

**Pacific Coast Theological Society, April 13, 2012****“Theopoetics and Mythopsychology”****Prologue**

At a meeting of the Pacific Coast Theological Society in 2011, Huston Smith asked that the Society dedicate a session to the relationship between religion, theology, and mythology. The topic was scheduled for the Spring of 2012 and this essay is a response. Unlike disciplines which explicitly rely on a system of mechanical precision, both theology and mythology benefit more from a precision and depth of stylistic understanding, or narrative context. In the case of disciplines primarily concerned with texts rich in metaphor this requires a consciously sympathetic relationship with the poetic and imaginal. As an experiment in congruence, not only the content but also the style of this essay, the rhetorical environment in which its proposals are couched, will attempt to convey through metaphorical prose something about the nature of studying and writing about myth, or mythography.

Please imagine the exploration of Professor Smith's questions as a journey. As it makes sense to consult the map key while plotting a course before setting out, it may be helpful to introduce or clarify a few discipline-specific terms. Here, "religion" includes the entire range of potential human responses that arise when making a way through the place where archetypal mysteries and daily experience intersect. Religious experience can be as Smith framed it, "an unstoppable force in human nature,"<sup>1</sup> because it wraps in one psychological package of cultural creativity a wide variety of related images, the expression of which has always been a part of what it is to be human.

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<sup>1</sup> Huston Smith. *The Way Things Are*. p151

Indicative of their provocative power and extensive implications, mytho-religious patterns in culture have received extensive attention from thinkers from a wide variety of disciplines. For instance, what is now known as Psychology of Religion must account for Freud pointing out the force of delusion in religious thinking oriented "to comfort ourselves in an uncertain world."<sup>2</sup> This is especially true because he went on to create pseudo-religious mythological tropes himself in order to support psychoanalytic theories. One of the primary critiques of C.G. Jung and his followers, particularly James Hillman and other archetypal psychologists, and has to do with application of Freudian thought to contemporary psychology in that both give insufficient weight to the part of human experience that is imaginal in nature rather than being simply self-deceptive or delusional. Too simple treatments of the interaction between unconscious and conscious myth-making, whether overtly sacred or secular, often carry an unintentional self-critique which exposes in the soul of the preacher the pattern he decries. Karl Marx, for instance, pointed to the mind-altering qualities of religion and its effect on large groups, but also largely missed the ways that his own world-view was religious in character, as well as the ways that mythological tropes consciously held and participated in can bring out both the best and the worst in the human character.

Religions invoke a range of related expressions, archetypal in nature, which allow the human being to get metaphorical hands on the disturbing parts of lived experience which do not lend themselves to straightforward manipulation. With these poetic hands we ritually weave boundary-violating experiences into a kind of understanding that deepens into nuance more readily than it provides mechanical utility. Mythologies are frequently the result, including

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<sup>2</sup> *The Huston Smith Reader* p237

global theories, like Capitalism or The Rapture, and “viral” catch-phrases, like Globalization and Gospel (“Good News”), as well as metaphor-packed pseudo-historical stories about gods, prophets, ancestors, and myriad roles. All are recognizable and powerful because they are archetypal. Mythology, psychology, and theology are each poetic ways of configuring these religious responses that are so natural to human beings, and each has its own rhetorical style. For instance, Hillman has provided *Healing Fiction* to illustrate the history, style, and impact of the objective-sounding writing of case-studies that underlie psychology’s theory and are woven into its practice as origin myth and world-view. Of course, this is easy to see from “outside.”

Mythology has come to refer not only to texts foreign to oneself which touch on divinity, but also to any belief system imagined epistemologically. Studying myth, or mythography, together with psychology is a way of imagining thoroughly how we believe in order to understand more about what we know and do. Any mythological process is capable of configuring human experience as understanding in a way that consciously includes facts and fictions as revealed through complexes of images, thereby complicating rather than establishing a world view held simply as either fact or fiction. A term familiar from literary study, mythopoiesis, then has to do with the creation of narrative in which mythological aspects are either overtly presented or may be discerned psychologically.

“Pioneered [at least] by Freud, Jung, and Cassirer,” psychology as it is understood today “uses mythical accounts as a psychological language.” According to Hillman, this “locates psychology in the cultural imagination”<sup>3</sup> where theology does much of its work as well, no matter how or where a division might be created between the mythical and the scriptural.

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<sup>3</sup>*Archetypal Psychology*. p19.

Psychology and theology are both imagined as referring to an "inner life" of compulsions and of belief where both pathologies and faith are attributed to individuals and imagined as private despite their impact on the public sphere. Thanks to the legacy of Descartes, these "inner" patterns are habitually split from "outer" choices in relationships and in social agendas in ways that require professional "outside" influence to change or control. This takes the form of progressive behavioral reinforcement through repetition with the help of counseling. Applying these controls in an industrially globalized society also shifts the behavioral norms of groups of people, and is apparently the concern of the psycho-therapeutic hour, the pulpit, public policy, and of advertising campaigns.

Initiated by James Hillman, Archetypal Psychology is formulated as a critique of psychology, as it is most frequently defined, and the society it helped create. "The primary rhetoric of archetypal psychology is myth," which overtly hybridizes the poetic sensibility of narrative built on archetypal themes with the fascination with dream that is the core of psychology. This creates a mythopsychology with characteristics that relate through literature to both cultural study in general and to religious study in particular, and is thereby related to theology through shared concerns.

### **A metaphorical journey**

The remainder of this essay will shift away from general distinctions and categorical definitions, in favor of revolving around persons as though the ideas discussed herein will be better understood in the narrative context of human relationship than by abstract comparison. Let us return to imagining the responses to Professor Smith's questions as a

journey. Like many a story from the road, the *dramatis personae* know each other already and are in the midst of a conversation that has lasted for many years. Introducing the companions is tantamount to introducing the ideas they propose and will carry the society most of the way to the crossroads of the relationship between the disciplines in question. By the time we reach that shared territory, mythography will have been deployed according to its current rather than its historical practice, and the mythic imagination will arrive with both sympathetic and critical gifts in hand for the theologian having to do with not only comparative but relational ways of seeing religious behavior, that is to say the psychology of mythology and theology. The place where eventually we pause, at the end of this text, like the journey itself, comes into being through a series of feet (or wheels)-on-the-ground experiences, poetic exchanges and pauses for refreshment, rather than materializing as the reward for a drive toward a market of ideas where a load of collateral conclusions may be sealed and delivered in the not-really-transparent plastic-wrap of certainty. Such is the nature of mysterious excursions. Such is the realm of religious study, of literary learning, of exploring the logic of psyche, perhaps of the liberal arts as a whole.

At least one proposal has already been made which may cause a stir—that speaking of mystery and relationship is speaking psychologically. This assertion is a core tenant of Archetypal Psychology which concerns itself primarily with psyche, or soul as imagined by the Greeks, Renaissance figures like Marsilio Ficino, and Romantic poets and thinkers. This conception of soul illuminates associated patterns shared through human history by both persons and groups because “soul” is perceived not as a thing but as signifying a process of meaning-making via archetypal images wherein private consciousness connects with the public world of daily experience and vice versa.

As Mythology and Theology are characters in this travelogue, psychology (always meant archetypally hereafter) is relevant as a rubric of inquiry because it concerns itself with illuminating relationship and behavior. Let us then costume even whole systems of thought as characters, and pay psychological attention to the images, plots, and themes that move within their stories. This style of inquiry is not only mythological but is also in keeping with the scriptural habits of theologians, mythologists, and psychologists, and certainly reflects the work of the colleagues who appear in conversation here. Two have died, one very recently, and must be represented by the memories of their friends, as well as from texts they have left behind. Those still living will speak for themselves through their texts as well, but also through my memory of our conversations.

## **Dramatis Personae**

### **Huston Smith**

As it is Huston Smith's interest in religion and mythology that generated this exploration, his considerable work in this direction will guide us, beginning with his own mythography. As a graduate student at the University of Chicago, in a paper for "a positivist professor of philosophy" named Dennis, Smith quoted Reinhold Niebuhr as saying that "myth is not history, it is truer than history." Professor Dennis wrote the following on the paper in red pen: "That isn't even wrong; it's meaningless. To be judged true or false an assertion must be meaningful, and the statement you cite has no meaning."<sup>4</sup> Smith continues to insist that the poetic trope is meaningful and that he holds to the stated conclusion. After telling the story, he asked as a

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<sup>4</sup> *The Soul of Christianity*. p18. Also *The Huston Smith Reader*. p153.

corollary “how it is that myths always seem to precede history? When we look at cultures and their transmogrification into civilizations, they always seem to have a myth behind them. Why is that necessary and what is really at work? And how is this related to theology?” This is a vast territory that seems to lend itself less to a comprehensive mechanical analysis and more to an always partial, associative inquiry leading to further questions and storytelling, getting a sense of the terrain as it is traversed.

Niebuhr went beyond “truer than history” to suggest that “unfortunately, the consistent dualism of orthodoxy complicates the task, necessary to the original meaning of the mythology, of relating the absolute to history. It does not adequately express the deeper feelings of the human spirit.”<sup>5</sup> Take away the dualisms created by the literalisms of orthodoxy in relating mystery to experience and it appears that mythology may express humanity’s deeper feelings. But what else is needed, beyond the expression of feeling that operationally roots myth deep in psyche? Is it the unlimited potential of the mythic imagination that is the source of its power to transmogrify. As an example of the power myth wields, consider its natural impact on a classic archetypal power—time.

Huston Smith went to India ten times. On a trip to Brindaban he listened to a tour guide in a western suit lecture at great length to a crowd made mostly of women in saris. Smith turned to a native to make sure the place was indeed Brindaban. The native man replied that it was “the very same.” “Where Krishna was born?” inquired Smith. He was assured that the ground at his feet was “the very spot.” “When?” inquired Smith. “A long time ago!” was the reply. “I understand, but how long?” he asked once more. “A very long time ago.” Came the

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<sup>5</sup> *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr*. p66.

reply. Getting a bit impatient, Smith tried one last time: “Yes. I understand, but can you narrow it down?” At which point the man seemed to understand and relax, saying with great satisfaction “I can tell you. The longest time ago.” If myth expresses something unique about the depth of human feeling and does so in a way that can tune the strings of creativity such that even the time signature of experience can be changed as necessary for the precise narrative expression of mysteries, then myth seems very powerful indeed.

When Joseph Campbell’s and Bill Moyer’s conversation entitled *The Power of Myth* was broadcast and then published in book form, Huston Smith suggested to his friend Campbell that their relationship thereafter had been laid out: “You will handle the Power of Myth and I will handle its Truth.”<sup>6</sup> Reportedly, Campbell was incredulous while Smith remained curious if, borrowing from Noam Chomsky, there might be a Universal Grammar of Myth<sup>7</sup>, a certain structure that may be demonstrated as relevant to all mythologies, thereby changing religious study and making clear how the truth revealing power of myth manifests. How to find out? This essay is in part a response to that question.

It has been Professor Smith’s practice not only to study but also to participate in various religious communities. He did this in order to experience not only their mytho-scriptural context from afar, but also to engage in their ritual practices and draw nearer in this way to their understanding of and relationship with divinity. Smith's worldwide notoriety, and the continued resonance of his published works spanning more than five decades, seem to suggest that being human requires excursions, pilgrimages experienced in search of ways to relate to the

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<sup>6</sup> Also see Smith *The Soul of Christianity* p18.

<sup>7</sup> Also see Smith *Tales of Wonder* p189 for a “Universal Grammar of Worldviews”



provocative unknown that seems to frame, or at least exert significant influence on every era of human life. It also seems from Smith's work that while shuttling back and forth between the known and unknown we would do well to weave understanding on the loom of direct experience rather than depending singularly on received doctrines. He seems to perceive religious truths through the lens of consciously adopted hermeneutics, navigating via sympathy with different orientations rather than opting for one exclusive way of seeing. For instance, deciding that sacred texts are either factual or fictional, which he eschews, might leave out the truths revealed by the poetic relationship between the concrete and metaphorical. A literally-minded theology might study texts offering ideas about God, or a god, or gods in a way that hinders discovery of the truthfulness of religion in general and its application to human being. Following Smith, a more nuanced inquiry explores not only the theology native to a single religion or denomination, but also engages in wider religious studies comparing not only the history of specific ritualized beliefs but also the perennial themes found in divergent traditions. Since the nineteenth century, this has been the emerging practice in secular religious studies, which usually distinguish themselves from denominational theology by becoming cross-cultural, comparing behavior and belief both in and beyond institutions using strategies from other disciplines.

But Religious Studies is also subject to believing its own interpretive myths, and can lean toward an explanatory and factual/historical perspective, borrowed from the social sciences, inherited from decades of legitimacy being equated with a scientific approach. Smith takes many opportunities to label the belief in science's lock on truth as "scientism," thereby aligning himself with the other thinkers who appear here. This is not to say that to practice the

scientific method is to believe in scientism. Certainly, there are many in the world of scientific experimentation who see the beauty of pairing a domain with its own language—“mythology is to religion what mathematics is to physics,”<sup>8</sup> and I would say “mythology is to belief.” But it has often been fruitful to draw a more wiggly and dotted line between domains and delve further into the areas where apparently discrete approaches address similar questions. The second day of the Spring PCTS meeting which includes this essay has a great deal of promise for this reason, theologians digging into “myth in the heart of science.”

Following related themes found in divergent traditions requires an avoidance of reduction to an easily measurable scope. Instead, some perspective is sought that accounts for what is known of the factual past while leaving avenues open to explore the scope of the human imagination in an ongoing struggle with mystery through the intimate creative psychology of narrative. This is where religion, theology, and mythology meet, but where theology often holds itself aloof, as a visitor, and mythology makes its home. While Huston Smith’s archetypalism is immediately apparent in his perennialist stance, his work as a mythographer is more of an open secret, as he performs the interpretive magic attributed to the mythic imagination while appearing to work more traditionally on Belief through the exploration of theologies. This is the beginning of a response to Smith’s question about the similarities and differences that arise when world-view shaping beliefs are seen psychologically by way of theology and mythology: in many cases, we mythopsychologists are following his lead.

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<sup>8</sup> *The Huston Smith Reader* p100.

## Joseph Campbell

The questions of origin and interpretation that both myth and religion address also exerted a strong attractive force on Huston Smith's friend, mythologist Joseph Campbell. Growing more psychologically informed as he read C.G. Jung, Campbell triangulated archetypal images with his research on religious systems and symbols, struggling to stretch theological study beyond the formal structures of rational interpretation owned and shaped by monolithic faith traditions. As Campbell did, contemporary mythology tends to wax more psychological than early mythologists recommended, casting diffuse light onto the often shadowy intersection of narrative, belief, and what I call "culturopoiesis,"<sup>9</sup> the narrative crafting of culture. Borrowing from specifically literary scholarship, contemporary mythologists also wonder about "mythicness"<sup>10</sup>, an inherently fictional orientation in the nature of consciousness, and deploy culturally nuanced tools of inquiry not only to map the structure of belief but also to follow its trail down psychological paths to the private and public behavior that follows.

From the "Venus" and bone flute of Hohle Fels, and stories suggested by the walls of Chauvet, to the "Fertile Crescent" scriptural traditions that are thousands of years old and still in creative, culturo-poetic flux, mythologists do well to follow Joseph Campbell, tracking artifacts and narratives which suggest and reveal images of divinity; exploring ritual and archetypal experience together. Considered theologically or mythologically, the perennial themes he documented are woven into lasting literature with provocative and ambivalent

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<sup>9</sup> WilliamsCraig p63.

<sup>10</sup> In particular, see page 264 of Wilhelm Dupré's *Religion in Primitive Cultures: A Study in Ethnophilosophy*. (1975). Also see page 119 of Eric Gould's *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature* (1981).

images of transcendence and depth that persist into daily life. Campbell having made a rather large splash with the help of Bill Moyers (*Power of Myth*) and George Lucas (*Star Wars*), contemporary mythological study morphed into an organized but openly participatory method of tracking religiously held and frequently institutionalized belief to its psychological lair, where it reproduces itself as mythic narratives, ritual, public policy, and other interpretive behavior. But Campbell frequently missed the potential partnership of his contemporaries studying theology who also delved deeply, if into their particular spiritual tradition, in order to provide a critique of the ways habits of literalistic belief can impact the world-view of believers and the society around them.

Perhaps the consideration of Campbell's work in theological settings, like the Pacific Coast Theological Society, bodes well for theological and mythological understanding sharing the benefits of a comparative method of both study and co-creation. Certainly, students of both theology and mythology who would like to correct past reductionism are at least in part driven by curiosity about the ways human beings consciously and unconsciously process experience by way of imagination. Both disciplines study the ways narrative encapsulates and deploys meaning, thereby internalizing and reproducing systems of belief by incorporating metaphors, stories, and themes in the rituals of daily life. Once used as a reductive subcategory of many academic disciplines to relegate "other peoples' myths" (Doniger) to the realm of superstition, thanks in large part to Joseph Campbell, "mythology" now refers to an independent field of cultural analysis and psychological study that investigates the part imagination plays in weaving both experience and specific interpretation into understanding and belief.

Theology and mythology are related at the root by being responses to this weaving, and

Campbell found endless examples to illustrate that the planetary socio-cultural record can itself seem like a vast narrative portraying attempts to navigate the terrain both mapped and crafted by the metaphorical tectonics of spirit, wonder, soul, and belief. All of these have shifting meanings but nonetheless play a formative role in the investigations and convictions that lead to the daylight and shadowy politics of commerce and psychology of social influence.

Campbell interpreted Freud's revelation as something like "myths...are public dreams: dreams are private myths,"<sup>11</sup> vigilantly observing the shifting between the two to see what emerges. Theology too is empowered to gaze at the dreamlike illusions of uncomplicated belief until the ambiguous images resolve into this idea or that, all the while knowing that the resolutions apparently established by conviction and rhetorical power do not remove the underlying ambiguity. In this process, theologizing, psychologizing, and mythologizing are ritual parts of the same poetic process, fundamentally and imperatively human, inescapable, and desperately in need of the kind of regard that the finest feeling, study, expression, and imagining can bring, because the way in which we believe and the work of our hands are intimately and causally connected to the worlds that we make.

### **James Hillman**

This territory of psychological poetics is explored at great depth by James Hillman and the other pillars of Archetypal Psychology, an approach rooted firmly in the Complex Psychology<sup>12</sup> of C.G. Jung and in the humanities. A psychology becomes archetypal when it

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<sup>11</sup> *Myths to Live By*. p19.

<sup>12</sup> Sonu Shamdasani, the foremost historian of Jungian ideas, reports in *Jung and the Making of Modern Psychology: the Dream of a Science*, that Jung renamed Analytical Psychology "Complex Psychology" (14) in the 1930's, referring to the psychological use of the word "complex" and also to the complexity of "psychical systems."

listens to mythological voices to learn how human beings seem always to have been moved by both tangible and intangible "forces" which feel beyond human control. This is the land of both conscious thought and unconscious dream from which all religiously expressed behavior seems to originate, and which both mythology and theology address. Mythology's fascination with soul can be to theology's devotion to spirit what archetypal psychology is to contemporary psychotherapy, which is to say a non-progressive "therapy of culture."<sup>13</sup> *Care of the Soul* author Thomas Moore writes about the strategies of archetypal psychology in *Blue Fire*:

Work with dreams, for example, requires an appreciation for the integrity and self-determination of the dream. Hillman argues strongly against all symbolic and allegorical translations of dream imagery into ideas, concepts, and humanistic applications. We should not lose the dream in the light of day; rather, we should visit the land of dream and be affected by the peculiarities of that world. Hillman sees most modes of interpretation, whether they are brash or subtle, as heroic, herculean efforts to spoil imagination, ultimately to defend against the challenging otherness of the dream or image...Hillman's therapeutic approaches do not favor the ego; in this way his work is a true psychotherapy, or therapy of the soul. When speaking of therapy and life, he recalls the words of the poet John Keats, who called this world, "the vale of soul-making." Soul-making is not interpretation, it is not change, and it is not self-improvement--all modern attempts to get the upper hand on fate and therefore to constrain the soul. (6)

Where theology is heir to a tradition that is spiritually uplifting, dividing the experience of divinity into philosophical proofs, mythology suggests a soulful deepening into poetry which naturally continues an appreciation for the integrity and autonomy of the images that signify the divine without claiming it. Myth lives in the "psychologically polytheistic"<sup>14</sup> realm of god-

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<sup>13</sup> A Confucian idea but also see Hillman's *Alchemical Psychology*.

<sup>14</sup> Please see David L. Miller's *The New Polytheism: Rebirth of the Gods and Goddesses*.

images David L. Miller describes, and favors the dropping of experience into understanding that feels like soul work, perhaps soul food, as a truly nourishing story can bring the heart closer into relationship with mystery than can a sharply defined proof.

### **David L. Miller**

As mentioned above, James Hillman illustrates throughout his work the history and impact of the creative writing that underlies psychology's theory and practice, particularly in *Myth of Analysis* and *Healing Fictions*. In doing so he calls into question the true mission of psychology, objects to its modernist, ego-strengthening bias and realigns its practice with the needs of psyche/soul. David L. Miller, Emeritus Watson-Ledden Professor of Religion at Syracuse University, provides the same service to theology, offering mythopsychological and poetic responses to theological questions. Miller was a colleague of Huston Smith's at Syracuse, a dear friend of Joseph Campbell and James Hillman, and a teacher of mine and of Thomas Moore's. At the beginning of his career Miller worked with Norman O. Brown, exploring the mythopsychological depths of religious expression, and learning from Brown to call that process "theopoetics." Miller is one of the best kept secrets in each of his fields, having been an innovative voice in religious studies, psychology, literary studies, and mythography.

He helps us here into a more extensive exploration of the relationship between belief, in the shape of religion expressed as theology, and mythology precisely because, like Huston Smith, he has become a master teacher and is able to interrelate all four areas. In his essential

books<sup>15</sup> he explores the relationship of mythology, psychology, and theology to a depth and degree which can barely even be hinted at here, as evidenced in his work on the Trinity in *Three Faces of God*:

No wonder the Trinity is [...] an offense to reason, a stumbling block to belief, and a folly in experience! How can we connect with that which in this book has been put together (remembered theologically) and reflected on (contemplated mythologically)? It is at this point that the poets may be crucial in leading the Trinity through into life. Poetry, by way of metaphors, dramatizes lifelike-nesses, “erweckten sie uns...ein Gleichnis” (awakening a likeness in us), showing the connections by seeing through the images’ ideas. This “seeing through” is critical in religion, and it is guaranteed in religion by the particular rhetoric of religion --parable, allegory, analogy, similitude, correspondence, and symbol. In short, trinitarian iconoclasm can be guaranteed if and whenever our understandings are poetized...Theopoetic--theology viewed as poetry--can save us from idolatries and fixations, which, even if correct, may well remain regressive. (96)

In the context of relating religion and mythology, Miller illustrates how the latter serves the former by seeing it as poetry, a fictional stumbling block to literal believing.

I sat down with David Miller at the “Longing for Beauty” conference, given by the Dallas Institute for Humanities and Culture, and let him know of the Society's interest in the intersection of religion, theology, and mythology. I asked if he would like to draw our collective attention to any particular part of the relationship. He reminded me of a friend and colleague of his, named Dan Noel, whose class on Native American traditions it had been my pleasure to attend, and at

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<sup>15</sup> *Interpretation: The Poetry of Meaning*, Edited with Stanley Romaine Hopper (1967); *Gods & Games: Toward a Theology of Play* (1970 or 1973); *The New Polytheism: Rebirth of the Gods & Goddesses* (1974 or 1981); *Christs: Meditations on Archetypal Images in Christian Theology* (1981 or 2005); *Three Faces of God: Traces of the Trinity in Literature & Life* (1986 or 2005); *Hells & Holy Ghosts: A Theopoetics of Christian Belief* (1989 or 2004); *Jung & the Interpretation of the Bible* (1995).



the end of which Noel had died unexpectedly. Noel had been working on a book on the dangers of unexamined belief, and Miller has devoted time recently to developing this work further in a way that explores the relationship of mythology to theology. Miller shared this story.

While in graduate school, his Greek language class had worked to translate 1 John 5:10, each student putting an offering up on the black board. The various conjugations of *pistis* are usually translated as one form or another of the English verb “believe” but, as Young’s Literal Translation has it, *pisteuōn* (πιστεύων) does not suggest “believes” but something closer to “is believing.” Miller was not satisfied with this because, even in an activated tense, belief is often understood to be an end result--a culminating certainty, which does not capture the Greek sense of continuing thought in action. Instead of using the expected “belief” Miller took poetic license and substituted “faithing into,” for which he received sharp criticism, meaning it like the sense of the phrase “she is really into skiing.” Belief is something you get into and get obsessive about but, unlike a hobby, it may be difficult to realize that this is both essential to the process and dangerous at the same time, as fixation is a prerequisite of pathology.

Miller pointed out to me that C.G. Jung also struggled with this question of faith and the nature of belief as well. It appeared in Jung’s private Red Book,<sup>16</sup> did not make it into his more public Black Book, and he addressed the question explicitly and in public only in his private seminar on Nietzsche’s “Zarathustra” given in 1934-1939,<sup>17</sup> telling his class “I say to people: ‘For heaven’s sake, don’t believe; we know nothing, we have no experience, so in what and why should I believe?’” An editor’s note suggests that “Jung always took ‘I believe’ to be an

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<sup>16</sup> *Liber Novus: The Red Book*. (2009).

<sup>17</sup> *Nietzsche’s “Zarathustra”* (1988). See particularly pp 291-295 of the first volume.

instance of having an opinion, in contrast to real knowledge.”(294)

Offered as a mythological gift for theology, the limitations of belief which attend “mythology’s” fictional sense potentially keep mystery alive while the search for experience of both the heights and depths of transcendence continues. Unquestionably, there are a wide variety of individual temperaments at play in each way of interpreting religious impulses but, especially as a hermeneutic, mythology tends to take belief seriously while refusing to take its objects literally, especially its own claims to objectivity, whereas theology has a history of obsessive orthodoxy, believing in a given metaphor as though it were a thing and singular, that is to say literally.

### **Thomas Moore**

It is for serving the polymorphous soul of religion with a poetic sensibility that Thomas Moore is known. He was part of a Catholic religious community, enjoyed the mentorship of James Hillman, was a student of David Miller’s at Syracuse, and answered a widely felt need for soul care that made his writing a series of best-sellers. He mythologizes theology in a way that re-opens the door to the mystery often closed behind centuries of argument. Also a friend of Huston Smith, following the “Longing for Beauty” conference, I acquainted Moore with this paper as a work in progress. By way of a contribution, he prioritized mentioning how many people understand “theology” to be divided by tradition, i.e. a disciplined consideration of one particular faith’s ideas about divinity. He finds this a stumbling block and “can’t work that way,” so he is as clear as he can be that he considers theology to be a contemplation of sacred texts in general, which he also sees as the purpose of mythology. The

pejorative associations that continue to hang around its neck prevent him from saying “Greek Mythology”, however, so he tends to opt for “Greek sacred texts” which put the work on an even footing with other theological enterprises. In this way he too acknowledges that in order to work as a psychotherapist and write theo-poetically he must first be a mythologist, which is to say a soul-worker in the deepening twists and turns of belief.

He writes that “the medieval idea about learning, that theology is the ultimate science and all the others are ‘ancillary’ — in humble service — is, to me, absolutely correct. Every issue, no matter how secular it appears to be, has a sacred dimension.”<sup>18</sup> But he also suggests that “we have yet to create a discipline of theology for the new century that is upon us”<sup>19</sup> that might be able to truly nourish the sacred dimensions in what is usually deemed to be unrelated to the sacred-secular distinction. In each book, Moore seems to draw attention to the relationship breaking, the sin, of institutionalization and show that the distance between institutional Christianity and belief moderated by the soul’s poetic sensibility, for instance, is what depotentiates the mysteries that Christian Theologians study? Moore’s oeuvre is a study of religious themes addressed through the corrective mythological lens of archetypal psychology.

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<sup>18</sup> *Care of the Soul* (1994). p290.

<sup>19</sup> *The Education of the Heart* (1997). p102.

### **The soul of mythopsychology**

This excursion into archetypal theory with theology in mind is necessary because myth's dialogue with religion allows the mythologist to make clear why mythology is necessary, continues to grow, and fills a specific niche in the history of ideas and the philosophy of knowledge. Perhaps its most important contribution lies in the fact that mythology comes at its work from the side, from the marginal and popular perspective of fiction, untrustworthily, dragging behind it the lamentably simplistic "oh, that's just a myth", rather than first establishing a buttoned-down, infinitely respectable, culturally enshrined and required gravity of purpose. The best place to see mythopsychology's various aspects is, of course, in public, in action.

Rather than in the traditional scriptures mythology or theology usually address, an example of the contemporary mythologizing in the literary study of fiction might be a better place to see mythography in action. In the November 21st, 2011, New Yorker where Martin Amis waxes poetical about writer Don DeLillo's "prophetic soul," he is describing a psychological myth-maker at his craft. Please excuse the length of the quote, but its entirety is required to see how Amis closes with what may be taken as a glance over several of the core functions of mythopsychology.

In common with his extraordinary ear for jargon (not least the jargon of everyday life), DeLillo's predictive powers have been much remarked. To take one graphic instance, it is clear that he never regarded the World Trade Center as a pair of buildings: to him they were always a pair of bull's eyes. In the novel "Players" (1977), Pammy Wynant works in the W.T.C. for a grief-management firm: "The towers didn't seem permanent. They remained concepts, no less transient for all their bulk than some routine distortion of light." This is certainly very striking--though we may wonder if the quoted lines shine brighter as prose because they

happened to come true. DeLillo said long ago that the mood of the future would be determined not by writers but by terrorists; and those who mocked him for this forecast must have felt even worse than the rest of us did on September 12, 2001. Although the story "Hammer and Sickle" was published in 2010, by which time the fraying of Western economies was far advanced, DeLillo is already sensing the vague insurrectionary stirrings that are a phenomenon of the past couple of months. I would nevertheless submit that it is his general receptivity to the rhythms and atmosphere of the future that we should value, rather than the slightly carny business of confirmable outcomes. And here DeLillo's angle of indirection is inimitably acute. Jerold Bradway is in a correctional facility for financial felons--in other words, part of a whole prisonful of Bernie Madoffs. Each weekday, the flabby culprits gather in the common room to watch a market report on a cable channel. The presenters are two little girls. "Did it seem crazy, a market report for kids?" Indeed--and the more so when we learn that the girls are Jerold's daughters, Kate, twelve, and Laurie, ten:

"The word is Dubai . . . Dubai," Laurie said.

"The cost of insuring Dubai's debt against default has increased one, two, three, four times."

"Do we know what that means?"

"It means the Dow Jones Industrial Average is down, down, down."

"Deutsche Bank."

"Down."

"London--the FTSE One Hundred Index."

"Down."

"Amsterdam--the ING Group."

"Down."

"The Hang Seng in Hong Kong."

"Crude oil. Islamic bonds."

"Down, down, down."

"The word is Dubai."

"Say it."

"Dubai," Kate said.

And we are invited to look even further ahead: these, after all, are the reproving voices of our swindled children.

In the end, "Hammer and Sickle" errs on the side of overexcitement (at about the point where the girls' duologues start to rhyme); but overexcitement is something that the DeLillo faithful will be exhilarated to see. Creative gaiety, a sense of fun and play, has been too firmly suppressed by the almost morbid tentativeness of his most recent novels and novelas. Literature seeks to give "instruction and delight": Dryden's tag, formulated three and a half centuries ago, has worn pretty well. We reflect, all the same, that whereas instruction doesn't always delight, delight always instructs. Very broadly, we read fiction to have a good time--though this is not to deny that the gods have equipped DeLillo with the antennae of a visionary. There is right field, and there is left field. He comes from third field--aslant, athwart.

It takes a bit of patience to see where theology becomes obviously a part of the mythological (fictional interpretive) exercise above. This is even more so because the vision-granting "gods" named with tongue firmly placed in cheek might obfuscate with irony the Power with Many Names which is truly worshipped daily with fervor and sacrifices--World Trade, the Dow Jones Industrial Average, Crude Oil, Bonds, Banks, that is to say The Market. Each of the dynamics which follows, excerpted from Amis' catalogue of DeLillo's virtues, forms an incomplete list of the functions of mythography which deserve, and in many cases have received, at least one book's worth of explication. They appear here to support what has already been said about mythography and give an idea of the field's scope and places of contact with the functions of theology.

Amis celebrates DeLillo's "soul," and does not clarify the use of the term explicitly. In the skills he describes in order to praise what seems to him like prophecy, however, he outlines the mythographer's idea of soul as Archetypal Psychology understands the word: the

process of meaning-making through psychological depth as distinct from the upward reaching progress of Spirit. What Amis finds in DeLillo's work is a fit resume for a mythographer. Studying the ways meaning is configured through narrative and then shapes culture leads to an extraordinary critical "ear for jargon" and also to what can be a prophetic voice, ever (archetypally) paired with being mocked. Certainly, it can seem to be fictional work indeed to claim to be in contact with divinities, even psychological entities, and to speak about them, even metaphorically, serving as an intermediary between humanity and powers of which most are unconscious. Taking uncertain fictions seriously conveys at the structural level a "general receptivity to the rhythms and atmosphere of the future" ... "rather than the slightly carnal business of confirmable outcomes" and, given the choice between confirmable outcomes and work with the imagination, one can see why mythography grows unpredictably in a culture with a scientific world-view. Seeing mythic themes 'round every corner habituates the mind to the protean nature of Truth in the face of truths, giving the capacity to weigh "concepts, no less transient for all their bulk than some routine distortion of light." Continued metaphorical weighing of these concepts leads to sensing "insurrectionary stirrings [as] a phenomenon" and developing a disciplined critical habit, an almost martial "angle of indirection [that] is inimitably acute." As children are renowned for delivering truths while innocent of the consequences, a field that studies fables, case studies, folklore, scripture, legislation, and manifesti as though all were fiction offers creative opportunities for "reproving voices" to speak to power—the opportunity to understand how what was once considered a game for children to be discovered as necessary for survival, human life on earth falling prey to the mythography of Profit.

### **The dialectical soul of theology**

Even if a mythologist can “err on the side of overexcitement,” and wander too far from the rigor associated with acting like a social science, those accustomed to the “morbid tentativeness” of academic interpretive studies might “be exhilarated to see [the] creative gaiety, [and] a sense of fun and play” that can wed “instruction and delight.” It is in this marriage that one learns to see in a way that “comes from third field--aslant, athwart” and reveals the narrative relationships on which culture is built. The implied conflict between religion and myth (which is True?!) is a false flag operation by the religiously literal. Also, few would suggest that the theologian lacks the skills necessary to perform mythographic research necessary to become intimate with the types of “gods” to which Amis refers. The deeper challenge comes in going against one's own corporate culture to do so, as well as disrupting the system which has always provided established thinkers their bread and butter.

At this time in its development as a field, Mythology has the leisure of being expected to be counter-cultural, but it may continue to serve this function when its novelty fades, where others have failed and become predictable, because of its nature. Mythology can err on the side of being too “New-agey” at about the point where cultural comparativism becomes indiscriminate; theology might could do with the exhilaration of shedding its tendency to be morbidly tentative and err on the side of poetic delight, thereby revitalizing its instruction. The dialogue between Mythology and Psychology creates the “third field” of religious and literary study which comes athwart the common practice of many established disciplines, including the industries of written theology and clinical psychology, and extends visionary antennae by way of the imagination.

### **Culturopoiesis**



Changes in mytho- and theological study can change the world not only of the academy but also of debates arising in the public sphere, especially as relates to the relationship between religion and science. The dramatis personae of this inquiry seem unanimous in their praise for and participation in the mythographic rigors of religio-cultural comparativism and cross-disciplinary study, and they critique as scientism the belief that the only truth lies in facts that can be verified by humans reproducing the completely controlled investigation of other humans. Along with colleagues in other disciplines, they advocate the discipline of being specific about the world-view in which an inquiry takes place without making exclusive claims about the universal truth of one's findings.

One consequence of this sea-change in contemporary thought has to do with a more specific idea of precision which is determined by the narrative environment and scope of an inquiry, thereby giving the investigator into cultural behavior poetic tools more suited to the soul and its humanities than are often wielded by the sciences. As a result, the study of and care for soul, or psychology, means more than it ever has, at least since medical doctors began purposely mistranslating Freud's "seele" as "mind" instead of "soul."<sup>20</sup> So too theology is deploying poetic strategies to escape its historical reductions to singularly Christian and even denominationally specific ideas about divinity. Thanks to Huston Smith and a growing number like him, theologians more frequently show an interest in the truths resident in images native to unfamiliar mythologies, and in the way they interpret their texts and extend their beliefs into

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<sup>20</sup> Bettelheim makes clear that Freud is pervasively mistranslated, most egregiously in the conversion of the very purposefully chosen and repeated word "Seele and seelisch," or soul. Freud chose this "rather than geistig because geistig refers mainly to the rational aspects of the mind, to that of which we are conscious" Please see *Freud and Man's Soul* (1983). p76.

practical and ritual forms. This is an excursion into the realm historically studied as mythology, which now also means more than any of the single definitions imposed on it by those who have customarily attempted to plant the flag of their discipline on the shores of mythological thought in the ongoing academic wars for categorical and disciplinary supremacy.

The dilemma facing adherents of academic disciplines is the same, to some degree, that it has always been: the choice between disputation to defeat an opposition and lay claim to The Truth, even in an arena that needn't have been host to a zero-sum game, or dialectic to sharpen the mind while exploring the potential meanings offered by a inclusive and poetic understanding of human experience. Do we need more Tertullians, for instance, who made classical philosophy responsible for heresies in the Christian church of the second and third centuries, moving from that conclusion to assert the logical incompatibility of philosophy and the scripture? "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" he demands, "or the Academy with the Church?"<sup>21</sup> He attributes to demons the popular paganism which appears to arise from the practice of philosophy,<sup>22</sup> and attributes heavenly wisdom to select Scriptures that were approved in his day.

If a clear choice between combatant ideologies is desired, then the value of Athens' voice to Jerusalem reaches no further than its use to Tertullian--to frame the position of the enemy in order to attack it all the more fiercely. If, however, it is desirable to understand the world-view that produces ideas with which some agree but others do not, then a mythological approach reveals that Athens' voice is indispensable to Jerusalem--it's felt presuppositions, unconscious habits of thought, and mythic forbears revealed mythographically in its style and angle of

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<sup>21</sup> *De praescriptione*. (vii)

<sup>22</sup> *De anima*. (i)

approach. Real capitals of actual nations are raised and razed, after all, by way of the rhetoric and convictions of those who lift their voices to realize the products of their imagination.

Beyond the satisfaction of seeking a nuanced poetry of meaning in the relationship between religion and mythology, Huston Smith's query matters because we enact and incorporate in the workings of our hearts and societies both what and how we believe. Tertullian's brilliance and passion created a particular kind of cultural expectation on which the rhetoric of later thought and then social regulation was built. If style, or narrative environment, is a mythological framework based on world-view through which the deep intentions of cultural position are better understood, then one of the most prodigious gifts of psychological mythography may be the fact that the form of one's fictions extends beyond the private realm into the public, revealing the links between.

Reflecting on this culturopoiesis is a way of opening a mythology to admit to its power and ubiquity, thereby making it less suitable as an unconscious building block of ideology. Presupposing culturopoiesis also offers opportunities to chart contemporary cultural experience as though it were "in" mythicity, mythic consciousness, which can shift existing ideologies in the direction of being recognizable as mythology, one plot among many in the stories which make up a culture. Abstract theories and labels, for instance, might be revealed as being inadequate. Tribal nostalgia and partisan loyalties which fail to represent the experience of living in community might be more likely to undergo revision.

As an idea and meaning-making strategy, culturopoiesis contributes to the transformation of contemporary society into an environment in which life may flourish because it involves waking from the dream of literalism into mythicity aware of its own dreaming, treats theological

ideas with respect but not simplistic belief, and so is not susceptible in the same way to domination by single myths become ideologies. Waking into mythicity involves participatory dreaming, accepting that any single narrative is always an expression of the agendas that created it and not to be believed literally, but to be taken seriously as an archetypal force and imagined as fully as possible so antecedents, social dilemmas, and change opportunities are not lost track of in the attraction of its claims. Mythologized theologies aware of the ways they make culture are a conceptual tool for applying imaginal salve to the wounds of literalism, leading to dialectic rather than diatribe. Potentially this process makes us more humane in relation to each other by bringing us into conscious contact with limitation, power, finitude, imagination, and other never-fully-known forces which sculpt the hidden contours of life.

Joseph Campbell was asked over and over, following his assertion that the old myths had perished and were lurking as dried ideological husks, to name the “new myth” which might take their place. More often than not he shrugged and said that, if one were to arise, it would need to account for the entire planet and all the life thereon. Thanks to Huston Smith<sup>23</sup>, and many others beside those included in this essay, there is an answer that can "provid[e] the culture with [a] *fundamental self- understanding of an orientation toward what is*" (xxv) "which leavens the culture as a whole and renders it secure against destruction from without,"(8) and "strikes all...notes as a chord. In developing this chord of an adequate world-culture...traditions come as equals. Each has something to contribute, and something to learn as well." (14) Given a mythopsychological lens, the rising mythology that can bring the world into community with itself and initiate the practice of peace is a kind of theopoetic ecumenism that psychological

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<sup>23</sup> *Huston Smith: Essays On World Religion.*

mythography and theology working together can build. It is in the poetic language of that World's Religion that any true follower of Huston Smith must speak.

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