Emergence Through Playwriting: Jung, Drama, and Creative Practice

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Abstract: Jungian artistic criticism is a thriving field of scholarship, with strong representation in the literature across numerous disciplines. However, there is relatively little Jungian representation in critical studies of dramatic writing. This essay adopts the dual perspectives of playwright and dramatic critic to argue for the utility of a Jungian theoretical framework for the creation and analysis of play texts. Such utility is demonstrated through analysis of a case study genre, termed the "contemporary family homecoming drama." C. G. Jung's theories of individuation and the psychological complex provide the theoretical framework for this discussion, along with a post-Jungian understanding of emergence theory. The central argument is substantiated via critical case studies of Tracy Letts's *August: Osage County* and *Eventide*, an original play. This essay proposes a model for a Jungian playwriting methodology, transferable to other playwrights wishing to create drama within a Jungian framework.

Keywords: playwriting, contemporary family homecoming drama, C. G. Jung, analytical psychology, complex, individuation, emergence

Introduction

As contemporary scholarship demonstrates, C. G. Jung's analytical psychology offers a unique and viable lens through which to interpret works of art. Jungian literary criticism, for example, is a thriving vein of inquiry, with numerous representations in the literature. Examples of texts receiving this analytical treatment include Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (Dawson 25–34), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (Moores 71–82), Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" (Fike, *One* 21–26), Jack London's short stories (McClintock 336–47), and Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* (Martinez 56–65). Jungian film criticism is a similarly fruitful discipline, yielding thoughtful psychological critiques of films as diverse as Alfred Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* (Palmer, "Hitchcock's" 266–75), Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (Hockley, *Frames* 48–61), Jane Campion's *The Piano* (Dougherty 227–42), Darren Aronofsky's *The Wrestler* (Lennihan 243–52), and Tom Hooper's *The King's Speech* (Palmer, *King's* 68–85), to name only a few.

Because of its disciplinary similarities to both traditional literature and to film, the medium of playwriting would seem to lend itself to Jungian critical interpretation in much the same manner. However, a survey of the scholarly literature reveals limited examples of published Jungian critiques of dramatic texts. There is evidence of Jungian ideas being employed in some critical readings of classic Greek plays (Edinger 67–89) and Shakespearean plays (Aronson 1–343; Coursen 1–217; Edinger 9–66; Fike, *Jungian* 1–203; Mikics 531; Porterfield 1–136; Rowland, *Ecocritical* 127–53; Rowland,

"Shakespeare" 31–46; Tucker 1–175). However, it appears that the Jungian interpretive paradigm has not been employed with any real consistency and rigor in studies of dramatic text, particularly post-Shakespearean dramatic text. Indeed, the literature reports that psychological criticism of dramatic writing and its neighboring forms traditionally favors the Freudian school of psychoanalysis. Freud is granted primary status in psychological criticism of literature (Delahoyde, par. 1; Rapaport 41), dramatic writing (especially Shakespearean) (Mikics 529), and theater and performance (Campbell 2–3; Fortier 86–87; Mikics 536; Pellegrini, par. 1; Wright, "Psychoanalysis" 175–90). As a practicing playwright I am interested in redressing this lack of Jungian representation, with a particular emphasis on studies of playwriting. Whereas film and literary criticism have both evolved to include a uniquely Jungian interpretive tradition, which can stand alongside its Freudian counterpart in each case, such evolution is lacking in my own discipline. It is my contention that Jungian psychology offers many unique theoretical principles that can not only deepen and expand psychological readings of dramatic texts in innovative and informative ways but also act as a fruitful conceptual basis for the writing of new drama.

Given the almost infinite thematic and structural variability of dramatic texts, this essay focuses on one genre as an example. I term this genre the "contemporary family homecoming drama." A rarely examined sub-genre of family tragedy, and sharing some characteristics with Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's "bourgeois tragedy" as described by Fleming (44–70), contemporary family homecoming dramas are psychologically realist plays in which estranged adult siblings return to the home they grew up in, at the demise of the patriarch or matriarch. Their reunions are characterized by immense relational tension, which derives from the surfacing of old wounds, rivalries, and long-held secrets. I use "contemporary" to refer to plays written in the last thirty years; that is, they are contemporary at the time of their critical analysis. Plays currently in this tradition include *The Memory of Water* by Shelagh Stephenson, *Radiance* by Louis Nowra, and *Hotel Sorrento* by Hannie Rayson. A noteworthy recent example is Tracy Letts's *August: Osage County*, which won the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

This essay provides Jungian case studies of both *August: Osage County* and my own original family homecoming drama, *Eventide*. In undertaking my critical analysis of these texts, I have drawn primarily on Jung's theories of complexes and individuation, as well as invoking a post-Jungian understanding of emergence theory. Understanding these principles from Jungian and post-Jungian psychology allows for a deeper appreciation of character and relationship when analyzing plays within the family homecoming tradition, in which psychological complexes and individuation themes pervade. Moreover, an understanding of how characters may be governed by their psychological complexes and by their journeys of individuation provides Jungian-oriented playwrights with a unique toolkit for creating psychologically credible characters with complex and compelling relationships, thereby elevating the drama. As this paper will demonstrate, complex, individuation and emergence theory together provide a viable theoretical framework in which to critique and generate works of family drama. In particular, a post-Jungian understanding of emergence theory offers a powerful lens through which to appreciate the transcendent character of such plays, both for their content and for the manner of their creation.

Jungian Complexes and the Contemporary Family Homecoming Drama

Jung defines psychological complexes as clusters of emotional and intellectual association around a common thematic core (Jacobi 8–9; Miller, par. 1; Noll 357; Ulanov 306). They are autonomous, unconscious contents highly charged with emotion and, when triggered, are prone to cause unexpected affective outbursts in the individual who possesses them (*CW* 9i, par. 497). A readily understandable example, and one with thematic resonances for this discussion of the family homecoming drama, is the mother complex. In the mother complex, an individual unconsciously groups together all experiences of his or her own mother, as well as the universal, timeless (that is, archetypal) concept of "Mother," forming a hub of psychological understanding, a summary conception of what Mother means to him or her. Whether the person's experiences of m/Mother have been predominantly negative or positive will determine the emotional tone of his or her maternal complex. A person with a negative mother complex, born of negative associations with the personal and archetypal m/Mother, may be triggered into hostile or defensive behaviors when in his or her mother's presence, or even when the idea of motherhood is raised in conversation with others. Jung explains that the "supreme example" of a negative mother complex is one in which a child exhibits an "overwhelming resistance to maternal supremacy," being driven by the motto, "Anything, so long as it is not like Mother!" (*CW* 9i, par. 170). By contrast, a person with a positive mother complex, born of positive associations with the personal and archetypal m/Mother, will likely experience positive emotions when presented with his or her own or the archetypal Mother, and respond accordingly.

Complexes, maternal and otherwise, are highly visible in the characters who populate family homecoming dramas. Crucially, a character's familial and childhood complexes, born of his or her cumulative interactions with parents and siblings during his or her formative years, are activated in the return to the family home. I argue that the family home functions symbolically in these plays, standing for childhood roles and dynamics, the dependent state of family identity. It is the realm in which the parents still rule, and in which the second-generation characters are forced back into a deferent relational state. This imposition of hierarchy creates significant tension, since the adult children experience the return to the family home as an unnatural regression. The reassumption of childhood roles awakens their hostility, and they forcefully reject the pull back to the dependent state and its negative associations.

This hostile rejection can be seen, for example, in the Australian family homecoming drama *Radiance*, by Louis Nowra, in which three Indigenous half-sisters reunite in their mother's home in North Queensland at the time of her funeral. Long absent from her childhood home, sister Cressy in particular exhibits discomfort upon her return. The playwright describes her as seeming "tense, uneasy to be back in the house" (6). Cressy's behavior here can be read as evidence of a dormant complex being activated by exposure to an environment that holds powerful, negative associations for her. Such a reading is substantiated by the revelation, late in the play, that the house is in fact the site of a major trauma in Cressy's past: her rape and impregnation by one of her mother's many boyfriends (53–54). The scars from this formative experience have substantially contributed to her negative complexes around both motherhood and her family home.

Similarly, sister Mary in Shelagh Stephenson's *The Memory of Water* experiences deep unease in returning to her childhood home in Yorkshire and is particularly uncomfortable at having to sleep in her late mother's bed (Stephenson 8–9, 37, 79). This

discomfort indicates that the house and all that it represents to her continue to exist at the level of unintegrated complex material. That the house wields psychic power over Mary shows in her comment: "Everything I look at makes me want to cry. I see things and a life unravels in front of my eyes. I can't sleep for remembering" (38). Like Cressy in *Radiance*, Mary's defensive reaction to her environment is justified when the play reveals the traumatic experiences she suffered there, which she still struggles to integrate years later. In particular, mother Vi's insistence that Mary give up the son she had as a teenager fuels her negative mother complex. The resentment she feels toward Vi manifests in a visceral fear and distaste in the present, with Mary complaining that her mother's bed is "full of bits of skin and hair that belong to her," which make her "feel uncomfortable" (9).

An uneasy or panicked reaction to the family home is just one example of complex material that frequently appears in family homecoming plays, demonstrating how unresolved trauma and decades-old disputes can still trigger violent emotional and/or bodily responses to an environment charged with negative psychological associations.

Jungian Individuation and the Contemporary Family Homecoming Drama

Jung's theory of individuation is similarly central to the present study of homecoming dramas. It must be acknowledged that individuation attracts numerous definitions within the Jungian community. In the traditional view, the individuation process begins with recognition and mastery of the personal shadow (Kotzé 515, 517; Bassil-Morozow ix, 19). The shadow contains everything that the individual finds unacceptable within himself or herself and therefore rejects from conscious life (Casement 143; Dougherty 229; Hauke 109; Kotzé 514–15), including his or her unconscious complexes. Traditionally, once the shadow is mastered, individuation continues with the individual gradually integrating all his or her personal archetypes: ego, the center of consciousness; persona, the idealized self; shadow, as discussed; and anima/animus, the contrasexual side of the psyche. The integration of these conscious and unconscious identities forms the cohesive—albeit contradictory—archetype of the Self. Importantly, individuation is a lifelong process. As Urban states, "One individuates but is never individuated" (65). Nevertheless, perseverance in service of the goal offers rewards; in individuation one finds wholeness, balance, psychological health, and a significant transformation and enlargement of ego-identity (*CW* 8, par. 430; Indick 18–19; Ulanov 304).

Individuation is a crucial theme for Jungian critics and playwrights alike when working within the family homecoming genre. Plays in this tradition are concerned with the development of individuals in relation to their family and the ways in which familial complexes impact on the growing children's psyches and their ability to differentiate themselves as individuated adults. Much of the conflict within family homecoming plays derives from characters' feeling torn between loyalty to their parents and familial values, and loyalty to their own needs. This is an example of what Jung calls the "moral conflict," wherein a person is unable to satisfy the whole of his or her nature and suffers as a result. The moral conflict is one of the chief causes of complex formation in the individual (*CW* 8, par. 204; Easter 136; Stephenson 3), as well as being readily identifiable within texts in the family homecoming genre tradition.

A potent example of this moral conflict's impact on individuation in the drama can be seen in Hannie Rayson's *Hotel Sorrento*. The action of the play is catalyzed when daughter Meg, high achiever of the Moynihan family, publishes a Booker Prize-nominated

novel, *Melancholy*, which depicts the childhood of three Australian sisters in the 1950s. While Meg claims that the novel is fictional, other characters in the play frequently challenge her, insisting that it is autobiography. The debate comes to a head when Meg's sister Hilary finally declares, "You know as well as I do that the only difference is, you haven't used our real names" (75). Meg's act of writing *Melancholy* can be interpreted as an unconscious exercise in individuation, in which she seeks to integrate her formative familial experiences by writing and reframing them. The therapeutic and individuative potential of creative practice and self-narrativizing is reported in the literature (Duncan 148–50), and Meg ultimately realizes that this cathartic self-narrativizing was the motivation behind *Melancholy*. She tells her sisters, "It's about time we all started. To own what's happened to us" (87).

Meg's moral conflict comes into play when her act of writing her history in service of her individuation puts her at odds with the values of her family, particularly those of father Wal. When the family gathers in the second act of *Hotel Sorrento* to mark Wal's passing, the subject of Meg's novel is raised in conversation. While Wal was reading *Melancholy* prior to his death, and was proud of his daughter's achievement, Meg's nephew tells her, "He said he didn't think you understood about loyalty" (71). Loyalty is established as Wal's most esteemed value, even more important to him than truth (71). The negative reactions of Meg's sisters toward the novel indicate their alliance with this value and implicitly reinforce Wal's view that *Melancholy* has transgressed the boundaries of familial loyalty. Youngest sister Pippa tells Meg, "It's our integrity. That's what you've stolen" (87). Pertinent here is the finding from Jungian analyst and author Betty Meador that cultural groups—of which the individual family is an example—establish absolute collective truths over the course of generations, which are absorbed by the children of the group during their formative years and which cannot be questioned within the group culture (172). The implication, in Meg's case, is that the familial value of maintaining loyalty outweighs the perceived validity of Meg's quest for individuation. In the eyes of her family, she can only reflect on and articulate her experiences of her childhood so long as such articulation does not wound or defame her family members. Inevitably, no family unit is without faults, and no experience of childhood is unproblematic. Therefore, Meg's moral conflict is that she is forced to choose between honest self-reflection and expression leading to greater Selfhood, and the approval and acceptance of her family culture.

Variations on this theme pervade the family homecoming drama; Meg's experience in *Hotel Sorrento* is only one example. Consistently, the dramatic families enact the pattern described by Jungian analyst Marcus West, whereby parents encourage some natural traits in their children while discouraging others (par. 24). West explains that the repeated signalling to a child that some aspect of his or her personality is unacceptable constitutes an "early relational trauma," causing the child to split off and surrender to the shadow whatever trait is forbidden, thereby causing a complex formation (par. 16). Reclaiming the banished facets of one's Self is part of the individuation journey the dramatic characters must undertake, although doing so inevitably brings them into conflict with the family culture that initially forbade such facets, meaning that the act of homecoming is laced with dramatic and interpersonal tensions.

Post-Jungian Emergence and the Contemporary Family Homecoming Drama

While complex and individuation theory form the Jungian basis for this study of the contemporary family homecoming drama, such an investigation is elevated through the inclusion of a third principle: emergence theory. Emergence is a transdisciplinary principle that has been embraced by the Jungian community in recent years (Cambray, "Towards" 7). Joseph Cambray explains that emergence occurs with "more complex levels of organization arising out of interactions from agents at a lower level in a manner unpredictable from the known properties of those agents" ("Jung" 455). Both within and beyond its usage in the Jungian community, emergence theory relies on two essential principles: that emergent properties cannot be predicted from the interacting agents that "gave birth" to them (Cohen 138; Kim 129–30); and that emergent properties are irreducible to their constituent elements or, simply, are greater than the sum of their parts (Kim 129; Sawyer 12).

I propose that an individual may undergo a process of emergence in his or her own life through the experience of Jung's transcendent function, whereby the interaction of conscious and unconscious material achieves psychological growth, a move toward individuated Selfhood. The emergent Self depends on the interaction of these oppositional forces but ultimately transcends them to possess an overarching, unpredictable, and irreducible character. In the following statement, Jung highlights the nature of the transcendent function in ways that strongly resonate with emergence:

> The shuttling to and fro of arguments and affects represents the transcendent function of opposites. The confrontation of the two positions generates a tension charged with energy and creates a living, third thing—not a logical stillbirth in accordance with the principle *tertium non datur* but a movement out of the suspension between opposites, a living birth that leads to a new level of being, a new situation. (*CW* 8, par. 189).

Elsewhere, he reinforces the birth of a "third thing" out of conflicting forces as an essential aspect of human development, stating: "We are [all] crucified between the opposites and delivered up to the torture until the 'reconciling third' takes shape" (Jung, *Letters* 375). Jung was, essentially, ahead of his time, conceiving of emergence theory through his transcendence model, despite not having "the language or the model for the science of emergent phenomena" (Cohen 138). For the purposes of the present discussion, it is therefore appropriate to consider the transcendent function within the individual as an example of an emergent process, with the idealized Self serving as an emergent property. In this identification of the Self as emergent, we see a universal principle activated at the level of personal psychology, the purpose of which is to foster individuation and the mastery of one's complexes.

Through a Jungian lens, I view contemporary family homecoming dramas as examinations of the transcendent function. The characters who populate these plays illustrate via embodiment and dramatic action that the task of integrating the conscious and unconscious selves can overwhelm or paralyze the individual, limiting his or her capacity for emergent Selfhood. Plays in this genre explore how a character's relationship with his or her family impacts his or her ability to individuate. The gathering in the family home triggers each character's familial complexes, and variously prompts and stalls his or her efforts at individuation. On the surface, these are stories about estranged siblings dealing

with the loss of a parent. On a psychological level, I see them as laments for the pain of attempting to emerge as an individuated Self while preserving family relationships. Herein lies the power of the family homecoming drama for its audience: it communicates an archetypal experience of moral conflict, the birth of a complex shared by humankind. This realistic mirroring not only creates a high degree of accessibility for audiences, but poses the question of each reader or viewer's own individuation journey in relation to his or her family.

While the characters in the family homecoming drama may typically fail to achieve a transcendent realization of Self, unable to overcome the complexes and moral conflicts that plague their familial relationships, the play text itself is an emergent property. Bringing together psychologically complex characters, each with his or her own agendas, secrets, and blind spots, the interactions in the play are a combustive force that explodes into a broader narrative. The rapid-fire bickering and one-upmanship that exists between the sisters in *The Memory of Water*, for example, propels the narrative and dictates the unfolding of the plot. Much like the Self in Jung's transcendence model, dramas such as this one are emergent in that they depend on the characters who populate them, but transcend each of these characters as individuals. They create a powerful, overarching portrait of the psychology of the family unit. The collective family psyche is unpredictable, complex, and irreducible to the sum of its parts, and this emergent quality is captured in the drama. It is an emergent content expressed in an emergent form. The play is not reducible to its lines of dialogue, stage directions, or character descriptions. Nor is it reducible to classifications of character psychology, the terms in which I elect to present a Jungian reading of the genre. As Susan Rowland surmises in her summary of Jungian approaches to art, "No criticism will ever wholly penetrate the art object" ("Introduction" 3).

The drama, like other forms of art, is larger than categorization, open to innumerable acts of interpretation. Its emergent character shows in the emotional and interpretive experience of the reader or viewer who engages with it, bringing his or her own history, complexes, and archetypal projections to the work, creating an entirely personal and inimitable experience of meaning. As the author Ursula K. Le Guin muses, "Although most writing is done in solitude, I believe that it is done, like all the arts, for an audience. That is to say, *with* an audience. All the arts are performance arts, only some of them are sneakier about it than others" (197, emphasis added). This phenomenon of reader participation in the creation of meaning in a text mirrors Luke Hockley's Jungian-inflected concept of unpredictable personal meaning-making in the experience of cinema, termed the "third image" (*Somatic* 1, 9, 135).

In addition to the emergent quality of the family homecoming drama and its characters, I argue that the act of playwriting can itself be an emergent process. I have experienced this process firsthand during the writing of my own homecoming drama, *Eventide*. My experience of emergence in playwriting will be discussed in more detail toward the end of the paper.

Generative Tension in Jung and the Drama

The relevant scholarly literature reveals numerous natural intersections between Jungian theory and the contemporary family homecoming drama, and these intersections provide a strong foundation for the creation of a transcendent text, one that demonstrates emergence

both within characters—through their individuative processes—and among characters—through their unpredictable and complex interactions, which drive the drama. One intersection of particular significance is the central importance of generative tension.

Tension and its ideational neighbor, conflict, are vital in both Jungian psychology and dramatic writing. Abundant literature evinces the fact that tension is an essential part of psychological health and development from a Jungian perspective. Jung states outright, "Man needs difficulties; they are necessary for health" *(CW* 8, par. 143), and elsewhere, "There is no birth of consciousness without pain" (*CW* 17, par. 331). Indick argues that the "need for an opposing force is crucial" in Jungian psychology (19), and Wehr even goes so far as to say that, for Jung, "The cessation of tension in the psyche would end in death" (44). Psychic conflict is vital because it prompts growth and forward movement. As Jung explains, "It is the old game of hammer and anvil: between them the patient iron is forged into an indestructible whole, an 'individual'" (*CW* 9i, par. 522).

Similarly, tension and conflict are imperative factors in the creation of successful drama. In *How Plays Work*, Meisel claims, "It is dissonance that stimulates our need to know what comes next. It engages us with what is going forward, and then works on our appetite for order, clarity, stability. It creates a tension and the need for resolution" (139). Not only does drama engage its audience by dangling the proverbial carrot of irresolution, but, as seminal drama theorist Susanne Langer claims, theatrical audiences presume and more actively perceive conflicts in dramatic work than in real life. She claims that the suspense for audiences in understanding both the dramatic present "and its yet unrealized consequent" is "the essential dramatic illusion" (311). Rowland observes that drama essentially "consists of conflicting voices" (*Ecocritical* 132), which supports Meisel's claim that the competing demands of character within a dramatic text serve to shape its arc of tension. He explains:

> If they have any life at all, characters come equipped with plots of their own—with plans, goals, desires, and interests—each character wishing to shape the action towards a particular outcome. Such projects can be wholly or partly at odds with each other, and they can be wholly or partly reinforcing. The final outcome will be the result of these plots, these forces intersecting . . . (140)

This quotation directly reinforces the point raised previously, that the dramatic text emerges from the combustive interactions of complex characters and their differing agendas.

Evidently, both the Jungian psyche and the play text rely on the conflict of opposing forces to create a generative tension, one that drives change and growth. Dramatically speaking, this tension applies to both the creation of text and the final product that spurs readers and audiences on to seek understanding and closure. Both the dramatic and the psychic situations reflect a transcendent—or emergent—pattern: the creation of new circumstances out of the complexity of lower-level conflict.

Critical Case Study: *August: Osage County*

At numerous points in his writings, Jung's comments on the psyche have strikingly clear parallels to the contemporary family homecoming drama. These parallels can be appreciated through critical consideration of a case study play, Tracy Letts's *August: Osage*

County, in which estranged sisters Barbara, Ivy, and Karen return to the family home in rural Oklahoma following the disappearance of patriarch Beverly and grapple with vitriolic matriarch Violet and her advanced drug addiction.

Although they may betray a comedic streak, family homecoming dramas are, as a rule, deeply tragic. They possess traits of the "infernal comedy," a term inspired by Dante, used to describe comedies that are "gritty, frightening," rather than funny, in which the hero survives his or her journey but "usually at great cost" (Bower, par. 4). Some homecoming dramas manifest qualities of the more optimistic "purgatorial comedy," also inspired by Dante, in which the hero recognizes his or her complicity in creating a hellish scenario and changes his or her behavior accordingly; he or she "vanquish[es] the evil *within*" (Bower, par. 8). In family homecoming dramas, this purgatorial arc is enacted by those characters who acknowledge their shadow and take individuative steps toward its integration. Such purgatory is essentially Jungian; for, let us remember, "Jung considers the confrontation with the shadow, with one's own evil, to be of the greatest psychological value" (Walker 34).

The arcs of the characters in *August: Osage County*, however, tend to the infernal much more than the purgatorial, with the individual family members little able or willing to mend their tragic personal and familial fractures. The tragic structure of the play makes pertinent the following statement from Jung: "There is no form of human tragedy that does not in some measure proceed from this conflict between the ego and the unconscious" (*CW* 8, par. 706). While Jung is speaking about the psyche, there are clear parallels to the Westons of *August: Osage County*, whose tragedy is brought about by their unwillingness to face the shadowy secrets that haunt their shared familial psyche.

A clear example of this internally motivated tragedy is found near the end of the play. Following the announcement from the local sheriff that patriarch Beverly has drowned, eldest daughter Barbara learns that her father had an affair with his sister-in-law, Mattie Fae, years earlier and fathered Mattie Fae's son, Little Charles. The implications of this secret and its revelation are immense. Although it is never explicitly stated, the playwright strongly implies that Beverly committed suicide, in no small part due to his ongoing sense of shame about the affair. Beverly and Mattie Fae have spent nearly forty years burying the truth, relegating it to the realm of the family's unconscious, its shadow. Here, the denied knowledge behaves in accordance with Jung's definition of the repressed shadow, sabotaging the family in revenge for its suppression (see, for example, Kotzé 515–16). The knowledge of the affair manifests in Beverly's lifelong shame and in Mattie Fae's unwarranted cruelty towards Little Charles, the constant and embodied reminder of her mistake.

Jungian theory suggests that the shadow loses its destructive power if it can be raised to consciousness, acknowledged, and integrated, and this potentiality is illustrated in *August: Osage County*. The tragic and ironic reveal of the play's final scene is that Violet, Beverly's wife, has always known about the affair but was never willing to speak this knowledge or offer her forgiveness for fear of appearing weak. When Barbara challenges her mother, "If you could've stopped Daddy from killing himself . . ." (Letts 100), Violet evades her, this time allowing her complicity in Beverly's death to fall into the shadow realm, into her own unconscious and that of the corporate family psyche. *August: Osage County* therefore aligns with and exemplifies Jung's view that human

tragedy always "In some measure proceed[s] from this conflict between the ego and the unconscious" (*CW* 8, par. 706).

Another claim from Jung that applies equally well to the psyche and to the family homecoming drama is as follows:

> The most intense conflicts, if overcome, leave behind a sense of security and calm which is not easily disturbed, or else a brokenness that can hardly be healed. Conversely, it is just these intense conflicts and their conflagration which are needed in order to produce valuable and lasting results. (*CW* 8, par. 50).

At the level of the psyche, this observation relates to the just-discussed idea that the individual who contends with his or her shadow has the opportunity to overcome its destructive power, although doing so may be a difficult and damaging process. In the contemporary family homecoming drama, characters are forced into situations of intense conflict, which they must choose to face or reject. In theory, the plays could end on a note of optimism, with the characters working together to overcome their differences and achieving some measure of "security and calm," a dramatic manifestation of integration. However, more often than not, the latter outcome Jung proposes is played out in the drama. Unable or unwilling to integrate the shadows that appear with full force in the projection hotbed of the family home, characters usually withdraw to safety, their relationships unmended, and the house—the site of their conflict—is abandoned, sold or destroyed.

In *August: Osage County*, hostile conflict and confrontation progressively drive each member of the family away, and the prospect of relational repair seems distant at best. Finally, only matriarch Violet remains, resting like a child in the lap of her housekeeper, and her descent into fatal illness and insanity appears immanent and inevitable. There is no sense of what will become of the family home, which is itself depicted as ramshackle and volatile, an architectural metaphor for its one remaining possessor. Despite the tendency to unhappy outcomes in the contemporary family homecoming drama, one notes that Jung's words still ring true; without "these intense conflicts and their conflagration," there would be no momentum or impact in the plays. In fact, they would not exist at all. These are stories *about* failed integration, surrender to complexes, and stalled individuation. They acknowledge the incredible difficulty of facing the unconscious, whether personal or shared. They illustrate the burden of Jung's moral conflict, through the struggles of their characters to balance the demands of family with the pull toward independence.

Practitioner's Case Study: *Eventide*

Conscious versus unconscious conflict in the drama reflects Jung's notion of grappling with the complex, just as the genre convention of the unhappy ending speaks to the theme of individuation and its deep-seated challenges. These same areas of tension operate in my original family homecoming drama, *Eventide*, a play set in the present day in a fictional small town on the east coast of Australia. The title is a reference to the Jungian interpretive convention of associating light and day with consciousness and darkness and night with unconsciousness. As "eventide" is an archaic term for evening, using this word as the name of the town where the play is set subtly suggests that home is the place where the dramatic family's conscious and unconscious—their light and darkness—meet. The act of homecoming intrinsically involves facing what remains unintegrated, both in the

individuals' lives and in the shared life of the family. The coastal setting is another Jungian metaphor; in keeping with symbolic convention, the unconscious appears in the form of ocean waves, breaking constantly against the shore of the beachside home, demanding the characters' acknowledgment. Ironically, the tide does not appear "even", rather escalating and de-escalating in correlation to the acts of integration that are undertaken or avoided by the characters during the play.

Eventide follows the reunion of the Murdoch family after the patriarch's diagnosis with a terminal brain tumor. The characters of the drama—patriarch Dex; his three adult daughters, Michelle, Jemima, and Heidi; and granddaughter Kendra—manifest unique complexes and represent different degrees of individuation. Therefore, complex and individuation theory provides a viable framework in which to understand the characters' psychological motivations and relational behaviors.

Eventide is in many ways an examination of father-daughter relationships and it is therefore appropriate to emphasize the paternal complexes of the three daughter characters in this discussion. The nature of each daughter character was determined in part by the parameters of Jungian and dramatic theory, and in part by my instincts as playwright. Analysis of the contemporary family homecoming drama revealed a consistency of daughter "types" across plays in the genre: a high achiever, a noble sacrifice, and a free spirit. In the interests of exploring the family homecoming genre and its psychological implications thoroughly, I deliberately crafted the central generation to mirror this pattern. The specificities of each character's personality and circumstances were, however, more organically led. Beginning with an instinctive idea of who Michelle, Jemima, and Heidi should be, I was then guided by my reading of Jung and post-Jungian commentators to develop a cohesive and realistic psychology of each character, and of their relationships to one another. Jungian theory and creative practice informed one another through a dialogic process of writing and rewriting. The nature of this dialogic process will be discussed more fully in the section that follows.

The paternal complexes at work in Michelle, Jemima, and Heidi can be illuminated via Maureen Murdock's Jungian-oriented writings on fathers and daughters. Murdock nominates many possible kinds of father—good enough, absent, pampering, passive, seductive, domineering, addictive, and idealized (3–4). I propose that Dex most conforms to the model of the domineering father, who "demands his daughter's submission and leaves her perpetually fearful and insecure" (4). Murdock explains, "The *daughter of a domineering father* is easily bullied into compliance or spends her adult life rebelling . . ." (4, emphasis in the original). Dex, largely typical of White Australian men of his generation, has firmly established, conservative assumptions and values, under which he has governed the Murdoch family from his empowered position as patriarch. His late wife, although voiced only minimally in the play, subscribed to the patriarchal model of family and, to use Jemima's words, "never said boo to him."

Michelle, who has modeled herself after her mother, similarly complies with the patriarchal family model and represents the daughter "easily bullied into compliance." I chose to have Michelle embody the compliant daughter type because of my scholarly interest in the psychological inheritance that can be passed down the maternal line in families, whereby mothers and daughters alike allow themselves to be ruled by the patriarchy that oppresses them. The more independently minded Jemima and Heidi, however, have transgressed Dex's rule systems with their alternative lifestyles, acts that

may be construed as "rebelling." Jemima and Heidi are a deliberate point of contrast from the submissive Michelle; they demonstrate what happens when the maternal line of internalized patriarchal oppression is rejected. Jemima and Heidi's unwillingness to be domineered by their father costs them his approval. This outcome reflects Murdock's statement that "Bad girls—daughters who are disobedient, rebellious, confrontational, loud, or precociously sexual—are usually rejected for being too much to handle" (21). Forced to choose between retaining Dex's approval and honoring their individuality, Jemima and Heidi are invested with the eternal moral conflict at the heart of the family homecoming drama. Since the whole of their being is not acceptable to their father, parts of them split off, fueling their paternal complex.

In much the same manner as *August: Osage County*, the characters in *Eventide* reach the end of the play having failed to integrate their personal and collective shadows. Dex passes away in a state of anger and desperation, unable to complete the home renovation project that would have given him a sense of ownership and closure over his life. His relationships with his daughters remain similarly unresolved. Michelle, who has projected her entire sense of worth onto serving her family, faces the crippling loss of both her father—to illness—and her teenage daughter—to a world beyond the small coastal town of Eventide. Jemima is exiled in shame from the family when her long-unspoken affair with Michelle's ex-partner is finally voiced, and she remains too paralyzed by fear to confess the truth to her husband. Heidi, who abandoned her family at age sixteen to join a surrogate family of traveling show people, returns to this life, denying the pain her choice continues to cause her biological relatives. Michelle's daughter Kendra, the most optimistic presence throughout the play, feels the weight of her family's failures and is left to choose between pursuing her passions in an independent life and following her mother into a life of disembodied servitude. For each of these characters, individuation is stalled at the point where unconscious integration appears too painful to endure.

Playwriting as Emergent Practice

The intersection of Jungian theory and dramatic writing convinces me that playwriting is itself an emergent practice. Part of my intention in writing *Eventide* was to explore the possibility of a uniquely Jungian approach to playwriting, proposing a model for other Jungian-oriented playwrights who may come after me. Over the course of approximately two years, a new understanding of my playwriting process emerged, one deeply informed by Jungian principles.

As a playwright, I have historically been slavishly devoted to planning, mapping out characters and story beats in advance of writing the words of the play itself. In the case of *Eventide*, I deliberately opened myself up to new, more instinctive methods of creation. The original concept for *Eventide* came to me in a dream in September 2016. I felt that writing based on the content of a dream was probably the most Jungian origin possible for the work, given Jung's deep respect for the power of dreams, his belief that this medium communicates ideas from the collective unconscious, and his claim that the collective unconscious is "the pure source of art" (Wright, *Psychoanalytic* 72). I took extensive notes the morning after this initial inspiration, and the first draft of the play was my attempt at faithfully rendering the characters, setting, and striking imagery of the dream. Although I had not yet learned the Jungian term "active imagination", my writing process here mirrored the phenomenon, whereby, in Jung's words, "a sequence of fantasies [is]

produced by deliberate concentration" (*CW* 9i, par. 101). In a therapeutic setting, the analysand engaging in active imagination deliberately invites and dialogues with images from the unconscious in order to grow psychologically through interpreting their messages. Bassil-Morozow describes active imagination as "spontaneous creativity," which can be "managed and directed to produce a creative product" (3). In the case of my playwriting practice, this took the form of a sustained and intentional dialogue with the characters and images that had arisen out of my unconscious.

Although deliberate engagement with the unconscious material of my dream provided a sound Jungian basis for writing a new play, I was forced out of pure active imagination by practical considerations. The first draft of *Eventide* was littered with problems: a rushed pace, over-explicit discussions of too many major reveals, and one-dimensional characters without a sense of personal growth. I was discouraged, concerned that my attempt at Jungian playwriting had failed, that trusting unconscious inspiration could not lead to a suitably polished work of drama. A quotation from the playwright Eugène Ionesco proved invaluable as I grappled with the tension between intuition and structure. Ionesco states:

> I believe that . . . a writer must possess a mixture of spontaneity, of subconscious impulses, and of lucidity; a lucidity which is unafraid of whatever the spontaneous imagination may give birth to. If one were to insist upon lucidity as an *a-priori* condition, it is as though one were to dam up the sluice gates. The waters must be allowed to come flooding out; but *afterwards* comes the sorting, the controlling, the understanding, the selecting. (qtd in Coe 31).

Through Ionesco's insight, I came to understand that an effective approach to Jungian playwriting must allow room for both conscious and unconscious imperatives. The unconscious must lead initially, bringing to consciousness those themes or images of great symbolic weight with which the playwright's unconscious is burdened. But then it is both appropriate and necessary to mould these instinctual properties with the conscious tools of the playwright, shaping them into a form that an eventual audience can find accessible and credible.

Through the drafts that followed, I rewrote *Eventide* with a more deliberate structure. I introduced genre conventions I had identified elsewhere in the family homecoming tradition, such as the central generation of three sister types, as well as focusing on the whole ensemble rather than a single protagonist. Importantly, my ongoing studies of Jungian and post-Jungian theory also informed revisions of the work. In these scholarly sources, I found psychological explanations for the temperamental, behavioral, and relational tendencies I had instinctively embedded in my characters, and through this fuller understanding I was able to round them out into complex, psychologically realist facsimiles of human beings. I came to understand their familial and personal complexes more fully and could situate them more intentionally along the continuum of individuation. Moreover, I took a deep interest in statements from Jung about the *participation mystique* that takes place within family units, and the concept of intergenerational inheritance. These considerations impacted my playwriting practically in that they led me to relocate my drama to the Murdoch sisters' childhood home, wherein I could activate the metaphor of the house as a threat to individuation. It was Jungian theory that allowed me to develop

such hypotheses about the metaphoric potential of the home and family, therefore substantially shaping my writing practice.

Following an in-progress reading of *Eventide* with professional actors in December 2017, I took a break of seven months from the writing process, needing time to absorb feedback from the reading and contemplate my approach to future drafts. Far from being wasted time, this fallow period was vital in that it paved the way for me to return to a truly Jungian methodology of writing. I had begun the play in an unconscious-led manner, then moved necessarily through the stages of more conscious structuring and editing. However, in returning to the play text in June of 2018, I found that it was once again time to let the unconscious lead. Here, I began to revisit Jung's active imagination as a way of reinvigorating the work.

In the months they had lain dormant, my characters had solidified themselves as self-sufficient identities in my deeper consciousness. Each member of the dramatic family had now developed a strong enough independent voice that I could invite each one to the forefront of my mind and invite him or her to speak freely to the other characters and to me. Akin to my original process in rendering my dream, I then attempted to reproduce faithfully on the page the dialogue through which the characters articulated themselves. My process here echoes Harding's account of active imagination, which states:

> This is exactly what happens in active imagination when we engage in dialogue with a mood or other unconscious part of the psyche. We personify it, give it a name, or, more likely, *it tells us its own name*; then the mythical story can begin to unfold, with the result that consciousness is enlarged by the inclusion of a previously unknown part of the psyche. (Harding 48, emphasis added).

Letting my characters lead created some vast differences in the later drafts of the play, the consciousness of *Eventide* being enlarged by the active imagination process, just as Harding suggests. The changes made elevated the organic quality of the writing.

The process that emerged for me as a deliberately Jungian playwright was one of unconscious inspiration, giving way to conscious improvement and shaping through the application of Jungian and dramatic theory, followed by a return to the elevating and clarifying power of the unconscious. In line with Ionesco's advice, the middle stage of conscious structuring was indispensable in strengthening the text, creating firm parameters within which my emergent characters could then freely roam. In this middle phase I was able to embed and activate findings from my Jungian and genre-based research within the play. Then, in relaxing my grip on theory and pre-planning in the later drafting stages, once again yielding authority to my unconscious instincts, I allowed the emergent character of my Jungian writing process to come emphatically to the fore. My understanding of Jungian and post-Jungian theory translated from my intellectual, scholarly comprehension into my instinct-driven process. As a practitioner, I invited my own transcendent function to operate once again, raising material out of the unconscious so that it could be translated usefully to consciousness through the conduit of dramatic expression.

Conclusion

This paper serves a number of purposes. At a basic level, it partially redresses the lack of Jungian representation in psychological critiques of playwriting. It considers how Jungian

and post-Jungian theory might influence an understanding of dramatic writing, from both a critic's and a practitioner's standpoint. To demonstrate the utility of this endeavor, I have offered the example of the contemporary family homecoming drama as a genre in which Jung's complex and individuation theories can be identified and usefully explored. Specifically, the potency of familial complexes can be seen in the metaphoric power the family home holds over the dramatic characters who return there, triggering profound and visceral reactions. Jung's moral conflict is exemplified in the characters' divided loyalties to the family culture and the individuating Self.

This essay also makes a case for the emergent character of family homecoming dramas, as an example of emergent works of art more broadly. While individual characters, lines of dialogue, developmental arcs, and so forth may shape a drama, the resultant play ultimately transcends these constituent elements, mimicking Jung's transcendent function in creating an irreducible and unpredictable identity for itself based on the combustive interactions of these lower-level agents. In support of this claim, the scholarly literature demonstrates that generative tension is crucially important in both the Jungian conception of the psyche and in the creation and sustenance of dramatic work.

The critical case studies of *August: Osage County* and *Eventide* illustrate Jung's claim that tragedy proceeds from the conflict between consciousness and the unconscious, as in the case of long-held family secrets coming to light, or in the destructive potential of a parental complex that puts one at odds with his or her individuation. The endings of these plays, grounded in confrontation and fracture, emphasize the painful necessity of confrontation with shadow material and the cost of denying integration. A genre littered with tensions, within characters, among characters, and in the haunting and constrained environment of the family home as setting, the contemporary family homecoming drama is a powerful site for exploring Jung's theories of psychological development and its failure.

Finally, my experimentations with process in tandem with my studies of Jungian theory convince me of the potential for experiences of emergence through the practice of playwriting. Through developing a method of writing that moves through the stages of unconsciousness-consciousness-unconsciousness, I have not only learned how to work more authentically as a Jungian playwright but also developed a model for use by other playwrights who want to work within a Jungian framework. Of course, experiences of emergence are possible in all forms of art-making; playwriting is but one example. I argue that Jungian theory is an eminently appropriate and generative complement to research grounded in creative practice, with many possible avenues for theoretical exploration beyond those I have employed in this paper. Moreover, Jung's theory offers immense generative potential not only for various genres of drama but also for any number of artistic disciplines. As multidisciplinary Jungian artistic criticism gains increasing exposure in the scholarly community, it is important that the literature expand to report the findings of both critics and creators. As the essay has demonstrated, Jungian theory is the province of both.

Contributor

Bianca Reynolds has recently completed her Ph.D. candidature at Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia. Her doctoral thesis explores the complementary relationship between Jungian theory and playwriting, with a focus on the family

homecoming genre. She advocates for Jungian theory as a valuable tool for both playwrights and critics of drama.

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