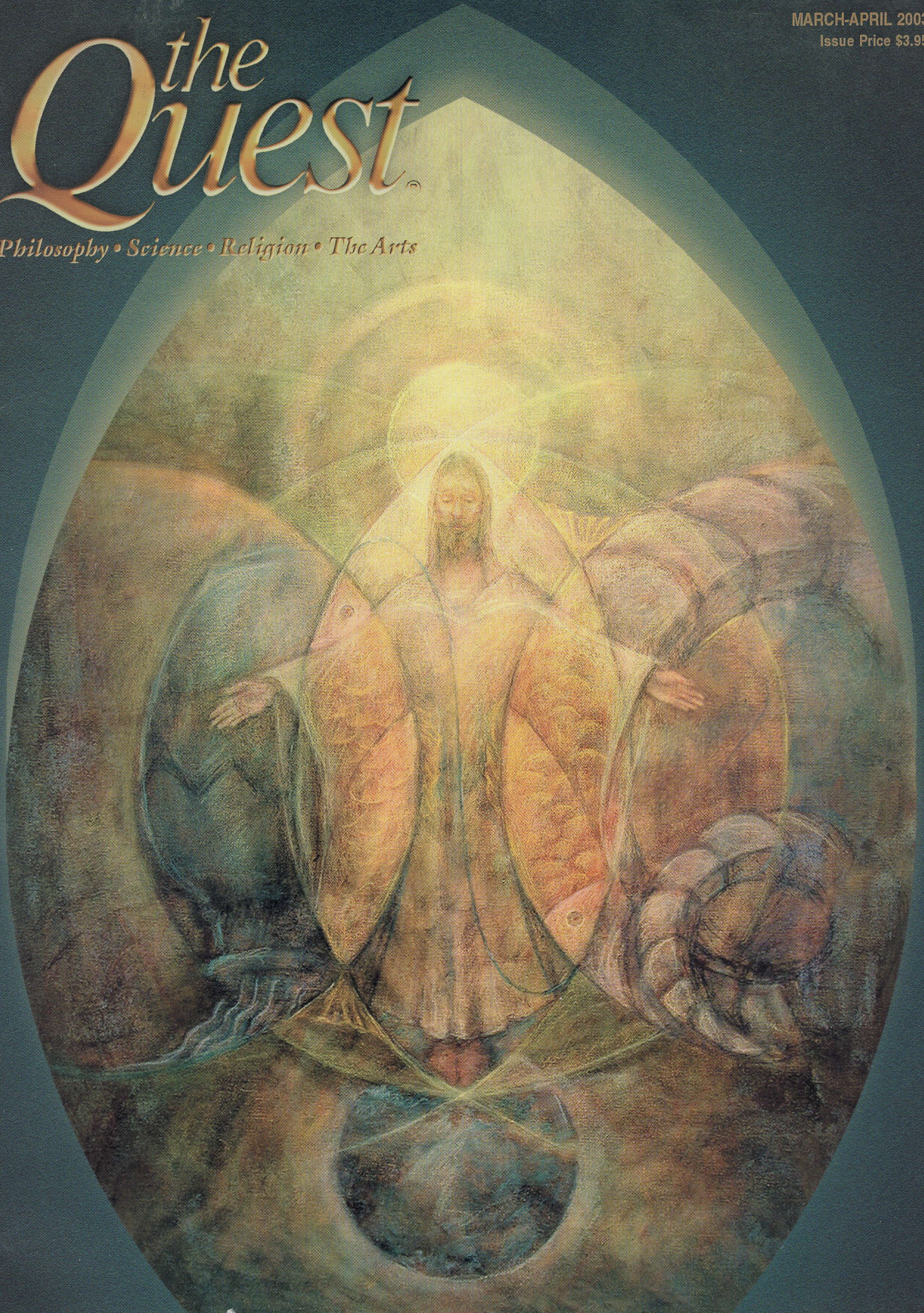


MARCH-APRIL 2003
Issue Price \$3.95

The Quest

Philosophy • Science • Religion • The Arts



PSYCHOANALYTIC
FESTSCHRIFT FOR
A THEOSOPHIST

Within Time and beyond Time:
A Festschrift for Pearl King.

Ed. Riccardo Steiner and Jennifer Johns.
London: Karnac, 2001. Paperback,
\$45.00, xxvi + 277 pages.

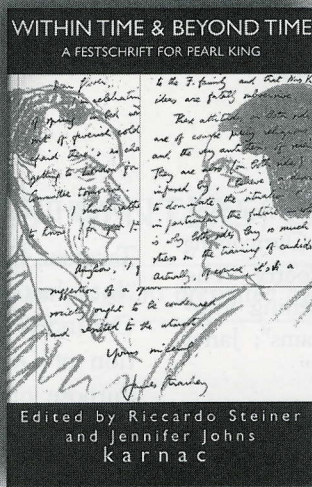
This anthology of eighteen papers on psychoanalytic theory and practice in the United Kingdom was assembled to honor the British psychoanalytic historian (and British Theosophist) Pearl King on her eightieth birthday. Among a number of other accomplishments—for example, her important coeditorship of the *Freud-Klein Controversies, 1941-45*, and her work with developmental issues in the mature psychoanalytic patient—the contributors make special mention of her work as the most important internal historian of the British Psychoanalytic Society.

The papers range over a capacious array of live topics within psychoanalytic theory and history. Among the topics dealt with are the split within French psychoanalysis in the wake of Jacques Lacan's short-term "wild analysis," recollections of the early life of R. D. Lang, the complex intertwining of the ego ideal and the super ego in first- and second-generation children of Holocaust survivors, the question as to whether or not classical Freudian drive theory is really incompatible with more recent object-relations theory, genetic versus developmental analyses in psychoanalytic practice, and the elusive problem of unconscious ego choice. While very few Festschriften are actually about their intended honoree, this one does acknowledge the centrality of Pearl King as a champion of both the London Society and the less secure fledgling Societies in the hinterlands to the north of London.

For Theosophists there are several issues here that are of great import. I will mention three of them. The essay by Leo Rangell, "Unconscious Choice and Responsibility: An Elusive Point of Psychoanalytic Theory," moves beyond the dyad between the weak consciousness and an all-powerful but deterministic unconscious. Rangell argues, and I think persuasively, that the unconscious piece of the ego

makes choices about object cathexis or intrapsychic integrity and has a small, but important, amount of free will. If this is so, then it follows that the Theosophical quest to work through and past the so-called lower self must first wrestle with this strange phenomenon of a conscious yet unconscious decision-making process within the hidden depths of the ego. There seems to be a special kind of consciousness within the unconscious that could be correlated further down into the etheric and astral bodies, insofar as they may have been part of the pre-formation of the personal and collective unconscious below even the genetic level. Put in the form of a question: just how does karma get expressed in unconscious ego choices, themselves based on both traumatic and inherited patterns, which can only be decoded by a rigorous psychoanalytic process?

Another question raised is that of knowing how to tell if an experience is a hallucination or has a true object reference. In the essay "The Unconscious: Past, Present, and Future," Clifford York carefully lays out Freud's evolving views on the unconscious system and the distinctions among the descriptive, dynamic, and systematic modes of the unconscious and the way these modes of the total unconscious relate to the preconscious. In "solving" the hallucination problem, he argues that occasionally an unconscious fantasy can emerge that does not pass through the preconscious. Therefore, as it is not even filtered through our partly controllable preconscious, we assume that the fantasy object comes to us from the external world. In reference to H. P. Blavatsky's many experiences, this distinction can become quite vexatious. Are her trance states simply fantasies that fail to slow down and get moderated by her preconscious? Are occult experiences



over-determined by projection, transference, and Oedipal or castration anxieties? Or are they, as Rudolf Steiner argued, validated insofar as they are seen by the "spiritual eye" rather than by the perceptual channels of "normal" consciousness?

Finally, the moving essay by Bernard Barnett, "The Holocaust, Its Aftermath, and the Problem of the Superego," gives case studies of survivors' children as they struggle with depression, rage, self-loathing, and paranoia. Barnett makes some brilliant moves when he correlates the sometimes unbearable, unconscious tension between the ego ideal of the child (who fantasizes rescuing his or her parents from the Nazis), and the damning superego (that tries to push the son or daughter into the false recognition that they are just like the Nazis in the camp). This raging psychic split can produce life-long psychosomatic disorders and make it extremely difficult to rebuild a whole psyche. For the Nazi party member or sympathizer, there is a pathological pseudo-blending of the ego ideal and the superego that deadens the conscience by linking it to a tribal identity that projects all forms of negativity outward into the Other.

The superego of the Nazi became focused on Jews and others who seemingly acted out the hidden drives and desires within the unconscious of the Nazi. One could make a strong case that this psychic dynamic is operating in the current Israeli Palestinian conflict. For Theosophists, usually working out of far less charged internal dynamics, the conflict between the ego ideal and the superego may play itself out in the tensions between the higher Manas and the seemingly endless repetition of the drives. The ego ideal may indeed become too inflated, thus putting backpressure on the superego to deflate and weaken the psyche.

It is clear that these essays not only honor Pearl King, but also give both psychoanalysts and Theosophists much to think about. While it should be clear that their issues are our issues, it may be less clear to them that our issues are theirs as well. It is my hope that this will change in our lifetimes.

—ROBERT S. CORRINGTON

The reviewer is Professor of Philosophical Theology in the Caspersen School of Graduate Studies at Drew University and the author of eight books.