

Different dreams

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Many, many, MANY years ago I wrote a book called "Autumn Street", which remains one of my personal favorites, perhaps because it was (is) autobiographical (though written as fiction) and the little-girl narrator—I called her Elizabeth—in a small Pennsylvania town in the early 1940's is actually me.

Although the child protagonist/narrator is very young, it is not a book for young children. It deals with loss, and with anguish, and with a young child's groping toward coming to terms with those things (writing this, the classic "A Death in the Family" by James Agee comes to mind because it grapples with the same themes).

I thought this morning of a short paragraph from "Autumn Street" and went and looked it up. Here the two little girls—Elizabeth and her slightly older sister, Jessica—are in bed in the room that they share, and have been talking. Then, after a silence:

"Good night, Jess," I whispered, but she was already asleep, breathing softly. I realized then, for the first time, that her dreams would always be different from mine.

In truth, I do remember a moment from my early childhood when I had that sudden awareness—psychiatrists have a term for it, but I have forgotten what it is—that I was separate from others, and individual, and unique. (My memory is not the scene I created in the book, but took place outside, and near a magnolia tree beside my grandparents' house, so that I am very aware, thinking of it, of bruised and velvety pinkish-white blossoms on the ground, though I can't bring back any other details).

Anyway, the reason I went back to the "different dreams" paragraph in "Autumn Street" was because a reader, referring to an earlier post titled "The Neglected Horse and the Undiscovered Room" has reminded me that many of us do have the same mysterious dreams.

She writes:

Good grief, I've had that horse dream too. I've never owned a horse, never wanted one. Why is it a horse? Why isn't it the "neglected dog or cat" dream, the forgotten ferret, the overlooked hamster? Why horses?

I have over the years talked to a number of people who have the "undiscovered room" dream....and of course ALL of us probably have the "Exam coming Up and I haven't studied, haven't even gone to class" dream. But I have not before met anyone who dreamed of the Neglected Horse.

And her question is interesting. Why horse?? A horse is an archetypal creature, I suppose. And so *large*. No averting your eyes from something so massive, the way you could from a dying hamster or a starving kitten.

So: all of this is just to say, thinking back on "Autumn Street" and that moment of awareness-of-self, that although it is true that her dreams would always be different from mine...still, clearly, there is something that connects us to one another, and there are parts of our unconscious life that we do share.

And I think that is what we look for, often, in fiction that we read: the moments of identification, of kinship, of reverberation.

Tags: Untagged