



Figure 1: Spawn n. 91 (2000)

COMICS, ANTIHEROES AND TABOO: REFLECTIONS ON THE EDGE OF POP CULTURE

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This article analyzes the comic book series *Spawn*, by the Canadian Todd McFarlane, in an exploration of and attempt to give voice to neglected cultural aspects of the American society and western collective shadow, and how they are translated by this American antihero. As I see it, the character Spawn symbolizes and reflects the putrefying process of a sociocultural body and represents an effort to give birth to a new system of beliefs and values in the contemporary secular world. I use extracts from the text of the comic book series to present some of my findings and reflections about this controversial antihero, as well as to provide further insights into the challenging times we live in.

Keywords: shadow, death, scapegoat, comic books, antiheroes, popular culture, myth.

I. Introduction

In 1998, while I was in Brazil concluding a specialization course in Jung's psychology, I decided that I wanted to work with the scapegoat phenomena, but I didn't know yet how to approach it. Then I was attracted by the advertising of the movie *Spawn*¹, about a comic-book superhero, whom I had never heard of. That same night I had a dream about that strange superhero. My curiosity was then fully engaged, so I decided to watch the movie. What I saw perplexed me: how could a semi-dead, festering, depressive, dense, complicated superhero be so popular among young teenagers in the universe of American comics, competing side by side with the classic superheroes like Superman, Batman, Spiderman, and Wolverine?

In fact, 'antiheroes' similar to *Spawn* have always populated literature, movies, and many other comic books², but for many reasons that I will bring forth and discuss in this article, I chose *Spawn* as a major and 'super' complex example of how a comic books antihero, can embody multiple layers of psychological interpretation. From the beginning of my research, I was impressed by how much a fictional character coming from a pop form of mass communication

could be so deeply connected with archaic and shadowy aspects of our human condition.



Figure 2: Spawn n. 81 (1999)

However, it has been a difficult and rather lonely journey of exploration as comics and graphic novels are scarcely mentioned in analytical psychology. Hence, this paper is an invitation and an opportunity to share some of my insights and discoveries since my first contact with Spawn, who, in fact, as if initiating a rite of passage, opened the (hell) gate to this rather tragic comic universe.

Although Spawn was created in the early 1990s, as it is a symbolic and archetypal phenomenon, it can reveal, at a closer and deeper look, many relevant aspects and tensions that underlie the political, social, religious, and cultural discourses of today's globalized scenario. The word *spawn* refers to the many eggs or newly hatched offspring of aquatic animals, such as fish and toads; as a verb, it also means 'to bring forth, generate'. However, paradoxically, the hero Spawn's 'dead live' body is fed by energy brought by worms. A possible

interpretation for this antinomy is that, considered as a cultural symbol, it reflects the putrefying process of a social-cultural body as an effort or attempt to give birth to a new system of beliefs and values in the contemporary, so-called secular world.



Figure 3: Spawn n. 63 (1997)

Like a thousand year-old tree that needs to die in order to allow a new one to take its place, grow and evolve, what would happen if this same tree were afraid of dying, or if the people that take care of her didn't want her to die and kept her in this putrefying state with the help of an artificial and expensive technological apparatus? Wouldn't she just have her suffering prolonged, as well as the suffering of her loved ones?

Several important works have been written since the 9/11 attacks through the analytical lenses of cultural complex theory (Singer & Kimbles, 2004) especially about the American cultural complexes³. I have found a lot of inspiration in all of them to write this article. They helped me to understand Spawn more deeply.

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In other words, what follows is based on the assumption that the reader is already familiar with these works in order to grasp more fully the meaningful parallels and insights I have made and will expose henceforth.

Notwithstanding the scope and depth of these hitherto studies, I have also attempted to give voice to what I consider still neglected elements of the collective shadow inherent in this process, namely, the unremitting process of analysis and deconstruction of the ‘problem of evil’⁴ in American culture and, in many respects, in the cultural history of western civilization in general. I show how this mythic and ‘gritty’ antihero condenses and translates these obscure and neglected aspects. Thus, in this article, I aim to contribute to this current psychological and political debate by presenting some of the findings and questions about this controversial antihero on the threatening postmodern times we live in.



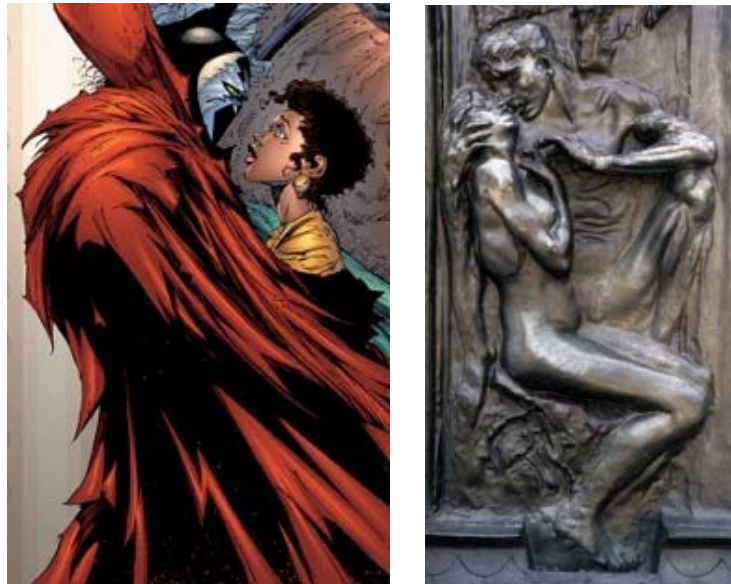
Figure 4: *Spawn Resurrection n.250 (2015)*

II. Introducing Spawn, the Soldier of Hell: the Center of the Mandala



Figure 5: Spawn 's logotype

The Spawn character was created in the early 1990s by the Canadian Todd McFarlane, who tells the story of an African American soldier, Al Simmons, who, after an outstanding career in the Vietnam War, was invited to become a secret agent for the US government. His missions focused on fighting crime but evolved into destroying the evidence by killing the targets. Simmons's boss, Jason Wynn, was a master at manipulating people. He made Simmons believe that everything they did had a fair purpose: protecting the nation's safety. With each mission the methods became more violent and bloody, and the explanations more unreasonable. The international missions involved killing civilians for the sake of US political ideals and imperialism. Simmons was murdered when he started questioning the purpose of these missions. In Hell, he met the dragon-devil Malebolgia, with whom he sealed a Faustian pact to become Hellspawn, leader of Malebolgia's army in the future Armageddon, in exchange for being able to recover his own life and that of his beloved wife, Wanda.



Figures 6 and 7: Spawn and Wanda; detail from *Gates of Hell* (Rodin)

Spawn's apocalyptic universe is filled with religious symbols related to Judeo-Christian history. Although McFarlane's main source of inspiration was Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Spawn's images and narratives also contain many other important classic literary references⁵, as well as archaic and ancient mythological elements mingled with postmodern reality.

In relation to the *Divine Comedy*, a basic difference is that Spawn strives but never reaches Paradise (except for a brief false glimpse of it). He becomes a monstrous dead-live (half-dead) demonic creature who exists in a kind of limbo. Malebolgia gives him a putrefying body charged with supernatural devilish powers and super force—all covered by an armored uniform that clothes him like a skin, for he no longer has human skin. In the beginning of Spawn's 'rebirth' he is totally confused, assaulted and tormented by flashbacks, and he doesn't know how to use his brutal strength and powers. Soon, he discovers that five years have passed since his death, and his wife is now remarried to his best friend. Howling with rage, all he wants is vengeance. Malebolgia and his demons easily manipulate Spawn's anger.



Figures 8 and 9: Clown (Spawn n. 12); Bes, Egyptian deity

Gradually, however, as the saga unfolds, Spawn learns more about himself, his personal history, his ancestral origins, and his damnable fate. He strives to use his new skills with more wisdom in order to reverse the evil curse and become the savior and redeemer for mankind. A key figure in his learning process is the old, wise ex-Spawn Count Nicolas Cogliostro⁶. In spite of his support, Spawn's ultimate goal of reversing this evil curse is hindered for several reasons, the most relevant of which are the following (in parenthesis I suggest some possible interpretations): The memory of his past life as Al Simmons is flawed and fragmented, which confuses him and misleads him when making decisions that require judgment and maturity. (Postmodern secular society has become alienated from many of its mythical and sacred values and roots. Most of the urban population does not have sufficient historical knowledge or cultural conscious memory; thus, daily choices and decisions are often extremely individualistic, relativistic and misled⁷).

He has to learn how to dominate and control his revengeful and destructive instincts, which are enhanced by his new uniform's devilish influence. (This could represent the anger, resentment and fear that increasing corporate globalization and abysmal social-economic inequality have been harvesting in

many countries, a tense situation that we clearly see widespread in the world and which increases the risks of a misuse of mankind's powerful technological and military arsenal for destruction).

His resources and powers are not unlimited and endless; he has to use them wisely to sustain them as long as possible, for when they are expired, he will return to Hell, to the sphere of Malebolgia. (This for me can be seen as a metaphor for our current environmental crisis, in which our planet is showing signs of depletion and imbalance due to man's overconsumption, which is putting our very existence at risk.)

Al Simmons' new home is a dirty alley (mankind's current existential condition in our planet, which has become so dirty and polluted) near an abandoned church (this could refer to either the average secular, cynical and skeptical attitude in society or the intensification of neo religious fundamentalist belief systems), where he coexists with other outcasts and homeless people (a possible metaphor for other orphans of the old 'Mother Church' or patriarchal religious institutions) so as to protect himself from society's persecution (this for me sounds like the gradual return to the 'state of nature' of Thomas Hobbes (Bain-Selbo, 2012) or the emergence of 'reciprocal violence' of Rene Girard (Girard, 1990), in a time where social, institutional and political trust seems to be dwindling).

Spawn is frequently depicted sitting by or holding onto the cross upon a church (maybe as perplexed as I was at the beginning of this journey), always lonely and contemplative, resembling the famous sculpture by August Rodin of Dante Alighieri, as "The Thinker," seated atop *The Gates of Hell*⁸, also inspired by the *Divine Comedy*.



Figure 10: Top of the Gates of Hell (A. Rodin)



Figure 11: Spawn n.2 (1992)

Even without reading any sample of Spawn's comics, the narrative provided above can already lend itself to be interpreted as symbolically as any myth or fairy tale towards understanding deeper layers of today's human psyche's problems, conflicts and challenges. In summary, the essential plot tells us that Spawn is a cursed and revengeful creature with a flawed mind, who,

nevertheless, possesses dangerous and powerful weapons and technologies at his disposal (compare this to the intensification of conflicts in the Middle East, the threat of a new cold war with Russia, economic and political crisis in Europe, the frequent school shootings in the U.S., the disastrous oil spill in the Gulf Coast of U.S in 2010, the Fukushima nuclear disaster, etc.). His powers become an instrument of justice and power, but also a trap.

Spawn is portrayed as a deluded *antihero* who believes naively that he can become a new messiah and change his diabolic reality, as well as save mankind from an early archetypal and primordial wound of separation, for he understands at a later stage of his unfinished saga that both missions are interdependent, namely, the personal and the collective redemption.

III. Creator and Creature

In order to further understand this character and his relevance for our study, I would like also to introduce Spawn's author and some aspects of its historical context. Todd McFarlane was born on March 16, 1961, in Calgary, Canada. He developed a solid career in the United States as a comic books (hero) artist for large publishing companies in the field such as DC Comics and Marvel. His great talent in making drawings for Batman and Spiderman won him acclaim as one of the best comics artists of his generation.

McFarlane admits that, of all the most famous comics heroes and villains, his major source of inspiration for Spawn was Batman, but there are also similarities with Spiderman, Spirit, Ghost Rider, Daredevil, and the villain Venom.

With the first issue in 1992, Spawn sold 1.7 million copies, breaking the sales record in the independent comic books category. It was turned into an animated TV series (HBO) and a movie in 1997. For the comic book series, McFarlane had the creative contribution of other renowned comics writers and artists such as Frank Miller, Allan Moore, Nail Gaiman, and Greg Capullo. Until the beginning of the twenty-first century, Spawn maintained its position among the best-

selling hero comic strips in Brazil and the United States. But it was also a major success in many other countries, and has been translated into ten different languages. The outlandish, dramatic, innovative, and lavishly artistic style of McFarlane is one thing that has clearly contributed to Spawn's achieving such remarkable popularity.

Spawn's financial triumph gave McFarlane (mercurial) wings to invest in many other attractive entrepreneurial projects—new comics titles, toys, cinema, video games, animated features, sports items—which inevitably pulled him away from close participation in the creative process of Spawn's drawings and narratives. Moreover, ironically, Image Comics soon became the stage of legal battles between McFarlane and other artists over copyright and royalty payments⁹. All this affected the quality of Spawn's stories and plots and contributed to its progressive decrease in popularity¹⁰.

Although Spawn currently doesn't have the readership that it enjoyed at the height of its success, it is still being published, and it still seems to have a solid place in the pantheon of comic books. In 2012, McFarlane held a special event to celebrate Spawn's twentieth anniversary with the release of Spawn No. 200. With that issue, the story saw a major turnaround. Behind the mask we no longer find Al Simmons, but a new character, Jim Downing. With this skillful change of course, McFarlane, akin to Dr. Frankenstein, tried once more to instill new 'ectoplasm' or 'spiritual life' into Spawn's mythical series. This necessary and astute maneuver in the trajectory of a superhero, to keep him living in a state of 'continuous present', is emblematic in the history of comic books, as Umberto Eco (1972) brilliantly analyzed in *The Myth of the Superman*. It is a creative strategy that draws a clear line which separates comic book heroes and the heroes and gods of the ancient and classic mythologies¹². The amplification of this topic—namely, the fundamental differences between ancient mythology and what one could designate as *pop-secular mythology*—is beyond the scope of this article, but it is worth mentioning for the purposes of further analysis. In an article about McFarlane on the website *Comic Book Resources* we can glimpse how this works:

“While some fans might long for the days when original Spawn Al Simmons starred in the book, McFarlane said he appreciates the opportunity that this new one (Jim Downing) offers from a storytelling perspective . . . ‘Some of the fans don’t like change, but for me that’s the exciting thing,’ McFarlane said. “It means now I can bring back all your favorite characters, but because this is a new guy with a new mindset, who actually doesn’t know any of the prior history and will act completely different from the other guy, the outcome, the circumstance and the flow of the story will be different than if this was the same guy . . . How can I bring the Clown back, but have it be different? Well, if he’s talking to someone different, he’s going to act differently, too.”¹¹

This extract also shows how much the comics artist and his public interact to give shape to the final layout and narrative of a superhero. This dynamic gives us some clues about the social function of this type of mass production mythology. And this leads us to one of our main concerns here: how much can this type of postmodern superhero or antihero be seen as a progressive, critical agent of psychological transformation and maturation? Or, in other words, how much is this type of antihero just reinforcing and protecting the status quo of traditional, dominant discourses, and fulfilling, in this way, the major mission to preserve society, not reinvent it¹²? Where on this gradient could we place Spawn and other comparable comic book antiheroes? What kind of motivation do these comics’ antiheroes inspire in the young public and adult readers? My view is that Spawn’s series contain moral and ideological conservative elements but, at the same time, they transgress and question many American traditional beliefs and ideals, exposing delusions and contradictions inherent to its social and political system: democracy/imperialism, freedom/control, exceptionalism/arrogance, justice/violence, peace/war, puritanism/capitalism, pluralism/fundamentalism, tolerance/prejudice, morality/corruption, opportunity/inequality, etc. Spawn is a conflicted popular anti-hero for rendering manifold conscious and unconscious features and ‘personality’ traces of the American collective soul and its cultural complexes (Singer, 2007). In the next section I wish to analyze some evidence of the symbolic impact that Spawn has had on American society and Western culture. Taking into account

that a significant number of academic books from a variety of perspectives and disciplines—cultural studies, philosophy, psychology—have been published in the past fifteen years related to the world of American superheroes, comic books, and graphic novels, I wonder why *Spawn* is still poorly studied and scarcely mentioned, considering its stirring stories and striking imagery on the one hand, and on the other, the evident and broad popularity that this pop hero rapidly achieved and sustained for at least a decade. Does it touch issues that are still taboo in western society?



Figure 12: *Spawn* n. 11 (1993): *Who killed Spawn? The murderer revealed!*

IV. Touching the Untouchable

The only significant and notable presence I've found so far are in M. Keith Booker's (2010) *Encyclopedia of Comic Books and Novels* and Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith's (2013) *Icons of the American Comic Book*; then in another book, *Super Black, American Pop Culture and Black Superheroes* (Nama, 2011); and finally, in *The Effects of Extremely Violent Comic Books on Social Information Processing* (Kirsh & Olczac, 2002), which features *Spawn* and six other comic book titles¹³.

Icons of the American Comic Book offers an extensive account of Todd McFarlane, Image Comics, and Spawn. However, part of the judgments and assessments about Spawn, as a comic book, do not seem to be consistent with what I found in the issues published until 2001:

Spawn is a savage adolescent fantasy, equal parts sexy and gory. Todd McFarlane and the artists who followed him filled splash pages and double-pages spreads with bravura art that did not leave much room for story. Even McFarlane has admitted that much of the success of the comic was probably attributable to his ability to draw Spawn's huge, flowing and really cool-looking cape. (loc. 10162)

Some pages further on the authors add:

McFarlane's other series such as Spawn still remain interesting from a historical point of view. However, their shallow excesses make for a difficult read in comparison to today's more sophisticated writer-oriented comics, and *McFarlane eventually became less and less involved with Spawn comics in any meaningful way, taking a more managerial than hands-on approach to Image's output as time passed, instead launching his own multimedia projects.* (loc.10193, my emphasis)

I don't disagree with many of the critical evaluations about Spawn. However, the evidence already presented from the beginning of this article, as well as McFarlane's recent efforts to revitalize his Image's first newborn, point to incongruities in the authors' position.

Adilifu Nama (*Super Black, American Pop Culture and Black Superheroes*) offers another perspective, one that is nearer to my own, particularly when, he starts touching the problem of transgressing moral and religious taboos' boundaries:

On the surface, the popularity of Spawn appears to have less to do with his race and overwhelmingly more to do with McFarlane's supersaturated

high-gloss artwork and the gothic pulp-fiction nature of his *noir* narratives. But arguably, even more than McFarlane's glossy aesthetic, the disturbing and at times amoral tone of the series is perhaps what attracted an all-too cynical post-baby boomer audience to eagerly peer into the shadow world McFarlane had etched. (loc. 1254)

After providing the reader with some interesting examples and evidence of the nihilistic and sadomasochistic atmosphere that pervaded the pop-culture context of the late 1980s and early 1990s from which *Spawn* emerged, Nama goes on to say:

McFarlane's *Spawn* remained cutting edge because the character took the genre further than most and arrived in some of the darkest corners of the adult-themed superhero landscape first. (p. 1264)

Notwithstanding the high-gloss superficiality, flamboyance, as well as the chaos, rudeness, and 'bloodthirsty' landscape we can find in *Spawn*'s pages, I find them, in fact, remarkably metaphorical and symbolic. This is actually, what I consider to be the major difficulty in reading *Spawn*. The aesthetic crude violence does attract a target seeking for bloody violent contents, which are commonplace today in movies, video games, TV programs and broadcast news. *Spawn* is, in this respect, not better or worse. However, the dialogues in *Spawn* are often written in the form of aphorisms, which on a semiotic examination, are aesthetically attuned with the dynamics and imagery of the page. Despite the high degree of rational elaboration, *Spawn* contains, simultaneously, close similarities with the spontaneous, mysterious, oneiric and irrational (and even transrational, as Jerome Bernstein would name it) language of the unconscious. As a dream or a work of art that at first glance seem to gather words and images that are not intelligible to our rational mind, when comic books are analyzed and studied carefully, they uncover another analogical structure of syntactic and semantics that goes much beyond the sense of control of the artist's conscious forms of expression.



Figure 13: Spawn n. 11 (1993), first page.

It is now becoming clearer that Spawn meddles with many issues that can be disturbing and even controversial, which go beyond the excesses with cruelty and violence. Spawn, as other canonical comic book superheroes are, is a fertile and compelling field for an in-depth psychological survey. The more we look into it, the more it reveals different levels of meaning, which are, in fact, interrelated. Although it is not possible and neither is the objective of this article to expand our analysis into this large scope of possible areas of interpretation, I find it important at least to mention a few of them, for these other dimensions of human knowledge are always present as a “noisy” background in our psyche, which influence directly or indirectly our perception of ourselves, of our immediate environment, and consequently our daily behavior. Moreover, these considerations combine for a comprehensive visualization (like contemplating a mandala) of the controversies and taboos that Spawn and other comics’ cultural phenomena may arise.

From a theological and religious viewpoint, Spawn discusses and questions, often playfully and sarcastically, traditional religious dogmas and beliefs that might unsettle even the most secular or atheistic mind.

In a more philosophical and ontological perspective, Spawn's 'dead-live limbo' condition is a constant reminder of the dreadful reality of our finitude and the inevitability of death on a symbolical and concrete level.



Figures 14 and 15: *Spawn* n. 93; detail from *The Gates of Hell* (A. Rodin)



Figure 16: another view from below of *The Gates of Hell* (A. Rodin)

As a political viewpoint, *Spawn* makes evident a sharp critique of the irrefutably negative aspects of the American ideology that still prevail in U.S domestic and foreign policies. *Spawn* mirrors graphically, a cultural complex¹⁴ related to a historical and ideological sense of entitlement to have power and control to dominate the world. It is a powerful complex that pervades and saturates the American political life, and, if it is not consciously addressed, understood and dealt with properly, will continue to cause damage and destruction to its own people and to the entire world.



Figure 17: *Spawn* n. 225 (2008)

And, finally, on a more psychological level, Spawn meddles with destructive, obscure and paradoxical human desires and emotions that are hard for us to deal with and accept as part of our own selves and our human nature. This conflictive aspect of our souls, namely, the frequent inability and insufficiency to withhold the tension of the opposites, opens room for unconscious and shadow projections to take place. This leads us to the scapegoating mechanism, which is a very complex psychological phenomena, also beyond the scope of this article but, nevertheless, fundamental in our next topic for analysis: Spawn can also be seen as a metaphor for post-traumatic stress disorder¹⁵ (PTSD) symptomatology, which has afflicted thousands of soldiers who have survived war. I will come back to this correlation of Spawn, the scapegoat phenomena and the PTSD among war veterans later in this article.



Figure 18: Angela, an angel hunter of Spawns

V. Shadow and Taboo: The Fear of Death and the Fear of Ourselves

Thus, from a Jungian perspective, Spawn can be seen as a comprehensive collective symbol that condenses various shadowy and perplexing elements of

human experience. Without these considerations made above, even in a brief way, our analysis would become impoverished and superficial.

Excesses of crude violence, terrorism, consumerism, fundamentalisms, devastation of the environment, etc. - these are the side effects *or* symptoms of a major collective ego-Self dissociation and alienation. It was necessary for ego development and for civilization to specialize in some areas and prioritize one or two psychological functions at the expense of the others. Nevertheless, this egotistical survival strategy is now literally leading us to the intensification of these symptoms and, consequently, to a self-destructive outcome (Bernstein, 2006).

The psychological and inescapable ontological fact that we have an inferior function has always been modern man Achilles's heel, or, one could say, man's blind spot. On the other hand, the inferior function chiefly (but not exclusively) is, paradoxically, considered to be the portal for our shadow (unconscious), but also for our creativity and transformation¹⁶. Therefore, this lack of balance and integration of the four psychological functions (aggravated by our tendency to ego 'one-sidedness') that we face more severely today, and which can be seen mirrored in global proportions (the Earth seen as a mandala), could be considered nowadays as our biggest challenge, i.e., a mission and a predicament for the individuation process both on a personal level and as a human society. Is this transformation and evolution possible? Howard Phillips Lovecraft once wrote:

The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the light into the peace and safety of a new dark age.¹⁷

A transformation of this magnitude would necessarily imply that our rational ego accepts and rescues our original humble capacity to listen more to the Self¹⁸ and to the symbol as an indispensable compass to guide us through life. Like Spawn, mankind seems to be at a dead end and we have no other way except to break the remnants of this everlasting ontological and epistemological form of taboo, face our damnable and cursed fate (made or perpetrated by man himself), and, hence, transform ourselves radically¹⁹. In other words, a paradigm shift of collective consciousness is called for. Otherwise, we will go on putrefying in a sort of limbo, constantly grieving and lamenting²⁰, instead of truly mourning, and by doing so, we remain endlessly trapped in a contradictory denial of our reality and our limited, nonetheless, crucial responsibility. I will now bring some examples of the dialogs present in Spawn's stories which illustrate in more details, how Spawn synthesizes metaphorically many of the topics discussed above.

In Spawn—the story series *The Kingdom* (*Spawn* Nos. 107–113) tells of a sect of fanatics whose main leader, Simon, the Pure²¹ (*Spawn* No. 112), was planning an attack on New York in order to purge it of all the impious bearers of the mark of sin. A relevant extract from this apocalyptic battle:

Midnight. The night of the cleansing. It begins. Like the plagues of Moses, we rain down upon the faithless. Teeth bared, blades flashing, a black and terrible scourge. Pulses quicken, piqued by the scent of blood and the bootless screams of the damned. We move as one. Like a pack of feral beasts. Like the holy wrath of angels. We are the children of the kingdom. We have come to do God's work. We have long waited for this night. We gave humanity every chance to awaken to the light. They have shown to be unworthy. It is up to us to teach these decadent mongrels a lesson. We shall feast upon their blood.

However, the attack fails because Spawn is able to clean all the marks of sin, absorbing into himself all the pain, failure, guilt, hatred, and greed. With that he attracts the fierceness of the vampires to his festering flesh:

SPAWN: You wanted a sinner, Simon! Here I am! See if you can take me . . . You wanted a sacrifice, . . . you wanted a flock of docile lambs to lead to the slaughter. The game has changed. You don't get lambs, you get me! And I will bury you!

In that moment, Spawn is taken down by a swarm of thirsty vampires; as always, though, he reacts and recovers. Spawn, with the aid of Ab and Zab²², two hellish angels, destroys the sect's ziggurat (a phantasmagoric tower that served as their temple and headquarters). At the end of the following issue Satan himself informs us, in one of his disguised apparitions, that Spawn has unknowingly opened the Pandora's Box—he opened another gateway for hellish powers to enter.

At this point, the symbolic connection between Spawn and the terrible events of the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 becomes visible —the series *The Kingdom* was published between April and November 2001. Issue No. 112, mentioned earlier, was published in October 2001 (with a special dedication to the 9/11 victims), and the previous issue, 111, was issued in August: the publishers skipped publishing for the month of September²³.

McFarlane's artistic talent shows from the start his critical view of US policies and a sharp intuition of the future. On an archetypal level, it is possible, therefore, to establish a synchronicity appearing in this comic book's artistic imagery and the political and social atmosphere of its time.

Six years before the dreadful events of 9/11, in issue 35, published in October 1995, there was already a plot that resulted in an attack on a skyscraper²⁴. One image in the story showed the top of a building engulfed in fire after an explosion.



Figure 19: *Spawn* n. 35 (n.36 in the US, 1995)

Then, in *Spawn* No. 105, named *Retribution Overdrive*, published in February 2001, there was another reference that corresponds even more obviously to the coming 9/11 attacks:

Hot, sticky New York night. The lines have been drawn in the sand. The big picture is set in stone. Now, all the Hellspawn has to do is wait. Wait and see who makes the first move. Not that he cares . . . (See Fig. 20)

All he has is time to kill and see what falls down from the sky. [*Double page showing a huge plane crash, while in the background we see two*

skyscrapers in fire, on the bottom of the page we read the title of the issue “Retribution Overdrive, part 1”]

Is violence a magnet? It draws them in. It demands an audience, participants and victims. One way or another they play a role. Some as witnesses, some as saviors. But mostly violence creates the dying, the violated, the dead. The violence mainly creates agonizing, profaned and dead. Yet they keep coming. They keep watching despite the horror. Despite the down-turned eyes. [*In the background, scenes and dialogues around the airplane disaster.*]

He [Spawn] is the only one who sees the truth behind the lie. It took him a lifetime to realize it. But he is violence. He was born into rage, trained for murder, killed by greed and reborn at evil’s hand. If violence is a magnet, Spawn is pure seething iron. For him there’s no escape. [*In this scene, we see Spawn’s ghostly figure in the dark of the night, hidden between two buildings observing everything.*]



Figure 20: Spawn n.105 (2001), first page.

I think this text speaks for itself, and it is not my goal in this article to dive deeply into the vast sea of political and ethical implications of these synchronistic events. I am not a political scientist but a psychologist. As a psychologist, however, I can say that they clearly point in the direction of the religious, historical and political foundations of contemporary elements of the American cultural complexes²⁵. And I would also dare to say that the terrorism of ISIL in Iraq could be considered as one good example of what this poorly assimilated and consequently projected shadow is capable of forging, counterfeiting and ultimately, backlashing. The projection, however, is never a one-way road; it comes from dark corners and alleys of unconscious processes that are fostered by both sides of the political fence.

VI. Striving toward Overcoming the Horrors of Trauma and Dissociation

The next passage will be used to give another example that shows how Spawn can be seen as a symbolic representation of the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), of war veterans as part of the American Cultural Complex phenomena. Here, Spawn deals also with environmental issues, ancient mythology, and the Old Testament.

The issues named *The Void* (No. 74) and *Sacred Ground* (No. 75) tell us how Spawn returns to a lost paradise (maybe inspired by John Milton?). The following dialogue illustrates McFarlane's exegesis of Genesis and Jesus's crucifixion, transposed to our current historical context, wherein Nature's ecological balance is threatened by man's deleterious technological and industrial actions:

You are in the heart of the world, Spawn. The place where everything began, welcome home, Al Simmons.

Spawn fights with the monster Heap (literally a heap of trash), which devours him, making him fall into the Eternal Nothing, into emptiness. He is guided

toward a point of light that resembles a spiral tree root. It is a gateway to Paradise:

Is this how it feels? To emerge from the still womb of darkness . . . to gaze upon the slowly opening the eye of the creation, opening, . . . floating in liquid night. Weightless. Timeless. Passing beyond the veils of life and death . . . moving towards the dawning light, leaving the fading shadows of the past behind . . . is this how it feels . . . to be born again?

In this story, Spawn takes a journey in the opposite direction from the one taken by Adam and Eve:

SPAWN: What is this? The sigil. The symbol of my servitude to Malebolgia, my link to Hell. It's dead. And my powers are gone. What does this mean?

In the distance, thousands of birdsongs harmonize into an impromptu symphony. Life springs forth every inch of this deep, rich earth. Amid this ripe green environment, Spawn moves like a shadow through a dream. And, somehow, his dark heart is lifted. This feels right. This feels like home. He allows himself to feel as he hasn't felt in far too long: free. At peace.

However, that peace does not last for very long (in *Prologue in Haven*, Goethe's *Faust* also returns briefly to Paradise). Spawn is soon grabbed by the vegetation and entwined by the roots and thorns. He thought he was in heaven, but Paradise is not Heaven. A guardian called the Keeper, who looks like the Roman god Silvanus of trees, bushes and herds²⁶, welcomes him to the *Greenworld*.



Figures 21: *Spawn* n. 75, *Sacred Ground* (1998)



Figure 22: Roman god Silvanus.



Figure 23: Wild Man and Artefact, Martin Schongauer (1480-1490).

Here are some passages of this dialogue:

KEEPER: You perhaps thought this battle had only two sides? You have much to learn, Hellspawn. And much to answer for. Heaven and Hell wage an endless, meaningless war over the collection of souls, such hubris.

In this scene, Spawn has been called to respond for mankind in a trial that will be held by the Emerald Parliament:

KEEPER: Do you imagine that man is the only creature to possess a soul? That your petty squabbling should take precedence over all other life? . . . You shall know the suffering that has been inflicted on our world by your kind. You shall be made aware.

Spawn is forced to go through a painful, cathartic rite of sacrifice in which he is tortured until flashbacks of his personal past life (before and after his death as Al Simmons), emerge into his consciousness. But gradually, after purging those personal contents, his mind is invaded by archetypal images from a deeper layer of the collective unconscious, images that carry contents still in a process of formation:

The ordeal begins. Bound to the thorny cross, slender tendrils, stout taproots burrow into Spawn's necroplasmic flesh. They trace spider web trails through the core of his being, a strange Emerald Communion. . . . Old friends and lost loves, enemies and allies. Victories, losses and betrayals . . . The scene shifts. A portent of things to come . . . He understands now that there is a third power beyond heaven and Hell, this realm of the Greenworld. A planet alive and sentient, teeming with lifeforms of every imaginable description. At the very mercy of one reckless arrogant species. Spawn can feel the world's anguish . . .

A mystic, dialectical process goes on until it reaches a final apotheosis, a prophetic eschatological vision:

A radiant figure, rising like a Phoenix from the ashes of folly, brings an end to the war between heaven and hell. Forging a new place, a new destiny. A middle path beyond pairs of opposites.

A possible interpretation for the violent psychological trials Spawn undergoes, and that produce such a deep transformation in his consciousness, is a parallel we can make with the large phenomenon of post-traumatic stress disorder in combat veterans that I mentioned in topic IV above. After being turned into a soldier of Hell, the veteran Al Simmons seems to personify the major symptoms of PTSD, one of the most cited mental illnesses caused by the psychological and physical damages of constant warfare, along with depression, drug abuse, and traumatic brain injury.

The Diagnostic Criteria for PTSD includes exposure to an initial stressor, which in Spawn's case was his direct exposure to death and destruction during his service in the Vietnam War as an infantryman and later at his own death as a secret agent. Al Simmons, as Spawn, also meets the DSM-5 criterion B of post-event intrusive symptoms, including intrusive memories and flashbacks²⁷. The population of living US veterans has been increasing in the past five decades, today totaling more than 22 million²⁸. Thousands of veterans commit suicide or become unemployed and homeless because of the deficient public health-care system. This is not a piece of fiction; this is the reality in the United States. Homelessness is frequently depicted as part of Spawn's underground condition²⁹.

All the episodes reported in this article, despite being only a small sample of the entire series, more than adequately illustrate the density of the narratives in *Spawn*. All the stories involve a great deal of suffering, existential anguish, despair, sacrifice, and cruel violence. Spawn is an archetypal symbolic form of a scapegoat, immolated repeatedly to purge mankind of its sins and guilts.



Figure 24: *Spawn n.75, Sacred Ground (1998).*

Similar to the way that violence is a magnet and, like a 'Pandora's box', it is difficult to keep it restrained after the arousal cascade is triggered, the flipside of the scapegoat archetypal (sacrificial) role is to absorb into his flesh and psyche (back into the 'box') the same violent and disturbing emotions caused by the horrors of collective wounding of war.

War veterans are and have often historically played the role of the scapegoats. In the context of the American society, war "heroes" are turned into "antiheroes" who also have to suffer, like Spawn, by being abandoned, betrayed and marginalized by society and the government. So much so that, the issue of care for veterans was a topical headline subject recently in the U.S. This was because negligence, demonstrated by long waiting lines at veterans' hospitals that resulted in many deaths and has become a media firestorm in the first quarter of 2014³⁰.

In addition to combat veterans, clinical practice has acknowledged the increasing cases of individuals with PTSD with accounts of mystical perceptions and heightened sensitivity to nature and animals. Jerome S. Bernstein (*Living in the Borderland*, 2006), considers these experiences not as a pathology, but rather as transrational experiences of a kind of liminal reality that allow 'Borderland' personalities to overcome the mind-body divide that prevails in Western consciousness³¹.

VII. Last Words and Conclusions

In the context of this study, I must mention the prejudice that comics and graphic novels in general have endured for so many decades as a marginal and cheap form of art and entertainment. With the exception of a few reputable studies, like the aforementioned by Umberto Eco, only in the past ten to fifteen years have there been the beginnings of a broader effort toward and interest in a serious investigation of the psychological, philosophical, historical, cultural, and social impact of this powerful form of mass media. Particularly in the case of comics superheroes (which is an American cultural creation), Helena Schugart (2009) emphasizes the outsider status as a paradoxical truism:

Accordingly, assessing the super characters that populate contemporary U.S. culture reveals an interesting story; specifically, whereas marginalization has long characterized superheroes, the shape that it assumes in current incarnations speaks directly to the significance of that concept to contemporary cultural politics. Because superheroes are celebrated icons of their received cultures, to suggest that one of their generic features is marginal status may appear oxymoronic. However, the superhero is necessarily an outsider, unlike ordinary mortals: super is, by definition, marginal.

If we look around everywhere in our immediate environment, sensibly and carefully, through the marginal lenses of Spawn—be it exposed through the bias of diverse mediums or shrouded behind histrionic and hypomaniac facades and masks—we will see and smell, the pervading and encroaching presence of a

much gloomier and putrefying atmosphere than we would like to admit, virtually the same one that permeates McFarlane's depiction of postmodern reality.

Considering the importance that the constant examination, elaboration and integration of the shadowy and repressed, or neglected and rejected, contents of human psyche and behavior has always had, we can hypothesize that cultural phenomena such as Spawn (and comic books category in general) should not be disregarded. They could help promote healthier compensations, creative responses and transformations on an individual level and in the collective psyche, and consequently, on a social and political scale. In many respects, Spawn is already a symptomatic compensation produced by our culture. After all, isn't it from darkness (nigredo and putrefactio) that new life, symbols, and myths emerge and shape reality?

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Images *

*All Spawn images are property of Todd McFarlane and have been used with his permission. Some were scanned from my private collection. Most covers were retrieved in January 2015 from

<http://ftp.spawn.com/main.asp?dir=TODD+McFARLANE+PRODUCTIONS>

Fig. 1. Spawn seems to allude here to Osiris and to an Egyptian sarcophagus.

Fig. 2. This image is suggestive of *Hamlet* (Shakespeare) holding the skull.

Fig. 4. See important news in note n. 11 below about this special Spawn issue with the return of Al Simmons.

Fig. 5. In this logo (or a symbol?) is possible to see a sword, two helmets facing each other, a cross and a chalice.

Fig. 6/7. Spawn. n.76 (1998); the detail represents *Paolo and Francesca* (Rodin Museum, Paris) from the Divine Comedy. Wanda is for Al Simmons what Beatrice was for Dante.

http://www.wga.hu/html_m/r/rodin/1gates/1gates07.html. Retrieved in January 2015.

Fig. 8/9. The Clown is a demon sent by Malebolgia to challenge and test Al Simmons. It is visible his resemblance with the ancient Egyptian deity *Bes* (360-342 B.C.; Louvre Museum, Paris). Both of them are examples of the cultural expression of the archetype of the trickster. <https://aras.org/records/2as.012>. Retrieved from *Aras, The Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism*, in February 2015.

Fig. 10. The Thinker "Le penseur de la Porte de l'Enfer (musée Rodin) (4528252054)" by dalbera from Paris, France - Le penseur de la Porte de l'Enfer (musée Rodin), Uploaded by russavia. Licensed under CC BY 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons - [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Le_penseur_de_la_Porte_de_l'Enfer_\(mus%C3%A9e_Rodin\)_4528252054.jpg#mediaviewer/File:Le_penseur_de_la_Porte_de_l'Enfer_\(mus%C3%A9e_Rodin\)_4528252054.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Le_penseur_de_la_Porte_de_l'Enfer_(mus%C3%A9e_Rodin)_4528252054.jpg#mediaviewer/File:Le_penseur_de_la_Porte_de_l'Enfer_(mus%C3%A9e_Rodin)_4528252054.jpg)

Fig.13. The original version of the text: "Spawn. More appropriately, Hellspawn. The officers in training of the Malebolgia, sent to the living world to hone their potent, yet limited, supply of power. They must first prove worthy of their rare selection as a warrior from the realms beyond. The last recruit, and the first this century, is LT. Colonel Al Simmons. Millions of souls, both good and evil, were bypassed before Simmons was appointed. He had the gift. The right wiring. The well tooled machinery. During his first existence on earth he had shown a willingness to follow orders to kill. To murder. To slaughter. All in the name of duty. He didn't believe in the great beyond, but his atheistic

leanings only made Hell's selection of him even more satisfying. Yet the unbeliever cannot be chosen against his will. He or she must open the door to evil willingly and without hesitation. The surreal trauma of death experienced by each soul leaves many opened to exploitation. The evil one quickly found the chink in Simmons's emotional armor: love. Not for duty or country, but for someone. The weakness has been the greatest of all aids to enlistment for the Malebolgia's army. Easily-manipulated-newly-arrived-souls will barter nearly everything for love. They will promise, and evil will accept. Thus, their fate is sealed. The pact will be in effect for eternity. This irony, love-as-evil trump card, is not hidden from God. Some day, these two powers will clash over the cosmic "Holy Grail" - Armageddon will be fought for the reason humans exist in the first place... Love. Al Simmons traded his soul for it."

Fig.14/15. Detail of gates of Hell (A. Rodin) retrieved in February from http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c7/Porte_de_l%27enfer_%28pilastre_droit%29.JPG

Fig.16. Image retrieved from http://stuartnafey.blogspot.ch/2010_11_01_archive.html

Fig. 17. Spawn n. 225. "*Todd McFarlane gets political with Spawn*", Comic Book Resources. Image: http://www.comicbookresources.com/prev_img.php?disp=img&pid=1353527802. Article: <http://www.comicbookresources.com/?page=article&id=42323>. Retrieved in January 2015.

Fig.18. Spawn (n.9, 1993).

Fig.19. Original text: "Target (Spawn) locked in. Two seconds. One. Bingo! Elimination Complete. The party's over. Good work man. We'll let the C.I.A. and civilians clean up the mess. See you back at home base".

Fig.22. Image of the god Silvanus retrieved from http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/2/2a/Silvanus_BritMu023a.jpg/800px-Silvanus_BritMu023a.jpg, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silvanus_%28mythology%29

Fig.23. *Artefakt und Naturwunder*, Ludwig Collection. Retrieved in January 2015 from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sammlung_Ludwig_-_Artefakt_und_Naturwunder-Schongauer-Wilder_Mann80410.jpg#filehistory

Notes

1. *Spawn*, released in 1997, directed by Mark A. Z. Dippé.
2. In literature it is worth remembering some classic examples: *Lost Paradise*, John Milton, *Dracula* (Bram Stoker), *Frankenstein - The Modern Prometheus* (Mary Shelley), *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hide* (Robert L. Stevenson), *Metamorphosis* (Franz Kafka), *Damien* (Hermann Hesse), *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov* (Dostoyevsky). In Comics, Batman, the X-Men, Daredevil, the Punisher and Hulk are also considered examples of successful anti-heroes, but they are not as dark as *Spawn*. Although MacFarlane or comics' critics never mention Hellboy, I think he can be compared to *Spawn* because he is a ('nice') devil creature himself.
3. Cf. Chapter 5, *When a Religious Archetype Becomes a Cultural Complex, Puritanism in America*, in *The Cultural Complex* (M. Roy, 2004); America: *Redeemer or Destroyer of the Higher Dream?* (Anne Baring), *Violent Hearts: America's Divided Soul* (L. Zoja), *Archetypal Reality in Politics* (J. S. Bernstein) and *The Soul of Terror/The Terror of the Soul* (R. Schenk), in *Journal of Archetype and Culture* (2007).
4. Jung's abundant reflections on the problem of evil, such as in the *The Problem of the Four or Answer to Job* (C.W. v.11, 1989), are too extensive and deep to be quoted briefly here, but, nevertheless, for the purposes of this paper, I recommend §470-473 of *The Foreword to Werblowsky's "Lucifer and Prometheus"* where he mentions and relates John Milton's Satan, Goethe's Faust and Nietzsche's *Übermensch* with the theological question of *privatio boni*.
5. The other major philosophical and literary authors that influenced McFarlane were John Milton, William Blake, Lord Byron, Thomas Hobbes, Goethe and Nietzsche. But Jung's concepts also seem to have kindled the imagination of McFarlane and his generation of comic book artist and writers. C. G. Jung and some of his theories were cited at the end of one *Spawn* issue published in Brazil.
6. The true and original Count Alessandro di Cagliostro, or Giuseppe Balsamo, lived in Italy in the XVIII Century and he was an occultist and alchemist. He travelled Europe as a witch doctor and he also founded a freemasonry said to be

Egyptian. In 1791, he was convicted to death by the Inquisition but he was able to reduce his penalty to life in prison.

7. See Berger (2011) for how marketing and advertising make use of psychological typologies and mythology in order to create fads and trends, manipulate consumers' fantasies and desires and, thus, promote consumption.

8. The famous August Rodin's sculpture *The Thinker* was taken out, like many other of his masterpieces, from *The Gates of Hell* and represents Dante Alighieri.

9. This makes me wonder whether MacFarlane was swallowed by the very same unfair capitalistic values he was critical of when he founded Image Comics. It is possible that as he became more money driven, Spawn reflected the gradual lack of an authentic soul energy investment. It seems, anyway, that Spawn represents some aspects of Todd MacFarlane's personality, who is a type of antihero himself. He starts fighting with giants of the comics publishing industry and ends up assimilating part of the same evil he wanted to defeat. However, this is considered part of the individuation and development of a mature personality, namely, the contact, digestion and integration of 'evil' elements of life and of the self.

10. In accordance to the sales figures found in Comichron, Comic Book Chronicles, sales resources (<http://www.comichron.com>, retrieved in January, 2015), it is possible to observe that from 2001 onwards, Spawn started gradually losing the position among the 15 comics best selling titles. In December 2003 it was already occupying the 49th position in the sales figures. Information retrieved in January 2015.

11. Comic Book Resources, *McFarlane Celebrates Twenty Years of Spawn* (2012). Retrieved in March 2014) from <http://www.comicbookresources.com/?page=article&id=38384>. Just as I was finishing to revise this paper, I discovered that Todd McFarlane had recently announced the return (resurrection) of Al Simmons as Spawn as of early 2015. <http://www.ign.com/articles/2014/10/09/todd-mcfarlane-passes-spawn-to-a-new-writer>

Retrieved in January 2015.

12. Richard Reynolds, *Super Heroes, a Modern Mythology*, quoted in H. Schugart (2009).

13. The results endorse other studies in media violence with respect to the potential influence it can exert for more aggressive or violent behavioral responses.

14. Cf. *Archetypal Reality in Politics* (Bernstein, 2007), and *Coming Home: Hyper-Images of the Hero and Child in America* (Kittelson, 1998).

15. Cf. DSM-5 criteria for PTSD, F43.10. In a publication by the American Psychiatric association I also found this information: “PTSD Debate within the Military. Certain military leaders, both active and retired, believe the word “disorder” makes many soldiers who are experiencing PTSD symptoms reluctant to ask for help. They have urged a change to rename the disorder posttraumatic stress injury, a description that they say is more in line with the language of troops and would reduce stigma”. (Retrieved November/2014 from <http://www.dsm5.org/Documents/PTSD%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>). This debate supports the idea of how war veterans feel inadequately and insufficiently taken care of and experience a sense of being relegated to a marginal social status. These conditions are partially realistic and partly, one could say, are aggravated by the PTSD or depression symptoms.

16. As an example of one Jung’s explanation of this creative process, see §167 (p. 104) and §184 and 185 (p.115), C.W. v. 6(1990); see also §134-136 from C.W. v.11 (1989).

17. *The Call of Cthulhu, Chapter 1, The Horror in Clay*, 1928.

URL: <http://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/fiction/cc.aspx>, page last revised 20/August 2009, retrieved on 19/10/14). We could compare this quotation with Jung’s reflection about the ego resistance to the unconscious reality: “The resistance of the conscious mind to the unconscious and the depreciation of the latter were historical necessities in the development of the human psyche, for otherwise the conscious mind would never have been able to differentiate itself at all. But modern man’s consciousness has strayed rather too far from the fact of the unconscious. We have forgotten that the psyche is by no means of our design, but it is for the most part autonomous and unconscious. Consequently the approach of the unconscious induces a panic fear in civilized people, not least on account of the menacing analogy with insanity. The intellect has no objection to ‘analysing’ the unconscious as a passive object; (...) But let the unconscious go its own way and to experience it

as a reality is something that exceeds the courage and capacity of the average European". (Jung, 1980, C.W. Vol.12, p. 50, § 60)

18. I imply here a notion of an extended sense of Self (mind and body) that includes the fact that we are part of nature. We are continuously affecting and being affected directly and indirectly, in multiple forms and intensities, by our environment. Our dreams are a good example of how we are in constant relation and in communication with animals and with forces of nature, or the *Anima Mundi* and its externalized events. When animals or natural events appear in our dreams they are not only symbolical representations of our body, archetypes and personal issues, they *also* represent another (psychoid) level of intimate relationship and correspondence with the "objective" or "material" reality.

19. We can already see signs of awareness and change on the news, for instance, the recent march in New York organized by The Climate Reality Project (23/0972014), or the recent dramatic videos made by the Conservation International (natureisspeaking.org). There's still a lot of work to be done. We cannot make evolutionary change on a situation that took centuries to crystalize in just a couple of decades, as Jung stated "Instinct can never be eradicated in an individual by arbitrary measures; it requires the slow, organic transformation of many generations to effect a radical change, for instinct is the energetic expression of the organism's make up" (§571, p.338, CW v.6, 1990) However, the environmental grassroots movement pressure is hastening the debate and demands urgent manoeuvres for sustainable adaptation, which, again, can only take place if there is a major moral effort to a paradigm shift of global consciousness.

20. See Samuel L. Kimbles, 2007.

21. Compare this Spawn's excerpt with chapter 5, *When a Religious Archetype Becomes a Cultural Complex, Puritanism in America (M. Roy, 2004)*.

22. Could Ab and Zab be related to Jesus being symbolically a representation of the Alfa and the Omega? Ab and Zab also seem to allude to Arab or Islamic names.

23. Another "significant coincidence" (synchronicity?) worthy of note relates again to the masterpiece *The Gates of Hell* (by August Rodin) mentioned earlier. In October 2001, one month after the 9/11 attacks, one of two original monuments in plaster, belonging to the Rodin Museum in Paris, traveled the

Atlantic and was exhibited in Brazil. The exhibition attracted more than two hundred thousand people.

24. In 1993 the WTC suffered its first bomb attack, killing six people and injuring more than a thousand. Could this event have influenced MacFarlane imagination? Information retrieved in October 2014 from <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/11/05/us/1993-world-trade-center-bombing-fast-facts/>.

25. Cf. p.164-171 of *A Meditation on Politics and the American Soul* (Singer, 2007).

26. A possible association with the Green Man mythology could be made here.

27. Spawns memory of his past life as Al Simons was cut off, felt unreal and was dissociative. Dissociative reactions meet another of the intrusion symptom complex of PTSD. War veterans diagnosed with PTSD enter, like Spawn, a dead/alive or limbo state, feeling cut off from their past lives. As in a fugue like state, the individual feels incapable of being fully engaged in the present, as if part of him were partially psychologically (and frequently physiologically) dead. Exaggerated feelings of horror, guilt and shame; distorted sense of blame on oneself or others; negative expectations and beliefs about himself and the world expressed by Al Simmons, as well as real war veterans, are all a part of the negative alterations in cognition and mood among the criterion D symptoms of PTSD under the revised DSM-5 guidelines. Finally, under criterion E, alterations in arousal and reactivity, Spawn exhibits irritable, reckless and self-destructive behaviour, as well as sleep disturbance (constant nightmares). Objectively using DSM criteria, Spawn is a symbolic amalgam of the American veteran with PTSD.

28. Information retrieved in March 2014 from <http://www.dosomething.org/tipsandtools/background-on-veterans>.

29. According to data obtained from the US Department for Veteran Affairs, recent studies (2009) suggest that 10–18% of Iraq and Afghanistan troops are likely to have PTSD, and the rates for developing depression vary from 3% to 25%.

Retrieved from <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/PTSD-overview/reintegration/overview-mental-health-effects.asp>). See also recent survey about “Challenges & Opportunities for Young Veterans (*Millennial*

Veterans in America),” published in April/14, by Participant Media and conducted by Princeton Research Associates, International /PSRAI: http://www.takepart.com/sites/default/files/Participant_Media_External_IssueBriefRTS.pdf, and also the high rate of veterans suicide: <http://www.takepart.com/article/2014/04/03/combating-military-and-veteran-suicide-and-supporting-mental-healthcare>. Retrieved in October 2014. 30. Cf. Links to news related to the scandal and controversy about veterans and health care system in the U.S: ‘*Veterans and Zombies, The Hype Behind the Health Care Scandal*’, (Jun/14) <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/20/opinion/the-hype-behind-the-health-care-scandal.html>; *Al Qaeda terrorists at Guantanamo treated better than our vets*, (May/14) <http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2014/05/22/al-qaeda-terrorists-at-guantanamo-treated-better-than-our-vets/>. On U.S. Office of Special Counsel website (<https://osc.gov/>, Phoenix) link on *VAMC Whistleblowers Obtain Significant Settlements*, (<https://osc.gov/News/pr14-17.pdf>). Retrieved in October/2014.

31. In accordance to Jerome Bernstein, the Borderland personality is a new type of consciousness that is becoming more common in clinical practice. Bernstein believes this is a healthy compensation mechanism promoted by nature/environment itself: “If, as I have theorized, the western psyche is being reconnected with nature from which it has been split for the past three millennia, then with that reconnection comes a link to a transpersonal dimension that holds promise of mitigating the inflation of the ego” (p. 225/loc.5603, Bernstein, 2006).

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