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An *Opus con naturam*: Labor, Care, and Transformation in the Garden

Rinda West, Ph.D.

Oakton Community College, IL

In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Jung writes this about his time in the tower:

> At times I feel as if I am spread out over the landscape and inside things, and am myself living in every tree, in the splashing of the waves, in the clouds and the animals that come and go, in the procession of the seasons. There is nothing in the Tower that has not grown into its own form over the decades, nothing with which I am not linked. Here everything has its history, and mind; here is space for the spaceless kingdom of the world's and the psyche's hinterland. (Jung, 1989: 225-6)

Jung's feeling of identification with *anima mundi* expresses his investment in his place, and its investment in him. He had earned the experience of oneness he articulates in the first line here through his labor on the land and the tower. By saying he is "living in every tree, in the … waves" and so on, Jung suggests that the surrounding natural world along with the objects within, and the tower itself, have all "grown into [their] own form" through their relationship with him. Mind and matter merge. He has carved out "space for the spaceless kingdom" of both world and psyche.

In this essay, I will propose that a garden can be a site and an occasion for a labor with nature, an *opus con naturam*, to play with the alchemical phrase, a collaboration that can potentially transform both nature within and nature without. A garden, that is, nurtures individuation. Here I am concerned with personal gardens, spaces carved out by individuals and families as for privacy, refuge, and renewal, designed and worked by the gardeners. The rich history of landscape design must wait for another essay.

We coevolved with the land, the plants and animals, and all of us, together with wind and water changed the land, and the land changed us. A garden embeds culture in the land and informs culture with the processes and needs of the land. Like ego and Self, body and soul, reason and instinct, in practice land and culture are not separate or opposed, but interwoven. The garden is a symbol, then, of that connection, a place of healing, retreat, and labor. Frances Hodgson Burnet's novel,

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Author contact: rinda.west@gmail.com

The Secret Garden, illustrates the healing power of the garden, and an analysis of the labor of gardening suggests how that power works.

Ruth Ammann, an analyst, writes, "In the garden, something difficult to describe recurs, something that eludes reasoning: entrenched ideas and emotions begin to become unstuck, and consciousness loosens. Grievances are erased as if by a magic hand, and vague ideas assume new shape. It is as if immediate, sensual contact with the soil and plants has a soothing, softening effect on people. Their energies no longer circle around inner problems, but are drawn outward by nature's ever-surprising and fascinating vigor" (Ammann: 139-140).

What she is onto here is a kind of mystery. We can parse the connections of inner and outer that the garden as a transitional space can inspire: connections between the imaginative life of psyche and the otherness of nature; tensions between the small, personal narratives we chew over endlessly and the chaotic, often oppressive and bewildering life of the public world. However it works, the garden is a kind of container for holding some of these opposites. Ammann says, "Between these poles – that is, the vastness of unconscious nature and the house as part of human culture – lies the garden, that very particular interstice; it is not only a part of culture and nature, and it is not exclusively edifice or wilderness, but the space in-between, connecting these elements. Gardens also connect heaven and earth, or the upper world and underworld…they also connect the immutable and mutable, the fixed and mobile, such as a stony stairs and walls and sprawling, active growth. Gardens are the vessel in which the most diverse and contrasting elements converge and are conjoined" (Ammann: 50-51).

According to Genesis, at least for Western culture, everything started in a garden. So what do we make of Eden? If Ammann is right, Eden should hold humans and nature in an embrace, allowing for a free flow of libido among all the inhabitants. Eden is fruitful, it's well stocked, it's well watered. In fact, it doesn't seem to have any real tension at all. The opposites don't exist yet, in Eden.

God puts Adam in the garden "to dress it and to keep it." And does God send Adam to agriculture school to learn how to farm? No, instead the first thing God tells Adam is to eat anything except the fruit of this one tree. That is, God sets up the only tension in Eden; for Eve and Adam, the pull of curiosity and autonomy provoke the fear of disobedience and punishment. Enter the serpent. This reptile is about as alien from human mammals as you can get, and for millennia snakes have provoked irrational fear. And yet Eve attends. Snakes can be poisonous, but they are also the symbol of healers and of regeneration. However one understands the snake – as an expression of Yahweh's unexamined Shadow, as the remnant of the reptilian brain, as God's test of Eve and Adam – it has a continuing symbolic power, embracing terror and hope. Eve, and then Adam, disobeys, and their eyes open.

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Their temptation is aggravated in that, since everything is in fruit, there was nothing in particular to do in Eden. No real work. Eden is, then, a fantasy garden, expressive of the nutritive intimacy of infancy, of immersion in the mother. It contains only one challenge, which Adam and Eve accept immediately, as they must if they are to mature. According to Genesis, then, consciousness comes about in a garden, consciousness and mortality, self-awareness. Arguably, the God/Serpent tension, expressive of the spirit and the soil, creates the conditions necessary for consciousness, the spirit calling forth the chthonic. But consciousness means that Adam and Eve must leave Eden and labor for their survival. And thus begin inside and outside: for Western culture, the opposites are born in Eden too.

As the origin myth of Western culture, the story of Eden in Genesis describes the split from nature that began with agriculture. The consciousness that follows from it is an awareness of difference, but the text of Genesis makes clear that in the Yahwist view, humans are *superior to* the rest of the natural world. This is not a universal condition; many indigenous people understand the human to have emerged from nature, often with the help of other creatures. It's not that they don't apprehend difference or make discriminations, but they do not perceive difference as necessarily implying superiority or inferiority. Genesis, however, makes clear that for farmers and shepherds, as for their scientific and industrial heirs, separation from nature implies dominion or, in our day, "resource" extraction.[1]

In *Answer to Job*, Jung makes this interesting argument about Job's growing consciousness: "Because of his littleness, puniness, and defencelessness against the Almighty, [Job] possesses…a somewhat keener consciousness based on self-reflection; he must, in order to survive, always be mindful of his impotence. God has no need of this circumspection, for nowhere does he come up against an insuperable obstacle that would force him to hesitate and hence make him reflect on himself" (Jung 1954, 1960, p. 39). The necessity of labor and the imperative to cope with nature's unpredictability are central to the consciousness that has its origin in the expulsion from paradise.

Robert Pogue Harrison, in *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition*, also talks about Eden as a place where Adam and Eve did not have to care for the garden:

> It was only after the fall that Adam acquired a measure of resiliency and character. In Eden, Adam was unburdened by worries but incapable of devotion. Everything was there *for him* (including his wife). After his exile, *he* was there for all things, for it was only by dedicating himself that he could render humanly inhabitable an environment that did not exist for his pleasure and that exacted from him his daily labor. Out of this extension of self

> into the world was born the love of something other than oneself. (Harrison: 8-9)

Harrison emphasizes the ethical value of the labor Adam and Eve inherit after their expulsion. They learn to garden, only after they leave the infantile fantasy of abundance without work. Eden is a childhood home, a bountiful gift, but it's no place for adults. Adam and Eve grow up when they are expelled from Eden. They must labor in their own gardens, but there they will be fruitful.

Harrison cites another origin story, an ancient Roman parable about *Cura*, or Care, that offers a different take on the human condition:

> Once when Care was crossing a river, she saw some clay; she thoughtfully took up a piece and began to shape it. While she was meditating on what she had made, Jupiter came by. Care asked him to give it spirit, and this he gladly granted. But when she wanted her name to be bestowed upon it, he forbade this, and demanded that it be given his name instead. While Care and Jupiter were disputing, Earth arose and desired that her own name be conferred on the creature, since she had furnished it with part of her body. They asked Saturn to be their arbiter, and he made the following decision, which seemed a just one: 'Since you, Jupiter, have given its spirit, you shall receive that spirit at its death; and since you, Earth, have given its body, you shall receive its body. But since Care first shaped this creature, she shall possess it as long as it lives. And because there is now a dispute among you as to its name, let it be called homo, for it is made out of humus.' (Harrison: 5-6)

Here humans are formed through collaboration among the gods. As in Genesis, the spirit god inspires humans with life, and the human body is formed of the earth. But the insight about care, which is echoed in the expulsion from Eden, here forms the core meaning of human experience.

Cura – care – is an interesting and ambiguous concept. Cares are burdens, worries, but also affections: do we labor because we love? Or do we love because we labor? Harrison argues that a garden is where we learn care, which is the essential human vocation. The design, cultivation, maintenance, and harvesting of the garden are the activities of care, its well-being the object of care, its story the narrative of care. And it is doubtless true that gardens require – and reward – labor. Gardening creates a dialogue between humans and the more-than-human world. In that, it both resembles individuation and fosters it. It is both an *opus* ***contra*** *naturam* and an *opus* ***con*** *naturam*, a marriage of the nature that is outside of us and our own nature as both conscious and unconscious beings.[2] I will argue later in this paper that interacting with soil, climate, plants, stone, and other living creatures in the garden stimulates the unconscious in the gardener, which resonates with the nature it shares. Thus gardening, understood not as the conquest of nature but

rather a mutual seduction, helps to deconstruct the old Western binary of human/nature. Working *with* nature, gardeners can discover that they are also *of* nature.

Harrison also argues that gardens are refuges, havens to which to retreat, if only momentarily, from war, pestilence, oil spills, layoffs, drought, and misery. Within the garden, we feel safe; we are sheltered against predators, private, engaged in unalienated labor, exempt, for the while, from the arrow of history. In the garden, the passage of time is experienced primarily as cycles – seasons of fruitfulness, of planting, of cultivation, of rest. Almost imperceptibly, those seasons turn into years and decades: trees mature, stone weathers, water cuts passageways. But the experience is of renewal more than it is of history, of comedy rather than tragedy. In that way, gardening is a kind of ritualized labor; like poetry, it offers what Robert Frost called a momentary stay against confusion. Ritual, as I have argued elsewhere, gives order not only to our relationship with external nature, but also to our conscious relationship to our internal wildness, the unconscious, the Self. Ritual mediates between the ego and the numinous; it offers sacrifice to the Other and rights our relationship to the cosmos. As Harrison puts it, "gardens do NOT bring order to nature; rather they give order to our relation to nature" (Harrison: 48).

If the garden is a sanctuary, though, we, like Adam and Eve, have to leave it in order to enter history. It is a place of retreat, but the tests of consciousness and the opportunities for achievement occur in the world, where we make a name for ourselves, combat injustice, and ease suffering. The world exposes us to perils; too often we must labor for someone else's profit, and harsh conditions, both natural and political, jeopardize our safety. But it is in the world that we make our mark. For this work, the garden can give us time to prepare and to attend to our inner realities. In this context, I decided to look at a familiar book from childhood, Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*.

The garden of the title is an enclosed private garden, an abandoned Eden walled off from the world. According to Penelope Hobhouse, a landscape historian, the first domestic gardens were carved out of desert by the irrigation systems that created the fertile delta. The formal gardens of the Muslim world with their rectilinear layout reflect this dependence on large-scale irrigation systems: their aesthetic is drawn from the plans that brought water to the desert. Indeed Genesis speaks of the 4 rivers that irrigated Eden. Hobhouse comments that "a formal layout with repetitive geometric themes is immensely satisfying, providing the safe logic of an identifiable pattern, pleasing to the eye and understanding." She goes on to remark that the walled garden protected valuable plants – and water – from raiding animals and enemies. Indeed, the word paradise derives from the ancient

Persian *pairidaeza*, a combination of *pairi*, meaning around, and *daeza*, meaning wall (Hobhouse: 18, 19). The tradition of enclosure persists to this day in the home garden, conceived as a sanctuary from the pressures and tempo of the workaday world. Neither wild nor totally constructed, the garden is both liminal and safe. It is a space where transformation can occur gradually, privately. The children in *The Secret Garden* are protected from the prying, controlling reach of adults, and open to the healing rhythms and responses of nature. In this regard, I think of the 'enclosure' of the psychoanalytic hour, where one can express unnerving thoughts and feelings. Like the analyst's office, the garden can be a *temenos*.

In this beloved story, two children, both neglected by their parents but coddled by servants, are transformed from sickly, tyrannical and selfish little snots into healthy, robust, wondering young people through their encounter with the secret garden, a rose garden that had been neglected since the death of its caretaker, Colin's mother. The children, Mary and Colin, are like the roses they prune, thorny and psychologically wizened but full of latent life. In the garden, care, labor, exercise, fresh air, and the cheerful friendship of Dickon, a local peasant lad from the moors, bring them gradually to buoyant health.

At the start of the story, Colin is bedridden in a curtained room; no one is permitted even to look at him. His only company is his doctor and the servants who attend him. His confinement and isolation seem like the shadow side of the protection offered by the secret garden, in the same way that his illness is the shadow side of nature's fertility. Enclosure can be imprisoning and disabling as well as protective and nurturing. And nature can be neglected, as Colin is, or virtually left for dead. His father's stifled grief, his refusal to look in his son's eyes, cripple the boy and starve the garden. He and Mary – and the garden itself - have been abandoned, but all have the seeds of life. All need care.

At first neither Mary nor Colin understands how stunted and isolated they are, but the experience of caring, working with nature and working and playing together, allows them slowly to heal. As a child who has had very little experience of other children or even of adults, except for her attentive servants, Mary has no idea that others have feelings. Her very gradual discovery of the subjectivity of others gathers animals and people into one container: the animate world becomes her tutor. She develops the capacity to imagine – to imagine how another may be feeling, or what it might be like to be someone else – even another species. Helpful too is a kind of passivity, a sitting and observing, which allows time for her ego to slow down and her eye and ear to attend to small signs of life. The narrative follows this pattern: small discoveries and the awakening of sympathies lead her on; she gradually gains some self-knowledge and even the stirrings of compassion; and her health improves.

In all of this the brother of Mary's caretaker, Dickon, a Pan figure in the story, guides her, and later Colin as well. Dickon charms birds, foxes, and plants, a nature

spirit and the soul of boyish goodness. Moreover, he charms more than the animals. Nature in the narrative subverts class while it's working its psychological healing. Mary admires Dickon, even though he's just "a common moor boy," and she begins to imitate his speech. Once she decides she can trust him not to tell, she escorts him into the secret garden, where they begin to bring the plants back to life with careful weeding and pruning. The rest of the narrative involves the rebirth of the garden, Mary's discovery of Colin and his healing through the good efforts of nature, Mary, and Dickon. All the roses needed was a good pruning. Like the roses, Colin and Mary both needed some pruning as well: nature and the common task trim their arrogance, their heedlessness, their isolation, and their fear. Fresh air stimulates Colin's appetite; exercise builds his strength; challenges inspire him to take risks; work builds his confidence; intimacy engenders trust.

But as significant as these is the effect of birds, animals, and plants, which infuse a life force into the children. Dickon initiates them into an inspirited world, and his mother, and mother nature, step in to animate them. All in all, the encounter with the natural world seems like an encounter with the Self, as we see in this passage:

> One of the strange things about living in the world is that it is only now and then one is quite sure one is going to live forever and ever and ever. One knows it sometimes when one gets up at the tender solemn dawn-time and goes out and stands alone and throws one's head far back and looks up and up and watches the pale sky slowly changing and flushing and marvelous unknown things happening until the East almost makes one cry out and one's heart stands still at the strange unchanging majesty of the rising of the sun – which has been happening every morning for thousands and thousands and thousands of years. (256)

To me this sounds like Jung in Africa, where he writes:

> The sunrise in these latitudes was a phenomenon that overwhelmed me anew every day. The drama of it lay less in the splendor of the sun's shooting up over the horizon than in what happened afterward. I formed the habit of taking my camp stool and sitting under an umbrella acacia just before dawn. Before me, at the bottom of the little valley, lay a dark, almost black-green strip of jungle, with the rim of the plateau on the opposite side of the valley towering above it. At first, the contrasts between light and darkness would be extremely sharp. Then objects would assume contour and emerge into the light which seemed to fill the valley with a compact brightness. The horizon above became radiantly white. Gradually the swelling light seemed to penetrate into the very structure of objects, which became illuminated from

> within until at last they shone translucently, like bits of colored class. Everything turned to flaming crystal. The cry of the bell bird rang around the horizon. At such moments I felt as if I were inside a temple. It was the most sacred hour of the day. I drank in this glory with insatiable delight, or rather, in a timeless ecstasy….The *moment* in which light comes *is* God. That moment brings redemption, release. To say that the *sun* is God is to blur and forget the archetypal experience of that moment…The longing for light is the longing for consciousness." (Jung, MDR: 268)

Jung's identification of deep history in the human welcoming of the sun offers a healing connection to all of life, just as connecting with nature puts the children in touch with archetypal energies. While Jung was contemplating a wilderness landscape, and the children a domestic garden, the dazzling grace of dawn, with its suggestions of consciousness and new life, affects both equally.

Work in the garden is also central to the children's recovery and to the redemption, ultimately, of the Father. At first neither Mary nor Colin understands how selfish and arrogant they are, but the experience of working, working with nature, and working together allows them slowly to comprehend that natural and human Others have feelings and standing. In this way, their inflated egos experience some relativization, and they become more social.

Ultimately, Colin's father, Mary's uncle, has his own awakening experience in some alpine meadows; at the novel's climax, he has returned home and is looking for Colin. He thinks about the secret garden, imagines it dead, searches for the entrance, and just as he does, Colin, whom he had left for a cripple, comes running out of the gate, astonishing his father with his resurrection.

So the secret place, the heart of the boy, the soul of the man, the anima of the estate, was not dead at all. It was waiting to do its magic, needing only labor and love. And of course it's significant that Colin runs OUT of the garden – his growth to health, adulthood, and individuation requires that he too enter history.

In this discussion of *The Secret Garden*, I've been emphasizing the role of labor, of care, in the healing process. This connects to my topic: gardening as an *opus* – a work – *con naturam*. Like gardening, individuation is also work, the conscious work of absorbing and shaping the nature within us. This labor seems to be furthered by the work of nurturing and shaping the nature that surrounds us. But how does the work of gardening contribute to healing and individuation?

Jung says, "For it is the body, the feeling, the instincts, which connect us with the soil" (Zar: 1541). But I'd invert that and say also the soil connects us with the body, the feeling, and the instincts. Life starts and ends with soil. Soil is a complex food web, teeming with life. A teaspoon of good topsoil may contain a million algae, a million fungi, and up to a billion bacteria. Recent studies at the University of Bristol suggest that a particular bacterium found in soil, *Mycobacterium vaccae*, stimulates the immune system and boosts the production of serotonin (Science

Daily, 2010). These microbes, together with the worms, rotifers, beetles, slugs, snails, springtails, mites, moles, rabbits, and other soil organisms, make up the life underground. Without these organisms, which decompose organic matter and recycle the nutrients for plants' use, we'd long ago have been suffocated by our own dead. Soil is the unconscious of the earth. In this context, I think about the snakes and monsters Jung imaged in *The Red Book*. Many live underground, and at least the monsters look to me both frightening and frightened. For Jung they seem to have conjured elemental threats associated with earth, with darkness, with what's buried. They also suggest his honoring of the autochthonous forces both of the earth and of the psyche. What stories would the monsters tell? How would they release their energies? Are these serpents echoes of the snake in Eden, emblems of both terror and hope?

Gardeners come in contact with soil all the time, where processes of death, decay, and regeneration are not abstract. The smell, texture, moisture, the color, the feel of the soil are familiar. Soil is life, visible and invisible. I can't demonstrate this, but I believe that contact with the soil fosters an appreciation of the parts of our own being that are 'underground' or invisible – or unconscious. Humus makes us human.

Working the soil is highly meditative: it loosens the imagination, brings up memories and feelings, and at the same time the physical labor involved – bending, stooping, squatting, digging, raking – is what the body has evolved to do . In this labor I can quiet the rational ego. I lose myself when I garden: I lose track of time, I am led on from task to task, following rhythms set by nature. My mind goes where it will. I notice bugs, small rocks, roots, buried toys from my kids' childhoods, and all these help to unearth association, fantasy, and feeling. My hands get really dirty and I sweat.

Jung is clear that the unconscious *is* nature; as he says, "…all inner experience springs from the unconscious, over which we have no control. *But the unconscious is nature, which never deceives; only we deceive ourselves"* (*CW V*, para 95). Just as the unconscious never deceives, neither does what David Abram calls more-than-human nature. Climate may confound us, but it never sets out to trick us. We can anticipate but not control it. We may become familiar with soil, seed, and sun, but they will also always contain mystery. Gardening, then, is an exercise in collaborating with an Other consonant with the Other in psyche.

Thus, the way of knowing of the gardener goes beyond the rational. Gardening fosters a knowledge of the world – inner and outer – that is muscular, imaginative, sensuous. Gardening at its most obvious is about desire. We garden to participate in the miracle of birth, of growth, of life's cycles, of fruit and seed and harvest. We bury the seed in soft dark earth, this act that is akin to the burial we anticipate at the

end, and we wait and prepare for the life that springs forth from the darkness. The garden loosens the stays on libido, allowing a gentle flow of pleasure as each new flower comes into bloom. Gardening delights with the seductiveness of flowers, the busy sex going on at any moment as bees and other pollinators bumble their way around the beds. Plants cannot be willed or charmed into flowering, but they can be cultivated and enjoyed, so the ego learns to let go a little of its proud will and to trust in the force of life. Nor can plants be forced to flower out of season, so the gardener's sense of time operates on nature's calendar, accepting the narcissus, the rose, the coneflower and the aster each in their season, loving them for a brief flowering, and taking pleasure in the goldfinch on the coneflower seeds, the robins on the dogwood. Garden time is cyclical, seasonal. Everything proceeds at its own pace, in a fairly regular pattern, but not on the kind of timetable our iPhones have bred in us. Gardening requires a kind of surrender to nature's rhythms, and that in turn inspires humility.

Working in a garden slows one down and forces her to open up the senses to notice the tiny shoots, the beetle, the leaf drop, the worms, the canker, the buds, to spot where the wild petunia has self-seeded, remark the first monarch of the season, listen to the rush of the hummingbird's wings. Garden time is slow, as nature proceeds at its own pace. It requires awareness of the connections among soil, seeds, birds, insects, sun, and water, that is, of the web of life. Gardening, then, is a kind of ritual activity, one that promotes a meditative consciousness that seems to invite psyche to bubble up. As Jung says, "This rupture of the link with the unconscious and our submission to the tyranny of words have one great disadvantage: the conscious mind becomes more and more the victim of its own discriminating activity, the picture we have of the world gets broken down into countless particulars, and the original feeling of unity, which we integrally connected with the unity of the unconscious psyche, is lost" (CW 11, par 443). Reading this passage from Jung calls one back to the passage quoted at the beginning of this essay, in which he expressed his personal feeling of unity, the product of his labor in and around the Tower.

Of course, there's plenty of science in a garden, plenty for the ego, the discriminating thinking function, too, and the garden also asks us to make judgments: who shall live, who shall spread, who gets pulled out. Because gardening is also about weeds: dandelions, crabgrass, creeping Charlie, bindweed, Canada thistle. They're weeds because they're tenacious and they're bullies. Some of them, like dandelions, have deep roots. Others, like Creeping Charlie, my personal enemy plant, are rhizomatous or stoloniferous, sending out runners so that I have to track down the whole string. Miss one little rootlet and I've got to do it all again. Weeding can become obsessive, but it has its meditative aspect too. At best I move from mildly obsessive physical labor to thinking about the weeds in my life, the ideas or habits or complexes that resist eradication, that run along below

consciousness, choking out whatever new growth is trying to come into being. But it's not just weeds I have to root out. Sometimes gardening requires that I decide to get rid of things I've prized, lovely plants that self-seed too abundantly. Then I make decisions, hard ones, to prune back rampant growth – I discipline and punish.

Gardening also exposes the gardener to insects and diseases. Insects tunnel and chew leaves and grass and drop their eggs and crawl on the skin and sometimes bite. They may ruin the tomatoes and eat the roses. They turn the grass brown. Rusts, molds, mildew and other plant diseases can disturb the aesthetics of the garden, or worse, can harm the plants. They are like complexes that won't go away.

One can use pesticides on them, but they will only evolve new resistances, and the chemicals are going into our air, our water, our bodies. Exposure to pesticides has been linked to Parkinson's disease and to increased ADHD. Pesticides are carcinogenic. Americans in particular have an unhealthy relationship with their lawns, which require fertilizers, poisons, water, and energy to maintain. This obsession with control is a shadow to the care the gardener brings to the task. As the garden of Versailles is a monument to the royal ego, the typical American suburban lawn attests to a psyche shaped by competition and conformity.

As a conscientious gardener, one can decide how much herbivory he can tolerate, and practice integrated pest management. Diseases, while not quite the gods in plant form, can prompt learning, and proper plant choice and siting can minimize their impact. The gardener can come to appreciate insects' role as recyclers, detritovores, the inevitable retinue of the garden; he can embrace his buggy shadow.

And insects are also beautiful, bizarre, and fabulous, as well as necessary to pollination, essential to life. Above and below ground, insects do work we require. Perhaps they remind us of the people laboring in factories in China to make our throwaway plastic goods, of the garbage collectors and grape pickers who are often invisible to us. We depend on them. Or maybe they remind us of our beautiful children, of jewels or of our deepest dreams. They are essential to the diversity of life, and just as the perfect lawn is the antithesis of biodiversity, the natural garden, like the Self-directed psyche, fosters and celebrates diverse lifeforms. Without this diversity, evolution, biological or psychological, is stymied.

So like us, insects are a mixed bag. I sit on my deck and watch the bees nuzzling the Joe Pye weed, the spider weaving her web, the flies and beetles doing their pollinating jobs, the holes in the leaves of the Chinese Elm, signs of herbivory everywhere, butterflies swooping and sucking, and I am glad to live on this planet, in this city, in my garden, glad to be part of the whole buzzing, bumbling business. At the same time I know there are hidden forces – diseases, things that bug me – at work, invisible, beyond my conscious control. And I am eating a banana grown in

Central America where workers labor with few rights and no benefits, brought here by ships that contribute to global warming, unloaded by warehouse workers hired as day labor, trucked to the store and sold to me by a teenaged checker who'd rather be at the beach. Et in arcadia ego.

One cannot avoid mortality in the garden: death, decay, decomposition. Some favorite plants die. At the end of the season, most things go dormant. In winter, most of the plants have disappeared; all we see is the skeleton. To some extent, the garden has prepared us for this: gradually, gradually, one species has yielded to another, seeds and fruit have proven food for birds and other creatures, and we have grown tired of the color, tired of the riot of growth. We are ready for dormancy.

Even being the human in the garden, the big one, the top carnivore (or herbivore), surrounded as we are by its life, its flowering and fruiting, even so, the ego is relativized, we are humbled, at the knowledge of the vastness and indifference of nature. And somehow in a garden it is easier to think about our own ends, to see our lives as part of nature's great circus, our work as a contribution to consciousness, our hope in the next generations, our faith is life's clinging to itself.

If individuation is a process of shedding collective identities and values and embracing authentic – i.e. Self-generated multiple psychic selves, then the garden can teach us a great deal both about shedding and about the Self. To go back to Eden, consciousness begins in a garden; it is a collaboration between ego and nature that produces both soil and soul.

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Notes

[1] I have discussed at length elsewhere (West, 2007) the various origins of the Western divorce from nature, as well as alternate world views in indigenous cultures.

[2] The ethics of care, developed by feminist ethicists such as Nel Noddings, holds that caring is the fundamental component of the network of relationships that forms the basis for ethical action. Focused specifically on relationships of unequal power, such as parent and child, moneyed and poor, this ethics also models relationships between humans and the unvoiced others with whom we share the planet.