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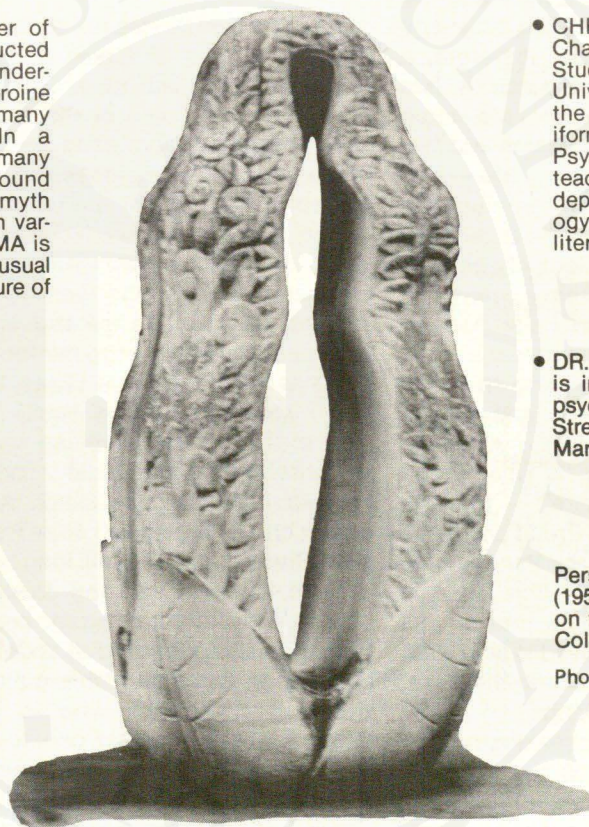
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persephone

- PERSEPHONE, daughter of Zeus and Demeter, abducted and carried to the underworld by Hades, is the heroine of a story replete with many archetypal symbols. In a search for self-identity, many modern persons have found new meanings in this myth and have identified with various portions of it. ANIMA is happy to present two unusual experiences with the figure of Persephone.



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Persephone, by John Rood (1952-53), standing sculpture on the Campus of Wellesley College

Photo by Paul Buck

Persephone

I want to use the story of my relation to the myth of Persephone to communicate the sense of how one learns about myth from myth — from the discovery of what it means to live a myth rather than from scholarly study. This essay has, therefore, a very personal aspect since it has seemed important to include some reference to my own dreams and fantasies and to events in my life — nevertheless it seeks to communicate that the recognition of the archetypal and universal dimensions of one's experiences frees one from a purely personal relation to them. I also hope to show that one can celebrate the mythic patterning without losing an appreciation of the concrete and unique moments that constitute one's existence. This, I believe, is what Freud meant by "transference" — to know that one is Sigmund Freud *and* Oedipus, that I am Chris *and* Persephone, and that either description alone is insufficient. This sense that an old story is being newly lived is also what lies at the heart of any *mythopoesis*, any creative mythmaking.

Because I will be speaking here in such detail of my relation to a particular mythologem, it seems important to begin by saying that this one myth has never been the only one for me. As far back as I can remember there have been several mythic patterns with which I have felt myself to be closely identified. Nor have these always been myths in which a female

played the central role nor always the classical myths of Greek antiquity. American Indian legends and Grimm's fairy tales and some of the books I read and reread as a child and early adolescent have impressed me just as deeply. For a bright and tomboyish young girl the acknowledgment of of some synonymy with Athena was inescapable. Even when very young I recognized myself in the stepmother who peers anxiously into her looking-glass as well as in Snow White, knew that I was more like the spoiled and idle, the irredeemably selfish second daughter in "Mother Holle" than like her admirably selfless sister. As an oldest child, I felt myself more Hansel than Gretel. Later, but still long before college, I *knew* I was the Joseph K whose early morning arrest propels him into a strange world of undefined accusation and ineluctable guilt and the Ivan Karamazov who is overwhelmed by the nihilist conclusions of his own relentless reasoning. I longed for the kind of education Hans Castorp received on the magic mountain.

The power some of these figures hold for me has deepened through the years; others (like Jo of *Little Women*) I have long ago left behind, though I can still recognize why she

• Persephone In Hades Christine Downing

seemed so important "once upon a time." And sometimes it happens that a god or goddess, a hero or a heroine, with whom one has never felt any particular connection suddenly asserts his or her claims upon us. I had a very vivid experience of that in relation to Aphrodite two years ago when I had just recently come to California to live. I was walking at the edge of the sea on the deserted beach near my new home with the waves lapping over my seaweed entangled feet. Standing still for a few moments, I had a sudden flash of Botticelli's "Birth of Venus" and what it is to be reborn — not as a child but as a grown woman — and understood more clearly and gratefully than I had without that image some of the feelings of "newness" and yet "maturity" that were so strangely combined in my consciousness at that time.

Sometimes, too, it has been another who has recognized that for him I incarnate a mythic figure and thus first suggested an identification I later come to admit as integral to my own self-understanding. I can remember, for example, being told that I was another's Ariadne, that I had held the thread which gave him the courage to dare the exploration of his own inner labyrinth. But because I knew that

Ariadne later is left on Naxos, I resisted seeing myself in this role. It was only gradually and reluctantly that I came to appreciate that all of Ariadne's story is indeed connected to my own. It took a long while for me to understand that if Ariadne helps Theseus as she does, she *must* be left behind — for his sake and her own. He must overcome his anima dependence and she must overcome her dependence on playing the anima role. Only then will she become some one able to relate to a man who has his own soul connection, like the Dionysos who comes to Ariadne after her desertion.

It seems to me also that some of these mythical prototypes one feels one *is*; others serve as models. I am not Abraham and will not be; nevertheless the risking faith he shows in his readiness to leave behind the known familiar world (and later to give up the well-loved son who was the only sign that all those years of wandering had any point to them) seems to say something to me about my life that I cannot honestly evade. I too have been called to separations and Sunderings, to *goings-on* that would mean *deeply regretted leavings-behind*. I have mostly been like Kafka's Abraham, too involved with getting ready to go or not wholly sure that the call is truly directed to me. Nevertheless, the biblical Abraham stands forth as exemplar.

So there is Jo and there is Aphro-

dite and Abraham and there are many others. Nevertheless, Persephone has a special place. For from her I have learned a different relation to myth than all these other identifications and all my familiarity with many mythological traditions and with much of the scholarly writing about mythology had taught me. From my lifelong involvement with this particular myth I have discovered how the apprehension of a mythic pattern teaches one that there may be symbolically meaningful connections between events which otherwise might seem isolated moments or stages, and shows one the *inner bond* between what one does and what apparently happens to one.

Often, in ways that continue to surprise, I have found that there are correlates in hitherto unnoticed parts of the Persephone myth to the apparent fragments or the apparent accidents of my life — and then I am less sure those personal experiences are adventitious after all.

I have come to understand, also, the difference between relating to a myth and relating to a mythological figure. It has seemed vitally important to have gotten past identifying only with one character in the myth, Persephone, and with one part of the story, Persephone's forced abduction by Hades.¹ Yet this transformation was not something that I deliberately aimed at. There was rather a gradual and seemingly inevitable discovery of

how all the elements in the story are a necessary part of it, belong together, so that now I see that the *myth is* the *mythos*, the *plot*, the *action*, not the figure abstracted from it. Persephone *is* the one about whom this story with all its ramifications is told. And in ways that I am still discovering her story is my story — through knowing that has no immediate or practical significance. I value very highly James Hillman's reminder, "Myths do not tell us how. They simply give the invisible background which starts us imagining, questioning, going deeper."²

"Always," as far back as I can remember, I have been Persephone. Perhaps because I am spring's child, born on the first day of spring, and Persephone is the goddess of spring. I have a mother who loves myths and fairy tales and loves to tell them, a mother whose own children and now grandchildren, too, have outgrown having such stories told to them and so who tells them instead to the children of strangers in parks and libraries. So perhaps it was from her that I first learned I was Persephone. I do not know. I cannot remember a time when it was not so.

Yet in many ways it seemed that it was only because of having been born on a particular day that I happened to be *this* maiden among the many other possibilities. I felt almost as closely identified with many others of the maiden goddesses: with *Athena* for

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her practical wisdom and the ease of her converse with men, with **Artemis** for her shyness and chosen seclusion. I felt a personal relation, too, to other maidens who like **Persephone** are carried off or abandoned and then rescued: to **Ariadne** as I have already noted and to **Psyche**, who must struggle so long to attain reunion with Eros. (I am struck at how closely these stories are **interwoven with Persephone's in a way** that suggests that in some sense these figures are all aspects of one another. Theseus who had carried Ariadne off tries much later to snatch Persephone away from Hades. Ariadne, as the Cretan Mistress of the Labyrinth, is like Persephone a goddess of the realm of the dead. Psyche's last task is her journey to Hades to obtain Persephone's beauty box. Having acquired psychic beauty she is now herself. (Perhaps **Psyche is that aspect of Persephone that cannot stay in the underworld**, the human soul that knows it isn't the goddess.) That Persephone is at first simply one among many maidens with no clear differentiation from the others is represented in the ancient hymn by having her at the beginning playing in the meadow in the company of her maiden companions. That scene recalls vividly to me a dream I had some twenty years ago: In this dream I am one among a group of young women of the tribe, hardly conscious of myself as more than just one of them, until the young and

handsome chief of our people calls me to dance with him and thus signals his choice of me as his bride. Through this choice, through his recognition of me, I become aware of myself and through the warmth of his love and its sensitivity I become more and more someone worthy of it, someone able to receive and in time to return. Then there is a drought and our people must go elsewhere in search of water but I am left behind alone, with the unborn son, their future leader, in my womb, as a token of their hope to return. I have become one who can wait alone and in peace for the birth of this son who now represents the whole future of my people. When I had the dream I was indeed a young woman of the tribe, hardly conscious of myself as more than just one of them. Hardly conscious, too, of Persephone as more than just one of the many maiden goddesses, though I did feel an identification with the rhythms of her life: the summers of ripeness and the winters of separation and loss, and the always unexpected (though always dreamt-of) rescue by the messenger god. But there were many parts of the myth which seemed less relevant, like the parts of a dream which one is not yet prepared to understand.

Then in my early twenties I began to discover my relation to Demeter, Persephone's mother, and to apprehend why this myth is the basis for the "cult of the two goddesses," the

Eleusinian mysteries. It is the relation to Demeter which makes Persephone different from those other maidens, those other anima figures, whose mothers are an insignificant and often wholly disregarded part of their lives. (Indeed, it is an important part of the traditions associated with **Athene** that she has no mother but sprang forth from Zeus's split-open head; and according to Hesiod, **Aphrodite** too is **motherless**, born in the foam that gathers about the severed genitals of Uranus.)

But Persephone is the maiden who has a mother and indeed, as its title, "The Hymn to Demeter," indicates, our most important source for the Persephone myth is one that views it from Demeter's perspective. That perspective was one I began to understand sometime during the years when I was literally becoming a mother myself. I experienced then what it is to lose one's dearly loved maiden daughter as I had done in losing my own maidenhood — not just or primarily in losing my biological virginity but in losing that in-one-selfness which Esther Harding has helped us to recognize as the essence of virginity.³ There was part of me that **mourned** the introspective self-enclosure that had characterized the earlier years, as another part of me **rejoiced** in motherhood, an existence given over to relationships, to giving birth and to nurturing.

Were it not for my dreams, I might

not know how deeply being mother enters into my way of being in the world. But the dreams reveal the centrality of mother/child imagery in my way of perceiving even situations which have little to do with biological relationships. The most oft-recurring dream motif in my adult life is that I have a child, a beautiful baby daughter that lives in a room in my house that I rarely go to. Yet whenever I want to see her she is bubbling, alive, and happy and has a way of smiling at me while I am attending to her that shows she knows as well as I that it is really she who is taking care of me. But once I had a very bad dream, a scary dream. I went into that room to see my lovely daughter and the crib as I approached it seemed to be empty. But in the furthest corner was a shriveled and shrunken little thing, about the size of a thumb. With fear and trembling and utter gentleness I picked it up and bathed it in lukewarm water and prayed with an intensity I had never before experienced, awake or in dreams, that the child might live. Here the dream broke off. It was years before I saw that beautiful smiling baby again — and when she does appear, as now occasionally she does, it is always cause for wonder. For she awakens in me as nothing else does a trust in my own capacity to grow, to feel wonder, to experience metamorphosis.

But just as Persephone is not just any maiden, so Demeter is not just

any mother. There are many incarnations of the great mother who gives and devours — and most of them represent the mother as the hero-son relates to her. But Demeter exemplifies the mother's own experiencing of motherhood and suggests how much of motherhood is loss. Demeter, as this myth shows her to us, is the grieving mother. She experiences the loss of the other, the loss of her child, as the loss of self (which as Freud taught us is what deep mourning feels like). All of us who are mothers know the truth of this, how intimately the cutting fear of loss, the searing pain of loss, are interwoven with our mothering. To have to give our child up — to death, to another, to madness, to simply going his own way — is more than we can bear and yet we must. The extravagance of Demeter's grief is something I can well understand. I feel in it her suspicion that in some way the loss is due to her own neglect (wholly irrespective of whether that is objectively so or not). Though my own expressions of mourning are muted and muffled in comparison with hers, I am deeply caught up in how entirely she allows herself to be taken over by her anger and sorrow, how ready she is to let everything else fall apart and simply *be* grief. But I am struck, too, by how Demeter in the course of her disconsolate wandering ends up mothering again after all, serving as nurse to another woman's

child — and how intent she is on this time raising a child who would escape death and the fates. This hope, too, has to be surrendered.

Carl Kerenyi has understood well what it means to enter into the figure of Demeter: it "means to be pursued, to be robbed, raped, to fail to understand, to rage and grieve, but then to get everything back and be born again."⁴ The hymn to Demeter is *her* hymn, as the open part of the Eleusinian rites seem to have been devoted to her. As long as the focus is on the mother/daughter aspect of the Persephone mythologem, the mother does have the more important role. And as long as the focus is here, the Persephone mythologem is particularly meaningful to women. The Thesamorphia was a woman's ritual which took the shape of an imitation of Demeter's grief. Solace and encouragement were provided by this representation of the basic emotions of woman's life as divine.

Demeter's story ends in a reunion with her daughter, a reunion beautifully described in the hymn: "Their hearts had relief from their griefs while each took and gave back joyousness." Kerenyi's reading of this reunion rings true to me. It shows that the two, mother and maiden, are one. (This is suggested in the mythological traditions about Persephone and Demeter by "doubling" — Demeter, too, is raped; Persephone, too, becomes a mother.) Motherhood and maiden-

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hood are two phases of a woman's life, endlessly repeating: the maiden becomes mother, the mother gives birth to the maiden, who becomes mother, who To recognize one's participation in this ongoing pattern is to be given access to a kind of immortality, an immortality very different from the hero's self-perpetuation. It seems also to mean that being mother doesn't have to mean not being maiden, after all. One can be experienced *and* innocent, turned toward others *and* in-one-self. Demeter and Persephone are distinguished in the myth and rite, but precisely in order to insist on their unity. They are the two goddesses who share one cult. Of the two, Demeter is the more accessible, the more human and kindly, more concerned with the practical needs of human life. (She is goddess of the grain, not an earth-goddess as such.) Nothing connected with Demeter is secret.

But there is another part to the myth which we have thus far neglected: Persephone's experience in Hades and her relation to its dark god. For a long while when I attended to this part of the story I did so from the perspective of the upper world, understood it as Demeter does, as does that part of Persephone that longs to return. I knew that her joy in the reunion was as great as Demeter's, for I know how deep in me is the longing to be mothered — and do not expect

there will ever be a time when that mother-longing will be entirely assuaged. I am the abandoned child in my dream as well as the neglecting and grieving mother.

I felt I knew all too well what it is to be pulled into the underworld. I related this to times of depression and separation, times when I felt I had lost my ego independence, times when I felt taken over by something outside myself. During such times I wanted only and desperately to "get back" — and knew only a messenger from the gods could make that happen, that I could not bring it about myself. Being back meant health and innocence, wholeness and happiness.

I could understand Persephone's abduction in another sense as well, as initiation into sexual experience (and beyond that into motherhood). The sexual symbolism is obvious — the radiantly awesome flower which Persephone reaches out to pluck is clearly a phallus; the red-juice-dripping, seed-filled pomegranate clearly suggests the womb. The Oedipal element is also apparent — Hades, who is sometimes spoken of as the chthonic Zeus, is here brother to Zeus and has Zeus's paternal permission to seize Persephone. (Ovid who often retells these myths in less subtle ways than do more ancient texts says that Venus/Aphrodite induced Cupid/Eros to inflame Pluto/Hades with love because she wanted control over the

underworld as she had it over earth and heaven — and because she was jealous of Proserpina's/Persephone's seeming determination to remain a virgin. Ovid also has Proserpina eat of the pomegranate out of her own careless innocence rather than at Pluto's deceitful urging). At this level the myth seems to capture the ambivalence of the maiden's relation to sexuality as I myself remember it — she reaches out *and* is taken, the lover is deeply familiar *and* a stranger, she is still the person she was (Demeter's daughter) *and* so changed that she will never be the same again. The Abyssinian woman whom Kerenyi quotes at the beginning of his essay on the Kore tradition said this simply and truly: "The day when a woman enjoys her first love cuts her in two. She becomes another woman on that day. The man is the same after his first love as he was before. The woman is from the day of her first love another . . . (A woman) must always be as her nature is. She must always be maiden and always be mother. Before every love she is a maiden, after every love she is a mother."⁵

Thus for a long while, Hades meant the away-from-myself times, including but not restricted to moments of sexual ecstasy. The rape represented sexual initiation understood in a way that made the male's role almost incidental: he gave me to myself. He brought me into touch with my own

passion, as my own first welcomed and resisted lover had done.

It has only been much more recently that I have come to see that the relation to Hades is just as central a part of who Persephone is as is her relation to Demeter. In the National Museum at Athens there is an important relief which depicts two scenes: in one Demeter and Persephone are seated at a banquet, in the other Persephone is seated with Hades. The two parts of the story are equally important and belong together. This is further confirmed by there being a temple dedicated to Hades at Eleusis. Only as we understand Hades' role in the myth and what it means that Persephone stays with him as goddess of the underworld can we appreciate how the Eleusinian cult could become the most important mystery in late-classical and Hellenistic times for men as well as women. It becomes evident then why Persephone is the focus of the secret part of the cult as Demeter is the focus of its exoteric side — and why it is that the secret cult, the mystery, is the one that matters in the Hellenistic period as Demeter's cult may have dominated in an earlier agricultural period. In the later period, Demeter is important not so much because of her relation to the grain but because she is the first initiate, the first to understand what has happened to her daughter. Persephone is regarded as the secret,

hidden ineffable goddess, related to things beyond, not even to be named except as *Thea*. She is, as Freud called her, the silent goddess of death.

I have had an entirely different relationship to this long familiar myth since I have begun to see Persephone in Hades as its center. When one begins there, sees that the whole story is told about one who is known first and foremost as goddess of the underworld, one understands very differently what it means to say that she is also goddess of spring and renewal. (It's like looking at the cycle of death/creation/preservation as illumined by the spirit of Shiva rather than Vishnu — **to start with death**, with the underworld, as a given is to see life in an entirely different way.)

To be Persephone, to be *this* goddess, Persephone *must* be raped — and the rape is necessary not only as the prelude to the reunion with Demeter. That reunion is part of the public happenings — it is not the secret. Persephone gives herself to Hades, she becomes his consort. All the stories that are told about her (other than Demeter's hymn) refer to her in this role. There are no myths which tell of someone arriving in Hades and finding her absent. As goddess of the underworld she is always there. It seems important that she does not bear Hades any children (though in some traditions she and Zeus are the

parents of Dionysos). The queen of the underworld is not the great mother. She is not the source of literal, physical life.

For a long while I understood Persephone as the innocent victim of Hades' rape just as Freud allowed his early patients to convince him they had all been infantile victims of parental seduction. I laid all the blame for Persephone's being in Hades on the apparent abductor — and saw it as a bad experience, saw it as meaning bad experiences, from which one could of course learn and which one would of course eventually get over. But then I began to see Hades as meaning not "bad" but "deep" — and to know how much in me, although mostly not quite consciously, yearned for the depths that Hades represents. I also see now **why being taken to those depths is always an abduction**. For we — or, at least, I — never feel quite whole enough, quite courageous enough, quite mature enough to go *there* on our own. We (I) are **always still virginal before the really transformative (killing) experiences**.

I have come to regard Hades' realm, the underworld, the depths, as the **realm of souls rather than of egos**, the realm where experience is perceived symbolically. The **Greek Hades** is not terrible and horrifying, full of punishments and tortures but simply **Beyond Life**. Hades is not only the god of the underworld but the god of

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wealth, hidden wealth. I now see Hades himself very differently than I had previously. Earlier I had welcomed **Hermes** as the **guide out of the** underworld, now I have come to welcome **Hades** as the **guide into it**. I feel I understand now how Persephone moves from defense against Hades to love for him. Again Hillman helps me say it, "Life becomes relieved of having to be a vast defensive arrangement against psychic realities."⁶

This changed understanding of Hades came not from meditating on the myth but from a personal experience which I only afterward saw as connected to the Persephone mythologem. A few years ago, I found myself participating in a visionary experience in which I felt myself being pulled to my own dissolution. I felt myself being pulled toward death or to a state that was indistinguishably death or madness and I felt very powerfully my fear of that — and particularly my fear of my fear. I discovered that night how afraid I was and have always been of being anxious, fearful, weak, helpless. But somehow I let myself fear and I let myself go mad and I let myself die — because I realized that not to let myself die would be a much worse death. I felt, and I think this is part of what provoked the fear, that this dying that I felt was happening to me was a kind of unending fall into nothingness, nothingness, nothingness. But I discovered

that the more I allowed myself to fall, the less it felt like that. I discovered that I had never really believed that there is a center at the center. And that there is. It wasn't at all a case of overcoming my fear, of overcoming my fragmentation or my hurts — but precisely a discovery that such overcoming is beside the point. The fear, the pain, the incompleteness, the woundedness, the dying were there. They were my pain and my fear and my fragmentation, but I had come to a kind of objective relation to them. **The fear was no longer fearsome**; I could just let it be rather than trying to run away from it. I saw then that wholeness did not mean not being in parts, that health did not mean not hurting. During that night I was brought to relinquish my negative view of illness, suffering, and mourning. I no longer saw these as things to get over, to put behind or deny. I now see that night as a night spent in Hades.

The secret of the Eleusinian rites seems to be that they gave a happy arrival in this realm: "Thrice happy are those of mortals, who having seen these rules depart for Hades; for to them alone is it granted to have found life there; to the rest all there is evil."⁷ The **Eleusinian initiation** provides an **entrance now (not just after death)** to this realm where the perspective is **in a sense post mortem: transpersonal and imaginal**. But time spent in Hades

that is not spent trying desperately to get out also leads to the discovery of the power and beauty of the dark moments in our life, the real confusions and desolations. Fear is so different when I don't have to fear fear but can simply fear — and incompleteness and hurt are also different when I see them not as something to get beyond but as something to live. I think again of the beauty box that **Psyche** had to obtain from Persephone — clearly the beauty it provides is very different from any Aphrodite might have the power to bestow.

As I try to consider again the whole mythologem and what I have thus far discovered in it and through it, I realize how important it is that Persephone does and does not return from Hades. Though from the point of view of the cult Persephone is always there, she does not belong only with Hades but also with Demeter, not only in the underworld but also here on earth. And I understand too that I am and am not Persephone. Even today it is the maiden Persephone with whom I identify; the goddess of the underworld is still a deep mystery to me. I am pulled to the underworld and return. She remains.

The Goddess who rules in Hades represents the mystery of the unknown, its fearfulness, and its lifegivingness. I experienced that very vividly in a fantasy in which I found myself

walking in the desert, unclear as to how I had gotten there but knowing I had come in search of HER. I walked for a long while through trackless sands, seeming to know the way I needed to go. I found myself approaching some cliffs. I climbed them, and deep within the cliffs, I found a cave. In the middle of that cave was a little fountain of water. It was very dark in the cave and I laid myself down in preparation for sleep knowing that the only way to see HER was to fall asleep and open myself to the vision that might then come. I felt myself falling asleep and then in my sleep making my way down into the rock under the cave through the channel made by that stream which created the fountain. I made my way very far underground into a very dark place and sat down there in that underground space and knew that SHE was present. But I also knew that I couldn't see HER. She was present, but as an unshaped presence. That was as far as the fantasy took me.

George Mylonas in his fine book on Eleusis testifies to his amazement that for 2000 years the secret of Persephone's cult, of the Eleusinian mysteries, has been kept secret. This seems inevitable to me. For it is the mystery about mystery....

1. For those readers not familiar with the classical traditions concerning Persephone, I recommend as the best introduction, the Homeric "Hymn to Demeter" in the Loeb Library version. (Hugh G. Evelyn-White, transl., *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 288-324.

2. James Hillman, *Revisioning Psychology*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 158.

3. cf. Esther Harding, *Woman's Mysteries* (New York: Bantam Books, 1973).

4. Kerenyi, "Kore" in C. G. Jung and C. Kerenyi, *Essays on a Science of Mythology*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 128.

5. Kerenyi, p. 101.

6. Hillman, p. 208.

7. Sophocles, quoted in George E. Mylonas, *Eleusis: The Eleusinian Mysteries*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 284.

This paper was presented at "Springtime IV," the 1976 conference of Friends of Jung/San Diego, May 1, and at the annual meeting of the Society for Values in Higher Education, South Bend, August 17, 1976.

Persephone

This paper is an attempt to apply an ancient Greek myth to the life of a modern woman undergoing intensive psychotherapy.

The myth is that of Persephone, caught between her old life with her mother and her new life with her husband. The patient in psychotherapy is a 28-year-old American woman caught in the same trap — struggling for identity and a true life of her own.

The method of applying an old myth to contemporary life is similar to that of Sigmund Freud, who applied the myth of Oedipus to the struggles of growing-up in little boys. The boy acts out a drama similar to that of Oedipus in the sense that he becomes attached to his mother, wants her all to himself, and is opposed to the father's claims on the mother. How the child works out his Oedipus conflict, says Freud, determines the subsequent course of the rest of his life.

If the parents' marriage is strong enough and they are mature enough, they can help the boy through his crisis where he will, in effect, "give up" his claims to mother at around the age of six, and "join the enemy" by identifying with his father. In return, during this period (ages six through twelve), the father will teach the boy to become a man, so that he can take care of himself, get a woman of his own, and found his own family.

Often, however, the boy is unable to do this, and his emotional growth

is arrested at a particular stage. Using the Oedipal myth as a working model, Freud developed his technique of psychoanalysis, which let a patient go back in time to this point of arrested development, relive the old conflict, and work it through to a more successful conclusion.

Freud's Oedipus model is inadequate for the construction of a psychology of woman. Any single model would be inadequate. The Greeks knew this and peopled Mount Olympus with many female deities — Ceres, Aphrodite, Athena, Artemis, and many others. The myths are not universal in the sense that they apply to everyone, but there are different types of myths just as there are different types of women. On the streets of any city you will find the brave warrior Athena, the love goddess Aphrodite, or — you may find Persephone.

The Flower Trap

In the Greek myth, Persephone was the daughter of Ceres, the goddess of fertility, and the wife of Hades, the lord of the underworld.

• Persephone Dr. Harold M. Hammond including "Persephone's Sketchbook"

As a young maid, Persephone lived in the Garden of Perpetual Springtime with her guardian maidens and her powerful mother. Hades, the dark monarch of the underworld, was the most eligible bachelor on Mount Olympus until he fell in love with Persephone. Knowing that the haughty Ceres would never give her daughter in marriage, Hades called on his brother, Zeus, for help. Zeus suggested that Hades lure the maiden away from her mother with a trap.

An especially beautiful flower was planted in the garden and when Persephone reached down to pick the flower, the earth opened beneath her feet to form a large chasm. Out of the chasm rode Hades on his chariot, driven by the dark horses from the land of the dead. He snatched Persephone into his arms and roared back into the bowels of the earth, the chasm closing behind him, leaving no trace.

Ceres, returning home, could not find her daughter and began a long, mournful journey to look for her. Finally, she was told what happened. She put a curse on the earth for be-

traying her, and the earth became barren and dead. With the earth producing no food, the mortals began to die from starvation, so the mighty Zeus intervened. He ordered Hades to return the maiden to her mother, so that Ceres would remove the curse and the earth would bloom again.

Hades knew that he must obey Zeus, the king of the gods, so he prepared to send Persephone away. Before she left, though, he had her eat just one seed from the fruit of a pomegranate tree, knowing that just one taste of this fruit from his world would cause the woman to be bound to him and someday return.

The struggle between Hades and Ceres was deadlocked. The power and strategy of each was great. Finally Zeus arranged a compromise. If Ceres would put aside her anger and remove the curse from the earth, her daughter would return to her for half the year, in the spring and summer months. But in the autumn, Persephone would return to Hades where she would be the queen of the underworld during the winter months.

So each spring Persephone returns to the earth, bringing warmth and sunshine, growing things, and new life. Each autumn, she returns to the underworld, leaving behind her unhappy mother and the dying earth.

Persephone and Me: Thoughts of the Modern Persephone

What is the point of all this? How does it help? Is it just an interesting analogy, or does it do any good?

There is a point — there is no point. It helps — it does not help. It does me good — it does no good.

I am in the middle of my struggle — my pilgrimage. Perspective for evaluation is limited. Right now I am not in a position to look back and say with great authority, "Oh yes, knowing this has helped me here, here, and here."

I can draw some parallels:

Ceres withdrew the rain and vegetation. The people and animals starved. Spring and new life returned only with the return of Persephone. I have had the feeling all my life that I have the power, that only I could bring happiness and joy, for a brief time, when I visited my own family.

Zeus, the father and ruler of the gods, allowed Persephone to be abducted by Hades. (There was seduction and sex play between me and my father on the night before he left the marriage.)

After much pleading, Zeus struck a "Solomon's bargain" between the mother and the husband. Each would get her half time, thus cutting her in two in terms of her feelings and commitments. (I am a dutiful daughter, granddaughter, niece, friend, worker, wife, and mother. My energy is consumed by being faithful to all these. Nothing is left for me.)

Ceres would like to keep her daughter by her side, but once Persephone tasted the seed of the pomegranate, she was destined to return. *(I was raised in a house of women, by a mother who hated men, an aunt, and her lover, and yet I still had a curiosity and attraction to men. This must be because I once had the love of a man, my father. Before he left, he must have loved me very much, and I am sure I loved him. I guess that was my pomegranate seed, and that little seed keeps me from giving up men and living altogether in a world of women.)*

In thinking about her experience, Persephone says, *When I can see my story reflected back by Persephone's story, I gain some objectivity on what's going on with me.*

Sometimes I laugh with recognition — sometimes I cry!

What a trip! What a strange power to be living a life that has similarities to an ancient Greek myth. The myth comes down through the centuries unchanged — the goddess locked into the repetition of her story.

When I'm at my best, I like to think I'm not locked into repeating my story over and over. Sometimes, a lot of times, I do. My omnipotence has been short; circuited. Now, when I find myself thinking: "My husband, child, family, friend, co-worker needs me to provide health, happiness, and well-being . . ." I say to myself in the middle of that frantic thought:

"Hey Persephone! Climb down off that myth of being responsible for human-

Persephone

kind's springtime!" It's getting easier for me to believe that.

At one point in dealing with my sexuality, I was agonizing over what sort of sexual being I was. For me, it was an either/or case. I found it helpful to deal with my early relationship and love for my father (which I'd hidden away), as similar to Persephone tasting the pomegranate and wanting to go back to Hades. For some reason, this was a helpful comparison. I had received love from my father. It became apparent I could love women and men. I want to love both.

Recently a woman in my therapy group put a twist on the myth that applies to me. To state it in word pictures: "When I'm on earth's surface with Ceres, I long for Hades. When I'm back with Hades, all I can think about is returning to Ceres and the earth's surface."

My personal curse is to be dissatisfied with the choices I make for myself. It is hard for me to live in the here and now. I'm worrying or planning about something in the future.

I'm in the middle of this one. Knowing about it hasn't brought much, if any relief, just recognition.

Ceres and Hades really could have survived and gone on living without the companionship of Persephone. What a trip they put on her:

"I need her in hell — I need beauty, passion, sex."

"I need her on earth with me — youth, new life, springtime, companionship."

Persephone never says a thing. Zeus decrees an equal division of her time be-

tween earth and hell. Her time is pre-arranged by a higher power.

A bite of pomegranate ties her to the gods of death. What draws her back to mother? Nothing except mother's temper tantrum that squeezes off life on earth.

Persephone: A Psychological View

As her therapist, I have walked quite a few miles with the modern Persephone on her journey toward womanhood. Perhaps an analytic look at her can shed some light on others like her, both men and women, who find themselves trapped somewhere between an old and a new life.

Persephone As Pawn

Persephone does not seem to be a real, distinct individual. She does not seem to exist as an autonomous person with her own likes and dislikes, desires, and conflicts. She seems a mere pawn in the power struggle between her mother and her husband. The mother has feelings. She grieves for the lost daughter, becomes vindictive, curses the earth, uses her power to get what she wants.

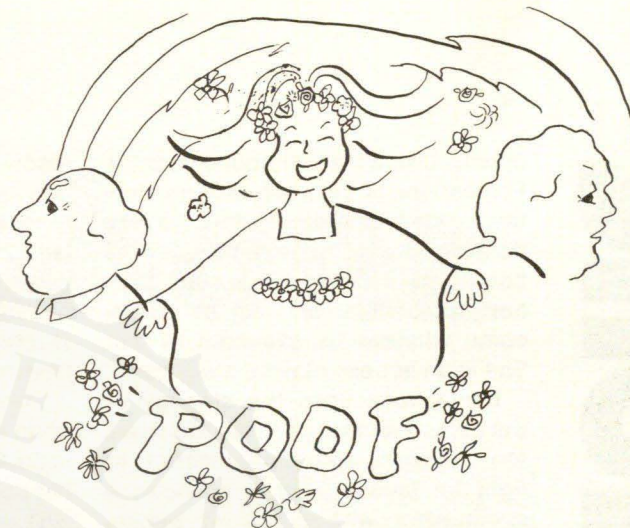
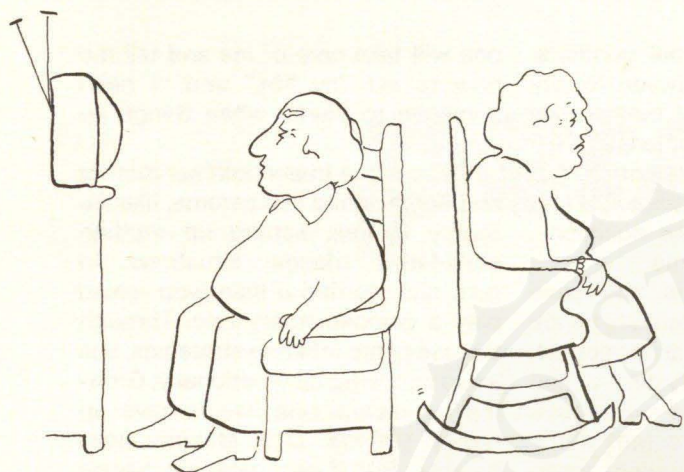
Hades is also real — existential. He lusts for the woman and goes after her. He is shrewd and uses what power he has to get his woman and keep her.

Both Ceres and Hades are active and aggressive. They know what they want and fight for it. Persephone is merely a pawn in their story.

One must take responsibility for one's life and for the consequences of one's behavior. Persephone's strategy also enables her to avoid her marriage, and the partial commitment she has made to being a wife and a woman. Thus she avoids both the pain and the pleasure of adult life. She avoids both the fear and the excitement of being free, of being an autonomous human being who knows what she wants in life and fights for it. She avoids the grief and sense of loss that goes with giving up infantile fantasies of power — that she has the power to give or withhold happiness.

A Poor Thing But Mine Own

If Persephone gave up her fantasies, she would feel diminished. The real world, at first, is pale and drab beside the world of fantasy. So, if she lost her illusion, she would, in a sense, become "smaller" — but "real." To her, it would feel like "a poor thing, but mine own." The fact is that she becomes an accomplished actress capable of playing many roles but, offstage, has no identity of her own. This is the reason why Persephone, and persons like her, often have difficulty during leisure time, such as weekends and vacations. These are the times when the underlying bad feelings about herself and the way she is living her life come to the surface. She may feel panic, she may become depressed. But she may choose for a partner a man who can play the same game — a man of many



AHHHHH

faces — and if the two of them stay busy enough, the game can last a lifetime.

Persephone As Victim

Persephone is always passive, always helpless, always the victim. She never acts, she is always acted upon. She is an arch appeaser. When she is

with her mother, she talks about how bad her husband is; when she is with her husband, she talks about her demanding, domineering mother. When she is with mother, she misses her husband, and when she is with her husband, she misses her mother.

As she sees it, if it weren't for her

mother/husband, she would be happy. Nothing is ever her fault. She can thus set up conflicts between husband and mother, or between anybody, while she hides out of sight. She avoids conflicts and maneuvers out of range of anybody's anger. She does not know how to fight for herself

Persephone

openly. Like a man without a country, Persephone is a woman with no identity, no clear emotional home, no relationship in which she feels safe and nourished. She takes her cues from her environment and seems to become whatever is expected of her. She is an actress playing many roles.

Persephone uses the strategy of the person who is too small, too weak, too helpless, too outnumbered to fight for herself. She is a sneak, a manipulator who plays off people against each other, just as a child plays off mother against father. She may let them fight it out, rather than take charge of her own life and fight for herself. She could stop the action at any point by taking a stand and making a commitment, but she fails to do so.

Persephone's Dissatisfaction

Persephone actually has hostile feelings towards her mother and husband. She feels inadequate, so she needs someone to take care of her, and she hates them for taking care of her. Dependency and hostility go together. She sees them as monsters who must be manipulated, else they may turn their anger against her and kill her. What keeps her stuck is her feeling that she is too weak, too scared, to incompetent to make it in the world alone, so she stays with monsters for security and prostitutes herself.

She lives a life of feigned and partial commitment to both. She never

resolves her own internal conflicts. She never chooses between loyalty to mother or to husband; between relating to men and to women; and between remaining a dependent child or becoming an autonomous adult, free to choose, free to make decisions, free to make commitments.

Persephone's myth is that once upon a time, she was eternally happy in the Garden of Perpetual Springtime, but now she is constantly dissatisfied with both lives because she is always in transition and never comes home to one. If she did, that would mean making a choice, and making a choice means giving up one, losing the other. She could solve the conflict at any time by taking a stand, but this she refuses to do.

Perpetual Childhood

She feels she has to live up to the expectations of others and takes her cues from them — reading, anticipating, second-guessing what kind of responses they're expecting from her. She may even read facial expressions and physical gestures as omens of approval or disapproval. She puts her self-esteem into the hands of the other person. How she feels about herself depends on how they feel about her. And she is as aware of all the little cues of approval and disapproval as a performer is of applause — or the lack of it. The key to this behavior is that she needs to maintain her infantile fantasies of the world. "Someone is in charge, some-

one will take care of me and tell me how to live my life," and "I need someone to blame when things go wrong."

Persephone treats both her mother and her husband like parents, like authority figures, setting up mother-child-father triangle situations. In fact, she married a man who would play a complimentary role. Through the use of her infantile strategies, she avoids growing up emotionally. Growing up means one has to give up having parents. Only children have parents. But if one gives up having parents, one must face the scary position of being alone.

Conclusion

I have held to view some of the struggle, pain, and triumph of a courageous woman. The paper is one-sided in that time has been distorted for the purpose of presentation. Persephone is at once the woman in the myth and the woman in the flesh. Also, she appears in the paper at her worst, as though there were a moment in time when she was most deeply caught up in living out the life of the archetype. Such a moment would have been before she undertook psychotherapy. The myth worked most strongly in her when it was at its most unconscious level. As she worked in therapy, her consciousness expanded, her awareness increased, and her insight developed. The more conscious she became, the

PERSEPHONE'S SKETCHBOOK



I WANT TO BE A GOOD CLIENT
TELL ME BUDDHA WHAT
MUST I DO TO BE
ONE OF THOSE NORMAL,
HEALTHY FULLFILLED PEOPLE



YOU SEE BUDDHA, I AM A
NEBBISH, A SMALL INSIGNIFICANT
VAPOR THAT CAN TAKE ON A
FORM AT WILL.



I HAVE TRIED TO FIT SOME OF
THESE SHAPES BUT THEY KEEP
BREAKING AND I Ooze OUT



EVERY ONE I KNOW IS SO HELPFUL
IN SUGGESTING WHAT I SHOULD BE
BUT THE ROLES ARE ENDLESS, I'M
GETTING TIRED OF FILLING THEM
IT'S HARD TO FILL SO MANY AT ONCE
I'M THINKING OUT... MY VAPOR
IS EVEN HARD TO FIND



BUDDHA YOU HELP ME PLAY MY
GAME NOW - YOU TELL THE SHAPE TO
TAKE - I'LL DO WHAT YOU SAY - YOU
HAVE THE CREDENTIALS YOU ARE
A DOCTOR BUDDHA.

OH SHIT - YOU AREN'T A BUDDHA -
YOU'RE A MAN

WHAT IN THE HELL AM I GOING TO DO WITH A
MAN?



CRINGE IN HIS PRESENCE

PLAY "POOR LITTLE THING"



SEDUCE HIM

IGNORE HIM



HO HUM



RUN AWAY !!

HOW FRUSTRATING - THE MAN WON'T
PLAY BY MY RULES.

DAMN IT - WHAT NOW - WHAT DO
I DO WITH HIM.

HE WON'T TEACH
HE WON'T PREACH
HE WON'T WORRY
HE WON'T CARE
HE'LL LIVE HIS OWN LIFE

I CAN'T MAKE A MARK ON HIS LIFE

I CAN'T BE THE MOST:

ORIGINAL
CREATIVE
BEAUTIFUL
CRAZY
SADISTIC
OR
FUCKED UP
CLIENT HE'S EVER HAD

I CAN'T PLEASE HIM

- I CAN'T PLEASE ME

I CAN'T PLEASE ME

WHAT DO I WANT FROM HIM

WHAT DO I WANT HIM TO GIVE ME

GIVE ME A CHANGED WOMAN - WHILE I SIT PASSIVELY IN MY CHAIR
MAKE HER:

STRONG
POWERFUL
CONFIDENT
LOVING
SEXUAL
GIVING
ACTIVE.

I WILL JUST SIT HERE:

WAITING
SLEEPING
SILENT
WATCHING
CRYING
HIDING

BE SURE AND LET ME KNOW WHEN X-MAS
MORNING ARRIVES SO I CAN UNWRAP MY
GIFT.

Some Gift...

IT'S SITTING IN MY LAP RIGHT NOW
I'VE BEEN GIVEN IT - IT WASN'T WRAPPED

SPOKEN WORDS - I HOPE THEY SLIP OFF
IF THEY FELL ON THE FLOOR
I COULD IGNORE THEM

SORT OF PUSH THEM UNDER THE COUCH

You HAVE EVERY THING YOU NEED TO CHANGE

BUT I'M SURE I NEED A FEW MORE TRIPS
TO THE STORE FOR MORE PARTS

I'M NOT READY YET....

SHOULDN'T I BRING UP MY SAD CHILDHOOD SOME MORE

HAVE I MENTIONED HOW INCOMPETENT I FEEL

I'M
STILL TOO CRAZY

I LOVE MY DEPRESSION

IT IS BLACK
SURROUNDING
PROTECTIVE
ISOLATING
LONELY
DRAMATIC

IT HAS BEEN MINE ALONE FOR TWENTY YEARS
IT'S THE THING I DO BEST.

less power Persephone had over her. The fact that she could write about herself, as she did for this paper, shows a depth of insight which is remarkable and not available to most persons. When you name the demon, it has less power over you.

I can bear witness to the fact that the woman written about in this paper has radically and dramatically altered her life since we met. This is not entirely due to work with Persephone, since the archetype is simply one of many techniques used in the course of treatment. But this woman has taken charge of her life, resolved basic issues around her personal and sexual identity, and become a successful human being — wife, mother, worker, and friend.

She is still plagued with occasional bouts of depression, inner conflict, and low self-esteem, but they are fewer and farther between. Some residue of the neurosis always seems to remain.

As you read this article, you may have thought, "Oh, what a poor crea-

ture!", but if you met the woman in person, you would likely think, "Wow, what a beautiful and powerful person." This article is written as she emerges with much triumph and some failure from her struggles with herself. She has incorporated into her being some of the strength of the mother-figure, Ceres, and some of the self-assertiveness of Hades. She has given up her mother attachment and made her primary commitment to her husband, which has left her free to be an adult, and not a child.

Many questions will be left unanswered in this paper: Is the woman's behavior learned or is it innate? Why does she act like Persephone? Is it because the myth incorporates universal principles of behavior, or does Persephone "live on," as it were, in the racial memory or collective unconscious? Why does Persephone seem to fit this woman and not others? Persephone and I simply present a piece of fascinating experience which we lived together.

TALKING TO MYSELF AT 27

Pamela Alexander

I agree.

The house plant plagiarizes the field of
wild flowers, imitation
is inevitable.

My mother at 27

was probably looking at her *Pittosporum japonica*
and talking to herself.

She married late; I was born
when she was 41. It's never too late
to put the self together
with parts of other people, to become
a piece of the world they likewise
possess.

"My daughter is two; she's learning to talk;
I teach her every word she knows."

The world can continue to exist only by
repeating itself. In Magritte's *Plagiarism*,
made in 1960 or about twelve years and nine months after
myself, a field of flowering bushes grows
inside the silhouette of a potted plant,
species unknown but a late bloomer
no doubt. We late bloomers tend to be
self-effacing.

I have sisters. I have teachers
who are also women.

I grow up
as in a convent. The *japonica*
has white flowers, waxy, well
protected.

Two mirrors hang on opposite walls
of the small attic room. In one,
I see my pigtails and blue corduroy dress
in alternating front and back views
12 or 21 times
depending on what year it is
and how well I've learned to count.
The line of little girls
curves out of sight, but I'm sure
it's endless, like numbers.

It was an arrangement Tantalus could have traded
for his pears and pool
with no other gain than
a change of scenery.
Putting one eye in the proper position to see
myself multiplied *ad infinitum*
meant my head got in the way (I have since
found this to be the main reason
infinity remains undisturbed).
Trying to get my head out of the way
without moving my eye
was an occupation which gave me numerous headaches
and glasses before I was five. Older philosophers
have gotten worse results
from similar exercises.

There are other mirrors.
I will fill the ungainly silhouette
of my mother's mother, the one
who showed me I would never grow up to be
a little old lady, that I will become
a large one instead.

My future still curves like the arc
of eighteen little girls
and exhibits the same perversity: leaned into, it
disappears. But now I know it is concealing
something more interesting than repetition.
It ends.

One thing the mothers and sisters and teachers
were careful not to mention
but which grandmothers boldly engaged in
as if it didn't matter what anybody said,

was dying,
the empty mirror just out of sight,
the silhouette in which someone else
appears, someone half-familiar —
a girl running through a weedy field,
a woman watering a house plant
and muttering —
someone almost
the same.

- PAMELA ALEXANDER, A.B. (Bates) has published in *Atlantic Monthly*, *Poetry Magazine*, and various anthologies. She spent two years as a writer in residence at the Fine Arts Workshop in Provincetown, Massachusetts.



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