

Introduction

On August 31-Sept 2, 2012, a symposium titled, “The Study of Myth: Exploring Myth, Culture, Theory, Practice,” was held at Pacifica Graduate Institute (PGI), in the foothills of the Santa Ynez Mountains of Southern California, hills that for thousands of years cradled the mythology of the Chumash People. Around eighty presentations, ranging from “The Practice of Myth in a Post-Modern Global Society,” to “The Alchemical Osiris, God of Regeneration,” were delivered by scholars, students, teachers and artists. From these we’ve selected a representation of five essays and one poem. In what follows, I will very briefly introduce the essays, and attempt to weave together a few commensal themes.

The symposium began in Pacifica’s Barrett Auditorium amid huge banner/portraits of psychologists C.G. Jung, James Hillman and Marion Woodman, archaeologist Marija Gimbutas, and mythologist Joseph Campbell. David L. Miller, the distinguished Professor of Religion, and an old friend of Campbell, delivered the keynote address, on which his essay, “Mything the Study of Myth,” is based. Miller is a scholar who takes the unconscious seriously, and thus likes to play with the sounds and structures of words. His subject here is not the interpretation of myths, but how they are studied, which he points out may be approached from the perspective of “unspoken narratives that unwittingly shape our work in the study of mythology,” to a point where, “the study of myth may be itself a myth...the story about the stories.”

This premise, on which Miller balances the length of his engaging essay, sets us forth on Sphinxian wings toward the other documents selected for this issue of the *Jung Journal: Culture and Psyche*, which I will very briefly introduce.

Mytho-archaeologist Thomas Christian presents an essay that centers on Southwest American Indian rock art, especially Puebloan and Navajo “Star Ceilings,” found in New Mexico, Colorado and Utah, as they “can be seen to exemplify Jung’s ideas pertaining to psychological

projection and the stars.” Following Jung, Christian’s theory, which he lucidly lays out, is that “the geological canvas for rock art—cave walls, ceilings, and the like—may act as a blank screen, or writing tablet, for psychological projection.”

In addressing the prolifically inscribed Painted Cave of the Chumash, located a few miles from PGI, David S. Whitley wrote:

“Some archaeologists have suggested that these represent depictions of the sun, solar eclipses, and other celestial phenomena...The problem with the theory, then, is not that we can prove that it is wrong, but instead that we cannot determine that it is right with any reasonable certainty.”(Whitley, 2001)

Whitney’s observation can be applied to most scientific work with indigenous rock art; indeed, to most paleo-archaeology, a qualification that also drives David Miller’s, “the study of myth may be itself a myth.” However, we cannot deny the psychological impressions found throughout humanity’s attempts to make sense of a mysterious world in which we are both host and guest. As Christian says: “(W)hat we are glimpsing in these artworks is the ancient view of human psychological drives, instincts wrapped in meaning by way of art and mythopoesis.” Interestingly, He also points out that “Puebloan and Navajo rock art is thought to be the ancestor of sandpainting motifs,” which are used in healing rituals. Christian’s essay highlights where time and distance fall away, and even the most ancient deliberate human marks are uncannily familiar.

Michael Lambert has been teaching high school students for some thirty years. His essay, titled, “Education Reform and the Hero’s Journey,” exhibits Lambert’s concern that his students to graduate into the world, not as corporate drones, but as thoughtful adults aware of their interdependency with *all* planetary life. He quotes Joseph Campbell:

“Man should not be in the service of society, society should be in the service of man. When man is in the service of society, you have a monster state, and that's what is threatening the world at this minute.” (Campbell,2005)

Lambert joins millions of teachers who are resisting a political agenda that measures their success with students by a common metrics “of external demands,” instead of guiding them toward their own creativity. Working against this, he is almost unique in his use of mythology as a way for his students to approach “with knowledge and skills” the “powerful threshold” they will cross upon graduation into the unknown beyond their high school experiences. “(T)he hero journey *is* everywhere,” he tells them. “That’s because we are all Perseus, Hamlet, Arthur and Orpheus.”

In his essay, David Miller pointed out that at the end of Joseph Campbell’s, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, the book that sent many of its readers off on a “hero’s journey,” Campbell says that the old myths “have lost their force; their symbols no longer interest our psyche” (Campbell , 2008), and that he reinforced this observation throughout his career. This leads us to a crucial question, one that C.G. Jung asked himself, and what Lambert asks of his students: “But then what is your myth---the myth in which you live?” (Jung,1963)

I said that Michael Lambert is *almost* unique in his use of mythology in the classroom, because Susan R. Woodward also teaches the power of myth to her high School students. “The study of myth,” she writes,

“drives how I teach literature, how the class approaches characters, and how students begin to examine the roles they play in their families, in their school, and in their community. What will they manifest in this world? What will be their contribution?”

She continues by saying: “After examining what the ancient characters have in common with their modern counterparts, the students also begin to look at how the values and beliefs demonstrated in the literature also mirror many of the values and beliefs they hold in their own lives.” Which makes me think: “I wish I had had a teacher like her!” For I feel the excitement she must create in her classroom by lifting the masks from “modern characters” to reveal the timeless mythological figures behind them. She made me recall reading Homer’s *Odyssey* in high school, and seeing how deeply moving classical literature can be. But this was still reading someone else’s adventure; while Woodward sends her students, in various creative projects,

some of which are available on-line, on a quest to find the hero in themselves---and this is most important---in their ordinary life.

In a poem titled, “Myths To Live By”---which is also title of one of Joseph Campbell’s books--- , Evans Lansing Smith, who chairs PGI’s Mythological Studies Program, continues the theme of narratives, spoken and non-spoken, which shape the study of mythology. His poem contains myths that rise from Smith’s imagination like fireworks lifting from where our psyches have never left---

“In the beginning, there was ignorance:
Mindless confusion, darkness on the deep.
No one knew nothin,’ had nothing to say.”

With erudition and humor, the poem makes the same point as Miller and Campbell, while adding a more poignant remark:

“Take your pick, from among these myths, reader;
Choose your culture, then follow your leader.
Confronted by what we can never know
We make up stories, terrified, alone.”

Then Smith creates another mythic universe, this one beginning with “The biggest bang / You can imagine...”

Professor of Mythological Studies, writer and poet, Dennis Patrick Slattery, wasn’t able to attend the Myth Symposium. As a consequence, we have the good fortune to present the paper he had planned to deliver. In, “Poetics of Soul: *Revisioning Psychology As Mythical Method*,” Slattery reads James Hillman’s seminal work, *Revisioning Psychology* (1992), against Herman Melville’s classic, *Moby-Dick* (1851). Speaking of Hillman, but also with Melville in mind, Slattery writes:

“Only a few souls will and have been called to muster the courage to explore such a region that stretches both horizontally across the landscape of history and downward mythically to the depths of pathology, affliction, and woundedness.”

Slattery’s essay is rife with anecdotes, the ligaments of a personal myth surfing waves stirred up by “the divinities of the deep.” It is also an in-depth analysis of Hillman’s book, in which he wrote that:

“Freud’s one myth is too univocal to sufficiently account for the plurality of narratives that constitute the polyphony of our plots. Hillman is insistent on claiming that one story, the heroic, is inadequate and oppressive in delineating the complexity of our storied lives.”

Indeed, throughout his career Hillman counseled against the Freudian hero as “reviving shapes of former egos.” (Hillman, 1979) However, for Campbell, “(t)he effect of the successful adventure of the hero is the “unlocking and release again of the flow of life into the body of the world.” (2008).

Finally, Slattery quotes Hillman:

“By means of myths is the experiencing of their working *intrapsychically* within our fantasies, and then through them into our ideas, systems of ideas, feeling-values, moralities and basic styles of consciousness” (1975)

Thus, may we say: The study of myth is the study of one’s ordinary self in a plethora of mythic ways.

Bibliography

Campbell, Joseph, and Bill D. Moyers. (2005) *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth*. New York, Mystic Fire Video.

Campbell, Joseph (2008) *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. Novato, CA., New World Library.

Hillman, James. (1975) *Revisioning Psychology*. New York: Harper Perennial.
(1979) *The Dream and the Underworld*. New York, Harper & Row.

Jung, C.G. (1963) *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*. . New York, Vintage Books.

Melville, Herman. (1851) *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*) New York, Harper & Brothers.

Whitney, David S. (2001) *A Guide to Rock Art Sites: Southern California and Southern Nevada*. Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing Company.

Joel Weishaus is Pacifica Graduate Institute's Artist-in-Residence. His latest books are, *The Healing Spirit of Haiku*, with David Rosen and Arthur Okamura (2004/2014), and *Feels Like Home Again: Collected Poems* (2014). Weishaus's archives are at The University of New Mexico's Zimmerman Library, and Virginia Polytechnic Institute's. Center for Digital Discourse and Culture: <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/host/weishaus/index.htm>