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Preface

Great talents are the most lovely and often the most dangerous fruits on the tree of humanity. They hang upon the most slender twigs that are easily snapped off. —C G Jung

What is the 27 Club? It is the collective's term for a group of famous rock stars such as Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Kurt Cobain, and Amy Winehouse, all of whom died at the age of 27. The 27 Club does not exist, some say. It's a journalistic convenience, a meme, a stereotype that is not supported by the scientific evidence. True. But a stereotype is only the social face of an underlying archetype. The notion of the 27 Club, stripped of the artificial precision of age, points to something that does exist.

First, what this book is not. It is not an attempt to prove or disprove the existence of the 27 Club. That I will leave to the fevered debunkers and rationalists, enslaved by their left hemispheres, who go to great lengths to prove it's an irrational myth. (And, yes, those two words are often put in the same sentence.)

The death of a rock star at age 27 is too literal and binding a notion for something that is one of the great patterns in our lives—this time in our late twenties when, for specific developmental reasons, we have an opportunity for more life or more death. So let's defocus a bit and abandon the notion of a specific age and the constrictions of a number. That gives the precisionists and statisticians too much leeway and we become blinded to an experience that is defined not by age and number but by psychology and circumstance.

Second, what this book is. It is about a style of consciousness and living which can lead to stories of both tragedy and beauty around age 27 but which is actually spread throughout the twenties. It was characterised by the Swiss psychiatrist, C G Jung as puer¹ or puella consciousness (Latin for girl or boy, young man or young woman).

The puer is the archetype of the eternal youth, the often brilliant and creative person who remains younger than his or her age, soars high, and crashes and burns. It is not bound by age but rather by personality; there are puers in their sixties or seventies. But if the phenomenon is not age-dependent—if there are adolescent pensioners—why does popular culture focus on age 27 and the 27 Club? It's because normal psychological forces bring us to a crossroads in our late twenties. This is not as widely recognised a stage as, say, infancy (0–3), preschool (3–6), childhood (6–12) or adolescence (12–18). Psychology, for the most part, does not have much to say about emotional and spiritual development after 18. But we continue to grow and change even after we become an adult, physically and cognitively.

I shall use an indigenous teaching called the Moon Cycles to give a more nuanced understanding of what happens in our late twenties.² The Moon Cycles have nothing to do with astrology or numerology. They are about an archetypal pattern of time as measured by the feminine cycles of the moon instead of the masculine movements of the sun.

I will not go into depth about the highly visible lives of rock stars like Jimi Hendrix and Jim Morrison who have

¹ For convenience, I shall use the term puer throughout to apply to both men and women.

² For an in-depth look at the Moon Cycles see Michael Owen, *Jung and the Native American Moon Cycles: Rhythms of Influence*,

become the founding members of the 27 Club—the famous few who get all the attention. That has been done already and it's easy to cherry-pick their lyrics to confirm your theories. But not much has been written about all the accountants, computer programmers or plumbers who have died at 27.

In an interview on USA National Public Radio in 2009, Eric Segalstad said that age 27 was around the time when people go from youth to maturity and that people who died at that age were not all victims of rock 'n' roll stardom. Some died in accidents and murders. Others didn't live hard, like Pete Ham of Badfinger, victim of dishonest managers and record label fights that left him penniless.³ The circumstances, method and particulars of an individual's death are not my concern here. Rather, it is the question, "Did they live out the archetype of the eternal youth?"

It is not a matter of "believing" or "disbelieving" in the existence of the 27 Club. Much too black and white. Belief, disbelief, faith, conviction and principles offer an escape hatch when we run into paradox, complexity, ambivalence, absurdity, chaos and contradiction. Belief, with its left-hand of gullibility and superstition, and its right-hand of rationality and scepticism (yes, superstition and rationality are two sides of the same coin) drains everything of colour and depth. It flattens, it simplifies, and makes us simpletons. So I invite the reader to temporarily suspend belief or disbelief and any principles or convictions that might divert you into one or the other. The ultimate test of something is whether or not it works in the human soul. I will leave the reader to decide if the patterns sketched this book have meaning for them, or not.

³ "Before I Get Old: 'The 27s' Made Early Exits: NPR." www.npr.org/2009/04/05/102670912/before-i-get-old-the-27s-made-early-exits

Because this book is about the early deaths of those in the 27 Club and other Clubs it has many stories of tragedy and suicide. There is another story of equal importance about success and joy in life. But that's another book.

But I do **caution** the reader who may be vulnerable to thoughts of hero worship or admiration for the 27 Club. Or those who harbour thoughts of self-harm or suicide which may intensify when you read this book. If in doubt, put the book down. Suicide is never just suicide. It's complicated. And it's often suicide *at* someone (including yourself). So do what works for you to keep breathing. That's all you have to do. Just this next breath. It will pass. That way you get to see how your story unfolds.

Chapter 1 explores the psychology of the eternal youth and how this psychology helps us understand those in the 27 Club. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 look at the patterns of the Big Moon Cycles and the Chaotic Journeys which help us answer the question, "Why age 27?" Chapter 5 on The Little Moons describes in more detail the Big South Moon from birth to age 27. Chapter 6 summarises the little that science has to say about the 27 Club and development in our 20s.

Volumes have already been written about the lives of 27 Club members. Another one is not needed. This is not a definitive study but rather a rough, initial sketch, so you will not find extensive referencing but I have given the occasional footnote. I am indebted to the Twisted Hairs and Harley SwiftDeer Reagan for the teachings of the Moon Cycles. and to the writings of C. G. Jung, Marie-Louise von Franz and James Hillman.

—Michael Owen
Maenam, August 2018