

SHRINK RAP RADIO #327

POLITICS AND JUNG

with Jungian analyst Tom Elsner

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Dr. Dave: My return guest today, Tom Elsner J.D., M.A., Jungian analyst, is a core faculty member at Pacifica Graduate Institute in Santa Barbara, California where he also has a private practice. A former attorney, he trained at the Jung-Von Franz Center for Depth Psychology in Zurich. A member of the C. G. Jung Study Center of Southern California, his areas of special interest include alchemy and the depth psychology of folklore and literature. He is currently completing a book about Coleridge and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Now here's the interview.

Dr. Tom Elsner welcome back to Shrink Rap Radio.

Thank you Dr. Dave, it's great to be here.

Dr. Dave: Well it's great to have you on the show again. People really loved our last interview on fairy tales. I got a lot of emails about that.

Tom Elsner: That's great. Well thanks very much, that was a fun interview for me. So I appreciate that.

Dr. Dave: I'm glad and hopefully we'll have another fun one here today.

We're going to be talking about Jung and politics but we're not going to be talking about our personal political opinions. We just went through an election and there will be a lot of emotions around all of that. There were then, there are now I imagine but as you pointed out in an email to me, that we should be influenced by Einstein's observation that the significant problems we face today cannot be solved at the same level of thinking that created them. So we're going to rise one or more levels above the current conflicts.

Most people don't think about Jung and politics in the same frame but you've pointed out that Jung was deeply engaged psychically with the events preceding the First World War and so maybe you could tell us about that and something about the series of dreams that he had about that time.

Tom Elsner: Sure, well just to start with, what you're talking about in terms of political discussions. These are the things you don't talk about at polite dinner conversations – politics and religion. The reason being, obviously, that these discussions constellate our deepest held values, they constellate emotional reactions, truths, certainties just like religion does. So we want to walk into this discussion within the framework that you constructed, which is definitely that we are not going to be talking about which is the right political opinion or not and I'm certainly not going to be sharing with you my own personal viewpoints on politics, which wouldn't be very interesting in any event. But hopefully we can try to look at the ways in

which Jung was interested in politics and the ways in which this might help us jump up to a new level of awareness and consciousness about these political problems.

Dr. Dave: Yes, let me just jump in and piggyback on your observation that we're reluctant to talk about these things. I just recently listened to an episode on *This American Life* where they explored how absolutely divided this country was in this recent election, to the point of families breaking up and long friendships being dissolved and real animosity and shock that the other could embrace their horrible, destructive, political position. So I'm sure you'll be getting into talking about the shadow and so on and that but back to Jung's dreams foreshadowing the First World War.

Tom Elsner: Yeh, Jung does come under criticism typically for being concerned with the individual and not very concerned with the collective, not very concerned with society or political issues, as in the sense of 'we've had a hundred years of psychotherapy and the world's getting worse.' What's the relevance of psychology to the world's political problems? Not many people know that with the publication of Jung's *Red Book* in 2009 – and I know you've had Nancy Furlotti on your show talking about *The Red Book* – but that whole experience of Jung of getting so deeply involved with his visions and dreams, encounters with the unconscious, active imagination – it all came out of dreams and visions that he was having prior to the outbreak of World War 1. So, for instance in October of 1913, Jung experienced a vision of a flood that covered all of Europe from England to Russia and this vision lasted two hours. He had other visions in which there was a sea of blood covering over all these lands, other dreams in 1914 of being in a foreign land and suddenly a terrible cold descended from space. So these dreams and visions he was having around that time were really apocalyptic and horrifying and...

Dr. Dave: Yes, and you mentioned that that initial vision lasted two hours. I knew that he'd had, quotes, 'a dream' but two hours – that's really something. I don't think I've ever had a 2 hour dream or vision or anything close to that.

Tom Elsner: Really? I have not either, so thank you for highlighting the uniqueness of that. And you know that Jung by this time was already a psychiatrist who had built a world wide reputation working with schizophrenics, so it wasn't lost on him what might be taking place within himself, namely he thought that he was – in those days they called it 'doing a schizophrenia' – he thought that these dreams and visions were prefiguring a psychotic break in himself. For instance, right before the outbreak of World War 1, he was in Scotland giving a lecture at a psychiatric congress on schizophrenia and in an interview in the '50s with Mircea Eliade, he said 'I was certain that I was speaking about myself and would probably go mad right after the lecture.'

Dr. Dave: Amazing! That took courage. I would say that took some courage.

Tom Elsner: Yeh, to go into the material? Yeh, you really get the sense of him being on the edge with these...

Dr. Dave: Well, not only going into the material certainly took a lot of courage but also getting up before a distinguished audience and announcing that you may be going crazy (laughter).

Tom Elsner: Oh, yeh, well he did not say that to his audience in the lecture but later in the '50s in an interview, he told that to Mircea Eliade and he said, internally to himself, he (Jung) was thinking 'probably I'll be speaking about myself and I'll probably go mad right after the lecture.'

Dr. Dave: Oh, O.K.

Tom Elsner: That was right before the outbreak of World War 1. Jung in that same interview in the '50s recounts how he says that when he was in Scotland and the news of the war broke out he had to take the fastest ship possible back home to Switzerland just as he had dreamt – he'd had that experience in a dream as well and he said nobody was happier about the outbreak of the war than me, namely because now I knew that these visions and dreams did not presage a schizophrenic break in myself but were related to the undercurrents of what was happening in the culture and what was happening in Europe and what was happening in terms of the war breaking out. This made a deep, deep impression on Jung about the reality of the collective unconsciousness and it gave him courage because right after this event and World War 1 was when Jung really started to work on *The Red Book*. It gave him courage to go into his unconscious, to spend time with it, to express what it was saying and to work with it because he was convinced after these experiences around World War 1 that his unconscious wasn't just his. It was something real that was in the culture. So for me, I really see all of Jungian psychology as we know it, being a response to political and social collective events.

Dr. Dave: That's interesting. So in fact you're seeing a far more political thread running through Jung's thought than we've previously been aware of.

Tom Elsner: Yes, I think that's right and I think with the publication of *The Red Book* recently I think we can really see that. Sonu Shamdasani in his introduction to *The Red Book* talks about this as well.

Dr. Dave: Yes, now I think I cut you off before you actually got to say something about the content of that initial vision that presaged the outbreak of World War 1 and probably many people will be familiar with that already but maybe you could just briefly recapitulate that.

Tom Elsner: Sure, well, the series of dreams and visions involved, for instance, a flood that covered all of Europe. Another vision in which Jung saw a sea of blood covering these same lands – a terrible cold descending from outer space and freezing all of Europe. And in *that* dream, he was, in the dream, in a remote English land, and had to come back by the fastest ship possible and the ice in that dream had turned the leaves of the tree into sweet grapes that were full of healing juices and he was giving those grapes to a crowd of people in the dream. So those were the basic dreams and visions that he was experiencing.

Dr. Dave: O.K. Thank you. So what are we to make of all this?

Tom Elsner: Well, I think the basic point we can make of all this is to consider the possibility today that the so called inner life, the world of psychology in our own dreams, our own visions – the way that our own inner nature is responding to our contemporary world political problems – there might be some relevance to those – to those so called inner events, to the outer collective reality. This is what Jung was really interested in and also what I'm interested in – what is the response of our inner nature today to political turmoil, to war, to these problems of over population, the ecological crisis – problems that if you look at them rationally, intellectually only, they have no solution. What happens then? How does our inner nature respond? So, I think for me that's the crux of it.

Dr. Dave: Yes, and that's a very good question and in a paper you sent me, you start off with proposing a number of questions and I'll probably end up restating them to you and the first one was really what you just said – how might a depth psychology that takes account of Jung's idea of the collective unconscious be relevant to our contemporary socio-political problems? And of course one place that we see this on the world stage today, for example, is Iran and the US – what might a Jungian perspective offer us as we are all nervous in thinking about that.

Tom Elsner: Yeh, thank you for phrasing it like that. For me there're a couple of main points there that a Jungian psychology can offer. One is Jung's concept of shadow projection and the other is the idea of thinking symbolically or metaphorically about religious and political events.

Dr. Dave: Well, let's take those two separately and tell us a bit about shadow projections and their role.

Tom Elsner: Sure. The word Jung came up with is shadow – it's a metaphor for what we don't see about ourselves, so the psychological rule is that there are contents that belong to all of us – aspects of our own psychology and personality and selves that for whatever reasons are incompatible with our conscious perspective, they're incompatible with our idealized image of ourselves, or they're incompatible with what society says we should be like and typically what happens to those qualities about the self is that they are repressed and if psychological qualities are repressed they don't go away. What happens instead is that they are inevitably projected out and seen in other people. So this is what Jung referred to as shadow projection – the phenomenon of seeing what is disliked, rejected, repressed – banished in our own psychology – in someone else and fighting against it out there.

So, you know, personally I'm sure all of your listeners and you and I can think of probably a few examples at least right off the top of our heads of how this affects us in our personal lives. On the world political stage these shadow projections can take archetypal or mythological forms, for instance, evil. The phrase 'an axis of evil' locating absolute evil in the others that live across the ocean. Ronald Reagan referred to the Soviet Union as an evil empire. George Bush in a State of the Union address that he gave referred to an axis of evil that consists of Iran, North Korea and Iraq. On the other side, the Ayatollah Khomeini is quoted as saying, for instance, that the United States is the Great Satan and Iran and Iraq responded to George Bush's statements by saying well the real axis of evil is the United States, Great Britain and

they listed another country that I can't recall off the top of my head and Russia was a lesser Satan. Hugo Chavez, speaking at the United Nations after George Bush took the stage, he said 'the devil spoke here yesterday and you can still smell the sulphur on the podium.' So we get the vivid experience – and this is why politics, I think, is so emotionally crippling is because it touches our deepest fears and highest values – and this can get expressed sometimes in terms of mythological ideas about evil.

Dr. Dave: And it's interesting how consistent those projections are from both sides. The examples that you gave are, you know, the archetypal devil and both sides are evoking that image.

Tom Elsner: And this is nothing new, right? This has happened, it seems like, throughout world's history on various levels. The people across the river are always the bad people and if we could just find a way to eliminate them everything would be fine.

Dr. Dave: And I also think of the witch trials in the middle ages.

Tom Elsner: The witch trials are a great example of this phenomenon. We could go on and on but I think we get the basic idea – the idea being that when we are emotionally gripped and certain and can't stand or tolerate the existence of another person, it's probably a good clue that we're hitting an aspect of our own shadow. So the psychological perspective on this and the psychological remedy would then be to take back those projections and try to work with them within the self. That's easily said and very difficult to do.

Dr. Dave: Is there value in us doing that at a personal level and can it be done at a collective level?

Tom Elsner: That's a great question. I can say that Jung's perspective on it was that if enough individuals could do this psychological work, of dealing with their own shadow, then the world's political tensions and conflicts might have a chance of being resolved. But if enough people don't do that work, then we're probably headed for another world war. So, Jung's idea was definitely that doing our own psychological work even on very small levels, day to day levels in our interactions with our boss at work or in our relationships with our spouses, or with our neighbours – that if we're consciously working on taking back and working with our own shadow, we're doing work of immediate political and social significance because these are exactly the same types of conflicts that are tearing the world apart.

Dr. Dave: So how do we balance? Again I'm thinking of the recent political election and the very deep divide between Democrats and Republicans. I have a lot of liberal friends and I can hear the demonization of the Republicans as if that would be the worst thing that could ever happen – if a Republican had won the election – and then on the other side, Republicans have vilified Barack Obama in the worst sorts of ways... I've forgotten what my question was behind that... help me out.

Tom Elsner: That's a great observation of the phenomenon. I think if we try to step back as you are doing right now, try to take a step back and see the political phenomenon in the country and just observe it – those are the facts. There's half the

country voted for Mick Romney, half the country voted for Barack Obama. One half – the Liberal side of that half – is absolutely certain that if Mick Romney had won it would be horrific and vice versa for the other side. A friend of mine who's a Liberal person – I called him up on the night of the election, when it was still going on and he said 'Oh my gosh, I hope the Nazi's don't win.' That kind of language.

Dr. Dave: Exactly, exactly – coming from both sides have used that language.

Tom Elsner: Coming from both sides – so this is really where we have take a step back and reflect and not be caught up emotionally in one side or the other being wrong because the way the phenomenon works is this big split – it's just left and right – those are symbols, you could say, of conscious and unconscious on both sides.

Dr. Dave: I remember what the question was that I was reaching for now – and it was; How does one balance the realization that, okay, I may be engaging in projection and demonization of the other, with action? 'I need to be an activist – I really believe that something needs to be done.' How does one find the balance point between those two?

Tom Elsner: I do know what you mean because this is, in a way, the question when we talk about psychology and politics – how do they go together, what is the balance point? And I don't have a formula for you, or your listeners, in terms of that. I think it's an individual issue and it's a question of one's own individuation process, of what one's called to do and how different people will have different ways in which they answer that question individually. Some people really are called to be activists and be on the political stage and other people not so much. I think the most important thing is to stay in tune with one's own dreams and one's own individuation process slowly, step by step.

Dr. Dave: I guess as I try to imagine my own answer to that question the key would be not demonizing the other person but still being passionately engaged but stopping short of the demonization.

Tom Elsner: Yeh, I think if you... I think the phrase that Barbara Hannah the Jungian analyst had for this was 'the introversion of war' – taking the conflicts back into one's self. I've been impressed by certain world leaders who seem to be able to do this and because they were adequately able to, say, confront the civil war within themselves, or the enemy within themselves – and they've come to grips with that – it seems that they were able to have a healing effect on their environment. For instance Nelson Mandela is a person that I'm learning more about right now who seems to have been able to do something like this – and he said over and again that the political activism has to start with the self and it has to start with one's own conflicts and one's own civil wars.

Dr. Dave: There was another example that you gave and I don't know if you'll have it on the tip of your tongue or not but to the question of what can we do to help the world's problems, in your paper, you had a great quote from Vaclav Havel. Maybe you can give a little background on him and if you have the quote, do you?

Yes, I have it here. Vaclav Havel – he was the leader of the Czech Republic. He was imprisoned multiple times for political dissidence and he later became the first President of the Czech Republic. He died last year, by the way, at the age of 75 but recognized throughout the world for his many contributions to world peace. When he was in prison he wrote a series of letters to his wife and these are published in a book called *Letters to Olga*. That was his wife's name and he's asking himself this question, sitting in prison: 'What can I do about the world problem?' It's probably the question that's most pertinent to us. What can I really do, one little person? And his answer is this, he says:

"If I consider the problem as that which the world is turning me into – that is as a tiny screw in a giant machine, deprived of human identity – then there is really nothing I can do. Obviously I cannot put a stop to the destruction of the globe, the growing stupidity of nations and the production of thousands of new thermonuclear bombs. If, however, I consider it as that which each of us originally is, or rather what each of us – irrespective of the state of the world – has the basic potential to become, which is to say an autonomous human being, capable of acting responsibly to and for the world, then of course there's a great deal I can do."

You can see that his response, basically, is that to make a contribution to the world problem one has to become one's own task first. This was really Jung's idea too – it was his idea of individuation. Not a lot of people are aware that Jung viewed the individuation process as ultimately having a social goal or telos. Jung thought the person who's going through individuation has to separate out from being identified with the social group. A process of separation takes place and that feels like a death – a death of one's own values, a death of one's identification with collective norms and social mores in a way, in favour of looking within and finding one's own path through life. Jung thought that was the way new values are created in the culture by individuals that go through that process and then can offer back the fruits of their own individual journey to the collective and this is the way the collective gets recycled in a way – it gets its values rejuvenated – by people going through this inner process of death and rebirth themselves and offering something back to the collective world from that.

Dr. Dave: Well, that's really well put. What's the relationship between war and the ability to withstand the tension of the opposites? That's part of this individuation process from a Jungian point of view. This idea of the tension of the opposites, how does that relate to war?

Tom Elsner: War is that tension of the opposites happening on a vast collective scale. If enough people split, then war results. If you just think of the Protestants and Catholics in Ireland, or different sects of Islam, if you think of the axis of evil ideas that we talked of before. If enough people on both sides of the problem are splitting their shadows off and getting emotionally constellated and seeing the enemy 'out there' – that's war. That's one of the things that contribute to war, certainly from the psychological perspective. The idea would be if enough people can introvert, or take back within themselves that conflict, it would have a collective effect.

Dr. Dave: I like the quote that you attribute to Murray Stein about letting go of one's most cherished cultural certainties and dearly held convictions and so I guess that

would be part of this individuation process and maybe this holding the tension of the opposites?

Tom Elsner: Yeh and it's easy to say let go of one's cherished convictions and most deeply held values but this is almost impossible to do. I think it's one of the reasons Jung said that we're headed for mass genocide in the world – another world war – unless we can find a way of salvation through a symbolic death, because to go through this process of individuation and confront one's own shadow, it's a death. This is a descent into the underworld, it's a death of the old self, the old certainties. It's a huge subject in and of itself – the phenomenology of what that looks like and it reminds me of a G.K. Chesterton quote that went something along the lines of 'It's not that the Christian ideal has been tried and been found wanting, it's been found difficult and left untried.' So I think of that all the time with this problem of taking back the shadow, because if you really do that, you're confronted with your opposite. It's a horrific event. It's an event that can lead to despair. It's very difficult to contain and hold the emotional reactions, one's split off wounds, everything one's been defending against through projection. To really confront that within one's self is a huge opus.

Dr. Dave: Yes, now earlier in your response you used the word 'symbolic' and you suggest we need to engage in symbolic thinking as a way out of this mess. What is it you're getting at? How do we engage in symbolic thinking as opposed to what – literal thinking?

Tom Elsner: Right, yes, as opposed to literal thinking. Why would that be? See, this is a question that needs some context and needs to be addressed because it's not immediately evident how developing the capacity to think symbolically or metaphorically could have any social relevance at all – as distinct from literally. But if you look at this from the perspective of fundamentalism it may become a little more apparent, what the relevance of developing that capacity could be. Fundamentalism is a problem that's having immediate political effects obviously in our world - fundamentalisms of all kind. Fundamentalists think of what us psychologists would call archetypal images as being true – their version of true. They think literally and concretely about religious imagery and they'll kill you if you have a different image or if you doubt the truth of their image. From the psychological perspective, fundamentalism takes archetypal images that in themselves are not good, or bad, or delusional, or anything and by taking them literally they become dangerous. So if you think of, for instance, take the problem of what from the perspective of the United States is Islamic terrorism. From the perspective of the people that are engaged in those acts and the people who support them, they aren't terrorists at all, they're martyrs. They're engaged in a sacred activity. Ahmadinejad asked, for instance, once 'Is there an art that is more beautiful, more divine, more eternal, than the art of the martyr's death?' Right? And the idea is that by blowing oneself up in a fiery inferno, one is not a criminal, or seeking one's personal gain but is engaging in an act of God. This is the idea of sacrifice and the idea of death and rebirth enacted literally. I think that's why it's dangerous.

Dr. Dave: And we have our own version of that – yesterday was Veteran's Day and in our neighbouring community here of Petaluma there was a big parade and so on

and a lot of honouring of veterans and the sacrifice that they made for, quotes, ‘God and country.’

Tom Elsner: That’s right, yes, this motif of sacrifice is a religious term really and it generates huge emotions and we’re not looking at it now as ‘is that right or wrong?’ We’re just trying to observe the phenomenon psychologically and point out that there are religious overtones to those words and that those carry big deep, deep emotional values. And also another thing, just to point out, that those deep religious emotional values get concretely enacted in terms of war and country. So I think this is what Jung was trying to get at when he said that we’re going to be heading for mass genocide unless we can work out the way of salvation through a *symbolic* death. If death is in the cards, in a way, is it going to be an inner symbolic one, or an outer enacted one? The way into this for me has always been through the poets. The poets in our culture who are, in a way, the experts in thinking symbolically. Goethe for instance has a poem called *The Holy Longing*. I’ll read you a little bit from that poem and think about this in the context of martyrdom. Goethe’s poem *The Holy Longing*, just a little bit of it:

*Tell a wise person, or else keep silent
For the mass man will mock it right away
I praise what is truly alive
And what longs to be burned to death*

He sounds a lot like Ahmadinejad, right? But then he goes on and at the end of his poem he says:

*And so long as you have not experienced this:
to die and so to grow
You’re only a troubled guest on a dark earth*

You see the poet has taken the same archetypal phenomenon as the martyr and instead of becoming a terrorist, or instead of literally enacting it, he’s seeing it symbolically as a process of death and rebirth that can happen in this life, now, in the inner process. And for that reason the poet is not a fundamentalist and he’s not a terrorist. The madness of fundamentalism is that it transforms the outer reality into a symbolic reality but it does it without conscious understanding, intention, meaning or purpose. Same phenomenon – I think it’s very hard in our culture today as I look around and listen to the radio and watch movies, there seems to be basically two points of view in our culture – one is literal fundamentalism, these are the religious people who think their archetypal images are true and literally real and then on the other hand people like Bill Maher – remember his movie *Religulous?* Making fun of those types of people – basically saying that they’re deluded, they’re just believing a bunch of lies. They’re delusional and more, they’re dangerous because these delusions are destroying our world. So the psychological point of view, the ability to think symbolically would be a third perspective between the either/ors of literal truth or delusions. Religious truths are metaphors and symbols and it seems that the Sufis and poets and people that can see archetypal imagery as symbolic don’t become violent people.

Dr. Dave: You know we've quoted a few other people here – I want to quote you, I like some of the lines that you wrote in the paper that I was reading and one that I especially liked, you write: 'There is a wild chaos in the human psyche, even an urge to destruction. Freud called it thanatos, or the death instinct, which is exacerbated through a naïve, one-sided belief in rational enlightenment, benevolent preaching and goodwill.' I really like that and then on that goodwill theme, you also say 'If peace could be attained by benevolently preaching enlightened philosophical ideals to others, we would have attained it long ago.' I like both of those a lot. I just wanted to underscore that 'failure of rational enlightenment, benevolent preaching and goodwill,' because I feel like I'm a person of goodwill, so I need you to expand on that a little bit (laughter).

Tom Elsner: Yeh, well, this for me is – what you just quoted from me – it's really influences coming from Switzerland and my training in Switzerland and you know, Jung lived through two world wars and Europeans lived through world wars and being an American and having travelled through Europe, I realized very much the American optimism and naïveté that I had that the Europeans I met didn't have. I think in part it has to do with they're living through on their own soil these world wars and feeling the reality of what human beings can do to human beings. You know, this is Rodney King at the 1992 LA riots asking 'Why can't we all get along?' I think of Neville Chamberlain who was famously quoted as announcing 'Peace in our time.' The British Prime Minister before Churchill, who had met with Hitler in the thirties and he came back to England and basically said 'I've met with Hitler, he's signed these treaties saying that we – our two countries – intend not to go to war together ever again and we will now have peace in our time and I encourage everyone to now go to their beds and sleep quietly tonight. You know this lack of imagination for evil I think also is ultimately destructive, so we get quickly into the realm again of psychology and this idea of shadow, namely that all of us have a shadow. Jung would say often that 'I'm a human being I'm capable of anything else any human being has ever done.' And Freud thought of this as an instinct in us that he called thanatos, as distinct from Eros, the life instinct – the urge to destruction. It's a sobering concept or idea to ponder over, I think, without a clear solution as to what to do about it.

Dr. Dave: One of the things you talk about is the relevance of collective dreams. We've talked about Jung's dreams – what are some examples of collective dreams.

Tom Elsner: Well, collective dreams would be the types of dreams that any of us can have that at least seem not to only have a personal significance, to not be about our personal lives or issues in our day to day existence – that seem to touch upon issues that involve lots of people. Ecological issues, issues of war, issues of the apocalypse, over population or just what Jung called the archetypal dimension of the collective unconscious – something not personal only to me.

Dr. Dave: So Jung's dreams that you started with would be examples of that – at first he took them at a personal level and he thought 'Oh my goodness, this means I'm going crazy' but in fact it foreshadowed the fact that the world was going crazy and was going into this time of war. But others of us, as you point out, can have dreams that touch upon collective world stage kinds of issues and in fact you shared a dream that you had around the time of 9/11. Maybe you could share that here.

Tom Elsner: Sure I'd be glad to. I had a dream that for me was an example of a collective dream – a dream that arose in response to 9/11. I had it about 10 days after that. At the time I was in Switzerland training as an analyst and – we all remember what that was like – it was just the feeling that the world's completely different, just the complete shock and the emotions of that, wondering 'what can I do?' I was very concerned with the question of 'What can I *do* about this?'

Dr. Dave: Yeh, particularly given that you were off in another country – I can imagine how disturbing that would be.

Tom Elsner: That's exactly right – off in another country, I'm away from family and friends and Americans and feeling very much uprooted as an American over in Europe and...

Dr. Dave: 'Is this the outbreak of war, will I be able to get back?' Those must have gone through your mind as well.

Tom Elsner: Yeh, all sorts of things like that – *huge* unknowns, just everything was unknown. It seemed like the world was just different, what had happened was inconceivable. So I was thinking about that. I mean thinking's too light of a word, I was really ruminating and just kind of 'What should I do, should I look at the television a lot, should I try to figure out what's going on, should I not do any of that, what's my role now as a person, what can I contribute as a little tiny individual to this?' And then I had a dream about 10 days after 9/11 and I'll share with you a part of that dream – it was long – but the main part of it is that in the dream there was an Afghan man and a United States man and I was there with a group of people and I was watching them and they were fighting. They were in a conflict fighting each other and in the dream I was thinking 'I have to do something to resolve this conflict or to help with it, I have to do something about it. Then as the dream went on it took on a strange, dark and for me bewildering turn of events. What I had to do to help with this conflict, was according to the dream, I had to go through this ritual where I took a knife and cut the palm of my right hand and I put my own blood into this vessel, this chalice and then I had to drink my own blood. And the dream said that is the ritual I would have to go through to do something about this conflict. Now in the dream I was able to cut my hand and put the blood in the vessel but I couldn't drink my own blood, it was just too much, it was too bizarre, too weird, too overwhelming and strange. And it took me a long time to even work with this dream and there's so much, of course, we could say about it and so much I've thought about it and compared it to Jung's ideas in *Mysterium Coniunctionis* that relate to alchemy and similar images that relate to alchemical ideas. But the main gist of this dream for me was that if I want to do something to help with the world problem, I have to start by extracting, becoming conscious of and then reintegrating something about my own body, my own fiery blood, my own emotional impulses. And that would be the way that I could help with this problem.

Dr. Dave: Yeh, we talk about eating one's shadow – eating your shadow – and this feels like that's part of what you're describing.

Tom Elsner: Hmmm... Thank you, yeh, that's a metaphor that in psychology we talk about, don't we, eating one's own shadow. It's a metaphor for integration – you

know, extraction, becoming aware of and reintegrating. So it's eating one's self, drinking one's self, becoming one's own problem – the source of the conflict lies within my own blood, my own body – that's what the dream was saying.

Dr. Dave: And you know in the dream you had this urgency to do something and it occurs to me that you are doing something, right now, by calling our attention to think symbolically about these issues and to be on the path of individuation and differentiating ourselves from the collective madness and the projection.

Tom Elsner: Hmm... Yeh, thank you. That is why I give talks about this subject and I'm going to be writing more about it and talking with you about it. My conscious intention varies to try to reoffer the collective something about my own inner journey and what I have experienced there and offer that back.

Dr. Dave: Yeh, well good and I'll look forward to any future conversations about that. As we begin to wind down I wonder if there are any other points that you'd like to make now, or that you had hoped to make here that maybe didn't get brought out.

Tom Elsner: This is a whole 'nother subject for another day but strangely 'how alchemy and alchemical symbolism and processes relate to world problems' because the alchemical process... Many people think of alchemy – and I know you've talked with Monika Wikman and others about alchemy, Jeff Raff – so we know that alchemy is to be thought of metaphorically and symbolically and what it really is all about is what we've been talking about today. These alchemists were people that turned towards what was banished, repressed, marginalized in their cultures – the shadow in their culture – and that's what they called the blackness of the nigredo. They engaged in these processes of symbolic death and renewal – the renewal of values within themselves and so alchemical symbolism actually has, I think, quite a lot to contribute as a phenomenology of what it looks like to go through a symbolic death.

Dr. Dave: Well, I think that would be an excellent topic for us to explore in the future if that's something that you're up for. And I wonder if mentioning the dream project that you're doing at Pacifica, if you are inviting listeners to contribute any collective type dreams that they might have. Is that part of why you mentioned that just now?

Tom Elsner: Yeh, that would be excellent and as I said it's just getting going just now, so if your listeners are interested in learning more about this project they can certainly email me at telsner@pacificca.edu and if you just put 'collective dreams' as the subject heading and I can get back to you and if there's an interest that's great – we are interested in collecting these dreams and really listening in to the world soul and its response to collective...

Dr. Dave: So just to help people with that, say again what might be considered a collective dream – how will people know if they've had a collective dream?

Tom Elsner: A collective dream could be a dream that you just wake up from. It's a big dream. They typically are shocking. They don't seem personal. You wonder 'Where the hell did this come from?' It's strange and archetypal, you don't have personal associations to the imagery and you might feel like 'This is something about

the world.’ I mean, it’s something about war, it’s something about the ecology, it’s something about population problems, or whatever it might be but something big – seems bigger than your personal life. That would be probably a collective dream.

Dr. Dave: O.K. Well, that's probably a good place for us to wrap it up for today, so Dr. Tom Elsner I want to thank you for being my guest again and hopefully in the future on Shrink Rap Radio.

Tom Elsner: Thank you, Dr. Dave, thank you very much.

Dr. Dave: It was great to have Tom Elsner back on the show, I hope you agree. I’ve never particularly associated Jung with a political context but it’s clear that the recently published *The Red Book* reveals the degree to which his thinking was impacted by the advent of the First World War and later by the Second World War as well. Immediately after the interview with Tom Elsner was over, I realized I had forgotten to ask a question that was triggered for me by reading his paper. My question concerned synchronicity as another way the collective unconscious comments on global events. I wanted him to expand on that. I do plan to take him up on his offer to come back at some time in the future and speak about alchemy and hopefully I’ll remember to ask him that question about synchronicity and world events at that time. As I say, that question was triggered by the paper he sent me, which was based on a presentation he gave elsewhere.

After the interview I contacted him to see if he’d be willing to let me post a copy of that paper on the Shrink Rap Radio website for you all to have access to and he generously and enthusiastically agreed. So, you can download the paper in PDF format by going to www.shrinkrapradio.com/jungandpolitics.pdf and I’ll also put a link to it in the show notes on the Shrink Rap Radio site.

Thanks to today’s guest Jungian analyst Dr. Tom Elsner for sharing his insights on Jung and Politics. And by the way, Dr. Elsner will be conducting a 4 month intensive on *Alchemy, The Red Book and the New Myth of Our Time*. You can find full details at www.pacifica.edu/alchemyElsner.html and by the way there will be a link to that in the show notes on our site, so if you didn’t quite catch it that’s a good way to get to it.