

Response to ‘Tina Keller’s analyses with C.G. Jung and Toni Wolff, 1915–1928’

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Swan has put together some very interesting, and tantalizing, excerpts from Tina Keller’s autobiographical writings, giving us snapshots of her analyses with Jung and with his protégée, Toni Wolff. Despite the fact that these snapshots are incomplete and inevitably portray a one-sided view of these analyses, they do provide us with an idea of how both Jung and Wolff worked clinically, the experimental nature of Jung’s analytical technique, and something of the social climate in which these three characters lived and worked. It seems that above all, according to Swan, what Keller benefited most from was learning the technique of ‘active imagination’, primarily through her work with Toni Wolff.

What is so evident in Keller’s account is the way in which social and therapeutic boundaries were ignored, denied, and transgressed as a matter of course. Contrary to Jung’s emphasis on the power of the symbol, the interpretations Keller records of her dreams and fantasies more often than not revealed a literal rather than symbolic understanding of the contents. This seems to have been the case especially in both Jung’s and Wolff’s failure to acknowledge Keller’s transference. Here it is not clear whether this is Keller’s failure or whether indeed it reflects a mutual failure on the part of Jung, Wolff and Keller. From the way in which Keller describes her analysis with Jung, it does seem that little, if any, account was taken of her transference to Jung. Instead, Jung seems to have recoiled from Keller’s fantasy material about the ‘black doctor’ which he dismissed derisively and which led to Keller’s first break with Jung. Although Keller’s analysis with Wolff was certainly more supportive, it seems that Wolff too did not explore the reductive aspects of Keller’s material nor her continuing transference to Jung. It also seems more than likely that Keller’s transference to Jung had begun before her therapy, during the weekly discussion groups that the Keller and Jung families engaged in. Jung originally sent Keller to Maria Moltzer, a Dutch colleague, for analysis and it was following a dream of Keller’s that she transferred to Jung for analysis. Unfortunately, we are not privy to the contents of this dream but it suggests that Keller was in the grip of a powerful transference to Jung, what she later referred to as ‘possession’, that in

some ways Jung fostered and colluded with while at the same time shying away from.

If we look at Jung's history at the point when he accepted Keller for analysis it is hardly surprising that he might demonstrate a reluctance to acknowledge and explore the transference. This was 1915, following Jung's break with Freud, his tumultuous entanglement with Sabina Spielrein, and his subsequent partnership with Toni Wolff as his 'anima' figure—an 'anima' who lived in the same household alongside Emma Jung for some time. (It would be interesting to know whether they were living together when Jung referred Keller to Wolff.) From what we know about Jung's analysis and subsequent relationship with Spielrein, it is apparent that he was aware of Spielrein's transference to him but seemingly unaware of his own transference towards Spielrein. Jung's increasing identification with Spielrein's transference towards him led him down a dangerous path that was never resolved—perhaps for either of them. With Jung's break with Freud, Jung seemed to turn his back on reductive analysis, on working with the transference, and on the importance of the past as a way of understanding psychic conflict. Instead, Jung emphasized the value of self-analysis, educating his patients in techniques for contacting the unconscious, such as active imagination and spontaneous writing. In the case of Keller, Jung stressed the importance of strengthening her ego and seemed to act principally in a didactic role, perhaps as a way of steering Keller away from a regression that he felt might be dangerous in some way. It is possible that Jung was concerned to strengthen Keller's ego because he sensed her incipient erotic transference and wanted to prevent this from coming out. In Keller's account, Jung seems to have actively discouraged Keller's dependence on him from the start. Keller writes:

Dr. Jung had told me quite early in my analysis: 'You must begin preparing for the time when you will not be coming here. You always have questions; even as you leave my office, new ones come up. Write these questions out as letters to me. But you need not mail them; in the measure that you really want an answer and are not afraid of it, an answer will emerge from deep inside yourself'.

(1972, p. 9)

As an obedient patient, Keller attempted writing letters with at first 'no luck' and when she complained of this to Jung, his response was, 'But surely you know what it means to pray' (1972, p. 9). Keller promptly wrote her daily missals on her knees in the position of prayer and reports that in time 'the writing became a kind of religious experience' (p. 14). However, we are left in the dark as to what meaning she or Jung derived from her writings and from the fantasy figures she refers to as arising from her unconscious. Furthermore, Keller does not describe any attempt to link the unconscious 'archetypal' contents that are revealed in her writings to her personal life or her feelings about her close relationships. During her analysis with Jung, Keller makes it clear that she knew about Jung's techniques for exploring his own unconscious, including writing 'in his "black and his red books" during emotional upheavals and

during the period of discovery [he] described his “visions” and then wrote dialogues and commentaries...sometimes these paintings would be visible in Jung’s consultation room [1981, p. 25]’ (p. 497) While Keller developed her own tools for self-exploration over time, and particularly during her analysis with Wolff, it seems that initially her own experiments may have been more imitative than genuine.

It is striking that both Jung and Keller’s husband opposed her desire to become a doctor, while Wolff supported her in this. We do not know the reasons for their opposition—it is possible that both Jung and Keller’s husband were being protective of Keller and may have thought that medical training would put too much of a strain on her while she also had a young family to care for. As it happened Keller proved that she was quite capable of managing to care for her family and to establish herself as a doctor. However, Keller must have felt angry with both her husband and Jung as she asserts, ‘something in me was stronger than all the obstacles’ (p. 495) From Swan’s condensed account, it would seem that she was being encouraged to continue to play the role of wife and mother, and that what Jung failed to address was her frustration in this role and perhaps some conflict in her marriage, hinted at when Swan comments that ‘during Keller’s analysis with Jung, he focused primarily on her symptoms of anxiety and confusion concerning religious matters’ (p. 497). Given that Keller’s husband was a pastor, one can only wonder whether some of Keller’s confusion may have referred to marital conflict. It was, after all, Keller’s husband who, concerned about her state of extreme anxiety, encouraged her to see Jung and, according to Keller’s diary, ‘believed that my state of anxiety would disappear after a few sessions and dream interpretations...But Dr. Jung knew that real analysis would take a long time; he knew it would affect my religious attitude, and this might easily endanger my marriage’ (1972, p. 4). Unfortunately, we do not know what Keller meant when she referred to her ‘religious attitude’, nor how Jung understood her religious concerns. We can imagine that Keller’s ‘religious attitude’ may have been linked to her transference to Jung but this connection does not appear in her writings.

While we can see that Keller had some reasons for hostility towards her husband, whatever the cause may have been, she had far more reason to be angry with Jung and his treatment of her. Jung’s cursory and dismissive treatment of Keller’s fantasy image of the ‘black doctor’ did not seem to be an isolated incident. Keller was later to write that he ‘could be so sarcastic. He made fun of people in an unfeeling way...’ (1968, p. B-3). Jung not only discouraged her from pursuing a career as a doctor but when she asked Jung to recommend her as a member of the newly formed analytic training organization in Zürich, ‘he refused on the grounds that he was “old and did not wish to interfere in matters of the Institute” [1968b, p. F-1]’ (p. 495). Although it is possible to understand that Jung may not have wished to interfere in matters of the Institute *at this point*, it is important to keep in mind that Keller had been working ‘as the only Jungian representative in Geneva for nearly 20 years’ while continuing to be

in contact with Jung and receiving referrals from him during this time [1968, p. C-7] (p. 495).

In contrast to her ambivalent feelings towards Jung, Keller's experience with Toni Wolff seemed to have provided the containment and acceptance she had been looking for from Jung. According to Keller, Wolff 'created a "special atmosphere and a sheltered place where one felt protected"' (p. 503). As well as encouraging Keller to express her feelings through different forms, such as dance, Wolff did not seem to be afraid of Keller's need for her. Keller writes that Wolff 'allowed a patient in distress to call her at any time. . . ' and expressed her gratitude 'of the way she was able to meet the very real dangers that threatened me [1972b, p. 11]' (p. 503). Wolff is portrayed as a benign maternal presence that enabled Keller to regress and most notably to gain confidence in herself and her desires, such as her ambition to become a doctor. Nevertheless, Wolff's ability to help Keller understand the roots of her anxieties and her inner conflicts and to work these through therapeutically are not indicated in the material. It seems more likely that Keller was helped by feeling cared for and by learning certain coping mechanisms that enabled her to manage the difficulties in her life rather than to resolve them in some measure. Wolff, however, like her master, Jung, thought nothing of crossing boundaries to the point that she later asked for Keller's assistance in conducting her own active imagination, something which she was peculiarly unable to achieve.

Keller's experience of 'possession' by Jung can be likened to an intense, suppressed erotic transference and suggests that she may have had difficulty in acknowledging and expressing feelings of anger and hatred as well as underlying depression. The figure of Leonard, the 'black doctor', most vividly expresses the ambivalence in her relationship with Jung—at one moment a spiritual guide, and at another moment a threatening demon. Keller spent nearly ten years in some form of analysis with Jung and it seems from her account that what she gained were certain techniques, such as active imagination and spontaneous writing, to manage her anxieties—although even these did not seem to be especially effective as evidenced by Keller's subsequent referral by Jung to Wolff. In describing her analysis with Jung, Keller writes: 'it is difficult to remember what Dr. Jung said in the many sessions I had with him. . . I wondered whether much of our conversation was not a waste of time?' [1968, p. B-11] (p. 506). This is also a question that cannot escape the reader's mind.

At the age of 94, Keller reflects on the prolonged effect Jung—or rather her transference to him—had had on her, commenting that,

My meeting with Dr. Jung, his ideas and personality, was such an undigested portion of my life. His image stood before my mind's eye as a great rock, blocking my way and outlook. My whole experience involving Dr. Jung's thought and person seemed like a sphinx to whose question an answer must be found. I had to face the painful fact that I was blind in my admiration and later in my hostility. . .

[1981, p.76] (p. 507)

It seems that at last the spell under which Keller had lived and worked was broken, thanks to whatever mental processes were at work for her, not the least being her approaching death and the clear-sightedness that can accompany an awareness of mortality.

We are left with yet another portrayal of Jung as narcissistic and at times dangerously inflated. Much of Jung's questionable treatment of his patients has been explained away by his followers on the grounds that he had never had the benefit of an analysis himself and that these were pioneering times in his life and in the life of the profession. Nevertheless, Jung was well aware of the power of the transference and of the analyst's countertransference, which Jung himself was the first to point out. We can only imagine that what appears to be his resistance to understanding and interpreting the transference was some indication of his fear of knowing about the past that he carried within himself. Despite Keller's admiration of Jung, her account of him is hardly flattering and reveals the dark side of his personality. In these snapshots we see a glimpse of Jung's unconscious identification with what he himself termed as the manna personality, eliciting from others both the attraction and repulsion that characterize this state of mind. As Keller so succinctly put it, Jung was 'not the kind of man [she] was attracted to' (p. 506) Indeed, one wonders how well Jung would have fared within analytic circles today.

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