Naomi Lowinsky has given us a remarkable, fearless, and full autobiography. Speaking in poetic, psychologically sensitive, scholarly dialogues with her shape-shifting muse, she has created a new form . . . This is a beautiful book to treasure and spread among worthy friends.

—Sylvia Perera, Author of Descent to the Goddess and Celtic Queen Maeve and Addiction.

...Naomi Ruth Lowinsky offers us a superbly detailed investigation of the powerful, mythic forces of the world as they are revealed to the active creative self. Don’t miss this enlightening and fascinating book.


Naomi’s poetry and prose is infused with the suffering and joys of humans everywhere. Insightful and deeply moving, she brings us the food and water of life.

—Joan Chodorow, Author of Dance Therapy and Depth Psychology, Editor of C.G. Jung on Active Imagination.

In addition to The Sister from Below: When the Muse Gets Her Way, Naomi Ruth Lowinsky is the author of The Motherline: Every Woman’s Journey to Find Her Female Roots and numerous prose essays, many of which have been published in Psychological Perspectives and The Jung Journal. She has had poetry published in many literary magazines and anthologies, among them After Shocks: The Poetry of Recovery, Weber Studies, Rattle, Atlanta Review, Tiferet and Runes. Her two poetry collections, red clay is talking (2000) and crimes of the dreamer (2005) were published by Scarlet Tanager Books. She is the recipient of the first prize for poetry in the Obama Millennium competition. Naomi is a Jungian analyst in private practice and poetry and fiction editor of Psychological Perspectives.

spirituality/psychology/creativity

“A passionate love letter to those who yearn to be heard. A must read for every woman who longs to write poetry.”

—Maureen Murdock, Author of The Heroine’s Journey and Unreliable Truth: On Memoir and Memory.

“Naomi Ruth Lowinsky reinterprets mythic and historical reality in provocative versions of the stories of Eurydice, Helen, Ruth, Naomi, and Sappho. The voice of the Sister from Below argues, cajoles, prods, explains, and yes, loves her human counterpart, and becomes the inspiration for Lowinsky’s stunning poetry in this highly original book.”

—Betty de Shong Meador, Author of Inanna, Lady of Largest Heart and Princess, Priestess, Poet.

The Sister From Below
WHEN THE MUSE GETS HER WAY

Naomi Ruth Lowinsky
What Others are saying about *The Sister From Below*:

“Naomi Lowinsky has given us a remarkable, fearless, and full autobiography. Speaking in poetic, psychologically sensitive, scholar-like dialogues with her shape-shifting muse, she has created a new form. Through it she beckons us to attune with her as she explores her own personal and archetypal journeys, sounding the passionate depths of the Self that Everywoman may traverse when she lives authentically. This is a beautiful book to treasure and spread among worthy friends.”

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“The Sister From Below: When the Muse Gets Her Way, is in part a memoir of the author finding her poetic calling and in part a superb meditation on the creative process itself. Using as her vehicle conversations with various aspects of her own muse(s), Naomi Ruth Lowinsky offers us a superbly detailed investigation of the powerful, mythic forces of the world as they are revealed to the active creative self. Don’t miss this enlightening and fascinating book.”

—David St. John, Author of *Study for the World’s Body: New and Selected Poems* and *Prism*.

“The Sister from Below is a major contribution to active imagination as encounter and dialogue with the gods within. At the same time it is interwoven with stories of travel as pilgrimage, travel as inner journey and travel through time. Naomi’s poetry and prose is infused with the suffering and joys of humans everywhere. Insightful and deeply moving, she brings us the food and water of life.”

—Joan Chodorow, Author of *Dance Therapy and Depth Psychology*, editor of *C.G. Jung on Active Imagination*.

“The Sister from Below tells the complex story a woman poet has with her muse—“a nudge, a nag, an intruder, a banshee” demanding her time despite the challenges to her everyday life. Lowinsky brings us the voices of Sappho, Eurydice, the hungry ghost of her grandmother, and others who give her their lives to shape into images. A passionate love letter to those who yearn to be heard. A must read for every woman who longs to write poetry.”

—Maureen Murdock, Author of *The Heroine’s Journey* and *Unreliable Truth: On Memoir and Memory*. 
THE SISTER FROM BELOW
“In poetry and prose Naomi Lowinsky has created a biographical self-portrait. Being a sensitive, intelligent woman, born shortly after her German refugee parents escaped the holocaust and moved to the United States, it is little wonder that this child struggled with “being taken over” by emotion-laden forces she calls “her shape-shifting Sister from Below.” Slowly these two, Lowinsky and her “Sister,” begin to converse, giving birth to poetry.

“The central anchor of the book is located in the chapters related to her paternal grandmother, who died in a concentration camp in Holland—from cancer, not the ovens. Lowinsky makes peace with her grandmother and gains a capacity to bear the unspeakable suffering of her family. Through her recovered vision, she reinterprets mythic and historical reality in provocative versions of the stories of Eurydice, Helen, Ruth, Naomi, and Sappho. The voice of the Sister from Below argues, cajoles, prods, explains, and yes, loves her human counterpart, and becomes the inspiration for Lowinsky’s stunning poetry in this highly original book.”

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THE SISTER FROM BELOW
WHEN THE MUSE GETS HER WAY

NAOMI RUTH LOWINSKY, PH.D.
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On the Muse

The test of a poet’s vision is the accuracy of his portrayal of the White Goddess. The reason why the hairs stand on end, the eyes water, when one writes or reads a true poem is that a true poem is necessarily an invocation of the White Goddess, or Muse, the Mother of All Living . . .

—Robert Graves

Who is this She?

She inserts herself into everything I do. Everyday She insists on time from me, time spent listening to her. Even when I’m busy, on my way to work or preoccupied with the news, She says: “Give me just ten minutes. That’s all I ask. Sit in a chair. Take a deep breath. Take pen in your hand and write down what I say!” And you know, I always feel better after I do: more grounded, more real to myself, creative and alive.

Who is this She? She is not about the ordinary business of life: work, shopping, making dinner. She speaks from other realms. If you let Her, She will whisper in your ear, lead your thoughts astray, fill you with strange yearnings, get you hot and bothered, send you off on some wild goose chase of a daydream, eat up hours of your time. For She is a siren, a seductress, a shape-shifter. Why should you listen to such a trouble-maker? Because She is essential to the creative process; She holds the keys to your imagination and your deeper life.

The image of the muse who visits the poet and inspires the creative process is as old as poetry. She has been invoked since the first poet we know, the Sumerian priestess Enheduanna, invoked her fierce goddess, Inanna, four thousand years ago. Homer knew Her and called on her for help. The Greeks knew nine Muses, daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, goddess of memory. Their names were Calliope, muse of eloquence and epic poetry, Clio, muse of history and writing, Euterpe, muse of music, Terpsichore, muse of dance, Erato, muse of love poetry, Melpomene, muse of tragedy, Thalia, muse of

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comedy, Polyhymnia, muse of oratory, sacred hymns, and poetry, and Urania, muse of astronomy and science.²

The 6th century BCE Greek poet Alcman, invoked Calliope and declared: “the Muse has raised her voice, the clear voiced Siren.” He knew Her to be a dangerous enchantress but essential to his creative process.³ The great lyric poet Sappho knew Her too, summoning the “Muses/ with lovely hair”⁴ to help her transform the torments of love into eloquent song.

Does the muse still visit poets and artists? Or did She disappear when people lost their faith in spirit and myth? Poets do not commonly invoke Her these days, so what manner of being is She who visits me? Do I mean the soul? Do I mean Atman as in Hinduism or the Self as in Jungian psychology? Do I mean inspiration? Or, with Robert Graves, do I mean the Goddess?

When a troubadour praised his Lady, was he invoking the muse? When the alchemists engaged in “meditatio,” which they described as an “Internal Talk….with another who is invisible, as in the invocation of the Deity, or…. with one’s good angel,”⁵ were they being visited by the muse? When C.G. Jung engaged in active imagination with an inner figure he called Philamon, who explained to him the objective reality of the psyche, was he being visited by the muse?⁶ When Jacob, his head upon a stone pillow, found himself in the grip of an angel, who wrestled with him all night long, wounded him, and gave him his name, Israel, was he in the presence of the muse? Is an angel a muse? Is the beloved a muse? Is a god a muse? Or is the muse an intermediary between the worlds? It is not in my nature to sort out these complex distinctions.

What I want to convey are my own experiences of being taken over, seized, wrestled with all night long. I want to convey how a figure can emerge out of a reverie, a dream, a fleeting memory, a difficult emotion. If you let that figure speak you will learn what you didn’t know you knew, you will make sense of memories, or be filled with the urgency of a poem that demands to be written. The muse makes weird things happen, excites your passions, moves

² Angeles Arrien, The Nine Muses, pp. 6-7.
³ C.M. Bowra, Greek Lyric Poetry, p. 29.
⁴ Sappho, translated by Mary Barnard, fragment # 25.
⁵ C.G. Jung, Mysterium. CW Vol. 14, p. 497. (CW refers throughout to The Collected Works of C.G. Jung.)
⁶ Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, pp. 44-45.
your soul, lifts the veil on other realities, can send you into agony or ecstasy depending on her mood.

When the muse appears, as Robert Graves says, your “hair stands on end . . . eyes water;” you feel turned on, charged with erotic feeling. Colors are bright, images clearly faceted, words come as music to your inner ear. Do you know Her in yourself? Sometimes She is like a tug from a dreamy eyed child who’d rather wander in the woods, make-believe all kinds of wondrous things, than go through your to-do list. Sometimes She’s a bitch on wheels. My muse has not, like Dante’s Beatrice, waited patiently for me and lifted me to the heavens. She’s been a nudge, a nag, an intruder, a banshee—flying into a screaming rage if She does not get the time She considers Her due.

I write of nine manifestations in which the muse has visited me, stirred up creative ferment, found me my voice as a poet, filled me with stories of ghosts, mysteries, erotic teachings, the old religion. In my experience the muse can be an inner figure, a fleeting memory from early childhood, an ancestor, a figure from myth or from a dream, an image of a culture, a dead poet, or a ghost from one’s personal past.

The muse has come to me in the form of the “Sister from Below,” the inner poet who has spoken for the soul since language began. She has been trying to get my attention all my life. A visit to Florence, where I lived for a year as a young child, filled me with yearning for my first muse, a nursemaid whom I longed to meet again. The muse leapt into my reverie out of a poem I was working on, in the form of Eurydice, a figure from a famous myth. Eurydice was the beloved wife of the poet Orpheus. When she died he went down into the underworld to bring her back. Many poems have been written from his point of view. When Eurydice visited me, her story was a different and surprising one.

My muse came as the ghost of a grandmother I never met, who died in the Shoah, and had unfinished business with me. The muse visited me in the form of Old Mother India, whose culture I visited as a young woman. She cracked open my Western mind, and flooded me with Her many gods and goddesses. She came to me as Sappho, the great lyric poet of the ancient world, who entered my imagination with a lovely midlife fantasy. In a dream She appeared as Helena, a root vegetable, dressed in a flowery summer dress, and kept appearing again and again on a journey I took to the ancient land

of Thrace, now called Bulgaria. She came as “Die Ur Naomi,” an old woman from the biblical story for which I was named, who insisted on telling me Her version of the Book of Ruth. And in the end, to my surprise, the muse came in the form of a man, a poet I’d loved in my youth, long dead.

There are many, Robert Graves among them, who would say that the muse is always female. At the beginning of my journey I would have agreed with him. But I was taken to places and given experiences that showed me another aspect of the muse. Graves, after all, writes as a man, a male poet. We know much of the male experience of the muse. We know how Orpheus risked everything to find his Eurydice. We know how that one glimpse of Beatrice illuminated Dante’s life and became the wellspring for the Divine Comedy. We know how the “dark lady” wanders through the sonnets of Shakespeare. But what of a woman poet? Since the days of Enheduanna and Sappho, what do we know of her experience of the muse? Perhaps, as women learn more about the white goddess in our history, and in ourselves, as we stand on the grounds of our own deep female nature, we will be freed to experience the muse as male, as well as female.

The *Sister from Below* is the story of my relationship to the muse. I imagine this book shaped as a mandala, a flower. Each petal comes from a different experience in my life. Each begins in a different place. But each connects at the core to the central theme of the muse. Or, I imagine this book as a necklace made of beads, each a different color and shape, but all held together by that common thread—the forms of the muse that have been revealed to me.

I invite you to enter my inner world, peopled by the figures of my imagination, to go with me on inner and outer journeys, to experience with me the tumult of creativity and weird visitations. I hope you will be inspired to listen to your own muse, in whatever forms She (or He) comes to you.
The Argument

She . . . she Who she?
—Judy Grahn

The Woman You’re Not

She’s been persistent. We’ve argued for years. We don’t have the same goals for my life. I thought She was a distraction, a frivolity. Who has time for poetry when the world is such a perilous place? And anyway, She was making a shambles of my life. She’d blast me with intense images, or send me careening off, intoxicated with the power of some word; I’d not be heard from for hours. The dishes wouldn’t get done. The children’s dinner wouldn’t get cooked. I had to send Her into exile.

That was a long time ago. I was a single mother with young children. She’d come along in the form of ecstasy, of poetry, saying She’d always been there, that She was the true stuff of life. She broke up my first marriage. That was necessary. I had married too young and for all the wrong reasons. I had lost contact with the one I was, one I’d known from time to time, in childhood. Imprisoned in a false version of myself, She was a wild wind, or an earthquake, that knocked that prison down.

But, when She took over I couldn’t get anything done. I needed to earn a living, to make a practical connection to the world, not wander about for days in her underworlds. She was a bad influence. I stopped listening to her, went back to school, became a psychotherapist and eventually a Jungian analyst. I had meaningful work now, an office, where I was useful.

But She refused to stay away, though I tried to fend her off. She was bad for my mental health, so I drew a line in the sand: psychology on one side, the safe side, the good side; poetry on the other side, dangerous, wild.

Nonsense! She cried, and did a fierce dance in the sand, obliterating my line, poetry and psychology are fruits of the same world tree. This tree, She told me, has its roots in the eternal underworld, where dead souls wander and dark gods reign; its branches reach up into the realm of flight, into spiritual imagina-

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8 Judy Grahn, She Who, p. 5.
tion. Its fruits offer those who taste them what the Hindus call the “rasas” of life, life’s juices, life’s essential emotions. Long before psychology became its own branch of the world tree, poetry was the medium through which psyche knew herself, felt herself, tasted the fruit of the tree.

Slow down, I say. You’re blasting me with those big images again. I’m trying to keep my feet on the ground of everyday life.

So you should. But you can’t be grounded if you don’t know the ground you’re standing on. Poetry is psyche’s first language, everyone’s first language. It begins in our ancestral need to talk to the gods, to invoke, to evoke, to chant, to pray, to use the human voice to make a bridge between the inner and the outer realms. Those who want to know their roots, who want access to a creativity that comes from the depths, need to listen to me. I go by many names, I wear many faces. I am the poem that appears in the dark, when the fire has been lit. I am the trance that comes over you when you see the moon. I am that ineffable feeling you have when a boundary between the worlds has been crossed. I make my way through your throat to your tongue:

the woman you’re not

is sure of her great breasted body mermaid to this one siren to that she knows where to put her feet knows each step of the dance and her voice from the deep of her belly how she flings it about like her long fiery hair her laugh that collides with the stars fear never touches her whose dreams rise up like sap and any man who knows her knows her teeth and the back of her hand
The Argument

she grows crystals
at the bottom of your garden
wears purple silk and lavender chiffon
travels in a green and yellow covered wagon
drawn by seven giraffes

this morning in a dream she’s handed you an image
under glass a bale of hay
in a field of darkness

Hey! That’s my poem!

Not exactly. It’s my poem I gave it to you. It is my own wild harvest of your dreams.

I’m grateful for the poem. It’s a gift. But I’m not the woman who has no fear. What’s the purpose of leaping about between the worlds when the country is at war, when not so long ago towers fell, when every day we hear terrible news?

I’ve been singing of war since poetry began. Remember Homer? Remember the Trojan war? I sang of those towers that fell. I sang of those many who died.

Well I’m no Homer, and I can’t be leaping all over creation when work is calling.

I am the source of the creative in you, in everyone. When you forget me you feel dead inside, lost, out of touch with your center. I am the tree of life whose roots go down into childhood, into the realm of the ancestors, into the dream world, into the myths that shape you, into the secret power of the very language you use. The poet Denise Levertov, who responded in her work to the war and terror of her times, describes language as a “form of life and a common resource to be cherished and served as we should serve and cherish earth and its water, animal and vegetable life, and each other.” But so many are cut off from the sacred roots of language—“mere words,” they say, as though words don’t have their magical roots in that treasure trove of ancestral imagery, the collective unconscious. You need me to do your work.

9 Lowinsky, crimes of the dreamer, p. 58.
10 Denise Levertov, ‘Origins of a Poem,’ in Donald Hall, Claims for Poetry, p. 262.
I resist Her. She is so pushy. I’m not sure what you’re trying to say here. The work of the poet is to make a poem. I can’t be making poetry all the time. I have to make a living!

_You’ll make a better living if you keep me with you, see through my eyes, hear through my ears. You’ll hear the mythic story behind the one you’re being told; you’ll see the images in the roots of the words, catch the spirit that moves behind them. Invoke me wherever you go, whatever you do. When you are washing dishes gaze out the window and see the light in the plum tree, recognize that it is blooming. In the grocery store see the beauty in the piles of red and green apples, oranges, grapes and bananas in the produce aisle. Children see like this all the time. The poet Robert Duncan understood this. He wrote:_

> The roots and depths of mature thought, its creative sources, lie in childhood or even “childish” things I have not put away but taken as enduring realities of my being.... The child hears the heart of speech, the emotional and illustrative creation.... Like the poet, the child dwells not in the literal meanings of words but in the spirit that moves behind them._11_

_He also said this beautifully in a poem:_

> From the beginning, color and light, my nurse; sounding waves and air, my nurse; animal presences my nurse; Night, my nurse._12_

But I am no longer a child. I am trying to be a responsible adult. If I get all involved in the spirit that moves behind words I’ll never get anything done.

_If you don’t pay attention to the spirit behind words you’ll lose contact with me, and with your deeper life. You have no life without me. Don’t split me off. You’ll feel deadened. You need me with you always. When you are moved, when affect and image come together, there I am. When you breathe deeply, and know what you are feeling, there I am. When a fragment of dream comes back and invades your daylight mind, there I am. When you’re turned on, excited, there I am. I am the poet in you, your Sister from Below, the voice of what is deep in you, wild in you, erotic in you._

Poetry Head

She is convincing. She claims that in the beginning of my life, She, the poet in me, was ascendant. She thought I’d devote my life to Her, which was, She is convinced, Her due. It hasn’t worked out that way. I’ve told Her, time and again, that I’ve done it all for Her. Neither one of us would have survived had I not. This argument does not impress Her. After a few years spent in a major pout she began staging Her comeback, guerilla warrior style, infiltrating the landscape of my consciousness, raiding my time and attention.

How has She managed this coup—the successful invasion of the life of a harried professional with children, stepchildren, grandchildren, a husband? Very simply: by inserting Herself into everything I think, write, teach, do. In every aspect of my life I hear Her voice, giving me Her rendition of my experience. She wants to slow everything down, to get to the heart of every feeling, the meaning under the meaning, the image within the word.

I finally surrender, even in my work as an analyst. She says there is no creativity, no transformation possible without her help. She puts her ear to the ground of the language I hear in my consulting room, helping me hear “the heart of speech” or dark intuitions reaching for “visible form.” I find that her impulse to get to the bottom of an image, a feeling, a presence in the room, to give voice to its deepest nature, supports my analytic concerns. You’d think She’d feel valued. You’d think our long argument would be over. But it’s not enough for her. She’s like the fisherman’s wife in the fairy tale, who keeps wanting more. Next She told me she was tired of hearing the poetry in other people’s voices; She wanted time for Her own poetry. But I didn’t have that kind of time; when I put time in Her hands She takes forever, dreaming, dawdling, working for hours on a single line.

That was when She began intruding on my personal life. My husband Dan can attest to this. She began invading our vacations, putting me into a trance state which She calls “poetry head.” Dan could barely have a conversation with me, so much was I being called inward to listen to Her. She’d squeeze at least one poem out of every trip. She got bolder. She began sneaking her poems into my prose pieces for journals.

I struck a deal with Her. I made a time and place to listen to her everyday. And every week I gave Her a full day or two for poetry. I found I was happiest when a poem was cooking in the back of my mind. It brought luster to my ev-
eryday pursuits, and what the day brought, would often bring new light to the poem. Again I thanked Her, told Her she was right. Again She wanted more.

What more do you want? I cry, my soul?

Get off it! says She. I am your soul and you know it. I want a legitimate place in your life. If I had a real voice in your calling I wouldn't have to be sneaky, wouldn't have to push my way in where I'm not wanted. If I could take the driver's seat, I wouldn't be a back seat driver!

She's getting shrill. Give some parts of yourself an inch and they take a mile! I don't understand what more you could ask of me, I tell her. I've given you time. We now devote certain hours every week to writing. I give you attention. We read poetry, subscribe to poetry magazines. What more do you want?

It's very simple. When you give a talk I want it to be in my voice. When you write a book, I want to be its author. I want to come out of the closet. I want to be taken seriously.

What if you embarrass me?

What if I do? You embarrass me all the time! You insist, for example, on separating poetry and prose. Why should they have to go off and live in different books? Why shouldn't they cohabit the same pages? They are different ways into the same experience. Prose tells the story, and poetry breaks into song. Prose gives the background, the landscape, and poetry fills in the myth, the unseen, the divine and demonic presences. For example that poem called “Initiate” that I handed you after you'd been reading the poet H.D. It's in her style and it came out so clearly you needed to make few revisions.

White Temple cut in gray rock
I have washed the stone floors
I have put the full blown
white peony
in amber glass
only Hecate knows the dark center

Through an arched window
blood red madrone stains the rocky slope
Snake is sacred here
also mongoose

I await you
daughter of Isis
lover of the blood lord
sister of the frenzied one

climb the mountain in your bare feet
bring me your mouth and young breasts
white cave is the place I have prepared for you
hot flame of female word

I see. You want payback for giving me that poem without a struggle. I get it now, the poem is about you and me. I am the initiate in whom you have prepared a place for the “hot flame of female word.” So what do you propose we write about in our white cave?

The creativity I bring to those who make a place for me in their lives, my many voices, as they are revealed to you, for “I am large, I contain multitudes!”

Hey! You stole that line from Whitman!

Of course. Poetry is, among other things, stealing. We borrow, join, rephrase our influences consciously or unconsciously. As Rilke said: “Ultimately there is only one poet, that infinite one who makes himself felt, here and there through the ages, in a mind that can surrender to him.” I want this to be a book about the one poet as I come through your particular life. My voice comes to you from myth, from dream, from journeys, from gods that have appeared to you, poems that have passed through you. I am your guide from below, from within.

Wait a minute. I didn’t spend all those years getting my roots into the ground of my real life, in order to be annihilated by you in my own book!

I’m not trying to annihilate you. I keep telling you, I have no life without you. The book I envision is entirely your book, your story. Much of it is in your voice, informed by how I know your life. I just make occasional appearances in various guises. I am your muse, your good angel. You are the flesh in which I manifest. I’ll take you all over the world, through the millennia. I will give you many different experiences of me. You’re a woman on a journey to gather up the pieces of your life, the myths that have shaped you, the eternal figures that visit you, and I will be your guide.

I don’t have a problem being the woman on a journey, guided by you, for I am that. But I also want to speak as the woman I am.

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13 Lowinsky, red clay is talking, p. 121.
14 Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass, p. 113.
15 William H. Gass, Reading Rilke, p. 183.
You and your lived life are the ground I spring from. I would have no existence without you. So your perspective, your memories, your life experience are essential here. This is a dialogue.

And so it is that I and my “Sister from Below,” in her many shape-shifting forms, got together to write this book.
When the Sister Gets Her Way

I always knew that I was two persons. One was the son of my parents . . . The other was . . . old . . . remote from the world of men, but close to nature, the earth, the sun, the moon . . . and above all close to the night, to dreams, and to whatever “God” worked directly in him . . .

—C.G. Jung

A Soul at the White Heat

As I’m sure you’ve gathered, it’s been a long struggle for me to find my way into my above ground sister’s life. Who are we to one another, we two parts of this one person? She is what Jung called the #1 part of the personality, the ego, the reality principle, the payer of bills, the listener to news. She belongs to this time. I am #2, what Jungians call the Self, the mysterious center of the personality, the vastness of the unconscious. I belong to all time.

She doesn’t realize it, my daylight other, but I am grateful for her green growth in the practical air, her roots in a particular time and place, the sunshine and rain realities of work and relationships. They feed us both. Without that, and more years than she’d want me to say of Jungian analysis, neither one of us would have survived. Jung wrote of the poet, in this case Rilke, that he “doesn’t have what it takes to make a man complete: body, weight, shadow.”

Without my above-ground sister, I would not have the body, weight and shadow to make myself complete. I would be insubstantial.

She needs me to make her life complete as well, my above-ground sister. I love the analytic work she puts me to, deeply hearing the voices of others. But she also needs me to deeply hear herself, or she will dry up, lose contact with the wellsprings of her soul. When she gets caught up in planning dinners, worrying about money, dealing with politics, answering e-mail, she forgets who she really is.

It’s been a lifelong challenge for me, getting her attention. She knew me when she was a child, but hid me from her parents who would have called me “fresh” and sent her to her room. Do you remember, my above-ground sister, when you

---

16 Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, pp. 44-45.
were eight and your family moved from the cityscape of New York, to the country world of Princeton, New Jersey—I was released from the prison of streets and pavements. That was a good time for me. I spent many hours with you in the woods being the wild horse of your imagination. You knew me in the oak tree where you'd sit for hours, reading, daydreaming.

I do remember. To this day it’s easier to connect with you in the woods, or by a body of water. To this day it’s easier to find you when I’m alone. My family was so haunted, there were so many ghosts, I was afraid if I listened to you some terrible trouble would get stirred up.

I understand that. Your parents were German Jews who got out of Europe just in time, leaving behind so many who died in concentration camps, including your own father’s parents. With ghosts like that it’s hard for a girl to feel her own life matters. Time and again you’ve said to me, you could have been Anne Frank, dead at thirteen. Why weren’t you, you wondered. Why did you get to live?

And when your body changed, when you developed breasts, and the time of your blood began, you did what so many young women do, you squelched me, except for the occasional impassioned English paper, or poem I gave you that was fierce enough to crack your resistance. I did not abandon you. I visited, even when I wasn’t welcome. Do you remember that evening, you were about fourteen, when I stood behind your right shoulder watching the day fade away, the bay darken, fog flow in over the Golden Gate?

I do remember. There was that strange sensation of seeing one world with the eyes of another. Here I was in California which so recently had been a mythic land when I was still in New York and New Jersey. I’d heard stories about fruit trees in people’s backyards, tall palms, bridges, a glowing bay. It had sounded like magic. Now, here I was, looking at it all. My parents were having a party and I was hiding out with you in my darkening bedroom. Remember the sounds: laughter, exclamations, voices being witty. It was Berkeley, 1957. Eisenhower was President; change was just beginning to happen. Eisenhower had sent troops to Little Rock to force desegregation. The Russians had launched Sputnik. My father’s colleagues from the University would be talking about all that.

Yes, but what they wouldn’t be talking about, which was of great consequence to you, was that Alan Ginsberg had come to Berkeley, Howl had been published, you had read it and your mind had been blown. You liked to put on
black stockings and hang out at the “Cafe Mediterranean” on Telegraph Avenue, hoping you looked like a beat poet.

Right. That was where I would have preferred to be, but I had claimed too much homework so I could get out of serving food at the party. My mother would be doing it, offering Ritz crackers with cream cheese, a circle of salami and a piece of parsley on each one. Also her sour cream and spinach dip. I know. I had helped assemble them. From my bedroom I could see the animated room below—signifying eyes, opening and closing mouths, elegant clothes. I could smell the women’s perfumes, and my father’s vivid European splash of 4711 Eau de Cologne. Smoke. People still smoked in those days. It was considered elegant to keep a container of cigarettes on the coffee table. Hard to imagine that the whole living room world was oblivious to the glory before me: the sky, the golden orb of the sun setting into a bank of fog streaming into the bay, sending fingers of white glowing across the darkening waters.

I was telling you a secret, revealing a mystery: there are always at least two worlds. Poetry comes in the dance between them, between the people in the living room and the angels who walked across the bay on fog fingers. I was whispering a poem to you, about all this, but you didn’t write it down. You just kept looking out the window, filled with inexplicable longing. I did my best to feed you. I gave you Walt Whitman:

“Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems”18

I gave you Emily Dickinson:

The soul selects her own Society—
Then—shuts the Door—19

I loved Whitman. I wanted to lie in the grass with him and invite my soul. Emily Dickinson took my breath away:

“Dare you see a Soul at the White Heat?”20

She was a mystic, a priestess. When I read her the other world was touched, another dimension opened. I wanted to go there, to live where Emily lived,

18  Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, p. 35.
20  Dickinson, p. 173
to be in that intensity in which the most ordinary things, a butterfly, a bee, an anvil, connect one to eternity. I longed to know the White Heat. And yet I feared it. For I also longed for the red fire, the common fire. I did not really want a life like Emily Dickinson’s, in her white dress, wandering the confines of her father’s house and garden, knowing the body heat of no lover, knowing the sweet smell of no babies in her arms. As a young girl I had been able to go past “the houses—past the headlands—into Deep Eternity”\(^{21}\) with Dickinson. But now I had new breasts, strange yearnings. I had other plans besides listening to you. I wanted love. My ghosts demanded babies.

The Red Fire

Your two worlds were pulling me apart, threatening to rip open the sky, to sever my heart from my body. You were so wild and cruel, filling me with grandiose visions. I couldn’t handle your poets and angels. Trying to catch the poems you were giving me on paper seemed like leaping into the ocean. I was so young, so unformed, so deeply afraid of life. I wanted security. Soon I was off, entwined around my young man, married at eighteen, pregnant at nineteen.

I thought I had successfully fought you off and found my own little life. I had no idea that I was possessed by ghosts until you explained it all to me years later in a poem. You came to me in the form of Hera, the goddess of marriage, and told me my story from the vantage of the eternal forms. It’s called “Hera Reflects on the Anniversary of a Long Ago Dissolved First Marriage.”\(^ {22}\) I used an epigraph from H.D. which summed it up neatly: “I will rise/ from my troth with the dead.”

White narcissus
pale blue
forget-me-nots
composed your wedding bouquet

There were more dead
than living

---

21  Dickinson, p. 39.
22  Lowinsky, *red clay is talking*, pp. 38-42.
among the guests
and of the gods
I was the only one
who knew
a woman’s
way

Demeter did not
come
she sat on her rock
she’d had enough
of daughters
in the underworld

I took the form of
the shadow cast
by a silver vase of lilies
on the altar
I took the form of
the ache
between your shoulder blades
the unholy
ferment
in your brain

Who else was there?
Besides the puffed up rabbi
the too young groom
the quarreling parents
on both sides
the only surviving
grandmother and those armies
of European dead
on their way
to Jerusalem?

Zeus came
on the groom’s side
he sees it as his job
to kiss the bride
and organize her mind
into a small
neat package
lavender sachet
to fit inside a drawer
on the right side
of her husband’s
busy brain

I won’t allow it
I took the form of
snakes
I mixed the blood
and the milk
I waited for you
in the apple tree—

Aphrodite did not
come
her laugh
was not heard
all day
all night
her gold did not
shine
she took off
to the backside of the moon
that was her howling
you heard
her keening
her keeping wild company
with Lilith

Hestia sent you
no gift
Artemis
gave you
not even
a backward glance
having caught
not a glimpse
of you
in her woods
since you were ten

And I who received
no sacrifice
no offering
no song
no prayer
took the form of
that cold shadow
on your wedding night
no wild thing bloomed
no flower flowered
no blood to show
That was no marriage
that was a wooly blanket for cold feet
a pillow for a pain in the neck
a menstrual cave
for all those
European ghosts
fresh out
of the ovens
fresh out of
mass graves
they had

no stones
to lay down their heads
no baskets
for their bones
no grounds
for their roots
they spilled over
oceans
invading
demanding
new born
baby bodies

Demeter changed
her mind
she came
to live with you
every evening
she swept the ghosts
out of your house
every night
before the dawn  
they came back  
by the time the children  
went down  
for their naps  
ghosts had  
torn you  
into pieces  
in the midday sun

I took the form of  
the shadow  
that shielded you  
the shadow  
that froze you  
for seven years  
I had other plans for you  
So did Aphrodite  
So did Lilith

Even Hestia knew  
her time would come  
But it was Artemis  
who built a bark for you  
out of the wild papyrus  
down by the river  
in the dark  
of a new moon  
she who knew  
the wild ways  
the sacred ways  
showed you  
showed you  
your craft

Can Poetry Change Such a World?

I don’t care whether dinner gets cooked or whether you study for exams. But I have no life unless you pay attention to me, bring me into your ordinary flesh and blood experience. Even in those years when, as Hera says in the poem, I
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In addition to The Sister from Below: When the Muse Gets Her Way, Naomi Ruth Lowinsky is the author of The Motherline: Every Woman’s Journey to Find Her Female Roots and numerous prose essays, many of which have been published in Psychological Perspectives and The Jung Journal. She has had poetry published in many literary magazines and anthologies, among them After Shocks: The Poetry of Recovery, Weber Studies, Rattle, Atlanta Review, Tiferet and Runes. Her two poetry collections, red clay is talking (2000) and crimes of the dreamer (2005) were published by Scarlet Tanager Books. She is the recipient of the first prize for poetry in the Obama Millennium competition. Naomi is a Jungian analyst in private practice and poetry and fiction editor of Psychological Perspectives.