

Amazing Grace

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*Amazing grace
How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost
But now I'm found
Was blind, but now I see*

"Amazing Grace," John Newton, 1779
(Turner 2002/2009, prologue)

*We argued where to lay the blame
On one man's hate or our nation's shame
Some sickness of the mind or soul
And how the wounds might be made whole
But no words could say what must be said
For all the living and the dead
So on that Day and in that place
The President sang Amazing Grace
My President sang Amazing Grace*

"The President Sang Amazing Grace," Zoe Mulford, 2017

I believe our hearts are all alike, destitute of every good, and prone to every evil. Like money from the same mint, they bear the same impression of total depravity. But grace makes a difference, and grace deserves the praise.

John Newton, Letter to Mrs. T., 1777
(Turner 2002/2009, prologue)

"Amazing Grace" is a powerful song written by an avowed slave trader who underwent a conversion experience. This piece of heartfelt music has carried on for nearly three centuries, crossing oceans around the world to land on US soil and be adopted by the Black community



Figure 1. Kronos Quartet and Meklit singing “The President Sang ‘Amazing Grace.’” (Written by Zoe Mulford, arranged by Jacob Garchik. Performed by Meklit and Kronos Quartet. Produced by Stanford Live. Filmed at Bing Concert Hall. Reprinted with permission of Meklit, Kronos Quartet, and Stanford Live.)

as a beacon of hope and by countless secular groups from diverse backgrounds and belief systems as an anthem during times of fear and threatened cross-cultural and political discord. This song has a vitality, history, and future all its own that persists, perhaps, because it inherently conveys empathy for human suffering beyond words and beyond individuals and is held together through confessional lyrics and the beauty of music; it continues to enter individual ears and, at the same time, remind us that *we all are “poor wretches”* who can understand ourselves and one another through *the transcendent truth and companionship of amazing grace* (Figure 1).

The contents of this paper were percolating during the dark days of late October 2020 leading up to the elections, when a patient came forward with her own amplification at the end of an hour. She requested that we screen-share and listen to a magnificent song called “The President Sang Amazing Grace,” written by Zoe Mulford and performed by a young Ethiopian-American singer/songwriter named Meklit, accompanied by the Kronos Quartet (2020). Multiple senses were awakened by the striking appearance, facial expressions, and soulful voice of Meklit supported by the mask-wearing musicians. The lyrics and melody came together as a ballad telling the story of President Obama singing the traditional “Amazing Grace” as part of his eulogy for Reverend Pinckney and the eight other congregation members. They perished when a stranger entered the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, one of the oldest Black churches in the South, and gunned them down after sitting through a Wednesday evening Bible study on June 17, 2015. The patient and I connected across many miles and were surrounded by the unbearable pain expressed in an exquisite and artistic form as a profound, contemporary lament. This soulful moment was one

that resonated with each of us within the context of our ongoing analytic work as we were surrounded by persistent national political strife and an atmosphere of collective duress due to the pandemic and the turmoil over conflicts related to racial inequality that has most certainly continued since 2015. This surprising analytic moment had arisen from a meaningful and layered hour culminating in a shared experience of grief and beauty held together by art: truly grace both “bidden and unbidden,” transcended as an ephemeral spirit that became manifest, offering a sense of hope and peace.

I will offer more details about the *process* of our unfolding clinical work and put forward multiple resonant *structural models* that reveal underlying *patterns* from the relational level of the analytic dyad to the mythological level evident in our current collective culture by using amplifications that are relevant and hold true at varying scales. To understand personal suffering and move through and beyond entrapping obsessive traumatic memories, it is essential to locate portals into larger contexts that engage alternate experiences and aspects of self. I also explore the meaning of *grace* and *lamentation*: both are biblical concepts that, I believe, very well relate to our current circumstances. We are living in the midst of extraordinary large-scale disruption and trauma beyond comprehension, and it is during such times that humans have historically looked to myth or to the Divine for understanding and guidance. No doubt some myths from the past and present convey destructive falsehoods, whereas others may provide wisdom from earlier beliefs that allow for comfort and solace; ideas about grace and lamentation are well worth reconsidering. Bringing forward such concepts may offer a means for processing complex emotions as well as structures that aid in the holding and working through of trauma.

During this recent time of titanic chaos, Dan Siegel’s model of “the window of tolerance” offers a visual and organizing structure for understanding affect regulation and dysregulation (2020, 341–348). Usually applied to an individual psyche, I believe that this organizing structure can be expanded as a tool for understanding our current individual responses to collective systems as well as a *tool for understanding the collective systems, themselves*. We are unavoidably embedded within complex societies that are affectively dysregulated, now on a grand scale. Locating a balanced domain within “the [collective] window of tolerance” can come into being through relationship: with others, the natural world, and the arts of all kinds. This kind of “regulated, integrated state” can ultimately be recognized and known as a “state of grace” that goes beyond the human and leads into something larger and inexplicable (Crowther and Schmidt 2015). Such a state of equilibrium is a kind of “self-state” where a fullness of being and *peace transcends*.

Jung’s alchemical image of Sol and Luna (1944/1966, CW 16, 213) can function as another orienting guide. In my mind, it metaphorically depicts a system of interaction that is transcended by a star symbolizing the cosmic influences always and forever surrounding us. Intertwined with the star is a dove representing a spirit connecting us vertically to the Divine as well as representing the ordinary winged movement of life-giving energy that connects us horizontally to others who share this plane with us. This alchemical drawing from another era has utility for traversing the complicated territory of our current time. Used in conjunction with the window of tolerance, we are better able to “see through” to underlying dynamic patterns common to all. Jungians would

understand the overall alchemical image as a metaphorical amplification of the transcendent function. There are similarities between Jung's transcendent function at the macrocosmic level of myth and the microcosmic concepts from infant researchers who describe "moments of meeting" (Stern et al. [hereafter the Boston Change Process Study Group] 1998) and the "dyadic expansion of consciousness" (Tronick 2007) that are harmonious with "states of grace"¹ as evidenced in the clinical moment to be further explicated in Part II of this paper. However, these models leave out the transcendent spiritual aspects that are part of the "religious function of the psyche" that Jung sees as essential for healing.

Throughout this paper, I point to reverberations among theories that amplify each other and extend beyond Jung's earlier and prescient remarkable discoveries. For example, I have been deeply influenced by applications of infant research to adult treatment whose theories are grounded in Complex Adaptive Systems theories. From my view, these contemporary concepts and empirical findings are highly relevant for analytic practice and are a natural continuation of what Jung intuited so long ago; resonant patterning is apparent within systems and can be analogously found between systems at varying scales. We can look at the details of a specific personal dyadic interaction, the intrapsychic interrelationships of dream figures, and locate similar patterns embedded within mythological motifs, works of art, or large group behaviors. Each affectively conveys analogous universal human struggles. The following description from information technology by cognitive scientists Ted Carmichael and Mirsad Hadzikadic sounds strikingly similar to Jung's idea about amplification as a method of analogy:

There is ... an ever-growing understanding that similar features in complex systems across a diversity of domains may indicate similar fundamental principles at work, and as such there is often utility in using the key features of one system to gain insight into the workings of seemingly distinct fields. (2019, 1)

My perspective is that there is value in surveying multiple fields of influence (macrocosmic/mythological in Jung's method of amplification and microcosmic/relational as described by infant researchers) in conjunction with the importance of art as a cultural vehicle that inherently allows for paradox and play. In other words there is an indivisible spectrum of associations spanning from the mythological to the personal. Art, as such, can function therapeutically and palliatively, not only in the analytic setting but also for collective cultures, especially when in states of exceptional upset. In seeming support, Jung states, "Just as the one-sidedness of the individual's conscious attitude is corrected by reactions from the unconscious, so art represents a process of self-regulation in the life of all nations and epochs" (1922/1966, CW 15, ¶131). The arts open opportunities to locate and recognize ourselves—our life circumstances, joys, and suffering. Often, we sense patterns in paintings, music, poetry, literature, film, and dance that reflect deep emotional, cognitive, and body experience. A vibrational field is co-created, imagination is ignited, and awareness of one's self as belonging to a larger whole emerges; this idea characterizes the shared experience between myself and the patient at the end of a therapeutic hour.

Part I of this paper offers descriptions of a specific clinical moment along with the life history of John Newton and the evolving trajectory of "Amazing Grace," as each magnifies and expands understanding of the others. There are actually three "case studies" or "stories" in

Part I: the story of Patient M., the story of John Newton, and the story of the song as a transcendent entity unto itself.

Part II offers a more theoretical, in-depth analysis of the case, the music, and the archetypal patterns reverberating from the microcosmic dyadic level to the macrocosmic collective level and back again ... the great round is self-perpetuating across time.

Part I

Introduction to the Analytic Moment

In this particular day, I had become dysregulated by the morning news. As is often the case, openness to the natural unfolding of the day brought unexpected but welcome grace through relationship and art. Portions of this particular clinical hour described here are those in which the patient M. introduced me to the song (with a powerful backstory) “The President Sang Amazing Grace.”² Immersion in the melody and lyrics brought the two of us into a state of meaningful resonance within the analytic dyad and simultaneously into resonance with the universe. It offered us a much needed perspective during a period of global disruption. I had never heard this song before and was profoundly moved as we listened to it together across the many miles on the internet. Inspired by this relational context, the string quartet, the singer’s voice/presence, and the gripping words along with the extraordinary history behind this remarkable song, a portal opened; I found a path into development of this paper and the energy needed to attempt to create a coherent whole threaded with art. I am truly grateful for this transcendent gift when our national atmosphere was thick with anxiety anticipating the conflicts that would emerge with the elections, the aftermath, and the insurrection that we could not yet know but could palpably sense. Despite (or because of) the surrounding tensions, I was inspired to maintain hope for abiding grace by following “the music of what happens” (Ogden 1999).

The reverberations of the two songs, “Amazing Grace” and “The President Sang Amazing Grace” act as a combined through-line for writing this paper. I invite the reader to join me in an unfolding process inspired by Hermes who connects all at every level, transgresses boundaries, and assists with the flow of energy. The unseen but powerfully impactful force of emotion moves from individuals to groups and from groups to individuals, for it is emotion (often conveyed through art) that ties us to the rhizomal layer beneath the feet of all who walk this earth; such energy flows, described metaphorically by Jung, as “the way of the snake” writhes back and forth bridging feeling to equally important thinking (2009b, 181).

Analytic Encounter

The patient M. and I began the hour by locating ourselves on different coasts, noticing the weather in the background—for M., leaves falling, temperatures cooler and rainy on the East Coast; for me, the California sun was shining, but new wildfires had recently broken out south of us; the smoke, however, had not yet traveled to where we now live. M. and I then fell into our known rhythm and style of being together. We had recently been working on the sadness

that she raised (reciprocal and acknowledged as such between us) regarding the boundaries of the analytic container that would not allow for more time together and the intimacy of a close friendship. Having recently decided to retire sooner than expected due to the pandemic, she has been re-orienting to a new lifestyle at home, something that I had certainly experienced with the move to California from the East Coast five years earlier. Sacrificing an external friendship for the sacred commitment of the analytic process is something that she deeply understands, and we have been able to share the bittersweetness of our circumstances. She has accurately sensed the many resonances in our lives without knowing, for the most part, the specifics of my personal story. We most certainly have co-constructed an interconnected relationship at multiple levels over many years of working together. Longings for closeness during the pandemic time of isolation and the need for companionship have posed archetypal tensions felt by most people globally, and not surprisingly, it emerged within this specific relationship. Surrounded by an environmental field laden with anxieties about illness and death and at a significant turning point centered around retirement, issues related to fears of loss of immediate family members and, indeed, loss of self to the coronavirus have raised deep questions about not only how to pursue the time remaining but also how to pursue meaningful activities of a life well-lived. These common struggles reverberated between us directly in conversation and indirectly in the poignancy of poetry we discussed. M. is aware that, on one hand, she wishes for friendship, and on the other, she is quite relieved that I hold the boundaries and see the relationship as asymmetric with a privileging of her psyche as the focus of our work; she is highly relationally oriented and is a “caregiver,” so not feeling a demand to take care of me, actually allows her much greater freedom to explore her own creativity and suffering but within a context of mutual appreciation.

M. began the hour by talking about her husband’s possible retirement and the need to organize finances that entailed the selling of a property that symbolized home for her during a complicated turning point in their family life; it had been a concretized secure base. She noted that our conversations had positively influenced the purchase of that property many years before; I had not known or forgotten about any influence that I may have had. The time was right for letting go. M. described an ambivalent feeling, and she associated to the concept of *nostalgia*. I sensed the emergence of complex, mutually shared emotions between us; simultaneously, within the co-created field, we seemed to be holding/appreciating past memories (hers/mine/ours) of love and loss as unavoidable aspects of life-lived as women of a certain age. We then began casting about to amplify the meaning of this important word and experience.

Amplification: The Meaning of Nostalgia

With natural curiosity, a love of words, and a long history of interest in the *Odyssey*, M. quickly found the Greek meaning for *nostalgia* as “longing for home” derived from νόστος (*nóstos*), meaning “homecoming,” a Homeric word, and ἄλγος (*álgos*), having to do with “pain” or “ache.” I learned later that the continuation of the etymology notes the word “was coined by a 17th-century medical student to describe the anxieties displayed by Swiss mercenaries fighting

away from home.”³ This history relates to the discussion to follow about the origins of the song “Amazing Grace” by John Newton (1779), a sailor and slave trader who eventually became a minister. Through many miserable adventures on the high seas, Newton’s memories of his “Penelope” protected him from suicide and kept hope alive for a safe return home. Although Newton’s strivings were not quite so heroic as those of Odysseus, we can find reverberations in the following lines from Homer: “Many cities of men he saw and learned their minds, many pains he suffered, heartsick, on the open sea, fighting to save his life and bring his comrades home” (Homer 1996, 77).

As our hour together wound to a close, the patient reflected on a moment that she and her sister had experienced with their mother when she was near death in the hospital. With palpable emotion, M. recounted memories when the three women engaged in a sacred bedside ritual that seemed to offer consolation for all, as their mother transitioned “home”; I felt included in sensations emanating from this memory as it was constellated within the field between us (see Ogden [1994, 3] on the “present moment of the past”⁴). From the outset to the conclusion of the session, M. and I had, ourselves, followed an invisible thread of emotion that led us through undercurrent patterns of loss and separation: from the reported letting go of a physical property representing a secure base; to her initiated turn toward a more archetypal amplification through the *Odyssey* and its associated meaning of *nostalgia*; to this profound place of the physical death of a parent, both very personal and universal. It was now time that we, too, wind down to the end and return to our separate homes and lives miles apart on different coasts.

A mutual complex that we might call “longing for home” was constellated along with concomitant longings for protection and closer proximity that often arise during times of uncertainty. Not surprisingly, seeking contact with a secure base naturally comes forward when potential threats emerge or when life transitions are at play throughout the lifespan. Suffering with the sacrifice of friendship has allowed us to move into another kind of intimacy in the analytic field that opens the possibility for M. to experience her own self-agency on her own unique journey toward individuation. Paradoxically, doing so means facing the feelings of loss and aloneness that necessarily come with becoming oneself. A deep connection can result when two people are capable of recognizing fundamental aloneness in one’s self and, at the same time, aloneness in the other.

Interactions about Art as Part of Analytic Work

M. has noted of late that she especially appreciates what seem to be “extra” conversations about art at the end of sessions. I, however, have not seen these as in any way extra but the culmination of the patterns that have been transpiring throughout the hour. Indeed, she has come to agree with me and has caught on to the value and meaning of Jungian amplification that she, actually, has understood intuitively and offered herself as evident in her associations about the *Odyssey* and *nostalgia*.

I have come to think of our ongoing conversations about shared interest in the arts as a movement toward comfort and soothing as we approach the end of our time together and an inevitable separation until the next week. Such engagement allows for much needed pleasure,

enjoyment, and a balancing of what has felt distressing, but certainly necessary to discuss, as each hour unfolds. In a way, this kind of mutual immersion in art allows for a sustaining transitional object that, at first glance, seems ephemeral but that, at root, relates to the undercurrent flow of archetypal patterns emergent between us. With increasing flexibility, M. has been able to move in and out of the ongoing and exceptionally painful places that she has not caused but that have befallen her. Recently, as she has taken on grief in a very deep way, M. has thoughtfully recounted some positive events and encounters in her life at the outset of the hour. She notes that by diving directly into the most recent distresses, she may well forget to share meaningful aspects of her life that co-exist alongside her anguish. By ordering things in this way, M. reminds herself that there is much more to her psyche and surroundings than the painful parts and she engages me in co-creating the safe holding environment of a secure base. With repetition over time, neural pathways of secure interaction patterns, such as those briefly described here, are internalized, fortified, and instantiated in the brain/mind. Put more poetically, these new and internalized patterns of attachment are formed by the warp and woof of interwoven dark threads of profound suffering along with often less obvious but durable threads of artistic amplifications. We have developed a rhythm that brings together explicit content with the more invisible, but tangibly felt, lifegiving threads of process and communication of emotion via art. M. has remarkable ego strength and has been developing greater confidence in bearing the “unbearable,” as was made clear in her sharing of the magnificent contemporary lament that I hope the reader will hear and experience directly by listening to this song.

At an important turning point moment, at the session’s close and by her request, M. and I experienced together “The President Sang Amazing Grace.” Her self-initiated and exceptionally apt amplification brought forward and captured the essence of a process that had been brewing. This musical communication expressed the depth of her personal anguish and, indeed, the anguish of the world soul; we, two women, on opposite coasts, were and continue to be influenced by the collective context of global grief. After immersion in the song, we exchanged no further words as there were none ... but grace presided and was accepted with gratitude.

Central Amplifications: “The President Sang ‘Amazing Grace’” and President Obama Singing “Amazing Grace”

Rather than try to report what listening to this music felt like, I ask the reader to *stop here* and experience two songs of lamentation: first, “The President Sang Amazing Grace” by Zoe Mulford (2017), performed by Meklit and the Kronos Quartet (2020) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LBQOQVsdzBE>).

Now, please listen to President Barak Obama’s rendition of the traditional hymn “Amazing Grace” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVRvZjEv00s>) from the June 26, 2015, memorial that inspired the “amazing” contemporary piece “The President Sang Amazing Grace” (Obama 2015a).

Lamentation

Together these two songs of lamentation so well capture the extraordinary present moment of collective anguish in which we all are now embedded but that has been altered and transformed through art so that the paradox of beauty and suffering are beheld as a completed whole. This kind of music has the potential to unite the human community.

In my own struggle to cope with our world surrounded in loss and grief (and the consequent collective defenses mobilized against such painful emotions), I had, for many weeks prior to this session, been researching the theme of *lamentation*. From Judaism and Christianity, we know that lamentation is a calling out to God as an expression of both personal and communal grief that commemorates both the horror and poignancy of human suffering. Lamentation is a plaintive cry to be heard, not forgotten or left nameless. It is a petition to other humans and the Divine to *remember* that allows for companionship as part of a journey through the process of grief in response to some terrible calamity. The language and poetry of lamentation “like great art, great music and great literature, points to something creative and redemptive in the human ... [soul in communion with the Divine] ... that can bring forth a thing of beauty in the midst of surrounding ugliness, brutality, and evil” (quoted and paraphrased from Wright 2015).

Mourners across time and cultures have expressed their sorrow through unarticulated cries, keening, wailing, and a wide range of utterances of strong emotion that seem to connect us with the physical animal, gut-wrenching nature of profound loss. As noted, humans have channeled suffering into songs, poetry, dirges, elegies, ballads, and the arts of all kinds throughout history; my own way of coping with global lamentation has been to write poetry as an expression of grief. Although physical bodies perish and personal memories fade, remnants of common human emotions and culture persist through the arts. We can find a metaphorical representation of this idea in myths about the Titaness Mnemosyne whose name translated from Greek (*Μνημοσύνη*) means “memory/remembrance.” Like the others from her race (different from the personified Olympians), Mnemosyne as a Titan is imageless and formless (despite Rossetti’s beautiful imagining of her shown here), but her influence is experienced when she incarnates in her daughters the Muses. From ancient times forward, we recognize their presence as they inspire and become manifest through creative productions in art, literature, poetry, music, and so forth. Indeed, we may not be capable of consciously recalling the specifics of history not lived ourselves, or reported by immediate relatives, or memorized in school, but we may sense emotional meaning and a kind of transcendent knowing implicitly passed from long-dead ancestors through the arts. These valuable remnants are more than simple physical reminders; they are imbued with emotion and meaning that have survived for millennia far beyond the actual death of their makers. We now know that trauma is passed epigenetically from generation to generation; it seems likely that we also transmit positive and creative patterns through similar mechanisms (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Mnemosyne*, 1875–1881. Oil on canvas, 126.3 cm × 60.9 cm (49.7 in × 24 in). Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, Delaware.
(CY by 3.0{{US-PD}})

Zoe Mulford's "The President Sang Amazing Grace," Inspired by Barak Obama

Folksongs, as we know them today, are often passed along with originators unidentified and fall within the oral tradition of storytelling until captured in written form. Homer may well have experienced lyrical performances and heard stories recited that were then recorded in the eighth or ninth century BCE as his epic poem the *Odyssey*. In our time, Zoe Mulford is a contemporary balladeer, a carrier of the old oral traditions, who picked up on the story of Barak Obama's eulogy in modern ways through the media and YouTube. **I now encourage readers to view Zoe Mulford singing her own song at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2qdB1EypJFU>** (Mulford 2017, 2019). In addition to experiencing this moving rendition, the viewer will hear her introduction that is relevant to this discussion of transmission of experience outside rational, cognitive written facts. The transcription is as follows:

In the Old Days folk singers told us the news. Something would happen—a battle, a shipwreck, a horrible murder. And somebody would write it up on a broadsheet ballad and sing it in the street and over time the news would become history. And in time maybe *the history would be forgotten but we still sing those songs*. Now, these days we don't need folksingers to tell us the news. We all have the news in our pockets 24/7. And news becomes old news and is forgotten but maybe we need the songs to help us remember 'cause it all comes round again. This is a song that I wrote about some things that happened in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015. (YouTube performance, January 10, 2019, italics added)

There is more to the Zoe Mulford story as evidenced in the publication of her song in January 2019, in the so-called children's book illustrated by Jeff Scher called *The President Sang Amazing Grace: A Book About Finding Grace After Unspeakable Tragedy* (Mulford and Scher 2019). This publication offers the song's words accompanied by moving visual images that document factual and cultural history through art as well as the backstory of the emergence of this collaborative project. Of note, at the moment, is that, in many ways, her creations presaged the protests of Black Lives Matter (BLM) of 2020. Her work astutely points to the importance of communication through the arts that often allows for the "unspeakable" of what cannot be addressed or included in the majority collective culture. The genre of "spirituals" was just such a method of expressing the lamentation of kidnapped, enslaved, and horrifically oppressed people sold into unremitting servitude. With daily abuses and stripped of dignity, familiar songs, rhythmically transmitted, may have provided a sense of unity and cohesion as well as a co-constructed vehicle to carry the burden of suffering and, at the same time, hope for freedom leading to continuity of family and tradition.

Zoe Mulford's song was inspired by President Barak Obama's eloquent eulogy for Reverend Pinckney. In the tradition of a Black preacher, he used his extraordinary oratory capabilities to honor the dead that culminated in his unexpected a cappella launch of the familiar and well-loved hymn, "Amazing Grace." The ministers behind him can be seen joyfully joining in, clapping hands, and the voices of church members are heard quick to follow in a unified oneness (Figure 3). What an "amazing" paradoxical moment that expressed simultaneously profound joy and deep sorrow! By facing into and not avoiding the harsh reality of



Figure 3. President Barack Obama sings “Amazing Grace” while delivering the eulogy for South Carolina state senator and Reverend Clementa Pinckney during Pinckney’s funeral service, June 26, 2015, in Charleston, South Carolina.
(Photo by Win McNamee/Getty Images)

tragic loss, Obama helped these anguished people to see beyond the fracturing and heart-rending tragedy to the meaning of redemption through companionship, belonging, and the emergence of divine grace that is inclusive and transcendent. Moving back and forth from the universal to the personal, he was sure to name each member of those fallen on that fateful day, similar to the naming of the dead at the time of All Soul’s Day in Episcopal churches when a Scots bagpiper plays “Amazing Grace.” Obama named each person murdered in keeping with an essential value of “lamentation” that the dead not be “forgotten.”

Even more importantly, he helped transform newsworthy facts of a terrible murder into meaning through his “matching” of Black oratory style, well-crafted words, and a traditional hymn that he intuitively knew would *meet* his listeners. Obama helped begin building a bridge for the community to come back into balance and bring them “home” to deeply held values. Perhaps, he mediated a kind of soul return through the container of shared faith passed from generation to generation knitted together with the ineffable quality of a familiar hymn of lamentation so well known to African Americans since their forced enslavement and relentless, persistent de-humanization in this country. Obama’s powerful eulogy and spontaneous reaching out beyond words through song to those traumatized by their shattered sense of sheltered

protection within a house of God, opened a transcendent moment of grace bringing together many layers of opposites into a synthetic whole within the context of community.

“Amazing Grace” has a long and significant history within the Black church, but in order to fully appreciate its current meaning, it is necessary to step back in time and consider the origins of the song salient for the discussion here. An excellent background for deeper understanding can be located in *Amazing Grace: The Story of America’s Most Beloved Song* (2002/2009), which was carefully researched and written by Steve Turner. The song’s words and tunes have varied throughout the years as it has taken up residence in numerous cultures when passed along hand-to-hand and ear-to-ear from England in the 1700s to America. “Amazing Grace” has been sung as a traditional church hymn but has also been very popular in secular groups. The appeal to diverse populations probably has to do with a common thread of universal suffering conveyed by the description of “a poor wretch like me.” These words, in particular, may empathically provide solace especially when sung communally as a kind of confession, reminding us that we are not alone and “lost” in isolated misery; with darkness and despair acknowledged, the poetic lyrics offer reassurance of hope for us in refrains of “amazing grace.” With a confluence of musical cadence, rhythm, and melody, the lyrics portray human unworthiness contained and held in juxtaposition with the transcendence of “divine grace” (not necessarily or only referring to a Christian God but more like an ineffable Self that opens a passage for renewal and future hope). Jung says, “To give birth to the ancient in a new time is creation” and results in salvation and redemption (2009b, 311). In order to look more carefully at the song’s recent manifestations, and specifically its import for Black churches, as well as for those of us suffering during the splits and divides so prevalent in our Titanic times, I offer a limited history of the author of the lyrics. *A central paradox is that “Amazing Grace” has been considered as a unifying, inspirational song of liberation across cultures, especially of the Civil Rights Movement; but, quite surprisingly, it was actually written by a slave trader.* This seeming conundrum requires emphasis, and aspects of the backstory may provide some elucidation for the remarkable tension of opposites within and surrounding this song.

John Newton (1725–1807), Writer of “Amazing Grace” (1748)

John Newton was a sailor involved in the slave trade, who began writing the words for “Amazing Grace” in 1748, when, aboard ship at age twenty-three, he was threatened with impending doom by a treacherous storm. He claims to have converted at that moment but did not publicly denounce slavery for another forty years! The song was not published until 1779 after he had become a landbound minister. Surprisingly, given his commitment to a new life in Christ and his subsequent ordination, he did not begin to come forward about the abolition movement in England until the mid-1780s (Turner 2002/2009, loc. 1930). At last, in 1788 at age sixty-three, Newton publicly condemned the slave trade by publishing a ten-thousand-word essay, “Thoughts Upon the African Slave Trade” (loc. 2024). As part of this process, he made statements about the terrible and ongoing sale of humans that we find embedded in Turner’s writing below:

[Slavery is] ... “iniquitous,” “cruel,” “oppressive,” “destructive,” “disgraceful,” “unlawful,” and “wrong.” [Further, Newton declared] ... that he was “bound in conscience to take shame to

myself by a public confession, which, however sincere, comes too late to prevent or repair the misery and mischief to which I have, formerly, been accessory." (loc. 2025)

Newton felt that "ordinary Englishmen [had] changed into callous barbarians" (loc. 2032) and that all involved in the slave trade had been debased, not only the slaves, themselves, but also the agents, captains, and merchants, alike (loc. 2031).

No apologies can be offered except to say that he did, apparently, repent and take responsibility for past tragically injurious actions that he confessed publicly. He assiduously pursued political actions toward abolition in England. He spent his adult life as a minister in servitude to others in need. "Amazingly," the song developed a life of its own and proceeded to become a unifying anthem for oppressed people worldwide! Further discussion of the psychological/emotional complexities inherent in Newton's personal story not only embedded within a specific time period but also embedded in an aristocratic, hierarchical society is beyond the scope of what is offered here. However, perhaps we can locate some compassion and understanding in key elements of Newton's history.

Newton's mother died of consumption (tuberculosis) sometime after his seventh birthday. His father promptly remarried, and with few other vocational options open for his son, the elder Newton signed the boy on at eleven years of age to begin life on the seas, thus creating a path to follow in paternal footsteps. During his years as a sailor, Newton depicts himself, in extant written documents, as sinful, blasphemous, oppositional, and challenging of authority (Turner 2002/2009, loc. 794). The descriptions of his behavior sound like uncontrollable rages. Such notable persistent emotional instability, evident in Turner's research, would not seem to predict Newton's eventual conversion and ordination as a minister. However, with the early loss of his mother, his father's absence due to a seafaring career far from their home in England, along with a general lack of adult protection and guidance, further compounded by traumatic abuse starting as a young boy aboard ship, leads me to think that the reported troubles with authority and continual conflagrations are not surprising. While at sea he suffered terrible experiences including imprisonment, extreme physical abuse, and the constant dangers that came with his work as a sailor crossing the Atlantic to Africa as a young boy, and later young man, very far from home. He probably had anything but what we would imagine as a "secure base."

However, a central and life-sustaining happenstance occurred in childhood when Newton met and immediately fell in love with Mary, the daughter of family friends who helped nurse his mother until her untimely death. It is the consistent memory of Mary as his "Penelope" (my amplification) waiting safely at "home" for him that sustained this "lost" young man through unimaginable circumstances as a sailor. Perhaps Mary's imagined presence functioned as a much-needed, mediating, transitional object. Or, it is possible to speculate that he maintained a connection with Mary as an "alive" internal figure and was, thereby, enabled to find a sense of cohesion through something like what Jungians refer to as "active imagination." From the recorded history, Mary held sway as the central axis of his imagination from the first moment of their meeting as children. She did, indeed, wait for him to come "home" (probably on many levels), and it is possible that their marriage contributed a stabilizing structure and emotional

environment that launched Newton into dramatic shifts and moves toward a healthier lifestyle and consequent concern for the well-being of others. From a rough start, Newton managed to face his iniquities and unconscionable behavior as a slave trader to live, what sounds to be, a life of service as a trusted, highly regarded clergyman.

Conversion

Consideration of the influence of conversion experiences would take us too far afield for this current discussion, but I refer the reader to the work of William James and offer a quote from him on this topic that may help us appreciate Newton's remarkable transformation from slave trader to the ministry and at last to an active abolitionist:

To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self, hitherto divided, and consciously wrong inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities. This at least is what conversion signifies in general terms, whether or not we believe that a direct divine operation is needed to bring such a moral change about. (1902/1999, 1902a, "Conversion: Lecture IX," 210)

Newton's conversion seems to have been an evolving one that began onboard ship and continued throughout his life. The words of "Amazing Grace" anticipate transformations over time. Kernels of alternative "selves" outside conscious awareness may have been dormant but persistent in Newton's psyche. For example, alternative, more constructive aspects may have been related to earlier positive implicit, internalized interaction patterns with his mother, with his wife, Mary, and her apparently generous family as well as with some school teachers who recognized and valued a young man with potential (Turner 2002/2009). This view seems to be supported by William James who says that conversion, from a more psychological view, is "due largely . . . to the subconscious incubation and maturing of motives deposited by the experiences of life. When ripe, the results hatch out, or burst into flower" (1902/1999, 1909b, "Conversion—Concluded: Lecture X," 254).

Of course, this is the happy ending to Newton's personal story, but slavery continued for many more years in the United States. However, the inspired and inspiring "soul" of "Amazing Grace" continued to travel, perhaps with assistance from Mnemosyne (Titanic memory that is invisible) through her daughters the Muses, who help to manifest memories in tangible artistic representations of collective cultural and emotional memories that reside in and are transmitted via the implicit domain.

I hope I have laid the groundwork for the theoretical discussions I further elaborate in Part II by looking at these three case studies: an analytic moment with patient M., the synopsized life-story of John Newton, and an outline of "Amazing Grace" as a character unto itself that has become manifest in current times through Zoe Mulford's ballad, "The President Sang Amazing Grace."

Part II

Infant Research: Microcosmic Resonant Pattern Matching

Contemporary infant researchers who are also psychoanalysts, like Jung, are superb at pattern matching with well-honed skillsets. In their work, they look at micro-processed videotapes of interaction patterns between babies and a primary caregiver. We have learned from their observations that similar nonverbal communication patterns are persistent throughout the lifespan and are essential for all adult human relationships.

Infant researchers work with a microcosmic level of dyadic interaction, whereas Jung's model is one that tends to be more macrocosmic using collective myths and stories: through resonance, both approaches offer portals into understanding human life patterns. We can zoom in to look at the details of a specific personal dyadic interaction and zoom out to find evidence of resonant fundamental patterns in artistic works replicated on a different scale; both convey universal human struggles.

I see Jung's macrocosmic model as more vertical, oriented to depth using word and image; whereas models used by infant researchers are more microcosmic and oriented to a horizontal relational plane that focuses on implicit nonverbal communication. However, each can be a portal to inner worlds. For example, it is possible to gain entry via relational openings and find the domain of archetypes; or locate the personal through story, ritual, and other collective vehicles. Relevant, here, is James Hillman's expansion of Jung's notions that "the gods have become diseases" (Jung 1929/1967, CW 13, ¶54): "Myth lives vividly in our symptoms and fantasies and in our conceptual systems." And further Hillman notes that myth and psychology are *interchangeable* (1979, 23):

Mythology is a psychology of antiquity.

Psychology is a mythology of modernity.

The Transcendent Function, Moments of Meeting, and Dyadic States of Consciousness

We might further consider the musical moment concluding the clinical hour with M., described in Part I, to reflect a moment of the transcendent function expressed through a song that has been embraced by collectives over centuries. At the same time, this also includes specific personal historical roots and reveals immediate dynamics in the analytic dyad. The screen-sharing allowed for a peak emergent moment, unplanned, outside conscious intention where reverberations could be felt within the interpersonal relationship. The entire constellation resonated with memories of the death of a parent in the personal historical realm and with the concept of *nostalgia* and the concomitant "longings for home" and protection that have been the undercurrent archetypal patterns throughout the pandemic. This kind of resonant synthetic moment of the transcendent function is

characteristic of the dynamic interactions of emergence in Complex Adaptive Systems where self-similar patterns can be located at differing scales. Even if such moments are present for only a split second, their reverberations can be long-lasting and function as touchstones, often operating outside explicit conscious verbal awareness but deeply felt and deeply known as body/emotional memories within the nonverbal implicit domain. This domain is where emotional communication is expressed through facial expressions, head nods, voice tone, rhythm, and so forth; explicit verbal interactions are shaped by this co-created ongoing implicit surround.

What Jungians refer to as the transcendent function is a concept that is highly consonant with fundamental notions from contemporary infant research. When combined, these similar models offer a more holistic perspective that I find extremely useful for clinical practice. Infant researchers who are also psychoanalysts look carefully at second-by-second implicit nonverbal interaction patterns between mothers and babies and have recognized similar interaction patterns within adult analytic treatment. Their findings record patterns resonant with those described by Jung in “The Psychology of the Transference” but on a very different and much smaller scale. From the perspective of the Boston Change Process Study Group (1998), within traditional psychoanalytic theory, interpretation is viewed as the semantic event that rearranges the patient’s understanding. They propose that a moment of meeting is the transactional event that rearranges the patient’s implicit relational knowing by rearranging the intersubjective field between patient and therapist, what Tronick refers to as “dyadic expansion of consciousness” (2007). The result is a mutual ratification of what is happening now between them (2007). These moments do not occur with conscious intentionality but emerge from the implicit procedural domain, again, usually outside explicit conscious awareness. This kind of collaboration and the emergent third should strike Jungians as quite familiar and very well describes the emergent moment of what the patient M. and I experienced together through the holding lyrics and chords of a beautifully sung and deeply moving lament. Tronick’s views about “dyadic expansion of consciousness” further elaborate or amplify Jung’s ideas about the transcendent function:

At the moment the dyadic system is created, both partners experience an expansion of their own state of consciousness. The boundary surrounding their own system expands to incorporate elements of consciousness of the other in a new and more coherent form. In this moment of dyadic formation, and for the duration of its existence, there must be something akin to a powerful experience of fulfillment as one paradoxically becomes larger than oneself. (291–292)

This, to me, comes extraordinarily close to what Jungians would call a transcendent experience of the self, constellated within and between two people, as the third in the field. It is an experience of the self as both center and circumference that changes, dramatically, one’s world view. The infant researchers seem to “get” the power of such a transcendent moment but lack the beauty and mystical feeling that Jung so masterfully articulates through amplification in his writing.

Further Reflections on the Analytic Work

At the level of clinical work, M. and I have operated, over time, as a collaborating partnership in playing with amplifications such as *nostalgia* and the *Odyssey*, for example, and have navigated well moments of disruption and repair. M.'s emotional range has expanded to face difficult feelings such as profound grief, and that has become more possible with the surety and stability of our co-constructed, substantial analytic container. Within the context of an affectively regulated and regulating relationship, we have been able settle her hyperaroused defenses against fears of overwhelm, sometimes through direct content and verbal conversation, but most often through the subtle rhythmic flow of nonverbal back-and-forth movement of matched and nonmatched states. Through experience over time, faith has evolved between us as a "knowing" that disruptions are repairable unlike earlier family experiences characterized by persistent conflict without empathic reconnection and reconciliation. As a result, M. is better able to locate internal windows of tolerance modeled interpersonally in the analysis and has begun to internalize regulating interaction patterns. She is learning how to carry, simultaneously, both the grief and pleasure that is so well portrayed by Meklit's singing the contemporary lament, "The President Sang *Amazing Grace*."

The Window of Tolerance: From an Individual Model to a Model for Large-Scale Groups

If in traumatized states, either as individuals or as collective groups, not within the parameters of the window of tolerance, true communication, substantial decision making, and real empathic relating are hard to come by, if not impossible. The inability to do so may well be a major contributing factor in the rampant polarization surrounding us. Persistent hyper- or hypoarousal outside the window of tolerance serves to instantiate neural pathways that are easily triggered and can foreclose on healthy alternative interaction modes at every level. Hebb's law clearly states: "neurons that fire together, wire together." In other words, ongoing disruption without empathic repair perpetuates traumatic and traumatizing interaction patterns that become instantiated in the psyche and soma; these are then transmitted horizontally through families, across groups, and vertically, transcending generations.

During this year of global crisis, our collective national body has been invaded by a virus *and* by intense and unrelenting disruptive affects. In order to reflect further on our current dysregulated circumstances, it is important to clarify Dan Siegel's intended meaning of a window of tolerance as the original ground for application of his ideas at a large group level. Put simply, a *window of tolerance* can be understood as a mediated, regulated state where cognition and affect operate in coordinated healthy balance; this kind of equilibrium, then, opens us to capacities for healthy decision making and social engagements as an antidote for the traumatic alternatives described previously. Siegel notes that the "window of tolerance" is "a band of arousal in which we function well" (2010, 50). He metaphorically likens it to a river "that flows across time, while the window refers to a given state in that moment." When the

brain is integrated, flow within a sufficiently expanded window of tolerance leads to harmonious, coherent, and empathic interactions with others; on one bank is hyperaroused chaos characterized by fight/flight responses, with high intensity emotions and disorganized cognitive processing; on the other bank is hypoaroused rigidity that is expressed in paralytic freezing, numbing, and dissociation (228–229).⁵ There is a profound human need to learn how to modulate/regulate varying emotional states that can be triggered internally and by the external environment. Developing flexibility and expanding the window of tolerance are essential elements for healing trauma within psychotherapy; doing so very often emerges through the subtle interactions in the nonverbal implicit domain where the patient experiences, in the real time of the present moment, what it is like to be engaged with an empathic other who relates from a position of calm presence (and does not repeat past traumatizing behaviors). With repetition over time, the regulating capacity of the therapist is internalized by the patient and new neural pathways are instantiated and become alternative interaction patterns (remember Hebb's law here). Without the capacity for regulated states, psychotherapy is quite limited, even impossible, when thinking and feeling are not well coordinated. An important question arises: how do we help dysregulated large groups to move toward the necessary tensions inherent in growth-producing change while sensing the edges of affectively precarious danger zones (52)? I argue throughout this paper that the arts of all kinds open options for group expressions of wide-ranging and paradoxical ideas, thoughts, and feelings now, from the beginning of time, and into the future.

Although originally intended for understanding individual neurobiological states of affect arousal (fight/flight/freezing), I expand the window of tolerance as a way to think about affect dysregulation to large-scale populations that are under exceptional duress. With stress at persistently high levels, emotions fluctuate dramatically from dysregulated states of hyperarousal to the opposite extreme of hypoarousal and sometimes both at the same time (likened to having one foot on the brakes and the other on the gas pedal). As a result, we, as individuals who constitute and contribute to the makeup of our fragmented country, have had difficulty in locating a coordinated, truly “democratic” society that values the innovation that emerges from differences within a complex but inclusive system. We desperately need to navigate our way between treacherous opposites toward an optimal arousal zone represented by Siegel as a flowing river that represents the regulated state where thinking and feeling can be experienced as collaborating partners, without one dominating to the exclusion of the other. I see this domain as a “state of grace” whereby an individual or collective group is not dominated by hyperaroused panic or hypoaroused paralysis. We have experienced fluctuating amplitudes of distress privately within ourselves; and, at the same time, we have seen the upheaval that unfolds when crowds are infected by emotional fear and anxiety and have lost the compass that logical thought can offer.

Unfortunately, since March 2020, many individuals and our nation as a whole have become polarized and have enacted behaviors fueled by affective dysregulation outside windows of tolerance; some people have been inundated with panic-like fears whereas others have been shut down and numb. Consequent dissociation, denial, and emotional outbursts may have emerged as defensive

responses to the relentless news reports of increasing illness and mortality that have been a constant in every household. Due to extended physical isolation, our point of collective contact has been filtered through media coverage and we have been constantly faced with the onslaught of nonstop disasters. We have been flooded by “disruption” with extremely limited possibilities for needed “repair” that usually opens potential for reconstituting cohesion. When confronted with colossal loss on previously unimagined scales, healthy processes of necessary grief and expressions of lamentation have become blocked due to fears of disintegration. Along similar lines, Jung notes:

And just as for the individual a time of dissociation is a time for sickness, so it is in the life of nations. We can hardly deny that ours is a time of dissociation and sickness. The political and social conditions, the fragmentation of religion and philosophy, the contending schools of modern art and modern psychology all have one meaning in this respect. And does anyone now with the slightest sense of responsibility feel any satisfaction at this turn of events? If we are honest, we must admit that no one feels quite comfortable in the present-day world; indeed, it becomes increasingly uncomfortable. The word “crisis,” so often heard, is a medical expression which always tells us that sickness has reached a dangerous climax. (1934/1978, CW 10, ¶290)

Siegel’s window of tolerance model and Jung’s model from alchemy along with ideas from infant research all portray underlying structures of potential dynamic interaction patterns that can assist in appreciating complex interactions that persist throughout the lifetime and across generations. After all, an important aspect of research has to do with “pattern recognition” that comes into focus by reflecting on past tendencies as a means to predict potential future outcomes. Is this not what Jung was attempting to do with his method of analogy or amplification? Pattern recognition is essential for all of life so that we can navigate, not just literal unknown territories, but also human relationships in order to avoid danger and destruction, on one hand, while on the other, moving with hope toward greater complexity and creativity. With skill development and practice over time, it becomes possible to “see through” what at first seems obscure and necessarily “fuzzy” to the bare bones that are, indeed, alive and constantly influencing our dreams, daily lives, and relationships. We recognize what we have previously known and experienced along with new and emergent possibilities leading into the future.

Struggling with the Window of Tolerance on June 6, 2020

On June 6, 2020, I was scheduled for a Zoom presentation on the “Archetype of the Nurse” as I had written about my grandmother’s experiences as a student nurse during the Spanish Flu pandemic in 1919 for the daily image service project called “Art in a Time of Global Crisis: Interconnection and Companionship.”⁶ We produced fifty images and commentaries between April and June 2020, and I certainly had plenty of material that I could discuss within the bounds of the invited presentation. However, George Floyd was murdered on May 25, 2020, and the world seemed to fall into the extremes of chaos. I, personally, felt an overwhelming sense of disorientation. I could not locate a window of tolerance to engage the cognition and affect required for preparation of the Zoom talk. I somehow muddled through but was deeply influenced by and anxious about the Black Lives Matter protests scheduled for that same day. I was worried about potential violence and about the COVID transmission that might ensue

with close contact in large groups. Following the presentation, I turned on the TV to see amazingly peaceful demonstrations around the world! I wept with joy and relief. However, that night I could not sleep. In my email inbox, I found a message from Neal Benezra, director of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, addressing the membership community about how the pandemic had “shone a light on the grave costs of systemic inequality,” underscoring that the Black community had been disproportionately hit. Before making this central statement, he began with the following personal confession: “This has been one of the most traumatic weeks in my memory and in our shared history.” His very honest and human statement had a profound effect on me and provided much needed solace and companionship. I was not alone with my inability to find a regulated state within a window of tolerance.

The Interplay of “Bottom-up” and “Top-down” Systems: June 6, 2020

Different kinds of influence are at play in our present time and include both self-organizing bottom-up and traditional top-down hierarchical systems of emergence. For example, individual voters influence elected leadership; governments and organizational institutions influence voters. For a practical illustration of how top-down and bottom-up systems worked together during the spring of 2020, see the relevant article from the *Washington Post*, dated June 6, by Frances Stead Sellers. It aptly reveals how a group of high-level thinkers used research from “behavioral science, social media savvy, lessons from political campaigns and their own connections to persuade” social influencers such as entertainer Chris Rock to spread substantiated public health information about COVID-19 transmission (Sellers 2020). Further, the relatively peaceful worldwide Black Lives Matter protest marches, also on June 6, 2020, were well coordinated through GPS cell phones on the ground that gave real-time overviews of unfolding events, areas of high-crowd concentration and areas of danger, in addition to basic, but essential, information about where to find emergency medical care, find trucks with bottled water, and so forth.

The Influence of Art during a Time of Global Crisis, or Art Influenced by a Global Crisis?

On that same day, June 6, 2020, the *Washington Post* (citing a *Guardian* article) also discussed the art of Michelangelo Pistoletto, an eighty-six-year-old Italian affiliated with the *Arte Povera* movement. He “has been known to take sledgehammers to his famous mirror works” (Smee 2020).

[Pistoletto] sees society “as a kind of broken mirror.” His aim ... is to reveal the world’s interconnectedness. “Each shard,” said the Italian, “still has the same reflecting quality as the whole mirror. So, all the mirrors are connected, smashed or intact, just as all humans share the same basic DNA.” (Smee 2020)

Art can provide much needed cohesion within shattering times such as ours. During the clinical session under consideration here, art became a through-line stringing together amplifications centering around archetypal fears of loss, the importance of lamentation, and the potential for

“grace” within individuals and groups (evidenced in the art of Mr. Pistoletto whose well-known creations have been viewed by many). We have seen that emergent motifs arising in analytic dyad are recognizable at different scales within embedded systems and throughout history. Amplifications from varying vertices allow us to discern the complexity of multiple influences affecting us. This method provides perspective on our state of polarization and opens options for stabilization. It also creates venues for “transitional space” where play is possible and we can flexibly move back-and-forth between “microcosmic” and “macrocosmic” scales.

Art has the capacity to hold paradoxical tensions that are unbearable if looked upon too directly. Metaphoric images provide an oblique angle that is, nonetheless, a vision of truth but one that allows for more tolerable engagement with various dilemmas that may seem, in the moment, to be insoluble or too powerful, even searing if viewed directly with naked eyes. Consequently, by entering art experiences or myths or the natural world surrounding us, we are better able to rediscover routes for stabilization and healing. Doing so moves us from a constricted, narrow hyperfocusing on “the problem,” or “the symptom of psychopathology,” to view our human condition within a larger context that is inclusive and balanced with creative, constructive aspects of ourselves reflected within the wider universe. Art and contact with nature are just such portals.

The Necessity of True Lamentation

The two songs “Amazing Grace” and “The President Sang Amazing Grace” open portals for entry into depth and poignancy as they well represent the profound nature of *lamentation*, or calling out to the Divine for mercy during times of profound grief and suffering. This past year has been one of lamentation for some; in contrast, others have been caught up in defenses against lamentation and necessary mourning that has resulted in dissociation and denial at collective levels. Terrified by fears of fragmentation, a search for causality has come into being with paranoid myths that allow for blame of an “other” as a means to relieve anxiety and create distance from what has been invisible and overwhelming. Some groups have been unable to locate affect regulation within the domain represented by the window of tolerance. For those with sturdy enough ego structures, engagement with *true lamentation* has allowed for a process of mourning and subsequent meaning; true lamentation is evident in the two songs under discussion here.

By entering the lyrics and music of these two songs, one is transported and carried to a peak experience that is nearly unbearable in its beauty, similar to the fullness of a wave as it crests with dawning awareness that it soon will break and crumble as part of the natural ebb and flow of the tides and ultimate return to the source; as with the fullness of love, we necessarily understand that loss and separation are inevitable as part of attachment and belonging within the great round of creation and destruction. Songs of lament carry the soulful outpouring of grief that can be contained within an artistic medium that simultaneously conveys creativity and beauty. By riding out the exquisite surges inherent in lamentation, tears dissolve the constriction that results from coagulated, literalized rage and denial of loss, allowing for the emergence of free play and paradox, the twin energies essential for health and well-being. The natural flow of life resumes, once these

forces are released from defensive limiting structures intended to protect against suffering but that in themselves become toxic. Play and paradox can be liberated by immersion in healthy grief that opens portals for honest emotional release leading to transcendent experiences and a fullness of being within a “state of grace.”

Grace

Grace is derived from the Greek word *charis* or *chairō* meaning “to rejoice,” translated into English as “charity.” It is a free and transcendent gift, not earned through achievement but offered out of love to all. Grace offers reconciliation, reunion, and the potential for redemption and new life going forward, *if accepted*. The emphasis here is on whether or not grace is *recognized and accepted*. To know peace that follows in the wake of *grace accepted* requires a prerequisite of facing the painful aspects of life that inevitably confront us all. Implied in religious language, we can find psychological truth in that we can experience a sense of wholeness and renewal by facing darker shadow aspects and by allowing ourselves to be influenced by the spirit of forgiveness. Self-forgiveness can transpire by empathizing with earlier aspects of oneself, often trapped or imprisoned by seemingly immovable regret, as if that younger aspect were an “other.” Rather than the blame and shame that leads to splitting, such empathic understanding can bring abandoned parts back into the fold, thereby *incorporating* them within a total system. Further, letting go of hope for something that can never be releases the seeds for liberation and states of grace with the gift of peace that follows. John Newton seems to have been capable of both recognizing past sins and the redemptive value of recognizing the divine generosity of grace bestowed.

Relentless Hope and the Path Toward Grace

To move along paths of redemption, regulation, and recovery, we must face into the hard realities of “sickness” and suffering *as it is*, within individuals and as nations. As part of this process, I suggest that we note Martha Stark’s exceptionally wise concept of “relentless hope” that has to do with hope for something that can never be; relentless hope functions as an anxious defense against mourning and grief (2000, 310–324). Stark notes that the task of the patient (in this case, a nation sickened by infection at every level) has “to do with coming to terms with the disappointment and the pain that come with the recognition of just how imperfect the world really is—optimal disillusionment” (313).

Indeed, facing reality opens us to a healthy flow of tears and often provides its own solace that many find easier to bear than the previous anxious defense against experiencing the reality of death and the loss of life as we have previously known it. I find comfort in reminding myself of this idea: “Do not focus on how you wish things were; focus on the reality of what *actually is* and work creatively with *that*”; I have consistently located both satisfaction and gratification in realizing that I have done the best that I can when confronted with highly difficult, even impossible situations.

To my amazement, I found companionship for this idea when reading an article in *The New York Review of Books* (Luiselli 2020). I discovered that Dorothea Lange, the famous photographer, pinned a quote from Francis Bacon (the sixteenth-century philosopher, not the twentieth-century painter) outside successive darkrooms that she occupied throughout the years: “The contemplation of things as they are, without substitution or imposture, without error or confusion, is in itself a nobler thing than a whole harvest of invention” (Luiselli 2020, 16).

Large-Scale Affect Dysregulation

I suggest that current states of hyper- and hypoarousal, apparent within and among groups in the US, can be understood as anxious defenses against fears of loss and profound grief stemming from our nation’s collective overwhelm by more than 639,000 deaths (as of August 2021) even as the newly formed administration attempts to recover from the lack of coordinated federal planning and remaining chaos leftover from the previous leadership. The unrelenting fears of massive unbearable loss in the corporeal body of this country is beyond our capacity to grasp. As a result, affect regulation has been nearly impossible to locate, and so, collectively, we vacillate between the extremes of sympathetic hyperaroused disorganizing anxiety and parasympathetic hypoaroused numbing; these fluctuating extremes inhibit much-needed stopovers for rest in regulated states within the *window of tolerance* that I liken to a *state of grace*. Entering this “in-between” mediated place allows for necessary coordination of right-brain affect that is adapted to rapid pattern recognition. This information is then sent to the left brain for rational, logical appraisal; once cognitive consideration is completed, it shifts its evaluative assessment back to the right hemisphere for cohesive and holistic comprehension of life circumstances essential for healthy decision making (McGilchrist 2009, 176–208). Collaboration between the hemispheres has been hard to attain given that ongoing global crises have set the usual mechanisms for beneficial regulation on a chronic pathway of dysregulation and the subsequent fragmentation of individual and group mind.

At a practical level, we have seen waves of unmodulated emotion in uncontrolled group expressions of rage and blame. Despite unquestionable statistics documenting the rise of viral spread and death across the nation, many downplayed the seriousness of this public health crisis and/or have viewed scientific fact as a hoax and, consequently, have refused to wear masks and defiantly participated in ongoing social gatherings without adequate distancing. Entitlement of individual “beliefs” expressed as “rights for personal freedom” have flaunted substantiated scientific evidence and, sadly, contributed to further contagion and unnecessary death (*Stark’s relentless hope*). The public health crises over this past year have involved many variables, but affect dysregulation influences capacities for containment of one’s emotions within the self and with others, and even may influence group violence and persecution of those seen as “different.” Individual affect states influence groups, and group-mind flooded with high emotions influences individuals.

[I] feel and know myself to be one of the many, and what moves the many, moves me. In our strength we are independent and isolated, are masters of our own fate; in our weakness we are

dependent and bound, and become willing instruments of fate, for here it is not the individual will that counts but the will of the species. (Jung 1928/1970, CW 10, ¶261)

To be emphasized, dysregulated states of arousal prevent access to the coordination of thinking and feeling that leads to careful, reflective decision making.

“Grace” as a “Self State” Moment

Moments of *grace* can also be seen as *self-state* moments of wholeness when thinking and feeling again operate as collaborating partners with a flow of energy between them within a *window of tolerance*. Anxiety that sky rockets us into hyperarousal can be a kind of possession by a demon or by a particular complex. Or it can be understood as an unrepresented or unrepresentable affect or an unattached spirit from the archetypal level of the collective unconscious. A plunge into the depths of paralytic despair can be imagined as a soul loss or dissociation of an aspect of the self (a complex that is organized with its own ego center) that has necessarily become frozen or numb in the face of overwhelming trauma. Locating ourselves in regulated states takes conscious effort at times, including the use of exercise, deep breathing, meditation, the presence of a loving, empathic other; or we may find needed peace through art or experiences in the natural world. Locating a state of grace requires sufficient ego capacity to calm the body by regulating heartbeats so that executive function can come back online. The possibility for movement and flow between the poles resumes once space is created and an individual or group is no longer consumed by one end of the pole or another.

An example of this very real struggle for us all unfolded recently when a young woman patient told of a conflict with a work partner that led to a state of anxious disruption. She lamented that she had, in fact, felt a deep sense of peace earlier in that day and her tears showed the grief and fear that she felt over losing a state of being, often hard-won for her. I suggested that we, together, in this moment, try to relocate that sense of peace. We closed our eyes and took two deep breaths, followed by companionable silence lasting a few minutes. Something had shifted. Through mutual regulation, the peaceful part of her had returned; a state of grace had descended; and such repetitions, I believe from experience, will lead to confidence and coherency of self over time.⁷

Paradox, Play, and Art

Jung often speaks about the tension of opposites with the goal of symbol formation as the transcendent function. Given his early history, of what I imagine as an early insecure attachment pattern (Carter 2019), led to persistent life-long fears of fragmentation. As a result, I think he often pushed his theories toward integration as a defense against fears of disintegration (see Winnicott 1964; Sedgwick 2008; Meredith-Owen 2015). He well understood the dilemmas inherent in attempts to tolerate conflicting positions: “Nothing is easier than to play at ambiguity and nothing is more difficult than to live ambiguity” (Jung 2009b, 170). Even though holding such tensions can be demanding, it is by doing so that a creative space “in between” emerges. Paradox implies movement, flow, and willingness to allow for continuity and change (Sander 1982).

Neither the individual self nor the world soul is to be found in only one position or the other but in the spaces in between, in the gaps, the voids, the unknowns. It is here where creativity can find voice and become manifest. It is here where one alone can wait bravely for the coming together of multiple influences that surround each separate individual. Movement, in the space between, opens possibilities for new syntheses and innovations that are life-changing. The focus should not be on one pole or the other but on doing “nothing.” Put another way, from the Chinese perspective, *wúwéi* (無為) is defined as “effortless action,” that is, a state of action through nonaction.⁸ From my view, flux within this “in-between” place without focusing on a goal, has the highest potential for the transcendence of grace, as I have described it in Western traditions; it is the ideal place for meaningful interaction in analysis or for discovering one’s own creative sparks.

If we can live in such a way that instinctive demands are given recognition as far as possible, the center of gravity of the total personality shifts its position. It ceases to be in the ego, which is merely the centre of consciousness, and instead is located in a hypothetical point between the conscious and the unconscious, which might be called the self. (Jung 1931/1962)

This idea of balance from Jung is predicated on disidentification and differentiation of subject from object that is blurred when in states of *participation mystique*; in other words, the withdrawal of projection of one’s internal dilemmas onto the world is essential for healthy functioning in individuals *and* collectives. At the moment, we are surrounded by large-scale groups who are projecting paranoid fears stimulated by anxieties about infection by an invisible virus onto other individuals and groups, leading to psychotic group delusions of conspiracy encouraged by psychopathic elected leaders.

Long past John Newton’s death, “Amazing Grace,” expressing the depth of his anguish as well as his hope, has had long-lasting meaning. The song journeyed many miles crossing the ocean to become a much-loved spiritual substantially embedded in the history and traditions of Black churches. “Reverend Matthew J. Watts, a pastor in West Virginia, says that for slaves, a song like ‘Amazing Grace’ would have been particularly significant.” From his view, “Amazing Grace” would have spoken to a “desire for an experience of freedom, of one day seeing God face-to-face, of one day being with him for all of eternity, and no longer subjected to the type of cruel treatment [enslaved people] experienced” (Franz 2017). This song of lament with extraordinary internal paradoxes has transgressed history and cultures. It was

written by an agent of white supremacy [that] has become an anthem for black congregations exercising faith and practicing a religion once used as a mechanism for controlling slaves ... Amazing Grace, commonly sung at funerals held in the black church, has become an elegy for the dead and an anthem of comfort for the living. (Arnett and Collins 2015)

Conclusion

Through the trauma of this past year with threats from a deadly virus and fragmentation of all kinds, individual and national security have been shaken, and democracy, itself, has been held on the brink. Without question, we all are always embedded within multiple levels of systems, influenced and influencing those who share our environment. Coordinating thinking and feeling within

windows of tolerance opens possibilities for optimal decision making and relational interactions. It is within this zone of balance, described by neuroscientists as a “window of tolerance,” that we can experience the soul’s return and a “state of grace.” Dan Siegel says that cohesion in the moment leads to coherence across states and across time (2020, 81). Metaphorically, I imagine this as adding pearls to a continuous thread, one by one by one, over time. To do so requires honest allowance for grief and lamentation as necessary and healthy aspects of the life process. The arts may open vehicles for expression and necessary paradox to hold and contain suffering and beauty as a paradoxical whole that transcends time. It is possible that a song such as “Amazing Grace,” which now seems ubiquitous, is one that moves beyond specific religious systems and political divides with identifications as “red” or “blue” to surreptitiously engage universal interconnection that implicitly unites us, despite what seem to be chasms of difference.

This paper has attempted to illustrate the value of amplification as a method for weaving together the interrelationships among various themes including “influence,” the meaning of “states of grace,” and the necessity of “lamentation,” along with the import of “paradox and play” as expressed through neuroscience, mythology, politics, and, most certainly, art. I have looked at resonant patterns within and between systems by using Jung’s amplification method of analogy and its resonance with current ideas about Complex Adaptive Systems theories that underpin contemporary infant research, neuroscience, and clinical practice. Case examples have been offered along with the song “Amazing Grace” as a through-line and as a “character” with a long complex history and a life of its own. This song has particular relevance for our current time of fragmentation and the deep need that we all share for cohesion and coming together within ourselves, within windows of tolerance and within transcendent states of grace and as one America, unified by a common commitment to the constitution and democracy.

ENDNOTES

1. See Catherine Crowther and Martin Schmidt’s paper “States of Grace: Eureka Moments and Recognition of the Unthought Known” (2015).
2. Note that Turner in his book *Amazing Grace: The Story of America’s Most Beloved Song* (2002/2009) tracks the life history of the song, itself, along with John Newton’s fascinating personal history as its inspired writer. See Newton and Cowper (1779) in references and the recorded trajectory of “Amazing Grace” provided by the Library of Congress website at www.loc.gov/item/pre.79197.
3. Wikipedia, s.v. “Nostalgia,” accessed October 28, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nostalgia>.
4. Ogden’s “present moment of the past” is a clinical idea derived from T. S. Elliot: “And he is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living” (Elliot 1920/2015, 11).
5. For a clear visual image of the window of tolerance model, see Figure 1 in the following website article by Lohrasbe and Ogden (2017), https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/anzf.1270?fbclid=IwAR2_s5v9nxbuUU5ejCGIP67Ujz2tjhQ_CQYNtZBfg8Mm6gl7UtqD4E107lQ. Diagram originally published by Ogden, Minton, and Pain (2006, 27).
6. See Daily Image and Commentary #22, May 12, 2020, “In Celebration of Nurses and Caregivers Worldwide,” found in the ongoing Virtual Gallery on ARAS (<https://aras.org/special-feature>).
7. I processed this moment through a poem that emerged called “Athena in the Wind,” written on November 28, 2020.
8. Wikipedia, s.v. “Wúwéi” (無為), accessed November 20, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wu_wei.

NOTE

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I offer my thanks to analysand M. for her inspiration and willingness to allow publication of excerpts of our ongoing work. I offer heartfelt gratitude to Jeffrey Benevedes, LeeAnn Pickrell, and the editors of *Jung Journal: Culture & Psyche* for their abiding faith and generous support throughout the complex sculpting process of this paper. The editors and I sincerely appreciate the extraordinary creative expressions of the musicians whose songs carry a continuous through-line linking the written ideas. Special thanks to Zoe Mulford for permission to quote song lyrics and personal reflections and to Meklit, the Kronos Quartet, and Katie Haemmerle from Stanford Live for permission to reproduce the opening photo. Given the free associative nature of early drafts of this nontraditional article, invaluable guidance from friends and colleagues, along with their enthusiastic encouragement as well as fair critique, cannot be over emphasized. I thank here the following patient readers: the Art and Psyche Working Group (Billy Brennan, Justin Hamacher, and Caterina Vezzoli), Beatrice Beebe, Mary and Tom Carter, Gus Cwik, Heather Davis, Chris Downing, Matthias Leutrum, Joe McFadden, Jane Pretat, Susan Rowland, and Dyane Sherwood. And, as always, Joe's steadfast presence continues with transcendent and amazing grace.

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ABSTRACT

In "Amazing Grace," the author provides a lens through which we are able to view the current upheaval of our time. A unique clinical hour is described initiating the evolving trajectory of the song and notion of "Amazing Grace" based on three "case studies" or "stories": the story of Patient M., the story of John Newton, and the story of the song as a transcendent entity unto itself. Offered is a theoretical, in-depth analysis of the case, the music, and the archetypal patterns reverberating from the microcosmic dyadic level to the macrocosmic collective. The author weaves a complex tapestry of the necessity of grief, lamentation, and paradox and play expressed through neuroscience, mythology, politics, and art.

KEY WORDS

"Amazing Grace," amplification, Complex Adaptive Systems, grace, infant research, Jung, lamentation, Meklit, Zoe Mulford, neuroscience, John Newton, nostalgia, window of tolerance