not part of book - a talk I gave at UCSC

GODDESS-SENT MADNESS

Some five years ago I had a dream which I have not been able to shake off. In the dream I found myself in a situation of confusion and despair. I decided to drive into the desert alone, hoping there to rediscover the still center I had lost. I drove and drove, on unfamiliar and seemingly rarely travelled byways, far into the night. Then, in what felt like the middle of nowhere, a tire went flat and I remembered I had no spare. It seemed unlikely that anyone would come by soon to offer help but far in the distance I saw a light which might mean someone available to assist me or at least a telephone. I set out toward it and walked and walked. It was sometime before I realized the light was no closer and that I was no longer sure it was there at all. I turned around, thinking it might be better after all to wait by my car; but it had disappeared, as had the road.

At that point a figure appeared from behind a sage bush in the strangely moonlit desert night, the figure of a wizened but kindly appearing old man. "Can I help?", he asked. "No," I said, "you and I have been through this before. This time I need to go in search of Her."

So I set out across the desert, seeming now to know in what direction to proceed, though there were no marked ways and I knew I had never been here before. Hours later I found myself at the foot of some steeply rising sandstone cliffs. I made my way up the cliffs, heading straight for a deep

small cave just large enough for me to lie down. Still seeming to know exactly what I must do, I prepared myself to sleep there, as though to fall asleep were part of my way toward Her.

While I slept there in the cave I dreamt that within the cave I found a narrow hole leading into an underground passage. I made my way through that channel deep, deep into another cave well beneath the earth's surface. I sat myself down on the rough uneven floor, knowing myself to be in Her presence. Yet though she was palpably there, 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.

My way of doing that was to return to the goddesses of Greek mythology to whom my mother had introduced me as a child but to whom I had paid but little conscious attention in the intervening years. I discovered that they had nevertheless been actively present in my life all along and that attending to their presence yielded a hitherto unknown depth to my own experiences, particularly some that had earlier seemed meaningless, trivial or unredeemably negative.

I began to understand why She had appeared to me in the dark underground cave. For each of the goddesses is in her own way intimately connected with some among our darkest and most difficult moments. Each shows herself most forcibly in moments we would prefer to circumvent or quickly transcend: occasions of intense grief or desperate loneliness, ugly, possessive rage or all-consuming lust, impotence or failure. Among the most fearful of the

ways in which the goddesses manifest their power is in the experience of madness. Yet just as grief or jealousy, abduction or abandonment are suffered differently when we recognize them to be divine mysteries, so madness, too, changes its meaning when we understand it as goddess-sent.

That madness may sometimes be more gift than curse is suggested by Socrates when he tells Phaedrus that it is not "an invariable truth that madness is an evil, in reality, the greatest blessings come by way of madness, indeed of madness that is heaven-sent." When due to divine despensation, madness is a valuable gift; in fact, he holds heaven-sent madness to be superior to man-made sanity. Socrates speaks of four types of divine madness and ascribes them to four gods: the inspiration of the prophet to Apollo, that of the mystic to Dionysus, that of the poet to the Muses, and the madness of the lover to Aphrodite and Eros.[1]

Socrates' list does not single out female divinities as instigators of divine madness, nor would I for my part want to suggest that it is only goddesses who drive us mad or provide us with models of divine madness. Yet even Socrates' list is more goddess-oriented than at first appears: for the prophetic esctasy he associates with Apollo is really a mode of prophecy the Olympian god inherited from Gaea, his predecessor at Delphi, and among the gods Dionysus is notoriously a sexually ambiguous figure. In <u>The Glory of Hera</u> Philip Slater (adopting a more clinical definition of madness than does Socrates) asserts that "madness in Greek mythology does not occur spontaneously but is always visited upon a mortal by a god or goddess."[2] Of the nineteen instances of mortals driven mad by Greek divinities that he analyzes, the agents are all either goddesses or Dionysus (who, Slater re-

minds us, was himself first driven mad by the goddess Hera.) Though my perspective is somewhat different from Slater's, I too believe that to ~~under-stand~~ knowing what the Greeks meant by calling madness divine necessitates examining why heaven-sent madness should be especially associated with female divinities.

I am persuaded that our own understanding of madness can be significantly enlarged if we can come to appreciate its goddess-sent aspect. Yet as anyone who has seen or read Aeschylus' The Eumenides, Sophocles' Ajax or almost any of Euripides' tragedies knows, the Greek apprehension of madness is in no sense romantic. The possibility that my exploration of madness as in some sense divine might encourage an evasion of the ugliness and misery, the terror and often cruel destructiveness that accompany insanity distresses me. I remember too well the pain my son Peter experienced during a psychotic break seven years ago. I do not expect ever to forget his fear of being overwhelmed or his sense of isolation. Nor can I deny the panic I have felt in those moments when my own most ominous nightmares seemed to become my only reality. The same anger that I feel when someone seems able to say "death and rebirth" in one breath is stirred by those who can too glibly compact "madness and transformation." To die is really to come to an end; rebirth has meaning only when it happens where it had seemed impossible. Madness is really being taken out of one's everyday mind--and that is terrifying.

Jung knew that, as any reader of the "Confrontation with the Unconscious" chapter of Memories, Dreams, Reflections discovers. Nietzsche's example had served as a forewarning to him: one does not choose such a confrontation. The dreams of bloody tides, crushing boulders, strangling jungle-growth which he describes as part of his lengthy nekyia communicate the terror unforgettably.

The psychosis-like experience of those years was not voluntarily self-induced. It followed the traumatic break with Jung's surrogate father, Freud, and was spontaneously initiated by the Siegfried dream. Yet the original meaning of psychosis, "I give life," was here realized, because Jung was able to go with the visitations rather than resist them. He responded to them as divine, that is to say, he attended to them. His attitude was consonant with his own definition of religion: careful, scrupulous consideration and observation of the dangerous or helpful numinous "powers" that act on a subject independent of his or her will.[3]

To go mad is terrifying, in part because (as Jung had learned from Nietzsche) not everyone returns. Yet he would also affirm that one is different for having gone through such experience. Comparing himself to Freud, he says, that he had risked a greater shattering and achieved a greater wholeness. I believe this to be true of my son as well. Yet it is important to try to specify clearly what constitutes the "greater"-ness of this wholeness. The difference in the wholeness on the other side of madness, I submit, is simply that one knows, as one could not have before, the parts that constitute the whole.

One knows the "Who"s that are at work within. (In addition to that familiar who, the ego) What is divine about madness is that it introduces us to the gods and goddesses of whose active presence in the psyche the so-called sane are often blithely unaware. Nietzsche's contemporary, Erwin Rohde, was impressed by the degree to which "Greek religion at the height of its development regarded 'madness' (mania) as a religious phenomenon of wideranging importance." It understood madness as "a condition in which the self-conscious spirit is overwhelmed, 'possessed' by a foreign power". This madness, and

here he quotes the Phaedrus, "comes not from mortal weakness or disease, but from a divine banishment of the common place."[4] To the Greeks, as Walter Otto in his book on Dionysus so splendidly shows, madness was a mystery in the deepest religious sense of that term.

What is divine about madness is that it introduces us to the gods and goddesses....The gods reach us through our afflictions because we are no longer attuned to their presence when unafflicted. In Jung's words: "The gods have become diseases."[5]

Madness is different though, if we can perceive it as heaven-sent, as a mystery, as a religious phenomenon. Again, Jung says it well:

> It is not a matter of indifference whether one calls something a mania or a god. To serve a mania is detestable and undignified but to serve a god is full of meaning.[6]

Yet, as Socrates saw, simply to speak of madness as divine is insufficient. One needs to be able to distinguish between different types of madness and to do so means being able to know which god one is serving. One needs to ask "Who?, who is at work here?"

Often, as I have already suggested, the answer will be: one or another of the goddesses. Why is that? A tempting explanation is that the Greeks were already picking on mothers as schizophregenic, just as Freud and everyone who followed him has done. This seems to be the gist of Slater's conclusion (buttressed by analyses of the dominant attitudes toward women and of the social position of women in classical Greece.) Yet Slater's failure to deal seriously with the difference between attributing madness to the personal mother and to a goddess is, I believe, misleading. It is not our mothers but something divine, archetypal, transpersonal that drives us mad. Nor

are only mother goddesses guilty--the virgin goddesses, Artemis and Athene, are also culpable.

Perhaps the goddesses are more implicated in human madness than are the gods, because they are generally more involved in the full range of human affairs than are the male divinities whose connections with mortals most often take the form of sexual liaison. The interventions of the goddesses are as likely to be creative as destructive. The heroes of Greek mythology are represented as singularly dependent on the support and encouragement of one female divinity or another: Jason and Achilles on Hera, Odysseus and Perseus, Heracles and Bellepheron on Athene, Aeneas and Paris on Aphrodite; Orestes is plagued by the Furies but rescued by Athene.

The goddesses represent forces essential to human life upon which the ego depends. To ignore them or to deny their divinity is to court madness. It is only when a mortal believes it possible to evade paying one of them homage that the goddesses become pathogenic. Thus when Hippolytus assumes immunity to Aphrodite's persuasions, she drives Phaedra, his stepmother, mad with a passionate lust for him that ultimately brings about his death. Veneration in the past provides no protection if a goddess believes that devotion has been compromised: Artemis displays no pity for Callisto when she learns of her seduction by Zeus. Mortals who implicitly deny a goddess's divinity by claiming power or beauty of equal measure are also apt to be struck mad, as is Arachne who challenges Athene's skill at weaving or Myrrha who claims to be as lovely as Aphrodite. Such inflationary inflation of ego and archetype inevitably leads to the mortal's becoming less than human: Arachne is changed into a spider, Myrrha into a tree. The goddesses also will

not tolerate being objectified; to look upon a goddess naked as Actaeon spies on Artemis is a violation quickly punished. The crime most inevitably associated with an eruption of madness is matricide, for this is the most heinous offence against the feminine realm, the epitome of the attempt to deny one's dependence on a feminine source, to cut oneself off from one's origins.

Greek mythology provides us with uncomparably powerful and precisely detailed descriptions of madness. Aeschylus' description of the Furies who attack Orestes is unforgettable.

The Pythian priestess says:

> they are black and utterly
> repulsive, and they snore with breath that drives one back.
> From their eyes drips the foul ooze, and their dress is such
> as is not right to wear into any huamn house....

Apollo speaks of them as:

> those gray
> and aged children they will whom no mortal man,
> no god, nor even any beast, will have to do.
> It was because of evil they were born, because
> they hold the evil darkness of the Pit below
> Earth, loathed alike by men and by the heavenly gods.

Clytemnestra urges them on:

> Let go
> upon this man the stormblasts of your bloodshot breath,
> wither him in your wind, after him, hunt him down
> once more, and shrivel him in your vitals' heat and flame.

Apollo, vainly, tries to send them away

> Get out, I tell you, go and leave this house. Away
> in haste, from your presence set the mantic chamber free,
> else you may feel the flash and bite of a flying snake
> launched from the twisted thong of gold that spans my bow
> to make you in your pain spew out the black and foaming
> blood of men, vomit the clots sucked from their veins.

> This house is no right place for such as you to cling
> upon; but where, by judgment given, heads are lopped
> and eyes gouged out, throats cut, and by the spoil of sex
> the glory of young boys is defeated, where mutilation
> lives, and stoning, and the long moan of tortured men
> spiked underneath the spine and stuck on pales. Listen
> to how the gods spit out the manner of that feast
> your loves lean to. The whole cast of your shape is guide
> to what you are, the like of whom should hole in the cave
> of the blood-reeking lion, not in oracular
> interiors, like mine nearby, wipe off your filth.
> Out then, you flock of goats without a herdsman, since
> no god has such affection as to tend this brood. [7]

All our fantasies of the forms madness can take are actualized here, Men and women are turned into animals or some form of vegetal life. They eat the raw or stewed flesh of dismembered children. They are filled with irresistible passion for all manner of beast or for their own parents or offspring--or even their own reflected image. They commit matricide or parricide. They utterly forget who they are or become transfixed. They lose the power of human speech. They are destroyed by jealousy or grief. They fling themselves from cliffs to escape a lover's pursuit, discover their skin and flesh being eaten away, find they have been transformed into a person of the opposite sex.

As Freud suggested, "Every member of the audience was once a budding Oedipus in phantasy, and this dream-fulfillment played out in reality causes everyone to recoil in horror."[8] The mythological descriptions are phenomenological in that they describe events as the afflicted individuals experience them rather than as they appear to an "objective observer": Actaeon really does become a stag, Agave really has killed her own son, Teirisias really is transformed into a woman. These experiences are not represented as only fantasy or only metaphor.

Many of the examples of madness I have named above are not included by Slater who discusses only those instances where someone has been explicitly designated as manic or mad by Apollodorus and/or Graves. Thus acting like an animal, becoming a vegetable, fleeing from a pursuer who keeps changing shape--images we still use to describe particular forms of madness are not even considered and thereby much of the rich iconography of madness Greek mythology provides is ignored.

The mythic catalogue of the forms of madness is more carefully elaborated than the diagnostic categories developed by modern psychology, such as hysteria, obsession, schizophrenia, paranoia, though we can readily find examples of each of these in the myths. When we look at madness as it is embodied in particular mythological figures we see not just isolated symptoms but a whole person whose way of being mad expresses a way of being in the world, reflects all that he or she has suffered and done. That such mad ways of being in the world are represented in myth also enables us to see them not only as idiosyncratic individual aberrations but as genuinely and archetypally human ways of being. Freud communicates the illuminating power of the discovery of the universally human significance of such mythological figurations of the human when he suddenly recognizes: "I am Oedipus." Freud was not looking for a "classy" analogy for an already achieved self-interpretation. Rather, "Oedipus" (by which he meant the whole myth from the oracle delivered to Laius to the death at Colunus) was the best possible name for a whole complex of experiences and feelings which only through this name could be recognized to constitute a complex. The first pages of Symbols of Transformation convey the impact Freud's recognition that Oedipus still

lives in us had on Jung:

> Anyone who can read Freud's Interpretation of Dreams... and can let this extraordinary book work upon his imagination calmly and without prejudice, will not fail to be deeply impressed at that point where Freud reminds us that an individual conflict, which he calls the incest fantasy, lies at the root of that monumental drama of the ancient world, the Oedipus legend. The impression made by this simple remark may be likened to the uncanny feeling which would steal over us if, amid the noise and bustle of a modern city street, we were suddenly to come upon an ancient relic--...Suddenly we remember that on this spot where we now hasten to and fro about our business a similar scene of life and activity prevailed two thousand years ago in slightly different forms; similar passions moved mankind, and people were just as convinced as we are of the uniqueness of their lives. This is the impression that may very easily be left behind by a first acquaintance with the monuments of antiquity, and it seems to me that Freud's reference to the Oedipus legend is in every way comparable. While still struggling with the confusing impressions of the infinite variability of the individual psyche, we suddenly catch a glimpse of the simplicity and grandeur of the Oedipus tragedy, that perennial highlight of the Greek theatre. This broadening of our vision had about it something of a revelation. For our psychology, the ancient world has long since been sunk in the shadows of the past; in the schoolroom one could scarcely repress a sceptical smile when one indiscreetly calculated the matronly age of Penelope or pictured to oneself the comfortable middle-aged appearance of Jocasta, and comically compared the result with the tragic tempests of eroticism that agitate the legend and drama. We did not know then--and who knows even today?--that a man can have an unconscious, all-consuming passion for his mother which may undermine and tragically complicate his whole life, so that the monstrous fate of Oedipus seems not one whit overdrawn. Rare and pathological cases like that of Ninon de Lenclos and her son are to remote from most of us to convey a living impression. But when we follow the paths traced out by Freud we gain a living knowledge of the existence of these possibilities, which, although too weak to compel actual incest, are yet sufficiently strong to cause very considerable psychic disturbances. We cannot, to begin with, admit such possibilities in ourselves without a feeling of moral revulsion, and without resistances which are only too likely to blind the intellect and render self-knowledge impossible. But if we can succeed in descriminating between objective knowledge and emotional

> value-judgments, then the gulf that separates our age from antiquity is bridged over, and we realize with astonishment that Oedipus is still alive for us. The importance of this realization should not be underestimated, for it teaches us that there is an identity of fundamental human conflicts which is independent of time and place. What aroused a feeling of horror in the Greeks still remains true, but it is true for us only if we give up the vain illusion that we are different, i.e., morally better, than the ancients. We have merely succeeded in forgetting that an indissoluble link binds us to the men of antiquity. This truth opens the way to an understanding of the classical spirit such as has never existed before--the way of inner sympathy on the one hand and of intellectual comprehension on the other. By penetrating into the blocked subterranean passages of our own psyches we grasp the living meaning of classical civilization, and at the same time we establish a firm foothold outside our own culture from which alone it is possible to gain an objective understanding of its foundations. That at least is the hope we draw from the rediscovery of the immortality of the Oedipus proble.[9]

Of course, it is not only Oedipus who still lives in us. Freud himself later found "Narcissus" to be the best name for another eternally reappearing way of being in the world. One could extend this and develop a mythologically-based set of diagnostic categories. We have heard already of Electra-complexes, and Orestes-complexes, one could go on to speak of a Pentheus-complex, a Medea-complex, a Phaedra-complex. My own conviction is that the particularity of such descriptions, that they imply a plot and not just a person makes this potentially richer than the more abstract archetypal forms Jung more often named: Such as, persona, anima, animus, Great mother, wise old Man.

Yet the point of the mythological perspective on madness is not really to provide us with yet another classificattory system, open to all the same modes of misuse as any other, but rather to help us see madness more accurately, to discern its rich variety and to see the wholeness, the pattern, inherent

in any particular madness. Recognition of the mythological pattern being re-enacted is important primarily because it helps us see a "Who", a person in the madness, rather than just a set of symptoms.

It also helps us see another "Who", a god or goddess in the madness, for (as I noted above) to the Greeks madness never occurs spontaneously but always as a divine visitation. To understand Actaeon's madness we must consider Artemis' role, as Ajax's implies Athene and Medea's Aphrodite. Yet the illumination provided by recognition of the divine aspect of madness is not to be taken as a new framework for etiological explanation. The gods and goddesses are integrally part of the experience, rather than external causes. The myth is the entire story: Heracles-and-Hera, Pentheus-and-Dionysos, Orestes-and-the Furies.

Yet it helps to know which divine being is at work in a particular case because when we know who is driving us (or another) mad we may begin to understand to whom we must now attend, what divine being is insisting on the need for more conscious devotion. E. R. Dodds describes how the search for the "Who" become a central element in the psychotherapy of 4th century Athens. Diagnosis as practised by the Corybantes was based not on symptomology but rather on the patient's response to a particular ritual: "If the rites of a god X stimulated him and produced a catharsis, that showed that his trouble was due to X." Dodds quotes Plato's description in the Ion of patients participating in this mode of therapy: "They have a sharp ear for one tune only, the one that belongs to the god by whom they are possessed, and to that tune they respond freely with gesture and speech, while they ignore all other."[10]

The homeopathic assumption evident here is central to the mythological understanding of madness: the divine being who causes the affliction is the same one who can cure it. This follows of course from the notion that the madness is a call to attend to an ignored or devalued divine power. The madness is the beginning of a necessary re-ordering. Freud made the same point in his analysis of Schreber's paranoia: we need to learn to see that what we mistake for madness is really an attempt at recovery; the real madness is the prepsychotic phase.

There is another mythological assumption central to my reading of divine madness. What the gods or goddesses do they also suffer. Aphrodite evokes love and is susceptible to it; Athene inspires prudent courage and herself reflects it; Artemis demands uncompromising devotion and herself displays it. Thus as we seek to comprehend the form of madness unique to each divine being it seems pertinent to look not only at the particular ways in which each afflicts mortals but also how each himself or herself models a particular mode of madness. We see what each god wants from us as we see what provokes his or her attack. But we also discover who these gods truly are, what blessings they have to offer, only as we are willing to look at their dark sides, at that in them which is in some way mad.

Slater can see madness as always produced by a goddess (or Dionysos) rather than by a male god in part because he ignores this dimension. For him Hera's relation to madness is seen only in relation to what she inflicts on Heracles, Athamas, Ino, Dionysos; he does not really discuss the fact that the extravagant jealousy which leads her to those attacks and to her equally unrestrained persecution of Leto, Io, and Semele (to name but a few of her

victims) is itself mad. From this second perspective, we could of course speak also of the madness modelled by the male gods: Zeus's power trip, Apollo's excessive rationality, Hermes' compulsive trickiness, and so forth. It may indeed be that these forms of madness are harder to recognize as mad; they seem more characterological than explosively eruptive; they are often given cultural validation.

Nevertheless I will focus here on goddess-sent madness and leave the gods and their madness to another occasion. I choose here as I did in the dream to say to the gods, "You and I have been through this before. It is time now for me to go in search of Her."

I make this choice in part because I think it is too easy at this juncture in feminist history for us women to lay all the blame for our madness on the gods, on the madness of a world's being dominated by the masculine--and to want to see only the benign aspects of the archetypal feminine, the goddesses. There is an enormous temptation to believe that the goddesses are seen as mad and mad-making only in the misogynist representations of Homer, Hesiod and the tragedians. Yet my research suggests that even in their more archaic forms the goddesses were seen to have a dark and fearsome and mad aspect--as, given their chthonic character, we might expect. The goddesses were associated with life and death, feast and famine, health and disease, growth and decay, peace and war, creativity and destruction--madness and sanity. Goddess-consciousness, as I understand it, means a profound acceptance of ambivalence, of the necessary and inevitable interplay between dark and light, death and life. It also, I believe, means starting with the dark and in the dark--Persephone is goddess of spring because she is queen of the underworld,

the day begins at sunset, the month at the dark of the moon. To discover the kind of sanity or wisdom that each goddess represents means beginning with the particular form of madness she embodies.

I would not want to deny that Hera and Aphrodite are pictured more negatively in the classical literature than in cult or other evidences of the aboriginal understanding. In Homer they are clearly less powerful, less healthy, less complex than they were archaicly. Each goddess has become a clearly differentiated, immediately recognizable, unique being. That each is seen as pathological relates to the diminuation of the full range of powers and attributes earlier associated with her. Part of their madness is simply being so much, too much, what they are: Artemis the self-sufficient solitude-loving virgin, Aphrodite the wile-weaving promiscuous seductress, Hera the unhappily frustrated wife. (The same applies to the gods--they, too, are more differentiated from one another and in that sense mad-der than in the preHomeric world.) But it is important also to acknowledge that Homer's differentiating consciousness is genuinely mythological: it is that exaggerating consciousness which sees any entity as its own epitome. Artemis and Athene were already distinguishable earlier; Homer makes us see those distinctions more clearly. This distorts--and clarifies. Here the richly articulated variety of feminine energies is displayed--and, implicitly, here, too, we may discover the warning: if one doesn't recognize one's relation to the full panoply--one is mad and may visibly go mad.

I am particularly interested in how the goddesses relate to the ways in which we women are and go mad. Yet I would not want to be read as suggesting that only the madness of women is goddess-sent. Indeed, Slater's reading is that the relation between agent and victim is predominantly contra-sexual:

the goddesses mostly drive men mad; women are driven mad by Dionysos. Because his working definition of madness in Greek mythology is narrower than mine, I cannot accept that conclusion. But I do agree that men may go mad because of their dealings or misdealings with each of the goddesses: Athene is responsible for the madness of Ajax, Artemis for that of Broteas. Furthermore I believe that men, too, may experience the kinds of madness the goddesses model: they too may be consumed with grief like Demeter's or with jealousy like Hera's--and these visitations may be particularly difficult and madmaking just because the victim may feel he is behaving like a woman.

What I can speak of more authoritatively, however, is necessarily the ways in which the goddesses afflict us women. As always I begin with Persephone who remains for this spring-born child the goddess who initiates me into the realm of the goddesses and their ways with us. I first knew Persephone as the innocent maiden who is abducted as she plays with her friends and taken into the underworld and I knew that (though she is eventually allowed to return to earth and is joyfully reunited with her mother) she is destined to return to the underworld each year. I felt close to Persephone because I felt I too knew what it is like to be periodically pulled away from myself into a dark place, into depressions that feel like death, and to long to get back. The sense of being abducted, taken away from myself, and having to endure that passively until some Hermes-like rescuer arrives, was the earliest form of madness I knew. Yet because I had a sense of its periodicity, of how the down times were part of a cyclic pattern, I could understand them as analogous to the time that a seed rests in the earth gathering the nourishment that will allow it to come forth as grain when spring again comes around.

Thus the association of these times with Persephone lightened them for me. But the Greeks knew a darker truth about Persephone, a truth I too eventually came to know. For Persephone is not only the maiden periodically taken away who passively endures her time in Hades. She is herself the queen of the underworld, who comes to love her dark consort, and whose real home is there. (There are no myths which tell of anyone arriving in Hades and finding her absent.) Thus Persephone leads us to something more difficult than the acceptance of periodic cycles of depression. She represents a willingness to embrace being pulled away from self as having its own meaning, a life-giving meaning, not as time out from real living. All the fears we have of geniunely transformative experience, of really dying to the self we have been, are constellated in her. To let go of our fears of the underworld and our negative evaluation of underworld experience.--that really feels crazy. She is that moment Jung can still date precisely more than fortyfive years later, when he let himself drop. The Eleusinian rites in honor of Persephone (as Sophocles described them) represented an initiation into the underworld which transforms one's relation to it: "Thrice happy are those of mortals who having seen these rites depart for Hades; for to them alone is it granted to have found life there; to the rest all there is evil." But we who live in a world where that ritual initiation is no longer available will probably only discover the life-giving quality of Hades in a more traumatic, fearful, involuntary way. (More as Persephone herself does than as her devotees do.) Only an abduction into Hades finally brings us to realize it is <u>more</u> mad to resist, more deadly to be transfixed by the fear of dying. To choose this realm will always seem mad to those who have not experienced this transvaluation. Recall

Robert Lowell's description (following Rilke's) of a Eurydice of whom Orpheus, imagining himself to be rescuing her from Hades, had no conception:

> She leant, however, on the god's arm;
> her step was delicate from her wound--
> uncertain, drugged and patient.
> She was drowned in herself, as in a higher hope,
> and she didn't give the man in front of her a thought,
> nor the road climbing to life.
> She was in herself. Being dead
> fulfilled her beyond fulfillment.
> Like an apple full of sugar and darkness,
> she was full of her decisive death,
> so green she couldn't bite into it.....
>
> She was a root, self-rooted.
>
> And when the god suddenly gripped her,
> and said with pain in his voice, "He is looking back at us,"
> she didn't get through to the words,
> and answered vaguely, "Who?"[11]

Though to start with Persephone is to start with the blessings of madness--it is important to remember that for the uninitiated "all there in Hades is evil". The other valuation, that of the initiate, is hard won. I feel the need to warn against sentimentalization: Persephone as queen of the underworld is not a romantically beautiful maiden--she is austere and awesome.

It is always easier to romanticize the goddesses and to avoid their darkness and pathology. Thus when we turn to consider Demeter (the other half of the mythologem of the two goddesses who are one) it is tempting to see in her only the beautifully devoted mother grieving her daughter, Persephone's, disappearance. But there is nothing pretty in Demeter's grief. She is overwhelmed by it. She has suffered what feels like an unendurable loss. She perfectly exemplifies Freud's description of melancholy: "an exclusive devotion to mourning which leaves nothing over for other purposes or other

interests." She refuses to accept the loss and is completely ready to let the world die. "In grief the world becomes poor and empty,"[12] as indeed it does when Demeter mourns:

Then the blond Demeter
installed herself there,
far away from
all the happy gods,
she stayed there,
wasting away
with longing
for her daughter
in her low dress.
And she made this
the most terrible year
On this earth
that feeds so many,
and the most cruel.
The earth
did not take seed
that year,
for Demeter
in her beautiful brown
concealed it.
And the cattle
many times
pulled
their bent ploughs
in vain
over the land,
and many times
the white barley
fell
uselessly
upon the earth.
And in fact
she would have wiped out
the whole race
of talking men
with a painful famine,
and deprived
thoses who live on Olympos
of the glorious honor
of offerings and sacrifices.[13]

Her mourning is truly divine in its extravagance--and mad. Demeter's madness

is one that those of us who have given ourselves so totally to a loved other that we have lost our sense of who we are apart from that love will easily recognize. Her sense of unendurable and meaningless loss issues in a felt loss of self, and, paradoxically, in unceasing self-indulgence.

The madness of Hera has some of the same ~~tone of~~ extravagance attached to it. She longs for deep fulfilling committed relationship with another and cannot bear to have this longing unfulfilled. Thus she is represented as defined in her very being by her rage at Zeus's betrayal of that longing--a betrayal as mythically inevitable as Persephone's rape or Demeter's loss. We know Hera's madness when we feel ourselves consumed by an unremitting jealousy that aims to destroy all that reminds us of our unfulfillment rather than to seek fulfillment in ourselves. It is not even Zeus himself who most bears the brunt of her jealousy, which is directed instead at the women he seduces, (Leto, Semele, Ino) and at their sons, (Heracles, Dionysos) and at her own sons and daughters. The effects of Hera's possessiveness are evident in the heroic madness of Heracles endlessly performing one impossible task after another at her behest. Ares and Hephaestus represent the madness she imposes on her sons: one, the self-defeating aggressive delighter in violence for its own sake who is hated by the gods; the other the gentle and skillful but impotent and crippled artisan whom they mock. She consumes Hebe and Eilytheia, too,--daughters who are little more than shadow versions of herself. We also live touched by Hera's madness when the Furies of another woman's jealousy are directed against us. To experience that and thereby to discover how unwittingly--that is, unconsciously--we have so destroyed another's well-being that she has gone mad may send us mad ourselves and

may lead us to a forced confrontation with sides of ourselves we cannot bear to see.

Remember, I am not saying the pathology is all there is to Hera. Every archetype has its creative and its pathological aspect; I have written at length elsewhere about the gifts of the goddesses, including Hera. I am stressing the importance of recognizing their dark side because it may help us toward a better understanding of our own wounds and destructiveness. To see the mythological representation may perhaps make possible experiencing the madness implicit in these archetypal patterns vicariously and thus be released from having literally to be taken over by it. The Greeks believed that to see, as the audience at the Dionyian theatre sees or as the participants in the mystery cult rituals see, is to be pulled so deeply into pity and terror that a catharsis may occur. Hera may carry some of our jealousy for us--rather than forcing us to carry hers.

It is easy to see the madness of Hera because our culture has difficulty in admitting the other side. It is less easy with Athene "about whom few if any unworthy tales are told." Yet surely there is something mad about a father-boundness which leads her to deny all dependence on feminine origins:

> There is no mother anywhere who gave me birth,
> and, but for marriage, I am always for the male
> with all my heart, and strongly on my father's side.[14]

We need to recall also that Athene's other face, the one she wears on her breast, is that of the Gorgon Medusa whose visage is so terrifying that those who see it are turned into stone. When Athene wears the gorgonhead it conveys the dark sources of her power, but does not destroy or petrify; ~~and~~ she uses the blood caught from Medusa's dripping neck to heal. In Athene a power which

is potentially destructive is presented in its creative transformed aspects. She may strike Teiresias blind when he comes upon her naked, but she then gives him supernormal powers: second sight and the capacity for creative thinking even in Hades. She deludes Ajax into thinking that the cattle he slaughters are the fellow Greeks (Agamemnon, Menelaus and Odysseus) he seeks to murder because he feels they have treated him unfairly; she drives him mad in order to prevent the killing. (Not that Ajax himself understands his hallucinatory state as a blessing; when he realizes what he has done, he is so ashamed that he eventually kills himself.)

The madness of Artemis is integrally connected to the singular purity of her chastity. She has no patience with those who violate her privacy nor with those who allow themselves to be violated. The fleeing one is, absolutely inevitably, she who slays those who pursue too relentlessly or those who allow themselves to be caught. The punishment is loss of self since it is in one selfness that is in question. Actaeon who comes upon her nakedly bathing becomes a stag, Callisto who succumbs to Zeus' seduction a bear. Both lose the power of human communication. Artemis is the solitary wilderness she inhabits. To stay sane there instead of becoming animal is tricky indeed, something perhaps only a goddess can accomplish.

That Aphrodite is connected to divine madness most would acknowledge, though the temptation is to emphasize the sunny joyous side of being taken over by love. But Helen of Troy knows the ambivalence inherent in being possessed by this goddess who pulls us away from all other commitments and allegiances:

> I grieved for the madness that Aphrodite
> bestowed when she led me there away from my own dear country
> forsaking my daughter, my bedchamber, and my husband.[15]

It is Aphrodite who inspires Pasephae with love for a bull and leads Myrrh to seduce her own father. She fills Phaedra with a passionate longing for her stepson she herself knows is madness but cannot resist:

When the madness I have described is that represented by the goddess herself it is always balanced by a mode of health, of creative being. Each of the goddesses represents a way of being mad as she represents a way of loving, a way of knowing, a way of fighting. As Walter Otto showed us each of the Greek divinities represents a whole but singular world.

> None of them represents a single virtue, none is to be encountered in only one direction of teeming life; each desires to feel, shape and illumine the whole compass of human existence with his peculiar spirit....Its special characteristic is always the signature of a world complete in itself. Each represents a wholly different, but a whole world.[17]

In goddesses that can co-exist simultaneously which in mortals is experienced sequentially. A goddess is at all times all that she is--infant and adult, virgin and mother, mad and sane. Artemis is eternally the newborn daughter helping her mother with her twinbrother's birth and that brother's companion in the hunt; Hera is at once virgin, wife, and separated one.

When humans are struck with divine madness in Greek mythology the story is different: Their madness excludes sanity. It is divine in part because it is all encompassing--and often in the tragedies, especially those of Euripides, there is no cure. Yet Orestes is finally let off when Athene intervenes. Years of lonely wandering bring Oedipus to a point where he can at last die in peace. Both stories represent the transformation of the Furies into the Eumenides,--the consoling ones, and suggest that if one stays with the inflicting agents long enough their transformative power may be released. But the "cures" (like the madness itself) are divine mysteries.

And mostly there are no cures. In the myths about those who suffer from Hera's jealousy, Artemis' merciless judgment, Aphroditic passion, there are no reprieves. As Robam observed long ago, though Eros may triamph in fairytales, in myths it is Thanatos that wins out. This is real madness that Greek mythology describes, not just the bad trip that we know will soon wear off, the bad dream out of which we can awaken. The divine power that inflicts the madness is a power that can enter human lives creatively, but is here

shown working destructively because too long denied or taken lightly. That the agent of madness is a repressed aspect of the victim is most unforgettably represented by the relation between Pentheus and Dionysos in Euripides' The Bacchae. Bennett Simon describes it thus:

> Let us first consider the madness of Pentheus. It is shown step by step to take place in an interpersonal process. Dionysus, the other "person" in this process, embodies the urges for release, the yearnings for ecstatic orgy, the repressed sexuality, and the warded-off, dreaded wishes to be feminine. Further, one sees Dionysus's power not only as he tempts the repressed prurient and voyeuristic side of Pentheus but as he stimulates wishes even more strenuously denied--the wish of the mighty tyrant to be a small baby nursing in his mother's arms or safely absorbed inside the mother.[18]

The play is overwhelming because it presents so vividly the ambiguity of what constitutes madness and what sanity. Pentheus goes mad because of what he has tried to deny. Every god must be given his due. But there is no mitigation of Dionysos' cruelty or vengefulness in Euripides' representation. There is no celebration of madness in this play--only a warning of the near impossibility of discovering and maintaining a balance between repression and possession. It is frightening--because it rings true.

Though in the myths the mortals are mad or sane, youthful or mature, represented from the perspective of a linear temporality, we know that there is a sense in which for us too, and not only for the gods, we may be both at once. We know that in the unconscious there is no time, that the child we were co-exists with the adult we are, that in our dreams we may be mad while in waking life we appear sane--and that the fears and fantasies of nightmare sometimes appear unexpectedly but inescapably during the day. Not all of us go certifiably mad, yet all of us, I'd agree with Hillman, experience the fear of going mad as primally as we do fantasies of growth

and health. All of us have moments when we know we are mad and we tend to experience such moments mythologically--that is we imaginally transform them into their ~~most~~ worst potential. Such moments introduce us to dark forces in the depths which seem ready to overwhelm us forever. All of us have some experience of madness. But, once more: I am talking about our most fearful, really terrifying moments, the moments when we really feel we've lost ~~it~~ all, moments when we know that's the real truth. I am not talking about madness as the highest high of all.

Divine madness attacks us in a variety of ways, because there are different goddesses at work. It may be that at different times a different one ~~may~~ will keep reappearing because we still have not learned to pay her attention. The fear of loss of control is very strong. Madness is scary. So even when we think we have learned how much we constrict, how much we lose, how much we risk, by being in control--my guess is most of us try to reinstate control. (Though the illusion that the Titans or giants or goddesses can ever be subdued for good is, of course, also madness, the madness of Zeus.)

Yet I believe we can learn to bless those appearances of the goddesses that remind us that they are always present, that the ego is never really master in its own house. The illusion of ego-mastery, and the constriction of self it represents, is what Socrates meant by "man made sanity", an always fragile and inherently inferior made of consciousness. To see madness as a gift of the gods and goddesses is not to abrogate responsibility for our lives; indeed, I would see it as an enhancement of responsibility. It brings us to acknowledge the importance of learning to respond to, attend to, those powers that work in and through us, powers that can bring creation or destruction.

For the Greeks it was not a sign of psychosis to see divine beings intervening in our psychic life: rather it ~~is~~ was felt to be madness to ignore their presence. The gods intervene not only in our boundless jealous or mindless grief; they are also the source of energy strength, courage, insight restraint, of every fateful decision and every inner transformation. For Socrates even reason was "an active manifestation of deity in human being." The point of divine madness is to teach us that these divine beings are always present. We seem to learn that only when forced to--and seem to need to learn it over and over again. Madness introduces us to the "Who"s at work in our soul. Socrates could see madness as blessing because he knew the Who's--and so prophecy could mean insight rather than sohpsistic babble, ritual ecstasy could mean creative release from egoic isolation rather than orgiastic frenzy, the Muses would inspire poetry not a formless outpouring of imagery, Aphrodite and Eros would lead toward an appreciation of harmony and beauty not a wallowing in bestial lust.

The real madness, so he taught, is not to know oneself--one's selves, all the Who's at work within.

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NOTES

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