

MYTHIC PASSAGES
THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
MYTHIC IMAGINATION INSTITUTE
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September 20th, Impressions

Editor's Note: I requested the impressions of a number of persons who attended this event on September 20. Here are several responses from members of our MII Leadership Group, plus my own impressions.

"Aha!"

by Jeanna Collins, Education

I did have an "aha" moment from the *War, Peace and the American Imagination* program. It came rather early in the program when Hillman was speaking for the first time but really wasn't manifested as an "aha" moment until I was on the way home.

I was immediately struck when he started talking about how we Americans didn't have a real sense of imagination. It was totally not what I expected from him at that moment and it jarred me awake. The juices really started flowing when he said that we needed to be able to imagine our enemies, to see them somehow through imagination. To come to know them and even to understand their rationale, their fears, their anger, etc. The thought of coming to know all of this about people that seem to be our enemies didn't surprise me because I have always thought it necessary to do so, but it was the coupling of these ideas with imagination. I had never thought of using imagination in that way. That was the key point for me that I gained from most of the evening. There were so many other wonderful, eye — opening moments, but I just couldn't get that idea of using imagination to reach out and get to know something important about others, even those you may never meet.

As I said, I didn't get the full impact of the meaning of this for me until I was on the way home. I began to think about my teaching experience and the work that my students had done in poetry units when we studied the Holocaust. After teaching a couple of years, I realized that although my students were gaining a lot of knowledge and finding the unit meaningful, somehow the victims were being lost. We were seeing them only as victims and not as real people with all of their aspects of humanity. Then I read the following quote in one of the Holocaust journals: "The

educational challenge was and still remains, the ability to probe the human element behind the facts." To meet this challenge, I designed a poetry unit with the main purpose of giving students the necessary tools to respond in some way (often metaphorically) to the victims. The work of the students for several years just blew me away, and I have presented their poems many times at educational conferences.

I have often wondered how they were able to cross that line of distance and come up with such beautiful and deeply meaningful images of someone they never knew. Suddenly, on the way home, I realized that what Hillman described was exactly what had happened with my students. Although I called the unit *Images: Poetic Responses to the Holocaust*, I somehow never took the word "images" to the next step of imagination (true imagination, not just trying to think of pretty words!). Through their digging for images, the students had used their imagination, and that imagination, peering into the lives of someone who lived over fifty years ago, opened their hearts and enabled them to "...probe the human element behind the facts." It was a real moment for me and that moment has been with me for days. What a wonderful gift from Hillman!

Emory Event

by Donna Barnett, Marketing

Being tied up with logistics until well after the event started, I was late entering the Glenn Memorial Auditorium. The auditorium is the primary edifice gracing the entrance to the Emory campus — a tall white church nestled on a hill among old oaks — that's still used for services as well as a classroom. The lights inside the auditorium were bright, so much so that the faces in the audience were clearly visible.

Having, no doubt, the crummiest seat in the house (backstage), the vantage gave me an excellent view of the crowd. All twelve hundred people seemed mesmerized. Even after sitting on hard pews for over two hours, the vast majority would have stayed for more. They were attentive throughout and applauded with vigor when a presenter said something that struck a chord.

The content was rich and thick. Deepak Chopra is a brilliant speaker, and, more than anything, he speaks simply and has a fine gift for synthesizing knotty material into clean, crisp statements chocked with easy to digest facts.

James Hillman is keen and incisive. He delivered quite a wallop from the stage as he threw out meaty tidbits. His book, *A Terrible Love of War*, is absolutely fascinating and his delivery of these insights into why we love war so much made our collective scalps tingle.

Everyone fell in love with Jean Houston. She's beautiful, witty and warm. Her smile could melt stone. She spoke about being on a radio talkshow — I think the talkshow's subject was war and turmoil. A man called in, his Texas drawl as thick as sorghum, yet he obviously had the slicing wit of a paring knife for the man said the most profound things to her. As she related the story, it struck me that in this simple manner, with beautifully mimed accent, she had seamlessly invoked the common man into the room — the very kind of citizen that some in our country seem to endlessly disdain — as though the "common man" is the latest plague. How fabulous and soothing it was to hear Jean Houston bring this "lowliest" so eloquently onto center stage.

I can't say what struck me most about what the presenters said. They all had great points, clever comments, deep insights and plenty of "factoids"...It was more to me about the way the crowd soaked it all up — like ancient sponges too long from deep water. Every one of us: Spartans, Cretans, yuppies, preppies, Jews, Christians, Pagans, gays, straights, Buddhists, ex-military, the elderly, the infirm, the young, the spry, were all breathing the same air, sharing the same hard benches, straining to catch each reverberation, in a church-turned-auditorium. Finally, I thought to myself, finally, the gods have re-entered the temple.

The Big Night

by Mary Davis, Publications

Preparing for the Big Night:

I finished the main part of my work for the event, researching, writing, and then, more than triple-checking the program notes so that John Bridges of Red Crow Studio could make the programs look beautiful, the program brochures we gave to attendees. And John did that both with his own great design skills and with his use, with Alan's permission, of parts of Alan Lee's incredible art work depicting war, *Finvarra*. Alan Lee is an Academy Award winning British artist who was a presenter at Mythic Journeys 04.

Our whole Leadership Group worked very hard as a team to make this event happen. Michael Karlin, MII's President, with MII Creative Director Honora Foah's assistance, worked with the Alliance for a New Humanity and Emory University on joint sponsorship with the Mythic Imagination Institute and also on the program itself with our presenters. Michael's work is not to be underestimated. The vision of both Michael Karlin and Arsenio Rodriguez of Alliance for a New Humanity were the source of the evening's program. James Hillman and Deepak Chopra were there from the beginning and together with Jean Houston (this very up-front woman who brought the Feminine into the discussion in her person) made the evening! We thank Michael, Honora, and Arsenio for their vision. We owe our deep gratitude to Chopra, Hillman and Houston with their great wisdom and grand personalities.

Andrew Greenberg worked so that everyone and everything was in place for the evening. Sheri Kling made sure that the production necessities were in place and that the filming for later public distribution was accomplished professionally. Anya Martin and Dawn Zarimba informed the press about the event. Jeff Morgan made sure that all was legal. Everyone distributed John Bridges' posters and we all sent emails to invite everyone we know. Donna Barnett made us pay attention to marketing, and Candace Apple helped. Dennis Papp, John and Bill Bridges and Charles Edge took charge of ushers. Chris Miner and back-for-the-evening-from-California Joe Good passed out information about the Alliance for a New Humanity's and Mythic Imagination's upcoming conferences. Kathleen Bingamen sold out all our tickets and George Bingamen managed Will-Call tickets. Clyde Gilbert and Ashley Carter helped with the Question and Answer period. Our staff person and much more, Brenda Sutton, did everything and held it all together! Emory and Dean Paul were very helpful. The rest of us in the Leadership Group and other volunteers filled in the gaps ...Honora's living room rug and screens even graced the stage!

The Night Itself:

Now to the event itself! Even though there were long lines waiting to enter, and the day was one of Atlanta's hottest and most humid, once we were seated, we were called to attention! Every cell in my body, even down to my bones, to my DNA, vibrated to that awe inspiring music from *Down To Earth!*, Parker Johnson from Foxfire Studios chanted — ("chanted" is an understatement) — while Shine Edgar and Zachary Sukuweh each sounded their didjeridu. The work is *The Angel's Lament* and it is a prayer for peace. What a prayer! Shine and Zach are known as shamans of the didjeridu and that is an appropriate description of their work. Shine, in his Australian hat, bending to the earth, touching the earth with this ancient sound, evoking all the pain and loss and hope and beauty we know. Looking at *Finvarra* and hearing *The Angel's Lament*, I was moved to tears, I heard the call, and I believe that most of our sold-out audience felt that a sacred space was being created for this discussion. Would that the whole world could have heard this music!

And, ah, the discussion! A historic discussion from East and from West, each person deeply rooted in each culture. Jean Houston gave a brief but thorough Western philosophic overview, quoting Virgil, Jesus, St. Augustine, and Machiavelli. She said, "We are at a turning point in history." James Hillman spoke about war as "the failure of imagination." He said that we must "turn to war and give it deep thought," that we must "think ourselves into its truth, its reality." His plea is for imagining, "We must enter into the heart of the Other, imagining what 'the enemy' is believing, thinking, feeling." Hillman noted that in his study of war (see his recent book, *A Terrible Love of War*), he found that love is important in war. "Yes, war has fear, horror and misery, but remember it has its own love, its own beauty, sacrifice, buddies' relationships, and an emotional sweetness. *Eros* and *thanatos* are present at the same time." He reminded us of our "American addiction to innocence, to not knowing, to not wanting to know." His quotes included Barbara Ehrenreich, "War wants one thing: to continue," and William Shakespeare, "What human leashes can we place on the mad dogs of war?" Basically, Hillman brings us back again and again to examine rigorously the deep psychological roots of war before we can find our way out.

Then, Deepak Chopra said that he found himself agreeing with much of what Hillman said about war, the seductive, the erotic aspects, all the things war is. He spoke of the mythic archetypes and of human biology, that out of 200,000 years of the human time line, we are still in our infancy, with the Upanishads, Lao-Tzu, and Greek philosophy all just within the last 5—6000 years. He discussed the history of violence, the limbic part of the human brain. Chopra said, "A permanently victorious species risks its own extinction. Now, we are the predators of the earth." Speaking of the bleak outlook for humanity, he thinks we have a "tremendous imagination, but it is diabolical," citing technologies like the neutron bomb which destroys living creatures, plus various poisons and electronic devices that interfere with living beings. Chopra continued, speaking of the mystery of the universe, nature's imagination, the place of our species, asking are we a cancer on the planet? From there, Chopra went on to ask what's missing and to surmise that it is a lack of imagination about a sense of self. He sees consciousness as the ground of being, "The universe is becoming self conscious through us and in that self awareness perhaps lies our salvation." He believes that there is the possibility to evolve into a new species altogether, that we are capable of "a sacred response to the mystery." (See his recent book, *Peace Is the Way*.) He noted that evolutionary biologists speak of periods of disequilibrium, chaos and ambiguity prior to change. He quoted Nietzsche's comment that when there is chaos, there is possibility,

and he used the metaphor of "phased transitions, like the great turbulence when water changes to steam." In this and other metaphors, Chopra offered hope from a place that looks bleak.

And these were just the introductions! There's no way I have space here to cover all that was said, but I want to include several of the ideas from the discussion among these three very thoughtful persons. Jean Houston asked, "Can we make peace sexy and alluring?" Chopra brought up Nelson Mandela, Rosa Parks, and Gandhi to demonstrate the power of peace and the imagination. Hillman added Martin Luther King, Jr., and said they showed resistance, strength.

But Hillman added that the dictionary defines "peace" as "the absence of war," and, "We have no images of peace that are not boring." Then Chopra, "That's the Judaeo-Christian..." Hillman interrupts, "The Judaeo AND the Christian..." Chopra continues... and contrasts them with Vedanta, discusses *ananda* (bliss) and says, "In the East, peace is the transcendence of opposing energies that allows consciousness with creativity and imagination..."

Jean Houston brings the psyche and Carl Jung into the discussion, and a discussion about consciousness follows, including, as Chopra says, "Pure consciousness which differentiates into body." Hillman returns to the question, "How do we account in our culture for this fertility of the diabolical, technical kind of imagination?" He answers his own question, "When imagination has lost its cultural roots, when it is no longer fed with value, then it becomes a kind of self-destructive fantasy. There is a lack in our schools, there is a need for myths, for art, for music!"

Chopra pointed out that in cultures with an aesthetic sensibility, with loving touch, with sensuality, there is less violence. Hillman, using metaphor said that our (collective, ruling class) psyche knows "the levees are broken," and that we must realize our weakness and find the way down with beauty, sensibility, and grace. Houston asks if we have to go down to the depths to retrieve the light, noting Plato's descent.

There was much talk about nature. Houston spoke of "God nested in Creation." Hillman quoted Spinoza re: Nature and God as the same thing. He said that the gods live in the world. Chopra said that in the East, God *became* the world. Hillman said that in the West, the view is that God *made* the world.

Houston discussed the Yoruba culture in West Africa, where Margaret Mead sent her, where the Yoruba danced, drew, envisioned, drummed solutions to conflicts. (See Houston's books, including *A Mythic Life*.) She discussed conflict resolution in the Iroquois Confederacy, reminding us that models for a different way exist. Hillman encouraged us to develop the political leashes for war: practical methods for arms control; communal experiences for the remembrance of war, for mourning the losses of war (not for "triumphalism"); and to recognize hypocrisy when it exists in religiosity, in ideology, in calls to patriotism.

Chopra called for the creation of "a culture of peace," starting with our children and developing successful techniques for conflict resolution. He encouraged the audience to "focus on yourself, now," to reach a critical mass, "be the change!" Hillman said that it is helpful to be faithful to what is, that we should leave this room struggling!

I did leave the room both delighted, feeling elated with the depth of the discussion and at the same time struggling, struggling with what seems the bleak, difficult place we've reached in our

history, struggling with my role, how to use my gifts to help the healing, wanting more of this discussion, more ideas about celebration and creating change.

The next morning in a small group at MII, I was encouraged by Deepak Chopra's statement that he would like to continue the discussion here, perhaps with a series. Chopra feels that this consciousness change is not something we are doing, but something "the world" is "doing" (through us). I was struck by the profound differences in the Western and the Eastern approaches to the core issues and by the interesting and creative interaction we witnessed.
