

The Snake, the Dragon and the Tree, by John Layard, Kitchener, Carisbrooke Press, 2008, 300 pp., US\$44.00 (paperback), ISBN: 978-4251-8889-4.

Upon receiving this book, the first question I asked myself was: Why is this book different from other published case histories? The answer that occurred to me was: Because its author may be the most interesting and least known of the early Jungian analysts.

John Willoughby Layard (1891-1974) is one of those characters in the Jungian hagiography who has been relegated to the wings while deserving stage center. According to Peter Redgrove, Layard, a creative genius with a flare for the rebellious, was 'somewhat feared in analytical circles'. (Redgrove, 1980, n.p.) In his obituary of Layard, Michael Fordham wrote that 'nobody could fail to recognize the brilliance of his insights, and his deft and erudite management of symbolic material'. (Fordham, 1976, p.217)

Layard was, first of all, an anthropologist. In 1914, he was one of a group of professors and students which included Alfred C. Haddon (who coined the term 'fieldwork') and his students, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski, who traveled to the South Pacific, stopping on Atchin, Malekula in the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu). Layard remained there for a year, immersing himself in the native language, culture and myths, being especially interested in the standing stones of that island.

One of the first ethnologists to use methods of 'participant observation', a technique of immersion in a culture instead of more scientifically acceptable disinterested observation, Layard later recognized aspects of 'participant observation' in psychology's theory of transference, fueling his interest to become an analyst. In addition, he remained on Atchin because of his interest in diffusion --the migration of images, symbols and practices-- as opposed to indigenous cultural evolution.

Layard returned to England exhausted, aggravated by the mental breakdown and death of his father. After receiving a PhD in Anthropology from Cambridge, he lived in Berlin, Zurich, Edinburgh, and finally settled in Oxford. Experiencing bouts of depression, he once attempted suicide by shooting himself in the mouth. To his surprise, he survived. Holding a handkerchief to the wound, (according to Edward Mendelson, 1980, n.p.), Layard 'went to (the poet W.H.) Auden's flat to beg that he (finish him off). Far from shutting the door in Layard's face (as some reports had it), Auden took him in and, as (Auden) recorded in his journal, 'had to kiss him and disliked it'. (In a personal communication to J. Pitt-Rivers, the distinguished anthropologist Sir Evans-Pritchard said, 'Of course John Layard's mad. He put a bullet through his head and it made no difference. He must be mad.' (MacClancy, 1986, p.65.)

Layard tried analysis, unsuccessfully, with several Freudian therapists, including Wilhelm Stekel. Then, in 1936, he was introduced to C.G. Jung, who was in London to give the Tavistock Lectures. Perhaps Jung was interested in Layard because *he* originally wanted to be an archaeologist. Whatever the reason, Jung accepted Layard as an analysand. A stormy on-again off-again relationship ensued. In one incident,

Jung refused to accept the transference of a homosexual dream Layard had recounted, telling him, 'We cannot discuss that.' (Layard, "Autobiography II" p.316 unpublished) In fact, Jung 'was interested more in learning about anthropology than in the state of Layard's psyche.' (MacClancy, 1986, p.56)

After working with several analysts, including Jolande Jacobi and C.A. Meier, Layard began his own practice. Victor White, one of his early patients, called him, 'The Magician.' Despite Jung and Layard's contentious relationship, in *The Psychology of the Transference*, Jung quotes Layard's work on the patrilineal and matrilineal moieties in Malekula as being important to his own theories on incest, writing that Layard 'regards the endogamous (incest) tendency as a genuine instinct which, if denied realization in the flesh, must realize itself in the spirit.' (p.66) Jung also footnotes Layard's essay, 'The Incest Taboo' (the editors allowed Layard to add his corrections to Jung's manuscript in brackets (Jung, 1989, p.64. n.25).

Layard took 25 years to produce his classic anthropological work, *Stone Men of Malekula*. In 1944, The Guild of Pastoral Psychology published his fascinating lecture, 'Incarnation and Instinct'. His other works include *The Lady of the Hare*, *The Virgin Archetype*, and *A Celtic Quest*. However, many of his notebooks, along with many manuscripts, including an autobiography, are yet to be published. In one unpublished paper, aptly titled, 'The Wounded Healer,' Layard addressed the reason why he left so much of his work uncompleted:

There is a possessive mother in all of us which tries to keep the spirit bound and will not let it free...This is the reason why the 'mothers' of so many 'gods'...die in childbirth, that is to say, abandon their claims to possessiveness from the outset, leaving the spirit-child so often to be suckled by animals uninfluenced by man's false notions of his own superiority.

I first came upon John Layard's writing 20 years ago, while researching the vast infrastructure of nuclear weapons development, manufacturing and (in the past) testing in New Mexico, for a museum exhibition for which I wrote forty texts inspired by the photographs of Patrick Nagatani, then a professor at The University of New Mexico. One of Nagatani's collaged pictures, titled 'Radium Springs', included 'white stones, marking a boy and his dog planted yew green high'. I went on to write: 'All children are hybrids of the boundless wild son, transforming sow into boar... With Mother bathing in tangled growth, hell-dog pet 'heads blindly for the bone.' Facing Seahrimir's last stronghold, son's boiled every night, reborn every day' (Weishaus, 1991, www.cddc.vt.edu/host/weishaus/Deeds/radium.htm) — lines inspired by Layard's *A Celtic Quest*.

Because I couldn't burden the prose poems with too much research, I developed a paratext, in which I elaborated white stones as 'the boundary between this world and the world beyond...white because that boundary is also the boundary of light and life', while 'The yew tree, or his branches, are symbolic of sorrow, death, or resurrection'. (Weishaus, 1991, www.cddc.vt.edu/host/weishaus/Deeds/radium-p.htm) Finally, I quoted from *A Celtic Quest*:

The thicket is a Great Mother symbol, particularly in connection with the boar hunt; there the boar turns at bay for its last self-defence before its death, and as such is

commonly met with in classical literature. It is a tangled growth of an almost impenetrable complexity which can be a refuge for wild animals, but can also be a last stronghold from which they attack their pursuers. (Layard, 1988, p.72)

The tusks of wild boars and the mythology of domesticated pigs; the Great Mother and her moon-maidens; the tangle of mythical thickets, and the thorny branches of incestuous relationships, ancient stone men and primitive kinship systems, are among the countless subjects that fascinated John Layard in his guises as anthropologist and Jungian psychologist.

Now there is 'the Mary Book', the working title of Layard's notes, beginning around 1950, on a orphaned woman in her mid-twenties whom he began to analyze and, indeed, he and his wife cared for and employed in their home, whose psyche he artfully unfolds in this newly published book, edited by Anne Bosch. Mary, the pseudonym Layard chose, was born around 1925. The only child of a pastor father and a schizophrenic mother, she grew up in rural England in a household of maiden aunts, two of whom were intermittently psychotic. Mary was home-schooled and spent most of her days playing by herself in the walled rectory garden, 'her Garden of Eden'. By the time she was in her early twenties, both her father --her 'perfect man'-- and her mother had died. After having and losing several jobs, 'chance', Layard writes, 'led her into analysis, (by which time) she had already reached the stage of the drooping half-open mouth, The vagueness and vacancy of her look corresponded well to the vacancy of her mind with regard to external happenings' (p.1).

What saved her, Layard contends, was a rich fantasy life coupled with an ability to project her fantasies into over 300 paintings, forty of which Layard brilliantly elaborates in this generously illustrated book. After several years of intensive analysis with Layard, and further intermittent sessions, Mary successfully trained as a psychiatric nurse, eventually becoming a Head Nurse in a London psychiatric hospital.

Both Jung and Layard trained as scientists. Both were also original thinkers who grew up in a Christian environment in which they felt constricted, and obligated to explore, blending it into the shapes and colors of their own imagination. Thus, while deftly guiding Mary's fantasies toward a more rewarding psychic and physical life, Layard had a larger project in mind; that is, of dealing with 'snake', 'dragon' and 'tree' as mythological symbols of psychic functions. 'The snake,' he writes, 'symbolizes the opposite dynamic principle of spirit and adventure, and 'knows', for it also stands for the spirit of individuation as the growing point of her personality.' 'The dragon, on the contrary, symbolizes the principle of division that wishes to keep everything apart. It is the most complex of these three main aspects of her psychic structure', while '(t)he tree symbolizes that aspect of her that is indeed uprooted and needs rotting in mother earth' (pp.3-4).

Of course, these are just the superficial beginning notes of Layard's mythologically deep and wide-ranging analysis of Mary's life-giving fantasies, examined mainly through her pictures. For, as Rudolf Michel wrote, 'if an analysand merely says the word 'bull', he evokes in the analyst his own image of a bull, but if she draws a bull, the analyst sees which aspects of the analysand's bull image are developed and which are not.' (Michael, 1964, p.69) Michel also speaks of 'the mood and feeling content

which can be expressed by colors...’ (Ibid.) Layard also addresses the feeling colors evoke. For example, he writes that, ‘(t)he colour purple is a disturbing one. When it appears in dreams it is always a warning colour which the dreamer or psychotherapist should not ignore’ (p. 27). To me, ‘always’ and ‘should’ are always disturbing; in fact, throughout this book, Layard makes intuitive statements on the symbolism in Mary’s paintings as if they are universal facts. Thus, John Wisdom said of Layard, ‘(I)n some degree he spins the interpretations out of his (own) ‘inner consciousness’’. (Wisdom, 1953, p.69) Of course this could be said of any analyst.

Interestingly, while rereading the manuscript of his book, Layard found a ‘striking correspondence between the symbolical context of some of Mary’s paintings’ and some of the alchemical pictures reproduced in Jung’s *Psychology and Alchemy*. It became apparent to him that ‘there were many more correspondences between the alchemical opus and the modern girl’s struggle to pierce and picture the obscurity of her psychic processes’ (p.14). (I recall here Robert Grinnell’s important book, *Alchemy in a Modern Woman*).

For analysts, anthropologists interested in the processes of the mind, artists and scholars of Jungian studies, *The Snake, the Dragon and the Tree* is a thesaurus of striking images, insights, and brilliant elaborations. Not only is it a valuable contribution to analytical psychology, but it is hopefully a sign that more of Layard’s work will be published in the near future, as well as perhaps an overdue biography of his extraordinary life.

Note: The John Willoughby Layard Papers 1897-1974 are deposited at the Mandeville Special Collections Library, University of California, San Diego. Archive #0175S.

References

- Fordham, M. (1976) *Journal of Analytical Psychology*. July.
- Grinnell, R (1973) *Alchemy in a Modern Woman*. Zurich: Spring Publications.
- Geismar, H. (2009) ‘The Photograph and the Malanggan: Rethinking Images on Malakula, Vanuatu’, *Australian Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 20, 48-73.
- Jung, C.G. (1968) *Psychology and Alchemy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- (1989) *The Psychology of the Transference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Layard, J. (1942) *Stone Men of Malekula* London: Chatto & Windus.
- (1972) *The Virgin Archetype*. Zurich: Spring Publications.
- (1988) *A Celtic Quest*. Dallas: Spring Publications.
- (1988) *The Lady of the Hare*. Boston: Shambhala.
- MacClancy, J. (1986) ‘Unconventional Character and Disciplinary Convention: John Layard, Jungian and Anthropologist’, in G.W. Stocking, Jr.(ed.), *Malinowski, Rivers, Benedict and Others*, Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Mendelson, E. (1980) Letter to *London Review of Books*. 5 June.
- Michel, R. (1964) ‘Pictures in Analytical Psychology’, New York, *Spring Journal*.
- Redgrove, P. (1980) Letter to *London Review of Books*, 15 May.
- Weishaus, J. (1991) ‘The Deeds and Sufferings of Light.’,
<http://www.cddc.vt.edu/host/weishaus/cont-d.htm>
- Wisdom, J. (1953) *Philosophy and Psychoanalysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

© Joel Weishaus 2010.

© The International Journal of Jungian Studies, 2011.