Psychological Perspectives: A Quarterly Journal of Jungian Thought

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/upyp20

War of the Ancient Dragon: The Transformation of Violence in Sandplay
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Published online: 10 Sep 2012.

To cite this article: Laurel Howe (2012) War of the Ancient Dragon: The Transformation of Violence in Sandplay, Psychological Perspectives: A Quarterly Journal of Jungian Thought, 55:3, 342-359

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00332925.2012.703030

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A six-year-old boy, nearly expelled from school for bullying, engages an eerie alchemical narrative in sandplay therapy, and through a torturous process, redeems his hostile attitude. “Randy” fights numerous bloody wars, dubbing one “the war of the ancient dragon,” which symbolically relates to his work with fire, ash, and water. He goes through a protracted burning process, and in several sessions tortures human and animal figures in the fire. His work with war, fire, and water allows his violent tendencies to burn themselves out and leads to the resurrection of a new, more related consciousness, indicated in his declaration of himself as “king of the bloodfire.” This account of the boy’s process traces the recovery and redemption of the feminine realm out of his violent, arrogant attitude. Randy demonstrates, in a numinous way, how the psyche’s ancient language and healing capacity are fully alive in the imagination of a contemporary child. We see how the unconscious offers itself to be brought into consciousness by way of the imaginal realm, and how transformation occurs via the symbolic dynamism at Randy’s fingertips.

Randy, a sly, wiry six-year-old, has been beating up his fellow first-graders and cursing at his teachers. His school, where I work as an intern-therapist, is considering expelling him for bullying. Randy is smart, arrogant, deliberately ambivalent, noisy, and proud as a rooster. He is also lonely, though he would never admit it.

In his first visit, Randy informs me that my office “smells like piss.” He nevertheless goes right to the sandtray and knows exactly what to do. Violence immediately emerges. Randy drops glass-jewel “bombs,” rocks,
Sarah Perry, *Gorilla Route 66* (including details), 1990.
Steel armature, castoff tire treads, copper wire; 65″ × 52″ × 62″.
buildings, people, and animals into the sandtray, imagining each figure exploding in a bloody eruption of sizzling fire. He embellishes the agonizing explosions with spit and roaring gurgles, sighs, screams, and the ooohs and ahhhs of someone genuinely impressed with the gore he is witnessing. He dubs this first war World War I. In his second session, he fights World War II. Nobody survives the bloodshed. In his third session, he calls the battle “the war of the ancient dragon.” The dragon, he says, is like a contagious explosion: “If you even touch the dragon, you blow up.” He drops soldiers into the tray, where they explode in agony. “There is so much fire in these guys, they just blow up. Everything is dying.”

But then Randy says something strangely hopeful: “Only one guy survived, because he didn’t have an explosion in him. They made him to be a real human, and he’s only half-dead. This was 1,200 million years before you were ever alive.”

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We each have our personal manifestation of the dragon:

a torturous longing, . . . a recurring depression, perhaps a painful identification with a wound.

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Randy’s war takes place “1,200 million years” before life existed, in the timelessness of the collective unconscious. Like archetypal conflict, Randy’s war is prehistoric, existing long before he did. His war exists in his parents, in his basic experience of himself, and in this way seems to coincide with life itself: Randy’s parents went through a hostile divorce when he was two and a half, and they still tend to use Randy as a kind of bomb, planting information in him that will explode in each other’s face. I talk to them, and they begin to understand how damaging it can be to use a child as a weapon. Their new awareness may help relieve Randy of carrying so much of their unconscious aggression. But Randy’s war also comes from a layer of the psyche deeper than the parental one; he is fighting the war of the ancient dragon. Even though it is ancient and very destructive, there is a human, an aspect of Randy, who can survive and become a “real human.”

In alchemy the dragon is a symbol for the prima materia, the basic, common substance that is to be transformed into something precious. More specifically, the dragon is the chthonic, volatile aspect of the prima materia, its drivenness, its inner spirit. The dragon symbolizes the ancient animal nature of the unconscious, an energy still writhing in all of us. It is a collective, driven energy, an archetypal phenomenon of unrealized proportions, which, in its unconscious state, can torture us. We see the dragon in its gripping
emotionality fueling war and discord around the world, and in our lives at home. We each have our personal manifestation of the dragon: a torturous longing or motivating desire, a recurring depression, perhaps a painful identification with a wound. For Randy the dragon lives as a tenaciously violent and deprecating attitude toward his classmates, his teachers, and himself. Yet, mysteriously, this dragon comes forward out of the unconscious to be transformed. As we read in Philalethes: “Above all it is marvelous that our stone, although already perfect and able to impart a perfect tincture, does voluntarily humble itself again and will mediate a new volatility” (as cited in Jung, 1968, par. 390–391). The dragon’s volatile nature is not only negative; it indicates an equally strong urge toward consciousness—toward a “new volatility.” The dragon’s willingness to “humble itself,” to come forward and be seen, to engage in the psychological drama, makes its transformation possible. When Randy sees his dragon, the process of transformation has begun.

The survival of “one guy” who “doesn’t have an explosion in him” indicates this urge toward consciousness in Randy. The survivor is a potential in Randy that is neither identified with, nor destroyed by, the explosive nature of the dragon but can become a “real human,” that is, able to accept human limitations and be related to other humans. On a personal level this means that Randy has the potential to adapt and to make friends. On the transpersonal level, so clearly indicated in his narrative, a warring entity made into a real human is an archetypal conflict that is brought out of the deep strata of the 1,200-million-year-old unconscious and into the present human realm—made more conscious and more related. Both masculine consciousness and feminine relatedness develop in and through Randy in order to bring this real human to life.

The transformation happens for Randy the way that it happened for the ancient alchemists—by putting his dragon into a retort, which for Randy is the sandtray, and relating to it via the imaginal realm. There, in the realm of the subtle bodies, a mixture of projection and reality, the dragon offers itself up, humbles itself, and transforms. In the course of 24 sessions, Randy fights battle after profoundly destructive battle, lights fires, tortures people, kills off parents, and melts entire soldiers, dooming them to harrowing deaths. Just as I begin wondering if the torment and gore will ever end, he discovers something in his melted wax that is “entirely and completely new,” even though it comes “from ancient times.” Exactly halfway through his process, in his twelfth session, Randy’s new-yet-ancient wax indicates that he has discovered a latent possibility in himself. “We are the haves!” he declares. “Finally, finally, we are the haves!” Randy seems to be saying that he is no longer the one living in the emotional poverty of hostility. Finally, he has discovered something valuable in himself. He has discovered his soul. An
ancient entity that to him is entirely new, the soul as the feminine feeling of life in him can connect him to the world. As anima, she is intimately tied to his transformation from a bully into a real human.

**The Alchemical Dragon**

According to alchemical texts, the dragon is a form of sulfur, the active ingredient in fire and the key to its transformation (Jung, 1963, par. 134). Sulfur, because of its foul odor and volatility, is considered a chthonic being like the dragon, yet it is also the animating essence in substances and related to Mercurius as the “spirit of the metals” (par. 142), capable of being reborn in a renewed form. In sulfur’s chthonic form, the dragon is also paradoxically the divine water, symbolized by the uroboros (see especially “The Visions of Zosimos,” Jung, 1967). Fire and water are basic life substances whose changeability and relationship to each other reflect the creative and destructive forces encountered in the alchemical opus. Each has its creative and destructive sides. In the circularity of alchemical thinking, the dynamism of opposite elements makes them identical: The sulfur is the dragon, the dragon is the uroboros, and the uroboros is water. They are all the stone, and the stone is Mercurius, which is the fire, and the fire is the dragon, the sulfur. This circularity brings to the fore the paradoxical nature of the alchemical work, in which the opposites, such as fire and water, are both polar and identical. There is duality but no duality at the same time. The dragon may appear to be negative, as it does in Randy’s sandtray (“If you even touch the dragon, you blow up”), but it also acts as a purifying and creative agent. Hence, as an unlikely result of a fiery war, one guy 1,200 million years old, a figure related to primordial man, will be made into a real human and brought into everyday life.

Psychologically speaking, sulfur is the animating essence of any drive, which, as we know from our own experience, has both creative and destructive properties. Sulfur, Jung (1963) explains, is:

the active substance of the sun or in psychological language, the motivating factor in consciousness. On the one hand it is the will, which can best be regarded as a dynamism subordinated to consciousness, and on the other hand a compulsion, an involuntary motivation or impulse ranging from mere interest to possession proper. The unconscious dynamism would correspond to sulfur, for compulsion is the great mystery of human life. It is the thwarting of our conscious will and of our reason by an inflammable element within us, appearing now as a consuming fire and now as a life-giving warmth. (par. 151)
Sulfur is the active ingredient or the spirit in curiosity, anger, violence, desire, creativity, and ultimately consciousness. When Randy says that if we even touch the dragon, we blow up, this means that if we touch the archetypal essence of a drive, we are blown out of our current form—the ego is assimilated by the unconscious and loses its unifying capacity. An explosion is an autonomous, dismembering experience, “possession proper,” caused by contact with the archetype. When we are possessed by a drive such as anger, or by the desire to do something or get something, we don’t at first realize that we are being propelled by the unconscious. The opposites are contaminated with each other; our consciousness is not really conscious, not separated from the volatile sulfur of the drive but driven by it. We might be identified with a burning urge for power, revenge, sex, food, or recognition, a drive that possesses our conscious will, whether we know it or not. We are in the fire (or the water) with the drive, but unaware of its negative effect on our life or on people around us. The unconscious nature of the attitude is intensified when we are born into it, as Randy was.

Randy’s world wars indicate that his whole experience of the world, the whole psyche, is at war. Randy is engulfed in the warring energy and convinced of its righteousness, so much so he doesn’t feel like a real human being. But when the dragon arrives in the third war, something has already changed. The world of violence has been put into the sandtray, contained, as in active imagination, and engaged by consciousness. Rather quickly (within three sessions), the violence turns from an experience of world war to an experience of the ancient dragon. Although destructive at first, the dragon is at least a discrete, living entity that has emerged from the chaos of world wars. In the beginning, the dragon is a representative of the hostile spirit living in Randy; yet it is the dragon that initiates a more conscious relationship with Randy. The dragon shows him the volatility in his own psyche—if we even touch him we blow up. It seems impossible: The emotion, the fire that drives the hostility and contains the ego, is the same drive that wants to become conscious. It offers itself in order to “mediate a new volatility”—a more conscious way.

For an adult, the experience of a dragon- or monster-like symbol arising in active imagination or in a dream can coincide with a complex finally making its way into awareness as a problem that needs to be addressed. Once we realize that we are in the fire with a complex, we are not completely identified with it. We have the potential to move from an unconscious to a conscious experience of that complex. We realize that we are in something that stinks (like sulfur), and that realization, though dismembering, can be the beginning of a conscious experience of the Self as “life-giving warmth.”
DISCOVERY OF THE HEART

In the middle of a “nuclear war,” Randy’s fifth session, a father gets sucked into a tornado and loses his head. Mom is killed by a meteor. But then Randy tells me, “She is in the hospital, and they are trying to fix her back. At least her heart didn’t blow up.” I say, “You wouldn’t want a mom with a blown-up heart.” He answers, “You know it.”

It’s an amazing testament to the paradoxical nature of our work with the unconscious that in the middle of a nuclear war, the heart is discovered. The nucleus, the heart of feminine relatedness in Randy, is not blown up, but has been discovered and can be “fixed back,” redeemed. On a personal level, the heart of the mother is Randy’s positive feeling experience of himself via his parents. The positive aspect of his experience with his mother, as well as his father’s feeling capacity, are saved. His parents love him very much, and in spite of their inability to contain their hostility toward each other, Randy has had a basic experience of himself as a valued son. This sandtray emphasizes the importance of Randy’s personal love connection to his parents and its basis as a healing experience out of which he can develop as an individual.

Symbolically, the heart with its feeling capacity is the central organ in the development of consciousness. . . .

On an archetypal level, Randy has discovered the heart of the Great Mother, which in one sense is the autonomous psychological process itself, at work in the background, reparenting Randy via what Dora Kalff (1980) called the “free and sheltered space” (p. 29) provided in sandplay therapy. A free and sheltered space is a completely accepting relationship in which Randy can express his hostility symbolically without being censured. Randy experiences the Great Mother’s healing capacity through his transference with me, and within the temenos of therapy that includes the archetypal dimension. She is related to both the destructive fire and the life-affirming qualities in the fire. She sees and accepts both; she is both. She is the dragon’s volatility, but she is also the heart, the new volatility, that can develop out of the dragon when it is engaged via the imagination. She is a prefiguration of the wisdom, or a conscious understanding, that can gather together the multiple aspects of the dismembered and lost heart.

Symbolically, the heart with its feeling capacity is the central organ in the development of consciousness, as the alchemists knew. Paraphrasing
Michael Maier, Jung (1968) describes how the heart is the sun in humans, related to consciousness, as well as the image of God:

The sun, by its many millions of revolutions, spins the gold into the earth. Little by little the sun has imprinted its image on the earth, and that image is the gold. The sun is the image of God, the heart is the sun’s image in man, just as the gold is the sun’s image in the earth (also called Deus terrenus), and God is known in the gold. The golden image of God is the anima aurea, which, when breathed into common quicksilver, changes it into gold. (par. 445)

The heart, considered in Maier’s time to be the seat of the soul, is to the human being as gold is to the earth. It is the highest value, the image of God, in the human body. The fact that the heart is compared to gold that is spun into the material of the earth by way of a natural phenomenon makes me think of the heart not as a discrete organ, but as distributed throughout the personality—veined, as gold is veined in the earth, and becoming more and more subtle and sensitive as it finds its way to the outer reaches of the personality, delivering feeling and realization as the gold of life. God is known in this heart that is gold, which is also the soul, the anima aurea. In this image we can begin to realize how closely bound consciousness and compassion really are. It is the heart, the feeling capacity, that delivers understanding and consciousness into the body, by feeling it. The heart—love, as realized in the body of the personality—turns a common entity such as a compulsion into something gold with felt meaning. Quicksilver, as Mercurius, is the dynamic aspect of the transforming energy, once corrupt (“consuming fire”) because it was not consciously felt. But by being felt for what it is, that dynamism is made conscious and thus more valuable than one could ever have imagined (“life-giving warmth”).

Although I would expect a nuclear war to be more intense than a civil war, this one lacks the energy of Randy’s previous battles. The explosions are neither as dramatic nor as prolonged. It seems that the hostile energy, now seen and experienced in the sandtray for what it is, already has begun to fight itself out. In fact, Randy’s identification with conflict has begun to loosen its hold on him. He has made a new friend at school and asks me if this friend comes to see me. Discovering a friendship and becoming aware of the reality of others in his world means that he is having a new experience of relatedness—the heart is being saved, the mother, a prefiguration of the anima, is being “fixed back.” Randy is beginning to realize himself as a different person, and the world as a different place.
TORTURE, SACRIFICE, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF FEELING

Randy prepares for a war in his eleventh session by pouring glass jewels and stones into the sand. Since his fourth session, his burning process has been engaged in earnest. After his war he creates a paper box to burn. Following rules we have carefully set out, he lights a candle and lets the wax drip into the sand. Then he adds people to the warm, gluey wax and says, “Goodbye, burning one. Goodbye, friend.”

“Why do I have to burn?” one of them asks. “It doesn’t make sense.” He answers them, “But you have to burn!” adding, “It’s Hades, Lord of the Dead, the Devil himself [who is burning them]. But nobody can save them.” He nearly adds a tiny pink baby to the mix, but realizes that there is a “force field protecting the baby.”

Torture is a frequent motif in alchemy, where, for example, in Zosimos’s visions, the Turba says: “Take the old black spirit and destroy and torture with it the bodies, until they are changed” (as cited in Jung, 1967, par. 440). Jung points out that the “old black spirit” and the “bodies” tortured together are the actual materials in the retort but also what the alchemist projects onto them, and so what is tortured is thirdly the investigator himself. The transformation takes place in the subtle realm that is a combination of both the operation in the retort and what the alchemist projects into it. The torture of the investigator, which in our case is Randy, has to do with consciousness realizing the agonizing quality of its own condition as witnessed in the retort. Randy says, “It’s Hades . . . the Devil himself” who is doing the torturing. Like Zosimos’s old black spirit, Hades is a personification of the torturous fire in the retort, but also in the investigator. Hades and Randy are torturing and being tortured at the same time. Hades represents a paradoxical fire that, on the one hand, is completely convinced of its legitimacy and, on the other hand, causes its own suffering and even pushes for its own transformation by mysteriously coming forward to be witnessed. To the extent that Randy remains identified with fiery hostility, he is the torturer. But, as he witnesses the hostility and declares it evil, Randy’s hostility is tortured, and transformation is engaged.

When as adults we consciously face a shadowy drive, remorse can become a torturer of excruciating effectiveness. It is horrible to witness ourselves identified with an emotion or a wrong attitude, to see that we have been inflated. Consciousness is tortured as conscience does its work, and through this suffering the ego becomes less identified with the complex. As a child Randy doesn’t have to understand that he is facing his shadow or even his hostility; it is enough that he witnesses himself doing the torturing. He suffers in the imaginal realm, via his sandplay figures, and as this happens,
the relationship between his conscious attitude and the unconscious hostility shifts.

As Jung points out, in addition to the bodies in the retort and the alchemist, the fire itself also suffers in the *opus* (1967, par. 440). The suffering of the fire can be seen as the suffering of the very essence of the attitude—its energy, its volatility or spirit. The same fire that drives the attitude is the fire that transforms the attitude, in part by transforming itself. As the fire and the ego become more separate, and as the fire in the attitude changes from destructive and arrogant to more humble and creative, we see in the sandplay process what Dora Kalff (1980) observed as the transition from destructive work to centering, creative work. We observe an *enantiodromia* in the quality of the fire from one of torture and “possession proper” to one of renewal and warmth. At the end of the work, Randy’s whole attitude and even the way he carries himself in his body have changed. I don’t think this could have happened if the essence of his hostility, the fire in him, had not truly suffered its own enduring transformation.

Alongside the gradual distancing from bullying and the transformation of the fire inside that bullying, we have seen a development in the heart—a concomitant differentiation of feeling that comes forward in the mother’s heart and now is realized more fully in the baby protected by a force field. This development paradoxically continues in the torture. The figures crying to be saved are unconscious contents expressing their longing for recognition. Randy’s compassion, his ability to relate to others, as we saw in the wounded heart of the mother, have been buried in hostility, making it impossible for him to form relationships. His feeling life has been in deep need of recognition. This suffering feminine aspect is a personal as well as a collective problem. Jung (1954) says of the unconscious or ignored anima that she “is a creature without relationships, an autoerotic being whose one aim is to take total possession of the individual” (par. 454). Likewise, Randy’s hostility keeps him from friendship. He is isolated by the “violent emotions, irritability, lack of control, arrogance, feelings of inferiority, moods, depressions, outbursts of rage, etc., coupled with lack of self-criticism” that Jung describes as symptoms of a dissociated anima, a lack and devaluing of relatedness (par. 504). Randy’s anger and outbursts can be heard as the cry of a feeling life that was lost in the material of his hostility. It is easy to forget, when dealing with an arrogant and hostile attitude, that there is a soul in the background suffering unendurable pain.

But out of the fire, the soul is extracted. In his twelfth session, Randy discovers the ancient wax that makes him feel like one of the “haves,” one of the people who have some value—some consciousness. In this same session, he emerges as a new king. He lights a red candle contained in a glass jar.
As the candle burns, he pours the melted wax into the sand and calls the molten fluid “a river of blood,” mesmerized by the way it moves and flows like mercury on top of the sand. He holds his hands over the smoke and blackens them. He smudges his arms and face with the soot and ash from the fire and declares himself “king of the bloodfire.” Then, “Finally, finally,” he discovers the brand new, ancient wax; a substance that he calls blood in its liquid form is now recoagulated and has become highly valuable, ancient, and brand new. It is a product of the fire, but also the fire itself, a river of hot blood he can now hold in his hands. It is the animating essence of life brought into the material world and recognized as something valuable, soul substance extracted and coagulated from the passion of the fiery violence.

Session 12: Randy declares himself “king of the bloodfire” and smears himself with ash. Ash is a form of the alchemical *prima materia*, referred to in the Chymical Wedding as the “diadem of the heart.”

*An old yet new substance* also beautifully expresses the nature of the alchemical king who was old and in some texts suffered under the sea, or in the darkness of matter, but when finally attended to, comes forth as an entirely new entity, his own son. He is old and new at the same time. Jung (1967) says of this king: “The alchemists [saw that] the dark background of the soul contains not only evil but a king in need of, and capable of, redemption, of whom the Rosarium says, ‘at the end of the work the king will go forth for thee, crowned with his diadem, radiant as the sun, shining like the carbuncle, constant in the fire’ ” (par. 183). The “dark background” of Randy’s soul is the hostility that has kept him in an isolated state. Randy has gone into this dark background and confronted the warring hostility directly, engaged
in the torture that his personality experiences in hostility, and, in the calcinatio operation, extracted a heart, a baby, and the valuable psychic wax. Now a king emerges, symbolizing a potential new consciousness, a new ruling attitude that has endured torture and now values life in a new way. For a male the king symbolizes the renewing, vital quality of the Self as well as its wholeness. That the Self and the soul are discovered at the same time reflects the fact that, for example, in Aurora Consurgens, the soul as wisdom and the image of the divine stone are identical (von Franz, 2000, p. 160).

In the alchemical symbol of the king we again find the paradoxical circularity that we encountered with the dragon. First, the king is the old king—the original psychic situation, calling out from the “dark background of the soul” for attention. Second, the king is the fire itself. He transforms as fire and retains its constancy. Third, he emerges from the fire as the new king. The new king is the filius regius, the son of the old king, just as the baby that Randy rescues is, in a sense, his own son, his new psychological and spiritual possibility, the beginning of what he calls a “real human.” And finally the new king is the enduring product of the fire, the ash. In the Chymical Wedding, the ashes are referred to as the crown of the heart: “And of the worthless prima materia they say, ‘despite not the ashes, for they are the diadem of the heart, and the ash of things that endure’” (Jung, 1963, par. 247).

Ash as a by-product of the fire in this quote is considered a crowning substance. Ash crowns the heart and endures. The purified by-product of intense suffering and torture, the ash is the new psychic substance, the consciousness that is in and of the heart. When emotional energy such as Randy’s hostility transforms, it endures; it lives on in the heart as a capacity to feel for oneself and for others, but also as an enduring experience of the living reality of the Self. The new king is the new ruling principle in consciousness, but as we know from alchemy, mythology, and fairytales, the new king rarely comes to rule without also having a new queen by his side, and vice versa. The heart is the feminine center, and perhaps the fixative, of the new ruling consciousness—the gold in the human being. As the king is to the

Randy’s urge to smear himself with the ash indicates that it consists of more than projection; it contains a magical quality, mana, through which Randy can experience himself as a . . . king with a heart.
In *Elementa Chemiae* (1718) the dragon has been transformed and emerges as a king.

conscious attitude, the queen is to feeling; both are needed for a transformation to occur and be felt in the personality. The heart—the feminine, feeling center—is the site of new realization and the place where love can be born; as such, it is crowned as the royal aspect.

Smearing himself with the ash from the fire as he declares himself newly related to his blood-passion, Randy identifies with the enduring, transformed substance that has been through a grueling transmutation. He expresses a union between himself and the product of his fire. The fire is no longer fire, the hostility no longer hostility, but ash, a substance so subtle it seems material and psychic at the same time. I find it numinous that the actual ash in Randy’s sandtray could be the material manifestation of a new psychic reality with which Randy can now be joined. The ash carries the projection of his new consciousness, but it also seems to exist for Randy as the actual psychic substance produced by the purifying aspect of the burning. Randy’s urge to smear himself with the ash indicates that it consists of more than projection; it contains a magical quality, *mana*, through which Randy can experience himself as a new kind of reality, a king with a heart. He (Randy’s ego), of course, is not the king; the new psychic reality in Randy is the king. But Randy is now in union with that reality as the ash; his ego has discovered something brand new to identify with, and that thing, that ash, the crowning achievement of the heart, is the feeling capacity that can value and realize a new way of being. This union of consciousness with differentiated feeling can be seen as nothing less than what the alchemists called
the *unio mentalis*, or first *coniunctio*—a joining of the spirit with the soul, which have been extracted from the body.¹

**THE INNER GOD-MAN**

In his following tray, Randy makes a final sacrifice, burning an entire soldier, “the best man in the army,” by holding him over a flame. “He’s a very good man,” Randy says, “but he had to spend his only life dying for justice. And then a very bad thing happened. The light went out forever. He spent his life dying.” Randy holds a female figure to the charred remains, and she kisses “all that is left of him.”

Two motifs are key in this narrative: the soldier who spent his life dying for justice, and the girlfriend’s kiss. The soldier melts and burns into oblivion like the “men burning yet alive” in Zosimos’s vision, men who “become spirits by escaping from the body” (Jung, 1967, par. 86) through burning in boiling water.² This soldier is identical to the god-man who suffers the torments of transformation into a more spiritual reality. Through fire and torture he has been extracted from the “body” of Randy’s hostile compulsion, and now Randy has contact with him. He is the “best man in the army,” that is, he is the one who, less possessed now by the consuming fire of the dragon, can become more spiritual, gain a new understanding, and join with the soul. He is the arcane substance, the stone that contains the spirit of death and rebirth. His death expresses the fate of a psychic content that lives for the purpose of dying, meaning that transformation is its main goal, and therefore sacrifice is necessary. Randy is experiencing the reality of this inner, living quality whose mysterious willingness to transform fuels the individuation process.

In this dying and resurrecting aspect, the alchemical stone in some texts is associated with the symbol of Christ (Jung, 1968, pars. 447–515), as well as other dying and resurrecting gods. Christ is the “best man in the army” of human beings because his sacrifice renews humanity: Christ was born to sacrifice his earthly body and demonstrate the reality of the spirit. In a way he “spent his life dying,” as Randy says of his soldier. The feeling-tone of this and recent burning sessions was more reverent than in the past, as if Randy were experiencing, on a more profound level, what was dying in him, and what was coming to life as a result. The sacrifice of the fighting energy takes place as the soldier literally goes up in smoke, his body slowly disappearing. The body of the fighting attitude, in alchemical terms, is in the process called *sublimatio*, when the spirit leaves the body as a result of being heated up. Psychologically this means that through the heat of reflection and containment, as we suffer in the fire of the truth being offered via the unconscious, our understanding (spirit) is separated from our emotionality (body). We can see ourselves in a different way because the old way of understanding...
and emotion are no longer locked in an unconscious union. Through the miracle of the unconscious sacrificing itself, the old attitude is dismembered (analyzed, realized), and in that process sacrificed, bringing a more spiritual perspective to which we can then be joined.

The girlfriend’s kiss is a final goodbye to the body, indicating that the death of the old fighting attitude has been realized; the sacrifice and dismemberment are in a stage of completion because they are now truly felt. As the expression of a feeling realization, the girlfriend’s kiss parallels, in its simple way, the lamentation of the two Marys over Christ, and Isis over Osiris, the mythological women who, through their tears and devotion, realize the death of the dismembered god. These feminine figures are, via their intense realization of the god’s death and its meaning, instrumental in his resurrection. Likened to the alchemical soul that leaves and then returns to the old body with new understanding, the lamenting feminine understands at a deep, cellular level what has passed, but she is also open to a new value. Through her realization, she makes new life possible. It is feeling that experiences the darkness, but also feeling that experiences the return of color to life after the darkness.

**WATER AND THE MOON**

Signaling the inner shift that has occurred in him, Randy now turns from fire to its opposite (also in alchemy its identical twin), water. He saturates the sand and uses the mud to create forms. In his fifteenth session, he forms and reforms a mound in a glass bowl, turning it upside down, then right side up, and after pounding it to make it “hard as a rock,” dubs it the “Temple of Doom.” Its foreboding name notwithstanding, symbolically this temple refers to a holy place in Randy, a place where personal and transpersonal can be joined in an ongoing relationship; it is a mandala in the truest sense. I trust a “temple of doom” more than I would a temple of goodness and light, because it includes, rather than excludes, the influence of the fiery conflict that has been fundamental to Randy’s transformation. The temple is Randy’s own body, the temple of his soul. And yet, it is his soul, as the vessel of his existence, no longer outside his body, as with the wax, but inside, a redeemed feminine reality. The fact that this temple is made of mud indicates a *coagulatio*, a birth of the transpersonal aspect in earthly reality.

Water is the main element with which Randy works now, and this choice seems to be related to the fact that water has a containing power over fire. If fire is emotion, water is feeling. If we give a fiery, dynamic drive a creative canal, like the sandtray or other forms of active imagination in which to expend its energy and converse with us, we begin to develop a feeling container for that drive and the life-giving warmth it can impart. We
become related to the meaning of the once obsessive energy, rather than flooded by its emotional charge. To have an empirical, feeling realization of the meaning and value of the drive is to contain the drive, as water contains fire. For example, Randy exercises his tolerance during this time by working with origami, which he finds horribly frustrating. He proves to himself that he can feel his frustration but not explode. This containment of the fiery drive in the water of feeling would not be possible if the fire itself had not transformed, nor if Randy’s heart or his baby had not been rescued from the fire. Randy can now talk about what it feels like to get angry, and we even discuss anger philosophically. He points out how anger can take over your body and even your mind, indicating an impressive degree of understanding of where he has been.

Randy tells me a fantasy during this period in his process that expresses this full-bodied, psychological realization in a profound way. He says that the day before a session, he went to the moon and brought back “the first handfuls of the moon’s dust.” Through this profound fantasy Randy tells me that, as he has been burning and fighting, saving a heart and discovering ancient wax, he has gone far away into lunar consciousness and retrieved its very substance, bringing it to life on Earth. Jung (1963) describes the moon’s connection to the soul in Mysterium Coniunctionis:

The relation of the moon to the soul, much stressed in antiquity, also occurs in alchemy though with a different nuance. Usually it is said that from the moon comes the dew, but the moon is also the aqua mirifica that extracts the souls from the bodies or gives the bodies life and soul. Together with Mercurius, Luna sprinkles the dismembered dragon with her moisture and brings him to life again. As the water of ablution, the dew falls from heaven, purifies the body, and makes it ready to receive the soul; in other words, it brings about the albedo, the white state of innocence, which like the moon and a bride awaits the bridegroom. (par. 155)

Randy has indicated, then, that he has indeed reached a point of completion. The dragon has been dismembered (the complex has been dismantled), and now the moistening quality of the moon brings new life to the dismembered body, resurrecting it with the life of realization. The moon is also related to the mother and, for Randy, may be experienced as a cosmic rendition of the mother’s heart that was saved so that the mother could be “fixed back.” Randy expresses a real-world experience of the archetypal mother as something he has grasped in his own hands and brought to the earth of his
life. He has experienced something of a rebirth by way of the moon. Incredibly, Randy’s fantasy reflects the moon’s role in alchemy as related to the incarnation of life on earth (Jung, 1963, par. 154).

The moon dust also seems to be a cosmic version of the ash with which Randy smudged himself. I imagine moon dust to be very similar to ash: both black and white, ethereal and material at the same time. This delicate substance is a wonderful symbol for the quality of the albedo that can arrive with a powerful insight, a full-blown illumination out of the darkness, and then disappear again in a moment if not incorporated into the feeling body. What was illuminating can become dark, and vice versa; we can have an experience of enlightenment, but until that experience is substantiated in life, holding onto it is like grabbing a fistful of airy ash. In the black–white ash we see how albedo and nigredo are opposites and yet entwined aspects of the same process on an ongoing basis. We also see how the achievement of a transformed personality can be elusive. But Randy’s fantasy, combined with his work with mud, his Temple of Doom, seems to indicate a more enduring experience of the overall whitening process: He has something in his hands that he retrieved from the cosmic depths—a sensory and a spiritual experience of a renewed attitude that, as indicated through his work with water, is integrated into the earth of his reality. Bringing his new identity into life indicates that the rubedo stage of the work is in play. This reddening process occurs when white and black are less in conflict and instead, life is colored with the resulting new consciousness—when, for example, a person can begin feeling like a “real human” after working with shadow material for a long period of time.

In his twenty-first session (the third from the last), Randy builds a construction out of yellow paper and stands it up on the table, a tall, rectangular accordion shape. Soldiers shooting at bad guys take shelter behind it. He calls it a “force field that protects the good guys” by giving them “extra power.” I ask Randy if the good guys always win. He says, “No, sometimes the bad guys win.” But for this war, the good guys have the force field on their side. “It gives them extra protection and makes them really smart.”

The force field that once protected the baby from the fire in session 11 is now built out of paper that is the color of consciousness. “The Force,” as in Star Wars, is a guiding spirit that helps us stay in the Tao, that is, remain in relationship with the Self. It is a spiritual entity that Randy now experiences in himself as separate from the chthonic and destructive spirit of the original unconscious and hostile dragon. Just as he is able to distinguish between good guys and bad guys now, so too can the guiding spirit of the Force help him distinguish between the good and the bad, creative and destructive, in himself, to a much greater extent than when he first started therapy. He is now identified with the good guys, as indicated by his pride in his school
work and his engaged social life. A new attitude has emerged and is brought into life: He feels the protection of a living manifestation of a field of energy, which connects him with his inner sense of basic goodness and wholeness. Randy’s experience of the force field is akin to the resurrected lapis, a redeemed, newly volatilized form of life energy joined with the soul and in vital relationship to the Self. It is ancient, having resided in the unconscious, and completely new, now that Randy has discovered it in himself.

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NOTES

1. In CW 14, par. 707, Jung describes the unio mentalis as “a fairly complete recognition of the shadow” and a realization of the transpersonal Self. He also discusses this stage in connection with the seventh picture in the Rosarium Philosophorum series of images, CW 16, p. 269.
2. This quote is taken from Vision III, i, 3, and reappears in III, vi, 1.
3. The soul returning to the body in the form of dew is depicted in Rosarium Philosophorum, Picture 8, CW 16, p. 275.

FURTHER READING

