

ANATOMY OF SURRENDER

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In Argentine Tango the woman (follower) can never surrender to the soul of the dance and its music unless she can surrender to herself. To allow this the leader (usually male) must clearly direct and support her in the frame of the embrace, similar to the analytic frame surrounding the analyst and patient (analysand) in psychoanalysis. If the leader controls the woman she can only submit or rebel and can never surrender. For the leader to have a firm frame and to be connecting without controlling, he too must surrender, to himself, to the music, and to his partner. Argentine Tango is about mutual surrender. As he senses the body of the woman he surrenders to his intuitive grasp of the axis and motion of the woman, and he surrenders to the fluidity of following the flow of the follower with his own rhythm and intention. To know which foot the follower is on the leader must surrender to his own instincts and to his connection in sensing the body and being of the other.

People often confuse surrender and submission. There are critical differences between these ideas, particularly in terms of the retaining and owning of one's power in surrender—being the agent and having one's own axis—in contrast to giving up one's power to the other in submission. The psychological meaning of surrender is distinctly different than the military definition. Yielding and letting go of control in surrender is a high level capacity in psychological development.

Trauma within the first three years of life, when the basic sense of an individual self is being formed, can disrupt psychological development and can create profound forms of defensive control (head control as opposed to organic body-based control). The repetition of such trauma is compulsively enacted in the life of women artists as a “demon lover complex,” as

I have written about in two of my books, *The Compulsion to Create: Women Writers and Their Demon Lovers* (Routledge, 1993, OtherPress, 2000) and *The Creative Mystique: From Red Shoes Frenzy to Love and Creativity* (Routledge, 1996). This is a syndrome characterized by an attempt to transcend the self in a state of surrender, which dramatically fails. This results in submission by women to male possession, as the woman is forced to give up her power rather than yield to it. In the literature and artistic work of women with the “demon lover complex,” sadomasochism results, instead of surrender and sensual and erotic modes of merger. Possession is followed by abuse and abandonment by the male “other” onto whom the woman has projected all her own power. The repetition of early trauma as repeated symbolically in literature creates incessant themes of possession and death. When the desired surrender to an all powerful muse results in submission to a demon lover the alter ego characters of the women artists and writers all die both psychically and physically (the voice of the woman poet being extinguished, as in the work of Emily Bronte). Emily Bronte speaks of the hoped-for moment of creative ecstasy, imagined by the woman poet as she cried, “My outer sense is gone, My inner essence feels.” Then her fantasy masculine god muse turns into the negative side of the father image. This negative father image is psychically imposed on the inner child self. It is imposed onto the internal helpless two year old psyche with primal mother loss, evocatively creating the psychic projection of the demon lover figure. Possessed by the projected demon lover, the female poet’s voice is extinguished and her poetic character meets her death in the image of a tombstone. Her inner being is annihilated. In her novel, *Wuthering Heights* Emily Bronte has her male character, Heathcliff, extinguish the life of his female “love” (Catherine), when he is compelled to possess her. The sheer force of his controlling manic erotic intensity knocks her out of consciousness and then out of her body, and further, out of life.

Similar to the Heathcliff/Catherine travesty, is the Argentine Tango travesty, when mutual surrender is perverted into dominance and submission with its sadomasochistic overtones. In a recent “Psychoanalysis and Argentine Tango” workshop, conducted by myself and Ellen Sowchek, an anecdote was told by one workshop participant, which reveals the travesty. He said that back in the 1980s, when Argentine Tango was first taught in New York, the teachers were performers involved in “Tango Fantasia,” (stage tango), rather than teachers and practitioners of social tango. The male workshop participant, telling this tale, got up to demonstrate to the group how a teacher from that time had a woman in a class down on the floor, commanding, “You don’t move! I will drive you!” He totally abrogated the woman’s own sense of self agency, demeaning and defacing the visage of Argentine Tango as it is known to us today.

The topic of surrender versus submission opens up many other topics related to the Singles Scene in the Tango world and the partnerships within couples in the Tango World. One ballroom couple in the second psychoanalysis and Argentine Tango workshop (“Being in the Moment”) spoke of a repeated dispute between himself and his wife concerning where he as the leader should put his hand. When I initiated a psychic visualization in the workshop, in which everyone closed their eyes, breathed deeply, and imagined a dance which they attempted to repair a disruption in the partnership as it occurred within the dance, often bringing the experience to the verbal level of communication, the husband in the ballroom couple spoke of having a conversation with his wife in his visualization that was better than any he had had in reality. In his visualization he spoke to her about how he felt when she corrected him during the dance, by moving his hand into the position she wanted him to have his hand in. He conveyed to her in his imagined conversation with her that this gesture of his while dancing made him feel like he had to submit to her. If they could have a dialogue outside the dance as he had in the

visualization, he could have felt a willingness to surrender and to show the cooperation of mutuality in relationship.

A woman in the workshop group spoke of being in mourning during the visualization for her deceased husband. She cried during the visualization and was able to tell the group that she had imagined dancing with her husband again, with whom she had “done every dance except tango.” This woman said that although her marriage with her husband had much friction in it, sometimes being volatile and leading to psychic separations, she and her husband seemed in perfect harmony when dancing. In her visualization, she imagined dancing with her husband again, and she wept for the lost mutual surrender into harmony, saying she couldn’t imagine there being a disruption in the partnership while they were dancing.

The capacity to mourn and the capacity to surrender are intimately connected. This can be seen in a monthly therapeutic mourning group in which individuals surrender into mourning with the support of the group, as well as in an every other week writing group in which individuals open up blocks to creative self expression through mourning loss and disappointment.

The British female novelist, Charlotte Bronte, could mourn, in contrast to her sister Emily Bronte, since her critical losses took place after the age of five, rather than during the first three years of her life (her mother dying when she was five and her sister only two and a half). Charlotte Bronte had the psychic development to mourn within her creative work, as she demonstrated in her last novel, *Villette*, where her alter ego character, Lucy Snowe, receives the losses related to unrequited love. Through the mourning process Lucy Snowe (Charlotte Bronte) is able to renew herself and proceed with her psychic development. Then she can surrender to a man’s love and have him surrender to her, with the result that both characters transform and

evolve. Charlotte Bronte's characters transform and evolve. Her characters stand in sharp contrast to Emily Bronte's characters who are psychically arrested and who kill each other off. In real life, as well as in her fiction, Charlotte Bronte mourned and surrendered. It was only after she wrote her last novel, *Villette*, (after her more famous novel, *Jane Eyre*) that she was able to yield to a man's marriage proposal and was able to enjoy the intimacy—in the moment surrender—of marriage.

And what about the biographical story of Suzanne Farrell and George Balanchine as it stands in contrast to the story of the sculptress, Camille Claudel and the sculpture Rodin? Suzanne Farrell never demonized Balanchine despite his rather demonic behavior towards her. She was able to separate through a psychic mourning process, even when he demanded she marry him, even when he blacklisted her all over America when she married someone else, and even when she was forced by him to leave his New York City ballet company. Suzanne Farrell separated, found a job as a prima ballerina in Europe and was later able to return to Balanchine. Farrell continually sustained a positive image of Balanchine in her mind. She never submitted to his power, and she never projected an image of an early bad mother onto him. She kept him as a muse and never turned him into a demon lover.

By contrast, the female sculptress Camille Claudel projected all her rage onto Rodin when she and he broke up a long term affair. She never dealt with the cold and narcissistic mother who had emotionally abandoned her from her earliest years. Instead she projected the hate towards her mother onto Rodin, turning him into a demon lover in her mind, assigning blame for emotional abandonment onto him, and thus projecting the image of her mother. She, unlike Suzanne Farrell, could not mourn, because the loss of a mother had occurred so early. Consequently, she could not separate from Rodin, nor could she retain a positive image of him.

In hating him rather than her mother who had rejected her from birth, she never let herself consciously know that it was her mother who was responsible for her being incarcerated in an insane asylum for the last thirty years of her life. Her mother had the power to release her and always refused. Camille blamed Auguste Rodin and ended her days in psychic as well as social isolation. Her demise can be seen as the consequence of not being able to mourn her early mother loss, which prevented her from transforming through the grieving process into someone who could create and sustain interpersonal connections, involving the capacity to understand the separate perspective of another person. Suzanne surrendered and Camille submitted. Suzanne continued to dance psychically, even when retired from the stage due to a hip operation, as she taught students to dance and to dance Balanchine ballets. Camille Claudel withdrew from sculpture as she withdrew from Rodin. She refused to continue her art, even when offered the chance to do so in the Asylum. She submitted to an empty incarcerated life, and submitted to psychic denial, never wanting to know the truth about her mother. She submitted and opposed, but never surrendered to her art, to herself, or to a man again!

To what degree is submission or attempts at dominance present in any Argentine Tango experience as opposed to mutual surrender? One female workshop participant spoke of how she experienced men in tango losing their ability to connect when they learned more steps and became obsessed with doing the steps. These men couldn't surrender while assimilating their knowledge of steps and technique. They were dominated by their own performance needs and anxiety and then exerted pressures on their female partners to submit to their mental agenda through their lead rather than to surrender to an intuitive and instinctive lead that lives in the moment.

Just as one needs more love than hate towards a lost loved one in order to be able to feel and thus mourn a love connection, one needs more love than hate for one's partner in order to surrender to the Argentine Tango partnership. The degree of internalization of love connections in early life is critical to maintain and sustain such positive partnership connection. However, even when such blueprints for sustained love bonding exist within the internal world of each person's psyche, conflicts over love and hate are prompted by difficulties in processing one's own aggression. Critical attitudes between the partners can cause a sense of being attacked, particularly in those who have been wounded in childhood. Both general frustrations in the partnership and reactions to narcissistic injuries can cause visceral as well as mental levels of anger. When this anger can be intuitively understood and then be communicated to the partner in a clear and direct verbal articulation, loving and caring feelings can be renewed so that a rebirth into mutual surrender can take place. When this can not be facilitated psychotherapy or couples' therapy can be of help.

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