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Madness and Creativity

Ann Belford Ulanov, David H. Rosen

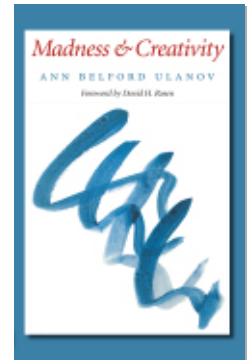
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Introduction

Madness and creativity share a kinship. These four chapters present two halves of the same whole. The first two meditate on forms of madness. Chapter 1 takes up madness in ourselves, of breakdown, breakup, breakthrough in our personal lives. Madness is real; we all know about it; we can be shattered by rejection, captive to post-traumatic stress disorder after exposure to war or crime. People speak of feeling crazy as what brings them into analysis. A highly functioning woman says she fears she could go insane. An executive partner in her firm comes because life is stalled; she lives suspended. A professor comes because in the midst of her lecture, her mind falls blank and she is mute. A man comes because he needs a place to tell his story, find its thread through three years of being jobless despite a hundred applications and a half-dozen interviews. We all know about madness, our own versions particular to our biography, neighborhood, and country and our time in history. We are located.

Madness dislocates us, out of our bodies, out of our minds. And yet, and yet, in the midst of madness dots of light appear; Jung calls them *scintillae*. These act as creative points indicating something bright, hopeful.¹ Strung together, the dots construct a path, which can transfigure our madness into our creative contributions.

These meditations on my clinical work relate to what Jung discovers at the height of his having attained riches, fame, and happiness:

an essential something has gone missing—his soul—and he is driven to find it. His path descends into chaos. There he encounters many others, who present otherness itself in multiple forms, points of view that countermand his beliefs and leave him in confusion, wandering, ignorance. Something happens to Jung, and when we read *The Red Book* something happens to us, too. We are addressed, summoned, pushed to find the essential missing thing that enlivens the whole, the multiplicity that makes up the complexity of living. Jung's breakdown of all he relied upon as rational, scientific, good, arrived at through thinking, breaks up his vision of the world and delivers him into meaninglessness as "the other half of life." He loses his vision of the good and faces evil looking at him.²

Chapter 2 takes up madness in the world. Personal experience of our madness opens us to collective anxiety about meaninglessness. We fear we have lost sure grip on principles of order and debate in government, trust in social goodwill and fairness, just use but not abuse of collective power. But worse, we fear we lose the means to think about meaning, to imagine recovery of foundational truths. Everywhere the world is erupting into violence and rapacious use of resources of earth, water, animal and plant life, even air. Wars, and their aftermath of rape, genocide, crippling of civilians as well as soldiers, overwhelm and frighten us. Patterns of collective life seem to be breaking up. No containing myth of meaning brings us together with enough room for our differences.

Working on our own madness leads to deep uneasiness; is there any sure meaning to depend upon? The analyst's office is not shut off from the world; the world lives in our clinical sessions. We look for something outside ourselves to depend on when we lose our job, but our joblessness opens onto national economic recession, public demonstrations that question how money is moved around in our society, whether it be Wall Street or French banks. Our search for meaningful employment opens onto our fear of national or even worldwide economic instability. This meditation relates to Jung's discovery that what he was seeing in chaos was not his personal psychosis (the clinical term for madness we all know in one form or another). What he was undergoing belongs to all of us as patterns of human psyche. What we take as social and personal order is right next to chaos.

Jung endlessly urges us, even shouts at us, *This journey I describe is mine; do not imitate my mysteries; you have your mysteries, find and follow them.*³ He shows tremendous faith in the psyche and in the efforts of each of us to follow its dots of light. Even evil, he discovers, finds its place in being bound into the foundation stone of life. *The Red Book* can be read as a testimony of madness that transfigures into a fountain of creativity.

The second half of the book features creativity. Chapter 3 focuses on the complex that haunts our whole life and usually lies at the basis of smaller issues that we conquer and assimilate into fuller living. Our life-long complex resounds like a musical theme with countless variations, playing itself throughout our life. It is a twenty-first-century version of our ancestor whom we cannot disregard without peril of being held hostage by compulsions that repeat over decades. We know this humiliation of being caught, forced to repeat a prescribed work schedule, sexual routine, evening drink, special rewarding food, reassuring pills, shopping excitement, fixed prayer forms, strict allegiance to political party, an unquestioned God-image. Trauma enforces such captivity. Like a child's superstition not to step on cracks in the sidewalk, we adhere to our defenses lest we fall to pieces. Here I dare two convictions my clinical work has created: our problem turns up in our solution to it, and more, our problem itself shows the path we are to follow to creative living. Creativity relies on a new kind of meaning that includes meaninglessness. Our dogged complex bestows precious legacies on us.

This meditation relates to Jung's insistence that we live our very own life—not his, not our hero's, not our mother's, not our analyst's, but our own which finds meaning that includes meaninglessness. Jung's devotion to this task sums up the creative path he discovers in *The Red Book*. He says of the visions, texts, and paintings in that volume that they were the decisive experiences of his entire life and he spent all his remaining years putting them forth into the world.⁴ His path unfolds in service to something beyond himself. Finding himself relates to finding his image of God. In his 1912 lecture in America at Fordham University, he says: "My personal view . . . is that man's vital energy or libido is the divine pneuma all right and it was this conviction which it was my secret purpose to bring into the vicinity of my colleagues' understanding."⁵

Chapter 4 focuses on the transformation of our compelling complex (the subject of chapter 3) into creative return, that is, a circling around at different altitudes that which comes into being in our human psyche. We create and find something that arrives that we do not invent. We develop a ritual through which we return to different levels in our complex to transform our path toward what we come to recognize we serve.

Jung discovers in *The Red Book* another center to the psyche and traverses back and forth between its multiple points of view within him and in the world, represented in encounters with different figures to whom Jung pays close attention, never trying to reduce them to one. Multiplicity, decentering, disrupting human forms of order that we identify with and then prescribe to others, come together in what Jung later calls the *complexio oppositorum* that makes up a wholeness that allows for our differences, too. There is no one final unity that moves like a big ship into view to dominate the ego. And yet, and yet, this multiplicity Jung also describes as making a unity, a wholeness where every part of us and of our world gets a seat at the table, engendering compassion for marginal and rejected aspects of ourselves and our communities. This attentive compassion to all of our soul life begets respect and justice toward our neighbor. Without this we unconsciously force our neighbor into adopting what we revolve around as a god.

The questions emerge: Around what do we revolve? And what place does it give for evil in life? How does our ritual show our central devotion? What is our God, or, as Jung says, our God-image? He makes a distinction: it is not God who comes but God's image, "*The supreme meaning is the path . . . the bridge to what is to come. . . . It is not the coming God himself, but his image which appears in the supreme meaning.*"⁶ We, too, must account to our own god-making capacity, what we find and create at the center that we serve, even if we say it is not a god but something else.

This fourth chapter relates to Jung's discovery of our god-making capacity. He opens *The Red Book* with quotations from Isaiah and from John's Gospel announcing the new god who emerges in the gap of our parched, barren state. From that very place, filled with grief and fear, anger and despair, the desert will blossom as the rose, streams of water will flow, the enlivening word steps into embodied life.⁷