

1-1-2005

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### Recommended Citation

Slattery, D. P. (2005). Slattery, D. P. (2005). The myth of nature and the nature of myth: Becoming transparent to transcendence. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 24(1), 29–36.. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 24 (1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2005.24.1.29>



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# The Myth of Nature and the Nature of Myth: Becoming Transparent to Transcendence

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The works by the American mythologist, Joseph Campbell, as well as the poetry of John Keats, especially his “Ode to a Nightingale,” offer new ways to reimagine our relation to the earth, to the dead and to language’s continued vitality. Beginning with a brief overview of some of the major tenets of Campbell’s guiding force of the “monomyth,” which gathers all the various world mythologies as inflections of one universal story, the essay then moves into a discussion of Keats’ poem in order to reveal the power of poetic utterance in reconfiguring a vital mythology. If there is to be a renewed mythos, it may come out of a revisioned care of language itself as a transport vehicle towards the transcendent or invisible realms of being that poetry exposes us to through its aesthetic and linguistic corridors. The purpose of yoking mythology to poetry is to realign consciousness along a mytho-poetic axis of insight and understanding.

*As long as I am this or that, or have this or that, I am not all things and I have not all things. Become pure till you neither are nor have either this or that; then you are omnipresent and, being neither this nor that, are all things.*

Meister Eckhart, in Huxley,  
*The Perennial Philosophy* (1970, p.107)

The mythologist Joseph Campbell, whose 100th birthday we celebrate this year (1904-2004), revealed in many of his 28 books and journals the intimate connection of mythology to the earth’s foundational soil. By doing so, he antedated the ecology movement as well as a fuller consciousness of the earth’s terminal illnesses if not diagnosed and treated with some careful prescription policies available for continued refills. Campbell would, I believe, diagnose the accelerating rapacity of the earth’s resources as yet another consequence of an earlier malady wherein “matter and spirit begin to separate;” Campbell refers to such a divorce as “mythic dissociation” (1972/1993, p. 74).

As I continue to read and absorb his elegant insights into the essential place of a shared and coherent mythos in the life of the individual and of an entire people, and now, of an entire planet, I detect his impulses moving in two directions: into the body and into the natural order in one direction, and towards the transcendent in the other, perhaps even to the transcendent Other that is in fact—tat tvam asi—thou

art the other.

In addition, 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. This essay will explore these regions rather than move to the topic that put him on the world map: that of the hero’s journey (1948/2004). For today we would be wise to place the earth’s journey at the forefront of any pilgrimage towards revitalizing the planet.

The “life of a mythology,” he asserts in *Flight of the Wild Gander* (1951/2002) “derives from the vitality of its symbols as metaphors” (p. xx). This quality of vitality of the symbolic and metaphoric realms of knowing is at the heart of Campbell’s teachings and one we would do well to retrieve, for it guides us to the proposition that in the active life of the imagination of a culture, language too is crucial, in the way we both disabuse and pollute, or nurture and elevate the status, of words themselves. What we do to words mirrors with exacting frequency what we do to the world. Language and landscape are intimate first cousins. And both are showing signs of permanent exhaustion.

In his incisive study on the importance of our ancestors, in *The Dominion of the Dead* (2003), Robert Pogue Harrison observed that “in the age of the new barbarism, words lose their moral memory. For even our morality—indeed, our morality above all—depends on the historical resonance of its foundation-

al words: liberty, duty, sacrifice, compassion, equality,” none of which brooks “the false eloquence of the times” (p. 86).

I believe that carelessness in speech, in self-expression, and in writing is directly yoked to a disrespect and indifference to the matter and, indeed, the world spirit that the philosopher Georg W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) believed was the nugget resting deep in the heart of the earth. Joseph Campbell’s entire work contains a Hegelian impulse; more needs to be cultivated regarding the intimate connections in thought between these two titans. Here is Hegel early in his epic work, *The Philosophy of History* (1834/1991):

It must be observed at the outset, that the phenomenon we investigate—Universal History—belongs to the realm of Spirit. The term “World,” includes both physical and psychical Nature....But Spirit, and the course of its development, is our substantial object. (p. 16)

Hegel’s insight comes seductively close to a key tenet of Campbell’s reflections on world mythologies as he continues: “the rational necessary course of the World-Spirit—that Spirit whose nature is always one and the same,... unfolds this its one nature in the phenomena of the World’s existence” (1834/1991, p. 10). Campbell, deploying similar words to delineate an analogous idea, believed, following the Irish writer, James Joyce who gave him the term “monomyth,” that all the varieties of world mythologies are inflections of one story. Phil Cousineau, in his Introduction to the revised *The Hero’s Journey*, writes that “the monomyth is in effect a metamyth, a philosophical reading of the unity of mankind’s spiritual history, the Story beyond the story that everlasting reiteration of unchanging principles and events inflected in particular and unique ways” what Joyce called a universal monomyth that imbeds itself in the various localities of a specific culture in time. ((1990/2003, p.xix). He furthers this revelation at the heart of *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* in writing that “to grasp the full power of mythological figures, we see that they are symptoms of the unconscious, but also controlled and intended statements of spiritual principles which are as constant in history as the human nervous system” (1948/1968, p. 257).

In this vein, let us link for a moment both Hegel and Campbell to one more crucial historical figure, Ranier Maria Rilke, who writes in his thoughtful responses to a young poet that “Spiritual creativity originates from the physical; they are of the same essence” (Rilke, 1929/1992 p.38). He further links

these two impulses that allow for some new creation to enter the world when he reflects that “spiritual creativity is a gentler, more blissful and enduring repetition of physical desire and satisfaction” (p. 38), which implies that psyche, nature, and spirit are more aligned than alien to some fundamental hidden unity that perhaps the metaphors of poetry are best equipped with a greater alacrity than other forms of expression, to transmit to a receptive audience. Campbell underscores Rilke’s insight when he coins the phrase “mythic identification” (1951/2002, p. 160) to capture the sense of a hidden transcendent unity of truth, substance and energy.

The latter part of this essay must, then, include a brief exploration of “Ode to a Nightingale” by the 19th century English poet, John Keats, who in his short but gifted life created some of the most remarkable poetry on the themes that Campbell and others believed were at the heart of any pulsating desire to restore the mythic impulse to the heartbeat of the common citizen. This ode recollects and records a transcendent pilgrimage into the imaginal realm, guided by the song of an invisible bird that turns an ordinary event in the life of an exhausted soul into a mythical journey that revitalizes and shifts his vision towards the mysteries of a transcendent realm. This languid soul has indeed heard and heeded the call and entered the vocational woods of poetic creation.

What Keats’ ode exposes is an essential and exhausting poverty inherent in literalism, which I take as the expression of the everyday shorn of its transcendent reverberations. The function of the poet, Campbell asserts, is “to see the life value of the facts round about, and to deify them, as it were, to provide images that relate the everyday to the eternal” (2004, p. xvi). The symptoms of literalism’s malady include an arresting or blockage of psychic energy’s flow, which Carl Jung observes in *Mysterium Coniunctionis* in a section entitled “An Alchemical Allegory,” “is the source of your fantasy, the fountain of your soul....You would like to make gold because poverty is the greatest plague, wealth the highest good” (1963/1989, par. 191). Jung believed, in this last book which he completed in his eightieth year, that the image of “the ever-flowing fountain expresses a continual flow of interest toward the unconscious, a kind of constant attention or ‘religio,’ which might also be called devotion” (par. 193).

Perhaps in entertaining the hero’s journey, we have read it too literally. I say this because there is implicit in the metaphor of this journey the possibility that the hero is an encompassing metaphor for the life energy

itself that flows, becomes sidetracked, end-stopped, decreased, increased, diluted, or polluted. The hero may be imagined as energy itself, the life force that permeates all matter, but which finally shares a universal origin, a common source, even a mythic heritage.

At the heart of the hero's journey is this proposal: "The effect of the successful adventure of the hero is the unlocking and release again of the flow of life into the body of the world" (1948/2004, p. 40). Campbell reveals in his writing how both the world's material, its physicality, and its metaphorical or symbolic resonances, matter. "There seem to be only two kinds of people: Those who think that metaphors are facts, and those who know that they are not facts" (2001, p. 48). The first group are the atheists and the second are "religious." However, he writes earlier in the same volume that "The divine is transcendent even of the category of transcendence, for that too is a category of thought..." (p. 39). Given this metaphorical quality that points to and exposes a mystery beyond contradiction and duality, he affirms that "myth is a constant regeneration, an identification with the life process" (2003, p.8). What for Campbell is the life process comprises for Hegel the World Spirit that animates and informs the World soul. Thus, the vitality and energy of the metaphors and symbols we create to describe the ineffable bear directly on what intensity of value the divine lives within and among us.

Campbell insists that "the life of a mythology springs from and depends on the metaphoric vigor of its symbols...which can convey some realization of the infinite" (2001, p. 6). A new mythos must therefore be diligent and dedicated to preserving speech as well as preserving species. The death throes of the soul reveal themselves in, among other venues, the death of language—its cadavers are strewn around us everywhere: in clichés, slogans, worn out phrases, vulgarity and profanity, empty words, strict denotation, newspeak, sound-bytes and a general lack of vitality in self-expression.

For Campbell, this metaphorical quality lying vibrantly at the heart of myths and myth-making, begins in the body, in its energetic language; it is the interior of flesh, even as it connects us to the natural, physical world at the same time that it clears a space for accommodating the transcendent, to allow us "transparence" to the latter. In allowing the energy of the world soul to permeate one's own body, one's own psyche, one opens oneself to the mythic impulse which is to make us "transparent to transcendence" (2003, p. 40), which is another way of asserting that myths promote our "learning to live the divine life within you"

(p. 40).

Only metaphor has this exclusively powerful quality of allowing us to enter domains not readily accessible to the rational mind. The word "metaphor," he explains, is from two Greek words: meta=to pass over, to go from one place to another; and pherein=to move or carry. Metaphors carry us from one place to another; they allow us to cross boundaries otherwise impossible; they also transport us past time, space; and they center us in the connotative dimensions of a world that is essentially and furiously denotative (2001, p. xvi).

Within this field of metaphor, which is a mode of transportation, an efficient and very economic delivery system of sorts, for the psyche, myths, according to Campbell, serve four functions: 1. they align consciousness to the *mysterium tremendum*, the universe as it is; 2. they are interpretive, providing a consistent image of the order of the cosmos; 3. they help carry the individual through various stages and crises of life; 4. they carry a religious function: to awaken and maintain in the person an experience of awe, to know and respect that ultimate mystery that transcends all forms (2001, pp.3-4).

Myths, therefore, as he writes in *Flight of the Wild Gander*, are the "texts of rites of passage" (p. 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* (1988): "the archetypes of the unconscious are manifestations of the organs of the body and their powers. Archetypes are biologically grounded..." (p. 51). 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. Finally, and to reveal the underlying unity of human embodiment and the cosmos, he asserts in *The Inner Reaches of Outer Space* that "the energy by which the body is pervaded is the same as that which illuminates the world and maintains alive all beings, the two breaths being the same" (2002, p. 41). A new mythos would gain much energy if it planted Campbell's observation in the forefront of its assertion as a central tenet of its development.

A key to this web of relationships, even a partnership between energy flows through shared matter, is offered more than once by Campbell when he quotes the 19th century poet Novalis: "The seat of the soul is there, where the outer and the inner worlds meet" (2002, p.5). Perhaps analogies are birthed right here,

in that “marsupial pouch” that for Campbell characterizes, in an organic and animal way, the place of society where the human body breathes itself into the social matrix, a second womb of sorts, that shapes it and is contoured by it.

I offer the following wobbly neologism to capture something of such a partnership: mythophysiology—a mythos of flesh, the body, which my colleague Robert Romanyshyn has eloquently described as “a gestural body, [which is ] a magnetic, gravitational, erotic field...” (2002, p. 93).

Campbell intuited something profound about the body’s relation to myth and meaning but chose not to pursue it in depth. He observed that “mythos and dream are motivated from a single psycho-physical source. The human imagination is moved by the conflicting urgencies of the organs—including the brain, of the human body” (2002, p. xiv). He called these “bioenergies, which is the essence of life itself; but when unbridled become terrific, horrifying, destructive” (p. xix). Human embodiment, like mythology generally, for Campbell, has its own organizing structures; learning to read the body as metaphorical of something beyond and within itself constitutes an angle of seeing in the construction of a revitalized myth in order that an individual, or an entire people, grasp in a sensate way an intuition of place and of belonging to something beyond themselves.

This is not a new myth but a reclaimed one, and we can here highlight the indispensable place of a historical imagination in retrieving the humanity of our species. Human history may then be understood as a biography of an entire species, as well as a record of the pilgrimage of *humanitas*, which Robert Pogue Harrison tells us, citing the work of Giambattista Vico, reveals that the word “*humanitas* in Latin comes first and properly from *humando*, burying” (2003, p. xi)... The human is bound up with the humus and is why burial figures as the generative institution of human nature, taking the word *nature* in its full etymological sense (from *nasci*, “to be born”; p. x). A new or revitalized mythos, then, would seek to reclaim the wisdom of the dead, for the quality of being connected to ancestry has been muted considerably in today’s future-obsessed consciousness, whose mythos is surcharged with planned obsolescence. A new mythos would exchange hubris for humus.

James Hillman, undoubtedly influenced by Vico, writes in *Healing Fiction* (1983) of the central importance of history’s qualitative hold on psyche. He argues convincingly against the preoccupation with the “historical ego,” whose organizing impulse is to remember

and reflect unconsciously “the history which formed it and which its continuity would uphold...” (p. 60). By contrast, each of us is influenced by “history’s hundred channels” which “show culture at work in the channels of the soul. The land of the dead is the country of ancestors, and the images who walk in on us are our ancestors.... They are the historical progenitors, or archetypes, of our particular spirit informing it with ancestral culture” (p. 60). So, perhaps less an emphasis on historical events and facts at this juncture, and more on the nature of a historical sensibility imaginably kindled that arouses one’s soul within a larger fabric of meaning and intentions, may assist us in reclaiming the ancestral imagination to allow for a fuller vision of our place in historical time.

By the same token, a new or renewed mythos would also ideally push against the blind obsession with the *individual* in order to allow one to see that a myth of a communal, global order is necessary and must take precedence over the rights and appetites of the seemingly autonomous self. Campbell writes in *Flight of the Wild Gander* (1990/2002) that “myths and rites constellate a mesocosm, a mediating middle cosmos through which the microcosm of the individual is brought into relation with the macrocosm of the universe” (p. 123). Given such a connection, life on earth “is to mirror in the human body the almost hidden, yet now discovered order of the pageant of the spheres” (p. 130); such an observation rests on a fundamental premise in all of Campbell’s musings on world mythologies: “the highest concern of all myths, ceremonies, etc, is to get people to identify with something outside of themselves” (1990/2002, p. 130).

His most cogent and sustained opus, the four volume *The Masks of God*, serves as a compendium of his thought on the matrix of mythic consciousness that anticipates or is in tandem with Stan Grof’s vision of a wholistic order. Early in the beginning of volume 4, *Creative Mythology* (1968), Campbell reiterates and in truth, redesigns his list of four qualities, goals and purposes of a people’s mythology. The fourth point is the only one I wish to access here:

The fourth and most vital, most critical function of a mythology, then, is to foster the centering and unfolding of the individual in integrity, in accord with d) himself (the microcosm), c) his culture (the mesocosm), b) the universe (the macrocosm), and a) that awesome ultimate mystery which is both beyond and within himself and all things. (p. 6)

Stanislav Grof’s own work, to which I have only

recently come, resonates a similar holistic view, especially in *Psychology of the Future* (2000): “Spiritual intelligence is the capacity to conduct our life in such a way that it reflects [a] deep philosophical and metaphysical understanding of reality and of ourselves” (p. 298). Such a shift of *capacity*—a key and critical word here—rests on the ability to recognize the myth of mechanism that has dominated a vision of nature and her structure for hundreds of years. Instead of “the image of the cosmos as a mechanical system” that assumes it can then be understood by “dissection” and explanation (p. 299), cultural forces shifted the inflection to one of the image of the cosmos as a mythical or series of overlapping mythical tonalities, organisms and the interfaces of both divine and human orders commingling and mutually influencing one another. Such a shift would, I believe, be in line and in the spirit of both Grof’s life’s work and Joseph Campbell’s sustained project of uncovering the “elementary ideas” of Adolf Bastian and the archetypal principles at the bedrock level of the psyche ordained and given authentic currency by C.G. Jung.

In such a relationship, nature becomes transformed into narrative, as Richard Kearney develops this idea in a powerful little book, *On Stories* (2001). There the nature and structure of the narratives we tell, are in a sense homologous—and perhaps even holotropic?—of the structure of the world we inhabit. Nature and narrative grow like seedlings from the same plot of ground, are fertilized by the same principles that organize and order the cosmic as well as social and individual orders. In such a paradigm, a full and authentic mimesis, or imitation of a psychic action, that Aristotle discovered in the 5th century BCE in Greece, would finally reach its fullest expression. Both Joseph Campbell and Stan Grof would find a strong partnership in the observation expressed by the latter writer in *The Holotropic Mind* (1990):

New scientific findings are beginning to support beliefs of cultures thousands of years old, showing that our individual psyches are, in the last analysis, a manifestation of cosmic consciousness and intelligence that flows through all of existence. We never completely lost contact with this cosmic consciousness because we are never fully separated from it. (pp. 202-03)

Let me turn in the last part of this excursus to the realm of poetry, to the process of poesis that only the human being is fully equipped to create. For the Greeks, poesis is a making or a shaping of something that has been apprehended; its praxis is to create by

analogy a mimetic representation of some vision, some insight that has particularly powerful mythic resonances. As such, poetry is capable of producing an organic mythology, a mythology of organs and origins, for poets do not eschew the world so much as they enter it more fully than the rest of us may be capable. They are the figures in the culture to whom we turn, for, as the poet Wallace Stevens observes, in writing of Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom, two southern poets of the last century, “the poets’ sensibilities have large orbits” (1997, p. 711). And from that penetration through the boundaries that might inhibit or resist the rest of us in our tracks, the poet is a partner in the hero’s journey who, having suffered through the concrete world in a unique way, returns with a boon that is worth contemplating as we tend to the right measure of our own voyage.

Poets are the antithesis of those souls caught in hell. For Campbell, “Hell, properly, is the condition of people who are so bound to their ego lives and selfish values that they cannot open out to a transpersonal grace” (2001, p. 100). In other words, these souls are landlocked, even drydocked, such that they find it impossible to leave their safe harbors and sail towards the transcendent. When asked about the experience of the transcendent and how one might achieve its status, Campbell reflected on it in a “Discussion” transcribed at the back of *Thou Art That*, and drew this conclusion: “How does the ordinary person come to the transcendent? For a start, I would say, study poetry. Learn how to read a poem. You need not have the experience to get the message, or at least some indication of the message” (p. 92).

I want to lean on his words a bit to complete this essay by briefly exploring one of the finest poets in our tradition who successfully and securely wedded the imagination to the mundane, in order to shatter those boundaries that Stan Grof believes keep us arrested within limits that are more arbitrary than absolute (2000, p. 318). The *Odes* of John Keats (1795-1821) are among the most famous and finely wrought in literature by such a young poet. While written in the early part of the 19th century, they could have been etched yesterday or even tomorrow.

As I stated in the title of this paper, there exists an intimacy between the myth of nature, perhaps a mytho-poesis of nature, that unveils and makes more transparent, the nature of myth. Keats’ “Ode to a Nightingale” (1819) renders that dual awareness in dramatic form as he implicitly outlines the lineaments of a mythological sensibility we must retrieve, as both Stan Grof and Joseph Campbell rightly insist on. Any

hope for a viable future of the planet and the politics that outline and contour its habitation must include the dual tasks of retrieval of the past and the renewal of the future. In short, our response must be both mythic and poetic. Wallace Stevens, one of our toughest and most elegant voices of the poet and the critic, could have been musing on Keats' *Ode* when he wrote: "There is always an analogy between nature and the imagination, and possibly poetry is merely the strange rhetoric of that parallel" (1997, p. 715).

In an earlier poem, "Ode to Psyche" (1819), Keats lamented the loss of psyche's place in the natural order through the "strange rhetoric" that Stevens confirms is the poetic response to the ordinary; Keats envisioned already the growing pulse in the Western psyche in the 19th century to denude matter of its mystery through a stranger metaphysic that also felt the need to confirm the loss of divinity from the created order. The poet's task, as Keats reveals it in that ode, is to become a priest of the imagination who utters psyche's presence back into the world as both a sacramental mission and as a sacred imperative.

In "Ode to a Nightingale" he renders an experience that is no less epiphanic, namely, to reclaim from the past, from the dead, a living testimony of the future. His ode is like a remembrance, for it returns to conscious awareness the absolutely essential role of the imagination as an instrument for reclaiming of the dead, for disinterring a relation that has been truncated and buried, between soul and matter. Said another way, the poet's task is not just concerned with the world's body, but with words' bodies themselves—the power of words' organic vitality to form a world and to transcend the ordinary world of sense by such a conveyance. Stevens completes his brilliant reflections on the nature and effects of analogy regarding poetry by stating what seems so appropriate to Keats' poem:

their words [the poets'] have made a world that transcends the world and a life livable in that transcendence.... Thus poetry becomes and is a transcendent analogue composed of the particulars of reality, created by the poet's sense of the world, that is to say, his attitude, as he intervenes and interposes the appearances of that sense. (1997, pp. 722-23)

Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" testifies to such a transcendent possibility as well as our capacity to nest imaginally in just that brooding domain.

The voice of the figure in the poem, its narrator, begins in lethargy: "My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains/My sense, as though of hemlock I had

drunk,/Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains" (1819, p. 205) as he (in fact it could be a man or a woman) falls Lethe-wards into the ennui of forgetfulness. What this voice seeks is some vitality in his own life, "a draught of vintage" that has been cooled a long time "in the deep-delved earth/Tasting of Flora and the country green,/Dance, and Provencal song" (p. 205), some elixir of life that would revive and restore a connection to the natural order. He hears at the same time, and in fact is inspired by, the song of an invisible nightingale singing in the dark shadows of the forest's trees. Such will be his catalyst to heed the sound of the call and venture out, "entering the forest at its darkest part," that is, where no one had cut a path before; Campbell insists the heroic journey must originate in pathlessness and in isolation; otherwise one is following another's path (2001, p. xvii). Bliss eventuates out of personal blisters.

The narrator's desire seems motivated, in part, by the oppressive sense of life's decay and death, "where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs/Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies" (p. 206). The response he feels—for odes convey as much feeling as thought or action—is moved by desire for a life of depth, for an *élan vital*, spawned by imagination, by the poetic impulse of the psyche, and perhaps by poetry's innate wisdom. Now, suddenly, through the invisible bird's song as guide, the languid soul is immediately transported into another level of consciousness which transcends the boundaries of time and space, yet is anchored securely in the voice of the bird—an image, I suspect—of the *animal mundi* herself—not seen, only heard: "Already with thee! tender is the night,/And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,/Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays" (p. 206). His soul is, in a moment of eternal time, re-animated by the feminine light of the moon and the dark vegetation, where he moves slowly "Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways" (p. 206).

The almost instantaneous transformation into the mysterious realm of nature through an imaginal leap instills in him what I would call a natural imagination, one which is attuned not just to the foliage but to the smells of "the coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,/ [and] the murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves" (p. 206). His world darkens as he reflects on his attraction,

to easeful Death,  
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme  
To take into the air my quiet breath;  
Now more than ever it seems rich to die. (p. 206)

This call by Death is both crucial and necessary, it seems to me, in the construction of a new mythos for the world; for unless the dead are now acknowledged as the central core of our legacy of the living, the same patterns of responses will remain stubbornly in place, both cadaverous and calcified. But with a reverent bow to the dead emerges a recognition of history's legacy:

The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
In ancient days by emperor and clown:  
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path  
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when,  
    sick for home,  
She stood in tears amid the alien corn; (p. 207)

This passage bears witness to an entry in one of Wallace Stevens' notebooks: "The poet is the priest of the invisible" (1997, p. 908). As priest, he consecrates the mundane into the transcendent. Within such a sacred posture, two losses most in need of retrieval grow from the soil of lament in the poem's voice: the dead, as well as a sense of the historical connection that binds us all as one into a common humanity: what we all share each in our separate ways is a relation to the past and to the dead. Harrison offers a dramatic image of this observation: "Our psyches are the graveyards of impressions, traumas, desires, and archetypes that confound the law of obsolescence" (2003, p. xi). He further asserts that any salvific impulse in humanity to preserve itself must be based on a humic foundation, "one whose contents have been buried so that they may be reclaimed by the future" (p. x). Indeed, to move into the natural order, as the voice of the poem does, is to simultaneously enter by analogy into the world of the dead and the unborn at the same stroke.

By the same token, the voice of Keats' poem not only retrieves the numinous quality inherent in the natural order, but that voice is also led to it by a kind of poesy, the song of the bird, which has now achieved in his imagination mythical status. Or, his imagination has uncovered the transcendent quality alive in the song's immanence, or perhaps more accurately, in its mythopoetic veracity: "Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!/ No hungry generations tread thee down" (p. 207) for the particular bird whose song led him into his initial reverie now swells its orbit, if not increases its volume, to become the sound that has echoed through the corridors of history from time immemorial; the solitary and lifeless voice of the narrator at the beginning has been revitalized by this seemingly ordinary connection to nature that has gestated in the poetic imagination and now leafs into a mythological experience. A temporal event has been

transformed, via the mystery of language, to a mythical experience, which at the same instant has married this sole soul to history, to the vast community of the dead. But as suggested in the archetypal pattern of Joseph Campbell's hero's journey, he or she must not rest content with the new experience or challenge; the heroic figure must return to the ground from which one originated to complete the cycle of departure, initiation, and return—with some gift of remembrance. The heroic is never completely unmoored from its humic and humble foundations:

Forlorn! The very word is like a bell  
To toll me back from thee to my sole self! (p. 207)

On his return, however, and with a clever oral pun on the word "sole," he continues to hear the fading echoic resonances of the bird's song, a catalyst or a transport vehicle that led him from the isolated and solitary regime of the personal into the more communal and historically imbedded transpersonal, or the "transcendent" realm cited earlier by Wallace Stevens and given several currency values in Campbell's work. But now the nightingale's song fades "over the still stream,/Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep/In the next valley-glades" (p. 207). It has found its earth home once again.

In the metaxis of dream and perceptual waking is the space of contemplation, remembrance, reflection, and renewal: "Was it a vision, or a waking dream? /Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?" (p. 207). One possible answer is "yes" to both, a waking and sleeping experience, a form of death of the self as it enters through the shining corridor of reverie, the thinly-bordered imagined realm "of silence and slow time," a line Keats crafts in "Ode On a Grecian Urn" (p. 207).

If we are able to slow down sufficiently to hear Keats' call, then we could suggest that a revitalized mythology must then include a poetic and imaginal response to the matter of the world, a connection to the natural and transcendent orders of being, to history, to a renewed relationship with the dead, with the past, with a historical sensibility, with an awareness of mythic time and space which situates us between flux and permanence, the permanence of flux and the flux of permanence itself; it includes as well a shift from a strictly solar to a lunar consciousness, to a deeper connection to one's "sole" self, and a return to share, to voice, to make public in a larger venue what one has discovered, in a language that is clean and freshly strewn with original analogies to wake the imagination from its dreary and often habituated slumbers.



Only by taking this last step in the journey—making public, not in shrill outcries of literal laments, but in a more imaginal and reasoned response, founded on a fertile loam of intuition, will there be any hope, to my mind, for the vitality of the magic of metaphorical and symbolic realities to be heard by those suffering from “a drowsy numbness” which pains their senses, numbs their souls and provokes increased consumption.

Harrison ends his Preface to *The Dominion of the Dead* (2003) with this observation: “sometimes the best way to retrieve a legacy is by freeing it from its original framework and reinscribing it in new ones” (pp. xi-xii). Surely the pioneering work of Joseph Campbell, Stan Grof, Rick Tarnas, John Keats, Carl Jung, James Hillman, Marie Louise von Franz, Marion Woodman, Christine Downing, Ginette Paris and others, each with his or her uniquely beveled and honed eloquent language, have all exercised just such a profound liberation of the past so that it can don and wear the shimmering and shadowy new wardrobes of a revitalized and freshly languaged future.

#### Author Note

This paper is based upon a presentation at the Sixteenth International Transpersonal Conference in Palm Spring, California: 13-18 June 2004.

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