

Two Zoning Inspectors and the Archetype of the Woman Healer

Jutta von Buchholtz, Ph.D.

The doorbell rang. I opened the door. There stood two strangers, whose sudden arrival in my life was to change me and the way I work.

The two strangers were city employees: zoning inspectors. They informed me that I was no longer to see clients at my home. They threatened me with a substantial fine and/or a prison term if I continued to do so. They maintained that seeing clients in my home for psychological consultations and dream work was the same as a physician's practice. And that was forbidden by zoning laws.

In the following two years arguments with the city drained me of vital energy, but also directed me to look critically at what a Jungian analyst does and is. Is a doctor curing patients the same as an analyst assisting a process that involves healing and wholeness? How clear was I about my vocation? I also wondered whether there were critical zoning inspectors under foot in my psyche, busily undermining my confidence in the efficacy of the psychology of C. G. Jung in this extraverted, materialistic culture? What started out as an angry retort and research to prove the idiocy of two bureaucrats, turned into an exploration of the archetype of the healer, specifically into the discovery of characteristics of the archetype of the Woman Healer.

I went about it rather methodically – sort of animussy in a way! After all, the animus had been constellated. I decided to look for information in the fields of etymology, mythology and in the works of Carl Jung.

I explored the history of some words: “to cure”, “to heal”, “doctor” and “physician” in Webster’s dictionary. While curing is done from the outside, healing draws on resources from within. Curing has to do with recovery or relief from disease, while healing is concerned with making sound or whole, restoring to health. Etymologically the word “heal” comes from the High German “*heilen*.” The noun for “*heilen*” is “*Heiland*,” the Savior. “*Heilen*” also has roots in the Old English word “*hal*” which means “whole.” The word “doctor” is derived from the Middle English “*doctour* – teacher” from the Latin “*docere* – to teach”. The word physician has its roots in the Old French “*fisique*,” meaning medicine, which means that a physician is a person who is knowledgeable of medicines. The important aspect seems to be whether healing and/or curing take place –

and that seems to depend on the particular situation.

To further deepen my understanding of what healers and physicians are about, I turned to mythology. Asclepius, mythical healer at the dawn of Greek civilization, was the son of Apollo (divine physician) and the mortal princess Coronis. Apollo and Diana taught Asclepius hunting, medicine, music and the art of prophecy. In an attack of hubris, Asclepius once raised a man from the dead, which only gods may do. Zeus was enraged and killed Asclepius with a thunderbolt. After his death, the sick and wounded continued to come to the physician's temple at Epidaurus to pray, to sacrifice and to sleep in order to dream. In their dreams Asclepius would reveal how they could be healed. At Epidaurus the treatment of physical ailments was embedded in a spiritual tradition.

It was the immortal centaur Chiron who specifically trained Asclepius in the healing arts. Chiron represents the archetype of the Wounded Healer. Once Heracles accidentally wounded Chiron with a poisoned arrow, but because he was immortal, the centaur could not die and had to endlessly suffer his painful wound. Another myth about Chiron tells that he offered himself in the place of Prometheus whom Zeus had chained to a huge rock in punishment for bringing fire to humans. Chained to the rock Prometheus and later Chiron were attacked by an enormous bird who feasted on their livers during the day. At night the organ would reconstitute, and the sufferer would have to undergo the torture over and over again. Eventually Chiron was allowed to die.

From these myths we learn that physicians and healers originally shared characteristics that belong to the archetype of the healer, such as knowledge of art, music, hunting and prophecy -- a connection between healing and a spiritual tradition, between the importance of dreams and the unconscious in healing, between hubris and the mystery surrounding the wounded healer.

Next I checked what Carl Jung had to say about the healer. In his essay “*Psychologie und Dichtung*” (CW 15) he notes that a physician healing a wound is himself carrier of a wound such as Chiron or Christ. In his essay on Freud (CW 15, paragraph 18), Jung states that the numinous qualities of the unconscious can provide helpful and healing energies for the patient. In the same volume, Jung also observes that the archetype of the healer is neither good nor evil in and of itself – it is an undifferentiated numen. The decision towards good or evil comes about through the human physician's attitude! Jung stresses the ambiguity of the archetype of the healer: on the one hand he is shown as wise, helpful and redeeming while on the other hand there is a darker incarnation, that of the deceptive magician,

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seducer, devil even. (CW 15, “Paracelsus” paragraph 159) In the same essay Jung points out that the physician is both master of the poison and of healing, and that he dwells in close proximity to the wizard as well as the healer.

This foray into the etymological and mythological roots of healing broadened my understanding of the topic. It shed some light on the differentiation between a physician curing patients and someone who is involved in the process of healing. But: Asclepius, Apollo and Chiron were masculine figures – and I wondered about their female counterparts – would they be substantially different?

As I reflected on this, I realized that over the last ten or more years, four women, representing concepts of healing, had constellated powerfully in my psyche. I understand them to be incarnations or representations of the archetype of the Woman Healer.

About eleven years ago I learned about Sanapia, of the Eagle Medicine tradition, expert at healing ghost sickness, which has many of the earmarks of a conversion neurosis. Her medicine has to do with *puha*, power, and empowerment by the Great Spirit.

Years later I came across a little wooden statue, a “Phemba” of an African queen nursing a grown man!

Again some years later, I saw Romare Bearden’s gorgeous collages and paintings of the profoundly moving Conjur Woman of African-American heritage who was called on for healing.

Very recently I became aware of Miss Ella Louis, a contemporary *traiteuse* of the Cajun healing tradition in Southern Louisiana.

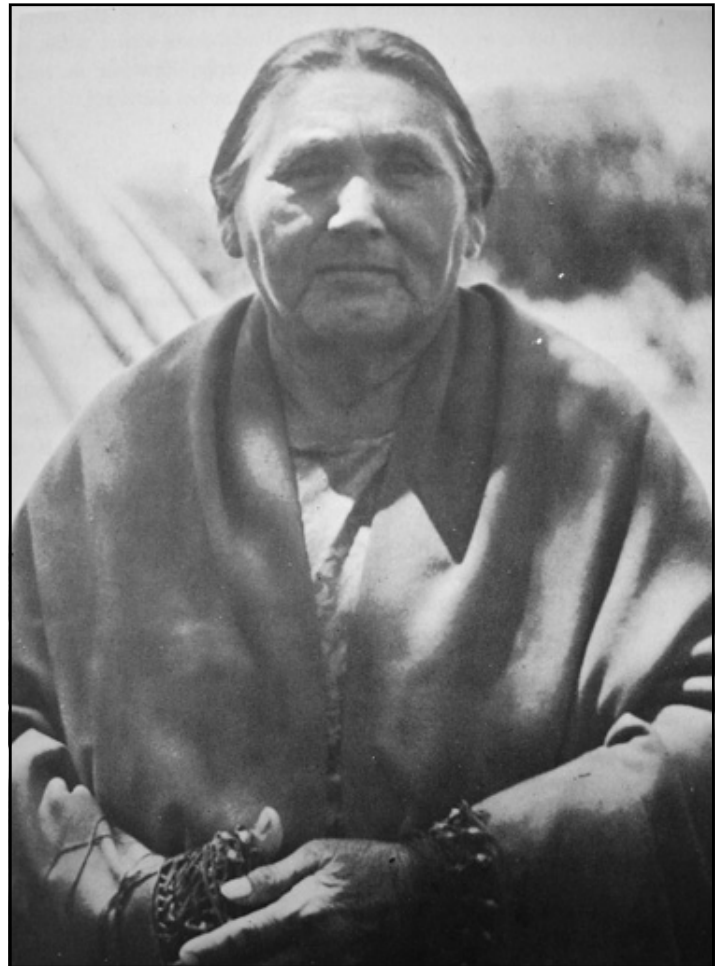
Ironically, in the process of unmasking the zoning inspectors as the ignorant imbeciles I thought them to be, their arrival at my doorstep brought me to explore these four incarnations of the Woman Healer archetype. Thus, mysteriously, the very ignoramuses I loathed were actually helpful, animating animuses!

Next I want to explore these four figures. I know almost nothing about Native American, African, African-American, Cajun or other “alternative” healing traditions. But Sanapia, Phemba, Conjur Woman and Ms. Eloise came to me in an emotionally meaningful way that wanted connection with the topic of the archetype of the Woman Healer.

SANAPIA

I first discovered Sanapia in 1995, as part of my research into rituals having to do with menopause. There were no such rituals. But I came upon David Jones’ book about a Comanche Eagle Medicine woman whom he met in the 1960s and whom he named Sanapia, “she who sticks with you.” Although trained when she was a young girl, Sanapia was not allowed to practice her medicine until she was post menopausal. Her life fell into three phases:

First phase: from birth to adolescence, approximately premenstrual, the age of Kore. Despite her initial reluctance, her mother and maternal uncle were able to persuade her to train as a medicine woman from age 13 to 17. Guided and in due course blessed by four mentors, she learned to identify medicinal plants in the field, was taught the necessary rituals of collecting plants and making manipulable medicine, learned to diagnose human afflictions and their proper treatment and



from *Sanapia: Comanche Medicine Woman*, David Jones

assimilated a strict code of ethics. The core of the training emphasized that the Great Spirit operated through the medicine woman. Her training culminated in a four day vision quest, which she failed. She kept the wound of her failure a secret. Overcome by fears of the ghosts that tortured and taunted her at night in the wild, she had crawled back home at dark to hide underneath the porch and returned secretly before daybreak to her place in the wild. As soon as she was blessed by four mentors, she married and had a child – initiating her second phase of life.

Second phase: Sanapia married three times and had several children. After her second husband’s death, she was “roughing it out,” walked on the wild side. She had violent bursts of temper, drank too much, was sexually promiscuous and gambled excessively. These were the years of adulthood, the time of Demeter. Comanche medical training is wise: a time is left open for the healer to be wounded by life before she can heal the wounded herself. I noticed at the Jung Institute that many trainees had found their way there, their souls wounded and their hearts in shreds. In analysis we tried to understand the purpose of our wounding for individuation and we learned that both were intricately intertwined with our calling as Jungian analysts.

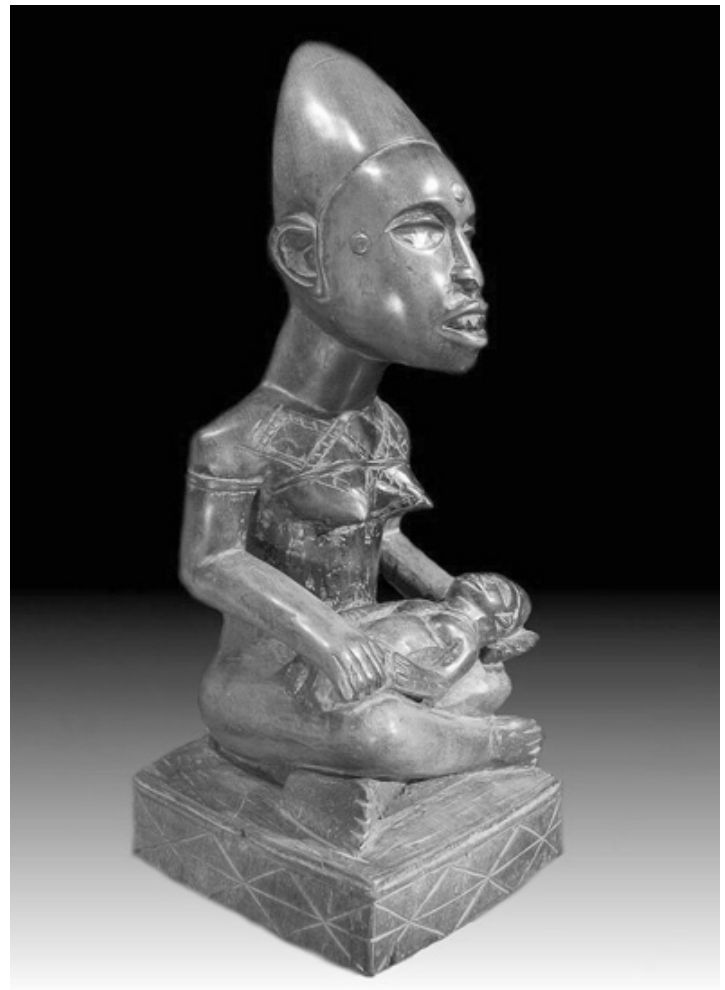
Third phase: Once Sanapia was post menopausal, at about age 50, she began her career as a medicine woman. That was the age of the wise medicine woman, the *puhakut*, the power woman.

At times in my practice, women consult me because they have lost their sense of purpose and meaning: they're about 50ish, the children are gone and often the husbands are gone as well. Sometimes I tell the story of Sanapia. Many of my clients find the idea of returning to the dreams, hopes and plans of their first third of life very encouraging. Often these dreams and hopes had to be sacrificed on the altar of practicality, economic stability and necessary adaptation to collective standards and values. To return to this – often very creative – phase, can result in a new sense of purpose, empowerment, a lightness of being, and a sense of following one's deepest bliss. Not long ago a client, a successful young career woman, confessed that once her children were grown she would want to do some acting – living out a dream she'd had as a young girl! When she explored this fantasy in the safe temenos of my library/practice, I experienced her as being joyfully animated, vibrant and full of life! The example of Sanapia's life can point to joy, animation and meaning that may open up if an older woman dares to follow the calling the adolescent had to forgo. In Jungian terms, we call this building a new relationship with a numinous archetype, the spirit man. It frees creative energies. In this situation, healing means a shift from anxiety and depression to animation, even bliss – a move from the dis-ease of "being less than" toward wholeness, being all you can be.

Although Sanapia's training involved standard instruction in diagnosing and treating illness, as well as the rituals for gathering and preparing herbal medicines, the core of her medicine was about *puha*, power, which in the Comanche tradition is synonymous with medicine and supernatural powers. Significantly, as a *puhakut* she thought of herself as a pitiable supplicant in need of assistance, a conduit of medicine. She prepared stringently and prayerfully in ritual for every session with clients. Those sessions could last for days during which she would totally focus on and devote her life and attention to the sufferer. She did not directly access the healing spirit but appealed to the spirits of her mentors as well as the eagle to access the Great Spirit for help. Her sense of humility and respect are in direct opposition to the Greek concept of hubris, Asclepius' deadly sin. Psychologically understood, hubris is an image for ego inflation due to identification with an archetype – the archetype of the healer in this case. I am reminded of Jung's understanding that healing takes place by the grace of God. Sanapia related with deep respect to her *puha* which she understood could effect good as well as evil. In her Comanche tradition, there is no distinction between a medicine woman/man and a witch/sorcerer: she understood the two sides of the archetype. Medicine is a two-edged sword -- it can cut for good or evil.

Sanapia could not ask for payment for her services as *puhakut*, but if she was paid, she was expected to give away part of the payment in turn, emphasizing her role as a conduit.

Sanapia was embedded in a community that was forced to survive marginally on a reservation away from the American mainstream. On a personal level Sanapia was living at the edge as well. An edge person is one who can navigate between realms, realities, areas of awareness. She was feared due to her proximity to the *puha* of the Great Spirit, which could be benevolent as readily as malevolent. She had the capacity to heal as well as wound, so people would stay clear of her.



Phemba

PHEMBA

About six or seven years ago, when I returned to Switzerland to teach at the Jung Institute, I visited the Museum for Ethnology in St. Gallen and was irresistibly drawn to a small statue of a "mother and child." It showed a woman nursing a grown man in miniature! I sensed a connection between our work as analysts and the nurturing of males – while not literally at our breasts, but offering to them, once they consulted us, some of our essence, which they, in turn, could experience as healing.

"Phemba" or "pfemba" are small (from nine to twenty-one inches in height) wooden "mother and child" figurines from the Yombe region in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The oldest of them date from the time the slave trade intensified (1770 – 1850), a time of profound fracturing and splitting, devastating to the social fabric of the culture. The figurine that captivated my imagination was brought to St. Gallen in 1915.

"Phemba," cultural icons of their region, are thought to have been created with multiple purposes in mind. One interpretation understands the figurines as representations of mothers of fortune tellers, the *ngana diphomba*. These sorceresses had to "kill" the mother before entering their influential office. It is not clear how we are to imagine this process, but psychologically speaking it could be an image for growing up, leaving mother's psychological domain, and becoming independent

individuals, metaphorically “killing” the influence of the womb/mother that can imprison the child and keep it from becoming an independent adult. In my consulting room I have listened to many mothers’ “babies” who were chronologically well beyond childhood, but were toddlers psychologically. Sanapia, in a way, “killed” her mother, or the rules her mother stood for, when she lived on the “wild side.” In other words, she had to become seasoned by life before she could be a powerful *puhakut* in her own right.

The St. Gallen sculpture shows a mother and infant who both wear knitted bonnets – *mpu*. Wearing a hat was a privilege reserved for the oldest wise men. Therefore, it is likely that these icons of Congolese art may be representations of powerful queens.

“Phemba” are tied to two more cults. The 19th century *mpemba* woman’s cult was concerned with womanly issues such as fertility, infertility and childbirth, and focused on midwifery and witchcraft. The *lemba* cult, which arose during the slave trade period, and whose members were of the wealthy elite, was concerned with healing. From travelers’ reports of long ago, powerful women would literally offer their breasts to select men, adopting them, accepting them as clients! The connection between women’s cults, sorcery and the healing of grown men jumped out at me. Understood symbolically, the giving of one’s milk is like giving of the essence of life-sustaining female energy: it is nurturing and can still a primal basic psychological hunger. In this kind of healing powerful, independent women healers are giving of their essence. Psychologically speaking -- and this sounds dry and pedestrian in comparison to the richly emotive response these figurines elicit -- if an analyst works with the transference and counter-transference, is she not giving of the essence of herself in service of healing and wholeness of her client? And is her client not imbibing the spirit of the anima in her soul-nurturing aspect?

The little figure from St. Gallen is represented very realistically: she sits on her haunches, turned a bit to the side, her legs slightly bent to the left as she offers the infant/man her left breast. Her gaze seems to see things that are far away and she strikes us as sternly majestic, orienting along lodestars that are beyond the visible realm. It is this profound connection to the spiritual realm that flows from her breast to the man and I think it is this kind of healing these little sculptures portray.

CONJUR WOMAN

In 2004 I saw a retrospective of the painter Romare Bearden’s work. An African-American himself, he focused on his traditions and the fragmentation of the African culture that resulted when Africans were introduced as slaves to America and eventually to the American mainstream. I was intrigued and drawn to a recurring female figure which stirred powerful, strange emotions in me. Bearden called this figure Conjur Woman. The word brings to mind conjurer’s tricks, the magical arts and the summoning of evil or benevolent spirits.

As I learned over time, Conjur Woman is the representation of a spirit-figure. She is critical to African-American culture and is primarily associated with the South and the Caribbean, where she is often called Obeah woman. Obeah is thought of as black magic derived from the beliefs of the Yoruba people and also used in religious practices in the Carib-

bean Spiritual Baptist Church.

Bearden’s thinking was deeply influenced by Joseph Campbell’s work. He was particularly stirred by *The Flight of the Wild Gander* and *The Masks of God*. Reading Campbell’s work stimulated Bearden’s concern with myth, history and narrative. In the catalogue for the exhibit, Bearden talks about “... my continuing interest in the prevalence of ritual. That is, as a young boy in the Baptist Church, I’d hear many sermons around such Biblical happenings as ... Noah’s Ark. What I’ve tried to do is show the continuing relationship of these myths throughout the years” (p. 83). Conjur Woman embodies a tradition that connects women, healing and a higher power. She is a figure both menacing and emblematic of spirits. She is called on to prepare love potions, cure illnesses and assist in all manner of personal problems. Her medicine is based on knowledge of healing practices from the African past blended with Native American wisdom. Conjur Woman is “magic woman in nature” and was greatly feared. Like Sanapia, a Conjur Woman understands herself to be a conduit of Loa, a powerful spirit or deity that visits her. Sanapia as well as Conjur Woman is deeply and mysteriously connected to rituals borne out of their culture. The meanings of the rituals for Sanapia, Phemba and Conjur Woman are complex, and in the cases of Sanapia and Conjur Woman they are rooted in multiple cultures and time periods. Bearden shows the fracturing and bleeding of cultures and religions in his powerful portrayals of Conjur Woman, in images of brokenness, fragmentation, of wounds and overwhelming suffering. Conjur Woman forces us to look at the closeness of the witch and the healer in the Woman Healer archetype as well as the suffering conjure women endure.

MS. ELLA LOUIS, CAJUN *TRAITEUSE*

I learned of Ms. Ella Louise, *traiteuse* in Ville Platte, Louisiana, only very recently and by “chance” from a friend; she is my last example of a woman healer for this paper. She was 77 years old in 1997, so I am not sure whether she is still alive today. She embodies the tradition of the Cajun healers who are called *traiteur/traiteuse* -- the terms are used interchangeably.

She reports that at age fourteen she had a visit: Jesus Christ and a nun came to her by a river – that’s when she was called to be a *traiteur* – a calling/vocation, a gift as well as a burden. Initially reluctant, she soon followed the call. As an adult she was solidly grounded in everyday life: she raised six nieces as well as her own daughter and son and worked as a cook until she was 72 years old. Cajun healing methods draw from a mixture of cultures from India, Africa and Native Americans with a thick overlay of French Catholicism. Her mother was a Native American and her grandfather a “black Indian.”

In the *traiteur* tradition the balance of masculine and feminine is essential, as an image of holding the opposites. The *traiteur* consciously balances between the light and dark sides of the personality, understanding that where there is good there is evil. Berk Veillon, *traiteur* and counselor in Eunice, Louisiana, points out that *traiteurs* can own their own darkness and that this knowledge in no way diminishes their ability to heal. (This is in contrast to Sanapia, who thought that her healing potential was less because she had failed her vision quest.) A *traiteur* is only a conduit, a “hollow bone” for the power of the

spirit to come through. “It is this power – and not the *traiteur’s* own – that does the healing,” Berk Veillon remarks in his book on Cajun healing. In the Cajun tradition healing takes place by the grace of God. The real challenge for the Cajun *traiteuse* is to empty herself so that the Great Spirit can flow through as a force of healing. It is essential that the *traiteur* do his spiritual preparation before the healing session. Understanding herself as a conduit to allow spiritual forces to do their healing work in combination with being securely grounded in everyday living are what makes a good healer. *Traiteurs* use some healing paraphernalia such as herbs, candles, tobacco, pipes, snakes and the crucifix. Ms. Ella relies on the cross, the Bible and many pictures of Jesus to help with healing. Had Ms. Ella and Sanapia known each other, they would have agreed that healing is not fun because at times the sufferer’s pain and foul-smelling sickness enter into the woman healer’s body, they literally take on and in the sufferer’s sickness. Like Sanapia, Ms. Ella does not charge a fee but accepts donations in form of money and goods. I believe some conjure women may ask for a donation.

Like the other three woman healers I have presented, Ms. Ella’s practice puts her on the outside of the mainstream American medical community. With a history of being dispersed from their homeland and dropped into a foreign culture, Sanapia, Ms. Ella and conjure women shy away from the limelight, protecting themselves, conscious that their practices might draw skepticism and ridicule from members of the establishment.

The following characteristics seem most significant, especially in comparison to present day medical practices where doctors often see many dozens of patients a day, employ specialists dealing with insurance reimbursement and pay fabulous sums to insurance companies to cover them in case of lawsuits. Eros is palpably absent in a doctor’s office, and hubris often is just as palpably present when we see one of the “Gods in White.” Like all archetypes, the archetype of the Woman Healer can constellate in men as well as women. This would mean that some of the following characteristics of the Woman Healer could become available to today’s busy doctors:

1. **An understanding of being conduits for a divine power flow which can be healing.** Stated in Jungian terms: the ego Self axis is activated. Spiritual preparation for healing is crucial for Sanapia, conjure women and Ms. Ella. Their special rituals are intended to make the healer as “hollow bones.” How these healers understand and prepare for healing seems dependent not only on their specific cultures but is individually coined as well. Their closeness to powerful archetypal energies makes others weary of them. They are ambiguous edge persons, loners: sought when needed and avoided otherwise.
2. **Wounding of the healer.** Sanapia and Ms. Ella are wounded by a fully lived life. “Phemba” and Conjur Woman are wounded by cultural splits and changes. In all examples, be it giving of their essence (“Phemba”), internalization (Ms. Ella and Conjur Woman) and/or literally ingesting the sufferer’s illness (Sanapia), there is a profound personal relationship between the sufferer and the healer based on the healer’s own woundedness.

3. **Payment – fees – sacrifice.** Sanapia and Ms. Ella understand that the proper honoring of the healing spirit does require a ritual offering, a sacrifice from the sufferer. I’m not sure that some conjure women don’t ask for a gift, and I don’t know enough about “Phemba” to make assumptions.
4. **The healing of the body takes place through the mind.** The underlying assumption is that body and spirit or mind are not separate and distinct. Medical schools in our culture, on the other hand, teach how to cure pathologies of the body. They are not concerned with the mind/spirit or soul of the patient.
5. **All four types of women healers are not part of an establishment.** Their traditions allow for their existence at the edge of their culture. On the collective level, the identity of their social group is not part of the surrounding collective. Neither the individuals nor their culture “belong.”

When Germans inquire about another’s dis-ease, they ask the same potentially redemptive question today it took Parsifal a lifetime to pronounce: “*Was fehlt Dir?*” ... “What is missing in your life?” The zoning inspectors’ visit reminded me of the story of Philemon and Baucis, the elderly couple living at the edge of town, who had a surprise visit by two beggars. They fed them and washed their feet only to learn that the “beggars” were in reality gods – Zeus and his son Hermes – who had come as outsiders to be acknowledged, cherished even. What is missing and needs to be cherished in our practice as Jungian analysts? Can it be that in these our godless days, the archetypal energies of the Self, searching for manifestation, can be detected, if we are to look more deeply, in symptoms, in pathologies even disguised as zoning inspectors? Their sudden appearance lead to my exploration of the archetype of the Woman Healer and its connection to my vocation. These women healers exemplify that a healer is empowered by and must understand herself to be in service of what Jungians call the Self. And in that sense the zoning inspectors’ ring at my doorbell had its own mysterious purposes which found their sediment in this paper and in changing the emphasis in my relationships with my clients ■

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