

**The Mother Archetype in American myth making: a Jungian analysis of the 1957 film *3:10 to Yuma***

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**Abstract**

This article provides a hermeneutic analysis of the 1957 film *3:10 to Yuma* (directed by Delmer Daves) from a Jungian perspective. It addresses the concept of 'The Mother Archetype' its role in the Alchemical and Symbolic Quest and it provides a reading of the principal characters of this film-as-Dream as composite of Jung's 'Personality Typology'. It proposes that the film represents the self regulation of the Psyche through the Ego/Self axis and the inherent Transcendent Function. It concludes that the film culminates in a 'Mysterium Coniunctionis', or 'Mystery of the Conjunction', of Female/Earth and Male/Spirit archetypes towards greater expression of Individuation, and that all of these principal Jungian concepts constitute the inter-textual layers of our chosen film.

**Keywords:** Jung, Mother Archetype, Alchemical Quest, Self-regulating Psyche, Ego/Self Axis, Transcendent Function, Individuation.

**Introduction**

The cultural medium of cinema is ideally suited to Jungian hermeneutic investigation (Carl Gustav Jung 1875-1961), since the Surrealist filmmaker Luis Buñuel (1900-1983) claimed that:

A film is like an involuntary imitation of a dream ... On the screen, as within the human being, the nocturnal journey into the unconscious begins ... The cinema seems to have been invented to express the life of the subconscious (quoted in Kyrou, 1963, 109-111).

The 'Dream Factory' is a common epithet for Hollywood itself (the home and birth place of US cinema), in common currency at least a decade before the genesis of *3:10 to Yuma* (Powdermaker, 1950). The power of cinema and the meaning-making resonances of analytic psychology are ideally suited to each other - albeit at an unconscious or subconscious level, for there appears to be no direct evidence for the story's original author, Elmore Leonard, or the screenwriter, Halsted Welles, having been directly influenced by Jungian psychology. However, it is argued that the 'Collective Unconscious' is universally present and accessible by all – including the authors of *3:10 to Yuma*.

Nevertheless, a theory of unconsciousness should be treated with a degree of caution, for as Jung himself observed:

Theories in psychology are the very devil ... they should always be regarded as mere auxiliary concepts that can be laid aside at any time (Jung 1910/1970, 7).

### **Film Synopsis**

The plot of the film is straightforward. It begins with a stagecoach slowly moving across the scorched Arizona desert to the theme song sung by 'Western crooner' Frankie Lane. A short distance from its destination at Bisbee, the coach is hijacked, for its bullion, by a gang led by the 'charming' outlaw Ben Wade (Glen Ford), and in the process the driver Bill Moons is shot and killed. This is witnessed by 'small time rancher' Dan Evans (Van Heflin) who remains uninvolved for the sake of his two sons with him, while they also have their horses confiscated to prevent them raising the alarm. Out of necessity then, Dan becomes embroiled in the capture of outlaw Ben, as his cattle are in danger of dying of thirst because he needs to pay a neighbouring rancher for the right of access to his stream. Dan needs \$200 and is exhorted by his devoted wife (Felicia Farr) to borrow it in town.

Dan 'rebounds', from his unsuccessful attempt to borrow the money, into accepting an entreaty from stagecoach owner Mr Butterfield. He is offering \$200 for each posse member to accompany the now captured Ben Wade to Contention City and on to the '3:10 train to Yuma' and 'Justice'. The plot then takes a twist that brings outlaw Ben to Dan's family homestead where – in a 'double-back' to evade the chasing outlaw posse – he is kept overnight before moving on to the train due at 'Contention'. Further twists see Dan being deserted by other 'hired hands' and left alone to shoulder the burden, and while Ben's gang stake out the hotel where he is held, Dan's wife arrives on the scene and implores him not to go on. Dan Evans is also given the opportunity to step down from his task by the stagecoach owner (keeping the \$200), but he refuses all offers and despite seemingly overwhelming odds delivers the outlaw to the 3:10 train.

### **Context**

The American zeitgeist of the time is certainly significant, for the decade that preceded the production of the film was notable for its dramatically fluctuating economic climate (Vatter 1963), combined with pressures of identity and 'belonging' due to a shifting population and the ending of the Korean War in 1953. This time was also marked by the outbreak of 'McCarthyism' (making accusations without evidence), notably in the form of an anti-communist witch-hunt that was to

effect the American psyche so profoundly (Latham, 1973), leaving its unsettling influence on some of the principal 'players' of Hollywood at that period.

### **Dreams, Alchemy and Archetypes**

Many essential aspects of Jungian theory and subsequent therapeutic practice were initially the result of Jung's own self-revelations when working with dreams as revealed in his seminal work 'Seven Sermons to the Dead' (1961). In examining his own dreams Jung reports:

I had dreamed repeatedly ... next to my house was another one, more precisely a wing or an added construction that was strange to me. Each time I would amaze myself in my dream because I did not know this part of the house, which apparently was there from the beginning (1961, 228).

The meaning of the dream, Jung considered, was that 'the unknown wing of the house was a part of my personality, an aspect of myself' (1961, 228). This led to Jung immersing himself in the lore of Alchemy (Casement, 2001); following a subsequent dream in which he was to find an ancient library in the 'unknown wing' in which there were housed books of copper engravings of symbols, which were only later realised to be alchemical: 'analytic psychology had, in a very curious way, coincided with alchemy' (1961, 231). He further claimed that in studying:

collective transformation processes and through the understanding of alchemical symbolism I arrived at the central concept of my psychology: the process of individuation (1961, 235).

### **Fate and Individuation**

The film-as-dream analogy, replete with all of its potent Jungian elements of 'alchemical transformation', and the 'process of Individuation', will now be applied to the film's principal characters and themes, in order to illustrate the different elements of this continuous unfolding process. The main theme, that of fate or kismet, is identified in the lyrics of film's title song, where we learn that a man's fate can be met on the '3:10 to Yuma' train.

According to Jungian theory individuation is an 'autonomous inborn process' which 'nobody can avoid' (Hall & Nordby, 1973, 82) and, as such, may be regarded as a 'universal formative principal' (Jung, 1942/1968, 137), governed by the Self Archetype, as its 'source and goal' (Jung, 1943/1968, 194). In this respect, the main character, Dan, as 'ego/hero', is driven and governed by the forces of

Fate as orchestrated by Self Archetype within the unfolding narrative of the film according to a 'process of Individuation'.

### **Character, landscape & the Mother Archetype.**

The principal 'character' is at the very least, peripherally present throughout the film. For this is the 'Archetypal' landscape of the 'wild west', as presented through the lens of the renowned outdoor photographer/cinematographer Charles Lawton Jnr.

Jung regarded Archetypes as images important in the functioning of the human psyche:

Archetypes are, by definition, factors and motifs that arrange the psychic elements into certain images, characterized as archetypal ...They exist pre-consciously and presumably they form the structural dominants of the psyche in general (1945/1968, 348.)

In viewing this film, one of its most arresting and powerful features appears to be its portrayal of a naturalistic and at times awe-inspiring landscape, providing a significant dramatic tension between itself and the characters inhabiting it. Jung says of nature and the Mother Archetype that: 'the mother carries for us that inborn image of the mater natura and mater spiritualis, *of the totality of life of which we are a small and helpless part*' [my emphasis] (1921/1969, 29). The principal characters of small time rancher Dan Evans's family would therefore appear to be a 'small and helpless part' of life in its greater scheme.

Jung also viewed the Mother Archetype as being 'intimately known yet strange like nature' (1921/1969, 28). This is evident in the film's strongly featured juxtaposition of man's seemingly feeble attempts at establishing 'civilised' townscapes such as 'Bisbee' and 'Contention City', against nature's 'strange' and potent archetypal presence. These townscapes appear as 'naturalistic' (as opposed to 'stage set'), constructions often starkly contrasted by the immediate and vast backdrop of an Arizonian 'Western frontier' landscape.

Using archetypes in this way the film-as-dream is highlighting and seems to be 'correcting an imbalance' (Tacey 1995, 12) by reaffirming that:

The emotional, psychic and spiritual connection with nature can still be brought into consciousness ... Soul is thus 'returned' to the world; not that it ever left ... but in our error and misperception we imagined soul was confined to the human. (ibid., 18)

What was present in the 'Collective Unconscious' of the American psyche is being made conscious to the individual(s) psyche via its self-regulating functioning film-as-dream. Jung himself had expressed his view with respect to 'The Complications of the American Psyche' claiming that: 'the foreign country somehow gets under the skin of those born in it' (1930/1964, 969). In this way he is clearly intimating that his notion of the functioning of the 'Collective Unconscious' is a profound 'quantum reality' in which nature and psyche share a common 'ground' of being. This 'primitive intuition' is elucidated further as:

Certain very primitive tribes are convinced that it is not possible to usurp foreign territory, because the children born there would inherit the wrong ancestor spirits who dwell in the trees, the rocks and the water of that country (Jung 1930/1964, 969).

Whether this is 'reality' or not, for Jung this 'quantum' view of the 'Collective Unconscious' was a distinct possibility for him and that the 'evolution and heredity [of the displaced indigenous population], provide a blueprint for the psyche' of the film's 'settlers' (Hall and Nordby 1973, 39).

The manner in which the main protagonists are presented in relation to a potent 'wild west' landscape portrays them as having 'usurped foreign territory' from the now absent Native Americans. The 'soul' of such a population is mirrored in the presence of such a landscape, as a 'reservoir of latent primordial images' (Hall and Nordby, 1973, 39), in the 'Collective Unconscious'. The film's Mother Archetype, casts a 'shadow' over the 'usurper' settler family as they precariously survive in its midst. A point reinforced both by the lack of any examples of Native Americans throughout the film – conspicuous by their absence – and the significance of the name 'Yuma' itself as meaning 'Son of Chief'. It appears then that the 'Collective Unconscious' of the now departed native peoples should return, via our hero's journey, to shape our 'collective' destiny.

### **The Inner Alchemical Journey**

The Mother Archetype, as it emerges from the 'Collective Unconscious' is the true *architect* of the principal narrative in the 'movie' as it 'seeks to correct an imbalance'. This comes following an early scene in which Dan is forced to watch outlaw Ben Wade and his gang hold up a stagecoach for its

gold bullion and shoot dead the driver. Dan's 'impotence' is then reinforced by our knowledge of the severe drought conditions and his inability to pay the \$200 needed for the six month water rights for his own cattle to access a neighbouring rancher's stream. This pressing need for Dan and his family thus provides the central dynamic for the film's narrative. In this way the Mother Archetype is the channel through which 'the hero's journey' can be viewed (Campbell, 2003). As in Johnson's words 'the eternal feminine draws us on' (1989, 34).

Each of the principal characters can also be interpreted as a composite representative of the different aspects of a singular psyche in an 'inner alchemical journey' towards 'Individuation'.

The opening frames of the movie serve as a metaphor for the beginning of 'the hero's journey' (Campbell 2003) with a journey into view of the stagecoach carrying the bullion waiting for ambush by Ben Wade's gang of outlaws. How the film's essential narrative unfolds, from its genesis of the Mother Archetype, is typically straightforward: Dan initially 'refused the call to action' (cited as a significant stage of such a mythological journey in Vogler 1985), by declining his son Mark's question about 'doing something' regarding the shooting of the stagecoach driver, Bill Moons. Dan understandably sees their situation as being hopelessly outnumbered by Ben Wade and his gang and chooses to ignore and deny the reality of the brutal slaying of an innocent man. Dan's refusal of his son's request is compounded by the reaction of his devoted wife, Alice, on their return to their 'homestead'. She is surprised at his lack of concern over 'the terrible things' Dan and his boys had seen. Dan retorts that she seems 'to expect something from me that I am not'. This would appear to point to a conflict between the ego *persona* – 'that aspect of the individual that is related to the outer world' (Casement 2001, 142) – and the inner *Anima*. This is outlined as being the 'archetype of the feminine side of the male psyche' (Hall and Nordby 1973, 46), although in this context 'the anima has a positive aspect. It is she who communicates ... the unconscious to the conscious mind' (Jung 1961, 212)

This communication is an example of the self-regulating ability of the psyche as it seeks to integrate its different elements. Additionally, in citing the Evans family constellation there is the presence of the two sons. Fittingly, children are symbolically representative of potentialities waiting to be fulfilled via the Self Archetype, and in this sense prepare the viewer, as seed does, for the 'growing' journey to come. They would appear to represent the beginning of the individuation process, in that the child male/female archetype as 'puer/puella' representing 'the eternal creativity of youth'

(Casement 2001, 143), then 'anticipates a nascent state of consciousness' (Jung 1945/1961, 168), dormant in the self archetype.

The central figure of Dan Evans thus appears representative of the *ego* and, in Jungian terms, stands as the centre and mediator of all conscious functioning (Hall and Nordby 1973). If developed normally in a stable axis with the Self Archetype, it is able to: 'stand in meaningful compensatory relation to the whole personality ... and make for psychic wholeness' (Neumann 1998, 49). In this way the maintenance of the Ego/Self Axis is crucial to 'the Hero's Journey' (Campbell 2003) with Dan (ego) operating as 'a mediating factor' to both his children and wife as representative of different archetypes, functioning within the psyche as a whole.

As the narrative progresses Dan accepts his challenge as 'the call to adventure' (Campbell 2003, 19), this being the next significant step for 'the Hero'. Campbell had built on Jung's notion of the 'Collective Unconscious' to encompass the universal nature of the language and symbol of myth, as the 'monomyth' (ibid.). Campbell explains the significance of 'the call' as follows: 'destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual centre of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown' (2003, 19).

This occurs for the 'ego' character when he 'follows the trail' of his (and his family's) pressing need for the \$200 dollars to buy the water rights for his cattle previously alluded to. Having initially followed his wife's suggestion to go into town (the homely sounding 'Bisbee') to borrow the money and be turned down by the prospective borrower, he finds himself hired by Mr Butterfield, owner of the stolen bullion to aid in the transport of the now-captured Ben Wade to 'Contention City', the eponymous '3.10 to Yuma' train and onward to prison. At this point, Dan is entering 'a zone unknown', both through the initial impetus of the drought conditions of the Mother Archetype and being thrown together with the outlaw Ben Wade. This conjunction of opposite personalities, representative as archetypal elements, generates further ingredients to be brought into consciousness in the alchemical journey of our hero.

In Jungian terms the outlaw Ben Wade takes on a number of functions in terms of aspects of the psyche as it seeks to find its own homeostatic harmony. In one sense, Ben represents the archetype of the 'Trickster', seen in opposition to the child archetype. Interestingly, these two archetypal elements are brought together in the Evans's homestead. They are shown sitting opposite each other at the supper table as Dan is forced to house Ben for the night prior to his appointment with

the departing train. Having thus helped facilitate the individuation process 'proper', the child archetype disappears from the narrative.

For Jung the 'Trickster' represents 'counter tendencies in the unconscious' (1954/1968, 262) which here appear to Dan as 'annoying accidents' (ibid., 262). However, arguably Ben, as the 'Trickster', is viewed as an outsider and agent for change; for it is he who precipitates more fully Dan's perilous quest towards individuation by shining a light on unresolved unconscious processes. Jung expounded this as an aspect of the inner 'shadow' at work, a split-off, 'opposite' portion of an archetypal figure present in the collective unconscious and available to the psyche for integration and resolution as presented in a person's life journey.

### **Personality Typology and Duality**

According to one of Jung's most influential ideas of Psychological Typology, Ben can also be seen as a subsumed 'shadow' of Dan's personality type. The film's two principal characters, Dan and Ben, can be seen as opposite dualities in the unfolding self archetype. Jung was to regard Personality Types (1925) as both attitude and function (Hall and Nordby, 1973). Accordingly, Dan represents an 'outward' Introverted Intuitive type/function, as a superior representation of its inferior more 'interior' type/function. This in turn is represented by the Ben character as Extroverted Sensation. In this way the inferior type/function of Ben could be seen to be the 'shadow' of the superior type/function of Dan which in terms of the individuation process is articulated through the ongoing narrative of the film as the Dan type/function seeks to balance the inferior Ben type/function (Casement 2001). This occurs through the strengthening of the Ego/Self axis on its heroic journey inward towards individuation.

Having set the stage for our 'hero' Dan, with his 'shadow function/type Ben duality, to meet the 3:10 train and his possible 'relief/reward/redemption', the actual timing of the struggle before the 'final journey' is significant in terms of the Jungian idea of 'The Middle Passage' (Hollis 1993). For Jung the middle part of life, approximately 40-50 years of age, was highly significant, encompassing the period of 'Ego/Self Estrangement' (Whitmont 1991, 279), commonly known as the 'Mid-Life Crisis'. Our central ego figure, Dan, is now in a form of crisis; while going through the middle part of his life chronologically and looking towards securing his later life as a place to resolve his inferior typology, he is forced to confront other split-off, unresolved, unconscious activities within the psyche, as presented by the 'opposite duality' of Ben. This is emphasised in the timing motif of the film's title, the mid-afternoon where unresolved activities would, of necessity, need resolution, for Jung argues:

'Whoever carries over into the afternoon the law of the morning, or the natural aim, must pay for so doing with damage to his soul' (1930/1964, 400). The necessity for inner resolution during the middle passage / mid-life crisis includes the 'emergence of the inferior function' (Hollis 1993, 74). As the film approaches its '3:10' afternoon denouement, this informs the narrative in the escalating conflict between the superior functioning Dan persona and its shadow. This is indicated in the emerging inferior function of the outlaw Ben Wade character.

The tension of the narrative reaches its zenith when Dan is abandoned by other hired hands to shoulder the task of guarding the killer, Ben, alone. They both wait, with Dan still intent on escorting Ben on to the 3:10 train and his 'final journey' to Yuma, walled-up in a hotel room in the (unconsciously?) aptly named 'Contention City' (Contention implies conflict and crisis as mirrored in the hero's passage). The clock continues to count down to the allotted time and builds the 'interior pressure' of the principal elements of the psyche as they seek to find balance. Dan (as 'ego') remains steadfast to his task despite the mounting odds against his success and being 'tried out' and increasingly tempted by his shadow inferior function and its cohorts as it 'calls for attention' (Hollis 1993, 77).

Here there appears to be the beginning of 'a conscious appointment with the shadow' (Hollis 1993, 78), with such 'invasions' ('stress' – 'pressure') regarded as essential to a fully regulated psyche in healthy process toward individuation. Through such conflicting experiences there emerges a growing regard for Dan from Ben, following the grounding of his steely will, to see the job through alongside Ben's associative declaration of Dan's 'nice' family life. When Ben's outlaw gang are alerted to Ben's presence in 'Contention', Ben is seen surveying the streets outside his hotel room prison, commenting that 'people figure a storm is blowin'. The viewer is presented with his face fading out of the shot as Dan's wife is seen riding out of the Archetypal Mother landscape to join him in the 'battleground'. Interestingly, here there appears fleetingly, a towering 'spire' rock formation, silhouetted against the sky, a natural, religious symbol supporting the Mother Archetype, Dan's wife, coming to aid the compensation of conscious and unconscious forces and to help facilitate their 'self-regulation' (Jung 1937/1966, 330).

At this point in the individuation process the *ego* character, Dan, encounters the two principal archetypes in the form of the older steadfast Mr Butterfield (Father) and his returning wife, Alice (Mother). Both archetypes offer Dan a 'way out' of his dilemma: they give him permission to exit his allotted task in the 'hero's journey' with honour (this following the brutal death of Alex, his fellow

'guard'). However, at this crucial juncture Dan refuses both offers, citing the greater cause 'of decency and peace for all'. Both encounters are considered vital to the 'actualisation' of the psyche in the process of Individuation and viewed in terms of 'the Symbolic Quest' (Whitmont 1997, 128)

Dan's choices are constructed as 'concrete maturation' (Whitmont 1997, 129) of the psyche and are important steps for the 'Hero'. This is further articulated in terms of the Hero's Journey as being 'In the belly of the whale' (Campbell 1993, 90), the point of no return. Dan is pursuing the completion of his task for more collective, generative reasons associated with 'the good of the whole'. Away from his previously 'known world and self' to a possible metamorphosis and 'transit to a field of rebirth' (ibid., 90), Dan is simultaneously anchored to the Self Archetype and grounded in the narrative of the whole as he proclaims the 'decency and peace for all'. The Ego/Self axis appears established and matured.

### **The 'Mysterium Coniunctionis'**

From this point on, the quickening narrative has a fateful inevitability to it with the Dan/Ben superior/inferior type/function heading for their appointment with the '3.10' train. The attention of the viewer is held as it reaches its alchemical conclusion. As the train is pulling out Dan carries through with his now greater purpose and in the final moment of action is 'unexpectedly' aided by Ben as they both climactically leap onto the train. This occurs as a clear reflection of the now acknowledged interdependence of the Dan/Ben function types and a fully regulated psyche. They redeem each other and an archetypal form of death/rebirth occurs with the 'final journey' of the train, symbolising the reconciliation of conscious and unconscious psychic activity through the transcendent function (Miller 2004). This is further validated by the presence of the archetypal Great Mother in the form of his joyous wife, coupled with the now freely-falling rain that appears to sanctify, celebrate and ritualise such psychological maturation. The Mother Archetype, having been the architect of the narrative, supplies the elemental form of water as a synchronic symbol of rebirth, a 'reanimating dew' (Jung 1938/1968, 103), an 'acausal connecting principal' (Jung 1952/1968, 417), as an outward reflection of a maturation of the individuation process.

Moreover, as the film's first and, final frames are of a journey into and ultimately out of view, formerly by stage-coach and latterly by train, the narrative and symbolism of the film's denouement represents that quintessential Jungian symbol of wholeness, the mandala – the totality of unconscious experience that incorporates itself in wholeness and symbolised in many forms. Jung viewed this 'circular movement' of life (Jung 1929/1968, 21) as an individuating process, and I

propose that, with the presence of the Mother Archetype and the rain now falling as 'reanimating dew', this is an example of the poetically named 'Mysterium Coniunctionis' (Jung 1956/1968), or 'mystery of the conjunction', out of which comes a new unity or wholeness - a new mandala. Here the rain symbolises the Male/Spirit element falling on the Female/Material earth element and, from this conjunction or union of opposites, a rebirth into a greater expression of Individuation becomes possible.

### **Conclusion**

*3:10 to Yuma*, analysed within the context of classical Jungian ideas, may therefore be understood as the expression of the Collective Unconscious of the American people, seeking to bring to conscious awareness issues related to the birth, survival and maturational aspirations of such a culture and society. Such a profound expression of myth-making is thus performing a self-regulating function, and serving as a healing mythological journey for the collective and individual psyche of the American viewer of such a film-as-dream. Ultimately, this essay envisions *3.10 to Yuma* as an archetypal reflection of humankind's most enduring quest: the search for meaningful identity and the attainment of an enduring, true sense of selfhood.

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