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THE WISDOM OF MARION WOODMAN

Judy Zappacosta
Monterey, California, USA

Internationally known Jungian Analyst Marion Woodman died on July 9, 2018 just before her 90th birthday. She left a large community of professionals who were her students, former analysands, friends and colleagues. She lived a full life leaving profound contributions to the understanding of body, mind, and soul. She was prolific in her writings on feminine psychology, the relationship between men and women, and leaves a legacy of books, videos, and interviews regarding the nature of psyche and the body. She developed C.G. Jung’s ideas in areas of imagination, creativity, metaphor, and the integration of shadow and addictions. Perhaps her most important contribution was highlighting Jung’s premise that psyche and matter were inseparable. She furthered Jung’s ideas regarding how psyche could be defined. She dedicated much of her writing and teaching to help others embody and relate to conscious feminine and masculine archetypes in a healthy balanced way. She was earthy, related, and very wise in her teachings, appealing to both women and men.

I attended my first Body/Soul Rhythms intensive with Marion Woodman at Pajaro Dunes along the California coast in 1996. At that time, I had already read two of her books, Addiction to Perfection (1982) and Leaving my Father’s House (1992), and had found her writing spoke deeply to me on a personal level.
During intensives, Marion would use the morning sessions to lecture and take dreams that might have meaning for the group. I soon realized the language she spoke was very similar to listening to Dora Kalff speak regarding the meaning of symbols in a sandplay process, and how the tension of opposites may have opportunity to find resolution and transcendence. When Marion spoke of the dreams, she offered the same tone and language as Dora Kalff. It was a joy to hear a teacher who again held wisdom of the unconscious, metaphor, and symbol, as well as offering a map of understanding regarding the path of individuation.

Conscious femininity, finding one’s authentic voice, integrating shadow, revering the mystery within psyche, trusting the body’s instinctual knowledge, were all parts of Marion’s gifted teaching. Along with Mary Hamilton, Ann Skinner, and Paula Reeves, the four teachers set up a myriad of experiential exercises to bring Jung’s ideas and Marion’s discovery of body/soul relationship into real practice. The study of dreams, body work, sounding with the voice, art, poetry, and mask-making filled out a two-week intensive that often carried particular archetypal themes and fairytales.

One of the other ways Marion brought Jung’s ideas to fruition some fifty years later was to show how politics and culture today mirrored Jungian theories, some even more profoundly now then earlier. She often used theatre, movies, and current news events in order to weave an understanding that brought archetypal significance to people’s lives.

In *The Maiden King* (1998), a book she co-wrote with Robert Bly, she grappled with the idea of projection:

A projection is like an arrow. Unconscious content in ourselves sees someone or something in the outer world to which is says Yes or No. The arrow flies to the target. Part of us is then hooked into that person or thing... The ego, unless it is very conscious, has no control over the content or the direction of the flight. If the arrow carries big voltage (archetypal projection) the dynamic between arrow and target may be electric... If the arrow is rejected by the target, such rejection has created some of the greatest love poetry, music, art, drama, and ballet in the world. (Bly & Woodman, 1998)

Marion’s ideas regarding the reclaiming of projections and shadow were exemplified in geopolitics and culture. She gave many examples from Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev’s achievement of a new détente through removal of projection onto each other’s countries in the early 1980s. She spoke at length regarding the marriage of Princess Diana and Prince Charles. Marion could easily
describe the fairytale wedding, the cherishing mother, and how the shadow began to emerge that would overtake Diana’s life as stories of an unhappy, neglected childhood emerged. In Diana’s death, Marion explained, she had ultimately rejected the projections of perfection. Diana, she said, had found her voice before her death, and had taken on the dynasty of Windsor single-handedly. To hear Marion discuss projection, shadow, addiction through that lens was profound. And then, as her predecessor before her, Louise von Franz, Marion tied Diana’s life story to a fairytale, the story of the Maiden King. The richness in metaphors is spellbinding in the text.

Marion wrote of the millions of women who took their young daughters to say good-bye to Diana, the princess who took on the patriarchy of Windsor, and brought feeling values to the forefront helping to differentiate feminine and masculine values. Woodman showed how Diana reflected values that were missing in the world, and that we still now in 2018 are currently wrestling with. Woodman wrote about how even Diana’s brother’s eulogy brought out a renewed image of the feminine, one who could not be rebuked by a removal of any title. In the collective of a grieving nation in the UK, a new living image emerged, a “pin” as in The Maiden King, had been removed. There was a renewal of the feminine happening on television screens, according to Woodman that reflected a mother, lover, seductress, and humanitarian, with both strength and courage. And yet, Woodman wrote, she was also a flawed human being just doing the best she could. “We are both animal and divine” (Bly & Woodman, 1998).

There are many ways to reach the voice of Marion Woodman, and her legacy of teachings. Many of us continue to teach using the exercises Woodman brought into her own intensives. The Dance of Three was one of those pieces that I continue to bring into my own teaching in sandplay intensives. Sandplay therapists know the importance of containment, mirroring, safety and protection. When Chopin’s Nocturne #12 is played, a Mover/Dancer is asked to move freely being both mirrored and contained by two other people. In five minutes, a participant is offered a visceral experience of a safe and protected space, with a direct sense of containment. It’s a powerful exercise, and a powerful somatic memory that lives on in the body for anyone who experiences it. With methodology grounded from her years as an English teacher, Marion Woodman was able to impart both ideas and practices that she encouraged her students to build upon in their own areas of expertise. She saw many ways to integrate her work into fields outside psychology. As neuroscience brought new explanations of how the brain and body integrated experiences, she sought out those who were doing cutting edge work in the field to both teach with and learn from.
Woodman will be profoundly missed by those who were touched by her teachings, as well as those who just discovered her books, and her writings. Many people say she gave language to feelings they had never been able to voice.

Fortunately, we can still share in the legacy she left, and work with ideas she found so meaningful in her own life. Marion Woodman brought Jung’s volumes, the Nietzsche Seminars, to the women who trained with her, naming it as the Leadership Training Groups, at once telling us that this might be “dangerous” work to take up. She lectured that Nietzsche’s ideas had been hijacked by many, and most blatantly by Adolf Hitler during World War II. She also knew Jung had been challenged for anti-semitism post war around the ideas he had brought up around Nietzsche. But Woodman found the seminars Jung offered on Nietzsche’s life were the closest he came to writing directly about the necessity for integration of body and psyche. For that reason, she felt it was very important to discuss and understand the Nietzsche seminars which had taken place with his students between 1934-1939. Nietzsche’s ideas were ground-breaking at the time, however he struggled on a physical level with many illnesses and emotional issues. Jung believed Nietzsche was unable to hold relationship between his mind and body, therefore, he was unable to hold the important balance of psyche and matter as a totality. Jung also feared for his own psychic wellness as he wrestled with his own inner psychology, and rightfully so, based on the later reproduction of Jung’s Red Book.

Marion Woodman believed that the seminar series between Jung and his students was very worthy of consideration again, in the years between 2000-2010. She believed the split that Jung has considered in Nietzsche’s life, as well as his own, deserved attention again, as the collective unconscious in Western Civilization seemed to be mirroring the same split, only deeper, culturally, politically and psychologically.

With a keen eye on the cultural and psychological perspectives, Woodman was very adept at showing the task of holding a huge tension of opposites
between ideas and somatic well-being. She believed western cultures' identification with the rational one-sided way of life was leading to more and more addictions, illness, and depression, and a deep imbalance between masculine and feminine elements.

Today, we see the huge divide growing deeper, more challenging and dangerous. The frame that Woodman left in much of her writings offers a way of living through a challenging piece of time by being present, compassionate, active, and always gentle with one’s own animal body.

REFERENCES

About the author:
JUDY D. ZAPPACOSTA, MA, MFT, CST-T, is an emerita member of the STA board of trustees and past member of the ISST board of trustees. She serves as associate editor of the Journal of Sandplay Therapy. She has been in private practice for many years; the focus of her practice is Jungian psychotherapy, sandplay, dreams, and the integration of psyche and soma. She consults and supervises therapists using sandplay, and has published and taught both nationally and internationally. Her publications include *Developing Therapeutic Language in Supervision of Sandplay Therapy,* H. Friedman & R.R. Mitchell, Eds (2008); *Sandplay Therapy: A Way of Rediscovering Inner Wisdom in Body & Psyche in Expressive Therapies for Sexual Issues,* S. Loue, Ed. (2013); *Pearls: Defining Moments in Our Lives,* J. Zappacosta, Ed. (2014), as well as various articles in the *Journal of Sandplay Therapy.* She completed the BodySoul Rhythms® Leadership Training Program with the Marion Woodman Foundation. Judy Zappacosta is a founder of Caring for the Soul conferences. CORRESPONDENCE: www.JudyZappacostaMFT.com
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A Reflection by Judy Zappacosta

Monterey, California, USA


ABSTRACT: Judy Zappacosta comments on Marion Woodman’s contributions that furthered ideas regarding soma and psyche. Woodman’s deep connection to Jung’s ideas formed the foundation of her own work. In reflection upon her death, Woodman is remembered for her legacy of writings that offered many a voice for their inner struggles with addiction, perfection, body image, dreams, and metaphors. Remembering her ability to weave fairytale and life’s dramas, Woodman and Robert Bly used the story of the Maiden King to exemplify projections, symbols, metaphor, and transformation.
About the artist

SHERYL HUMPHREY, is a painter and writer in Staten Island, NY. She did two years’ undergraduate study at Yale University, received her BFA from Virginia Commonwealth University, was awarded The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Graduate Fellowship in Painting in 1982, and earned her MFA degree at Brooklyn College in 1998. She has exhibited extensively in New York and across the US. Her paintings are included in many public, private, and corporate collections, including Prudential Insurance, the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, and the Williamsburg Art & Historical Center in Brooklyn. The artist says of her work: “My paintings are representations of powerful forces that I sense within myself, in others, and in the world around me. I sometimes think of these paintings as portraits of the spirits of Nature; they reflect my visions of anthropomorphized energies at work in the universe. Herbalism, alchemy, folklore, and mythology, in conjunction with close contact with Nature in my garden, are sources for the subjects of my paintings.” Ms. Humphrey is the author of The Haunted Garden: Death and Transfiguration in the Folklore of Plants (2012), available at http://www.etsy.com/listing/118819081/. Ghosts and gardens also figure in her writings, which have been included in anthologies published by Egaeus Press. See more of her work at http://sherylhumphrey.tumblr.com/
CORRESPONDENCE: brainiacbooks@gmail.com.