

## THE GAMBLER

### Romancing Lady Luck

*A Jungian exploration*



Billye B. Currie

#### A Book Review by Deb Herberger

During these days of being bombarded with news of failure after failure of major financial institutions in the US and abroad, with threats of further such failures, and meanwhile needing to sort through confusing, risky, and often opposing solutions of “bail outs,” “work outs,” and “temporary loans”... we struggle to understand how we have gotten to this disastrous moment in our country’s history. It seems this struggle to understand does not merely involve the economic and political “nuts and bolts” of the borrowing, lending, and trading practices of Wall Street and Main Street that have helped to bring us to this point. Rather the search seems to be to understand why so many knowledgeable professionals were willing to take such huge and repeated risks with the assets of others, even to the point of potentially damaging the very international market economy that they themselves rely upon to survive. What has happened in the individual and collective psyche that sets us up for such foolhardy and damaging risk-taking?

Instead of reading an economic treatise or financial historical review, my personal search for understanding in this current moral mess, led me to personal notes recorded at a Saturday evening lecture of the Jung Society in Atlanta in mid June of

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this year—before news of an economic crisis had hit the mainstream media. The guest lecturer was Jungian Analyst Billye B. Currie, PhD and her topic was “The Gambler: From Play to Pathology.” My notes of Currie’s lecture quickly led me to her recently published book from which the lecture was taken—a small book, modest in size but quite powerful in content—*The Gambler: Romancing Lady Luck*. In this very readable 100 plus pages, Dr. Currie guides her readers through a Jungian exploration of gambling as both an inner and outer force that urges many of us to take chances—big and small. She makes the point that gambling has become a mainstream component of Western culture, with over 80% of people in North America admittedly participating. And true to Jungian style of analysis and study, Dr. Currie demonstrates the light and dark sides of the issue that run the gambit from recreational and restorative play to addictive and destructive pathology.

Beginning in the introduction to her book, the author describes the energy and emotional charge in and surrounding gambling. She points out that even the word “gambler” brings an immediate energetic response in most circles. And using a more Jungian descriptor she goes on to claim that gambling can quickly constellate powerful autonomous complexes.

Dr. Currie contends that the continuum of gambling from play to pathology is poorly conceptualized in our society, partly because of the secrecy involved. She quotes Krishna from the *Bhagavad Gita* as saying “I am the game of the gambler.” And she goes on to quote Jung’s response to Krishna taken from “The Philosophical Tree” in Jung’s *Alchemical Studies*: “In emotional intensity, game and gambler coincide.” So, it seems that according to Krishna, Jung, and Currie... no one escapes this great gambling game that is Life. We each and all are gamblers to one extent or the other—and perhaps most dramatically in those moments and times of wanting to hide ourselves with our assets under the mattress. Currie directly challenges her readers with the question “How well do we know our inner gambler—that risk taker who enables progress?” The author describes the archetypal power of Lady Luck “couched in her temple, partnered with another god, Money.” She describes the ease of becoming seduced. She points out that governments bless the business of gambling and she asks the question “Can our collective and individual consciousness resist the temptation to gamble?” Thus, while some individuals and groups can be linked to culpable and at times pathological risk taking, are any of us purely “innocent?”

The book explores certain psychological connections to gambling including von Franz’s notion that the archetype of the gambler is play. Play itself is observed from its different points of view. Huizinga’s view of play is described as being voluntary, enjoyable, and expressing freedom with a step out of real life into make-believe. It is suggested that we can become spellbound in our play or in our observation of it. At what point does play become an aggressive power struggle? Currie quotes Jung’s observation of play in America as giving way to the gladiator style of professional sports, bringing forth in the spectators the excitement of “ancient instincts that are akin to bloodlust.” What would Jung say about the current field of financial investment and the collective mesamerization with ever expanding corporate power and influence, and the instinctive break down in rules and accountability?

The author posits that the archetypal quest for the gods—for the soulful, divine feeling of the ecstasy of life—poses many dangers. She suggests that the goddess image of the Great

Mother can be at work (and play) with the gambler who is ready to receive her abundant gifts and perhaps not sufficiently wary of the Terrible Mother with her power to devour or dismember. Currie describes the spiritual journey as one requiring “ego solid enough to confront the irrationality of the unconscious as it bubbles and boils with the fire of passion... Otherwise the dark side of the feminine—of Lady Luck—will interfere with the spiritual journey.” She goes on to explain in Jungian language “our inner psychic other (the anima or animus)—the functional complex that is supposed to relate us to the Self—has not been differentiated from our shadow. Thus projections onto the external other are filled with the numinosity and psychic energy of both the shadow and the anima/animus, resulting in an attraction to a figure who is “extraordinarily powerful, fascinating, and fearsome” (Currie citing Haule, p.82).

Currie reminds us that we all have our moments of magical dance with chance. She goes on to warn us of the seductiveness of the dance itself with its illusion that a treasure will be won—whatever form that treasure may be. (A reviewer aside: some search for their treasure in the Lottery, others in the Rapture?) The thrill is the quest. We can each and all be swept away in our own ways to the point of surrendering our humanity and being rendered unconscious. The harmony of the dance can be destroyed when the play loses its balance, when the boundaries of the game are broken.

In the Epilogue, Currie states quite succinctly: “In the gambler, patterns repeat themselves. If these patterns invade consciousness and take over, the result tends toward destruction or addiction. Our own grounding, our own sense of self, enables the gambler to play imaginatively between the world of illusion and the world of reality—to stay within the powerful energy of the game...luck ... skill and consciousness are necessary in managing my emotional self. The strength of the gambler, in any walk of life, may be measured by the authenticity of the

person... I find my life inside myself. As I experience this, I feel a rhythmic cadence—a dance is in the making. The trick is to keep my feet on the ground as I face the many gambles that confront me. Too much of the illusory world is dangerous and addictive. Too much of the rational world is deadening.”

Perhaps Currie might agree that the crises of these difficult times also presents us with great opportunity to take back some of the projections we have too quickly placed on financial experts, politicians, and news analysts. It is, more than ever, a time to live our lives “awake” to dangers and opportunities. It is crucial that we accept the challenge to find and express our own voice, individually and collectively—living more and more authentically in our work, relationships, neighborhoods and communities.

Currie finishes *The Gambler* with the reminder that in the gamble of life and individuation, winning and losing are not always apparent—and she alleges that this “does not matter!” Perhaps we will need a reminder of this from Currie in a sequel some time in the near future, not too long after the country’s upcoming presidential election. Such a sequel might lead us from the casinos of her first book to following the gambler into board rooms, onto trading floors and political campaign trails, as well as catching up with those of us “junkies” too regularly plugged into the internet, television, radio, and other forms of often mis- and over-information. In The Epilogue to *The Gambler* Currie spoke of the difficulty of finding ones own voice. Perhaps in her next book, more strategies will be outlined for doing just that. Perhaps, for example, we might be encouraged to allow periods of regular “fasting” from news in order that we may pause to listen to that still, quiet voice within—quite a revolutionary act that could very well call us into base communities of conscious compassion and fierce kindness, helping to about real change, regardless which political party may be in power or which economic strategies may be operative at the time |