

Exile from Earth

Sandra White

“We are connected to the dead of every kind in ways not commonly remembered. The bones of the ancestors, which lie in the body of the Earth, are transformed into the bodies of plants and creatures, including us. The Dineh who live in and around Chaco Canyon understand that they are an intimate part of this ancestral community as expressed through mountains, mists, clouds and generating rain. They know in their bodies, in their bones, that they are directly connected to the mountains that gather the cloud, the green that gives rise to clouds, and the mist and ultimately the rain that nourishes all that grows to give forth the beautiful pollen that fertilizes and heals. In all these forms, the ancestral continuity confirms our true identity.”
Joan Halifax¹

“... it is the body, the feeling, the instincts, which connect us with the soil. If you give up the past, you naturally detach from the past; you lose your roots in the soil, your connection with the totem ancestors that dwell in your soil. You turn outward and drift away, and try to conquer other lands because you are exiled from your own soil.” Carl Jung²

These two extracts together provide some deeper explanation of a personal experience a couple of years ago, Autumn 2007, when I was helping a friend sift her two large compost bins which had been left to their own devices for over two years. For one or two hours a week, I repeatedly thrust my spade into the compost and then, on my knees, spread it out with my hands, looking for unbroken-down matter. Of course, there was hardly any and I marvelled at the fineness of this soil. Each time, my next two days were transformed. Everything I engaged in, work or play, filled the ‘right’ amount of time and I was in an effortless, flowing, grounded, calm, light and joyful state. As the days passed, however, these qualities gradually faded. So I became hungry for those compost bins and went more often. Some days I desired to burrow deep into that soil, breathe in its smell, feel its fine granules and its clumps, cover myself with it; perhaps to move myself into the very centre of the cycle of life. I was home. At home, my body feels secure and my mind can settle in its safety, in its solidity, in its fluid responsiveness. At home, my unified body and mind relate anew to time, space and motion, accurately measuring them while flowing expansively within them. When I reconnect with my ‘creatureness’, more is available to me: my whole, instinctual intelligence as well as that of my intellect, working in harmony.

My recollection of that experience explains further why I keep wanting to read the last phrase of Jung above as “*You ... try to conquer other lands because you are exiled from your own soul.*” The connection between soil and soul has been explored by many, and now, through the linking of these two paragraphs, I understand it better still. They provide more perspective on wars and on every-day power battles I regularly hear about within bureaucracies. They give me, too, a new angle on consumerism. For, surely, exile also generates hunger, yearning, a yawning hole that cannot be filled.

Without roots, without body, without instinct, how can *enough* be known? How can *abundance* be recognised? In this state, without rootedness in soil, the real

abundance of the Earth becomes psychologically unavailable and a quest for more ensues; then, because being in the midst of *plenty* cannot now be experienced as nourishing, this quest turns into a need to own more and more.

Jung’s next sentences amplify this: *That is inevitable. The feet will walk away and the head cannot retain them because it also is looking out for something. That is the Will, always wandering over the surface of the Earth, always seeking something. It is exactly what Mountain Lake, the Pueblo chief, said to me, ‘The Americans are quite crazy. They are always seeking; we don’t know what they are looking for.’ Well, there is too much head and so there is too much will, too much walking about, and nothing rooted.*³ These days, due to the pressures of time and the technologies we have built which are meant to help us to cater for those pressures, we could say that many of us don’t walk enough – but his point is clear.

“Seeking” is a vital attribute of the human being and, indeed, I class myself as a “seeker”. But something important is to be understood here. I think that we are in the paradoxical situation where the seeking which arises out of exile has brought into the world the huge and valuable benefits of our technological age, much of which we need, but which risks killing immense swathes of life on Earth **because** it arises out of exile.

In a way, I find that Alan Garner’s story of *The Prince and The Tower* describes something of this seeking which arises out of exile, this unquenchable thirst for more and more of ... what?

“It’s about a Prince who is so vain that he is interested only in himself and his clothes and how he looks. So his father has a round tower built for him, and the wall of the top room and the roof are made of alternate panels of mirror and window. The view from the windows shows all the world and the sky.

The Prince loves the room and won't leave it. All he does is look at himself in the mirrors and at the reflections from every side. He never looks out of a window.

The next day he's woken by a creaking sound. And the creaking wakes him every morning. He thinks nothing of it; then after several days he notices that the mirrors are becoming wider than the windows. ...

Well, the Prince is chuffed with the bigger mirrors, and every morning he wakes at the creaking and goes to see how much more they have widened. This goes on until, one day, he thinks the mirrors are getting dirty, because he can't see himself clearly, so he sets about polishing the glass. But it makes no difference. Then he sees what's happening.

The mirrors aren't dirty. It's the windows that are getting narrower and letting less and less light in. He tries to force the windows apart, but he can't. Outside, the sun is shining and he sees all the bright colours. And when he looks in the mirrors all he sees is a dimming reflection.

Each day he presses his face against the mirrors, but he can see no more than his own self fading. Then there is one last creak, and the wall and roof become all mirror, and the Prince is alone in the dark.”⁴

Whilst he is walking about only within his room at the top of the tower, I have yet to find a clearer image of the detachment and rootlessness of which Jung spoke. Whilst he may not be turning outward to conquer, the Prince has drifted away so completely from soil and soul that he is lost to his “ancestral community”, as it is to him. Of course, there are many ways to think about the story. When I interpret the mirrors as a metaphor for our civilisation's technology, it tells me something of the dangers of Western culture's infatuation with its own creations. That the Prince “sees what's happening” and still “never looks out of a window” is why I keep working with this story, offering it in workshops with different groups of people in enactments and constellations. This central metaphor names the question of our moment in history: can we alter our course?

I continue to believe that what underlies the hungers we are visiting upon the Earth can itself be unearthed and that the desire for re-“connection with the totem ancestors that dwell in [our] soil” pulses strong. As Dartmoor lyricist Carolyn Hillyer has written in the title track from the album *Exile*

The river's lonely,
the mountains stolen
the morning faded
the forest fallen
the sky is wounded
the road is broken
the lives are scattered
the road is torn
distant spirits
bring me home
distant spirits
bring me home



Exile, I am lost in exile
looking from outside
Exile, I am lost in exile
looking from outside in

I'll find our mountains
mend our sky
soothe the river
recall those lives
I dreamt our country
weeps alone
my heart is hurting
bring me home⁵

References

1. Halifax, J extract from “The Fruitful Darkness” in *The Sacred Earth, Writers on Nature and Spirit* (Ed Gardner, J) p.135 (New World Library 1998)
2. Jung, C “Zarathustra Seminar” para. 1541 in *The Earth has a Soul, the Nature Writings of C G Jung* (Ed Sabini, M) p.74 (North Atlantic Books 2005)
3. *Ibid*
4. Garner, A *Thursbitch* (The Harvill Press 2003) pp.120-121
5. Hillyer, C. (lyrics) & N. Shaw (music) www.seventhwavemusic.co.uk

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