

# *Hemispheres*

by John Gallagher



## **Introduction**

This essay is my depth psychological analysis of a Rush song called Cygnus X-1. Cygnus X-1 is a two-part song series by Canadian progressive rock band Rush. The first part, 'Book I: The Voyage' is the last song on the album *A Farewell to Kings* and the second part, 'Book II: Hemispheres' is the first song on the following album, *Hemispheres*. This is a modern mythology in the form of song and belongs to the genres of progressive rock, science fiction and fantasy. I then discuss cultural and dialectical forces of change from a depth psychological perspective.

## **Analysis**

On the front cover of *Hemispheres*, two figures are standing on top of a brain. Each figure represents the character and qualities of a hemisphere of the brain. The naked and performing man represents Dionysus and the right hemisphere of the brain. The formal businessman represents Apollo and the left hemisphere of the brain. Dionysus was the Greek god of many things including the arts and music. Dionysus is emotional and creative. These are characteristics of the right brain. Apollo was the Greek god of many things including knowledge and truth. Apollo is logical and practical. These are characteristics of the left brain.

The lyrics of 'Cygnus X-1, Book One: The Voyage' from the album *A Farewell to Kings* and the lyrics of 'Cygnus X-1, Book Two: Hemispheres' from the album *Hemispheres* are also very symbolic. The black hole, Cygnus X-1, is analogous to the *sol niger* (black sun) in alchemy. Alchemy was practised in medieval times and was a forerunner of chemistry and the individuation process in Jungian Psychology. Alchemists were attempting to transmute base metals into gold and achieve self-realisation. Protoscience, psychological transformation and transcendence were combined in their practice.

*Cygnus X-1, The Voyage*  
Invisible to telescopic eye  
Infinity the star that would not die  
All who dare to cross her course  
Are swallowed by a fearsome force

The sun was worshipped as a God in pagan cultures. The sun is a symbol of God or Spirit which in Hinduism is known as the Self. In Jungian Psychology the Self is the core and organising principle of the psyche. The Self is our essence and transpersonal identity. The Black Hole of Cygnus X-1 is a black sun and a symbol of the Self. The sun is black because the Self is unconscious. Our hero calls the black hole a 'fearsome force' as the Self is superordinate to the ego in the psyche and identification with the Self threatens the ego with annihilation. When one realizes God within one experiences a psychological death or ego death. The ego has to be sacrificed in order to realize one's greater Self. 'The...process of individuation [is] the conscious coming-to-terms with one's own inner centre (psychic nucleus) or Self' (von Franz, 1964, p. 169).

On my ship, the Rocinante  
Wheeling through the galaxies,  
Headed for the heart of Cygnus

The 'Rocinante' is alluding to the horse in *Don Quixote*. Rocinante is a worn-out horse and represents the depression experienced by the withdrawal of libido (psychic energy) from external drive when ego-consciousness (conscious mind) has reached an impasse and energy is directed inwardly to seek a resolution. The spaceship represents ego-consciousness – the conscious reasoning mind of our explorer and psychonaut. Our hero is 'headed for the heart of Cygnus.' His feelings are the 'heart' of Cygnus. He must enter the black hole, his unconscious, to integrate his feelings. The integration of feeling will complement his intellect.

The x-ray is her siren song  
My ship cannot resist her long  
Nearer to my deadly goal  
Until the Black Hole —  
Gains control....

'siren song' alludes to sirens in Greek mythology that were female humanlike creatures who allured sailors to destruction. A siren is an anima symbol. The anima represents the feminine in the psyche and is associated with feeling. Our hero refers to the Black Hole as 'her' because it represents the unconscious feminine in his psyche. The ship is his rational conscious mind (ego-consciousness) which can no longer resist the pull of the unconscious. The Self is the centre of the unconscious and is appearing as a 'black' hole because it is unconscious in our hero's psyche. The will of the unconscious (Black Hole) is going to overpower the will of ego-

consciousness (ship) and when the 'Black Hole gains control' our hero will become directed from within.

Sound and fury drowns my heart  
Every nerve is torn apart....

The *sol niger* is the dissolution stage in alchemy where the sun dissolves the body. In 'Cygnus X-1, The Voyage' our hero is consumed and dissolved by the black hole and his physical form is destroyed. In psychological terms, this stage is the dissolution of the persona. The persona is the mask we present to the world and the identity we developed through the process of imitation, socialization, genderization and role modelling to achieve adaptation with the collective. It is formed around the accepted norms and values of our culture and environment and is built upon our ego-consciousness which is characterized by our strongest psychological functions of consciousness (thinking, feeling, sensing and intuition) and our defining attitude of introversion or extraversion.

*Cygnus X-1, Hemispheres*  
I have memory and awareness  
But I have no shape or form  
As a disembodied spirit...

He has undergone a psychological transformation and discovered his spiritual identity.

I see the Gods in battle rage on high  
Thunderbolts across the sky  
I cannot move, I cannot hide  
I feel a silent scream begin inside

Our hero has brought both hemispheres of his brain into consciousness and is experiencing the conflict of their differing views.

Then all at once the Chaos ceased  
A stillness fell, a sudden peace

The conflict has been resolved and the differing views have been accepted. Our hero can accept the differing views because he is now spirit and has achieved higher consciousness. He no longer identifies with either hemisphere of his brain and discriminates against the other. His ego-consciousness has now embraced and integrated both hemispheres.

We will call you Cygnus,  
The God of Balance you shall be

The ego has found its place in the psyche. The ego no longer perceives itself to be central in the psyche. The Self is central in the psyche, but the ego is the centre of consciousness and is

now a mediator considering the views of each hemisphere of the brain represented by Dionysus and Apollo.

We can walk our road together  
If our goals are all the same  
We can run alone and free  
If we pursue a different aim

Harmony has been restored in the psyche of our hero which is now an alliance working together. Both hemispheres have been differentiated and brought into consciousness.

Let the truth of Love be lighted  
Let the love of Truth shine clear  
Sensibility  
Armed with sense and liberty  
With the Heart and Mind united  
In a single perfect sphere

The Heart and Mind represent the right and left hemispheres respectively and are no longer striving for dominance as the Self has been realized in the psyche. The perfect sphere is a symbol of Spirit which is perfect Love and is our essence. Unconditional Love cannot discriminate. Each hemisphere has found unconditional acceptance. The sphere is also a symbol of wholeness and unity.

The hero of the tale is of course, Neil Peart, who wrote the lyrics for Cygnus X-1. Rush provided our culture with a mythology in the form of progressive rock which provides a framework for psychological and cultural integration.

### **Cultural Forces of Change**

Now I would like to focus on the cultural dynamics represented by Apollo and Dionysus in 'Cygnus X-1, Book Two: Hemispheres'.

When our weary world was young  
The struggle of the Ancients first began  
The Gods of Love and Reason  
Sought alone to rule the fate of Man

The gods of Love (Dionysus) and Reason (Apollo) are known as the anima and animus in Jungian Psychology. The anima is the feminine aspect of the psyche. Eros (Love) is the feminine principle which characterizes the anima. The anima is associated with feeling, intuition and the right hemisphere of the brain. The animus is the masculine aspect of the psyche. Logos (Reason) is the masculine principle which characterizes the animus. The animus is associated with thinking, sensation and the left hemisphere of the brain.

***Apollo Bringer of Wisdom***

I bring Truth, and Understanding  
I bring Wit, and Wisdom fair  
Precious gifts beyond compare  
We can build a world of wonder  
I can make you all aware

I will find you food and shelter  
Show you fire to keep you warm  
Through the endless winter storm  
You can live in grace and comfort  
In the world that you transform

Apollo represents reason, wisdom, truth, knowledge, awareness, mastery over nature, civilisation and technological advancement.

***Dionysus Bringer of Love***

I bring Love to give you solace  
In the darkness of the night  
In the heart's eternal light  
You need only trust your feelings  
Only Love can steer you right

I bring Laughter, I bring Music  
I bring Joy, and I bring Tears  
I will soothe your primal fears  
Throw off those chains of Reason  
And your prison disappears

Dionysus represents love, emotional intelligence, instinct, relationship, connection, the arts, fun, joy, freedom and harmony with Nature.

They battled through the ages  
But still neither force would yield  
Their people were divided  
Every soul a battlefield...

Apollo represents the animus and Dionysus represents the anima which are dialectical forces of change in human culture throughout human history. The dominant force is the thesis and the opposing force is the antithesis. And the integration of both thesis and antithesis becomes a synthesis. In a matriarchal culture the anima is dominant and the animus suppressed and in a patriarchal culture the animus is dominant and the anima suppressed. In an enlightened culture the anima and animus are equally valued and there is a balance between feminine and masculine, yin and yang, spirituality and materialism. In Western culture at present the animus

(left brain) is dominant in the collective consciousness and the anima (right brain) is suppressed. Scientism has become our religion and spirituality has been lost. We are living in a *Kali Yuga*, a dark age of materialism. The time is ripe for the return of Spirit and the synthesis of science and spirituality.

We can walk our road together.

### References

Peart, N. (1977). Cygnus X-1, Book I, The Voyage [Recorded by Rush]. On *A Farewell To Kings* [Compact Disc]. Rush, & T. Brown.

Peart, N. (1978). Cygnus X-1, Book II, Hemispheres [Recorded by Rush]. On *Hemispheres* [Compact Disc]. Rush, & T. Brown.

von Franz, M.-L. (1964). The Process of Individuation. In C. G. Jung (Ed.), *Man and His Symbols* (pp. 157-254). New York: Dell Publishing.

*John Gallagher © 2025*  
(first published 2015)

johngallagher.online  
strath.academia.edu/JohnGallagher