

## Mystic Faces, History's Traces: Joseph Campbell, Irish Mystic

The Sufi mystic al-Hallaj said the same thing, 'I and my Beloved are one,' and he too was crucified. This is the mystical realization: you and that divine immortal being of beings of which you are a particle, are one (*Mythic Worlds, Modern Words* 71).

Each reader of Joseph Campbell's enormous body of work comes to it seeking what one needs, desires, hopes for or, in some instances, may not expect. I thought that what was going to be the big magnet was what he discerned about myth. I stayed for lunch, to feast on, to my surprise, at the mystical quality of his thought, disposition and insights. That is my topic of exploration for this essay. But I also choose to write about him for several reasons that link us, beyond our passion for underlining books as a form of meditation. "Kindred souls" is too kitschy for my tastes; and yet...

Both the Campbell and the Slattery clans have their origins in County Mayo on the western terrain of southern Ireland. As individuals in those clans, both Campbell and I love to explore that interstitial space that lies moist and shadowy between the realms of spirit, poetry, the depth psychology of C.G. Jung, myth and history. Moreover, we share a love of teaching ( I am in my 39<sup>th</sup>. year in the classroom); a sense of humor which shields us from taking ourselves too seriously; a love of language's lyric and metaphoric inflections; a desire to migrate ideas hatched in our reading and teaching to the wider cultural landscape; an openness to travel and to other

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cultural habits of mind and behavior; a belief, explicit or more subtle, that some deep relationship obtains between the mystic and the poet. To this last venue, Joseph Campbell was both.

Campbell added immeasurably to the conversation on world mythology; his major strength as I understand him, is as a magnificent synthesizer a harvester of ideas through narrative agglutination. His ability to sum up, to sniff out relationships, to intuit analogies, to create metaphorical bridges between what appear to be disparate cultural expressions, is remarkable, especially when added to his own original insights, adroitly affirmed with both conviction and grace. So often have I gazed at his neat, thin and sharply-penciled hand on yellow legal pads of his work in the Joseph Campbell Archives housed at Pacifica Graduate Institute. He had adopted the habit of summarizing a book in neat bullet points on yellow paper. The curator for the Archives, Richard Buchen, told my students and me that when Campbell finished a book, he would summarize it in one page, a compressed distillation of many pages of neatly-inscribed notes. It is as if he compressed in order to better comprehend what he had read. Compression and comprehension went hand in hand with his thin silver metal ruler, the instrument he used with fidelity during his meditation exercises. It is safely housed in a glass case in the Archives, reminding one

of a crown jewel under glass, or a sliver of the true cross on eternal display for pilgrims to gaze on with reverence and awe.

His own roots are no less compressed. His grandfather, Charles, The Larsens' biography of Campbell informs us, sailed from County Mayo during the three years (1845-47) in which the potato crop failed. Charles marries and has three children: Mary and Rebecca and Charles William, who will become Joseph Campbell's father (*Fire in the Mind* 6). Reflecting later on his family's heritage and their living in Boston, Joseph Campbell said that "being an Irish Catholic in Boston or New York in those days...was 'to be neither fish nor fowl'" (7).

Early in 1928, when he is 24, his biographers relate, he makes his first sojourn to Ireland. His initial quips about his impressions reflect the vernacular speaking that Campbell would be known for throughout his life: "Ireland was a funny little dream," and "My trip to Ireland was a riot" (95). Much later, and now accompanied by his wife, Jean, the two travel to Ireland in 1957 so he can trace, with great relish, the sacred geography of *Finnegans Wake*, and "to follow the course of the hearse in the *Wake*" (Larsen 433). The land of his heritage takes on a mythopoetic hue as Campbell tracks the mystical, dreamy novel of James Joyce published 4 May, 1939 (*A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake* xiii). Five years later,

Campbell, along with Henry Morton Robinson, publish *The Skeleton Key* in 1944, which remained for years the only extensive guide to such an innovative and enigmatic fictional labyrinth stewing language, myth, history and pure Irish genius.

Readers of Campbell would not be surprised to learn that Joyce's dream work captured the imagination of the budding mythologist, for the novel carries both a mythos and a mystical linguistic landscape that I believe lies at the heart of Campbell's inclinations as a writer and as a person. To that sensibility, or way of being conscious to and in the world, I wish to devote the remainder of this essay. I hope to reveal some of the lineaments of this propensity for the mystical in and through his involvement with the mythical. Indeed, like Thomas Merton or the Anglican priest, Bede Griffiths, or C. G. Jung, Campbell is both a synthesizer and a unifier of large sweeps of history and culture. His delight lies largely in seeking and discovering patterns inherent in the human soul that find expression in world mythologies and religious traditions, literary patterns and rituals world-wide. His landscape of exploration is global, finding within it inflected (one of his favorite words) local customs and mores of behavior and thought. To that extent, he is an inheritor of a tradition of work begun in 1934 when Maud Bodkin wrote her classic work, *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* that, she

hoped would further unite the studies of “psychology and imaginative literature” (Preface v). Freud and Jung were her two priests of the imagination in this innovative project.

Perhaps a salient place to begin is with an observation of Campbell’s in *Oriental Mythology*, the second volume of his magnum opus, *The Masks of God*. Largely in this study, but not exclusively, he practices his own form of cultural and mythological yoga, by which I mean to point to the origin of that word, which Campbell obliges by stating: “The Indian term *yoga* is derived from the Sanskrit verbal root *yuj*, ‘to link, join, or unite,’ which is related etymologically to ‘yoke,’ a yoke of oxen, and is in sense analogous to the word ‘religion’ (Latin *re-ligio*), ‘to link back, or bind’” (13). I sense that Campbell is perhaps one of the most astute and persistently-practicing yogis in that his work sustains this quality of “linking back,” of sensing analogies where someone else might see only differentiation, separation, even alienation. His work reveals to me the writer’s intense desire to burst through “the illusion of duality, [which] is the trick of *maya*. ‘Thou art that’ (*tat tvam asi*) is the proper thought for the first step to wisdom. By collapsing the *I* of myself into the *Thou* of the other, dualism is usurped, a linking is established and a consciousness of wholeness is achieved. Herein lies the heart beat of Campbell’s life work as I understand it.

Moreover, something else is roiling about in these early pages of this volume. He wishes at the same time to further “the basic difference between the Oriental and Occidental approaches to the cultivation of the soul” (15), a distinction I wish to link back to throughout this essay. Campbell designs it this way:

...spiritual maturity, as understood in the modern Occident, requires a differentiation of *ego* from *id*, whereas in the Orient, throughout the history at least of every teaching that has stemmed from India, ego (*aham-kara*: ‘the making of the sound ‘I’) is impugned as the principle of libidinous delusion, to be dissolved. (15)

What I wish the reader to note in the above distinction is the place of history in the making of such a constant position derived from India and to hold that for a moment, to be linked to an observation Campbell delineates a few pages later. Ever a storyteller, he deploys narratives themselves to press home an observation or an insight. In relating the story of the “Buddha-to-be,” the prince Gautama Shakyamuni, he follows him on his quest wherein the young man “seeks the knowledge that should release all beings from sorrow” (17) until he reaches the still point of the revolving universe, which, Campbell observes, “is described here in mythological terms, lest it should be taken for a physical place to be sought somewhere on earth. For its location is psychological” (17). He continues by affirming that this point is one of balance and equilibrium, and more importantly, it is “in the mind

from which the universe can be perfectly regarded: the still-standing point of disengagement around which all things turn” (17).

I find these statements by him in relatively close succession to be marrying several important stems of thought: history, spiritual awakening, mythology and psychology. Blended together in Campbell’s life-long studies, these disciplines, together with his passion for wisdom embodied in multiple, but primarily Western, literary traditions, comprise the mythic mystic that is this unique student of world mythologies. In addition, his citation above is cautionary, and one he tirelessly repeated throughout his life: mistaking the vehicle of an image for the tenor of its reality to which it points. This confusion, I sense, occurs when the condition of mind is literal rather than contemplative, as he reminds us in speaking of the image of the Promised Land: “Its connotation—that is, its real meaning—however, is of a spiritual place in the heart that can only be entered by contemplation” (*Thou Art That* 7).

I refer the reader back to Campbell’s distinction above that “the supporting point of the universe” within Shakyamuni’s quest is described in mythological terms “lest it should be taken for a physical place.” Here is a pivot point of contention for Campbell: to mistake, as he will say later, borrowing an old image from .....the finger pointing at the moon, for the

moon itself; in the postmodern lingo of literary criticism, to mistake the signifier for the thing signified. To do so is to commit a cardinal mythological transgression: to take the metaphor literally, or to mistake the symbol for what is now to be understood symbolically, or to take the figure for the ground. A more accurate and engaging interpretation derails at just this juncture of switching the tracks.

### **The Energy of Myth and Mysticism**

When literalism deflects the symbolic order of awareness, the mythic life dissociates and collapses; when it does, the mystical element of awareness, which I believe is the end of Campbell's own pilgrimage towards understanding, evaporates as blue haze. I say this because of another refrain he uses in several of his writings: first, he suggests, is the literal stories that comprise the myth; but if that mythos is alive and vibrant, animated by symbols, then it serves the culture and the individual through "four fundamental functions: the mystical, the cosmological, the sociological and the psychological" (*Pathways* 25). Embedded in all of these functions, it seems to me, is the symbol, which Campbell defines in another context as "an energy-evoking and directing agent. When given a meaning, either corporeal or spiritual, it serves for the engagement of the energy to itself" (*Flight* 143). The mythical therefore, driven by the energies of the symbol, is

then that point midway between the sensate world and the mystical realm of being, a path on which Campbell as mystic and monk is always tending as the goal of the journey. Artists themselves, he believes are an essential part of the hero mythos, for they are called, he asserts, “to cast the new images of mythology. That is, they provide the contemporary metaphors that allow us to realize the transcendent, infinite and abundant nature of being as it is” (*Thou Art That* 6). Culturally, we might best look to the artists to restrain us from becoming so overly denotative in our interpretative projects that we lose the connotative ground that artists insist we see by means of as eternal analogies of Being.

He phrases it slightly differently when in conversation with Michael Toms, who interviewed Campbell over a ten year period, beginning in 1975. In this conversation, Campbell recalls another insight from the East: “Another lesson in Buddhism is if you see the Buddha coming down the road, run away. Because if you concretize the divine in any fixed image and say ‘There it is’ you’re off course (*An Open Life* 66). Toms suggests “We’re really talking about the Great Mystery, the ineffable” to which Campbell replies: “That’s what we’re talking about. It’s exciting to talk about it” (66). In their continued discussion the archetype of the Waste Land edges into the conversation. For Campbell it is a powerful and perduring image, in part

because it depicts the life of so many people. He pushes the idea of the Wasteland into the psychological and spiritual condition to which it refers:

The moment the life process stops, it starts drying up; and the whole sense of myth is finding the courage to follow the process.... that's what hell is: the place of people who could not yield their ego system to allow the grace of a transpersonal power to move them. (67).

In his own manner and style, the mythologist taps into the source and place of energy that I believe underlies all of his writings: the energy wellspring is the transcendent unknowable to which the powers of metaphor lead one. Kant outlines “a simple formula for the proper reading of a metaphysical symbol” (*The Flight of the Wild Gander* 50). In the four part schema—a is to be as c is to x—what intrigued Campbell is that “x represents a quantity that is not only unknown but absolutely unknowable—which is to say, metaphysical” (51). However, metaphor carries in its vital organs a source of energy that has the capacity to lead one to the ungraspable x.

In an Irish context, this very energy has been called *Dana*, named after the Tuatha De Danann, whom Frank MacEowen refers to as ancient “earth-loving people in the Celtic past” who embodied “a tradition beneath the traditions, an undercurrent simmering and churning beneath what is called ‘Celtic’ or ‘Druid’ tradition” (*The Spiral of Memory and Belonging*

27)<sup>1</sup> They were a people intimate with the force and energy “of the spiral powers of the earth and spirit” (28). MacEowen’s own travels in Ireland attuned him to the “primordial power” that he believes inhabits the swirl of the spiral, a spiralic life force or principle of power.

Now without “going Celtic” in these musings, I do want to insist that there is a correlation and communion between myth, mysticism, mystery and energy, what in another context the British biologist Rupert Sheldrake, whose work was familiar to and quoted by Campbell, calls morphogenetic fields and which the former calls the mythogenetic zone: “And the mythogenetic zone, [is] the primary region of origin of the myths...” (*Flight* 78), wherein energy coagulates and folds back on itself. I suggest that the spiral is the motion of myth in this more precise way: my reading of Campbell aggravates two questions that spiral back on one another: 1. In what ways is myth historical? 2. In what ways is history mythic? Might it be that myth is: the inner sleeve of history?<sup>2</sup> Might history be the informing temporal agent of what is beyond time, space and causality? To press further: how does myth, which explores, discovers and voices the timeless and the transcendent, or at the very least, lead a soul to this space?

He outlines the first function of myth in the face of affirming, negating or reforming the world as it is, as that force that arouses “in the

mind a sense of awe before this situation through one of three ways of participating in it ” (*Thou* 3); for my purposes in this essay, the first function is most essential, for Campbell regards it “as the essentially religious function of mythology—that is, the mystical function” by which the individual comes into direct contact “with the mystery of being” (3).

In her simple but powerful abridged version of a more staggering study of Mysticism, Evelyn Underhill writes of the ordinary man of common sense: he orders and arranges his world to “reducible little squares” (*Practical Mysticism* 19) which are static and safe elements to guide his sense of the real. But on the other side, she affirms that the neat and orderly patterns of the woven work “are short ends, clumsy joins and patches; all of these disturb my simple philosophy” (19). Behind the manicured hedges of my ordered world of appearances, where I would place the historical self’s reality, is another, more confusing and very differently-arranged landscape of myth. The mythical and the mystical are both in the fabric of reality, but backside. This backside of things is the realm of Campbell’s exploration and the texture of his design as mystically-situated explorer of the inherent mystery embroidered in all that is.

“To give up one’s own comfortably upholstered universe” is the task of the artist, the poet and the mystic, Underhill further affirms, puts one

closer to the animals, in that like animals, “the mystic and the poet strive for a directness of apprehension which we have lost. The terrier gets and responds to the real smell, not a notion or a name” (27). That “real smell” one arrives at through the imaginal act of contemplation Underhill describes as “the essential activity of all artists,” one which embodies “a virginal outlook on all things, a celestial power of communion with veritable life, when sensation is freed from the tyranny of thought” (28). Perhaps, to push the analogy one more waltzing step, W.B. Yeats writes, in one of the most formidable works on “Ireland’s mystical and spiritual tradition,” *Mythologies*, that before he can be initiated into the tradition of alchemy, he must learn the complex steps of “a magical dance, *for rhythm was the wheel of Eternity*, on which alone the transient and accidental could be broken, and the spirit set free” (286 my italics). The mystic, the poet and the animal participate in this eternal round of the rhythm of life itself. My offering is that Joseph Campbell, in his own bodily vitality, his love of and player music, his gourmet appetite, his love of the geishas, participated in such an elegant and exuberant energy flow of the universe.

Now there are dozens of definitions and descriptions of the mystic. I am suggesting here, however, that what unites in the soul of Joseph Campbell are the complementary impulses of mythologist, poet, mystic and

historian, wrapped in the psychological cellophane or gossamer of depth psychology as outlined and promoted by C.G. Jung. Recursivity, coil and recoil, spiraling, retrieval, deepening, a love of metaphor and its necessity, the folding back of energy and patterns of consciousness both individually and collectively—all these are skeins working in bits and “joins” on the backside of Campbell’s marvelously polished prose studies of myth.

### **Journeying and Journaling into Destiny**

I base the above proposition in part on two of his works that, to date, have not been widely read or discussed, but which make up the qualitative backdrop of his inflections towards the mystical. Both *Baksheesh and Brahman* as well as *Sake and Satori* are the extended and often neatly polished journals of Campbell he kept during his year-long pilgrimage around the world in 1954-55 at the age of 50. In that journey, a spiraling of sorts around the globe, he not only discovered and settled on his life work; he also came to inhabit a certain *habitus* of mind, an exuberance of body and a *gravitas* of spirit that molted into the mystic he became through a favorite pastime of his: brooding. He writes for instance on Wednesday, September 8, 1954 in Amarnath, India as he travels to a temple by car with friends: “During the drive I had time to brood a bit more on the Indian problem” (*Baksheesh* 22).

One reads in these early journal entries the growth and further sophistication of an analogical imagination, one which discerns relationship, connectedness and commonality through the clear sharp eyes of differentiation; he learns to envision a Oneness foraging amongst the Many. Multiplicity in India breeds in Campbell a vision of an underlying Unity, a pattern of exploration that he would continue to sharpen for the rest of his days. Two pages, 22-23, are illustrations of his thought processes, his listings—he adored lists and used them everywhere as compressed ordering principles!—as a way of seeing in history, in memory, patterns of mythic presences. And then, in a slight lifting of the veil that accompanies one of Campbell’s fictional heroes, Stephen Daedalus, as he walks the strand in Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and suffers in one unplanned knee-buckling instant what Joyce referred to as “esthetic arrest,” Campbell offers this poetic, even lyric, description of an analogous emotional moment:

Last evening, during our boat ride, I saw a woman standing alone, in one of those canal-vistas, and she seemed to me to be linked to nature in the way of these people, that is to say, linked to nature by being linked to a principle beyond nature, through a ritual attitude, something very different from the romantic return to nature and intuition of God through nature. (*Baksheesh 22-23*)

Being related both *to* and *beyond* at the same instant is the heart thump of mystical experience and Campbell’s participation in it. These two

italicized prepositions are as well mythic propositions of one connected to and transcendent of the material world. For Campbell, a mystical sense is: 1. esthetic; 2. mythic; 3. historical; 4. poetic; 5. depth psychological. In his fine chapter on Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist*, Campbell draws a dramatic comparison between Dante's beholding Beatrice Portinari in the streets of 14<sup>th</sup>. century Florence and Stephen's coming upon the woman on the strand that sparks or ignites an instant of "esthetic arrest" (19). "It is an eternal moment....What he sees is not simply a lovely girl, but a ray of light of eternity. It opens his third eye (his inward eye); the world drops back a dimension; his life is now committed to this seizure" (*Mythic Worlds* 19). Stephen's version of bliss is carved out for him in this crux, or crossroad, of time and eternity made possible and poignant by the intrusion of beauty into the querulous quotidian. Esthetics, mimesis, myth and the mystical congeal in his imagination in an instant. My thesis is that just such a sensibility was also Campbell's guiding shaman in his mature work, which gave a decidedly mystical cast to his thought and writing.

But one more ingredient is necessary at such a rich juncture of mystery and matter: the *sublime*. Continuing with the image and nature of beauty that Joyce outlines in the spirit of Thomistic theory in *Portrait*, Campbell rests on the quality of radiance that accompanies esthetic arrest:

“If it’s a radiance that doesn’t overwhelm you, we call it beauty. But if the radiance so diminishes your ego that you are in an almost transcendent rapture, this is the sublime. What renders the sublime is immense space or immense power.” What such a moment of transcendence that expands immediately and forcefully one’s orbit of awareness leads to is “a beautiful accord”...the” enchantment of the heart” (23). Discovery, recognition, rapture, release, rejoicing—the properties of such an encounter in and through the material world is an experience that preoccupied Campbell as he searched with abandon through world mythologies for this moment in human consciousness.

Such an experience of the sublime, moreover, is not alien to another of Campbell’s trenchant interests: history itself in its relation to myth. We gain an inkling of such import for him in the philosopher Schopenhauer’s insight into the unfolding of a human life. His essay, “An Apparent Intention in the Fate of the Individual,” outlines how so many people and events we encounter in the pilgrimage of our lives seem gratuitous, accidental, haphazard as we live through them: “Then you get on in your sixties or seventies and look back, your life looks like a well-planned novel with a coherent theme. Things have happened, you realize, in an appropriate way” (*Mythic Worlds* 286). Structure and coherence replace the chance quality of

those events seen from an angle of the present; now, recollected in a backward gaze, one sees pattern, accord, coherence, theme, congruence, relevance where before there was a chaotic array of incidents and characters with no interior design.

I would push Campbell's idea of a novel taking shape in one's life here into a little lower layer. What one discovers is the mytho-poetic character of one's being in its temporal becoming, arrangement, order and coherence; and contrary to Schopenhauer's question: Who wrote all of these? Which answer is: "You did" (286), I would entertain the possibility of more hands at the writing desk of one's life than one's own inscribing self. In addition, Campbell's example from Schopenhauer suggests some further reveries on one's personal memories, a larger mythic pattern embracing it, and a discovery of the unique--ok, novel--mythos that one has been spinning out of herself. Memory, history, mythos and an awareness of some patterning accord between them is as well another corridor of the mystical sense that Campbell's work engages. I assert this last point because I believe it underlines another of his observations expressed earlier in the same volume in a discussion with an audience after he has lectured on Joyce's fiction.

Campbell returns to one of his most heat-generating themes: the nature of God: “God isn’t a fact. God is a symbol. As soon as you interpret God as a fact, you are off the beam....As I have said, deities in mythological systems are personifications of energies. And then just below, he continues: But where I have used the word *God*, let us simply say *Brahman*, a neuter noun that refers past itself to the mystery of the total energy of life” (275). His focus on energy is bedrock to his theory and function of the hero outlined so fully in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* that brought mythic discourse back into high fashion. That is, the hero appears at those moments of crisis in culture when the energy flow between the macrocosm and the microcosm has ceased movement.

The hero’s task, which s/he must first hear, then heed by giving up self for a higher achievement, is to restore the flow of the life energy between the cosmos and the collective as well as individual psyche. He observes early in the study: “for the hero as the incarnation of God is himself the navel of the world, the umbilical point through which the energies of eternity break into time” (49). A successful, if you will, heroic quest is, as Campbell asserts, “the unlocking and release again of the flow of life into the body of the world. The miracle of this flow may be represented in

physical terms as a circulation of food substance, dynamically as a streaming of energy, or spiritually as a manifestation of grace” (40).

My own reading here is that the energy field or principle is the goal and source of all understanding of mythic thought and sense. I believe it worthy to notice as well that the hero is not *in relation to* God but shares that same *identity as* God. The terms of relation and identity is another staple Campbell motif in his writings; to be incarnated as God elevates the soul of the hero and the heroic potential that resides, most often sleeping in a coiled state, but surfacing in one’s dream life, within every individual. In addition, these essential energy fields reveal the deepest patterns in human life and were discerned by Campbell, in important moments, during his year-long pilgrimage in 1954-55, to which I now wish to return.

### **Distance and Discernment**

Before we leave India with Campbell and travel to southeast Asia, we should pause for a moment to listen to how this trip released in him a full grasp of his life’s work. Much akin to James Joyce, who chose finally to exit Ireland in order to write about her, so did Campbell feel a necessity to leave his normal life and work in order to discern in what direction it needed to develop. Early on in his Indian sojourn, he comes to this recognition:

What I am to study is definitely here: folk religion, with its roots in the deep past; aristocratic religion, represented in the ruins of

the temple art of India; the phenomenon of the sadhu—past, present, future....Moreover, it is just possible that there may be someone in all of this from whom I may wish to learn something fundamental. (*Baksheesh* 23).

His experiences in India develop two complementary impulses in him: one is the power of the human spirit amongst oppressive poverty to remain serene, content, and spiritually rich; the second is the increasing value of Western consciousness that he thirsts to step back into with greater enthusiasm: “The hope, the immediate teacher of the modern world is the West. The main problems of the modern world are functions of the Western style of life and thought. The most significant approach to the modern problems, therefore, must be via the modern Western psyche—and most emphatically, via the modern American psyche” (165). His expression here is prologue to a profound awakening in his life’s trajectory, delineated in the following manner: “This realization has moved me to dissolve my earlier thoughts of a series of works on Oriental religion and legend...and to plan to concentrate on the legendary mythological themes of the West--...” (*Baksheesh* 165).

Later, and closer to his time of returning to America, Campbell in Kyoto, Japan suffers both a disillusionment with his proposed projects that were to occupy him for decades, as well as incisive clarity about his life’s

professional design. Startled by an essay he reads in *Time* on 9 May 1955 by C.S. Lewis in an inaugural lecture as Medieval Studies scholar delivered at Cambridge, Campbell is stunned by Lewis' announcing "a new archetypal image" into history: that of old machines "being superceded by new and better ones" (*Sake* 102). This replacement addresses a larger archetype, which seems the real emphasis of Lewis' address, namely, the impulse to constantly attain new goods and provisions rather than conserve what we have as "the cardinal business of life, would most shock and bewilder [our ancestors].... I conclude that it is the greatest change in the history of Western man..." (qtd. in *Sake*102). Acquisition and consumption are the new archetypal patterns of being that, Lewis asserts, will and may have already replaced conserving and sustaining as patterns of behavior in the West.

His insights draw Campbell up short to evaluate his own projects. Here he draws a parallel with Buddhism's idea that "All is without a self" would seem to me to go along very well with the idea of the discarded machines (though not, indeed, with that of striving for goods we have never yet had)" (102). He descends into disillusionment with the Oriental way of thought and life, it seems to me, preferring instead to retrench his future work in historical and philological scholarship—"let's not then try to read

our own reactions back into Oriental context” (103). Lewis’ making evident a new archetypal pattern emerging in the West persuades Campbell to shy away from his earlier epic plan: “All of this implies great warnings and danger signals for me in the work ahead on my *Basic Mythologies of Mankind*” (103), works that will eventually materialize into the multi-volume *The Masks of God*.

In addition, his shifting mythology is accompanied by a reassessed methodology in typical Campbell fashion, a series of items drawn up in a crisp, succinct list:

1. Beginning from the beginning, I am to follow motifs objectively and historically. Also, I am to record interpretations objectively and historically, on the basis of contemporary texts. (*Sake* 103)

The list is too involved to duplicate here, except for this final item in it which is a colossal shift in the way Campbell would conduct his studies, now that he has absorbed experientially the worlds of India, Southeast Asia and Japan. My own belief is that without this year-long journey he would not have arrived at what follows, or at least not so early as he did to pursue it with success and which is finally orchestrated by Bill Moyers and him in *The Power of Myth*, the most ubiquitous of all he wrote and created for television. “3. The historical milestone represented is that of the recognition

of the actual unity of human culture (the diffusion and parallelism of myths)... The time has come for a global, rather than provincial, history of the images of thought” (*Sake* 103). These words comprise his big picture, his grand design and his epic vision. He ends his list with a promise to adhere to the little picture: 5. Make no great cross-cultural leaps, and even within a given culture, do not try to harmonize what philosophers of that culture itself have not harmonized. Stick to the historical perspectives and all will emerge of itself (*Sake* 103). Already familiar and highly influenced by Oswald Spengler’s *Decline of the West* when he wrote *Hero*, Campbell seems to be aligning himself in a moment of great resolve with Spengler’s sense of history, who himself wrote of “the metaphysically exhausted soil of the West (*Decline* 5). What Spengler proposed and Campbell assumes the mantle of, is a morphological grasp of history in which one discovers “from a morphological angle, disparate events will take on under examination ‘deep uniformities’” (*Decline* 6). The symbol and the archetype are for Spengler, categories of understanding so that “the whole of mythological religions and artistic thought...constitutes the essence and kernel of all history” (7). Spengler assists Campbell in blending the disciplines of psychology, religion, mythology and artistic expressions into a palimpsest

and a palette from which he will paint for himself a new inflection of the mythopoetic imagination given fullest commerce in History.<sup>3</sup>

### **History and Psychic Energy**

I wish to devote the last pages of this article to Campbell's sustained interest in psychic and spiritual energy that flows from earth, individual, culture, outward to the wider cosmos and back again, as a spiralic loop that world mythologies give voice to in ritual, rites of passage, narratives and other forms of incarnate expression. Not to be overlooked or reduced here as well is Campbell's own explorations and love of the smallest forms of life, the seedling and budding plant given elegant display in volume II, Part 2: *The Way of the Seeded Earth* comprising a section of *The Historical Atlas of World Mythology*, his love and study of *The Way of the Animal Powers*, as well as his decades-long colloquy with Body Worker, Stanley Keleman in *Myth and the Body*. I showcase these works especially at this point because, as a mystic engaged in the transcendent oneness of creation, Campbell is, as many mystical expressions confirm, deeply rooted in the material imagination, the seedlings, as it were, of a mystical fullness.

I have written elsewhere that "psychic and spiritual energy, though not divorced from matter but actually inhering within it, within Mother Earth, seems to be one of Campbell's perennial and abiding concerns"

(“What’s Up History’s Inner Sleeve: Myth and the Fabric of Culture” 1). My sense is that the principle of energy as a life force derived both from his study of world mythologies as well as his abiding study of C.G. Jung’s work, especially, I suspect, Jung’s powerful essay, “On Psychic Energy,” a centerpiece of his *Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche* (§§1-130). Yet this energy is materially-inflected, ubiquitous and links spirit, psyche and cosmos. Consider his early insight in *Animal Powers*: poets and artists today are present in large measure

to perform the work of the first and second functions of a mythology by recognizing through the veil of nature...the radiance, terrible yet gentle, or the dark, unspeakable light beyond, and through their words and images to reveal the sense of the vast silence that is the ground of us all and of all beings. (10)

Campbell refers here to the first function of a mythology: “to awaken and maintain in the individual a sense of wonder and participation in the mystery of this finally inscrutable universe” (8); the second “is to fill every particle and quarter of the current cosmological image with its measure of this mystical import” (8). Myths, therefore, are both current to a culture or a people as well as providing a current of energy flow through the grounded gravity of silence, itself an energy field embodied in image.

Furthermore, the body for Campbell is no small player in this cosmic drama of mythic sustenance. He reminds us, for instance, in *The Flight of*

*the Wild Gander* that “myths are the texts of the rites of passage” (34)

having their origins in the energies of the organs of the body, both in conflict and in complement to one another. He furthers this idea in *The Power of Myth*: “the archetypes of the unconscious are manifestations of the organs of the body and their powers. Archetypes are biologically grounded... (51).

Musing on this same idea in another context, I wrote:

A renewed or revisioned mythos might then include an ability to reimagine the relation of spirit, body and earth in a constant but benevolent dialogic tension between the body’s interiority and the world’s matter, mediated by the social customs that comprise a specific historical time and place. (“The Myth of Nature and the Nature of Myth” 31)

To leap another step forward in pursuing this energy trail that snakes through his writings, especially the later ones, in *The Inner Reaches of Outer Space* Campbell observes that “the energy by which the body is pervaded is the same as that which illuminates the world and maintains alive all being, the two breaths being the same” (41).

Such a unitary vision of a comprehensive design of the world’s interior and exterior natures he inherited, at least in seedling form, from Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, whom Campbell observes of his thought: he “could maintain that the metaphysical principles symbolized in India in the dreamlike imagery of myth are implicit in mythology everywhere” (34) and

goes on to quote from Coomaraswamy's own writing, in which he affirms "an underlying spiritual unity of the human race" (34): "...the various cultures of mankind are no more than the dialects of one and the same spiritual language" (*Flight* 34).

I have not attempted nor wanted to put sack cloth and ashes or even a crisp Cistercian garment on Joseph Campbell and dress him up in what he is not. However, this contemplative extrovert returns repeatedly to the grand synthesis or design of a world *monomyth*, a term he inherited from James Joyce, that attends and informs his exploration of myth with a decidedly spiritual cast and one which highlights Jung's inspiration of the *unus mundus*. Furthermore, there exists in his prose a coiled, or if I may return to the spiral image here as I bring this brief excursus to completion, energy structure: it folds back, remembers itself, loops back through history and sees by way of analogy the power of myth's presence in the world psyche. Campbell continually intuits a secret harmony between the human being embodied and, as he writes, forms of the macrocosm that are given voice and substance by the miraculous imaginal power of metaphor, what he affirmed repeatedly as "the native tongue of myth" (*Thou Art That* 45).

Images of mythology are all metaphorical of a reality that can only be intuited, never known, Campbell suggests further in the work that I believe

most deeply grooves the prominence of metaphor: that the universe might best be imagined as “a living being in the image of a great mother, within whose womb all the worlds, both of life and death, had their existence.

Analogy, or an analogical imagination, rests squarely here: “the human body is a duplicate, in miniature, of that macrocosmic form. Throughout the whole a secret harmony holds sway. It is the function of mythology and relevant rites to make this macro-microcosmic insight known to us...” (45).

The images of myth are metaphors, symbolic at the same time of vital energies that traverse the cosmos through and into the individual, through the mesocosm of particular and specific cultural and tribal customs. A deep and thick relationship attends such an energy flow, or even energy transfer system, wherein mythic images carry both intellectual, historical and affective powers to guide the psyche as they direct psychic energy. That Campbell intuited, then traced these divine powers of presence and their capacity to ignite in ritual remembrance, is a sign, to me, of his monkish and mystically inflected imagination.

In a discussion on “Earthrise: The Dawning of a New Spiritual Awareness” appended at the back of *Thou Art That*, he sounds the final note, for this exploration anyway, about myth’s elaborate design: “Campbell: Myth has many functions. The first we might term mystical, in that myth

makes a connection between our waking consciousness and the whole mystery of the universe. That is its cosmological function... (103).

Let's leave him there, beaming, in fine company, nested deep in dialogue, as if he were in an Irish pub in Kinvara or Dublin, thinking once more about the place of the imagination in mythic pilgrimaging. A mythic icon for the extraverted soul, Campbell was also a devout solitary: brooding over his studies, musing over his spiraling sentences that often go on for the better part of a hefty paragraph with seemingly inexhaustible rhetorical vitality, he never tired of thinking through myth to the mystical. His energy transported him to the image of the Earthrise, a spectacular photo taken from the moon. That image, he pondered, is the great cosmic bumper sticker to usher in a new mythos, where so many of the borderlines drawn by human fear and fatigue were suddenly dissolved, leaving only the blurred edges of oceans and land, clouds and wind patterns, and a human imagination to revel at their mysterious design, their sacred narrative, their trenchant moment in a cosmic story, still unfolding, still enfolding and willing to embrace us all.

## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Another image to explore in relation to the Celtic spiral is that of the coiled Kundalini serpent depicted with such majesty in *The Inner Reaches* (56) which as symbol of “an original knowledge” in its 3.5 spiralic turns suggests a primordial disposition of psyche.

<sup>2</sup> “What’s Up History’s Inner Sleeve? Myth and the Fabric of Culture.” Presented at a Symposium entitled *Myth, Memory and Culture*, jointly sponsored by The Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture under the direction of Dr. J. Larry Allums, and Pacifica Graduate Institute, May 11-12, 2007 in Dallas, Texas.

<sup>3</sup> Of course I am bypassing the other earlier pilgrimage Campbell inaugurated during the years 1927-28, as Richard Tarnas writes, “to study in Paris and Munich, where he first encountered the work of Freud, Jung, Joyce, Mann and Picasso and conceived his understanding of the mythic foundations of human experience” (*Cosmos and Psyche* 331). Nor am I developing the cosmic conjunctions that Tarnas’ magisterial study of cosmos’ influence on psyche in history develops so eloquently and thoroughly.

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