The Phenomenon of Nostalgia

Ideas about Paradise are very widespread, going far beyond the Judeo-Christian cultural sphere. According to Mircea Eliade the myth of Paradise is to be encountered virtually everywhere, in forms of varying complexity. The ultimate goal of nostalgic longing is a condition, then, a state of being which finds symbolic expression in the image of Paradise.

The fact is that we all tend to paint for ourselves a picture of the “good old days” that does not accord with the facts. There never were any good old days, there never was an “intact world.” . . . The world of wholeness exists mostly in retrospect, as a compensation for the threatened, fragmented world in which we live now.

The word nostalgia means something very akin to the English homesickness and the German Heimweh. The term comes from the Greek nostos (the return home) and algos (pain). In addition to homesickness in the narrower sense, nostalgia has come to mean a longing for what is past, a painful yearning for a time gone by.

Some years ago I treated a thirty-year-old man who suffered from agoraphobia (fear of open spaces). He lived in a boarding house, far from his parents who lived in Germany, and he could not leave his quarters without suffering the most intense anxiety. He needed the “security” of that house, as he repeatedly emphasized. At the same time he complained about being so confined and about the narrow, religious atmosphere of his rooming house. Initially I had to hold our therapy sessions in his room, but after some time he found himself able to come to me. Then he began to speak of how homesick he felt and expressed the wish to visit his parents. This meant a long train journey abroad. Finally, driven by his mounting homesickness, he made the journey. He called me once more from the Swiss frontier, and then remained with his parents for two weeks.

As might have been expected, his stay at home was a grave disappointment. There was a vast discrepancy between his fantasies and expectations of Home, Security, and all-embracing Mother Love, and the reality he encountered there. Angered and disappointed by what he perceived as his parents’ lack of understanding and icy unrelativeness, he returned with the firm determination never to go back. But barely four weeks later his homesickness returned and with it his desire to visit his family again. The inner image of “Home” had regained its overwhelming power, nearly obliterating the sad reality he had experienced there. . . .

Homesickness or nostalgia is apparently related to something which need not exist in external reality. It is the longing for oneness with the mother in a state of problem-free containment, where total harmony, full accord, utter security and consolation reign supreme. . . . Ultimately, it is a longing for the mother as the “containing world,” as experienced in the best of circumstances in the so-called primal relationship, the initial link between mother and infant.

The perspective of depth psychology links ideas of Paradise, the Golden Age or the “intact world” with the pre-conscious state of infancy, when the ego as the center of human consciousness has not yet been activated. . . . At this stage in the infant’s development there is not yet any polarization between internal and external, between subject and object, ego and Self (in the Jungian sense of those terms). I deal with these matters extensively in a later chapter.
For many individuals midlife is a time when, without warning, the unconscious abruptly grabs them by the neck and wreaks havoc with their lives. This can be particularly shocking for those of us who have worked long and hard at establishing a connection to our inner world. Shouldn’t this sincere effort at building relationship with the psyche spare us massive shocks from within? The reality seems to be that all of us are vulnerable to the sudden dissolution of our world view.

This midlife transition can shake our relationship to everything: work, spouse and children. The painful withdrawal of projections from these outer sources, which we may have unconsciously assumed would continue throughout life, activates a major realignment of dependence needs. If these outer people and activities will not take care of us, who will? James Hollis’s answer is clear: “The loss of hope that the outer will save us occasions the possibility that we shall save ourselves.”

What happens to the personality at midlife? Hollis’s view is that, for many, the ego undergoes a decompensation: “The breakdown of the ego means that one is not really in control of life.” Perhaps due to the gravity of this experience, as a compensation our popular culture often treats the symptoms of midlife crisis lightly. In contrast, Hollis approaches the experience in its earthy reality, squarely identifying the gravity of this experience, as a compensation.

The Middle Passage: From Misery to Meaning in Midlife (title 59, 128pp. $22), reviewed by Richard G. Dunn in Psychological Perspectives, no. 30 (Fall-Winter, 1994)

Using the metaphor of an earthquake, Hollis believes that the psyche shifts beneath the surface for years before there is a violent shake-up of conscious life. The middle passage occurs at any point in the second half of life “when one is radically stunned into consciousness.” The opportunity offered by the crisis is the possibility of reconnecting with the aspects of one’s soul that have been repressed or neglected. Symptoms such as boredom and depression may be clues that one’s nature is too narrowly channeled.

The value in The Middle Passage is that it is successful as a practical workbook for midlife. Hollis lays out tools designed to help us find ourselves. The tools themselves are not original, but the relatedness of his presentation assists the reader in picking up the tools and putting them to good use. For example, Hollis believes we must identify and dialogue with our inner parental voices: “Perhaps no task is more important at midlife than separation from parental complexes.”

He also encourages us to dialogue with the powerful emotional states that may occur throughout the passage. When we seek the deeper meaning in these experiences, “our terror is compensated by meaning, by dignity, by purpose.” In addition, Hollis recommends establishing a ritual of personal solitude, “investing it with the same energy previously given to dependencies.” Solitude thus becomes an experience that transcends loneliness.

This book is an excellent complement to Murray Stein’s In Midlife. Stein’s book has some brilliant insights, is highly refined, and is long on mythological amplification. Hollis helps us put our feet squarely on the ground with his emotional honesty and practical suggestions. The subtitle, “From Misery to Meaning in Midlife,” may convey an image of linear movement out of the morass. The midlife journeyer might want to keep in mind some of the ideas from Stein’s work—particularly regarding the prolonged period of “liminality” that midlife may encompass. Additionally, as one progresses, there may be movement backward, seeming regressions, as one tries to find one’s way.

Hollis’s abiding faith is that turning inward eventually brings us to a new sense of purpose. His call to readers is a bit of a dare: either engage the dragons heroically, or risk an inauthentic life.

— MORE BY JAMES HOLLIS —
UNDER SATURN’S SHADOW
The Wounding and Healing of Men
(title 63, 144 pp., $22)

TRACKING THE GODS
The Place of Myth in Modern Life
(title 68, 160 pp., $22)

SWAMPLANDS OF THE SOUL
New Life in Dismal Places
(title 73, 160 pp., $22)

THE EDEN PROJECT
In Search of the Magical Other
(title 79, 160 pp., $22)
Marion Woodman’s profoundly sensitive and intelligent analysis of women’s psychology, eating disorders and personal growth has firm grounding in Jungian psychology, literature, myths, religion and studies in physiology.

Her excellent books synthesize her experience with herself and thousands of analysands, putting a face on the agony of eating disorders, addictions and psychic disease, and she provides understanding by gently leading us into the darkness that generates them. When we find there our abandoned selves, our healing journey can begin.

In *The Owl Was a Baker’s Daughter*, her first and most formally psychoanalytic work, Woodman introduces her research on obese and anorexic women. She meshes insights about the physiology of obesity with personality profiles, case studies and dream analysis. Finally she holds out hope: Women must rediscover the feminine in themselves by taking possession of their bodies at a conscious level and learning to cherish the mysteries their bodies contain.

Woodman moves beyond the specific mechanics of eating disorders in *Addiction to Perfection*. Here she explores what happens when we accept external authority for inner reality. Full humanity requires r avishment, which happens when we allow the merging of spirit and love, masculine and feminine, within our hearts.

When we fragment ourselves by rejecting the deep, the unknown and the mysterious, we lay ourselves open to rape by the unchecked notion that we are in fact God. And the spiritual impoverishment that follows drives us to eat, to drink, to numb ourselves to our own internal war.

Woodman shows how watching our dreams and listening carefully to inner signals can lead us out of perfectionism’s hell and into the risky yet vital realm of real living.

*The Pregnant Virgin* is at once the most broad in scope and the most personal of Woodman’s books. It begins with the metaphor of a chrysalis, in which one phase of life ends and another begins. Avoiding the pain of the old life’s death drives us to addictions of all sorts; but if we endure the darkness and the uncertainty we can emerge fresh and whole.

Woodman recounts her journey to India, where she began her own transformation. She peppers the text with dreams and telling comments by her analysands. Compassionate and eclectic, this is Woodman at her best. —DG

“Women have lived for centuries in a male-oriented culture which has kept them unconscious of their own feminine principle. In the attempt to find their own place in a masculine world, they have unknowingly accepted male values—goal-oriented lives, compulsive drivenness and concrete bread which fails to nourish their feminine mystery. Their unconscious femininity rebels and manifests in some somatic form.”

—from *The Owl Was a Baker’s Daughter*. 
The magnitude of Jung’s life and work has not yet dawned on the world. Even some of his followers are reluctant to acknowledge his true dimensions. He is the carrier of a consciousness so magisterial that it has no peer. Quite understandably did he complain in a late unpublished letter that, “I am practically alone. There are a few who understand this and that, but almost nobody sees the whole.” There can be no question of a critical evaluation of Jung’s work at present for the simple reason that no one is competent to judge it.

Let someone appear who has gone deeper than Jung and has seen the psyche more comprehensively than he—to that person’s judgments I shall listen with respect. But so far such a one is not to be found. Jung thus becomes a kind of touchstone. Our reactions to him reveal the nature of ourselves. In my view, he embodies the highest level of consciousness yet achieved by humanity. Valid books on Jung at present, therefore, cannot be evaluative. They must explicate, exemplify and mediate the conceptions obliquely, chiefly through descriptions of Jung’s ideas. Where specific answers are offered, it is with quotations from Jung. The issue is faced most squarely in the chapter entitled, “Coincidentia Oppositorum,” in which Answer to Job is discussed. The high point of this chapter is a quotation from Jung’s autobiography, Memories, Dreams, Reflections:

Answer to Job, he replied, “I live in my deepest hell, and from there I cannot fall any further.”

Dr. von Franz organizes her presentation around the major guiding images that underlay Jung’s opus. A chapter is devoted to each of the following: The Underworld God, The Storm Lantern, The Physician, Mirror-Symmetry and the Polarity of the Psyche, The Journey to the Beyond, The Anthropos, The Mandala, Coincidentia Oppositorum, Morning Knowledge and Evening Knowledge, Mercurius, The Philosophers’ Stone, Breakthrough to the Unus Mundus, Individual and Society.

What most interests me about this book are the implications of its subtitle. What is Jung’s myth? What is its relevance for our time? Dr. von Franz approaches these questions obliquely, chiefly through descriptions of Jung’s ideas. Where specific answers are offered, it is with quotations from Jung. The issue is faced most squarely in the chapter entitled, “Coincidentia Oppositorum,” in which Answer to Job is discussed. The high point of this chapter is a quotation from Jung’s autobiography, Memories, Dreams, Reflections:

“The unavoidable internal contradictions in the image of a Creator-god can be reconciled in the unity and wholeness of the Self as the coniunctio oppositorum of the alchemists or as a unio mystica. In the experience of the Self it is no longer the opposites ‘God’ and ‘man’ that are reconciled, as it was before, but rather the opposites within the God-image itself. That is the meaning of divine service, of the service that man can render to God, that light may emerge from the darkness, that the Creator may become conscious of His creation, and man conscious of himself.”

That passage should be put beside another one from Memories:

“As far as we can discern, the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of mere being. It may even be assumed that just as the unconscious affects us, so our increase in consciousness affects the unconscious.”

These two passages convey the essence of Jung’s myth for our time. It is elaborated more fully in Answer to Job, which von Franz tells us is the only one of Jung’s works with which he was completely satisfied. A new myth can regenerate a society, and Jung’s myth offers Western civilization a sound container to hold the precious life-essence of meaning which has been spilled during the breaking of the vessels of traditional religion.

In this new myth, man is perceived as a necessary partner of God. Consciousness, whose only carrier is the individual, is the supreme value, goal and meaning of the universe. It has groped its way blindly out of the boundless chaos and laboriously fashioned a vessel to contain it—the individual self and its spatio-temporal incarnation, the human ego.

The ego, in turn, after a long series of mistakes and presumptions, with tortuous slowness, backslidings and perversities, gradually learns its purpose for being—to be the carrier of cosmogonic consciousness. The mythless ones who encounter this new myth and are gripped by its numinosity will be drafted into its service.
The secret garden reveals its secrets

**THE SECRET GARDEN: Temenos for Individuation** by Margaret Eileen Meredith (title 111, 160pp, $22), reviewed by Ann Walker in *Psychological Perspectives*, 2006

“...and guided the children to work in the manner the garden needed. Dead wood is cleared away. New growth is nurtured until it reveals itself. Fallow periods are endured as patiently as possible. The children have the correct attitude: they care for and respect the garden and its mystery and feel fortunate to have the opportunity to work in it. They are devoted to the garden and continue to work in the garden even when they do not see anything emerge from all their hard work. They willingly and generously sacrifice their time and energy. Their devoted labor engages the individuation process and yields the healing transformation of both children. In the end, Colin and Mary emerge robust, transformed by their work with the secret garden, so strong that they can initiate Colin’s father into the healing mystery of the secret garden.

Margaret Meredith concludes her book eloquently:

The mystery and magic of the secret garden is an abiding reality where temporal and eternal worlds unite. It is a temenos where the invisible plane underlying and supporting the visible one is manifest. It is also a place where one may find a deeper connection with what could be considered the womb of nature, the soul of the world.

I found *The Secret Garden* to be an accessible and wonderful exploration of the mysterious and numinous process of transformation. Throughout Meredith remains steadfast and true to the image of her dream, offering us the opportunity to walk with her in the sacred forest and delight in its mysteries.

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Each gender has power and primacy, as do the bodies of each gender. Potency, as I use the word here, is my way of speaking of the intensity of power grounded in male instinct, emanating from deeply within the conjunction of psyche and body. It is seen in erection, the energy of the male groin, leading to male penetration as a force standing behind ongoing life. An erection may be more or less subjectively powerful according to the mood of its perceiver but it is never, psychologically/emotionally, without power.

That power is universal, or in Jung’s terms archetypal. It varies in cultures as in individuals. But it is always present as definition, mystery, prompt and metaphor. It moves a male beyond himself, into and around his opposite, bespeaking a man’s identity, his place and his function. Phallos evinces new life in reproduction, but also in excitement, the expression of male intensity and in the implication of a man’s purpose and his promise.

The English language does not ordinarily give gender to nouns, but since I use potency as erection in this work, potency inevitably has gender. Of course, females have yang or phallic psychological qualities, and in physical qualities as well, although usually in shorter supply since phallos is clearly a masculine attribute, fed by testosterone of which hormone the female has far less. Phallos and testes organically function to express male participation in life as present satisfaction and future consequence. Masculine characteristics always refer to, or are attributed to, phallos as essential masculine signifier. An energized penis, full of blood and heavily intent upon the pleasure of penetration leading to ejaculation is an analogical god appearing from primal and inaccessible source in physical form – Michelangelo’s Sistine divinity touching man with his phallic finger—as a picture of that which gives male erection its spiritual and psychological importance.

C.G. Jung paid little attention to the psychology of masculinity since males were always in charge in Victorian Switzerland and Jung, in that sense, was a man of his time. Women were dependent upon men, the leaders. Psychoanalytic fundament, inherited from Freud, rested easily upon the presumption of male dominance—patriarchy. No one had to define or explain masculinity any more than one had to define or explain mountains.

As I write today, aware of an ever-enlarging international feminism as well as of democracy, and the enormous extension of individual freedom everywhere, one can no longer take inherent male supremacy for granted. The collapse, or impending collapse, of patriarchy—that is, the social dominance of males as an assumed cultural given—is on our doorstep if not already in the house. Men feel this change deeply as they experience their cultural authority challenged. Being born male, almost everywhere, has made a man feel entitled, so deeply has patriarchy been the common parlance of ego culture. Becoming unentitled can make men insecure, angry and pathologically violent, as though they face the threat of castration, as though their metaphorical birthright were suddenly on the verge of loss, leaving them standing shakily without their familiar support for self-regard. For how can men contribute to life without their traditional ability to design, police and run things?

I intend this work to be a means of addressing that question.

This book is based upon my Jungian training, and, in some ways, Christian suppositions, for those, along with my liberal political leanings, are the main ideological factors in my life. It is more of a Jungian book than a Christian book and more of a Christian book than a liberal book. The reader has a right to know this from the start.

If the reader does not know Jung or Christianity, bookstores and libraries are full of resources. Read Jung himself. Start with Volume 7 of the Collected Works, Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, or Jung’s autobiography Memories, Dreams, Reflections. If one were to read Christianity in a Monickian direction—one that is traditionally Anglican and thus in the middle between ancient and modern, liturgical and prophetic, Catholic and Protestant, one might be well advised to avoid explicitly right-wing and/or fundamentalist commentaries.

For the purposes of this Introduction, I can but mention briefly one issue that draws upon both Jung and Christianity. Jung, as I understand him, believed that nothing “exterior” to one’s personal psyche—and one’s personal psyche as imbedded in the collective unconscious—should dominate a conscious person’s life. To understand that statement requires knowledge that “one’s personal psyche,” my phrase, has a transpersonal dimension, an ability to (cont. on page 7 >>>>>)

Eugene Monick

POTENCY: Masculine Aggression as a Path to the Soul

Excerpt from the Introduction (title 114, 160 pp., $22)
POTENCY (excerpt cont.)

reach or sense a reality that is beyond what Freud, and Jung after him, called the ego, the “I” quality of personal experience. The question of what is exterior, for the purposes of this note, has to do with ego and ego’s evaluations and ego’s essential connection to and expression of the exterior world. Without an “I” one can hardly begin. The idea here is that one’s ego is the means, the organ, as it were, by which one moves out from personal experience in order to perceive that which goes on beyond one’s borders. That is the world. How one evaluates one’s perceptions is an important further matter but not specifically my object in this writing, aside from my take on patriarchy.

Jung, as I understand him, believed that nothing “exterior” to one’s personal psyche—and one’s personal psyche as imbedded in the collective unconscious—should dominate a conscious person’s life. To understand that statement requires knowledge that “one’s personal psyche,” my phrase, has a transpersonal dimension, an ability to reach or sense a reality that is beyond what Freud, and Jung after him, called the ego, the “I” quality of personal experience. The question of what is exterior, for the purposes of this note, has to do with ego and ego’s evaluations and ego’s essential connection to and expression of the exterior world. Without an “I” one can hardly begin. The idea here is that one’s ego is the means, the organ, as it were, by which one moves out from personal experience in order to perceive that which goes on beyond one’s borders. That is the world. How one evaluates one’s perceptions is an important further matter but not specifically my object in this writing, aside from my take on patriarchy.

Not so the soul. Soul belongs to a transcendent order, meaning “to pass beyond” the ego into a sense of depth. Soul represents that aspect of experience that is not as limited as ego since soul is not constricted by rational or conscious boundaries. Soul sinks deeper into the psyche. Soul is the translation of the Greek psyche. Soul is more closely related to subjective experience as ego is more closely related to objective experience, viz.: how one feels and thinks about life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Christian scripture reflects the matter this way: “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” (I Cor. 1:20) Soul here speaks through the letter of Paul, having the capacity, due to its transcendent nature, to know that “the wisdom of the world” cannot be depended upon if taken at its face value, that something other than “the world” is necessary and of greater value and that soul is the organ of that discernment. Soul is the way of knowing that a painting moves one, that a landscape has a quality of the ultimate, that a certain person is one’s soul mate. Soul, then, has a subversive effect upon ego. It can influence the ego to doubt itself. But only if one moves beyond ego and “listens” to the comforts and discomforts of soul.

For Jung, one’s reaction to symbol is an expression of soul’s impact upon ego. Symbol stands for that which rational ego cannot manufacture or understand since ego, by itself, does not go deeply enough into the collective unconscious. Along with concrete ego reality in modest amounts, particularly ego’s capacity to discern importance, symbol is arbiter of psychic truth. Symbol tends toward abstraction in situations where literalism cannot express depth. One person can stare at symbol and never see more than is there in lines and colors and space. Another can see in what one is watching a kind of revelation.

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The collective unconscious, specifically the realm of the archetypes, lying, as it does, beneath the personal unconscious, moves far beyond Freud’s concept of the unconscious as the repository of repressed and forgotten personal experience. Jung’s collective unconscious has a teleological function, bringing his thought close to the spiritual world acknowledged by religion, though religion it be not. It is soul. On a personal level, the way to find the second, internal world is through dreams, fantasy, imagination, feelings and affection—what happens in the privacy of personal awareness, where a man encounters anima, soul and his own closeness to the feminine.

Jung’s way was to find a way back to a possibility of primal wholeness without surrendering the accomplishments of modern life. This could happen through the union, or even more, for a modern person, the re-union, of the collective unconscious with the ego world, the two opposites Jung took pains to explicate and rejoin. That process Jung called transformation.

Also by Eugene Monick:
PHALLOS
Sacred Image of the Masculine
(Title 27, 144 pages, $22)

CASTRATION AND MALE RAGE
The Phallic Wound
(Title 50, 144 pages, $22)
The basic structure of Jung’s theory is fairly well known. Essentially, it argues that everyone tends to function in the world according to one of two basic attitudes, in association with one of four functions.

Jung defines the functions as thinking, feeling, sensation and intuition, the first two being judgmental (or rational) and the last two perceptive (or irrational). The way we see the world depends on how we use these functions. Energy may be directed toward the inner world, with the subject being of prime importance, or outside where the object and other people count more. Jung called these basic attitudes introversion and extraversion.

From his observations of people and from a theoretical standpoint, Jung came to the conclusion that thinking is opposed to feeling and sensation opposed to intuition. The structure fits into a neat double quaternity when extraversion and introversion are taken into account.

Sharp explains all the above simply and clearly in the first part of his book, “Introduction to Jungian Typology.” The next two parts describe in detail the characteristics, as well as the normal and neurotic ways of behavior, of the eight possible types. In the last part he comments on type testing and the shadow.

There are two appendices: an interesting paper by the late Dr. H.K. Fierz, “The Clinical Significance of Extraversion and Introversion,” and a delightful sketch entitled “A Dinner Party with the Types.”

Sharp says in his preface, “Other books have been written based on Jung’s system of psychological types. If there is anything distinctive about this one it is its close adherence to Jung’s expressed views.” In all, it is succinct and comprehensive.

Eros and Pathos is a gentle, wise and very beautiful book.

It is gentle in its concern for human suffering and in its awareness of its limitations before the mystery of such suffering; gentle in its relating of suffering to erotic love, which it also approaches as a delicate and terrible mystery; and gentle in its sensitive meditation upon suffering love’s fears, guilt, prohibitions, inhibitions, delusions, seductions, vulnerabilities, jealousies, betrayals, solitudes and destinies. It is wise in being as intriguing in its theorizing as it is helpful in its directing.

Suffering and love are here interpreted as our pathways toward psychological growth. We choose, perhaps unconsciously, our suffering and our loves insofar as we need them for further growth. The book is beautiful not only in that it abides in the presence of the gentle physician Jung and the wise philosopher Nietzsche, but also in that it keeps constant company with the great poets. Shakespeare, Goethe, Dante, Rilke, Gerard Manley Hopkins and Dylan Thomas are only a few of the many called upon to enter the conversation.

For lovers, sufferers, psychologists, philosophers, poets and religious spirits of all types, this book will be a delight. As a work of art it exposes a world wisely, it composes its background gently and reveals strife beautifully.