



The Grail Legend

by Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz

report by Van Waddy

Jarl Jung remained faithful to his wife Emma in one way only serious scholars can understand: He promised never to talk or write about the Grail Legend, as Emma Jung spent thirty years of her life researching the Grail story. She died in 1955 before she could finish and publish her work. In keeping with his promise to her, Jung asked Marie-Louise von Franz to complete his wife's lifelong endeavor. **The Grail Legend**, by Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz, is the result of this joint feminine circumambulation around the archetype of the Self.

Theirs is a psychological consideration of the Grail legend based on meticulous research – with countless multi-layered side-bars interwoven like an iridescent thread – reaching as far back as Celtic and pre-Christian Eastern sources around the eighth or ninth century, focusing mainly on two main texts from the twelfth century, the work of Chretien de Troyes and of Robert de Boron.

The semi-historical, semi-legendary King Arthur and his knights of the Roundtable form the back drop of this story of

Perceval's quest for and encounter with the Grail. Arthur is traced back to sources dating from the fifth or sixth century when Britain endured the Saxon invasion, but it is Chretien's and Boron's inclusion of Arthur and his knights in connection with the Grail that embody, for Emma Jung, "the psychological expression of an extraordinary stirring of the unconscious" at that time, transforming "the popular fairy tale of a simpleton into a mystical religious quest" that inevitably "addresses the religious problem of modern man."

It would be impossible, within the scope of this report, to do homage to these women's 400 pages of conscientious research and insight. Each motif, each connecting story within the story, each invitation to deeper reflection defies my ability to contain its completeness. I can only share the thrill of my own experience of how the Grail legend captures my personal imagination.

The story is fairytale material. The Grail—a mysterious,

Van Waddy is a family and couples therapist with a practice in Atlanta.

life-preserving and sustenance-dispensing vessel—is guarded by a king in a castle that is “difficult to find.” The king is either old or suffering (different versions of the same story) from some mysterious wound and his kingdom is devastated. The king can only be restored to health if a knight of conspicuous excellence finds the castle and, seeing what goes on there, asks a certain question. Perceval thinks himself up to the task and sets out on the quest. He fails to ask the question “about the origin of evil, the king’s wound, and about the Grail’s meaning” the first time he encounters the Grail Castle and the Grail. As in all fairy tales and myths, there *is* a second chance. Perceval prevails.

The Grail Castle, “the castle difficult to find,” is the timeless dimension, concealed from view – for our authors, an archetypal concept of the unconscious. The Grail, available only to one worthy to share in what it offers, is thought by some to be the vessel which held the Christ’s blood (his essence, his soul substance), hidden by Joseph of Arimathea after the Christ’s death. This vessel, for Jung, “signifies the whole psychic man as a realization of divinity reaching right down into matter”. She identifies this, in Jungian terms, as the Self—that inner guide that is God’s voice, “the hidden disposition to wholeness which slumbers in the depths of the unconscious of each person.” The Grail story is itself a projection of the Self as an inner center, unrealized by and inaccessible to those trapped in the medieval mindset.

“The story of Perceval anticipates psychic problems reaching so far into the future that it could not be wholly comprehended by the medieval attitude.” The medieval world, represented by the ailing king in our story, suffered from a “one-sided insistence on the light side of the God image (in the Christ figure) and so cast off its shadow – the Anti-Christ, its individual inner opposite – outwardly onto barbarian opponents instead of being able to integrate it.”

Arthur’s knights led a life of “high virtue” which led to pride and was perverted into evil. There was a “too intense, one-sided spirituality of the feminine found in the Cult of the Virgin,” without a balanced genuine relationship with the actual women in their personal lives. “There was a drifting apart of the opposites of spirit and world, of spiritual matters and worldly matters, choosing holiness instead of humanity.”

This problem of opposites and the failure to recognize and integrate the shadow were responsible for the king’s sickness (the king representing the dominant collective consciousness). The old king had to die, or the ailing king had to be restored, redeemed, before the land could be freed from its present state. “It is as if the dark aspect of divinity had attacked him in order to awaken him to a more conscious religious attitude.” Until he grappled with the dark divinity—like Jacob and Job before him—he could not come to a realization of the totality of the God-image.



he Grail “signifies a stage of development of the human spirit, when man is no longer satisfied with the materialistic view or with the effectiveness of working things, but goes beyond this and endows the concrete with a symbolic meaning.” This requires the ability to reflect, to discern, to place value. In this respect, the Grail can be compared to the Feeling Function, our ability to discriminate between good and evil that reaches beyond the world’s perspective of these. It means rediscovering the soul of

nature, the incarnate God.

It would be misleading not to mention that Perceval went on many a misguided adventure, lost many battles, made wrong turns in the woods, and, certainly, didn’t ask the question – suffered from his own wounded Feeling Function – when he had the chance. All of these adventures are explored and given their true place. The journey is not a straight line. We all know about that.

The Grail, says Jung, is the principle of individuation available within each person. “As threads of fabric are woven into a pattern, so the Self as a living garment of divinity is woven out of the many decisions and crises, in themselves possibly insignificant, by which we are affected in the course of our lives.” Individuation comes one person at a time, not to the collective, “for only in the individual are opposites reconciled and united.” I take from this that I, personally, cannot wait for the collective to come to an awareness of what is important to heal our earth, to come to consciousness, to discover the truth behind the illusions we worship.

Perceval’s quest, spiral though it was, was that of “redeeming the Spirit of God in matter, under the guidance of the Self, the ‘inner Christ’ . . . to discover the form in which the essential psychic life of Christ continues to exist and what that means.” This Grail is concerned with “carrying on Christ’s effectiveness *in this world*,” as a vessel through which the divine can have its way.

But Perceval had to ask the question, discern the value and importance of what he saw around him. “To whom is the Grail brought?” and “Whom does the Grail serve?” seem to be the archetypal tipping point of the story. The Grail is brought to the Old Grail King; the goal of the quest is death to the old king (not just finding the Grail) – death to the dominant collective consciousness of the day and to the one-sided god image it maintains. With the secret words spoken and Perceval’s royal ancestry revealed, the Grail is placed in his care. In the story’s version with the ailing King, the ailing King, along with his kingdom, is temporarily restored.

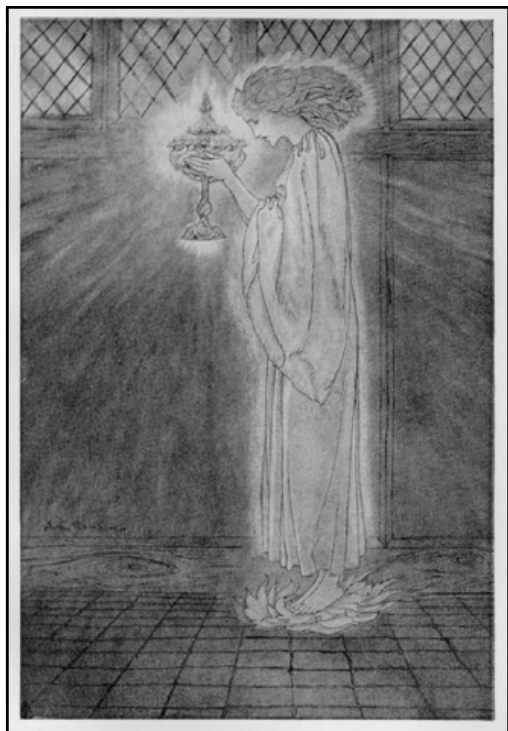


ung points out that Perceval didn’t himself complete the arch. He remained at the Grail Castle and did not choose to take the Grail back to Arthur’s court. Is not the hero supposed to return with the boon? Because of this, the Grail disappeared with his death, went back into concealment. For our authors, this means that the archetypal Grail remains in the unconscious of each living person, available as an inner guide, the voice of the divine, inviting each of us to our individual completeness.

“Individuation, when seen from the ‘other’ (archetypal) side actually depicts the process of the incarnation of the divine.”

To ask the question, “Whom does the Grail serve?” is to ask, perhaps, Whom does the Self serve? Does the Self serve that ultimate Wholeness of which we each participate? Does the Self come in the service of that numinous experience we each encounter once or twice in a lifetime that feeds our hunger for deeper connection with life? Is the Self available to continue the incarnation of the divine in whatever form it happens to be evolving in the universe?

Encountering the Grail imposes a question on the beholder, say our authors, it does not impart direct knowledge. The Grail “gives us an emotional readiness to receive,” a numinous experience of our inner center, the Self. I remember Carl Jung, in



Memories Dreams, Reflections, speaking of life addressing a question to him: “Or, conversely, I myself am a question which is addressed to the world, and I must communicate my answer; otherwise I am dependent on the world’s answer.” The Self asks a question of us unique to our personal destiny or daimon.

Our authors use the characters of Perceval and Gauvain to urge us to listen to our own inner nature and not to be distracted by what the world thinks we ought to be doing. Perceval, the Introvert, gets dazzled and distracted from his mission by Arthur’s court and the colorful knights: “An unreflective Perceval (not asking the question, not accessing his Introverted Feeling Function) is a Perceval cut off from the true source of his inner being.” His extroverted activity, without reflection on the true value of what he experienced, drains and weakens him.

Gauvain, the great Christian hero and Extrovert, fights unreflectively in the story for what is recognized by the community to be right. He falls asleep when the time comes for him to use his Feeling Function, reflect on what is happening around him. Eventually, Perceval “hangs back, seeks the ‘lost God’ and his own soul,” gets back in touch with his Introverted Feeling Function and *can* ask the question. I, too, get out of sorts when I do not make time for my inner life, if I am too danced around by the colorful extroversion of the outer world. Jung and von Franz make the distinction between “the uninterrupted chain of outer events versus making time to reflect on one’s experiences” as vital for both introverts and extroverts in the process of individuation.

I have only scratched the surface here of Emma Jung’s life endeavor and Marie-Louise von Franz’ generous contribution to Jungian thought. Their book has an entire exploration of the doctrine of the Trinity and their transformation of it into a quaternity – Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and Mary (The Grail) and the Feminine Feeling Function. They introduce a section on Merlin as the image of the whole man, as the one who points to the unconscious and past it to the wholeness beyond opposites. It is beyond the scope of this paper to include

these important explorations.

I was moved to incorporate metaphors to reframe so-called Christian ones. I love thinking of the Self as rich in second chances (Perceval gets that second chance, as we all do, over and over). I am moved to more trust in the incarnating power of the Self in each of us as a purposeful movement of the divine in our midst. I wander around our authors’ notion that the origin of evil (the shadow) and the dark side of God are questions still to be solved by post-modern man.

I was pulled to read this work because of Robert Johnson’s love affair with Perceval and the Grail Legend that dates from around 1987 when he first began talking about it as his platform for exploring Western Man’s Wounded Feeling Function. Emma Jung was his analyst in Zurich and he took a course on the Grail Legend from her. I am indebted to Robert for pointing the way and indebted to Emma Jung for her passionate search that reaches beyond the grave. I am also moved by Carl Jung’s fidelity to his wife in the one way he could truly honor her.

I am grateful, too, for your fidelity in wandering with me through this lengthy report ■

Poetry by Jack Hayes

BLACKBERRY PRAYER

God, grant me your prolific root,
that I may spread the good by branching.
Let me poke up through the sidewalks,
under fences, in the wasted places
and of course in flower gardens
side-by-side the daffodil and dahlia.

Let me intermarry like the Irish
and the German, Jew and Christian,
like the African and Cuban.

Teach me, teach me ways of blossoming
that I may be resplendent
though my legs are little more than canes
and cannot stand for long.

I ask you, let me reach with sweetness,
let me offer up my treasure,
let me serve myself to hungry passersby.

Yes, let the birds, let even turtles taste of me,
for I am all I am and nothing more.

Yet I am nothing, nothing less than wonderful.

Jack Hayes is a poet and a journalist for more than three decades. A collection of his poems won the 1992 Georgia Poetry Circuit award and in 1993, he was a recipient of the Rainmaker Award. Jack recently became Georgia's first Certified Poetry Therapist. He is currently completing an MSW internship with placements at Dekalb Addiction Clinic and a pilot program at the Rockdale County Juvenile Court system.