

## On the Making of Myths: Mythology in Training

*Ann Shearer*

### Abstract

This paper explores the importance of studying mythology in analytic training. It suggests some reasons why this may have fallen out of fashion and sets these against the central place of myth in Jung's psychology and instances of myth-making in contemporary Western culture. It suggests that the study of mythology not only deepens psychological understanding but also helps candidates define their own approach to practice and provides a counter to some of the more malign aspects of psychological training programs.

### Keywords

Mythology, analytic training, Jungian psychology.

Why should a study of mythology be part of an analytic training? Nearly 20 years ago, in his assessment of the Jungian scene, Andrew Samuels (1985) cited some who doubted that myth was other than a secondary elaboration of primary infantile experience and others who were persuaded more by theories of cultural diffusion than Jung's notions of psychic universality. He quoted Fordham's concern that too much alchemy, myth, and folklore caused loss of analytical contact with the personal context and led to an exercise which, while wide-ranging, was primarily "intellectual and non-specific." In conclusion, Samuels reckoned that there had been a switch of emphasis in not just the "Developmental" school but, to an extent, the "Classical" one as well, so that "myth, legend, and so on, whilst still studied and regarded as important, have been replaced by a wider personal, social and familial investigation as a basis for archetypal theory" (Samuels, 1985, pp. 35–36). In the same year and on the other side of the Atlantic, a standard textbook of Jung's ideas made only two mentions of mythological studies, together with another two of what Jung himself had made of them, although in her contribution on training, June Singer (1985) still found a place for the study "in considerable depth" of "one or two mythological systems or motifs" (p. 379).

Nearly 20 years on, and despite Michael Vannoy Adams's (2001, 2002) vigorous advocacy of "psycho-mythology," I wonder how many directors of Jungian training still dispense Singer's prescription, let alone anything more ample. In

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*Ann Shearer is a senior analyst and former Convenor of the Independent Group of Analytical Psychologists in London, where she is in private practice. She lectures widely to different Jungian training and interest groups and for the past three years has been a visiting supervisor to the IAAP Developing Group in St. Petersburg. Her most recent books are Athene: Image and Energy (1996) and (as co-editor) When a Princess Dies (1998).*

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three recent “state of the art” collections—representing between them an international gathering of “post-Jungians,” the (British) Society of Analytical Psychology and the British Association of Psychotherapists—only 4 out of 54 papers address themselves specifically to that wealth of “myth, legend and so on” (Casement, 1998; Alister & Hauke, 1998; Christopher & Solomon, 2000). A straw in the wind?

Yet in a Jungian perspective, we are all myth-makers: making myths, it seems, is what humans do, whether consciously or not. Personally, we psychotherapists, as anyone else, live and work by the myths we make; professionally, we all follow one myth or another about the nature of human psychology. These activities are not possible for ego alone but must draw on images and intimations from the unconscious in a work that is essentially of the imagination. And this work seems in psychological essence the same as the one that happens when there is engagement with the old mythic tales. So the kindling of a feel for what myth and mythologizing are about through engaging with those tales seems to me most valuable to any training program that wants to help its students and teachers imagine about and reflect upon this whole business of depth psychology. This process has a further value: it can bring a corrective energy to some of the more malign aspects of psychological training.

But if this is so, why the relative inattention to matters mythological? Training program may, and perhaps inevitably, be reflecting aspects of a recent shift in collective Western consciousness. It is not very long, after all, since people stopped knowing that the old stories say something important about human nature and aspirations. These days, the British national curriculum for schools relegates the Greek myths to the “history section” for seven- to eleven-year-olds, along with projects on the shape of ancient houses and cities. Yet when the Rev. Charles Kingsley rushed out *The Heroes* for the Christmas market of 1855 (Kingsley, 1902), he fell into a European mythological tradition which stretched back at least as far as the early fourteenth century (Seznec, 1953). The instant success of Kingsley’s little volume, and its numerous reprints over the next hundred years, fostered a moral education whose influence went well beyond the children at whom it was ostensibly directed. Next to the Romances of the Christian Middle Ages, thought Kingsley, “there are no fairy tales like these old Greek ones, for beauty, and wisdom, and truth, and for making children dare noble deeds and trust in God to help them through.” He knew his young readers were not so simple as to fancy that even half the stories were literally true. “But the meaning of them is true, and true for ever, and that is—‘Do right and God will help you.’ And such role models they offered, too! Here is Perseus, the very type of the hero, ‘brave, truthful, gentle and courteous,’ forged into manhood by seven long years of adventure and trial: ‘he had gone out a boy, and he was come home a hero; his eye shone like an eagle’s and his beard was like a lion’s beard, and he stood up like a wild bull in his pride’” (Kingsley, 1902, pp. vi–ix, xvii, 53–54).

Only 50 years ago, this sort of thing would pass. But such simplemindedness can hardly find a place in today’s multiplicity of meanings, and contemporary psychological approaches would be more likely to deconstruct its apparent innocence than to wonder where in the collective psyche its informing ethos had gone. This is not an easy time for heroes; after a century of depth psychology we know too much about their patterns for attitudes to them to be other than deeply ambiguous.

Perseus was the paradigm of the hero for Erich Neumann too. But can we these days accept with Jung that Neumann's (1970) interpretive certainties "placed the concepts of analytical psychology on a firm evolutionary basis" (p. xiv)? Psychology's understandings of the complexity of the human soul readily find their crude collective expressions: the media knows that there's no copy like knocking copy, particularly when it can dish the dirt on once-heroic moral leaders.

So the ancient stories have lost their traditional moral force. Nor is there likely to be much other welcome for them, perhaps, in the contemporary intellectual climate, which sees any big story, any hint of universals, any study of the past except in terms of the present, profoundly questionable. In its urge to connect with unchanging aspects of human nature, an engagement with myth can seem rather to lead to culture-bound stereotyping and from there, at the extreme, to a morally repugnant and murderous politics. Is it simply coincidence, for instance, that the three men who did most to rekindle the modern interest in myth—Joseph Campbell, Mircea Eliade, and Jung—should all have been associated with an intellectual climate that also fostered early fascism and sometimes anti-Semitism, and with extreme right-wing politics as well? As Robert Ellwood (1999) underlines in his careful exploration of this deeply disquieting question, all three shared a "world-weariness," a romantic anti-modernism that yearned for traditional values and a Gnostic despising of "mass man" which might indeed have made them vulnerable to the creeds of the 1930s and 1940s. And although the conclusion from this evidence must be that "mythological" thinking is of itself no more politically dangerous than any other kind, its tendency is perhaps bound to relativize political immediacies. In the mythological perspective, after all, we are all living in what the Greeks called the Age of Iron, Hindus know as Kali Yuga, and Christians lament as exile from Eden, and no contemporary concern can match our deepest longing, which is to return to who and where we once were.

This is hardly the tune of the times, and insofar as depth psychology seeks consciously to embed itself as a profession in the contemporary collective, it is unlikely to find it worthwhile to dust down those old tales of goddesses and gods, heroes and monsters, appalling retribution and derring-do. At the same time, it must also be an expression of that collective, and bound to engage with what that may mean. The feminist-inspired debate about the nature of woman and "the feminine" that still engages Jungian passions after nearly 30 years, for one instance, speaks to questions of nature and culture (e.g. Wehr, 1988; Schaverein, 2003; Shearer, 2003). The continuing shame and concern around Jung's conduct and beliefs in the 1930s, for another, leads beyond the man to questions about the nature of mythological consciousness (Maidenbaum, 2002).

Yet depth psychology is also, by its nature and paradoxically, a countercultural force. The centaur Chiron, the "wounded healer" so often evoked as its patron, lives not honored at court but in a solitary cave: his service to his community seems to demand a separation from its struggles. That collective service is also a service to the individuals he treats and trains, and so it is with depth psychology. Few, I imagine, would argue with Jung's (1957a) insistence that psychotherapists learn not just the personal biography of their patients, but also "the mental and spiritual assumptions prevalent in his milieu, both present and past, where traditional and cultural influences play a part and often a decisive one" (p.

viii). Yet depth psychology also needs another perspective alongside that of social and political immediacy to nourish its imaginative attention to the symbolic, and it is to this world beyond that myth beckons.

Can we still get there—or does it even still exist? Wolfgang Giegerich, at one extreme among contemporary mapmakers to psyche, argues that the nearest we can get is a sort of nostalgia. “It is psychologically that the gods are dead, while for ego-consciousness, i.e. in our literary or intellectual tradition and by way of metaphor, there has indeed been and may still be some sort of ‘survival of the pagan Gods’. It is the soul that is subject to violent changes in history...[T]oday’s soul cannot possibly have real access to the Gods any more” (Giegerich, 1996, p. 176). James Hillman (1994), in an earlier exchange with Giegerich, tells a very different story. For him, the Gods ask of us still what they did in classical Greece: to be remembered. And they will continue to ask it, for it is in their very nature not to die—a nature utterly beyond the historical and factual situation on which Giegerich continues to rest his argument and one which needs neither ritual nor logic, neither faith nor belief, to sustain it. Just because you can’t find something, in short, it doesn’t mean it isn’t there. “The Gods can’t be cut off...they inhabit our subjectivity and govern our acts. Whether invoked or not invoked, they are present” (Hillman, 1994, p. 12).

This, as Hillman reminds us, was what Jung had inscribed on the lintel of his house. For Jung himself then, wherever contemporary “(post)-Jungians” situate themselves on the Giegerich–Hillman scale, the Gods were to be evoked at the very threshold between inner and outer worlds; that evocation bridged the “inner” world of the unconscious and the “outer” world of ego. Jung knew the realm of the Gods, the mythic realm, to be psyche’s own. For him, it is in myth that psyche itself may be studied as the objective reality which is the riverbed of personal experience; without myth, “our clinical approach to the human mind was only medical, which was about as helpful as the approach of the mineralogist to Chartres Cathedral” (Jung, 1953, para. 833). In Roderick Main’s (1999) masterly summary: Jung believed that through myth he could empirically demonstrate the existence of the collective unconscious and its archetypes, read as far as possible their meaning and interrelationships, and amplify and make more tolerable the varieties of psychological contents. Myth was one of the principle mediums through which he articulated his differences from Freud; it helped him to find meanings in Christian, Gnostic, alchemical, and Eastern symbolisms and texts that informed his own philosophical and psychological thinking; it gave him an empirically legitimate alternative to metaphysics for framing his speculations about the nature of reality, the origin of consciousness, the meaning of life, and the possibility of surviving death. In short, “Jung’s writings on myth are of pivotal importance for his psychological theory and its many cultural and religious ramifications” (Main, 1999, pp. 160–161).

As Robert Segal (1998) points out, Jung’s is one of the few theories that answers fully three major questions about myth: its subject matter, its origin, and its function. This isn’t to say, however, that the theory is without problems, and these too may make for reluctance to engage with the mythic world. Jung’s circular use of the collective unconscious to interpret myths and of myths to interpret and even establish the collective unconscious may be particularly hard for the log-

ical mind to bear. Here's one view from the world of social and developmental psychology: "In effect, he is telling us we need to study myth because it shows the workings of the psyche as hypothesised by him. If we reject his hypotheses about the psyche, there seems to be little reason to study myth. He needs to convince us about his model of the psyche in the first place—and by and large, most psychologists are not convinced" (Jones, 2003, pp. 621–622). Jung's constant reminder that the impossibility of standing outside psyche must make its study a matter of metaphor and symbol, image and inference, clearly has no value to an exclusively ego consciousness.

For Jung though, as he makes plain in his 1950 foreword to *Symbols of Transformation*, there can be no psyche without myth:

Hardly had I finished the manuscript when it struck me what it means to live with a myth and what it means to live without one. Myth, says a Church Father, is "what is believed always, everywhere, by everybody"; hence the man who thinks he can live without myth, or outside it, is an exception. He is like one uprooted, having no true link either with the past or with the ancestral life which continues within him, or yet with contemporary human society....[He] lives a life of his own, sunk in a subjective mania of his own devising, which he believes to be the newly discovered truth. This plaything of his reason never grips his vitals....The psyche is not of today; its ancestry goes back many millions of years. Individual consciousness is only the flower and fruit of a season, sprung from the perennial rhizome beneath the earth, and it would find itself in better accord with the truth if it took the existence of the rhizome into its calculations. (Jung, 1950, p. xxiv)

This, Jung says, was the insight that gave him his work for the next decades. It also gave him an immediate personal question. When he asked himself "What is the myth that you are living?" he took this on as "the task of tasks....for—so I told myself—how could I, when treating my patients, make due allowance for the personal factor, for my personal equation, which is yet so necessary for a knowledge of the other person, if I was unconscious of it?" (p. xxv).

So, for Jung, we cannot truly live without myth: if the old Gods are no longer accessible to us (and he often enough lamented their passing) then we must discover the myth that is ours personally—not as an exercise of ego, but in ego's engagement with the images and intimations of the mythic layers of the unconscious. We know that Jung's question may also be the "task of tasks" that is brought into the consulting room. It is the nature of myths, and our nature, too, that we must speak them and speak of them, for a *mythos* is an thing spoken, an utterance. The aim, or rather the hope, of a psychotherapist, says Robert Hobson (1985), is to share with his patient in the creation of a language—a language spoken with a "true voice of feeling" (p. 76). And in the search for that, the very way in which we speak myths and speak of them and of their playful and bewildering ambiguities, can tell us something about what it is to be a psychotherapist, one who waits upon, attends to, soul. The stories we tell about ourselves are also the ones we make up; our tales are also fabrications as we seek what James Hillman

so eloquently explores as “healing fictions.” “Makers” have their feet on the ground if it is shoes they are fabricating. But in Old English and contemporary Scots, a “maker” is also a poet, whose work is of the imagination. As Hillman (1983) has it: “Psychoanalysis is a work of imaginative telling in the realm of *poesis*, which means simply ‘making’ and which I take to mean making by imagination into words. Our work more particularly belongs to the rhetoric of *poesis*, by which I mean the persuasive power of imagining in words, an artfulness in speaking and hearing, writing and reading” (pp. 3–4).

So what is it of which we speak and hear, write and read? When Jung asks “What is the myth that I am living?” his context is beyond the personal. Susan Rowland (2003) has seen in Jung’s writings “an entwined dual impulse in which an acknowledgement of the roots of his ideas in his individual experience (personal myth) works with and against a drive to universalise and construct a comprehensive psychological scheme” (p. 23). Yet that “dual impulse” is surely also a common one, as individuals seek to find a wider meaning in and understanding of their experience. Jung’s question is also theirs, and, as myth itself, it forms a bridge from personal to collective, and from consciousness to the collective unconscious as well as the personal one.

Perceptions of the landscape on either side of that bridge and of whether it is even worth maintaining will vary from time to time, person to person—and psychological persuasion to psychological persuasion as well. The “Popular Psychology” shelves of today’s bookstores burgeon with paperbacks telling us that we can feel afraid and do it anyway, create our own lives, remake ourselves in our preferred image—as if the unconscious need hardly detain us at all. Across the way, a galaxy of myths, legends and tales of the supernatural tumble out of the “Occult” section in anticipation of a New Age in which the same might be said of rational consciousness. Maintaining bridges between the ego-certainty of the one and the magical thinking of the other can seem work indeed. And even at the level of the troubled individual, how relevant is it? When Jung said that “the Gods have become diseases,” he couldn’t have known how very skillful science would become; it could seem almost perverse these days to continue to attend to those old altars when we could be seeking their demolition by pharmaceuticals instead.

Yet Jung’s meaning was precisely the opposite. He was warning against the “enlightened” view that those old gods no longer have any relevance:

What we have left behind are only verbal spectres, not the psychic facts that were responsible for the birth of the Gods. We are still as much possessed by autonomous psychic contents as if they were Olympians. Today they are called phobias, obsessions and so forth: in a word, neurotic symptoms. The Gods have become diseases; Zeus no longer rules Olympus but rather the solar plexus, and produces curious specimens for the doctor’s consulting room, or disorders the brains of politicians and journalists who unwittingly let loose psychic epidemics on the world. (Jung, 1957, para. 54)

So to honor the Gods—and Jung by no means restricted himself to those who sat on their golden Olympian thrones—is to honor psyche itself, for these deities are images of the forces which govern us, both individually and collectively.

This view would have been entirely understandable to those who lived in those ancient realms. “Only Gods can be causes,” King Priam of Troy tells Helen; he cannot believe that it was she who was responsible for the war. (And of course he was right, for who wound up the whole ghastly business but Aphrodite?) In his marvel-filled retelling of the Greek myths, *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, Roberto Calasso declares himself on Priam’s side (and, we could say, on Jung’s as well): “No psychology since has ever gone beyond this; all we have done is invent, for those powers that act upon us, longer, more numerous, more awkward names, which are less effective, less closely aligned to the form of the experience, whether that be pleasure or terror. The moderns are proud above all of their responsibility, but in being so they presume to respond with a voice that they are not even sure is theirs” (Calasso, 1994, p. 4)

That Calasso’s book was a best-seller surely tells us something about a contemporary longing to hear once more that voice beyond. Maybe we can look again at those bookshelves labelled “Occult” and see not a regressive denial of responsibility but a yearning for connection with the voice’s source. Joseph Campbell (1982) puts it more poetically: “It would not be too much to say that myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation” (p. 3). He, of course, was advisor on George Lukas’s hugely successful *Star Wars* films. This isn’t just kids’ stuff either—as the deep devotion paid by adults to Harry Potter’s apprenticeship as a wizard and the Oscar-laden imagery of Tolkein’s *Lord of the Rings* films attest. It seems too simple to see such phenomenal popularities as occasional triumphs of the ad-people’s art. In the summer of 2004, retellings of different Greek tragedies were playing in three major British theaters, with two other productions planned: this was unusual enough to merit a long newspaper report. The directors of these productions referred directly to the Iraq war: through the Greek dramas, they sought to engage their audiences with its horror and tragedy, as an earlier theatrical generation had turned to the Greeks for their own commentaries on the wars in Vietnam and the Gulf. What struck the theater critic Michael Billington (2004) in his report is that for everyone involved in the current productions, these plays are not cultural artefacts, but intensely topical: “It is the Greek understanding of the human consequences of war and the gulf between public rhetoric and private feeling that makes these plays seem shockingly relevant to our own divided world” (p. 3). In other words, these old tales of the tragedy of war, of the cruelties and follies of humans and the caprices and implacabilities of the Gods, connect us still with psyche’s mythic ground. The article’s headline was “Terror of modern times sets the stage for Greek tragedy.” Couldn’t we also say the reverse is as true?

Such manifestations of myth in the collective and in individual lives seem to me extraordinary intimations of the nature of psyche itself. To seek within and beyond the imagery of my own Western European culture to discover other images, from other places and times, that could help to illuminate patterns that are not tied to either, seems to bring both psychic nourishment and education. So no wonder I see value in the study of those old tales, both personally and in psychological training programs!

Here are some of the things we may find in those old places:

- A deepening imaginal and feeling connection with the inner world of therapist and patient;
- A deeper “knowing” of the personal psychological myth on which individuals base their professional practice;
- A countervailing energy to some of the more malign aspects of psychological training programs;
- An engagement with psychological paradox;
- A meditation on unknowing.

### Deepening Connections

“Speech and myth are one and the same. Myth means originally the true word....speech about *that which is*” (my italics). That’s the mythographer Walter Otto (quoted in Hillman, 1978, pp. 207–208). “Myths...consist of symbols that were not invented but happened.” They are “first and foremost psychic phenomena that reveal the nature of the soul.” They are “original revelations of the preconscious psyche, involuntary statements about unconscious psychic happenings.” Those are Jung (1961, para. 568; 1954, para. 7; 1951, para. 261). Or as the Roman historian Sallust had it some 2000 years ago when he wrote *Concerning the Gods and the Universe*: “These things never happened, but they always are.”

Individual reaction to such statements is bound to vary on the Giegerich–Hillman scale. Contemporary Western consciousness may not be able to experience the mythic world as the ancients did, but simply to engage with it may be the beginning of that *remembering* which the undying deities demand. The intellect may be drawn not to ego’s greedy colonizing—“gods and goddesses in everyone” as both description of and justification for known states—but to a meeting with the symbolic. Those old tales, with their impossible metamorphoses, their incomprehensible plotlines, their evocations of terror and of bliss, can act as a series of Rorschach tests. Which is the moment in the tale, which is the image, that seizes me? Who is the character with whom I identify, whom would I hiss off the stage? At which moment do I burst out “But it’s not fair!” and have to remember once more that in these just-so stories, that’s simply the way it is? Thus I learn again about myself, and in doing so may also learn about others, as I am recalled to that dream image, this fantasy, that unexpected affect, which has entered the consulting room from an ancient place.

As Jung (1968) emphasized, this is far from being a parlor game: “When archetypal contents assume grotesque and horrible forms and lead to fears of madness, it is absolutely necessary to supply these fantastic images that rise up so strange and threatening before the mind’s eye with some kind of context, so as to make them more intelligible. Experience has shown that the best way to do this is by means of comparative mythological material” (para. 38). And as well as “calming and clarifying a consciousness that is all at sea” (ibid.), attention to the mythical may help both therapists and those with whom they work to reach a deeper understanding of what it is to be human. Donald Kalsched (1995) expresses this eloquently in writing of his own approach to psychotherapy:

We must remember that *mythology is where the psyche "was" before psychology made it an object of scientific investigation*. By drawing attention to the parallels between the findings of clinical psychoanalysis and ancient religious ideation we demonstrate how the psychological struggle of contemporary patients (and those of us trying to help them) runs rather deeper into the symbolic phenomenology of the human soul than recent psychoanalytic discussions of trauma or the "dissociative disorders" are inclined to acknowledge. Not everyone is helped by an understanding of these parallels, but some people are, and for them, this "binocular" way of viewing, simultaneously, the psychological and religious phenomena is equivalent to finding a deeper meaning to their suffering, and this in itself can be healing. (p. 6, his italics)

### Understanding the Personal Basis of Professional Practice

If the study of myth may add depth to learning about self and others, it may also, and by extension, amplify most usefully the psychological mythologies which house individual understandings of both. What are the consequences of attraction to this theory or that, when *theoria* has to do with looking about, beholding, contemplating—with, in short, the way individuals see things? As Jung (1931) often emphasized, "Every psychology—my own included—has the character of a subjective confession" (para. 774). The passage quoted above, in which Donald Kalsched (1995, p. 6) describes his approach to psychotherapy, continues to give his own: "It is not an accident that our discipline is called 'depth psychology,' but for psychology to remain deep, it must keep one 'eye,' so to speak, on the life of man's spirit, and the vicissitudes of the spirit (including its dark manifestations) are nowhere so well documented as in the great symbol-systems of religion, mythology, and folklore. In this way, psychology and religion share, as it were, a common concern with the dynamics of human interiority."

Of course others see things otherwise! That's only to be expected, part of the myth-making in which we are all engaged. It seems to me that training programs would do well to emphasize this, rather than supporting current strivings for homogeneity in approaches to psyche. The study of myth is one way in which to encourage people to develop a personal *theoria*, because it is in the nature of myth, as of psyche itself, to appear differently to each individual. Pausanias, that still-invaluable travel-guide, found that out when he visited Greece in the second century CE, and decided quite early on that he had to give up any idea of reconciling the many versions he heard of the stories of gods and humans. At first he concluded that it was simply in the nature of Greeks to disagree with each other. But by the time he finished his own journey among the myths and their monuments, he had reached a different view: he now understood that the famous wise men of Greece had told their differing tales not out of stupidity but because the nature of the material demanded that they speak in riddles (Pausanias, 1985, IX.16.4, VIII. 8.3).

Any modern psychology that posits the existence of the unconscious will also accept that riddles are part of its inevitable language; ego-consciousness can come no closer than that to a description and understanding of psyche as a whole. A study of the old tales can help training psychotherapists to begin to define the

riddles which are their own. This seems one indispensable goal of training, if “individuation” is still to be the process and goal of the work.

For one instance of how mythology may work with these riddles, consider the most basic conundrum of all: the given nature of the human being. When Lord Krishna was a very small and naughty boy, he one day infuriated his mother by stuffing his mouth full of clay and then, bulging-cheeked, denying it. When eventually she forced the child to open his mouth, she saw inside it not a gooey mess but the entire fullness of creation: the stars, the planets, the sun and moon, the continents, the ocean, the vast immensity of space itself. And travelling through time and space, a Jewish saying reevokes that amazing image: in our mother’s womb, we know the universe, at birth we forget it and our life’s task is to remember what we once knew. Such images of the child as coming into the world with limitless “knowing” could hardly be further from those of the philosophical and psychological tradition which sees the child as simply *tabula rasa* for experience to write upon. It seems to me that reactions to those alternatives must matter greatly, not primarily because a sympathy for the first is “Jungian” and to the second something else, but because the understandings of the psychotherapeutic task will be so different. If the child is a bundle of potential waiting to be remembered (as the Jewish saying and Jung’s archetypal theory both see it), then the attention to, and waiting upon, psyche which is psychotherapy must have to do with attention to those images and stories which reconnect consciousness to what is already, in some important sense, “known.” If the child is primarily the product of personal experience, then the remembering of that experience must be the emphasis.

This debate has been the stuff of philosophical mythologizing for centuries. But by connecting it with the old images and tales about the births and natures of children extraordinary and divine, individuals may connect to themselves and each other beyond the rivalries of contemporary psychological theories. By responding not intellectually but imaginally, they may reach an intimation of their own myth that goes beyond the demands of the training seminar and case presentation, and begins to inform a professional practice which will become their own and not a hand-me-down.

### Counteracting Some Malignities of Training

Even 20 years ago, there were warnings among Jungians about the dangers of the search for regulation, uniformity, and standardization of training programs. The dangers may seem particularly acute to this community, for, as Patricia Berry (1982) put it then: “Talk of uniformity is destroying our unity. For the Jungian mind, uniformity and unity do not mix easily” (p. 198). But now that the urge for greater regulation and uniformity has grown so very much more powerful, perhaps it is not only “Jungians” and those touched by Jung’s concept of individuation who may wonder what is becoming of the art of psychotherapy—the attending upon psyche—itself. Isn’t it intrinsic to that art that people in training should be encouraged to grow in responsibility by beginning to distinguish their own professional as well as personal mythology from that of the institution, its trainers, and its regulators?

We know what a difficult task that can be, when the institution's own predominant mythology will presumably have played a large part in the conscious and unconscious choice of its students to submit to its demands. Those who exercise power and influence over them will also and inevitably have their own mythologies, often strongly held. In such complex (and complex-activating) situations, it may seem to be stretching it to suggest that the study of the old stories has any direct value in loosening structures that may be Saturnine in their stifling of both trainers and trained. Yet maybe it does, too, by offering imaginal opportunities to link textbook and professional debate to a deeper personal level for both parties, in an experience that is essentially *democratizing*. Does a shared experience of the symbolic call for supervisors with a super(ior) vision, or a common work of the imagination need a "right" response? Not if it's psyche itself which is being honored.

In his definition of psychotherapist as image-maker, practicing a therapy "that is aware of mythical expressions of the psyche, that looks into the person's conflicts with a mythical imagination," Raphael Lopez-Pedraza (1989, p. 11) equates the study of mythology with the study of psychology itself. He contrasts this Hermetic approach with others that are concerned with authority, power, system, or reductive technique. Of these, "power is the most extreme example of the non-image, where instead of imagination there is only a barren wasteland" (p. 33). This insight into the mythic as a counterforce to the striving for power seems most important—not just for training programs, but also in individual psychotherapeutic work, which is so vulnerable to the power shadow (Guggenbuhl-Craig, 1989).

None of this means that the hard-won insights and speculations of a century and more of depth psychology should be discarded, nor that theoretical studies are other than essential both as working models and as counterpart to excessive subjectivity. Nor is it at all to deny that some people have a great deal more theoretical knowledge and professional experience than others, or that the activation of painful complexes in and by training institutions is a valuable and probably intrinsic part of the education they offer. But it is to suggest that a retelling of the old tales may have its part to play in the form as well as content of training programs, and may illuminate both process and goal.

### On Living with Paradox

Whatever the preferred mythology of the program, its teachers, and its students, the study of myth itself can also, perhaps, help them to live with the fact that down the road there's another that holds its own preferred mythology just as dear. All this riddling, all this uncertainty! It can seem intolerable to consider that when I am "right" I am also somewhere "wrong," that where I am passionate I am also somewhere indifferent—and vice versa. The painful shift from a yearning for the clarities of "either-or" to the paradoxical consciousness of oppositions which are also "both-and" is intrinsic to the psychological journey, whether it is called learning to hold ambivalence, withdrawing shadow projections, achieving the depressive position, integrating the opposites, or something else again.

The old stories prefigure such contemporary theorizing. "Myths are made up of actions that include their opposites within themselves," says Calasso (1994,

p. 280). And “only when we become aware of a sudden consistency between incompatibles, can we say we have crossed the threshold of myth” (p. 22). The work of discrimination has been so defining of Western consciousness, ever since God separated light from darkness and saw that this was good, that we may stumble on that threshold. Yet the concern of psychotherapists is also with the symbolic, that which throws together the opposites and presents us with an image which is, as Jung has it, the expression of a third as yet unknown.

It is into this unknown yet already intimated territory that myth invites. It shows a wealth of couplings, which may seem beautiful, grotesque, or bizarre, and invites delight and revulsion, terror and joy. Why her with him, and him with him, and her with her, this creature with that human? What is the Minotaur to Theseus, Baubo to Demeter, why them and then—and us and now? The opposites come together in images gendered as other, gendered as same. They come together within a single image, too, as the great goddesses of the ancient Near East and their successors show when they rejoice in the energies of both war and the peaceful arts. Such images are hard to honor in their fullness; anyone who has evoked them will know just how powerful is the urge to engage with what appears positive and banish the negative. So the Minotaur is returned to the locked labyrinth, to the people in white robes who specialize in such pathological states. Consciousness emphasizes that the horrifying, petrifying Medusa is beheaded to release the pure, white, sky-travelling Pegasus; yet she also has her story, and wise Athene carries her head forever next to her heart, in reclamation of that power which she herself has destroyed (Shearer, 1998). Chiron is easily enough cited as “wounded healer.” But what would be the *experience* of this union of animal and human energy which finds its healing strength through the anguish of interminable suffering?

One of the attractions of Indian philosophy to so many Westerners may be that its stories and imagery can carry imagination beyond the limitations of post-Enlightenment consciousness into a living experience of the opposites held in balance. In the Hindu Kali Yuga, the present Age of Kali, paradox, and the energy of opposites is a given of the human state. From countless shrines, posters, and penny postcards, the image is returned: the goddess, Black Time herself, still grasps her terrible sword in one hand, a severed head in another. Yet the gesture of her third hand means “Fear Not!”, and if they can obey her injunction, her devotees may see that in her fourth hand she holds out to them a bowl of sweet rice milk.

### On Not Knowing

Mythic images tumble and jostle like the bewilderment of carvings on a Hindu temple, interweave like the characters on a North American Indian totem; they present themselves precisely on a Greek vase, to draw attention to a moment of decisive action. But what is this one doing, and that? I thought they were meant to be somewhere else, or on the same side, or not in this bit of the story at all! Just so. These images cannot be reduced to ego’s certainties. Not least of what mythology’s tales and images might offer psychotherapists and those with whom they work is a study in how to live with the not-knowing which is a given of the work.

“Understanding,” said Jung (1915, p. 31), “is a fearfully binding power, at times a veritable murder of the soul as soon as it flattens out vitally important differences. The core of an individual is a mystery of life, which is snuffed out when it is ‘grasped.’ That is why symbols want to be mysterious.” The terrible punishments wreaked on those who seek to approach the gods too near stand warning: the blindings and madneses which are the very opposite of the “seeing” and “understanding” that impelled the trespassers in their greed for more. Yet if myth-makers can remain willing to engage with the unknown by allowing the image to work in them, who knows what might be revealed in the Gods’ good time? Or not?

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