



The Inner Reaches of Outer Space: Metaphor as Myth and as Religion (Collected Works)

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Developed from a memorable series of lectures delivered in San Francisco, which included a legendary symposium at the Palace of Fine Arts with astronaut Rusty Schweickart, Joseph Campbell's last book explores the space age. Campbell posits that the newly discovered laws of outer space are actually at work within human beings as well and that a new mythology is implicit in this realization. He examines the new mythology and other questions in these essays which he described as "a broadly shared spiritual adventure."

The Inner Reaches of Outer Space: Metaphor as Myth and as Religion (Collected Works) Details

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From Reader Review The Inner Reaches of Outer Space: Metaphor as Myth and as Religion (Collected WorksI) for online ebook

Kerri says

I'm a huge Campbell fan (? follower ?), but this one just did not do it for me. Quite honestly, it almost came off as the ramblings of a lunatic-- some manifesto one of those guys who builds his own church out of hub caps would write. It isn't that there weren't the amazing observations and bringing together of the worlds mythology that makes Campbell's brilliance what it is, but it seemed put together so haphazardly, like some unedited stream of consciounes novel (which is ironic, since he wraps the whole last chapter around James Joyce's views on art).

Basically, he lost me in the first chapter of the book, where he gets into the commonalities in the numerology of several religions. Most of the time, when Campbell speaks of these common "magic" numbers, I'm completely with him, but he was really grasping at straws here: "This religion found significance in X. If you add up all the digits in Y, then divide it by two, and reverse it, it's an integer of X. So they're exactly the same!" Well, okay... no.

Campbell's never been a particularly easy read for me, but most of the time the ends justify the extra concentration it takes me to cut through his genius ramblings, but this one was a bit too heavy on the ramblings for me.

Maan Kawas says

Another great book by Joseph Campbell!

Andrea Paterson says

Joseph Campbell is extraordinary. This particular work was pretty complex, and I skipped the last chapter on art, but the parts about the principle of Kundalini from yoga and the reinterpretation of some elements of the bible were fascinating. You're never going to look at the serpent in the garden of Eden the same way again. I was absolutely amazed by the comparative study of world religions presented here. Campbell shows that most religions, even when geographically isolated and separated by hundreds and thousands of years, contain eerily similar elements--specifically the idea of Kundalini that is reiterated in truly diverse cultural and social contexts as an aspect of spirituality. The result is a mind bending argument that suggests a universal experience of human spirituality that has worked its way into multiple systems of spiritual thought. The specifics vary culturally but the core idea remains too similar to be discounted as pure coincidence.

Robert Dietrich says

One of Campbell's finest books.

Joseph says

[Closer to 2.5 stars]

This was my first foray in Joseph Campbell's work, and it was a pretty uneven read overall. There were some things in here I honestly liked a lot though, focusing on attempting to rebuild myths deconstructed by modern science and multiculturalism by grounding ourselves in timeless yet inarticulable truths, and creating myth as a way of wrapping transcendent experience in something comprehensible. The way he argued for it though was... less than convincing. We had a lot of honestly interesting journeys into Navajo, Indian, Buddhist, and even Gnostic myth as a way of trying to get at a central idea or set of ideas which these traditions attempted to bring back down to earth, but despite a lot of examples and analysis, I never did quite feel like I had a good grasp on where he was going. And then there's the frankly cringeworthy segments where he goes into numerology, seemingly at face value, and in several examples tried to show similarities between cultures with similar important numbers, relying much too heavily on a decimal numbering system with place value, which if you're a fraction the student of history Campbell was, you may recognize as decidedly *not* a universal among the ancient world's cultures.

I want to let this one percolate for a while then read it again (at 148 pages it's not a humongous investment), but on the whole I was disappointed by his execution of what is a truly interesting and important premise.

Sarah-Lambert Cook says

Really enjoyed the final chapter: The Way of Art. That chapter is the primary reason I wanted to read the book and I'd give that 5 stars. The rest, however, didn't feel well put together and was difficult to get through because of that.

Alice says

I am sure Campbell offered some great reflection points and analysis points, but these were lost to me among the rambling pages that concealed their supposed message and purpose. I drowned in the sea of unrelated myths, intermingling in a mysterious net of philosophical and religious memoirs.

I am sure between the numerous parentheses and the scattered writing he held some valid arguments, sadly I couldn't find them, his ongoing sentences being too cryptic for me to follow.

Bob Prophet says

This book I pick up from time to time, slowly working through it a couple pages at a time, giving Joseph Campbell's words a chance to sink in and meld with the writings of other authors like Richard L. Rubenstein and Chris Hedges. Eventually it will be completed and I'll move on to his other works.

Steve Wiggins says

Joseph Campbell is dependable for his comparative, thoughtful analysis of mythology. A bit heavy going at times, these mature reflections are worth the effort. Read more at: [Sects and Violence in the Ancient World](#).

Lisa Pounders says

This was not my favorite Campbell book regarding Mythology and its role in "current" society. Except for the last chapter, "The Way of Art", which I would give four stars. Overall the book felt like a repeat of his other works. I would say that if you read "The Hero with a Thousand Faces" and "The Mythic Dimension" you would not necessarily gain anything from this book. Also, I believe that the interviews with Bill Moyers do a better job of taking Campbell's work into the present.

Jason says

I still remember when José pulled this off his mythology shelf back in '95 and turned straight to the weird numerology section at the front of the book, where Campbell finds wonderful numerical correlations between the various systems of world mythology and the then-contemporary scientific understandings of the universe. At that point I knew I *had* to read this book, which meant that, true to form, I bought it almost immediately and promptly waited seventeen years to read it.

In this collection of reworked lectures, and his final book (I think), Campbell provides a fascinating take on the perennial philosophy and presents it as a means of bridging the divide between the languages and worldviews of religion and science. According to Campbell, the problem is that neither side understands the metaphorical aspects of mythical language and symbolism and so mistakenly take literally that which is intended to point to a lived experience of the sacred and not to express a fact about history, biology, etc.

Here are some of the things Campbell had to say that really blew me away:

One cannot predict the next mythology any more than one can predict tonight's dream; for a mythology is not an ideology. It is not something projected from the brain, but something experienced from the heart, from recognitions of identities behind or within the appearances of nature, perceiving with love a "thou" where there would have been otherwise only an "it."
(p.17)

[A] *true* prophet ... knew the difference between his ethnic ideas and the elementary ideas that they enclose, between a metaphor and its connotation, between a tribal myth and its metaphysical import. For when the inner eye is awakened and a revelation arises from inner space to meet impressions brought by the senses from outer space to the mind, the significance of the conjunction is lost unless the outward image opens to receive and embody the elementary idea: this being the whole sense of the transformation of nature in art. Otherwise,

nothing has happened; an external event has been merely documented and a cultic, ethnic centrality given as the last word of religion, with naturalism the end and beginning of art. (34)

The first step to mystical realization is the leaving of such a defined god for an experience of transcendence, disengaging the ethnic from the elementary idea, *for any god who is not transparent to transcendence is an idol, and its worship is idolatry*. Also, the first step to participation in the destiny of humankind today, which is neither of this folk nor of that, but of the whole population of this globe, is to recognize every such local image of a god as but one of many thousands, millions, even perhaps billions, of locally useful symbolizations of that same mystery beyond sight or thought which our teachers have taught us to seek in their god alone. (44)

[M]ythical figurations are the "ancestral forms," the insubstantial archetypes, of all that is beheld by the eye as physically substantial, material things being understood as ephemeral concretions out of the energies of these noumena. Traditional forms of tools, dwellings, and weapons have their justification in such everlasting models. Rituals are direct expositions of their life-sustaining patterns. Temples and the narratives of myth are hermetic fields within which those apparitions known as gods and goddesses, demons, angels, demigods, incarnations, and the like, typify in the guise of charismatic personalities the locally recognized vortices of consciousness out of which all aspects of the local theatre of life derive their being. The figurations of myth are expressive, therefore, as those of dream normally are not, of range of universal, as distinguished from specifically individual, concerns. (56)

[E]ternity being by definition outside or beyond temporality, transcendent of all categories, whether of virtue or of reason (being and nonbeing, unity and multiplicity, love and justice, forgiveness and wrath), the term and concept "God" is itself but a metaphor of the unknowing mind, connotative, not only beyond itself, but beyond thought. So that all can be said of it, whether as touching time or eternity, has to be in the way of an "as if" (*als ob*): philosophically and theologically ... through the analogy of a rationally inferred First Cause, and mythologically ... in the way of a psychologically affective image transparent to transcendence. (57)

One cannot but ask: What can ... tribal literalism possibly contribute but agony to such a world of intercultural, global prospects as that of our present century? It call comes of misreading metaphors, taking denotation for connotation, the messenger for the message; overloading the carrier, consequently, with sentimentalized significance and throwing both life and thought thereby off balance. To which the only generally recognized correction as yet proposed has been the no less wrongheaded one of dismissing the metaphors as lies (which indeed they are, when so construed), thus scrapping the whole dictionary of the language of the soul (this is a metaphor) by which mankind has been elevated to interests beyond procreation, economics, and "the greatest good of the greatest number." (58)

There is a Hindu tantric saying, *n?vedo devam arcayet*, "by none but a god shall a god be worshipped". The deity of one's worship is a function of one's own state of mind. But it also is a product of one's culture. Catholic nuns do not have visions of the Buddha, nor do Buddhist nuns have visions of Christ. Ineluctably, the image of any God beheld ... will be of a local ethnic idea historically conditioned, a metaphor, therefore, and thus to be recognized as transparent to transcendence. Remaining fixed to its name and form, whether with simple faith or in saintly vision, is therefore to remain in mind historically bounded and attached to an appearance. (67)

The first task of any systematic comparison of the myths and religions of mankind should therefore be ... to identify [the] universals (or, as C.G. Jung termed them, archetypes of the unconscious) and as far as possible to interpret them; and the second task then should be to recognize and interpret the various locally and historically conditions transformations of the metaphorical images through which these universals have been rendered. (99)

The universally distinguishing characteristic of mythological thought and communication is an implicit connotation through all its metaphorical imagery of a sense of identity of some kind, transcendent of appearances, which unites behind the scenes the opposed actors on the world stage. (110)

The metaphors of any mythology may be defined as affect signs derived from intuitions of just this play of the Self through all the forms of a local manner of life, made manifest through ritualized representations, pedagogical narratives, prayers, meditations, annual festivals, and the like, in such a way that all members of the relevant community may be held, both in mind and in sentiment, to its knowledge and thus moved to live in accord. (113)

[I]t is the function of the priest to represent the claims of life in the world, ethics against metaphysics, the art of living in the knowledge of transcendence without dissolving into it in a rapture of self-indulgence.... Like the priest, the artist is a master of metaphorical language. The priest, however, is vocationally committed to a vocabulary already coined, of which he is the representative. He is a performing artist executing scripts already perfectly wrought, and his art is in the execution. (121)

Robyn says

Gift from my uncle. | Oh, boy. Start elsewhere if you're new to Campbell. This made me believe his theories LESS than I did before starting the book. | This is a bit awkward for me, because I received the book in the mail in July 2008 with a note from my uncle "Just because. This is one of my most important books few 'get it' I know you will." I started reading it then, but even the introduction seemed so rambling and without point

or purpose that I set it aside and forgot I had it. There's some fascinating stuff in here, some ideas and connections which deserve attention. Unfortunately they're mired in exceptionally scattered writing, some actual poor scholarship--shocking since Campbell was good at what he did, a 'preaching to the choir' voice, and what in a few cases came across as ravings. He almost lost me completely near the beginning with the ridiculous number section. I mean, I was due to be born on the 9th of the month (ooh, a 9!), but was actually born the 18th (wow, $9 \times 2 = 18$, even though who knows where that 2 came from, plus $1 + 8 = 9$!), met my sweetheart on the 18th of a month, if you add together the digits of the years we were each born you get 45, and $4+5=9$, and since 9 "relates traditionally to the Great Goddess of Many Names, as matrix of the cosmic process, whether in the macrocosm or in a microcosmic field of manifestation", clearly he and I have special meaning in the universe. Or, you know, maybe we could acknowledge that this is how number games work, and by careful selection we can make anything fit. One random phys ed textbook told Campbell that a male in good physical shape will have a resting heart rate of *about 60 bpm or less* and he bases the idea of man being "in accord at once with his own nature and with the rhythm of the universe" on using that number with complicated math?!

Speaking of careful selection...my reference to poor scholarship is examples such as the Egyptian weighing of the heart. Campbell goes into detail connecting the shape of the scale, with seven nodules, to the chakras of yogic tradition. Except that the image he gives of the scales is literally the only one I've ever seen in which the scales are not smooth. Sometimes there are stars or dots on the scales, but it is nearly always a smooth-sided center rod. How does that tie Egypt to the Lotus Centers? Or discussion of how the "God" referenced on US money could not be the Judeo-Christian God, because the deists of Jefferson's studies would not have referenced that god...except that phrase wasn't on any US money until the Civil War, partly to demonstrate that a very particular god was on the side of the Union, and wasn't on the paper money Campbell is describing the symbolism of until the anti-Communism days of the 20th century!

Enough. The more I write this review, the less respect I have for the book. I'm going back to Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, which does a far better job at demonstrating connections between world myths/religions/practices, does it more clearly, and does it with a more coherent purpose.

Mike says

Those who dismiss religion outright, or who understand their religion literally and historically, should, Joseph Campbell would say, consider mythic and religious imagery as the interface between the knowable and the unknowable, as universal truths dressed in local costumes. This book was more difficult, more obtuse, than the other Campbell books I've read. Nevertheless, his words left me amazed as they always do. His words, as Campbell says of the true artist, "...break windows through the walls of culture to eternity."

Ryan Denson says

This is one of Joseph Campbell's finest works. It was published in 1986, a year before his death. When compared with *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), one can really see the evolution of his thoughts, but still recognize the same sophisticated and mercurial mind of Campbell. His central idea in this work is based upon viewing religious and mythological stories as metaphorical rather than historical facts. Anyone familiar with his other works will be accustomed to how eloquently Campbell shows the similarities between a variety of traditions, both eastern and western. He convincingly argues myths and stories, especially those of religious figures like Buddha and Christ, should not be taken literally. When taken as literal truths and historical facts by their followers, mythologies and religions often become abrasive and divisive forces.

Campbell argues that when these seemingly disparate traditions are viewed for their metaphorical implications, with an emphasis on their similarities, they become a powerful unifying force in a globalizing world. This book takes a deep dive into the metaphysical, philosophical, and psychological aspects of humanity. It may take some effort to get through, but will hopefully make the reader pause and reflect on the broad themes of commonality and compassion for all people.

Francisca Pageo says

«La creación del mito es la creación del mundo, y durante los últimos años de su vida, creó el mundo de nuevo.»

Marina Tsvietáieva

En Las extensiones interiores del espacio exterior, el mitólogo, profesor y escritor estadounidense Joseph Campbell nos presenta tres de las conferencias que impartió en San Francisco entre 1981 y 1984. En ellas reflexiona sobre la metáfora a través del mito, la religión, la belleza y los arquetipos, así como de la cosmología y la imaginación. Para ello, Campbell señala y expone diversas referencias extraídas de las religiones y tradiciones de todas las partes del mundo, así como de varios autores literarios y artísticos.

En la primera conferencia, La cosmología y la imaginación mítica, Campbell discute la importancia que tiene para nosotros la mitología en base al conocimiento actual que tenemos de esta. El autor nos muestra cómo el espacio exterior (el universo, la física) se coordina a la vez con nuestro interior, al hacer uso de las diversas leyes que gobiernan a ambos. Así, enseña cómo la historia de las religiones va añadiendo metáforas continuas y presentes entre lo que sucede externa e internamente en torno a nuestra percepción. Nos habla del alma como la esencia en la que se asienta el mundo exterior y el mundo interior. También sobre los mitos tribales de las sociedades aborígenes, ya que cuando despertamos nuestro ojo interior a la revelación que sucede, en forma de insight, se produce la creación de estos mitos. Campbell estudia las antiguas (y no tan antiguas) religiones, las expone y compara. De ellas extrae diversas referencias, ya sean numerológicas, artísticas o físicas, para llevarnos a entender cómo estas han influenciado al hombre.

Más adelante, nos sumerge en La metáfora como mito y como religión. A través de esta se suceden los sueños, que al igual que los mitos, son productos de la imaginación humana. El mito, de manera intencional o no, se hace símbolo psicológico, pues con sus imágenes y narrativa no trata de manera literal, sino metafórica. Los mitos nos hablan de los orígenes, del mundo de las artes, las leyes y las costumbres sociales de cada religión. De tal manera que el poder que detentan los convierte en un hallazgo importante para plantear una liberación mental como la de especificar las connotaciones psicológicas y metafísicas que hallamos a través de ellos.

Cuando reconocemos la metáfora y nos identificamos con ella sucede una transformación personal. Esta puede verse en el budismo, a través de la meditación sobre los diferentes chakras y la transformación que llevan a cabo con el despertar de la kundalini -una especie de energía invisible e inmedible. También se puede ver y comparar esta apertura de la percepción con la simbología de la ascensión de Jesucristo en la cruz, pues la última y suprema liberación del hombre es dejar a Dios para ascender a Dios. A través de las religiones hallamos diversos símbolos, como el Sol o la Luna, que nos ponen en conocimiento de la vida corporal así como de la vida eterna, como puede ser la simbología del eterno retorno en el ouroboros, que

puede verse tanto en el budismo como en algunas tradiciones indias americanas. Así, nos transformamos cuando tomamos conciencia de la metáfora externa a través de nosotros.

En la tercera conferencia, La vía del arte, Campbell señala cómo la vía del místico y la del artista se parecen, pues ambos, absortos en su vida interior, traducen los conocimientos que sobre Dios y lo misterioso obtienen y tratan de hacer aflorar a la conciencia las verdades más íntimas y profundas. Así, ambos se convierten en maestros del lenguaje metafórico. Para Campbell, también para Nietzsche, el arte es la tarea propia de la vida, su ejercicio metafísico. Por tanto, el arte es más meritorio que la verdad. El autor nos muestra cómo el arte ha hecho uso de la metáfora y cómo la metáfora ha hecho uso del arte, pues ambas se entrelazan entre sí y a una le es imposible existir sin la otra. Cabe señalar la importancia que se le ha dado a la imagen como un ente propio, personal pero a la vez universal, pues este puede ser interpretado por todos y a través de todos. El arte parte de la naturaleza, así como también el universo. Por ende, los dos son aspectos de una misma realidad.

A través de esta serie de conferencias que la editorial Atalanta ha reunido en el presente libro, encontramos respuestas sobre lo que podemos hallar en las diferentes tradiciones, mitologías y en el mismo arte. Con su invitación a explorar tan vasto territorio, Campbell nos ayuda a dilucidar y arrojar un poco de luz sobre la metáfora, lo exterior y lo interior en todos sus diversos aspectos y formas.

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