

Chapter 2 On the Nature of Personal Mythology

On the Development of Personal Mythology as a Concept

According to Stanley Krippner, the first recorded reference to the idea of a personal approach to mythology occurred in 1926, when art critic Carl Einstein described the worldview of painter Paul Klee as manifesting a “private mythology” (139). A case can be made, however, that the first work proposing a mythological foundation for individual human experience was actually published more than a decade earlier. In 1912, C. G. Jung published his seminal work, *Symbols of Transformation*, the work that initially postulated his vision of an inherently mythological basis to the operation of the human psyche. In the introduction to the fourth edition of this work, Jung asks the question, “What is the myth you are living?” He goes on to observe that, in the process of writing this book, “I took it upon myself to know ‘my’ myth, and I regarded this as the task of tasks” (CW 5: xxiv-xxv).

In 1961, near the end of his life, Jung repeats this theme of the mythic nature of personal experience, writing in the prologue of his memoir, *Memories, Dreams, and Reflections*, “I have now undertaken, in my eighty-third year, to tell my personal myth.” Commenting on the inherently subjective nature of the process of telling one’s story in mythic terms, he also observes that he can only “tell stories.” Continuing in this vein, Jung goes on to declare, “Whether or not the stories are ‘true’ is not the problem,” finally concluding, the “only question is whether what I tell is my fable, my truth” (3).

Krippner additionally notes that the first use of the term “personal myth” within psychoanalytic literature was by Ernst Kris in an article published in 1956. In this article, Krippner writes, Kris employs this term to “describe certain elusive dimensions of the

human personality that he felt psychoanalysts need to consider if their attempts to bring about change were to be effective and lasting” (139). In applying the term “personal myth,” Kris himself refers to individuals whose “personal history is not only [. . .] an essential part of their self-representation,” but also “a treasured possession to which the patient is attached with a peculiar devotion.” “In this sense,” he continues, “I propose to speak of [their personal history] as a ‘personal myth,’ which, as all living myth, extends from the past into the future” (654). Kris then discusses the case histories of two individuals who, he believes, manifest this sense of a personal myth, finally concluding that they “do not borrow their autobiography from cultural tradition, or any general mythology. They are the creators, and their myth is a personal one” (680). Unlike later Jungian, humanistic, and transpersonal psychological views on personal mythology, however, Kris’s earlier psychoanalytic position generally does not consider the personal myth to be a form of personal adaptation, but rather a kind of “screen” blocking integration of unconscious, repressed material (681).

Along with Jung, another key figure in the development and promotion of the idea of personal mythology was the comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell. From his earliest writing onward, Campbell wrote about the ways in which the study of the various mythologies of the world are directly relevant to the lives of contemporary men and women. In 1949, his first major work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, introduced the now-famous concept of the “Hero’s Journey,” a concept which he repeatedly suggested is as much a model of life today as for our distant ancestors. Indeed, that volume ends with a chapter entitled “The Hero Today” and considers the contemporary significance of the heroic journey for contemporary people. In 1965, Campbell went on to introduce the

term “creative mythology” in the last of his four-volume *Masks of God* series, thereby describing the process by which modern individuals might reinterpret and revitalize the core myths of the world’s mythological traditions and, as a result, reclaim them for themselves. “Creative mythology,” he writes, “springs not, like theology, from the dicta of authority, but from the insights, sentiments, thoughts, and visions of an adequate individual, loyal to his own experience of value” (6-7).

In 1965, Arthur Warmoth introduced the concept of personal mythology to the literature of the newly emerging humanistic school of psychological thought. At that time, Warmoth employed the term “personal myth” in a brief article commenting on the way certain personal mystical experiences—in particular, those falling under the category of what Abraham Maslow termed “Peak Experience”—might take on a mythic quality for those individuals undergoing such episodes. Warmoth also specifically noted the possibility that such personal myths might fulfill on a personal level the function once performed by collectively shared cultural or religious mythologies. “The valuable peak experience,” he writes, “can be seen as fulfilling on a personal level a function that myths have historically performed for whole peoples” (18). Indeed, he goes on to suggest, the transformations brought about through such experiences may be all the more powerful because during such events “the role of powerful communal symbols is minimized, and the experience itself becomes a personal symbol” (19-20).

The first reference to the idea of personal mythology in the writings of archetypal psychologist James Hillman occurred in 1971, in what is described as a “psychological commentary” on the autobiography of the Hindu teacher Gopi Krishna. In that commentary, Hillman suggests that the various archetypal events reflected upon within

Krishna's recollections might be understood as aspects of his "personal myth." Hillman further observes that the mythic quality of Krishna's narrative is comparable to that employed by Jung in the creation of the latter's *Memories, Dreams, and Reflections* (43).

In 1973, Sam Keen and Anne Valley-Fox published the first comprehensive self-help text on working with personal mythology, a volume entitled *Your Mythic Journey: Finding Meaning in Your Life Through Writing and Storytelling*. In the introduction to this work, Keen and Valley-Fox observe that, despite the continuing existence and power of collective mythologies, "finally, the entire legacy and burden of cultural and family myths comes to rest on the individual." Being content with neither an unconscious or unconditional adherence or rejection of the myths of one's family and one's culture, these authors write, is an essential aspect of claiming a mature orientation to one's life. "We gain the full dignity and power of persons," they continue, "only when we create a narrative account of lives, dramatize our existence, and forge a coherent personal myth that combines elements of our cultural myth and family myth with unique stories that come from our experience" (xiv).

Keen traces the origin of his involvement with the concept of personal mythology back to his own mythic reflections on the death of his father in 1964. Later, "after experimenting with my own stories," he writes in *Your Mythic Journey*, "I began in 1969 to conduct seminars around the United States and Europe on 'Personal Mythology'." Keen subsequently went on to interview Joseph Campbell for the popular magazine *Psychology Today* in 1971 ("Man and Myth"). While in the midst of that interview process, Keen further relates, the Esalen Institute called and asked Campbell if he would do a seminar there and Campbell suggested doing the workshop together with Keen.

From that point onward, Keen writes, he and Campbell did seminars together “combining the methods of recovering personal mythology with reflection on classical mythical themes” (Keen and Valley-Fox, *Your Mythic Journey* xviii).

In both 1979 and 1989, the Humanistic Psychology division of the American Psychological Association sponsored national symposia on the topic of personal mythology organized by Stanley Krippner. The papers presented in the latter symposium were edited by Krippner in the summer of 1990 and published in a special issue of the journal *The Humanistic Psychologist* entitled “Personal Mythology: Psychological Perspectives.” With titles ranging from “Our Inner Cast of Characters” to “Life Stories and Personal Mythmaking,” the articles in this volume explored a range of approaches to the application of the idea of personal mythology within the humanistic psychological model.

One of the contributors to that special issue was David Feinstein, a psychologist who had already joined with Krippner in 1988 to co-author a self-help volume entitled *Personal Mythology: Using Ritual, Dreams, and Imagination to Discover Your Inner Story*. Based, in part, on workshops employing a guided process for helping laypersons to discover the mythic dimension of the personal and interpersonal conflicts in their lives, this volume was substantially revised and enlarged in 1997 and republished under the title *The Mythic Path*. “Because of a convergence of developments including the speed of social change, the breakdown of community, the ascendance of the individual in Western society, and electronic media that portray the culture’s diverse and rapidly shifting mythic imagery,” write Krippner and Feinstein in this revised work, “myth making has become an intimate matter, the domain and responsibility of each person” (14).

In 1990, a third self-help volume employing the concept of personal mythology was published. Written by Stephen Larsen, another close associate of Campbell and his official biographer, this work is entitled *The Mythic Imagination: Your Quest for Meaning through Personal Mythology*. Employing the term “conscious mythmaking” to describe his approach to the concept of personal mythology, Larsen suggests a twofold purpose for engaging consciously in personal mythwork. Regarding the first of these purposes, Larsen observes, consciously working with myth potentially offers a “needful kind of immunity to destructive [...] myth forms,” adding that “by willingly entering to dialogue with myth we forestall being taken unaware by it in the neediness of our mythic deprivation.” The second purpose, he continues, involves “the ‘living’ nature of myths and the necessity for them to address the circumstances of our lives” (232). For this to happen, Larsen writes, “the myths must arise out from within us in moments of genuine need—‘crying out for a vision,’ as the Plains Indians would say, or seeking the Asclepian sanctuary of the ancient Greeks” (233). Combining Jungian material on the archetypal nature of the unconscious with Larsen’s earlier work on the shamanic nature of psychotherapy, this work also directly employs Campbell’s concept of creative mythology.

Another key development in the evolution of the concept of personal mythology was the publication in 1993 of *Living Myth: Personal Meaning as a Way of Life*, by D. Stephenson Bond. In this work, Bond, a Jungian analyst, offers a framework for applying symbolic and imaginal consciousness to recognize the mythic dimension of everyday life. Describing his approach to personal mythwork at the start of this volume, Bond writes:

A living myth is in many ways a fantasy that has become a way of life. To me, the most vital aspect of mythology is not found in the stories of gods

and goddesses of long ago, nor in the psychological truths those stories reflect, but rather in the contemporary framework of images and meaning that are found in our own lifestyles. There is an intimate connection between our way of life—the rhythm and structure of our weekly, monthly, and yearly cycles—and the myth that informs our life. (1)

By far the most thoroughly Jungian treatment of this subject, *Living Myth* was also inspired by the work of Campbell, since Bond acknowledges in its introduction that the book initially evolved out the experience of leading a discussion group on Campbell's television series with Bill Moyers, *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth*.

Also first published in 1993, Dan McAdam's *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* reflects the first work to directly employ the concept of personal myth within the context of developmental psychology. Also influenced by the psychological orientation or school that has recently come to be known as "narrative psychology," McAdams describes the ways one's story tends to evolve through the various stages of life, from childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood, through midlife, and finally into elderhood. "I must come to see in all its particulars the narratives of the self—the personal myth—that I have tacitly, even unconsciously, composed over the course of my years," McAdams observes, adding "it is a story I continue to revise, and tell to myself" (and sometimes to others) as I go on living" (11).

Most recently, William G. Doty introduced the term "individual mythostory" to the field of personal mythology. Doty defines this concept as "the self-crafting of autobiography" which incorporates a "mythostoried account of the personal origins, strongest and weakest suits, and individual features" (*Mythography* 43). Doty further observes that "each of us develops a personal set of mythostories, a means of relating our own existence to the larger cultural and universal meanings that have been treasured in

the past.” In commenting on the significance ascribed to one’s mythostory, Doty notes that its importance “doubtlessly is related to the sense of important ‘history’ conveyed in myths.” Further considering this idea of an inherent sense of history in both the personal mythostory and collective myths, Doty writes, “I do not refer to history-as-chronicle but to meaningful history, the historic rather than the historical” (44).

On the Nature of Personal Mythology

To comprehend the nature of personal mythology more fully as a concept, it is also important to consider its relationship to the larger discipline from which it has evolved, namely that of the general study of mythology. Complicating this initial question is the profound difficulty one faces in concretely delimiting the meaning of terms like “myth” and “mythology” in the first place. The recognition of this difficulty, a key observation of postmodern scholarship in the study of mythology, is clearly expressed in an observation of Eric Gould:

Myth is now so encyclopedic a term that its means everything or nothing. We can find in it whatever we want to say is essential about the way humans try to interpret their place on earth. Myth is the synthesis of values which uniquely manages to mean the most things to most men. It is allegory and tautology, reason and unreason, logic and fantasy, waking thought and dream, atavism and the perennial, archetype and metaphor, origin and end. What a burden myth has to carry as a portmanteau term!

(5)

Effectively working with this simultaneously nebulous and all-inclusive quality of mythology as a concept has required contemporary mythologists and mythographers to develop what Doty describes as “polyphasic” definitions of this subject. Aspects of Doty’s own comprehensive effort to derive such a definition offers an excellent vantage

point from which to consider the relationship between mythology and personal mythology. Doty writes that:

a mythological corpus consists of (1) a usually complex network of myths that are (2) culturally important, (3) imaginal (4) stories, conveying by means of (5) metaphoric and symbolic diction, (6) graphic imagery, (7) and emotional conviction and participation (8) the primal, foundational accounts of (9) aspects of the real, experienced world and (10) humankind's roles and relative statuses within it. Mythologies may (11) convey the political and moral values of a culture and (12) provide systems of interpreting (13) individual experience within a universal perspective, which may include (14) suprahuman entities as well as (15) aspects of the natural and cultural orders. Myths may be enacted or reflected in (16) rituals, ceremonies, or dramas, and (17) they may provide material for secondary elaboration, the constituent mythemes (mythic units) having become merely images or reference points for a subsequent story [. . .]. (*Mythography* 33-4)

While the more collective and communally oriented of these seventeen elements may be less relevant to the idea of personal mythology than to cultural mythology, a surprisingly high percentage of the components of Doty's definition apply equally well to both the collective and personal forms of mythology. As will be seen, both consist of networks of stories that employ metaphor, symbol, and graphic image. Both encourage and stimulate participation and engagement at a deeply emotional level. Both cultural mythology and personal mythology speak of the origins of worlds, albeit the world we share for the former and the personal world of the individual human being for the latter.

As will also be seen, since personal mythologies do not exist in isolation from collective, cultural, and societal mythologies, but rather grow out of and within them, even the seemingly non-personal elements of Doty's definition bear some relevance to the idea of personal mythology. For example, personal mythologies often incorporate references to collective political and moral values, even if those references are as likely to be antagonistic or skeptical of such values as to endorse them.

In particular, a primary concern of personal mythology is Do ty's idea of interpreting "individual experience within a universal perspective." That such an interpretation of personal experience may engage not only the relationship of the individual human to the natural world and the world of culture, but also one's relationship to the transpersonal dimension of human existence is a particular focus of this dissertation. With regard to this religious dimension of mythology, it can be argued that one's personal mythology might become the basis of personal ritual or ceremony or affect one's individual relationship to collective rituals and ceremonies. Finally, like collective mythologies, personal mythologies are comprised of multiple mythic elements that can become the basis of new or variant stories.

Another contemporary attempt to define the purpose of myth and mythology is Campbell's often-cited fourfold classification of the functions served by myths and mythological systems, namely those of metaphysics, cosmology, sociology, and psychology. While the last of these functions clearly has the greatest inherent relevance to the idea of a personally derived sense of the mythic, it is also evident that the metaphysical function has largely devolved from the domain of organized religion to the personal sphere for many people in today's world. Regarding Campbell's sociological function of myth, as was noted above, while the evolution of myth at this level is outside the purview of personal mythology, how one adopts or adapts such myths is relevant to the development of one's personal mythology. Even the cosmological function of myth might be said to have personal implications in terms of how much or little one explores scientific paradigms within the context of one's mythology, as well as in how much one's mythology is open to working imaginally with the implications of such paradigms.

Perhaps one might go so far as to observe that all new scientific paradigms, from Darwin's evolution to Einstein's relativity, somehow emerged out of the mythic dimensions of these scientists' life stories.

With regard to Campbell's four-way classification scheme, Larsen appears to have taken these four functions and collapsed them into a twofold distinction regarding the role of myth in human life. Ignoring Campbell's cosmological function, Larsen differentiates two dimensions of myth, namely the collective and personal. "We have two dimensions of mythology which must be distinguished," Larsen writes, "the culture-bound aspect, which has a primarily socializing function and which I shall define as *orientation*, and the psychological aspect that lends depth and richness to human existence, whatever its setting, which I shall call *guidance*." Although Larsen refers to the guiding function of myth as "psychological," its role in imparting "depth and richness" to life clearly connects this function to that of metaphysical reflection (*Shaman's Doorway* 12). Of Larsen's two dimensions of the mythic, the idea of personal mythology largely falls under that of guidance, though one must also take into account the individual's attitude toward and relationship to myth's collective orienting function in the understanding of how personal mythologies evolve.

Ian G. Barbour has also suggested several reasons why myths are potentially useful guides for both the practical living of daily life and the search for metaphysical understanding. The first of these reasons is that "myths offer ways of ordering experience." In this sense, myths have relevance to daily life because they take as their subject perennial problems of human existence in the world. Another reason why myths are able to offer meaningful guidance is that "myths inform man about himself." This is

because humans derive their sense of self-identity, in part, from reflection on significant past events, and consideration of myths relevant to our experience can aid in that reflective process. A third way in which myths are relevant to the living of life, according to Barbour, is that “myths express a saving power in human life” (17-18). Importantly, Barbour observes, this salvational quality of myth is derived from the experiential nature of an encounter with mythology rather than from any intellectual or theoretical insights one might derive from a mythic narrative.

Psychologist Rollo May has also proposed a set of functions which are served through the application of mythic consciousness within the context of our individual life stories. The first of these functions relates to myth’s potential as a framework for the discovery and unfolding of a sense of personal identity, proposing answers to the question “Who am I?” The second of May’s functions of myth is interpersonal in nature, helping us to find an appropriate and meaningful sense of community in the world. The third function of mythic consciousness is concerned with the development of and support for a personal sense of moral values. May’s final function of myth, similar in nature to Campbell’s first function, is that of providing a framework for dealing with “the inscrutable mystery of creation” (30-1).

Another important distinction regarding the nature of both collective and personal mythologies relates to the narrative or storytelling dimension of myth versus its underlying belief-oriented dimension. Referring to this latter aspect of the mythic, Michael Pieracci observes, “the beliefs lying just below the surface of the narrative text must be reflected in any definition of myth” (212). Pieracci coins the term “ontic myth” to describe this belief-laden substrate of mythologies. Pieracci writes that he employs the

term ontic, “because it refers to how one understands what is and should be in the world.” In this sense, he notes, “one’s world view defines the ontology (‘the being’) of that person in the world.” As a result, he continues, ontic myths might be described as “beliefs concerning how one should ‘be’ in the world.” As Kirwan Rockefeller observes, “people tell their life stories, certain symbols, images, and metaphors arise which contain patterns and/or configurations which themselves, in turn, convey guiding truths and principles which shape that person’s life” (193). Further supporting this idea of the interrelationship of narrative and underlying belief structure, Feinstein and Krippner observe that “personal myths are circular in their effects—a personal myth is a constellation of beliefs, feelings, images and rules of behavior that influences your experiences, which shape your mythology, which further shape your experiences” (6).

Among the most telling observations regarding the attempt to define the meaning of the term personal mythology is that nearly all of the authors who have written to date about this topic, with the notable exception of Campbell, have academic and professional backgrounds in psychology. Indeed, Larsen goes so far to state, “the terrain of personal mythology [. . .] has its near boundaries in academic and clinical psychology and its far boundaries in ancient cultures, in storytelling, and fable” (*Mythic Imagination* 14). In this regard, it is also important to note that the differing psychological orientations of these authors significantly affects the ways in which they both define personal mythology as a concept and view the purpose of exploring one’s personal mythology.

One of the key differences in the general orientation of these authors toward the concept of personal mythology grows out of their differing stances toward the idea of using personal mythology as an approach to psychological integration. For example,

Krippner and Feinstein, whose psychological orientation is largely that of humanistic and transpersonal psychology, tend to see personal mythology as a tool for helping individuals achieve a greater sense of wholeness and continuity in their lives. “Your personal mythology,” they write, “is the loom on which you weave the raw materials of daily experience into a coherent story” (3). Supporting this view, Dan P. McAdams, whose background is in both narrative and developmental psychology, observes of personal mythology “First and foremost, it is a special kind of story that each of us naturally constructs to bring together the different parts of ourselves and our lives into a purposeful and convincing whole” (12).

In contrast, authors whose psychological orientation reflect the Post-Jungian Archetypal school tend to view the function of personal mythology in terms of its ability to counteract the limitations of a singular and unifying vision of one’s inner life. Thomas Moore, for example, states “The personal myth is not your own story: not a story of your external life, not a story that explains the events of your life, not a story that holds together and has a beginning, a middle and an end” (*Rituals of the Imagination* 22). As a result, he continues, “We get at this myth, not by telling the story of a life, but by telling its stories, over and over again, with all their many versions and contractions” (26).

A point on which many of the theorizers and practitioners of personal mythology largely seem to agree, however, is the idea that, like collective mythologies, personal mythologies are inherently impermanent, unpredictable, and evolving in nature. Remarking on this point, Feinstein and Krippner write that one’s personal mythology “is continually evolving,” adding that it “is a map that forever needs to be updated because its territory is always changing” (5). There also seems to be, according to these authors, a

kind of cyclic quality to the evolution of a person's mythology. "Over a lifetime," notes Bond in this regard, "we don't so much live out of a personal myth as live out the death and rebirth of a personal myth." Commenting on the largely discontinuous quality of the experience of the mythic as it manifests in our personal lives, Bond further observes "We fall into and out of myth several times over the course of a lifetime" (73-74). Relating this inherently unpredictable and erratic nature of personal myth to the overall nature of the mythological, Moore writes:

Mythology is extremely unstable and fluid. A mythological story readily decomposes, so that we find many contrasting versions, great variety in the names of characters, changes in locations, variations in plot and even contradictory outcomes. But this is the nature of experience: facts may seem to remain the same, while our stories are always changing. ("Developing a Mythic Sensibility" 23)

Another quality of personal mythology that has been widely commented upon by those writing on the subject relates to its inherently fragmentary nature. This quality is sometimes described in terms of the difference between "myth" and "mythology," where the former refers to a discrete mythic story (e.g., the myth of Eros and Psyche) and the latter to an interconnected mythic web or system to which any number of myths belong (e.g., Greek mythology). In a similar manner, for example, what one might call "the myth of my first love" is distinguishable as a particular mythic story within the totality of one's personal mythology.

In this sense, writes Moore, "We are all bundles of stories that are interlaced, embedded in each other and connected to stories of greater scope" (*Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life* 243). Also remarking on the inherently fragmentary, incomplete quality of a personal mythology, Hillman writes, "As all myths fold into each other, no single piece can be pulled out with the statement: 'This is my myth'" (*Re-Visioning Psychology* 158).

Commenting further on the significance of the multiplicity of mythic elements in our stories, Hillman continues, “Living one’s myth doesn’t mean simply living one myth.” In this sense, he concludes, “As I am many persons, so I am enacting pieces of various myths.”

Moore also observes that this fragmentariness is intrinsic to all myth and, therefore, is an inevitable aspect of personal myth. “As myth travels through time it seems as loose as a cheap necklace,” he writes, “broken apart here and there and pasted together haphazardly.” As a result, he suggests, “Maybe we should stop treating these holes and contradictions in myth as anomalies and see them as being of the essence of myth.” Connecting this suggestion to the concept of personal mythology, Moore proposes that “when entertaining the idea of a personal myth, we should keep in mind this tendency of myth toward fragmentation, this nonlinear, loose, unending, broken quality of myth” (*Rituals of the Imagination* 21).

Another way of speaking about the essentially fragmentary, inconsistent, nonlinear nature of the mythological relates to the concept of “mythologems,” a term describing the various mythic themes and images contained within the totality of a given mythic narrative. As Stephen Larsen writes, personal mythology is concerned with “our awakening to the presence of [such] mythic themes in our lives—those ‘fragments of the gods.’” Likening such themes to bricks used in the construction of an edifice, Larsen goes on to observe “We may find these structural components in a great edifice, such as a world religion, or in a far more personal dwelling, such as an individual human psyche” (*Mythic Imagination* xxxii).

Still another way of considering the internal inconsistencies contained within one's personal mythology relates to the idea that, as within traditional mythologies, there is no one single authoritative, official version of any mythic narrative. In this sense, there is no such thing as a "pure" myth, a myth unchanged by the very process of its recounting. As Dabney W. Townshend comments, "All there are are stories, and not even one single story can claim absolute primacy." Instead, he continues, every myth can appear in numerous variations in which "all are related, but none are exactly the same" (195). In this sense, a person relating a version of some aspect of their personal mythology today needs to bear in mind the possibility of other versions of that story, versions which will evolve and emerge in keeping with the psyche of that individual.

On the Nature of Mythic Consciousness and Its Relationship to Personal Mythology

While individual personal mythologies most clearly manifest in the form of mythic narratives and their underlying belief structures, personal mythology itself is equally concerned with a unique kind of story-making consciousness as with the particular stories that are generated by means of that consciousness. Various described as "archetypal," "symbolic," and "imaginal" in nature, the form of consciousness that gives rise to an awareness of the mythic is also inherently non-objective, non-rational, non-analytical, and nonlinear in nature.

In this regard, writes Moore, mythic consciousness evokes "the world of invisibles—the spirits, thoughts and emotions that crowd our imaginations and yet are untraceable by [...] mechanical methods of detection" (*Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life* 233). Engaging in this form of awareness, he adds "keeps our imaginations at a level where emotion and meaning have a home but where rational analysis has no entry."

Moreover, Moore continues, “One of the purposes of mythology is to transport our imagination to a level beyond the factual, giving full articulation to matters that can’t be measured—things like love, hate, death, fear, and evil—and noticing themes that underlie surface events and understandings” (234).

A number of theories have been advanced in the attempt to differentiate mythic consciousness from consciousness that is inherently non-mythic in orientation. Some of these theories relate to the purpose or intention of engaging a mythically oriented framework, while others focus on distinctive qualities of mythic consciousness. One such quality of the mythic that differentiates it from non-mythic forms of discourse is its inherently narrative dimension. A theory that is particularly useful in contemplating the narrative nature of working with personal mythology is psychologist Jerome Bruner’s distinction between two opposing ways of knowing and constructing reality, modes of consciousness which Bruner designates as the “paradigmatic” and the “narrative”. According to Bruner, the paradigmatic mode “attempts to fulfill the ideal of a formal, mathematical system of description and explanation.” Paradigmatic consciousness, Bruner writes, “employs categorization or conceptualization,” as well “the operations by which categories are established, instantiated, idealized, and related one to the other to form a system” (12). It is this type of consciousness that gives rise to all logical and scientific discourse. The paradigmatic mode, McAdams observes, “is not able to make much sense of human desire, goals, and social conduct” because “human events are often ambiguous and resistant to paradigmatic efforts to understand them” (29).

The alternative and opposing form of consciousness to the paradigmatic, according to Bruner is the “narrative mode.” While the paradigmatic mode has clearly

come to increasingly dominate western consciousness from the classical period into the modern age, Bruner observes that the narrative mode is far more ancient. As compared to the paradigmatic, he writes, narrative consciousness “leads instead to good stories, gripping drama, believable (though not necessarily ‘true’) historical accounts.” In addition, he adds, narrative “deals in human or human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course” (13).

Perhaps most importantly, Bruner observes, while paradigmatic writers try to “say no more than they mean,” narrative writers know that their stories inevitably “mean more than they can say” (15). For those concerned with personal mythology, this overflow of meaning inherent in narrative consciousness is essential. Fundamentally, narrative consciousness arises in and through the telling of stories about oneself to oneself and to others. “By telling these stories we start to construct a meaning with which our experiences gains sense,” writes Alfredo Ruiz regarding the significance of Bruner’s conception of the narrative mode. “The construction of meaning arises from the account,” Ruiz concludes, “from the continuous actualizing of our story, of our narrative plot.” Indeed, Bruner’s work suggests, it is precisely the narrative nature of mythic consciousness that provides its unique ability to impart an experience of meaning to one’s life.

In his observations about the nature of mythic consciousness, Bond offers a conceptual framework that considers symbolic consciousness to be a bridge between a purely subjective and a purely objective frame of reference for interpreting the world, a bridge which may, in turn, give rise to personal myth. For Bond, mythic consciousness is directly related to Jung’s concept of projection. Projection, according to Jung, concerns

the manner in which one understands one's interactions with emotionally charged images and experiences. As Bond describes Jung's concept of projection, it "is the basic confusion between object and subject, inner and outer" (7). In this case, the content of the projection has to do with any felt sense of intense meaning or significance connected with an external object or an event.

As Bond observes, the purely subjective frame, which characterized the pre-rational age of human development, viewed the mythic as literal truth. To live within a purely subjective frame of reference, writes Bond, "means living in a projection," assuming that the object or the event is the sole source of the significance of the experience (18). On the other hand, writes Bond, purely objective consciousness, which characterizes the modern frame, "means knowing a projection for a projection," thereby removing the possibility of perceiving the world as inherently meaningful.

For Bond, there needs to be a third state of consciousness, one that might allow a modern person to engage in a mythic frame of reference. That intermediary form of awareness, Bond suggests, needs to engage a symbolic frame of reference as a way of avoiding the twin perils of both a purely subjective *participation mystique* with the mythic and a consciousness that has become completely demythologized. "Symbolic consciousness is [...] a mode of awareness focused on the play of imagination, rather than the subjective and objective aspects of the experience itself, he writes, adding that symbolic consciousness "lives in a myth while knowing it as a myth: it experiences the fantasy process neither as 'reality' nor 'illusions,' but rather as meaning" (17-18).

In Bond's conceptual framework, symbolic consciousness gives rise to mythic consciousness. While the "symbol shows the way," he writes, "it is not yet a myth,"

because “what is heard from psyche does not become a myth until it becomes a way of life” (97-98). In Bond’s view the “movement from symbolic to mythological consciousness comes from the need to live in a context” (25). By “context,” Bond means “the vital necessity of discovering a functional relationship to the environment,” both inner and outer (32). For Bond, human beings cannot live without myth because “we need a vital functional relationship to the environments in which we live” (41). Most especially, he contends, one needs a personal myth because it “expresses a functional relationship to the psyche, a pattern of adaption to the internal world” (48).

Like Bond, Larsen is also concerned with the relationship between the mythic, the symbolic, and the imaginal dimensions of human consciousness. For Larsen, the fundamental source of mythic consciousness is what he calls the “mythic imagination.” Derived in part from the aesthetic theory of the English Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Larsen’s concept of mythic imagination is based on the distinction between two modes of imaginal consciousness, forms which Coleridge called “primary” and “secondary” imagination. For Coleridge, primary imagination is the driving force of all creativity. This elemental form of imaginal awareness, according to Coleridge, is “the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception” and functions “as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM” (379). In other words, in Coleridge’s view, this form of imagination in humans is essentially an extension of divine consciousness and creativity.

Primary imagination, Larsen proposes, is an ancient, pre-cognitive, pre-conceptual form of consciousness. Nevertheless, he writes, this faculty “which is susceptible to and also generates myths is more than merely an archaic stage of cognitive

development.” Indeed, he continues, “it is rather an alternative mode of consciousness, with an a-priori, instinctive impulse toward this different, sacred mode of comprehension” (*Shaman’s Doorway* 28). Most importantly for Larsen, it is due to the engagement of primary imagination that what he calls “primary meaning” emerges into conscious awareness. While primary meaning often attaches itself to particular symbols or images, it is neither defined nor delimited by them. Indeed, observes Larsen, once one begins to differentiate or explain such a symbol or image, one is already referring to a secondary order of meaning.

“It is this faculty of perception informed by primary meaning” Larsen writes, “that I shall define as the mythic imagination” (29). Though not itself susceptible to conscious control, he proposes that mythic imagination can be employed in a process he calls “conscious mythmaking.” He describes this process as one in which an individual consciously creates a container—which he describes as both a “ritual form” and a mythic “frame of reference”—into which images and symbols evoked by the process of primary imagination might be invited and engaged (*Mythic Imagination* 232-3).

Larsen writes about four stages of “mythic engagement,” which he also describes as four “typical patterns of relationship between man and his primary, mythic imagination” (*Shaman’s Doorway* 34). Larsen calls the first of these stages “Mythic Identity,” a form of *participation mystique* during which the mythic imagination “is activated with little or no relationship to the actual properties of ‘outer reality.’” The second stage of mythic engagement, according to Larsen, is that of “Mythic Orthodoxy,” in which “the mythic imagination and ‘outer reality’ are held to a fixed relationship.” In

this stage, Larsen writes, “Revelation hardens into dogma,” as a result of which, “a given mythic hypothesis is accepted and alternative points of view are unwelcome.”

The third stage of this process, according to Larsen is the “Objective Phase,” in which “man imagines he can eliminate the mythic imagination from his involvement with outer reality” (35). During this stage, writes Larsen, “there is a determination to accept no mythic hypothesis without empirical verification,” as a result of which “the relationship to the ‘reality principle’ is systematized.” While the third stage leads to demythologization, the fourth and final stage of the evolution of mythic consciousness, according to Larsen, leads to true “Mythic Engagement,” a stage in which “the creative capacity of the mythic imagination is activated and engaged.” In describing this stage, Larsen observes: “Assertions about the ultimate nature of outer reality are not made; rather learned truths are recognized as psychological. The ability to return to the world of ‘common sense’ and normal experiencing is retained.” Employing a kind of descriptive shorthand, Larsen alternatively names these four stages respectively as “possession,” “religion,” “science,” and “dialog, transformation, and renewal” (36).

Religious studies scholar Walter Gulick has suggested another useful concept for understanding the nature of mythic consciousness. In an essay exploring the source the Joseph Campbell’s effectiveness as a mythologist, Gulick observes that Campbell encouraged his readers and listeners to approach mythic narrative with a particular kind of intention, an approach described by Gulick as “mythical intentionality” (36). Regarding this idea, Gulick observes, “in appreciating a story through mythical intentionality one must look beyond the literal (visible) meaning of the story to its deeper (invisible) existential meaning” (40). Mythical intentionality, therefore, is concerned

with the purpose of consciously engaging a mythic perspective. That purpose, Gulick suggests, is the search for a sense of personal, existential meaning contained within the narrative. “A person engages a story with mythical intentionality,” he writes, “when a self-involving normative meaning is sought in and through the narrative” (36).

Describing that sense of meaning further, Gulick observes that mythic intentionality is invoked “when a person seeks and finds within a story self-involving clues as to why life is as it is or directions concerning how it should be lived” (38).

Directly applying this idea to personal mythology, Gulick suggests that one might “utilize mythical intentionality in reviewing the important events of one’s own life and assessing what they reveal about the direction and purpose of that life.”

For Gulick, a story “becomes a myth only when the items and events in the story are seen via mythical intentionality as revealing a deeper message.” Such items and events must cognitively “be seen as existentially meaningful items, as having an allegorical, analogical, or metaphorical weight,” Gulick continues, thereby connecting mythical intentionality with the invoking of symbolic consciousness (37). Moreover, according to Gulick, while the intention to invoke mythic consciousness must engage cognition in the pursuit of existential meaning, the process of doing so also inevitably and necessarily must engage one’s emotions. The experience of the mythic “involves both feeling and cognition, for both are necessary to experience existential meaning.”

Nevertheless, he observes, “Only if a story has the power to evoke in the reader or listener an emotional interest bearing upon meaning in life, does it function as a myth.” While “a story entertains one’s mind and fills one’s time,” Gulick concludes, “a myth touches one’s heart and enriches one’s life” (41).

Importantly, Gulick does not view mythic intentionality as a goal of some kind, but rather always as a process. “If our linguistic habits permitted it,” he adds, “it would be desirable to regard ‘myth’ as a verb in order to emphasize that the power of myth resides in an activity it induces in its readers or auditors.” Such a process requires a shift from ordinary, everyday awareness. As a result, Gulick observes, “all myths have to deal with transformations of consciousness in the sense that a transformation to mythical intentionality from everyday pragmatic consciousness is required if the story is to be appreciated as myth” (37).

Related to Gulick’s concept of mythic intentionality is another idea, namely, the notion of “mythic.” Originally introduced by the literary scholar Eric Gould, this latter term is defined by Doty as “a generalized orientation to the experienced world based upon a myth or series of myths.” As Doty observes, “it is helpful to distinguish between myth in the sense of ‘narrative,’ that is mythic story or thematic pattern, and mythicity” (*Mythography* 15). The reason why the distinction between myth, in the sense of particular mythic narratives or mythic themes, and mythicity is useful, Doty observes, is that the concept of mythicity describes a fundamental quality of what makes a narrative or theme truly mythic in nature.

Like Gulick’s mythic intentionality, Gould’s concept of mythicity is primarily concerned with the inherently open-ended quality of mythic narrative and of the need, therefore, for ongoing interpretation of the symbolic and imaginal content of mythic narrative. Both concepts are also concerned with the desire to seek a sense of meaning from the story content encountered and recounted in a mythic narrative. For Gould,

however, the focus is on the inevitable interpretive gap that always exists between mythic content and the meaning sought in relation to it.

“Myths apparently derive their universal significance from the way in which they try to reconstitute an original event or explain some fact about human nature and its worldly or cosmic context,” Gould writes, “but in doing so, they necessarily refer to some essential meaning which is absent until it appears as a function of interpretation.” For Gould, “There can be no myth without an ontological gap between event and meaning.” As a result, he argues, “Myth’s meaning is perpetually open and universal only because once the absence of a final meaning is recognized, the gap itself demands interpretation, which, in turn, must go on and on” (6). In this way, mythicity points to the inherent impossibility of arriving at some ultimate or permanent sense of meaning from a mythic narrative. At the same time, however, Gould’s concept proposes a dialogical, interpretive framework for approaching what must remain an ever-evolving sense of the meaning of mythic narrative. Ultimately, the concept of mythicity suggests that mythic consciousness requires both a profound openness to perpetually re-imagining one’s story as a mythic narrative and an equally firm resistance against the desire to derive a conclusive sense of meaning from that narrative.

On the Relationship between the Personal and the Universal within Personal Mythology

Any attempt to consider the relationship between the general study of mythology and the evolution of the concept of personal mythology needs to recognize that personal myths derive much of their power from the fact that they refract historically common images and symbols through the lens of individual life stories. Indeed, one of the most compelling qualities that the mythic perspective offers as a framework for refracting

one's life experience is the access that myth provides to a larger—perhaps even universal—context for comprehending one's personal story, thereby facilitating what Doty calls “individual experience within a universal perspective” (*Mythography* 33).

Regarding this concept, Doty observes:

Myths provide a sense of a person's role in the universe, a centering upon ourselves as located within a cosmic as well as a local context [. . .]. Part of what it means to study myths and rituals of other peoples, other times and places, is that one recovers aspects of personal identity, the personal microcosm re-created from the impersonal macrocosm. (73)

One of the key reasons given by writers on personal mythology for this concern with the relationship between the personal and the collective or universal dimensions of myth is the desire to see and experience more clearly the nature of the human condition itself. “The colorful and soulful images that pervade myth allow us to step back from our experiences,” writes Phil Cousineau, “so that we might look closer at our personal situations and see if we can catch a glimpse of the bigger picture, the human condition” (*Once* 6). This ability to connect with a larger vision of humanity is especially important in light of the particular emphasis accorded the role of individual consciousness within both modernity and psychology. “The premium placed on the uniqueness of self-understanding has alienated us from universal and archetypal symbols found in the stories of others,” cautions Charles E. Winquist, “but we have found that our story has no content without first having available the language of all stories” (103).

Commenting on this need to seek the universal in our stories, James Hollis writes of what he calls “the cosmic drama,” defined by him as “a metaphoric schema which permits us to see the patterns amid the plethora of mythic material.” If one were able to assemble such a schema, he suggests, combining myths across all cultures and periods,

“one would have, in effect, the human story in all its permutations.” The advantage of envisaging such an overall narrative, he writes, would be to “allow us to identify where each mythic motif, including those from our own traditions, fits into the larger scheme of things.” As a result, Hollis continues, “we would also be able to see where our individual lives enter into this timeless drama” (*Tracking the Gods* 109). Furthermore, such a conceptual vantage point might assist one “in identifying the recurrent patterns, the motive and movement that informs each myth, and how those suprahistorical patterns are replicated in the life of the individual” (110).

Another important reason for connecting universal patterns and themes with the particular mythic experience of the individual is the need to ground the non-temporal, non-historical features of one’s personal mythic narrative within the context of a specific and individual sense of time and place. In this sense, writes Robert A. Segal, “a myth is not merely a myth in its own right,” but instead must be seen in context as “a myth for someone.” As a result, Segal continues, “the meaning of a myth is more than its general meaning for all humanity” (Introduction 13). If myths are to become more than mere stories and archetypes and more than idealized images, they must be encountered and engaged through one’s experience of one’s own life and of the world in which one lives.

Also commenting on the need to ground the mythically universal in and through the personal and the particular, Philip Wheelwright writes of an aspect of archetypal thinking he calls the principle of “concrete universality,” a concept which emphasizes the idea that only through the particular manifestation and experience of the universal can the universal be known at all. In this sense, he observes, the universal “exists only in and through the particular and hence can be known only by opening our eyes and ears and

hearts to the sensuous living world” (*Burning Fountain* 88-9). Moreover, Wheelwright suggests, even the attempt to consider the universal apart from the uniqueness of its particular manifestations tends to subvert the mythopoetic experience of universality into meaningless abstraction.

Regardless of whether one initially seeks to find a sense of universality in one’s personal experience or instead reflects on the ways one personally relates to the great themes of world mythology, a goal of personal mythology in the end must be to dynamically interconnect the personal and the universal dimensions of our stories. “Concrete particulars become universalized through myth,” writes Hillman, while “myths [. . .] tell of universals in specific images of figures and places” (*Re-Visioning Psychology* 154). In this way, he continues, “Myths make concrete particulars into universals, so that each image, name, thing in my life when experienced mythically takes on universal sense, and all abstract universals, the grand ideas of human fate, are presented as concrete actions” (155). As a result, the potency of the universal quality of experience is simultaneously grounded within a personal context for the individual reflecting on the mythic nature of his or her story.

For most writers on personal mythology, intrinsic to this interrelationship between the particular/personal and the universal /collective within mythic narrative is the concept of archetype, an idea first introduced into the language of psychology by Jung. While a discussion of this idea in the larger context of Jung’s work is reserved for Chapter 6, the general concept of archetypes is so central to any discussion of personal mythology that it is necessary to at least introduce it here. Though the concept of archetype is characterized or defined using varying language by these authors, the basic idea that myth

derives its universal and collective meaning from some form of underlying and inherently symbolic patterning is widely assumed among them. Commenting on this close interrelationship between the mythic and the archetypal, Pieracci writes, “Narrative myths are the stories that explain the archetypes” (212). As to the particular connection between archetype and personal mythology, Winquist observes “the archetypal story is a foundation for my personal story” (109). Deepening this link between the mythic and the archetypal dimensions of personal mythology, Robert Atkinson defines “personal mythmaking” as the process of “recognizing and understanding the archetypal images and traditional motifs in one’s life story” (205).

In the entry on “archetype” in the recent *Encyclopedia of Psychology*, Feinstein writes that Jung developed this concept “to explain the corresponding themes he identified among dreams, waking imagery, private ideas, myths, religious symbolism, occult disciplines, and tribal lore.” Feinstein further observes that Jung attributed these “apparently universal patterns of human cognition” to “preexisting psychological motifs,” motifs conceived of as “underlying templates that shape subsequent perception, imagination, and understanding (232). These primordial patterns, Jung suggested, are shared by all human beings and emanate out of the communal substrate of consciousness that he called the objective psyche or the collective unconscious. Perhaps most importantly, these universal patterns cannot be experienced in their pure forms, according to Jung, but are known only through their particular manifestations in particular cultural or personal forms, among the most significant and powerful of which are myths.

Regarding the relationship between archetype and myth, Jung saw the latter as a manifestation of the former. “The archetype is a kind of readiness to produce over and

over again the same or similar mythical ideas,” he writes (*CW* 7: 69; para. 109). Further commenting on the archetypal source of myth, Steven F. Walker observes that “from the treasure house of archetypal images are drawn the elements, the archetypal motifs, of mythology.” Whether such motifs “are represented visually, dramatically, musically, or verbally,” he continues, they “are usually found linked in a sequence which we call a myth” (4).

Nevertheless, Segal cautions, myths can never simply be reduced to archetypes. “Myths are more than archetypes,” he writes, further noting “they are stories that, read symbolically, contain archetypes.” In this sense, he continues, “an archetype is not merely a motif within a myth but a motif within many myths,” since “a motif found in only one myth would not be an archetype.” In addition, he notes, “The plot of myth is not only the manifestation of one or more archetypes but also the development of them and their interaction” (Introduction 43).

While many writers on personal mythology tend to assume Jung’s conceptual model of archetype in their work, others either adopt variant approaches or try to define archetype in terms that are more general. “At the most abstract level,” writes Doty, employing a broader framework than Jung’s for understanding the idea, “we speak of archetypes represented in action, or embodied, as ultimate symbols of interior life and human interaction” (*Mythography* 74). In this regard, Doty also observes, “The archetypal usefully names ways in which the repetitively useful, the traditionally significant, makes its appearances: archetypal figures are those whose [. . .] structures recur repeatedly in many generations and across many different societies,” (“Exploring the Manifold Spheres” 122).

It is worth noting that, despite Doty's desire to minimize the potentially mystical implications of the classically Jungian conception of archetype, he nevertheless recognizes the metaphysical implications of the archetypal, noting that archetypes name "recurring patterns by which homo sapiens knits together the ways life has ultra- or super-meanings" (*Mythography* 74-75). Commenting on this deeper level of meaning implicit in the archetypal dimension of myth, Atkinson observes that the recognition of the archetypal patterns in one's mythology can "become an awareness that we are participating in the same mystery as our ancestors before us and our descendents after us" (206). As a result, he adds, "the experience that is archetypal for us in this sense is lifted out of the occasional and transitory and into the realm of the ultimate and ever-enduring."

Because both the local/universal and personal/collective are always present within mythic and archetypal discourse, reflecting on one's personal mythology can be approached from either end of this dialectic. For example, one can start by focusing on those mythologems and archetypal images arising from the contemplation of some aspect of one's life story. In employing such an approach, one would then amplify or enlarge upon the mythological themes and symbols in one's story, comparing them to similar themes and symbols in myths, legends, fairy tales, and archetypal stories. This method of starting with one's own life story and amplifying the mythic and archetypal content emerging from within that narrative is the principal approach employed in many of the texts on working with one's personal mythology, including Keen and Valley-Fox's *Your Mythic Journey*, Feinstein and Krippner's *The Mythic Path*, and Larsen's *The Mythic Imagination*.

Alternatively, one might engage in the process of working with personal mythology by first carefully reading and imaginatively reflecting on existing mythic and archetypal literature and then contemplating how the images and themes in these stories relate to the story of one's own life. As to how one most effectively might identify personally relevant and meaningful stories and images from the historical and cultural storehouse of myth, James Hollis suggests being attentive to an archetypal resonance between such mythic material and our innermost sense of who one is. "When something is *of* is, is *for* us, it sets off the tuning fork inside us," he writes, resounding within one "because it has always been there archetypally" (*Creating a Life* 61). Remarking on the value of this approach, Jean Houston writes "In the mythic and symbolic dramas of Psyche, Prometheus, Parsifal, Oedipus, Antigone, Odysseus, Isis, Rumi, Jesus, Buddha, Faust, and Coyote, we can discover the broad patterns of our own lives, finding ourselves changed and charged" (*Search for the Beloved* 93). Wendy Doniger also comments on the idea that one might encounter a way of meaningfully engaging one's own myths through the careful study the myths of other peoples. "Taking other people's myths seriously," she observes in this regard, "means recognizing that they are *our* myths, which means not only that they have general meaning for us, but they narrate the story of our own lives" (139).

Authors employing this approach to working with personal mythology have based works on a very wide range of mythological literature drawn from many historical periods and cultures. Examples include: *Healing the Wounded King*, by John Matthews, which employs aspects of the Grail Legend to work with wounded aspects of the inner masculine; Jean Houston's *The Passion of Isis and Osiris*, which uses the Egyptian myth

of Isis and Osiris to explore the mythic aspects of intimate human relationships; Jean Shinoda Bolen's *God's in Everyman* and *Goddesses in Everywoman*, which explore male and female psychological differences and concerns through archetypal portraits of the Greek divinities; and Carol Pearson's *Awakening the Hero Within*, which focuses on twelve archetypes, ranging from Orphan and Warrior to Ruler and Fool, as a means to explore issues of psychological and spiritual development.

Of course, neither the personal-to-universal or universal-to-personal approach to exploring one's mythology can really exist in isolation. The work of understanding the mythic and archetypal implications of one's life story is really a process of alternating between the two focuses. Sometimes one might begin by directly reflecting on the mythic or archetypal themes and images one encounters in one's own life experience, while at other time one's reflections might be triggered by the sense of a mythic or archetypal connection between a story one is reading and some event in one's life. Regardless of which end of the process one starts from, however, in the end the touchstone of one's personal mythology must always proceed from and return back to the narrative of one's own experience. As Jean Houston astutely observes regarding this primacy of the personal within personal mythology:

What had been part of the collective as the shared myth or archetype is now finding new rivers of unique stories flowing from out of the passion play of individual lives. This does not mean the dismissal of traditional myths, but rather that now as the maps of the ancient traditions no longer fit the personal territory to the degree they once did owing to the radical change of our time, we must live our stories with the mythic vibrancy of those who inhabited the ancient stories. ("Joseph Campbell and Changing Times" 42-3)

To conclude this chapter, in considering all of the above material, it becomes possible to propose broad conceptual definitions of both personal mythwork and personal

mythology. In this context, the practice of personal mythwork can be characterized as encompassing any activity that engages one in deep imaginal, symbolic, metaphorical, and archetypal reflection on the story of one's life. In addition, the concept of personal mythwork can also be said to include imaginal reflection on any pre-existing mythic material from the perspective of one's own deeply felt life experience. To become personal, it does not matter whether mythic material erupts spontaneously in the form of dreams and synchronicities of profound personal significance or through the experience of being gripped by mythic material that one imaginally encounters in the many cultural and religious forms that mythic consciousness has inspired. Continuing in this vein, personal mythology can be defined as the evolving and collective outcome of all such encounters. Such outcomes inevitably alter underlying belief structures regarding oneself, the others in one's life, one's relationship to the larger environments in which one lives, and one's relationship with that realm of human experience called sacred or holy. The ultimate result of such a personal encounter with mythology is nothing less than a fundamental and profound alteration of the way in which one envisions one's life and engages the world.