatively inspired on the theatre's stage.

Steve Coleman and the COVID Moment



Figure 2 Steve Coleman at his desk.

Among the many treasures of the Throckmorton Theatre, none has played a more important role than Steve Coleman (Figure 2), a resident of Mill Valley since his childhood in the mid-1950s. Steve has been the set designer and much more at the Throckmorton Theatre for twenty years. In turn, the Throckmorton Theatre has served as his studio, workshop, and playground for collaborative projects. Steve's personality, energy, talent, and spirit are a living portal to the imaginal. He embodies a bridge between our everyday reality of twenty-first-century America and other times and

places, including psychic spaces and realities. Steve does not use a cell phone; he does not use computers; he does not own a car. He carries a sketch book at all times (Figures 3 and 4) and his imagination roams the natural world and other historic eras as he evokes a world that beckons with delight, enthrallment, and mystery.



Figure 3 Sketches by Steve Coleman.



Figure 4 Sketches by Steve Coleman.

During the era of COVID, Steve has come to play an even more special role at the Throckmorton Theatre. He would never claim to be a shaman, but he and his collaborators have taken on the responsibility of keeping the spirit of the theatre alive in the dark times of the pandemic. Steve spoke to me about the impact of the siege of COVID on the Throckmorton Theatre:

“It makes me so sad when I see the empty stage and just the columns on the sides of the proscenium. It’s like I could sense all the ghosts of all the people that ever performed in the theatre. I have seen so many performances, so many hours of being with the performers and felt the connection with the audience. And, it would make me weep because it’s all lost. I mean we’ve just been in a state of frozen disconnection.”

The images in this paper are strictly for educational use and are protected by United States copyright laws. Unauthorized use will result in criminal and civil penalties.

“A state of frozen disconnection” is a good description of what happens when a pandemic strikes and when the dark mood of a dystopian vision of the world takes possession of the collective psyche as it has in this contemporary time. Among its many casualties is the capacity to imagine a positive future. In such a mood of profound dis-ease, fear, anger, uncertainty, sadness and loss, Steve took on with an unassuming charisma the role of breathing life into a theatre on life support.

Some two months after the theatre had to shut down in March 2020, a Throckmorton leadership team consisting of Steve Coleman, Lucy Mercer, Mary Dilts and Bruce Treymane gathered for a group Tarot reading (after all, this is Mill Valley, California and the esoteric has its place and meaning). The question that the four held in their minds and hearts while consulting the Tarot concerned the future of the theatre. With the duration of the shutdown unknown, could the down time be used to imagine potential new beginnings? What were some strategies for survival during COVID? The overall theme that emerged from the reading was “the Moon” which, according to the *Wild Unknown Tarot Guidebook* (by Kim Krans 2012) suggested to them: “the shadow realm, where dreams, fears and mysteries are born. Many great artists have roamed this inner landscape. It’s where imagination and creativity drift freely upon the midnight air.” In the photograph next (Figure 5), Steve is accompanied at the Tarot reading by his long time alter-ego puppet companion in his tattered clothes whom he describes as “a character who has outlived his period of history and has left that world behind, only to find himself disheveled and disoriented in a contemporary world that he sees filtered through the lens of another time and world.”



Figure 5 Steve “drifting freely upon the midnight air” of the Tarot reading, accompanied by his long-time puppet companion.

Shortly after the Tarot reading, the project to keep the theatre alive took its first concrete form in a modest way. Steve assembled a miniature of the theatre itself in one of the theatre's front windows. It quickly became an evolving exhibit that morphed into a structure that housed a three act play about moles, starring J. Arthur Mole (Figure 6).



Figure 6 COVID Mole production in the Throckmorton Theatre front window, starring J. Arthur Mole.

Lights were strung up in the window and placed on a timer so it appeared as if there was a performance going on in the mini theatre every night. As it turned out, the doors of the larger theatre would remain closed to the public for more than a year and yet the miniature theatre appeared to be thriving in its pretend offering of fantasy performances. People would walk by the theatre day and night, pausing to see what new thing had taken shape. A regular “audience” developed: nannies with kids, grandparents

with their grandchildren. A woman and her husband, who suffers from Alzheimer's, became regulars. Her husband loved the windows because it brought back memories. Steve and his colleagues began to get feedback that their attempt to keep the spirit of the theatre alive was working. As Steve had always wanted to start a puppet theatre at the Throckmorton, the next incarnation of the front window was an exhibit of puppets (Figure 7).



Figure 7 COVID puppet show in front window of Throckmorton Theatre.

These early front window displays turned out to be just the beginning of what was to unfold. The pandemic and the initial experimental “theatre” in the front window set the stage for Steve to begin imagining with his collaborators a much more elaborate exhibit on the theatre’s mezzanine, a generous space between the first and second floors of the theatre. Actual work on the mezzanine began in November 2020 and six months later the first public tours began in April 2021. It is essential to underline the collaborative

nature of this project. All who participated (even this writer after the project was fully installed) shared in a collective burst of spontaneous energy that allowed them to generate another level of reality through their combined efforts, which are needed to sustain the creative genius of the Throckmorton Theatre and other organizations like it. Steve and his collaborators constructed an evocative history of the theatre by creating a series of three-dimensional miniature sets or dioramas. These were not intended to be a literal narrative of the Throckmorton's past. Rather, the goal of the project was to stimulate the memories and spirit of the theatre by evoking a connection to the imaginal, a meeting ground, and a place of active exchange.

The Stuff (Prima Materia) of the Exhibit: Steve's Alchemical Workshop



Figure 8 *Steve Coleman's studio at the Throckmorton Theatre.*

The images in this paper are strictly for educational use and are protected by United States copyright laws. Unauthorized use will result in criminal and civil penalties.

Steve Coleman’s studio/workshop (Figure 8) in the Throckmorton Theatre can seem chaotic with its overwhelming number of random objects, but its richness and warmth are the very essence of Steve’s *prima materia*—the basic material out of which he makes extraordinary scenes that tell a story or hint at unseen mysteries. Just being in Steve’s workspace made me feel as though I was simultaneously in his space and in Isak’s rich, overstuffed shop (Figures 9 and 10) in Ingmar Bergman’s wondrous 1983 film *Fanny and Alexander*.

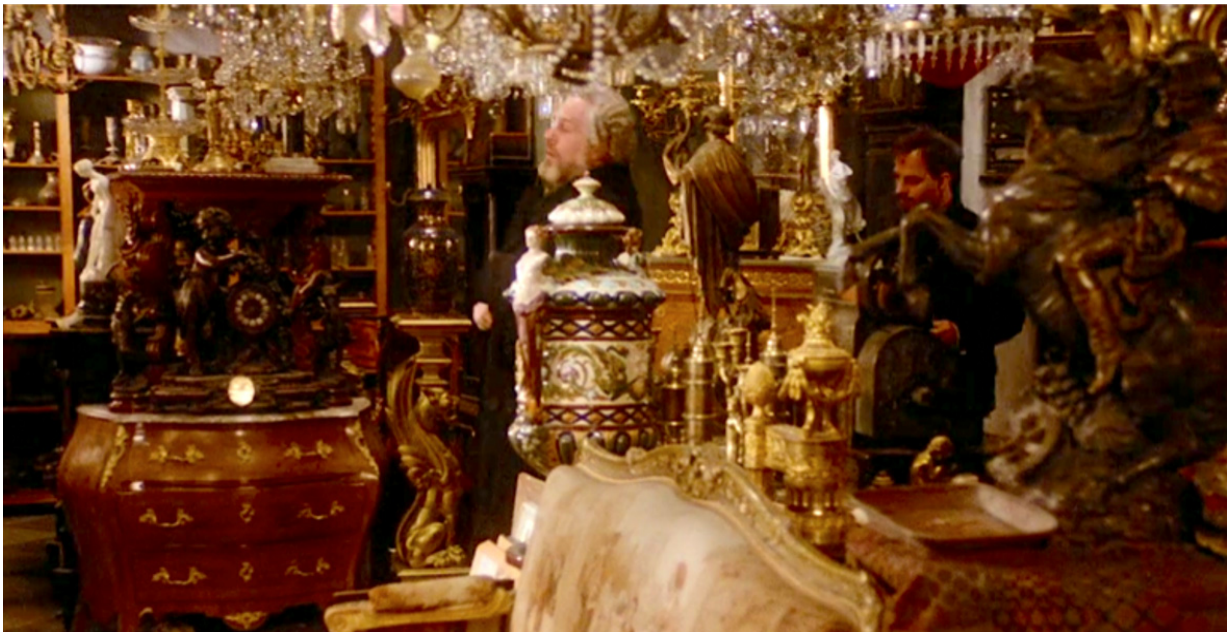


Figure 9 Isak’s Store in *Fanny and Alexander*.



Figure 10 *Fanny and Alexander in Isak's Store.*

Unfettered by the need to produce a theatre set according to carefully crafted designs that suit the needs of a specific play, director, and actors, Steve was given free rein during the pandemic to improvise in the creation of a series of small sets with the purpose of bringing the imaginal soul of the theatre to life. Steve could use all the props that the theatre had accumulated over many years of productions. Working in his magically alive studio he was in his natural habitat. As he told me: “I looked up and saw all this rubble hanging on the walls (Figure 11) in the prop room and my studio. It’s bits and pieces of things from every show we’ve ever done and it inspired me to fantasize about creating these miniature worlds”



Figure 11 *Steve's Wall of Rubble.*

As Steve describes it, the theatre had already become a repository, if not a museum, of discarded objects from the town of Mill Valley, all of which became the raw material of his wild palette:

“Lucy, the Director of the Theatre, lived in an old, old house for a while. People had moved out of the house years before and it hadn't been lived in for years. And everything was left as it was back in the Thirties. All the things were still in the cupboards, including unused products that were still on the shelves. And not only that, the basement of the house was a huge inventor's laboratory or factory with all kinds of machines. It had everything in it. Little by little, things kept coming down to the theatre and we absorbed them into the prop department. I kept thinking that we were somehow curators of these objects because we were

preserving them as a whole window on a world that's gone, that's completely gone.”

The story of curating those objects into three-dimensional symbolic images as a window into other worlds is at the heart of the narrative that I want to tell about Steve's work. And in this narrative, there are stories within stories and worlds within worlds which Steve opened to us with his rich, almost childlike imagination.



Figure 12 “A collage of ruins, of old sets, and these shreds of things” in the prop room.



Figure 13 *Would-be portals to the imaginal await their turn.*

“This whole thing was created from a collage of ruins, of old sets and all these shreds of things, most of which never went together in the first place (Figures 12 and 13). But they were suddenly recomposed in these little vignettes that came

The images in this paper are strictly for educational use and are protected by United States copyright laws. Unauthorized use will result in criminal and civil penalties.

together by themselves. And it wasn't as if we did it all in one day and said 'OK. This one's going to be just like this . . . We kept remodeling and pushing things around and changing things completely, turning things upside down and trying all different kinds of things and doing it without a conscious concept or design. This is the first time I've designed something with no floorplan, no initial drawings. You know everything I work on in the stage is always based on hundreds of drawings beforehand. You just keep planning and planning and planning on paper before you actually do it. This, on the other hand, is just random, just allowing things to emerge from the rubble. And that's how it really happened. It was like the object itself was telling us, beckoning us to put it in this context. And then it would just give our imaginations the stimulus of seeing what the next layer would be—so it all came out of the materials just letting it happen as an improvisation . . . Throwing this stuff at the wall was supposed to relate to something we'd done in the theatre in the past.”

An Imaginal Tour of the Imaginal Exhibit

I am now going to take you on a guided tour of the exhibit in the Mezzanine room of the Throckmorton Theatre that resulted from this mid-COVID smorgasbord creative effort. It may strike you as an unusual tour because I actually listened to Steve when he insisted that I open myself to my own imaginal space as I took in the exhibit. As with most artists, Steve did not want to provide me with his interpretations of the various scenes. Although he was curious what I thought as a Jungian psychoanalyst and perhaps hoped that I would offer special insight through symbolic interpretation, his primary goal was to open me and all who view his work to their own worlds. Steve said. “We're trying to invite the viewer to create their own story in a sense.” I loved the invitation to be a viewer creating my own story and accepted it wholeheartedly as I believe that the

interaction between the artist's creation and the viewer is its own creative act and continues the act of creation.

In reflecting on the fact that many people spontaneously began to sob on viewing the exhibit, Steve said, "During COVID, I think we are connecting to some part of one another that is neglected—the child part." As it turned out, my first responses to the exhibit were neither sobbing nor symbolic interpretations. My initial responses were not psychoanalytic or even thoughts per se, although I was instantaneously delighted, even thrilled, at the sense of both discovery and recollection. More specifically, Steve's small sets and the special world to which they beckoned brought to mind images from Ingmar Bergman's *Fanny and Alexander*—scenes of puppets, of Isak's shop jammed with curiosities, and the invitation to go into another world that was no less real than this one, just different. I told Steve how the spontaneous and vivid memory of scenes from *Fanny and Alexander* were the first things that came to mind in viewing his work.

Without pausing, Steve said that he had watched *Fanny and Alexander* with his family every Christmas for years. At that point I knew we were truly connected and had something meaningful to share. Steve's memory of the film was far more detailed and vivid than mine, as I had last seen it almost forty years ago. But, in that moment of mutual discovery, I became aware that flowing between worlds is at the very headwaters of the creative imagination that inspires Coleman and Bergman and that my goal in writing this paper would be to let their visions flow into one another, coningle, and inspire us.

When I discovered that both Steve and I had fallen under the spell of *Fanny and Alexander*, I realized that we both knew what it was like to be called into another world—in the same way that Alexander knows it with his own curiosity and enthrallment in the first scene of *Fanny and Alexander*. Look now at another puppet theatre design (Figure 14) that Steve created and then click to the link of the opening scene of *Fanny and Alexander*. More than anything else, seeing the warm glow of the lighting at the front of both Steve’s and Alexander’s puppet show stages was the pivotal moment for me in making self-evident the connection between the imaginal realms of Steve Coleman and *Fanny and Alexander* and my own delight in both.



Figure 14 A Steve Coleman puppet display.



Clip 1 *Alexander and the Puppet Theatre in Fanny and Alexander.*

This is the imaginal world of childhood illuminated in as pure and tender a way as possible. The dreaminess of Alexander is not unlike the dreaminess of Steve and perhaps, at times, my own dreaminess.

I was struck with the delight of mutual recognition, of realizing that Steve, his work, and I were all deeply connected through the shared experience of that glorious film—as if we shared the same deep childhood memory of Bergman’s creation wakened in both of us and brought back to life by Steve’s creation. Even after decades, some of the scenes from *Fanny and Alexander* had remained as light and as dark in my memory as any I have ever witnessed. After touring the exhibit with Steve, I immediately got hold of the film to make even more vivid the connections between *Fanny and Alexander* and Steve Coleman’s exhibit and between the two of us.

In the spirit of Steve's intention of opening up the viewer's imagination and memory, of "inviting the viewer to create their own story," I wish to create a dialogue between Coleman's imaginal world and Bergman's imaginal world as I experienced them.

The first two small "stage" sets from Steve's exhibit speak to the potential magic of transformation that occurs in the alchemist's workshop and the writer's study.

The Alchemist's Room



Figure 15 *The Alchemist's Room.*

The images in this paper are strictly for educational use and are protected by United States copyright laws. Unauthorized use will result in criminal and civil penalties.



Figure 16 Close up of Alchemist's Room: skull, ancient text, and other objects.

The images in this paper are strictly for educational use and are protected by United States copyright laws. Unauthorized use will result in criminal and civil penalties.

The Alchemist's Room (Figure 15) is a rich evocation of mysterious medieval processes, the goal of which was to transform base metals such as lead into gold. The imaginary room has all the necessary equipment to carry out these transformative experiments: the globe, the mortar and pestle, an instrument for heating substances, a skull, a musical instrument, a timing device, an open text (Figure 16).

In a way, the alchemists conducted early natural science experiments in what eventually became known as chemistry. But there were other levels to the alchemist's quest. The symbolic transmutation of lead to gold also had a psychological or spiritual goal as well. And is not the creation of any artistic work and performance that the theatre offers a kind of alchemy? Is not the imaginal the realm through which such alchemy occurs? One reality becomes a passageway into another or is transformed into another. Steve's entire exhibit—mixing the rubble from past Throckmorton shows and cast-off objects from the town of Mill Valley—is a kind of alchemy, of taking base materials and transforming them into something of special meaning.

The Writer's Room



Figure 17 Writer's Room.

The images in this paper are strictly for educational use and are protected by United States copyright laws. Unauthorized use will result in criminal and civil penalties.

The Writer's Room (Figure 17), the next one on the Dickensian road that the exhibit creates, is also a place of transformation. The writer takes the raw stuff of experience and through digestion and reflection reworks it into something else that, at its best, either reveals to us underlying meanings of this reality or points to other levels of reality in the world and in us, including our own human nature. Always whimsical, Steve places a large Rabbit as the writer in this room (Figure 18), standing quietly in a corner, and slyly remarks to me that the rabbit is his spirit animal, a truly tricksterish character.



Figure 18 *In the Writer's Room, the writer is a larger-than-life rabbit, standing quietly in a corner.*

The creative activities of the alchemist and the writer are mirrored beautifully in a scene in *Fanny and Alexander* when Oskar, one of the sons of the matriarchal Ekdahl family, speaks to his theatre troupe after the annual Christmas play:



Clip 2 *Oskar's speech at the theatre's Christmas party in Fanny and Alexander*

We can think of the alchemist and writer as being first cousins of Oskar, the theatre director in *Fanny and Alexander* or Steve, the set designer at the Throckmorton Theatre when Oskar says quite modestly,

“My only talent, if you can call it that in my case, is that I love this little world inside the thick walls of this playhouse. And I am fond of the people who work in this little world. Outside is the big world, and sometimes the little world succeeds in reflecting the big one so that we understand it better. Or perhaps we give the people who come here a chance to forget for a few short moments the harsh world outside. Our theatre is a little room of orderliness, routine, care, and love.”

Steve gives a great deal of thought to scale in his work and especially how the small, even the miniature, can become a microcosmic mirror of the much larger world, the macrocosm. The Throckmorton Theatre is a small world, what Oskar in *Fanny and Alexander* calls “this little world”. In its own small way, it seeks to transform the base experience of the everyday or the dystopian dark experience of the pandemic into the gold of delight, play, and meaning. And what if each of us maintains our own small rooms as part of “this little world” inside us as a safe place to sustain life in times of crisis? And what if, on fortuitous occasions, we find that our own small rooms in this little world are able to connect with the small rooms and little world of another person?

The Contemplation Room



Figure 19 *The Contemplation Room*

The theme of scale plays an important part in Steve’s thinking about the Contemplation Room as well. In an interview with Steve, I recorded his meditations on the nature of scale, space, and mystery in the Contemplation Room:

“It is a tiny, tiny room like a monk’s cell with a violin hanging on the wall. There’s just a chair and a window looking out onto a mountain countryside. It transports me. It is contemplative. I found old scraps of real pine, not plaster or plywood. It was all salvaged through rubble piles. I had it smoothed and finished it. I made it warm with a sense of time and the presence of time. And then just the stark wall with the tiny child’s violin hanging on it and a tiny chair that my friend pieced together from some tattered piece of old textile that was shredded. And she just made enough to cover the chair (Figure 20). So it looks like a perfect chair from some other time....”



Figure 20 Barb Nimmons and Janice Tatarski, Throckmorton Theatre volunteers, working on the upholstery for the chairs in the Writer’s Room and the Contemplation Room

And then looking out the window within the window (Figure 21), you go into a scene with the morning light on the slope of the mountain where there's just green openness and infinite space for your imagination to go into. And it's all in a tiny little space. It not big like a stage where you are creating on a large scale.”



Figure 21 *Painting the nature scene for outside the window of the Contemplation Room*

Steve likened the feeling of this room to his memory of a tiny room where he imagined a child could have lived when he visited the Florence home of Michelangelo's youth. The Contemplation Room is his favorite because, as he remarked, small rooms can transport us back to childhood.

Many of his rooms make use of a principle he learned about so-called Zen space. “You create something where you can’t see what’s above it or what’s around the corner. And the eye is just automatically drawn to wanting to know what’s in that Zen space beyond that you can’t see. You create a way so that it beckons to you. It still feels open and free.”

Because we had connected around *Fanny and Alexander*, Steve mused on the nature of space in the Ekdahl house in *Fanny and Alexander*.

“If you look at the way they light the scenes in her house, it’s like a series of proscenium in a theatre, these arches, with space going on beyond that. And then you want to know what’s going on in that next space because you can’t see where it goes off on the sides. Whereas in a normal room, they just show the whole room and you see everything at once and it’s all revealed. And that’s what I adore about *Fanny and Alexander*, too—that it’s not all revealed at once and you have to wonder what’s around in the next space, the next scene.”



Clip 3 *Alexander and the Ekdahl house rooms*

And, quite naturally, Steve's reflections on space and scale in the Contemplation Room, his memory of the small space in Michelangelo's childhood home, and the rooms of the Ekdhal home in *Fanny and Alexander* eventually led to a recollection of his own childhood.

“There's something so intriguing about going down into a smaller world, like when you're in a Japanese garden with a miniature landscape and suddenly you're seeing mountain ranges right in the middle of that tiny world. I used to love lunchtime at the old Edna McGuire School in Mill Valley when I was in middle school. I'd walk around the area where the track was. It was a wild, grassy area and I would pretend that I was flying at 30,000 feet and looking down I would see these little river valleys that went through jungles and all these fascinating places that I would just keep exploring. There was an infinite world to explore in this limited ratty old land. It was going from one reality to the tiny other. I don't know how to describe that, other than that the mind just naturally wants to go there.”

The Thai House over the River

Further along the Dickensian street of small stage sets, we come upon a most intriguing puppetry arrangement, one that introduces a darker note into the exhibit (Figure 22).



Figure 22 Bruce Tremayne working on *The Thai House over the River* that is home to two puppets

Inside *The Thai House over the River* (Figure 23) there is the central scene of a bigger puppet that is manipulating the strings of a smaller puppet that stands below it.



Figure 23 *Big and Little Puppet in The Thai House Over the River: who's pulling the strings?*

This arrangement raises serious questions about the nature of reality. Who is pulling the strings in our lives? Are we being manipulated by forces that we can't see or control? If the bigger puppet is pulling the strings of the smaller puppet, who is pulling the strings of the bigger puppet? Is it fate? Originally, the bigger puppet was quite “creepy” according to Steve. “There were red lines all around her face and she had hair that went

out in every direction. Her body language was disturbing, too. We were concerned that she might frighten children. So we cleaned her up.”

The image of Plato’s cave came to my mind in hearing Steve talk about these two puppets, one pulling the strings of the other. At the center of Plato’s myth, people in the cave—normal human beings—are actually seeing shadow reflections on a wall in front of them that they take to be reality. These shadows are cast by puppet-like characters walking behind the human beings who sit facing the wall. The shadows are reflections of the puppets cast on the wall in front of the humans by a fire behind both the puppets and the humans. In other words, what we think is reality may simply be shadow puppetry of unseen forces. This same metaphysical quandary is portrayed in one of the most terrifying scenes of *Fanny and Alexander*.



Clip 4 *Alexander, God and puppets in Fanny and Alexander*

Who is behind the puppets in *Fanny and Alexander*? Is God pulling the strings? Is fate pulling the strings? Is nothing pulling the strings?

Grotto Room



Figure 24 *The Harpies in Steve Coleman's Grotto*

We move farther down the exhibit road and come to the Grotto. Steve first called the figures in the Grotto “harpies” but as we discussed it they seem closer to what the ancient Greeks called *keres*—spirit figures of the strengthless heads of the dead, akin to

The images in this paper are strictly for educational use and are protected by United States copyright laws. Unauthorized use will result in criminal and civil penalties.

what we think of as ghosts (Figure 24). They are little shrunken winged men, representing the shadow of the soul or a soul without vitality. I see the *keres* as continuing the theme first revealed with the larger puppet pulling the strings of the smaller puppet, of potentially darker forces that dwell both within us and outside us. Steve is not sure what the *keres* are when he says:

“There is something kind of mysterious about them. When Tom said the grotto has a darker side, I was kind of intrigued because I know there is something in there that’s haunting. And I don’t know what it is. I made the ‘out of time’ puppet (Figure 25) a long time ago. He has been with me a long time. But the others came to me now out of the blue. I just had the heads and I put them on these things and they are weird looking.”

We can imagine them as darker unseen forces in the world and in our own psyches that can cause havoc.



Figure 25 Steve Coleman placing his “out-of-time” favorite puppet in the Grotto

The images in this paper are strictly for educational use and are protected by United States copyright laws. Unauthorized use will result in criminal and civil penalties.

To be absolutely clear, dear reader, the thoughts about a darker side suggested by the winged characters in the Grotto are mine. I have filled in Steve's sense of haunting uncertainty with my own story—which, of course, he invited me to do. But Steve and I do share a deep love of *Fanny and Alexander* and I see a direct link between these *keres* and the most haunting scenes in *Fanny and Alexander* where we learn about the grave dangers of moving between worlds that exist alongside the more positive aspects of flowing between them.

Three Scenes from Fanny and Alexander of Passing Through the Portals of the Imaginal

The following series of clips from *Fanny and Alexander* explore the darker mysteries of moving between realms with all the attraction and repulsion that such movement invites. And if you find all of this too dark for your taste, has not COVID presented us with the same horrors on a huge scale and given us reason to go to Steve's exhibit and the theatre, both for relief and, perhaps at the same time, to help us find a way to move through these very light and dark realms?

1. Unexplained mysteries in the world of Fanny and Alexander:



Clip 5

2. “Uncle Isak says we are surrounded by different layers of reality, one on top of another.”



Clip 6

3. “Perhaps we are the same person with no boundaries and stream through one another shamelessly.”



Clip 7

Just as Ismael can flow into Alexander, so too can Coleman and Bergman flow into us.

The Cake Room



Figure 26 *The Cake*

Moving through light and dark realms is part of everyone's life. The haunting darkness of Steve's Grotto, of the outer world's pandemic, and of my associations to parts of

The images in this paper are strictly for educational use and are protected by United States copyright laws. Unauthorized use will result in criminal and civil penalties.

Fanny and Alexander are not the end of the story that I want to tell. In a room of Steve's exhibit that can easily be overlooked as too light and frivolous without a context to give it deeper meaning is a symbolic image that opens the door to the most profound transformation and redemption. It is the Cake Room (Figure 26) and it sits directly across from the Alchemist's Room where these transformations tend to be born.

Why put a pastry shop in the exhibit? Steve loves pastries and coffee in the morning and so it is part of his world. But, if we consider the whole exhibit, might the cake be much more than a pretty stolen pleasure in the midst of COVID? What if the cake is the key to transformation? What if the cake is the symbol of transformation? Cakes are at the center of celebrations that mark the major transitions from one stage of life to another such as birthdays and weddings. In eating the cake, we take in or become part of the transformation, not unlike the Christian ritual of eating the body of Christ in taking in the wafer. The horrific darkness of the scene in *Fanny and Alexander* when Ismael flows into Alexander and together they travel through an imaginal portal to witness the fiery death of the harsh and cruel Bishop (Clip 7) is transcended by the next scene in which the numinous quality of the light on the screen is unlike anything I have ever seen on film, before or after. It is the dazzling, white light of life reborn and sitting in the center of that transformative scene is a cake.



Clip 8 *The numinous light in Fanny and Alexander: the Ekdahl Easter dinner table becomes a living mandala cake*

This scene celebrating the joy of creation in *Fanny and Alexander* is not about any one person. It is about the whole extended Ekdahl family. And in celebrating the accomplishment of keeping the spirit of the Throckmorton Theatre alive in a time of darkness, the cake can be seen as celebrating a collaborative group, its own kind of extended family, that created something extraordinary. The Throckmorton Theatre cake was baked by a community of volunteers who were able to evoke a special world by moving back and forth between different realms through the vehicle of the imaginal.

The portals to imaginal worlds open us up to all the diverse, archetypal forces of the psyche that move between life and death, good and evil, joy and sorrow, and the yearning for renewal in the face of the mystery of the unknown, of what is just around the corner or just beneath the surface of things. If the sadness and loss is inside us, we seek to transform that into something else, just as when it is outside of us in the

pandemic we yearn to transform it in the outer world, too. In such a dynamic process, the depth of feeling moves from fear, terror, anger, sorrow and grief to wonderment, contemplation, gratitude, and joy. Such a celebration of the joyful flowing of creation, as in the Ekdahl family Easter scene or as in Steve Coleman's Cake Room, came to the citizens of the small town of Mill Valley in October 2021, when what the meteorologists described as a "bomb cyclone" over the Pacific joined forces with an "atmospheric river" to produce a monstrous early winter storm that drenched the town in seventeen inches of rain over a four-day period, giving hope to the yearning that the almost Biblical quadruple plagues of drought, catastrophic fire, pandemic, and the infection of the extreme national cultural and political polarization might be washed away with a deep cleansing from Mother Nature (Figure 27).



Figure 27 *The flowing water of life: hope for renewal in Mill Valley after the threats of fire, drought, COVID, and polarization of the national psyche. Cascade Falls, Mill Valley, October 25, 2021.*

This brings us to the conclusion of my story about Steve Coleman, the Mill Valley Throckmorton Theatre, and *Fanny and Alexander*. I hope you have a chance to experience your own story of this magical exhibit. To come full circle, watch the closing scene of *Fanny and Alexander*.



Clip 9 Reading Strindberg at the end of *Fanny and Alexander*

Acknowledgements

Steve Coleman, Mary Dilts, and Bruce Tremayne were enormously generous in sharing with me their joyous experience of creating the Throckmorton exhibit. Allison Tuzo of ARAS has been an intrepid and patient collaborator in piecing this complex story together.

The Throckmorton project would not have been possible without the skilled and dedicated volunteers who assisted them in assembling the exhibit: Barb Nimmons, Janice Tatarski, Maureen McRae, Adam Rechner, Jimmy Labioda, and Kimiko Shiro.

Photographic Credits

John Prince, Joeann Edmonds, Mary Dilts, Bruce Tremayne, and Tom Singer

Thomas Singer, MD is a psychiatrist and Jungian psychoanalyst who has lived in Mill Valley for the past thirty-five years. He is the author of many books and articles that include a series of books on cultural complexes that have focused on Australia, Latin America, Europe, the United States, and Far East Asia countries. In addition, he has served as co-editor of another series of books on Ancient Greece and Modern Psyche. He serves on the National Board of ARAS (Archives for Research into Archetypal Symbolism) and as its co-editor of ARAS Connections for many years.