# Joseph Campbell

## *Bios and Mythos*

***Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) wrote this article for a collection of essays,*** Psychoanalysis and Culture***, printed in 1951 to celebrate the sixtieth birthday of the famed psychiatrist and ethnologist, Géza Róheim. In it, he seeks to define the biological roots of the human mythic impulse. Written two years after his seminal*** Hero with a Thousand Faces***, "Bios and Mythos" takes what was, for Campbell, a unique view of myth. In deference to Róheim, who defined myth as a mechanism for satisfying the universal human desire to return to the infant's safety with its mother, Campbell invokes what was to become one of his favorite images for the function of myth: that of the marsupial pouch, the second womb. Here, more than elsewhere in his work, Campbell emphasizes myth as an intermediary aid that the individual can outgrow.***



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# *Bios and Mythos*

## [I]
## *Sociological and Psychological Schools of Interpretation*

The archetypes of mythology are constant enough for sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Roman Catholics, adequately trained in their own symbology, to have regarded the myths and images, sacraments and temples of the New World as diabolical mockeries of the truths of the one True Church. Fray Pedro Simon wrote of his mission in seventeenth-century Colombia:

> The demon of that place began giving contrary doctrines, and among other things sought to discredit what the priest had been teaching concerning the Incarnation, declaring that it had not yet come to pass, but that presently the Sun would bring it to pass by taking flesh in the womb of a virgin of the village of Guacheta, causing her to conceive by the rays of the sun while she yet remained a virgin. These tidings were proclaimed throughout the region. And it so happened that the headman of the village named had two virgin daughters, each desirous that the miracle should become accomplished in her. These then began going out from their father's dwelling and garden enclosure every morning at the first peep of dawn. And mounting one of the numerous hills about the village, in the direction of the sunrise, they disposed themselves in such a way that the first rays of the sun were free to shine upon them. This going on for a number of days, it was granted the demon by Divine Permission (Whose judgments are incomprehensible) that things should come to pass as he had planned, and in such fashion that one of the daughters became pregnant, as she declared, by the sun. Nine months and she brought into the world a large and valuable *hacuata*, which in their language is an emerald. The woman took this, and wrapping it in cotton, placed it between her breasts, where she kept it a number of days, at the end of which time it was transformed into a living creature: all by order of the demon. The child was named Goranchacho, and he was reared in the household of the headman, his grandfather, until he was some twenty-four years old whereupon he proceeded, in great state, to the capital of the nation and became known throughout the provinces as “Child of the Sun.” [1]

Fray Pedro's testimony is but one of many. The Mexican symbols and myths of Quetzalcoatl so closely resemble those of Jesus that the Padres in that area supposed that Saint Thomas's mission to India must have reached Tenochtitlán, where, cut off from the pure source of Rome, the Waters of Redemption were muddled by fallen angels. Three centuries later, Adolf Bastian (1826-1905), voyaging in China and Japan, India, Africa, and South America, also recognized the uniformity of what he termed the “Elementary Ideas” *(Elementargedanken)* of mankind,[2] but he took a scientifically maturer view of the implicit problem. Instead of attributing the local variations to the distorting power of a devil, he considered the force of geography and history in the

processing of the "Ethnic Ideas" *(Völkergedanken)*, that is to say, in the shaping of the local transformations of the universal forms. "First," he writes, "the idea as such must be studied . . . and as a second factor, the influence of climatic-geological conditions must be studied." [3] A third factor, to which he devotes many chapters of his innumerable volumes, is that of the impact and influence upon each other of the various "folk" traditions throughout the course of history. Bastian's insight is basic, and has not yet been supplanted.

Tylor, Frazer, and the other comparative anthropologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries likewise recognized the obvious constancy in mankind's Elementary Ideas. Franz Boas, for example, in the first edition of his early work, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, [4] stated without qualification that "in the main the mental characteristics of man are the same all over the world"; and that "certain patterns of associated ideas may be recognized in all types of culture."[5] But these avowals were expunged from his second, "revised" (actually, recomposed) edition;[6] for the vogue had by that time begun of stressing differences, even to the point of denying correspondences, between the dialects of the common human language.

We owe this new tendency in large measure to the muddleheaded Emile Durkheim. Read his confused discussion of Kant's *a priori* forms of sensibility,[7] and his quackery about the distinction between the Zuni and European experiences of space, and the shallowness of his whole parody of profundity will be apparent! The entire culturalist movement in our contemporary Anglo-American anthropological literature is touched with this Durkheimian myopia. Bronislaw Malinowski's misreading of Sigmund Freud's technical term "Oedipus complex" and his refutation, then, of his own misconception added new dignity to the movement,[8] which in the midnineteen thirties culminated in a kind of professorial *curia*, dedicated to the proposition that mankind is not a species but indefinitely variable dough, shaped by a self-creating demiurge, "Society." The idea that man may have a psychological as well as physical character was anathematized *ex cathedra* as "mystical."†

The *curia*'s characteristic mistake, specifically, has been that of confusing function with morphology—as though a congress of zoologists, studying the wing of the bat, the flipper of the whale, the foreleg of the rat, and the arm of man, should not know that these organs, though shaped to differing functions, are structurally homologous, and were to suppose that the wing of the bat might be compared, morphologically, with that of a butterfly, the flipper of a whale with the fin of a trout, the leg of a rat with that of a beetle, and the arm of a man with that of a lobster. Skipping the first task of a comparative science—that, namely, of distinguishing precisely the sphere of analogy from that of homology—these students of mankind proceeded to the second task—that of the monograph; and the result has been a complete dismemberment of what, at the opening of our century, promised to become a science.
In contrast, we have the sundry schools of the diffusionists, stressing cultural affinities that

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Durkheim quotes F. H. Cushing to the effect that space in Zuni has seven quarters, and declares this to be an essentially different space from ours, which has but four. The seven Zuni quarters are, to wit: north, south, east, west, above, below, and middle. Very different indeed! Durkheim's problem, obviously, was semantic and absolutely elementary. "Les divisions de l'espace," he concludes, "changent avec sociétés; c'est la preuve qu'elles ne sont pas fondées exclusivement dans la nature congénitale de l'homme." This he regarded as a refutation of Kant's concept of space as an a priori "form of sensibility."

† The denotation of this neologism in the polemical literature of the social sciences, where it is employed as a term of abuse, is obscure. It seems to mean, roughly, "unscientific."

obviously unite vast portions of the human race. The philologists of the nineteenth century (Bopp, the Grimm brothers, Max Müller, etc.) studied the wide diffusion of the verbal roots and deities of the Indo-Europeans. Hugo Winckler and his school then indicated Mesopotamia as the area from which the world image and concomitant social structure that we find in all the high cultures of the planet must have been diffused;[9] James H. Breasted, G. Elliot Smith, and W. J. Perry spoke for Egypt;[10] Harold Peake and Herbert John Fleure tentatively championed Syria;[11] while V. Gordon Childe supposed that it was somewhere in the area between the Nile and the Indus that the crucial step was taken from Paleolithic food gathering to Neolithic food production which underlies the structure of settled civilizations throughout the world.[12] Sylvanus G. Morley, on the other hand, held out for an independent origin of the agricultural civilization of the New World in Middle America,[13] thus maintaining the traditional isolationism of the American Anthropological Society; whereas Leo Frobenius, long before, had recognized evidences of a diffusion across the Pacific.[14] Adolf E. Jensen supported Frobenius's view in a study of the trans-Pacific diffusion of the mythological complex of an early gardening culture;[15] G. F. Scott Elliot thought it probable that fugitives from Japan, c. 1000 B.C., had been responsible for the Middle American development; [16] Robert von Heine-Geldern showed that late Chou Dynasty art motifs had been somehow diffused from China to Indonesia and Middle America;[17] and now, most recently, in a richly documented joint publication by Betty J. Meggers, Clifford Evans, and Emilio Estrada, it has been shown that, possibly as early as 3000 B.C., an early type of Japanese cordmarked (*Jomon*) ceramic ware was carried from Kyushu to the coast of Ecuador.[18] We know, furthermore, that the sweet potato, called *kumar* in Peru, is in Polynesia *kumara.*[19] Moreover, as Carl O. Sauer has pointed out, a number of domesticates besides the sweet potato appear to have crossed the Pacific in pre-Columbian times: West to East, the bottle gourd, jack bean, coconut, and plantain, a diploid cotton, the dog (and the custom of eating dogs), the chicken, and the art of brewing *chicha* beer; East to West, sweet potatoes, grain amaranths, and a tetraploid cotton; kapok and maize also were known on both shores of the great Pacific water.[20] C. C. Uhlenbeck has pointed to a fundamental affinity between the Western Eskimo languages, the Uralo-Altaic, and the so-called "A" complex of the Indo-European tongues,[21] and there is, moreover, increasing evidence of some kind of Semitic-Indo-European continuity.[22] In short, there can be no question but that vast areas of culture diffusion have been distinguished, and that these represent not only late diffusions but also very ancient ones. We cannot fall to be impressed, furthermore, by the clean-cut definition and self -consistency of many of these culture spheres, as well as by the tenacity with which their fundamental patterns of ritual and mythology have been retained in differing landscapes and even in spite of greatly differing economic conditions .[23]

However, it is of first importance not to lose sight of the fact that the mythological archetypes (Bastian's Elementary Ideas) cut across the boundaries of these culture spheres and are not confined to any one or two, but are variously represented in all. For example, the idea of survival after death seems to be about conterminous with the human species; so also that of the sacred area (sanctuary), that of the efficacy of ritual, of ceremonial decorations, sacrifice, and of magic, that of supernal agencies, that of a transcendental yet ubiquitously immanent sacred power (*mana, wakonda, ǂakti,* etc.), that of a relationship between dream and the mythological realm, that of initiation, that of the initiate (shaman, priest, seer, etc.), and so on, for pages.[24] No amount of

learned hairsplitting about the differences between Egyptian, Aztec, Hottentot, and Cherokee monster-killers can obscure the fact that the primary problem here is not historical or ethnological but psychological—even biological; that is to say, antecedent to the phenomenology of the culture styles; and no amount of scholarly jargon or apparatus can make it seem that the mere historian or anthropologist is dealing with the problem at all.

In this sensitive and trickish field (Goethe's wondrous realm of "The Mothers") the poet, the artist, and a certain type of romantic philosopher (Emerson, Nietzsche, Bergson, for example) are more successful; for since, in poetry and art, beyond the learning of rhetorical and manual techniques, the whole craft is that of seizing the idea and facilitating its epiphany, the creative mind, adequately trained, is less apt than the analytic to mistake a mere trope or concept for a living, life-awakening image. Poetry and art, whether "academic" or "modern," are simply dead unless informed by Elementary Ideas: ideas, not as clear abstractions held in the mind, but as cognized, or rather re-cognized, vital factors of the subject's own being. Though it is true that such living ideas become manifest only in the terms and style of some specific historical moment, their force nevertheless lies not in what meets the eye but in what dilates the heart, and this force precisely, is their essential trait. Hence, since mythology is a compendium of such ideas, the historian or anthropologist heeding only his objective eye is gelded of the organ that would have made it possible for him to distinguish his materials. He may note and classify circumstances, but can no more speak authoritatively of mythology than a man without taste buds of taste.

On the other hand, however, though the poet or the artist, with immediate recognition, experiences the idea and grows to meet it; though it thus affects him as initiatory to his own nature, and in such a way that through it he comes into possession of himself and simultaneously into increased understanding of the Elementary Idea—he is finally an amateur in the fields of history and ethnology. There is certainly no comparison between the profundity of Wagner's masterful realization of the import of Germanic mythology in his *Ring of the Nibelungs* and Max Müller's sentimental theory about solar allegories; nevertheless, for detailed information concerning the materials involved, one would properly turn to the unilluminated philologist, not to the genius of Bayreuth.

Is it then impossible to have a science of myth?

Since Wagner's and Max Müller's day, C. G. Jung and Sigmund Freud have opened the way to the new prospect. With their recognition that myth and dream, ceremonial and neurosis, are homologous-their psychological readings of the phenomena of magic, sorcery, and theology, demonstrating the identity of the mythological realm and age with the unconscious, and the relationship, consequently, of myth to dream and of ceremonial to the symptomatology of a neurosis-a total transformation of our control of the problem of the Elementary Idea has taken place. Freud, mainly stressing the parallelism to neurosis, and Jung, recognizing the educative (in the primary sense of the term *e-ducere)* power of the life-binding images, have laid the foundations of a possible science of the universals of myth. Bastian's order of study was correct: (1) the Elementary Idea; (2) the influence of local climatic-geological factors in the processing of the Ethnic Ideas; and, (3) the impact upon each other of the varying local traditions in the course of history. Psychoanalysis now makes it possible to go beyond Bastian's mere listing and description of the Elementary Ideas to a study of their biological roots. To criticize the method as unscientific is ridiculous, since objective scholarship, in this particular field, has shown itself helpless—and absolutely so; helpless by definition, since the materials are not optically

measureable, but must, on the contrary, be experienced, if not as in the craftsmanship of the poet and the artist, then somehow in life.

There is no need to rehearse the demonstration by psychoanalysis of the parallelism of dream and myth, and the consequent theory of the possibility of mythology developing spontaneously, along traditional lines, wherever mankind may be nesting. "Anyone who really knows what a dream is will agree," writes Géza Róheim, "that there cannot be several 'culturally determined' ways of dreaming just as there are no two ways of sleeping. . . . The dream work is the same for everybody although there are differences in the degree and technique of secondary elaboration."[25] The relationship of dream and vision to mythological symbolism, from Dante to the dreamers (*oko-jumu*) of the Andamanese,[26] is too well known, now, to require demonstration. There is a close relationship between the protective, ego-defending religious symbolism of any people and the dreams of its most talented dreamers. The medicine men, as Róheim so aptly phrases It, are "the lightning conductors of common anxiety. They fight the demons so that others can hunt the prey and in general fight reality."[27] They fight the demons and, while doing so, achieve a measure of psychological wisdom that is denied their extraverted fellows. They are, in fact, the forerunners of those really great dreamers whose names are the names of the pedagogues of the race: Ptahhotep, Akhnaton, Moses, Socrates, Plato, Lao-tzu, Confucius, Vyasa, Homer, the Buddha, Jesus, Quetzalcoatl, and Mohammed. The intentional fathoming of the interior darkness of the psyche in the long tradition of the disciplines of yoga has perhaps given India a larger share than other lands of the wisdom bestowed by the "Eternal Ones of the Dream"; nevertheless, some portion of that wisdom is shared by all the world. Hence Ananda K. Coomaraswamy could maintain that the metaphysical principles symbolized in India in the dreamlike imagery of myth are implicit in mythology everywhere. "All mythology," he wrote in a paper comparing Platonic and Indian thought, "involves a corresponding philosophy; and if there is only one mythology, as there is only one 'perennial philosophy,' then that 'the myth is not my own, I had it from my mother' (Euripides) points to a spiritual unity of the human race already predetermined long before the discovery of metals. It may be really true that, as [Alfred] Jeremias said, the various cultures of mankind are no more than the dialects of one and the same spiritual language."[28]

"Myth," he states again, "is the penultimate truth, of which all experience is the temporal reflection. The mythical narrative is of timeless and placeless validity, true nowever and everywhere";[29] precisely, one might add, as the dream is the penultimate truth about the dreamer, of which all his experience is the temporal reflection.

A serious science of mythology must take its subject matter with due seriousness, survey the field as a whole, and have at least some conception of the prodigious range of functions that mythology has served in the course of human history. It is dreamlike and, like dream, a spontaneous product of the psyche; like dream, revelatory of the psyche and hence of the whole nature and destiny of man; like dream—like life—enigmatic to the uninitiated ego; and, like dream, protective of that ego. In the simplest human societies mythology is the text of the rites of passage; in the writings of the Hindu, Chinese, and Greek philosophers (as of all who have ever read them) mythology is the picture language of metaphysics. The first function is not violated by the second but extended; both harmoniously bind man, the growing animal, to his world, simultaneously in its visible and in its transcendent aspects. Mythology is the womb of mankind's initiation to life and death.

## [ 2 ]

## *The Biological Function of Myth*

How mythology functions, why it is generated and required by the human species, why it is everywhere essentially the same, and why the rational destruction of it conduces to puerility, become known the moment one abandons the historical method of tracing secondary origins and adopts the biological view (characteristic of the medical art of psychoanalysis), which considers the primary organism itself, this universal carrier and fashioner of history, the human body. As Róheim states in his brilliant monograph *The Origin and Function of Culture:*

> The outstanding difference between man and his animal brethren consists in the infantile morphological characters of human beings, in the prolongation of infancy. This prolonged infancy explains the traumatic character of sexual experiences which do not produce the like effect in our simian brethren or cousins, and the existence of the Oedipus Complex itself which is partly a conflict between archaic and recent love objects. Finally, the defense mechanisms themselves owe their existence to the fact that our Soma (Ego) is even more retarded than the Germa (Id) and hence the immature Ego evolves defence mechanisms as a protection against libidinal quantities which it is not prepared to deal with.[30]

"Man," as Adolf Portmann of Basel vividly phrases it, "is the incomplete creature whose style of life is the historical process determined by a tradition."[31] He is congenitally dependent on society and society, commensurably, is both oriented to and derived from the distinctive psychosomatic structure of man. This structure, furthermore, is rooted not in any local landscape, with its economic-political potentials, but in the germa of a widely distributed biological species. Whether on the ice of Baffin Land or in the jungles of Brazil, building temples in Siam or cafés in Paris, "civilization," as Dr. Róheim shows, "originates in delayed infancy and its function is security. It is a huge network of more or less successful attempts to protect mankind against the danger of object-loss, the colossal efforts made by a baby who is afraid of being left alone in the dark."[32] In such a context, the symbolical potentialities, of the various environments are at least as important as the economic; symbolism, the protection of the psyche, no less necessary than the nourishment of the soma. Society, as a fostering organ, is thus a kind of exterior "second womb," wherein the postnatal stages of man's long gestation—much longer than that of any other placental-are supported and defended.

One thinks of the marsupial pouch, likewise auxiliary to a foetal development that overreaches the intrauterine possibilities of the species. The young of the kangaroo, for example, born after a gestation period of but three weeks, measure an inch in length and are entirely naked and blind; their hind limbs are undeveloped, but the forelimbs are robust with claws. William King Gregory, of the American Museum of Natural History, describes the climbing of these little creatures, by means of their sturdy forelimbs, up the mother's belly, immediately upon birth, and into her pouch, where they reach for the teats, one of which each eventually seizes. The tip of the teat then expands within the mouth, so that the young cannot be released. "Thus the marsupials,"

Gregory summarizes, "specialized in the early and brief internal development of the embryo, which depends for food chiefly upon its own yolk-sack and which completes its development after birth while attached to the teat. The higher or placental mammals gave the young a longer and better uterine development and a more flexible system of nursing, with greater maternal responsibility."[33]

The marsupials (kangaroo, bandicoot, wombat, opossum, etc.) represent an intermediate stage between monotremes (the duck-billed platypus, spiny anteater of Australia, etc.), whose progeny, like those of reptiles, are born from eggs, and placentals (mice, antelopes, leopards, gorillas, etc.), whose young appear only after a comparatively long gestation period within the mother (made possible by the placenta) and at birth are almost ready for life. Man, biologically, is a placental. The period of gestation, however, has become again inadequate—indeed, even less adequate than that of the marsupials; for instead of the mere few months spent by the young kangaroo in the auxiliary womb of its mother's pouch, the infant *Homo sapiens* requires years before it can forage for its food, and as many as twenty before it looks and behaves like an adult.

George Bernard Shaw played on this anomaly in his biological fantasy *Back to Methuselah*, where he viewed man, in Nietzsche's manner, as a bridge to the superman. Looking forward to the year A.D. 31,920, he showed us the birth from a huge egg of a pretty girl, who, in the twentieth century, would have been thought to be about seventeen. She had been growing within the egg for two years; the first nine months, like the nine of the present gestation period of the human embryo, recapitulated the biological evolution of man; the remaining fifteen then matured the organism, briefly but securely, to the condition of the young adult. Four years more, spent among youthful playmates in the sort of childhood that we remain in today until seventy, would terminate when her mind changed and the young woman, tiring suddenly of play, became wise and fit for the wielding of such power as today, in the hands of children, is threatening to wreck the world.

Human adulthood is not achieved until the twenties: Shaw put it in the seventies: not a few look ahead to Purgatory. Meanwhile, society is what takes the place of the Shavian egg.

Róheim has indicated the problem of man-growing-up, no matter where-defense against libidinal quantities with which the immature ego is not prepared to deal;" and he has analyzed the curious "symbiotic mode of mastering reality,"[36] which is the very fashioner, the master builder, of all human societies. "It is the nature of our species," he writes, "to master reality on a libidinal basis and we create a society, an environment in which this and only this is possible."[37] "The psyche, as we know it, is formed by the introjection of primary objects (super-ego) and the first contact with environment (ego). Society itself is knitted together by projection of these primary introjected objects or concepts followed by a series of subsequent introjections and projections."[38] This tight-knitting of defensive fantasy and external reality is what builds the second womb, the marsupial pouch that we call society. Hence, though man's environment greatly varies in the corners of the planet, there is a marvelous monotony about his ritual forms. Local styles of the century, nation, race, or social class obviously differ; yet what James Joyce calls the "grave and constant in human sufferings,"[39] remains truly constant and grave. It arrests the mind, everywhere, in the rituals of birth, adolescence, marriage, death, installation, and initiation, uniting it with the mysteries of eternal recurrence and of man's psychosomatic maturation. The individual grows up, not only as a member of a certain social group, but as a human being

## [3]
## The Image of a Second Birth

Rites, then, together with the mythologies that support them, constitute the second womb, the matrix of the postnatal gestation of the placental *Homo sapiens.* This fact, moreover, has been known to the pedagogues of the race, certainly since the period of the Upanishads, and probably since that of the Aurignacian caves. In the Mundaka Upanishad we read, for example: "There are two knowledges to be known—as indeed the knowers of Brahman are wont to say: a higher and also a lower. Of these, the lower is the Rip, Veda, the Yajur Veda, the Sama Veda, the Atharva Veda, Pronunciation, Ritual, Grammar, Definition, Metrics, and Astrology. The higher is that whereby the Imperishable is apprehended."[40] "Those abiding in the midst of ignorance, self-wise, thinking themselves learned, hard smitten, go around deluded, like blind men led by one who is himself blind. Thinking sacrifice and merit the chiefest thing, naught better do they know. . . . But they who practice austerity and faith in the forest, the peaceful knowers who live on alms, depart passionless through the door of the sun, to where is that immortal Person, even the imperishable Spirit." [41]

In India, the objective is to be *born* from the womb of myth, not to remain in it, and the one who has attained to this "second birth" is truly the "twice born," freed from the pedagogical devices of society, the lures and threats of myth, the local mores, the usual hopes of benefits and rewards. He is truly "free" (*mukti*), "released while living" *(jivan mukti);* he is that reposeful "superman" who is man perfected though in our kindergarten of libidinous misapprehensions he moves like a being from another sphere.

The same idea of the "second birth" is certainly basic to Christianity also, where it is symbolized in baptism. "Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."[42] One could ask for no more vivid rendition of the doctrine of the two wombs: the womb of the mammal and the womb of perfected man.

Within the Christian Church, however, there has been a historically successful tendency to anathematize the obvious implications of this idea, and the result has been a general obscuration of the fact that regeneration means going beyond, not remaining within, the confines of mythology. Whereas in the Orient—India, Tibet, China, Japan, Indo-China, and Indonesia—everyone is expected, at least in his final incarnation, to leave the womb of myth, to pass through the sundoor and stand beyond the gods, in the West—or at least throughout the greater part of the Judaeo-Christian-Mohammedan development—God remains the Father, and none can step beyond Him. This accounts, perhaps, for the great distinction between the manly piety of the Orient and the infantile of the recent Occident. In the lands of the truly "twice born" man is finally superior to the gods, whereas in the West even the saint is required to remain within the body of the Church, and the "second birth" is read rather as being born into the Church than born out of it. The historical result was a shattering of this particular marsupial pouch in the fifteenth century.

There is no need to multiply examples of the rebirth motif in the philosophies and religious rites of the civilized world. The Neoplatonic and Taoist philosophies, the Greek Mysteries, the myths and rites of Phoenicia, Mesopotamia, and Egypt, as well as those of the Celts and Germans, Aztecs and Mayas, abound in applications of the idea. Nor is it less prominent in the myths and

rites of the primitive peoples of the world. "Death and rebirth," declares Róheim, "are the typical contents of all initiation rites."[43]

Among the Keraki of New Guinea bull-roarers play a prominent role in the ceremonies of initiation. The boys are made to sit with their eyes covered by the older men and then the bull-roarers begin to sound. The boys think they are hearing the voice of the presiding crocodile-deity of the ritual; the sound comes nearer, as though the monster were approaching to swallow them, and when it is directly over their heads, the old men's hands are removed and the boys see the bull-roarers.[44] Thus they become aware, abruptly, of the source of the sound that throughout their childhood had been thought to be the voice of a living monster.

Such sudden awakenings are characteristic of the tradition of initiation everywhere. What for the child were disciplinary terrors become the symbolic implements of the adult who knows. Nevertheless, the result is not that the symbols are understood as frauds; on the contrary, the bull-roarers of the Keraki receive food offerings.[45] They are divinities: the guardians of the Way of life. "At the creation of the world," said a medicine man of the Pawnee of Kansas and Nebraska, "it was arranged that there should be lesser powers. Tirawatius, the mighty power, could not come near to man, could not be seen or felt by him, therefore lesser powers were permitted. They were to mediate between man and Tirawa."[46] The myths and paraphernalia of the rites of passage represent such powers, and so are informed with the force of the source, support, and end of existence.

The fact that some of the burials of the Mousterian cave men include implements and joints of meat suggests that the idea of regeneration beyond the veil of life must have been entertained some fifty thousand years B.C. Later Paleolithic burials with the corpse in the crouch-position of the foetus in the womb give point to the same theme by stressing the idea of a second birth. And, finally, the picture of a dancing, masked medicine man in the Aurignacian cave of the Trois Frères, Ariège, France, suggests that there must have been, fifteen thousand years ago, initiates aware of the force and meaning of the symbols. It would perhaps be going too far to suggest that in any primitive society pedagogues, or mystagogues, can have existed whose reading of the rebirth idea drove as far as that of the Hindus; nevertheless, it cannot be denied that in primitive mythologies and rites we find the image of the sun-door, the clashing rocks, death and resurrection, the Incarnation, the sacred marriage and father atonement, employed not haphazardly but in the same relationships as in the myths of the higher cultures.[47]

> The actual unity of folklore represents on the popular level [declared Ananda K. Coomaraswamy] precisely what the orthodoxy of an élite represents in a relatively learned environment. The relation between the popular and the learned metaphysics is, moreover, analogous to and partly identical with that of the lesser to the greater mysteries. To a very large extent both employ one and the same symbols, which are taken more literally in the one case and in the other understood parabolically: for example the "giants" and "heroes" of popular legend are the titans and gods of the more learned mythology, the seven-league boots of the hero correspond to the strides of an Aani or a Buddha, and "Tom Thumb" is no other than the Son whom Eckhart describes as "small, but so

> puissant." *So long as the material of folklore is transmitted, so long is the ground available on which the superstructure of full initiatory understanding can be built.*[48]

Whether, in any given culture, the individual is enabled to be really born again or required to remain spiritually foetal until released from purgatory, myth is everywhere the womb of man's specifically human birth: the long-tried, the tested matrix within which the unfinished being is brought to maturity; simultaneously protecting the growing ego against libidinal quantities which it is not prepared to deal with and furnishing it with the necessary foods and saps for its normal, harmonious unfoldment. Mythology fosters a balanced intuitive and instinctive, as well as rational, ontogenesis, and throughout the domain of the species the morphology of this peculiar spiritual organ of *Homo sapiens* is no less constant than that of the well-known, readily recognizable human physique itself.

## [4]

### *The Anxiety of the Misborn*

Misbirth is possible from the mythological womb as well from the physiological: there can be adhesions, malformations, arrestations, etc. We call them neuroses and psychoses. Hence we find today, after some five hundred years of systematic dismemberment and rejection of the mythological organ of our species, all the sad young men, for whom life problem. Mythology leads the libido into ego-syntonic channels, whereas neurosis (to cite, once again, Géza Róheim) "separates the individual from his fellows and connects with his own infantile images."[49] Psychoanalysis and certain movements in contemporary art and letters represent an effort to restore the biologically necessary spiritual organ. Blake, example, Goethe and Emerson, saw the need for it. The effort was to restore the poet to his traditional function of seer and mystagogue of the regenerative vision. James Joyce has supplied the whole blueprint. The morphology of the organ will remain the same as ever, but the materials of which it is composed and the functions served will have to be those of the new world: the materials of the machine age and the functions of the world society that is today in its throes of birth as myth.

## ENDNOTES

*BIOS AND MYTHOS was originally published in 1951 in a collection,* Psychoanalysis and Culture. *Campbell subsequently included it, in somewhat updated form, in his collection of essays,* The Flight of the Wild Gander, *originally published in 1969. It is presented here as it appeared in that work, with some minor formatting changes.*

1. Fray Pedro Simon, *Noticias historiales de las conquistas de Tierra Firme en las Indias Occidentales* (Cuenca, 1627), published in Lord Kingsborough's *Antiquities of Mexico* (London: R. Havell, 1830-1848), Vol. VIII, pp. 263–64.

2. Adolf Bastian, *Ethnische Elementargedanken in der Lehre vom Menschen* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1895), p. ix.

3. Adolf Bastian, *Das Beständige in den Menschenrassen und die Spielweite ihrer Veränderlichkeit* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer,1868), p. 88.

4. Franz Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1911), p. 104.

5. *Ibid*., p. 228.

6. Franz Boas, The *Mind of Primitive Man* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938).

7. Durkheim, *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, pp. 15-21. Contrast Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Einleitung and I. "*Transzendentale Elementarlehre*."[9.] Winckler, op. cit.; also, same author, *Die babyloniscbe Geisteskultur in ihrer Beziehunq zur Kulturentwicklung der Menschheit* (Leipzig: Quelle und Meyer, 1907).

10. James H. Breasted, *The Conquest of Civilization* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1926); G. Elliot Smith, *Human History* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1929); W.J. Perry, *The Children of the Sun, A Study in the Early History of Civilization* (New York: E.p. Dutton and Company, n.d.).

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13. Sylvanus G. Morley, *The Ancient Maya* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1946).

14. Leo Frobenius, *Geographische Kulturkunde* (Leipzig: Friedrich Brandstetter, 1904), pp. 443-664.

15. Adolf E. Jensen, *Das religiöse Weltbild einer frühen Kultur* (Stuttgart: August Schröder Verlag, 2nd ed., 1949).

16. G. F. Scott Elliot, *Prehistoric Man and His Story* (London: Seeley, Service, 1920), pp. 255-271.

17. Twenty-ninth International Congress of Americanists, Museum of Natural History, New York City, September 7, 1949, joint paper by Dr. Robert von Heine-Geldern and Dr. Gordon F. Ekholm, "Significant Parallels in the Symbolic Arts of Southern Asia and Middle America." This paper was supported by the evidence of a temporary exhibit housed in the Museum, as well as by a paper read in the same session by Dr. Carl Schuster, "The Circum-Pacific and Oceanic Distribution of Some Body Markings and Petroglyphic Designs."

18. Betty J. Meggers, Clifford Evans, and Emilio Estrada, *Early Formative Period of Coastal Ecuador: The Valdivia and Machalilla Phases* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1965).

19. Peter H. Buck (Te Rangi Hiroa), *Vikings of the Sunrise* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1938), p. 314.

20. Carl O. Sauer, *Agricultural Origins and Dispersals* (New York: The American Geographical Society, 1952); see also his article, "Cultivated Plants of South and Central America," in Julian H. Steward (ed.), Handbook of South American Indians (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 143, 1950), Vol. 6, PP- 487-543.

21. C. C. Uhlenbeck, "The Indo-Germanic Mother Language and Mother Tribes Complex," *American Anthropologist*, 1937, Volume XXXIX, pp. 385-93.

22. J. Vendryes, *Le langage* (Paris: La Renaissance du livre, 1921), pp. 356-57.

23. See, for example, Leo Frobenius, *Kulturgeschicbte Afrikas* (Zurich: Phaidon Verlag), and Jensen, *op. cit*.

24. For a review of the universal archetypes of the "adventure of the hero" and "cosmogonic cycle," see Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, The Bollingen Series XVII (New York: Pantheon Books, 1949).

25. Géza Róheim, "Dream Analysis and Field Work in Anthropology", *Psychoanalysis and the Social Sciences* (New York: International Universities Press, 1947), Vol. I, p. 90.

26. A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, *The Andaman Islanders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), pp. 177-79.

27. Géza Róheim, *The Origin and Function of Culture* (New York: Nervous and Mental Disease Monographs, 1943), p. 51.

28. Ananda K. Coomaraswamv, *Recollection, Indian and Platonic*, Supplement to the Journal of the American Oriental Society, Number 3, April-June 1944, p. 18

29. Ananda K. Coomaraswamv, *Hinduism and Buddhism* (New York: Philosophical Library, n.d.), p. 6.

30. Géza Róheim, The Origin and Function of Culture, p. 17.

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32. Róheim, The Origin and Function of Culture, p. 100.

33. William King Gregory, "Marsupialia," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th edition, XIV: 975-76.

[34] George Bernard Shaw, *Back to Methuselah* (New York: Brentano's, 1921), pp. 735ff.

[35] Róheim, The Origin and Function of Culture, p. 17.

[36] *Ibid*., p. 81.

[37] *Ibid*.

[38] *Ibid*., p. 82.

[39] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: The Viking Press, 1964 ed.), p. 204.

[40] *Mu£™aka Upanißad* I.I. (Translation by Robert Ernest Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads* (London: Oxford University Press, 1921), pp. 366–67.

[41] *lbid*., 1.2. 8–11, in Hume, *op. cit*., pp. 368–69.

[42] John 3:5-6.

[43] Géza Róheim, *The Eternal Ones of the Dream* (New York: International Universities Press, 1945), p. 116.

[44] Richard Thurnwald, "Primitive Initiations- *und Wiedergeburtsriten*," *Eranos-Jabrbuch 1939* (Zurich: Rhein-Verlag, 1940), pp. 364-66. This entire volume, by the way, should be consulted by anyone doubting the universality of the rebirth idea.

[45] *lbid*., p. 369.

[46] Alice C. Fletcher, *The Hako: A Pawnee Ceremony*, Twenty-second Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology (Washington, D.C., 1904), Part 2, p. 27.

[47] *Cf*. Jcff King, Maud Oakes, and Joseph Campbell, *Where the Two Came to Their Father: A Navaho War Ceremonial*, The Bollingen Series I (New York: Pantheon Books, 1943).

[48] Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "Primitive Mentality," *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought* (London: Luzac, 1946), p. 220. The italics are Dr. Coomaraswamy's.

[49] Róheim, *The Origin and Function of Culture*, p. 93.