



WRITING MYTH MYTHIC WRITING

PLOTTING YOUR
PERSONAL STORY

DENNIS PATRICK
SLATTERY, PH.D.

Riting Myth, Mythic Writing

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Plotting Your Personal Story

Dennis Patrick Slattery, Ph.D.



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INCIPIIT

Naturally, I thought about the significance of what I was doing, and asked myself, “Now, really, what are you about? You are building a small town, and doing it as if it were a rite!” I had no answer to my question, only the inner certainty that I was on the way to discovering my own myth.

—C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*

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FOREWORD

Imagine sitting in an Irish pub, drinking ale and listening to the bard weave stories about so many different things, or perhaps captivated by the glow of an outdoor fire while listening to an elder telling stories about history, traditions, and ways to navigate the different life portals that each and every one of us will have to enter at some time. And then—there are stories about destiny, that illusive, mercurial something that catches hold of us at the beginning of life and never seems to want to let go. *La forza di destino!!* These are the experiences one has in knowing and working with Dr. Dennis Slattery. Whether sharing a pizza and beer or having the luxury of attending one of his lectures or classes, one is privileged to experience an authentic “elder” who, in the tradition of all those wise ones who came before him, has the gift of bringing the world of myth and imagination to life and showing us that indeed these are as real as anything we can touch and hold in our hands.

Dr. Slattery reminds us that myths teach us about all aspects of life, from birth to death, and through the weavings of these eternal stories not only help us recognize the presence of these universal and archetypal patterns but also shows us ways to approach the transcendent.

With more than thirty years of teaching and working with myth, Slattery’s newest work, entitled *Riting Myth, Mythic Writing*, is a bold adventure in that it asks the reader to actively engage in the mythic tradition, who is asked to take on the role of bard and allow the soul to tell its story. While he opens the book in reminding us of the perennial wisdom contained in myth, he extends this work by inviting the reader to speak with Self and soul and, in a mythopoetic way, engage psyche as experienced in one’s own symptoms, fears, hopes, and joys.

Unless one understands inherent profundity contained and revealed in myths and legends, it may be difficult to grasp the challenge inherent in Dr. Slattery’s latest work. He wants his readers not only to know these perennial stories but to assume a certain authorship in the mythic process. His hope is that through this process of “Mythic Writing,” the individual will cultivate a meaningful relationship with those transpersonal forces which guide the life process.

There are far too many workshops dealing with myth, legend, and personal writing experiences where individual narratives are somehow elevated to the domain of archetypal, mythic stories. Personal narratives are temporal, whereas myths are eternal and exist as the universal bedrock upon which each new experience is built. The “prima materia” of the soul’s experience may not easily accommodate personal narratives, which tend to override, dominate, and ignore those eternal processes that represent the gold of myths. In this journey between the personal and eternal, we sail between Scylla and Charybdis, a journey of two worlds. One is the world of the ego and the whims, needs, and illusions of an egoic world whose actions are often purely secular, despite its protest of caring for soul. Then there is the world of the transcendent. This is the domain Jung spoke of as Soul and Psyche and Rabbi Herschel calls the “Ineffable.” Once the realm of transcendence is touched, ego dominance and the supremacy of conscious intentions must, by necessity, take a back seat. Constructionism, narrative therapy, and the illusion that every piece of personal writing is a magnum opus of the soul must be humbled by all that is truly profound. We all know how important it is for parents to believe that whatever their child produces is sacred, and to some extent it is, even when it involves peanut butter, tomato sauce, sesame oil, and chocolate over noodles. But there comes a point when pasta and steak dinner and a really great bottle of wine really does sound and taste so much better than our child’s culinary creative expressions. For anyone who partakes of the joys of gastronomical wonders, a moment of reckoning and humbling will someday come when we have to say that my cooking just does not match up with what I know is truly delicious. After more than fifty years of working side by side with many of my own families’ cooks, learning the tradition of “La Cucina Povera,” there are still some foods I still can’t make as well as my aunts and grandfather have done for decades.

Slattery knows and fully appreciates great food and wines and knows where to find the pubs serving the finest brews in Ireland. He knows and loves tradition and has an eye for beauty, originality, and the dialect of Self. Now the question remains if he can inspire these same sensibilities in his students and readers.

His work is that of a bridge builder, a “mediatore,” one who connects, and in this book he points to a realm where the universal and eternal can be approached through the personal. In doing so, he shows us the relationship between those myths that have guided humanity since the beginning of time and those very tender and personal moments when we begin to write our own story, tell a tale, and hope to God that our story is a telling of

something that still connects our life to the life of all those who came before us and that bridges the ego to the transcendent and archetypal. Writing from the ego can be—well, the story of the ego, while the work of myths is a telling of the eternal, the story of soul and a wisdom that far transcends conscious understanding. These are two very different approaches to myth and story.

It is in this work of making connections between ego and soul that Dennis Slattery is a master. From his many years of working with these eternal motifs, he can easily distinguish when the story is created for the benefit of aggrandizing the ego, from those moments where Self and pure inspiration eclipses the wishes of ego. Two different worlds, two different sensibilities, and each requires the deft hand of a master to sail through these waters, in which one wrong turn will land you against the rocky shore. On the other hand, we also experience those moments when sailor and sea are one, and at those times one has access to those vistas reserved for seekers of—of what?—of wisdom, of knowledge, of a way of life that far transcends the limitation of their personal ego?

So dear Dr. Slattery, navigate well with these sojourners. Teach them the ways of ancient mariners, of the shoals that have stranded sailors since the beginning of time and those stretches of open water that allow for endless journeys across the deep blue sea.

Michael Conforti,
Founder and Director of The Assisi Institute
Brattleboro, Vermont

INTRODUCTION

PERSONAL MYTH: THE SOUL'S CENTRAL STATION

Why write, if this too easy activity of pushing a pen across paper is not given a certain bull-fighting risk and we do not approach dangerous, agile, and two-horned topics?¹

Mythic Voice

Several years ago in the parking lot of Pacifica Graduate Institute in Carpinteria, California, where I have been teaching for almost twenty years, I experienced a moment where a shard, an important shard, of my own myth surfaced through a voice within me but *other* than me. It was early morning. I like to set up my wares in the classroom an hour prior to the course's beginning. Teaching days at Pacifica are eight hours in length, so one had better be prepared with a full day's cache of material.

My own habit was to bring books that might be of interest to the students, my own texts to deploy in the class, folders stuffed with notes both hand-written and typed, perhaps a newspaper or magazine article I had snagged along the way to emphasize a point or idea I wanted to develop. I also shared texts that had influenced my own thinking and writing. So, as always, my groaning two-wheeled case with an extended handle was overburdened with options and bulging to the point that the clasps had long ago ruptured, victims of my ambitious desire to widen the contours of the class material. I found myself asking, as I rolled this mass across the driveway, why I had once more brought as much as three times the amount of material I could ever traverse, even in 16 hours. The response, at 7:30 a.m., startled me and stopped me in my tracks. From some wise source within I heard a responsive assertion which consisted of three succinct words: "Excess is Access."

I paused and smiled at this revelation, and humbly offered thanks to the primal source that helped me understand my behavior. I believe now that the voice's genesis uncoiled from the core of my personal myth. It did not arise from my ego; it came from a deeper, more

1 José Ortega y Gasset, quoted in James Hillman, *Re-Visioning Psychology* (1975; repr., New York: HarperPerennial, 1992), pp. xv-xvi.

Introduction

resonant place in me, the soul and source of who I am. It carried an impersonal or, better said, objective quality about it so that I knew it was in me but not of me. Myths, I considered, even if personal, maintain their own autonomy but often let us in on their patterns if we are open and receptive to receive them. This last observation defines the purpose of the book that follows.

I felt great comfort in this pronouncement. I continued to the classroom equipped with some sense of myself that carried far beyond the amount of material for class; it went so far as to designate a world view, a way of being in the world and of relating to the material that contributed importantly to my life substance and texture both as professor and as person. The pronouncement gave voice to the mythic dimension of who and what I am. It was part of my narrative, but it had its origin much deeper, more in tune with a pattern in my soul, an arrangement of scarcity, of not having enough, of needing more, to come to an agreeable equilibrium. Excess opened up possibilities that I did not feel I had access to without the “too muchness” of my goods. Having “enough” was not “good enough.” Too much was for me indeed enough. The myth within showed how it organized my behavior into a patterned meaning that carried the voice of soul within it; it enacted in language what I was behaving bodily and divulged, as if in a mysterious revelation, what I *was* as much as *who* I incarnated.

I am not so much questioning how mythos, or, for the Greeks, *mutbos*, means story or narrative. It is simply not enough, or does not penetrate sufficiently into the energy field that myths inhabit. There is the pattern again, one I am in the service of. Our stories that we plot are often unconscious; nonetheless, they comprise ways of seeing, or to say it another way, mythopoetic modes of knowing and discerning through particular imaginal constructs that are first of all, embodied paradigms. It relies as much on a method or a way of seeing as it does on the content of those perceptions and fantasies. They need only be true for me. In addition, only I am in a position to tell my story. Others relating my narrative is little more than hearsay. What is important for the structure of this book is that each person who participates in its riting meditations has the opportunity to tell her own story, as unedited as one wishes to risk and in their own authentic voice as they understand that authenticity.

A myth, I began to discern, is a manner, and even a style of being present to the world’s matter as well as to interior ideas and thoughts. A myth is like a fulcrum balancing two realities: the external world I meet day-to-day, and the inner psychic world that has its own objective nature, not needing me to exist but is rather working itself through me and that I must come to a fuller awareness of to have a fuller knowledge of what I am.

A myth includes a way, a *via* or roadway, a path, that allows things of the world to present themselves to me in a particular style of intellectual and emotional presence. One of its means of expression is through ritual behavior, as my luggage all those tomes within my roller suitcase advanced its expression and allowed it to emerge on that particular morning as a revelatory presencing. It was my way of ritualizing the teaching day, of giving it props and form, and certainly formatting how I wanted learning to progress: with abundance. Perhaps it took the shape of excess, but that line may be a fine, and even a shifting one. One person's excess is another's abundance or even another's scarcity! Shaping the contours of one or another along mythic lines may be a matter of attitude and disposition, to say nothing of style. Myths dispose us to inflect the world in one or more variant lines that often, but not need, converge. I may react conservatively to one life situation or idea and liberally to another. We each are polluted constellations of both tendencies. Discovering personal myth's changing and shifting contours is a life's work and indispensable to self-knowledge. Few tasks in life are more critical than exploring and realizing the terms of one's personal myth, as C. G. Jung's quote that comprises the *incipit* of this volume confirms.

My personal myth, then, is in large measure the consequence of how I structure my images of reality based on patterns that I have developed from my life experiences as well as deeper preexisting arrays embedded in the psyche of all of us. Further, lurking behind these patterns I believe are energy fields of the psyche that are unique to me and yet transcend me because they participate in a much larger cosmos than my own micro-world is capable of holding. However, I am able to participate in this larger cosmos. To study the contours of one's personal myth, which is the intention of this book through both a variety of sources on the subject and related disciplines as well as numerous writing meditations, is to begin to discern the patterns in the prose of our lives, in the poetics of the way of our knowing and shaping reality to conform at least in part to the inner terrain or landscape of our being. The more each of us is able to discern the formats and energies as well as the persons that inhabit and shape our fantasies, day dreams, night narratives, modes of perception, what attracts and interests us, what repels us, what is distasteful, boring, ugly, beautiful, where and what we distort, disturb and deflect, and to see within those patterns the energy flow of invisible presences, is to glimpse the outlines of the plot of our lives. Moreover, the more honestly and fully we comprehend the deep tap roots of our narratives as well as the elaborate fictions we are and continue to shape and be shaped by, the more our plot complexity reveals itself.

Introduction

As he worked dream images and narratives in a group setting, the Swiss psychologist C.G. Jung would pay close attention to the emergence of patterns that rose up from the unconscious as clues to making sense of the dream.² Patterns of images, narratives and energies seemed to comprise the psychic scaffolding of a life, both consciously and unconsciously negotiated, and always without intermissions. I reference once more Jung's observation that begins this book: "I had no answer to my question, only the inner certainty that I was on the way to discovering my own myth." The key word here is *discovering*. It sets the landscape for the meditations that populate the journey through these meditations.

The avenues or corridors that I plan to implement in moving us into the (w)riting meditations throughout the chapters include the following: 1) the image of the spiral; 2) psychic energy as outlined by C. G. Jung; 3) the mythic energy involved in making something affectively present, a term developed by the cultural anthropologist, Robert Plant Armstrong; 4) the fields out of which one's personal myth arises and from which it has its genesis; 5) the patterns that reside behind and beneath the narratives that instill in our lives meaning and coherence, even within its multiple structures and impulses; 6) the force and power of ritual as enactment and as frame for the work of soul-making to reveal the contours of one's personal myth; 7) writing as a ritual enactment of remembrance of psyche's embodied motion and intentions.

I believe that by tracking and recording these areas we can develop inroads into the dynamic and unique energy that comprises our mythology, make it *more conscious*, as well as discern ways to change what is no longer operative yet remains obstinate hindrances in and to our growth as unique persons. Writing primarily, but not exclusively, will be the most dominant activity of the imagination to unfurl into these areas. Others will include "authentic movement" as outlined by Joan Chodorow and others, as well as drawing and painting to give non-verbal image and body to some of the meditations. Some of these writings will lead into pockets of darkness and obscurity, areas that may frighten us into turning the other face to resist gazing into that imposing and unnerving darkness. Whatever level of the pilgrimage you, the participant, wish to take without harming yourself is your decision. Each of you is encouraged to draw your boundary lines for this work and to work

² C. G. Jung, *Dream Analysis: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1928-1930*, ed. William McGuire, Bollingen Series XCIX (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 99-101.

within a realm that is challenging but not debilitating, at times difficult but not disarming, for the richness lies in the depth of the treasures of insight you dig deep enough to garner.

Structure of the Chapters

The roads one could take into the mythos that lives within each of us and that we at the same time live outside in the world we inhabit, are infinite. Choosing certain fields to enter while stepping around others was challenging, until I was able to relinquish trying to control which should be included and instead simply listened to what might be most fruitful. The results include the following: “Introduction: The Soul’s Central Station” allows me to outline in broad strokes the method and the manner of this exploratory pilgrimage; Chapter 1, “Meditations on Myth and Mythic Consciousness,” discerns the broad contours of mythos and its implications for a richer, more nuanced, and consciously-lived life; Chapter 2, “Engaging the Myth That Rites You,” explores the power and mystery of those numinous presences that help to shape the contours of our character and our callings; Chapter 3, “The (W)riting Self,” engages the act of writing as a way to ritualize a conversation with and within the deepest layers of ourselves, as well as between personal and collective; Chapter 4, “Riting the Aesthetic Self: Mythopoesis,” invites us to journey into the shaping or making quality of the soul, which is constantly, it seems, whether in waking life, in dream or reverie or sleep, in fantasies and aspirations, always in process of poetically and aesthetically offering imaginative form to our plot patterns; Chapter 5, “Riting the Wounded Self,” opens to our afflictions, infections, even our *affixations*, a word I coin to capture the sense of fixations within our afflictions. They can have the numbing capacity to fixate us in an arrested place in our lives, but can also allow us a new freedom, and to beckon us to a shifting narrative, to dissolve parts of that story in order to heal some part of us that may have been scabbed over for decades; Chapter 6, “Riting Through the Embodied Self,” returns us again to our enfleshed being and becoming by urging us to reclaim our conscious embodied selves; Chapter 7, “Riting the Self as/and Other,” asks that we consider the unitary presence of ourselves through the Otherness of the world; Chapter 8, “Riting the Spiritual Self,” emphasizes that we are each spiritually psychological or psychologically spiritual because the soul is inspirited and enfleshed; Chapter 9, “Reviewing and Riting the Patterned Self,” spirals back in an ancient geometric pattern that is retrospective, recursive, and re-collective as we review and grasp what patterns or motifs, what mythic themes seem to recur to restrain,

resist, or renew our prose. The spiral is a geometry of retrieval that offers us a way back without duplicating where we have been. In the more innate and ancient triple spiral, for instance, that appears at the great Entrance Stone of Newgrange in Ireland, wisdom has it that it marks “the place where past and future collide in a miraculous present, where darkness transforms itself into renewing light.”³

Each writing meditation will allow some uncovering as well as occasional moments of revelation, insight, observation, and revaluing within the cauldron of our life’s ingredients, even its gradients of importance and value. Writing may be best understood as a ritual which includes moments of revaluing, renewing and perhaps resuscitating what might continue to serve both our development and our retreats back into earlier persistent patterns of thought and behavior as well as point out what might be best relinquished at this moment in our lives. Our personal myth, like all living myths, is organic: it grows, sheds, renews, shrivels, attacks parts of itself, restores others, ages, ripens, molts and renews. Holding on desperately to our myth can create an encrusted ideology out of the mythology such that all life energy end-stops. Riting meditations are thus exploratory to find and perhaps choose to excise what is keeping us from a full and joyful life. We can only imagine what is waiting to be let into our story if we give it space and an invitation to enter.

A good therapist friend suggested to me that sometimes the most important aspects of our lives is on the margins of it, and that writing may be a way to write those margins into fuller consciousness. Marginal matters in our lives may become most meaningful through writing of them in a meditative way. Our peripheral vision picks up shards of our myth and highlights them in consciousness: fragments from dreams, parts of conversations, a film that particularly stirred us, an overheard conversation, for instance.⁴ Not main events but more minor experiences can yield the greatest insights by meditation and writing.

Modes of Knowing

For the past dozen years I have given one-, three-, and four-day “Riting One’s Personal Myth” retreats across the United States, in Canada, and in Switzerland. In all cases, I have

3 Patricia Monaghan, “Foreword,” in Frank MacEowen, *The Spiral of Memory and Belonging: A Celtic Path of Soul and Kinship* (Novato, Calif.: New World Library, 2004), pp. xii-xiii.

4 Dr. Charles Asher, Jungian analyst, personal communication, December 20, 2011.

been astonished by what participants create out of these “psychological prompts” that allow for a spiraling down into their particular histories to excavate at the deepest levels of their being what guides, informs, and helps shape their lives through twistings, distortions, woundings, and idealizations as well as through the persons and places that comprise the imaginal landscape we inhabit. For in each of our personal biographies are patterns of energy that guide, twist, distort and disassemble us, along with gifts of genius that create us into the being we are destined to become. But such a journey requires immense courage as well as a conviction that this voyage takes a lifetime to accomplish.

Many of the meditations I have used in these riting retreats will be included here; others more currently crafted for this text will also find their way into the chapters. It is almost impossible to gauge which meditations will work best, which will have less energy and thus must be abandoned, without first trying them out. Again, the test and the surprise is in what participants produce through these prompts. Therein abides the real story as well as the excitement that clusters around crafting this book together. This text is completed only with your participation as ritual writers of your narrative history and destiny.

Spiral, Presence, Pattern, and Energy Field will be our primary street signs. Imagination and intuition instead of reason and analysis will comprise our guiding modes of inquiry; the intent is to reclaim a poetics of myth rather than an analysis of mythology. Hence, mythos will be claimed over logos as a mode of knowing. Its tension is claimed in those realms of what is imagined as our fiction and what is remembered as our history. My hope is that this book will allow and encourage a deeper penetration into the self as it relates to the world than simply recording as in a diary, bits and pieces of our daily plot, the broken shards of our becoming. Its intention is to retrieve what we are through the poetics of depth and archetypal psychology and by means of the shaping and forming instincts of the soul. Attitude and angle of vision will take precedence over information and recollecting past events as simply the literal plot of our dramatic emergence. Inviting a fuller and deeper consciousness through imaginative writing will trump data-processing or information-herding. In it all I have a fundamental trust in the soul of each of us to reveal what is necessary to contemplate, not analyze, to confront and not flee from, to recognize as part of our own shadowed and illuminated being, the darkness and light of our soul’s ambience.

We will resist both analysis and certainty; the ritual of writing is a manner of being present in what has been called “liminal space,” where we give up control, seek not confirmation, and rest in the rite of space “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and

Introduction

between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial. . . . Thus liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness . . . to the wilderness and to an eclipse of the sun or moon,” writes ritual expert Victor Turner.⁵ In our writing meditations we will indeed experience death along with renewal, not once but many times, for in the ritual process, some parts of our secure skin will be sloughed off, new skin gleaned and a fuller comprehension of our entire galaxy beckoned. Such is the exciting segment of how our personal myth enlightens and darkens who we are.

⁵ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1995), p. 95.

MEDITATIONS ON MYTH AND MYTHIC CONSCIOUSNESS

You stumble—blunder, there is the treasure. One plows a field; the plow snags on something; one digs down—finds a ring; hoists the ring and finds a cave full of jewels.⁶

In preparation for a recent radio interview on the nature of mythology, I continued to wonder where myths originate and what they are guided and goaded by.⁷ One idea that surfaced is that there exists a deep connection between psychic energy and its patterned expressions, rhythms, repetitions, imitations, analogies, metaphors, symbols, and styles. They each take part in a conspiracy to access deeper and more complex layers of one's fictional fabric, one which denies nothing in our imaginations. I thought too of how speaking of myths as stories is perfectly legitimate and yet somehow incomplete, for behind the story is a structure, behind the structure is an archetypal pattern and behind the archetypal pattern is an energy field that powers and shapes perception, imagination, memory and our particular form of constructing via intuition the events of our lives into coherent, if finally fragmented, experiences.⁸

If this insight is even partially valid, then myth may be likened to a gerund, as a way of seeing rather than a content of perception, although I do not wish to split these two parts of consciousness. But as an example, the heroic manner of being in the world, for instance, in which ego consciousness dominates, is one in which the person seeks to be in constant control, where order and prediction, conquest and mastery, operate the engines of that personal myth. All of these stances comprise potent yet limited parts of what remains a complex way of being and behaving. My point is that the heroic is a way or style of

6 Joseph Campbell, *An Open Life: Joseph Campbell in Conversation with Michael Toms*, foreword by Jean Erdman Campbell (Burdett, N.Y.: Larson Publications, 1988), p. 6.

7 Philip Lynch, interview of Dennis Patrick Slattery, November 3, 2009, *InTouch with Carl Jung*, blogtalkradio.com/carljung.

8 Susan P. Rowland, *C. G. Jung in the Humanities: Taking the Soul's Path* (New Orleans, La.: Spring Journal Books, 2010), p. 23.

constituting the world along a particular patterned and energy-laden groove. We want to avoid such a heroic stance in our work here but use the illustration of myth as a manner of perception that matters profoundly in how we envision and fabricate the world.

Out of such an observation, I suggest that a myth, then, is a patterned manner of imagining, a style of being present to the world. The way the world presents itself to me is no hodgepodge or accident; rather, it follows some invisible force, a particular muse-laden manner of presence. Many people are unaware that this is occurring; they assume that they are the creators of such a complex plot. This term *presence* I will entertain more fully later. Here, however, I suggest that when something attracts our attention in its present-ness, our personal myth is startled into full play on the stage of perception and interpretation; it seeks to know what is presenting itself in its full-bodied affective state.

What, I have often wondered, is at play in the field of myth that gives it energy or siphons energy from it? We can feel the depletion when we awaken from a night's sleep and have little or no energy, no interest in the world and little desire to arise. On the other hand, when do aspects of the world hold a powerful attraction for me and when does that attraction fade into indifference or otherwise become invalid for me because the energy that once (em)powered it has dissipated or shifted to other interests? Answering these questions touches on the changing, protean and elastic nature of myth if it is organically alive. As neuroscience points with plenty of evidence to the brain's plasticity, namely, its ability to change, so too with myth. Myth has a plasticity and an elasticity; otherwise we might be arrested in one way of living if the myth could not metamorphosis into new venues or mutate into new areas of attraction.

Such a thought led me to consider the way in which myths are a form of a method; I created the neologism *mythodology* to suggest that the manner of my interpreting the world carries simultaneously both a myth and a method in it—a mythic method aligned or in consort with the world's matter. Out of such a conversation between a “tension of opposites” arises a third thing, a *tertium quid*, that aligns the first two with a meaningful third.⁹ It is *as if* all our perceptions are imaginal acts of consciousness in that they always engage a sense of metaphor, the creation of a third reality out of two conjoined, even if, and perhaps especially if, they are in-tense opposition. From it grows a significance based or resting on

⁹ The term “tertium quid” appears in *Alchemical Studies*, vol. 13 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), ¶ 199.

the relation or equation of a to b and c to d in relationship with one another.¹⁰ The mythologist Joseph Campbell suggests that “metaphor is the native tongue of myth.” Metaphor reveals a presence of likeness within obvious difference; from its presence, a third possibility is borne out in the tension of likeness with difference. The third is what we carry with us as new knowledge within the rubric of the first two terms.¹¹

I want us to entertain what is revealed if we think of a metaphor as an energy field that is instrumental in accessing unconscious contents in the same way that the energy of a drill bit can bore down and into dimensions of the earth not available without such a vertical force bearing down and in it. So, for instance, reading a classic work of literature or listening to a Bach Fugue invites the creation of a metaphor between my own mythos and the myth inherent in the poem or music’s composition so that *some turbulence* arises between the two, to break open what is set in place to allow for insight in both the imaginative creation and my own mythopoetic self. An opening occurs between conscious and unconscious forces or presences through the poem or music as I experience and interpret it. Out of that engagement a third thing appears, which may be a newly-formed conscious way of grasping or apprehending what before was unknown. It may in fact be that all art accesses this energy of tension in likeness/difference with itself and within ourselves that nourishes us with a new way of apprehension. Something emerges as an intuition, a felt insight, even a vision of something true. Such a moment of presence is precisely what we are after in the riting meditations.¹²

In the imaginal act of reading, then, a collision often accompanied by a collusion, emerges between two mythologies that promotes a greater self understanding by means of the fiction I am journeying through. Metaphors as myths serve as transport vehicles to move us from one arena to another, from a visible reality into the terrain of invisible presences; it links what is known with what cannot be known directly, but only by way of analogy,

10 One of Joseph Campbell’s favorite quotations from Immanuel Kant on the syllogism that comprises the structure of metaphor. See Joseph Campbell, *The Inner Reaches of Outer Space: Metaphor as Myth and as Religion* (Novato, Calif.: New World Library, 2002), pp. 29-30.

11 Campbell goes on to claim that “the life of a mythology springs from and depends on the metaphoric vigor of its symbols.” Joseph Campbell, *Thou Art That: Transforming Religious Metaphor* (Novato, Calif.: New World Library, 2001), p. 6.

12 In a discussion on what it is that unites the opposites, C. G. Jung claims that “here only the symbol helps, for, in accordance with its paradoxical nature, it represents the ‘tertium’ that in logic does not exist but which in reality is the living truth.” Jung, *Alchemical Studies*, ¶ 199.

through metaphor, that is, by likeness. Through the window of likeness, something new on the horizon of consciousness introduces itself. Myth powers this new perception.¹³

Similar musings have led me to believe that the psyche is fundamentally poetic, analogic, metaphoric, symbolic in its field-creating and pattern-producing proclivities. Its inherent and abiding impulse is to fabricate fictions—by which I do not mean lies or untruths, but authentic images and stories of the soul's life. The soul has a poetic existence that it uses to create its own elaborate fictions. Impulses¹⁴ for such story-making arise from both conscious and unconscious forces. A mythology is in part a crafted aesthetic form that emerges as an infant from its mother's body. The mother is the myth and the child is the mythology that grows from such a maternal enwombing. Both carry their own energy fields, their own powers of presence; both have a persuasive force when they are affectively present in relation to others.¹⁵

Patterned presences witness and expose the imprint of the archetypes, which are energy fields in themselves. Moreover, as C. G. Jung reminds us, “an archetypal content expresses itself first and foremost, in metaphors.”¹⁶ Regarding the reality of myths, then, archetypes contain and entertain life energy, the libidinal force that makes meaning and significance in the realities we construct through perception and behaviors. Just as important to consider is the manner in which metaphors as energy fields bridge a range of qualities between conscious and unconscious contents as well as body-psyche. In so doing, metaphors convey

13 In her discussion of literary genres—lyric, tragedy, comedy, and epic—literary critic Louise Cowan develops the qualities and characteristics of these poetic universes through mimesis and analogy: “Such a generic territory is ruled by its own laws, analogically related to life yet different from daily experience.” Louise Cowan, *The Terrain of Comedy* (Dallas, Tex.: The Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1984), p. 8.

14 James Hillman, *Re-Visioning Psychology* (1975; repr., New York: HarperPerennial, 1992), p. 18.

15 Armstrong is very emphatic about the personhood of a work. He writes, for example: “If the presence of the work is such that the work is treated after the fashion of a human person, then it also follows that such powers as the work owns must be very like those owned by human persons.” Robert Plant Armstrong, *The Powers of Presence: Consciousness, Myth, and Affecting Presence* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), p. 16.

16 This quote is one of the central cores of depth psychology, in part because Jung goes on to reveal that metaphors and similes reveal not one or the other “but the unknown third thing that finds more or less adequate expression in all these similes.” C. G. Jung, *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, vol. 9, part I of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, ed. and trans. R. F. C. Hull and Gerhard Adler (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), ¶ 267.

their own form of knowing through fundamental patterns. At times they can dehydrate, lose their vitality, their *élan vital* and so become anemic, drained of their gravitational pull on us. No energy is left in them; they dry out and can in turn become brittle responses to life. Recognizing these shards of ourselves that need to be jettisoned is part of becoming more fully conscious of what we are.

An individual may discover with dismaying clarity that each day is “same ole, same ole” in a deadening repetition where no imagination informs the day’s events, no life energy is present, no soul life deepens and animates the ordinary. Joy is no longer an operative experience or feeling. Perhaps one signal of wisdom’s presence occurs in knowing when to relinquish what feeds like a tapeworm in one’s life, devouring all the erotic fuel from one’s system. Not to do so is to invite in and even begin to worship dogmatic assertions, rigid beliefs, stern prejudices, unnamed resentments. Even more critical is the loss of the symbolic order of being which myths put us in touch with, in order to deepen our consciousness of ourselves in relation to our world. Symbols also help to organize experience, offer diverse responses to what without them might leave only one routine response; they allow for ambiguity and even paradox in life and keep intact the mysterious reality of being. Without the symbolic order and the accompanying energy that symbols carry to revitalize us by pointing us to invisible presences within the phenomenal world, life becomes colorless, reduced to a sparse number of adjectives that allow for limited unique qualities, differentiation and a paucity of joy.

We each can plateau at a stage of stasis in which symbolic thinking is not even recognized or engaged, which is to relinquish some fundamental vitality in the individual or in a larger orbit, in a culture or a civilization. Manifestations of literalism in the form of set and certain beliefs that entertain no others then proliferate become excessive to fill in the gaps, the black holes in an impoverished soul. Out of such darkness all forms of literalisms and absolute certainties emerge to plague the fertile soil of the imaginal as well as the fecundity of the soul’s possibilities. Addictions can take many forms. One of the most arresting is a world view in which all vitality has dissolved, leaving one with a clichéd life, full of empty prose and a life of simple sentences that spark no variety, boast no adjectives, invite little complexity. If one’s world view can fit on a bumper sticker, it may be a sign of life’s limited possibilities.

One compelling antidote to such a futile condition is to retrieve the mythopoetic sense of life, its creativity and vital energetic inflection, where what seems so familiar takes on a

different caste because seen again for the first time, where perception once more imagines some new quality within familiarity. Such a spiralic form can shape personal biography or a more inclusive history into a poetic utterance; such mythic thinking encourages it to become what was before an unformed, frightening ordeal, now affectively present. Worth pondering is C. G. Jung's observation during a dream analysis seminar in 1929 in which he remarked: "One of the fundamental laws of natural development is that it moves in a spiral and the true law of nature is always reached after the labyrinth has been traveled. . . . Psychologically you develop in a spiral, you always come over the same point where you have been before, but it is never exactly the same, it is either above or below."¹⁷

This primal or primordial spiralic action is part of the ritual imagination; it fosters presence in a ritual act which coalesces what was before unloosed and unformed because unseen. All perception becomes at this point a work of art and an act of remembrance; it can be the occasion for an aesthetic response. Meditating on specific writing questions can release parts of the multi-volumed self with its episodic plot to reclaim the larger complexity of who we are. Poetic knowing has tight cords connected to a mythic form of discernment which I believe we can cultivate and strengthen through writing. Writing is an ordering action that can reveal patterns where one never expected them to be present. Let's begin then with a meditation that coaxes a part of our personal myth upward and outward.

Writing Meditation: Assumptions that Frame Me

Within the self swirl dozens, if not hundreds, of assumptions that help to frame as well as form our way of experiencing and modulating our world. They can certainly in-form our way of imagining a self-world dialogue that goes on even when we move through parts of our day below the threshold of awareness. Within assumptions the self-world dialogue can burrow into solitude, take a vertical turn underground and speak in whispers rather than fully-voiced utterances. Assumptions shape the sense of our world in an "as if" mode of

17 C. G. Jung, *Dream Analysis: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1928-1930*, ed. William McGuire, Bollingen Series XCIX (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 100.

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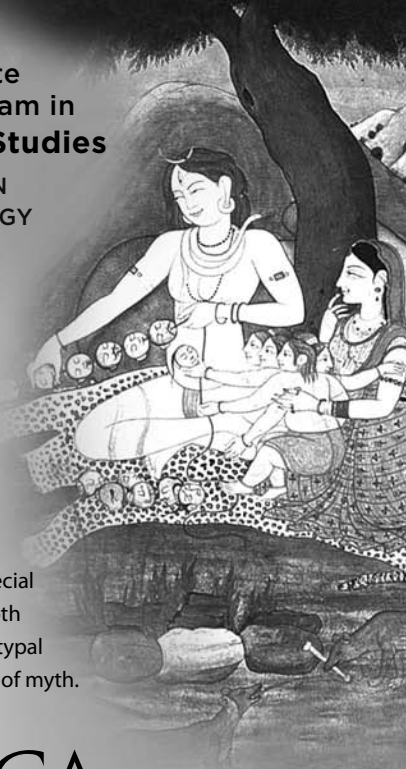
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