

Alchemy and Eros in Ridley Scott's *Legend* (1985)



By: Jay Dyer and Jennifer Sodini

Ridley Scott is reportedly not happy about *Legend*, nor is Tom Cruise. However, when we think “80s Tom Cruise,” we think *Top Gun*, *Risky Business*, and *Legend*. How does one go from *Blade Runner* to *Legend*? These are great 80s mysteries that we are not here to solve – what we are here to solve are the enigmatic, and sometimes bizarre, scenes and images in *Legend*. No stranger to positing deeper meanings to jovial 80s films targeted at adolescents, Jennifer Sodini and I have decoded the moribund (and sometimes meandering) mythos of *Legend*.

Packed with all the key elements of fantasy/whimsy: unicorns, princesses, sprites, goblins, fairies, and forest people galore, *Legend* resembles other 80s fantasy films like the *Dark Crystal*, *Labyrinth* and *The NeverEnding Story*, yet has its own unique elements. For those of us who grew up enchanted by the fantastical fairy tale imagery of this film, taking a deeper look at the hidden esoteric symbolism involved in the story reveals a shocking subplot about sexual temptation/desire and alchemical imagery one wouldn't expect.

As the story begins we are introduced to Tim Curry's character, which many would mistake to be “the devil,” but is actually the demon Darkness, the beast of temptation and lust that lives within all of us (even the purest of heart). Darkness summons one of his goblins, Blix, to do his bidding as he expresses the urge of his carnal desires to be satiated. The accomplishment of this act is intimately tied to the ritual action of removing the unicorn's horn and consuming the energy of its innocence through blood sacrifice, signifying both menstrual blood and the blood of the broken hymen.

Functioning as an antithesis to the red (the color corresponding to the base chakra/carnal desire, *muladhara*), dual-horned demon Darkness, the unicorn's white signifies sexual purity/innocence.¹ While the unicorn has a horn, the horn (just as sexual energy) can either be used to create or destroy, to protect, or to impale. Sexual energy (the orgasm in particular), as viewed by most religions, is sacred: The power of the orgasm is perceived to be the same power of both death and creation, arising from the universe.² This theory was also explored by scientist Wilhelm Reich, in his cloud-busting and orgon box energy experiments. Carl Jung explains the symbology of the unicorn in relation to alchemy and Mercury:

The unicorn in alchemy: The example of the Unicorn is chosen to demonstrate how the symbolism of Mercury is intermingled in the traditions of pagan gnosticism and the Christian Church. As the unicorn is not a single, clearly identified entity, more specific concern is centered on the beast with a single horn (the alicorn). Examples are given from the literature, especially the *Chemical Wedding* of Christian Rosencrantz, in which the unicorn, the lion and the dove appear, all of these being symbols of Mercury. Reference is also made to medieval art in which images of the virgin and the unicorn appear.

These images are said to represent the dual aspect of Mercury: the virgin as the passive, feminine aspect of the unicorn, and the unicorn or lion as the wild,



WILHELM REICH (1897-1957): Austrian psychoanalyst well known as the second generation following Freud, and the most radical. Reich attempted to harmonize psychoanalysis with Marxism and later influenced many young student radicals through his book *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, which would later become popular. Reich was interested in sexology, particularly in relation to bio-mechanical feedback, and other far-flung theories arising from his “Orgone Institute.” Reich was arrested by the FBI in 1941 under suspicion of being involved in subversive activities and espionage.

rampant, masculine force... References from the Church fathers are variously given in which the unicorn is identified with the God of the Old Testament or Christ. It is pointed out that there are ecclesiastical quotations in which the unicorn is said to carry the element of evil. It is this inner contradiction that makes the unicorn an appropriate symbol to be used by alchemists' monstrum hermaphroditum. [the hermaphrodite – a key stage of unification in the alchemical process].³



The initial relationship between Lilly (Mia Sara) and Jack (Tom Cruise) is presented as juxtaposition between a feisty, rebellious princess who does not like being told what to do, and the peasant boy of the woods who speaks with animals and abides by the code of nature (hearkening to Shakespeare's Puck and Ancient Greece's Pan). Interesting opposites, as one would assume the princess would listen, and the forest boy would be wild. As Lilly is approaching her "time" and Jack is naturally ripe, the loss of innocence in the forest commences as he blindfolds her before leading her to the unicorns. Lilly protests by saying, "Do you not trust me"? Then she frolics off to tickle the forbidden phallus.

When the unicorns appear, we see two paired together, striding down a stream that is sexually provocative given the angle of the camera. Riding on the running "water of life" is also noteworthy, as water in alchemy is associated with the power of emotion and intuition. Sexual temptation presents itself, and courses through the power of emotion/intuitive desire, leading Jack and Lilly to experiment beneath the Tree of Life, a classic image of sacral fertility. Both images recall the Jung quote above, as well as speaking to a possible link with Scott's *Blade Runner* usage of the unicorn in Deckard's dream – both seem to suggest an alchemical union amongst both films' protagonists.



The cyclical clock of nature, frozen in death after Lily's fall.

Jack instructs Lilly not to approach the unicorn, yet she defiantly does so, eventually touching it. As she touches it, Blix, the goblin sent to do the “Big D’s” bidding shoots the unicorn with a poison dart, releasing chaos, death and darkness into the world. After her “fall,” Lily removes her magical ring, which is emblazoned with a waning moon, highly suggestive again of the menstruation cycle and the seasonal clock Lily gazed upon in the peasant cottage. Lily tosses her ring off a cliff and issues a challenge to Jack to recover it from the abyss, and, in so doing he may have her in marriage.

The explanation for the enigmatic clock scenes, which displays the seasons and is then frozen following Lily’s fall, are eloquently explained in concert with her challenge for Jack by Julius Evola:

We find here a similar conception of a cyclic development, symbolized by the “cosmic clock” and its course. The first phase is the entry of God into nature, of the “Son” into process of becoming, and of the male into female. It is the woman or Shakti, the lowest point of the clock, that predominates in this phase. At the figure six, which corresponds to the lowest point of the clock, that is, the descending arc, “in which woman dominates man and matter imprisons the spirit in the depths of its entrails,” we have the limits of the abyss; when we reach his limit we either die or are reborn to eternal life. It is the point of the “dangerous passage” or the turning point where the great trial is held.

After that, themes of sexual magic appear because the trial should also consist in facing the woman in the same spirit as the Tantric principle of “victory over the bad through its transformation into the good.” The woman is thought of as the gate through which it is possible to enter the sphere of death or life. In the fall, sensual pleasure became the magnet which draws man towards woman, not for the conquest of life (which equals God), but for the conquest of death (which equals Satan), and Eve ... became the battlefield of the struggle between life and death.

At the decisive point of this trial, man sees his “bride” again and is invited to immerse himself in her, the female, once more, not in order to enter into the realm of death and becoming, but in order to leave that realm and maintain awareness of his own being instead of dissolving. In this context the woman is seen as the Gateway of Heaven, and as the essential element for freedom. From the end of the descending phase six, the victorious male next finds himself reprojected to the starting point of the cosmic clock’s cycle, freed from matter and consecrated King. This is the rite of the “Second Wedding,” which coincides with that of the formation of the Messiah.⁴

Jack nosedives from the cliff after the moon ring and upon descending to the abyss, the seasons rapidly change, the water freezes, and winter falls over the land. As this is all happening, the unicorn Lilly touched is captured and de-horned (emasculated), an allegory of innocence lost, chastity discarded, and the death of sexual purity in Jack’s concession to Lily. This explains why the unicorn who dies is the male, while the female survives. As Blix presents the horn to Darkness, the demon replies that the destruction of both is needed, and in particular the ritual sacrifice of the virgin female, since the female possesses “the power of creation.”

Jack’s descent into the abyss is signified in the sense Evola describes in this scene, whereupon, emerging ringless, he experiences a psychosexual emasculation, having lost both his “horn” and Lily, who has now run away. Recalling the mythology of Osiris, the lost phallus is primeval in its mythological origins, and only as Osiris’ disembodied form is reassembled into a higher unity, including the return of the phallus, can the process of the restoration of the masculine occur. It is within *Legend* this same narrative is played out, as Jack must mature from adolescence into manhood, undergoing the trial of losing his essence due to Lily’s folly, imprisoned in the wintry, watery abyss that now encompasses his world. Our abyss interpretation is also confirmed by Darkness’ opening salvo that, “in the beginning, there was only Darkness, and the void...” (the abyss), from whence the order of created beings emerged (Gen. 1).



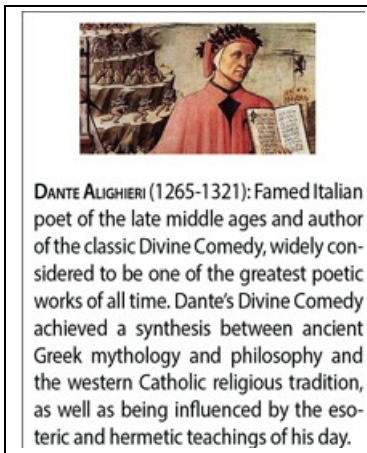
JULIUS EVOLA (1898-1974): Italian baron and philosopher, painter, and esotericist. Evola believed mankind had entered a Kali Yuga - a dark age in which traditional relations and societies were being inverted by nefarious earthly and spiritual forces, dominated by materialism. Evola's books focus on the metaphysics of war and sex, as well as the meaning of mystical symbols like the Holy Grail. Evola's work would become highly controversial, influencing fascists for decades to come, as well as modern day right wing, conservative and traditional movements.



Darkness' lair.

Before Lilly is captured, we see the abuse of the power of the horn as Blix uses the horn for trivial/egotistical purposes, emblematic of base desires utilizing the magic of sexuality to destroy, not create. Eventually Lilly and the female unicorn are captured and brought to the underworld inferno of Darkness. Darkness' realm is a massive, dead tree, a kind of Da'at* inverse of the Tree of Life, with a vast network of underground abodes and prisons borrowed quite clearly from Dante.⁵ Gump, the Frankie Muniz lookalike that accompanies Jack on his quest, identifies it as the location of the ritual site where the wicked once performed ritual blood sacrifice (Jack also mentions "alchemy" in this scene, confronting the witch). Blood had already been let in the loss of Lily's innocence, and now Lily must undergo the temptation to give in to her shade, the Goth alter persona she almost embraces.

This scene is oddly reminiscent of Sarah's dalliance with Jareth in the orgiastic masked ball in Jim Henson's *Labyrinth*. In both films, maturation into puberty is the subtle theme, with the energy of sexuality evoking confusing and conflicting ideas for both protagonists grappling with the opposite sex. For Sarah, the loss of her mother and the possibility of childbearing as a result of bodily coitus are repellent, as she despises the care of Toby. For Lily, the alter persona of the sexually liberated gothic babe engaging in trysts with "Big D" almost overcome her resolve. Both scenes occur in the context of the underworld/Labyrinth's connection to the subconscious, from whence arise our potentially multiple personas or alters. As we saw previously, the meaning of the labyrinth or underworld as the subconscious signifies a maze of strange passages, chambers, and unlocked exits in the cellar emerging from the Egyptian representation of the underworld.



The seduction of Lilly, and her shade self, exemplified in the mirror reflection.

Of particular import is Lilly's dance with the devils in an interesting choreography where her black clad shade twirls her into a seductive spell. Under the sensuous mind control of Darkness, she eventually merges with the shadow, acquiescing to the pomp and luxury of Darkness' appeal to her ego through flattery (and women do love jewelry!). Drawn into the material, Lily adorns herself with the diamond necklace that alludes to Ezekiel's description of Lucifer as bedazzled with emeralds and precious stones (and I don't mean the Bedazzler). Ezekiel 28:12-14 describes the fallen Cherub:

Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "You had the seal of perfection, Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. "You were in Eden, the garden of God; Every precious stone was your covering: The ruby, the topaz and the diamond; The beryl, the onyx and the jasper; The lapis lazuli, the turquoise and the emerald; And the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets, Was in you. On the day that you were created They were prepared. "You were the anointed cherub who covers, And I placed you there. You were on the holy mountain of God; You walked in the midst of the stones of fire.

The consistent theme throughout the film is gnostic duality and dialectical tension: masculine vs. feminine, light vs. dark, innocence vs. desire, spirit vs. flesh, and even in the climax, Darkness' destruction results in the explicit exclamation, "What is light without darkness?" "Big D" is "conquered" though Jack stabbing him in the solar plexus (ego center) with the unicorn horn (death of ego by desire), Darkness disappears into the abyss from the light of the sun. Indeed – the French term for the orgasm, *le petit mort* means the "little death." Author Nicolas Laos aptly comments on this deep association of sex, death, and nihilism in his introduction to Anna Schaeffner's *Modernism and Perversion*:

...Furthermore, observing and studying the history of modernity, in general, I never stop being appalled by the desecralization of life in the context of modernity, as a consequence of which the modern subject lives in the dimension of time separated from eternity, that is, under the aspect of death. Thus, the modern subject has gradually developed a perverse relation with eros and death (which, according to Sigmund Freud, are the two basic instincts): in the context of the desecralized life of the modern subject, death is a taboo and repulsive issue, in the sense that the modern subject, by living separated from the absolute (eternity), cannot manage the issue of death and desperately tries to forget, evade, and silence this issue, while simultaneously fusing death and eros into a necrophiliac perception of culture manifested through necrophiliac aesthetic values (e.g., skinny fashion models and asexual 'cyberfreaks' as opposed to the ancient Greek erotic archetypes of Aphrodite and Apollo, artifacts that emanate disharmony and decadence, etc.), necrophiliac sexual attitudes (e.g., confusion between pleasure and pain or between sensationalism and violence, etc.), and necrophiliac working patterns (i.e., working for living, that is, for satisfying temporal needs/desires, and not for living well, which is a spiritual question)...

Darkness has some poetic dying quips that exemplify the principles Nicolas Laos elucidates when death has come to dominate the sexual impulse as destructive, as opposed to life-giving: “Every wolf suffers fleas, ’tis easy enough to scratch,” “What is light without dark ... what are you without me?” “I am a part of you all, you can never defeat me, we are brothers eternal.” In the gnostic schema, darkness is just as necessary, fundamental and ontologically real as light. Both are flip sides of the same coin, and with *Legend*, the identification of evil with good once again relativizes meaning. Thus, the climax of this celluloid sex magic extravaganza is the attempted blood sacrifice of the unicorn to the powers of darkness, a transference of essence from one being to another – just as Jack found himself powerless before Lily, so Lily becomes powerless before Darkness.

Alchemical frolicking.



As Laos notes, when death and sex are combined to cancel one another out, death takes preeminence and Lily’s fascination with sexual union with death becomes emblematic. “Big D” eventually dissolves back into the universe, but as Jack and Lily run off into the sunset after Jack has successfully retrieved the magical ring and both Lily and Jack and the unicorns are reunited in alchemical harmony, “Big D” ominously reappears and laughs as the movie comes to a close. The conclusion may be that Darkness, or the lustful desire both awakened, was the overriding principle that brought about the transformative psychosexual process. Or perhaps they have triumphed over discord.

So let’s ask ourselves this, what is light without dark, life without death, desire without consequence, and love without desire? The shadow aspects of the lightness of being will never be separate from our human experience. We all have our demons, we all have our desires, and we all must exercise control over the passions that govern the shadow aspects of our personality. While *Legend* is a mystical mythology of this understanding of the power of innocence, sexuality, orgasm, and temptation – the lesson is a similar recurring theme through other 80’s movies such as *Labyrinth*. Control your thoughts, control your reality, as Plato encouraged his neophytes in *Phaedo* to control their passions, in the allegory of the chariot (mind) and its horses (passions).



RIDLEY SCOTT: English film director and producer known for neo-noir dystopias like *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Alien* (1979), as well as later films like *Gladiator* (2000) and *Prometheus* (2012). Scott’s films often contain revolutionary themes and of late, Scott has focused on co-operation with NASA on the Mars-themed blockbuster *The Martian* (2015). Scott, like Lucas and Spielberg, has championed the alien mythos while simultaneously working closer and closer with the deep state on his major projects.

¹ Fondin, Michelle. “The Root Chakra: Muladhara.” Chopra.com. Web. <http://www.chopra.com/ccl/the-root-chakra-muladhara>

² Aun Weor, Samuel. “The Transmutation of Sexual Energy.” 2005. Web. <http://gnosticteachings.org/the-teachings-of-gnosis/lectures-by-samael-aun-weor/144-the-transmutation-of-sexual-energy-2.html>

³ Jung, Carl. “Abstracts of the Collected Works of Carl Jung.” CGJungPage. 27 October 2013. Web. <http://www.cgjungpage.org/learn/resources/jung-s-collected-works-abstracts/854-abstracts-of-the-collected-works-of-cg-jung>

⁴ Evola, Julius. *Eros and the Mysteries of Love: The Metaphysics of Sex*. Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 1991, pg. 262.

⁵ Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 107.

⁶ Laos, Nicolas. Unpublished Introduction. Web. <http://jaysanalysis.com/2015/06/13/alchemy-and-eros-in-ridley-scotts-legend-1985/>