EDUCATION

Charles Boer • Stephen Karcher
Ann McCoy • Ben Sells • et al.

EDUCATION AS MYTHIC IMAGE

What Archetypal Psychology Can Teach Us

GREG NIXON

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Life slumbers. It needs to be roused, to be awakened
to a drunken marriage with divine feeling.
(Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, 603)

Meaning & Objectivity

Education as an enterprise of research and knowledge creation is most often understood as a social science. It is a study of patterns and changes in a particular society as measured, naturally enough, by the exacting instruments of science and technology. In this way, society itself becomes an object of study (as do the persons living their span within it). Our very experience of life becomes a study from an outside perspective. We are asked to identify with an image of reality that exists from the outside looking in. To be "successful" is to forget oneself and one's attendant emotions, fantasies, obsessions and become a part of the collective. Education is the process that takes students from their origins in soul and unites them with the pre-existing grand identity of civilization. It is for their own good, of course, that we measure them so well and choose from amongst them the best and brightest to keep the process going. Many of us feel, however, that such "objectivity sickness"—manifested by the mania for measurement, standardization, and quality product control—tends to deny the reality of our most profound experiences.

To escape the prison of perfect objectivity, studies of curriculum have looked for sources of guidance and inspiration outside the routines and discourse of empirical science. Such studies have evolved into curriculum theory—which has, in turn, reconceptualised the entire field of educational thinking. Though evolving into a field of its own, curriculum theorizing has drawn its structures and even some of what may be called its methods from areas that most strongly resist the compelling hum of perfect objectivity. Phenomenology, the science of experience that has long had an impact on psychology and philosophy, has proven to be a inspiration in curriculum studies as well. The arts themselves, with their appeal to the verities emerging from the creative act—and from naked human experience—have provided a literary, expressive language with which to conceive or unconceive curriculum, schooling, and life in this world.

Mythopoetry, the imagistic voice of the muses which manifests in myth and natural poetry, has been invoked as an impression of ideal curriculum with which to cherish intimate, vital experience (and to oppose its exile from educational life). In this statement, I intend to see through the pleasant surface of the label, mythopoetry, to see what image may lie just out of sight, beyond the "inspired writing" that mythopoetry implies. Beyond words themselves, meaning is found in sound and in expressive representation. "Music, when soft voices die, / Vibrates in the memory" (Shelley)

Image & Symbol

Human beings are animals. This statement should startle no one, yet its implications are either denied or avoided by a great many people today. We are, after all, cultured animals who have attained to the universal structures of logic and rationality and so have superseded our merely instinctive animal nature. As we have been told since grade school, we are the animal who need not adapt (i.e., physiologically evolve) to

suit its environment; we, instead, adapt our environment to suit ourselves. Such environmental adaptation is, of course, culture. Language is the tool we have learned to help carry out the imperatives of our primate nature, yes, but it is more than this. Culture and language have allowed us to step beyond mere bestiality and become social or even spiritual beings who strive for the welfare of all other such beings and perhaps even communion with the ultimate transcendent divinity.

In our state as enlightened cultural beings (perhaps even chosen beings?), we regard animal nature as either romantically anthropomorphized or as brutally instinctual. Do other animals talk? Do they think? Can they make choices? Can they feel? Are they even conscious? The romantic idealizer would likely answer in the affirmative to all of the above and the evolved rationalist would likely say no to the first three and give a qualified assent to the latter two. Both would agree that a chasm exists between even the experience of our nearest animal kin and our own.

All animals, including us, have perceptions. Can we take that as a given? It may be, however, that we are the only animal who has expressive conceptions. We take a step back from the immediacy of experience in an eternal present by abstracting it. Led by some mysterious teleology, according to Cassirer, humankind at some point held in mind the flux of images from the senses and the memory of previous responses and extended its immediacy of experience into a remembered past and a projected future—symbolically. Symbols took forms like visual abstractions, vocalizations, or even such things as tools and clothing.

With such objectification of experience, humankind awoke in an utterly different reality and evolution responded to this efflorescence of abstraction. Robert Jay Lifton says that "enlargement of the brain depends upon, and partly results from, the development of culture—that is, of historically transmitted patterns of meaning" (13) and such noted scientists as Terrence Deacon agree. What is this human *culture* and when did it appear? Lifton writes:

> Culture is inseparable from symbolization; and both had developed by
> the appearance of Neanderthal man one hundred thousand years ago,
> as we know from the existence of a variety of stone tools and other
> artifacts of burial rites and religious rituals. (13)

Today, it seems clear that much earlier—up to a million years ago—*Homo erectus* was engaging in pre-sapiens cultural activities such as organized gathering and hunting. But with the symbolic interaction came symbolic forms of social recognition and bonding. This change to *Homo symbolicus* (Cassirer) was not just the change to cultivating culture, that is, a change in external circumstances. It was also an unprecedented tectonic shift in our experience and even our perception of reality.

> We perceive nothing, so to speak, nakedly; our only means of taking in the world of objects and people around us is through this unending process of reconstituting them. (Lifton, 28)

To gain mastery over our environment, we had, apparently, to learn to check our very perceptions against previous perceptions held in habit routine memory engrams. We see that which we expect to see and can symbolically represent.

To go back a bit, all this seems to imply that what is symbolized or represented is an actual objective world. It implies that our brethren in the rest of the animal kingdom must experience reality nakedly, unadulterated by our symbolic recycling. But one only need consider the vast range of perceptual organs which exist in the rest of the natural world to understand that each experienced reality is very different from the next. Does it even make sense to posit a mutually existing, solid, objective reality for all creatures? The only way we can do so is to project our own perceptual experience and imagine that other animals (and perhaps plants) simply have some lesser perceptions of it.

And this is getting back to the core of things. For to imagine is to participate in the play of images, to receive or to project them. We cannot know what other animals experience but, from what we know of our own experience, we can imagine their experience taking place without symbolic abstraction, without recognition or self-objectification. They mostly have no self-concept or image of themselves.[1] They are, therefore, unaware of such data as the inevitability of death or even of ageing. Regret, anticipation, and worry are equally absent. There is no concept of an inner self and therefore no concept of an outer world that is separate from it. In this sense it makes little sense to speak of sensory perceptions being received by the inner perceiver. The animal has no *homunculus*. Experience is world, and world is experience.

We can comprehend neither such experience nor such a world. Our nearest analogy may be the dream, though for many dreamers projected self-concepts abound. Still, in the dream the image rules: not the perception, not the concept, but the image in itself. It is exempt from the symbolic controls of our daylight hours and refuses to follow the carefully cultivated paths we have imposed on it. Cause and effect break down and remembering what has just happened or anticipating what will happen next is a barren harvest. Images abound seemingly without order or purpose and, strangest of all, our very selves are simply one image among others. Still we find ourselves seeking, escaping, hiding, and participating. Of course, the forms of our particular dream images are constructed from sensory experience. We must not imagine that particular images for other species with different senses—and unified perception—have any continuity with our own.

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[1] Some chimpanzees and orangutans have been shown to recognize their mirror-images, though whether or not this is an act of self-recognition is anyone's guess (see Gallup, 86-87).

To call such a world a chaos of images is perhaps to indulge in too much projection, especially when we apply it to nonsymbolic experience in nature. Chaos sounds too miasmatic, too action-packed. The images experienced are certainly evanescent but they may also be placid or serene. Still, without an objectively conceived self that differentiates, the senses themselves likely remain undifferentiated. Perception in nature may be unified apprehension. We can imagine other higher mammals remembering imagistically and, to a limited extent, even planning imagistically. But what we must remember is that it is the image which is the fundament of their experience, not self-worries, self-glorification, or self-anything. Their experiencing is itself an image within an image. Even to posit an experiencer is a projection of a particular human conception.

Language & Concept

Roberts Avens writes, "The transformation of images into symbols more or less coincides with our gradual separation from embeddedness in the processes of nature" (90). We find ourselves thrown into a symbolic world, a world of language and concept. Our selfhood becomes one more concept in this symbolic continuum. We conceive of experience as something that happens to us as experiencers, as we remain isolated within our own subjectivities. We are wound in the "cool web" of language, as Robert Graves called it: "There's a cool web of language winds us in, / Retreat from too much joy or too much fear..." (9-10).

Post-modern semioticians claim the web is so complete that language cannot refer to anything outside of itself. They claim language is a system of differences and not "a transparent medium" through which we perceive the objects referred to in our concepts. If this were entirely true, then we have lost our "embeddedness in the processes of nature," the *participation mystique* of which Lévy-Bruhl wrote and the possibility of a Dionysian immersion in the immediacy of experience. We have eaten of the Tree of Knowledge and been barred from the paradise of unselfconscious impulse.

However, this position seems a bit too unyielding, too self-contained. Of course language as strict correspondence has been taken for granted much too readily, but language, like myth, need not enclose. It need not be either one thing or another. Mythopoetic[2] language can be employed as metaphor to evoke or invoke. As Herakleitos of Ephesos understood it: "The lord whose oracle is at Delphi neither speaks nor conceals, but indicates" (Frag. found in Freeman, 31). Daily common sense language is the language of consciousness and comfortable habit routine. Yet mythopoetic language twists back on itself and rents asunder habit routines,

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[2] The preferred form is "mythopoeic," meaning myth-making. However "mythopoetic" places more emphasis on the poetic impulse, so I use it here.

occasionally giving us glimpses into imagistic reality. Such oracular mythopoetry may even provide sudden insight into the nature of language. Language, itself, must be an outgrowth of previous nonself-aware experience. In this sense, language itself is an image. Words are acts of imagination.

That philosopher of myth and being, Martin Heidegger, has written of the world-changing moment when we emerged from the literally unthinkable into the web of language:

> The origin of language is in essence mysterious. And this means that language can only have arisen from the overpowering, the strange and terrible, through man's departure into being. In this departure language was being, embodied in the word: poetry. Language is the primordial poetry in which a people speaks being. (171)

Heidegger says, "language was being." Here, for the first time perhaps, we have an indication of the form taken by the language that circled the image: poetry. The deconstructionist Paul de Man declared that "poetic language names the void" (18). This poetic language need not be construed as the self-conscious vanities that so often pass for poetry today but more simply as the imaginative language that indicates — a language which evokes or even invokes the inconceivable image behind the words.

I need hardly interject that such language is more and more regarded at least as childish whimsy and often as offensive impracticality in today's world. Language which explains, classifies, places, and points the way toward instrumental ends is the generally accepted language of educational institutions. Mythopoetic language may be studied in schools today for cultural or historical reasons or to memorize the rhyme scheme or even to dredge up the hidden ideology contained in the text. However, it is rare to discover such language actually being used in speaking, writing, or in classrooms. Many think a language which merely evokes the unknown serves no purpose in education; and a language which invokes—calls on the gods[3]—is definitely suspect. That may be the case, but mythopoetic language remains the mode of personal experience and transformation. It may not prepare devoted workers, but it does serve to open the minds of many individuals to the deeper wells of mystery within them.

Still a chasm has appeared between the language of conceptual differentiation and its predecessor, the image-world. How is it possible to ever feel our continued immersion in Heidegger's "strange and terrible"? Between the image and the concept falls the myth and the archetypal strange attractor. The transition from imagistic potency to manifest form takes place in the movement through myth. Alexander Eliot

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[3] The English term "god" derives from the Indo-European gheu(h), meaning "to call, invoke." (Claiborne)

explained myth almost in those exact terms: "Although it cannot be defined, myth may be pictured in a way. It is the glistening interface between consciousness and creative chaos" (1976, 282).

Archetypal Myth

The order given to this creative chaos by archetypal myth is not an order imposed on it from the outside (as it were) by self-conscious minds—that is, an order which is unnatural—but instead arises from within natural creative chaos. The organizing principles are archetypal, which is to say they are already present as organizing potentials within Eliot's creative chaos. Such archetypes never become manifest, except as organizing principles of myth. Some interpreters understand archetype and image to be names that identically refer to the same reality, but others see them as distinct. In her introduction to Bachelard's *Imagination and Reverie*, Colette Gaudin sees mythopoetic language as imaginative catalyst:

> Thus the relationship between the image and the unconscious must be contained within the realm of language. Images are not a translation of complexes; rather, it is the imagination which awakens the complex. . . . Primordial images such as those of flight, falling, and the labyrinth are spoken before they are thought, felt vicariously before they are experienced in life. They elicit the peculiarly lyrical emotion of possible experience. (xiv)

It is this aspect of the mythic—the threshold sense of potential—which allows us to reunite our practical, linear reality with the preconscious world of image. The myth in this sense implies a mythopoetic participation and does not limit itself to the narrow sense of mythic tale. Whether manifesting image or archetype, myth is the interface. Such speaking, or expressing, or creating, or acting quite properly has no proper name at all. This creative reality appears to stand opposed—or "beyond" or "within" but never quite *here* or *now*—to the mundane reality constructed by the mind to serve the body's survival and reproductive needs. It is a mythic reality—perhaps one step from the real—something Taoism envisions as existing in a continuum of its own with or without us:

> There, in the atmosphere of absolute freedom, the images associate, intermingle, and interfuse with one another according to their own law of symbolic evolvement, drawing among themselves and by themselves mythopoeic pictures of Reality. From the standpoint of a Lao Tzu or a Chuang Tzu, these mythopoeic pictures, being essentially archetypal, reflect more faithfully or more fundamentally the true structure of reality than what is afforded by sensation, perception and reason. (Izutsu, 31)

Unlike other written or spoken utterances, this is the true subject of myth. Most of our speaking and writing seems in response to orders from a self-conscious subject, our inner *homunculi* who manipulate language to suit their ends. Myth, however, must be understood as the speaking of the archetypal image itself, as it manifests through the cultural particulars of its human medium. "The primitive mentality," writes Jung, "does not invent myths, it experiences them" (Kérényi and Jung, 101).

With Izutsu's mention of "mythopoeic pictures" and Jung's reference to experience, we are perhaps beginning to conceive of the poetic imagination. From his own experience, the poet Robert Duncan has described such imagining:

> An image is not a metaphor. Yeats had already seen it, an image is not symbol. Symbols are generated by images. Metaphors are generated by images. Our minds work with and create out of images, but images are absolutely there. (8-9)

Archetypal images are primary; cultures, institutions, and selves emerge from them. In this vision soul reaches into the dayworld through us, yet it remains steeped in the beyond of death. Literal reference dies. Our trusted objective material world wavers. The light imparted by our speech falls away into shadow. It is this metaphoric and metamorphic moving into shadow that reveals archetypal psychology's path to a shady sort of enlightenment.

Hillman's journey into a deeper light is a *via negativa*. It does not fulfill the self but serves soul. To penetrate the security of self-esteem and comfortable ego-structures (the literalized mythos of conceptual belief) is to leave us exposed to all the hidden aspects of daily life. Death is that dark side with which we would prefer not to deal, but which clouds our vision of the further reaches of soul. To take the negative journey into archetypal fantasy is not to return our souls to our selves. However it is to get at the root of things. Hillman indicates that our "soul-searching" brings "soul making" to the world:

> We practice an alchemical metaphysics: "account for the unknown in terms of the more unknown." Notice here that this further unknown beyond is a *more*; at the same time that emptying is going on, so is filling. In the act of deconstruction there is constructive aim. ("Back to Beyond," 220)

Archetypalizing's *via negativa* has proved itself to be a *via regia*, as well: the royal road to awareness. Myth for the archetypalist is not a theology or not what most would consider a psychology. For Hillman, such distinctions mean little next to the possibility of attuned awareness (not "consciousness" which implies an object):

It hardly matters to me whether theology or psychology brings awareness to our baggage as long as awareness comes. Rather than separating the theo-psychic mixture, let it continue. It will anyhow. It's an authentic compound, for the soul itself is just this sort of mixture." ("Psychology: Monotheistic or Polytheistic," 128)

Mythology, Narrative & Ideology

Myth in itself—the mythologem[4]—is not storying with a beginning, middle, and end. Mary Aswell Doll indicates that myth is not a closured narrative, a story which ends with a moral lesson:

Myths, we could say, have a curious Beckettian quality. As stories that never come to an end, myths build upon basic patterns, giving an opportunity to create endings and to re-create beginnings. (p. 1)

Mythologems become embedded in expanding mythologies, which use them freely in all sorts of stories, which again become enlarged or adapted in the retelling. Conscious elaboration creates self-conscious narrative.

It may be the narrative structure and the later development of expository prose that bury the mythologem deeper and deeper in the archeological substrata of psyche. In this way mythic images become appropriated by forces seeking only social indoctrination. Mythology is perverted into ideology, and an image of the wheel of life in creative advance can be transmogrified into the wheel of death and oppression: the original Sanskrit *svastika*, a sign of good luck, becomes the Nazi swastika of murderous stasis.

Jung considered the archetype to become hidden as mythic stories gained in complexity and in the shifting of perspective. Elaboration increased conscious objectivity and supported social orders but also disguised the memory of the primal mythic image. In specific mythic tales, the archetype has already been altered by conscious elaboration. If the early myths were expressions of transpersonal archetypal experience, which mythologies collapsed into narratives, then fairy tales are even more so (Miller, "Fairy Tale or Myth"), and so on into the ideological matrices of the novel, expository prose, and political propaganda.

This applies as well to most of the writing in educational studies and thus to schooling itself. Most of such writing is buried in the scientific paradigm of impartial objectivity. In recent decades, however, other curriculum writing has recognized that there is no escaping subjectivity and that the narrative mode has evolved an important place in

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[4] A mythologem is a recurring mythic motif, which, like an image or a god, is subject to further dispersal and greater depth upon study.

clarifying the lived experience of teachers and professors. If narrative writing, especially autobiographical narrative writing, purports to also reveal objectively quantifiable data, then a strange hybrid takes place in which the self who writes is but an objective construct for whom narrative can only reveal self-conscious information. In narrative, with such an objective self-construct, the subject will not be obscured but instead positioned centrally, the "objective subject" as subject, and the danger is self-idealization or self-inflation.

The laws of narrative, themselves tend to support such closured structure. In *The New Polytheism*, David L. Miller warns:

> Narrative form is no better than abstract ideation if it is used ideologically, that is, for ego-security. This is particularly important to note in a time when story-form enjoys a more than passing popularity in philosophy, theology, and literary criticism. (17)

And, one might add, in educational research, theory, and practice. Narrative form has been taken so literally as to be transmuted into the dogma of empirically verifiable scientific discourse and into the anti-mythic, anti-aesthetic, self-enclosed world of academia. Subjectively we come to believe we are our stories, often to our confusion in the face of erratic experience, as literary art often reveals. If our narratives only serve to make us feel better about ourselves, then seeking out myths may be just to find other exotic adornments for ourselves, our narcissistic objects of desire. Miller continues that

> if stories are believed to be a crutch that helps ego hobble back into a modicum of control...then the stories of the Gods may be as disappointing as the social ideologies and the monotheistic theologies which replaced them. Enthusiasm for narrative-form can become just one more idolatry. (*New Polytheism*, 18)

This need to enhance the self, this "paranoid drive toward unified meaning" is nothing but the archetype of the *senex*—fearful old age.

Perhaps this totalized and totalizing self may have derived from the Enlightenment inversion of the objective monotheism of the West (another reason why the mythic path may be seen as a "deeper light" and not "enlightenment"). Such a path requires imaginal or epistrophic memory which is not mere autobiographic recitation. Its mystique is clearer than its method. Archetypal seer Hillman sometimes calls it a psychologizing of the past; it seems nearer literature, psychoanalysis, or even deconstruction. He suggests not reducing the given facts of the past to concentrated essence, but taking them and twisting them:

> The particular virtue of the psychological mind is its twisting of the given; seeing through, hearing echo and implication, turning back or upside down. The psychological mind makes the given imagistic, fantastic. Hence its affinity with both the pathological and the poetic, and hence, also, its distance from the programmatics of action and the formulations of the sciences. . . . Where scientific abstractions seek to posit what is really there in the given, substitutive for it and constitutive of it, our abstractions seek to drop the bottom out of the given. ("Back to Beyond," 217-218)

This is the archetypal remembering Hillman (1979a) calls "...epistrophe, reversion, return, the recall of phenomena to their imaginal background . . . regarding phenomena in terms of their likenesses" (*The Dream and the Underworld*, 4).[5] This may imply a dramatization of the stories of one's past, or, perhaps, an expressive poetics. An acting-out with others—what was once called psychodrama—may be useful. But these specifics fail to express the twistedness or madness of what Hillman means. Far from the Freudian couch of shameful confession or even the Jungian/Campbellian fantasy of "awakening to the myth I am living," Hillman suggests we should intrude many of the forgotten gods in our re-storying: Pan and Aphrodite, certainly, and maybe even the god of masks, Dionysos. The god need not be Hellenic. A mythical deity will come who awakens within us a shock of recognition. Our approach to the Underworld need not be a sombre procession after the grim reaper or psychotherapist or teacher but instead the ribald reversion to carnival shadow in the wake of the archetypal Trickster.

Mythic Education

This is not the sort of activity that one expects to find in schools, even in advanced autobiographical curriculum classes or in narrative research. Yet the "problem of multiple I's" has come to be expected by some researchers into teachers' narrative inquiry (Connelly and Clandinin). Most of these "I's" are resisted, especially in classroom situations, and others allowed only in unique circumstances like carnival. Hillman says there is an archetype with the face of a god behind the collection of each, and each god speaks in a different mode, some of which may seem insane or obscene. To conjure this god out from its concealment, we may have to write in its language. This is akin to dialoguing with what Mary Watkins calls "invisible guests," though Hillman's (1979a) epistrophic approach may mean identifying with each god, each "mood" as a theophany:

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[5] Hillman credits Henry Corbin for the original method of epistrophe, called in Islam *ta'will*, which means literally, so Hillman says, "...to lead something back to its origin and principle, to its archetype" (*The Dream and the Underworld*, 4).

> Reversion through likeness, *resemblance*, is a primary principle for the archetypal approach to all psychic events. Reversion is a bridge too, a method which connects an event to its image, a psychic process to its myth, a suffering of the soul to the imaginal mystery expressed therein. Epistrophe, or the return through likeness, offers to psychological understanding a main avenue for recovering order from the confusion of psychic phenomena, other than Freud's idea of development and Jung's of opposites . . . . Epistrophe implies return to multiple possibilities, correspondences with images that can not [sic] be encompassed within any systematic account. (*The Dream and the Underworld*, 4)

Also known as imaginal memory (Perlman), epistrophe is a more accurate reflection of our actual experience than statistical psychology provides. A singular self-schema attempts to deny or forget most of what we experience and even what we do, but allowing the other characters in us to speak deepens, widens, and perhaps even adds other dimensions to our awareness. To speak from the position of the abandoned child, or the wild woman, or even the glowering, fearful *senex*, is to give voice to what was once only unexplained emotion.

Our experience, according to this view, is always archetypal experience. To allow myth to awaken us to the world and the multiplicities of being, Hillman, Avens, Miller (and others of the archetypal school) have made the polytheistic move. "[A]s soon as the soul is freed from ego domination, the question of polytheism arises" (Hillman, *Archetypal Psychology*, 35).

The memory which lies behind all our knowing is drawn through remembered value and image back into the gravital complexes identified as "Gods and Goddesses." These, Hillman ("Psychology: Monotheistic or Polytheistic?") says, are not objective beings but are (archetypally) present in all our perceiving, so are understood as effective, and affective, presences within us and within the world.

Memory is itself the gravity that holds the gods—the archetypes—together enough to provide an inner integration for subjectivity. We are the objects of memory. The mythic perspective of archetypal psychology, then, is a journey of feeling and humility. Humility because our ego-structures come apart when subjected to the pathologizing effects of the gods and goddesses. The form of the deity, however imagined, can only be constructed from the fragments of our own experience, like a whirlwind's appearing only through that which it draws into itself. The resulting wisdom is that we are mere products of the word, that our self-concepts are mythic structures over an abyss of memory, and that our actions are under the sway of many "divisibles." Gilbert Durand once wrote:

> It has taken all the discoveries of contemporary depth psychology to
> bring the *ego* back to this modest pluralism, to show that behind its
> triumphant consciousness the unconscious proliferates disquieteningly.
> (89)

It is this *disquietening* journey into the "morbisms" of the shadow side makes why the seeing through (or feeling through) to the myth or mythic image must be understood as humbling to the central self-schema, but self-creative to the other images who afflict us as moods, intrigue us in visual flashes, cause "beside myself" actions, or who populate our dreams and reveries. The self in such a journey is not rejected, but it is no longer reified as a psychological absolute either. Lifton has written of such a "protean self" as the "symbolizing self" which "centers on its own narrative, on a life story that is itself created and constantly re-created" (30). The self is just one of many schemata, a symbol among symbols. In this way, it may achieve some freedom and create a space for its own metamorphosis.

It may be well to keep this in mind when training our youth into becoming confident and successful selves or otherwise constructing narratives of educational experience or simply telling the stories of our lives. If the choice for the ego-self of the writer is reification or deification, the mythopoetic imagination chooses the latter, but only as part of a larger pantheon of presences.

The predominant myth of our time, according to Guggenbühl-Craig (1991), is *the* myth of progress, which encompasses other such myths as that of development, improvement, and growth. In accord with our frontally-placed carnivore's eyes, we seem only focused on what's coming—from the next instant to the distant fulfillment of our anxieties or machinations. In this sense, we are displaced from our present, living (as it were) in deferment and anticipation. Even more, we have sacrificed the past. By referring to the past I do not mean the past recorded in history or in our personal *curriculum vitae*. The past to which I refer has never ceased to be present. It is the "past" of imagistic experience, of myth, dream, and symbol. It is this past which has been dissected to fabricate the image of life indefinitely postponed, forever awaiting at the end of our endless journey of progress.

In the field of education, the extension of this complex is the myth of development or instruction, that individuals are storage tanks of information, and that nature (or the gods) provides nothing. We can even test to see how much is stored. The media continually remind us of the woes for us all when *others* have not lived up to their information-storing capacity. Everyone must progress further up the ladder of instruction. The more you are taught, the readier you are for life:

> When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought
> as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. (I
> Corinthians 13:10-11)

This is, we are told, only being realistic. Like all mythologies, this story has a dark side, as the rest of the biblical passage shows:

> For now we see through a glass darkly. . . . now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. (I Corinthians 13:12)

Like all mythologies it has seemingly infinite systems of justification. Like all mythologies experience seems to prove its truths. Memory as *techne* rules. Even religion and art classes have to be justified in terms of results.

There is no way out of a social mythology, Jungian and archetypal psychology indicates, unless we come to recall the foundational myths of its origin, objectively (as it were). The possession can only be broken through the creation of new myths: symbols and images that seem to inhere in other instincts, that seem to be needs of other centers of intuition. A mythic archetype captures and possesses imagination, but our imaginations have been appropriated into all the anxieties and lusts of the Myth of Progress (otherwise known as the Myth of Success). To support such a vision of the future over an obliterated past, we have developed the guardian mythos *par excellence*: the mythos of science. Any archetype or mythos captures imagination, imprisons the image-experiencing faculty into a narrow field and makes it impossible to imagine any other way of doing things. Religion and nationalism have done this well for thousands of years. Now we have the *senex* of science with its unyielding attributes of objective materialism, determinism, and reductionism. These guardian myths of denial, skepticism, and objective proof crudely channel our imagining and our experience. Furthermore, since the mythopoetic image transcends both subject and object, the world-potential is grimly lessened as well.

It does not take a great deal of social awareness to realize our technological drive into the future has a shadow side that "proliferates disquieteningly" (though it is also disquieting how many successful people fail to see this). Lifton (1993) expresses this unease well:

> Increasingly, we have an amorphous but greatly troubling sense that something has gone wrong in our relationship to nature, something that may undermine its capacity to sustain life. (21)

One need only mention environmental abuse, population growth, new plagues, and the spread of weapons of mass destruction to get an idea of the kind of world we are thrusting into. It is just as doubtful that the human psychological condition has not begun to decay as a result of the soul's isolation into energies of progress and success. As in soul, so in the world: "The woods decay, the woods decay and fall, / The vapors weep their burthen to the ground. . ." (Tennyson, 1-2)

Mythopoetic Metamorphosis

It is not that I am suggesting that myth will save educational visions, or schooling, or society, or the world. We are always living out one myth or another, always under the influence of one god or another, or always within one image or another. It is the change from the possession of one image to another that is so soul wrenching, so frightening. To see through or even abandon the archetypal image that possesses one is to metamorphose, an experience the poets see as painful indeed: "Lamia" is a magnificent erotic poem by John Keats which tells the story of a snake woman who yearns for the body of real woman again so she may experience its delights, however transitory. Hermes grants her metamorphosis, but the process reveals itself as one of the utmost agony:

> Left to herself, the serpent now began
> To change; her elfin blood in madness ran,
> Her mouth foam'd, and the grass, therewith besprent,
> Wither'd at dew so sweet and virulent;
> Her eyes in torture fix'd and anguish drear,
> Hot, glaz'd, and wide, with lid-lashes all seer,
> Flash'd phosphor and sharp sparks, without one cooling tear.
> The colours all inflam'd throughout her train,
> She writh'd about, convuls'd with scarlet pain. (I: 146-154)

Lamia emerges a woman and experiences passionate, even lewd love but is eventually destroyed, shrivelled like a dream, by the rationalist eye of the well-named philosopher, Apollonius—just as Apollo, the Hellenic god of order, rationality, and light shines over our modernist Enlightenment era. The loss of enchantment through the cold eye of dissecting thought (which Keats calls philosophy) is the loss of imaginal participation. The poet asks:

> Do not all charms fly
> At the mere touch of cold philosophy?
> There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:
> We know her woof, her texture; she is given
> In the dull catalogue of common things.
> Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,
> Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
> Empty the haunted air, and gnoméd mine—
> Unweave a rainbow, as it erstwhile made
> The tender-person'd Lamia melt into a shade. (II: 229-238)

The mystery that is reduced to explanation appears both from the world and from awareness of the world. With the light of reason, we see the world only objectively and subtract the *vital* component of subjective awareness. It need only be mentioned that such unremitting light casts dark shadows. In such shadows we have hidden our fantasies and our fears, and the mystery of our knowledge of death that snaps

complacency and inspires us to journeys. "I dream of journeys repeatedly: Of flying like a bat deep into a narrowing tunnel . . ." (Roethke).

One must employ these poetic incantations in attempting evoke a mythopoetic response and indicate what is missing in our schools, in our theories, and in our world. To describe is be caught in the trap of objectivity where one must compare and contrast positions, rationalize purposes, and hypothesize effects. Usually only a poem can evoke poetic experience; often only the myth can reveal soul. To dissect such things for hidden symbols, secret messages, or overall meaning is to murder the experience, to dismember the soul.

Even this essay is something of an impossibility. I have attempted to explicate image and symbol, archetype and god, myth and poem, and experience and imagination. My purpose has been to make clear in a rational, systematic manner *toward* what is meant by such terms and how important a part of our time in this veil they are. A life without imagination or experience is indeed literally thinkable and we end up with postulates like robots, zombies, or computerized intelligence. Most would feel, I suspect, that a life without such experience is no life at all. Still, we give our time to description, classification, and the institutionalization of objective materialism. We have come to expect such explanations (and that is why I have attempted this one) but by explaining myth and image might I not be in danger of *unweaving a rainbow*?

It may be so. Still, for many of us emerging from the modernist tyranny, rationalist explanation is the path into the darkening tunnel of Roethke. At some point, however, the light is extinguished and we are cast back into the primal encounter without the comfort of explanation. It is from the position of mythopoetic participation that new worlds appear, as Mircea Eliade knew:

> This is not, of course, a matter of rational cognition, but of apprehension by the active consciousness prior to reflection. It is of such apprehensions that the World is made. (202)

Hillman has avoided political delicacy in his position against reductive explanation. He insists that even our scientific, rationalist method is ultimately but another mythos in action:

> Gathering of data does less to demonstrate objectively the existence of archetypes than it does to demonstrate the fantasy of "objective data."
> ("A Note on Story," 13)

And further along he delivers his *coup de grâce* to our current educational aims and perhaps our whole inflated civilization by flatly stating, "Literalism is sickness" (45).

This is not to say something like one should believe in trans-objective realities. This is

to say that experience need not be limited by our faith in objective reduction. With regard to mythopoetry, there are no "shoulds." There is merely the choice to see or not to see. As classicist Charles Boer puts it:

> Belief is not an issue. But "seeing" can be detached from belief. ... And seeing the Gods, whatever else, has always been one of mythology's *pleasures*." (105)

And it is certainly not to identify mythology with ideology, as, for example, Roland Barthes in cultural criticism and Peter McLaren in curriculum theory have done. The literary critics and critical pedagogues who also oppose an overreliance on rationalism because they see such rationalism as disguising an oppressive patriarchal, capitalist hierarchy are guilty of their own sort of explanatory reductionism. According into Boer, to direct such critical theorizing at the mythopoetic imagination or at literary experience is to amputate the archetype, to just as surely wither poor Lamia as the cold eye of Apollonius:

> Just as we have allowed art and literature in recent years to be treated as nothing but disguised ideology, we assume that mythology must be even more so. For mythology, ideology with its proliferating rationalisms is becoming a lethal mistake. (105-106)

Anyone can see that a solely mythopoetic education would be impractical and not serve the ends that schools have been designed to serve. People want jobs, society wants progress, and science wants discovery. Education is aimed squarely at directing dreamy little minds into the realistic channels that lead to these ends. These purposes need to be served. It should not be forgotten that there are more unpleasant prospects than material prosperity.

But the point is that such an instrumental drive toward material prosperity has come to dominate all our thoughts and certainly all our major institutions. One need only visit the classrooms in the majority of schools or page through the professional journals related to education to discover that instrumentality, results, standards, achievement, are simply taken for granted as the motivating force of the education industry. The gain here may be an increase in the GNP and a better standard of living for a minority, but the price, as I've indicated throughout, is a loss of consciousness. After the confused rhetoric of the seventies, we seldom attempt to educate for personal growth, imagination, or experience. The point has been reached when even the most intelligent of curriculum theorists feels the need to apologize for ever using a term like "heightened consciousness" (Pinar). Imagination and experience have become embarrassments.

To sum up, experience of world as being—as subject and object united in the image—is reduced as soon as we adapt to the limitations imposed by our senses. The first

reduction of the image and of experience within it is supplied through the brain and central nervous system. The second reduction occurs through the entrance into the cultural world of symbols (such as language), something more than a re-presentation: a reduction of experience-in-itself but an expansion of mind and objective time. Now we continue our dutiful reductionism in the field of curriculum and schooling. We separate, categorize, and channel young minds into socially productive activities. Personal experience and imagination are seen as luxuries left for leisure time—if there is the energy left to support them. It is as though we have drawn the waters from the ocean of being and over time have channeled the flow into rivers, streams, and creeks until they all disperse as drainage into the desert. There is no return, no renewal or revitalization, only the progress of withering seepage.

Certain highly academic areas of curriculum theory have for decades been attempting to inspire educational thinking from the position of the arts and humanities as opposed to the usual reduction to scientific data and professional recommendation. A reconceptualization (Pinar *et al.*) is said to have taken place. Though many mythopoetic approaches have been successfully undertaken, it may be that up until this time an in-depth mythopoetic rationale—oxymoronic as that may be—for educational vision has never been attempted. With the archaic experience of the image, the apotheosis of imagination as described in archetypal psychology, and the call to awaken life "to a drunken marriage with divine feeling," I hope this needed epistrophe has at least been suggested.

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