

Response to William Ventimiglia

By Soren Ekstrom, Ph.D.

As a blind reader for “Supervision and the Circumcised Heart”, I did not know who the author was before writing this response. During my reading, however, I had a strong sense that it came from someone who had trained in Zurich and that he or she was articulating views I had heard during my own training there, now almost thirty years ago. This was confirmed upon being told that William Ventimiglia, a colleague while I was still part of the Boston institute, was the author.

In my response, I am going to disagree with the views Bill expresses, especially the romanticized disregard for organizational structure and accountability that is implied in his amplification of the circumcised heart. My argument is twofold. To begin with, I am concerned that Ventimiglia, in his description of supervision, leaves out some important distinctions between the various training activities. My second point has to do with the general understanding of training and cuts to the core of what I think is the problem with the exclusively archetypal understanding, an understanding that seems to have its source in the early days of Zurich training.

In the first place, the lecture has very little to do with supervision. It is unclear if Ventimiglia has ever con-

ceived of supervision as a distinct activity with its own particular dynamics. We are left in the dark as to how it differs from regular analysis, training analysis, and class instruction. What is clear, however, is that he wishes to make a point about formal Jungian training which is at odds with the direction and efforts of most American training institutes. Why single out supervision, which often serves functions other than formal training? Is the archetypal theme of initiation also supposed to cover supervisory relationships before formal training and after?

The purpose of supervision is to give clinical assistance: from managing a private practice and developing an analytical attitude to following transference/countertransference dynamics. Supervisory relationships may vary, but as a rule they are concerned not with the psychology of the supervisee but with his or her clinical work. When not part of formal training, it is a collegial relationship in which none of the dynamics ascribed to the circumcised heart are likely to appear.

My second objection concerns the approach to training that I feel is being advocated. The lecturer moves, seemingly unaware, from possible personal experiences of being in training to the structure and organization of training institutes. Is Ventimiglia in fact advocating that training programs be authoritarian and non-responsive in order to create an atmosphere of the “power differential” he finds in initiations? Isn’t there, instead, a need organizationally to mediate any actual differentials, to

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create an atmosphere of fairness, lack of arbitrary judgments, and understandable procedures? If the former is true, we are, by default, giving the teachers and training analysts, the “elders”, a *carte blanche* for abuse. The cruel disrespect for personal dignity and demand for blind loyalty, which Ventimiglia traces to certain initiations, does not belong in Jungian training and should never be tolerated, even when its symbolism seems to resonate with the private fantasies of those in training.

From an organizational point of view, training involves groups of people: groups of analysts in committees, as faculty, etc., and groups of trainees as class participants and as a student body. Are these elements to be understood as being the same archetypal constellation, or are we in fact dealing with a much more complex situation in which various archetypes and various interpersonal dynamics get activated? I think the latter.

Relating training to the ritual of the circumcised heart does not do justice to any of this. Ventimiglia implies that, since initiation is the goal, training institutes need not worry about policies of accountability, fairness, and clear procedures; furthermore, that ethical issues are being taken care of by the Self (capital letter). But whose self are we really talking about - the self of the training analyst, the trainee, the training institute, or some ever present *deus ex machina* present only among Jungians?

The experience of a power differential is not exclusive to Jungian training. It is part of any formal educational experience in which a certain performance is required. However, dependent on the integrity of the institution, such standards do not have to result in intimidation, abuse, and a need to avoid

openly confronting one's own personal psychology. These are phenomena caused by institutional problems: rigidity, bitterness, and divisiveness among those in charge, typically resulting in a lack of accountability and problems in organizational structure.

As for the sense of specialness that the initiated are supposed to experience, it is something we cannot prescribe or arrange for. However, if we try to do our best, we may hope that those trained at our institutes will have the therapeutic tools to make themselves feel proud of what they do and proud to be one of us. But to think that anyone completes Jungian training solely for the sake of belonging to a select group of those already initiated is both arrogant and incorrect. People complete Jungian training because they feel that they have been given something meaningful, something they wish to claim as their own. And in the long run, pride in belonging to one of our groups will depend on whether the training provided something which works and which brings fulfillment in their everyday life as clinicians.

The idea that analytic training is a form of initiation may have its roots in the pioneer days, when it was more or less a one-man show on the shore of Lake Zurich. But to paraphrase a statement attributed to Jung in his later years, now, some fifty years later, with training institutes all over the world, we are clearly not Jung but Jungians, communities of clinicians who can share in the many responsibilities of training. In so doing, personal analysis, supervision, and class instruction have a chance to become distinctly separate parts of the educational process called Jungian training, all within a sound organizational structure.