

Story, Archetype and Healing

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Abstract

In this article, three (3) of Dr. English's stories are presented with commentary. Parallels are drawn between story and archetype and then archetype and therapy. The common element in story and therapy is the archetype. It is through the transformative archetypal energy that change and healing takes place. Archetype contains the numen of transformation for healing whether it be contained in story, or in the lives of our clients or within our own lives. It matters not whether archetype is enlivened via story or the story of own our lives, the impetus and strength to heal and change is enlivened. It is the archetype which brings the healing.

Text of the essay

In the Jungian tradition, myth and story cannot be separated from therapy and healing. Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estes in "Women who run with the wolves" is both a Jungian trained therapist and a cantadora "keeper of the stories" within her Hispanic and Hungarian family of origin tradition. She writes of "story as healer".

Joseph Campbell, who spent his life studying the commonalities of myth across civilizations, believed that all lives are worth a novel. In his book, "The hero with a thousand faces", he addresses the common themes appearing again and again across civilizations.

Story may even be the reason why the Christ spoke and taught in parables and story. The parables of Christ are so deep; the meaning can only be accessed through story (Van Zandt, 1995). Not "mustard seeds" or "fowls of the air", but kindness, courage and acceptance (Luke 13:19). Within the Christ story, could there be metaphors for universal hints into individuation and healing? As a counselor educator and therapist, the search for universals is an imperative. Again and again, I return to story to convey both message and meaning. It is through story that we are able to touch that slender thread that connects all of us.

In this article, three (3) of Dr. English's stories are presented with commentary. Parallels are drawn between story and archetype and then archetype and therapy. The common element in story and therapy is the archetype. It is through the transformative archetypal energy that change and healing takes place. Archetype contains the numen of transformation for healing whether it be contained in story, or in the lives of our clients or within our own lives. It matters not whether archetype is enlivened via story or the story of own our lives, the impetus and strength to heal and change is enlivened. It is the archetype which brings the healing.

Introduction

Dr. Estes writes in dealing with stories, we are handling archetypal energy, which we could metaphorically describe as being like electricity. This electrical power can animate and enlighten. Stories contain the archetype.

Archetype changes us. Archetype infuses a recognizable integrity, a recognizable endurance into the story and into the hearer (1992, p. 509).

Story One (1)

Let us begin by looking at, "... the love of the child...

April 11th, 2005

I want to remind you "right here at the end" of how vital your very presence is in the lives of the children, parents, teachers, administrators and school communities, which you choose to serve.

At what I believed to be a "routine" site visit within one of our area schools last Thursday, I arrived just in time "to tend to one of mine" as she was "tending to one of hers". As my counseling intern was dismissing her students to "make a place in her schedule" for our meeting, I witnessed an amazing moment, which I would like to share.

The child was seated near the back of the room "head down". When my Intern disturbed the child to introduce her "to her teacher", we both realized that the child was ill and feverish.

As the child left the classroom, she walked back to my Intern and with the sweetest expression, this eight (8) year old looked into the eyes of her teacher/counselor and said softly, "I love you, Mrs. _____." I was moved.

Somehow, my hectic morning and long drive melted away in a moment of remembrance of "why I went into this field" to begin with...

I felt honored to have even been given the opportunity to witness such a tender moment intended only for my student and her student. I was humbled.

May we always be reminded of "why we went into this field" in the first place... and to always be reminded of our "first love"... the love of the child...

As always,
Linda G. English

It is through the eyes of the teacher/counselor that we are permitted a glimpse of the archetype of remembering the importance of children.

It is through the eyes of the child that we are permitted a glimpse and a peek at the archetype of knowledge and learning.

Commentary

Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estes says that “stories are medicine”. Whenever a tale is told, it becomes night. No matter where the dwelling, no matter the time, no matter the season, the telling of tales causes a starry sky and a white moon to creep from the eaves and hover over the heads of the listeners. Sometimes, by the end of the tale, the chamber is filled with daybreak, other times a star shard is left behind, sometimes a ragged thread of storm sky. And whatever is left behind is the bounty to work with, to use toward soul-making (p. 504).

And to look at the more painful and yet more healing aspect of story...

Dr. Estes continues with “absolutely, one is enabled in the healing art, in the medicine of story, by the amount of self that one is willing to sacrifice and put into it. I mean the word sacrifice in every nuance of the word. Sacrifice is not a suffering that one chooses oneself, nor is it a “convenient suffering” in which the terminus is controlled by the ‘sacrificee.’ Sacrifice is not a great striving or even a substantial discomfort. It is in some wise “entering a hell not of one’s own making,” and returning from it, fully chastened, fully focused, fully devoted. No more, no less” (p. 510).

Story Two (2)

This brings us to the midpoint of this series of stories, “Hazel Marie Brown; Wife, Mother, Sister and Friend.

1725 Highway 24 East
Prescott, Arkansas 71857
January 11, 2004

Mrs. Lanora Dalrymple
Nevada County Cancer Association
P. O. Box 600
Prescott, Arkansas 71857

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Dear Mrs. Dalrymple,

The purpose of this letter is to submit the materials requested: the five (5) photographs and the one (1) page personal history of my mother, Hazel Marie Brown. I will be unable to attend the dinner and dedication program. It sounds wonderful. I would have really enjoyed being there. I will be teaching a class at Henderson on that evening. (Wouldn't Mother be proud?)

Hazel Marie Brown
1917-1978
Wife, mother, sister and friend

Mother was diagnosed with bone cancer in the winter of 1974. She fought valiantly and bravely for four and one-half (4 ½) years. She died in the Spring of 1978. The pictures included are from 1968 and 1969.

Mother did not like to have her picture taken, as these pictures reflect. I trust that she will forgive me for submitting them. This recognition would be embarrassing to her. I am thrilled to have the opportunity to honor her, though posthumously.

I know that you will remember Mother from her days in "the store". She and Daddy owned and operated their Mom and Pop's store on Highway 24 East for thirteen (13) years, Brown's Grocery and Station from 1960 to 1973.

I watched Mother practice social work, parenting and genuine care for her fellowman for our customers under the guise of store owner and clerk. She may have been selling you milk and bread, but she was really caring for and "tending to you".

Mother's spirit was absolutely beautiful. I do not remember a time that she ever hurt someone purposefully. She truly was a kind and gentle soul.

When I consider how deeply and profoundly she affected my life; my life's work as teacher, counselor and counselor educator is merely a continuation of the work that a simple woman began as she cared for her customers in the store on a daily basis.

Customers in the store were not "just customers". They were her friends and neighbors and folks that she genuinely cared for and about. Sometimes, she just listened. Other times, she offered suggestions. I can remember on three (3) occasions where Mother went bodily to help a woman in distress. Mother was quite remarkable in her quiet way.

There is a real "push" in education these days to "teach tolerance". When I reflect upon the lessons that my mother's life taught, how could I not be tolerant of all people when I was fortunate enough to have Hazel Brown as my mother.

The principles that Mother lived included spirituality, Southern womanhood and integrity. When she spoke, many times, it was a paraphrase of a scripture. She had been gone many years, when I made that discovery. Mother's heritage of "being Southern" was real to her. Scarlett O'Hara was alive and well and living in my family of origin. I can remember Mother showing me a pencil that she and Daddy sold in the store and the brand name was Integrity. It came from Logan's there in town. I remember her showing me the word and telling me, it was important. My, what a legacy she left for me to attempt to live up to...

Thank you for the opportunity to try and honor my mother in some way. In many ways, I am the survivor of Mother's cancer. I appreciate the work that the NCCA Board and members are trying to do. It is such an important work.

Please find enclosed my \$5.00 for membership in the NCCA. The American Cancer Association and the NCCA, specifically are doing excellent work. Because of Mother's struggle, these organizations are "near and dear" to my heart.

Thank you for all you do for others on a daily basis.

As always,
Linda G. (Brown) English

Mother passed away in spring of 1978. As far as I know, she knew nothing about psychology, but she knew a great deal about instilling life-changing principles in the life of her daughter.

Commentary

Dr. Estes tells us to "Look to your people, your life. It is not by accident that this advice is the same among great healers and great writers as well. Look to the real that you yourself live. The kinds of tales found there can never come from books. They come from eyewitness accounts" (p. 511).

Permission to tell another's tale

Dr. Estes writes gaining permission to tell another's tale and the proper crediting of that tale, if permission to it is given, is absolutely essential, for it maintains the genealogical umbilicus; we are on one end, the life-giving placenta on the other. It is a sign of respect, and one might say, of befitting manners in one properly raised in story is to ask and receive permission, to not take work that has not been given freely, to respect the work of others, for their work and their lives together make the work they give out. A story is not just a story. In its most innate and proper sense, it is someone's life. It is the numen of their life and their first hand familiarity with the stories they carry that makes the story "medicine" (p. 508).

Story Three (3)

This brings us to Linda's final story in this series and my personal favorite...

The first ever "William Hillery" Story...

Hi William,

I am not school age and on Saturday morning (after my favorite cartoons), I can hear the tractor(s) "going" in that patch in front of ya'll's shop...

If I am "lucky" enough, it will be William "bush hogging"...

Mr. Mack, or Mr. Cliff (White) or even Darwin would let me ride with them, but William was "my favorite"...

So anyway...

This particular day, Mr. Mack sees you "swing me" up on the tractor...

Oh before that... I would go stand at the edge of the patch and wait for you to "come around"... Then I would stand "flat footed" by the tractor" and you had taught me to "put my hands above my head" and clasp my hands together really tight and you would "swing me up" and onto the tractor...

Well, anyway... This particular day, Mr. Mack sees you do this... I can still "see him" walking "out of his solar plexis" taking three yards at a time... Two steps across the front of the shop, three (3) steps across the highway and in just a minute, he is across that field... Oh and he's yelling at us the "entire time"...

We haven't moved...

He's up on that tractor... Hollering at you over the top of my head...

He's saying... "If you hurt "that baby", Luther will kill us all"...

(Can't you just hear him")

So anyway...

You just lifted me down... Gave me the command to reach up and "do my hands" and you lifted me like before... And I just giggled... And Mr. Mack got to see me...

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“Reach for you”... He saw that “we knew what we were doing”... And that you had even taught me how to place my arms so that I wouldn’t get hurt...

He also saw that as we drove away on the tractor... That I was safely “straddling your thigh” with my right hand with a wad of your t-shirt and my left resting on your forearm...

He didn’t say anything else...

Not only was I safe with Mother and Daddy “in the store”, but within a secure web of caring individuals that “tended to me”...

In some way, I am still “riding tractors with William”...

Hope this memory is as meaningful to you... as it is to me...

As always,
Linda~

P. S. I shared a portion of this story with Mike this morning... He just smiled and said, “We’ll get the farm back for you, Baby!” L*

The rest of the story...

Daddy came and got me and you let me “off the tractor”... Ya’ll both watched to be sure I was safe...

When we got back home, Daddy said, “Riding the tractor with William Hillery, huh? And I said, “Yessir”...

He said, “Mr Mack come and talk to ya’ll”...

Yessir!

Show me how William puts you on the tractor...

So I jumped down off the counter and put Daddy on the steps into the house...

And showed him what you had taught me...

Then for several weeks “after that”, that was “one of Luther’s stories”... that he shared with everyone that would listen... About how smart Linda was and “how good William was “with ‘the baby’”...

As always,
Linda~

P. S. I don't actually have money... I am a philosopher... So, all I have is "words" and I share them with you... L*

Commentary

Dr. Estes concludes her essay on story as medicine with the following passage: The authentic mining of stories from one's own life and the lives of one's own people and the modern world as it relates to one's own life, as well, means that there will be discomfort and trials. You know you are on the right path if you have experienced these: the scraped knuckles, the sleeping on the cold ground—not once, but over and over again—the groping in the dark, the walking in circles in the night, the bone-chilling revelations, and the hair-raising adventures on the way—these are worth everything. There must be a little, and in many cases, a good deal of blood spilled on every story, on every aspect of your own life, if it is to carry the numen, if a person is to carry a true medicine.

I hope you will go out and let stories, that is life, happen to you, and that you will work with these stories from your life—your life—not someone else's life. That is the work--The only work (p. 511).

Conclusion

As we look at Linda's three (3) stories, the main characters are the student and the teacher; the mother and the feminine and the father and the masculine archetypes. In the classical Jungian view, we are "calling" the professional and character archetypes (Hillman, p. 11). When dealing with archetype, the energy seems to be paradoxical. Characters are bigger than life, either "gods or demons" (Zweig & Wolf, p. 280).

My training in mythology as an undergraduate English major was excellent preparation for my current professional endeavors as counselor educator and therapist. To quote Joseph Campbell, "the latest version of 'Beauty and the Beast' is standing at the corner of Main Street waiting for the light to change" (1988, p. 19).

As we wrestle, the difficulties in our lives, the archetype is called. As we work through our difficulties, the archetype is enlivened. Story contains, calls and enlivens the archetype.

Again and again, as I am teaching a psychological truth within a "teachable moment" with my counseling students, I draw upon story and myth. Students have noted that without client stories, there are no "teachable moments". Bach in "Illusions" invites us to be "fictional" for

awhile. “You will understand that fictional characters are sometimes more real than people with bodies and heartbeats” (p. 103).

We contain, we call and we enliven the archetype.

We, are the story—the only story.

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Biography

Linda G. English is an Assistant Professor of Counselor Education. She has taught at Henderson State University since 2001. Prior to returning to her alma mater, she taught for three years at Valdosta State University, Valdosta, Georgia. She served for twelve (12) years within the public schools of Arkansas as a teacher and counselor. In addition to her teaching and counselor supervision duties, Linda has a part-time private counseling practice with Prescott Family Clinic.