

CUPID AND PSYCHE

The Evolution of Love

INTRODUCTION

The tale of Cupid and Psyche is a love story, and a story about change. It is a unique and beautiful tale of the evolution of a human being and the evolution of a god. As the story of the evolution of a human being, our tale is a profound example of the individuation process, the process whereby an individual becomes the full, complete person of his or her destiny.

In general, it is the process by which individual beings are formed and differentiated; in particular, it is the development of the psychological individual as a being distinct from the general, collective psychology. (CW VI, p. 448.)

As the story of the evolution of a god, our tale is even more complex, particularly because that god is Love himself. We can say that our tale is a story about the evolution of Love through Love. Perhaps this is where we should begin, with Love himself as archetype and god.

CHAPTER I

THE NATURE OF EROS

Love has many names. In the Greco-Roman tradition he is called Cupid, Amour, Eros, Phanes, Protogonos Phaeton, the “firstborn shining one.” Already these names are a little confusing. If we were contemporaries of Apuleius we might have an easier time of it. So let’s explore a little of what might have been common knowledge at the time that our story was put on paper.

Cupid/Amour is the Roman god of Love. Traditionally he is known as the son of Venus/Aphrodite, the goddess of Love. Amour/Love is the son of Love who is herself a complex and mysterious, eternal goddess. Cupid is usually depicted as a little boy, a child with wings, naked except for his bow and arrow.

[Cupid and Psyche as Children by Adolphe William Bougereau (1825-1905) from Website *IMAGES OF CUPID AND PSYCHE* <http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~mjoseph/CP/ICP.html>]

In Ancient Greece, the God of Love was often called Eros. And with the mention of Eros, our investigation of Love becomes far more complex. Eros is Love; Eros is the principle of relationship without which life, as we know it, would not exist.

It is through relationship that one unites with another to make the two that give rise to the third. According to ancient Orphic tradition, Eros is the first god, because nothing can be created without the principle of relationship manifested as Eros.

[EROS/PHANES/PROTOGONOS—Phanes, the golden winged primordial being, the Protogonos (first-Born), emerges from the cosmic egg. Image located in Galleria e Museo Eustense, Moderna, Italy. Image from <http://www.phanes.com/phanes.html>]

Eros is the Egg, the beginning thing, the germ, the seed that already contains everything. The great god Eros reveals himself in many forms. Phanes, the “revealer,” is a loudly buzzing celestial bee, son of the Great Goddess. As Phaeton Protogonos, “first-born shiner,” he is the Sun. The descriptions and tales of Eros are at times vague and confusing, but it is clear to see that EROS is a tremendously ancient and powerful god.

Eros was there in the beginning, and as is true of most creation myths, it is at the beginning that things are very confusing. Depending upon which Orphic text you read, Eros is said to be there before all other things, even before the darkness that is Night herself. But others say that Eros was born of Night, or NYX as she is called.

[Night/NIX—*Night With Her Train of Stars* by Edward R. Hughes. From: <http://mythology.tonyarn.com/creation/night.jpg>]

Carl Kerényi summarizes these many versions of the origin of things:

*In the beginning was NIGHT (NIX), a bird with black wings, a goddess of whom even Zeus stands in awe, “Ancient Night conceived of the Wind and laid her silver egg (Some say it was the MOON) in the gigantic lap of Darkness. From the Egg sprang the son of the rushing Wind, a god with golden wings. He is called EROS, the god of love.” And it was Eros who set the universe in motion. Eros is the Principle of relatedness. He is double-sexed, a woman before and a man behind. He has four eyes, four horns and golden wings; he bellows like a serpent or bleats like a ram. He is called PROTOGONOS PHAETON, the “firstborn shining one,” the firstborn of all the gods. He is also called PHANES. As Phanes he is “he who appears” and “he who reveals.” When he was first born of the egg, he “revealed and brought into the light everything that had previously lain hidden in the silver egg—in other words, the whole world.” Up above was a void, the Sky. Down below was the Rest.” (Kerényi, *The Gods of the Greeks*, pp. 16-17.)*

Night in her triple form of Night, Order and Justice lived with Eros in a cave and her child, Eros, was her father and her husband. It was said that no one could look Eros/Phanes/Protogonos in the face except Night. All others were simply bewildered by the light he shed. As the principle of relationship, Eros/Phanes/Protogonos gave rise to all things:

Phanes in his cave was the first king. He laid the scepter in the hand of Night. From her it passed to Ouranos, from Ouranos to Kronos, from Kronos to Zeus, who was the fifth to rule the world. After Zeus came the sixth ruler, Dionysos, with whose reign the song of Orpheus ended. (Kerenyi, *The Gods of the Greeks*, pp. 113-116.)

So the Orphics tell us that Eros is the father, husband, and child of Night in her triple aspect. This triple aspect will be important later on. In the Olympian tales, Eros gives rise to Ouranos, who gives rise to Aphrodite, but doesn't our story tell us that Eros is the son of Aphrodite? So what is that all about? The fact that the Gods perpetually unite with and give birth to themselves, bear and are born by their offspring makes sense if we think of the process in terms of the archetype, particularly the archetype of the Self, perpetually giving rise to, incorporating, and destroying the archetypal image in ITS ongoing attempt to know ITSELF:

The self is a quantity that is supraordinate to the conscious ego. It embraces not only the conscious but also the unconscious psyche and is therefore, so to speak, a personality which we also are...there is little hope of our ever being able to reach even an approximate consciousness of the self, since however much we may make conscious there will always exist an indeterminate and indeterminable amount of unconscious material which belongs to the totality of the self. (CW VIII, ¶274.)

And who is the mother of Eros anyway? Is she Night or is she Aphrodite? What is the nature of this goddess who is mother to Love and Love herself?

CHAPTER II THE GODDESS

Bear with me now while we make one more digression, this time into very ancient myth, myth that is far older than the Orphic tales, far older even than the Olympians themselves.

The Orphics have already told us that Eros is a child of night, or Nix as the Greeks call her, and that Nix is a triple goddess. This reference to the Triple Goddess takes our Olympian/Orphic story way back into the realms of the ANCIENT GREAT GODDESS, the GODDESS of Neolithic man. Images of the triple goddess and preoccupation with triple signs, tri-lines and triplicity date as far back as 10,000 to 15,000 years before Christ. (Gimbutas, p. 97.) Strong examples of triple signs include the triple snake coils at Newgrange.

[Newgrange, Bru na Boinne, County Meath—Image from:
<http://home.earthlink.net/~laurieyoung/photos/newgrange/trispiral.JPG>]

The Triple Goddess is the three phases of the Moon. She is the past, the present, and the future. She is the three faces of Hekate, a goddess who is herself associated with Night and the Moon and who has dominion in the three realms of Heaven, Earth and Underworld.

[HEKATE. From Sarah Iles Johnston, *Hekate Soteira*, cover illustration. Drawing based upon a 3rd century relief from Aegina.]

She is the Virgin/Mother/Crone that is all women. She is the Moirai (the Three Fates), the Three Graces, or the Three Charities as they are sometimes called.

[THE FATES (MOIRAI)—J. M. Strudwick, *A Golden Thread*, 1890. Image from:
http://mythology.tonyarn.com/misc/paintings_m2z.html]

[THE THREE GRACES—Sandro Botticelli,
La Primavera. Image from: http://www.wmich.edu/~emrl/vt/paint1g_big.htm]

The Triple Goddess is as ancient as the recording of time itself. At the dawn of Time, the primordial unity of unconsciousness that was the state of primitive man (A state that was probably similar to the primary narcissism of an infant) gave way to opposition, a duality, a self and others, a this and that, an I and an everything else. This was the beginning of consciousness. But the duality of this consciousness disrupted the Eden-like peace of unity and introduced conflict and opposition. Thus a third thing was necessary, a third thing that by containing the duality of the opposites within itself gave rise to a new unity, but a unity with one critical difference, this difference is consciousness. The goddess is the third thing that contains the two that are also Her.

Eros' mother, Night, is a triple goddess and therefore embodies for the early Greeks the Great Goddess of their predecessors. Eros' Olympic mother, Aphrodite, a central character in our story, is also considered one of a trinity of goddesses and thereby presents herself as a carrier of the power and numinosity of the Great Goddess. With Hera and Athena, Aphrodite was a competitor in the infamous beauty contest judged by Paris. But Aphrodite has still other connections with the ancient Great and Triple Goddess. One of the earliest and most pervasive representations of the Ancient Great Goddess is as a bird.

[Dancing Bird Goddess. Image from:

http://www.artsales.com/ARTistory/angelic_journey/angel_images/Dancing_Bird_Goddess.jpg]

[Minoan Bird Goddess. Image from:

http://www.funrubberstamps.com/indexpage/kc%20images/75minoan_bird_g.gif]

Her bird nature is reflected in the black wings of night and in the silver egg, the Moon, which night lays in the lap of darkness.

The bird nature of the Great Goddess is also reflected in the totems of Aphrodite. The dove, the swan, and the goose are associated with Aphrodite and remind us that she is an image of her predecessor, the Great Goddess.

[Aphrodite rides a Goose

Pistoxenos Painter ca 460 B.C.

Image from: <http://web.uvic.ca/grs/bowman/myth/images/haifa/h104.jpg> and

http://www-lib.haifa.ac.il/www/art/MYTHOLOGY_WESTART.HTML]

[Aphrodite riding Swan. Image from:

<http://www.theoi.com/image/K10.11Aphrodite.jpg>]

The Ancient Great Goddess united within her own being the contradictory principles of birth/rebirth and death. As the goddess of birth and regeneration, she is the fecund, round, matriarch with full breasts and large buttocks.

[Venus of Willendorf circa 25,000 BC. Found in Willendorf, Austria. Image from:

<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/humm/Courses/Religion/Resources/lespugue.jpg>

As the goddess of death she is the stiff white nude.]

[Stiff White Nude circa 3000 BC. Image in Marija Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, plate 6. Image from:

<http://www.chiefbloggingofficer.com/images/cover-clip-gimbutas-sm.jpg>]

This comprehensive and paradoxical, life and death duality of the Great Goddess is frequently symbolized as the sacred butterfly axe. The life destroying, severing and separating function of the axe is here united with the immortal and transcendent symbol of the butterfly. The butterfly reminds us that without death there is no renewal, no rebirth, no evolution. The ancient Great Goddess is therefore the death dealer and the life giver. In her life giving form one of her names is Aphrodite. And we shall soon learn that one of the meanings of “Psyche” is butterfly.

[Late Minoan Pottery Cup with double axes. Copyright Jerome M. Eisenberg. Image from:

<http://www.royalathena.com/PAGES/greekcatpages/Vases/EarlyGreek/CLT124.html>]

The fact that Aphrodite carries so many aspects of the more comprehensive, more ouroboric, Great Goddess, invests the Olympic goddess with an ancient mystery and power. The

Aphrodite of our story is not just the sensuous, not-to-be-taken-seriously goddess of sexuality. She is a more modern personification of an ancient principle of unity and completion, of life and death, of beauty and terror.

All these associations and attributes of our two major divinities, Eros and Aphrodite, would have been background knowledge of the people who lived at the time of this myth. Eros would have been not just a fat little cherub of a boy, not just a mischievous youth, but the first god, the Protogonos. Venus/Aphrodite would have been not just a jealous and vain beauty, but a Great Goddess of Life and Regeneration, Death and Terror.

Now with this background knowledge, we shall return to our story.

CHAPTER III THE TALE

A king and queen have three daughters, two of whom are commonly beautiful, but the third is of strange and exceptional beauty. This youngest, most beautiful child is named Psyche. The fame of psyche's beauty spreads throughout the land. People desert the shrines and temples of Aphrodite to pay homage to this earthly Venus. (Neuman, *Amore and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine*, p. 3.)

Our story begins with a king and a queen and their three daughters. It is often useful when interpreting a fairy tale or a myth to consider the *dramatist personae*, the cast of characters, who present at the beginning of the story. Here we have a royal family. If we count the characters at the beginning of our story we notice there is one powerful male figure, the head of the family and the head of the collective, and four female figures for a total of 5 initial characters. So what is the symbolic significance of the number 5? Those of you who have read Dan Brown's *The DaVinci Code* will already know a lot about this. Five symbolizes the human microcosm, the number of man, forming a pentagon with his head and four limbs.

[Universal Man. Image from: http://www.allposters.com/-sp/-Posters_i320924_.htm]

Five-petalled flowers and five pointed leaves such as the rose, the lily and the vine also represent the microcosm (Cooper, p. 116). The pentagon itself is a five pointed star formed by an endless line and therefore, like a circle, it symbolized perfection; the five-pointed star thus symbolized individuation. Five is the number of the sacred marriage, the *hieros gamos* in that it combines the feminine, even number 2 with the masculine, odd number 3. In the Greco-Roman tradition the

number 5 is the nuptial number of love and union, the number of Venus. So already we have hints of the things with which our tale is dealing: the human microcosm as set against the realm of the god, the individuation process, and the sacred marriage. And we already have a hint as to what the problem of our story may be, because, of our five initial characters, only one is male. So we may be able to say that we have a need to redeem or develop the masculine principle within our tale.

The birth of Psyche is a critical event in human history. From the beginning she is marked as being special, divinely beautiful. What does it mean to be special from the very beginning? The first answer is naturally that all children are special, but that evades the question. Psyche, her name itself speaks of her specialness, for the word “Psyche” in classical Greek means soul or butterfly.

[Psyche as Butterfly

Cupid and Psyche by Middleton Jameson, 1898. Image from: <http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~mjoseph/CP/MJ1898.jpg>]

As the soul, Psyche is the truly immortal aspect of man. As Butterfly, Psyche is the transiently beautiful symbol of transformation, the emblem of beauty arising from the dry and brittle cocoon of death. I remind you of the earlier images of the butterfly axe and its association with the paradoxical death/life aspects of the Great Goddess. Psyche here represents the life giving, transcendent, butterfly aspect of the soul.

Psyche’s specialness, her immortality, her capacity for transformation all identify her as that most unique type of person, the individual. I use the word “individual” in a Jungian sense here to refer to a person on an individuation path, a person on the journey to discover her true Self, the full and complete being she was born to be. Already we have clues as to one of the major themes present in our story. This theme is that of individuation.

Another theme, that will become even more apparent later in our story, is the theme of Selfishness, not in the sense of a constant disregard of others for the sake of immediate personal gratification, but in the sense of a love of Self. As our story will soon show, the early Psyche is not Selfish enough. She has no regard for herself and therefore easily slips into depression, self-pity and even thoughts of suicide. At the beginning of our story, Psyche has not yet developed Self Love, the higher form of Selfishness that we can call “Constructive Selfishness.” Alice Miller describes this Constructive Selfishness:

The child has a primary need to be regarded and respected as the person he really is at any given time, and as the centre—the central actor—in his own activity...we are speaking here of a need that is narcissistic, but nevertheless legitimate, and whose

fulfillment is essential for the development of a healthy self-esteem. (Alice Miller, *The Drama of Being a Child*, (London, 1987), p. 21.)

Miller goes on to say that when the primary narcissistic need is not met, when the child's initial Selfishness, as a focusing upon the Self, is not satisfied, the result is narcissistic disturbance, a disturbance that often brings the wounded, gifted child to analysis:

It is one of the turning points in analysis when the narcissistically disturbed patient comes to the emotional insight that all the love he has captured with so much effort and self-denial was not meant for him as he really was, that the admiration for his beauty and achievements was aimed at this beauty and these achievements, and not at the child himself. (Ibid. p. 5.)

Is not this Psyche's difficulty? Psyche's specialness, her individuality, sets her away from her fellow man and inspires an intimidating awe that insures no man would take her as his wife. And her beauty offends the goddess of beauty herself. Venus is enraged that a mere mortal would usurp her place. She calls upon her own son, Eros, to assist her in taking revenge upon Psyche:

“Cause the maid to be consumed with passion for the vilest of men, for one whom Fortune has condemned to have neither health nor wealth, nor honor, one so broken that through all the world his misery has no peer.” (Neuman, p. 5.)

[*Venus and Cupid*, Pieter van Lint (1609-1690)]

Image from: <http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~mjoseph/CP/PVL.jpg>

After giving her commission to Eros, Aphrodite plunges down to the floor of the sea.

In our myth, we see Aphrodite's jealousy and possessiveness as the shadow aspects of Love. Soon we shall realize that it is just these negative aspects of Aphrodite, her very “unloveliness” if you will, that provide the catalyst and support of Psyche and Love's evolution.

Psyche's earthly beauty is the beauty of an individuating human, the beauty of the soul. She is the new good thing, an evolutionary step for man and for his image of divinity. Aphrodite is the old good, divine and powerful, but as Jung says, “the good is the enemy of the better” (CW XVII, p. 185) and as the new good thing, an image of the individuating and evolving soul of man, Psyche is tormented and tested by the archetypes that precede her.

In response to his mother's commands, Eros visits Psyche as she sleeps and pricks her side with the point of his arrow. Psyche wakes and opens her eyes upon Eros, who is himself invisible. Psyche's waking startles Eros and in his confusion he pricks himself with his own arrow. (Bulfinch, p. 106.)

[*Cupid and Psyche* by Alphonse e Legros, 1867.
Image from: <http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~mjoseph/CP/AL1867.jpg>]

So here we have the beginning of Psyche's love for Love and of Eros' love for Psyche. According to tradition, if a person is pricked or pierced by one of Eros' arrows, that person immediately falls in love with whomever he first sees. Psyche is pricked by Eros' arrow and she "opened her eyes upon Cupid" and thus fell in love with something invisible, could we say that she fell in love with Love? And Eros is also made victim of his powerful arrow. He falls in love with Psyche.

Meanwhile, Psyche and her family have begun to despair of her future. Her great beauty has inspired worship but not love. Her two older sisters are wed while Psyche remains alone, "loathing in her heart the loveliness that had charmed so many nations." (Neumann, *Amore and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine*, p. 6.) Psyche's father suspects that the gods are angry and consults the oracle of Apollo. The oracle delivers this chilling pronouncement:

"On some high crag, O king, set forth the maid,
In all the pomp of funeral robe arrayed.
Hope for no bridegroom born of mortal seed,
But fierce and wild and of the dragon breed.
He swoops all-conquering, borne on airy wing,
With fire and sword he makes his harvesting;
Trembles before him Jove, whom gods do dread,
And quakes the darksome river of the dead."

(Neumann, *Amor and Psyche: The Psychi
cDevelopment of the Feminine*, p.7.)

Her parents are devastated by the oracle, but Psyche is wise enough to accept the father ordained by the gods. Might she already be suffering from the ennui and melancholy of being in love with Love? Might she already be experiencing the depression and hopelessness of the narcissistically wounded child?

"'Suffering is the fastest horse that can carry us to completion.' (Meister Eckhart). When the soul (anima) embraces and accepts suffering the pain reveals itself as the birth pangs of a new inner being. 'Psyche' in classical Greek means 'soul' and 'butterfly'. The latter was a symbol of the soul led by Hermes after death into beyond." (Peter Birkhauser, *Light From the Darkness*, pp. 96-97.)

[Image from: users.ipfw.edu/doughert/nbci/index.html]

With tremendous intuition, Psyche realizes the source of her despair:

“When nations and peoples gave me divine honor, when with one voice they hailed me as a new Venus, then was the time for you to grieve, to weep and mourn me as one dead...It is the name of Venus and that alone which has brought me to my death. Lead me on and set me on the crag that fate has appointed. I hasten to meet that blest union, I hasten to behold the husband that awaits me...Was he not born to destroy all the world?” (Neumann, *Amore and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine*, p. 8.)

In a procession that more resembled that of a funeral than of a wedding, Psyche climbs a lofty mountain to its topmost crag where, abandoned by those she loved, she fearfully awaits her fate, her MARRIAGE OF DEATH.

[*The Wedding of Psyche* by Sir Edward Burne-Jones, 1867.
Image from: <http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~mjoseph/CP/EBJ.jpg>]

In the archetypal world of myths and dreams, death does not necessarily mean the death of the body. It may symbolize a transformation, a major change, a death to the old self. But never think that a transformation, a death of the old self, is approached with any less terror, any less resistance than that with which we face our physical mortality. The terror of transformation is at times so great that suicide is the preferred choice, especially for those whose narcissistic wounds prevent them from having faith or hope for any positive destiny.

Without hope or regard for herself, without the healthy narcissism of a valued individual, Psyche prepares for her marriage of Death. For many women of ancient Greece, the transformation from maid to wife was a death. At the moment of her marriage, and Athenian woman was transformed from a free maiden to chattel, the property of her husband. In our own culture, we no longer consider wives as property, but we do tend to weep at weddings. The bride usually wears white. White is the color of virtue and virginity; but in the ancient religion of the Great Goddess, white, the color of bone, was the color of death. And for men as well as women, marriage is death to the old life; it is a transformation. Marriage is a sacred ritual, a sacred act of transformation, an *hieros gamos*, a sacred union from which a woman emerges completely changed.

The *hieros gamos*, or Holy Matrimony, predates the dawn of history and is another theme that unites our story with the ancient rites of the Great Goddess. The *hieros gamos* represents the union of the masculine essence, and the feminine power of the Great Goddess. To symbolize the sacred union of masculine and feminine principles, “women at their initiation into the mysteries

of the Great Goddess, sacrificed their virginity in the temple, by entering into an *hieros gamos*, or sacred marriage, which was consummated sometimes with the priest, as representative of the phallic power of the god, sometimes with the phallic image itself, and sometimes with any stranger who might be spending the night in the temple precincts.” (Esther Harding, *Woman’s Mysteries, Ancient and Modern*, (New York, 1971), p. 134.) A central fact is that these rites were impersonal unions. When a woman participated in the *hieros gamos* she was not uniting with a man but with the incarnation of a god, and as such she was not chattel, not a wife, but a virgin. The word “virgin” originally meant not that a woman was sexually inexperienced but that she was independent. (Robert Briffault, *The Mothers*, (London, 1959). p. 375.) As Esther Harding tells us, in the ancient meaning of the word, a “virgin” was “one-in-herself, belonging to herself alone.” (Harding, pp. 102-103.)

So Psyche waits in fear of what is to come, then Zephyr, the gentle wind from the West, softly lifts her from the earth and bares her down the high and desolate cliff onto a flowery valley. Gradually Psyche’s fear and despair leave her and she falls asleep. Psyche wakes to find herself near a grove of trees. She enters the grove and finds a crystal clear fountain with a spectacular palace nearby, a palace so grand that it had to be built by the gods.

[Psyche Entering Cupid’s Garden,
John William Waterhouse, c. 1904.
Image from: <http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~mjoseph/CP/waterh49.jpg>]

Soon Psyche is addressed by disembodied voices telling her they are at her service. She is given food and drink “wafted to her as it were by some wind,” (Neumann, *Amore and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine*, p. 8.) and soon she falls asleep. In the night Psyche waits in fear of the unknown that is before her. In the darkness her husband comes to her and makes her his bride. And so life goes on for Psyche, attended by bodiless voices during the day and visited by her husband at night.

[*Cupid and Psyche* by John Roddam Spencer Stanhope, early-mid 19th century.
Image from: <http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~mjoseph/CP/jrssc.jpg>]

At this point in her development, Psyche is still a virgin in the ancient sense of the word. She is still independent, still one-in-herself; for she has married no man. The one who comes to her at night is unseen, unknown and whether stranger, priest or god, her lover participates with her in the ancient matriarchal sacrament of the *hieros gamos*. Psyche was pierced by Eros’ arrow and looked upon an invisible lover, a lover who is a god, a lover who is Love Itself. This is the

first aspect of love for Psyche; at this point she is a very young woman in love with Love. But there is an immature, unsatisfying aspect to this love. It is a love that is not real. It is a love that is in the realm of the archetypes rather than in the realm of true relationship.

Psyche, the soul of patriarchal man, a gifted, beautiful child, is unloved for her Self. It is her beauty, not her being, which is loved. As an unloved being, Psyche does not yet have a notion of her true Self. The knowledge of her Self is to come only after great experiencing and suffering. The knowledge of the Self comes from the process of becoming the Self, the process of individuation.

Eventually Psyche misses her family and begs her husband to allow a visit from her sisters. Reluctantly and with a warning that she never tell her sisters what he is like, Eros grants Psyche's request.

When the sisters, who had been grieving over Psyche's fate, discover that instead of being dead, Psyche is living in great luxury, they are filled with a malicious envy.

[*Psyche and her Two Sisters* by A. E. Fragonard, 1798.
Image from: <http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~mjoseph/CP/JHF1.jpg>]

The sisters return to their homes consumed with jealousy and complaining to one another of their own husbands. And what can we say about the nature of these envious, unhappy sisters? They tell us about their unhappy marriages, marriages to kings, but marriages that must have had very little to do with Eros, very little to do with Love. These sisters express not love but resentment toward their husbands. One sister describes her marital role as more that of a sick-nurse, a servant, than that of a loving wife. She describes herself as the chattel that many Greek women of the time were thought to be. These sisters are not virgins; they are not independent, individual souls, women-in-themselves. Their marriages have nothing to do with the sacred *hieros gamos* of the Goddess. But we must admit that these sisters perform a critical and essential service. They, like the Goddess Aphrodite herself, provide a stimulus for Psyche. They generate in her a curiosity that, like the curiosity of so many heroines of myth and fairy tales, gives rise to the *felix culpa* that leads to evolution.

Eros warns Psyche that her sisters will try to persuade her to see his face. Eros does not want to be seen; he does not want to be known. In fact he threatens her that if she does see him, it will be the last time. Eros wishes to remain a mystery, the object of an infinite variety of projections. Eros is invisible. He has no face and Everyman's face. He is capable of carrying any projection. Without an identity, Eros remains an abstraction, the abstraction of Love itself. And it is to this abstraction, to this Love, that Psyche gives her heart. She falls in love with Love.

She falls in love with the principle of relationship, with the idea of Love, with Everyman and with No-man. It is the love of a narcissistically wounded woman, a woman who, failing to love and value herself, experiences love as an over-idealization, almost a worshiping, of the other. But at the instigation of the two shadow-sisters, Psyche's over-idealization threatens to turn into devaluation.

The unseen Eros remains in the realm of potentialities, in the realm of the archetypes. He is the blank face onto whom can be projected any mask, any image. He is the young man, the middle aged man, the ram, the lion, the serpent/dragon monster, and the bull. While invisible to Psyche, he is all these things in one; he is undifferentiated and terrifying in his unknown-ness. Eros as god and archetype, as object of the over-idealized, in-love-with-Love, of Psyche, is resistant to change. He would prefer to remain as the Object of Psyche's love and devotion. But change and evolution are inevitable. The truly wise gods know this and Eros is an ancient and truly wise god. He allows the fateful visits from the sisters. He allows the story to continue.

So the sisters come for the second time, and with the confident arrogance of the vicious, they leap into the arms of the West Wind. (Neumann, *Amore and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine*, p. 20.)

With the cleverness of malice, the sisters come to realize that Psyche has never seen her lover. They speculate to one another, "But if she has never seen her husband's face, clearly she has married a god." (Neumann, *Amore and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine*, p. 21.) Then the sisters devise a plan. For the third time, they visit Psyche and this is what they tell her:

"Ah! You are happy, for you love in blessed ignorance of your evil plight...He that lies secretly by your side at night is a huge serpent with a thousand tangled coils; blood and deadly poison drip from his throat and from the cavernous horror of his gaping maw. Remember Apollo's oracle, how it proclaimed that you should be the bride of some fierce beast...so soon as your time has come, he will devour you with the ripe fruit of your womb." (Neumann, *Amore and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine*, p. 22.) For by this time, Psyche is pregnant.

Psyche becomes terrified by her sisters' words and admits to them that she does not know what her husband looks like. The sisters advise Psyche as to what she must do. Psyche must arm herself with a sharp knife and a covered lantern and wait until Eris visits her and falls asleep. When she knows that her husband is sleeping, Psyche must remove the cover from the lamp and using the knife must cut off her husband's head.

Psyche waits in anguish for the arrival of her lover. When he falls asleep, she takes the knife and uncovers the lamp.

[Psyche Gazing at Cupid,
by Simon Vouet, 1590-1649.
Image from: <http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~mjoseph/CP/PV1590.jpg>]

So what is the lamp that Psyche must bring to her relationship with Eros? Psyche, as a narcissistically wounded woman, loves an invisible man, a man with no face. Having no knowledge of her own Self, she has no frame of reference from which to relate to the other as a real being. She relates by projection. Jung was talking about the anima, but he could have as easily been talking about the animus when he said the following:

“Every man carries within him the eternal image of a woman...Since the image is unconscious, it is always unconsciously projected upon the person of the beloved, and is one of the chief reasons for passionate attraction or aversion.” (Jung, *Collected Works*, XCII 198.) Before Psyche saw Eros he was the ideal recipient of her animus projections. He had no real identity, no face, that would contradict or correct her animus projections. He was Eros; the divine “first born shining one.” He was the ancient, multi-visaged, all containing archetype, much closer to the true unknown and unknowable archetype than any known and therefore limited god. But evolution comes from knowing. Evolution comes from consciousness. In her desire to know her lover, to know her god, to relate to a true being rather than a projection, Psyche shines her light of consciousness and begins to see.

The creature that is revealed to her is not a serpent, not a monster, but “the kindest and sweetest of all wild beasts, Amor himself, fairest of gods and fair even in sleep, so that even the flame of the lamp, when it beheld him, burned brighter for joy and lightnings flashed from the razor’s sacrilegious blade.” (Neumann, *Amore and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine*, p. 25.)

Now we find ourselves at an historical moment, the moment when Psyche looks upon Eros. The Orphics have already told us that prior to this time anyone other than Night who looked upon the face of Eros was simply bewildered by his light. Remember that Eros is also Protogonos Phaeton, the “firstborn shining one.” He is Phanes, “he who appears” and “he who reveals.” He is the light of consciousness. As an archetype, Eros must be seen to represent the Self. Like the Self, Eros is complete, part masculine and part feminine. Like the Self, Eros is incomprehensible, unknowable. Like the Self, Eros has many forms. Like the Self, Eros must be known if mankind is to evolve, if mankind is to progress on the path of Self-discovery that is individuation. It is for this reason that Psyche can do what no mortal before her has done; she can see, she can begin to know Love and Consciousness. She can begin to know the Self.

Psyche gazes in awe and despair at the beautiful creature that is her husband and by accident she pricks herself with his arrow. Now consumed even more by her passion, but this time a passion for an incarnated being rather than an archetype, Psyche reaches for her lover and in doing so spills a drop of hot oil from the lamp onto his shoulder. The pain of the burn awakens Eros who immediately takes flight away from her betrayal.

Just a quick note on Eros' burn. Remember that Eros resisted Psyche's knowing him. For the gods, to be known is to be reduced in some way, to be wounded, to be burned. For the gods, being known is a sacrifice of the ouroboric nature of a true archetype. But what is gained from this sacrifice, this wounding, is an image, an image that promotes the process of consciousness. At the moment of burning, the God, Eros, becomes incarnated; he becomes finite and therefore vulnerable to Psyche. At the moment that Eros becomes incarnate, there is relationship.

Eros flees, but Psyche clings to and soars with him, holding on as long as she can and finally falling to earth, far away from their garden paradise.

[*Cupid and Psyche*, (in style of Bougereau)
By E. Medard? (1990-200?)
Image from: <http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~mjoseph/CP/cpanon.jpg>]

In her despair at being abandoned by Eros, Psyche throws herself into a nearby river. But that river fears to dishonor the wife of powerful Eros and lays her unharmed on a flowering bank. Nearby sits Pan, who tells Psyche to “address Amor, the mightiest of gods, with fervent prayer and win him by tender submission.” (Neumann, *Amore and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine*, p. 29.)

[Pan and Psyche,
Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones (1833-1898)
Image from: <http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~mjoseph/CP/panandpsych.jpg>]

In the language of the Greeks, the name Pan means “all,” a name that identifies this god with all the physical universe. The characteristics ascribed to Pan are dark, terror-awakening panic and the phallic sexuality of his half goat-half man aspect. He is the shepherd god of nature. Pan advises Psyche to pray to Amor. He advises the soul to seek out the aid of the Self.

Meanwhile, Eros flees from his pleasure garden to the house of his mother. In this action, Eros regresses back to being the little boy, the *Puer*, who runs home to Mama. Or in archetypal terms, we could say that the Self, as represented by Eros, after having been all too

briefly visualized and known, returns to the Ouroboric unconsciousness represented by the Great Mother.

Our heroine, abandoned by Love, wanders desperately in search of her husband. Eventually determined to face the cause of all her despair, Psyche goes to plead her case before Aphrodite herself.

[*Psyche at the Throne of Venus*, Edward Matthew Hale (1883)
Image from: <http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~mjoseph/CP/EMH1883.jpg>]

Venus has her handmaidens, Trouble and Sorrow, torment Psyche and then presents our heroine with a series of four tasks, each one more daunting than the one before.

[*The Labors of Psyche*,
by John Roddam Spencer Stanhope (1873).
Image from: <http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~mjoseph/CP/JRSS.jpg>]

For her first task, Psyche must sort and divide a huge pile of mixed seeds and grains. This is a task of discrimination, of carefully and painstakingly dividing one thing from another over and over again until the task is done. It requires persistence, patience, humility and painstaking attention to detail. It is like interpreting a dream sentence by sentence, interpreting a fairy tale symbol by symbol, separating contaminated archetypes from even more contaminated complexes, separating and sorting the various aspects of the animus or anima from shadow and persona. This repetitive and sorting work quite frequently is even less glamorous than those I have mentioned. This work includes preparing and filing a tax return, filling out insurance forms, balancing a checkbook, sorting socks, moping floors, all the sometimes thankless tasks that seem to never end.

And in accomplishing her unending task, Psyche is aided by ants. The ant is a small, humble creature whose actions are instinctive and collective. So here we have one of the paradoxical aspects of individuation. At times, and sometimes quite early on, the individuation process demands that we relinquish our sense of specialness, that we accept our collective responsibility humbly and instinctively. At times we must give up our overblown narcissistic attitudes, attitudes that are merely compensations for the intense feelings of inferiority generated by our narcissistic wounds. At these times we must humbly accept the attitude of the ant. We must accept our insignificance. We must bow our proud heads and backs to the unending task of sorting and dividing. We must get down to regular and boring work. (Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Problem of the PUER AETERNUS*, (Toronto, Canada, 2000), pp.16-17.)

At dawn the next day, Venus gives Psyche her second task. Psyche must gather the golden fleece from a herd of fierce and dangerous sheep. Again Psyche is so daunted by her task that she determines to cast herself down from the cliff that looms over the river. But in the riverbed is a green reed who whispers softly to Psyche:

“Psyche, racked though thou art by so many a woe, pollute not my sacred waters by slaying thyself thus miserably, nor at this hour approach those terrible sheep. For they borrow fierce heat from the blazing sun and wild frenzy maddens them, so that with sharp horns and foreheads hard as stone, and sometimes even with venomous bites, they vent their fury in the destruction of men. But till the heat of the noonday sun has assuaged its burning, and the beasts are lulled to sleep by the soft river breeze, thou canst hide thee beneath yonder lofty plane tree, which drinks of the river water even as I. And, when once the sheep have abated their madness, and allayed their anger, go shake the leaves of yonder grove, and thou shalt find the golden wool clinging here and there to crooked twigs.” (Neumann, *Amore and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine*, pp. 43-44.)

Psyche does as the gentle reed suggests and completes this second task. And once again Venus accuses Psyche of being aided by Eros.

The reed that advises Psyche in this second task is described in Apuleius' tale as “green reed, nurse of sweet music.” (Neumann, *Amor and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine*, p. 43.) That the reed is green is significant. A green reed is still growing, still alive. A green reed is pliant, capable of bending with the wind, capable of bending instead of breaking. It is this pliability, this feminine capacity for yielding that allows Psyche to safely complete the second task, the task of stealing golden fleece from the fierce and magic rams of the sun. The wool of these magic sheep is golden and reflects their masculine, solar nature. Their sharp horns, hard heads and venomous bites attest to the dangerousness of their maddened, masculine solar power. When the sun is at midday, his power is at its highest and his influence upon these rams is maddening. The rams represent a solar masculine principle, the principle of power. Their golden fleece reflects and manifests the central power of the sun itself. And when this power is its greatest, when the rams “borrow fierce heat from the blazing sun,” they take on an excess of that power. (Neumann, *Amor and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine*, p. 43.) They become intoxicated, maddened, frenzied by power. In our current language we might say that these rams have a power complex. And how is a woman to deal with a man who is maddened by an excess of power? If she is wise like Psyche, she will take the advice of the whispering green reed. She will wait patiently until the excess of power is tempered by the passage of time and by

the soothing feminine influence of nature. Psyche accepts the teaching of the wise and philosophic reed. She waits, observing the madness and decline of power. She avoids the heroic masculine method of confronting power with power and instead pursues an indirect, feminine method of patience and humility. And with her newly gained feminine wisdom she collects just enough, not too much, power from the trees. In doing this, Psyche shows that she is beginning to value herself; she is beginning to let go of some of her unhealthy self-destructive narcissism. She is able to meet her needs without being noticed, and by not being noticed she is able to survive.

Venus presents the third task as follows:

“Do you see the high mountain peak that crowns yonder lofty cliff, wherefrom the swarthy waves of a black stream flow down till, caught in the neighboring valley’s walled abyss, they flood the Stygian swamps...Go draw me icy water even from where on the high summit the fountains farthest waves well forth, and bring it to me with all speed in this small urn.” (Neumann, *Amor and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine*, p. 44.)

Saying this, Venus gives Psyche a small crystal jar. Psyche begins her climb to the mountain peak, but soon realizes the impossibility of her task. The rock is infinitely high, slippery and inaccessible. The stream itself is surrounded by fierce dragons “with long craning necks and eyes sworn to unwinking wakefulness, whose pupils keep watch forever and shrink not from the light. And even the very waters had voices that forbade approach.” (Neumann, *Amor and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine*, p. 45.) For this is the River Styx, goddess, stream of death and rebirth, and sudden death to any living mortal who touches her. Psyche is paralyzed with fear.

The River Styx is described as a circular stream that, like in an Escher painting, falls from a high mountain, disappears into the earth, circles Hades and returns to her source in the mountain again.

[M. C. Escher, *Waterfall*

Image from: <http://www.worldofescher.com/gallery/jpgs/P14.jpg>]

In this sense she is an Ouroboros, an emblem of eternal death and renewal.

[Ouroboros

Image drawn by Theodoros Pelecanos in Synosius.

Image from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Ouroboros.png#file>]

The waters of the River Styx are said to be deadly poison. Her voice warns those who approach of the danger. She is the vast, uncontainable, Ouroboric, ever flowing barrier between the opposites of life and death. She is the water of the unconscious. And what Aphrodite requires is “icy water” from this stream, a small amount to be contained in a crystal vessel.

But assistance comes again, this time in the form of a royal Eagle. Not just any eagle, some say this Eagle was the great god Zeus himself, just returning from his flight to Olympus where he had delivered Ganymede to become cupbearer to the gods. This royal Eagle assists the bride of Love by taking the crystal vessel and filling it with the sacred waters. Here, in the form of Zeus’ eagle, we see divine intervention, the grace without which mankind cannot hope to progress. (Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Golden Ass of Apuleius: The Liberation of the Feminine in Man*, (New York, 1992), p. 125.)

Like Ganymede, in this third task, Psyche is a cupbearer. Ganymede bore the cup of divine nectar for the gods. This sacred nectar, paired with sacred ambrosia, conveyed immortality to anyone who partook of them. Psyche’s elixir is also an elixir of immortality. The nature of this elixir will soon be revealed, but first I would like to continue with our discussion of the symbols contained in this task.

We can imagine the dramatic scene in which the Serpent/dragons guarding the Stygian waters are defeated and frustrated by the divine Eagle. The Eagle, a solar creature, opposes itself to the chthonic dragons.

[Eagle and Snake,
6th century mosaic flooring Constantinople, Grand Imperial Palace
Image from: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/thumb/a/ae/Byzantine_eagle2.jpg/200px-Byzantine_eagle2.jpg]

The eagle represents light, that which is solar, masculine and spiritual; while the dragons represent the dark, earthly, chthonic powers, matter, the feminine, and the instinctive. If the eagle represents light, the serpent often represents darkness. If the eagle, as the totem bird of the dominant god Zeus, represents good, the serpent represents evil. Whatever these two principles represent, their conflict is a conflict of opposites.

As the above figure demonstrates, in their continuous struggle with one another, the eagle and the serpent become entangled, united in one common image “together they are a totality, cosmic unity and the union of spirit and matter.” (Cooper, p. 58.) But there is yet another symbol to explore. Aphrodite requires a small amount of the cold icy water of the River Styx. Aphrodite requires a little death contained in the urn that is Psyche herself, the feminine vessel, a crystal vessel containing the River Styx, the essence of transition from one state to another, a crystal

vessel of transformation. So we have the opposites, and the union of opposites and a substance of transformation, a substance that, like the waters of the River Styx, allows for transition and passage from one opposed state to another. This substance of transformation and transition, this icy cold and crystal clear water of immortality is the transcendent function, the clear, cold and uncompromising symbol that unites the opposites into a third thing that becomes the solution of the conflict.

We may even say that Psyche herself is the transcendent function. She is the new archetypal image that unites god and man, past and future. She is the third thing that contains and combines the opposites of god and man, past and future; she is the *tertium quid* that contains and unites them both.

Here Psyche reveals the true significance of her name. She is the pure crystal and shining vessel that contains the uniting principle that is also herself as Soul. She is the soul, the psychopomp, the guide between life and death, the uniter of opposites, the bridge, the transcendent function. And as the Soul, Psyche goes to fulfill her last and most important task. She finds the way to the divinity that is the Self, she finds the way to Persephone.

Venus demands additional work from Psyche: "Take this casket and straightway descend to the world below... There present the casket to Proserpine and say, 'Venus begs of thee to send her a small portion of thy beauty, such at least as may suffice for the space of one brief day. For all her beauty is worn and perished through watching over her sick son.'" (Neumann, *Amor and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine*, pp. 46-47.)

Psyche is mortal and still alive; this fourth task is every bit as impossible as the previous three. Once more in despair, Psyche contemplates suicide. She goes to a high tower with plans to throw herself from it. But the tower speaks to her, and gives her very detailed advice.

All of Psyche's advisors up to this point have been creatures of nature, the god Pan, the helpful ant, the gentle reed, the brave eagle. But this final and extremely helpful counselor is a tower, a creation that in its complexity results from the knowledge, wisdom and intellect of man. The tower has both feminine and masculine attributes. As a structure that ascends toward heaven, the tower symbolizes the spiritual and intellectual masculine aspects. It is a phallic symbol. As a protective and containing structure the tower symbolizes the inaccessible, the feminine principle and virginity. (Cooper, p. 175.) So again we have a symbol that contains union of the opposites. The tower provides Psyche with detailed, logical and wise advice. This action of the tower manifests the highly evolved, far seeing masculine principles of intellect and knowledge. And by providing this information and advice, the tower gives the terrified and despairing Psyche

containment and the confidence to continue. He gives her the advice that will allow her to cross the boundary of hell and enter the realm of the dead.

The River Styx represents the boundary in our psyches between the sacred world of the archetypes and the profane world of our daily life. In our dreams we have a glimpse across this River Styx. In our dreams we see the distant land that we call the collective unconscious. But very few of us have the courage, the opportunity, or perhaps the misfortune to cross that boundary and to actually spend time in that shadowy and confusing realm. It is the realm of madness, the realm of divine inspiration, the realm of confrontation. It is not a place to enter lightly and not a place to enter without preparation. With the aid of the wise tower, Psyche has that preparation.

First the tower gives our heroine directions to a place where one can enter Hades. Then he instructs Psyche to take with her two cakes made of barley and mead, one in each hand, and two coins in her mouth.

Imagine Psyche with two barley-cakes, one in each hand, and two coins in her mouth. She can neither touch nor speak. These restrictions force Psyche to turn inward, to introvert. They force her to focus on herself, on her feelings, on her thoughts, on her internal and unconscious self.

The tower tells Psyche what she can expect as she makes her passage:

“And when thou hast traversed a good part of thy deathly journey, thou shalt meet a lame ass bearing wood and with him a lame driver who will ask thee to hand him a few twigs that have fallen from the load. But do thou speak never a word, but pass on thy way in silence. (Neumann, *Amor and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine*, pp. 47-48.)

[Man Loading Donkey with Firewood,
Diego Rivera, 1938.

Image from: <http://www.oceansbridge.com/oil-paintings/product.php?xProd=10283&xSec=2451>]

The ass is associated with humility, stupidity, stubbornness, poverty, and fertility. (Cooper, p. 16.) Lameness can mean castration, powerlessness. (Cooper, p. 95.) Psyche is a kind young woman. She is just the sort who would stop to help a lame man with his lame ass. After all he is not asking for much assistance, just that she pick up a few twigs that have fallen from the load. But we all know what it is like when we try to add twigs to a load of twigs. We put one on to the load and four or five or twenty more fall off. Who would not help a lame man with his lame ass? But the humility, stupidity, and poverty of the lame ass on which he rides are also associated with stubbornness and fertility. He will not change and he will multiply.

Psychic energy is a limited thing and at critical times in our lives, we have only enough for the task at hand. We have none to spare, not even for the smallest task. This is where Constructive Selfishness, a selfishness based upon a love of the Self, must be expressed. By not helping the lame man Psyche defies her natural generosity, her natural Christianity if you will and expresses an undeveloped aspect of herself. This is shadow work. It is not evil. It is the greatest good.

The tower continues with his advice to Psyche. He tells her she will then come to the River of the Dead where Charon waits to ferry across souls. Psyche is to give Charon one of the coins, but she must make sure that he takes the coin with his own hand directly from her mouth. (Neumann, *Amor and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine*, p. 48.)

Charon appears here as a bit of a curmudgeon, greedy and ill tempered. He demands his due. He is a ferryman, conducting souls from the condition of living to the condition of death, linking one phase of existence with another. According to Marie-Louise von Franz (Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Golden Ass of Apuleius: The Liberation of the Feminine in Man*, pp. 126-128.) Charon symbolizes the *transcendent function*. His insistence on getting his due reminds us that intrapsychic processes require energy, here symbolized by the coins. In antiquity, if a corpse did not have the necessary coin under its tongue its soul was forced to remain on the shore between the two worlds. This suspension between two realms is the agony of crucifixion, an agony that release from which often requires an excess of energy just at a time when one feels emotionally exhausted. It is essential that we not waste our energy on unnecessary speech, an action directed outward rather than inward. It is essential that we be silent and conserve our psychic energy.

[Psyche and Charon
John Roddam Spencer Stanhope (ca. 1873?)
Image from: <http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~mjoseph/CP/psycheandcharon.jpg>]

The tower goes on to tell Psyche that as she is crossing the River Styx, she will have yet other unpleasant confrontations:

“Likewise as thou crossest the sluggish river, a dead man that is floating on the surface will pray thee, raising his rotting hands, to take him into thy boat. But are thou not moved with pity for him, for it is not lawful.” (Neumann, *Amor and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine*, p. 48.)

[*The Soul Crossing the Styx*,
Edward Calvert (1844-1883) Image from: http://www.mythicjourneys.org/images/psyche_styx.jpg]

Here again Psyche must exercise her constructive selfishness. A corpse asks to be carried along with our heroine. But corpses are filled with disease. They contaminate. And contamination at this critical point of transition in Psyche's life would be disastrous. The advice of the tower continues:

“And when thou hast crossed the river and gone a little way farther, old weaving women, as they weave their web, will beg thee lend them the aid of thy hands for a little. But thou must not touch the web; it is forbidden. (Neumann, *Amor and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine*, p. 48.)

[*A Golden Thread*

J. M. Strudwick, 1890. Image from: <http://mythology.tonyarn.com/sisters/thefates.jpg>]

It is very tempting to assist in the weaving of fate. Especially when they are weaving *our* fate, and especially when we are engaged in a dark passage. It is critical, especially at the times of dark passage, that the ego resists the temptation to try and control her own destiny. At these darkest times we must have the courage and the faith to yield our destiny to fate, to trust the inevitability of the Self.

The tower warns Psyche that all these snares are set by Venus in the hope that Psyche will drop one of her barley cakes. Were she to do so, she would remain in Hades forever:

“For there is a huge hound with three vast heads, wild and terrible, that bays with thunderous throat at the dead, through they are past all hurt that he might do them...Bridle his rage by leaving him a cake to prey upon, and thou shalt pass him by with ease, and forthwith enter the very house of Proserpine. (Neumann, *Amor and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine*, p. 48-49.)

[Cerberus

By William Blake

Image from: <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/25/Cerberus-Blake.jpeg>]

The three-headed hound, Cerberus, brings to mind the triple aspect of Hecate who often is accompanied in her nightly wanderings by dogs. And Hecate brings to mind the Triple Goddess. Cerberus guards the entrance to hell. His three heads identify him as an agent of the ancient Great Goddess as does the nature of the cakes that satisfy his raging. The cakes with which Psyche calms Cerberus are made of barley and mead. Mead is an alcoholic drink made from honey. Honey and barley were ancient sacrificial gifts, gifts for the Great Goddess.

Cerberus warns us against regression into the Goddess' ancient Ouroboric realm. Mankind won consciousness at great price and sacrifice. To return to the unconscious realm means regression, a return to darkness, a passage into hell. But hell, the realm of Hades, the realm of Pluto, is also the realm of wealth. It is the hiding place of the pearl of great price. Sometime in our psychological development, we must return to the Goddess, we must re-enter the Ouroboric, all consuming, overwhelming unconsciousness in order to find the new thing, the new potential, the treasure that is our true self. Psyche pays homage to the Goddess and bravely enters her realm.

[Prosperine

By Dante Gabrielle Rossetti, 1874.

Isis by Peter Birkhauser, February, 1976.

Image from: http://www.appellations.com/Birkhauser/images/z14740011_jpg.jpg

Here we see two vastly different representatives of the Goddess Persephone. They are both correct. She is the beautiful and beloved daughter of Demeter, and she is the powerful and terrifying Queen of Hades.

Even as she reaches the house of Persephone, Psyche is not out of danger, for the Queen of Hell herself sets traps for our heroine. The Tower's warnings are again essential:

“She shall welcome thee with kind courtesy, bidding thee sit down and partake of a rich feast. But do thou sit upon the ground, and ask for coarse bread and eat it. Then tell wherefore thou hast come, take whatsoever shall be given thee and, returning back, buy off the hound's rage with the remaining cake. Then give the greedy mariner the coin thou hadst kept back and, when thou hast crossed the river, retrace thy former steps till thou behold once more yonder host of all the stars of heaven.” (Neumann, *Amor and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine*, p. 49.)

Persephone's story of her own abduction into hell is a warning about careless eating in the realm of the dead. It is a difficult and often necessary task to enter the dark realm of the unconscious, but we must watch what we eat. As a representative of the Great Goddess, Persephone would naturally be nurturing and generous, but what she offers is the food of hell, the sustenance of the unconscious realm. While in this realm it is all right to partake of basic sustenance, but to eat richly and drink deeply of the products of this realm would leave us satiated, and probably intoxicated, and in such a state we run the risk of remaining there forever. Psyche avoids this danger. She asks for and receives her treasure and makes her return from the realm of the dead.

[*Psyche in the Underworld*

After Paul Alfred de Curzon (c. 1840-1859).

Image from: <http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~mjoseph/CP/PaC.jpg>

And so far as Psyche's return is concerned, the tower offers our heroine one last piece of advice:

“But I bid thee, above all, beware that thou seek not to open or look within the casket which thou bearest, or turn at all with over-curious eyes to view the treasure of divine beauty that is concealed within.” (Neumann, *Amor and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine*, p. 49.)

Like her predecessor, Pandora, Psyche cannot resist the temptation of the unopened box, “Oh! What a fool am I, for I carry the gift of divine beauty and yet sip not even the least drop therefrom, even though by so doing I should win the grace of my fair lover.” (Neumann, *Amor and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine*, p. 50.)

[*Psyche Opening the Golden Box*

John William Waterhouse, 1903.

Image from: <http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~mjoseph/CP/waterh39.jpg>

And saying this, Psyche opens the casket and out of it come no beauty potent but a Stygian sleep which covers her like a thick cloud leaving her as still and lifeless as a sleeping corpse.

The treasure hard to find, the pearl of great price, the contents of Persephone's sacred casket, these treasures from the unconscious realm are of infinite value and tremendous power. Psyche cannot resist partaking of the beauty ointments of the gods. This is a type of inflation. The ointment is meant for goddesses only. The inflation produced in a mortal by such an anointing would be overwhelming. Von Franz says this about the situation, “Psyche is not killed but she falls into a complete unconscious state, into the state of the gods, and loses the feeling of her own individuality.” Psyche is overwhelmed by the collective unconscious. (Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Golden Ass of Apuleius: The Liberation of the Feminine in Man*, p. 132.) But Eros, having recovered from his wounds, flies to the side of his beloved Psyche.

[Cupid Gazing at Psyche

Sir Edward-Burne Jones

(Between 1865-1887).

Image from: http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~mjoseph/CP/burne_jones.jpg

Carefully Eros wipes the deadly sleep from Psyche and returns it to the casket. Then he wakes her with a prick from his arrow. He then sends her to complete this final task imposed by Aphrodite. Psyche's inflation would have destroyed her had it not been for the love and intervention of Eros. Inflation, a getting lost in the realm of the gods, takes us out of the day-to-day life of mortality and mankind. But love, relationship, Eros can bring us back.

As Psyche is taking the cask to her mother-in-law, Eros flies to Olympos where he requests the aid of Zeus, his father. Zeus, unable to resist his son's charm and ever mindful of Eros' power, grants his request. Zeus calls an assembly of all the gods and addresses them as follows:

“Gods whose names are written in the Muses' register, you all know right well, I think that my own hands have reared the stripling whom you see before you. I have thought fit at last to set some curb upon the wild passions of his youthful prime. Long enough he has been the daily talk and scandal of all the world for his gallantries and his manifold vices. It is time that he should have no more occasions for his lusts; the wanton spirit of boyhood must be enchained in the fetters of wedlock. He has chosen a maiden, and robbed her of her honor. Let him keep her, let her be his forever, let him enjoy his love and hold Psyche in his arms to all eternity.” (Neumann, *Amor and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine*, p. 52.)

Then great Zeus has Mercury bring Psyche up to heaven. When she arrives she is given ambrosia to drink. There was a great nuptial banquet in heaven and “fair Venus danced” (Neumann, *Amor and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine*, p. 53) at the party.

So Psyche became Eros' bride and soon a daughter was born to them and her name was Pleasure.

[Mother Playing with Her Child
Mary Cassatt. c. 1897.
Image from: <http://www.abcgallery.com/C/cassatt/cassatt47.JPG>]

The child of Eros and Psyche is not the immortal boy that was first predicted. This child is a girl and her name is Voluptas, sensuous lust, Pleasure. She is the *tertium quid*, the third thing derived from the union of Love and the Soul.

There is a bit of sadness when we realize that Psyche after all her struggle and transformation is no longer in the realm of mankind. She is now an immortal. Jungians repeatedly insist that the individuation process is an ongoing process, an adventure, a journey that

is never completed. We insist that our own personal individuation is finished only at the time of our death. But if we are successful in our journey, we join the realm of the Immortals.

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