

allan a.

last to you. I am ready at
 especially I thank you very
 with which your comments -
 we rewrote I entirely agree. as
 into ch. 1, - Put most of my experience
 7 "Gaea at the no mountain
 fits better where it is, I love the
 (and how your note to
 end of this chapter;
 we're here against!)
 (hall) Chris

BEGINNING WITH GAEA:

Earth, isn't this what you want: invisibly
 to arise in us? Is it not your dream
 to be some day invisible? Earth! Invisible!
 What, if not transformation, is your
 insistent commission?
 Earth, dear one, I will! Oh, believe it needs
 not one more of your springtimes to win me over.

The goddesses of Greece with whom we are most familiar, Hera and
 Athene, Aphrodite and Artemis, even Demeter and Persephone, are Olympians,
 participants in a polytheistic pantheon dominated by all-father Zeus whose
 meeting place is high on Mt. Olympus or in the sky. They are complex and
 vivid personalities, clearly defined, easily distinguished from one another,
 immediately familiar, very human creatures whose connection to aspects of
 the natural world is no longer directly apparent. Yet implicit in some of
 the myths in which they are involved and more visible in the cults devoted
 to them are evidences that each of these goddesses has some original con-
 nection to vegetation-ritual, that they are highly developed and specialized
 forms of the primordial earth goddess, Gaea. To understand the role of the
 Divine or Great or Grand Mother in Greek mythology (in the Greek imagination
 and our own) means attending to her. As Jane Harrison proposes, we need:

"By an effort of the sympathetic imagination to think back of the many we have so sharply and strenuously divided into the haze of the primitive 'one.' Nor must we regard this haze of the early morning as a deleterious mental fog, as a sign of disorder, weakness or oscillation. It is not a confusion or even synthesis; rather it is . . . a protoplasmic fullness and forcefulness not yet articulated into the diverse forms of its ultimate birth."²

The most familiar goddesses are, as we are so often reminded, the mothers of patriarchy. They are the equivalent of the mothers of what Freud has taught us to call "latency", the period that begins when the presence and primacy of paternal power has been acknowledged. Perhaps a reason these goddesses seem so familiar is that we can so easily recognize our own mothers (and ourselves) in them. Yet we half-know they are not adequate representations of the original mother; something has been lost. As we heed that presentment, we discover that what has been lost is precisely: the mother. These ancient goddesses have all been cut off from their own mother -- as our mothers, too, were cut off from this source. I find myself wanting to borrow again those lines from Adrienne Rich in which she so powerfully articulates this painful discovery:

"In fact, we were always like this
 rootless, dismembered: knowing it makes the difference.
 Birth stripped our birthright from us,
 tore us from a woman, from women, from ourselves
 so early on
 and the whole chorus throbbing at our ears
 like midges, told us nothing, nothing
 of origins, nothing we needed
 to know, nothing that could re-member us."³

Demeter, Hera and Hestia were swallowed by their father immediately after birth; Aphrodite was born (at least according to Hesiod's account) out of the semen that surrounded her father's severed genitals after ^{Cronos} Zeus had thrown them into the surging sea; Athene (according to the same source)

emerged full-grown from father Zeus' head.

Of the major Olympian goddesses only Artemis had a mother -- a mother whom she seems to have mothered from almost the moment of her own birth. The newborn daughter immediately set about assisting with the delivery of her twin brother Apollo, and on many other occasions rescues Leto from insult or danger. There is much that is instinctively motherly in Artemis, especially her tender solicitude for all that is young and vulnerable, animal or human. Indeed, at Ephesus, she was worshipped as the many-breasted Great Mother. Yet the classical Artemis is a virgin who never literally mothers a child of her own; she shuns the world of men, lives in the forest on the fringes of the inhabited world. She represents the persistence of the natural, the untamed, even within the Olympian hegemony -- but a naturalness that has become infertile.

Nor are any of her sister goddesses more whole in their mothering. Like Artemis, Athene and Hestia are childless. Though Hestia can love generously and impartially, and in Rome as Vesta becomes a prototype of the good mother, she seems, perhaps in consequence of the early loss of her own mother, to be deeply suspicious of close personal attachments. Athene is a devoted and dependable friend, she is a protectress of the generation of young children on whom the future of the polis depends, but she carefully protects herself/ (in Aeschylus' Oresteia) avows an allegiance to father-right and implicitly accepts Apollo's declaration "that the mother is no parent of that which is called her child." Aphrodite's marriage to Hephaestus is sterile; her children are the incidental consequences of the self-indulgence of her passionate attraction to an Ares or an Anchises. She loves Aeneas, the issue of the latter liaison, and tries to protect him as best she can during the Trojan

war and his subsequent journey to Italy, but she takes no part in rearing him. In her mothering, she seems to display the same kind of adventitious dispensation of favors which characterizes her sexual involvements.

Though Hera is wife to all-father Zeus, their marriage, too, can hardly be regarded as bounteously fertile; Hera is pre-eminently wife not mother. Her daughters (Hebe and Eileithyia)^{are} but pale shadows of herself; her sons, Ares and Hephaestus (who, at least according to some accounts, are parthenogenetic offspring), serve her primarily as pawns in her incessant battles with her husband. Her stepson and namesake, Heracles, is the prototype of the hero who must take on one impossible task after another in the never-quenched hope of receiving her blessing. Demeter's boundless love for her daughter, Persephone, seems at first glance to represent an idealized version of maternal devotion -- yet a closer reading suggests it may be her very over-investment in her child that makes Persephone's abduction by Hades a necessary ^{and compensatory?} denouement.

Thus these goddesses seem to represent precisely the mothers with whom we are all too familiar -- the mothers whom we see as having failed us in the variety of ways articulated by Rich in Of Women Born (and less subtly in Nancy Friday's My Mother, Myself) -- the mothers who leave us feeling "wildly unmothered." In these goddesses we see in divine proportions the mother who abandons her children or holds them too tight, the mother who uses her children as agents in her marital struggles or to fulfill her own frustrated ambitions.

But there is in Greek mythology a "great" mother in the background -- Gaea, grandmother to Demeter, Hera and Hestia, great-grandmother to Athene and Artemis, and ancestress also of Aphrodite who is born of the severed genitals of Gaea's son-lover, Ouranos. Gaea is the mother of the beginning,

the mother of infancy. She is the mother who is there before time -- a recognition given mythological expression in Hesiod's Theogony where she is represented as coming into being at the very beginning, long before Cronos.⁴ In Freud's terms Gaea is the mother of primal fantasy, the mother who is the correlate of what he called primary narcissism. She is a mother whom we come to know only as we begin to long for a mother from whom we are not separated as we in time, in consciousness, find ourselves to be separated from the mother of the present. She is a fantasy creature behind the personal mother, construed of memory and longing, who exists only in the imagination, in myth, archetypally -- who is never identical with the personal mother. Paradoxically, though she is there from the beginning, our discovery of her is always a return,

** Paradox (the seeming or actual contradiction) is not a re-cognition. sensu stricto the case here. The relation between being born of the mother and returning to her i.e., giving birth to her is transpositional, not contradictory. The other (giving birth to the mother) is the converse of the one.*

But to effect that return is to see the later goddesses (whom we inevitably know first) and our own mothers differently. For to recognize

Gaea's presence in the background is to return them to their source, to their mothers, and thus to their own primordial stature and power. To see them matrilineally is to discover aspects hidden in the patriarchally-shaped classic presentation. I have ^{myself} discovered ^{how} myself more richly pertinent to the self-understanding of contemporary women Athene becomes when we appreciate what it means that she is Metis' daughter and not only Zeus' -- and when, as we seek to interpret the complex story of Erecthionius' birth, we discover that Athene herself has a Gaea aspect. Hera, too, becomes fully herself when ^{she} seeking to free herself from being possessed by the anger and jealousy that Zeus' infidelities inspire in her, returns to her birthplace in Argos. There, in the land of her mother, she immerses herself in the spring of Canathus and recovers her virginity, her in-one-self-ness.

Probably each of the Olympian goddesses was originally a pre-Hellenic local earth goddess -- Hera in Argos, Athene in Attica, Artemis and Aphrodite somewhere in the near east. In this sense, each is Gaea. Nevertheless, I see Hesiod's attempt to distinguish the Olympians from the original mother as deriving from a genuinely mythopoetic sensitivity. It is of the essence of the first mother (of these first undifferentiated "protoplasmically full" mothers) to give birth to a rich variety of daughters. So remembering Gaea's relation to these later goddesses does not mean saying they are really nothing but Gaea herself under other names, but rather that she is the ground out of which their figures emerge.

Discovering the archetypal character of the great mother who lives in the imagination of each of us also makes possible a different relation to our personal mother. We can forgive her for not being what she could not have been -- the transhuman all-giving source -- and can understand how she, too, began as an unmothered daughter. As we are able to return her to her source, to see her in relation to but distinct from the archetype, as its necessarily frail and fallible carrier, we may at last be able both to bless what is communicated through her and to forgive her for what she could not give. For we now see her as standing herself in exactly the same relation to Gaea as do we.

It is perhaps inevitable that we notice the figures in the foreground first. I know it has taken me a long while to get to Gaea, and I am only now beginning to see why. The history of my search among the goddesses has proceeded along the course of an inexorable psychologic -- though I understand that only in retrospect. It began several years ago when, in a dream vision, I found myself proceeding through an unknown

Beautiful

wilderness in search of "Her." My way led me to a cave deep within the earth. There Her presence was palpable all about me but I could not discern Her shape. Though I waited and waited, expecting to be able to see Her once my eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, that did not happen. I returned to waking consciousness aware that, though I did not know who "She" was, it was indeed time for me to go in search of Her.

I had thought of that cave vision as peculiarly my own until very recently I found (in Susan Griffin's Woman and Nature) this passage which describes the experience in eerily exact detail, except that where I said "I" Griffin more beautifully and truly says "we":

The way we came here was dark. Space seemed to close in on us. We thought we could not move forward. We had to shed our clothes. We had to leave all we brought with us. And when finally we moved through this narrow opening, our feet reached for ledges, under was an abyss, a cavern stretching farther than we could see. Our voices echoed off the walls. We were afraid to speak. This darkness led to more darkness, until darkness leading to darkness was all we knew.

The shape of this cave, our bodies, this darkness. This darkness, which sits so close to us we cannot see, so close that we move away in fear. We turn into ourselves. But here we find the same darkness, we find we are shaped around emptiness, that we are a void we do not know.

The shape of a cave, this emptiness we seek out like water. The void that we are. That we wash into as sleep washes over us, and we are blanketed in darkness. We see nothing. We are in the center of our ignorance. Nothingness spreads around us. But in this nothing we find what we did not know existed. With our hands, we begin to trace faint images etched into the walls. And now, beneath these images we can see the gleam of older images. And these peel back to reveal the older still. The past, the dead, once breathing, the forgotten, the secret, the buried, the once blood and bone, the vanished, shimmering now like an answer from these walls, bright and red. Drawn by the one who came before. And before her. And before. Back to the beginning. To the one who first swam from the mouth of this cave. And now we know all she knew, see the newness of her vision. What we did not know existed but saw as children, our whole lives drawn here, image over image, past time, beyond space.

The shape of a cave, the bud, the chrysalis, the shell, what new form we seek in this darkness, our hands feeling these walls, here wet, here damp, here crumbling away; our hands searching for signs in this rock, certain now in this darkness, what we seek is here, warm and covered with water, we sweat in this effort, piercing the darkness, laying our skin on the cool stone, tracing the new image over the old, etching these lines which become clear to us now, as what we have drawn here gleams back at us from the walls of the cave, telling us what is, now, and who we have become. . .

This cave, the shape to which each returns, where image after image will be revealed, and painted over, painted over and revealed, until we are bone. Where we touch the ones who came before and see their visions, where we leave our mark, where, terrified, we give up ourselves and weep, and taken over by this darkness, are overwhelmed by what we feel; where we are pushed to the edge of existence, to the source which sounds like a wave inside us, to the path of the water which feeds us all.

So, although I at first thought of my search as a more solitary one, than it has since proven itself to be, I did know, as I woke from my dream, that I must begin tracing the faint images etched on the walls and sensed that beneath those were older images, images that would take me back to the beginning, to Her.

The image closest to the surface was Persephone and so I began with her.⁶ Not because, as the Greek divinity whose cult persisted far into our own era, long after the service of Zeus Olympios had fallen silent, she is connected to a more recent past than the other goddesses -- for I didn't know that then and still don't know whether that propinquity means others, too, would most easily begin with her. Nor did I consciously know that -- since to attend to Persephone is inevitably to attend also to Demeter -- I had begun not only at the end of the story of the Greek goddesses but close to its beginnings as well. For of all the pre-Homeric offshoots of Gaea, Demeter resembles the primordial mother most closely.

I began "in all innocence," which is perhaps exactly why I had to begin with Persephone, innocent child of spring. This was a goddess to whom I had

felt close since I was a very young child when my mother who loves Greek mythology had introduced me, born on the vernal equinox, to the Greek goddess of spring. Thus I had as long as I can remember associated the deep bond that exists between daughters and mothers with Persephone and her passionately devoted mother, Demeter -- and had known, if only tacitly, that there is something divine in this bond. I understood this more fully when I in my turn became a mother with a daughter of my own. Being a daughter, having a daughter; being a mother, having a mother -- these were mysteries which the goddesses had helped me enter more deeply than I might have without their aid.

Yet the dream vision pointed to a darker mystery and suggested that I had come to a point in my life where a deeper knowledge of whatever I might mean by "Her" had become imperative. Nevertheless the place to begin was still with Persephone -- but not now the Persephone who is Demeter's daughter and who experiences the separation from her mother as abduction, as separation from self, but the Persephone who comes to love the underworld god, Hades, and who becomes herself the silent goddess of death. The pull to "Her" was somehow connected with my being at a time in my life when I was done with literal mothering and with putting most of my psychic energy into personal relationships, when I was ready to devote myself to the underworld, the realm of soul, the imaginal. Soon after the cave vision I had an experience which I could only long afterwards understand as a continuation of the initiation begun then. It was a fearful experience during which I felt sure I would either go mad or die, but rather than running from it, I was somehow able to enter the fear in a way that entirely changed my understanding of underworld realities. Depression, confusion,

fragmentation, loneliness, vulnerability, hurt, anger, failure, loss -- all those realities which I had spent a lifetime defending myself against had now become simply inevitable and necessary elements in my life, made dark only by my fear of them. The connection between this revisioning and Persephone only became apparent when I began to try to make explicit in written form what attending to the invisible self of the cave might require.

Yet once the connection had been made visible, I imagined I had come to terms with the darkness in the cave. I was no longer consciously in search of Her. It did not occur to me that I had only begun.

But then unexpectedly I found myself having to attend to Ariadne,⁷ a goddess who had initially come into my life much later than Persephone and more casually, when a young lover experienced me as the one who had made it possible for him to enter his own labyrinth without fear of being lost there. Since then Ariadne had dropped out consciousness. Because I believed I had long since gotten past the temptation, so powerful when I was younger, to live the life of an anima woman, I couldn't understand what present pertinence Ariadne might have. Yet I felt compelled to learn as much about her as I could and thus discovered that she is not just the young maiden holding the spool of thread at the entrance to the labyrinth but that she occupies its center. Before she was Theseus' soon-discarded helpmate, before she was recalled to life by Dionysos' passionate embrace, she had (in the archaic cultic tradition) been the self-sufficient partheonogenetic mistress of the Wild Things, a Cretan Gaea. To attend to this Ariadne was to attend to my own soul, not to serve as anima for another. It was to confront the goddess of my cave vision. It seemed that just as I needed to wrest Persephone free of her ties to Demeter in order really to see her, so, too, I needed to separate Ariadne from Theseus.

The truth these goddesses communicate is a truth that emerges out of darkness. Though there is much in me that may yearn for the depths that Hades represents, being taken there is always an abduction. I never feel quite whole or courageous enough to go there on my own. Though in my dreams I can respond so confidently to the call to solitude and soul, in waking life I must be abandoned before I'm willing to be alone. How strong that fear of abandonment still is in me, how powerful the pull to relationship, how hard to be forced by Ariadne's reappearance to recognize that at this time in my life, dedication to even the most nurturing of loves might still be evasion.

The next goddess to appear on this serpentine path that has brought me progressively close⁸ to Gaea was Hera: Again, a goddess with whom I thought I had long since done, who belonged to my past, to the early years of my marriage, was suddenly imperiously present. As I had had to penetrate more deeply than before into the mysteries of the relationship between mother and daughter, between lover and beloved, so now it was time to confront more directly the dark and transformative aspects of the relationship between wife and husband. Again this meant focussing on just that part of Hera's story I liked least: her ugly jealous possessiveness, her rage at Zeus' repeated betrayals. As I came to understand that Hera, the Hera of Homer and the tragedians, in relation to the serenely fulfilled Hera of an earlier time who was still/in the women's cults of the classical period, I saw her rage as a response to Zeus' thwarting of her authentic being. In her threefold form as maiden, wife and solitary one Hera is at one and the same time the young woman who looks forward to a marriage which would fulfill her, the wife who discovers that her marriage robs her of her in-her-self-ness, and the solitary one who on the other side of the particular failure knows the costs of both in-one-self-ness and being-with and dreams still that one

need not choose.

During the confrontation with Hera I began to see that each of these goddesses met me as yet another psychotherapist might. By each I was being taught a new mode of attending to soul; and each made possible a new more imaginal reconnection with a disclaimed or neglected aspect of my past. I should not have been surprised then, though I was, that the next goddess to step forward should be Athene.⁹ It was only as I let her clear-sighted and unflinching gaze penetrate that I discovered that through her I was being led to a long-avoided working-through of my relationship to all that is meant by "father." For Athene, at least in the classical accounts, is pre-eminently the father's daughter, Zeus' child. "What is wrong with loving him?," I cried, thinking of how much that I most value in myself are his gifts to me: courage and self-confidence, clarity of purpose and trustworthiness in friendship, delight in creative accomplishment. Yet I began to see that he had given me also a sense that these are masculine attributes and bequeathed to me a deeply imbedded assumption (seemingly beyond the reach of conscious criticism) that they are more reliable than the subtly disparaged more "feminine" aspects of my being -- emotionality, sensuality, vulnerability. I began to feel my anger at him, but also at the father-as-such who had stood in the way of my experiencing my strength and wisdom and creative capacity as deeply feminine aspects. I discovered my anger -- and my undiminished love, for there is nothing wrong in loving him so long as I do not allow that love to cut me off from the feminine source of my being. Athene when she reappeared showed herself as the daughter of Metis, the ancient Titaness whom Zeus had swallowed to make her wisdom his own. Athene is, *after all, not only* ~~not, after all,~~ Zeus' parthenogenetic daughter. Behind the father is the original, the primal, mother.

The morning after I had finished writing about this re-engagement with Athene, I dreamt just before waking that a telephone call had come for me from my parents' home three thousand miles away. I picked it up in a room filled with a small holiday gathering of my children and their lovers and my own: "Chris, your father has just died." I went to take the call in another room. The message was still the same: "Chris, your father has just died." I knew somehow ^{that} it had been a sudden and easy death; it felt timely. I had no sense of regret, no feeling that though perhaps timely for him it was premature for me. I lay face down on the bed and wept, simply, naturally, with full release (as I would long to be able to do when this "really" happens.)

It was time -- is time -- to turn to Gaea -- the mother before the father (and before the literal mother). One can't after all begin with Gaea -- though when we come to her we recognize "we have arrived where we started and know it for the first time." Farnell (in the wonderful study of Greek cult he wrote at the end of the nineteenth century) suggested that "of all the religious conceptions of primitive man", Gaea might be most available to contemporary consciousness. The inescably irreducible anthropomorphism of the Olympian deities makes them seem alien, whereas "the latent secretion of this most ancient belief is in our veins . . . source and measure of the warm affection with which we attach ourselves to external nature."¹⁰

So it is time now for Gaea, for Ge-ology in the truest sense: the word she will draw forth from me. The Homeric Hymn to Earth which begins:

"The mother of us all,
the oldest of all,
hard,
splendid as rock

whatever there is that is of the land
 it is she
 who nourishes it,
 it is the Earth,¹¹
 that I sing."

is such a Ge-ology.

For Gaea is not simply mother, she is earth mother. Indeed she differs from the later goddesses in that she is -- and remains earth, earth recognized as animate and divine. Gaea is never wholly personal, never entirely humanized -- not even in Homer, not even in Hesiod.

This is not deficit, does not mean she is thereby somehow less than the so completely anthropomorphic Olympians (who may wield the thunderbolt or drive the chariot of the sun but are not them themselves the lightning flash, the solar disc; who may take on the shape of a bull in sexual pursuit or of a swan in flight but without forfeit of their human-like personalities.)

Gaea reminds us that the divine is transhuman and prehuman -- there from the beginning -- not simply human projection. Because of this she is source as no human-like mother can be. She is the answer to that deep longing for homecoming which no mother (and no lover as mother-surrogate) can assuage.

Yet she is not earth as an abstraction, not the earth but earth, especially that particular expanse of earth which for us is earth, from which we know the earthiness of earth. Though that we have such a piece of earth is perhaps no matter of fact reality for us rootless, dismembered ones. It has certainly not been for me. Uprooted from my motherland, when I was very young, I can go back there now and find it beautiful, feel that my feet are somehow treading on long familiar soil, and yet know that

These has some very beautiful lines on homecoming (in this sense) in Wandering - the meditation on trees. But, of course, you know that.

nevertheless this is not quite home. Yet neither is America, though I think and dream (mostly) in English and even in my dreams move (mostly) through American landscapes and dwellings.

Not until I went to Greece for the first time, twice seven years ago now, did I know what it is to be at home on earth. There to me earth showed herself. I experienced the truth of the words I later found in Henry Miller's The Collossus of Maroussi:

Greece is what everybody knows, even in absentia, even as a child or an idiot or as a not-yet-born. It is what you expect the earth to look like given a fair chance. It is the subliminal threshold of innocence. It stands as it stood from birth, naked and fully revealed.

It was not only that I found myself in places I had heard spoken of with reverence from the time I was a child, not only that this was the land that had inspired so much of the poetry I have been most touched by (from Homer to Hölderlin and on to H.D.), but because here I directly felt how a particular image of the divine emerges from deep sensitivities to the sacredness of a particular place. Once there it seems self-evident that there would be a temple to Poseidon on the ocean-washed cliffs at Sounion, and one to Athene atop the rocky Acropolis. To know Persephone one must only be in Greece in April when the peach blossoms cover the meadows and hills with a soft pink cloud and the brilliant red poppies are everywhere underfoot.

Here, earth happens -- and especially so at Delphi. I knew I was at the center of the earth the first time I was there. Recently, I found again the account I wrote then, not having remembered how like that experience had been to my cave vision (and only now understanding why):

In the midst of the temple's ancient upward-thrusting pillars, surrounded by the sternly unapproachable mountains, and under a sky alternately bluey brilliant and dark with thunderous clouds, one could not help but recognize the god's presence. It was overpowering. Yet it was a presence that never condensed into a shape, a speaking that never focussed into word, not even into the ambiguous words of the most famous of the oracle's pronouncements.

Delphi affected me on that visit much as it must have May Sarton:

At Delphi

The site echoes
Its own huge silences

Wherever one stands,
Whatever one sees --

Narrow terror of the pass
Or its amazing throat,
Pouring an avalanche of olives
Into the blue bay.

Crags so fierce
They nearly swallow
A city of broken pillars.
Or Athene's temple,
Exquisite circle,
Gentled on all sides
By silvery leaves.

Eagles floating
On high streamers of wind.
Or that raw cleft,
Deep in the rock,
Matrix
Where the oracle
Uttered her two-edged words.

Wherever one stands,
Every path leads to Fate itself:
"Speak! Speak!"

But there is no answer.

Choose the river of olives.
Choose the eagles.
Or choose to balance
All these forces,
The violent, the gentle;

Summon them like winds
Against a lifted finger.
Choose to be human.
Everyone stands here
And listens. Listens.
Everyone stands here alone.

I tell you the gods are still alive
And they are not consoling.

I have not spoken of this
For three years,
But my ears still boom.¹⁴

Yet Sarton at least knew enough to speak of "the gods," whereas I after that first visit spoke only of "the god." When I returned to Delphi seven years later it was with a deeply-loved woman friend. I had hoped so much that this place would be as self-evidently sacred for her as it had been for me, but it was summer and the path to the shrine was filled with noisy, hurrying tourists. "They go up and they come down and they are not changed," she observed. Wordlessly, we turned off from the sacred way and, a few hundred yards into a pine grove, sat down. I have no idea how long we sat there, several feet apart, still silent. In some ways it seemed forever. I had never had such a sense of a deep communion with another human being. It seemed to me as though my soul had entered her body as hers had entered mine. Much later, we both arose, knowing it was time to go. We embraced and I began to speak, "There's no need to ask," she gently said. "It really happened." But that evening I spoke. "I don't understand," I said, "why this should have happened here at Apollo's shrine and not rather at Eleusis which is dedicated to the deepest bonds that unite woman with woman."

I thought of it still as Apollo's place though we had experienced another presence. I know now that it was Gaea's and know who Gaea is in

part by virtue of ^{SP.} that theaphony, that appearance of the goddess. For Delphi, I have since learned, was first Gaea's; as navel of the earth it is pre-eminently the place where humans and earth come together. ^{Even} ~~Still~~ in classical times there was ^{still} a temple to Gaea near the Castalian spring. The omphalos may originally have been a grave mound, clear evidence of a connection to some Chthonic cult. When the oracle was Gaea's it probably took the form of dream incubation, the quest for the kind of knowledge that emerges from hidden depths. Aeschylus suggests the transition from Gaea to Apollo was a peaceful evolution (via Themis and Phcebe). Hesiod and the Homeric Hymn to Pythian Apollo present a more violent struggle. Python, a female dragon created by Gaea as guardian of the shrine, was slain by Apollo to make possible his usurpation of the oracle. Gaea responded by sending dreams to all those who might otherwise have come to consult Apollo's wisdom, until Zeus was persuaded by Apollo to order her to desist. So goes the story. I'm not sure she ever really did.

I first encountered Gaea, the divine presence of earth, there at Delphi, and only afterwards discovered, one doesn't have to go to Greece. Some friends had wanted to share with me a place sacred to them in the desert at the far eastern edge of the Southern California county in which I now live, but had left me to explore it in my own way, alone. It had not occurred to me I would know so immediately, I am here, that I would so surely know this place had a power I had felt in only one other place, Delphi. I knew I was here and I knew, my body knew, just where to go. I climbed up some cliffs remarkably like those in the goddess dream-vision of two years earlier, though I did not consciously recognize the similarity then.

Some fifty feet perhaps from the summit was a small grassy plateau, just large enough for me to lie down in, completely ringed with low, fairly flat boulders. Ritually, carefully, I took off my clothes and neatly folded them and lay down in the prepared space, ~~in~~ in that wonderful sun, feeling the earth beneath, the encircling stones, the mountain behind me, the other mountains to my left and before me, ~~for~~ for who knows how long. And at some time I began caressing my body, ~~in~~ in that loving, knowing, unhurried way in which women make love to women. And at some time my fingers in their wanderings came across the moist spot, and followed the channel whose opening it marked, deep, deep down into the center within - Her sacred place. And then the vision flashed back and I knew I was there, ~~and~~ found it ~~so~~ strange that as often as I have thought of that vision, and even told it, I had never really thought of the cave within the cave as my womb - not until now when I simultaneously entered and was entered. . .

3 } ~~... both so~~ . Recognizing that I had now lived what then I had imagined, ^{I knew} ~~and~~ that this was in some very deep way a moment of completion, ~~of~~ of finding Her. And then some while later ^{I sat} ~~sitting~~ up to look around me and ^{ed} ~~ing~~ discovering that behind where my head had been laid there was the opening of a cave. I moved toward it, unbelievably and of course utterly believingly, for it was the cave of my vision. Except that in the middle of it lay the stone Mother, Ungit, lying on her side, knees somewhat drawn up, with ripe, ripe breasts. Waiting. There was room, barely, for me to lie down beside her, my stomach to her back, my hands caressing her warm round belly. And room,

barely, for me to tuck myself in the half circle made by her breasts and belly and thighs and to feel myself in the Mother. And room, barely, for me to turn around and make love to her and she to me. Laughing and smiling all the time. Knowing exactly what we were up to. The sweetness of woman with woman and the dark, dark mystery. And then when it was over, knowing I needed to leave a sign. And knowing what it had to be. And knowing it was impossible for I had stopped flowing the day before. And then, looking at the hand which had been within Her/me at the beginning of the afternoon and seeing a faint marking of dried blood (which I didn't wash off until I got home), ^{I returned} ~~and so returning~~ to the sweet source and ^{found} ~~finding~~ there the rich ripe drops of blood with which I marked the cave. And then I left, ~~And~~ climbed down the mountain, ~~And~~ walked and walked in the desert until I felt ready to be with others again.

I learned that day what Heidegger means, when in response to Hölderlin's "Homecoming," he speaks of "learning at home to become at home."¹⁵ Gaea had home-d me as no literal mother could. Gaea is that recumbent rock I had embraced and the boulders within whose cluthes I had sat, the landscape at which I had gazed, and the earth itself. She is the earth, recognized as animate and divine; a goddess and yet never wholly personal, never entirely humanized.

Gaea is the living presence of earth; she reminds us of the time "when matter was still rebellious,"¹⁶ long before one could imagine it as terra firma. She reminds us that matter is still rebellious, alive and eruptive. Gaea is earthquake and volcano, molten lava and shifting rock. She is earth as it is in itself, not earth as subdued by humankind.

She may be goddess of all that grows but she is never the goddess of agriculture. (Indeed, in Greece the agriculture rites are so entirely civic, political affairs that a goddess as far removed from being a fertility goddess as Olympian Athene can be their patron.) To know Gaea is to be deeply attuned to the irony implicit in this passage from Susan Griffin's Woman and Nature:

The land is brought under his control; he has turned waste into a garden. Into her soil he places his plow. He labors. He plants. He sows. By the sweat of his brow, he makes her yield. She opens her broad lap to him. She smiles on him. She prepares him a feast. She gives up her treasures to him. She makes him grow rich. She yields. She conceives. Her lap is fertile. Out of her dark interior, life arises. What she does to his seed is a mystery to him. He counts her yielding as a miracle. He sees her workings as effortless. Whatever she brings forth he calls his own. He has made her conceive. His land is a mother. She smiles on the joys of her children. She feeds him generously. Again and again, in his hunger, he returns to her. Again and again she gives to him. She is his mother. Her powers are a mystery to him. Silently she works miracles for him. Yet, just as silently, she withholds from him. Without reason, she refuses to yield. She is fickle. She dries up. She is bitter. She scorns him. He is determined he will master her. He will make her produce at will. He will devise ways to plant what he wants in her, to make her yield more to him. 17

Splendid
Gaea reminds of all that cannot be brought under control. She is divine; she transcends the human. She is that very transcendence but as an earthly, shaped, present, appearing reality.

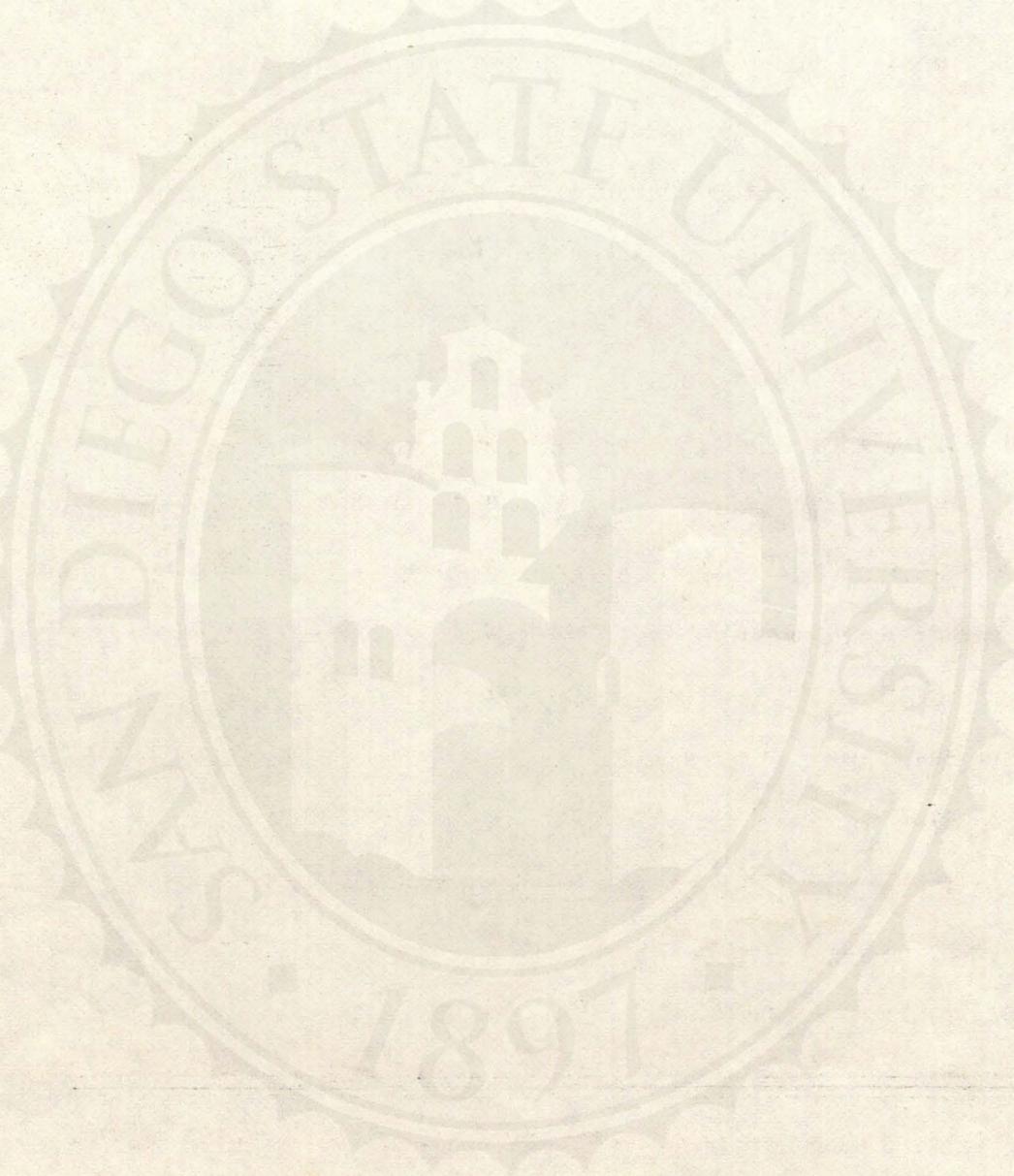
Yet to understand Gaea as only earth, to reduce her to being a personification of an aspect of the natural world (à la Max Müller's reductionist interpretation of mythology) is to miss the point. Gaea is earth made invisible, earth become metaphor, earth as the realm of soul. She is never just vegetal fertility nor even ~~earth~~ ^{the physical globe} at its most volatile and destructive. There is a with-in-ness to Gaea; souls live in her body. The Greeks understood that soul-making happens in earth not the

sky. Soul (unlike spirit) relates to the concrete imagination.

One cannot understand Gaea entirely in human or psychological terms. The very name, earth, serves to remind us of that and yet she is nature moving toward emergence in personal form. The most usual artistic representation of Gaea expresses ^{this?} that beautifully -- she is shown as a human woman emerging breast-high from the earth itself. (to 22A)

A week after the West Coast volcano, St. Helen's, erupted I had a devastating vision from which I could not free myself. I felt myself to be the mountain, felt energies long, long repressed or ignored, entirely unfamiliar, to be gushing forth, with tremendous force and heat. There was no stopping them. I knew myself also to be the slopes steaming with lava, the trees topped by the fierce wind, the bare trunks consumed by the fire, the fields covered with ash. Freud called this force "das Es" (usually and misleadingly translated as the Id) -- some primal "that" in us which is sheer raw instinctual, nature alive within, nature just on the way toward being given human form. These psychic forces within that so clearly transcend the individual, that are an aspect of the unconscious that is inexhaustible and unassimilable but without which we could not live -- these forces that Freud called das Es, these forces, I suggest are Gaea. It is true that Strabo knew how the volcanic deposits left by eruptions of Vesuvius and Mt. Etna enriched their slopes and the nearby plain, and Jung can speak of the collective unconscious mostly in terms of its creative potentiality. But Jung knew of moments when we feel ourselves about to be shattered and smothered by an avalanche of rock; he knew the Gaea that shows herself in St. Helen's eruptions.

Gaea arises from the earth but does not leave it; it is a later conception that imagines Dionysos rescuing Semele (a Gaea figure) and taking her to heaven or that is disappointed by Orpheus' failure to bring Eurydice up from the underworld.¹⁸



she
 For the Greeks, Gaea is always first the earth; all that means as goddess follows from that. This is clear in Homer where, though Gaea has a definite shape, is more than a vague and unchoate conception of the whole earth as animate and conscious, she is not as concrete and personal as her Olympian offspring and not personally active. She is the presupposition. Because earth is always near at hand and cannot be escaped, she is the guarantor of the most serious oaths. Even the gods swear by her. When Erechthonius establishes the Athenian cult he declares that every other sacrifice must be preceded by a preliminary offering to Gaea in gratitude for her nurturance. Likewise in Aeschylus' The Eumenides Apollo's priestess dedicates her first prayer to Earth.

Though in Hesiod, too, Gaea is still clearly earth, she is, nevertheless, more personalistically conceived. According to his Theogony, in the beginning there was chaos, by which he means simply emptiness, pure potentiality, a yawning abyss. Then, by a process of spontaneous emergence, appear Gaea and Tartarus (along with Eros, Erebus, or Darkness, and Light.) This doubling in the Greek conception of earth reappears at later stages of the divine geneology. Tartarus represents the within-ness of earth, its dark unknowable interior; Gaea its giving forth; Tartarus its chthonic aspect, earth's relation to death and soul; Gaea its relationship to vegetation, physical life, fertility. (Persephone's relation to Hades is a later representation of the chthonic dimension, her relation to Demeter represents the fertility aspect.) But the two cannot really be separated. Tartarus is Gaea's within-ness, Gaea is Tartarus' self-externalization. (The geneology suggests an understanding of darkness within darkness, Tartarus is the darkness within Gaea, Erebus is the gloom of Tartarus, and

then there is Night itself. There is also an understanding of light and life as necessarily born of darkness. Thus, the mating of Erebus and Night produces Light and Day.) To be creative is Gaea's very essence. To be Gaea is to give birth to something other than herself, to heterogeneity. To honor Gaea is to celebrate otherness and polymorphousness. Her first creations are her parthenogenetic offspring, sea, and mountain and sky. Though she then mates with her own dark double, Tartarus, and with sea and sky, she is still their origin. All things begin with the mother, even fathers. Of these primal divine beings only Gaea has a cult. The others belong to mythology, to cosmogonic reflection, but are not experienced as living still active principles as is she. The others are supplanted, Ouranos by Zeus, Pontus by Poseidon. She is not; indeed, she participates in the supplantation.

Ouranos and she co-parented not only the twelve Titans but also a race of ~~the~~ one-eyed Cyclops and of hundred-handed monsters. Because Ouranos found these latter creations ugly and terrible, he hid them in Gaea's depths and did not allow them to emerge. But it is Gaea's very nature to give forth. Thus, she is in great distress at having to contain these creatures within her. She solicits the aid of the youngest of the Titans, Cronos, to accomplish their release. When next Ouranos comes to make love to her, Cronos springs forth from his hiding place and using the sickle his mother had fashioned precisely for this task, cuts off his father's genitals. The falling drops of blood are received by Earth who conceives and later gives birth to the Erinyes, the giants, and the tree nymphs. From the foam surrounding the sea-tossed member Aphrodite emerges. Castrated Ouranos has lost his physical potency but

Excellent
But see p. 30
+ concept of
creation.

See p. 30

not his life -- Hesiod is well aware that the primal powers can never really be eliminated. Ouranos is henceforth relegated to the sky, and there serves as the very figure of distance, uninvolvedness, abstraction. Cronos (with his sister Titan Rhea as consort) takes his father's place and gives birth to six children. But Gaea and Ouranos warn that he is fated in his turn to be overcome by one of his children. So, one by one as they are born, he swallows them. Once again it is Gaea who intervenes on behalf of the emergence of life. She deceives Cronos into swallowing a stone instead of his last born child, Zeus, and herself secretly brings up her grandson. When Zeus grows up, he tricks Cronos into disgorging the swallowed stone and children and then fights against his father with his siblings, the Cyclops, the Hundred-handed and one of the Titans, Themis, as allies. The battles are of truly cosmic proportions -- sea and earth and even the wide heavens are shaken by them. Hesiod's descriptions of the clamor, the heat, the confusion are magnificent. But though Gaea sides with Zeus against the Titans when he next begins to battle the Giants she sides with them. ^{25A} ~~for now~~ It seems ^{to her} that Zeus intends to deny his common origin with all her other creations and offspring. This so enrages her that she proceeds to engage in the creation of new monstrous forces to pit against him, most notably the fearsome dragon, Typhoeus, from whose shoulders grow a hundred snake heads. Gaea shows herself here as always for life and against any stifling order. Gaea cannot be subdued nor can her responses be predicted. She deceives and betrays. She is ever-fertile, a drop of Ouranos' blood or of Hephaestus' semen impregnates her, but she is as likely to give birth to the monstrous as to the beautiful.

She is for life but for ever-renewing, ever-changing life and so for life that encompasses death. ^{25B} Gaea rituals included animal sacrifice as well

The Titans are Ouranian; they seek to contest the Olympians for heavenly supremacy. The Giants win her support because they are truly earth-born (not at all the huge ogres of fairy tale).¹⁹

The Olympians, in contrast, represent immutability and deathlessness. They would not have understood Rilke's song:

Because to be here is much, and the transient Here
seems to need and concern us strangely. Us, the most
transient.

Everyone once, once only. Just once and no more.
And we also once. Never again. But this having been
once, although only once, to have been of the earth,
seems irrevocable.²⁰

as offerings of cereal and fruit; they may in archaic Greece as in many vegetation cults have included human sacrifice. The Orphic hymn addresses this goddess thus:

Divine Earth, mother of men and of the blessed gods,
You nourish all, you give all, you bring all to
fruition, and you destroy all.²¹

Guthrie distinguishes between ge and chthon as between furrows and graves and associates Gaea only with the fruitful earth and speaks of chthon as its cold dead depths.²⁰ But this is to force a distinction that is foreign to the Greek conception; the depths are not dead in that sense; the depths are where the dead live, the realm of soul. There are many evidences that Gaea is a chthonic deity. On the Areopagus her statue stands with those of Hermes and Hades. At Athens, Mykonos and probably Delphi she was worshipped in association with the dead. The Attic Genesia (also called a Nekysia -- a descent into the underworld) was an All Souls' Festival when offerings were brought to kinsmen's graves. The Anthesteria which in classical times was celebrated in honor of Dionysos was probably originally a mournful festival consecrated to Gaea and the dead, and even in the classic period Gaea was still involved.²⁰

Gaea is the giver of dreams and of mantic oracles, of soul-knowledge and soul-food. The elusive, fragmentary, often unfamiliar and sometimes unwelcome, bewildering and terrifying yet grounding, deepening character of dream consciousness seems appropriate expression of Gaea -- as ^{are} its earthiness, its concreteness, its self-sufficiency. Hermes may be the divinity most closely associated with the interpretation of dreams, Gaea returns us to their source. Her prophecies come not from being able to read the stars or the entrails of bird or beast but from her deep knowledge of what is really and inevitably going on. Her warnings to Cronus and to

Zeus stem from such insight. (When Zeus is seen as having oracular power, as at Dodona and Olympia, it is only by virtue of his association with her.) Though Zeus intervenes on behalf of Apollo's usurpation of the Delphic oracle, the style of prophecy remains hers. Apollo's victory seems a surface truth. Near the Castalian spring her temple still stands. She remains.

Gaea remains also in her emanations. Farnell says Gaea "must disguise herself under other names that do not so immediately betray the material fact (as "Ge", does) -- in order to develop into active personality."²⁷ Gaea is indeed the source of polytheism. She is the incarnator of the polytheistic imagination which tends inevitably toward a multiplication of forms. It is in her very nature to create, to bring forth variety, heterogeneity. She groans and protests, feels essentially thwarted when Ouranos forces her to contain her own children in her body (in contrast to Cronos who swallows his progeny, in order to feel safer -- who feels threatened by what he does not contain.) Gaea's emanations are projections of her own being, each catching one aspect of her own protoplasmic fullness. To know her fully is to see her in that which emerges from her.

Among the pre-Homeric offshoots of Gaea the most important are Themis, the Erinyes, and Demeter and Persephone. What a different aspect of Earth each reflects -- and yet there is no conflict between them (as there is among the Olympian goddesses). Themis, daughter of Gaea and Ouranos, shares many of her mother's functions and attributes, including her foreknowledge of the future. (It is she, for instance, who warns Zeus against the threat posed by any son born to Metis.) Delphi was hers after it was Gaea's and before it became Apollo's. As bride of Zeus she is mother, among

others of Dike (Justice) and the Fates. She comes to be associated particularly with righteousness and communal order among men. But it is important to see the significance of its being an earth goddess that thus represents righteousness -- for this suggests that right order in the human realm means harmony with the natural order.

The Erinyes (whom if we follow only Aeschylus we might see as the very opposite of Themis) also represent the forces which insist on such right ordering and emerge to re-establish it when it is disregarded. They come into appearance especially to extract retribution for the most heinous crimes -- matricide and oath-breaking. But Aeschylus who has them become the Eumenides only within the patriarchal order as given shape by Athene has it all backward. The aboriginal conception associated ^{m?} then with marriage and childbirth not just retribution (though these, too, are bloody events) and as bringers of a gentle death (as to Oedipus), not only as avengers. ^RDemeter and Persephone in their essential bond with one another represent the two aspects of Gaea, the vegetative and the chthonic. But Demeter is more associated with cultivation; she is the corn-mother not really the earth-mother. She is human, too, especially in her bereavement and grief, as Gaea never is. Persephone is the goddess of the underworld but ~~she is~~ never just a goddess of the world of soul; ^{than is Gaea} she is ~~but~~ always also the beautiful young goddess of spring as it manifests itself in tender leaf and half-opened bud, in the rushing streams and the freshness of birdsong. To hold soul and earth together, the hidden and the appearing -- that is Gaea's gift.

Gaea's rituals like other chthonic rituals and the rituals of the mystery cults suggest the possibility of a different kind of identification

between the worshipper and the goddess that we find in the worship of her Olympian offspring. Ecstatic, perhaps orgiastic possession (as in the cult of Rhea and Cybele) has no place in the worship of Athene or Hera. The Olympians may be seen as humans writ large in whom we can recognize ourselves. To be taken over by Gaea is to be overwhelmed by a clearly extrahuman force, to be taken out of ourselves.

Gaea is the all-mother, the mother not only of the gods but of human beings as well. There are many different tales of how the primordial human sprang directly from Earth: one speaks of ^{Erechthonius} whom Gaea conceived when Hephaestus' semen fell to earth; ^{another of} Cecrops who was born from the earth with a snake's body. There is a story to the effect that once in anger Zeus determined to destroy the whole human race with a flood. Only Deucalion and Pyrrha were saved; as they longed for other human companionship they were told to throw over their shoulders the bones of their mother. They picked up stones and tossed them behind them: Deucalion's stones became men, Pyrrha's women.

All humans have their source in Gaea but Pandora, the first woman, is Gaea in human form. Her very name, "rich in gifts," "all-giving," a name also of Earth itself, suggests this. In Hesiod's account she is fashioned by Hephaestus of earth and water. In vase paintings, where she is often represented as a creation of Prometheus, her art-type is indistinguishable from Gaea's -- she is Gaea emerging in human form from the earth, an earth worked up by Prometheus' (or Epimetheus') hammer. In Hesiod she is associated with the letting loose of many evils into the human world, including sickness and death. It is easy (and proper) to attribute this to Hesiod's misogyny, but important to see the truth as well.

Pandora is indeed Gaea's manifestation: ~~The~~ giver of all gifts, those we welcome and those we would rather decline.

For Gaea represents a protection against those feminist reinterpretations of goddess-religion that seek to deny or explain as patriarchial overlay the dark side of the goddesses. I would repeat (and somewhat change) Sarton's verse:

I tell you the goddesses are still alive
And they are not consoling.

Gaea is not benign: she is creative -- that is her only principle. The Python and Typhoeus, the Furies, the Giants, the Titans, the Cyclops, the Hundred-handed are terrifying -- and there are ever new forms of terror. No kiss transfigures them into fairy princes. There is, irreconcilably, that which does not conform to human scale, that is not moral or purposive. Gaea is never present as a model for human being -- but she is a never to be ignored reality.

The humanization of the Olympian goddesses is both gain and loss. They represent much more clearly differentiated versions of female possibilities; they are closer to our own lives and experiences, more reflective of our own pathologies. But just because of this it becomes vitally important to remember their connection to Gaea. For she reminds us that they are indeed goddesses, more than bigger human beings acting out very human scenarios. To remember her is to be protected against inflated indentifications. We need an earth goddess to bring them down from Olympus and to bring us down. As we return each goddess to the mother we rediscover their fullness. They do not thereby lose their particularity but they do lose their pathology. Their very dark aspects come to be visible as transformative. Thus Hera becomes not simply the

generative?
"Creative" here seems at once too much and too little!
Earth is essentially generative, the productive, the sustaining, the Greek word for the creative act has, I think, a very strong inclusion of "to establish, to ordain. A form of the verb in Iliad (22) means to populate, settle a region, countryside. Is it Gaea more becoming, sustaining, leading, em bodying, than form rather than determining? The energy of Gaea which a form comes to pass, Hesiods "broad-breasted" is significant here.
2) Too little because all goddesses are bearers of the creative principle in their own persons. So Gaea is not sufficiently specified by saying that her only principle is that she is creative.
Also, source and cause are better uncollapsed into other

} p. 24

jealous wife but the threefold goddess who pertains to all aspects of a woman's life; Athene becomes a representative of a fully feminine strength and creativity rather than a woman who has identified with patriarchal power.

To see the Olympian goddesses in relation to Gaea is also to be reminded that we do not get to choose among them -- we are, like it or not, involved with every one. Persephone or Hera or Athene may initially seem closer to our experience or temperament than Artemis or Aphrodite, as is true for me, but the others, too, must be met. As some led me to her, she in turn leads me to others. To return to the beginning, to Gaea, is not to finish but precisely to begin. It is to be back in the cave where Artemis and Aphrodite are still shapeless presences and where one senses still unfamiliar aspects of those goddesses one thought one already knew. The relation between Gaea and the later goddesses is twofold. They are seen as who they truly are in relation to her. But she is also seen as who she truly is in relation to them. Ge-ology can never be a monotheism. Gaea really is mother; she mothers children; more importantly she mothers mothers. We are not called to be children in relation to her, but to be birth-givers -- who make of every drop of semen or blood that falls on us something vital, though not necessarily pretty.

As I begin again after coming at last to Gaea, I hope to remember her as I turn to the others -- to Artemis, to Aphrodite, to the child. And like the poet of ^{the} Homeric hymn, I invoke her:

Now,

mother of the gods,

bride of the sky

in stars

farewell:

but if you liked what I sang here

give me this life too

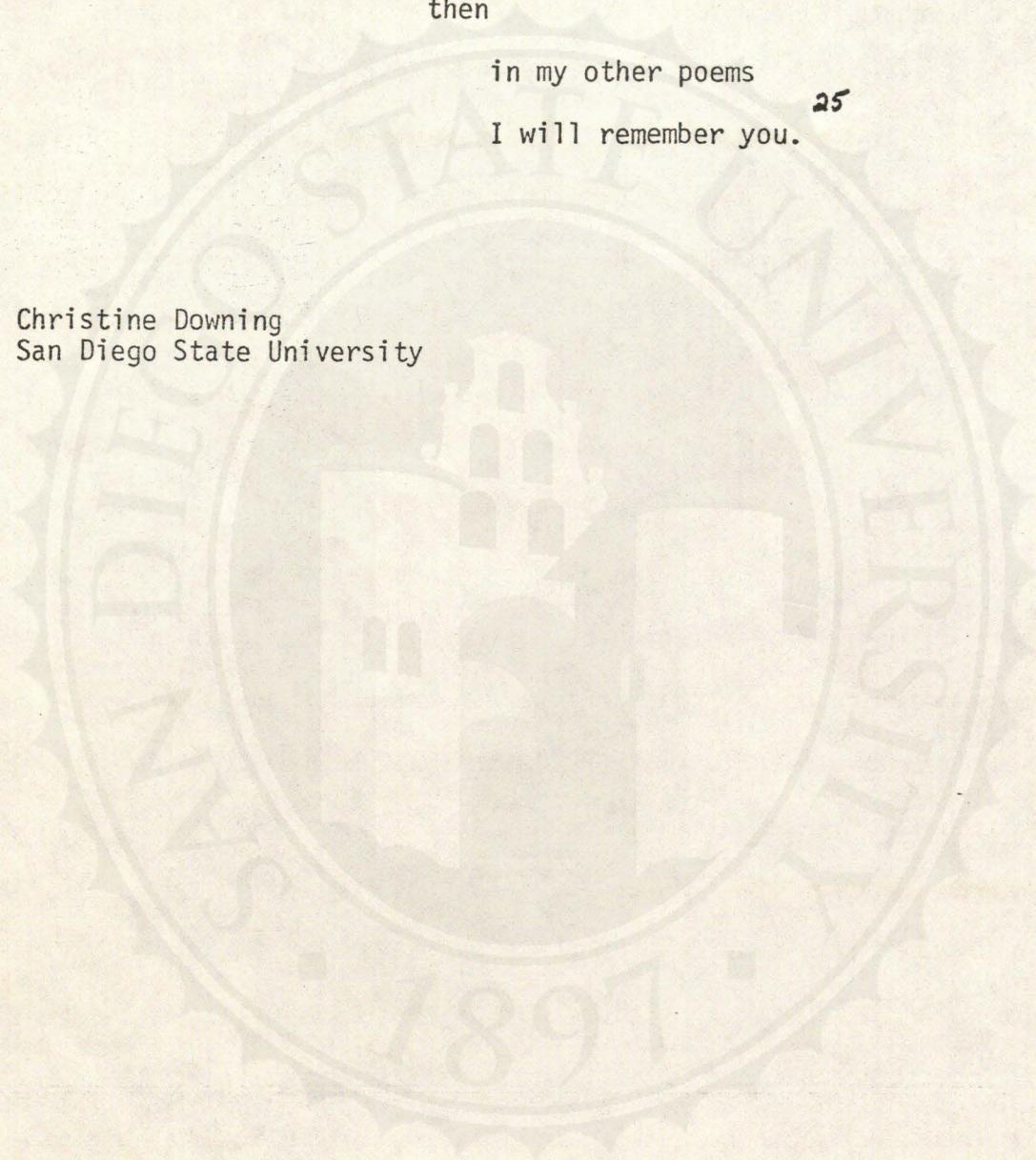
then

in my other poems

I will remember you.

25

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NOTES

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