In the deep well

Etain Addey[1]

I Spring Equinox

> *Weaving a cocoon out of the substance of one's own life is the necessary prerequisite for the emergence of psyche.*
> – Nor Hall

> *There was a very deep well on the farm, more than four hundred feet deep, and that was the only source of water up there on the hill. It took one man with a rope and bucket a whole day each week, working for twelve solid hours, to draw up enough water for all the farm people and the cows for the next seven days. They used to give me a twenty gallon milk-churn full and that water had to last us a week for everything: drinking, cooking, washing ourselves and our clothes, cleaning the house and watering the vegetable garden.*

This is part of my mother's brief account of the remote Cornish farm where I was born. She repeated it to me several times during my childhood and it was word for word the same story every time. She told me the facts, almost without comment and without expressing her feelings and many years later, I still have no answers for all the questions I would like to ask. I never interrupted her tale to ask for more details because I sensed that it was a world apart, a world with sinister undertones, a description of which my mother felt reluctant, and at the same time compelled, to pass on to me, feeling perhaps that the story was my business.

Plotinus says that the soul, on coming into this world, chooses four things: the body, the parents, the destiny and *the place of entry into the world.* I had left that place before I reached the age of one and it was only half a century later that Plotinus' words led me back there, triggering a series of inner revelations, answers to those unasked questions.

My parents were not farming people. My mother had worked as a secretary for the radio in London: she had started work at thirteen in order to provide for her mother, who was a widow in poor health. My father, who had been crippled in an accident, had just graduated. Both of pacifist persuasions, they married just as the war ended and at that time they were penniless and looking for work. My father found a job as tutor to a boy of ten, the son of a farmer in the Cornish countryside. The local school was too distant for him to get there and although the farming family obviously felt the daughter could do without schooling, something had to be done about the boy. So it was that those two city people found themselves in a remote part of the south west, on a hill farm called Elder Hill, where they were offered a cottage with no running water or electricity

and a small salary. My father was still walking with two sticks and it fell to my mother to carry water, fetch wood and dig a vegetable garden so that they could eat.

> *What a lot of nettles we ate! The war had only just ended and rationing was still on, and even though we were on a farm, they never gave us so much as an egg. They were people who kept themselves to themselves.*

My parent's first child was stillborn, poisoned by toxaemia. "*She had such a sweet little face. Her head was a normal size, but her poor little body was tiny – perfectly formed, but tiny."* My father had wanted to call her Etain, the name of the queen who was stolen away by the Lord of the Otherworld in the Irish myth that he loved. It is the Celtic version of the myth of Demeter and Persephone, the journey to the Underworld. "*But I think your father knew beforehand that she wouldn't live. One day while I was pregnant, I found him in tears and he wouldn't tell me what the matter was."* He was already an astrologer.

Etain Mary was buried and my mother, who by then was thirty two and desperate to have a baby, found a naturopath and for a whole year ate nothing but fruit and raw vegetables and drank nothing but water. My parents had married on the day, indeed at the very hour, of the autumnal equinox and at the same equinox of the second year, she fell pregnant again. My father had been very reluctant to try again, wanted to wait…but my mother prevailed.

> *It was a strange family. Mr. Belbin was a man of few words. His wife was mad - mad as birds! She had taken to her bed some years before. People said she saw spirits. Apart from their son Robin whom your father taught, they had a daughter of eighteen called Jilly, who did the work that ought to have been her mother's: she did all the cleaning and cooking and took care of the hens and geese.*
>
> *The four young men who worked on the farm were Italian prisoners of war. The government didn't want to send them home until our own men were all back from the war, for otherwise who would work the land? One of these Italians was in love with Jilly, and she with him, but her father wouldn't hear of an enemy for a son in law. In the end the lad was sent packing and when he got back to Italy, he sent Jilly a huge box of Italian chocolates, but Mr. Belbin confiscated them and sent them off to the Ministry of Defence to have them analysed because he said they were surely poisoned.*
>
> *When you were about to be born, I was at my wit's end to know what to do for help. My mother was too elderly and anyway she lived far away in London, your father was still unsteady on his feet. So I made an application: in those days the government would pay for a woman to help for the first month of a baby's life in cases of real hardship.*
>
> *And so it was that this lady arrived on our doorstep. She was getting on in years, well dressed and very spinsterish. When I opened the door to her, she looked at my belly in horror and said 'Oh no! The baby's not born yet!' I had to admit that you were late. 'I do not wish to be present in a house where a birth is taking place!' she replied. I didn't know how to apologise, so I showed her in and took her to see her bedroom and made her something to eat: she had had a long journey from a distant town.*

The farm was so out of the way that the lady obviously decided to stay despite the imminent birth. The bus that had brought her to the nearest village only came by once a week and then she had had to climb Elder Hill on foot to get to the cottage.

> *On the morning my labour started, at the end of May, I went out and hid in the vegetable patch so that she couldn't see me from the kitchen. I spent the whole morning planting out cabbages, very slowly. I squatted down during each contraction and pressed the little cabbage plant into the earth and then when the pain passed, I stood up and went on to the next one. I managed not to moan out loud while the three of us had lunch, but when it got to teatime, I said to your father, 'You'll have to bring me something on a tray upstairs – I can't pretend anymore!'*

Darkness had fallen when the doctor and the midwife reached the farm: the rain was coming down in sheets, and there was thunder and lightning. The doctor was an old man who had been a naval surgeon all his life, looking after sailors. In his retirement, he had gone into obstetrics, which seemed a funny thing to do after a lifetime at sea, taking care of men! He had a wooden leg and I could hear the noise of wood hitting wood on the steep stairs as he climbed up to my bedroom. He was a good-natured man but he had no psychology: the first thing he did was to arrange a whole armoury of surgical instruments along the mantelpiece where the candle was burning: clang, clang, clang! 'What are they for?' I asked. 'Oh, just in case of need,' he replied. He examined me and then he said 'It'll be hours before you give birth…I'll go down and keep your husband company in the kitchen.' As soon as he left the room, the midwife had a look. She was a good woman and kind. 'He's a man!' said she, 'What can he know about it? Don't worry, it won't be long now – you'll see that the baby will be born before the moon rises – that's if we can see it in this downpour!'

Sure enough, you were born well before midnight, with the storm still wild outside the window. Your father came up to see you and afterwards he told me that at the moment he heard your first cry, there was a sound of the front door slamming and when he went to look for the spinster lady, he realised that she'd gone, suitcase and all. As soon as you arrived, she'd run off into the night, across ploughed fields in the middle of that storm! We never heard from her again and the doctor, on his way back to the village in his ancient car, saw no sight of her on the road. It was a mystery. But it was the happiest day of my life!

My father called me Etain Elizabeth: he must have really loved that name!

There wasn't another woman for miles around, but I had to show you to somebody. So when you were a few days old, I wrapped you in a shawl and carried you down to show you to the farmer's wife. The geese saw me and came running after me, and I ran with you in my arms and my heart in my mouth and those big white goose wings in my face and the geese screaming at me.

I knocked on the door of the bedroom where she lay in the gloom, day and night in that big high bed. I went up to her and said 'Look, Mrs. Belbin, I've brought my little girl to show you!'

She turned her head towards me, her grey hair sticking up around her face and looked at you. There was a long silence. Then she said, in a distant voice, 'Ah, a little girl.' There was another long silence and then she said, 'I often see a little girl wandering around the farm.' A long pause.

Then, 'She fell down the well many, many years ago!'

My mother didn't tell me what her reaction to this was. She told me about another occasion, on a day when I was nearly one year old, and she came out of the cottage to see the men loading all the cattle onto two lorries. *"Where are the cows going, Mr. Belbin?"* she asked. And he: *"Off to be slaughtered. They're all riddled with tuberculosis."* I'd been weaned onto their milk several months before.

I said to your father 'I'm going back to London with the baby. If you come too, I'd be happy, but I'm not staying here.'

My father went with her, although he'd grown very fond of Robin and was sorry to leave him. Thus ended their brief time in the country.

II Autumn Equinox

We celebrate a rite which marks the cessation of generation at the spring equinox. At the exact time of the opposite equinox, the myth places the rape of Koré, that is to say, the descent of souls.
– Salustio, *On the Gods and the World*

If you gaze into the abyss, the abyss gazes also into you.
– Nietzsche

"Your daughter will fall down the well!"
"Your daughter's falling down the well!"
"Your daughter's fallen down the well!"

It was the curse which changed everything. When Mrs Belbin turned her gaze on me, did my mother hear the roaring from the hundred gaping mouths of the Cumanian Sybil, the howling, raging mouth of the waters, the thundering tumult of the waves at the bottom of the well? Surely she must have seen then that the bed was Hecate's mound, made of the piled-up feathers of those screaming geese, that the madwoman was sitting on the edge of the umbilical well itself and that she, the still grieving mother, had brought me to the very place where the deep waters washed and sucked at the shore, where the sea's undertow tugged at me? "Bitter pain seized her heart" when Demeter heard the cry of her daughter as she sunk out of sight.

Turning towards me, Belbin's wife was suddenly moonlike Hecate, she who shapes destinies, she who hid from Hera's wrath in the house of a birthing mother and for this filthy proximity was cast into the Underworld. Invincible Queen, with her retinue of infernal dogs, moving through the black night because she can see in the darkness, she who carries the torch along pathways and hears everything that happens, the sole ear that heard Persephone's scream as she was swept up and carried down, the only one who could reply to Demeter's questioning, who knew how and by what means mother and daughter might be reunited.

Hecate draws us out into the dark because one birth is never enough, another emergence is needed and the second birth is harder, a burning, harsh passage like the fire into which Demeter thrust Demophonte every night. Hecate of the sacred grove of Averna, of the cavernous entrance to the Netherworld, is the Goddess of byways and crossroads, a Goddess of the heavy depths of the earth who demands the sacrifice of maidens. She rules the precarious states of birthing mother and newborn and wears the terrifying face of abandonment and exposure to the elements. Her face is threesome like the moon and so our destinies are never the same. Hecate has the power to look directly at this world of matter and not lose herself.

Did my mother know that when you pick up a newborn baby, you have to ask permission from the Dark Ladies? "If it pleases Your Excellent Selves," women used to say in the Sicilian countryside right up until the nineteen-fifties and maybe they say so still as they reach into the pram. It is necessary to pay respects to these Dark Ladies, to ask news of the child's destiny from the bird-headed Goddess on the stinking midden heap, from Baba Yaga as she flies over her chicken-legged hut, from the thousand year old Sybill in her cave, in order to grasp the invisible threads and bindings of our lives.

If she didn't know this, my mother, didn't she hear the warning from the prophetic geese who ran screaming after her as she fled towards the farmhouse door? That egg-incubating, feathered retinue of the Great Mother, those otherworldly messengers who can see in the dark, who fly up for a bird's eye view of things as they really are and scream out their presentiments of danger? Birds of good fortune or ill fortune who brood over the future with their warm, downy, waterbird breasts and announce the descent towards the Underworld.

Did she see that the bed was in fact the Pythia's tripod? That it was stuffed with the feathers of augural birds? The bed is a place of brooding, the small space for death and birth, the place of healing dreams and of the nightmares that drive us into panic. It is the place of sleep and inner journeys, visions hovering on the edge of consciousness. Did she see how the terrible old woman squatting by the central well might convey either a blessing or a curse? Did she know that the deep waters are the dwelling place of the Dead, invisible to us but present in the very midst of life and that the boon of new

births, of marriages and healings are only in their gift? And that the journey back up from the watery abyss is not certain?

What did my mother mean by telling me such a story when I was so small? Perhaps she felt a kind of duty to pass on to me the circumstances of my birth, feeling that somehow they were more my business than hers? Every mother indeed tells her child the story of their own birth and perhaps that story holds a key to the child's life.

Laurens van der Post was a friend of Jung's in the last years of the Swiss psychologist's life and had many conversations with him about the ideas he had formed from years of experience with the inner workings of the human heart and mind. He says: "Jung came to the conclusion that every human being had a story, or to put it in its most evolved form, a myth of his own. That story is the personality's most precious possession… That was the secret key to unlock the door that barred reality, in all its dimensions, both within and without, from entering the personality and transforming it."

So this is not a human story, these events have to be read below the surface of the water, down in the depths of the well.

There are many daughters in this story: my mother all by herself, unable to ask her distant mother for help; the daughter of the mad farmer's wife who perhaps had to submit to her father's desires instead of enjoying her young Italian boy's love. The daughter born dead and buried with her Koré name, the newborn daughter that was me, another Koré, who might fall down the well like the little spirit girl who wandered the farm, a daughter of the farmer's ancestors. Silent daughters, who wander the place, lie quiet or submit but don't talk. Only the newborn cries loudly and threatens the silence. Perhaps the mad farmwife, who had taken to her bed many years before, thought drowning at birth might save my mother's child from worse harm?

I have to lean over the lip of the well and stare into the water, search the depths for images. Sleep with my head on the stones near the abyss for revelations. Sit on the stone of the mother well and wait, like Demeter, for the daughter part of me to come back from the Kingdom of the Dead where she is perhaps trapped. Wait for the inspiration of the waters like the Pythia who drank from the spring of Castalda,

Perhaps the well was not just four hundred feet deep but was really the entrance to the Underworld and there were not just many daughters but also many dark Mothers under that hill. To whom, otherwise, were the milk cows with the moon-shaped horns sacrificed? The same sacrifice that Ulysses and Hercules made for their descent into the Underworld.

An entire zodiac of figures clustered around that entrance: the Spinster, the Lover, the Newborn with her dead Twin, the Midwife, the Father, the Virgin Jilly, Belbin, the Man who Drew Water, the Pupil, the MadWife, the Mother, the Doctor from the Sea – twelve actors, six male and six female.

My mother said "Mr. Belbin" as if that were an everyday name, but this is not a name from the upper world, it is akin to *Beli*, name of the God of the Celtic Underworld, and *Bin*, hill. Beli or Bile, his feast was Beltane "the fires of Beli", when people drove their cattle through the flames to purify them. His name has resonances with *Bellil*, the Sumerian lunar deity, a very ancient underworld goddess, protector of trees and goddess of love and with *Belit-Shari*, the Scribe of the Underworld, with *Baal* or *Bel* or *Belus*, the Old Testament God of the High Places, with *Belial*, the underworld devil from the Hebrew "*Beliy Y'aal*", "worthless one". There on the hill my father and mother were innocent guests of the God of the Underworld, his talk is of enemies, sickness and poisoning. And guests of the Old Woman who lives under the Hill, or was she the Hill itself?

All these connections floated up into consciousness after my visit to Elder Hill. Before that, my mother's words had been like a fairy story: after I walked on the hill, I realised that these events had really happened and then I began to perceive the deep map underlying the events of everyday life, the presence of archetypes of a high order moving below the surface.

My father, solar, visionary, wounded, perhaps did not want to turn away from the splendour of the One, was reluctant to drag a beloved woman down into the dark birthing matter of the world, which continually regenerates itself in the midst of blood and danger. This insistence on calling both daughters with a Persephone name was really an expression of his love for the truths he felt were *behind* the physical world, the consciousness of the steep descent of the soul into this world, as if to remind the child at every moment of her true identity.

But perhaps the world is very insistent, clutches at our feet, pulls us down, wants indeed to see our hands and mouths and hearts full of mud, full of the juices, wants to see us devouring each other, full of endless desire and tempestuous feeling. Perhaps jealous matter herself has something golden to tell us and won't let us into the secret until we are down in the forgetful darkness at the bottom of the well, amongst the decaying corpses of sows sacrificed to the sea Mother. Was his naming a refusal to take part, to dirty his hands? Or was it a golden gift, a single ear of corn, a secret key to the daughter generated by his giving in to the world?

There are Cardinal virtues, which set things in motion: The first belongs to the Spinster, who allowed the birth to happen by absenting herself, removing from the story the primordial unity, the being-at-One, non emanation. The second belongs to the MidWife, who fished the daughter from the sea. The third belongs to Belbin, who called my parents to that place of underground waters. The fourth is the MadWife, the midwife of the second, terrifying birth, who named the descent.

Then there are the Fixed virtues, which keep the world in motion. They are exercised by the Lover, who continues to pour his heart out to the Virgin, that heart full of homesickness for his invisible Italian places. The second fixed virtue belongs to my Father, who agreed in the end to take part in the regeneration of the sublunary world, knowing that generation is a dark matter and never-ending. The third one with fixed virtue is the Man who had the endless task of drawing water from the well, pouring out water for men and animals, dredging it up from the world of the dead to give the decomposed, rejuvenating juices to the living.

And the fourth fixed virtue was my Mother's, who wanted things to flourish, who strongly desired the continuation of the world. Fasting for many months just like Demeter to call back her dead daughter, transforming wild nettles into warm soup, she dug, she sowed, she carried wood for the fire, planted cabbages and watered them with her birth waters, hid from the horrified eye of the One who does not love multiplicity and flees from it. She indeed multiplied a small bowl of liquid every day into whole cascades of sweet waters so that from that tiny, magic spring came a green and fertile garden, live children, the ecstasy of love. Life had been hard on her, born late to an elderly mother and a father who ran off to sea. Alone as a young woman with a mother who was tired and poverty-stricken, then married but grieving for her dead firstborn child, she had already made her own journey down to the Underworld and come back strong.

Moving to that Cornish hill, a place so alien and strange to her, she had managed to draw towards the secret cave of her womb three water-carriers: the Full Moon midwife with her tidal understanding of time, the man who drew water from the farm's deep well, and the man from the sea with his single leg, a merman who brought the birth to culmination and was fatherly to her, a father finally back from the sea. Three

people with dripping hands, the cardinal midwife who dealt with the amniotic waters of emanation, the man of fixed virtue who slaked the thirst of the living and the mutable sailor-doctor who knew that the sea is the goal of all flowing.

The Mutable virtues take us back to the source. The first belongs to the Newborn daughter, cursed and blessed as she came into the world with the task of the journey down and the return home. The second belongs to the daughter Jilly , who seemed bound to given up love and take her mother's place, leaping straight from her virginity to the end of human life as if, nun-like, she had renounced the world. The third person with mutable virtue was Robin, who aspired to learning and this leads us all back towards the ancestors. The fourth with this virtue was the Doctor who knew that every birth is another wave in the sea and yet every individual life is still part of the ocean.

At Eleusis, the initiates circled a well. The Mysteries are forgotten but the soul does not forget and the world still offers itself as a place of ritual.

III Spring Equinox

Be careful how you approach the cave of rebirth.

It is hard to believe that the events of the past in our parents' stories really happened; those times and places seem remote, like an old dream. When my mother told me the story of my birth, as I was growing up in London, it seemed like the recital of a fairy story and the Cornish hill farm with its deep well lay, in my imagination, in the unreachable past.

So to get into a car in the new millennium and find the road which led to that hill was almost like walking through the looking glass into another world. Driving along roads which became smaller and narrower the further we went, we finally arrived at the nearest village. I was travelling with Suzi, an old friend with whom I had shared important transitions in both our lives: loves, childbirth, escapes, some quite dramatic moments. It was the Spring Equinox: the sun was shining with that blinding, white, northern light which is so different from the warm Italian sunlight and huge clouds raced across the sky. The rolling hills with their granite outcrops and boulders told us we were in a landscape with its own fantastic nature; huge slabs with smaller clitter spread across on the slopes and tumbled blocks of stone struck us with their presences.

We found the road which led up from the village, snaking between hedges; after a few miles, we saw two men working on a tractor and stopped to ask if we were on the right track. A dog ran across the field with a dead rabbit and one of the men came over to the side of the road. "Elder Hill?" he said, pointing, "It's quite a way up there."

Finally we came to an even smaller track with an old board: *Elder Hill Farm*, it said. The place really existed!

We drove down the track and stopped in the big farmyard and got out. The yard was surrounded by old outhouses and hay barns and the main farmhouse was down at the bottom of the paved area. On one side of the yard was a small cottage, perhaps the house where my parents had lived. I looked around for people. A large dog came towards me, wagging its tail in a welcoming kind of way. There was a loud engine noise coming from one of the sheds and I found a red-cheeked man working there. He explained that he was a mechanic and just rented the space. "The owners left twenty minutes ago for town. They'll be sorry to have missed you," he said. This was not the Belbin family, but people who had bought the farm a few years before.

When I think back to that windswept, sunny morning when I wandered around the farm, I remember feeling glad there was nobody at home. I had in mind Plotinus' words and I wanted to see if this were indeed the kind of place I would choose for my

entrance into the world. I walked among the chickens round the old stables and henhouses in the company of the amiable dog who preceded me like a kindly guide and I felt - at home. The fields which led down from the low farmhouse were pastures and I could see small, thickset little horses turning their rumps to the wind under large oak trees.

Yes, when I contemplated that landscape, I thought I could take responsibility for dragging my parents out of London for just enough time to allow me come into the world in a beautiful place, far more homelike to me than the city suburbs where I grew up. Seeing the physical reality of that place, I suddenly understood how my mother's story had been full of unexpressed feelings. To her, the place had felt precarious, dangerous, remote, hard, inhabited by rough and ignorant people and she had faced it all bravely and then, perhaps intuiting that the place was in some way my business, had felt obliged to tell me about it without adding her own comments.

Our life choices, which we feel are freely made, are perhaps embedded like a seed in the moment of our birth? And all births contain these mysterious archetypes in the guise of the ordinary, the everyday things.

So I was born with the smell of cattle in my nostrils, dust, hay, geese, and in my ears the sound of Italian voices shouting to each other. I was also born in a place that seethed with high feeling: my mother's fear that she might have another dead baby, and her great desire for a living child, Belbin's resentments, his wife's angry ravings, the passions of Jilly and her lover, the Romeo and Juliet of the situation, the homesickness for their own places of the Italian prisoners. Those Cornish hills were overlaid with other landscapes, perhaps Sicilian, Sardinian, Umbrian, held in the hearts of the young men who worked outside the open windows of the room where my cradle stood. I lived near woods full of wild animals and close to the farm animals with whom I shared the suffering of tuberculosis and then quietly recovered.

This awareness came to me shortly after my visit to Elder Hill, in that timeless moment at dawn between sleeping and waking, a sort of *cognitio mattutino*. That psychic reality of fifty years ago was suddenly real and present to me as if all the intervening years had not happened yet, as if the emotional circumstances around my birth time had stayed inside me, a live seed which grew and flowered in the vicissitudes of my life, dragging me down into the abysses and caverns, down the deep well of the physical world where the rest of creation demands real participation.

As I watch my sheep moving up the hill here with their twenty little lambs running like the wind and jumping madly along the ditch, I meditate on the interpenetration of past and present and feel obscurely how the landscapes of the world recreate themselves mysteriously inside and outside us and how we are all perhaps illusory shards of the world soul dressed as beings, caught up unknowingly in this unfolding of the world.

The poet Maria Gualtieri says, "deep down, we know this: that the landscape and our inner selves speak mysteriously to each other, are emanations of each other. It is far more than influence, it is more complex than an identity. Something happens between a person and a landscape which we can feel but not grasp."

The physical world's embrace to which the deep well invites us, the descent to the Underworld, that search for the self in the world, suddenly appeared to me on that awakening as an invitation to hidden knowledge. My birth is not my business alone, nor my parents', but a moment in the wider narrative, part of the seamless weave of relationships between beings, human and non-human. It is the paradox of multiplicity: as soon as the whole web appears, it becomes a unity.

The Great Mother has the head of a Bird, a Bear, a Snake, a Fish, a horned Cow because the death of our small individuality is a process of inclusion. The dark

underside of things, the bottom of the deep well, the muddy water seething with many lives, offers this golden epiphany: the only reality is the generous outpouring of multiplicity which calls us all to take part, to really embrace the world, so that we can move back towards the overflowing source.

IV Autumn Equinox

I lie curled at the bottom of the pit and I do not rise.
–Mariangela Gualtieri, *Fuoco Centrale*

I have come across five retellings of the descent to the Underworld: the oldest one I know is the Sumerian version of the myth in which the Goddess Innana descends to meet her dark sister Ereshkigal. The Greek version is the story of Persephone's rape by Hades, who carries her off to be the Queen of the Dead and of the Corn Goddess Demeter's search for her abducted daughter. The equivalent Irish legend about the Otherworld and the stealing of the queen is called Tochmarc Étaíne: it is presumed to date from the Iron Age and is completely preserved in the Yellow Book of Lecan (c. 1401). Then there is a German fairy story called Frau Holle in which the unhappy girl falls down the well and finds herself in another world at the mercy of a powerful witch. Finally, there is the dance representing the battle between the White King and the Black King for the princess or *Bula* which I watched on the Island of Korçula in the Adriatic, performed by men and boys with bleeding hands.

In this terrifying sword dance, the White King and his army of twelve men are dressed in blood red while the Black king and his men are dressed in black. The *Bula* is dressed in gold, because although she could be seen as a kind of Helen of Troy, she really represents the soul. It is a very ancient dance, most recently coming from Spain but originally danced all around the Mediterranean and the red worn by the White King tells us that the story is happening on two levels.

On one level, the White King is the lord of the Upper world, the world which is the *cause* of this physical world and then the Black King is the tyrant of this everyday world. However, the red worn by the White King indicates that he can also be seen as lord of this flesh and blood world and in that case, the Black King is lord of the Underworld, the dangerous place where the soul may be carried away to experience its own dark night and whence resurrection to new life is never certain. The battle is about the resistance of the soul to the dark journey which has to be made in order for the White King to finally overcome the Black King by subsuming his kingdom. Breathless and with bleeding, wounded hands, the men bring their dance to a standstill and there is a long, stunned moment of silence before the watching crowd breaks into applause because everyone, dancers and spectators, have looked upon their own inner journey made visible.

James Hillman says that the growth of understanding "goes from the narrower embrace of my empirical human world and its personal concerns toward archetypal events that put my empirical, personal world in a more significant frame." Each one of us would like to see our own inner journey played out and by becoming part of a story or a ritual enactment, we begin to see the truth of which Jung spoke : the pschye is "something that lives of itself, that makes us live; it is a life behind consciousness that cannot be completely integrated with it, but from which, on the contrary, consciousness arises." He regarded the pschye as a spark of the same substance as the anima mundi.

Étaín is the wife of Midir, the Lord of the Otherworld, or Fairie, but Midir's first wife is jealous and transforms Étaín into a butterfly. She falls into a goblet of wine and is swallowed by a queen and reborn as a mortal. This image of the butterfly is reminiscent

of the anima, flying close to the ground, attached to the things of this world: forgetful of her origins, she is reborn into matter, the beginning of a long metamorphosis. Given in marriage to the High King of Ireland, who first meets her washing at a well (" he saw a woman at the edge of the well"), she is eventually found by Midir who wins her back so that she remembers her identity as a Goddess and returns to the Otherworld. In one version, Midir offers to give Étaín back if the king can recognize her in a group of women who all look like her. The king chooses her: "I know Étaín by her manner of serving" but later Midir tells him the woman he chose was really Étaín's daughter. Here is the vegetation theme, the death and reappearance of the seed, but the implied father-daughter incest is also about the concentration of power: Étaín's daughter's daughter bears a son who is the High King Conaire Mor.

The life we lead as human beings hides something in us which is simply part of the rest of creation. Jung often repeated his conviction that "man … is enclosed in *the* psyche (not in *his* psyche)." and that "the soul functions (operator) in the body but has the greater part of its function (operatio) outside the body". This is exactly what I felt on that morning when I became aware just how profoundly I belonged to the strong web of human and non-human relationships into which I had been born. Later on, we grow up and forget, we become concerned with our personal story and lose track of the others. In his autobiography, *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*, Jung says, "I feel very strongly that I am under the influence of things or questions which were left incomplete and unanswered by my parents and grandparents and more distant ancestors."

I would widen out this circle to include the place and the beings present in that place at the moment of our birth, a bit like including the thirteen fairies in *Sleeping Beauty* who come to the christening with their gifts and their curse. The birth of the individual is the continuation of a story which began a long, long time ago. It is not just the beginning of the child's own personal life story but a new part of the old story.

In this sense, we do not just live our own life but are part of a much greater psychic reality. Perhaps if we were aware of this, we would understand ourselves better and forgive ourselves more easily for our unrestrained passions and inexplicable miseries and manias.

Quoting Stephen Aizenstat, the ecophilosopher Tim Boston says "At the dimension of the world unconscious, the inner subjective natures of the world's beings are experienced as dream images in the human psyche. In addition, I believe dream images are real, have imaginal weight and body, and act in dreams on behalf of themselves. For example, the elephant that appeared in my dream last night was fully engaged in his activity, not mine. In the dream, I watched as he looked intently at me with shiny black eyes and wide flopping ears. He used his trunk to spray dirt and tiny rocks over his fine-haired rump, his tail all the while swatting flies from his sagging hindquarters. After a time he plodded back to join the rest of the herd. The dream elephant, like all dream images, is alive, has body, and moves about according to his own inner nature." The poet Gary Snyder, who says " Seeing a bear in a dream, this is a true mode of seeing a bear" would agree with him.

The idea that the world's other beings appear to us in our dreams seems to me more credible than the idea that I am the source of all those images. And when I think by what twisted paths I came from city life in England to this little Umbrian farm at a time when I was young and following obscure and unreasoning sensations rather than rational plans, it seems to me likely that my life was still tightly woven into the complex story of place that was unfolding around me at the moment when I was born. That story I still carry forward, and I imagine that if each one of us were to examine the place and circumstances of his or her own birth, s/he would find that personal narrative

embedded in a wider story and see the many other strands still present in the weave, bright threads representing the other players of that time and place.

Thus my life is perhaps still bound up with the aftermath of war on Elder Hill: with the feelings of the homesick Italian prisoners, the farmer's jealousy, his wife's wild spirit-visions , the heartache and the ecstasies of the two lovers, the spinster's self-sufficiency and her terror, the constancy and the weariness of the man endlessly drawing up the precious water, my parents' determined struggle with the problems of generation, the kindly doctor back from the sea, the animals and the spirits who clustered around the hill that May night.

I had fallen into the well of this world already, that wild and delirious mouth spoke the truth. Now my way forward depends on learning how to survive in the deep waters and how to re-emerge at the right time. The stories we tell are for teaching these things.

In the story of Mother Hulda, the protagonist is a girl whose mother has died and whose stepmother hates her. In tears near the well, she drops her spindle into the depths and in her desperation, jumps in after it. At the bottom of the well, she finds herself in another country where an oven calls out to her, "Take the loaves from me, they are all well-cooked" and then an apple tree, "Pick my apples, they are all ripe!" At the end of the path, she meets Mother Hulda, Frau Holle, Hola, that old hag with the big teeth and the terrifying gaze.

The figure of Frau Holle, who inhabits the elder tree, is a late echo of an ancient European Goddess. Swirling snowflakes or goose feathers in the air announce her arrival, feathers from those wild, howling birds, for she was Goddess of the storm, guardian of the unconscious, which has its own will. She is also in charge of spinning which, as Mircea Eliade, says, "is a perilous craft…In some parts of the world spinning has been given up, and even completely forgotten, because of its magical peril'. Eliade explains that Frau Holle is a figure from German fairy stories , originally a divinity: the souls of the newborn rise from her pool; she is at the head of a company of wild spirits especially those of the recently dead, she rides across the skies, her appearance it is that allows the crops to flourish and she presides over women's work, such as weaving. She brings to mind the three stern Moirai, daughters of holy Chaos, who spin the inescapable destinies of men, spinning, measuring and cutting the thread of life.

The daughter who falls down the well has to work for Mother Hulda and she works hard and willingly. "Mind you shake the featherbed well and make the feathers fly!" says the witch. At the end of her time in the Underworld, when the girl begs to go home, Mother Hulda covers her with a shower of gold as she steps over the threshold of the hut. The girl's lazy step-sister, on the other hand, who deliberately jumps into the well to seek a similar fortune for herself, but refuses any help to the bread oven and the apple tree, works reluctantly and sullenly for Mother Hulda and is rewarded with a shower of black pitch.

This *descensus ad inferos* tells us how to approach the unconscious: it is a spontaneous impulse, we have to recognize when the time is ripe and then gather our courage and work hard. *And this 'right way' to approach the unconscious is also the right way to live in this world of matter:* we have to understand the ripening and maturing of things in this world, offer respect to the other material forms and be willing to have to do with the substances of the physical world. In order to understand ourselves, we need to stay close to the natural world patiently for as long as it takes. "At bottom, psyche is simply 'world'" says Jung.

When the Goddess Inanna (Lady of Heaven) descended to the Underworld to look for her dark sister Ereshkigal (Queen of the Great Earth), she passed through seven

gates, removing one veil at each threshold. She arrives in the depths naked and is hung on a pole to rot for three days before she can rise up into the sunlit world again.

Like the Persephone story, this is a vegetation myth about the death of the seed and the regeneration of life but it has more profound implications. Dionysius the Areopagite said that thinking by analogy allows us to rise towards the cause of all things, analogy being the only way to approach the great Mystery saving both the creative and sustaining presence in the world and divine transcendence.

So these myths also tell us that it is necessary to embrace this physical world wholeheartedly, to take part without reserve, if we want to climb back out of the Underworld with the gold of self-knowledge. We have to get our hands dirty, allow ourselves to be stripped naked and hung up to rot, we have to fall to the very bottom of the well and lie in the murky waters, participate in the cycles of generation. This world, the bottom of the deep well, is not to be repudiated; it is to be penetrated, known and loved. If we treat it as Evil or as an Illusion, we cannot take part and we cannot climb back up into the sunlight.

The process of *mortificatio,* which we intuit awaits those who undertake the downward journey like the Goddess Inanna, those who are abducted by the lord of the Underworld like Persephone or fall into the deep well like the girl in the fairy story of Mother Hulda, is the experience of psychic complexity breaking through the boundaries of the ego like the waters from a collapsing dam. No longer a lonely individual, no longer a single seed, the being at the bottom of the pit finds her inner world seething with the world's other presences who press for inclusion, who want to live. The Florentine neoplatonist Marsilio Ficino said, "The world lives and breathes, and we can draw its spirit into us." When Demeter mourns the disappearance of her daughter Persephone, tearing the covering from her hair and fasting, the whole of nature dies. "Our task is to impress this provisional, transient earth upon ourselves so deeply, so agonizingly, and so passionately that its essence rises up again invisibly within us" thus spoke the poet Rainer Maria Rilke. The sunlit world is incomplete without this journey down.

In his *Commentary on the Phaedo of Plato*, Damascius describes the beginning of the soul's journey thus, "The soul descends into generation after the manner of Kore" and finishes with the goal of this descent: "She elevates herself to the causes of her being with Demeter."

Whereas Kore-Persephone is so overcome by the beauty of the sweet-smelling narcissus with a hundred blooms, a reflection of the beauty of her own soul, that she is drawn into the materiality of generation, Demeter rules the fruit and the seed, the phase when the plant no longer uses its energy for its own growth but for the future generations. This is Persephone-Demeter resurrected, who provides for the world not through action but because *she is*, because she abides in the inexhaustible Mother Deep, which the physicist David Bohm with less poetry calls the implicate order and the source of this unfolding world, the explicate order.

In order to rise, it is necessary to have truly engaged with this terrifying, beautiful earth. The curse of the well was really a blessing and the story my mother told me was a brave passing on of knowledge.

Bibliography

Tim Addey (2002), *The Seven Myths of the Soul*, The Prometheus Trust, Frome.
Tim Boston (1996) "Ecopsychology: an Earth-Psyche Bond," *The Trumpeter Journal of Ecosophy* 13 (2).
L.G. Westerink (ed and trans) (1976–7), *The Greek Commentaries on Plato's Phaedo*, Vol I (Olympiodorus) and Vol II (Damascius), North Holland Press, London and New York.
Mircea Eliade (1958), *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, Harvill Press, London.

Jeffrey Gantz (ed) (1981), *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, Penguin Classics, London.
Mariangela Gualtieri (2003), *Fuoco Centrale*, Giulio Einaudi, Torino.
James Hillman (1985), *Anima: an Anatomy of a Personified Notion*, Spring Publications, Dallas.
Carl Gustav Jung (1989), *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*, Vintage Books, New York.
Carl Gustav Jung (1980), *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Routledge, New York.
Nor Hall (1980), *The Moon and the Virgin*, The Women's Press, London.
Sallustio (1793), *On the Gods and the World*, Thomas Taylor and Edward Jeffrey (trans), Pall Mall, London.
Michael Shepherd (1999), *Friend to Mankind: Marsilio Ficino*, Shepheard-Walwyn, London.
Yellow Book of Lecan, manuscript in Trinity College Library, Dublin, col. 876–877 (facs. p. 175a–b), middle part.

Notes

1. Extracts from Etain Addey, *La Vita della Giumenta Bianca. Il mondo Incantato e il Paradosso della Sobrieta*, Magi Edizioni, 2015, translated into English by Etain Addey.Etain Addey left a job with a multinational in Rome when she had finally had enough of the lack of ethics and has spent the last 30 years living on a small farm in the foothills of the Italian Apennines where she and her family share the place with horses, donkeys, milk sheep and wildlife. This is an attempt to find a way back into a native way of life through practice and the good and kindly advice from elderly neighbours. She is a member of the Italian Bioregional group, Sentiero Bioregionale, and has published two books of stories and reflections on day to day life, one of which, *A Silent Joy* (2010, Eyebright Books) is translated into English.