

The Visitor: Beloved Archetype & Boon Companion

by
Ismana Carney, Ph.D.

The flames were high and burned orange, gold, red, and blue-tipped as a warmly scented summer breeze gently fanned them. The Fire Sisters, a small group of women gathered at Indian Canyon to engage in Earth-centered therapeutic Fire rites, were encircled by attentive oaks while a thousand crickets sang, blue jays screeched, and hummingbirds hovered brilliantly here and there, exquisite and fleeting. We had come together to work on our lives to work on our selves; we were, in depth psychological terms, actively engaging in our respective journeys toward Self-discovery—a process that Carl Jung called individuation. The process of individuation is itself a spiritual endeavor. It is a sacred pilgrimage, a quest for the Holy Grail. It points to the deepest orientation of the human soul and that is achieving its own wholeness in the context of Self-discovery. To remain unconscious of this fundamental need, is to invite psychological, emotional, spiritual and physical disintegration of the individual and collectively of the community and society-at-large.

Each woman took her turn in interacting ritually with the Fire whom we all understood to be an intelligent entity, fully present and intentional—the Divine manifest. When my turn came I approached the edge of the roaring Fire to carry out my own rites. This was a way for me to express my profound and lifelong connection to Fire through my own sacred relationship with, and to the sun, the light, the Creator and the Mystery beyond. Here I run out of vocabulary, because the immediacy and certainty of the experience of this relationship is too long-standing, and too precious to entrust to the rudimentary language forms of the human heart and mind. It is also necessarily secret. As Jung reminds us in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, "the secret is also the secret of grace" and this kind of grace-filled knowing belongs "to God's world which it is better not to speak of" (1959, pp. 8, 11). In silence we hear the voice of God. Silence is to sound what black is to color. As black holds within its own heart all the colors; or to put it

another way, all colors when dissolved completely into one another produce black; so does all sound when dissolved into itself become a resounding silence. It is this kind of silence that holds the world in its great heart.

But beyond the silence, it is also true that there are levels of numinous experience that simply must be expressed because they are too much to bear alone and discovering the language to articulate them becomes an imperative. Jung identifies for us the language form most easily accessible to the human soul and its experience. This is the language of mythological narrative, enlivened by symbolic and metaphoric images that emerged out of the human experience in primordial times and that continue to resonate with no decrease in presence, power and significance even today. We still revere our modern renditions of gods and goddesses, heroes and heroines, nymphs and dragons, fairies and the Sacred Quest. Thus every ancient myth is eternally renewed and in the process translated into the language system of the time so that it might access and live itself out through human experience. In the same way, every individual across time and space who has an overriding need to achieve a free spirit and a liberated mind must set out to discover, understand and live out his or her own personal myth in order to ultimately achieve a fully integrated and enlightened Self. In Jungian terms this means achieving full individuation—becoming a *mythic being* who languages his or her journey toward Self-discovery in *mythopoetic* terms.

I will share my own experience with the Fire in these terms. Preparations for the Fire rites over the previous weeks initiated a powerful resurgence into the forefront of my awareness of a certain aspect of my Self and my life. A fragment of my own personal history informed by recalled bloodlines, re-minded itself into my consciousness. I was called to acknowledge once again my richly cast ancestry, and to broaden the inner and outer circumference of where I see my place in this world and my life's direction. I know I belong to the universe. I am not confined. I am not defined. But the shadowed side to this “free spirit” is that none have ever fully and unconditionally embraced me as one of their kind. I am a multinational, I am multivalent, and, in the process, I have become too much the *other*. It seems that in any setting

or context I am always the Visitor, a welcome Guest for a limited time. *I* cannot decide to belong because, being multiethnic, I am not perceived by any of the cultures with whom I identify by blood and by spirit as being truly one of *their* own.

Living in the borderlands, walking out onto the edge of things to enjoy the unobstructed view is both liberating and isolating, literally and figuratively. Even if one can find a community of similarly described individuals to attach one's Self to, it is community also made up of borderlanders. It is an ephemeral floating world and the roots are shallow. I will never know the sense of belonging to the depths that a full-blooded Japanese, Indian, Swedish, or Hunkpapa Sioux man or woman know. This is a life-long personal complex—to use the term in the Jungian sense—that normally is held in check quite effectively. In my life I range far and wide, as there is no place to stop and stay permanently, because then the notion of “belonging” kicks in hard on my heels and I don't know how to fully belong to a people since it has never been offered. Roots and connectedness nourished by bloodlines and founded in the DNA are something I know about on a psychic-soul level, but have never experienced in the everydayness of my life. I am a seasonal migration. I explore, hunt, gather, and move on. Yes. Domestication? No. But I have embraced this as a part of my reality, an intimate and integral thread in the fabric of my being. And so was taken aback when this very complex constellated in very dramatic ways during my Fire rites.

Fire is the most important symbol for life, love, creation itself and encounters with soul and the Divine. This having been said, Fire is also unpredictable, dangerous, death-dealing. It signifies and provides for the safety of hearth and home, while it also spells out Armageddon. We never know what will be elicited, pried open, scalded, or split open when we ritually circumambulate the Sacred Fire. As I began my own ritual, I was “directed” by the Fire to make offerings of sweet rice and milk to the flames in honor of the unresolved taught perceptions of shamed ancestral blood that runs through my veins. Shame is a heated emotion that, if applied with enough of the right kind of pressure, can shrink the greatest heart, forcing the boldest of heroes to his or her knees. I was also “invited” by the Fire to honor the timeless past of my soul-Self

and the worlds she knows; worlds that the Fire then invited me to reincorporate into the timeless now.

Tears fell and words spilled spontaneously into the smoke-scented blue air as I stood close to the flames, and cradled in both hands a solid round of lapis lazuli that a good friend had gifted me with especially for this day with the Fire. My encircling Fire Sisters, feeling the depth of the moment, spontaneously rose from their chairs to stand as sentinels in each direction, holding me energetically in their loving concern. What had been constellated over the weeks of my own preparation and now during the Fire ritual was the bittersweet experience of a deeply ruptured aspect of my identity that was still negotiating the grief of never knowing in this life that particular experience of communal belonging that I so admired and valued in the very cultures whose blood runs in my veins. And here by the Fire my work was to negotiate the tug-of-war that had unexpectedly surfaced between the opposing aspects of my borderland personality and my Self and to create a “clearing” in the interior geography of my own soul in which I could move this reality toward integration into the wholeness of my Self. Jung would describe this conscious holding of the tension between these oppositional positions as an essential move toward re-framing the issue at hand, transcending the affect and the immediacy of the suffering and then from an objective stance open one’s Self to receiving the deeper insights, clarifying intuitions, even revelations that lead to the transformations of the experience at hand that are necessary for final resolution. Jung called this the transcendent function at work by which he meant the function that creates the capability in an individual to transition permanently from one attitude to another. And this is an essential dynamic in the process of individuation—the journey toward an enlightened Self.

As I added wood to the Fire and flames swept toward me, I wept over a lifetime spent denying my East Indian heritage, due to the shame it carried for my Anglo-Indian mother who forbade any identification with it. I have always been a foreign guest to my Indian heritage and hide a deep and distant vibrant love. I offered ritually prepared saffron rice cooked in milk and sugar to the Fire as I cried out loud to my lost ancestors, asking them to turn toward me, that we

might mutually welcome each other at least in spirit, and share with each other our selves, our wisdom-traditions, and our karmic responsibilities, in this world and in worlds to come. I asked them to bless my children and our genetically linked descendents-to-come, with all the beauty and intelligence, soul and strength of our unacknowledged ancestral line.

I wept for the fact that I would never fully be a part of my beloved English, Celtic, and Norse heritage. I would always be the Anglo-Indian; not fully one or the other, and once again, an alien to a people, to a culture and a history that runs like the richest vein of gold through my veins; like a morning mist curling around a clear mountain stream, or a lightning strike on a run to the Gates of Valhalla. Along with my tears I offered the Fire wild rosemary, sage, and heather, and birch branches to Yggdrasill, the Sacred World Tree for the Vikings and to their great goddess, Freyja. I wept tears of gratitude for the gift of welcome into the indigenous spiritual traditions of the Lakota, Azteca, Blackfeet, Oneida, Mohawk, Apache and Pomo-Kashaya peoples of North and Central America. I thanked my elders and the Great Mystery for the profound gifts of earth-referenced wisdom; of teachings about the strength and beauty of humility, hard work, and the privilege of being the last in line; that which, in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, would be seen as the *rightful* place of a being in a Bodhisattva-frame-of-mind. But more than that, to be gifted with the ancient ways of being able to truly and prayerfully embrace the land itself in all Her sacredness. The tears flowed even more bittersweetly in the knowing that I am, and always will be, only an honored guest seated, albeit lovingly, in the heart of these People of the Land; a stranger in a strange land no matter how steadfastly welcomed. I offered tobacco, sweetgrass, and my tears to the Fire.

I shared what I was going through at that moment with the Fire and my sisters. The trauma of living in two worlds as a child, one the little British Raj princess in India with the British Empire at her beck and call, and two the “Pakkie mongrel” in England, ironically the culture that I had been brought up to identify with body and soul. It was *that* thread of personal history that contributed to developing both the fiercely independent and liberated spirit in me but also the profoundly oppositional side of me. I shared growing up and my struggles and then success

in establishing a self-identity that was and is accepted and welcomed by any individual and community I live and work among. While the back story told of a child-woman being used and abused for years in particular ways by a variety of men of many races. As a child I was described as being an unbearable little snob with a princess complex, as being strange, unpredictable, frightening, and sometimes violent; I was blasphemous, a hell brand, and the devil's daughter to boot. Well ... they were right. But it was also *there* that the solid core of the threefold woman I am today, me, my Self and I, was forged. Thank God for God then, and the magnificent Lucifer for we know that to ultimately defeat the Dark Side one has to *know* it inside and out. Thank Earth for providing a safe haven from it all. And then finally, as a young woman coming into my own power, I hit back for all it was worth—and it was not pretty.

But there, by the Fire, looking over the ensuing years of devoted and intensive spiritual practice and self analysis, of gifting this world with two amazing children now grown, and learning slowly and excruciatingly how to create lasting friendships and participate in healthy community life, I admitted aloud to my great surprise that this particular complex had once again appeared and with such unexpected force. Frankly, I had not thought about it for many years, since that part of my life experience had not been an active aspect of my reality for a very long time. But here it was, suddenly so present and so immediately imbedded in my body, my emotions, my soul. As I stood for a long moment in silence by the Fire, a familiar and well-beloved insight crystallized. When we commit to this kind of soul work with the goal of Self-integration, of individuation in order ultimately to become as real and as true as we all can be, we sign up for a lifetime plan. It is a task—in the epic sense—that has no end. Here at the Fire, I had been transported back to the border, to the crossroads, a stranger, a guest, a visitor in my own homeland, amidst my own people. Feminist scholar Gloria Anzaldua describes this place or state of being as "a consciousness of the borderlands, or *mestiza* consciousness. The personal work takes place underground—subconsciously. It is the work the soul performs". She continues: "That juncture where the *mestiza* stands is where the phenomena tend to collide. It is where the possibility of uniting all that is separate occurs" (quoted in Lorenz, 2000, p. 237).

Once again, I had to face and *interact* with that aspect of my Self that I identified as the “mongrel”, mediating the antagonism between the mixed blood versus the pure blood, the subjected versus the dominant culture, in whatever context that would fall for me. But as I allowed myself to draw deeper into the burn of my own emotion, I realized there, around the Fire, that the dynamic of the *colonized* self versus the *colonizer* had more to do now with my own sustained, but long shelved belief in a personally imposed rhetoric. I had successfully colonized my own multiethnic, culturally and spiritually diverse selves who had, in turn, succumbed to the belief system that they were fundamentally inferior, of less value and worth and only nominally welcome anywhere. I had effectively created and imposed upon my Self, what Morales describes as, "an imperial version" of own my life (Morales, 1998, p. 23). Yet we know, in as much as polarity is inherent in all living things, according to Jung, "nothing so promotes the growth of consciousness as [the] inner confrontation of opposites" (Jung, 1959, p. 346).

And I *was* being called out. The Fire had asked me to step out and disclose to the world *that* part of my Self inside the safety of the ceremonial arbor, at Indian Canyon, in the good company of the Fire Sisters and the ritual itself. The archetypes that had constellated around this complex were giving voice not only to my own need for wholeness in that respect, but collectively to what my need symbolized for the *whole* of my personal history across space and time. It is in this position that the process of individuation shows itself as the experience of rupture, regression, resistance, re-evaluation, redemption, and all held within a matrix, or holding pattern, the guiding principle of which lies in the certainty that God-Spirit *is* the unifying force present in the depths of every individual psyche.

Citing Jung, Lorenz states: "Because the individuation process requires ... a confrontation with the shadow, and a 'defeat of the ego,' nothing in the past can help us to predict what call may suddenly be felt. We have to be open for what brings us joy, excitement and energy or pain, sadness and a blockage in the new landscape, and enter into a deep dialogue with it" (2000, Lecture). I understood that this day by the Fire, I needed to be both the originator and mediator

of my own process of reconciliation with regard to this particular life stance. It had begun with the assistance of my own soul spilling itself over into the borderlands between it's Self and my conscious self. Then I named it, knowing that correctly identifying a problem is a critical component to connecting a symptom with its cause, a powerful affect with its complex source. But, to beg an understatement, this was certainly not easy. Morales relates: "What is so dreadful is that to transform the traumatic we must re-enter it fully, and allow the full weight of grief to pass through our hearts." And again, "only through mourning everything we have lost can we discover that we have in fact survived; that our spirits are indestructible" (1998, p. 19).

The flood of tears finally stopped with my last invocation and prayer to the Fire, Earth, and Spirit, which celebrated the fierce independence and strength of heart that has been my true-Self's gift from early childhood directly as a result, I believe, of my having to accept my *outsider-other* status. I equated this gift with the Sun, my Prince of Light, Solaris and in his Greek aspect, the Great Lord, Phoebus-Apollo radiant twin of my beloved goddess, Artemis. That great golden star in whose grip I move with love, in whose force of love this beautiful blue spinning planet resources life itself, and in whose gravitational field our solar system articulates, through an erotic consciousness, its own meaning in relation to our star-struck galaxy and the universes beyond. I also gave thanks for the magnetic power that works within me in that aspect of my Self who is seen and experienced as the enigmatic Visitor; the dignity and mystery that the Stranger carries. The Unknown Visitor or the Enigmatic Stranger who tarries only for a while bringing gifts or messages, who can be a harbinger of peace or war, or who brings predictions that protect or guard against danger has been a powerful mythic figure from the beginning of human storytelling.

I have experienced this mysterious dynamic throughout my life. In the deepest ways, this is the great archetype that stories itself through me and I through it. I know that I am here simply to visit, to take in the sights, to witness, to carry out certain tasks pre-scribed in the great mystery of things, to love much and be even kinder still, and then to return "home," to a place where I imagine I truly "belong." I gave thanks for all of this and offered the Fire honey, olive oil, wild

mint, and healing water from an ancient sacred healing waterfall in Indian Canyon, and of this to honor the Divine and other ancient deities who stood by a loyal devotee around a small but radiant Fire, on Native American holy ground. For me, bringing all of this to the Fire, to work it ritually and at every other level, was a central move, to use the term depth psychologically. It brought into focus on a conscious level, the need for me, my Self, and I to commit to embracing once again this extraordinary archetype, the Visitor, that had re-positioned itself once again in my life, as *it* moved toward a critical shift in orientation and purpose with regard to *my* life and *its* ongoing role in it. In the context of my interaction with the Fire as both spirit-being and natural element within a ritual setting, I was able to witness this aspect of my-Self across time and space.

As my Fire rite neared the end, I was transported into a vision where the small oak-circled arbor filled with people I "recognized" as my ancestors. They were accompanied by tiny children I envisioned as belonging to my own heritage, and whom I acknowledged as my descendents still to come. My deceased father, whom I adore, crossed the Threshold, walked into the arbor, *through* the Fire and stood beside me, arm curved around my waist. My grandparents, and so many others from so many bloodlines, from so many lifetimes, formed a semi-circle behind me. It seemed that there was not an inch left on the ground that was not taken up by a relative of some kind.

I felt compelled by the orange-gold, blue-tipped flames, and the white smoke curling around my body like the double helix of a DNA strand, to soul-speak. I was asked to "stand on ceremony" regarding my unconscious need to make conscious once again, a familiar, though still acutely painful sense of simply not belonging. The irony of course being that I did this in the spiritual presence of hundreds of beings precisely because I did belong to them! My transient Self emerged into the light making herself known in the ways archetypes constellating around a complex usually do; in the poetic image—tears falling like rain on golden ground—in alchemical mysteries, in visitations, in the exaggerated language of myth, and from the ground on up. As I came to the completion of my rite, a chant rose up through me and sang itself out.

As it filled the air, the crickets in the trees joined in with a resounding stereophonic chorus, a ruby-throated hummingbird flew up to the fire, paused right in front of me, dangerously close to the flames, and sped away. A pair of hawks circled above and cried, and a sudden gust of warm sun-scented wind loosened a shower of golden oak leaves that sparked in the Fire like fireworks.

In terms then of the journey toward Self and wholeness, of individuation, this is all part of the ongoing transformation of being taken to ground zero to begin a new beginning, where, at the fine line between the unconscious and conscious self, between the inner and the outer life, one makes soul and is made, in turn, by soul. It is all rarely fully understood, although sometimes intuitions can bring an illumination, an in-sight to the matter-at-hand. For all of us that day, the archetypal-chemical workings in our Selves and our lives leading up to and during that Fire ritual, was clear to see. The symbolic language we used to express our deepest sense of things, the alchemical attitude with which we *approached* our ritual enactments, the opening toward transformation at whatever the cost all this pointed to a commitment to ongoing individuation, to wholeness and connection to a higher purpose, to a surrendering ultimately to what cannot fully be known.

References:

Jung, C. G. (1959). *Memories, dreams, reflections*. New York: Random House.

Morales, A. (1998). *Medicine stories: History, culture and the politics of integrity*.

Cambridge, MA: South End Press.