

# CONTENTS

ABOUT THE COLLECTED WORKS OF JOSEPH CAMPBELL	xì
PREFACE TO THE 1949 EDITION	xii
PROLOGUE: <i>The Monomyth</i>	I
1. <i>Myth and Dream</i>	I
2. <i>Tragedy and Comedy</i>	19
3. <i>The Hero and the God</i>	23
4. <i>The World Navel</i>	32

## PART I

### THE ADVENTURE OF THE HERO

CHAPTER I: <i>Departure</i>	41
1. <i>The Call to Adventure</i>	41
2. <i>Refusal of the Call</i>	49
3. <i>Supernatural Aid</i>	57
4. <i>The Crossing of the First Threshold</i>	64
5. <i>The Belly of the Whale</i>	74

CHAPTER II: <i>Initiation</i>	81
1. <i>The Road of Trials</i>	81
2. <i>The Meeting with the Goddess</i>	91
3. <i>Woman as the Temptress</i>	101
4. <i>Atonement with the Father</i>	105
5. <i>Apotheosis</i>	127
6. <i>The Ultimate Boon</i>	148

CHAPTER III: <i>Return</i>	167
1. <i>Refusal of the Return</i>	167
2. <i>The Magic Flight</i>	170
3. <i>Rescue from Without</i>	178
4. <i>The Crossing of the Return Threshold</i>	188
5. <i>Master of the Two Worlds</i>	196
6. <i>Freedom to Live</i>	205

CHAPTER IV: <i>The Keys</i>	211
-----------------------------	-----

PART II  
THE COSMOGONIC CYCLE

CHAPTER I: <i>Emanations</i>	219
1. <i>From Psychology to Metaphysics</i>	219
2. <i>The Universal Round</i>	223
3. <i>Out of the Void—Space</i>	231
4. <i>Within Space—Life</i>	234
5. <i>The Breaking of the One into the Manifold</i>	241
6. <i>Folk Stories of Creation</i>	248

CHAPTER II: <i>The Virgin Birth</i>	255
1. <i>Mother Universe</i>	255
2. <i>Matrix of Destiny</i>	259
3. <i>Womb of Redemption</i>	264
4. <i>Folk Stories of Virgin Motherhood</i>	267

CHAPTER III:	
<i>Transformations of the Hero</i>	271
1. <i>The Primordial Hero and the Human</i>	271
2. <i>Childhood of the Human Hero</i>	274
3. <i>The Hero as Warrior</i>	287
4. <i>The Hero as Lover</i>	293
5. <i>The Hero as Emperor and as Tyrant</i>	296
6. <i>The Hero as World Redeemer</i>	299
7. <i>The Hero as Saint</i>	304
8. <i>Departure of the Hero</i>	306
CHAPTER IV: <i>Dissolutions</i>	315
1. <i>End of the Microcosm</i>	315
2. <i>End of the Macrocosm</i>	322
EPILOGUE: <i>Myth and Society</i>	329
1. <i>The Shapeshifter</i>	329
2. <i>The Function of Myth, Cult,         and Meditation</i>	330
3. <i>The Hero Today</i>	333
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	339
ENDNOTES	341
BIBLIOGRAPHY	363
ILLUSTRATION LIST	383
INDEX	397
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	415
ABOUT THE JOSEPH CAMPBELL FOUNDATION	417



ABOUT THE COLLECTED WORKS OF  
JOSEPH CAMPBELL

---

AT HIS DEATH in 1987, Joseph Campbell left a significant body of published work that explored his lifelong passion, the complex of universal myths and symbols that he called “Mankind’s one great story.” He also left, however, a large volume of unreleased work: uncollected articles, notes, letters, and diaries, as well as audio- and videotape-recorded lectures.

The Joseph Campbell Foundation—founded in 1990 to preserve, protect, and perpetuate Campbell’s work—has undertaken to create a digital archive of his papers and recordings and to publish *The Collected Works of Joseph Campbell*.

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF JOSEPH CAMPBELL  
Robert Walter, Executive Editor  
David Kudler, Managing Editor

## PREFACE TO THE 1949 EDITION

---

“THE TRUTHS CONTAINED in religious doctrines are after all so distorted and systematically disguised,” writes Sigmund Freud,

that the mass of humanity cannot recognize them as truth. The case is similar to what happens when we tell a child that newborn babies are brought by the stork. Here, too, we are telling the truth in symbolic clothing, for we know what the large bird signifies. But the child does not know it. He hears only the distorted part of what we say, and feels that he has been deceived; and we know how often his distrust of the grown-ups and his refractoriness actually take their start from this impression. We have become convinced that it is better to avoid such symbolic disguisings of the truth in what we tell children and not to withhold from them a knowledge of the true state of affairs commensurate with their intellectual level.<sup>1</sup>

It is the purpose of the present book to uncover some of the truths disguised for us under the figures of religion and mythology by bringing together a multitude of not-too-difficult examples and letting the ancient meaning become apparent of itself. The old teachers knew what they were saying. Once we have learned to read again their symbolic language, it requires no more than the talent of an anthologist to let their teaching be heard. But first we must learn the grammar of the symbols, and as a key to this mystery I know of no better modern tool than psychoanalysis. Without regarding this as the last word on the subject, one can nevertheless permit it to serve

as an approach. The second step will be then to bring together a host of myths and folktales from every corner of the world, and to let the symbols speak for themselves. The parallels will be immediately apparent; and these will develop a vast and amazingly constant statement of the basic truths by which man has lived throughout the millennia of his residence on the planet.

Perhaps it will be objected that in bringing out the correspondences I have overlooked the differences between the various Oriental and Occidental, modern, ancient, and primitive traditions. The same objection might be brought, however, against any textbook or chart of anatomy, where the physiological variations of race are disregarded in the interest of a basic general understanding of the human physique. There are of course differences between the numerous mythologies and religions of mankind, but this is a book about the similarities; and once these are understood the differences will be found to be much less great than is popularly (and politically) supposed. My hope is that a comparative elucidation may contribute to the perhaps not-quite-desperate cause of those forces that are working in the present world for unification, not in the name of some ecclesiastical or political empire, but in the sense of human mutual understanding. As we are told in the Vedas: "Truth is one, the sages speak of it by many names."<sup>2</sup>

For help in the long task of bringing my materials into readable form, I wish to thank Mr. Henry Morton Robinson, whose advice greatly assisted me in the first and final stages of the work, Mrs. Peter Geiger, Mrs. Margaret Wing, and Mrs. Helen McMaster, who went over the manuscripts many times and offered invaluable suggestions, and my wife, who has worked with me from first to last, listening, reading, and revising.

— J. C.

NEW YORK CITY | JUNE 10, 1948



FIGURE 1. *Medusa* (carved marble, Roman, Italy, date uncertain)



## PROLOGUE

---

# The Monomyth

---

### *I. Myth and Dream*

WHETHER WE LISTEN with aloof amusement to the dreamlike mumbo jumbo of some red-eyed witch doctor of the Congo, or read with cultivated rapture thin translations from the sonnets of the mystic Lao-tse; now and again crack the hard nutshell of an argument of Aquinas, or catch suddenly the shining meaning of a bizarre Eskimo fairy tale: it will always be the one, shape-shifting yet marvelously constant story that we find, together with a challengingly persistent suggestion of more remaining to be experienced than will ever be known or told.

Throughout the inhabited world, in all times and under every circumstance, myths of man have flourished; and they have been the living inspiration of whatever else may have appeared out of the activities of the human body and mind. It would not be too much to say that myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into the human cultural manifestation. Religions, philosophies, arts, the social forms of primitive and historic man, prime discoveries in science and technology, the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic ring of myth.

The wonder is that characteristic efficacy to touch and inspire deep creative centers dwells in the smallest nursery fairy tale—as the flavor of the ocean is contained in a droplet or the whole mystery of life within the egg of a flea. For the symbols of mythology are not manufactured; they cannot be ordered, invented, or permanently

suppressed. They are spontaneous productions of the psyche, and each bears within it, undamaged, the germ power of its source.

What is the secret of the timeless vision? From what profundity of the mind does it derive? Why is mythology everywhere the same, beneath its varieties of costume? And what does it teach?

Today many scientists are contributing to the analysis of the riddle. Archeologists are probing the ruins of Iraq, Honan, Crete, and Yucatan. Ethnologists are questioning the Ostiaks of the river Ob, the Boobies of Fernando Po. A generation of orientalists has recently thrown open to us the sacred writings of the East, as well as the pre-Hebrew sources of our own Holy Writ. And meanwhile another host of scholars, pressing researches begun last century in the field of folk psychology, has been seeking to establish the psychological bases of language, myth, religion, art development, and moral codes.

Most remarkable of all, however, are the revelations that have emerged from the mental clinic. The bold and truly epoch-making writings of the psychoanalysts are indispensable to the student of mythology; for, whatever may be thought of the detailed and sometimes contradictory interpretations of specific cases and problems, Freud, Jung, and their followers have demonstrated irrefutably that the logic, the heroes, and the deeds of myth survive into modern times. In the absence of an effective general mythology, each of us has his private, unrecognized, rudimentary, yet secretly potent pantheon of dream. The latest incarnation of Oedipus, the continued romance of Beauty and the Beast, stand this afternoon on the corner of Forty-second Street and Fifth Avenue, waiting for the traffic light to change.

"I dreamed," wrote an American youth to the author of a syndicated newspaper feature,

that I was reshingling our roof. Suddenly I heard my father's voice on the ground below, calling to me. I turned suddenly to hear him better, and, as I did so, the hammer slipped out of my hands, and slid down the sloping roof, and disappeared over the edge. I heard a heavy thud, as of a body falling.

Terribly frightened, I climbed down the ladder to the ground. There was my father lying dead on the ground, with blood all over his head. I was brokenhearted, and began calling my mother, in the midst of my sobs. She came out of the house, and put her arms around me. "Never mind, son, it was all an accident," she said. "I know you will take care of me, even if he is gone." As she was kissing me, I woke up.



FIGURE 2. *Viṣṇu Dreaming the Universe* (carved stone, India, c. A.D. 400–700)

I am the eldest child in our family and am twenty-three years old. I have been separated from my wife for a year; somehow, we could not get along together. I love both my parents dearly, and have never had any trouble with my father, except that he insisted that I go back and live with my wife, and I couldn't be happy with her. And I never will.<sup>1</sup>

The unsuccessful husband here reveals, with a really wonderful innocence, that instead of bringing his spiritual energies forward to the love and problems of his marriage, he has been resting, in the secret recesses of his imagination, with the now ridiculously anachronistic dramatic situation of his first and only emotional involvement, that of the tragicomic triangle of the nursery—the son against the father for the love of the mother. Apparently the most permanent of the dispositions of the human psyche are those that derive from the fact that, of all animals, we remain the longest at the mother breast. Human beings are born too soon; they are unfinished, unready as yet to meet the world. Consequently their whole defense from a universe of dangers is the mother, under whose protection the intra-uterine period is prolonged.<sup>2</sup> Hence the dependent child and its mother constitute for months after the

catastrophe of birth a dual unit, not only physically but also psychologically.<sup>3</sup> Any prolonged absence of the parent causes tension in the infant and consequent impulses of aggression; also, when the mother is obliged to hamper the child, aggressive responses are aroused. Thus the first object of the child's hostility is identical with the first object of its love, and its first ideal (which thereafter is retained as the unconscious basis of all images of bliss, truth, beauty, and perfection) is that of the dual unity of the Madonna and Bambino.<sup>4</sup>

The unfortunate father is the first radical intrusion of another order of reality into the beatitude of this earthly restatement of the excellence of the situation within the womb; he, therefore, is experienced primarily as an enemy. To him is transferred the charge of aggression that was originally attached to the "bad," or absent mother, while the desire attaching to the "good," or present, nourishing, and protecting mother, she herself (normally) retains. This fateful infantile distribution of death (*thanatos: destrudo*) and love (*eros: libido*) impulses builds the foundation of the now celebrated Oedipus complex, which Sigmund Freud pointed out some fifty years ago as the great cause of our adult failure to behave like rational beings. As Dr. Freud has stated it: "King Oedipus, who slew his father Laius and married his mother Jocasta, merely shows us the fulfilment of our own childhood wishes. But, more fortunate than he, we have meanwhile succeeded, in so far as we have not become psychoneurotics, in detaching our sexual impulses from our mothers and in forgetting our jealousy of our fathers."<sup>5</sup>\* Or, as he writes again: "Every pathological disorder of sexual life is rightly to be regarded as an inhibition in development."<sup>6</sup>

*For many a man hath seen himself in dreams  
His mother's mate, but he who gives no heed  
To such like matters bears the easier fate.*<sup>7</sup>

---

\* It has been pointed out that the father also can be experienced as a protector and the mother, then, as a temptress. This is the way from Oedipus to Hamlet. "O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams" (*Hamlet* II.ii). "All neurotics," writes Dr. Freud, "are either Oedipus or Hamlet."

And as for the case of the daughter (which is one degree more complicated), the following passage will suffice for the present thumbnail exposition. "I dreamed last night that my father stabbed my mother in the heart. She died. I knew no one blamed him for what he did, although I was crying bitterly. The dream seemed to change, and he and I seemed to be going on a trip together, and I was very happy." This is the dream of an unmarried young woman of twenty-four (Wood, *Dreams*, p. 130).

The sorry plight of the wife of the lover whose sentiments instead of maturing remain locked in the romance of the nursery may be judged from the apparent nonsense of another modern dream; and here we begin to feel indeed that we are entering the realm of ancient myth, but with a curious turn.

“I dreamed,” wrote a troubled woman,

that a big white horse kept following me wherever I went. I was afraid of him, and pushed him away. I looked back to see if he was still following me, and he appeared to have become a man. I told him to go inside a barbershop and shave off his mane, which he did. When he came out he looked just like a man, except that he had horse’s hoofs and face, and followed me wherever I went. He came closer to me, and I woke up.

I am a married woman of thirty-five with two children. I have been married for fourteen years now, and I am sure my husband is faithful to me.<sup>8</sup>

The unconscious sends all sorts of vapors, odd beings, terrors, and deluding images up into the mind—whether in dream, broad daylight, or insanity; for the human kingdom, beneath the floor of the comparatively neat little dwelling that we call our consciousness, goes down into unsuspected Aladdin caves. There not only jewels but also dangerous jinn abide: the inconvenient or resisted psychological powers that we have not thought or dared to integrate into our lives. And they may remain unsuspected, or, on the other hand, some chance word, the smell of a landscape, the taste of a cup of tea, or the glance of an eye may touch a magic spring, and then dangerous messengers begin to appear in the brain. These are dangerous because they threaten the fabric of the security into which we have built ourselves and our family. But they are fiendishly fascinating too, for they carry keys that open the whole realm of the desired and feared adventure of the discovery of the self. Destruction of the world that we have built and in which we live, and of ourselves within it; but then a wonderful reconstruction, of the bolder, cleaner, more spacious, and fully human life—that is the lure, the promise and terror, of these disturbing night visitants from the mythological realm that we carry within.

Psychoanalysis, the modern science of reading dreams, has taught us to take heed of these unsubstantial images. Also it has found a way to let them do their work. The dangerous crises of self-development are permitted to come to pass under the protecting eye of an experienced initiate in the lore and language of dreams, who then enacts

the role and character of the ancient mystagogue, or guide of souls, the initiating medicine man of the primitive forest sanctuaries of trial and initiation. The doctor is the modern master of the mythological realm, the knower of all the secret ways and words of potency. His role is precisely that of the Wise Old Man of the myths and fairy-tales whose words assist the hero through the trials and terrors of the weird adventure. He is the one who appears and points to the magic shining sword that will kill the dragon-terror, tells of the waiting bride and the castle of many treasures, applies healing balm to the almost fatal wounds, and finally dismisses the conqueror, back into the world of normal life, following the great adventure into the enchanted night.

When we turn now, with this image in mind, to consider the numerous strange rituals that have been reported from the primitive tribes and great civilizations of the past, it becomes apparent that the purpose and actual effect of these was to conduct people across those difficult thresholds of transformation that demand a change in the patterns not only of conscious but also of unconscious life. The so-called rites of passage, which occupy such a prominent place in the life of a primitive society (ceremonials of birth, naming, puberty, marriage, burial, etc.), are distinguished by formal, and usually very severe, exercises of severance, whereby the mind is radically cut away from the attitudes, attachments, and life patterns of the stage being left behind.\* Then follows an interval of more or less extended retirement, during which are enacted rituals designed to introduce the life adventurer to the forms and proper feelings of his new estate, so that when, at last, the time has ripened for the return to the normal world, the initiate will be as good as reborn.<sup>9</sup>

Most amazing is the fact that a great number of the ritual trials and images correspond to those that appear automatically in dream the moment the psychoanalyzed patient begins to abandon his infantile fixations and to progress into the future. Among the aborigines of Australia, for example, one of the principal features of the ordeal of initiation (by which the boy at puberty is cut away from the mother and inducted into the society and secret lore of the men) is the rite of circumcision.

---

\* In such ceremonials as those of birth and burial, the significant effects are, of course, those experienced by the parents and relatives. All rites of passage are intended to touch not only the candidate but also every member of his circle.

When a little boy of the Murngin tribe is about to be circumcised, he is told by his fathers and by the old men, "The Great Father Snake smells your foreskin; he is calling for it." The boys believe this to be literally true, and become extremely frightened. Usually they take refuge with their mother, mother's mother, or some other favorite female relative, for they know that the men are organized to see that they are taken to the men's ground, where the great snake is bellowing. The women wail over the boys ceremonially; this is to keep the great snake from swallowing them.<sup>10</sup>

Now regard the counterpart from the unconscious. "One of my patients," writes Dr. C. G. Jung, "dreamt that a snake shot out of a cave and bit him in the genital region. This dream occurred at the moment when the patient was convinced of the truth of the analysis and was beginning to free himself from the bonds of his mother-complex."<sup>11</sup>

It has always been the prime function of mythology and rite to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward, in counteraction to those constant human fantasies that tend to tie it back. In fact, it may well be that the very high incidence of neuroticism among ourselves follows from the decline among us of such effective spiritual aid. We remain fixated to the unexercised images of our infancy, and hence disinclined to the necessary passages of our adulthood. In the United States there is even a pathos of inverted emphasis: the goal is not to grow old, but to remain young; not to mature away from Mother, but to cleave to her. And so, while husbands are worshiping at their boyhood shrines, being the lawyers, merchants, or masterminds their parents wanted them to be, their wives, even after fourteen years of marriage and two fine children produced and raised, are still on the search for love—which can come to them only from the centaurs, sileni, satyrs, and other concupiscent incubi of the rout of Pan, either as in the second of the above-recited dreams, or as in our popular, vanilla-frosted temples of the venereal goddess, under the make-up of the latest heroes of the screen.

The psychoanalyst has to come along, at last, to assert again the tried wisdom of the older, forward-looking teachings of the masked medicine dancers and the witch-doctor-circumcisers; whereupon we find, as in the dream of the serpent bite, that the ageless initiation symbolism is produced spontaneously by the patient himself at the moment of the release. Apparently, there is something in these initiatory images so necessary to the psyche that if they are not supplied

from without, through myth and ritual, they will have to be announced again, through dream, from within—lest our energies should remain locked in a banal, long-outmoded toy-room, at the bottom of the sea.

Sigmund Freud stresses in his writings the passages and difficulties of the first half of the human cycle of life—those of our infancy and adolescence, when our sun is mounting toward its zenith. C. G. Jung, on the other hand, has emphasized the crises of the second portion—when, in order to advance, the shining sphere must submit to descend and disappear, at last, into the night-womb of the grave. The normal symbols of our desires and fears become converted, in this afternoon of the biography, into their opposites; for it is then no longer life but death that is the challenge. What is difficult to leave, then, is not the womb but the phallus—unless, indeed, the life-weariness has already seized the heart, when it will be death that calls with the promise of bliss that formerly was the lure of love. Full circle, from the tomb of the womb to the womb of the tomb, we come: an ambiguous, enigmatical incursion into a world of solid matter that is soon to melt from us, like the substance of a dream. And, looking back at what had promised to be our own unique, unpredictable, and dangerous adventure, all we find in the end is such a series of standard metamorphoses as men and women have undergone in every quarter of the world, in all recorded centuries, and under every odd disguise of civilization.

The story is told, for example, of the great Minos, king of the island empire of Crete in the period of its commercial supremacy: how he hired the celebrated artist-craftsman Daedalus to invent and construct for him a labyrinth, in which to hide something of which the palace was at once ashamed and afraid. For there was a monster on the premises—which had been born to Pasiphaë, the queen. Minos, the king, had been busy, it is said, with important wars to protect the trade routes; and meanwhile Pasiphaë had been seduced by a magnificent, snow-white, seaborne bull. It had been nothing worse, really, than what Minos' own mother had allowed to happen: Minos' mother was Europa, and it is well known that she was carried by a bull to Crete. The bull had been the god Zeus, and the honored son of that sacred union was Minos himself—now everywhere respected and gladly served. How then could Pasiphaë have known that the fruit of her own indiscretion would be a monster: this little son with human body but the head and tail of a bull?



Society has blamed the queen greatly; but the king was not unconscious of his own share of guilt. The bull in question had been sent by the god Poseidon, long ago, when Minos was contending with his brothers for the throne. Minos had asserted that the throne was his, by divine right, and had prayed the god to send up a bull out of the sea, as a sign; and he had sealed the prayer with a vow to sacrifice the animal immediately, as an offering and symbol of service. The bull had appeared, and Minos took the throne; but when he beheld the majesty of the beast that had been sent and thought what an advantage it would be to possess such a specimen, he determined to risk a merchant's substitution—of which he supposed the god would take no great account. Offering on Poseidon's altar the finest white bull that he owned, he added the other to his herd.



FIGURE 3. *Sileni and Maenads* (black-figure amphora, Hellenic, Sicily, c. 500–450 B.C.)