Abstract:

James Hillman is remembered as the author of papers and books, including “Senex and Puer: An Aspect of the Historical Present,” “The Feeling Function,” and *A Terrible Love of War*, that both explicate and deconstruct the premises of depth psychology in general and Jungian analytical psychology in particular. Although Hillman helped to found the school of “Archetypal Psychology,” the author of this memorial, who knew him personally, does not find him to be doctrinaire; rather he challenged even his followers, in raising his individual voice to assert the duty of psychological citizenship to pursue fresh understandings. The author argues that although Hillman’s eventual subject was the soul of the world, the way he addressed it was quintessentially American.

**Key Words:**

America, archetypal psychology, citizenship, criticism, deconstruction, Hillman, Jung, world soul

James Hillman’s contribution to the integration of Jungian thought into American life is so enormous that it is impossible to see him apart from his commitment to citizenship, the ultimate ambition of the American. With a European education that was by turns literary, philosophical, and psychological, he had trained himself to be a psychological citizen of the Western world. As such, he was given to complain that in pursuit of a humanistic and then a scientific “ego,” Western, and of late American, consciousness had all but forgotten what its psychological tradition is for. When, in 1989, he gave up the practice of individual psychotherapy to address, full time, the world soul, he explicitly broke with the
insularity that sometimes attends the career of a depth psychologist. He began to call himself Mr. Hillman. Even his own school of “archetypal psychology,” which had never been just his creation anyway, could not count on him to champion its cause. His concern was with what an American psychological mind could see around it, and more and more he seemed to belong at least as much to the tradition of Emerson, Thoreau, and Twain as to that of Freud, Jung, and Adler, the depth psychologists he deconstructed so brilliantly by exposing the root metaphors of their oeuvres.

There was a time, however, when someone trying solely to make sense of the developments within analytical psychology since Jung could gain orientation within James Hillman’s writings as nowhere else. I still recall, as a psychiatric resident at Stanford, playing hooky in the library on the University’s main campus. I found, in an unexpected place in the stacks, a copy of the 1967 Eranos Jahrbuch, which had just arrived, and there discovered “Senex and Puer: An Aspect of the Historical Present.” Not yet thirty myself, and with a stern, military father responsible for U.S. army propaganda for the Vietnam War, it was astonishing to have my own psychological situation mirrored. For a long time after that, like many young Jungians of my generation, I read everything Hillman published.

I was particularly influenced by his long essay, “The Feeling Function,” collected in Lectures on Jung’s Typology (the rest of the book is devoted to von Franz’s monograph on “The Inferior Function.”) Since I don’t think I was alone in benefiting from that essay, perhaps I can speak for many readers when I say that one reading it was grateful for the mind that could dissect lazy habits of Jungian thought and give the concepts Jung handed down to us from his own effort to discriminate the functions of consciousness a new clarity and relevance. It was not atypical of Hillman to change his mind about the need to dwell on typological understandings of psychological phenomena, and more than once in our encounters over the years, after I had become a junior colleague, he chided me for taking this as my task.

He was regretful, on the other hand, that people who claimed to care about his writings paid so little attention to his last book, A Terrible Love of War, which I confess sits on my own shelf still unread. Did he not “get” that he sometimes frightened us with what he knew, and knew we too needed to know?
I want to assuage my guilt, and allay any resentment this master of understanding may yet be harboring, in however occult a place, by telling him to wait and assuring him it won’t be long—we can’t do without his late thoughts, even more than we can’t do without Bob Dylan’s latest song. The ghost that won’t give up will get it’s piece of us, and be at peace. It was in *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) that Freud said, “The voice of the intellect is a soft one, but it does not rest until it has gained a hearing” (p. 53), but James Hillman always insisted on speaking out in his beautiful, cultured voice, and he was never soft-spoken. Gifted with an anima that was not about Eros, his was a life-long polemic, driven by Eris, the goddess of strife.

Often, in the afternoon of a brilliant, daylong Hillman seminar, when everything had started to come together in the mind of the audience and a kind of *gemütlichkeit* had settled on his listeners, Hillman would tear into a comment or question from someone that seemed to threaten premature synthesis, some “theory of everything,” or some new dictionary of accepted Jungian ideas. He would have none of that and not least when we thought we were agreeing with him.

It remains to recall how generous he was to new voices. I won’t forget his telling me, after my first presentation at an International Congress, that I should write more. A few years later, I had written enough to be invited to speak, and was about to do so in front of my largest audience yet at the Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco, on a bill with Joseph Campbell and Ursula Le Guin in a program for which Jim (as I could now call him) had agreed to serve as its “Moderator.” Jim saw me hesitating in the absolute backstage darkness and realizing that I was not sure-footed enough to find my way to the center of the stage, he took my hand and led me forward. After I had spoken, and he openly challenged what I said, and I answered confidently back, my own lecturing career was launched.

After that, he was only unhappy with me when he felt I wasn’t living up to what he knew I could bring to it. I savor his criticisms, and the encouragement he tacitly gave me (exactly by not sparing me) to transcend them, and at the same time, my own limitations. But this is not to say that Jim did not understand limitation. After I had published *Integrity in Depth*, I received a card from him, in which he said, “We are all damagers. Integrity, for me, is accepting that limita-
tion.” The comment came back to me, as if in two parts, in the last two years of his life. Reflecting at the U.S. Library of Congress on the existential lessons to be learned from Jung’s Red Book, he said, “We are all scandals” (Hillman, 2010). And I heard from others, who kept pressing him to speak in the last year of his life, that he would tell them “I don’t know how long I have left.” We all haven’t long enough left to hear his wise voice, but we really need to start. I hope to get to A Terrible Love of War before long.

References:


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