

Introduction

I first encountered the Jungian interpretations of the Roman myth, Amor and Psyche, in the 1970's when I was new to Jungian psychology. The texts included Erich Neumann's book *Amor and Psyche: the Psychic Development of the Feminine*, published in the 1950's;ⁱ Marie Louise von Franz's *The Golden Ass of Apuleius: The Liberation of the Feminine in Man*, in 1970;ⁱⁱ and Robert Johnson's *She!: A contribution to understanding Feminine Psychology*, in 1976.ⁱⁱⁱ Psyche, therefore, became a model for "feminine development" or a model of a man's anima in Jungian scholarship.

This classical research was based on three chapters of the novel *The Golden Ass* of 2 C.E. by Lucius Apuleius. He recorded his version of the myth using the Roman name of the god: Amor. In the book, an old woman, servant to robbers in a cave, tells the story to soothe a young woman whom the robbers had kidnapped from her betrothed. Apuleius' journey as the protagonist of the novel leads to his initiation into the mysteries of Isis and Osiris.

Reviewing this literature in 2015, I find the classical examinations formulaic in their blanket application of the Jungian concepts of anima and animus. They also adhere to the conventionality of traditional gender roles as Jung defined them, that is "feminine" as eros, "masculine" as logos, (ironic, given that Eros/Amor is a male god!) Erich Neumann also defines the feminine as the unconscious and the masculine as consciousness. These gender definitions are limited and dated.

While much of the archetypal discussion in these scholars' interpretations has validity, especially within the Greek and Roman cultures, the individual woman as female gets lost in the lofty (even brilliant) use of Jungian principles. As an example, these scholars do not take up the embodied fact of Psyche's pregnancy as a psychological factor during the course of her initiatory challenges. The real experience of gestation, either literal or symbolic, and its effect on a woman and her psyche is therefore buried in the avalanche of archetype and symbol. For the myth to have relevance for a contemporary woman, her cultural and particular life circumstance must be revealed. A woman in the 21st century ostensibly has choices about her sexuality, her career, mothering, marrying or living an independent life.

Looked at psychologically as an inner journey, the myth of Amor and Psyche opens the possibility for a woman to develop within her life style choices. This paper examines a unique situation in which a woman painter discovered the myth and intuitively enacted her own inner journey to realize her mature feminine identity by painting the story. By femininity I mean the archetypal core of woman-identified womanhood that includes a woman's femaleness and the inner conflicts that she encounters in defining her identity.

The Painting Amor and Psyche or The Journey

The Tucson artist Lynn Taber painted *Amor and Psyche or The Journey* in 1979. Through our friendship, I introduced her to Jungian psychology, and she

discovered the myth which took on a life of its own in her psyche. Her encounter with the myth came during a period of time in her late 30's when she was questioning her identity as an artist, feeling tensions within her marriage, and reflecting on whether to have a child. The myth and its meaning have continued to resonate throughout her life.

Taber had been lauded as an emerging star in the art world for some years after college and graduate school at The Art Institute of Chicago. At her sculptor husband's initiative, the couple moved across country to Tucson, Arizona, where she found herself feeling isolated in a new environment. Taber became depressed for three years and found it difficult to make art. Contributing to her paralysis was an emotional alienation from her husband, who had withdrawn from her in the wake of his mother's death, and the loss of three of his male relatives in small airplane crashes within two years. Taber's conflicts about her ongoing emotional dependency on her family of origin added to the marital discontent.

After a long period of studying the myth of Amor and Psyche in many versions, Taber began making sketches for a painting. While she was drawing, her hands began to blister. Tests revealed that she had a genetic disposition for a disease called *porphyria cutanea tarda*, which had been activated by her long term use of a birth control pill. Consequently, Taber executed much of the painting on canvas with her hands bandaged. This physical handicap became part of the personal ordeal she endured as she explored the myth through her painting.

The Myth

There once were a king and queen who had three daughters; the eldest is soon married off, but the youngest, Psyche, is so beautiful that people begin to worship her as a goddess, a second Venus. The true Venus is angry that her divine honors are now bestowed on a mortal maiden. She sends her son Amor, the god of love, to punish the girl: *“Cause the maid to be consumed with passion for the vilest of men...”*^{iv} Meanwhile, since no man has dared to ask for her hand, Psyche’s father consults the oracle of Apollo at Delphi and receives the answer that he should deliver Psyche, dressed in bridal finery, to a cliff where a dragon bridegroom will come to her. With great lamentation on the part of the people, the sacred oracle is fulfilled and Psyche goes to meet her doom. But Amor pricks himself with his own arrow and falls in love with Psyche himself. He sends the West Wind to carry her to a castle where he makes her his lover. Psyche enjoys every material luxury (served by unseen hands) and Amor’s nightly visits to her bed, but she is lonely and perplexed at the condition her “bridegroom” imposes for this life: *“Do not seek to know who I am...”*

After a time, Psyche’s two sisters come to see what has happened to her, and when Psyche generously shows them her home and gives them gifts, they become envious. Amor warns Psyche about her sisters’ evil intent and tells her *“...speak not at all with them.. or at least give neither ear nor utterance to anything concerning your husband. Even now your womb, a child’s as yet, bears a child... If you keep our secrets in silence, the child will be a god; if you profane them, mortal.”*^v But Psyche, in her loneliness and innocence, insists on entertaining her

sisters. They trick Psyche, and convince her that her husband must be a hideous serpent. They persuade her to take a dagger and a lamp one night to see for herself. When Psyche lights the lamp, she sees the beautiful god of Love—and in her awe of his beauty, she pricks herself with one of his arrows and falls in love with Love. At this moment, a drop of oil spills from the lamp, burns Amor and awakens him. Seeing his secret betrayed, he leaps from the couch, abandons Psyche, and flies wounded back to the house of his mother, Venus.

The remainder of the myth takes up Psyche's search for her beloved. It details her despair and her triumphs as she entreats the goddesses Ceres and Juno for help, then goes to Venus herself. Venus, furious at her son's disobedience, sets Psyche four tasks—to sort a mound of seeds; to gather the wild rams' golden fleece; to collect water from the River Styx; and to fetch a jar of beauty cream from Persephone/Proserpine in the underworld—all of which Psyche accomplishes through great hardship. In the end, she is reunited with her husband and married to him on Olympus. Zeus grants her immortality and she gives birth to a daughter named Joy or Pleasure.

Psyche's Pregnancy

When Taber chanced upon the myth, it spoke to both her inner and outer life. She entered the myth already feeling the loss of eros or passion for her work and in her marriage. Eros had flown; she felt abandoned and lost. Although she had found a psychiatrist and begun taking anti-depressants, her creative life and her marriage still felt empty.

Dreams like this one told her, however, that a psychological/spiritual pregnancy had already taken place.

I felt my stomach bulging. I saw red and blue lines on it. I knew I was pregnant. Then out popped a disc like a hard-cooked flattened egg inserted in my vagina. I feel good about being pregnant.

In the dream, the egg looked like a diaphragm; it popped out, removing an obstacle to pregnancy, yet it was also the ovum with its potential. Like Psyche in the myth, something had been seeded in the dark, in the painter's unconscious.

The central motif of Psyche's pregnancy holds the inner mystery through her initiatory ordeal. All her labors or tasks are related to, originate from, and have physical corollaries to her psychic development during her journey. Forced into exile, pregnant Psyche is forced to redefine herself without her husband's approval or her family's support. Abandoned by Amor, initially she abandons her own self-worth. She becomes suicidal because she is unusually sensitive to the precarious edge between life and death. But as a pregnant woman she is also undergoing the internal reorganization of psyche and body that is necessary, biologically and psychologically, to mother a newborn. Through her labors she gains a sense of her own feminine centrality and accomplishes the tasks which lead her back to her mate. Psyche is both pregnant with herself as an individual and bodily pregnant with a daughter of her own.

Many women in psychotherapy dream of being pregnant or giving birth to a daughter as they are evolving into their own mature femininity. These dreams suggest that a woman has been fertilized by the masculine spirit or numen, the generative seed, by love or Eros. Internally, something has impregnated her, taken hold: an idea, a problem, a neurosis, a suffering, a longing for something to develop, to be different.

Taber felt called to paint the myth. The composition that she designed is a 43-inch square heavy linen canvas, and consists of thirty-six 6x6 inch squares which illustrate the myth in successive rows. She faced challenges in the complicated format: number of squares; the interlacing weave of sand colored verticals and horizontals, the whole framed in sienna. The paint is gold leaf metallic--copper, bronze and gold; and acrylic paint-- desert tones of purple, mauve, sand. The images shimmer. During the preparatory stage, Taber meticulously thought out and sketched the division of space, color choice and design elements

Although the myth can be read from left to right beginning at the top left corner, the uniformity of the squares, the balance of colors, and the weaving pattern between the squares encourage the eye to enter the painting at any square and to travel in any direction. The viewer can also focus on one image with the exclusion of the others. This visual dynamic mirrors the process of consciousness emerging during psychotherapy. The patient glimpses an insight, then another and another, often seemingly unconnected. Larger pictures come into view over time. The visual complexity also mirrors the seemingly random way that initiatory

patterns in dreams and in one's life appear as one is individuating. Taber unconsciously created this reflection of the unconscious.

Looked at as a whole, paradoxically, the painting is extraordinarily *ordered*. This is striking, not only because of the intricacy of the design, but because the myth begins with cosmic disorder. The goddess of love, Venus, is being ignored in favor of a mortal girl. *As a result, nobody took the trouble to visit Venus' shrines at Cyprian Paphos or Carian Cnidos or even in the isle of Cythera where her lovely foot first touched dry land; her festivals were neglected, her rites discontinued, the cushions on which her statues had been propped at her sacred temple feasts were kicked about the floor, the statues themselves were left without their usual garlands, her altars were unswept and cluttered with the foul remains of months-old burned sacrifices, her temples allowed to fall into ruin. And Venus says, "Really now whoever would have thought that I'd be treated like this? I am the world's lovely Venus whom the philosophers call 'the Universal Mother' and the original source of the five elements!"*^{vi}

The theme of disorder is repeated in the myth, especially with regard to the female deities. Restoring order, or sorting, becomes Psyche's first task. The disorder in Taber's psyche as she prepared this canvas for painting included feeling devalued by the world as an artist. Her husband's work had immediately been affirmed upon their arrival in Tucson; he had been invited to show his sculpture and asked to jury many shows. In the 70's female artists received less

attention than men. Or they were trivialized as “women artists” in a less-than category. She dreamed:

I am chosen to do some task with my hands. It is an honor but right before I am supposed to do it, the people in charge say my hands are too small. I am very hurt but understand. I don't like these people; they are selfish and mean. I feel I need attention and sympathy for having been removed from the task. Someone else was now going to do it. I feel ignored and neglected.

Matrilinear Origins of Psyche's Journey

During the forty years of my analytic practice, I have worked with women who also have relived Psyche's journey toward becoming woman-identified instead of being “other,” (often “man”) directed. Psyche's rite of passage reaches back to the matrilineal or woman-centered spiritual cultures of pre-history, yet remains within the context of her love for a man. Modern women in psychotherapy also touch their matrilineal origins, at the same time as they try to recreate valued relationship to the men in their lives on a more equal basis. So the myth reaches both back in history and forward in time, with meaning for modern women and men.

In the analytic container, the personal history of the individual, the cultural time of the present, the cultural time of the past and archetypal time intersect to create the ritual of healing and initiation that takes place. In reaching back, the relationship between Psyche and Venus comes to the fore in the myth. Venus

symbolizes the denied or rejected feminine value, the goddess presence or force from the Homeric Age and earlier Neolithic and Paleolithic time. Spurned, she exacts vengeance from the daughter, here her daughter-in-law-to-be, Psyche, who in her unconscious identification with the father, then with Eros as lover, both of whom she initially obeys, has not respected the larger forces of life which Venus represents.

A woman's experience in psychotherapy parallels the myth when she is forced to confront the repressed, spurned feminine aspect of herself, who may have turned into a persecuting witch. The rejected feminine within her then spurs her to undergo a psychological initiation which prepares her for womanhood. Through the accomplishment of her psyche-like tasks she re-establishes a connection to feminine centrality. She develops her feminine ego and re-connects to an archetypal feminine entity, her Self.

This development usually occurs through a woman's inner relationship to negative and positive archetypal feminine forces which have been forced underground for centuries. Venus' odd behavior in the myth is a consequence of that repression. As the myth says, *"Now it was to a girl men prayed, and it was in the worship of mortal beauty that they sought to appease the power of the great goddess."* Venus is enraged. In Taber's dream, she feels ignored and neglected. She is both Venus and Psyche, the ancient goddess spurned and the girl trying to grow up.

The repression of the archetypal feminine was far older than our Apuleian tale. Even Aphrodite, the Hellenic antecedent of our Roman Venus, is a patriarchally reduced version of an ancient Aphroditic mother-goddess of the Eastern Mediterranean, the personification of the generative powers of nature. Likewise, Hera, the Roman Juno, was the cow-eyed sky goddess of women and fecundity who antedated her husband Zeus, the Roman Jove. And the Greek Demeter (in our tale Ceres) was the ancient barley goddess associated with death as well as fertility. All three--Aphrodite, Hera and Demeter-- were powerful goddesses who stood alone. When patriarchal tribes from the North came down into Greece, these previously independent mother goddesses were married off or subjugated to male gods. Aphrodite was married to Hephaestus, Hera to Zeus, and Demeter was raped by Poseidon.

The goddesses then became culturally influenced archetypal images of human females as envisioned by males. Characteristics desirable to men were distributed among a number of females rather than leaving them concentrated in one being. The statesman Demosthenes said, in the fourth century B.C., "We have mistresses for our enjoyment, concubines to serve our person, and wives for the bearing of legitimate offspring."^{vii} This Olympian pattern has survived as the patriarchal ideal. I am using the term patriarchy to mean a ruling system or structure of "fathers" whose primary mode is domination over others.

A modern woman is frustrated with implicitly being asked to choose between being a frivolous sex-object like Aphrodite, a respectable wife-mother like Hera,

or an intellectual, asexual career women like Athena. These are trivialized versions of previously powerful goddesses who embodied the life and death forces of nature. But if the characteristics of the major goddesses were recombined, a female being with unlimited potential for development would emerge. And the feminine divinity would include birth, death, and regeneration.

In the context of moving forward in time toward a real relationship, the story is framed by the union of Amor and Psyche, each one unconscious of the other's identity at the beginning of the tale. For a modern woman, one condition of this reuniting is that she withdraw her projection of power from the men in her life. Psyche's initiation or individuation reunites her as an equal partner with Amor. At the end of the story, Psyche's status is changed from that of mortal to goddess; she and Amor have become equals. In Taber's case, she was seeking a reconnection to her muse, to eros/Eros, as well as reconnection to her husband.

Each of Psyche's tasks alludes to the matrilineal origins with which she has to reconnect, both to become a mother and to develop as an individual. Each task also alludes to the patriarchal culture that already oppressed women in the second century A.D. when Apuleius recorded the tale. The myth shows Psyche negotiating—or being forced to negotiate by Venus—between her matrilineal past and her patriarchal present. Being pregnant, creating new life, makes Psyche the physical embodiment of transformation and the link in her feminine matrilineal line between one generation and another. Being pregnant also helps her accomplish her tasks.

The Theme of Initiation

Psyche's initiation in the myth has many elements of those in menarche rituals throughout the world. Venus, in negative form, is the older woman companioning the initiate through her ritual of coming to adulthood. Menarche ceremonies involve physically demanding tasks (grinding corn, ritual dancing, running races, picking saffron) and challenges of discipline (isolation, fasting, obeying taboos) and instruction, usually by the elders of the group. Ceremonies also involve receptive rituals such as elaborate adorning of the initiate's body. Psyche accomplishes many seemingly impossible tasks. The teachers that help her come mostly from nature. Psychologically, the plants and animals who instruct her are her own instinctual energies aroused by her pregnant state. At the end, she reaches for the adornment that is rightfully hers and her husband returns to her.

Psyche learns self-control and endurance and comes to an attitude of hope instead of despair—things which are necessary for individuality, maturity, responsible child rearing and relationship. But unlike a Navajo or Ancient Theran initiate, for instance, who is supported by the community in her rite of passage, Psyche has to do it alone using only her inner resources. Her journey is book-ended by an act of disobedience. With this defiance, she succeeds in separating from the unconscious life that was dictated for her. So too, a woman in psychotherapy has to defy collective expectations and forge an often lonely path to individuation.



Square 1 Taber symbolizes VENUS with the image of WAVES. As the myth says, Venus is “*the goddess who sprang from the blue deep of the sea and was born from the spray of the foaming waves.*” Originally, Aphrodite’s journey to Athens from the East was mythologized as a sea birth. The sea is also the collective unconscious, the mother of all things. Here the shell alludes to Aphrodite’s birth on a scallop shell and to the conch shell sounded when she approaches, which prefigures a later square in which Psyche is symbolized by a small conch shell. Through this imagery, the artist establishes the relationship between the two women—the goddess and the mortal—a relationship that becomes critical in any female initiation. The painter was unconsciously searching for that initiatory feminine experience while studying the myth. By painting the story, she

distinguished herself as an artist, rescuing herself from the depression that was thwarting her work.



Square 2 PSYCHE is represented as the “*earthborn beauty*,” as a PURPLE FLOWER blessed by the rays of the sun. The myth says, “*heaven had rained fresh procreative dew, and earth, not sea, had brought forth as a flower, a second Venus in all the glory of her maidenhood.*” The precipitant for the action in the myth is mankind’s neglect of Venus, goddess of love, light, and laughter. Meanwhile, “*Psyche, for all her manifest beauty, had no joy of her loveliness... she sat at home an unwedded maid, sick of body and broken in spirit, bewailing her loneliness and solitude, loathing in her heart the loveliness that had charmed so many nations.*” This is an apt description of many women I have

seen in psychotherapy whose alienation from the cultural standards of achievement and beauty or even, paradoxically, whose high accomplishment in those very standards leave them *“sick of body and broken in spirit.”* Taber mourned her sense of emptiness with self doubting thoughts: *“Am I capable of being truly productive? Why am I procrastinating?”*



Square 3 This is the ROAD Psyche took, followed by mourners, when she was led up to the cliff for her marriage. Taber represents it as an empty road to the top of the rocky cliffs. Marriage as death was one theme in the Eleusinian mysteries, memorialized in friezes of the funeral banquet of Hades and Persephone. The hidden reality in this ancient motif was the threat to the girl of dying in childbirth. Girls were married off shortly after menarche, even though it was known that teenage pregnancy often led to the death of the young mother.

On the archetypal level, marriage as death commemorated Persephone's descent to the realm of the dead, her encounter with the dark other in Hades and her destiny of becoming Queen in the underworld. Psyche's journey begins here, but the allusion to marriage as death also intimates a rebirth. The archetype of marriage as death is still active in modern women's psyches. In the painter's psyche, the combination of her inability to make art, her loneliness and her husband's depression resulted in her sense of living a lifeless marriage.

One woman I saw in psychotherapy had the following dream on the eve of her marriage:

I have died. My coffin is sitting there. They want me to get into the coffin; I don't want to. They are placing photographs of everyone I have known in and on the coffin. I realize I am both in the coffin, about to be buried, and also standing beside it saying, "Please, no." I am sad. My lover is standing beside me. I am saying good-bye to myself. I wake up crying. ^{viii}



Square 4 Here is the BOW of Eros, the god spirit of love and passion who awaits her at the top of the cliff to create the bond to Psyche. Taber uses a twisted ROPE, its two ends floating as they come to meet one another to symbolize their union.



Square 5 CLIFFS with the WEST WIND that caught and carried her to the castle.



Square 6 EROS, symbolized by glorious WINGS, comes to Psyche. The landscape in these images is the painter's internalized design of the desert in which she is living. The two large rocks here, edged with gold and the lush prickly pear are Taber's image of the castle in which Psyche will be living, alone, tended by unseen hands. Taber had recently moved to a new home high on a mountain above the city, a stone block house, that her husband had designed and helped build into the rocky cliff site. She, like Psyche, was in a beautiful home, almost inaccessible to others. A removed setting is often the stage for the beginning of an initiation. In the initial stage of some menarche rituals, the girl is secluded and is visited by spirits, demonic or heavenly. Here Psyche is contained and entranced by her ghostly lover or spirit. Taber, alone in her studio aerie, labored to paint.



Square 7 THE UNION OF EROS AND PSYCHE

As long as Psyche does not seek to see her husband's face, she enjoys her captivity. Psychologically, this idyllic state lasts as long as Psyche is willing to ignore her own development, to remain unconscious of her own identity as well as his. The ancient Greek myth of Eros and Psyche played a part in the Orphic Mysteries around 600BCE, symbolizing the marriage of the feminine soul, Psyche and the masculine love Eros. An image depicting their marriage shows both of them heavily veiled, suggesting a dual initiation.^{ix} The veiling also signifies dedication to their union and its archetypal purpose of creating new life. Psychologically, being veiled would also signify their unconsciousness of one another as individuals, their submission to a collective way. The painter represents the union in an erotic and spiritual way. A vulvular open shape

receives the fertilizing semen of her unseen lover. As Taber painted, she brought the myth into her body: feeling inseminated by Eros.



Square 8 The SERPENT of doubt cast by Psyche's sisters, who envy her seemingly paradisaical situation. In antiquity, Eros was often represented by a dragon or snake. Psyche has already been impregnated by her lover; she is decidedly ambivalent. The painter renders the snake as both threatening and seductive, with phallic insinuations. The sisters are Psyche's suspicious shadows, failing to share her joy in pregnancy. Early pregnancy is often a time of doubt for a woman. While her body is dramatically shifting and reorganizing itself to contain the developing embryo, her psyche is undergoing simultaneous change. During pregnancy a woman often wonders: *How will I manage my career and*

my time with my baby? Will I ever have time for myself, for my own creativity, for my husband? Does my husband love me for myself or only as the mother of his child? Who am I and who am I becoming? Such anxious thoughts can serve then as impulses toward change, and often a deepening of intimacy with her partner.

Pregnancy, like therapy, predisposes a woman to change. Taber had many dreams of being pregnant, and dreams in which she feared being pregnant. She and her husband had originally decided not to have children, but she was intermittently unsure about that decision.

Taber dreamed: *I went to my therapist, Dr. W, and sat outside in a courtyard patio talking to his daughter. Then I was in an open doorway where I was lying on a table on my back. I delivered a baby boy. I was surprised and I knew everyone would be too. I went back and talked to the daughter again. Dr. W was waiting for his next patient in the garden, raking leaves. I left and showed my husband the baby, told him it was a quick birth, a few twinges, and the baby popped out. He was not a newborn, but a one year old. I said we have to buy a bassinet, crib and food. My husband seemed to like the baby. My mother put the baby in a back room. I went to see him. The baby cried a little, then started smiling, happy to see me.*

The painter had begun psychotherapy a year before and the process was already bearing fruit. In the dream, she delivers a baby boy whom she does not yet know how to nurture. But the new life smiles at her and draws her in. Here, the baby is

a boy and her husband is pleased. Dr. W., her therapist who is in right relation to his own daughter, is affirming the painter and the woman she is becoming. The baby may be her awakening eros.

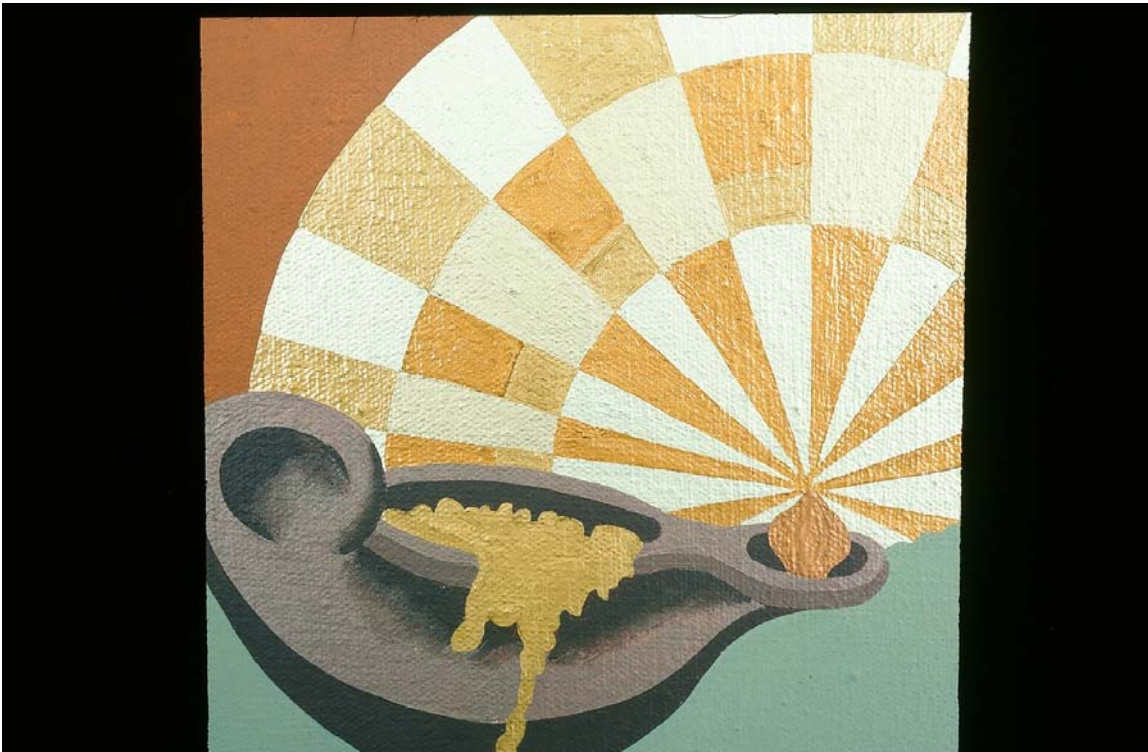


Square 9 DAGGER

Becoming psychologically pregnant with herself, with a new feminine identity, creates a time when a woman becomes most distrustful of the men and male influence in her life. In the words of the myth: *“Her resolve was made and her heart fixed, yet as she strove to nerve her hands for the deed, her purpose failed her and was shaken and she was distraught by the host of passions that were born of her anguish. Impatience, indecision, daring and terror, diffidence and*

anger, all strove within her and worst of all, in the same body she hated the beast and loved the husband.”

This moment, like many initiatory moments, is often extended into a lengthy stage in psychotherapy as a woman is torn by conflicting feelings which cause disruption in her primary relationship as she seeks to uncover the shadow of the relationship. She (and her partner) then need patience and endurance as she waits for a new level of consciousness before she and they can find a resolution.



Square 10 In the myth, lighting the LAMP, a woman’s first step toward her own consciousness of herself, paradoxically shows her the man instead of the beast. Startled by Amor’s beauty, Psyche accidentally burns him with the lamp oil. Her refusal to obey him and stay in the dark then results in her pricking her own

finger with the knife and drawing the blood that binds her to him forever.

Previously it had been an arrangement of convenience, essentially a marriage made by her father in response to the oracle.

Taber's graphic depiction of an ancient Greek oil lamp and the web-like bright light that it casts illuminates the dramatic moment of Psyche and Amor's mutual revelation, the moment of his betrayal, her remorse.



Square 11 The BROKEN BOND

Against the blaze of light, the bond between Amor and Psyche, symbolized by the twisted rope, goes up in flames and breaks. The painter preserves the knot which intimates that their love endures. Now pregnant with herself, in love for the first time with her true mate, Psyche has to suffer his loss, his misunderstanding, his

anger *and* pursue her own quest for her woman-identified nature, not knowing whether she will find him again. By electing to *know* him (and herself) for what he is—man, beast or god—she embarks on a path to consciousness and suffers the immediate loss of both her own comfort and security and her partner’s love.

Taber had already suffered estrangement from her husband as she sought treatment for her depression and tried to renew herself as an artist. Yet she simultaneously sought to heal the rift with her husband.



Square 12 EROS, wounded, goes back to his mother, Venus, who berates him for disobeying her. In the painting, her waves almost engulf him.



Square 13 Psyche's conscious quest begins here. The RIVER rejects her suicide attempt and proves stronger than Psyche's despair. Pregnant Psyche carries hope, in the bodily form of new life within her. Every time she thinks about giving up, a helpful being or aspect of herself awakens her courage. On the banks of the river of life, she meets the goat-god Pan who tells her to look for her husband and win him back by tenderness. Pan calls Psyche's attention to Amor's vulnerability which she unmasked by looking at him. This awareness gives Psyche the nerve to persist. But first she finds and encounters the lost archetype of the feminine. Seeing a temple, she goes to seek help.



Square 14 Taber condenses the three TEMPLES of the goddesses, Ceres/Demeter, Juno/Hera and Venus/Aphrodite into one image. She illustrates them as PILLARS of stone. Psyche finds Ceres' temple first. Often during psychotherapy a woman thinks that what she is looking for is a man or that a man will solve her problems, but what she finds is the archetype, the goddess, her feminine Self. At Ceres' temple, Psyche enters and approaches the sacred couch. There she sees the reapers' tools and the sheaves of wheat and barley piled in a heap or twined into garlands. But all lies randomly, confused and untended. *"Psyche separates them all with care and arranges them in due order, each in its separate place; for she thinks that she ought not to neglect the shrines or ceremonies of any god, but rather appeal to the kindness and pity of all."* This is Psyche's first ritual act, paying tribute to her feminine source, Ceres, the grain

goddess of harvest and fertility, priestess of the Eleusinian Mysteries, goddess of the fruits of the civilized, cultured earth, and receiver of the dead.

Here, Psyche begins to remedy the neglect of the feminine, within and without. But there are still many challenges ahead of her. Ceres turns Psyche away for the sake of her relationship to Venus. Rejected by Ceres, Psyche turns to Juno, Jove's wife, goddess of wedlock and childbirth. She finds Juno's temple and again makes ritual offering to the Goddess. But Juno also refuses her help on the same grounds of loyalty to Aphrodite.

Having honored Ceres, the grain mother and Juno, the sky goddess, Psyche, despite her exhaustion, finally proceeds to confront Venus and her fate directly. She says to herself *"Come then, take heart... yield of your own free will to your mistress, and assuage the fierce onset of her wrath by submission... Who knows but you may even find the husband you have sought so long, there in his mother's house."*

In psychotherapy, a woman often proceeds slowly through her resistances of wanting to hide from the fearsome confrontation, the difficult tasks, the dread descent—to a final realization of the inevitability of her own development. Yet along the way she has performed many acts of respect to the powerful forces of her own unconscious that eventually come to her aid. As Psyche touches the pre-Hellenic Ceres and Juno at their sacred temples, so too does a modern woman touch them in her own psyche and pay tribute. Taber was observing the proper deference to her individuation through her craft by carefully painting and

organizing each square in the painting. Here, the prickly pear cactus takes on a suggestively animated nature. Peeking into the right hand side of the image, it now conveys Psyche's smallness/Taber's ego as she approaches the powerful goddesses' altars in her work and her journey.



Square 15 VENUS and PSYCHE finally meet. Psyche is now seen as a small conch shell being engulfed by Venus' waves and clouds. Venus is the motivating goddess force behind Psyche's initiation. In the myth, Ceres and Juno uphold the value of relationship that Venus embodies, but has abandoned in her rage. Psyche's task is to develop the relationship value in this myth both to the pre-Hellenic, dynamic, independent goddess forces and eventually, to her husband, Amor. This can only happen out of her differentiation as a woman. That is why

she has to confront Venus and why neither Ceres nor Juno can take her in and shield her. She has, first of all, to develop the relationship to herself.



Square 16 Psyche's FIRST TASK, assigned to her by Venus, is to sort an undifferentiated MOUND of seeds, corn, barley, millet, poppy seed, chick peas, lentils and beans.



Square 17 The ANT aspect of Psyche's nature comes to her aid as she faces the overwhelming mound. Ants are sacred to the harvest mother because they busily carry grains and seeds from one place to another. Here it seems that Ceres, the goddess of the harvest has come to Psyche's aid in a covert form. Ceres would not intervene and prevent Psyche's confrontation with Venus because it was Psyche's fate to engage with her mother-in-law. But once Psyche takes on the journey, the earth mother's ants come to help her sort the seeds. Psyche has re-connected with Ceres, the grain mother, on an instinctual level. The ants may also allude to the minute biological and emotional reorganization that is going on in Psyche's body, stirred up by the hormonal and metabolic changes of pregnancy. The painter emphasizes the reality of the ant insect with its large size and anatomically

correct form. Taber observed ants, ubiquitous and busily ordering, in her desert environment. She devotes three squares to this task emphasizing its importance.



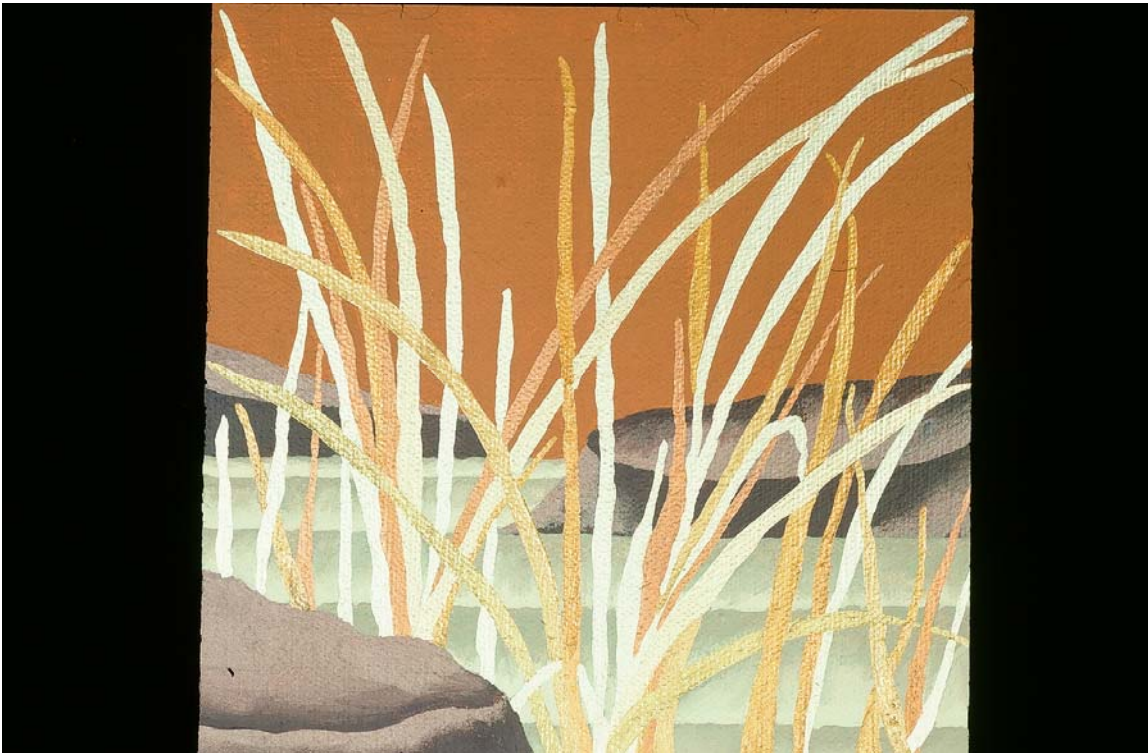
Square 18 The Piles of Sorted SEEDS

Sorting is often a feminine task. Women in psychotherapy dream about sorting, talk about sorting—sorting out their priorities, their complexes, sorting out their closets, their kitchens, their children’s rooms, their offices. Sorting means arranging, culling, combing, separating, sifting, choosing, dividing, grouping, winnowing. Mapping out the design and making the preliminary sketches for the painting entailed all these discrete activities. An inner order was also occurring. Then Taber dreamed:

We were leaving on a boat and each of us was in charge of sections of seeds that

were floating in water. These sections took up the whole boat. The water level in my sections were too high and I was afraid the seeds would start floating together over the top so I bailed some water.

Here, even as she is underway, committed to the journey, the water of the unconscious threatens the sorted seeds, the order. Taber continued to feel at the edge of being overwhelmed by failure, chaos, or sadness.



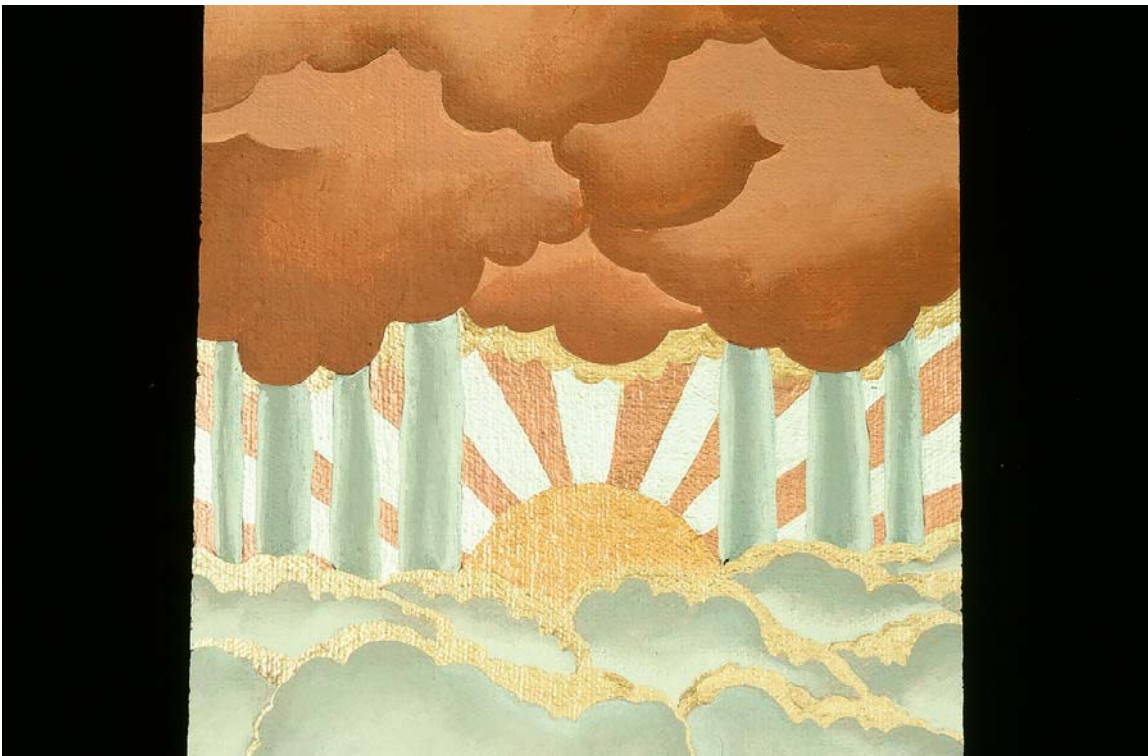
Square 19 RIVER REEDS

Venus then assigns Psyche her SECOND TASK—to gather the golden fleece of the wild fierce rams. Psyche again succumbs to despair. But RIVER REEDS come to her aid and give her instruction. The reed whispers to her with its vegetative

wisdom, the wisdom of growth, “Wait. Be patient.” Pregnancy requires a woman to rest in a state of patience as the fetus develops in her dark womb.



Square 20 Taber shows the RAM HORNS as an extension of solar power at midday. The potentially lethal horns, long and curly emphasize the aggression of the male animal. The reeds tell her to wait until evening when the rams are resting, and then to collect the golden wool that has rubbed off on the crooked twigs. As with the ant, the ram horns are illustrated in realistic detail and the synecdoche emphasizes their power. The reeds are like the cacti with which Taber was communing in the desert.



Square 21 Here is the GOLDEN FLEECE scattered over the bushes, the sun going down with its lessening intensity. The ram is both a sacrificial victim and a phallic power by the second century CE. But, originally, like other horned animals, it also belonged to the goddess. Here again Psyche touches the matrilineal power in her unconscious. The fleece would be used for a feminine activity, that of spinning and weaving into cloth. Psyche collects the fleece without confrontation, a mode congruent with her pregnant state, takes what she needs from her matrilineal past to weave a new life in the patriarchal present.

In the Eleusinian mysteries: *“The veiled candidate sits surrounded by symbols: between his feet lies a ram’s horn, representing the fleece of purification.”*

Demeter also sits on the fleece of purification or sacrifice and the initiate imitates

her. While Taber emphasizes the power of the horns, the sun's rays also suggest a simple weaving pattern. As she interlaces the frames of the panels and the border of the painting, she is meticulously weaving her own initiation.



Square 22 The THIRD TASK that Venus assigns Psyche is to fetch icy water in a crystal jar from the waterfall of the treacherous RIVER STYX, its approach beset with obstacles. The spring flows continuously up and down from the underworld to the highest pinnacle.



Square 23 The RIVERS from the spring guarded by dragons who tell Psyche *“Thou art doomed to die.”* A description from the myth of Psyche’s feeling at this point parallels that of a woman who is braving her depths in psychotherapy. *“Psyche felt herself turned to stone by the impossibility of her task. Though she was present in the body, her senses had flown far away from her and, quite overwhelmed by such vast inevitable peril, she lacked even the last solace of tears.”* There were moments when the painter too felt paralyzed as she faced the obstacles in her art and her marriage.



Square 24 The creature who comes to Psyche's aid in this task is Jove's EAGLE. Again, Taber selects a part of the animal to represent the whole. In this panel, the eagle's talon is filling the CRYSTAL JAR for the girl. Could it be that Juno, Jove's wife, was responsible for convincing her husband to send his eagle on Psyche's behalf? Psyche touches the soaring of energy, inspiration of mind with this bird. As in other initiation ceremonies, Psyche gains a fundamental relationship to the four elements--earth, air, fire, water--in the course of her tasks. Spirit guides come to help her with each one.

Water is the water of life, placental water, purifying water, the waters of renewal and of dissolution of old patterns. Water is also precious in the desert. Taber emphasizes the preciousness of this substance with the faceted crystal jar

prominently being submerged in the river. The jar's luxuriousness also suggests Psyche's womb with the baby she is carrying.



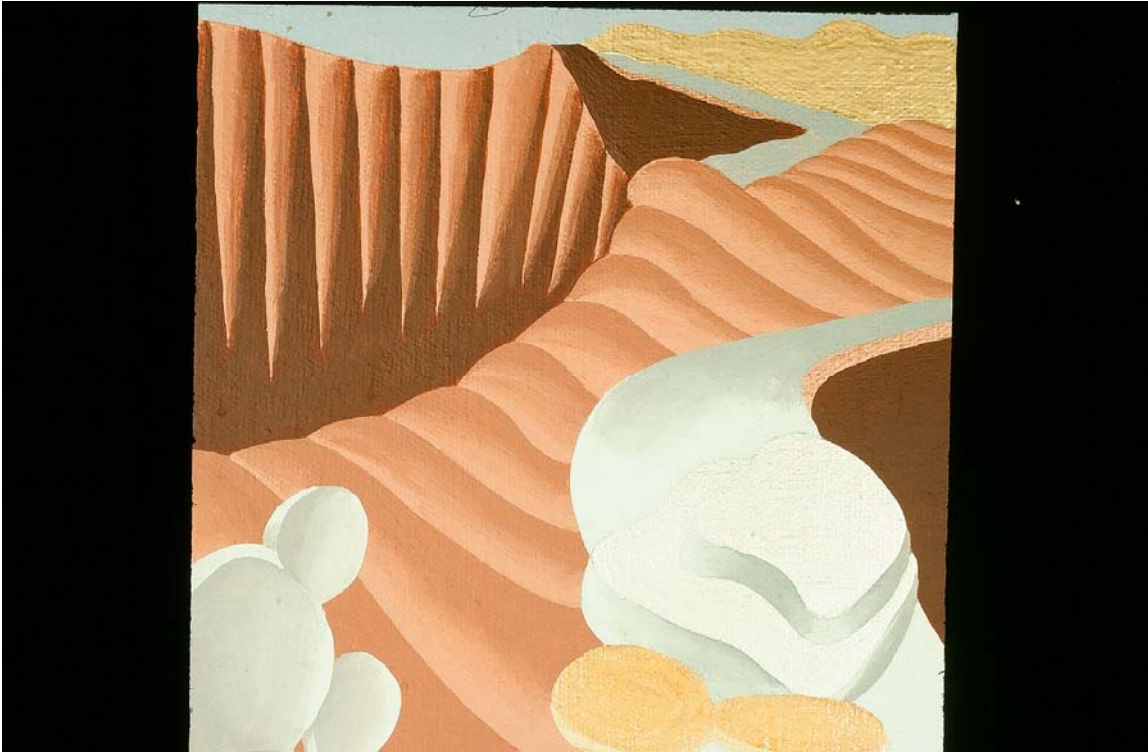
Square 25 The perilous DESCENT from the rocky peak depicted as towering layers of rocks. At the bottom a tiny golden casket glimmers, prefiguring her next task. Again, while the tasks in the myth are laid out sequentially, the unconscious has a different structure. The painter's process of self-discovery, like any individual's psychological journey, did not conform to linearity. There is a simultaneity of time in the unconscious with layers of images and material, bits and pieces available and surfacing to consciousness at different times during an individual's life. The last task in the myth may occur first in a woman's psyche or in the middle, or repeat itself over years. As has been pointed out, Taber was

already in a depression, alienated from her husband, and suffering the onset of a disease when she began psychotherapy, discovered this myth, and began to paint the story.



Square 26 Psyche's FOURTH and most daunting TASK is to descend to the Underworld to ask Proserpine/Persephone for a bit of her beauty cream to put in Venus' jar. Once again Psyche is seized with despair and this time imagines throwing herself from a TOWER. But the tower dissuades her, and awakens her feelings of self-preservation on behalf of her unborn child by giving her hope, in the form of specific instructions about what she must do in the underworld in order to accomplish her task. The tower is the first man-made structure that

helps Psyche. As she accomplishes her tasks, a new psychological structure is rising in her that offers a new perspective.



Square 27 This is the corridor down into the UNDERWORLD. In many menarche rituals, the girl must traverse different worlds in the course of the ceremony. The initiate brings back gifts for her people from those worlds. She returns as a culture heroine transformed into a fertile mature woman. In psychotherapy, a dark descent is inevitable once the pull from the unconscious to take up the call of the Self has been actively chosen. Taber dreamed:

I was in a house, there was a silence that was a clue. My husband said, "this is really it." And I knew he meant the end of the world. I was lifted up by some force, put on my left side where I curled up and my body was propelled through

space. I was in a dark tunnel or funnel. I knew this was my death. I said goodbye to my husband, my mother and father. Then I woke up.

As she followed Psyche's path and delved into the unconscious, Taber began to separate psychologically from those she loved. At the top of the corridor to the left in this square, the lively prickly pear leads the way like a guide. To the right are the two gold coins for Charon, the ferryman, and the two slices of barley cake with honey for Cerberus, the three-headed guard dog. These are the prices she must pay for entering and leaving the underworld.



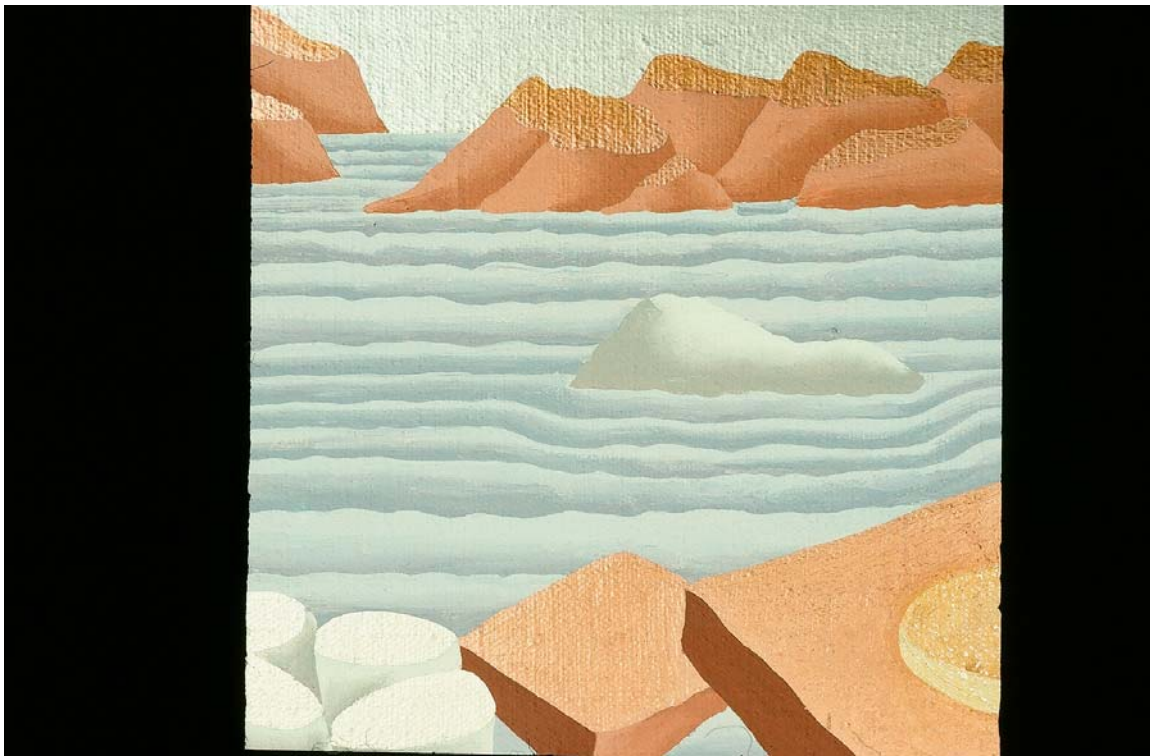
Square 28 RIVER STYX The artist creates a visual pun on the river's name by using a pile of sticks to dominate the panel. The image also refers to the tower's

injunction not to help a lame donkey-driver who would ask her to pick up sticks falling from the animal's back. Psyche's psychological task going into the underworld is to not be moved with pity for those who call out to her. Many women with whom I have spoken feel the need to develop this ego strength. A woman must be able to keep herself separate from collective suffering in order to effect her own differentiated goal. Otherwise she fragments her energy and loses herself.

One woman who found herself constantly responding to friends and colleagues problems and needs said to me in the midst of her analysis:

I'm looking each day at the discrepancy between my stated values and what I do. It is painful for me to see myself making choices at every point about time and not feeling good about any of it. I feel like Psyche in the two tasks of sorting seeds and having to say No to the souls in the underworld who beg for her help. The only place I feel support for this work, for feminine values, is from my analysis.

The huge pile of sticks is both humorous and brings into the foreground the difficult task of saying "No" to a multiplicity of demands when a woman must focus on an inner goal. Taber was often distracted by her parents' and siblings' emotional demands.



Square 29 The RIVER STYX with a DROWNING MAN in the water whom Psyche must refuse to take into the boat. The coin for Hades' ferryman, Charon, is lying on the shore. The slabs of rock that form her path are hazardously placed. Some of the fallen sticks seem to be forming another part of the path. With this image, Taber suggests that Psyche is creating her own path down with each discriminating choice she makes en route.



Square 30 The path takes her past the WEAVERS whom Psyche is likewise forbidden to help. The beauty of the cloth that looms over her path like a fanning spider web is seductive and dangerous. Psyche continues to her goal. Taber continues to weave her own fate.



Square 31 The BARLEY CAKE in the air that Psyche throws to the three-headed guard dog CERBERUS. The most difficult challenge for Psyche at this point is that she has to repeat each of these acts on her way up and out of the underworld: hide the second coin for the ferryman, the second cake for Cerberus, all the while refusing to succumb to pity. This is the first time in the myth that she has to show this self control. No gods or animals come to her aid.

The painter shows other broken offerings on the ground in front of the dog's mouth. And the prickly pear, larger now, makes an appearance from the lower right hand corner, waiting for her return.



Square 32 At PERSEPHONE’S TABLE, Psyche asks only for coarse bread and sits on the ground to eat as the tower instructed. All these ritual tokens mark Psyche as a visitor to the land of the dead. Her offerings set her apart from the dark life of the shades in Hades. In psychological terms it would mean that she does not identify with the unconscious. By this point Psyche is strong enough—having been tested by despair and suicidal feelings several times in the course of her journey—to carry out the tower’s orders. She maintains her ego-consciousness in the face of unconscious energy pulling her down and under. At this point, she is almost to term in her pregnancy which adds to her heightened awareness of the responsibility she is carrying.



Square 33 Psyche does RETURN safely; in the words of the myth *“she regained the shining daylight and worshiped it with adoration.”* But once safe, she has an overwhelming desire to open Venus’ box with the beauty ointment and use a little of it herself. The motif of adorning the initiate is present in all menarche ceremonies where, after a girl’s seclusion for days, weeks, sometimes months, the initiate is bathed, dressed, and adorned as part of her transformation into womanhood. Some beauty ointment should be Psyche’s. But this is Venus’ last trick: instead of beauty cream, the cask contains a deathlike sleep, at least for Psyche.

Taber repeats here a large vulvular form suggesting that the essence of feminine beauty is in Psyche’s body, the container of new life. The cask Proserpine gave her

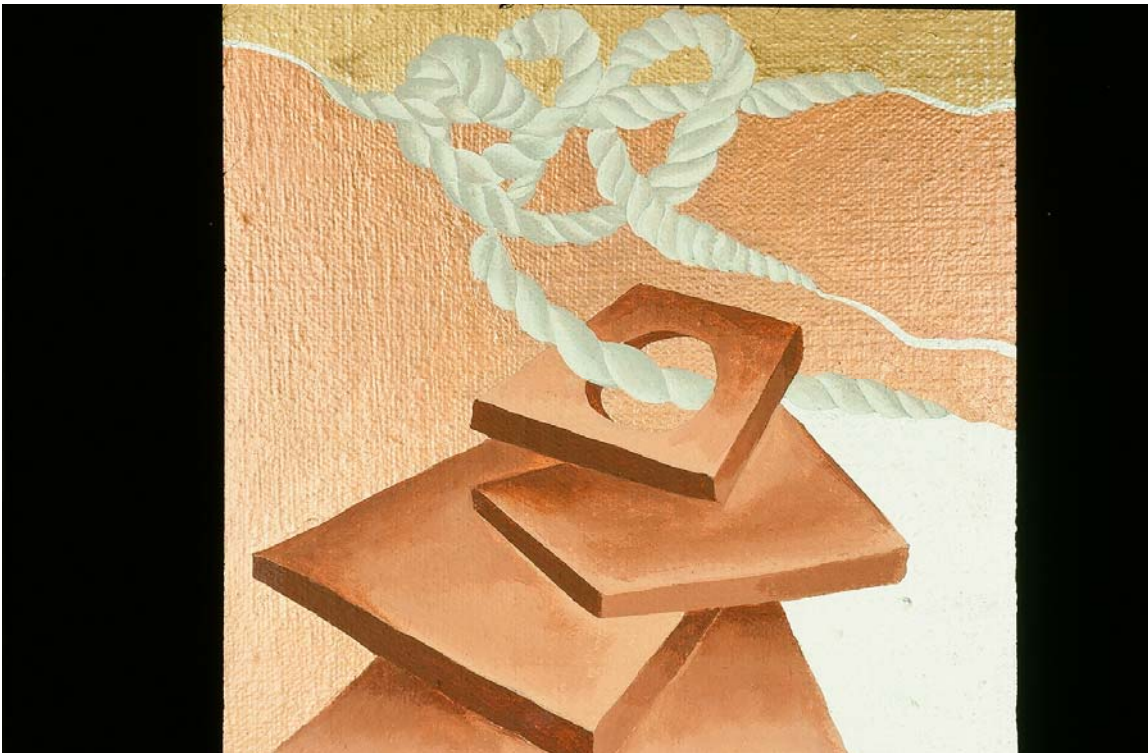
from which the bronze cloud of sleep escapes is rendered, small and golden to the right. The vulva here is golden, veined, repeating the pattern of the sun and the spider web above. Large and numinous, it reveals Psyche's acquisition of feminine consciousness since its previous incarnation in Square 8 where Psyche and Eros meet in the dark .



Square 34 WINGED AMOR comes to pull Psyche out of her slumber.

Strikingly, Taber has Amor pulling Psyche out of the fluffy gray clouds of the deathlike sleep through a doorway or picture frame. In this square, the painter and the heroine of the myth merge; the muse has returned to the painter and brought her to life once again, her creativity renewed.

Carefully Amor wiped the sleep from off his beloved Psyche and confined it in the casket, its former receptacle. Then waking Psyche with a harmless prick from one of his arrows, he said: “My poor child, your curiosity had almost brought you to destruction yet a second time. But meanwhile make haste to perform the task with which my mother charged you; I will see to the rest.”



Square 35 The REUNION of Psyche and Eros which creates a new bond, symbolized again by the twined rope. The knots in the rope are more complicated here than the simple knot designating their union at the beginning of the painting. One of the ropes is strung through the top paving stone from the path to Pluto’s realm. The rope pulls the underworld blocks of Psyche’s path up into Mount Olympus where the two are finally wed and Psyche is made immortal.



Square 36 The SUN'S RAYS emanate from the twined rope symbolizing the BIRTH of their DAUGHTER—named Joy, Bliss or Sensual Pleasure. Due to her mother's perseverance through the story, her daughter is divine, not mortal. Psyche becomes immortal, joining the mystery of the world soul. Psychologically, the transcendent function has arisen from an impossible situation, pitting a goddess against a girl, an archetype against the ego. Psyche's willingness to embrace her fate influences the archetype of the goddess of love and laughter, Venus, who accepts her as her daughter-in-law. There is a renewal of the feminine on earth and in heaven.

Conclusion

The artist has rendered the myth through symbols. There are no human forms in the painting, and Psyche herself appears as a flower at her birth, as a vulva receiving Amor, as a small conch shell engulfed by Venus. The desert prickly pear serves as an occasional reminder of the painter's presence or ego. As a result, the viewer experiences Psyche's journey as if he/she is the protagonist in the settings that the panels bring to life. We are drawn to enter, to participate, not just to observe. The images provoke our engagement.

Psyche has accomplished an incredible transformation in this myth. She has proven herself worthy of every initiatory challenge and, in the end, as in the beginning, refuses to obey any injunction against her *knowing* or *seeing* the truth. Her feeling at the end that she wants her beauty for the sake of love reunites her with her lover. As the initiate, she deserves the adornment. In this way, Psyche again affirms the basic values of her femininity and of relationship that she has been pursuing all along. Wounded Eros has healed and matured within her and without her.

Throughout her journey, Psyche renders each situation, each god or goddess or person his or her due. She listens attentively, takes her punishment from the enraged Venus, trudges wearily on, trusting in the face of no trust. She never violates a feeling value. So she upholds Venus' positive nature, that is, the

goddess' essence of relatedness. Finally, Venus herself is renewed by her initiate's capacity to endure and develop through the trials.

In the myth, Amor's role is limited to unseen lover at the beginning, wounded man at Psyche's betrayal, and Psyche's rescuer from sleep at the end. He is absent for most of the story. Taber's husband too was uninvolved with her psychotherapy or with her studying and painting this myth. There is wisdom in a man's absence for a woman when she needs her own empowerment. She has to be alone for a time in relation to finding her archetypal feminine energies. In the end, Amor gains a differentiated woman as a wife instead of an isolated unconscious mate.

In painting "Eros and Psyche or the Journey," Taber accomplished a journey of her own. She reunited with her muse and to her passion for her work. The immersion in the mythic realm led her then into other mythic visions, such as Navajo creation myths, and into fairy tales that became the subjects of her paintings for many years. She learned the difficult technique of Renaissance gold leaf to bring her fairy tale images alive.

Taber and her husband continued to confront the challenges of their relationship and agreed not to have a child. Ironically, life imitated art twenty years later when, after 32 years of marriage, Taber's husband left her and sought a divorce. During the period following the divorce, a new cycle of initiatory tasks were thrust on the painter. For the first time in her adult life, she lived alone and

created new space for her art. She continued to develop psychologically and twelve years later, she and her husband reconnected and remarried. It is as if their first marriage was veiled and patriarchal, and the second marriage fully seen and psychologically equal.

Recently, Taber had a dream in which someone was talking about her remarriage and a voice said to her, “What took you so long?” If someone had posed that question to Psyche, she would have had a long story to tell. Taber does too.

Credits

Photography by Peter George

Painting from the Collection of Virginia Beane Rutter

ⁱ Neumann, Erich. *Amor and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine. A commentary on the Tale by Apuleius*. Bollingen Series 54. Princeton NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, NY, 1956. Translated from the German by Ralph Manheim.

ⁱⁱ Von Franz, Marie Lousie. *The Golden Ass of Apuleius: The Liberation of the Feminine in Man*. Shambhala Publications. Boston and London. 1970, 1980, 1992.

ⁱⁱⁱ Johnson, Robert A. *She! A contribution to understanding feminine psychology based on the myth of Amor and Psyche and using Jungian psychological concepts*. Delacorte Press, 1976. Revised Edition 1989 *She: Understanding Feminine Psychology*, Harper Collins, New York, London, Toronto, Sydney.

^{iv} All quotes from the myth are from Neumann, pp-3-53 unless otherwise noted.

^v Translation from Latin courtesy of Professor Ralitzia Christo, UC.Berkeley and St Mary's College.

^{vi} Graves, Robert translated from Apuleius. *The Transformations of Lucius Otherwise Known As The Golden Ass*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Young. 1951. P.97.

^{vii} Demosthenes Orations. In Neairas, 59.122 Loeb Classical Library 351. Translated by A.T. Murray.

^{viii} All dreams quoted (with the exception of the artist's dreams) from Rutter, Virginia Beane *Woman Changing Woman: Feminine Psychology Re-Conceived Through Myth and Experience*. Harper San Francisco, 1993. The artist's dreams were recorded in personal communication with the author.

^{ix} Harrison, Jane Ellen. *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*. London: Merlin Press 1962. Reprinted 1980, 1992. Pp.532-33.