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Salome, the Antidote:

Jung's Discovery of the Cure for Patriarchy, for a World Out of Balance

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Before Jung's work was about the Shadow and the Self, it was about Salome: the young, Jewish woman, the sensual dancer, who requested the head of John the Baptist from the transfixed and obedient King Herod. Jung met this disheveled, discarded woman in the depths of his own psyche and withdrew in horror. "Let me be," he tells her when they first meet, "I dread you, you beast."¹ And yet, Jung had embarked on this journey into the depths of his psyche in order to pay attention to what arose. Over many nights of his descent (and his many years of exploring these early visions), Jung came to acknowledge Salome's divine power. He experienced Her divinity within his own body, not as he had once understood the divine feminine in Mother Mary, but as Kali, the dark goddess of Hindu mythology. This "many armed bloody Goddess—it is Salome desperately wringing her hands."² In the face of his fear, he strained to witness her presence and power. She then transforms, as he does, and Jung comes to love her. He discovered that She is him. She is that which brings him life and joy, the capacity to feel, to create art, to deeply connect, and to trust—"[she] takes hold of me, she is my own soul."³ But she had not come to him in the form of someone safe or lovely. She did not descend from on high surrounded by golden light.

¹ Jung, 2012, p.175

² Ibid, p.184

³ Ibid, p. 185

In the long, seemingly co-morbid histories of the rise of patriarchy and the struggle towards consciousness, the feminine was split into the now near cliché paradigm of a Mother/Whore opposition. Jung came to understand a great deal about the dangers of this split, and the problem that came from the elevation of the Mother. Just a few years after his first encounter with Salome, he wrote the following:

Since the psychic relation to woman was expressed in the collective worship of Mary, the image of woman...sank into the unconscious...In the unconscious the image of woman received an energy charge that activated the archaic and infantile dominants. And since all unconscious contents, when activated by dissociated libido, are projected upon external objects, the devaluation of the real woman was compensated by daemonic traits. She no longer appeared as an object of love, but as a persecutor or witch. The consequence of increasing Mariolatry [worship of Mary] was the witch hunt.⁴

His fear of the dreaded Salome of Christian lore, and his unexpected relationship with her, helped him towards these realizations. Decades later, Jungian analyst Marion Woodman and co-author Elinor Dickson reflected too on the danger of a social view of the feminine as the all “good” or Holy. The result is that: “The virgin soul, meanwhile, lies buried in the basement or is dumped into a trash can. Such dreams of the exiled soul are among the most common initiatory dreams.”⁵ In encountering Salome, Jung had one such dream—over and over again. Woodman and Dickson offer direction for these encounters, informed by Jung’s own experience.

The chaos that we fear is the very thing that can free us. To refuse to enter into Kali’s dance of creation and destruction is to get stuck in a one-sided view of reality that can bring anarchy—destruction without creation. Armed with a new understanding of the very nature of reality itself, we may now be able to embrace the Goddess energy that is necessary if we are to move forward in our evolution.⁶

⁴ Jung, 1921/1971, para. 399

⁵ Dickson & Woodman, p. 34

⁶ Ibid, p. 45

Jung's encounter with Salome within his own psyche informed his unfolding understanding of how patriarchy had entrenched humans—all of us—in this harmful split. And he learned from Her what to do about it.

In the section of *The Red Book* titled “Castle in the Forest,” Jung approaches a castle door in the dark of night to request a place to sleep. Once inside and settling in for bed, Jung tries to sleep but begins to feel haunted by the presence of the owner's lonely, beautiful daughter. No longer fearsome, this feminine strikes Jung as something even worse: banal. The vision seems too mundane and novelistic to be worthy of his genuine attention. Yet the lonely young woman demands more from him than his jeering dismissal. “You wretch, how can you doubt that I am real?” she cries. This rather ordinary young woman, isolated to the brink of insanity, begs Jung to see her. She is a captive in the home of her father, “an old man petrified in his books, protecting a costly treasure” (her) “and enviously hiding it from all the world.”⁷ Finally, again, Jung drags his consciousness as if out of a drunken state, forcing himself to witness this young woman's pain—not as a part in a dull soap opera drama he's forced to observe, but as something truly worthy of his empathy. The young woman replies with relief: “Finally, finally a word from a human mouth.”⁸ She disappears once acknowledged. A red rose appears. She was Salome in another form.

Once acknowledged and engaged, Jung's true creative work was born from these encounters. He recognized that he had spent the first half of his life climbing the ladder of patriarchal achievement. His crisis at mid-life undermined all previous desire for the accolades of academia and a community of decorated colleagues. He retired from celebrated positions; retired from boards. These accomplishments and goals did not interest his soul. Salome was, in fact,

⁷ Jung, 2012, p. 221

⁸ Ibid., p. 223

simply crazed from neglect and demanding a wholly different form of focus. And after Jung's life lost meaning, and his depression had sunk him into the state of near-psychosis, he was forced to witness this neglect head-on. He was forced to acknowledge too that the sudden assault of war on the world was in a tightly woven relationship to his own outbreak of suffering; was the result, in fact, of the same root of suffering, the same absence of something precious to modern humans everywhere but hidden away and forgotten. The state of the world, and the state of Jung's psyche, were one and the same. To seek restoration of both, Jung had to descend into his own chaos. He had to engage with Salome.

Jung understood the goal of dialogue and curiosity and, despite feeling disgust, terror, and boredom, he didn't turn away—or if so, not for long. He acknowledged Her. He spoke with Her. He listened. And... he came to love Her. She was, in fact, the core of his humanity all along. Mythologist Christine Downing expressed the collective resonance to this work: “What we are hungry for, from Jung's perspective, is an immanent *She*, transcendent to the ego but discovered within.”⁹ Without knowing Her, the feminine inside all of us, male or female (which was, perhaps, Jung's greatest oversight) no progress—or even abstract recognition of the shadow—will unfold. It is She we need.

Unfortunately, even in lengthy lectures or discussions with some of the most prolific and decorated practitioners of Analytical Psychology, this critical, foundational element of Jung's *Red Book*—and therefore of his entire psychology—is lost. In discussions of the historical elements, the Greek, Latin, and Christian antecedents, or the various conceptual points of his psychology, these critical encounters with Salome are obscured, relegated to the background as women and the feminine have been for most of recorded history. It is a precedent that must be

⁹ Downing, 1981, p. 6

reversed if we are to truly understand Jung's relevance for the modern world—for this exact moment in history when we need nothing more than guidance on the next stage of the feminist revolution, for women and girls, but perhaps more particularly, for men and boys.

Jung was one of the great feminist philosophers of our time. While his personal track record was not squeaky clean when it came to women, and while his writings abound with contradictions on the topic, respect for him as a feminist pioneer is under-expressed. His achievements in this space must be acknowledge and applauded. He found the elixir; the antidote. He stood at the top of society as a wealthy, respected, Western male and chose to descend towards the feminine rather than stay where he was, grasping for wisps of meaning to keep him alive. Jung understood that climbing upwards was no longer the goal. He beseeches men, following his encounter with the banal, neglected Salome:

It is bitter for the most masculine man to accept his femininity, since it appears ridiculous to him, powerless and tawdry. . . Yes, it seems to you like enslavement. You are a slave of what you need in your soul. The most masculine man needs women, and he is consequently their slave. Become a woman yourself, and you will be saved from slavery to woman. You are abandoned without mercy to woman so long as you cannot fend off mockery with all your masculinity. It is good for you once to put on women's clothes: people will laugh at you, but through becoming a woman you attain freedom from women and their tyranny. The acceptance of femininity leads to completion.¹⁰

The acceptance of femininity leads to completion because of the patriarchal soup in which we all swim. To engage directly with this energy, we are all released from the tyranny of our own projections. The women themselves were always just screens; separate beings living their own lives, sorting through their own paths.

As offspring of patriarchy and the greed-driven, racially divisive and institutional violence which patriarchy engenders, each of us finds ourselves at some point longing for the experience of a life and a planet in balance. We long, separately, isolated, for the experience of

¹⁰ Jung, 2012, p.228

embodiment, connection, and intimacy with one other, and with Nature—that which we experience with our physical senses, and that which we experience internally in dreams, visions, revelations, and insight. It is only through a restored relationship to the feminine soul, long ago dumped and discarded, that we can accomplish these tectonic shifts in culture and lived experience. This is the revolutionary notion of Jung’s psychology. It is an antidote to the life-threatening experience of living within a lopsided patriarchal society that takes everything for granted, and views life not as a circular, mutually dependent and enriching experience, but as one of linearity and dominance.

Through a slow, laborious recognition of Salome—through *listening* to Her—Jung came to discover the entire foundation of what was to become Analytical Psychology. Indeed, one cannot—or should not—speak of his psychology without speaking of Her. To do so belies the core of his ideas: that She is the Shadow of modern civilization; and that She is, therefore, also the road to the wholeness of existence found within the Self. When Jung listened to Salome, and loved Her, he offered guidance to rebalancing the patriarchal toxins that flow through our blood. He acknowledged his own, subjective desire: his desire, the nuanced longings of his own life, his feeling function which had eroded from an adulthood emphasizing rational thinking and collective interests, versus his subjective, individual needs. This liberation of his feeling function then liberated the women (and children, and animals) in his world from carrying this projection of his feelings. This liberation released them from the prisons (external and internal) in which patriarchy places these non-dominant members of society; it released them from the slow-burning insanity of neglect, abuse, voicelessness, and powerlessness. This empowerment allowed an external re-balancing to occur. Today, as a result, Analytical Psychology may be the world’s greatest tool to see through the fog of a patriarchal world, a system so wedded to “rationalism”—

the old academic lost in his books in a lonely castle—that it neglects and abuses the deeply relational daughter. Nothing thrives under hierarchy and power. Everything thrives under connection: empathy, love, the erotic, embodiment; the sensory, and the sensual. Jung offered us a way to get back there, where we actually belong.

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