

Analytical Psychology and Garro's *Los pilares de doña Blanca*

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This short play seems to be based on a children's singing game. Its plot is surrealistic but not illogical. In a tower protected by formidable walls and pillars, Doña Blanca lives with her husband, Rubí. Four knights of old come successively to the foot of the tower where the lady strolls with her red parasol, and each throws his heart to her with lovesick words. She places the hearts on her person, wearing them as jewels. A fifth knight, Alazán, arrives. Far from offering her his heart, as she expects, he starts to knock down the pillars of her tower with his lance. Soon the tower falls, the two occupants, Blanca and Rubí, disappear, and Rubí's voice is heard to say that neither they nor the tower were real, only reflections in a mirror; and now that the mirror is broken, they have ceased to be. Alazán crosses over the debris into the ruins of the tower. There, on a splinter of mirror, he finds a dove; he picks it up, places it on the tip of his lance, and contemplates it. Then he hides the dove in his bosom, saying: "Entra; que te reciba mi corazón,"¹ and the curtain falls.

One wonders what may be the significance of such straight-forward fantasy. Both Alazán and Rubí are part horse: Alazán has a beautiful tail; Rubí, a horse's head. The dove is evidently Doña Blanca in new form because all along Rubí has been referring to her as his dove. Thus, Alazán takes Blanca into *his* heart instead of surrendering his heart to her, as did the other knights.

The elements in the play that pertain to the classic fairy tale (knights, lady inside a walled tower) suggest a means of interpretation. Fairy tales are generally an attempt to exteriorize psychological processes, adventures of the psyche. Let us therefore think of all the characters of *Los pilares* as possible representatives of unconscious factors. They might be contending forces within one person's psyche. For example, anthropoid animals like Alazán and Rubí can represent our animal instincts; in other words, they could be symbols for unconscious powers that are at the disposal of consciousness. Indeed, such powers are often personified, projected on external reality, and experienced as objective entities.

Marie-Louise von Franz, the Jungian psychologist, says that all fairy tales endeavor to describe one and the same fact, the psychic fact that Carl G. Jung calls the Self, so complex and difficult for us to realize that thousands of tales do not exhaust the theme; each fairy tale emphasizes a particular phase of this lifelong experience.²

In this context, *Los pilares* is basically a hero myth in which a knight is seeking to liberate a captive or to find a treasure, and must do violence to himself, break down walls to achieve his goal. Walls, pillars, and fortresses are symbols of the unconscious, which is also called the Great Mother when it is personified; the unconscious tends to encompass ego-consciousness and seems to resist its emancipation. The captive that the hero liberates is his own soul or the positive feminine element of his personality, which separates from the terrifying Great Mother and becomes a partner. The captive is what Jung calls the *anima*. The treasure he finds is the psychic energy, the creative powers of his soul, which, together with the captive, effect the transformation and development of ego-consciousness. The captive and the treasure are generally closely related if not identical: union with one's soul or *anima* gives rise to a sense of wholeness, and to the flow of psychic energy or libido, at least for a while.

Alazán, the one dynamic character in the play, is the hero who enters into himself to be reborn. The first words he utters express his need to find himself:

BLANCA—¿A quién buscas con esos ojos terribles? (eyes are symbols of consciousness.)

ALAZÁN (*humbly*)—Me busco a mí.

(Why then is he striking her house, trying to knock it down? she asks.)

ALAZÁN—Golpeo este muro que me cubre al mundo, que me aparta de mí mismo. Debo ver qué guarda. (p. 47)

Given that he is outside the wall trying to get in, the wall he speaks of is evidently a psychological one. Indeed, the wall that hides the world from Alazán is the unconscious, which means that he is unable to adapt satisfactorily to the world and that he must pierce the wall or remove the obstacle that impedes the flow of psychic energy. In one respect, the treasure (or psychic energy) he is seeking is Rubí, whose name means ruby, a precious stone whose fiery color well represents the concept of libido; besides, Rubí is horse-headed, and the horse is another libido symbol. Rubí is also the guardian of the treasure, Blanca; it is he who keeps her in the tower, where none may enter, as she tells Alazán: "Aquí no hay entrada y mi marido olvidó poner un aldabón. No recibimos visitas" (p. 46). As guardian of the treasure, Rubí represents the ego's fear of risk, of change, of breaking away; the four timid knights, who disfavor Alazán, inform on him to Rubí. It can further be seen that Rubí is Alazán's double because of their common anthropoid features and because of the sun symbols they share (which signify consciousness): one has a golden tail leading to the sun; the other is fiery red. Rubí therefore represents the Self, the total personality in whose likeness the individual ego grows as it develops: the indestructibility of a stone such as the ruby suggests and symbolizes the Self. So while Rubí is at first a force to be overcome, he is

seen to have supported the hero's action all along once it is accomplished. It is an instance of the winner-take-all principle that prevails in the affairs of the unconscious (You vanquish a dragon, it becomes your friend. You embrace a beast, it turns into your prince. But if you lose—you lose everything).

Up to this point the *anima*-to-be, Blanca, is still identical with the Great Mother. When the first knight saw her twirling her red parasol (a sun symbol), he addressed her as “¡la luna, con el sol en la mano!” (p. 40). In mythology, the Great Goddess is the moon and brings forth the sun; she is the matrix of light, for consciousness is the product of the unconscious. Blanca flirts with the knights and entices them to throw their heart, which is the symbol of life, to her for her amusement, which they do. This is in keeping with the Great Mother Goddesses who demand abject slavery of their worshipers. In the play, the idea is emphasized by the first knight as he tosses his heart up to Blanca: “¡Ahí va, bólido, cometa!” (p. 41), he cries. This heart eventually sets fire to Blanca, but it is lost energy for the knight. And each of the next three knights, as he looks up to her, indicates that he has been pining for her for so long that his heart has dried up and died. The four represent the early stages of ego-consciousness, when the *anima* and all its energy are projected on the Great Mother, that is to say, onto a figure of such insuperable authority that the ego is constrained to remain an impotent plaything of fate and does not command the energy which is rightfully his.

Blanca goes offstage with Rubí; the four knights join hands and dance in a circle, singing a ditty that may be part of the child's game:

“Doña Blanca está cubierta / de pilares de oro y plata; / romperemos un pilar / para ver a doña Blanca.”

Then they break off in alarm:

“¿Quién es ese . . . ?” (p. 45)

A newcomer, the Knight Alazán, makes his entrance sporting a beautiful golden tail. He flourishes his tail, then he begins to strike the tower wall with his lance. The drumming noise he makes brings Blanca back and she greets him over the wall in smiling amazement. She admires his beautiful tail and asks him if it is the road to the setting sun, but he does not answer her. Later, when he announces that what he wants is to find himself, she exclaims: “Pues sigue las huellas dejadas en el polvo por tu hermosa cola de oro” (p. 47). In these words, the *anima* is telling the ego that he will find himself through self-sacrifice, that is, by following the sun into the westerly realm, inasmuch as the sun's setting and rising are universal symbols of death and rebirth.

Alazán's answer to her is that he has long been deciphering the labyrinth traced by his tail and that all signs have led him to her: “Hace mucho que descifro el laberinto escrito por mi cola. Todos esos jeroglíficos . . . me han traído hasta aquí” (p. 47). These hieroglyphics are clues left by the libido indicating the direction of its activity; they are like labyrinths which, when studied and deciphered, will eventually lead to the mother, source of all libido. He is trying to enter her domain to see if within he can find what he seeks, presumably himself transformed: “Golpeo este muro . . . que me aparta de mí mismo. Debo ver qué guarda . . . debo entrar.” And he resumes

pounding on the wall. In short, he has followed the libido back to its source, and now he must dare to penetrate the unconscious so as to unite with the mother and give birth to himself.

Before Alazán achieves his purpose, he and Blanca discuss the meaning of projections in enigmatic terms. To his assertion that he must see what is kept inside the tower, she answers that she is kept there, but that if he wants to see her, he should look at her from out there; in other words, that he should continue to project the *anima*. (She seems to be testing him).

Alazán: "Mientras más te miro, menos te veo. Tendría que verte adentro de mi corazón" (p. 47), meaning that seeing her outside himself is false, that he must withdraw the projection and have her within. Blanca asks him to show her his heart as the others did, but he says that it cannot be shown; that it is an empty palace that must be seen from inside and that no one has ever visited. He says it contains mirrors that would show her real face to her: "encontrarías el rostro que perdiste por haberte reflejado en espejos contaminados de narices que no eran las tuyas" (p. 48). I understand "narices" to signify a projected image or "face"; to say that Blanca's face, or its reflected image, has been contaminated with noses other than her own is to say that in projection the image of the *anima* is distorted by those who, like untrue mirrors, reflect it back to us; that the projected image of an archetype is always defective. Thus, Alazán is admitting that the *anima*, his *anima*, has been scattered in the faces of others and disfigured thereby, but if she were within, if she were integrated into his consciousness, she would be what she truly is for him.

Blanca then asks, would she be prettier if she saw herself in his mirror; what would she look like?

BLANCA—¿Y cómo sería yo?

ALAZÁN—Como yo . . .

BLANCA—Y si tú te miraras ¿qué encontrarías?

ALAZÁN—A ti. (p. 48)

This is accurate, because the *anima* personifies a man's conscious femininity and is a facet of his own personality.

At this point, one of the pillars crashes under the lance; Rubí from the wings inquires what is happening, and Blanca calls back that a collapse of noses is taking place, meaning of course that Alazán is withdrawing his projections. Then turning to the hero, she exclaims: "Yo no tengo narices, Alazán. Nunca las tuve" (p. 49), by which she is telling him that she has always been his true *anima*, even though he may have perceived distorted images of her. Whereupon the tower falls to his blows, Blanca disappears, and the disembodied voice of Rubí proclaims: "¡No hay torre! ¡No hay Blanca! ¡No hay Rubí! Todo era el reflejo de un espejo. Ahora se ha roto y ya no somos más. Sus astillas reflejan otros soles" (p. 50). The shattered mirror is an effective representation of the process called Fragmentation of the Archetypes.³ The image of the unconscious projected in the form of the tower with its lord and lady (Great Mother, *anima*, treasure), along with the crushing power emanating from such an image, is split up and deflated. The fragments become archetypal images that are more readily assimilated into conscious-

ness, so that their dynamic content which was "out there," can be transferred to one's own psyche—an experience which feels like a rebirth. The "other suns" that Rubí mentions ("sus astillas reflejan otros soles") refer to such fragmented archetypal images, now reflected on the splinters.

Alazán penetrates into the ruins of the tower, that is, he enters the unconscious. Although no mirror was visible before, there are now slivers of a broken mirror in the debris. On one of these a dove appears: the dove is obviously Blanca as *anima*. By having been transformed into a dove, the *anima* has been spiritualized, as she should be; instead of being projected on a woman, she will now be his soul and inner partner. But first, he places the dove on his lance and contemplates it, drawing our attention to a vivid configuration: the male and female symbols (lance and dove) brought together in a kind of spiritual nuptials, a *hieros gamos*. This portrays a union of opposites, consciousness with the unconscious, which results in a release of energy and is the central idea of rebirth.⁴ Alazán then tucks the dove in his bosom saying: "Ven aquí, copa de espuma, forma perfecta del granizo, entra; que te reciba mi corazón" (p. 50). The vessel of foam is the vessel of transformation containing the water of life—the foam which is the Great Mother Aphrodite (Aphrodite means born of foam). The hail stone is ice-crystal, symbol of the Self. Since Alazán is the personification of an instinctual drive toward consciousness, he can incorporate the dove by which he is transformed and brought closer to the Self, or psychic wholeness. The transformation is neither dramatized nor alluded to, but it is the likely consequence of uniting with the *anima*.

Recapitulating, one way to understand Elena Garro's fantastic playlet, *Los pilares de Doña Blanca*, is to suppose that the plot situation deals with the reality of the soul rather than with external reality, in which case the first four knights represent early stages of ego development in relation to the unconscious, expressing a progressively deteriorating condition, which is in fact a salubrious growth leading to outright emancipation. The fifth knight, Alazán, personates the self-generating power of the psyche that prompts the ego to discover the treasures within. The walled tower and the two figures it contains are common projections of inner realities upon outside reality, namely, the unconscious and its archetypes. The direction of the plot is to shatter the projection, to integrate, at least partially, the *anima* and the treasure of psychic energy, which are, in this instance, one and the same, and to reach a higher consciousness.

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Notes

1. Elena Garro, *Un hogar sólido y otras piezas en un acto* (Xalapa, Mexico: Universidad Veracruzana, 1958), p. 50.

2. Marie Louise von Franz, *An Introduction to the Interpretation of Fairy Tales*, 3rd ed. (Zürich: Spring Publications, 1975), pp. 1-2.

3. Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, Bollingen Series 42 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), p. 320ff.

4. Carl Jung, *Symbols of Transformation*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, Complete Works, 5 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 432.