

Michael Vannoy Adams, *The Mythological Unconscious*, New York/London: Karnac, 2001, Pp. 512, Paper, \$30.00.

In "The Hymn of the Pearl," an ancient Manichaean document with decidedly gnostic features, the protagonist, Mani, is challenged by his royal parents with the coming-of-age task of descending into Egypt to retrieve a lost pearl. As happens in many allegories of the soul, however, this mission, though undertaken eagerly, soon lapses into forgetfulness. Upon his arrival in Egypt, Mani enters a tavern, eats the heavy food and drink of that fallen land, and completely forgets about the pearl.

Now Mani is by no means the only forgetful hero in the cannon of myth and fairy tale. The motif appears in numerous other accounts as well. Forgetfulness, or as we now say in psychology, unconsciousness, is a typical moment in the soul's life. During the course of his quest, Perceval also forgot about the grail for a time. And Odysseus, forgetting his wife, his son, and his kingdom in Ithaca, idylled away for many years with the nymph Calypso on her island. Turning from myth to poetry we find still further versions of the same mythologem. In "Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward," John Donne describes himself as riding westerly, that is, away from the Cross, on the day of his Lord's death--the sphere of "man's soul" having become so "subject to foreign motions" that it had lost or forgotten its own. And finally Wordsworth, in his famous intimations of immortality ode, places all our lives in the status of forgetfulness. "Our birth," he declares, "is but a sleep and a forgetting" of "that imperial palace whence [we] came," i.e., the archetypal realm.

But forgetting also remembers. Worried by Mani's long absence, the parents back home in the super-celestial kingdom dispatch a message to him by way of an eagle. The message is simply a wake-up call, reminding him of who he is and of the mission with which he has been entrusted. Receiving the message, Mani remembers his purpose, quickly finds the pearl, and then returns to the celestial palace where he is invested as king.

The other examples I have cited also contain this complementary motif of consciousness-increasing remembrance. The forgetful Perceval eventually awakens, or as the myth puts it, remembers his lady, Blancheflor, and the grail. In a similar vein, Odysseus awakens from his steamy idyll with Calypso to complete his journey home. And Donne, while riding westward on Good Friday, has the saving thought that the Lord will think him worthy of an afflux of divine anger and correct (or as we say in psychology, compensate) his wayward course with merciful punishments until his face turns east again.

As what Jung called a form of myth continued by other means (CW 9, i: 302), analytical psychology also enacts the motif we have just amplified. It, too, forgets its mission, strays from its quest, and becomes so subject to foreign motions that it loses its own. But periodically a book appears that is a wake-up call and a reminder. Reading Michael Adams's new book, *The Mythological Unconscious*, so lucid in its presentation of the essence of Jungian theory and practice, I had the impression that our discipline was awakening within its pages to a vitally new, or rather, vitally renewed awareness of its unique spirit.

In the first chapter, "Psycho-Mythology: *Meschugge?*," Adams returns depth psychology to its origins in Freud's and Jung's fascination with mythology. From among numerous references to Freud, the following one from a 1897 letter that Freud wrote to Fliess warrants quoting here:

Can you imagine what "endopsychic myths" are? ... The dim inner perception of one's own

psychic apparatus stimulates thought illusions, which of course are projected onto the outside and, characteristically, into the future and beyond. Immortality, retribution, the entire world beyond are all reflections of our psychic internal [world]. *Meschugge?* Psycho-mythology. (p. 3)

Jung, too, came early to an appreciation of the importance of myth for psychoanalysis. Documenting this early interest, Adams quotes from a letter Jung sent to Freud in 1909:

It has become quite clear to me that we shall not solve the ultimate secrets of neurosis and psychosis without mythology and the history of civilization. (p. 1)

The passages Adams quotes from these and other letters, together with his lucid account of the Jungian technique of amplification (explicated in part by a discussion of what T.S. Eliot, with reference to the novels of Joyce, called "the mythical method") are like the letters sent by the parents of the super-celestial kingdom to Mani in Egypt--a wake-up call for psychoanalysis in general and analytical psychology in particular.

Psychoanalysis, in many quarters, has de-emphasized interpretive analysis of the unconscious. Forgetful of its identity as an interpretive approach, it has become more "psycho-relationist" than psychoanalytic in approach. In the course of making these provocative points, Adams discusses comments that the psychoanalyst, Joyce McDougall, has made in which she demurs on the point of whether it mattered in one of her own cases whether her interpretations were accurate or not. In Kohut's writings, too, he finds evidence of this softening of the interpretive stance. Turning from contemporary psychoanalysis to contemporary analytical psychology, Adams finds much the same shifting of emphasis away from the interpretation of imaginal contents in terms of comparative symbolic material from the world of fairy tale, myth, and religion in favour of a narrowing of the clinical focus to issues pertaining to the technical management of the transference. "Some Jungian analysts," he writes,

consider mythology to be irrelevant to clinical practice. They tend to be analysts who, historically, have had an inferiority complex about clinical technique. More specifically, they have felt clinically inferior to analysts in the Freudian tradition. ... To compensate for what these Jungians regard as a deficiency, they have appropriated clinical techniques from the Freudian tradition. They tend to dismiss the serious interest that Jung had in mythology as a quaintly idiosyncratic antiquarian curiosity of no particular clinical value. (p. 16)

Horribile dictu: analytical psychology has increasingly become so subject to foreign motions that it has lost in own. And along with this it has lost its pearl--the notion of the archetype, the collective unconscious, and the objective psyche--in the bargain. But as Adams, returning to these signature concepts of Jung's, reminds us, Jung developed a very specific technique by which he applied mythology in a credible manner within the clinical context--"*interpretation by amplification.*"

To demonstrate the relevance of interpretation by amplification for analytic practice, Adams ingeniously applies the technique to the cases of various analysts of the Freudian tradition who have drawn analogies to mythological figures in a very casual and archetypally illiterate manner in their

writings. By "sticking to the image" (what Adams calls "content-specific interpretation"), he shows, for instance, Freud's famous interpretation of the Medusa's head in terms of the castration complex to be arbitrary and unconvincing. Likewise, by bringing a discussion of the figures of Odysseus and Telemachus to bear upon what Hillman has called the "psycho-daimonics" of the father-son theme, he shows Freud's totalizing of a single archetype--his famous Oedipus-complex--to be itself a form of repression of other insights carried by other myths and other archetypes. In a detailed critique of the Lacanian Serge Leclaire's analysis of a unicorn dream, Adams again shows how wide of the mark psychoanalysis can be when it reductively translates a patient's dreams and fantasies into terms which fit with those that its theory privileges such as the phallus. An old case and dream report of Wilhelm Stekel's also receives from Adams the same sort of Jungian supervisory commentary. In this way, Adams masterfully illustrates the difference between what he calls the "reductive-derivative" style of interpretation, which is characteristic of the Freudian tradition, and the "explicative-amplificatory" method of the Jungian school, bringing this difference to bear upon an interesting transference/countertransference enactment.

Now it should not be thought that Adams is anti-Freudian or anti-Lacanian. (There is no Manichean splitting in this volume.) Nor is it the case that his critique of those Jungians who have forfeited their tradition to what Samuels has recently called "the rapprochement with psychoanalysis" places him at the classical-symbolic, or even Jungian fundamentalist, end of the analytical psychology continuum. Adams's account of the mythological unconscious and of the Jungian method of working with it is a recovered, recollected, remembered account. It is as an analyst well-versed in Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalysis that Adams champions his timely "return to Jung."

The business of recovery, recollection, remembering and return is very important, as a little further reflection upon the myths I have cited immediately conveys. Had Mani simply gotten down to the task of fetching back the pearl, or had Perceval simply asked the question he should have asked when he first came into the presence of the grail, their myths would have failed because there would have been no story. Likewise, if analytical psychology had simply stayed in Zurich, or made only that short and faithful journey from Küsnacht to Bollingen, it would have only been identical with itself, not conscious of itself. Adams's book, in marked contrast to such a pristinely innocent form of Jungianism, *is* conscious of itself, its faithfulness to the Jungian tradition being the tested product of an immensely fruitful engagement with its Freudian (Kleinian, Lacanian) Other.

"The unconscious is structured like a language," Lacan famously declared. Returning from his rich Lacanian slumbers (Adams has written insightfully in the past on Lacan and deconstruction), our author awakens to his own, Jungian version of this adage: "The unconscious," he writes, "is structured like a myth--or like myths, in the plural" (p. 1). Again and again, throughout his book, Adams makes a similar journey back to analytical psychology's methods and techniques, affirming these more consciously against the foil of the rival tradition. The effect of this is not to depreciate the achievements of Freudian psychoanalysis (again, the book could not have been written without a deep understanding of the various psychoanalytic schools), but to claim a place of equality and collegiality for analytical psychology as the same table.

The Mythological Unconscious is a proud book that reminds us that analytical psychology has much to be proud of. As such, it is just the right medicine for the inferiority complex, creeping eclecticism, and forgetfulness that have undermined our field. With clarity, erudition, humour, and much panache, Adams contemporizes Jung's most important contribution to psychoanalysis--his notion of the archetype and of the collective unconscious--showing the relevance of this to the

practice of analysis today. What Whitmont's *The Symbolic Quest* and Edinger's *Ego and Archetype* were for an earlier generation, Adam's book, I predict, will be for our own--a standard of the field for many years to come.

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