

THE HARE AS A HIEROGLYPH OF 'TO BE'

NAOMI STADLEN

This was one of Anthony Stadlen's Inner Circle Seminars, and was called 'The Mystery of the Hare'. It was held on Sunday 7 November 2004, in honour of the sixtieth anniversary of the publication of *The Lady of the Hare* by the English anthropologist and Jungian analyst, John Layard.

The plan expanded when Anthony learned about the 'Three Hares Project'. This was a research study by Dr Tom Greeves, an archaeologist, cultural environmentalist and historian, to trace an enigmatic motif of three hares chasing each other in a circle, each ear shared by a pair of hares, from Buddhist cave-paintings in China through the Middle East to seventeen churches on Dartmoor. Professor David Singmaster, a professor of mathematics and metagrobologist (expert on puzzles), a world authority on mathematical puzzles such as the Rubik Cube, had also contributed to the three-hares research. Both Dr Greeves and Professor Singmaster agreed to speak at the seminar.

A third guest was the poet David Harsent, who had based a cycle of poems, *Lepus*, and the libretto for a composition by Harrison Birtwhistle, *The Woman and the Hare*, for soprano, reciter and instrumental ensemble, on themes from *The Lady of the Hare*.

Seventeen seminar participants contributed and asked questions. It was a real exploration, not simply virtuoso performances by the presenters.

Anthony opened the day by introducing *The Lady of the Hare*, placing it in the history of both Jungian analytical psychotherapy and family therapy. He explained that Layard rightly called it the first attempt to describe what actually happened in a Jungian analysis. Jung, in a letter to Layard, admired it but deplored its publication as 'throwing pearls before swine'. Jung's own case studies, while giving fascinating mandalas and mythological 'amplifications' of the 'material', contain almost nothing of what is going on in the patient's life or between the patient and analyst. Layard's case was also a pioneering one in that he did not just accept the 'identified patient', a young 'mentally defective' girl, but instead saw her mother (the 'lady of the hare'), to try to facilitate insight and change in the whole family.

Anthony read a dream aloud from the case, drew attention to Layard's interpretations, and asked participants what they thought. Anthony pointed out that, while there were phenomenological aspects to Layard's interpretations, he actually changed the 'manifest content' of the dream (the dreamer said she was standing 'beside deep water', and Layard told her she was 'in deep water'), and also introduced his own assumptions as to the dream's meaning. Layard's first words on his response to the dream were 'I could not refrain from...' Anthony commented that a psychotherapist should above all have the phenomenological humility to refrain.

Next, Tom Greeves gave a slide show, revealing how the three-hares motif was found in at least four religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Judaism. One participant urged him to agree that the universal recurrences must endorse Jung's theory of the Collective Unconscious. But he replied that he thought it important to keep an open mind, and wait for further information.

After lunch, David Harsent explained how he came across *The Lady of the Hare* as a teenager working in a bookshop. He started by reading aloud his unpublished text for a

second version of Birtwhistle's *The Woman and the Hare*, followed by about eight of his poems from *Lepus*. One was titled: 'The hare as a hieroglyph for the auxiliary verb "to be"'. This was based on Layard's observation, of striking interest for existential psychotherapists, that, in ancient Egypt, the hare was used in this way. We then heard a recording of *The Woman and the Hare*.

David Singmaster presented further findings on the three-hares motif from round the world, and he showed how it arose naturally from certain purely formal, mathematical-puzzle considerations. He thought that people had subsequently read various different numinous, archetypal, and religious meanings into the motif. This was a useful caveat, complementing and confirming Tom Greeves's caution against too quickly assuming one knows the 'meaning' of the hares motif.

Anthony then returned to discuss, at last, the dream that gave Layard the title for his book: the dream of the killing of the (apparently trusting and willing) hare. Again Anthony asked how Layard's powerful interpretation of the dream's meaning – the killing of the hare as a religious sacrifice, the outward sign of an inner spiritual transformation in the 'lady of the hare' – could be confirmed or disproved.

Anthony raised three questions. First, had the dream interpretation been *helpful*? Second, did it make sense to ask whether it was *true*? Third, if it did make sense, *was it true*? He pointed out that Freud, Jung, and Boss all acknowledged that 'incorrect' interpretations could be helpful, but each insisted that his own interpretations were *true*.

Anthony left the second and third questions for participants to reflect on. They had been discussed in detail at a number of previous Inner Circle Seminars, and would no doubt be at future ones.

Limiting himself here to the first question, Anthony reported briefly on the findings of his interviews with surviving relatives of the 'lady of the hare', including her daughter, Margaret, and villagers who had known the family during the Second World War.

The findings threw some doubt on Layard's rather grandiose claims. He had analysed the dreams of the 'lady of the hare' to try to help Margaret and he claimed that Margaret had blossomed in consequence. However, neither Margaret herself nor Anthony's other interviewees had noticed such a blossoming at the time of Layard's 'treatment'. Only later, after her father and mother had died, did Margaret at last raise her head to greet people in the street, get a job, and find a husband. Her parents had regarded her as a hopeless case with a hereditary 'taint', and had opposed her efforts to get work and make relationships.

By the end of this many-sided seminar, participants were not tired but excited. The three guest speakers seemed like the three hares, linked by their thoughts, if not by their ears. Anthony's questions probed the empty centre, enhancing the mystery. This was not an event of closed answers, but one of open questioning of the possibilities of being.