ARCHETYPES OF TRANSFORMATION: HEALING THE SELF/OTHER SPLIT THROUGH CREATIVE ACTIVE IMAGINATION

DAVID H. ROSEN

"Imagination is more important than information."
— Albert Einstein

Introduction

Archetypes. Archetypes are inborn, affectively charged ancient motifs and predispositions toward ideas, images, symbols, as well as patterns of behavior that are common to all human beings. Archetypes are intricately and fundamentally part of the collective unconscious, a concept that Jung postulated in clear distinction to the personal unconscious of Freud. Paralleling Darwin's physical evolution, Jung postulated that the same thing occurs in a psychic sense; all of nature, animal instincts and the history of humankind is within the psyche.

As Jung stated, "Instinct is an essentially collective, i.e., universal and regular occurring phenomenon, which has nothing to do with individuality. Archetypes have this quality in common with the instincts and are likewise collective phenomena" (Jung 1969, 134). For example, the newborn has an instinct to suckle the mother's breast. This instinct is tied to an ancient predisposition based on an archetype to find the mother. We recognize this form of behavior as imprinting in animals, but it takes on a more evolved form in humans, which leads to attachment behavior (Bowlby 1969, 220-28). An essential part of the archetype is the exis-
tence of “organizing factors [...] which are to be understood as inborn modes of functioning that constitute, in their totality, [human] nature. A chick does not learn how to come out of the egg—it possesses this knowledge 
a priori” (Jung 1967, 328).

Jung’s use of the term archetype encompasses both positive and negative possibilities. For example, the mother archetype would encompass the kind, nurturing mother, who feeds and holds her baby, and the terrible mother, who rejects and neglects her infant. Proceeding with this theme of opposites, which is the cornerstone of Jung’s psychology, the Self unifies them and is the timeless center and totality of the psyche. The Self is a higher power or force that includes the other: the dark side or shadow. The Self is also the symbol of wholeness and eternity represented by the circle which has no beginning or ending. In Taoism, the same concept of the Self is present (Lao Tzu 1985, 29). It encompasses the ever-present principles of Yin [the dark and feminine] and Yang [the light and masculine] (Ornstein 1972, 67). Jung postulates related concepts: the feminine archetype in man or anima, which means “soul” in Latin, and the masculine archetype in woman or animus, which means “spirit” in Latin (Jung 1969, 345).

The term Self is “an empirical concept [...] that expresses the unity of the personality as the whole. [...] The suprapersonality in contrast to the ego, which is only the center of consciousness” (Jung 1971, 425, 460). In other words, the Self is the central archetype, the driving, innate healing force that is behind every individual realizing that he or she is here for a unique purpose, i.e., to fulfill one’s own personal myth. The latter relates to the concept of individuation, a process towards wholeness or “coming to selfhood,” or “self-realization” (Jung 1966, 173).

Relevant to the theme of this volume, Jung stated,

The concept of the archetype [...] is derived from the repeated observation [...]. for instance, the myths and fairy tales of world literature contain definite motifs which crop up everywhere. We meet the same motifs and fantasies, dreams, deliriums, and delusions of individuals living today. These typical images and associations are what I call archetypal ideas. The more vivid they are, the more they will be colored by particularly strong feeling-tones. They impress, influence, and fascinate us. They have their origin in the archetype, which [like the

Transformation. The concept of transformation literally means to change the nature of one’s personality. Jung posits that the ego or one’s conscious identity is a complex that relates to one’s personal unconscious and history and has to do with introjected parental characteristics and conflicts. Being unaware, one can become a false self, identified with an “outer other” and a manifestation of one’s parents and society’s wishes and not one’s true self. The Self represents a “forward-striving function,” which through the eruption of affect-laden archetypal images, facilitates the process of transformation that breaks the deadlock (Jung 1967, 397). At the core of transformation process is an archetypal death-rebirth experience. In other words, the Self is the force behind the sacrifice or Symbolic Death of the “false self or dominant ego image” (Hall 1986, 39) or conscious manifestation of one’s identity, both the persona or mask one wears and the ego complex (Jung 1967, 394-440). New Life, the resultant change and increase of consciousness through the rebirth and renewal process is facilitated by an “inner other” represented by numerous archetypes of transformation: the journey of the hero or heroine, the wise old man or woman, helpful animals, the divine child, the great mother and father (and the opposite, terrible mother and father), the anima and the animus (perhaps related to one archetype of androgyny), marriage, death and rebirth, and the healing and centering Self which may also manifest as a mandala.

Active Imagination. June Singer calls active imagination, “Dreaming the dream onward” (Singer 1973, 331). In a directed, conscious, almost meditative state, the individual goes deep into the unconscious, that inner well or spring and brings up dreams or fantasies, which as Jung stated, “want to become conscious” (Jung 1968, 49). The elaboration of these unconscious fantasies and contents is an active process, utilizing intuition and sensation and results in some art form: writing, painting, sculpting, song making, singing, and dancing. Active imagination is a

1Author’s comment.
Archetypes of Transformation

Central to Jung's psychology is the union of opposites. Prior to this union, there is a radical experience of the opposite. To describe this condition, Jung used a term enantiodromia from Heraclitus, which literally means "running counter to" (Jung 1971, 425-26). This is at the core of the transformation process. In the philosophy of Heraclitus it is used to designate the play of opposites in the course of events—the view that everything that exists turns into its opposite. In other words, to live life fully one must confront death. To experience death fully one must be alive. To do good, one must know evil, especially one's own shadow. To love fully one must experience hate. Unobtrusively, I have introduced the concept of the "other," i.e., the unfamiliar opposite. It is as natural as day to night, sweet to sour, dry to wet, and hot to cold. It is a part of nature, our daily lives and ourselves! The extreme moralist needs to consciously and painfully confront the inner shadow in order to undergo transformation. If one does not confront the shadow within it will reign down on the person. The macho man will remain stuck (depressed and demoralized) until he comes to terms with the feminine within (animma). The ultra feminine woman or lady will likewise be frozen in a masked smiling depression (a state of despair) until she comes to know and love her inner masculine (animus).

Religious conversion states involve archetypes of transformation. Being reborn is associated with religious symbols such as the cross with its unifying intersection (which in its earliest form is a symbol of androgyny). In the preconversion state, the person is severely depressed and often divided against himself/herself. He or she feels lost in an abyss or adrift in a sea of darkness. The person is preoccupied with death, and not uncommonly suicide. If this is denied, as is often the case, the person could become involved in self-destructive behavior such as alcoholism, which is a form of partial chronic suicide. It is in this context that the conversion occurs light and hope return along with a new sense of self often connected with integrative symbols such as mandalas.

Active conversion involves a confrontation of one's "sick soul and an acceptance of one's own inner evil tendencies" (James 1958, 194). In The Varieties of Religious Experience, William James gives an example of Tolstoy and his morbid psychological state as being drawn to suicide and then an enantiodromia occurred. By confronting death and his own
pull towards ending his life, he let go of the old false self or negative persona and dominant ego image. Through a “psychology of self-surrender” he contacted a higher power (in Jung's psychology the Self) and felt the spiritual vitality of being reborn and contacting his true self (James 1958, 194).

The Indian God Shiva is another example of the surrendering of the ego in a dance of destruction and creation. This is represented in a circle of flaming wholeness, the flames being symbolic of purification. It is a constant cycle of eternal renewal, the circle of wholeness or Self. From destructive energy comes creativity and from death comes rebirth. It occurs in the context of Shiva stepping on a dwarf, which represents the human ego. Again the concept of ego-death or self-surrender leads to contact with a higher power, the concept of the Self. What follows are some examples of archetypes of transformation.

Snake or Serpent. Snakes or serpents, particularly poisonous ones, are symbols for the fear of death or insanity (Henderson & Oakes 1971, 37). Through the dangerous confrontation with death, i.e., the serpent, one is allowing for the enantiodromia of rebirth and renewal. The snake or serpent, an ancient symbol of healing, is associated with the doctor-patient relationship and the healing professions. For example, in ancient Greece the Divine Physician, Asklepios, had a staff that was entwined with a serpent (Kerenyi 1959, 4, 13). The serpent has also been identified as a sexual or fertility symbol, both with the masculine, because of its phallic form and the feminine, because of its direct contact with mother earth and water (Matthews 1986, 168-70).

Jung clearly acknowledges that, “The idea of transformation and renewal by means of the serpent is a well-substantiated archetype. It is [a] healing [symbol] (Jung 1968b, 144). Jung goes on to mention that the “most significant development of serpent symbolism as regards renewal of personality is to be found in Kundalini yoga” (Jung 1968b, 144).

It is noteworthy that the cobra, the most deadly yet most holy snake in India, protected the ancient Egyptian Pharaohs and Buddha, as well. A unique symbolic form of the serpent is the uroboros, the depiction of a serpent in a circle swallowing its own tail. It is a symbol of infinity, eternity, and the perpetual return (Matthews 1968b, 207-208). In sum, serpent symbolism is “highly complex and universal” (Cooper 1982, 146). As a negative, it can represent destruction and death. Because the snake renews its skin periodically, the serpent also symbolizes rebirth and resurrection.

Cross. “The universal symbol from the most remote times [...] the point of communication between heaven and earth, the cross represents the tree of life and the tree of nourishment” (Jung 1986b, 144). The cross signifies an intersection of vertical (which is celestial, spiritual, intellectual, positive, active, and masculine) and horizontal (which is earthly, rational, negative, passive, and feminine). Therefore, the whole cross forms a primordial androgynous figure. It is dualism in nature and union of opposites” (Cooper 1982, 45).

The crux ansata underlines the Egyptian “ankh.” It combines male and female symbols, is a union of heaven and earth; it represents immortality and hidden wisdom, and is a key to the mysteries of life and knowledge (Cooper 1982, 45). The cross is also tied to the crucifixion and represents the “essence of antagonism, an idea which lies at the root of existence, expressing as it does life’s agonizing pain, its cross-roads of possibilities and impossibilities, of construction and destruction” (Cirlot 1971, 71).

Death and Rebirth. As we have already discussed, the serpent, especially in its uroboric form, represents death and rebirth. A great myth representing a common theme of death and rebirth is told in the story of the Sumerian goddess Inanna (also known as the Babylonian Ishtar). “She descended to the underworld, the land of No Return, experienced death, and achieved the impossible return to life again” (Henderson and Oakes 1971, 17-18). These authors go on, “This is the basic myth but there is also an important variant. The chief characteristic of the variant to the descent of Inanna lies in the nature of her mission to the underworld. Here the journey is a kind of mystery in which Inanna accompanies the quest of herself and emerges as one reborn from a symbolic sacrifice and death” (Henderson and Oakes 1971, 18). Easter, with its death and rebirth (resurrection) theme, as well as the Easter and pre-Christian association of eggs with spring, symbolizes the eternal cycle of life after death.

Journey of the Hero/Heroin. The journey of the hero (or heroin), which includes a symbolic death and rebirth experience, is best described by Joseph Campbell in his classic work, The Hero with a Thousand Faces. Campbell describes the adventure of the hero as follows: (1) the departure (with a call to adventure and the crossing of the
first threshold); (2) the initiation (with the road of trials—confronting the shadow, meeting the goddess-like anima figure and atonement with the father). The adventure of the heroine would also involve the departure and initiation with the road of trials—confronting her shadow, meeting the god-like animus figure, and atonement with the mother; (3) the return process—initially there is a refusal to return but then a magical flight or rescue from without and the final crossing of the return threshold. Then and only then can the hero (or heroine) become whole—master of the two worlds and he or she has the freedom to create and live fully. Campbell maintains that “Anyone in exile in the community is a nothing. From the other point of view, however, this exile is a first step of the quest. Each carries within himself the all; therefore, it may be sought and discovered within” (Campbell 1956, 385). It is during this personally caused exile, self-surrender or ego-death,3 that true depression or the dark night of the soul is faced by the individual. Paradoxically but naturally as spring follows winter, out of this Symbolic Death comes New Life.

In sum, this journey of the hero or heroine is based on the archetype of death and rebirth. Campbell states that the enemy is great and “equals death.” Through the confrontation and battle with the shadow or “other” there is transformation from destructive energy to creative energy. By overcoming the fear of death, being guided into the depths by either a goddess-like (or god-like) figure and contacting the Self, “Imago Dei,” one feels and is reborn.

The journey of the hero (or heroine) has immediate links with literature. For example, in Dante’s Divine Comedy, Beatrice, a goddess-like (anima) figure is Virgil’s guide during the descent (death) and ascent (rebirth). Another example is the prince who kisses Sleeping Beauty causing her to awaken to a creative life. It is critical to let go of one’s negative persona or dominant ego image (false self), that emanates from one’s parents and society, and to become one’s true self.

I will now discuss three examples of literature as creative active imagination. I postulate that at the very core of these creative works are the writers’ own death and rebirth experiences, with the destructive disintegrated energy being transformed into constructive re-integrated forms.

Healing Aspects of Active Imagination

Most writing, especially fiction, is autobiographical. That is the underlying basis for my assumption that these literary arts are manifestations of creative active imagination. A further supposition is that often they have a healing impact on the writer.

The Second Coming. The first example of a literary work that I will examine is The Second Coming by the late Walker Percy, a physician turned novelist. In The Second Coming, Percy’s main character, Will Barrett, a middle-aged lawyer and widower, suffers from an ailment that causes him to remember everything. He also has another physiological problem which causes him to black out and fall. Compounding these difficulties is an urge and plan to commit suicide, like his father did.4 In an effort to be himself (his “true self”), Will decides not to commit suicide because it “leads to nothing.” However, he vows to carry out a scientific experiment that will resolve the issue. He enters the Lost Cove Cave, after nearly and legally leaving his estate to his favorite uncle. He assumes that if there is a God, there will be some sign from Him while in the cave which will intervene and prevent his suicide. In case there is no sign from God, he takes an ample supply of Placidyl capsules (sleeping pills) so that he can kill himself. The crystal clear water of this test scientific experiment is muddied by a toothache which leads to nausea because of severe pain, Will begins to take the Placidyl. At first, he takes three then sleeps and takes three more. However, he wakes after a period and realizes that he has taken over half the bottle. Will then decides to get treatment for his toothache and begins to exit in pain. In his weakened and drugged condition, he falls 20-30 feet and is lying there bruised and bleeding. His flashlight missing, he is lost in utter darkness, but then he sees another opening. Writhing in pain, he crawls toward the light, but then he falls again through the roof and on to the floor of a greenhouse. He awakens from an unconscious state with Allison giving him some water.

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3 Or “egicide” as I term it (Rosen 1975; Rosen 1976; Rosen 1996).

4 Supporting my thesis it turns out that Percy’s own father committed suicide when he was a boy and it seems like The Second Coming is a working through of this trauma and Percy’s own struggle with suicide. In a real sense, Walker Percy undergoes egicide and transformation in this book which is a testament to the healing powers of active imagination.
Allison (Allie) is the second main character in the novel. She is an escaped mental patient who has had a series of electric convulsive treatments (shock therapy). One of her main problems is that she cannot remember anything, so she has the exact opposite condition to Will. It also turns out that Will had met her before, but given his injured and post-unconscious state, he does not remember who she is. It turned out that Allison’s mother, Kitty, was an old flame of his. Kitty and her husband were also friends of Will’s and his late wife, Marion’s. At any rate, the plot thickens. Allison inherited the greenhouse with a plot of land left to her by her grandmother; that is where she has escaped to, and was living in, the greenhouse, which is contiguous to the golf course. Will had been wandering around and looking for his golf ball when he bumped into Allison on a previous occasion.

We can postulate that Will represents a shadow figure in Walker Percy’s psyche, a negative father complex, that is profoundly depressed and suicidal. The professional lawyer and widower persona and negative dominant ego image is vulnerable to self-inflicted death like his father. Will’s three years of psychoanalysis helped him survive his personal unconscious conflict with his father, but he remains suicidally depressed when he enters Lost Cove Cave. This cave is symbolic of entering the “womb” of the collective unconscious, which is similar to Dante’s mid-life crisis and entering the dark wood. He is not only entering Lost Cove Cave, but he becomes lost after the first fall within the cave. He then falls a second time to make contact with the greenhouse floor and Allison, who represents Will’s (or Percy’s) anima or lost soul rediscovered. Water is the symbol of life and it also represents the feminine and the collective unconscious. There is great opportunity for healing and growth—the situation is ripe for enantiodromia. What happens over time as Allison nurses him back to health is that they fall in love. Another fall! This is the first time that Allison has ever been in love. Of course, Allie is working out her love of her animus or masculine aspect of her psyche. She differentiates it from her father because Will is old enough to be her father. Also, Will embodies the differentiation from his father, so that he can fall in love with himself, which occurs when the man falls in love with his own anima; this allows for a union of Yang and Yin and leads to a sense of wholeness and unity. Will clearly chooses life (To be) in contrast to his father who chose death (Not to be) by his own hands. Shakespeare’s “To be or not to be” captures the essence of every human being’s struggle. Percy, like Tillich (1952), clearly sided with the “To be” philosophy of life.

Will’s medical doctor is named Dr. Battle, which is significant regarding Will’s (and Walker Percy’s) own battle with the forces of good and evil, life and death. After he recovers from his fall-related injuries, he leaves Allison and goes home. However, he develops double vision and falls again (it is like Dante’s continuing descent to deeper and deeper levels of Hell). When he looks in the mirror he sees a stranger (this represents his “inner other” and emerging self that he cannot yet recognize).

Will subsequently has a car accident because he saw two roads instead of one. He thought he was on an interstate in the passing lane until he saw headlights of an oncoming car coming toward him. To avoid the car, he went off the road and ran into a ditch. He hit his head on the windshield. After this head injury he developed amnesia, which puts him in a state of further empathy with Allison, but she was gradually gaining back her memory.

Later Will is taken to Duke Medical Center, escorted by Leslie, his daughter, Jack Curl the priest, and Dr. Battle. At Duke’s University Hospital, he is diagnosed as having Hausmann’s Syndrome, which is a type of petit mal temporal lobe epilepsy. It is characterized by a set of typical symptoms. When Will asked what are the symptoms, the expert doctor states, “depression, fugues, certain delusions, sexual dysfunction alternating between impotence and satyriasis, hypertension, and what he called wahnsinnige Sehnsucht [...] which means inappropriate longing” (Percy 1980, 346). It turned out that there was a simple cure for this Hausmann’s Syndrome; it could be cured by a single proton. It apparently came down to an unstable pH fluctuating too much between alkalosis and acidosis. Hydrogen, the simplest atom controls wahnsinnige Sehnsucht. It was similar to lithium, the simplest metal controlling depression. So all Will had to do was monitor his blood pH every hour. To maintain his blood pH at 7.4, he would need to take the medicine. Once he was discharged from Duke, he recovered at St. Mark’s Convalescence Home, taking his pills and shots and having his blood monitored every hour. Dr. Battle would come twice a day to give him his “acid” and to take blood to test the pH. Will not only tolerated the drug, he seemed to prosper in a new and unusual way. However, a small amount of a pesticide smell hung in his nostrils. In the convalescent
home, he decided that he wanted to see Allie. He wanted to see if his longing for her had been a symptom of his disease or whether it was real love.

Unexpectedly, Kitty came to St. Mark's and assaulted Will. She was outraged that he had been “shacked up in the woods with Allison” (Percy 1980, 360). She further stated, “You—snake in the grass! You're taking advantage of a psychotic girl” (Percy 1980, 360). Kitty was enraged and the final comment was “I hope to God you're pleased with yourself. She is now hopelessly regressed. She won't say a word” (Percy 1980, 360). Kitty stormed out saying that she was going to take action so that Will would never be able to see Allison again.

Soon after the incident with Kitty, Will leaves the home; he escapes. He did not see double, but he was worried that he might because he had not taken his “acid” for twelve hours. He had forgotten to go to the lab. Most likely, his pH was up. He went to see Allie. They talked and both decided that they were in love. He takes her away before the sheriff comes to return her to the psychiatric hospital. They go to a Holiday Inn. There Will has a dream in which he has a dialogue with his father, and Will throws his gun away. The book opens with Will contemplating suicide with that same gun, his father's German Luger. This is an example of the healing power of the compensation function of a dream. Of course, this further represents the healing nature of Percy's creative writing, which is a manifestation of active imagination. Since he is in love with his anima (soul) and life, he can now throw away the possibility of taking his own life. This is an example of acting-in rather than an acting-out. He and Allie make love and decide to get married. Will says to Allie, “I love you. I love you now and until the day I die” (Percy 1980, 405). In fact, he no longer has to take his hydrogen. His pH miraculously is now in a state of perfect balance.

Will and Allie end up personifying something Paracelsus said long ago, “The main reason for healing is love.” The book closes with Will thinking, “Is she a gift and therefore the sign of a giver? Could it be that the Lord is here, masquerading behind this simple silly holy face? Am I crazy to want both, her and Him? No, no want, must have. And will have” (Percy 1980, 411).

The Second Coming embodies the death and rebirth archetype of transformation, manifesting as a journey of the hero, which involves Will confronting the shadow (his own dark father), and the sacrifice of his negative ego (his false self) through a series of falls then guided to the depths and back out and up to new heights of renewal and reintegration by a goddess-like figure, his anima (soul) which is represented by Allie. He contacted the Self, the “Imago-Dei” within manifested as love. He ends up marrying Allie which represents integrating the Yang and Yin, to repossess his lost soul. Will (Walker Percy) is involved in individuation—a process towards wholeness. Walker Percy is criticizing the reductionist and the biological orientation of the medical profession by pointing out that love heals all. Now let's move on to the second literary example of active imagination.

Even Cowgirls Get the Blues. Tom Robbins' Even Cowgirls Get the Blues is an example of the healing aspects of active imagination manifesting as humorous writing. Robbins is something of a modern-day Mark Twain. Wit and laughter represent the enantiodromia of depression and despair and promote healing. Even Cowgirls Get the Blues contains a very unusual archetype of transformation.

The main character in this novel is Sissy Hankshaw. She is a single, very attractive young woman. However, depending on how you look at them, Sissy has two apparent deformed appendages or unique and valued assets which only contribute to her profession, hitchhiking. Her abnormalities or gifts are excessively large thumbs, the size of bananas. Large thumbs are very handy in her avocation/vocation in that she could bring even 18-wheeler semitrailers to a grinding halt when she sticks out her thumb.

When she was a teenager, her mother took her to a plastic surgeon. His diagnosis was that Sissy had a congenital abnormality, thumb giantism, that resulted from a tumor of the veins that drew excessive amounts of blood into the affected thumbs. Because they did not hurt her and she did not complain about them, he said that she will just have to learn to live with them. Following this visit, her mother took Sissy to a palmist, Madame Zoe. The Madame was shocked by the size of Sissy's thumbs. According to her, the first phalanx of the thumb indicated willpower and determination. Where the thumb attaches at the base to the hand is called the Mount of Venus. The Madame suggested that it represented love, sympathy, music, grace, and passion. She surmised that her second phalanx, next to the thumb and related to logic, revealed that Sissy might

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eventually show signs of irrationality. She would not elaborate when Sissy inquired further. After feeling her thumbs, Madame Zoe stated,

Your thumbs are surprisingly supple and flexible [which] personifies extravagance and extremism. Such people [...] achieve their goals by brilliant dashes. [...] Large thumbs denote strength of character and belong to persons with great determination and self-reliance. They are natural leaders.” (Robbins 1976, 31)

The Madame added, “So accurate a revealer of our personality is the thumb, that the Hindu charomancers [palmists] base their entire work on it, and the Chinese have a minute and intricate system founded solely on the capillaries of the first phalanx” (Robbins 1976, 32). In response to Sissy’s inquiry, Madame Zoe shared her view that there were future relationships with both men and women and that she would get married.

Following an arrest for successfully hitchhiking an ambulance and because of other incidents of being picked up by the police, the judge wanted to place Sissy in a reformatory school, but a policewoman intervened and facilitated the handicapped route. But, Sissy screamed at a Goodwill Industries Ball, “I am not handicapped, Goddammit!!” (Robbins 1976, 47). As a 17-year-old high school dropout, she took off and gave herself completely over to hitchhiking because she felt that there was nothing else she could do and no hope of anything else.

On her journey, she met the Countess, a tycoon of feminine hygiene products; eventually Sissy was put on the payroll for making commercials for two of his products, Dew Spray Mist and Yoni Yum spray powder. The Countess, who respected Sissy’s avocation/vocation, learned to wait patiently for Sissy to hitchhike to her assignments.

Tom Robbins’ choice of Sissy and her huge thumbs are manifestations of two archetypes of transformation. One of them is the anima and the other is the thumbs, which are uniquely human and therefore superb symbols of transformation in the individuation process. Tom Robbins’ choice to use the thumb as an archetype of transformation is very creative. To be sure it says a lot about Robbins as an individual and that he basically accepts his unique and powerful soulful side.

Even Cowgirls Get the Blues involves the following additional archetypes of transformation: the snake, death and rebirth, the healing doctor-patient relationship, the journey of the heroine, confronting the shadow, the sacrifice of the ego, the wise old man, and contacting the Self. Robbins develops a parallel story about Bonanza Jellybean (Jelly) and the smooth riding cowgirls of Rubber Rose Ranch, which happens to be the largest all-girl ranch in the West, located in South Dakota.

The novel weaves a complicated web of encounters with characters who represent unknown or longed for aspects of Sissy’s own psyche. She marries Julian an Anglicized Native American whom Sissy feels will link her to her past Indian past. As the Countess predicted, she learns that she gave up too much of her freedom in marriage. In a desire to incorporate one aspect of herself, her ancient roots, she loses another: her independence and uniqueness. This sacrifice is too costly, and Sissy returns to hitchhiking and the unfolding of her own personal myth.

She travels to the all cowgirl ranch where her independence, the fact that she travels alone is admired by the women. In the context of a feminist cowgirl ranch, they are practicing Kundalini yoga, utilizing their serpent power. At the ranch she develops psychological and physical union with a powerful woman, Jelly, and a wise old man, Chink, who admires her thumbs and the unique spirit which they represent. These experiences of acceptance take place in a natural setting—a western ranch near Clockworks, an ancient Indian site.

Often the archetypes of transformation are activated in nature, where growth and wholeness are usual, which contrasts sharply with the urban life of New York City, where her husband lives. Sissy returns to Julian attempting to reveal the transformations she has experienced but he cannot understand. Because she was overly introspective and brooding, Julian surmised that she was “immature and self-indulgent.” He thought that since she was so “lovely and intelligent,” she needed “only to be taught to overcome her affliction instead of reveling in it” (Robbins 1976, 196). Julian took Sissy to see Dr. Goldman, at a psychiatric clinic. After two sessions with Sissy, he was left frustrated, annoyed and a little scared because he thought that Sissy belonged “in a category of the voluntarily crazed” (Robbins 1976, 197). He turned Sissy’s case over to his assistant, Dr. Robbins. Dr. Robbins resisted and ignored Dr. Goldman’s opinion of Sissy, and he asked her directly, “Why did you turn your husband’s birds loose?” This was the precipitory reason why Julian had

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6 *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* is a product of Tom Robbins’ psyche and represents a creative active imagination process which reflects the healing nature of his own individuation process.

7 By having a doctor in the novel with his name, it seems that Tom Robbins is being a doctor to himself. This inner healer is relating primarily to and with the anima.
taken her to a psychiatrist. Sissy replied, “I couldn’t bear to see them caged any longer. They deserved to be free” (Robbins 1976, 199).

Dr. Robbins exclaimed emphatically to Sissy, “I went into psychiatry with a desire to help set people free” (Robbins 1976, 235). As in most doctor-patient relationships, which represent a healing archetype, the healer must experience and know his or her own disintegration process and illness before he/she can begin to know that of another. And after meeting Sissy, Dr. Robbins becomes temporarily insane. As the author puts it, “He flopped in the grass [in the clinic garden]. Sissy says with a smile, “Doctor, forgive me, but I get the impression that you are a bit of a mental case, yourself.” Dr. Robbins adds, “It takes one to know one” (Robbins 1976, 244-45). 8

Sissy leaves the psychiatric hospital and returns home to Julian. However, as soon as she is there, the balance is tipped away from positive affirmation of her uniqueness, symbolized by her thumbs and the negative, darker side emerges. In response to threats from abusive males, the Countess (who would betray the cowgirls) and another man (who is a sexual pervert and rapist that she meets hitchhiking), she becomes violent and beats them with her thumbs in the head and penis (both symbolic of stereotypical masculine power). Contacting the destructive shadow nature of herself and her thumbs brings Sissy much distress. Sissy feels she must “normalize” her thumbs, this source of destructiveness, so she recontacts the plastic surgeon she saw as a child. She allows surgery on her right thumb, actually she “sacrifices” it and her masculine thumb is essentially amputated. Fortunately, she stops the needless surgery before her left (feminine) thumb is altered.

Nevertheless, she was wounded but from her wounded nature came healing, a genuine transformation—acceptance of her true self. Although maimed, she called Dr. Robbins and told him what had happened and that she had decided to keep her left thumb. It was apparent to her and Dr. Robbins that she had decided to accept her new feminine ego and self. Sissy now seemed connected to her Self and therefore to a higher purpose or meaning in her life. Sissy hitchhiked with her good left thumb to the Dakota Ranch, which was under siege by governmental forces, because the cowgirls were attempting to protect the endangered Whooping Cranes. 9

At about the same time, a snake arrived with a Jack of Hearts card under its tongue, which it delivered to Delores, the cowgirl who had organized the Kundalini yoga. The Jack or Knave is a boy or young man, so it can be related to the divine child archetype and/or the anima (spirit). It can also represent a messenger or trickster figure, as well. The heart represents the life or world center (Cooper 1982, 29). To the alchemist, the heart was the image of the sun within the human being. The heart also signifies love, as the center of illumination and of happiness (Cirlot 1971, 142). Here we have the snake, the healing serpent, making the journey to give the Jack of Hearts card to Delores who is already connected to serpent power, which means the possibility of rebirth, the arrival of the masculine spirit and love.

As Robbins points out,

We have a reptile in our totem. It has been there since Eden. It lives at the base of the brain and has a special relationship to women. It is associated with the dark world, dark consciousness, the necessary opposite of light [...] In a male, its venom can cause violence or art. In a female, it produces a peculiar madness that men do not understand [...] Delores ate seven peyote buttons [...] and she lay in the reeds at the water's edge. Asleep yet awake, she had sunk so deeply into the hole in her mind that gale and dust could not follow her. Jellybean gave up on trying to rouse her and lead her to shelter, leaving her there, spattered with green vomit, to communicate with her totem. Delores moaned. She seemed to crawl on her belly, to slither into the wind-whipped waters of the pond. It was there in that state that they found her. “They?” Niwetukame the Divine Mother and the snake from the message service. Had they come together? Were they in cahoots, the serpent and the goddess? What was said? How was the playing card dealt? Was Delores shown jewels or hummingbirds or strikes of lightning? Did she meet her double. (Robbins 1976, 387-88)

Finally when Delores spoke it was with intense simplicity, “The natural enemy of the daughters is not the fathers and sons [...] I was mistaken [...] the enemy of women is not men. [The enemy is] the tyranny of the dull mind” (Robbins 1976, 389).

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8Now we have an example of the “wounded healer,” another powerful archetype of transformation.

9The Whoopers were being “held captive” after they had stopped at a pond on the ranch on their yearly migration from Canada to Texas.
Following the intervention of the serpent and transformation, “The Whooping Crane flock rose in one grand assault of beating feathers—a lily white storm of light, gush of albino Gabriels—swarmed into the waiting sky, and after circling the pond one time—either a limbering exercise or some primordial ornithological farewell—[and] flapped south towards Texas” (Robbins 1976, 394).

Bonanza Jellybean was killed in an unnecessary attack by the military that followed the Whooping Cranes departure. Sissy was asked to oversee the ranch, which was officially deeded to the cowgirls who were each made an equal partner. At this time, Delores and Sissy became lovers. They shared the room adjacent to Chink’s. It was not long before Sissy discovered that she was pregnant. She assumed that Chink was the father of the growing child.

Later, the name of the ranch was changed from Rubber Rose to El Rancho Jellybean. Chink, back to his usual self, returned to the Clockpeople, leaving Sissy and Delores snug in Siwash Cave. After giving away the old Rubber Rose Ranch, the recovered Countess dissolved his corporation and went to work as an orderly in the maternity ward of a charity hospital, this was as per his personal advisor, Dr. Robbins. Dr. Robbins had told the Countess, “Get Thee back to the aroma of birth [...] the smells of the female body, the smells you have sought to kill with your totalitarian chemicals, are the very smells of birth, the strong odors of the essence of existence” (Robbins 1976, 399).

When Sissy is about eight months pregnant, it was clear that she had grown apart from Delores. In that context, Dr. Robbins appears and conveys his warm feelings toward Sissy. Delores ends up leaving and Dr. Robbins stays. The novel ends with birth and rebirth (a wedding seems inevitable) having evolved out of destructive pain and sacrifice.

The Colossus of Maroussi. Now, I turn to a different genre, the memoir. The Colossus of Maroussi is one of Henry Miller’s best yet least known books. He wrote it after an eight month trip through Greece prior to returning to the United States at the beginning of World War II.

The following statement relates to Miller’s personal and archetypal transformation, which took place at Epidaurus, the ancient healing place of Asklepios.

At Epidaurus, in the stillness, in the great peace that came over me, I heard the heart of the world beat. [...] Sitting in the strangely silent amphitheater, I thought of the long and devious route by which I had at last come to this healing center of peace. No man could have chosen a more circulations voyage than mine. Over thirty years I had wandered, as if in a labyrinth. I had tasted every joy, every despair, but I had never known the meaning of peace. En route I had vanquished all my enemies one by one, but the greatest enemy of all I had not even recognized—myself. [...] There was nothing more to conquer: an ocean of peace lay before me. To be free, as I then knew myself to be, is to realize that all conquest is vain, even the conquest of self, which is the last act of egotism. To be joyous is to carry the ego to its last summit and to deliver it triumphantly. To know peace is total: it is the moment after, when the surrender is complete, when there is no longer even the consciousness of surrender. Peace is at the center and when it is attained the voice issues forth in praise and benediction. Then the voice carries far and wide, to the outermost limits of the universe. Then it heals, because it brings light and the warmth of compassion. (Miller 1941, 79-80)

This is one of the most beautiful examples of an archetype of transformation (a healing place activating or catalyzing the healing archetype within) and the healing aspects of active imagination. Going to a special place, an amphitheater in the mountains, a healing place of death and rebirth represents a special moment in a journey of the hero when Henry Miller was realizing his own personal myth. He sacrificed his ego (surrendered the self) and contacted the Self, the center and totality within and without. He experienced egocide and transformation (Rosen 1996).

Henry Miller’s life following this transformation took on a different dimension. He continued to write, but it changed. It became more peaceful and reflective. One of his last books, To Paint Is to Love Again, was another manifestation of an archetype of transformation and Miller entered a new active imagination phase, the healing expression of the visual arts. Years later, when Miller was in his eighties and married to a young Japanese woman, I read an account of an interview in which he was queried as to why he was no longer writing or painting. How could he not continue to produce art when he was so talented. Henry Miller paused, reflected and said, “I am involved in the most important art form of all.” The perplexed interviewer asked, “And what is that?” Miller responded thoughtfully, “The art of living.”
Summing Up

Active imagination is a healing art form expressing archetypes of transformation. It involves healing the self/other split. Through active imagination, the inner healer within the psyche of the individual is activated and eventually leads to self-healing. This is the journey of the hero or heroine. The removal of the persona (taking the mask off), contacting the inner other and allowing the negative dominant ego-image or images to be "analyzed to death" allows the true self to emerge so one can fully live out one's own personal myth. The true self in the Jungian sense would be the new reconstituted ego after the confrontation with the shadow and sacrifice (self-surrender) of the old negative ego (which used to be in the center and assumed it had all the power and was in control). The new ego identity is secondary to a higher power, the Self, which is now in the center and is the major archetype of transformation in the individuation process. When the individual arrives at this point he or she is in balance, in harmony and at peace with the natural order of things. By incorporating one's "inner other," the person's soul is in a healing relationship with the "outer other" and the world soul.

Works Cited


10 Associated with active imagination and healing creative productions is the individuation process and experience of the often neglected emotions of joy, inspiration, and hope. See Kast 1991.


