

JUNG'S PSYCHOLOGY AND THE STUDY OF MYTH

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The connection between dream and myth, and hence between myth and the unconscious, has long been recognized by those who have treated the psychological ills of modern man. Nor has such a connection been ignored by anthropologists as the following quote from Current Anthropology makes clear:

Much ethnographic evidence points to the fact that both whole myths and modifications of existing myths often originate in special dreams or trances of religious leaders of a society (Fischer 1963:242).

Attempts to explain myths in terms of psychological processes, however, while they have gained an increasing audience among anthropologists, have been largely dominated by the theoretical framework of Freud.¹ The insights of Carl Jung, on the other hand, have unfortunately been made little use of by professional anthropologists.² The remarks of Melville Jacobs, in his forward to a collection of articles by anthropological folklorists, typify the general attitude that has prevailed towards Jung:

The scientific labors of present-day anthropologists display . . . a lusty disdain for thrilling statements about ritual-to-myth and archetypal origins . . . Anthropological folklorists find it sufficient to try to say a number of significant, although unsystematized, things about myths and tales. They do this without a nod in the direction of the dogmas or improbable guesses of the Cambridge and Zurich shamans . . . Perhaps their principle shared characteristic, at this moment, is their awareness of need to probe the many aspects of expressive content, and in order to assist them in doing so they borrow components of theory from neo-Freudian dynamic psychiatry (Jacobs and Greenway 1966:vii).

The characterization of Jungians as "shamans" interested in "thrilling statements," I believe, is the legacy of a fundamental misconception of Jung's theory of "archetypes of the collective unconscious." Indeed, Bascom, in his "Four Functions of Folklore," early posited that "Jung's approach to folklore and mythology removes them from the province of the cultural anthropologist" (1954:291). In this paper I hope to clarify Jung's concept of the "archetype" and suggest that such a concept, if properly understood, need not conflict with the goals of cultural anthropologists, whether they apply functional, structural, or other preferred approaches to myth. I would, moreover, like to suggest that the pioneering works of Erich Neumann (1954 and 1955) and of Ira Progoff (1953) have provided the groundwork for an as-of-yet-unrealized nexus between Jungian thought and the "more proper" concerns of modern anthropological folklorists. I shall draw from the insights of these two men concerning archetypes and myth, as well as from Jung's.

Bascom's explanation of Jung's concept of "archetypes" is good up to a point and merits repeating:

Jung believes that the mind is not a tabula rasa at birth. There are, among other things, archetypes which are living entities consisting of inherited forms of psychic behavior. Often the archetypes are manifested in myth. Archetypes are a a priori and given, so that primitive mentality does not invent myths, it experiences them. (1954:291).

So far so good, but then Bascom, in explaining why Jung's theory is unpopular among anthropologists, misinterprets Jung:

Since archetypes are pre-cultural; they are essentially beyond the influence of cultural conditioning, and therefore Jung's theory eliminates the need for the study of cultural conditioning to understand mythic archetypes (1954:291).

This last statement of Bascom's is clearly a misunderstanding: Jung constantly emphasizes the fact that the archetypal images he deals with have an infinite variability as to content and that the exact content of an archetype is relative to the historical and cultural situation in which it appears. To begin with, the archetypal images that appear to consciousness are manifestations of psychic processes occurring in the unconscious; it is these processes that are generic to the human and as such are inherited. Jung, moreover, points out that the

symbolic content (i.e. the archetypal images) through which these processes seek expression are not determined as to content but vary about the common core of the process involved, which finds expression through the medium of the cultural and personal experience of the individual. For example, he states that an archetype "is determined as to its content only when it has become conscious and is therefore filled out with the material of conscious experience (Jung 1969:13). It is far from correct, then, to believe as Bascom does that the archetypes are beyond the influence of cultural conditioning.

Marie von Franz (1975) cautions against just such an error as Bascom has made in confusing the archetype (i.e. the psychic process itself, the organizing principle in the unconscious) with its manifestation (the archetypal image):

A clear distinction must be made here between archetypes and archetypal images . . . the archetypes are very probably innate structural predispositions which appear in actual experience as the factor, or element, which orders or arranges representations into certain "patterns" . . . archetypes appear as archetypal representations or ideas, that is, in the form of mythological, symbolic representations which are common to certain collectives, such as whole people of epochs. They are typical "modes of apprehension" which appertain structurally to all human beings . . . The archetypes can also be described as "elementary behavior patterns" of the psyche (1975:125-126).

Progoff (1953), in a similar vein, states that "an archetype does not become meaningful until it goes out into the world and takes part in life according to its nature and according to the time in history in which it occurs" (1953:76). He then quotes Jung's metaphor to the effect that the facts of the specific cultural and personal existence will provide the actual clothing of the archetype. In other words the archetype is only an inherited mode of expression; the particular expression, however, will be influenced by historical, cultural and even personal conditions.

Jung's ideas of a collective unconscious and of archetypes are intimately linked. Jung frequently stresses that he postulated his idea of a "collective" unconscious in addition to a "personal" unconscious (i.e. repressed, forgotten, or subliminal elements as recognized by Freud) on

the basis of empirical evidence. Speaking of patients he treated as early as before 1912, he says:

Typical mythologems were observed among individuals to whom all knowledge of this kind was absolutely out of the question . . . Such conclusions forced us to assume that we must be dealing with "autochthonous" revivals independent of all tradition, and consequently, that "myth-forming" structural elements must be present in the unconscious psyche (Jung and Kerenyi 1963:71).

These structural elements, individually denoted as archetypes, comprise the collective unconscious. The collective unconscious, then, is collective in the same sense that the human body is collective - each person possesses it generically. The body, moreover, functions and articulates with the world in the same fashion for all humans. Likewise, the psyche articulates with the world in a specifically human way that is inherited. The expressions of this articulation are the archetypal images.

Jung has postulated that psychic energy is made available to consciousness and culture through the symbol that spontaneously rises up from the unconscious. The details of this theory are not important for our purposes, but what is important is that the energy of unconscious contents is made available to consciousness through the archetypal symbol.

With this admittedly sketchy background in Jungian terminology and theory, we can now examine what Jung has to say about myth itself. First of all, Jung distinguished between myth and dream. He explains that the spontaneous products appearing in dream

are never myths with a definite form, but rather mythological components which, because of their typical nature, we can call motifs, primordial images, types, or . . . archetypes (Jung and Kerenyi 1963:72).³

Myth also consists of archetypal motifs or images, but they have been given a coherent and meaningful order and are "traditional forms of incalculable age" (1963:72).

The difference between dreams and myths is important, for while dreams are spontaneous products, pure and simple, myths, in being given their coherent order by society, will also give

order to society. (This articulation between the original spontaneous products of the unconscious and the functional needs they can be applied to in different cultures will be discussed later.) Keeping this difference in mind, then, we see that for Jung the origin of myth, as of dream, is the unconscious, and as such myth is never invented, but rather is revealed. Myth is, however, given coherence in the context of the culture and even of the personalities of the individual dreamers; in this respect, then, myth is created by the culture. (At this point, one should be able to appreciate the rationale, in Jungian terms, of the quote from Fischer's study (1963) cited at the beginning of this study.)

Jung postulates, moreover, that these "revelations" are made "accessible to man's consciousness by way of projection - that is, mirrored in the events of nature" (1959:289).⁴ This insight concerning projection is, perhaps, one of Jung's most important contributions to the understanding of myth:

that the psyche contains all the images [again, the archetypal images are the expression of psychic structures or processes] that have ever given rise to myths, and that our unconscious is an acting and suffering subject with an inner drama which primitive man rediscovers, by means of analogy, in the processes of nature (1959:289)

To the "processes of nature" might be added other categories as Joseph Campbell does when he says, "Mythology . . . is psychology misread as biography, history, and cosmology (1949:256).

But what is this inner drama that primitive man rediscovers through the projection of his psychic contents upon nature, the gods and heroes? This is where a reading of Erich Neumann proves enlightening.

A fundamental Jungian postulate is that consciousness in man - defined by Jung as "the relatedness of psychic contents to the ego, insofar as they are sensed as such by the ego" (1959:246) - is derived from the unconscious. The collective unconscious is the larger, unconscious base of consciousness, and as psychic contents come into a new relationship with the nascent ego, consciousness develops; the psychic structures of the child articulate in the unconscious and determine the maturation of the personality, which involves a freeing of the

conscious individualized ego from the predominating unconsciousness.

According to Neumann, the evolution of consciousness in the individual progresses through a series of "stadial" (i.e. stage of development) relationships between the growing ego and the unconscious. Individual development, moreover, is the ontogenetic recapitulation of what occurred in the primordial psychic evolution of man. But most important - and this is the idea Neumann (1954) develops in his book The Origins and History of Consciousness - myth, as the projection of man's psychic processes, depicts this stadial progress; Neumann traces the evolution of the ego by tracing the evolution, as depicted in myth, of those archetypal images that are an expression of the process taking place, namely the increasing articulation between the unconscious and the developing ego-consciousness.

His fundamental thesis, then, is that

a series of archetypes is a main constituent of mythology, and they stand in organic relation to one another, and that their stadial succession determines the growth of consciousness (1954:xvi).

Neumann does point out that "the stages of conscious development form only a segment of archetypal reality as a whole"; so there is no attempt to explain all myth as depending on this one psychological process and relationship, but only a central core that seems to run through all myth.

Some presentation of the developing stages of consciousness projected in this core of myth is necessary, but I find it virtually impossible to compress a theme Neumann elaborates on for over 300 pages into a few paragraphs; but rather than confuse with arbitrary detail, I shall give only the barest outline of his "stages" and refer the reader to Neumann's own work for further clarification.

These stages begin and end with the Uroboros symbol, the tail-eating serpent that represents the total nondifferentiation of all opposites which precedes consciousness. (What it represents at the late stage is not important here.) The intermediary stages which Neumann traces are found projected in the universally occurring motifs of the World Creation, the Great Mother, the Separation of the World Parents, the Birth

of the Hero, the Slaying of the Dragon, the Rescue of the Captive, and the Transformation and Deification of the Hero.

The ever-developing hero throughout this sequence is the ego-consciousness, which is at first totally embraced by the unconscious (Uroboros); later a flicker of consciousness is experienced as the mere satellite of the Great Mother, which as a still Uroboric mother combines both masculine and feminine, good and evil characteristics. She is at once a nourishing mother and a terrible slayer of her progeny.

But it is not until the Separation of the World Parents, the masculine and feminine aspects, that the world of opposites comes into existence and is experienced as the dawning of light for the ego. But the final separation from the dominating World Parents (the unconscious) is accomplished through their being slain. What is won in this battle with the dragon and triumph over the hostile male is a new relation to the feminine represented by the Captive Princess, who will now relate to the male consciousness and be his helpmate rather than overpower and oppose him. The Transformation and Deification represent further stages, through which the ego is replaced as the center of consciousness with the Self (the totality of the psyche, including the unconscious).

For Neumann, this core of myth is a manifestation of the psychic development that man went through as consciousness developed; a strong and directed ego-consciousness is, in fact, a recent development:

Human life in the beginning is determined to a far higher degree by the unconscious than by consciousness; it is directed more by archetypal images than by concepts, by instincts than by voluntary decisions of the ego (1955:16).

Consciousness certainly dawned as far back as Paleolithic man, but the crucial psychological event that finally secured consciousness occurred fairly recently. The crucial point in this battle for consciousness, the hero fight, occurred for the Greeks, for example, in classical times when Greek myth was "largely the dragon-fight mythology of a consciousness of a consciousness struggling for independence" (1954:265). The previous Creto-Mycenean culture was, on the other hand, the Greek Great Mother period during which her cult was dominant.

Neumann further points out that each culture struggles towards greater consciousness on its own time scale: while

the development of the dragon-fight took place in Greece between 1500 and 500 B.C., the corresponding process was achieved in Egypt before 3300 B.C.

The function of this core of myth, then, for early man (early in the sense given above) might be viewed as the original tutor of man's consciousness. This is how Neumann describes the function of the spontaneously appearing symbol; and myth, as the cultural ordering of these symbols, has a similar function for the group. Speaking of the symbol, Neumann says:

It not only strengthens, but positively forms consciousness. Through the symbol, mankind rises from the early phase of formlessness, from a blind, purely unconscious psyche without images, to the formative phase (1955:17).

Neumann explains that symbols as "molders of consciousness" arouse and fascinate the budding human consciousness, which concentrating attention upon them expands through greater differentiation. In his own words: "to the differentiation of consciousness corresponds a more differentiated manifestation of the unconscious, its archetypes and symbols" (1955:17). It is this differentiation into contrasting aspects of the originally undifferentiated symbol of the unconscious which Neumann traces as the projected evidence of the ever more secure relationship between the developing consciousness and the unconscious.

Once that consciousness is firmly established, however, myth still has the function of tutor, although in a slightly different sense - now it keeps man in touch with the archetypal layers of his collective unconscious, which are still of course present, as Jung has demonstrated. Jung warns that if such a connection is not maintained, the archetypes, functioning as autonomous complexes, may oppose conscious intent as in neurosis. Jung sees such a function, for example, in the Trickster tales of the Winnebago Indians: "What the repeated telling of the myth signifies is the therapeutic anamnesis of contents which . . . should never be forgotten for long" (1969:144).

In reading the Winnebago Hero Cycles from Trickster to Hare and on to the Red Horn Cycle and that of the Twins, one is immediately struck with the high level of spiritual development they portray - they take us from the archaic instinctual level of the Trickster through the egotistic hubris of the Twins who, infatuated with their power, destroy one of the pillars upon which the world rests. In a culture in which

ego-consciousness is firmly established, such a cycle of myth seems to point towards the goal of the fully individuated personality, where direction, rather than stemming from the limited conscious will, stems from a conscious relationship with the archetypal unconscious; such a relationship makes access to and use of the valuable wisdom and orientation of the unconscious possible.

Such a function for myth at this level would not be unlike that of the individuation process through which Jungian analysis guides the individual in the second half of life, when what is needed is a reevaluation and relativization of the values that applied to the first half of life. In undergoing Jungian analysis, the archetypal elements in one's dreams are uncovered and a conscious attitude and relationship toward them is developed; this has the effect of expanding consciousness by integrating those aspects of the personality that were repressed or never made conscious.

Thus myth at this point might be viewed as a mediator between consciousness and the unconscious, allowing the former control in that the latter has not been morbidly suppressed or ignored. Progoff makes this point when he says that

Very often primitives are more conscious - frequently more highly individuated with a more harmonious relation between consciousness and the unconscious - than moderns (1953:277).

Myth, therefore, might be viewed as functioning as an educator in three different ways at a different points in the development of the individual and his culture: first there is the rise to a secure level of ego consciousness; secondly, it maintains this ascendancy of consciousness through maintaining a harmonious relationship with the unconscious; and thirdly, it can establish the Self (the center and totality of the psyche, including both the conscious and unconscious) as the directive center for the personality, as opposed to the limited conscious will of the ego. This is the culmination of the second stage and is rarely achieved by moderns with their characteristic paucity of mythology, symbol (i.e. spontaneous symbol form the collective unconscious), and religion (in the sense of religio, a linking back).

But there remains the question of how the anthropologist interested in myth as an expression of culture might utilize Jung's concept of archetypal images or Neumann's linking of these with the evolution of consciousness. Here we should

recall that the archetypes not only have a universal psychological aspect but that they also have a definite social and historical aspect.

Progoff points out that two types of study of the archetypes are possible (1953:246ff). The first seeks the underlying universality of the archetype as it appears in its infinitely varied forms in history and culture. Such an approach would be similar to that of the Finnish School of folklorists, except that instead of tracing folklore motifs back to a geographic origin and thereby uncover the motifs' primordial forms, it would trace them back to an archetypal origin as manifestations of psychic processes. As such, this approach has the same shortcomings as that of the Finns: a solution as to origins hardly satisfies questions as to function. (Melville Jacobs, quoted earlier 1966:vii, seems to have recognized such shortcomings.)

A similar criticism that might be leveled against such an approach is that there is always the danger that in classifying the motifs that appear in myth as manifestations of a certain archetype, one will simply reduce the myths to these psychological "modes of apprehension" that are generic to man and leave it at that, much as the Freudians have been wont to reduce the symbols of myth to some psychological mechanism such as well-fulfillment. Such an approach would ignore the aspect of myth which is a reflection of a particular culture.

But fortunately there is a potentially much more valuable approach to myth and its relation to individual cultures, Progoff sees this as a

more integrative and evolutionary study, which seeks to interpret the nature of the historical differences, the basis for variations, and their significance for the development of individual personality within their context (1953:246)

Clearly Neumann's work is a beginning in this direction, for although he postulates a generalized educative function to a central core of myth, he definitely sees meaning in the progressive historical change in archetypal expression in a particular culture. It is just this idea, that the archetypal manifestations do change, that is so valuable; the main concern may become, then, how they change, and why, and what these changes tell us about the forces at play in the culture that undergoes them.

These ever-recurring yet ever-varied forms of archetypal expression, it might be conceded, do indeed find their origin in psychic processes as Jung postulates; and one further might concede that the core of mythological motif which Neumann traces may very well be a manifestation of the evolving relationship between the expanding ego-consciousness and its matrix of unconsciousness; but it still remains that these archetypal manifestations are put to use in a culture at any stage of growth in differing functional ways.

This is simply to say that any spontaneous archetypal expression of the unconscious will always have to come to terms with the prevailing social, political and religious forces that exist in a given historical culture. As such, they can be put to numerous different functional uses.

Just because mythological motifs can be seen as originating from psychological processes universal to all mankind, does not mean that we know how these archetypes have been arranged into a coherent cultural canon to be utilized in a particular culture. There is always a reworking of the raw revelation of the archetype in the interest of cultural stability and institutional continuity. A functional interpretation will, therefore, always be needed above and beyond any psychological one; only then can one come to appreciate the dialectic between timeless revelation and time-bound culture that myth is.

NOTES

¹Although dated, the best bibliographical aid to the considerable psychoanalytic literature is Alexander Grinstein's Index of Psychoanalytic Writings, 9 volumes (New York, 1956-1966). Melville Jacobs and John Greenway's collection (1966) contains several representative articles utilizing Freudian concepts. Studies by folklorists have, likewise, largely been of a Freudian bent. See, for example, Paulo de Carvalho-Neto's Folklore and Psychoanalysis, trans. Jacques M. P. Wilson (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1968) which, although it give introductory coverage to most psychological approaches to folklore, including the Jungian, is overall doctrinairely Freudian. Also, Alan Dundes' (1980) excellent recent collection of his own work is decidedly Freudian in its approach.

²J. L. Fischer (1963) in his valuable study, however, argues for an eclecticism that would not completely ignore Jung. Fischer argues ultimately for a combination of psychological and sociological approaches, as he views myths and folktales as functioning on multiple levels. It is characteristic of Fischer's well-balanced approach that he pays tribute to Jung, albeit somewhat critical: "I think Jung is correct in postulating some kind of particular, unconditioned, inherited mental factors in the formation of a variety of myth and dream images, but I also believe that his failure to analyze these images sufficiently is a serious deficiency" (1963:256).

For estimations of Jung's formulations by folklorists, see Wilson M. Hudson, "Jung on Myth and the Mythic," in The Sunny Slopes of Long Ago, eds. Wilson M. Hudson and Allen Maxwell (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1966); "Jungian Psychology and Its Uses in Folklore," Journal of American Folklore, 82 (1969), 122-131; and Carlos C. Drake, "Jung and His Critics," Journal of American Folklore, 80 (1967), 321-333.

For a sustained application of Jungian principles, see Marie Louise von Franz's An Introduction to the Psychology of Fairy Tales (New York: Spring Publications, 1970). Her book on Jung and the development and influence of his thought (1975) is one of the best available.

³Jung was not always careful to distinguish between archetype and archetypal image, especially in his early

writings. This has, undoubtedly, caused some of the confusion among his critics. Von Franz makes this point (1975:125).

⁴See Alan Dundes' interesting article on projection, "Projection in Folklore: A Plea for Psychoanalytic Semiotics," in his collection of essays (Dundes 1980).

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