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Reflection Article

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Death in Persia: the Symbolic in Suffering, Death, and Suicide in the Work of Annemarie Schwarzenbach

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Resumo

This article offers a symbolic reading of "Death in Persia", by Annemarie Schwarzenbach, grounded in James Hillman's archetypal psychology. Through a close analysis of selected passages, the study explores how suffering, death, and suicide can be understood as expressions of a soul in transit. Psychology here is summoned not to interpret or correct suffering, but to listen to it in its imaginal language. Schwarzenbach's narrative is read as a poetic testimony of descent into the unconscious and confrontation with the dark forces of the psyche, where figures such as the Angel and the nameless fear represent archetypal experiences of transformation. The paper concludes by reflecting on the analyst's role in the face of suicide, suggesting that their task is to sustain—without judgment—the symbolic weight of the soul's images.

Descritores

Psychic pain, suicide, imagination, Junguian psychology.

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Morte na Pérsia: o simbólico no sofrimento, na morte e suicídio na obra de Annemarie Schwarzenbach

Abstract

O artigo propõe uma leitura simbólica da obra "Morte na Pérsia", de Annemarie Schwarzenbach, com base na psicologia arquetípica de James Hillman. Por meio de uma análise cuidadosa de passagens da narrativa, o trabalho explora como temas como sofrimento, morte e suicídio podem ser compreendidos como expressões da alma em travessia. A psicologia é aqui convocada não para interpretar ou corrigir o sofrimento, mas para escutá-lo em sua linguagem imaginal. A narrativa de Schwarzenbach é interpretada como um testemunho poético de descida ao inconsciente e de confronto com as forças sombrias da psique, em que figuras como o Anjo e o medo sem nome representam experiências arquetípicas de transformação. Por fim, o artigo reflete sobre o papel do analista diante do suicídio, sugerindo que sua tarefa é sustentar, sem julgar, o peso simbólico das imagens da alma.

Descriptors

Dor psíquica, suicídio, imaginação, psicologia junguiana.

Muerte en Persia: lo simbólico en el sufrimiento, en la muerte y el suicídio en la obra de Annemarie Schwarzenbach

Resumen

El artículo propone una lectura simbólica de la obra "*Muerte en Persia*", de Annemarie Schwarzenbach, con base en la psicología arquetípica de James Hillman. Por medio de un análisis cuidadoso de trechos del relato, este trabajo explora de qué manera temas como sufrimiento, muerte y suicidio se pueden comprender como expresiones del alma en travesía. La psicología es convocada aquí, no para interpretar o corregir el sufrimiento, sino para escucharlo en su lenguaje imaginario. El relato de Schwarzenbach es interpretado como un testimonio poético de descenso al inconsciente y de confrontación con las fuerzas sombrías de la psiquis, en que figuras como el Angel y el miedo sin nombre representan experiencias arquetípicas de transformación. Finalmente, el artículo hace una reflexión sobre el papel del analista frente al suicidio, sugiriendo que su tarea es sostener, sin juzgar, el peso simbólico de las imágenes del alma.

Descriptores

Dolor psíquico, suicidio, imaginación, psicología junguiana.

Introduction: prelude to the storm

By adopting a symbolic perspective, we understand that psychology has the essential task of addressing death not only as a biological end, but as an experience of the soul. In medical training, we perceive a limitation due to a clinical model that tends to avoid, combat, or silence death. However, this limitation is broader: in clinical practice, the topic remains marginalized, rarely being heard or discussed, despite being central to psychic life.

> It is not in life that our ultimate individuality is centered, but in death. Its realm, say the Greek myths of Hades and Tartarus, is the world below and within all life, and there souls find themselves at home (Hillman, 1975/2010, p. 229).

Through the literary work "Death in Persia" (Schwarzenbach, [1936]/2008), we propose to explore arid and profound themes such as suffering, death, and suicide, while simultaneously broadening our perspectives on these experiences, allowing them to be approached with greater listening, imagination, and depth.

> This book will bring little joy to the reader. It will not console or comfort them, as sad books often do; for it is a common opinion that suffering is imbued with moral strength, provided it is borne worthily. I have heard it said that even death can be edifying, but I confess I do not believe it, for how could one ignore its implacable force? Death is too incomprehensible, excessively inhuman; it only loses its violence when we recognize in it the only path of no return granted to us to escape the false paths of life.
> And it is about false paths that this book deals with, and its theme is hopelessness (Schwarzenbach, [1936]/2008, p. 13).

As Hillman (1975/2010, p. 132) states: "[t]he **insights** of depth psychology originate from souls *in extremis,* the sickly, suffering, abnormal, and fantastic conditions of the psyche." According to the author, sooner or later every soul ends up manifesting its illusions and depressive states, as well as overvalued ideas, moments of manic euphoria, outbursts of anger, anxieties, compulsions, and perversions. For it is also in these experiences of twists and fissures that the soul reveals itself.

Written in 1936, "Death in Persia" is one of the most intense and poetic accounts by the Swiss writer, journalist, and photographer Annemarie Schwarzenbach. The book stems directly from her personal experience during a long trip to Iran (then still called Persia), in the company of her friend and lover Ella Maillart . There, amidst the arid and mysterious landscapes of the Middle East, Annemarie confronted not only the external vastness, but above all

the inner abysses of her soul, marked by episodes of depression, loneliness, and morphine addiction.

Much of the manuscript was written while she was still in Tehran, where Annemarie recorded, amidst memories and reflections, the impressions of a traveler in an existential crisis. At the end of 1936, she returned to Europe and Switzerland, her native country, deeply shaken, without finding the emotional healing she sought on her Asian journey. The book, however, remained unpublished during her lifetime, kept among personal papers and notes.

Annemarie Schwarzenbach died prematurely on November 7, 1942, in the Swiss city of Sils , after suffering a bicycle accident, at the age of 34. It was only in 1998, more than half a century after her death, that "Death in Persia" was finally published, revealing to contemporary readers the power of her writing, marked by a rare combination of melancholic lucidity, poetic sensitivity, and historical testimony (Martin, 2008).

> While we may sometimes be happy for no reason, we can never be unhappy in the same way. And in a difficult time like ours, it is expected that each person will choose the right enemy and a destiny that matches their strength.
> (. . .)
> And even if youth tries to escape unscathed, however conscientious it may be in the way it interprets its escape, it still bears on its forehead the mark of Cain, the mark of one who betrayed his brother (Schwarzenbach, [1936]/2008, p. 14).

This work proposes a symbolic reading of "Death in Persia," based on the archetypal psychology of James Hillman . Hillman was chosen because of his critique of the Jungian tradition and his emphasis on archetypal plurality, the poetic listening to language, and the experience of the psychic underworld. Excerpts from the Portuguese edition of the book, with the original spelling maintained, were analyzed, addressing themes such as descent into the unconscious, symbolic death, and psychic imagination, highlighting how the protagonist's journey expresses profound internal transformations of the psyche in crisis.

> The line separating the inhuman from the superhuman is thin, and the grandeur of Asia is superhuman: not even hostile, just too vast. (. . .) Danger is incomprehensible, fear has no name—and that is what makes it terrifying. And there are paths so terrible that we cannot return from them. If that were not so, why die?
> Death is not natural for us; it leaves us perplexed. (. . .) Asians await death without anxiety—but our life is

> inconceivable without this anxiety, which is its true element (Schwarzenbach , [1936]/2008, p. 15).

According to Hillman (1979/2013), when Hades intervenes, a radical inversion of perspectives occurs: the life-centered view dissolves, and phenomena are perceived not only through the lens of Eros, linked to human vitality and love, but also through the prism of Thanatos, which reveals the cold, immobile depths detached from life. "The experience of the underworld is overwhelming, it comes as a violation, tearing us from life into the Realm that the Orphic hymn to Pluto describes as 'empty of day'" (Hillman, 1979/2013 , pp. 84-85) .

In this book marked by despair, Annemarie leads the reader through dark paths of the soul, where there is no possible consolation nor guaranteed redemption. Suffering does not present itself as a moral force, and death, inhuman and implacable, emerges as the only escape from life's false paths. By articulating images of a youth marked by guilt and an impossible escape, and by describing a superhuman Asian landscape where fear has no name, the author confronts us with the limits of human experience.

> Sometimes we can still cling to the pain, the bitterness of longing and regret, but in that case we no longer see our own guilt, we think in vain at the beginning: "what led me here?" To be able to accuse once more, to be able to trust once more, to be able to love once more! We then fall into illusion, vast as the sea, we have faith and we pray; and when we look into the face of the loved one, we forget the dark fear. But how can we protect ourselves from fear?
> Ah, to awaken once more without feeling its claws, to once again not be alone and surrendered to fear! And to feel the joyful breath of the world.
> Ah, to live once more! (Schwarzenbach, [1936]/2008, p. 16).

Thus, throughout the book, we will see that Schwarzenbach's suffering transforms into poetic and imagistic writing, not as a clinical account, but as an expression of the soul. As Hillman (2024) says, "imaginativo is heightened in melancholy; it makes sense that all great writers, thinkers, and artists considered themselves melancholic" (Hillman, 2024, p. 103). And it is precisely from this profound pain that the author's most vivid and symbolic images emerge.

The end of the world... And a person at the end of their strength

The limit of despair.

> Sometimes we call this valley the end of the world, because it is far above the world's plateaus. And because it is not possible to climb higher, except by scaling the giant, the smooth cone of Damavand , inhuman and supernatural, already touching the sky. (. . .) I spoke of the valley's exit... does that mean it flows into another side further down? That the water flows in some direction? The shepherds point with their hands: to the right, skirting the foot of Damavand . (What will be the size of this foothill? Is there still fire inside down there, where the water flows, and lava?) (Schwarzenbach, [1936]/2008, p. 37).

In this excerpt from "Death in Persia" (Schwarzenbach, [1936]/2008, p. 37), the valley is described as the "end of the world," marking a limit beyond which the body and psyche seem unable to proceed. The Damavand , an inhuman mountain looming above, represents an insurmountable obstacle, both external and internal. Doubt about the flow of water and the existence of subterranean fire reveals a downward psychic movement, in search of meaning beneath the surface. The landscape is not merely geographical: it mirrors the author's inner journey, in a dialogue between the external world and the psychic drama, as proposed by the psychology of James Hillman .

> To put it more directly: the **world of darkness** is psyche. When we use the expression **world of darkness** , we are referring to a totally psychic perspective, where our entire way of being has been desubstantialized, stripped of natural life, and yet it is in every form, sense, and size, the exact replica of natural life (Hillman, 1979/2013, p. 79, highlights in the original).

Schwarzenbach continues:

> What happens when a person reaches the end of their strength? (It's not illness, it's not pain, it's not unhappiness, it's worse.) (. . .) Hands are sweaty, speaking is an overwhelming effort. Get up and walk! The heart beats fast, and we follow the riverbank even faster, so as not to give in to the temptation to throw ourselves to the ground and cry from exhaustion and despair. Ah, here we don't cry. It's worse, much worse. Here we are alone (Schwarzenbach, [1936]/2008, p. 45).

In this passage, Schwarzenbach ([1936]/2008) touches on the point of absolute exhaustion, a state that transcends pain or unhappiness and establishes itself as a psychic experience of collapse. It is not just about physical suffering, but about extreme and languageless loneliness, in which even crying becomes impossible.

Hillman (2021) observes that, in addition to marriage, intimacy, and freedom, a fourth hidden word lurks in our relational lives: loneliness. He argues that, behind the aspirational expectations of the soul, there is a disturbing sadness for which these three concepts offer only seductive solutions. For Hillman, the human condition of loneliness remains a fundamental reality, often disguised by the contemporary idealization of community and therapeutic clichés about relationships, which ultimately only reveal the underlying isolation of individuals.

> Isn't loneliness cosmolological? Doesn"t it como with our Weltbild? Like atoms rapina in a void: we May be attracted and repelled to one another, but we are inherently unrelated. Isa"t our loneliness epistemological? (. . .) And so, your loneliness and mine tell of a more fundamental separation - that exile from the cosmos itself, from the gods and daimones and ancestors, and from the rituals that keep the world, that is also their world, intimately shared (Hillman, 2021, p. 432).

In describing the despair experienced in the valley, Schwarzenbach ([1936]/2008) reveals a soul at the extreme of its resistance, where reality begins to unravel.

> Psychological inwardness begins when we first succumb to depression whether through loss, failure, or heartbreak, or worse through an interior incomprehensible dejection with morbid fantasies. We begin in our personal lead. And the depression reações its terminal point only with recognition of the archetypal melancholy in the soul of the world (Hillman, 2024, p. 10).

Next, the author evokes the image of "flying" as a desire to break free from pain, an almost suicidal impulse to escape the unbearable. However, it is the survival instinct that compels her to move forward. In this liminal state, she tries to anchor herself by babbling the names of those she claims to love, not out of complete affection, but as the last thread that binds her to existence.

> Perhaps we could fly, we thought, and only by an instinct for survival did we force ourselves to keep walking. We began to murmur the names of those we thought we loved. It's terrible how they too are carried away by the

> wind, their faces torn to shreds, their eyes empty, their bodies so distant, unreachable, lost. (. . .)
> Almost collapsing, we kneel in the wind. Will it always be like this, we think, always? Mother, we think (how this name helps to cry!), I did something wrong, right at the beginning. But it wasn't me, it was life. All the paths I've taken, all the paths I haven't taken, end here, in the happy valley, from where there is no way out, and which therefore already resembles the place of death (Schwarzenbach, [1936]/2008, p. 45).

Hillman (1975/2010), instead of seeking to cure or unify the ruptures of the psyche, proposes restoring its imaginal (the soul thinks through images) and mythopoetic (the psyche creates meaning through archetypal narratives) perspective: understanding multiplicity not as pathology, but as an expression of the soul's richness. Psychology, therefore, should be rooted not in reason, but in imagination, in the heart, in emotions, and in Eros, for it is imagination, understood as a living and autonomous force of the soul, that produces the images that give meaning to psychic experience.

Thus, the emptiness and the fall, described by the author, do not need to be repaired by unity, but can be embraced as legitimate expressions of a plural consciousness, where each image, however dark it may be, carries its own symbolic and transformative value.

> This relationship with images means giving them full credit: it means restoring fallen idols and cracked icons that were formed and counter-reformed into pale likenesses of once sacred **figures**. The restoration of the image, however, does not mean the literal reinstitution of idolatry, but rather the restoration of the image to our sight – not so much **in** what we see, but in the **way we perceive it.** As we see it. It means bringing an imaginal perspective , bringing fantasy to everything we see.
> (. . .)
> Instead of trying to cure pathological fragmentation wherever it appears, we would let the content of this fantasy cure our consciousness of its obsession with unity . (. . .) And, with the dominant unitary fantasy from the start, would also go its dominant emotion: loneliness (Hillman, 1975/2010, pp. 112-113, highlights in the original).

The Angel[i]: a dialogue with death

Hillman (1993/2011) criticizes psychology for neglecting death, prioritizing the banalities of daily life. Although death is, for him, central to the study of the soul, there is little psychological literature

on the subject. In contrast, theology offers consolidated answers, supported by dogmas, scriptures, and traditions. Archetypal psychology, instead of fixed truths, works with the living experience of the soul, always in movement, imagination, and transformation (Hillman, 1993/2011, pp. 67-68) .

> In another essay on the idea of the soul, I suggested that the word refers to that unknown component that makes meaning possible, transforms events into experiences, is communicated in love, and has a religious yearning. I already put forward these four predicates some years ago; I began to use the term fairly freely, often interchangeably with *psyche* (from the Greek) and *anima* (from the Latin). Now I am adding three necessary modifications. First, "soul" refers to the **deepening** of events into experiences; second, the meaning that the soul makes possible, whether in love or in religious matters, derives from its particular **relationship with death**. And, third, by "soul" I mean the imaginative possibility in our nature, the experiencing through reflective speculation, dreaming, imagery, and fantasy – that mode which recognizes all realities as primarily symbolic or metaphorical (Hillman, 1975/2010, p. 28, highlights in the original) .

In the chapter "The Angel," Schwarzenbach ([1936]/2008) describes an intense experience in which solitude, pain, and transcendence intertwine, giving rise to the psychic figure of the Angel as an intimate interlocutor. This encounter is not reduced to an external event, but, as Hillman would say, it deepens into experience, transforming suffering into something that can have meaning, by opening space for love, reflection, and religious yearning. The presence of the Angel embodies this imaginative dimension of the soul. "When the complex is personified, I can perceive its specific qualities and give it the specific respect it requires. What was previously an affect, a symptom, an obsession, is now a figure with whom I can speak" (Hillman, 1975/2010, p. 101) .

> That night the Angel entered my tent. (. . .) He was among the shadows, but visible.
> (. . .)
> It was then that I remembered that I had fought for my life with the Angel, for the life I thought was already lost.
> – I had an almost irresistible urge – I said – to go down to the bank and plunge my face into the dark, cool waters of death. Yes, I wanted to die – I saw him nod and continued, – But this was only the last temptation, not even the worst. I fled the tents when I couldn't take it anymore…

> – When you thought you couldn't take it anymore – the Angel corrected me. (. . .)
> Giving in to fear, I opened my eyes . – It was at the top of the hill – said the Angel – that I began to wrestle with you. I saw how you suffered. I saw how you tormented yourself, against all reason, and how you placed your last hope in a miracle. What was it that you lacked?
> This terrible question left me speechless, and the old despair from which there is no escape descended upon me. – I don't know, – I said. (. . .) – Because you are weak – he said – you are among the weakest, but you are sincere. And that is why I decided to fight with you, to lift you from your fear of death. (. . .) Do not think that I can lighten your burden – said the Angel. (. . .)
> – I was careful the whole time not to get too close to the river.
> – So now you're clinging to life?
> – No, – I said – the wind tore to shreds the faces of those I thought I loved.
> – I did not come here to lighten your burden – said the angel, – I did not come for that. I only wanted to see you. I wanted to know if you would now be able to bear the desolation and helplessness of my land (Schwarzenbach, [1936]/2008, pp. 47-51).

Hillman (1933/2011) questions the notion that suicide is "unnatural," reminding us that death is the natural end of the life cycle, marked by decomposition and rest. We consider suicide premature because it does not follow this path, but, as he points out, even in nature the rhythms of aging and death are diverse and non-linear. Thus, classifying suicide as unnatural reveals more about our cultural and moral beliefs than about the reality of the psyche or organic life (Hillman, 1993/2011).

> – From your homeland? – I asked, sounding doubtful.
> – Don't have too much hope in me – he said sternly, – we too have our limits. In this land there are thousands of angels; you may cross paths with them and, as you seek salvation, perhaps you will be able to see them. But your guardian angel, as they told you at home, does not exist. Nothing can remedy your loneliness. Out here you must be content with me, an angel among thousands.
> – I'm not unhappy – I replied, venturing a correction, – I just feel so alone, and I no longer know where I can find shelter, find comfort. Today you helped me once again, and it wasn't easy. We don't find an angel every day, but every day we see the dawn and the dusk, which burn like

> the fires of hell, and we see the empty hours, which are content with themselves, but bring me no solace. (. . .)
> With a weariness that felt like death, I said, "I can't take it anymore."
> He simply replied: – You are sincere to the point of obstinacy. But that is of no use in facing life, which is actually stronger than you, stronger than everyone – and he left the tent (Schwarzenbach, [1936]/2008, pp. 51-52).

Normally, when we think of death, we only think of biological death, that is, when the body stops functioning, when organs and tissues deteriorate and physical life comes to an end. But Hillman warns us that, in addition to this physical death, there is also a death of the soul, which happens throughout life. This death is not literal: it appears in losses, in profound changes, in emotional pain, and in moments when we feel that a part of us needs to die so that another part can be born (Hillman, 1993/2011).

> Death is the only absolute in life, the only certainty and truth. Because it is the only condition that any life must take into account, it is the only human *a priori*. **Life matures, develops, and leads to death. Death is its legitimate end. We live to die. Life and death contain each other, complement each other reciprocally**, and are only comprehensible when placed in relation to one another. (. . .) And analysts cannot dispense with a philosophy of death (Hillman, 1993/2011, pp. 71-72, highlights in the original).

In these small symbolic deaths , parts of us die inside, but this does not destroy us; on the contrary, it allows the soul to mature, grow, and transform. Hillman (1993/2011) believes that if we spend our entire lives trying to escape these small deaths, denying suffering and change, we will reach the end of life biologically alive, but psychically impoverished , because our soul will not have had the chance to renew itself. Therefore, he proposes that we can live already aware of death, not only the physical death that will come one day, but also these small inner deaths that give depth and meaning to existence (Hillman, 1993/2011).

Nights in Rages and the beginning of fear

In the chapter "Nights in Rages and the Principle of Fear", Schwarzenbach ([1936]/2008) describes her experiences in Rages , where the desolate setting and restless nights evoke a dense atmosphere of primal fear. The author delves into an intense reflection on the nature of fear, not as an immediate reaction to

concrete threats, but as a deep and diffuse existential state that permeates the environment and the psyche.

> But in Persia I experienced very different nights. Nights of pitch-black darkness with no way out. (. . .)
> George was waiting for me. – I'll go with you – he said, silently guessing my nameless fear. Fear? At that time, I didn't know this new sensation. Only later did I understand when it became too powerful and almost annihilated me. And, since then, a dark curtain hangs above everything, the nameless fear. (. . .)
> There was no protection against him. There was nothing, and I cried for my mother.
> Gradually, I understood. And I will never be able to overcome it. And I will never be able to forget (Schwarzenbach, [1936]/2008, pp. 74-75).

In light of archetypal psychology, this fear is not something to be eliminated and understood, but a profound experience of the soul in its descent into the psychic underworld. It reveals an existential, unnamable, and transformative condition against which there is no defense. It is an archetypal experience of terror that destabilizes, marks, and transforms us—something that, as the author confesses, can never be overcome or forgotten.

> (. . .) One day, they regained their spirits, but for how long? Because now came the moment of impalpable danger, when no moral decision is possible, when all efforts are useless.
> Danger has many names. Sometimes it's simply homesickness, other times it's just the dry mountain wind that sharpens the nerves, other times it's alcohol, and other times it's even more lethal poisons. At certain times it has no name; in those moments we are overcome by an unspeakable fear (Schwarzenbach, [1936]/2008, pp. 77-78).

The fact that danger takes on mutant forms, such as longing, wind, alcohol, or poison, echoes a central idea in Hillman (1975/2010): the affects and images of the soul are essentially polymorphic, manifesting themselves in multiple and unpredictable ways, without being reducible to a single origin or rational explanation.

> You will have noticed that we have been talking about archetypes in the plural.
> We are working from the premise that there are several valid points of view regarding any psychological event , and that these points of view have an archetypal basis . Our psychology is, to begin with, polytheistic , less as a

> function of religious affiliation and more as a function of psychological necessity (Hillman, 1975/2010, p. 35),

The principle of silence

> Sometimes I wonder why I write down all these memories. Why do I want to have strangers read them? Why do I want to confide in strangers, or if not strangers, in people close to me, good friends? But confide in what? It's clear to me that this book contains no confidences. (. . .)
> Therefore, I don't ask myself so much why I surrender to abandonment, but rather why I even write. Because writing is not easy; it demands a terrible and probably futile effort. It forces us to remember, and although I can never rid myself of memories for even a moment, neither I nor those who share my destiny would at least like to be spared this knowledge. After all, we are already accustomed to this singular condition of this country: we are never free, we are not ourselves, the unknown becomes stronger than us and leads us to estrange ourselves from our own hearts (Schwarzenbach, [1936]/2008, pp. 85-86).

In the chapter "The Principle of Silence," Schwarzenbach ([1936]/2008) reveals that writing, for her, is not an act of confidence, but an ambiguous gesture, marked by effort and pain. The silence that permeates the text is more than the absence of sound: it is a psychic force that isolates, hardens, and prevents surrender. By questioning why she writes and for whom, the author shows that she seeks neither consolation nor understanding – she merely tries to sustain, between words and silences, the experience of a soul that no longer trusts either itself or others.

> But when someone misses home, they don't talk about it – and this is only the first stage of suffering. (. . .) Angels are too strong and walk with invulnerable feet, but men don't want to ask anything of anyone, we don't know for sure what the vulnerable point of others is, and perhaps that is ours? And so silence spreads. And we call this propagation of silence "hardening" (Schwarzenbach, [1936/2008, p. 87).

"Since our psychic matter is made of images, making images is a *royal road* , a true path to the cultivation of the soul" (Hillman, 1975/2010, p. 81). Writing, in this sense, is not a utilitarian act, but a spontaneous expression of the soul – a gesture of **making soul** – even when it implies effort or exposes the subject to their own suffering. After all, "the psyche seems to be more interested in the

movement of its ideas than in the resolution of problems" (Hillman, 1975/2010, p. 289).

The theme of hardening, "thus spreads silence," expresses what Hillman calls archetypal defenses: not mere mechanisms of the ego, but symbolic ways of protecting deep zones of the psyche. Instead of seeking immediate healing, the soul resists explanation and preserves the mystery of suffering as a defense against monotony and trivialization. Personifying this silence, giving it a face and language, is what prevents the soul from becoming opaque, it is what maintains its vitality (Hillman, 1975/2010).

In our view, this passage reveals not only the author's personal suffering, but the universal emotional drama of writing, remembering, and enduring the mystery of human vulnerability amidst invisible and relentless forces.

The Angel and the death of Ialé: an attempt at love

In this chapter, Schwarzenbach ([1936]/2008) recounts the death of Ialé , a young Persian woman who was very ill and had been closely cared for by the narrator and her traveling companions. Despite her frailty, Ialé was a beloved and affectionately cared-for presence, but her health deteriorated rapidly. Ialé 's death occurred amidst the atmosphere of exhaustion and sadness that already permeated the journey. Schwarzenbach describes how Ialé passed away peacefully, almost without resistance, and how her body was wrapped and prepared according to local customs.

> It was then that the Angel came to meet me for the second time. (. . .) I knew that Ialé was dying, and I didn't even look up to speak to the Angel, who stopped a few steps from me. (. . .) When he spoke again, I was frightened.
> – What you're thinking is sacrilege – he said. – You know very well that it will be of no use and that you will never see this girl again. You know that no one can enter another person's heart and unite with them, not even for a brief moment. Even your mother gave you only a body, and when you began to breathe, it wasn't air you inhaled, but loneliness. (. . .)
> – And you? – asked the Angel, and I recognized his stern, very distant voice again, – you never wanted to die? Why do you think about it?
> – I just think that this is always the only way out we have!
> – Do you value death so little? Is it only for you to escape from yourself? (. . .) – I can grant you nothing nor forbid you anything. That you give up on yourself and let yourself

> fall, that's all I wish. If you have already reached that point. (. . .) A few weeks ago – he said – you thought you had reached the end of your strength. Since then, you have never sought my help again, even though I came to your tent for that purpose. You preferred to cling to a more human hope. And where has this hope led you? (Schwarzenbach, [1936]/2008, pp. 127-129).

In this intense dialogue between the narrator and the Angel, we see a radical confrontation with loneliness, death, and human hope. The Angel, here, does not appear as a consolation, but as a stern voice that exposes the illusion of fusion with the other and the fallacy of escape through death. The message is clear: from the first breath of life – "it was not air you breathed, but loneliness" – the human being is thrown into their condition of radical separation and autonomy. The Angel questions the value attributed to death as a simple escape, warning of the danger of using it as an escape from oneself, and not as a conscious surrender. The critique of the "most human," fragile, and deceptive hope reveals that, for the Angel, the true crossing of pain requires the surrender of personal will: "giving up oneself" not as defeat, but as acceptance of powerlessness in the face of the mysteries of existence. This passage, therefore, marks a moment when the protagonist is called upon to confront death and suffering without false illusions, abandoning the resistances of the ego to enter into a deeper experience of herself and of life.

At the end of "Death in Persia", Annemarie Schwarzenbach ([1936]/2008) describes the physical and psychological exhaustion she experiences after the long journey through Iran. There is no redeeming resolution or comforting ending: the author remains immersed in a feeling of helplessness and alienation. She recounts her departure from Bandar Abbas, on the coast of the Persian Gulf, feeling profoundly empty and marked by everything she has experienced. The experience of the journey, far from bringing healing, accentuates her awareness of the essential solitude of existence and the abyss between her and the world

Conclusion (the human condition)

"Death in Persia" (Schwarzenbach, [1936]/2008) is more than the account of a physical journey through desert landscapes and distant cities; it is the narrative of a spiritual descent, in which the author confronts the darkest regions of her own psyche. The external journey, punctuated by images of vastness, ruin, and silence, mirrors the inner journey of a soul stripped of illusions, forced to face the fundamental solitude of existence and the inevitability of death. Following the perspective of archetypal psychology, we can understand this journey not as a search for overcoming or

transcendence, but as fidelity to the descending call of the soul, a necessary movement for the deepening and making of the soul (**making soul**).

Schwarzenbach ([1936]/2008), by evoking images such as the angel, nameless fear, and the principle of silence, constructs an imaginary world that sustains and shapes the experience of suffering and dissolution. In this sense, the work reminds us that, faced with helplessness and fragmentation, the soul has no other task than to endure, to give imaginal expression to the forces that traverse it, and to consciously inhabit the arid territory of non-belonging. Thus, "Death in Persia" becomes a profound testimony of the psychic journey in times of crisis, in which symbolic death, far from being the end, marks the beginning of an incessant work of transformation of the soul.

This conclusion is not a conclusion. It is an ethical unfolding that remains and moves forward. Throughout this work, we have explored images of despair, silence, and death as symbolic expressions of the soul in transit. But what does the analyst do when these images erupt into the clinical space not as metaphors, but as concrete decisions of death?

> When a man builds the structure of his life vertically, like a building, climbing step by step, floor by floor, only to jump out the top window or be felled by a heart attack or stroke, will he not have fulfilled his own architectural plan and received his own death? From this point of view, suicide is not one of the ways of entering death, **but all death is suicidal** , and the choice of method is only more or less evident, whether it be a car accident, a heart attack, or those acts normally called suicide (Hillman, 1993/2011, p. 74, highlights in the original).

Hillman questions: “The experience of death is necessary, but is concrete suicide also necessary? How does the analyst proceed when the experience of death is lived through suicidal fantasies?" (Hillman, 1993/2011, p. 89). For him, it is up to the analyst to maintain the distinction between the internal and external world, preventing unconscious fantasies from being lived literally. “We suffer both when projecting images of the soul onto the world and when living unconscious fantasies literally – thus distorting the symbolic experience" (Hillman, 1993/2011, p. 89).

The author further proposes that the analyst resort to philosophy when addressing suicide, since "suicide may be for some an act of unconscious philosophy" (Hillman, 1993/2011, p. 90). Thus, the desire to die may reflect a profound search of the soul for an encounter with absolute reality or for a fuller life that is only achieved by passing through death (Hillman, 1993/2011).

> Without terror, without the prejudices of pre-fixed positions, without pathological bias, suicide becomes natural. It is natural because it is a possibility of our nature, a choice available to every human psyche. The analyst's concern will then be less with the suicidal choice itself, than with helping the other person understand the meaning of this choice, the **only one that directly requires the experience of death.** An essential meaning of the choice is the importance of death for individuality. As individuality grows, so does the possibility of suicide. (Hillman, 1993/2011, p. 74, highlights in the original).

Understanding a soul's story, as Hillman proposes , means accepting to become part of the other's destiny, not as someone who interprets or organizes facts around a diagnosis, but as one who listens to the symbolic language of suffering. In situations where suicide emerges as an image or possibility, this listening demands even greater responsibility. The analyst's role, in this context, is not to prevent death at any cost, nor to redeem pain with explanations, but to bear the weight of the presented psychic image. By embracing the symbolic dimension of the desire to die, the analyst commits to a radical presence: he accompanies without judging, listens without reducing, and remains faithful to the soul's journey, even as it approaches its end (Hillman, 1993/2011).

> From the perspective of the soul's history, the secret alliance determines the analyst's responsibility. Their responsibility extends to their involvement and participation in the other person's soul history. In theory, they participate equally in every type of death and **are no more responsible in suicide than in any other type** . In suicide, an analyst's lack of responsibility does not signify the act of suicide itself, as is thought when it is claimed that every suicide is a therapeutic failure. Rather, it signifies their failure in relation to the secret alliance in two possible ways: not being involved or not consciously sustaining involvement. One must maintain the position of one foot in and the other out. Both feet out is non-involvement; both feet in is unconsciousness of responsibility. **We are not responsible for each other's life and death; each person's life and death is their own. However, we are responsible for our involvements.** (Hillman, 1993/2011, p. 94, highlights in the original).

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[i]Schwarzenbach dedicates this passage _/chapter of the book to her personal friend, Cathalene Crane. Most likely, she was someone with whom the author shared confidences about her inner journey, her pain, and her existential quests (Martin, 2008).