

Persephone & Me

a personal reflection

Miriam Pickard

I gaze around me, I gaze inside me¹

I was born with big curious eyes and am often caught staring at people. I have come to see that my intense gaze is a fascination with what I see and feel around me and inside me. My gaze lives in relationship to my environment influencing the way I relate to the world, how I internalise my experiences and what is born as a result. The Greek Philosopher and writer Nikos Kazantzakis refers to the authentic gaze that moves between the outer and inner world. This is captured in the subtitle above and reflects my own experience in pursuit of an authentic gaze. It raises a personal question for me: how to give form to the life force deep within me as I gaze outward and inward. My gaze takes me beyond what can be seen with the naked eye and allows beauty to take shape within me and around me.

She began a long time ago as a force of nature.

Now she sits in a lane at a cafe table.

A woman who looks like any woman sitting there at a table or beside a hole in the rock and full of water.

A woman who is thinking of planting a fig tree.

A woman (like any woman), who at one and the same time is a woman and a force of nature.²

My mother is a storyteller and my father is an Anglican priest. My imagination was captured by the ceremony of church and the drama of storytelling. The stories of the Christian faith were woven into my childhood. Perhaps it is no surprise that theatre, film, ceremony and a curiosity about human life is interwoven through my personal, creative and professional life. The ancient Mediterranean myth of Persephone/Demeter is an immense dream, a universal pattern and an original form of story. It's mythic songlines have sung themselves into my gaze, into my being and settled in my underground. Craig san Roque's re-imagining of the drama in *Persephone's Picnic* (part 1) and *Persephone Goes Under* (part 2) awakened a life-force in me through a simple act of speaking Persephone's words and making her gestures in relationship to the environment. Mythic narrative allows for a mysterious transformation to occur. In this reflection, I am attempting to articulate subtle and internal process in which an actor prepares for such theatre events as these. My task is also to find words that express what my body knows and in some

¹ Kazantzakis, N, *Report to Greco*, Simon and Schuster, 1965 p.22

² Dr Craig san Roque, *Persephone Goes Under*, 2016

cases what my body is still learning. *Persephone & Me* is a personal account of my emergence; simple and chaotic, painful and beautiful.

Long before I knew the name Persephone, I was in a period of incubation and preparation where my gaze was being challenged and cultivated. It is not possible to rush or manufacture emergence. Emerging is a slow burning attunement, an active spirit of waiting and a receptivity to life in all its different forms, seen and unseen. People, places and tasks were all part of my preparation. First I was in Alice Springs working as a filmmaker with a Warlpiri women's dance project in Yuendumu. This was followed by theatre training in France for 18 months. Returning to Australia, I came home to Canberra where I met A Chorus of Women and Central Australian scholar, writer and dramaturge, Dr Craig San Roque. The Persephone dramas adapted by Craig took me back to Alice Springs with my European roots slightly more intact. Soon, I will be travelling to Europe to visit sacred sites in the Mediterranean including Pompeii, Sicily, Delphi, Eleusis and Crete. The country I travel changes me. Places carry transformational power and knowledge of ancestral beings and mysteries beyond rational or intellectual thought. They can be felt.³ It is this intuitive sense and feeling that I am learning to cultivate so that I may continue to grow in receptivity and reciprocity with the world around me and inside me.

From the Great Above she opened her ear to the Great Below.

From the Great Above the goddess opened her ear to the Great Below.⁴

In 2010 I moved to Alice Springs and slowly built up freelance work as a video producer, editor and theatre maker. I began working with an Aboriginal Warlpiri women's dance project between granddaughters and grandmothers called Southern Ngalia⁵. These women were singing and dancing the jukurrpa (dreaming) of an ancestral inland snake on a journey northwards through Warlpiri country called Jardiwana jukurrpa.⁶ Jukurrpa describes the origins and journeys of ancestral beings in the land and also maps the sacred places where the spirits reside. The Jardiwana jukurrpa of Warlpiri country was the first big story I found myself mixed into as an adult. In this project, I was asked to film the cultural lore and practices of the Jardiwana jukurrpa. My gaze through the camera witnessed the Warlpiri grandmothers and granddaughters in a regenerative cycle of initiation and renewal. The four-day event was full of campfires, singing, dancing, storytelling, kangaroo tails on the fire, grieving for loved ones who had passed away, body painting, disputes about dance gestures and raucous laughter. I witnessed the mystery of ceremony; its simplicity, chaos and symbiosis with the land. I remember one dance camp I followed a little girl's experience of paint up very closely. She was studying her grandmother's face who was singing and rubbing oil into her skin. Oblivious to her aunties watching on, the little girl concentrated on following her grandmother's wrinkled finger painting the dreaming into her chest. Her older sister tied feathers on her arms and around her forehead. She was sitting up tall in her camp chair waiting for the others to be painted for dancing. Proud of her feathers, her body paint and herself. She was a strong five-year-old. After ten minutes the adrenalin and excitement started to wear off and she let out a big yawn. Moments later she had fallen asleep and woke up two hours later half way through the dancing. My gaze through the camera was fixed on her and I could identify with her big curious eyes.

³ Dr Craig San Roque, performance notes for *Persephone Goes Under*, 2016

⁴ Wolkstein, D., Kramer, N.S., *Innana, Queen of Heaven and Earth*, Harper & Ro, New York, 1983, p52

⁵ Southern Ngalia was a three way partnership project between Warlpiri Elders, Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation (WYDAC) & Incite Arts

⁶ *Jardiwana Yawulyu*; Warlpiri women's songs from Yuendumu, Batchelor Press, 2014; p1



Southern Ngalia 2015 (Photo: M Pickard)

Powerful dreamlike states were induced when watching an elder dance their jukurrpa. Only days before, I saw the same old woman sitting by her house in Yuendumu hardly able to walk. Craig talks about a 'ceremony state of mind' where people get taken over, they lose sense of themselves as single individuals, there is mystical participation with spirits, the gods, the jukurrpa and with the people all together.⁷ This ceremony state of mind is not limited to the moments where an elder is dancing with the ancestral spirits of that place. From the moment discussion began as to when the next camp would be and which site, the ceremony state of mind began to emerge. Spreadsheets and schedules were helpful to a point but quickly became a distraction to being receptive to the group feeling. In general, *kardia* (non-aboriginal person) were less attuned to the collective psychology of a 'ceremony state of mind'. In some cases, *kardia* pushed the agenda of 'paint-up' and 'dance' without considering *how* the consensus was going to be found communally. This lack of shared understanding presented challenges of authentically working two-ways between *Kardia* (non-aboriginal person) and *Yapa* (central Australian Aboriginal person).



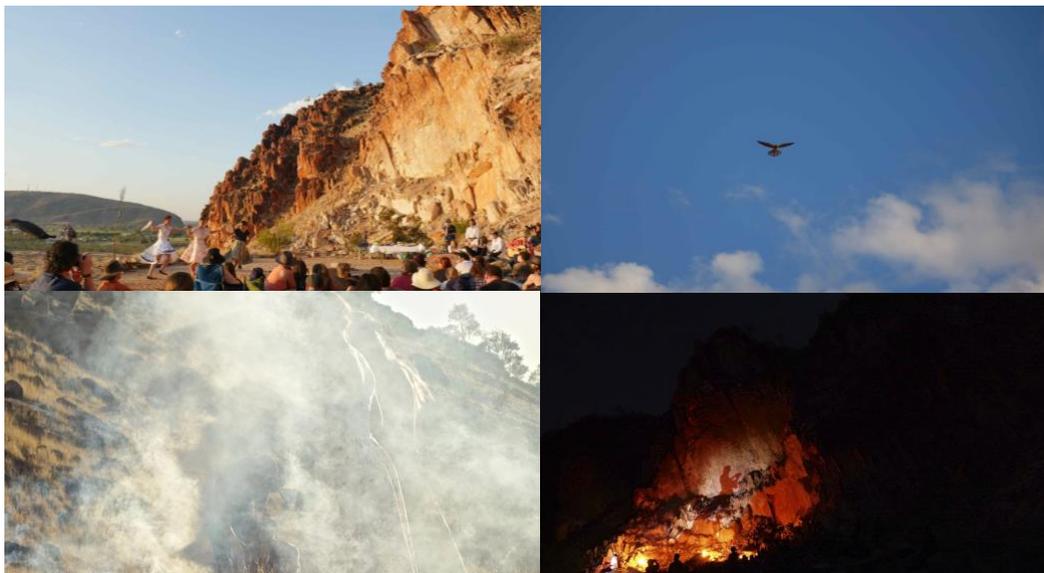
Southern Ngalia 2014 (Photo: J Mackay)

A few months after returning from France in 2014 I went back to Alice Springs for the dance camp at Mission Creek. At dusk I sat near some ladies who were still singing. I used to think the singing was more like noise because it was beyond my experience of singing. On this night curiosity enveloped me. Free of the camera I closed my eyes and just listened. There were so many notes and vocal ranges blended together in a simple rhythm. I picked up one note and started to hum softly on my own. I found other notes and started moving between them. I heard harmony. Then I saw that the women were all looking out to the horizon, so I looked out. I realised that the land they were gazing upon held the song and the women were simply joining in. It was a carefully woven creation between land and human; a poetic response to the natural world. When I got home I wondered what other wisdom I was clearly missing if I had overlooked their songlines.

⁷ Craig San Roque, *On the First Boat People and the Value of Ceremony*, for WYDAC employees, presented March 2016, Yuendumu.

I first met Craig in the context of my film work with Southern Ngalia. I was troubled by my filmic gaze. With what assumptions, cultural influences and family conditioning was I assessing what was important to film? How was this impacting upon the authenticity of the story? I was ready to put the camera down. Craig encouraged me to explore my position as a filmmaker and question with what kind of eye I might be looking through the camera. If I was not there to save something, record a tragedy or show the idealized version, what was I there for? This was an important conversation which resulted in a deepening consciousness to my gaze. More than anything, this kind of work inspired in me a deep curiosity to connect with my own Indigenous European lineage and my cultural elders, past and present.

On August 26th 2015 I was standing on a cliff face overlooking the Illparpa valley saying, "Two eagles flew around the body of Demeter. They flew right around inside the skin of the sky; inside the body of the first mother..." when the audience gasped! Literally, two eagles were soaring above us all. Magical timing. The landscape and people radiated the ancient Mediterranean myth just as I had heard the Warlpiri woman harmonize with the song of the land they were listening to. The long walk up the cliff, the smoke and birds of prey and the caves lit up by the flames, *it is as if the country and its creatures are taking part in the drama.*⁸ My gaze was broadening to discover a oneness between two ancient practices and the creative process of Aboriginal jukurrpa, dance and song alongside mythic theatre events and ancient European mythology. I documented Warlpiri ceremonial practices and witnessed the transformative, regenerative nature of jukurrpa from a distance. In the creative process for *Persephone's Picnic* it felt like I was being initiated into a new story and I was overwhelmed by the nurturing yet exciting form of creative process. Just like Shayla had fallen asleep during some of the key moment of ceremonial dancing, I was sure I was missing significant parts. Perhaps this is why ceremony is meant to be repeated, because it takes a lifetime to connect, understand, embody and be transformed by ancestral mythic wisdom. The Persephone/Demeter myth became the next big story I found myself mixed in with. It felt like white-fella jukurrpa.



Persephone's Picnic 2015 Illparapa Valley at the quarry site. (Photos: F Walsh)

⁸ Kieran Finnane, Picnic of Promise, Alice Springs News Arts Review, October 2015

My French theatre teacher, Philippe Gaulier, wrote that the actor can borrow wild images of nature to help show inaccessible feelings which he or she will never have.⁹ The images above which are taken from *Persephone's Picnic* at the quarry site overlooking Illparpa Valley show the landscape to be a character. In the creative process of *Persephone's Picnic* I understood that the landscape was not to be imposed upon. Instead, we were developing a focus and sensitivity to listening to what the site was already speaking. I had witnessed the Warlpiri women do this so I understood but in this new situation I was not a witness, I was a participant who was listening for my own story. My task was to simply join in, be open and curious. As a result, the natural world instructed me in the acquisition of one of the actor's most valuable tools.

Gaulier also introduced me to the term fixed-point. I understand the fixed-point to be the punctuation of the human body; the intentional interruption of the flow of human movement signaled by a pause, stillness, silence, suspension or isolating body parts. The fixed point is one of an actor's most important tools to communicate because it is the means through which drama is created. The audience is intentionally invited to connect with the human emotions being conveyed. Without such fixed points there is a diminished presence, rhythm, focus and meaning of drama. A fixed point draws together these elements to a still point, a germinating seed from which the humanity of the character and the situation can spring forth. I was acutely aware of my struggle to be at ease in playing with fixed-points on stage during my theatre training. It requires coordination and courage to punctuate the human body and reveal humanity. Central Australia's Ilparpa Valley, the epic landscape and backdrop to *Persephone's Picnic* required me to inhabit the space with clear poetic punctuation of movement and gesture otherwise my human form would be lost in the environment. The Persephone/Demeter myth also called forth my fixed-point so that I might listen deeply.

A seed fell and it nestled in Kore, it settled in her own heart, in her own heart the seed spoke.

*It said, I am the seed of the world, you are the seed of the world, nurture us.*¹⁰

A seed is the unseen point from which a plant grows. The fixed-point is the unseen anchor from which drama finds form in the human body. However only after *Persephone's Picnic* did I understand that my fixed-points were central moments of receptivity to the transformational work of the mythic story of Persephone/Demeter. The fixed-points along the story opened me to the humanity and force of the ancestral beings I was working with. Fiona Walsh's photography of the event seemed to capture the potency of these moments effortlessly. I am reminded of the fresco images in the Villa of Mysteries depicting precise moments of initiation and transformation where the fixed-point gives clear intention to the gesture and focus of each scene. One could look at the performative experience in *Persephone* Part 1 and 2 as a potent sequence and evolution of gesture, action and text in which an attunement to the life force of the Persephone/Demeter Myth becomes available. Perhaps this attunement occurs on several levels of participation in an event such as these.

⁹ P. Gaulier, *My Thoughts on Theatre*, Editions Filmiko, France, 2012, p168

¹⁰ V. B Rutter, T. Singer., *Ancient Greece, Modern Psyche*, Routledge, New York, 2015 p60



In 2014 after theatre school in France, I returned to Australia and moved to Canberra. From wild Europe with intense Frenchmen to the clean Canberra public servants and five day working weeks. That was what I initially thought. It was not long before I realised Canberra had a lot more going for it. This place seemed to me a self-assured radiant young spirit that was in need of my creative impulse. It took me two years before I was confident to make theatre in Canberra. In the meantime, Canberra nurtured family, friendship and financial stability in order that I might flourish. *She* helped me find clarity to my purpose. *She* was like a grandmother teaching me compassion, patience and empathy. Canberra's song is very beautiful.

The music score above is called *Canticle of Night* and is sung between generations. It was written by Glenda Cloughley and first sung by *A Chorus of Women* in their community oratorio called *A Passion for Peace* (2015). *A Chorus of Women* have been singing since 2003 when 150 Canberra women gathered in the Australian Parliament to sing a lament for the people of Iraq as the Prime Minister announced that Australia was at war. When I first arrived in Canberra I met one of their founders, Glenda Cloughley at a refugee event. She approached me at the end to ask if I would be interested to sing with them. I had never heard their sort of music before. It often brought me to tears. They sing with full hearts, overflowing with compassion for people, the planet and our future. Woven throughout much of their music is a rare quality of lament in which lies much wisdom. From vastly different cultures these women, *A Chorus of Women* and the Warlpiri elders were reviving, restoring and maintaining the timeless wisdom of their cultural mythologies. To my surprise, I had somehow found myself seated in a group of senior women in Canberra of my own European culture, some of them the equivalent to the Warlpiri elders. The way these women talked with each other and came to a group consensus was so similar. With *A Chorus of Women*, I was like a droplet of water immersed in their overwhelming ocean of passion, wisdom, heart, intensity, commitment, intelligence and creative dreaming for the future. I felt so taken care of.

She can hear the singing of women. She comes up. Kore comes up.

*She comes up through the crack in the rock, she is like a fig tree in the morning.*¹²

In 2016 I wrote a travelling performance called *Penelope's Odyssey* and collaborated with some members of a *Chorus of Women*. It was a site specific travelling performance in the National Gallery of Australia Sculpture Garden based on Bourdelle's sculpture of *Penelope*, Odysseus' wife in Homer's epic myth, *The Odyssey*. A significant impetus for the creation of this project was the desire to celebrate and cultivate intergenerational relationships between women. In the final stage of the experience the audience descended into James Turell's *Skypspace*, a womb shaped space that I imagined to be the inner world of Penelope and a place where she discovers connection to ancient

¹¹ *Canticle of Night* was written & composed by , Cloughley, Musical Direction by J, McBride for *A Passion for Peace* with A Chorus of Women in April 2014.

¹² V. B Rutter, T. Singer., *Ancient Greece, Modern Psyche*, Routledge, New York, 2015 p79

wisdom and her Grandmother spirits. Glenda rearranged short pieces of music from both her chorale works, *Gifts of the Furies*¹³ and *A Passion for Peace* which we all sang throughout the performance. In the *Skyspace* Glenda and Johanna began singing the *Canticle of Night* to me. I was lying in the center on a large inbuilt Lapis-lazuli stone. By the end our voices had woven together in harmony. The 'eternal now' of the intergenerational cycle is alive in this music.¹⁴ *A Chorus of Women* empowers my gaze and gives me a strong sense of belonging among women who care deeply for humanity. Their force of nature gives me hope for the future. Exploring Penelope's wisdom offered a threshold crossing for sharing wisdom across generations, ancient and present.



Penelope's Odyssey 2016 with Bourdelle's *Penelope* at NGA, Canberra
Left: Kaveri Chakrabarty, Meg Rigby, Cassie Schilg, Miriam Pickard, Johanna McBride
Glenda Cloughley, Emilia Dellatorre.

*Instinctively, theatre is born within a certain silence ... a kind of silence manifested by the present moment.*¹⁵

In 2013 I was studying theatre in France with Philippe Gaulier, a world-renowned Master clown and theatre teacher. He is an ageing Frenchman who teaches in his 'tormentor clown'. You were either 'Beautiful' or "Theatre of my balls". He once told me I was like a communist vacuum cleaner. To clarify he said, "it simply doesn't work." These clear boundaries encourage students to go beyond the realm of what they know to discover their beauty. With enough courage, the fixed-point is one of the actors tools in which their beauty can be revealed. Michael Chekov, a Russian director and actor talks about the four brothers of art; Beauty, Ease, Entirety and Form.¹⁶ Cultivating these four feelings (qualities) prepares the actor to restore herself toward centeredness. The fixed-point gathers these four feelings together so they work in harmony. Chekov explains that from a point of centeredness the actor is more inclined to attain a state of inspiration. A ceremony state of mind and a state of inspiration are captured in Barault's quote above as they both rely on the present moment. The matter of beauty resides in the present moment as well, whether it be by design or by accident.

¹³ Composed by G.Cloughley, Musical Direction by J, McBride, Sung by A Chorus of Women, September 2010 at The Museum of Australian Democracy.

¹⁴ G, Cloughley, *The Generative Substratum: On relocating the indigenous European psyche in The Axiom of Becoming* (PhD thesis, 2005), School of Psychology, University of Western Sydney p336, 337.

¹⁵ J.L Barault, *The Theatre of Jean Louis Barrault*, U.K 1961, Chapter 7

¹⁶ Michael Chekov, *To the Actor; on the Technique of Acting*, Routledge, U.K 1953, p13

I remember the first time I encountered my beauty on stage. It occurred accidentally by design. We were studying a Melodrama unit where we were learning to move and speak with the pleasure to be poetic and tragic. We had to capture the aching hearts of the *People of Paris*; the poor people of 18th Century Europe who knew what it meant to suffer with hunger and under oppression. An appeal for mercy, a soliloquy of grief or a rebellious rant against the authorities was delivered for the *People of Paris* who would weep in empathy or heckle the evil bailiff! My teacher set the melodrama task for the lesson. Five people were to stand in a line on death's row. One by one, each person had to step forward at the sound of the drum and 'save themselves from death' by being beautiful. No more detail was given than this. If a performer captured the aching hearts of the *People of Paris* (within the first 3 seconds) their life would be spared. Otherwise, they would be shot dead with the Frenchman's drum. All who preceded me had failed. My heart was pumping. I stepped forward after the drum, closed my eyes and sang a note from lullaby I had recently written. I kept humming the tune. Five seconds had past and I had not heard the beat of failure. My eyes opened to meet the audience. The room was silent and all eyes were fixed. My voice grew. I stopped thinking, worrying and trying. I kept singing and walking slowly and looking at my audience. They kept looking at me! This was the fixed-point; a manifestation of beauty in the present moment and suspended in a dream. My teacher beat the drum after several minutes. In his croaky French grumble he woke us all and whispered, "Et la, she is beautiful non?" Moments like this were rare at theatre school for me. Gaulier said it was common for students to be in crisis. Many left school to travel the European and Australian Comedy/Fringe scene however I left France rather undone inside. When I returned home for Christmas 2013 I went into a personal and creative hibernation. My fixed-point was a little frozen and scared to act.

Nearly two years later, after performing *Persephone's Picnic* I remember expressing a profound surprise having discovered beauty in the performance of *Persephone's Picnic* and throughout the creative process beforehand. It was revelatory to me that I could be growing and maturing with ease and beauty instead of creative crisis management and frozen fixed-points. I would not deny the rich learning experience that pain can provide so perhaps I should add that there is beauty by pain as well. My theatre study with Phillippe Gaulier was attuning my inner gaze particularly how I saw my own beauty. The authentic gaze *learns to play all sides, not ignore or suppress the opposites of our experience but working them all with agility and pragmatic humor.*¹⁷ Embracing the oppositional forces of creation and destruction and accepting beauty in all its facets began to cultivate a more balanced perception in me.

¹⁷ Roque, CS, *Report to Greco: Chalk and Salt - The other side of the Canvas* PACFA Conference notes, 13 June 2014

*Aidos/Hades held me calmly to him, the coils of his body wrapped around me*¹⁸



Persephone Goes Under 2015 Persephone turning into snake form.
(Photo: F. Walsh)

The snake seems to be a reoccurring animal in my dream world. When I was young I dreamt that my sister chased me around the house with snakes. I can still remember the sensation. When I was twenty-two I worked at Melbourne Zoo, usually holding my breath as I handled snakes for educational programs. During my work in Central Australia not only was I filming sacred ceremony about an ancestral snake but I was given the skin name associated with snake and emu Jukurrpa. In 2015 I began seeing a homeopath about my creative crisis and my perceived lack of purpose or direction. The first remedy prescribed was Copperhead snake. As a result, I had a profound series of snake dreams. Not only did the snake medicine reveal itself to be a healer and restorer of my creative force but it was symbolic of a much longed for companion and was the key to empowering my relationship with myself. I was finally redirecting my emotional gaze onto myself and my own personal work rather than distracting myself with romantic relationship projects that were usually exhausting and unsatisfying. Below are three selections from my dream journal in 2016, each directly occurring after taking the remedy during the day.

19th January - I take the first pill. A snake gently coils around my feet, it wraps around my lower abdomen and travels around my neck. It sinks into my body, through my skin. The snake appears below me and its mouth opens like fish lips taking in oxygen. It consumes me completely. I rise out of the snakes mouth like the beautiful Psyche or rising Venus. My eyes open out of the vision and I continue on with the day.

January 20th - I take my second dose. Without warning a knife slices straight through the middle of the snake. I see the red raw flesh of the snake then I see the other half wildly writhing about. My perspective changes and I am so close that I watch the blade pressing in on the snake skin. The skin stretches in until finally it releases and splits open. My dream flashes between a writhing snake, splitting skin and the red raw flesh of the snake body. Over and again until it finishes.

21st January - On my third dose I dissolve the remedy in water and only take a teaspoon. I feel brown warm soil gently turning. Underneath a golden brown snake is travelling through the soil. I can see the soil particles gently crumble away from the skin of the snake as it glides. My perspective changes to see the snake is making a long journey through this warm soil. When it finishes, I fall asleep.

¹⁸ Craig san Roque, *Persephone Goes Under* (script), Section 6: In Jerusalem, 2015

A few weeks later Craig was nearly finished writing the story and he told me that Persephone and Aidos/Hades travel underground as snakes. I noted the parallels to my personal life and carried on feeling more confident in the 'ceremony state of mind' and this creative process than ever. During the rehearsal week for *Persephone Goes Under* I worked on a short movement sequence as Persephone changed form into a snake. I was inspired by Pina Bauche in *Café Muller* (1978) and the movement qualities in my dreams. The action of changing form into a snake through dance was entirely out of my comfort zone, deeply satisfying and strangely familiar.

The proximity between my personal story of unravelling and Persephone's human emergence in *Persephone Goes Under* was compelling and overwhelming. I as a performer was anxious about being overpowered by the constant movement of the Seven Sisters in the second half. To contrast, we gave Persephone a fixed-point by clutching onto a hanging rope. It worked on several dramatic levels. Yet still, it was confronting that all these things were being done to me and I had so little agency for so much of the story. It was a full moon in Scorpio; a moon of the shadows. I stepped out to prepare for Persephone's first words and saw the full moon gazing on us all. This was the first moment of reassurance. One of the Seven Sisters approached and I could feel my worry. Before she touched my arm I heard a voice say something like, "This is bigger than you. Let it flow through. You are here and that is all." Before I knew it, the Dog and Seven Sisters had thrown a blanket over me and we were travelling to get a body. This was a moment of conscious submission to the process. I chose to be gathered, I chose to be worked upon, to be challenged, to be beautiful, to be transformed. After all my preparation, I chose to surrender. These moments feel like a gravitational pull, a spontaneous immersion. Instinct, impulse and feeling are the guides. The veil between the physical world and mythic dissolves. After the performance I remembered my visions of the snake travelling through the warm soil, the writhing snake belly, the sliced raw flesh of its body. These images seemed to follow the narrative qualities of Persephone becoming human; wildly thrashing, stretching, splitting open, in and out of consciousness, gliding, unfurling, breathing, immense and intimate. A universal story of emergence that is often painful and surprisingly beautiful.



Persephone Goes Under 2016 (Photo: F. Walsh)

*Persephone, she who shines in the dark*¹⁹



Persephone's Picnic 2015 (Photo: F. Walsh)

I love this image. My eyes are clear with intent. My heart and chest are over exposed, shining in the dark. A pomegranate seed pendant swings around my neck. My companions are close by. The woman who dances with Persephone in times of joy and lament. The narrator, voice of the dog and guide through the underworld. When I look at this image I see someone who is not afraid to look with an authentic gaze. The mythic theatre events of *Persephone* have given form to my life force. The performance sites and the story have imprinted themselves in me allowing me to travel between darkness and light and gather wisdom from the deep. I gaze around me and I gaze inside me with a stronger sense of who I am and where I belong. Attuning my receptivity to sites and song has given me confidence to listen deeply to what is around me and inside me in many facets of my life. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community. For the cultural and social health and wellbeing of our community we need connection to our ancestral wisdom and continual opportunity to reflect this back to ourselves. If we foster this pursuit we become healthy in spirit, mind, body and heart and we invest in the cultural life and wellbeing of our future. The unexpected gift of witnessing the Warlpiri grandmothers and granddaughters in ceremony was pivotal in reconnecting with this truth. Without the wisdom of these Warlpiri Grandmothers I could not have perceived the life force of *A Chorus of Women* nor let my body be still in the transformative nature of mythic theatre and ceremonial events. The wisdom of these places and people have grown and restored my bones, my organs, my beauty, my creativity and my gaze. When we walk with it our land can teach all this and more.

¹⁹ Jules Cashford, *The Moon, Myth and Image*, Cassell Illustrated 2003; p 244