

I Imagine, Therefore I Am

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Reading is symbolization, the realization that what we read is not comprehensible, but points to something else. Reading engages our complexes and, if successful, brings them into awareness. It calls upon our epic imagination to penetrate the veil between our ego and our complexes, strengthen the self-ego axis and link us to the process of individuation, our own divine destiny.

An epic, like psyche, is a labyrinth. Like Theseus, we go in to find our minotaurs, those primitive urges that have been devouring our potential consciousness. Woods, too, are a labyrinth and “are a metaphor for the narrative text...In a narrative text, the reader is forced to make choices all the time” (Eco p 6). The text, with its potential to form patterns of meaning and understanding for the reader, behaves like an archetype. The reader’s choices are the personal experiences that form the shell of the complex through which she incorporates its symbolic content.

Reading engages us on two levels, which Eco calls the empirical and the model. Empirical readers function like our complexes and therefore “...can read in many ways, and there is no law that tells them how to read, because they often use the text as a container for their own passions, which may come from outside the text or which the text may arouse by chance” (Eco p 8). Where the empirical reader says “...this does not fit into my lexicon so I’m booting it out” (Slattery Epic Imagination 5 May), the model reader, like the ego, is less reactive and more collaborative, “...willing to be shaped by the work as he or she shapes it” (Slattery Epic Imagination 5 May).

The model reader responds mythologically, savoring subtlety and paradox. The empirical reader responds reflexively, seeking certainty and predictability. The model reader has accepted the futility of trying to understand and imagines herself as a fiction, ready to be written by the story. The empirical reader is twisting the world smaller and smaller, eager to report a manageable set of facts. Like the ego, the model reader is an "...organ of relationship" (Slater) and asks the text "what kind of knowing do you want me to enter into and cultivate?" (Slattery Epic Imagination 5 May). Like a feeling-toned complex, the empirical reader is only aware of its own network of associations.

"...The model author and the model reader are entities that become clear to each other only in the process of reading, so that each one creates the other" (Eco p 24). The empirical reader never sees anything but clarity and feels complete from the start. The empirical and model readers have different answers to the question: "What is the relationship of narrative to truth?" (Slattery Epic Imagination 5 May) The empirical reader doesn't hesitate before classifying something as one or the other. The model reader hesitates and lingers, understanding that "...if something important or gripping is going to take place, we have to cultivate the art of lingering" (Eco p 50). The model reader knows that a fictional essence is the core of reality, just as an archetype is the core of a complex. It is the ability of these cores to create patterns that enable reality to assume meaning just as "the identity of self in Homer is so much a function of the realm of the unidentified, or dissociated, inarticulate myths" (Adorno p 309).

Just as psyche needs both the ego and the feeling-toned complexes, reading also requires both the empirical and the model readers. If we are to read and not just react, we need the help of the gods. We thank them for Ariadne's thread as we pass it through the I of psyche's needle, paying archetypal tribute to its potential to pattern. Understanding that we are always hanging by

a thread, we honor the way imagination has created us. Because the Muses are the creators of narrative, we ask them to accompany our fictional selves as we weave ourselves through the labyrinth.

If we offer ourselves to the journey instead of grasping at the destination, we will discover at the end, no matter what the finale, that “Ithaca has not defrauded (us and we will) ...have understood by then what Ithacas mean” (Cauafy). If not, and we take reading from the gods and appropriate it for ourselves, we behave like Minos when he kept the bull instead of sacrificing it to Poseidon. Then the gods will make sure that the result of our intercourse with the text is a monster instead of a deity.

There are many entrances to the labyrinth, but reading involves joining as well as entering. The themes of the text and the trigger points of the reader’s complexes intersect and generate “pattern energies that are archetypal energies coagulating” (Slattery Epic Imagination 9 June). The number of intersections depends on the size of the reader’s imagination.

“The readerly process of making predictions constitutes a necessary emotional aspect of reading which brings into play hopes and fears, as well as the tension that derives from our identification with the fate of the characters” (Eco p 52). These hopes, fears, tensions and identifications bring forth images that activate our complexes through the same mechanisms that events in the external world reach us. Because we each have different complexes, we will open up different ways and “...one member of the audience weeps while the rest ‘take pleasure’” (Segal p 364).

Once the complexes open the doors to the unconscious, the text enters the reader’s imagination and the reader enters the author’s imagination. The narrative labyrinth which the reader enters is incomplete because “...in building a world that comprises myriad events and

characters, (the narrative fiction) cannot say everything about this world. It hints at it and then asks the reader to fill in a whole series of gaps” (Eco p 3).

We start by suspending disbelief and calling upon Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory. Her existence suggests that “memory may be free standing. It doesn’t reside in us but in the world” (Slattery *Epic Imagination* 5 May). When we honor Mnemosyne, we believe what objective psyche remembers, not what we remember from our own personal experience. “... We are ready to accept, say, that wolves speak; but when Little Red Riding Hood is eaten by the wolf, we think she’s dead ...” (Eco p 77). As a goddess, Mnemosyne is also an archetype. This suggests that she forms the core of a feeling toned memory complex, which will be felt in the body as much as imaged in the mind.

Because our complexes make our lives complex, we sense both rational and irrational possibilities and are able to make multi-nodal connections. In this we are like the Internet, which, if one route is blocked, will find another way to send its messages. As they use their memory to connect the dots in the text, “readers, in order to predict how a story is going to go, turn to their own experience of life or their knowledge of other stories” (Eco p 50).

They begin dancing into new psychic territory as the reader “... causes the text to reveal its potential multiplicity of connections. These connections are the product of the reader’s mind working on the raw material of the text, though they are not the text itself-for this consists just of sentences, statements, information, etc” (Eco p 15). Although the empirical reader is anxious to know what happened, the model reader, like the reflective ego, is intrigued by what is happening. The author helps focus the reader’s attention by manipulating time. “The story could be very banal, but the tangle of flashbacks and flashforwards makes it magically unreal” (Eco p 32).

“One of the lingering or slowing-down techniques that an author can employ is the one that allows the reader to take “inferential walks. ...imaginary walks outside the wood...” (Eco p 50). As the reader adds his imaginative energy to the text, a field takes form that expands and contains parts of his psyche. The size and vibrancy of this field depends on the reader’s experiences and attitudes because “the more analogies you have to pull from, the greater is your orbit of your vision” (Slattery Epic Imagination 9 June).

Not only do we reach into the text, but it reaches into us and wraps itself around us every time we slow down and look deeply. Therefore “...digressing and lingering helps to enclose readers within those time-woods from which they can escape only after the most strenuous efforts (and which they will then want to get back into again)” (Eco p 69).

“Time, memory, and dream can melt together and...the reader’s duty is to be captured by the whirl of their unresolved struggle” (Eco p 70). Once we accept that duty, the whirl takes us into the labyrinth and, if our personal mythology is big enough to hold this chaos, we move beyond ourselves and the text. We go from “...the physical place as an event (to) the poetic place as an experience” (Slattery Epic Imagination 5 May).

We undergo a form of psychic translation, a process that

the original preface to the King James Translation of the Bible... (describes as one that) ‘... openeth the window, to let in the light; that breaketh the shell, that we may eat the kernel; that putteth aside the curtain, that we may look into the most Holy place; that removeth the cover of the well, that we may come by the water’ (Edinger p 10).

As the text is translated into the boundaries of a new protean labyrinth, open windows coalesce and cast new lights on our shadow. The shells of our complexes break and crack, letting us taste the archetypes at their centers. We put aside the ...”veil separating material and immaterial existence, allowing an intimate relation between gods and men” (Cowan p 11). We

peel away the layers of empiricism and gaze into new depth of the unconscious. “This is really the attraction in every fiction, whether verbal or visual. Such a work encloses us within the boundaries of its world and leads us, one way or another, to take it seriously” (Eco p 78).

This may not always happen. Perhaps the author does not intend to deal with any sort of archetypal material but “... wants sadistically to show us that we are not Stanley but Livingstone, and that we are doomed to get lost in the woods by continuing to make the wrong choices” (Eco p 6) or the empirical reader within us, like an obsessive complex, refuses to yield to the model reader when we reach the labyrinth. For instance, we could be so disgusted by the prospect of a mother killing her child that we rigidly caricaturize Sethe and refuse to open up to her complexity. Then we can never hold the tension of opposites of love and murder that lead us to that new place.

That place is a liminal space in which our ego and complexes meet in different ways as the labyrinth of the text builds another boundary space and opens up new pathways. An erotic temenos arises from the tension between the me of the reader’s imaginative energies and the you of the narrative text as they search for an intercourse. From this is born a we of added consciousness.

Reading doesn’t just build new liminal spaces. It also destroys old ones, so that we are freed from their fields and can use their energies for our new explorations. Among the techniques of destruction is “... defamiliarization which is obtained not semantically but syntactically and in which the reader is forced to ‘shift gears’ ...” (Eco p 56). When we hear a complex story, the complexity calls to our complexes. When the familiar causality and connections between times and spaces are distorted, our consciousness gets worn out because it’s not used to these irrational

pathways. But the timeless and formless unconscious is comfortable in this realm and therefore starts to play a bigger part.

These conflicts with our understanding focus our attention and can bring new awareness. In “Beloved,” Sethe acts out a very powerful part of the maternal archetype, that which is willing to kill for its child. But Sethe manifests a very unusual aspect of this archetype because the child she kills is the child she loves. Sethe is scarred by this because “the likelihood of a pathological complex is strongest (when)...the forms of actualization do not merely modify but are directly antagonistic to the fundamental archetypal pattern ...” (Whitmont p 120). She is not able to hold the tension between her own belief that she acted out of love and the condemnation of her community. But we, as readers both enmeshed in her life and separate from it, can be shocked and then wonder. Our experience of the dark side of the maternal archetype can open us to new vistas.

We have many minotaurs to face and each demands a journey into its labyrinth. The epic opens new passages and illuminates the way so our complexes are less able to surprise us from the dark. But we must ultimately face the minotaur, and the illumination, while alerting us to its presence, also makes us more aware of its hideous and brutal nature. But this awareness is also therapeutic, because “shock can resolve complexes” (Jacobe p 14).

With the gods help, “the reader became the book” (Stevens p 358), but then comes the time for the reader to become the reader again. It’s important that we enter the labyrinth and use the epics to find and confront the minotaurs in our unconscious, but it’s essential that we don’t get lost in the reading but remember who we are. After we read, we must come back. We need to look down, pick up Ariadne’s thread of feeling and follow it back to our world.

If, instead of using and engaging texts in the open minded way of the model reader, we pursue them with the passion of the empirical reader, we may become that text in the way Ahab became Moby Dick. Then, when we finally find Moby Dick and the other minotaurs in our labyrinths, we may not be able to let go and untangle ourselves from our harpoons. This fatal identification with the book may plunge us down into the depths of our unconscious instead of bringing more up to our consciousness.

We never really leave the labyrinth. Instead, we make part of it our own through our memory and the book becomes the day residue for our dreams about our lives. Reality and fiction can both affect us in the same way because, to psyche, there is no difference between them. Reality is the dream of Vishnu.

The interaction between author and reader which I have been describing is just one example of the larger dynamic that occurs when two imaginations intersect. It happens in the classroom between the teacher and the students, in conversations between two open-minded people, in movies and in lectures and religious worship. It is the process by which "...we read the signs and symbols in the world and find the language to make them live for (us)" (Slattery Epic Imagination 9 June).

We can enhance this process by developing our imagination, so that we can increase the orbits of vision which it can encompass. We can do this both by loosening the grip that our empirical reader holds and by exposing our model reader to opportunities to exercise its epic imagination.

There are endless minotaurs lurking in endless labyrinths, or perhaps in the same labyrinth. If we are on the path of individuation, we need to realize that our task isn't to map the labyrinth but to rescue the innocents. It is through the entering and leaving the labyrinth that our

Theseus grows. Our psychic success depends on our ability to fictionalize because we are similar to Odysseus, whose "...autobiography is therefore a grand weaving of not what literally happened to him but, on a much deeper and mythical level, what he imagines what happened to him means" (Slattery Nature and Narratives p 39).

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