
Abstract: In this essay I have woven together the outstandingly magical and memorable events that introduced me to Leonora Carrington’s extra-sensory and spiritual powers. I had met Leonora through a correspondence connected to my research for a doctoral dissertation in Comparative Lit., and she invited me to stay with her in Mexico to learn more about her work in both art and literature. My own journey linked her teachings together with the meaning of her novel and our friendship in ways that I discuss as I recall the many things I learned when I spent time with her. These were joyful times together, sharing our intuitions and our life experiences as mothers in the pre-feminist era verging on the beginning of the second wave of Feminism in the early seventies. Our friendship remains a significant turning point in my life “her story” and a gift that was unanticipated, transformational, and unforgettable. Perhaps I might say it was truly both Real and Surreal, a “Point Supreme” according to Breton, where opposites are no longer contradictory.

Key words: Surrealism, Feminism, Shamanism.
The power of Leonora Carrington’s magical gifts was apparent to me by the way we first met. I was then, a graduate student in Comparative Literature about to complete my dissertation on Surrealism at NYU in New York. My advisor, Prof. Anna Balakian, had requested me to add something on Latin American Surrealism in my dissertation, and time was running out on my deadline. There was nothing in the New York Public Library, and she had said she was returning from Latin America with important texts, BUT her valise with that documentation got stuck in transit and did not arrive in time.

A good friend of mine, Joanne Pottlitzer, who then had been the Director of TOLA (Theater of Latin America), an organization that brought playwrights from Latin America to NY, told me that she knew a woman Surrealist who wrote plays in Mexico. She gave me her address, and I immediately sat down and wrote to Leonora Carrington, not knowing that she was primarily a visual artist. She never replied. So, Joanne suggested that when she would return to Mexico she would visit Leonora and ask why she never answered me, and see if she might convince her to write back to me. Leonora told her in no uncertain terms that she was not interested in academics! What she really wanted to know was why the Feminists were burning their bras in New York. Now there was a question I could respond to, as I had become involved in the New York Feminist Movement. I rewrote to her, informing her of my affiliation with the Feminist Movement, and my desire to teach Surrealism with an inclusion of the women in the movement as soon as I would get my Ph.D. Leonora wrote back to me immediately and sent me money to purchase books on Feminism for her as well as books that had published her plays in France for myself. I was overjoyed, and set right to work. I still did not know that she was a visual artist. We had a lively correspondence in which she often addressed me playfully as Grande Mere or Grand Pere. I used to wonder: “What could she be thinking?” Her grandparents were probably not even alive at that time. Then, little by little, I came to understand her sense of humor, and also the way she was using humor to disguise the contents of her mail. Often her letters would be hidden within a Birthday card that you would have to open to its fullest extent in order to find a message folded and lying deeply within it. I came to understand that she was using playful surrealist humor to hide more important things that she wanted me to know. She was, at that time, active in the student revolt in Mexico City,
and she was protecting herself. Soon she began to include newspaper articles about the student revolution in her letters.

One day a letter arrived that had hidden within it reproductions of her art work taken from a Mexican journal. When I opened them up, I was in a state of ecstatic awe. These were images that I felt I had seen in another world, another life. I had never had those thoughts before. This was so extraordinary. I decided I had better include her in my dissertation, because the world had to know about her fabulous paintings. My thesis was on Surrealist Theater in France and Latin America after WWII, but I just had to include her visual art in it. I told her about my intensely personal response to these images, and I asked for some reference material to guide me as I wanted to write about the work and include it in my dissertation, but did not have any documentation on her. She wrote to me saying that I would have to come to Mexico to meet her because, in fact, while the male Surrealists had books on their work, the women artists had nothing. She felt that she had been shelved and forgotten forever. I wish I could convey how completely shocked I was to learn that such an incredible artist was omitted from the History of Surrealist art. In fact, as I started to do research I only found her name mentioned with regard to her relationship with Max Ernst, her beauty, and her surrealist culinary creations. How was it possible that nothing was written on such amazing art? Leonora said I would have to visit her in Mexico to find out more about her. I could not do that because I had two daughters. We were preparing to spend the next academic year in Paris where my husband was to do Physics research. I did not know where to turn, so my sub-conscious took over. I somehow got the idea that I had to purchase a Mexican dress, put it on, and trust that the vibrations from Mexico would penetrate my brain, and I would understand her very mysterious and completely wondrous paintings. I did purchase a dress in Greenwich Village, and on July 6, 1971, I wore it as I stood at my kitchen table (my desk at the time), and addressed the cosmos in these words. “If I can’t go to Mexico, let Mexico come to me!” At that very moment, the telephone rang and a deep English accent spoke to me saying; “This is Leonora Carrington. I have just arrived in New York, and I would like to meet you”. I began to shake from the unbelievable synchronicity of her ‘call’ with my words that had invoked help from the cosmos.
I told Leonora what had just transpired, and she seemed to know about it. “Of course I know that Gloria. I am a Witch”. As I did not know what to make of that information, I just decided to ‘go with the flow’, for I had never met a Surrealist before and this was an incredible opportunity for me to learn about Leonora’s art and writings. We made a date to meet at the Chelsea Hotel that night, and when we did so, Leonora greeted me by making a sign with her hand. She put two fingers up to form the shape of the horns of a moon. She was making this sign to me gleefully, but I did not know the meaning of her strange sign language. I asked her what that meant, and she replied: “Those are the Holy Horns, Gloria”. I was still baffled. “The Holy Horns of What?”, I asked. “The Holy Horns of Consecration”, she boomed at me, because clearly I had to remember this. It did, indeed seem like she thought it was very important. “Consecration of what?”, I asked again, in total naivete.

“Consecration of The Goddess!” she boomed once more. This was most certainly something extremely important, and something I should never forget. At that point I had only heard about Goddesses in the plural, but never in the singular. I realized that she had told me something utterly new, at least for me, and that I had to find out more about The Goddess —in the singular. Before I could catch my breath she said: “Let’s get this out of the way right now, Gloria. I am a Witch, and I have been in a madhouse!” This encounter marked a turning point in my life. I was infinitely curious about her life, her work, and her magical powers. Surely these powers were what made her say that she knew I had invoked the cosmos, because she was a Witch. Much later I began to refer to this incident as “The Methodology of the Marvelous”, for synchronicities and incidents the Surrealists refer to as le hasard objectif began to enter my life in more and more unbelievable ways.

We became fast friends, and I learned that she was leaving for England, and that she wanted to invite me to meet her in Paris. I knew that I had to do that, but I had no access to my own money (in what was still a pre-feminist era!). I managed to borrow a credit card from my brother, and went to Paris for several weeks while my children were in summer camp. My husband was already there, and had gotten us an apartment for the year. He would be doing research in Physics.
We visited Le Theatre Renaud Barrault where Leonora had previously sent her plays. They seemed very interested in staging them, but she was in a hurry to leave. When we got out, she turned to me and said: “Gloria, I plan to make the sets and costumes from things I take from trash cans in the street. I don’t think that Paris is ready for ‘The Theatre of Garbage’ quite yet! Her pronouncements were always unforgettable. They were humorous as well as a reflection of her reactions to this encounter, and later to those in many other settings.

We then went to our luncheon date with Henri Parisot, who was, at the time, an Editor at the Flammarion Press. They were friends from the past, and it was a joyful reunion until Leonora said: “Tell me about your wife, Henri. What is she like?” I took a deep breath as I could imagine what would ensue, and indeed it did. Henri told her this: “My wife is absolutely wonderful. She is a complete Femme-Enfant (Woman-Child). She cannot buy a train ticket by herself, she cannot make phone calls by herself. I have to help her with everything. She is simply marvelous... true Woman-Child”. At that point Leonora stood up, put her hands on her hips, and exclaimed:

*That’s about enough for me! I am leaving. How can you call a woman of a certain age a Woman-Child? It is so demeaning! Good-bye Henri. Gloria, I’m going to my hotel for a couple of stiff drinks, and I won’t be out for at least four days. See you then.*

On the way out, Henri called after her: “Without rancor. Right? Leonora?”, and she called back in a thunderous voice: “With Rancor, Henri!” (*avec rancune, Henri*). The poor man was left alone with me, and he had understood nothing of this drama. He was almost in tears: “What did I do to cause her to leave? I don’t understand what happened?” I had to explain to him that it was completely insulting to call a woman in her mid-fifties, as possibly his wife was, too, “A Woman-Child”. I told him that Leonora, in her mid-fifties, was an exceptionally gifted artist of maturity and wisdom, and that it was improper to think of her, or of his wife, as helpless children. He did not seem to think that this compliment made by a friend of Surrealism, merited such a harsh response. He was, in fact quite sad.

I tried to lecture him about the Woman-Child as I had come to understand it within the context of Surrealism. It was an ideal that Breton, himself had
advanced. The theory maintained that while men, who are rational and logical can create important art, so that they can actually do 98% of all cultural creation, because women are closer to the purity and innocence of childhood, and closer to their unconscious and the dream world, they should constitute the missing 2% to be added to the contribution by the men, so that, like in chemistry, the solution would crystalize— or so that the work could be brought to its perfection. All that was left for women was the missing 2%, but that was the essential part necessary to realize the highest quality of the work. The men thought of this as a form of high praise of the importance of women. Naturally, at that time, it was the challenge to the Women of Surrealism to demonstrate that when they did work of equal quality to what men do in cultural creation, they would not sacrifice their unique vision that was closer to the unconscious, and they would, indeed, retain their closeness to the dream world. Women could be both rational and irrational, and that went along well with Breton’s definition of le point supreme in Surrealism. The supreme point, as defined by Breton was the point at which opposites like life and death, high and low, male and female, etc. would no longer be considered contradictory.

A few days later Leonora emerged from her retreat in the hotel. She was still in a furor over the idea that these men of her age would continue to promote their ridiculous ideal of “the woman-child”. My husband and I were living in a temporary apt., the kind that was rented to scholars on leave in Paris. There was no decoration on the walls. In fact, they were stained and needed a fresh paint job. Leonora looked at our living room wall and said, in her characteristic English accent with a glint in her eye: “Gloria, don’t you think that right up there, over the couch, you should put a painting of a blue cow?” As usual I had no idea how to respond to such a suggestion. I just laughed. In later years, Leonora would often suggest that in a particular corner of one of her paintings she thought “just bit of blue” was needed. When I would return the following week, those corners were, indeed painted, blue, but the blue was the color she gave to a bizarre beings from other worlds and dimensions. I realized that she could imagine or visualize exactly what walls would look like with her own imagery framed on them. The results were always amusing to me. I could not tell if she was joking or serious because of the gravitas with which she spoke her ideas. I always enjoyed these moments such as when she showed me her painting of a potato. It was done full-size, as if it were the portrait of a human.
She praised it —how lovely the potato was. I kept on wondering why she would paint such a large painting of one potato. Finally, I realized something, actually very profound. For Leonora the potato was a living being with a spirit, with intelligence and perhaps with thoughts transmitted to the world. It had a soul. She had a true reverence for the vegetable world, and would never eat meat. This was a portrait of a potato-being. Back in 1971, her vegetarianism was a bit ahead of her time with respect to the U.S. Today, of course, there would be just a few left who continue to eat meat.

While we were together Leonora told me the entire story of her life. She was very eager to talk to me about the madhouse, and about Max Ernst. She explained that she only married her first husband in order to get to America right after the war, but that they had agreed to divorce when they landed. Soon they did divorce, and then she looked at me intensely. This was the first time that I realized she was probably clairvoyant. She asked, looking deep into my eyes: “Gloria, how did I meet my husband Chiki Weisz? You know! You know!” I was stupefied. How could I possibly know? I didn’t know anyone in Mexico, or anyone named Chiki anywhere. I did not know the Surrealists or their friends. How could I know? She said that when we would meet again, I would tell her. She was absolutely adamant that I knew. We left it at that, but the answer came later after my family settled in Paris a few months later in the Fall.

Leonora had a terrible fear of flying. I met her when she arrived at the ocean liner’s dock in New York. She had returned by steamship, and I had taken a plane back to the states from our short time in Paris in 1971. I took her to my apt. for a few days. Actually, I tried to convince her not to go to Mexico by bus, but to try to go by plane. It would be a very short trip. She was already feeling sick at the thought of it, and I could see that she wanted to please me. We reserved a ticket for her on the plane to Mexico, and got into a taxi. She was very frightened throughout the trip to the airport. When we arrived, she took her luggage out of the taxi, and then put it right back in, heaved a great sigh of relief, and asked the driver to take her to the Port Authority Bus Terminal. As we bought her bus ticket, she told me to call her family and tell them that she had “freaked out”, and said that they would definitely know what she meant. Then she turned, and looked at me quizzically, and said with great seriousness: “Gloria, are you suggesting that I must reclaim my bird right?” This was one of
those memorable quips that she often came up with to deflect the energy onto a more whimsical wavelength. We both laughed at the question, but I did say that because there were so many birds and bird-beings in her art, I was sure she must love flying. That was not the right thing to say. I must admit that over the years she worked hard at reclaiming her bird right. Once she had been invited to fly with one of her sons to Europe. She really wanted to do it, and was beside herself because of her fear. I came up with the great idea of taking her to the sky show at the NY Planetarium so that she could practice being in the air, among the stars, and yet it would be completely safe. Another big mistake! She got sick to her stomach right after we left the Planetarium. It occurred to me that perhaps she painted so many birds in order to understand how they flew so freely and joyously.

At her departure I promised that I would come to visit her the following summer. We corresponded all that year while I was in France. Then, the Extrasensory Question she had posed to me when she told me about her marriage to Chiki got answered.

One night my husband and I went to the ballet in Paris. We were seated in a balcony, and at the intermission I stood up and looked around. There below me sat Jean Malaquais, a Professor I had for a course on Rimbaud when we spent two years at Northwestern Univ. where my husband was teaching and doing research in Physics. I took that course with Professor Jean Malaquais in order to prepare for a Master’s degree. I did not really need one, as I had earned one already, in Russian, at Harvard. I just took this course for my own enjoyment. I got to know Jean Malaquais because there were very few students in the class. I knew he would remember me if I went down to say hello. Here is where things started to become very interesting. He greeted me enthusiastically, and asked what I had been doing over the years since I had taken his course. I explained that I had completed my Ph.D. in Comparative Lit. and he inquired about what I had studied. When I told him that I wrote on Surrealism in French and Latin American Theater after WWII, he got very excited. “Did you ever meet a woman named Leonora Carrington?” he asked me. I told him that, in fact, I had just spent several weeks that summer with her before leaving for France. His reply was something I could never have imagined, and I found it to be absolutely stunning. He said: “She was my friend, and she met her husband at my party in
Mexico (!)”. I could not believe it. She had been right! I would be able to tell her how she met her husband when I would see her the next time. She obviously had extrasensory powers. She knew a lot about me that went beyond what I had told her personally.

Back in Paris, I took up my quest for the Women of Surrealism that my meeting with Leonora had inspired. When I visited Leonor Fini she spoke to me about her art, and how her imagery, while coming directly from the unconscious, was always alchemically correct. It was in her work that I first saw the depiction of the pregnant female whose womb she considered to be an alchemical oven of transformation. She and Leonora both called the pregnant womb, the Athanor and the Egg, using alchemical language to indicate that women were Alchemists in their lives as well as in their art. In Paris I also met with Meret Oppenheim, who was very eager to tell me how right I was to critique the Surrealist concept of the Woman-Child. She said that when she was young she was always sitting at the café with the men, but when she turned 30, in their eyes, she was no longer a Woman-Child, a Femme-Enfant. They let her sit all alone, and did not invite her to sit with them at their table. She got very depressed, and went back to Switzerland, where she burned all her art, and went into therapy. Her father had been a Jungian therapist, and she was familiar with the language of dreams according to Jung. One night she had a dream that was a turning point for her. She dreamed that there was a rabbit running through the garden. She knew this was a sign of fertility at last, and soon she packed up, and returned to Paris to reinvent the rest of her life as an artist.

This was the moment when the women artists of the Surrealist Movement explored Jungian psychology and Alchemy, and used them in their works to transform the meanings of the symbols so that the new feminist vision of a Goddess-centered creation story would be revealed when all was turned upside down and the viewer could glimpse this ‘otherworld’ more directly. In Leonora’s painting “The garden of Paracelsus” (1957) we might inquire why the Hanged Man from the Tarot is juxtaposed with the White Woman bearing the egg. Conventional interpretations tell of the egg as the name of the alchemical vessel and the Hanged Man as a metaphor, in this case, for the persecution of all Alchemists, like Paracelsus. The white and black beings are the Albedo and the Nigredo, also male and female, Sol and Luna —all elements and stages of the
alchemical process. However, in my article “Leonora’s Visionary art for the New Age” (Chrysalis, 3, 1977) I wrote that:

...in a feminist reading of this painting, I would suggest that the visionary content of the painting portrays The White Goddess (of her Celtic tradition) bearing the egg, and that she represents the end result of a New Alchemy, in which the patriarchal vision is reversed as depicted in the image of the Hanged Man from the Tarot.

Here, when even the great Alchemist Paracelsus, is turned upside down, it becomes possible for us to see the manifestation of The White Goddess carrying the egg as the central figure in his alchemical garden. Similarly, in “The burning of Bruno” (1964), we see that when the male Alchemist is, turned upside down, and here he is being burned at the stake, the energy from the overturning of patriarchal power, stimulates the release of the many symbols of the pre-patriarchal religion of the Great Goddess that we see emerging in the white spirit figures surrounding the burning of Bruno. What these works and others show is that when the vision of the male Alchemist is reversed, the world of the Great Mother and the (possibly Celtic) White Goddess carrying the egg, appear in nature, suggesting that patriarchal history had eclipsed and erased the past millennia of history in which the Great Goddess civilization, and its cosmology reigned supreme. “In Carrington’s work this Alchemy often takes place either via the alchemy of cooking or via the alchemical bath. “Cornelia and Corneilius” (1973) expresses how, when patriarchal alchemy is reversed, the matristic Creation cosmology is revealed. Here, Sulphur and Mercury, male and Female, Sun and Moon are immersed in the alchemical bath by the blue figure, the Alchemist, aided by two mythico-legendary beings. Curiously, when the painting is presented correctly which is thought to be upside down, but is really rightside up, a change of vision occurs that includes a change of gods as well. The shadow selves and otherworldly counterparts of the male and female, are, in the reversed painting, holding a vessel decorated with the spiral serpent and The Tree of Life”. This image is linked to the serpent of the Kundalini energy upon which Carrington’s Women’s Liberation poster, “Mujeres Consciencia” (1972) is based... Thus, a reinterpretation of the Garden of Eden myth from Carrington’s perspective would bestow a positive identity upon the serpent and would envisage a New Eve returning the apple to The Old Eve of patriarchal myth, as her energy rises, parallel to the Kundalini energy shown in the “Mujeres Consciencia” poster. That energy then reaches the Third Eye of illumination as a
new, now reclaimed, feminist re-vision of the Garden of Eden myth. Carrington’s poster is green, for the New Eve, having rejected the patriarchal myth of her responsibility for sin, births a “green” vision of an ecologically and gender-balanced and sustainable future world.

Leonora’s altered state of consciousness, when, during the war, she was interned in a psychiatric hospital in Santander, Spain, had put her in touch with a critique, of Christianity from a female perspective. Her inner universe of oneric, mythic, and archetypal imagery, which recounts the sanatorium experience is related in her narrative Down Below. Carrington’s identification with the female principle in all its earthly and spiritual manifestations and her desire to restore to their rightful place both female power and feminine wisdom are evident in the following excerpt from Down Below:

I knew that Christ was dead and done for, and that I had to take His place, because the Trinity, minus a woman and microscopic knowledge, had become dry and incomplete. Christ was replaced by the Sun. I was Christ on earth in the person of the Holy Ghost[1].

Leonora’s intuition that the Trinity was minus a woman showed her prescience of the kind of critique that feminists would bring to bear upon the discussions of women and religion some decades later.

My first trip to Mexico was planned for the summer following my meeting Leonora and our trip to Paris. Before I left, she gave me precise instructions: “Do not read anything about Mexico before you come here: no Anthropology, no Archeology, no History. Come here with an open mind”. When I arrived in Mexico she gave me a copy of her novel, The Hearing Trumpet. She then told me that our first trip would be to the pyramids of Teotihuacan. I was enthralled with our plans for travel to these sites, and I had certainly never seen a pyramid before, nor had I read anything to prepare me for this experience.

One of her friends in the neighborhood drove us to Teotihuacan. When I first set eyes on the Pyramids of the Sun and the Moon, it was as if that incredible vista and the power of the pyramids suddenly opened me to a more cosmic vision of my place in the universe. Leonora told me to inspect these pyramids and to tell her what purpose they had served. She gave me all the time she thought I would need. Truthfully, I realized that I was lost without some
information to use in order to interpret their function. She pushed me very hard to come up with an answer based only on my visionary intuition. I soon learned that this was precisely how she gathered the information from which her most otherworldly images would emerge. I tried very hard, and finally, as I could see she was getting impatient with me, I said: “Leonora, they remind me, to some extent, of the Brandeis University science building”. I had no idea why I said that, but at least it was something. However, she got very excited by my answer, and led me on: “Gloria, that’s wonderful! The Science Building! Go on! Go on! Tell me more”.

I was amazed that what I said meant anything at all. But I was encouraged to go on. “Perhaps they served as landing fields for vehicles from outer space... places where they could land and from which they could take off as they flew back out into space”. I was truly baffled by how I had said this, as I had never thought about space flight or life on other planets very much previously. It was in her presence that these ideas started flooding my mind. “That’s Great Glory!” I began to understand that there was something in that site, today we might think of it as the energies produced by the earth in the presence of those huge pyramid shapes, their sacred geometries, that I was able to make contact with when I was there in person with someone like Leonora. I realized I was learning a new approach to studying the source of her inspiration and her art: it was the ‘sacred geometries’ energy at a specific site that released this knowledge I might have stored within me from past lives, or perhaps it was the pyramids, themselves, that emitted transmissions of this information to me via some type of telepathic communication. “Go on Gloria! This is absolutely fabulous!”, I heard Leonora prodding me to continue and say more. But by then I had just about exhausted my ability to come up with these impressions. We soon decided that the visit was over. I had not realized that Leonora had carefully prepared another teaching for me, like this one that was to take place a few days later.

She had a friend who had a home in Cuernavaca, and let her use it if she wanted to go there, because Leonora was dreaming of creating a feminist retreat home and center in Cuernavaca. I was to learn about that on another visit.

Before embarking on our next trip to Cuernavaca, Leonora said to me: “Remember I told you to bring only the Zohar with you to Mexico. Now you
must bring the Zohar with you on our trip to Cuernavaca”. Things were getting a bit complicated, and puzzling for me, but I had actually purchased a small volume of the Zohar with an introduction, and I had carried it with me to Mexico, not having any idea why I would need it, nor what the Zohar was, either. Once we had arrived at her friend’s house, Leonora showed me to the room I was to sleep in that night. I was not suspicious of anything except: “Why the Zohar?” During the night I had difficulty sleeping. I thought that perhaps I had asthma. I felt that I was not getting enough oxygen. This was new for me. I decided I had to go outside, into the garden right behind the bedroom, and breathe in some fresh air. I spent quite a while in the garden, and then I was able to sleep through the rest of the night. The next morning, I didn’t say anything, but Leonora did. “She addressed me with a glimmer in her eyes: “So, tell me how you slept last night, Gloria. Did you have any trouble sleeping in that bed?” How could she have figured that out so quickly? “Yes, I did have difficulty sleeping Leonora. I had to go out to the garden to get some fresh air, as I felt like something was impeding my ability to breathe freely, like something heavy was weighing down on my chest. “After I said that, Leonora’s face lit up: “Bring out the Zohar, Gloria. We will have to do an exorcism!” Leonora explained that I was sleeping in the bed of the deceased female lover of her friend, and that people had seen the spirit of this woman hovering over her place in the bed before. We had to send this spirit away. I had no idea how to perform an exorcism, but I knew that we had better do it if I wanted to be free of this kind of attack while we stayed there. She prepared a small ritual which involved candles, incense, and readings from the Zohar. First Leonora read a passage, chosen at random (or perhaps nothing was really random at all, here), and then I read another passage that came up for me as I flipped through the pages. Leonora was quite pleased with our ritual. I was skeptical about it, and did not know quite what to believe. But the next morning, when Leonora quizzed me about how I had slept, I was happy to announce that I slept perfectly well throughout the entire night. “Great Gloria. We did succeed in our ritual. You did a great job! See how well you are feeling this morning.” She held up the Zohar, so I could remember how powerful this text was. I was learning that sacred geometries and sacred texts contained unseen, and for me, heretofore unsuspected powers.
In Cuernavaca we visited the site where Leonora was planning to build her own house, and to create a retreat center for women artists, writers, actors, and scholars. She began to tell me about her plans for the center as she envisioned it. Here, again, she had some rather “out of the box” ideas that so intrigued me, that I vowed I would belong to the group of women on a journey of spiritual evolution who would gather to do their creative work in her home.

The plan was for the home to be constructed in a circle around an inner garden, her Garden of Eden, for the New Eves. Only creative women could belong to the group who would gather there. It was a kind of protest against the role of the housewife as it was defined in our society at the time. These women artists and intellectuals would only be engaged in tending the garden and working on their creative projects. There would be no furniture, as such, at the site. Outdoors there was to be a large dining room table with a huge hole in the center. She explained that we would not be doing dishes. Everything we ate would be disposed of into this hole. We would have a hose right by the table, and would wash the table down, hosing all the leftovers from our meal into that hole. Below the table there would be a place for the recycling of the debris from the meal as well as for the dishes, which she envisioned as recyclable and made of paper products. All would be absorbed and recycled by the Earth. We would never do housework, so that we had enough time for tending the garden, studying herbal healing, and for our creative work. The bedrooms would be located in a circular line up of rooms that had nothing in them, but were all placed next to each other in a circle around the garden. A ledge emerged from the plaster of the wall of each room, and that ledge was to be used as a bed. She explained that we would leave our blankets folded on the ledge in the morning with our pillows, and that would take care of the bedroom in the simplest way possible. There would be a front house, in which I imagined that the bathroom would be located, but the only other thing I learned that day was that she was planning to call it “The rath at cow horn”. “Cow Horn” was a translation of Cuernavaca, and a Rath was a Celtic word for an ancient type of small habitation.

My trips with Leonora were opening my mind to what I have since called ‘a world without limits’. There were no limits to what she would come up with. I always believed that her dreams would manifest in our world in the near future. That was not to be true for the Rath at Cow Horn. Eventually I learned that she
had sold that land and given up plans for the retreat center. To say that I was disappointed when I learned of this is an understatement. I had my heart set on being a part of her spiritual community.

But... there was always something new and fascinating in store for me. On another trip when we passed through Vera Cruz, we decided to return to Mexico City via the pyramids of Tula. Naturally, I had no idea what to expect on this trip, as I had not even heard of Tula before. Tula is another pyramid site. There are two or more pyramids there. What was unique to these pyramids is that they have statues of men, who look like Astronauts because of the kind of backpacks they have sculpted over their outfits that resemble Astronaut packs. Leonora had a gleeful look as she told me that this time I had to walk back and forth along a lengthy path away from the pyramids, and tell her what I noticed that was special about them. I began to walk as far from them as I could, and then turn around and walk back to stand in front of their façade. I must have done this about twenty times, but, again, I could not possibly imagine what I was supposed to be seeing that was different from afar from what I saw close up. Back and forth I went, squinting in the sun, and trying to observe absolutely everything. “Come on Gloria, tell me what you see”. After a while I gave up. “I only see the pyramids, Leonora. I don’t know what you have in mind, and I don’t see anything happening”. “Well, that’s odd, because there is a great optical illusion taking place here that you are missing”. She explained to me that when you stand far away from the pyramids, you do see the Astronauts on top of them. But when you come up as close as you can to the front of the pyramids, you don’t see the Astronauts any longer. As a result of a special Optical Illusion, it seems as if the Astronauts have sunk into the pyramid, or that they might have descended into the earth beneath the pyramid. It looks as if they have disappeared, because they are no longer within your range of vision. Of course, they are still there, but from up close you cannot see them. “Well, Gloria, you see, I believe that these pyramids are creating a memorial that was constructed to honor those from outer space who came here to build all the structures on this site. They seem to have come from a race that was highly intelligent, very advanced technically, spiritually, and for reasons we do not know, have either sunken into the earth or left the planet. She was intimating that they may be alive inside the earth or that they may be living inside the pyramid, and that they had the scientific knowledge of how to execute these acts of arriving and
landing, building the pyramids and their city, and then disappearing when it was necessary. In later years, Leonora would send me postcards that had pictures of pyramids on them, and bore as the content of her message, only these words: “I live under here.” We could say that she was postulating that the underworld, the underground, or the subconscious, was where all the advanced information known by ancient civilizations was being stored. Her idea was that if we, women, would evolve psychically, we would be able to access this ancient storehouse of knowledge of the keys to the mysteries of life in the universe. The New Eve from her poster, ‘Mujeres Consciencia’, undergoes this evolution until the Kundalini energy reaches the Third Eye of Illumination. She believed that this Illumination, acquired by practicing a spiritual path, would eventually make it possible for women to save the planet from all the destruction we, humans, have wrought upon it.

At the end of the summer Leonora told me that she was planning to paint a gypsy caravan for us so that the next summer when I would return, we could go traveling everywhere in her gypsy caravan. I don’t know how she intuited that all my life I had the following belief. I would follow the straight and narrow path, and if that did not work out for me, I would run away with the gypsies. I loved this fantasy as much as I had loved the dream of the feminist retreat house in Cuernavaca. Just before the next summer, I called Leonora to tell her that I had bought my ticket for our Great Adventure, and I gave her the dates that I would be coming to Mexico. There was a silence. Then she said: “What Great Adventure, Gloria?” I reminded her about our trip in the Gypsy Caravan, and she burst into the heartiest, most resonant laughter I had ever heard. “Don’t tell me you took me seriously, Gloria! It was just a fantasy of mine”. I realized this was taking the same route that the dream of the Rath at Cow Horn had taken. I was quiet. I am sure she understood that I was very disappointed. So, she said:

_Gloria. Keep your ticket. I am coming to New York to see Pablo, and I thought I would see you there, too, but now you can go to Mexico and stay with Chiki and Gaby, and have a good time sightseeing, visiting museums, places of power, and meeting people. I'll see you when you return. I'm planning to stay at least six months in New York._

My spirits revived, and I made plans to go to Mexico again.
At this point I must tell the reader that during my first visit to Mexico, the previous year, I had asked Leonora why Marion, the protagonist of her novel *The Hearing Trumpet*, wanted so desperately to go to Lapland. Marion was 92 years old, and was placed in a home for the aged, called Lightsome Hall, where many amazing epiphanies took place for her. I could not understand why she was so enchanted with the dreamworld of Lapland. I asked Leonora why her protagonist wanted to go to Lapland, and she replied: “Gloria, it’s because the Shamans of Lapland just happen to be the most magical people on Earth!” I knew I had to learn more about Lapland, and to find out what Shamans actually were. But I never found the time to do that during the entire year I was in New York. These were the kinds of facts that seemed not to have any relationship to my actual life. But as time went on I learned that I had underestimated the extreme importance of many things Leonora told me. One of these was the fact that: “The Shamans of Lapland just happen to be the most magical people on Earth”. I began to realize that not all of her fantasies came to exist in reality. Not the Rath at Cow Horn, and now I had learned that the Great Gypsy Caravan Adventure would not take place either. But I also learned that these were relatively small fantasies in comparison with one that was about to loom very large over the rest of my life, one for which I was completely unprepared.

Here we find me several years later, during the Fall of 1987, a Professor of Comparative Literature and Gender Studies at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. By this time, I was divorced and one of my daughters was at Barnard College in New York when I moved to L.A., and the other daughter moved out to California with me to begin college at USC. This was the year that I was co-creating an Ecofeminist conference at USC, and preparing the book *Reweaving the world: the emergence of ecofeminism* (Sierra Club Books, 1990), which would contain the presentations by the speakers at our conference. I was working in my office one day in the Fall semester when the phone rang. The call was from Prof. Berit As, a Sociology Professor from the Univ. of Oslo in Norway. I had met Berit at a Feminist Studies conference in Europe, and I was surprised to find out that she was touring the U.S. on a fundraising mission to enable her to create a new Feminist University in Oslo that would focus on Feminism, Peace, and Ecology. Berit was calling from Berkeley, where she had come to do some fund-raising, and was now planning to travel to Los Angeles. She wanted to know if “they” could stay with me. I had
to inform her that I lived in a very small one-bedroom apartment, but I had colleagues who lived in spacious houses, and would love to put “them” up. I knew I couldn’t take in two people, but I had no idea who she was traveling with. She responded that “they” had to stay with me. They just had to. I insisted that they would be so much more comfortable in a colleague’s home overlooking the Pacific Ocean. I was sure I could find someone who would love to have them as houseguests. She was adamant. “You don’t understand Gloria. We have to stay with you!” She was, in fact, getting exasperated, because I continued to insist that my apt. was probably too small and would be uncomfortable for them. So, she asked the jackpot question: “Don’t you want to know who I am traveling with, Gloria?” I supposed that I would like to know that, but it wasn’t a priority. “Fine”, I said. “Who are you traveling with?” not expecting to hear anything earth-shattering. But I was wrong again. She told me she was traveling with a shaman from Lapland! When I heard those words I became as electrified as I had been when Leonora first called me in New York after I had spoken to the cosmos about bringing her to me. Now this was even more than a synchronicity! More than an example of the Surrealist concept of le hasard objectif. This was truly more like an earthquake. How did it happen that the “most magical person on Earth” according to Leonora, was coming to L.A. and how did this Shaman happen to know about me, and insist that they stay with Gloria Orenstein? How did this happen? I told Berit that her Shaman friend was “the most magical person on Earth, and I cited Leonora and her novel, The Hearing Trumpet, and I linked it all to my Mexican dress and the phone call from Leonora after I had just asked the cosmos to “Let Mexico come to me”. Berit said:

Gloria, you do realize that I am a Sociologist, and you are telling me stories about a magic, Mexican dress, and a Hearing Trumpet, and the protagonist of a novel by a Surrealist, and I don’t understand any of this? What are you talking about, and finally, can we stay with you?

I began to look around the campus to see if there was any Professor I knew who could appreciate the fact that this Shaman from Lapland was ‘the most magical person on Earth’. I had to admit that this was not the kind of idea that would appeal to my colleagues. So I told Berit that, in the end, they would be welcome to stay with me if they would sleep on a couch that opened out onto the living room floor. Berit said that would be perfect, because the Shaman had always
slept in a tent in the woods. She can sleep anywhere. And so it was solved. They would come to stay with me.

On the day of their arrival, I looked into my closet to select what outfit to wear to meet a Shaman. I decided upon a two-piece outfit that I had bought in Greenwich Village, but which was made in India. It was pink with black energy lines on it. I wore it for our meeting. Berit introduced the Shaman, Ellen Marit Gaup-Dunfjeld, as a full Shaman and the daughter of The Great Shaman of Samiland, who had trained her. At our first meeting the Shaman could speak only very little English. But after she came back to participate in our spring Conference on Ecofeminism, she had learned English. It was miraculously fast. I could see that she had extraordinary powers of intelligence. She was probably the most beautiful woman I had ever set eyes on, and she told those gathered in my office, (with translation from Berit) that her people should not be referred to as Laplanders, but as Sami. Samiland was the land above the Arctic Circle that went through Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula of Russia. Ellen Marit offered to sing some of her Sami yoiks for us. Yoiks are chants that have the power to invoke the presence of the ancestors in our room. When she sang them, most of the people in the room began to cry. We were suddenly in touch with some very ancient sounds that woke up parts of us that had been asleep, perhaps for centuries and through our many incarnations. I could not believe that this was happening to me. It was as if she had stepped right out of Leonora’s novel, The Hearing Trumpet. I knew, or at least felt sure that her arrival in my home was still part of Leonora’s power manifesting in my life. How could it be that someone, like Leonora’s protagonist, or the Shaman of Samiland would want to meet me and possibly travel with me to Lapland, now called Samiland? How did they decide they should stay in L.A. with me? After their visit I went to hear a medium do some channeling in Los Angeles, and I went up to him afterwards and told him about The Shaman of Samiland. I told him the whole story and asked him if he had any idea what was happening to me. He said something that shook me to the very core. “You are obviously channeling the Ice Age into the New Age, Gloria”. I was literally beside myself—lifted onto another plane of the universe.

When Berit and the Shaman were planning the rest of their visit, the Shaman said she wanted to visit Rosalyn Bruyere’s Healing Light Center Church in
Glendale. I could not believe that this was possible. Rosalyn had a small Healing Center at which I attended lectures and workshops. She was a psychic channeler, and a healer, and I was mesmerized by her. But there were only a handful of people anywhere who would have known her name. It was astounding that this Shaman from the North Pole in Norway knew about her and wanted to meet her. More astounding was the fact that I was already a student in her classes, and I knew how to get us all to see her. The next morning when I went into the kitchen to prepare breakfast, there was Ellen Marit wearing a twin outfit to the one I had worn on the day they arrived. Hers was yellow with the black energy lines, and the fabric was the same. The only difference was that my outfit had a skirt and hers had slacks—in the same material. When we wore them together, we looked somewhat like twins. I asked her if we were ‘Cosmic Twins’, and she said that we were. (I had just been joking, but suddenly this became more serious). At the Healing Light Center, Rosalyn was giving her Workshop on Egyptian Healing, and Berit was translating most of what Rosalyn said for Ellen-Marit, who told us that she had been a Priestess in Egypt in a past life. I asked Ellen Marit why she had not told me that she also owned an outfit almost identical to mine. Hers had come from India, too, but she had bought it in Switzerland. Her answer provided new information.

“Gloria, the student of a shaman must learn for herself and not be told these things in advance. You had to see this for yourself to understand the meaning. You are my student. My father has invited you to come to Samiland this summer, and learn a little about Shamanism with us. “Things were happening so fast! How did I suddenly become the student of a Shaman? I could not come up with an answer. Yet, I knew that after the conference, to which she would come and sing her Yoiks and teach us about her people and their struggle against colonization and Christianization –how they had their Sami language taken away from them, and how their land was now being overrun by Europeans overfishing in their waters... I knew that I would do everything in my power to go to Samiland with her the next summer. We had so many life stories to share that I could not wait until she would return in the Spring to participate in our conference. Then she would, hopefully, explain to me what would happen when I would go to Samiland with her after I gave a paper on the art of Leonora Carrington in Ireland that summer. When she returned in the Spring, she told me I would have to walk 25 miles in nature, and climb three mountains. Then
we would put up a tent and go fishing. We would also visit their sacred site, give offerings, and do a ritual at the site. I was experiencing the kind of excitement that ruled out any feelings of fear. I did not realize, at the time, that I had replaced my fears with the excitement and thrill of all this news. I could not take in the fact that this was happening to me. I was completely unprepared for what was to come.

I will not relate the complete story of my four and one half years visiting Samiland every summer in this paper. However, I will just say that while the first two years were the most magical of my life, and were years in which I knew that what Leonora had told me about the Shamans of Lapland being the most magical people on Earth was completely true, the second two years taught me about the darkness in the life of a Shaman. Her two sons, whom she adored, were killed at ages 18 and 24, and she was so bereft that she developed cancer, and did not want to be treated, because she wanted to join her sons in the spirit world. There are many stories relating to Shamanism that taught me much about how different our cultures were, and how difficult the path of Shamanism can be, but these are all for another time. I will simply say that on the return from our trip to their sacred site, Ellen Marit asked the ancestors whether she had their permission to make a reindeerskin pouch for me into which she would put a reindeer horn through which they could speak to me. They agreed, and this horn was to become my own Hearing Trumpet through which I could hear voices calling me from the Otherworld, beyond the veil. One night I was awakened by ghostly voices calling “Gloria, Gloria Gloria; kafe, kafe, kafe”. I knew these were the voices of the ancestors. I had heard them moving furniture around in my room. I never knew whether to believe the shamans or not when they told me these things until I actually heard them myself.

I also had an amazing encounter with my spirit guide who appeared in my dream— I was told that this man in the leather outfit and the three-cornered hat was the Shaman’s grandfather. They said he was the guide that helped me climb three mountains in Samiland on our very first trek up the mountains. Once again, I didn’t know what to make of this information until they took down a photo from their living room wall of the exact image of the man I had seen taking off his long hiking boots in my dream. He was a giant, like the man in my dream, and he wore the same outfit. It was a form of proof, to me, that, as they
insisted, I had been taken up those three mountains by him because “How would you have been able to climb three mountains at the North Pole, Gloria? You are not in shape for mountain climbing”. Touche! I must have been levitated some way up those mountains, because I was not in any athletic shape not even to climb a small hill. Why did the ancestors ask me for kafe (coffee)? They then explained to me that it was because at the North Pole the magnetism from the pole is so strong that it draws you into a deep sleep, even during the day. The Sami drink very strong coffee every half hour to keep them awake. We used to read fortunes in the coffee grains left in our cups. All of these experiences, and so many more have shaped the rest of my life. My Shaman ultimately died of cancer, or as she put it, “in a spirit war”. There is more to this story that I will explain elsewhere. But what interests me here is that I am impressed by the way Leonora Carrington’s novel had come to be alive in my life. I had even been given a Hearing Trumpet from the Shaman of Lapland, and Leonora had known that these were the most magical people on Earth. I felt as if it could even be possible that Leonora’s protagonist, Marion, who wanted to go to Lapland (and did set out for Lapland at the end of the novel), might have hitched a ride with me on my journey to get there. She would have been as invisible to me as the Shaman’s grandfather had been on my hike up the three mountains. But he was my spirit guide. He was the one who took me up those mountains and appeared in my dream the next night. Being invisible to someone who was not yet “psychically evolved”, as Leonora would have expressed it, does not mean that these spirit beings are not real. It means that they have the power to manifest according to their will. It means that some of us have not attained enough spiritual evolution to see them, but that others, like the Shaman and her father, have evolved to that degree. It means that it could be possible for all humans following a spiritual training to become able to access the power necessary in order to see these beings, who may be human, hybrid, Otherworldly or possibly, even fictional (in our limited definitions of what is real and what is fictional).

When I first read the manuscript of The Hearing Trumpet, although Leonora was 56 at the time and I was in my early thirties, I was interested in the fact that she had chosen to depict a 92-year-old woman as the heroine of a Grail Quest novel, surrealist style. Today, I understand how fascinating older age is, and how the prevailing patriarchal myths and denigrating stereotypes of elderly
women have limited us in our ability to conceive of the new kinds of magical encounters and expansion of consciousness that can occur, much later in life. In fact, one might be more prepared for them only at these advanced ages. Indeed, the new sense of time one acquires, where night and day, years and decades all seem to flow into each other and intermingle... and where life and death are no longer conceived of as contradictory, might simultaneously be preparing one to apprehend the spiritual visions that Shamans perceive, whether in a trance or in a mildly altered state of consciousness. Needless to mention that the opposites of night and day are completely reversed when you live in the country of the Midnight Sun, one in which the sun rises at 7 AM and sets at 7:20 PM, one where the magnetism of the poles draws you into a deep sleep, and where you spend the rest of your winter days in nighttime. You live in a cosmos that comes close to The Supreme Point that the Surrealists strived to attain in their lives and their art.

Marion, the female Grail Quest heroine undergoes many experiences of epiphany and revelation that began when the portrait of an Abbess on the wall of Lightsome Hall would wink at her as she passed by. This connection with the Abbess structures her interior journey through history, that Leonora explained to me was written in order to place a descending spiral (the history of the Abbess) in the center of this Goddess novel—right in the center of a revised cosmic vision. As the history unfolds, and as Marion’s life in Lightsome Hall interfaces with that more ancient history, the novel ends with Marion’s grandest epiphany when, after being immersed in a cauldron, she has the revelation of her three faces, one, black, one white and one red, the vision of her Akashic—recorded self throughout time in the colors of the Alchemical process. She attains the knowledge that she is an incarnation of The Goddess (in the singular).

Her desire had been to return the Holy Cup and the Pneuma (that had been stolen) to the Goddess to whom it originally belonged may now be fulfilled. With the Alchemy of Revelation of her ‘Akashic’ lives now recovered, she takes off for Lapland with her friend, Carmella, who had given her The Hearing Trumpet for long-distance hearing while she was in the old-age home. The alchemical transformation of the protagonist in this book includes the discovery that the hero of the Grail Quest might be a 92 year old woman, not a gallant young man,
and that the recovery of the Holy Cup and the Pneuma, when restored to the Goddess by elderly women engaged in secret, spiritual exploration transforms the hopelessness of the vision of planetary destruction into a vision of healing, regeneration, and Feminism via a revised Alchemy in which opposites are no longer contradictory, so that a 92 year old woman can receive information from the Beyond via a work of art on the wall of an old-aged home.

Art is part of all creation, and as such has spirit infused in its existence. In such a vision, art has agency, and in the case of Leonora Carrington’s visual art and particularly her novel, *The Hearing Trumpet*, I can identify with someone who sees art winking at her, as I feel *The Hearing Trumpet* winked at me. I see the powers of Leonora Carrington’s spirit and creativity having performed a Great Work of Alchemy in her lifetime. She has transmuted the outworn patriarchal categories in which women were seen as inferior, into a cosmic vision in which women are Alchemists, and their lives undergo revelations and epiphanies that lead to the knowledge of regeneration, and in this case the healing of the planet. Once women’s consciousness undergoes a spiritual evolution, the power of the New Eve will arise and the Great Alchemical Work of repairing the world will be underway. Lapland/Samiland and the shamanic powers of the most magical people on Earth are given to us if we learn to open ourselves to the teachings of The Great Earth Mother, The Goddess, in the singular.

**Note**