

Wilderness, the Body, Poetics, and the Crane: Curriculum in Four Parts

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Abstract:

Written as a circuitous reflection on curricular lessons from nature, each of the four parts highlights endangered aspects of learning that if not attended will jeopardize who we are as a species. Attention to wilderness, non-dual consciousness, and the body, along with the centrality of instincts guide part one. Creation myths, wisdom traditions, and the Hermetic arts, including language and play, lead part two while body and nature maintain a necessary yet oft unrecognized container. The wild, poetics, and creativity shape part three, honouring the subtle role of language via the body. Part four brings the crane to the foreground, with its psychological symbolism as well as its anthropological and mythological history, an image to provoke curricular remembering of its ancestral roots. Together the four parts call for awareness to our forgotten bodily relations, as reflected in language and relationships with the natural world and all its life forms, while amplifying the storybird crane.

Keywords: wilderness, consciousness, language, play, creativity, body

The Creator of all things sent two cranes to search for a perfect place to rest. When they found that place, they were to fold their wings and wait. First, they flew to the prairies and tasted Bison meat. The meat was good, but they saw very few Bison. Then they flew to the forest where many four-legged animals lived. Their meat was good, but for many days, they saw no more animals. Then they flew to the Great Lakes, and they landed on the shore. Every day there were plenty of fish for them to eat. So they folded their wings and waited. They stood very still and gradually they became First Man and First Woman, and that is how the Crane people became the Crane Clan of the Ojibwa. (Price, 2001, p. 166)

Cranes are the stuff of magic, whose voices penetrate the atmosphere of the world's wilderness areas. (Johnsgard, 1992, p. 8)

[T]he gods are symbolized as animals—even the Holy Ghost is a bird; all the antique gods and the exotic gods are animals at the same time. (Jung, 1988, p. 1393)

[O]ur appreciation of the crane grows with the slow unraveling of earthly history. [Her] tribe, we now know, stems out of the remote Eocene....When we hear [her] call[,] we hear no mere bird. [S]he is a symbol of our untamable past, of that incredible sweep of millennia which underlies and conditions the daily affairs of birds and [humans]. (Leopold, 1949/1966, p. 234)

On Childhood and Wilderness

There is something about growing up close to nature—a particular land, its foliage, and feathers—its pulse never quite leaves you. It might be described in hindsight as knowing one's self was not confined to a body; that soul and place enfold; that a fluidity exists in and out and through all things. It might be described as Gary Snyder (1995) does, "knowing who we are and knowing where we are intimately linked" (p. 234). The two aspects, self and place, are inseparable.

Growing up in the Canadian north under a big prairie sky on a small self-sustaining farm made for a radically different childhood than most in North America today. As Wallace Stegner (1992) describes in his classic *Where the Bluebird Sings*, "there is something about living in big...space, where people are few and distant, under a great sky that is alternately serene and furious...—there is something about exposure to that big country" (pp. 9–10). Here I witnessed life's cycles unfolding—mating, birthing, dying—and knew that my existence was intricately interwoven with theirs. A life lived in tandem with seasons, crops, and animals taught many lessons. One such learning, familiar to children who grow up immersed in nature, is merging—that experience where one's perception of boundaries is a more porous one, softening, blurring, even dissolving or inverting the divisions of imposed subject and object. "Merging is below or beyond ego," describes Jane Hollister Wheelwright (as cited in Hollister, 2013, p. 21). "It's like the earliest mother-child experience. Land as mother, returning to the source, like being back in the ocean, submerged" (p. 21). This symbiotic relationship between human and wilderness, a "psycho-spiritual experience" (p. 21), draws one "down to the deeper psychic layers in themselves...to the world of the archetypes, including the Self" (Hollister Wheelwright, as cited in Hollister, 2013, p. 25). Here, "the child's first-hand experience would be the real thing. And this is the first step toward the reality that [she] will need for the rest of [her life]" (p. 25). After all, a connection or commitment to the Self was a "commitment to the wilderness within" (Tempest Williams, 1995, p. 53). As Hollister Wheelwright elaborates within Western understanding:

small children exposed to nature and to wild creatures come face to face with an inherited level of potential experience within themselves that corresponds to what primitives know. In other words, this psychic region, when constellated by an actual experience of wilderness, will resonate to the psychic stratum laid down eons ago when human beings' adaptations were determined by the wild environments in which they lived. (as cited in Hollister, 2013, pp. 24–25)

Such knowing aids to preserve instincts and gives psychic depth for one knows wilderness on the inside—for being inside wilderness. One may not know it at the time, but this early experience imprints the body to be better able to re-enter this state later—often and easiest in the same familiar place. Even though I live in the metropolis noted for the most green space in North America, the park opposite my house and the groomed trails along a nearby creek lack the raw aspect of the wild places of my youth. Nature was not a place I went to on weekends. It was home. Despite 30 years living on unfamiliar soil, my internal rhythm undulates with northern seasons. When I return to the Saskatchewan farm, I still slip into a non-dual consciousness—a deeply felt bodily feeling of belonging to a vast harmonious whole—when riding a horse across the hayfield or lying on the grass below falling star showers. However, I discovered, during a time when profoundly ill, when all regular cognitive functioning ceased, an undivided core within where I was whole, present, small, and attuned to all things. A profound bodily resonance with life's coursing. Before becoming ill, like Hollister Wheelwright, I had found the most porous veil existed between wilderness and my inner child, "where the foundation for a deep instinctual life was laid" (p. 26).

This very insight is set in stone on a wall of the Monterey Bay Aquarium in Carmel, California—"a facility dedicated to the preservation of sea otters" (Galipeau, 2013, p. 41): "Wildness reminds us of what it means to be human, what we are connected to rather than what we are separate from" (Tempest Williams, 1995). Such sentiments reflect C. G. Jung's (1961/1989) attitude expressed throughout his writing as well as the way he lived in Bollingen—"in modest harmony with nature" (p. 226). Of this experience, he describes:

At times I feel as if I am spread out over the landscape and inside things, and am myself living in every tree, in the splashing of the waves, in the clouds and the animals that come and go, in the procession of the seasons. (pp. 225–226)

In adulthood our relationship with instinct and wildness has a quality of *knowing* to it. With a more differentiated consciousness than in childhood and an understanding of the primal or archaic self that exists within us, one comes to know that the worlds on both sides of the body are merged in an awareness of unity—the external world and internal world are but two of the same. Polyvocal and relational, our becoming arises out of an infinite animated potentiality, which manifests through particularities of place, time, and culture as consciousness does through our personalities. "The depths of mind, the unconscious," echoes Snyder (1990), "are our inner wilderness areas, and that is where a bobcat is *right now*" (p. 16). For those who have forgotten, a movement must begin downward into the entangled root systems of our being, "like a plant that lives on its rhizome [i]ts true life is invisible, hidden in the rhizome" (Jung, 1961/1989, p. 4). "The dig begins...through unpleasant complexes, unruly projections, irrational dreams, and finally reaches down to archetypes and the collective unconscious," to the two-million-year-old self, to the land where two cranes folded their wings and waited (Perluss, 2006, pp. 206–207). Here all things are wild.

On Language and the Body

According to Aldo Leopold (1949/1966), "[The Crane] is the symbol of our untamable past, of that incredible sweep of millennia which underlies and conditions the daily affairs of birds and [wo/]men" (p. 103). Who better to tell this archetypal tale of words than the Crane? Revered by many First Nations people of Native Americas as a *storytale* bird, as one

of the oldest living bird species, the Sandhill Crane can claim the longest successful tenure on earth, a pre-eminent position in the world of birds. "Extended longevity is the ultimate honour that evolution grants a species, and Sandhills are therefore the most-favoured survivors of the bird world" (Grooms, 1992, p. 39). The Sandhill stands "as an emissary from an ancient and largely unknowable age" (p. 39). "We owe it the respect due a time traveller," urges nature writer Steve Grooms, "whose eerie yellow eyes have witnessed the birth and death of glaciers and the innumerable scramblings of the North American species" (p. 39).

Along with indigenous and oral peoples, wisdom traditions and the ancients, I shared this knowledge from a young age, that spirit imbues all things, including the rocks we picked and piled in heaps every summer. Our own unconscious tribute to the old god, Hermes. Indeed, like cairns of the past, these field markers were strategically placed to demarcate borders between geographical spaces. These summers were heralded by the spring migration of cranes. When they passed overhead, the sight was other-worldly. With head tilted skyward and breath held, the blue rang with the haunting trumpet of the returning Sandhills.

The Lesser Sandhill, *Grus Canadensis Canadensis*, the smallest of the Sandhills (standing about 110 cm or 39" high), comes from the farthest away; their breeding range includes the distant edges of Alaska and even Siberia. The Canadian Sandhill, *Grus Canadensis rowani* (standing at 46"), shares some of its breeding range with the Whooper, *Grus Americana*, including Canada's Wood Buffalo region and farther east, nesting areas near and south of Hudson's Bay (Grooms, 1992). Near extinction in 1941, the Whooper numbered 21 birds; due to conservation awareness and action, their count now totals 300. Protecting their wild habitat, wetlands, has been crucial, not only for their survival but also for ours, as well as educating people about their endangered status.

The *Book of Ballymote* (1390 CE), an early stone recording by our Irish ancestors, recently found by archeologists, reveals that birds and seasons held riddles to convey the great knowledge and teachings of the Celts (Price, 2001). Not only did the Celts have very advanced medical knowledge (beyond that of the Romans and Greeks) but another closely held secret that had been discovered—the power of the word. In the secret code of the *Ballymote*, the Crane is linked to the "month of wisdom," the wisdom of sea god *Mannan Mac Lir* (or Lugh to the Gauls), magician, shape-shifter, patron of the arts, seer, god of healing, and patron of traffic and business activities on water and land. Associated with fertility, rebirth, weather, and sailing, he also had a ship that moved without sails and was navigated by the mind (psyche). Most importantly, however, he was said to always carry a "Crane Bag"; within this magically empowered skin of the Crane, he carried the secret alphabet of the Celts, the *Ogham*, of which there were more than 100 versions, including the tree alphabet (Price, 2001).

In the beginning the alphabet held a kind of lure, a power to *cast a spell*; indeed, to shape individual letters into words was "to spell a word" (Abram, 1996, p. 133). As the tale goes, Esus was inspired by the elegant flight of Cranes to create a set of consonants. This early invention demonstrates the interdependent nature of play, embodiment, imagination, and the sensual world. While the Crane inspired Western written language, the winged one is not representative of it. Leopold (1949/1966) explains:

Our ability to perceive quality in nature begins, as in art, with the pretty. It expands through successive stages of beautiful to values as yet uncaptured by language. The quality of cranes lies, I think, in this higher gamut, as yet beyond the reach of words. (p. 102)

Remembering that language is rooted in the sounds, movements, and images of nature signals that it is not human language that is primary. Rather, it is the sensuous, felt, and perceptual life-world, whose wild, participatory logic elaborates itself in language. The tree language in the *Book of Ballymote* is illustrative with stem-lines, forking branches, and line crossings, and reads beginning from the bottom left-hand side of a stone, continuing upward along the edge, across the top and down the right-hand side, winding like leaves and branches (Ogham inscription, n.d.). Language “is the very voice of the trees, waves, and the forests” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 155). It is not the human body *alone* rather the whole of the breathing world that provides the deep lattice of language (Abram, 1996). Flesh upon flesh. Bodies in relation is where language arises (and dies); embodied we are part of an intertwined, actively enfolding matrix of mutually dependent phenomena, both sensorial and sentient. After all, one does not have a body; one is bodily. Such knowing reflects the capacity to identify, even empathize, with animals and trees—“an innate instinct arising from our shared evolutionary heritage” (Jung, as cited in Sabini, 2002, p. 13). Even though the living, attentive body is in continuous silent conversation with things, one might not have been aware of or lived closely to nature and thus lacks the experience that can provide such testimonial. Add the ego and intellect, which like to distract, in addition to the inundation of technology, and the actuality of our interconnectedness is easily missed or forgotten. When people start to notice, they do so with their senses and may not recognize their bodily feelings which are largely preconscious in nature, yet run underneath the sensorial, reaching out like sonar waves to feel what is there and reverberate back to inform what is here. In this way, the vectoral ebb and flow creates the potential for *prehending* a fleeting *unity of feeling*—a direct experience—between oneself and aspects of the world with which we are intimately related (Whitehead, 1929/1941, p. 200). For educational philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, “the most primitive perception” is “feeling the body as functioning,” and it is through an evolving unity of feeling conjoining self and tree, crane, or rock that growth occurs (p. 125).

Contrary to Socrates’ claim that “trees and open country won’t teach anything,” which has become all too instructive within educational structures and practice, David Abram (1996), in his aptly named essay “Of Tongues in Trees,” likewise argues that in indigenous and oral cultures, “nature itself is articulate; it *speaks*” (p. 116). The human voice in an oral culture, he suggests,

is always to some extent participant with the voices of wolves, wind, and waves—participant, that is, with the encompassing discourse of an animate earth. There is no element of the landscape that is definitively void of expressive resonance and power: any movement may be a gesture, any sound may be a voice, a meaningful utterance. (p. 117)

In “The Language of the Birds,” he continues that whenever members of a literate culture seek to engage and understand discourses of predominantly oral cultures, they strive to detach from the habitual impulse to visualize language as a static structure that can be diagrammed, coded structurally. Without a formal writing system, the language of an oral culture cannot be objectified as a separate entity by those who speak it. This lack of objectification influences not only the way in which oral cultures experience the field of discursive meanings, but also the very character and structure of that field—its inhabitants, sounds, and matrix of colour. In the absence of written analogue to speech, the breathing, textured, porous world remains the primary text of spoken utterance—the visible accompaniment of all spoken meaning. Consciousness remains more deeply embedded in the landscape (seascape, etc.). In other words, just as the intellect objectifies experience, splitting it into an *in here* and *out there*, the alphabet as an abstracted tool for writing has over time done the same thing—it separates landscape and meaning, place and soul, self and other. We would do well to remember and redress this separation. Despite this splitting capacity, it has a creative capacity as well. Playfully, even poetically, we invent words. And

there are those who have maintained an attentive, artful, Hermetic way with language, who understand words to be a kind of membrane or fibre, stitching one with place—that the aliveness, beauty, and power of stem-lines (Ogham) are contingent upon the very world itself, and so their magic remains.

Another example of this usage is *Nüshu*. Terry Tempest Williams (2012) beautifully describes the ancient script of *Nüshu* as “bird tracks, crows walking deliberately down a narrow path of snow” (p. 156). “A linear and elegant calligraphy” that may predate oracle bone etchings (1600–1100 BCE), *Nüshu* was a secret text of women “used for hundreds of years in the rural villages of Jiangyong in Hunan Province of China”—a time when women did not have the same access to literacy as boys and men. It was a method that empowered women (at least among themselves) in a place that silenced and suppressed many (p. 156). This subtle system of dots, horizontals, virgules, and arcs reveals the whispered relationships among women, particularly from mother to daughter and amongst “sworn sisters” (pp. 156–157). It belonged to a society of women who worshipped birds.

The symbol for a bird’s head is the character for a woman’s head. Women and birds were interchangeable, shape-shifting, inscriptions carved on bones and the carapaces of turtles, an archetype for the Earth Goddess, who presides over fertility, continuity, and wisdom. (p. 157)

A language carefully guarded and used outside the presence of men, it spoke intimately of life narratives and place. Books were passed from one woman to the next and personal journals were burnt as an offering to accompany the woman in the afterlife. A syllabic language, composed in vertical verse, it did not carry pre-inscribed meanings common to logo-graphic Chinese characters. Born out of oppression and reflective of the particularities of life, this text was a landscape, “a conjoining word and spirit” (Tempest Williams, 2012, p. 157).

On the Wild and Play

“Wild,” according to Snyder (2000), “alludes to a process of self-organization that generates systems and organisms”; “wildness can be said to be the essential nature of nature” (p. 1). As reflected in consciousness, it can be seen as “open awareness—full of imagination but also the source of alert survival intelligence” (p. 1). Language, from this perspective, can be seen as reflecting back nature’s own wildness rather than imposing order onto a chaotic world. To approach language as a Hermetic art, reminiscent of Cranes, is to not foreclose on an either-or. It is to see language as a co-creation with aspects of nature, including human beings, and the creative principle of the cosmos. While language can be restrictive, narrowing, and even misleading, Snyder suggests that rather than dismiss it, we “turn right back to language. The way to see *with* language,” to be less constrained by it and to use it artfully, skillfully, so to “know both mind and language extremely well and to play with their many possibilities without any special attachment” (p. 2). In doing so, language can surprise and “can lead back to unmediated direct experience” (p. 2)—back to star showers and the bodily feeling of being part of a larger whole. To illustrate:

To see a wren in a bush, call it “wren,” and go on walking is to have (self-importantly) seen nothing. To see a bird and stop, watch, feel, forget yourself for a moment, be in the busy shadows, maybe then feel “wren”—that is to have joined in a larger moment with the world. (p. 4)

The way to see with language requires what James Hillman (1989) calls a “poetic basis of mind” (p. 15), a rooting in aesthetics and imagination with an unfolding *through* the body, not a doing by the intellect alone. Let image be a way to see, not the thing itself. Wren! Imagination, as image arising within rather than enacted through cognition, then is

the intelligence of creative thought, with the capacity to “renew the power and impulse to create at its very source” (Cobb, 1977/2004; 1959, p. 539). Play, “selig” in German (Middle Low), meaning “holy” or “blessed,” becomes central to creativity: “[T]he creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect, but by the play instinct acting from inner necessity. The creative mind plays with the objects it loves” (Jung, 1971/1990, para. 197). Play too is not something one does; rather, it is something that one *has to do* or is *called to do* (and cannot resist), joining serious endeavour and playful creation to form “deep play” (Ackerman, 1999)—that which is necessary for all outward creativity. “If play expires in itself without creating anything durable and vital, it is only play, in the other case it is called creative work” (Jung, 1971/1990, para. 197). Diane Ackerman (1999) calls this “transcendent play”; “something exquisitely human”; “a deeper form of play, akin to rapture and ecstasy, that humans relish, even require to feel whole” (p. 12). Deep play always involves the sacred and holy, sometimes hidden in the most unlikely of humble places. As such it curls back into wildness. Stegner also calls these elements together: “[T]he integrity of wilderness and the integrity of art were the same thing, something to be honoured and protected as a wellspring of inspiration” (as cited in Tempest Williams, 2012, p. 137). Creativity, for Stegner, is “another form of open space, whose very nature is to disturb, disrupt, and *bring us to tenderness*” (p. 137). Creativity unfolds in our deepest practices, mucks around with meaning and relations, transgresses, narrates and questions, and thereby begins to recognize then challenge the bounds of certainty. “Permeability, porousness, works both ways” (Snyder, 1999, p. 266).

Remember, “poetic” and “*poietic*” come from the Greek *poien*, “to make,” a root word that “bespeaks the sources of poetic perception in harmonious rhythms of energy systems and formative processes of the body that are continuities of nature’s biological and cosmological behavior” (Cobb, 1977/2004, p. 16). Over time however poetic has come to be associated not with artful creation but with representation or *mimesis*. *Mimesis* in Greek, “representation” in English, also seems to have been poorly interpreted and in Western rational thought has further distanced the natural and the holy. The premodern (re)presentation of *poiesis*, to create, “the making of soul through the imagination of words” (Hillman, 1983, p. 49), is another richer interpretation of mimesis than the modern understanding: representation is imitative. While both words, poetic and poietic, are related etymologically, their corresponding interpretations and usage—imitation and creation—take up representation or (re)presentation in different ways. (Re)presentation, actually *reenactment*, re-turns us in a Western way to the “orality of ancient Greeks and the participatory creating, not transmission, of knowledge” (Trueit, 2005, p. 79). Here “language’s primary gift is not to *re-present* the world around us, but to call ourselves into the vital presence of that world—and into deep and attentive presence with one another” (Abram, 2010, p. 11). This distinction illustrates the way thinking that values certainty, prediction, and control has moved away from complex appreciations of cosmological processes to simplistic, representational ones. It also illustrates that modernity, in its very attempt to attain knowledge, abandoned enchantment and wilderness. Its use of language served to distance itself from the grunt, rut, and roar of nature thereby becoming (at least in its perception) objective, neutral, and repeatable. To forget the root of poetic and then to subordinate its partial memory as a less valuable form of knowledge is to deny the major attribute of Erus—“the instinct of creativity” (Stein, 2000, p. 4). After all, it was my child’s sense of wonder that was aroused in response to the mystery of elements in my landscape that promised “*more to come*, or better still, *more to do*—the power of perceptual participation in the known and unknown” (Cobb, 1977/2004, p. 28). Such creativity is “born of being deeply immersed in what *is*” (Snyder, 1995, p. 176).

A note of caution: along with attempts at representation, excessive interpretation stifles both the sensory and felt (primary and primordial) experience of nature, poetry, and

art. "Ours is a culture based on excess, on overproduction; the result is a steady loss of sharpness in our sensory experience. All the conditions of modern life—its material plentitude, its sheer crowdedness—conjoin to dull our sensory faculties" (Sontag, 1966, p. 13). Above all, writing from or for nature is to "reveal the sensuous surface of art without mucking about in it" (p. 13).

On Poetics and the Crane

In the psychological and poetic study of *Air and Dreams*, Gaston Bachelard (2002) proposes that through our interaction with the world, we learn about our soul's desires. Nature mirrors our spiritual aspirations: She engages our imagination, seizes on images, and exploits them to express our innermost being. Not simply reproductions or representations of nature, these images are the reality that we select from the multitude of potentialities wherein we live. In *The Poetics of Space* (1958/1994), Bachelard writes, "One must be receptive, receptive to the image at the moment it appears: if there be a philosophy of poetry, it must appear and re-appear through a significant verse, in total adherence to an isolated image; to be exact, in the very ecstasy of the newness of the image. The poetic image is a sudden salience on the surface of the psyche. (p. xv)

Be receptive to what arises within us—a lesson dependent upon our ability to feel and to notice the subtle, fleeting, and unexpected, then to host it. The arrival of the poetic image as it strikes the psyche is the moment of poetic imagination. Not just any image, but a primordial, archetypal one, such as the Crane, the ancient feminine, or the Bird Goddess; it vitalizes the poet's psyche. Bachelard (2002) suggests:

[W]e envy the bird's lot in life, and we attribute wings to what we love, because we instinctively feel that, in the domain of bliss, our bodies will be blessed with the ability to go through space as the bird goes through the air. (p. 67)

A *pteropsychology* creates an ideal, a transcendence that gives reality to what has already been experienced in dream. As with the great, graceful flyers, the Cranes, something upon sight of them touches us deeply. Nature writer Dayton Hyde, who raised Sandhills on his Oregon ranch, notes:

There is in a sandhill crane no movement, no action not of immaculate grace, unless it is at the moment they first touch land from flight. But then, once settled, they are pure grace again with elegant and measured step, as though that one ungainly moment had never been. (as cited in Grooms, 1992, p. 57)

Jung (1964) suggested that the bird marks "release through transcendence"—the theme of the "lonely journey or pilgrimage, which somehow seems to be a spiritual pilgrimage on which the initiate becomes acquainted with the nature of death" (pp. 147–150). Death, Jung identified, was not "a last judgment or other initiatory trial of strength," but "a journey of release, renunciation, and atonement, presided over and fostered by some spirit of compassion" (p. 150), represented by a feminine figure, and a symbol of transcendence or liberation as a bird or the flight of birds. An image perhaps rooted in the "Greek portrayal of death as a bird-shaped female being (with a human upper body), the frightful *keres*, who carried the souls of the dead away to Hades" (von Franz, 1987, p. 51). Death is both psychological and physical; in the case of the former, we must welcome the death of old attitudes, structures, and behaviour especially when they have out-grown their value. Recall the Celtic sea god Mannan MacLir, the god of healing and rebirth. In Greek mythology, Hermes recovered attributes of the bird life to add to his chthonic nature as serpent. The god becomes the *flying man* with winged hat, sandals, and staff while retaining relationship with the earth and matter ("māter" or "mother" in Old English and French) (p. 155). Like the crane who shifts effortlessly between the elements: sea, air, land, we see Hermes' full power of transcendence, whereby "the lower transcendence from underworld snake-consciousness, passing through the medium of earthly reality, finally attains

transcendence to...transpersonal reality in its winged flight" (p. 155)—*each remains bound to other through the body*. Above and below are always already weighted by the sensuous throb of nature's particulars.

Descending from the sky, the Crane becomes a long-legged shore bird who inhabits water's edge, the fertile intertidal zone where waters ebb and flow. This earthly medium is the liminal terrain of transformation. To the poets and philosophers of ancient Greece, water was the primordial element, creating life, enabling, and sustaining it. Like a winged border crosser, the Crane shifts realms, ascending or descending effortlessly, and flies between spirit world and sensual world, between dream and day consciousness, to take the living energy of the dream into life and back again. Neil Russack (2002) describes it thus:

More than anything, it was the birds' movement that intrigued me. Lifting off gracefully, sometimes returning to lift again, effortlessly they float and sink. With the same ease of movement, they stay grounded or rise into the air.... Spontaneous in response, the bird waits till the last moment before taking off perhaps before its wings are completely unfurled.... (p. 75)

This bird of transcendence does not fully reside in the material world. Rather it makes temporary nests to raise its young for flying northward. Nests for flying. Materials for flying. Body and soul. Imagine what the bird experiences at the moment of take-off for its northern journey, its heart beating to the accompaniment of the shaman's drum. It looks for its place in the flock, its own place in the universe. (p. 76)

Women, water, and, crane are ancient kin. "Nests for flying. Materials for flying. Body and soul"—phrases that ring of women's journeying. Yet where is the ancient Greek or contemporary female companion to the flying man? During the last 100 years, some thousand reliefs, engravings, and sculptures of female images from "the Paleolithic period have been found, dating from c. 30,000 to c. 9000 BC" (Reis, 1997, p. 579). Such findings suggest "that for more than 20,000 years during the Paleolithic era this Great Goddess existed in our mythic imagination, in our art, in our rituals, and in our lives" (p. 579). These images indicate in the "earliest periods of human consciousness the creative impulse was imagined as female" (p. 579). She was conceived of as the organizing principle of the cosmos and she was the *cosmogonic woman* who embodied the whole cosmic cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (p. 579). Many of the figurines found possessed bird-shaped faces and bodies, with wing-like arms, greatly exaggerated buttocks and long necks—most likely fashioned after waterbirds. The fertility of the female form has been associated with the special generative powers of the waterbird, as it was "an important source of food and consequently a symbol of well being" (Gimbutas, 1996, p. 234). Archetypally, birds possess a dual nature: as waterbird, "they are givers of life"; as raptor, "they are bringers of death" (Gimbutas, 1996, p. 230). So too, archetypal woman has a dual nature: the two sides of the moon and the faces of birth and death. By extension, we have sides of dark and light, for we are all of woman born. Highlighting this relationship between woman and bird, Mircea Eliade (1964/1992) writes:

All over the world learning the languages of animals, especially of birds, is equivalent to knowing secrets of nature and hence to being able to prophesy.... Birds are psychopomps. Becoming a bird oneself or being accompanied by a bird indicates the capacity, while still alive, to undertake the ecstatic journey to the sky and the beyond. (p. 98)

Archaeologist Marja Gimbutas found re-creations of waterbirds—geese, cranes, swans, and ducks—in Paleolithic art in bone carvings and cave drawings. Most notable among these earliest figures is the Bird Goddess figure—a hybridization of waterbird with womanly form—a woman leaning forward in the posture of the Crane. The largest portion of

the figure's anatomy is a swelling posterior sometimes hollowed to contain what, many archeologists believe, a reference to the cosmic egg of the late Greek creation myth (Price, 2001). As Gimbutas (1996) documented, "this is an identification of female [egg-shaped] buttocks with the long body of a bird or bird carrying an egg" (p. 235). The cosmic egg, laid by a "wide-winged waterbird" hovering in darkness then creating the earth is a guiding myth not only to the Greeks but is understood to be "universal from Africa to the Arctic" (p. 102).

In some locations the Bird Goddess was shaped with a phallus (or long neck) with breasts and a lower body as testicles, blurring sexes and thus suggesting androgyny or hermaphroditism. For millennia the Goddess with a phallus was "an accepted form of depicting life promotion,...as well as the snake, is endowed with the mysterious power of spontaneity" (Gimbutas, as cited in Reis, 1997, p. 581). This particular configuration has been interpreted as portraying both a unity and a multiplicity; s/he is both the giver and the taker of life. This profound image, conveyed in art, tells about the nature of fe/male creative potential. This image, with a bisexual nature, remains "definitively female"; it holds "the possibility for self-fertilizing, for self-renewal, and regeneration" (Reis, 1997, p. 581). This ancient image still resides deep in the human psyche, perhaps echoing a time when women were birds.

As all myths, languages, and life narratives change with time, the Bird Goddess image was transformed over several millennia, reduced to a slimmer upright goddess. Like the Moon over which she reigned, her light-giving power was outshone by the sun god Zeus. While not completely abandoned, her many earth-embracing attributes, over time, were portioned off to lesser goddesses. No longer do we have the Bird Goddess, Mother of the Earth; rather, we have multiple goddesses with fractions of her original power, powers that have been separated out, wherein some lose her fertility all together like the chaste goddess Artemis. In this slimming and paring of ability, what effect has it had on our consciousness and relationship with place, with wilderness, and with other creatures?

Poet and mythologist Robert Graves (1948/1997), for whom the White Goddess was a consciously real presence and generative force in his writing, maintains that most ancient love of the earth is embodied in reverence for the great goddess, whose nature is both destructive and nurturing. While a rationalistic, patriarchal, urban culture has suppressed value of this life force, he writes that "the longer her hour is postponed," the more "exhausted by [hu]man's irreligious improvidence the natural resources of the soil and sea" will become; and so the more mercilessly destructive her return (p. 486). Indeed, in forgetting these myths, and privileging the light of consciousness (solar or logos) over the equally valuable dark aspect (lunar or slow, earthly, instinctual, receptive, and sensual), we have reduced not only our ways of learning but also what we learn and so value. For Graves her return shall come in the form of a "gaunt, red-wattled crane" who will use her beak "like a spear to fetch [us] home again" (p. 486).

These elegant creatures, "their stature, grace, and beauty, their wild fierce temperament," for naturalist and environmental activist Peter Matthiessen (2001), offer a striking metaphor for the "vanishing wilderness of our once bountiful earth" (p. xiv). As he reminds, "Perhaps more than any other living creatures, [cranes] evoke the retreating wilderness, the vanishing horizons of clean water, earth, and air upon which their species—and ours too, though we learn it very late—must ultimately depend for survival" (p. 4).

The immortal cranes call, their cries sound from afar, their thoughts circle upward into distant skies. Below, on the autumn rivers, stands a man, above him the bright moon. The man wanders aimless, trailing after the endless Milky Way. The wind

blows past him. I, too, thinks the man, would like to be utterly free. (Jiang Yi Ning, as cited in Matthiessen, 2001, p. 3)

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