

## Embodying Persephone's Desire: Authentic Movement and Underworld Transformation

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Jungian interpretations of the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* that address the theme of woundedness focus primarily on the abduction/rape of the maiden and the inconsolable rage of Demeter. Another subtler wound implicit in the *Hymn* frequently goes unmentioned: Kore's initial status as a nameless offshoot of the mother goddess. This essay shows how the author explores emotional implications of the myth through a ritualized enactment of the central Eleusinian mysteries using the principles of authentic movement, a process that generated a fresh interpretation of the *Hymn to Demeter*. The thesis is that an interpretive variation of the myth focusing on the mutual vulnerability and strength of Hades and Persephone—their willingness to recognize and be recognized, to penetrate and be penetrated—makes possible a shared healing, in turn contributing to the fertility of the underworld. It is through the *coniunctio* of Persephone and Hades that the underworld becomes a place of abundance.

A myth chooses us, say depth psychologists, not the other way around (Downing, 1981, p. 27). Whether first appearing in a dream, through active imagination, or in writing, painting, choreography or sculpture, and whether the myth presents itself in the guise of a contemporary novel, film, or video game, the ego is first a spectator, captivated by a spectacle and often unable to look away. A hallmark of being chosen by a myth is the uncanny need to reencounter it many times over months, years, or even decades. It is as though one is slowly seduced, drawn into the delicious recesses of a deep mystery in which each fresh encounter generates a new understanding of the story and of oneself as enacting some or all of its mythic patterns. A sense of the whole drama slowly becomes available to different kinds of perception, awareness arising from a particular and perhaps momentary way of being that brings some things into focus while obscuring others. For instance, one can apprehend the drama intellectually, imaginatively, spiritually, or somatically, musing upon the lived experience of individual characters, their relationship to one another, and how they shape and are shaped by pivotal moments in the story. But if the ego is an avid, interested spectator, then who directs this unfolding drama? In Jungian language, it is the Self, the archetype of wholeness within each person. The Self is “our life's goal, for it is the completest expression of that fateful combination we call individuality” (1953/1966, p. 240). He also referred to the Self as the *imago dei*, an image of god, who gracefully integrates ability and entelechy to facilitate the emergence of the individual over time.

A myth that chooses us rumbles through the deep structures of the psyche, like a temblor in earthquake country, breaking apart, breaking down, and unearthing hidden riches. Breakdown is not easy, but it can be meaningful. Perhaps two figures, who may be participating even as I write, have selected the metaphor: Hades,

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lord of the underworld, and his powerful queen, Persephone. This supposition demonstrates a key premise of the archetypal school of Jungian psychology. Not only do myths express patterns of experience that are relevant for contemporary people, we can speak of Hades and Persephone as persons (Hillman, 1992), figures who are “alive” in the psyche in much the same way characters in fiction are “alive” for an author. There is no doubt this myth has chosen me. Over the last three decades, I have repeatedly returned to the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* (Boer, 1970), which tells the story of Demeter, Kore/Persephone, and Hades, never once exhausting its wealth. Hillman suggests why:

What makes an image archetypal is that so much wealth can be gotten from it. An archetypal image is a rich image. ... This subliminal richness is another way of speaking of its invisible depth, like Pluto is another way of speaking about Hades. Our exercise with the image gives us a new appreciation of the unfathomable nature of any image, even the meanest, once it dies to its everyday simple appearance. It becomes bottomlessly more layered, complicatedly more textured. And as we do our image-making, even further implications appear, more suppositions and analogies dawn on us. An image is like an inexhaustible source of insights. (1977, p. 80)

As Hillman points out in *The Dream and the Underworld* (1979), Pluto, meaning “wealth” or “riches,” is an apt name for Hades. No one who is content with the surface of things will ever understand this because “our main concern is ... with the unknown” (1977, p. 68). Even Hades and Persephone, as beloved as they are, serve as *psychopomps* or soul guides who lead beyond themselves to deeper ground.

The Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* is one of the richest and most profound texts from the classical tradition, the subject of analysis and inspiration for a variety of scholars, artists, and educated readers, including Agha-Jaffar, 2002, Bachofen, 1881/1967, Baring & Cashford, 1991, Bernstein, 2004, Downing, 1981, 1994, Edinger, 1994, Foley, 1994, Holtzman & Kulish, 1998, Jung & Kerényi, 1951, Luke, 1992, Meyer, 1987, Rudhardt, 1994, Spretnak, 1984, Stone, 1990, Vandiver, 1999, and Wilkinson, 1996. Clearly, it is a myth that chooses many people. As a source of psychological insight, the *Hymn to Demeter* has become the companion to those whose lives have been suddenly, irrevocably changed. To use the text’s own imagery, readers have been abducted into the underworld as was Demeter’s nameless daughter Kore. The *Hymn to Demeter*—along with the *Descent of Inanna*, a Sumerian myth that predates the *Hymn* by at least 1,000 years and the Greco-Roman tale of *Eros and Psyche*, recorded in a second-century CE novel—are grand stories of trauma and transformation (Wolkstein & Kramer, 1983; Apuleius, p. 1994). Although the hymn’s title suggests Demeter as the main focus, I am moved most profoundly by the mutual vulnerability and strength of Hades and Persephone. Their willingness to recognize and be recognized, to penetrate and be penetrated makes healing possible and contributes to the fertility of the underworld. It is through the *coniunctio* of Persephone and Hades that the underworld becomes a place of abundance.

This insight did not arise from reading the text or any of the abundant scholarly analyses of the hymn. Rather, it occurred through an authentic movement process, which is a creative and therapeutic practice that values the expressive body as a means to discover unconscious material. Using the body to explore the psyche or soul is a matter of “following the inner sensation, allowing the impulse to take the form of physical action,” says Whitehouse; it is what she calls “active imagination in movement” (1999, p. 52). The experience for the mover can be profound and persuasive, a non-ordinary moment that requires careful integration into waking life. For instance one person, describing the forcefulness of the experience, says she often has found herself “enacting very particular, specific movement gestures... directed by *some unknown certainty* within me” (Adler, 1999, p. 184; italics added). The pioneers who developed authentic movement, and those who continue to practice,

develop, and teach it, take seriously Jung's comment that

So it is with the hand that guides the crayon or brush, the foot that executes the dance-step, with the eye and the ear, with the word and the thought: a dark impulse is the ultimate arbiter of the pattern, an unconscious a priori precipitates itself into plastic form. (1954/1981, p. 204 [para 402])

Perhaps a dark impulse led my partner and I into the dance, directed our steps, and offered me an insight into the vulnerability of Hades and Persephone that may not have been possible in any other way. It was a genuine discovery process that unearthed unconscious material that may belong to the original story and to the pattern of experience the story dramatizes. I know I was prompted by some unknown certainty, and that I never could have choreographed the dance without psyche.

### **Collective blindness or collective neglect?**

The *Hymn to Demeter* offers scant detail about Kore/Persephone in the underworld. Hades seizes the maiden, and scholars assume for good reason that the abduction includes rape primarily because the *Hymn to Demeter* is a literary text from a patriarchal age in which a bride was property passed from the father to the husband (Foley, 1994; Vandiver, 1999; Yalom, 2001). This included the tradition of bride abduction and may easily have led to rape as a means to claim and degrade the female through physical domination.) Readers do not know what the underworld looks or feels like to the young girl, and they do not know what happens between Kore/Persephone and Hades. Wilkinson commented, "the rites of passage that might enable one to negotiate a descent without being destroyed are unknown and unpictured to the living" (1996, p. 213). As the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* makes plain, the underworld is equally inaccessible to the gods. Demeter rages on earth and Mount Olympus, but she cannot descend to rescue her daughter. None of the other Olympians, not even mighty Zeus, travels to the underworld. The exception is Hermes who, as messenger between realms, must go there; but even he does not stay. The sole occupant of the underworld, Hades, is so entrenched that the name of the god is also the name of the place. Lacking the necessary distance that makes perspective possible, how could he describe the underworld even if he wanted to? He is only able to abduct the maiden after she rips the narcissus up by its roots, opening the crucial gap that allows his momentary passage to the sunlit meadow (Rudhardt, 1994, p. 204). Once he seizes Demeter's daughter, Hades immediately descends, never to emerge again. To the gods and to readers the underworld is a mysterious and inaccessible place.

Today, in the twenty-first century, blindness to the underworld appears to have intensified. The culture's aggressive denial of death (Becker, 1973, p. 11) is the complement to an equally aggressive pursuit of instant transformation. P. Aries, who studied the evolution of western attitudes towards death, discovered that it took only 30 years at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to uproot thousands of years of tradition. Death ceased being a commonplace, acceptable, and social experience and instead became something "shameful and forbidden" (1974, p. 85). Baring and Cashford point out that the attitude toward death had already undergone significant change around 2500 BCE, with the loss of an archetypal feminine perspective that valued death-in-life as the very basis for transformation (1991, p. 159). Thus it is that many people regard the slow, arduous journey into and through the underworld not merely as unwelcome but as abhorrent.

The descent to the underworld can manifest as chaos, depression, illness, and addiction, or simply as a felt sense that a once vital, juicy life is now desiccated. It is tempting to believe that something is terribly wrong—I *have failed*—because it is assumed that masterful, competent people do not have such an experience. Even if they do, they fix it right away because who, in their right mind, would ever define success as falling apart? In its

blindness, contemporary culture seems to have forgotten that descent is archetypal, honorable, and visionary. We seem to make no collective ritual space for it. Instead, a powerful and profitable pharmaceutical industry offers relief in the form of a pill—several kinds, in fact—that sufferers ingest in the privacy of their own homes. We see little value in chaos even after admitting that the forms, structures, beliefs, and roles that are crumbling no longer serve and after knowing destruction not merely as an end but as a prelude to new beginning. Instead, those among us who endure the disorientation of an underworld journey are left to find its meaning with few or no companions, witnesses, and teachers.

### **The enigmatic and inviolable queen**

Perhaps all underworld journeys are essentially individual, essentially mysterious to the collective. Irigaray alluded to this when she said that “Kore-Persephone escapes perspective. Her depth, in all its dimensions, never offers itself up to the gaze, whatever the point of view may be. She passes beyond all boundaries, withholding herself from appearance, even without Hades” (1991, p. 115). Foley called Persephone “inscrutable” and “never fully known” (1994, p. 130). Downing stated “the goddess who rules in Hades represents the mystery of the unknown, its fearfulness and its unforgiveness” (1981, p. 50). The enigmatic nature of Persephone could be an expression of her power. She may refuse to be fully known to *remain* inviolable. She may *choose* to preserve herself for herself despite the traumatic abduction or because of it. Or her inviolability may symbolize the true nature of an underworld queen, the quintessence of bottomless depth in which arriving is simply not possible because there is no final understanding, only an endless cascade of deeper and deeper understandings.

Stories of descent to the underworld, both ancient and contemporary, are clear on one point: for those who endure the descent and successfully return, the world will never be the same because the person is never the same (Campbell, 1968; Foley, 1994; Mahdi, Foster, & Little, 1987; van Gennep, 1960; Wolkstein & Kramer, 1983). Descent is an initiation into a new role and a new relationship to life that is irrevocable. Thus the underworld journey is a fruitful image of the individuation process, which Jung defined as “fidelity to the law of one’s own being” rather than the law of the collective, and the realization of one’s individual and unique wholeness (1954/1970, pp. 172-173). Individuation is a “high act of courage” that feels as inescapable as a law of God (p. 175). Ideally, it also moves culture beyond what Woodman and Dickson poetically described as “Mother Mud” and “Father Law”—that miasmatic and authoritative body of custom and convention that binds collectivities (1987, p. 181).

Because descent pits person against collective where one sorts inherited values and beliefs to find authentic ones, it wounds. It also is terrifying because leaving the collective is a symbolic death. How does one withstand the turbulence of moving out and away from a crucial relationship “in the midst of strong, binding counter forces” that would prevent separation? This is one of the many fine questions Schwartz-Salant asked in his discussion of another myth that depicts the real dangers of a son or daughter leaving a powerful mother (1998, p. 126). “When one dares to take up the mantle of individuation, [one is] to some degree, caught up in this web whereby separation leads to death” (p. 138). The person simultaneously feels “the demand to individuation and the equal or greater demand to stay merged with an inner loved object, either known, *or more likely, never known enough*” (p. 138, emphasis added). One may ask: in a merged relationship, is it possible for either to know the other? In the *Hymn to Demeter*, does Demeter truly know her daughter before she becomes Persephone? Equally, does the Kore truly know her mother?

To borrow Perera’s lovely phrase, wounding creates “separations across which fresh passions can leap” (1981, p. 80). Trauma and passion are bedfellows. The painful and forced separation of Demeter and Persephone

is, of course, the trauma that sets the *Hymn to Demeter* in motion. Thus Demeter's hymn can be read as the story of fresh passion created by two deep wounds, abduction and betrayal. However, the text implies another erotic wound in the *Hymn*, one that is prior to the abduction, one that in fact motivates the plot: Hades's desire for a consort and queen. Zeus and Gaia may know of this desire; they certainly are complicit in its consequences, Zeus by giving Kore/Persephone to his brother without Demeter's permission and Gaia by "growing the narcissus as a snare for the young girl—a flower herself, as her mother says—instead of supporting Demeter against him, as might have been expected" (Baring & Cashford, 1991, p. 383).

Eros is a potent force throughout the *Hymn*. The visible passion of Demeter and the invisible passion of Hades are just two of many examples. For the maiden, abduction is the most intimate possible experience. In one shocking moment, everything she has known of the world changes. Over the course of her mysterious sojourn in the underworld Persephone is literally wedded to Hades and figuratively wedded to the depths. This is the place of her transformation. Forever after she "is both eternal virgin (Kore) as well as wife of Hades" (Foley, 1994, p. 110). Furthermore, the abduction and subsequent negotiations among the immortals result in a profound transformation in Persephone's status and rights. Marriage to Hades, irrespective of the circumstances, grants "the girl a powerful role of her own as queen of the underworld ... indeed, among the dead Persephone comes to have an awesome power and autonomy that is matched by few other female divinities in the cosmos" (p. 129). Foley's claim was echoed in my own experience of embodying the descent, as my notes below document. Its raw emotional power convinced me that the maiden's ineluctable desire to become herself was another expression of eros in the myth and an essential part of her underworld journey.

### **The crucial question of agency**

Although readers have the outward facts of the maiden's transformation, the text offers no clear description of Persephone's relationship to Hades or how her attitude towards her captor and his realm evolves, if it does, while she is in the underworld. What happens down there?

Attempting to understand the daughter's fate compels readers to analyze closely the only important (and importantly ambiguous) action that takes place when she is in the underworld, whether or not Kore/Persephone eats the pomegranate voluntarily. If she chooses to eat, she demonstrates agency. Some aspect of the maiden consents to the transformation of her identity, her role, her powers, and her life such that she becomes consort and queen of the underworld. That aspect may well be the drive to separate from Demeter rather than remain fused with her mother as a perpetual child, the nameless offshoot of a powerful goddess, a point I return to in a moment. If, on the other hand, Hades forces or tricks her into eating the pomegranate, Kore/Persephone continues to be a victim, and her bond with Hades is characterized by the fresh trauma of deceit and betrayal.

As just mentioned, I speculate that eating the seeds of the pomegranate may symbolize the nameless Kore's desire to end the fused state with the mother, a desire that originates from the maiden's *self*. Jung described the self in two ways, as a concept and as an experience. The self is "no more than a psychological concept, a construct that serves to express an unknowable essence which we cannot grasp as such, since by definition it transcends our powers of comprehension" (1953/1966, p. 238). The experience of the self is far different, often laden with affect. For instance, it may be felt as an irrepressible urge or desire, such as Kore's attraction to the flowers that led her away from her playmates and her choice to eat the pomegranate, if choice it was. Jung's description of the Self used earthy metaphors that are particularly resonant with her story. "The beginnings of our whole psychic life seem to be inextricably *rooted* in this point," he said, "and all our highest and ultimate purposes seem to be striving towards it" because the self is "the *full flowering* not only of the single individual,

but of the group, in which each adds his portion to the whole” (pp. 238, 240; emphases added).

Whether or not Kore/Persephone chooses to eat the pomegranate seeds is crucial to contemporary readers using the *Hymn* to help negotiate their own underworld journeys. The text suggests both possibilities. To complicate matters, Persephone is not a reliable narrator because she may have mixed motives for telling her powerful mother the truth. For instance, in lines 371 – 374, the narrator, speaking in the third person, says:

But he [Hades] gave her to eat  
a honey-sweet pomegranate seed, stealthily passing it  
around her, lest she once more stay forever  
by the side of revered Demeter of the dark robe.

Later, when Demeter asks Persephone if she ate anything in the underworld, she begins by stating, “I will tell you the whole truth exactly, Mother”, then proceeds to embellish the narrator’s version of the story:

He stealthily  
put in my mouth a food honey-sweet, a pomegranate seed,  
and compelled me against my will and by force to taste it. (406 – 408)

In this moment Persephone is emphatic, but is she trustworthy? What are her motives for telling the story this way?

If readers accept Persephone’s own words, then Rudhardt is correct: Persephone is “still enough of a child to remain passive during the entire drama in which her fate is decided” (1994, p. 204). In the symbolic sense, this certainly does happen. Many people are abducted into the underworld and experience only abject helplessness. Never, at any point, are they capable of partaking of the fruits of the experience to participate in shaping their own fate. Someone else decides. Speaking symbolically, one might say that perhaps they cannot see, feel, or smell the pomegranate, let alone taste it. Perhaps the fruit was offered but refused. Terror, confusion, suspicion—any of these can stop someone from moving from the passive role of the victim toward agency.

The text emphasizes Persephone’s despair in the underworld. The one moment of exuberance occurs when she “jumped up/quickly with joy” (Boer, 1970, p. 124), which many readers assume is the daughter’s delight at the prospect of rejoining her mother. The text, however, does not clarify the source of her joy. Hades offers two things to Persephone at this moment in the story, return to Demeter as well as “rule over all living things on earth, honors among the gods, and vengeance against those who wrong her or fail to propitiate her with sacrifices and gifts” (Foley, 1994, p. 55). Therefore, her joy could be attributed either to the reunion, certainly long-awaited by Demeter, or to Persephone’s new powers and position, including “a social identity independent from that of her mother” (p. 129). Perhaps Persephone is like many of us. She wants it both ways.

The first several times I read the story, Persephone was an enigma. Nonetheless, I continued to doubt that she could remain passive throughout the story and emerge transformed by the experience. Any descent to the underworld exposes our vulnerability, but returning requires agency in some form, such as the will to face reality rather than deny it, the will to persevere through suffering rather than collapse, or the ability to perceive the value in what seems base. Without agency, the transformation simply is not complete. The one thing the text makes quite clear is the maiden’s transformation. She becomes queen of the underworld in name and practice so fully that Hades “received cult offerings almost exclusively as the husband of Persephone” (Foley, 1994, p. 89).

### **Embodying Kore/Persephone in authentic movement**

How did Persephone’s transformation take place and, more importantly, what role did she play? These are

questions that will continue to perplex anyone drawn to the *Hymn to Demeter*, questions for which there is not and will not be a definitive answer because they can be asked and answered again and again, and not merely within the context of this story because we may as well ask how does transformation take place for any of us, and what role do we play? With the interpretive texts as a foundation, I now turn to the experience of reenactment to demonstrate how the expressive body can offer new insights into myth that may subtly extend scholarly analysis. When I hosted one part of the story in my own body during an improvisational ritual with a group studying the *Hymn to Demeter*, I was not prepared for the forcefulness of the experience. It gave me new respect for the originators of authentic movement and their devotion to the body as a source of unconscious knowledge. Here is how it happened:

A group of students had spent the morning and afternoon discussing the *Hymn to Demeter* and the Eleusinian Mysteries to explore the mythic and ritual antecedents of depth psychology. Part of our education was to reenact each stage of the mysteries in the evening. With scant time for preparation, and a lot of good humor because none of us was a pro, my classmates began volunteering to perform different aspects of the story. I watched and waited, strangely uneasy. Would I end up holding the circle as a witness rather than taking a more active part? Dusk approached, and the cozy room slowly darkened. My unease increased as, one by one, the other students elected to take part in the first eight stages of the ritual. When our facilitator announced the final stage of the work, the central mysteries, the stillness intensified as though we were holding our collective breath. Without knowing what I was doing or why, I felt my hand creep up. I looked to my left and saw another hand. It belonged to one of the few men in our group, someone who had remained remote and mysterious, someone who would now become my Hades. All thoughts fled.

During the dinner break my partner and I had a few minutes to talk about this moment in the story and work out a very loose structure for what we would attempt: to embody the relationship between Hades and Persephone beginning with the abduction and ending where? Truthfully, we did not know, or plan, where it would end. Studying the *Hymn to Demeter* had provided a firm intellectual foundation, but now we would let our bodies tell a story that nobody knew: the central mysteries are aptly named.

Our improvisation can be described as “movement in depth,” a powerful form of active imagination in which the body can become the expressive vehicle for the Self. Whitehouse, who originated the practice, described it as “simple” and “inevitable,” “the flow of unconscious material coming out in physical form” (Frantz, 1999, pp. 23, 20). If we allow it, said Chodorow, the unconscious

manifests itself continually and at all times in the way we move. There is a stream of movement impulses available to each person all the time. The impulse to move in this manner comes when one can let go of all conscious control and identify with oneself as perceived through sensations and images. An impulse might lead to movement that takes only a few moments to unfold but a sequence of impulses, or self-directed authentic movement, can go on for a very long time. (1999, p. 233)

There is little question that I was following an impulse without any idea of dramatic aim, the audience encircling my partner and me, or the impact our process would have. In fact, though I was initially nervous, I quickly lost all sense of performance and along with it all sense of time. The experience of timelessness continued for hours afterward and was profoundly disorienting. Years later I would conclude that my disorientation belonged to this myth, it was part of the archetypal pattern my partner and I were enacting, since an authentic embodiment of the maiden’s abduction might easily duplicate her experience of disorientation.

The original name given to this practice, movement in depth, was superseded by the phrase authentic

movement, and now includes trained practitioners around the world, supported by robust interdisciplinary theory, scholarly publications, and professional conferences. An indispensable resource is the two-volume collection of essays (1999, 2007) edited by Pallaro that explains the origin, development, theory, and practice of authentic movement in addition to offering illuminating case studies and personal accounts. Perhaps the distinguishing belief of authentic movement is that “consciousness is physical” and that “inner wisdom ... is found in the body itself: the physical act of allowing the body to initiate movement or stillness leads to physical release, recuperation and reorganization” (Lowell, 2007, pp. 300, 297). Authentic movement can reverberate in the deepest parts of one’s being, with lasting effects. When used in psychotherapy, for example, one of the early applications of authentic movement, an analyst trained specifically in this technique is both facilitator and witness. She or he is careful to contain the experience for the analysand and host a dialogue about any insights that emerge. This includes grounding patients at the end of the session so that they are prepared safely to exit the authentic movement process with minimal disorientation.

Authentic movement has expanded well beyond the clinical setting and its psychotherapeutic aims, although I would argue that respect for the body’s own wisdom is *culturally* therapeutic, necessary medicine for the western proclivity to treat the body as an object or ignore it altogether. Lowell points out that authentic movement in a group setting “enhances attention, bringing focus of purpose” (p. 300). Working with a group of movers also “means there is more energy in the room, physical and psychic,” as well as offering “a community of support, moral and otherwise” (2007, p. 300). As a group endeavor, authentic movement shares many aspects commonly found among ritual practices, especially dance rituals, in which a series of actions are

performed bodily ... made up of movements and still poses, gestures and postures. The ritual is experienced through the physical and bodily senses, not only believed in some disembodied soul or mind. People feel, see, smell, hear and touch the ritual in very tangible ways. It is here that the ritual comes alive, holds power. In neuron and sinew, artery and bone, people personally and collectively apprehend and take home the ritual’s significance. (p. 300)

In our ritual enactment of the central mysteries, the group encircling us served as witnesses while our instructor, a Jungian analyst, was the facilitator. We were not a group trained in authentic movement using its guiding values and beliefs. In some ways, this made the wealth of insight revealed by the expressive body more convincing, not less.

The movement felt subjectively authentic to me, in part because of the sense of timelessness during the enactment, but primarily because I personally was not choosing to move. Instead, I experienced what Whitehouse describes as “the sudden and astonishing moment when ‘I am moved’ ... when “the ego gives up control, stops choosing, stops exerting demands, allowing the self to take over moving the physical body as it will” (1999, p. 82). If there had been any doubts about the objective authenticity of the enactment, the group’s reaction laid them entirely to rest. Most people were simply speechless. Some, over the next few hours and days, found a quiet moment to try and describe the effect it had on them, but words still failed. However, at no point did I confuse the power of the movement process with my personal power, as though the impact was a triumph by my ego. Whitehouse expressed this distinction well when saying

whatever else by way of ego trips I may have indulged in, I had a healthy respect and overpowering feeling for the reality of the unconscious appearing in others as well as in myself. Consequently, when things happened in the course of the session, I did not make the mistake of assuming that I personally had done it. (Frantz, 1999, p. 25)

Authentic movement, like other forms of active imagination, confirms and simultaneously expresses the



presence of an activated archetypal image. The person doing the work is a host who willingly loans his or her body, mind, time, and attention to the mythic guest. In this case, we might say that Persephone and Hades were present in a profound and tangible way, or so it seemed to me at the time, and still does now. They were personified forms of the “dark impulse” Jung spoke of, quoted earlier, archetypal figures directing the dance. As a result, I know them in a manner heretofore unimaginable.

### **Curiosity and desire**

The insights from an authentic movement process are utterly convincing and may be utterly transformative. For instance, I found—or rather, my body found—that the same sensuous curiosity that led the maiden away from her playmates toward the narcissus led her ultimately to explore Hades. My body discovered that Kore was ripe for transformation and, though the abduction was traumatic and dislocating, it was also timely. This insight supports Bernstein’s assertion that Persephone’s journey into Hades is the beginning of a profound movement into life. “The dark journey to the realm of death suggests a fateful trajectory away from mother’s care and protection toward adult sexuality,” he stated, which “draws her not simply toward penetration, pregnancy, and childbirth but beyond, toward motherhood, menopause, old age, and death” (1998, p. 615). The gloomy underworld could not entirely destroy the one quality that is associated with females and the feminine (for better and for worse, but mostly for the worse) in patriarchal literature: curiosity. (This includes the Judeo-Christian story of Eve’s curiosity about the apple and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, which told the story of the creation of woman, starting with Pandora.) Enacting Persephone’s experience in the underworld showed that curiosity is not meddling, naïve, or immature. Curiosity is eros in action.

I do not claim that my insight about Persephone’s desire is universally true. Likewise, it is not a strong reading of the text. Persephone in the underworld is described as shy and reluctant. She all but tells her mother that she does not desire Hades. However, someone can be shy *and* curious, reluctant *and* passionate. As many scholars have pointed out (Agha-Jaffar, 2002; Bernstein, 2004; Downing, 1994; Foley, 1994), how Persephone describes the pomegranate episode may be attributed to the fact that she is speaking to her mother, the dread Demeter. From the viewpoint of scholarship, choosing among the possibilities is challenging. From the viewpoint of imagination, the choice is exciting. The *Hymn to Demeter* is big enough to hold many truths, each with its own profound meaning.

Particular moments of the enactment stand out with such intensity that I was easily able to slip into the role of Kore/Persephone and later, in journal writing, express the felt sense of what was occurring, moment-by-moment, in “her” own words. Upon reflection, it seemed quite similar to personifying, which Hillman defines as “spontaneous experiencing, envisioning and speaking of” the persons of the psyche *as* persons “so that events touch us, move us, appeal to us” (1975, pp. 12-13). It also was a daring move for me as a writer, since I was not merely narrating the story in my journal but telling it from the inside. Moreover, this choice was not something I made or decided but instead was an impulse I followed. Perhaps it was that selfsame “unknown certainty” that guided the authentic movement? That seems right to me. Although the result is radically subjective, E. Edinger argued that “subjective, living meaning ... can affirm life” because it occurs “when we describe a deeply moving experience as something meaningful. ... which, laden with affect, relates us organically to life as a whole” (1992, p. 108). Nonetheless, including subjective accounts in scholarly work must be carefully done, every passage evaluated to see if it serves both the topic *and* the reader. Thus, as the anthropologist Clifford Geertz asserts, rigorous self-examination is “supremely worth doing” but it “does not relieve one of the burden of authorship; it deepens it” (1988, p. 146).

I feel the burden and the risk as I offer the passages in italics below and on the next few pages where “I” am speaking in “her” voice. They are extracted from my journal of the experience. For instance, as Kore I am aware of how enchanted I am with the meadow of flowers, so enchanted that

*I do not even hear the laughter and conversation of my girlfriends. The world grows quieter as I move from flower to flower, inhaling the fragrance of each one. And then, the narcissus! This is the most irresistible of all, but why even contemplate resistance? I am bold in my sensual curiosity. Much more bold than my playmates who never wander far, nor far from each other.*

The opening scene provides a key to the maiden’s personality. Though she is naive and unguarded, she is curious and caught up in the sensual. The alluring combination of naiveté, curiosity, and sensuality makes her ripe for descent.

When the earth opens up to reveal Hades, readers do not know it is the first and only time in his immortal existence that the god ventures beyond his realm. It is, which suggests the intensity of his desire. Hades grabs and holds what he views as rightfully his: the maiden (and future wife) whom the king of the gods has promised to him. He drags her down, never loosening his grip until the upper world is impossibly distant. But when Hades releases the terrified maiden is it possible that he does *not* consider the immensity of the breach?

As my partner and I enact the Kore’s first moment in the underworld, I feel the terrible, confusing disorientation of being suddenly dropped into a wholly alien landscape.

*I curl into a tight ball, my body bruised and battered. I blink my eyes open, feeling the crusty tears that sting and burn, but this place is so dark that I can see nothing, not even the hand in front of my face. I rock to and fro, cradling my own terrible aloneness. Where has everyone gone? ... A flicker at the edge of my vision. There. A figure, restless? I unwind myself and approach, slowly, but it is only a shade, cold, vaporous, slipping away from me. No warmth. Nothing. Ah, wait! There is another. No! Again, nothing. And another slips away. There is no warmth here. It is cold, so cold. I feel so alone.*

Accustomed as the maiden is to light, warmth, and the intoxicating fragrance of spring flowers, how could she not continue to seek life, even among the evanescent shades? She is the principle of life, the new shoot, the tender offspring of mother, *mater*, matter. What else would feed her despair if not the continual unmet need for warm, sensuous, bodily life? This curiosity, this hunger, eventually leads her to Hades.

*I notice you, for the first time, seated with your back to me. Quite still. I do not know what you are, but you seem more substantial than the others. I walk up behind you slowly, not too near, but I want to see. I back away, then edge around the other side. You do not look at me. Why not? Who are you? What is this place? But I’m scared. You are so still, not moving. Nothing. If I get too close will you fade away too, like the others? I drop to the floor in one sudden movement, pressing my back against yours. My own racing heart begins to slow down so that I can feel the slow rhythm of your breath. We breathe together this way, back to back. I nestle against you. Ah, warmth! I thought I would never feel it again. I let my head fall back into the curve of your neck. Tendrils of your hair tickle my skin.*

The authentic movement process, which allowed me to speak from within the story as though I were the maiden encountering Hades for the first time, convinced me that the pivotal move is hers. It is her curiosity—as well as her appetite for warmth and breath and touch—that drives the plot. Although the myth speaks of the maiden’s continual despair, the spontaneous movement discloses her irrepressible urge for life. It is Persephone who approaches her captor, or tries to, and Hades who looks away. As she seeks another way, her curiosity aroused

but not satiated, he evades her again. Now who is shy—and who bold?

*I finally see you. I look deeply into your eyes as we gaze for an infinity of time. It is such a struggle to let myself be seen. By comparison, seeing is so easy. And I do see. The pain of your loneliness is inscribed in your flesh. How long did it take to sharpen the edge of your desire? How long did it take to gather the courage for one swift journey to my Mother's world; a spasm of time, no more? You are terrified, too, so close to what you most desire—and knowing the futility of trying to take that which can only be given. Waves of longing surge through your body and pour into the space between us. I do not know which is more difficult: to give all of myself, or to hold everything that you would give to me.*

The dance between Persephone and Hades continues its immeasurable flow that even the messenger of the Gods can only temporarily disturb. Hades agrees to let Persephone go; he must. But he wants Persephone to remember the sweet fecundity of the underworld too, and so he offers her the pomegranate. Persephone accepts. And as she willingly bites into the honey-sweet flesh, she feels the rush of life that this single eventful choice releases.

Thus, when Hades guides Persephone back to the upperworld, it is her wisdom, the fruit of this descent, which consoles his sorrow:

*Hades, I am yours. Though I return to my mother, I am wedded to the underworld now. This place of mystery and depth is my native habitat and home. Know that in the upperworld of light and fragrant narcissus, I will often close my eyes to seek you in the darkness. I will let myself spin down into your realm and recall our dance, our union. I will feel again the raw intensity of your power, the depth of your loneliness. I will know that your shy and pensive quest for a bride was ultimately conquered by a greater lust—lust for a partner who could match you. I will see the struggle you endured when you knew that I could not be taken, only invited. And I will linger over the memory of your awe as you watched a curious, unconscious and sensuous girl become a powerful and much-beloved queen.*

As the woman who embodied Persephone, I know the fragrant narcissus was merely the lure. The treasure is the rhizome buried in the dark earth. For others drawn to this story, perhaps identifying with the nameless girl and undergoing descent as part of their individuation, my insight may offer a new appreciation for the ways of the underworld.

After her descent to the underworld, Persephone is associated with Hecate, the crone goddess of the crossroads who symbolizes the deep transformation that has taken place. Having suffered and returned, Persephone's freedom of movement—a genuine and remarkable kind of power—now exceeds even that of her dread mother Demeter, her formidable husband Hades, and every other god except Hermes the messenger. Persephone can move easily between the worlds, living most of her days in the realm of light, *mater*, and mother yet remaining queen of the underworld regardless of the season. Her ability to be at home on earth and in the underworld is an image of depth psychological wisdom, but being wholly present to each place is not easy. Schwartz-Salant alluded to this in saying that “the whole enterprise is extremely painful, old wounds being opened up and salted in the process. But one finds one's way only through repeated excursions into that territory” (1998, p. 132).

In embodying the maiden's journey into the underworld, I felt Hades welcome Kore/Persephone as the beloved, a cherished partner worthy to share his domain. This insight echoes the words of Woodman and Dickson, who said that “in her embodiment, she is known. She is recognized by her Beloved. She receives the penetration of the Spirit that will change consciousness forever” (1997, p. 199). Hades' gentleness, restraint, and shy desire are also surprisingly consonant with an observation about the mythic Hades. He is the least tyrannical

male in the *Hymn to Demeter* with notable feminine attributes. For instance, “by assisting Persephone as she undergoes the difficult experience of giving birth to herself, Hades assumes the role of a midwife” (Agha-Jaffar, 2002, p. 128).

Other scholars may reject this interpretation as specious, undiscoverable in the original texts, and easily refutable when the patriarchal nature of classical mythology is considered. For some, Hades is simply a rapist, similar to his two brothers, Zeus and Poseidon. Authentic movement, however, revealed another interpretation of the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*. The mutual vulnerability and strength of Hades and Persephone—their willingness to recognize and be recognized, to penetrate and be penetrated—contributes to the fertility of the underworld. Through Persephone Hades becomes Pluto, the god of abundance. Authentic movement also revealed the compelling power of the archetypal patterns all of us enact consciously and unconsciously in ordinary life. We are meant to hold and treasure the stories that touch us deeply and to pass them along without trying to hide the faint traces of our embrace, the impressions left in the material as we worked it, and as it worked us.

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