Night Vision: An Imaginal Approach

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Abstract

This paper explores the poetics of death and dying using an imaginal approach. It focuses on an understanding of death, dying and palliative care within the framework of Arnold Mindell's process-oriented psychology. It develops a mythopoetic weaving of ideas and images intended to invite reveries of death and dying that take us more deeply into a personal understanding of this liminal experience. The paper is illustrated with reference to poetry and myth, specifically the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, and offers an extended reverie from Eurydice's perspective.

Waitari

E tahuri ana tēnei pepa ki te whakatau i ngā mōteatea tangi, kōwhekowheko hoki mā te ara pōhewa. Ka aronui ki te mātauranga hāngai ki te mate, whakamatemate me te mahi mirimiri e ai ki ngā whakahaere hātepe hinengaro a Arnold Mindel. Ka whaneke ake he rarangatanga whakaaro, whakaahua hai whakaputa i ngā wawata whakahōhonu ake i ngā aweko o te mate me te whakamatemate te huarahi e hōhonu ake ai te mātauranga o tēnei momo wheako. Ko ngā mōteatea me ngā pakiwaitara pūmau tonu atu ki te pakiwaitara Kiriki mō Orpheus rāua ko Eurydice te whakaaturanga whakamāramatanga o tēnei korero, ā, ka whakawhānuihia ake he whakaaro mai i te tirohanga a Eurydice.

Keywords: death and dying; palliative care; process-oriented psychology; imaginal psychology; mythopoesis; dream; reverie; Orpheus and Eurydice

Eurydice Returns to the Underworld
Walking a darkness unformed and vaporous
I am colliding with intangibles.
There is so much to learn.

Vague murmurings are all I remember.
Do I know you, here?

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I can see the black trappings were a preparation
for this, overlapping with shadow
bleached of proportion until noon.

After nightfall, I could be a veiled slope, an incline, take on the shape
I required to converse with the oracle.
I could lie still as a landscape disquieted by stars
and allow things to loosen around me.
My garments sheltered the land; kept still the small things;
watched and protected.

There is no reflection on the dark waters,
no movement.
This time no fanfare, no ovation, none to call me back.
(Deed, 1994, p. 51)

In the Beginning

T. S. Eliot, the English poet, wrote "In my beginning is my end" (1944, p. 21). As I begin writing this paper my intention is to write an academic article in the hope that this might be of use to others practising process-oriented psychology. However, I begin to be aware of an increasingly insistent voice, quite other to the academic tone of the article I was writing. Taking up Arnold Mindell's (1985) encouragement to follow and amplify my process through attending to what calls for my attention and unfolding it, I discover this voice has a completely other intention.

It seems that in engaging with a project involving process work and palliative care, a marginalised part of myself comes to life and wants to have something to say about the poetics of death and dying. This poet has been silenced for over a decade by Academia. I have come to think of her as the Deceased Poet. Now it is Academia's turn to die. Now the Deceased Poet is returning to life and wants to claim her poetic voice. As Gaston Bachelard noted, poetic reverie is a language of dream and image capable of expanding consciousness (1960). It is in this spirit I engage with the spirit of the Deceased Poet in this work.

As I stay with my process, I find myself recollecting the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. This myth evocatively expresses the grief process: it is a story of loss and longing; of wanting to repossess the lost loved one and eventually losing this possibility in order to grieve and remember the loved one imaginally. It is the very myth of love, death and transformation so eloquently unfolded in Robert Romanyshyn's (1999) book, *The Soul in Grief: Love, Death and Transformation*.

Orpheus is the mythic singer-poet whose songs resonate with the soul of creation. He attempts to defy death when he travels to the underworld and bargains with Hades for the return of his beloved wife Eurydice who has died from a serpent bite. Hades agrees she can return provided Orpheus walks ahead and does not look back to see if she is following. They are accompanied by Hermes, the God's messenger, the Trickster, which suggests things aren't as straightforward as they seem. Orpheus, at the last moment, can't

help himself — he turns, glances backward, and in that single moment all is lost again. Orpheus returns to the land of the living to mourn his loss.

Orpheus is a master of altered states: a poet-musician who is literally able to charm women, birds, and animals, as well as his way into and out of the underworld, but eventually the women of the world to which he has returned, seduced by his charms, realise that in his grief he is lost to them. Disenchanted and frustrated at not getting a piece of him they tear him to pieces. Dismembered, his head floats down the river, whispering the name of Eurydice, and is eventually buried under the temple of Apollo, where in the whispering of her name Eurydice is eternally remembered. Orpheus' lyre is flung into the heavens where it becomes the constellation Lyra, a heavenly body playing heavenly music.

I wonder if Orpheus, the archetypal grieving poet-hero, is the voice that wants a claim in this work. Yet, on reflection, the reflected light of a star perhaps, it seems my poetic voice is not a star-dwelling poet high up in the heavens, but a poet deeply intimate with concepts of death and the underworld.

I consult T.S. Eliot again: "What we call the beginning is often the end | and to make an end is to make a beginning" (1994, p. 47). Eliot encourages me to attune to the spiralling cyclical process of life and death and to follow these rhythms in the structure of this work. I return to the beginning. When I began writing the academic article, I kept hearing the words of a poem I had published twenty years ago, wanting to include it somehow. Titled *Eurydice Returns to the Underworld*, it is the poem I present at the beginning of this work (Deed, 1994). I have found my voice: Eurydice wants to give voice to the experience of death and dying from the perspective of her dreamlike underworld.

Another Beginning

While training in process-oriented palliative care I become immersed in the idea of communication beyond death, a theme that travels into the altered state of my dream life. In my dreams the dead begin speaking and increasingly they ask me to translate what they have to say. As these dream communications are from Māori ancestors I offer here an acknowledgment of Māori perspectives of death and dying, my voice as only one voice, my vision as only one way of seeing into a darkness about which we all make our own sense and sensing. For, as Liese Groot-Alberts (2012) wrote in the context of palliative care: "When difference of worldview is not acknowledged and we transfer our Western autonomy- and individual-based knowledge indiscriminately onto community-based culture we fail to honour difference, creating new hurts instead of healing" (p. 158).

Turning back to the poets, I find Hone Tuwhare's (1993) poem "We who live in darkness" describes, for me, not just a creation myth in which space between Father sky and Mother earth is created, but the potential space that needs to develop in our engagements between realms and between cultures. In this space, which Tuwhare described as a beginning, and Light, we endeavour to bridge the gaps between worlds and worldviews through openness, spaciousness and willingness to hold the uncertainties and tensions of difference. We move from the darkness of separation and single-mindedness to the light that is a beginning of mutuality. As Pākehā, I find myself standing

between realms, between the living and the dead, and between two cultures. I am in the darkness of unknowing and can only approach discussion of these dreams from the place of the dreams themselves, not analysing or interpreting from psychological frameworks, but letting them speak with their own voice, the voice of the Māori elders who communicated through them. I consulted with Māori over communicating the messages I received in these dreams, and I honour the ancestors who ask me to give them a voice. I do so as a respectful outsider looking out into and from the darkness.

In the first dream the ancestors hand me three 19th century tiki, asking me to protect and care for them. Then follow three dreams about death and dying.

In the first I witness the death scene of a young Māori woman, attended by her lamenting people. She looks directly into my eyes, asks me to feel her pain and grief.

In the next dream I attend a deathbed ritual of a Māori man, again attended by his people. I am required to participate in the ritual of releasing his soul. I carry the bowl containing his soul outside and pour it back into the earth with a prayer.

In the third dream I enter the back row of the tangi for the man in the previous dream to honour his passing. A gesture ripples through the gathering and reaches a kaumatua, who walks down the aisle. We hongi and he hugs me warmly, saying — when you people (pākehā) show up it's usually good.

After this dream the ancestors give me a manaia and tell me to wear it over my heart.

In his exhibition "Out the Black Window" artist Ralph Hotere (1997) invited us to look out into, and from, the darkness to the laments for what is lost; his paintings weave poems and images into dark elegies for individuals, tribes, humanity, and the environment. I present these dreams as communications about death and dying, not just on a personal level, but as Hotere indicated, on myriad levels of lamentation. I find it useful to introduce here some principles for *a* — not *the* — Māori worldview embracing concepts of death and dying. This transitional state from life to death is one of tapu (sacredness), referring to the spiritual essence of things, deriving from mauri, the life principle of all creation. According to Hogg (2013) tapu aims to keep creation safe by maintaining cosmological equilibrium, directing us always back to the Supreme Being, Io-Matua-Kore. Tapu requires us to be kaitiaki (guardians) of life through tika and pono (right relationships that are sincere and faithful), and aroha (compassionate concern) for all things. These interconnected principles are a framework of a te ao Māori whakaaro (Māori worldview). They are represented here by the ancestors through the images and narrative of dream. In these dreams I believe we are asked to protect and care for the taonga of grief, inviting a witnessing, participation and honouring of the grief of this country and our people. The collective grief of colonisation in Aotearoa New Zealand needs to be shared. Without connection to family, history, place, we become unable to stand in the space between darknesses. In death we disconnect from what we love in order to reconnect in other realms, a transmuting into presence through absence. The healing of disconnection comes through witnessing and participating in grief with an open feeling heart.

In Māori culture it is customary to talk to the dead and about ancestors, continuing relationships with the dead (Groot-Alberts, 2012). Mindell (1996) suggested that the dead are both real and roles in group process. With no-one representing them directly, they hold "ghost roles". By representing the dead, letting them speak through me, I find a way for them to communicate. Eurydice asks that the dead be represented, affirming that they hold a valuable role in our process of grieving. James Hillman (1979) also suggested that our communication with the dead continues. He described death as a community matter in which we are all entangled, and in which the dead other goes on existing as a psychological reality with whom we go on communicating. Greg Mogenson (1992) described it tenderly: "Deep inside the grief of the bereaved, the dead are at work, making themselves into religion and culture, imagining themselves into soul" (p. xi). He claimed that not only do the dead live on in us but that we live on in them. The voices and songs of the dead, their opinions, lessons and curiosities continue to be worked through in us as we make room for them to be heard.

So I begin to listen and ask what it is that Eurydice wants to share. According to Hillman (1979) we must meet the dream and the underworld in their own territory, not strive to wrench them into the ordinary light of day. In order to hear Eurydice, I join her in her underworld, not trying to return her to the land of the living, as Orpheus had done. Only then can she sing in her own voice.

An Underworld Perspective

Death is an intimate part of ourselves, and an essential part of knowing ourselves, not just on an individual but on a world level. In death one does not choose to return to life but to dwell ever more deeply in the understandings/dreams of the underworld. In order to understand the world we also need to stand under it, in the underworld and hear what death has to say.

In marginalising the dead we doom ourselves to an altered state of twilight insubstantiality where nothing can be spoken. Yet when we attend to the voices of the dead there is great energy for life and creative vision. We also need to attend to the places and parts of this planet and its people who are dying for lack of voice. We can be a voice for the dead and dying. As we re-engage the marginalised dead we strengthen a voice to affirm the living and strengthen our ability to recollect and remember those who would otherwise be forgotten. It is in this remembering, this willingness to attend to the voices of the dead, that they are able to live again in our imagination.

Eurydice speaks of the power of the heart, not to descend into the underworld along with the dead, nor to seek to repossess them and refuse to let them go, but to find room in our hearts to grieve and to be torn apart and then to remember. Eurydice invites us to attend to the collective voice of our ancestors who continue to sing the world into being through us, through our willingness to love and to listen. Both Orpheus and Eurydice show us the potentials of creation and destruction. The heavenly body and the underworld shade both hold a vision and a perspective. Eurydice's voice makes claim for the underworld perspective, for the value of attending to darkness as well as light.

While the focus remains on Orpheus, the heavenly poet and singer, while we remain

spellbound and starry-eyed, Eurydice remains unsung and unheard. This paper opens a space for Eurydice to sing herself into being once more and her songs are the poetic knowledge of the dark realm.

As I listen to Eurydice's voice from, or on behalf of, the dead, I find more sense of life and a growing energy and illumination in myself. I shine, not perhaps with the reflected distant light of the stars, but the glow that comes forth from inner depths, dark places that contain the vastness of our internal and ancestral cosmology. In death it is the singing of the cosmos we are asked to pay attention to, and to kindle toward new life. In order to learn Eurydice's song, I want to hear not just what is sung to me but what has been sung to others. So I return to the poets. In this way I bring a richer voice, a deeper and more complex understanding. For example, both Margaret Atwood and Rainer Maria Rilke also represented the voices of Orpheus and Eurydice. In catching the echoes of their words they also are represented as ghosts in the process, having perspectives that contribute to the ongoing song. The poets, like Orpheus, are threshold figures capable of standing on the edge between the visible and invisible realms, gathering the strands of the songs of the dead, offering us glimpses of the mysteries of the underworld. Just as Hillman (1979) has implied, the voices of living and dead are entwined in a communication that develops their ideas beyond the limits of time. Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus* (2004) focus on that poet, speaking the lament of our own mortality. Atwood (1988a, 1998b, 1988c) let both Orpheus and Eurydice speak through her. Where Rilke brings ghosts from his childhood to life through his images, tending them and mourning them as he weaves presence into his passing life, it is Atwood's Eurydice, in all her vague insubstantiality, who remained determined to stay in the underworld. Both explore themes of possession and relinquishment. Atwood's Eurydice has already let go of memory and desire and cannot see why she would return. Rilke's Eurydice also finds it hard to recognise her former world. These poets show us that we cannot possess the dead and hold them in the world of the living. We continue to communicate with them in the realm of images, in which we become possessed by them rather than possessive — in this way they retain their own voice, their own unique presence. We also learn that the imaginal realm is one of insubstantialities. It is not physical reality and we must approach the imaginal life of our loved ones with the intangibility of the underworld. As Atwood (1988b) wrote from Eurydice's perspective in Orpheus:

> Before your eyes you held steady
> The image of what you wanted
> Me to become: living again.
> It was this hope of yours that kept me following…
>
> Though I knew how this failure
> Would hurt you, I had to
> Fold like a grey moth and let go.
> (p. 60)

How does this apply to process work in palliative care? Working with death and dying we work with an edge, or perhaps rather a threshold or portal between two realms. As healers, how we are able to be with that edge matters, for ourselves, for those who go on ahead to those other realms, and for the songs that come through from there to carry us forward. Hillman (1979) describes dreaming as the place where we are in the underworld, a different world with different rules to those of the conscious world of everyday reality. Mindell (2000) encourages us to dream lucidly, to dream while awake, thereby consciously opening the portal to other realms and inviting the underworld in as a valuable part of our consciousness. During the dying process it seems people, be they patients or healers (and one can ask here who are the patients and who are the healers?) move more easily and more deeply into this intuitive dream consciousness, into the altered states of beings letting go of physical reality and attachments. As healers, are we willing to stand between worlds, to be patient witnesses to the underworld dreaming itself through to our more conscious reality? Are we willing to accompany Eurydice and her kind down to the underworld and to let go of her there and return without her in order that when she is ready she can sing her own songs back to us in dream — physically no longer present but shining in the imaginal life of the heart. If we let the underworld into our heart we heal ourselves of possession, of wanting to control and hold on. We are invited to be the vessel, Orpheus's lyre perhaps, through which the world's songs can float through, without memory or longing, without wrestling the angel of language, just being in the reverie that lullabies us gently through the storm.

Eurydice's Song: A Reverie of Night Vision

A vast consciousness awakens in me: the energy of night vision. Such a vast representation of love and death — the death that lives inside us in order for us to live; the death that sleeps inside us, waiting for living to wake us up. It is in fully living that we prepare for, and become, our dying. As death sleeps inside us and dreams the world — dreams up beings and things, visions and love, journeys, relationships, sorrows, gazes — as it dreams the world into being the world is named, found, made real. Only through death's dreaming can we realise the world.

If death is planted quietly at the centre of our self in order to dream the world, the world becomes both more and less tangible, death is peaceful and fluid and able to grow strong in us, to dream the world vibrant and alive in us, to sing it into a form that matters, into matter and being. From here we could say we are only, in these waking moments, death's dream of us, death's dream for us. In the sense of death as a consciousness of a non-being state which is the river that runs through things. This non-being existence is one to fall in love with and embrace; not to force death, not to wake death from the dream, but to let it sleep the world gently from the centre of ourselves; let death's collective dream in us go out into the dreaming world. For in death's dream of us we are connected, the collective dream consciousness is sourced by death's immortal song.

Grief is part of the song, the world has its griefs and death dreams this too, dreams the longing, loss, letting go of things; the separations and the hard edges that prevent things from flowing together. If we are not aware of death dreaming inside us we are also not

aware of the grief which leads us fully to joy. Death sleeps, spinning out the thread of dream which we are part of whether we feel connected or not. To disconnect from death's dreaming is to live an unlived, undreamed life; a life distant from depth and feeling — the song of ourselves.

If death is planted quietly in the centre of myself and I go into the dream and dream the death in my life I invite death to dream more deeply and richly, more life-fully. I wonder how to give death more room and freedom inside myself to dream up the world in me and around me.

We need to see with night vision in order to experience death's dreaming of, and in, the awake world. We need night vision, to see through and beyond and into things obliquely, to see the illumination of things for themselves and to illuminate things to themselves. Night vision is dreamconsciousness. Attention to the invisibles in the visible world.

This night vision finds me through a long letting go. I feel the inward pull of something and begin to sense the inwardness of the full moon beginning her lessening. As she declines, losing her ripeness and her full light, my body also experiences decline and the tides in me seem to drag and ebb.

I begin to feel the inward pull of everything — the hushed drawn-in quality of the air and the ocean. The birds are less energetic, simply echoing the places and names of things rather than singing the ripe vibrancy of life. *There* is the still point: life vibrating smaller, narrower, darker, closer to the still point of the sleeping world. The rhythms are tighter and quieter, the loop is smaller, narrower in its frame, closing in. I begin to see an aerial view of the land, like patchwork in all its carved up pieces and plantings.

In the contracting of the light as the world is pulled into paler rhythms it is not surprising we feel colder, stiller, smaller, and more inward. It is this other side, the inward interior landscape, that grows larger — the place of shades and shadows, the glimpsed other world. This night vision is the vision of the owl, gliding with the shadows, gliding in silence through the shapes of things, negotiating a darkness that is always there. This is an *other* sight, an *other* way of seeing or sensing the dreamworld.

We can learn to become a ghost of the dreamworld and have safe passage to glide through, let nothing take shape, let nothing matter to the point where it becomes form. Just to glide through the emptiness of things, the internal insubstantiality of things. And in doing so the internal landscape becomes so much more than our external sense of ourselves.

Hush, storm, lullaby, sleep, despair. The dreaming world hibernates at the still point in a momentary lull, the spaces between night and day. The night world holds something more vast between its teeth. This is the time for ebb, quiet, lostness, dark, space, inwardness. This is the melancholy of the world, moments of calm reflection and reverie, still moments of gazing into the pond or the river or the long shadows. Let the shadows find voice and speak themselves through you. Stones are cold and silent, huddled together. Grass is quiet. The light is thin, and all the plants, stones, birds, lean into it, drinking in what they can — a quiet song of replenishment. This is the world song of decline, of loss, of memory, of withdrawing into melancholy in wait for desire, for what Romanyshyn terms "greening of the soul" (1999, p. 60).

This is the natural process of grieving and loss, the withdrawal from the alive world into an inward focus before one can return to the world of life and activity. It's a state of suspended animation, waiting through the process of transformation, wanting to haunt the world, to walk through it invisibly, wanting to ghost through in the night shadows. There is also the dark edge of grief, wanting to fall into the grave, wanting to follow loved ones into the world of dream, feeling pulled more surely there than here. Not sure of being seen, walking through rivers of light and eddies of shadow. It is peaceful, effortless and comforting to be in the subterranean gloom, simply breathing water and light. To stay subterranean, lulled into the dream while the world waits to inspire us; waits for us to inspire her.

Still in decline, I become like an overripe fruit, beyond perfection, poised to fall from the tree and rot in the soil. The deliquescence of beginning to decay whilst still connected to the branch: the delicate tension of wanting to fall. Then to fall is bliss: freefall through the air into the soft leaves, the best part of decline — the complete abandon of letting go. It feels good to let things loosen their grip and just fall into space. As I fall away from myself I become something other. Take a fall, go to pieces, begin to lose shape and purpose. There are things to learn in the falling, in the falling apart, and in the darkness before new life begins. Let yourself fall and then let yourself be in the dark.

There are so many unseen potentials. Imagine plucking dark velvety plums from a tree in the night. It is impossible to see without night vision, growing, silently in the flowering dark.

Love, Death and Transformation

This reverie of night vision, Eurydice's song, reflects my grief process over the many months of the process-oriented palliative care course. I had lost two dear loved ones just before starting the course and knew my grieving would be entwined with my learning and leaning into palliative care. In hindsight, with the Orphic glance of looking back, I see how the reverie contained the themes and process of grief — love, loss, longing for the loved one's return, letting go, being torn apart, and realising the seeds of transformation. This is also the essence of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, which continues to be sung in our grieving, just as in the myth, Orpheus's buried head continues to sing the songs of the soul of creation.

My calling in this piece, my vocation, is to give voice to the underworld perspective of Eurydice. It seems to me Eurydice is the voice of those we care for, those we attend to with love, who must learn how to leave us, and in leaving us, teach us about letting go. As the dying let go of what they love, whilst still longing at times to return to life; as their lives in the everyday world, and often their very bodies fall apart, they reveal to us the dark mystery of the underworld, in which Eurydice claims there is both bliss and so many unseen potentials silently growing fruit. In working on these images and the myth, I come to realise more intentionally the partnering of life and death. In dying and in losing a loved one we go through a similar process of disintegration and transformation. And in the myth of the poet it is through the act of relinquishing that we become ourselves and find that heart space in which we are eternally present in an other realm.

Eurydice also invites us to attend to what is lost in ourselves, to give voice to our underworld shades, those things in ourselves that haunt us. In allowing them presence we become more present in ourselves and our presence becomes prescience — a state of intuition or insight in which we are not afraid to see into the dark. Mindell (1985; 1989) says we all have the chance in death to become our total selves through living out our personal myths. He invites us to practise dying, and to imagine dying as a healthy experience. He says that in order to grow, old parts of ourselves need to die and we need to realise that we are constantly practising this art of dying. He also urges us to notice what happens in our dying, in other words to be both present and prescient in the cycle of life and death — to be alive in, and to, our death. In this death space, the place where I sense fruit growing silently in the dark, Mindell suggests death implies a new process wanting to happen, that as we die, some part of us is also continuing with life. Eurydice also wants us to know that there is an underworld life, with its own perspective — one that does not belong in the day world where the everyday self has died, but one that goes on in the eternal realm of image and dream that understands our conscious awareness. One that we can access in altered states of consciousness. Mindell asks us to learn to share our altered states with others we love so that we don't end up alone and isolated when we enter into these states (1989). Eurydice asks us to hear her perspective, to see through her eyes, if we are to attend to the dying. And both of them also ask us to attend to the death planted quietly at the centre of ourselves. We must learn to relate to people in altered states and to connect to the dead as if they were an inner part of ourselves. In this way we take death quietly inside us and also recognise the eternal aspects of being within that heartfelt space in which image and underworld become present and prescient. With the understanding that comes from the underworld perspective, we are able to let what is no longer needed die away and find new ways to engage with life.

At this endpoint, returning to my beginning, I find my writing has undergone a transformation from academic article to article of faith: that poetic faith of the imagination that Coleridge described as a "willing suspension of disbelief" (1817, p. 169). Glancing back, I discover the one who writes at this endpoint is not the one who began the writing. I have set aside what Keats described as the "irritable reaching after fact or reason" (1899, p. 277) in favour of the willing suspension of myself in order for Eurydice to sing through me. This is what grief asks of us. And through this process of mourning, suspended animation, and disintegration, I now see there has been transformation — the dark fruit of the imagination growing itself in the silence.

Afterword/Afterward

Endings are also a grief process. As I work through my feelings of loss as we near the final seminar of our training, part of my process is a questioning of whether I have really taken up the call I had felt for palliative care. It is as if the learning has slipped through my hands like water, sensed but intangible, I am left holding nothing solid. I have a week left to finish this paper, to craft and shape and lovingly let the work speak for itself. But process has other ideas. On Guy Fawkes night my lovely chicken, Virginia, injures herself in fright, then catches pneumonia. Everything else is laid aside as I tend her, hopeful she

will survive, then realising she is dying and just wanting to support her process. Process-oriented palliative care comes into play. Unable to communicate verbally with my patient, I follow her experience. As she listens to the birds calling outside I listen too, looking with her into the trees through the window. As she gazes at me I gaze back. Language is no longer a problem as I use blank access responses simply to echo her process and be alongside, encouraging her with the tone of my voice and the familiar beeps we usually speak in. Most of all, I give her my breathing, breathe with her and for her at times. I lie beside her and feel her calm and comfort from the companionship. At times, when she is weary and growing less conscious I mirror her closing eyes, gazing into hers and then closing mine. She then closes her own eyes and sleeps peacefully for a while. In her last moments, as I touch my hands round her, gently cradling her, she opens her eyes wide, looking directly into mine and clucks softly to me — the cluck we had often exchanged in our daily lives together. This is her last communication and she is at peace.

I realise I have been doing the work instinctively. It strikes me now that I have been in touch with the ghosts of this work, the insubstantial presences of the underworld. Eurydice can share her perspective but she remains disembodied, unable to be grasped in the light of day. I do not need to hold it solidly, but to let it flow through my hands as simply as water, as intuitively as a poem.

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