

Trust and Betrayal in Love

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*Love is the dynamism that most infallibly brings
the unconscious to light*

— C.G. Jung

The topic of this article originates from a question that was asked after my June lecture on *Love as an Agent of Change*. Referring to the part of the *Eros and Psyche* story where the lovers come together in the magical palace and Eros forbids Psyche to see him or speak of him, the questioner asked “Why does the god Eros not want to be seen?” As I tried to answer the question, I found myself wandering farther and farther away from any meaningful answer, as though I, myself, was not supposed to *see* or *know*. The night after the lecture, I was aware when I awoke several times in the middle of the night that my mind was really working with the question. What did I not want to see? What could I not see?

The myth of *Eros and Psyche* is a story of an awakening soul, yet the god is asking not to be seen or spoken of. On the surface, the purpose seems designed to perpetuate the idyllic, magical state between the lovers. And we know from the story that when the god is eventually exposed, he vanishes. How are we to understand this? Is Eros deceiving Psyche? Is it a big set-up? Is the god’s entreaty a call to remain ignorant of the fullness of love?

I am reminded immediately that sweet deceptions are the leitmotif of love and that the paradoxes of love are always pulling us in different directions, often at the same time. Also that this contradictory and paradoxical nature is the most striking feature of Eros. His charmed bow is armed with twin arrows, one aimed at happiness, the other at life’s confusions.

Many people who have written about the myth interpret the taboo as a warning of the greater mystery that cannot yet be contained by an immature psyche. We find the theme in many myths and fairy tales. Infringement of the taboo usually turns out to be an initiating event and a move into a fuller consciousness, even though it is initially experienced as a loss or a be-

trayal.

Psyche comes to know Eros in the dark, which suggests a kind of blindness or unconsciousness. We are told that it is a time of bliss and great joy. We can all relate this part of the story to those times when we have fallen in love and experienced that state of euphoria, when we give ourselves in complete trust to another. On an external level, we can experience this state with a person, with a job or organization, or with a new way of life. On an internal level, it represents the hidden regions of our soul, the place of imagination and creativity. This time of magical thinking is vital to our psychic life. It often has no language and cannot be talked about. And in fact, often should not be talked about. Consider, for example, the importance of the incubation of a tender, unformed thought or intuition in a creative project. How often has that infant idea been crushed by talking about it before it matures? Or how often has an intuitive insight dissolved when exposed too soon to a logical examination? Or how often has the creativity of an inner drama been aborted if talked about too soon? And what could possibly be more painful than having one’s image of a new lover and the accompanying fantasies dissected before it is time?

Some things need to be held in the dark for a while before being exposed to the light. A personal experience taught me the importance of this fact. While I was in Zurich, I had a dream that consisted of a single symbol. It was a numinous experience and held a lot of energy. When I shared it with my analyst, he simply asked me questions to deepen the experience. I walked away with such gratitude that he simply honored the dream and did not try to analyze it or examine it too closely. In this way, I was able to hold on to the power and energy of the symbol that emanated from that deep layer of my unconscious.

This is the great mystery of creation. Under the cover of darkness, the erotic quickening that is so necessary to the creative process takes place. In this space, masculine and feminine energies come together and ideas form, separate and exist in a timeless, effortless flow.

James Hillman, in his book *The Myth of Analysis* writes about the twin aspects of Eros, the inhibiting and the driving force. The inhibiting force, he says, “delays, heightens tension and expands imaginative possibility...the indirect movement is not a pattern of flight, though it may be intertwined with the reflective. It is not, essentially, a bending-back or a turning-away from the object; it is rather a continued advance upon it, but indirectly, and with a different timing...” This inhibiting component holds back life and leads into the “invisible realms below and beyond mere life, endowing it with the meaning of the soul given by death.”

But there is a time to bring things into the light and the driving force of Eros pushes us to reach for the lamp. What emerges from our depths has to be translated into everyday language and experience. The taboo that Eros imposes on Psyche implies and requires the transgression. Psyche must break the taboo, just as Eve must eat the apple from the tree in the Garden of Eden, or as the innocent girl must open the door in Bluebeard’s castle. If Psyche says yes to Eros’ demand forever, or buys into the secrecy pact, she closes the door to further reflection and consciousness. Her disobedience and betrayal of the pact, which seems self-destructive at first, has a prospective function for individuation.

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Don Huntley—photo, Brookgreen Gardens

I'm reminded of those times when we "look the other way" because we don't want to see something. If we dare to look, we are forced to confront an other, be it an-other opinion, an-other who is different from us, an-other side of ourselves. Then we must bear the tension created by the opposites. Although the interaction between the opposites may torment one, it provides the secret energy source of life.

Eros awakens the psyche by exposing it to its divisive nature. This is how it brings us to an awareness of its archetypal background. Progression constellates regression, love constellates death. One side constellates the other, thereby giving the soul its yearning for union and wholeness. This is the creative aspect of Eros that functions as synthesizer and intermediary, bringing two realms together. We can all recognize this movement in any creative endeavor where we are inspired, enthusiastic, and full of imaginative possibilities and at the same time fearful, blocked and critical.

Eros always constellates idealizations that need to be counterbalanced. By breaking the taboo, Psyche initiates the emergence of the opposite pole of the creative impulse. Without the interplay with erotic destruction, Psyche remains virginal. The destructive aspects of love make us aware of the gaps in our personalities, of the unhealed aspects.

From the moment of conception, it is inevitable that we will be betrayed and that we will betray. Our first experience of betrayal, of being thrust out of the womb, leaves an indelible mark on our psyches and forms a recurring theme in our lives. We live with the illusion that this basic betrayal will be corrected in our love relationships. Every time we fall in love we are reenacting the lost wholeness that goes back to our

earliest moments and the loss of our primary object, the first love of our lives in whom we put absolute faith. But in the course of our infancy, that faith is inevitably shattered. This is an impossible faith and a blind trust from which we need to be liberated. Love ignites the dream of recovering the original love object and our early trust and it is only when we understand that the loss has already occurred that the journey to a fuller and more mature love can begin. Even when genuine betrayal occurs, we have an opportunity to understand that it isn't necessarily the beloved who is betraying us. It is the betrayer in ourselves that holds on to the illusion.

We relive this primary emotion in every relationship and encounter every loss as if it were the first. If we can work through the sense of abandonment and isolation, it can make us aware of the impossibility of being fulfilled by another. Loss and betrayal always brings feelings of failure and raises questions about oneself. What did I do or not do? The

idea that one's own inadequacy caused the separation is unbearable and difficult to live with, because the meaning and value of one's being have been challenged. But for the psyche to bring to birth what it carries, it must suffer the loss of these betrayals.

There is no betrayal more wounding than the betrayal of love. It touches us in our most vulnerable spot, that of the helpless child who is totally dependent on another. This child always emerges in any relationship where there exists the possibility of trusting in another person. I once witnessed a mother duck waiting for her baby ducks to jump out of a nest that was situated in a very high tree. I will never forget the squawking of the last reluctant duck who did NOT want to jump. When the mother bird finally gave up on him and started to walk away, PLOP! He leaped. Betrayed by his mother and stunned by the fall, he then moved into life, taking his place at the end of the line as they moved into and across the lake. At those times when relationships fail to live up to our expectations, we too fall to earth with a PLOP! But such experiences may actually be a nudge to wake us up to the realities of life.

In the myth, the oracle of Apollo decrees that Psyche is to become the bride of Death. Experiencing a betrayal is like experiencing a death. One's naiveté and innocence are put into question and the capacity to trust is challenged. Hillman suggests that real trust can't, in fact, truly be realized without betrayal. He also makes the point that naiveté and trust are not necessarily the same thing. Before a betrayal we may be oblivious to the risks involved in trusting. It is only after we have experienced betrayal that we can fully know the risks and trust anyway. This is true trust, one that is grounded in our experience of betrayal, acknowledgement and grief for what has been lost. Rilke writes: "*only from the side of death is it possible to*

do justice to love.”

Love itself creates a taboo, an uneasy fear that something destructive may happen. We know that we are entering into an uncertain, unpredictable terrain. We're afraid to love. We're afraid not to love. We're afraid in love, always looking for reassurance, for signs that will tell us it is safe or secure. But just as we sense the taboo, we also sense that we have the courage to break the taboo. When we manage to be a transgressor and do something in the face of fear, we choose our own direction and become aware of our own existence. This necessarily creates apprehension and fear. Love and fear go together because they both pass that threshold into the unknown.

Hillman again helps us see the bigger picture by reminding us about the wise council of our fears and doubts. Fear arouses the psyche to become aware of its fantasies, moods and feelings. By containing the tension, the psyche can differentiate its psychological aims and needs. Fear also serves to regulate the erotic compulsions. This is why we can actually trust love, because it contains its own regulator in the interplay between the polarities. This means, however, that we must listen and trust the movements of the psyche and the process of love. In his book *A Secret Symmetry*, Aldo Carotenuto recounts something Jung wrote to Sabina Spielrein in a letter in which he said that it was not in him to love except for love's own sake, without any other motive, without the need of justifying his behavior, without the need of promising anything. Carotenuto exclaims that "these are words to sign one's name to without hesitation." He then goes on to pose the question: "What sense is there in loving only when you can have total confidence?"

Eros' taboo and Psyche's betrayal of the taboo must be seen within a larger perspective. So must the betrayals that we encounter in our lives. Psyche's movement out of an infantile state

of love and experience of loss and betrayal transforms the initial union into something greater. This is our challenge too. If we refuse to love for fear of betrayal, or if we set ourselves up as victims and judges when we've been betrayed, we miss the possibility for change. The loss of innocence makes way for the transformation of the initial tie. Loving always brings risk and seeking assurances that one will not be betrayed is an infantile demand. Relationships cannot in themselves heal the basic betrayal and ache of being a separate individual.

Eros' taboo becomes the driving force toward which Psyche searches for her own truth. How then, do we experience the god's taboo in our everyday lives? Where do we hear the inhibiting "don't look" or "don't speak" in our own experiences? When do we hear that inner voice of warning? Perhaps we can recognize that still small voice in our own moments of frenetic "doing", telling us about the importance of just "being". Or perhaps we hear the voice in those moments of fear, of closing, or of caution. The inhibiting "no" is probably there when we fail to give voice or form to our creative ideas; when we hold ourselves back in relationships; when we ask for reassurances or when we fail to act in the face of deeply felt convictions.

The Self is always urging us to overcome our unconsciousness. The ego's job is to listen to that inner voice and determine when it is time to pick up the lamp and shine the light into the darkness. To experience the whole spectrum of life, we are sometimes required to be deviant. If one does not live up to an inner possibility it may become destructive. Do we have the courage to become transgressors when the time is right? To give voice to those unspoken thoughts and ideas? To walk into that unknown terrain and open ourselves to love's challenges and dilemmas? In his poem "What Hurts The Soul", Rumi writes:

*What hurts the soul?
To live without tasting
The water of its own essence*

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