

Jacqueline Dell

Imagining James Hillman

The best intro to Hillman is "The Blue Fire", which gives you a wider view of his work, one of his latest works is "Souls Code" and one on growing older is "Character and Calling". One that I'm reading at the moment 'Pan and the Nightmare' is more about nature.

'A dream has a core of meaning and so does a myth; and like a dream, a myth has a "plot" formed by the world in which it was conceived.'

(Rafael Lopez-Pedraza, *Dionysus in Exile*)

Just recently I was given the opportunity to give two talks on a subject which has been close to my heart for many years. The subject is Archetypal Psychology, mainly seen through the works of James Hillman, who is in turn influenced by the works of CG Jung. It was Jung who first opened up the idea and worked with archetypal structures in the psyche, or instincts of the psyche. For me this means that all our history is contained within the psyche, which is looking for meaning in our time. I called the talks (which to some extent took the form of workshops) imagining James Hillman. My first one was in my home town Cambridge, for the 'Jungian Circle', and the second was one of eleven for the AFIPP to mark its 20th anniversary. I am so glad the AHPP workshops are to continue - they are an excellent forum through which to network and share our different ways of working, and especially to share the spirit of what the Association of Humanistic Psychology Practitioners is all about. These workshops are low cost and are usually at weekends.

The process that began by my agreeing to do these workshops turned out to be a very creative and rewarding experience for me, It gave extra meaning to my interest in Hillman and other writers such as Rafael Lopez-Pedraza and Marion Woodman, and, of

course, CG Jung. It was somehow like entering a community of writers who creatively inspired each other. I now had even more excuse to submerge myself even further in their works with the idea of sharing the results with others. After my first talk in Cambridge, where people were so generous in their participation, I felt a lot more confident about coming to London for the AHPP workshop. When looking down the programme of workshops for the year ahead I was struck by the number of different orientations of therapy that come under the Humanistic umbrella. Already I could see a synchronicity. Hillman is a great believer in polytheism, this polytheistic psychology has some Rogerian tolerance in it, some Gestalt concern to let images speak for themselves without letting the ego identify with the image, and a great deal of Jung's mythological sensibility without the desire to integrate and make all things conscious. Absolutely not a monotheistic notion.

You could say that many therapy myths were at play here, all in the service of getting our stories heard, of keeping us in our stories, and as a way of re-imagining our stories. Hillman puts it this way in *Healing Fiction*, 'It is our stories that need therapy.' As T. Moore explains in *A Blue Fire*, 'Hillman takes up ancient mythology and alchemy and turns them, so to speak, to the most

recent concerns. Above all, he re-visions psychology, taking it back from those who use it as a science of behaviour, to treat it as an art of the soul.'

During my build-up to both events I bubbled away in a creative alchemy, stepping out of the 'vessel' from time to time to consider what I was actually going to do on the day(s) - how I was going to present my talks and organise the workshops. Then I would think, 'Oh well, an idea will distil through in time', then I would get back in and continue to bubble.

Hillman's writings can be quite infuriating at times. He tends to digress and will often use what I think must be made up words. What I love though is his ability to take apart a particular idea or philosophy and bring to it a fresh burst of consciousness, thereby imbuing the subject with what I can only describe as soul. In this we can see the influence of the Dionysian myth, the Greek god who is also known as the 'loosener', who had a reputation for dismembering in order to remember, with new insight. He also writes about everything', so the task of identifying which ones of his many ideas to use for our imagination on the day seemed endless. When he writes about 'Anima Mundi' - soul in the world, or perhaps more aptly, world in soul, it opens up for me the question, is soul in us or are we in soul? Do we have individual souls or is our sense of soul collective? I think Jung thought about this question quite a lot, and has left it for us to try to answer.

In the eighties Hillman was saying it will do little good to do therapy with people in the privacy of the therapy hour if they have to return to a world that is lacking in feeling and sense. His frequent question is, what does the soul want? That is what does it want in terms

of everything, not just therapy, but in the workplace, in architecture, gardens, parks, homes, nature, - you name it, and he write about it in order to promote a chance for some soulful reflection. David Miller wrote on the same subject. 'Some people study myths and the world by bringing their so-called soul with them and laying on the world, like a trip, like a warm fuzzy linus blanket, a pair of rose glasses, like a sugar coating for a bitter pill. They think they have found soul in the world. But that's not it. That's fake soul and fake world. Real soul of the world is the soul of the world'. I particularly like this quote because it illustrates that our soul can be in many guises. It can be the very dark and suffering side of us, and what I observe in my work is that it is often through what we consider to be the inferior aspects of ourselves that we find what is more truly our essence.

At heart Hillman is a polytheist, and just as there are many gods, likewise there can be many ways to approach a subject and many ideas about it that are equally valid . He describes the psyche as a lover of ideas, especially psychological ones. In fact he believes in the universality of ideas; that they are not our own, but are always out there, belonging to everyone. Imagination is helped if we 'see with our ears and hear with our eyes'. So we watch the images that arise from what we hear in order to see more clearly what is being said. He invites us to look mythologically at our experiences, to look for and to sense different styles of consciousness in what we experience. I think of the death of Princess Diana and how the collective experience had a mythological sense to it, how Diana had become the good loving fantasy Princess. This myth will long echo in the collective imagination

when the subject of compassion is in the air. In terms of myth-making, Diana seemed to pick up on quite intuitively all the necessary ingredients. A myth was born.

'It is not that we are at odds with certain myths, but today we have broken with the status of soul that made myths possible in the first place.' Wolfgang Giegerich, in *The Soul's Logical Life*

At last something was distilling. I decided that the core of my workshop would be based upon Jung's idea of the 'objective psyche', which, very briefly, means the psyche's ability to bring about change, and which many of Hillman's ideas stem from. For this I would use material from work I had done with two former clients who had given me permission to do so. They had donated their stories. In the workshops I presented the two cases and the work we had done together so that we could see the psyche at work psychopathologising. To write coldly and objectively about these cases here would not feel respectful, and would only serve to concretise the work that we did. What I will say is that by my sticking to the imagery in the story, our imagining it together brought one client to understanding the need for a softer, more feminine style of consciousness, - a person who until he came to understand this need had attempted many times to end his life.

Until then he had been plagued by a negative relationship to his anima, bringing him depression after depression until we could engage with the plot. He would flee into manic flights, identifying with a hero consciousness which was doomed to fail in the face of a feminine complex which had the power almost to be a personality in its own right. Until we could engage with

this process, there was no possibility of the transformation of Eros that this person so needed.

I am sorry that I can't go into any more detail regarding the cases that I brought to the workshop, but I feel that this would be disrespectful through this medium. At the same time I also feel that I would fail if I tried fully to convey my precise feelings at the workshop, and just how generous and full of insight were the people who attended. Through their engagement and presence I felt both a sense of humility and confirmation in this job of being a psychotherapist.

The next leg of this process for me is a residential course at the Schumacher College, aptly called 'Shadows of the Earth'. It lasts for two and a half weeks in the presence of James Hillman, Margot McLean and Mermer Blacksee. The focus of the work will be through the media of thinking, painting and poetry, which should throw some more chemicals into this very invigorating and rewarding subject of Imagination. I'll keep you posted - maybe I'll be able to share it with you at a future AHPP workshop!

Further reading

Hillman, James. (1991). *The Blue Fire*. Harper Perennial.

Hillman, James. (1997) *The Soul's Code*, Bantam.

AHPP's series of workshops continues this year. For anyone interested you can contact the administrator, Ian Doucet, on 0345 660326.

Jacqueline Dell is an A H P P Accredited psychotherapist and counsellor. In addition to her private practise in Cambridge she is also the supervisor for several different agencies, including Centre 33, a young peoples information and counselling service, and Corona House, a women and homelessness group. She is also a counsellor for Cambridge County Council.