

The Romantic Nightworld of Radio

In the middle of the night

I go walking in my sleep

From the mountains of faith

To a river so deep ...

—Billy Joel, 'River of Dreams' (Tower of Song theme-song)

*There is one part of the night about which I say, "Here time ceases!" After all these moments of nocturnal wakefulness, especially on journeys for walks, one has a marvelous feeling with regard to this stretch of time: it was always much too brief or far too long, our sense of time suffers some anomaly. It may be that in our waking hours we pay recompense for the fact that we usually spend this time lost in the chaotic tides of dreamlife! Enough of that! At night between 1 and 3, we no longer have the clock in our heads. It seems to me that this is what the ancients expressed in the words *intepestiva nocte* ... "in the night, where there is no time".... —Nietzsche, Nachlass*

You Higher Men, it is going on midnight; I want to whisper something in your ears, like that old bell whispers it into my ear—as secretly, as terribly, as cordially as that midnight bell, which has experienced more than any one man, says it to me. It has already counted the painful heartbeats of your fathers. Ah! Ah! how it sighs! how in dreams it laughs! The ancient, deep, deep midnight!" —Nietzsche, "The Nightwanderer's Song" (Thus Spoke Zarathustra)

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to inform Tower of Song listeners of the Gypsy Scholar's conviction that there's a special connection between the mythopoetic realm of "Night" and the format of *freeform radio* (as it was invented and developed in the mid-1960s and became known as "underground radio").

The GS has expounded on this at length in a 2008 series of musical essays on the history of *underground radio and rock-in-roll music* in the sixties counterculture. ¹ There he made the connection between the *mythic underworld* and the *mythopoetic nightworld*, because much of the innovative cutting edge of freeform, underground radio *happened on the "experimental" late-night programs*.

However, the GS thinks there's a deeper reason for this, and not just because most radio managers feel they have little to lose if a deejay "experiments" at night, since it's a notoriously low listening time-slot. It is evident to the GS, as host of one of these late-night music programs, that this diurnal or daily alteration impacts the atmosphere of radio; that is, the energy at night and its rhythms are of a radically different quality than

during daytime radio. Indeed, any long-time radio deejay, who has a late-night program, will testify to a special “magic” of the midnight hours. As the GS sees it, after the all-night radio program (just like in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*), the *magic* of the *mythopoetic nightworld* (the animated and enchanted night) fades at the break of dawn with the return of everyday, quotidian reality—and the imaginal Tower of Song fades from view.

By reviving the *mythopoetic nightworld* here, the GS is (as his “School of the Night” page demonstrates) participating in a counter-cultural project of “reclaiming” the reality of *darkness* from its entirely negative (Christian) valuation—a kind of postmodern “reevaluation of values.”

The Romantic Nightworld

The early mythical distinction—and antagonism—between day and night seems fundamental in Western culture. This diurnal/nocturnal divide (the nocturnal associated with the evil side of things) was particularly prevalent in the Christian Middle Ages and in the Renaissance.² Then, in the nineteenth century, with the alternate concept of the “*Romantic*

nightworld," the nocturnal world was revisioned as a realm associated with a *lunar world* of rebirth, imagination, poetic creativity, magic, mysticism, and soul. The "*Romantic Nightworld*" then became an overarching, poetic meme for all the values that had been repressed in mainstream (Christian) culture—those, for instance, associated with the *moon* and the *feminine*—due to the tyranny of the dayworld (patriarchal) ones. Thus, the Romantics celebrated the "feminine" realities of the "*Nightworld*:" imagination, myth, dream, the unconscious, feeling, magic, mysticism, and drug-induced, altered states of consciousness; i.e., the entire realm of the so-called "inferior" or non-rational part of the psyche. Thus, it wouldn't be too much to say that the Romantic poets returned—went way, way back—to an archaic *lunar mythology*, one associated with a matrifocal worldview presided over by a Great Mother figure. (Robert Graves' poetic myth of the mysterious "White Goddess" applies here. Suffice to say, there is long legacy of the association of poets to the moon, which survives rather negatively in the modern world as "lunacy." But, as my "School of the Night" page demonstrates, this lunar association is actually a fundamentally positive one. Thus even Nietzsche celebrates his "nightwanderers," his "artists," as divinely "moonstruck"!) As archetypal psychologist James Hillman

would put it, the *Romantic Nightworld* has to do with “the soul’s connection with the night world, the realm of the dead, and the moon.” (But long before Hillman’s insight here, there was this from literary critic Northrop Frye: “I see Romanticism as the beginning of the first major change in this pattern of mythology [Biblical/patriarchal], and as fully comprehensible only when seen as such.... Such myths tend to become mother-centered myths, where nature is an earth-goddess renewing her vitality . . . every spring. . . . The mother-centered myth has always been attractive to poets”)

The Romantic poets, writers, and philosophers championed the "*Romantic Nightworld*" as an essentially *lunar* world that corrected the imbalance of a dominant solar world, which had become too one-sided with hyper-rationalism, scientism, regimented order, masculine values, and etc. etc. In this *lunar* "*Nightworld*," the values of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European society were overturned in favor of everything that was rejected and cast out, at least since the fifth-century Greek rationalists, as the realm of the "irrational:" mystery, myth, mysticism, poetry, imagination, fantasy, ecstasy, altered states of consciousness, and the feminine. The Romantics associated these alternative values with a "*lunar*" *consciousness*, which

was socially repressed in favor of the "solar" ego-consciousness (and the reigning "scientism" of their time).

Following in the footsteps of the Romantics, Friedrich Nietzsche would later develop the meme of the "*Romantic Nightworld*" and its opposition to the dayworld in terms of the opposition of the *Dionysian vs. Apollonian* consciousness and his revolutionary project of the "revaluation [or transvaluation] of all values." (For, Nietzsche, the ideal was the perfect synthesis of the Apollonian and the Dionysian principles.) The "Romantic Nightworld," then, was under the aegis of the god of ecstasy and excess, *Dionysus*, instead of the god of limits and ego-consciousness, Apollo.

Therefore, we can understand that the Romantics took the side what has since been called "*the Night-side of things*." The realities of the "nightworld" are symbolic and fluid, associated with the feminine, the moon, water, dreams, imagination, hidden meanings and connections, poetry, love—and music! Orpheus in the underworld! Yes, it should be remembered that the archetypal musician/magician—"the father of song"—played his most enchanting music for his underground

audience. In sum, then, *the “nightworld” is the imaginal landscape of soul’s “underworld perspective.”* (Hillman). . . .

¹ To access a shortened version (made up of excerpts) of this Essay-with-Soundtrack series, entitled *“Notes from the Underground of Radio,”* go to the “Underground Radio” page (a subpage of the “Revision Radio” page #7) and click the link found under the “Underground Radio & Romantic Nightworld” meme.

² The ontological difference between the “dayworld” and the “nightworld” can also be seen, for example, in the medieval period, when the witchcraft phenomenon was at its height, a legend arose about certain mysterious beings, called either “People of the Night,” or “Phantoms of the Night.” This “good society,” as they were oftentimes referred to, magically appeared during the night, usually in forests and high mountain valleys and fields, “accompanied by delightful music of unearthly beauty, which placed human beings under a spell and summoned forth nameless yearning.” In fact, their music was so beautiful that it was described by those that accidentally stumbled upon their merry company as “heavenly music,” or music that seemed “as if the angels were playing.” These “People/Phantoms of the Night” are roughly equivalent to the “faerie folk” of the Celtic underworld. Associated with the “Witchcraft” phenomenon, other magical elements accrued themselves onto this folklore complex of the “People/Phantoms of the Night,” such as (1) the story of the wild “night-riders,” who could be heard thundering through the countryside on horseback or even through the air; (2) the story of the pagan goddess of the Hunt, Diana-Artemis-Hecate, who lured women to “night flying,” or nocturnal travels of riding upon wild beats. This mythic theme reappears in the Renaissance under different guises. For instance, we witness Shakespeare’s use of it in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, where the night-magic of the faerie world fades as daybreaks at the end of the play.

