

The Gods Have Become Diseases¹

By **Graham Mummery**

The gods have become diseases. Zeus no longer rules Olympus, but rather the solar plexus and produces curious specimens for the doctor's consulting-room or disorders the brains of politicians and journalists who unwittingly let loose psychic epidemics upon the world.

Carl Jung

I

Suddenly your heart is beating faster,
You draw in breath...sharply...look again.
Unable to move, unable to master
the simplest tasks. You struggle to regain

your sense of control, but it keeps slipping.
Everything now different
as if an arrow were twisting
in your chest with a message, sent,

its orders dictated by your heart:
'Everything in your life must change.'
Your once familiar routine now starts

to become completely new.
You might have fallen in love, except some
doctor tells you: 'Take it easy... Yes, you.'

II

They sit around the table
throw their dice, make wagers on Olympus,
then move down to Earth, quite able
to manipulate you through the solar plexus,

skin, heart, pancreas, and even the brain.
They leave riddles written on your body:
texts for you to puzzle out, explain
as best you can, while each one of them vies

for supremacy in their cosmic game
in which you're a piece they move
with their hands. Win or lose, it is the same

to them, whether you live or die.
The game goes on. You try to understand
what is happening, the reasons why.

III

Eczema looks upon his work with a grin.
An artist who has used for canvas
the white pigments of your skin,
painting florid brush-strokes in shades of red

leaving rough Impressionistic patches
daubed all over your body:
handiwork you criticise with scratches,
rejecting all thought that this is holy.

Your whole body erupts with weals,
every movement becomes horribly sore.
You sit waiting for them to heal,

for your ideal to end, even if it means
you change your life, strike a deal
with some god – unseen, or real.

IV

Diabetes is the most alluring
femme fatale, sister of Artemis:
sweet as urine, bitter as the sugar
she throws in your blood: the cruellest mistress.

Through the Langerhan archipelago
her hounds, on loan from her fierce sibling,
devour everything in their way. There is
only delay, no stopping her killing.

To satisfy her hunger she bites through
Pancreas, eyes, nerve endings in the feet.
She sighs in ecstasy: ‘Oh, that’s so sweet!’

Only insulin’s love can distract her
as she drives forward in her conquest.
For a while, his needle halts her progress.

1 We reproduce here, by kind permission, the first four sections of an eight-section composition; from Graham’s anthology *Meeting My Inners*, Pindrop Press, St Andre de Valborgne, France, 2015, 84 pp, ISBN 978-0957329072, price £8.99; see <https://tinyurl.com/y573jyt8>.