

The Gypsy Scholar offers this paper as a way of giving some explanation (as per his sunset meme above) as to why many people feel a vague sadness—a *melancholy mood*—while watching the sunset, especially during the autumn and winter season.

There are those people who even cry at the beauty of the setting sun going down below the horizon. Yes, we know that these folks are often made fun of as oversensitive cry-babies. (I recall a comedy movie in which a new-age male character thought he was “getting in touch with his feminine side” because he began to tear up when watching sunsets!) However, in the Gypsy Scholar’s opinion, there is a logical and unsentimental reason for this *sunset melancholy* (whether or not it comes to tears—yet tears are, as we shall see, mythologically appropriate).

This has to do with the Gypsy Scholar’s last two musical essays: “The Winter Blues” and “The Winter Solstice.” In the former, the GS presented the phenomenon of the Babylonian “Weeping Goddess” Ishtar and her “Weeping Ritual” for her dead sun god Tammuz. In the latter, the GS went on to present the phenomena of the reborn sun god at the Winter Solstice.

Therefore, the Gypsy Scholar would suggest that *the real reason for the sense of melancholy at watching the sunset has to do with the tapping into the genetic memory of our ancient ancestors,*

who mourned and wept for their dead sun god in a ritual manner.

In order to lend support for this fanciful notion, the GS offers the following information for your consideration. If it sounds at all convincing, this means that you men will now be able to watch winter season sunsets in company and openly shed the tears that you formerly suppressed for fear of being taunted as a wuss. (So much for the GS's "Public Service Announcement"!)

The Winter Blues & the Babylonian Dying-and-Reborn Sun God

(Excerpts from the GS's "Winter Blues" musical essay)

"We can make the moment ecstatic. Through the fountain of our tears we make our little songs and dance on." –Anonymous

The Babylonians believed that the sun god had died. And so on the Winter Solstice, they would weep and burn a log called "the log of the sun." The day after they burned what later came to be known as the Yule log, they would see that the days were getting progressively longer again. Thus, they naturally assumed that the sun god must have resurrected from the dead. In celebration, they would decorate a live evergreen tree with silver and gold, representing the log that was burned yesterday is alive again today. For the Babylonians, the son god Tammuz was the symbol of death and rebirth in nature. In cult practice, the dead

Tammuz was widely mourned on the Winter Solstice in the ancient Near East. Thus, Babylonian women weeping for Tammuz were participating in the annual Winter Solstice ritual, which weeping was believed to have the power of bring back the sun.

This Babylonian Winter Solstice *weeping ritual* was part of the religion of Mesopotamia. This Winter Solstice ritual of mourning and weeping for the dead sun god Tammuz was initiated by Ishtar, the amorous Queen of Heaven, Tammuz being and her son/consort. (Tammuz's Winter Solstice festival commemorated the yearly death and rebirth of vegetation. At an earlier period, before the rise of the Babylonians, the Sumerians had already connected the god of vegetation with the sun.) The *weeping ritual* for Tammuz was instituted because the Babylonians believed it essential that human beings should share the universal sorrow caused by the death of a god. If they remained unsympathetic, the deities would bring them misfortune. By observing their ritual, the worshippers won the sympathy and co-operation of deities.

The Mesopotamian grain deities were both weeping deities and deities to be wept for. As deities of fertility, they shed fertilizing tears; and the sowers simulated the sorrow of divine mourners when they cast seed in the soil "to die," so that it might spring up as corn. And when harvest came, it was a time for rejoicing, so the weeping was both for sorrow and joy. This ancient

custom, like many others, contributed to the poetic imagery of the Bible. Thus, David sings in Psalm 126:6: “He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.” Again, in Hebrew Hanukkah the leitmotif of turning *weeping into rejoicing* is evident. Likewise, the ancient Babylonian *weeping ritual* performed at this time of Winter Solstice moved from *death to rebirth; from sorrow to joy*.

The Descent of the Sun in the Night-Sea Journey & the Dying-and-Reborn Sun Gods

Basically, the mythic “night-sea journey” is about *the sun’s nightly descent into the ocean and its rebirth in the dawn*. In the mythology of many ancient cultures, notably the Mesopotamian and the Egyptian, the sun is personified as the dying-and-reborn sun god, who makes the heroic night-sea voyage east toward dawn and is reborn anew.

The depth-psychologist, C.G. Jung, has written extensively on the “night-sea journey” from an archetypal perspective regarding the psychopathology of depression. (This is the topic the Gypsy Scholar had taken up, from an archetypal-psychology perspective, in his previous musical essay on the “Winter Blues.”) He refers to it as a “*nekyia*,” or journey to the underworld, and understands it as an archetypal motif in

mythology, psychologically associated with depression and the loss of energy characteristic of neurosis: “The night sea journey is a kind of *descensus ad inferos*—a descent into Hades and a journey to the land of ghosts somewhere beyond this world, beyond consciousness, hence an immersion in the unconscious.” (“The Psychology of the Transference,” CW16.) For Jung, then, the archetypal “night-sea journey” is the descent into death or the underworld by a heroic figure, in which individuals confront their greatest fear and converse with the dead, who guide them onto a new course of their life.

What is important to understand here is that *all the “night-sea journey” myths derive from the perceived sun’s nocturnal descent into the waters*, which, in Jung’s lyrical image, “sails over the sea like an immortal god who every evening is immersed in the maternal waters and is born anew in the morning.” (“Symbols of the Mother and of Rebirth,” CW5.) Jung interprets the sun (the ego-consciousness) going down into the waters (the unconscious) as analogous to the loss of energy in depression, which is the necessary prelude to rebirth. (This is the rather paradoxical idea that the Gypsy Scholar presented in this musical essay for the “Winter Blues;” i.e., that the pathology of depression can actually be the catalyst for psychic rebirth.) Thus, the “night-sea journey,” as a descent to the underworld, is a journey of death and rebirth. To put it in Jungian terms: cleansed in the healing waters (the unconscious), the sun (ego-consciousness) lives again.

One of Jung's disciples, Erich Neumann," has also written on the "night-sea journey" in his book, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*:

"The struggle is represented as the entry into the cave, the descent into the underworld, or as being swallowed This is shown most clearly in the hero myths which take the form of sun myths; here swallowing of the hero by the dragon—night, sea, underworld—corresponds to the sun's nocturnal journey, from which it emerges victoriously after conquering the darkness."
(p.154)

"The hero's fight is always concerned with the threat to the spiritual, masculine principle from the uroboric dragon, and with the danger of being swallowed by the maternal unconscious. The most widely disseminated archetype of the dragon fight is the sun myth, where the hero is swallowed every evening by the nocturnal sea monster dwelling in the west, and who then grapples with its double, so to speak—the dragon whom he encounters in this uterine cavern. He is then reborn in the east as the victorious sun, the *sol invictus*; or rather, by hacking his way out of the monster, he accomplishes his own rebirth. In this sequence of danger, battle, and victory, the light—whose significance for consciousness we have repeatedly stressed—is the central symbol of the hero's reality. The hero is always a light-bringer and emissary of the light. At the nethermost point of the night sea journey, when the sun hero journeys through the

underworld and must survive the fight with the dragon, the new sun is kindled at midnight and the hero conquers the darkness.”
(p.160)

(This passage about the sun myth in the context of the “night-sea journey,” which describes the “victorious sun,” the “*sol invictus*” [literally, the “unconquered sun”] can be directly related to the Gypsy Scholar’s present musical essay on the Winter Solstice, where the Roman sun god, the *Sol Invictus*, is honored during the Winter Solstice celebrations, and where the archetypal solar myth of the various pagan sun gods are discussed in terms of the “dying-and-reborn” gods, particularly the Babylonian Tammuz.)

Turning to examples of the mythic narrative of the “night-sea journey,” one of the most famous and influential is that of the Egyptian *Amduat* (1500 CE and translated as “Book of What Is In the Netherworld” or “Text of the Hidden Chamber Which is in the Underworld”). It is an important ancient Egyptian funerary text of the New Kingdom of Egypt that tells the story of the Egyptian sun god Ra’s (or Re’s) nocturnal journey through the underworld (or netherworld) from the time when the sun dies, after setting in the west, to its rebirth at sunrise in the east through the 12 hours of the night from sunset (symbolizing death) to sunrise (symbolizing rebirth). The central moment in the sixth hour, the deepest point of the underworld, is the unification of the sun god with the body of Osiris.

Although there is no record of a specific “night-sea journey” concerning the dying-and-reborn sun god Tammuz in Babylonian mythology, the fact that he is a sun god who is identified with the sun and thus shares in its mythological profile allows for a related “hero’s journey” in the case of Tammuz. Thus, we find that Tammuz, as a sun god, does make the descent into the underworld and rises again.

The esteemed archaeologist and Assyriologist Stephen Herbert Langdon, in his book *Tammuz and Ishtar: A Monograph Upon Babylonian Religion and Theology* (1914), gives an account of Tammuz’s underworld journey. In discussing the various Mesopotamian sun gods, he notes that their mythology was “closely connected with the sun’s crossing the mean equator into the northern hemisphere, his slow approach to the northern zenith of the ecliptic and his return to the equator.” Thus, he traces the arc of the death and rebirth story of “the sun from the period of the winter solstice to the summer solstice.” (The GS covered this astronomical data in his “Winter Solstice” musical essay and on this accompanying “Winter Solstice” webpage.) Langdon then turns his attention specifically to sun god Tammuz:

“When the luminary began to turn back toward the equator, he, like Tammuz, was supposed to begin a long journey into the lower world. We hear much nowadays from a school of Assyriologists, who speak of the sojourn of the sun in Hades.

But it must be remembered that we have to do here with a religious fancy which applied to Shamash, the sun, the ideas current in regard to Tammuz. [Shamash was the ancient Mesopotamian sun god.] It seems to me certain that in Babylonian religion no god was really thought of as sojourning for an extended period in the lower world, or of being brought back from the sleep of death except Tammuz. . . . Tammuz sojourning in Sheol has as his companion the sun god with whom he had been identified. [Sheol is the abode of the dead.] We are only to understand in the rich religious imagery of the ancient mind that the sun passed the long winter nights in company with Tammuz. Still the legend shows that there was a tendency to connect the dying lord with the sun.” (pp. 30-31)