Stories to Tell and to Live With

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(Graduates: Yukiko Higuchi, Monica Lavecchia, Wendy Wilmot)

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http://www.murraystein.com/Stories_to_Tell_and_to_Live_With.shtml

I am not alone to notice that books and articles often fall into my hands by chance when I am preparing to speak on occasions like this, and they are more relevant than anything I could dream up on my own. I even rely on these synchronicities, and for this graduation ceremony I was not disappointed.

Recently the following quotation jumped off the page while I was reading a book that Wendy Wilmot had shared with me, The Inuit Imagination, a work on the art and stories of the Inuit peoples of the far North. In the opening chapter, the authors write:

Storytelling may have been the earliest art form. It is an essential means of individual and social expression common to all peoples. Every culture has evolved a framework of stories to describe and to reconcile the complementary worlds of reality and imagination… Far more than simple entertainment, the stories represent the cultural memory and imaginative history of the community. They encode the values considered important for survival. Both the commonplace and the important events of life are understood in relation to these stories and the beliefs they express.(1)

In Jungian culture, we too have such stories, and they do indeed function to draw together the worlds of reality and imagination for us as a community, and they help us to reconcile the complimentary worlds of our everyday ego consciousness and the imagination that has deep roots in the unconscious. Reality offers us, individually and collectively, many pleasures and satisfactions, and also confronts us with sometimes severe challenges. Imagination offers a way to enjoy and to engage reality in all its multiplicity from positive to negative aspects. Stories combine the two realms ingeniously and act as symbols, drawing wisdom from the deep well of the unconscious.

Our clinical practice rests on this fundament. Imagination and reality must meet and touch one another, intertwine and form a coniunctio, and bear fruit. A symbolic story is the child of their interpenetration. We draw wisdom from the wellspring of dreams, which are such stories that combine features of reality and dynamic, often dramatic, elements of imagination. We need such stories to guide us in our work. We need stories to live by. Our personal narratives are also such stories.

Jung has bequeathed us a wonderful story of this kind to draw upon as a community. He received it from his friend, Richard Wilhelm. I'm speaking of the "Rainmaker Story," well known to all of us. Jung was so fond of it that he instructed Barbara Hannah to be sure to tell this story whenever she lectured (this is another Jungian story, and a part of

our tradition). It is by now woven deeply into Jungian culture, and so I bring it to you here today – Yukiko, Monica, Wendy - to receive it in this context of commencement and to take it with you as you graduate from ISAP and go out into the wide world as analysts.

There was a great drought where Wilhelm lived: for months there had not been a drop of rain and the situation became catastrophic. The Catholics made processions, the Protestants made prayers, and the Chinese burned joss sticks and shot off guns to frighten away the demons of the drought, but with no result. Finally the Chinese said: We will fetch the rain maker. And from another province, a dried up old man appeared.

The only thing he asked for was a quiet little house somewhere, and there he locked himself in for three days. On the fourth day clouds gathered and there was a great snowstorm at the time of the year when no snow was expected, an unusual amount, and the town was so full of rumors about the wonderful rain maker that Wilhelm went to him to ask the man how he did it. In true European fashion he said: “They call you the rain maker, will you tell me how you made the snow?” And the little Chinese man said: “I did not make the snow, I am not responsible.” “But what have you done these three days?” “Oh, I can explain that. I come from another country where things are in order. Here they are out of order, they are not as they should be by the ordnance of heaven. Therefore the whole country is not in Tao, and I am also not in the natural order of things because I am in a disordered country. So I had to wait three days until I was back in Tao, and then naturally the rain came.(2)

This story, like so many symbolic tales, tempts us to ask: Is it really true? Did that really happen once upon a time in Qingdao, China? However, we also know that when we deal with symbolic stories, as with dreams and fantasies, it is forbidden to ask this true-or-false question. The story exists in an intermediate realm of psyche, and to inject the one-sided reality question here would fracture the marriage to imagination and destroy their child, the symbolic story. So we hold the story in our hands like a Ming vase, with great care, and gently inquire into its meanings. There are many. The story offers us points of wisdom reflected from the depths, upon which we may meditate and try to understand for our present purposes.

So what does this story say to us – and to you as graduates now of ISAP – about our lives as Jungian analysts, if we take it as a symbol, a statement of psychic truth? The first thing the Rainmaker story tells me is this: there are problems in life where external solutions are not effective. Here we find a country locked in drought, a dire condition. Without water, life itself is threatened, and new life is impossible. The land of consciousness is cut off from sources of life-giving energies in the unconscious. It is a Wasteland. We know this problem well as Jungian analysts and recognize it as one of blocked access to libido, to the living waters of the unconscious, above in the heavens of the spirit and below in the underworld of the instincts. You can’t solve this problem with conventional means because they do not connect any longer to the sources of life. Rituals have become nothing more than occasions of noise-making, traditional prayers no more than exercises of the vocal chords. People try everything but the necessary:

jogging, pill-popping, going to the movies, shopping – all of these activities are nothing but distractions and have no lasting effect. None offers a solution to this problem of draught. The analyst knows too that advice, assignments, exercises, diagnoses and what not else are all useless because they they do not contact the source, the living waters.

The second thing the story tells me is that the Rainmaker understands the depths of the problem: he "gets it." He feels the disturbance in the atmosphere deeply in himself. Jung notes that analysts will sometimes become infected by the patients' psychic illnesses. For the Rainmaker to become effective, it is important to take the problem in and to feel it deeply. This can be an individual's problem, or it may be a culture's problem. As Jung noted already many years ago, modern man generally is in search for soul. This is because modern people have lost contact with the soul, the source of living water. Thus we find in the collective today violence, frustration, acts of terrorism, addiction, confusion, and a lot of noise in the world everywhere. In the story, we see that a sense of kinship develops between the Rainmaker and the ill country he has entered. He feels the problem within. The healer and the ill are not separated; they are not different. Neither is healthy any longer. Both suffer the malady in the land, the dryness, the lack of water, and the absence of contact to the inner world, to imagination, to libido. The Rainmaker explains later that he noted when entering the land that there was disorder and the people were out of Tao. This is the cause of the drought. He has plumbed the issue to its hidden and invisible depths. We would say the ego-self axis has been disturbed, and the ego is bereft.

The Rainmaker asks for a shelter at the edge of town, and he then enters the small hut on the margin, and into himself. This is not defensive withdrawal. It is a strategy for dealing with the illness in the land. The healer is not trying to save himself by withdrawing. He is preparing the way for curing illness by taking a course of action that may look puzzling. It is certainly indirect. The people must be wondering if he knows what he is doing, because nothing happens for three days. You can imagine their frustration and impatience. They paid for help and assistance, and look, nothing is happening! Three days can seem like a long time, and things may get worse in this time. But we should have faith. We know that the Rainmaker "gets it" and is working on the problem, but in an inward way. This is different from the extroverted attempts taken before by the people to solve the problem. He is not out there teaching and instructing, preaching and admonishing. He is working in another dimension. Why does Jung want us to remember this story? It must be because it corresponds to a plan of action that belongs deeply to our culture as analysts. It shows a pattern that we can follow in taking on similar problems as they come to us in our world even today, and we certainly have many problems facing us from all directions.

Now I'm going to skip over the magical part. This is so well known anyway: On the fourth day the moisture comes, the way has been opened to the source of life, and the whole community benefits. Rather, the third thing I am taking from this story is this: the individual healer is not isolated from the community even though the method of healing is introverted. We often think that working with individuals in analysis only benefits

them. Analysis is introverted, it is isolated from the world, it takes place in private, in a temenos. People come for help individually and generally one at a time, and we hope they leave our practices satisfied. But the deeply introverted work that is done in analysis is not only for their benefit as individuals. The solutions we find by creating connections to the unconscious in them as individuals will benefit everybody around them. Health is as contagious as illness. We see this in many fairytales and symbolic stories. At the end of the Ten Ox-Herding pictures of Zen Buddhism, for instance, after the ox-herder has found his ox and tamed it, and after he has gone through the stages of emptying the ego and individuation, we find him in the marketplace speaking to a young man. And the text says that the trees blossom wherever he goes. Growth and fruitfulness accompany him as he makes his way back into and through the community. The process was not only for him individually, but also for the whole community.

As Jungian analysts you – now as graduates! – are working for the individuation of your clients and through them for the health of the world. The good stuff spreads around, across families and neighborhoods and political parties and nations. When you open the way to the creative waters of the unconscious in the individual, this touches the creative energies in the Unus Mundus, and the effects spread out above ground and underground. We are working for the world, even though it may look like we're working in isolation and with only a very limited number of individuals. The Rainmaker story gives us a much broader perspective.

One final lesson to take away from this story: the Rainmaker is utterly without inflation after his success in bringing moisture to the dry land. In fact, it is a misnomer to call this person a Rain-maker. The rain falls Deo concedente. This does not mean that the healer had nothing to do with it, only that the credit for the result must not be taken by the ego. It is not by our methods and techniques, or by our personalities, or by our good training and deep immersion in the study of the archetypes, that psychic healing for our patients and our communities comes about. All of that is important, but we cannot take the credit for positive results. The Rainmaker credits the Tao. As Jungians we would credit the Self, by which we mean the mysterious nucleus of our own psyches and of the unus mundus. Gratitude must therefore be our most constant companion, for healing comes by grace.

I close with a quotation from Isak Dinesen's marvelous story – another story that should be included in the Jungian culture's canon! – "Babette's Feast," where the aged and much decorated General Loewenhielm pronounces these memorable words:

"… the moment comes when our eyes are opened, and we see and realize that grace is infinite. Grace, my friends, demands nothing from us but that we shall await it with confidence and acknowledge it with gratitude."(3)

Today we at ISAP acknowledge you, graduates, Yukiko, Monica, Wendy, with gratitude. Go forth in grace, and may your rainmaking efforts find abundant success.

(1) Seidelman, H. and Turner, J. (1994) The Inuit Imagination: Arctic Myth and Sculpture (London: Thames and Hudson), p. 16.

(2) Jung, C.G. (1997). Visions 1 (ed. C. Douglas), Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 333.

(3) Dinesen, I. (1993) Babette's Feast. In Anecdotes of Destiny and Ehrengard (New York: Vintage Books), p. 52.