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A Mythography of the Crossroads: How is the Severance/Threshold/Return progression in both mythology and modern wilderness rites-of-passage established through metaphor? An enquiry conducted through contemporary storytelling practice

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Graduate Committee.

Relevant seminars and conferences were regularly attended at which work was often presented.

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Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MARTIN SHAW', written over a horizontal line.

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Abstract

How is the Severance/Threshold/Return progression in both mythology and modern wilderness rites-of-passage established through metaphor? An enquiry conducted through contemporary storytelling practice.

This research examines the metaphorical structures within seven selected myths in relation to wilderness rites-of-passage, and the key thematic progression of Severance/Threshold/Return. These rites-of-passage are an essential component of an ongoing programme offered to the general public. The research is primarily creative in that the oral texts have been developed from extant myth over several years, and adapted to a variety of performance contexts. The evolution of these oral texts is examined in an analytical text, which draws on contemporary philosophy and critical theory to consider both the activity of wilderness rites-of-passage, and the role of metaphor within the storytelling.

Crucial to the methodology is mythography; myth apprehended not by one perspective, but requiring consideration by a variety of disciplines. The concept of shape shifting is central to the seven stories, and also suggestive of the processes contained within this submission, to which there are four components: 1. The session texts; transcripts of performance sessions which took place over a twelve-month period with the same twenty-five participants. The texts contain three years of preparatory research, creative and analytical, presented orally to the group, and subsequently transcribed and revised according to new research, but retaining the syntax of an oral presentation. 2. Analytical text; this engages with a wider discourse on the properties of myth, and contextualises the constituent elements of the session texts. 3. Oral recordings; a recording of a live theatre performance, with improvised syntax, language and metaphor, is presented in contrast to a controlled studio recording. 4. Painting; during the programme, my artistic practice was affected by an enhanced understanding of the mythological elements, and the silent, solitary practice of painting asserted itself as a profound way to contemplate the severance/threshold/return progression.

A Mythography of the Crossroads:

Rationale

Mythography:

1. The artistic representation of mythical subjects
2. A collection of myths, often with a critical commentary

(Doty 1986)

Research Question

How is the Severance/Threshold/Return progression in both mythology and modern wilderness rites-of-passage established through metaphor? An enquiry conducted through contemporary storytelling practice.

Methodology

Many areas of enquiry into myth retain at their centre the Jungian concept that all characters in a story are elements of our own psyche, eviscerating the idea of one specific internal voice in favour of the notion that we are a host to many. This concept is fundamental to my own use of storytelling, and it is, furthermore, fundamental to my research methodology, which employs a variety of disciplines and techniques to provide insights into what a myth might be. At the heart of my research project lies the complex act of storytelling and the collection of mythological texts that encompass systematic research, creative addition, and improvisation (according to local conditions of performance). This analytical text structures my systematic and intensive reflection upon those acts of storytelling, in order to contextualise these 'events'. My research is presented in four components.

I. The session texts.

These are oral transcripts of a series of performances over the period of a calendar year, in which a series of myths are related to wilderness rites-of-passage. These performances involve a personal appraisal of myths, some well-known, others obscure, and utilise personal narratives and observations derived from my long term involvement with wilderness rites-of-passage. Audience-participants numbered twenty five, and attended all sessions. The setting was invariably around a campfire and dialogue with the participants was included, most sessions took around four hours. I was left with over thirty hours of material, recordings just audible for transcription, but of a rough listening quality. The participants were also keen that their contributions maintained their privacy (i.e. neither transcribed or heard orally).

The session texts origins are in three years research leading up to the year programme – so, true to the nature of a mythography the practice has gone through a varied set of stages: from research to oral recitation to transcript. The recitation allows a lively orality to be integrated back into the research. The thesis's emphasis on shape shifting is, as mentioned, a crucial mirror to this process. As I state later in the text; "speech is occurring within the writing and writing is occurring within the speech." The thesis is an intense shutting back and forth between orality and writing, both infused with the other. This movement is central to the thesis's investigation of a crossroads point within wilderness rites-of-passage.

Contemporary figures involved in a similar field have been the writers and wilderness guides Steven Foster and Meredith Little, (Foster, Little 1987) - widely credited as initiating the return of wilderness rites-of-passage to a Western setting, the poet Robert Bly (Bly 1990), the mythologist Daniel Deardorff (Deardorff 2004), and Dagara elder and author, Malidoma Some (Some 1995). Over the five years of the research I worked alongside all but Steven Foster (deceased). I have also presented at conferences in the U.K. and U.S. on related themes alongside the psychologist Robert Moore (Moore 2001), the poet Coleman Barks (Barks 2010), the storyteller Gioia Timpanelli, (Timpanelli 2008), and the author Lewis Hyde (Hyde 1998). Collaborations have ensued with Bly, Deardorff, Barks and Timpanelli. These collaborations do not imply a complete accord of opinion, rather a robust platform from which to exchange ideas.

2. Analysis.

This analytical text examines my methodology in the formation of these performances. It also engages with wider discourses on the nature of myth, explores contexts for their interpretation, and addresses component elements of the session texts themselves.

3. Oral recordings.

These recordings reveal the interplay between organised narrative and spontaneous use of improvised language. As well as the live recordings in front of an audience, studio recordings are included (as a form of 'control' recording) to illustrate different qualities in the delivery and exegesis of the stories.

4. Paintings.

The practice of making paintings was another mode of experiencing the initiatory process. The paintings have played a distinct role in the development of my ideas, but are too recent to permit extensive commentary and hence are included as an appendix. The intensity of the written research has impacted on my perception of the process of making paintings, as I will reference later in the text.

Wilderness rites-of-passage refers to a pan-global form of initiation involving extended fasts in a wilderness setting. The initiation motif involves three phases: 1. sudden, dramatic severance of normal societal roles; 2. exposure to challenge and trial; 3. return to the original community carrying wider insight and growth. The core purpose of initiation is almost always a progression from one stage of being to another - crucially childhood to adulthood. Importantly, this progression can be found both in initiation practices and certain myths and folktales. The session texts isolate a structural crisis in the application of wilderness rites-of-passage to the modern day and use the motif of wilderness in language, art and landscape as ways of deepening our enquiry into why this might be.

A series of paintings have emerged from my extant practice as an artist in response to my enquiry. During this period, the silence of the painting studio became my own wilderness space, one in which I was not constantly required to reflect on my use of words and stories. The paintings consequently became potent vehicles for transformation, and as well as offering a visual form of mythography, represent an intimate means of engaging with initiatory stages.

Response to myth has always been varied: by that I mean that reactions can be articulated in a variety of ways - through song, sculpture, boat construction, the creation of ritual - any form of activity containing a unifying set of symbols that activate the imagination of the specific community, that create a binding tangle of connotation. By connotation I imply direct relationship between the imagination of the individual listener and the local cosmology.

The poet and essayist Gary Snyder, in his college thesis *He Who Hunted Birds in His Father's Village: the dimensions of a Haida myth* states:

What I'd emphasise now, even more than when I wrote it, is the primacy of performance: in the dark room, around the fire, children and old people, hearing and joying together in the words, the acting and the images. It's there that that shiver of awe and delight occurs, not in any dry analysis of archetypes and motifs - or the abstractions of the structuralists.
(Snyder 1979, p.xi)

The performances upon which this thesis is based were intended to engender the 'awe and delight' Snyder writes of, and consequently the field recording of my live engagement with story as an oral narrative, is central. This narrative was influenced by the gathered community (from Maine in the United States), the rendition staying true in the 'matter' (the sequential details) but the 'sense' (linguistic phrasing) of them responding flexible to culture, landscape and occasion.

A contrast is supplied in the studio recordings of *'The Deer Woman and the Velvet Antlered Moon'*, and *'The Red King and the Witch'*, alongside a reading of the oral commentaries. Excluding the year programme, the ethnicity of audience over this five year period has been varied - from a longhouse in Northern California full of Native American Miwok to a hundred Norwegian Lutherans in a Midwest USA lecture hall - but aspects of response and insight proved consistent - a

concern to gain a personal relationship with the narrative, all seeming to have a robust appreciation of metaphor. I will address the issue of orality and storytelling in more detail in chapter three.

The selection process was specific to the relationship of each story to the three initiatory stages. Other concerns were stories that related to the motif of shape shifting, and, in the case of the final three, that they contained a core theme of longing. Hence *Ivan the Bear's Son*, *The Serpent and the Bear*, and *Valemon and the Wild Third Daughter*, had the adventures of a male, an adolescent and a woman as the central narrative, therefore exploring the role of initiation from three differing perspectives. If the source is given as 'traditional' it indicates that the author did not find the story in a specific text but would have heard the story orally from other storytellers, often cross-culturally.

The stories were as follows:

The Birth of Taliesin, adapted from trans. Lady Charlotte Guest, *The Mabinogion*, (Dover Thrift editions, 1906)

Ivan the Bear's Son, Russian, traditional.

The Serpent and the Bear, Siberian, adapted from translations from James O'Riordan, *The Sun Maiden and the Crescent Moon: Siberian Folk Tales* (Interlink Books, 1989)

Valemon and the Wild Third Daughter, Norwegian, traditional.

The Deer Woman and the Velvet Antlered Moon, Siberian, adapted from James O'Riordan. *ibid.*

The Birth of Ossian, Irish, traditional.

The Red King and the Witch, Romanian Gypsy, adapted from compilation by Francis Hinds Groome, *Gypsy Folk Tales*, (London, 1899.)

Literature is a complicated word. What I wish to establish from the beginning is its confines within this text: when I use the word literature, unless making overt otherwise, I am referring to Western literature. I include here an observation by Native American writer Paula Gunn Allen: "Ceremonial literature includes all literature that is accompanied by ritual actions and music and which produces mythic (metaphysical) states of consciousness and/or conditions. The literature may appear to the westerner as either prose or poetry, but its distinguishing characteristic is that it is sacred... "sacred"... has a very different significance to tribes people than to members of the 'civilised' world." (Allen 1983 :173)

Chapter One

A collision of ruptures: an associative review of myth

The first thing that one realises in trying to grasp the semantic implications of myth is that myth can cover an extremely large field...it is clear that myth can encompass everything from a simple-minded, fictitious, even mendacious impression to an absolutely true and sacred account, the very reality of which far outweighs anything that ordinary life can offer.
(Honko 1972 :41)

I will begin by addressing the term 'myth' itself. This thesis has particular associations with the term, associations that must be clarified by addressing a wider academic framework. In this review, I have chosen a variety of mythologists, philosophers and anthropologists to demonstrate how varied and controversial a field it is. To locate the position of the thesis, after a broader survey, i will narrow the enquiry to the area of 'initiatory' myths.

Source texts for this section include: Sacred Narratives: *Readings in the Theory of Myth*, ed. Alan Dundes; The Myth of Primitivism: *Perspectives on Art*, ed.Susan Hiller; Madness and Civilization by Michel Foucault; Mythography: *The Study of Myth and Rituals*, ed by William G. Doty; Mythologies by Roland Barthes and Wisdom of the Mythtellers by Sean Kane.

The above texts are cited for their range of mythic perceptions, academic and philosophic integrity and scope of reference. Doty's collection of essays in particular, with its extensive commentaries from the realms of psychology, anthropology and the arts, has proven to be a vital resource.

In his opening commentary to the anthology, Doty (Doty 1986 :9) has compiled fifty definitions of the word, a number he regards as conservative. Components of the definitions include: *myth as aesthetic device, narrative, literary form, as mistaken or primitive science, myths as the words to rituals, or myths dependent upon ritual, which it explicates, explaining origins, subject matter having to do with the gods, the "other" world*

We could associate a phrase like 'primitive science' as an indication that myth belongs to a distant past, that it no longer has primacy in the societal conditions of the day. However, as Doty indicates, this is one of a myriad of claims for the title 'myth'. In this next section I offer three perceptions of myth through the ideas of Roland Barthes, Mircea Eliade and James Hillman.

Myths of advertising, difficulty and pathology

Myths are the instruments by which we continually struggle to make our experience intelligible to ourselves. A myth is a large controlling image that gives philosophical value to the facts of ordinary life; that is, which has organizing value for experience... Myth is fundamental, the dramatic representation of our deepest instinctual life, of a primary awareness of man in the universe, capable of many configurations...
(Murray 1986 :10)

Henry A. Murray's phrase 'myth is fundamental' implies an implicit presence not defined by era, whilst 'controlling' indicates the possibility that myths are more than benign decoration. Roland Barthes (Barthes 1957 :117) views myth as implicit in many aspects of contemporary life - myth is far from dead, but infused through the tenacity of the media to continue this element of control, of dominating societal wants psychologically. The television set or newspaper are ever-changing temples to the desires of the myth-makers themselves. From this standpoint, myth is an enemy of both freedom and imagination.

Michel Foucault (Foucault 1961 :88) indicates that the problem is not the impact of the image, but the investing of the image with a literal truth that then inhibits the life of the believer. He illustrates this in the realm of dreams and madness.

Imagination is not madness...at the moment he wakes from a dream, a man can indeed observe: 'I am imagining that I am dead': he thereby denounces and measures the arbitrariness of the imagination - he is not mad. He is mad when he posits as an affirmation of his death - when he suggests as having some value of truth - the still - neutral content of the image "I am dead".

So Foucault claims some internal barometer is present in the sane for engaging with the intense persuasions of the image, that it need not imply blind obedience, in fact, that would be a kind of madness. So, is Barthes suggesting that to be identified to myth is to be close to madness? The 'still-neutral' content of the image may remain within dream, but Barthes sees nothing neutral in the myth of advertising:

The meaning of the myth has its own value, it belongs to a history, that of the Lion or that of the Negro (examples of objects): in the meaning, a signification is already built, and could well be self-sufficient if myth did not take hold of it and did not turn it suddenly into an empty, parasitical form. The meaning is already complete, it postulates a kind of knowledge, a past, a memory, a comparative order of facts, ideas, decisions. When it becomes form, the meaning leaves its contingency behind; it empties itself, it becomes impoverished, history evaporates, only the letter remains.
(Barthes 1957 :117)

Barthes is clearly not sentimental, and rather than relegating myth to ancient history, views it as alive and well, suggesting manipulation and even damage when its influence is detected. Rather than myth as an expression of vivid

insights into consciousness through the centuries, he orientates it in the centre of modernity, of advertising. Myth takes the personal meaning of an object and places its signification over it, almost as a form of possession. He views the moment when myth claims an image as the movement from 'meaning' to 'form' - it has become something else, and he implies a terrific loss in this. Certainly there is an ambivalence to the power in such a move. Mircea Eliade also claims a 'mythology of modern elites' that harks back to some of the very earliest impulses towards the function of myth:

We may note the redeeming function of 'difficulty', especially as found in the works of modern art...it is because such works represent closed worlds, hermetic universes that cannot be entered except by overcoming immense difficulties, like the initiatory ordeals of the archaic and traditional societies. (Eliade 1963 :188)

So to Eliade we find ancient urges reconfiguring: that abstraction and complexity in art represent a labyrinthian challenge. The artist enters a ritualised container - the studio - for much the same motivation that the young tribeswoman enters the desert for fasting and vision, to be set apart from her peers, to amplify inner revelations, to suffer, study and grow. Both Barthes and Eliade's perception of the word ensures that myth loses its association as primarily concerned with the past, and locates itself both in societal conditioning and the psychological impulses of the body.

For the founder of Archetypal Psychology (a form of psychology originating but not entirely defined by the work of C. J. Jung), James Hillman (Hillman 1989 :150), the old gods have fled into our pathologies and reveal their character through symptoms - Saturn handling depression, impotence and emotional distance while Aphrodite revels in the endless erotic undertow of much of our advertising, for example. Symptoms are not seen as weaknesses but doorways into specific temples. The myths remain, their hints of the transcendental dimmed, but shifting effortlessly into whatever psychological triggers hold society in general captive. A god is concealed behind the trigger.

But Hillman typically reviles the idea that somehow mythic figures are nothing but mental constructs: "when we think mythologically about pathologizing, we could say, as some have, that the "world of the gods" is anthropomorphic, an imitative projection of ours...but one could start the other end, the mundus imaginalis, of the archetypes (or gods) and say that our "secular world" is at the same time mythical, an imitative projection of theirs, including their pathologies." From this position, the 'Otherworld' of folklore could be this very one in which we live. We are the dream of the Gods. The aggression of our ambitions, the wild affairs that rupture a steady life, the cradling of a young child, all could be caught in the dream tendrils of some luminous deity working through their 'issues' as they slumber, our myth world framing their lunar wanderings.

For many theorists the anthropocentric tone of modern definitions of myth continues. In Lauri Honko's essay 'The Problem of Defining Myth' (Honko 1972 :47), she adds to Doty's earlier list of mythic definitions with what she describes as 'modern theories of myth', of which some appear to support Barthes's tone of unease:

myth as a source of cognitive categories, myth as a charter of behaviour,
myth as legitimisation of social institutions, myth as marker of social relevance,
myth as a medium for structure.

But what of its ancient relationship to ritual and landscape? Theodore H. Gaster (Gaster, 1954: 113): “ the purpose of ritual is to present a situation formally and dramatically in its immediate punctual aspect - as an event or occurrence, something in which present and actual individuals are involved. That of myth on the other hand, is to present it in its ideal, transcendental aspect - as something transpiring (rather than occurring) concurrently in eternity and as involving preterpunctual, indesinent beings of whom living men and women are but the temporal incarnations”.

This clearly religious (note reference to ‘transcendental’) connotation to myth and its relationship to ritual could, if we follow Barthes lead, take us to some of the greatest abuses of ‘meaning’ to ‘form’ imaginable. It appears a sinister imprint, a contortion of the original personal sentiment into a mesmeric charm entirely for the benefit of the societal mythteller, whether a multi-national corporation or advertising agency. Is this the sum of myth? Are spin doctors our greatest storytellers - a literal enchantment? Eliade says: “Every sacred space implies a hierophany, an irruption of the sacred that results in detaching a territory from the the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different” (Eliade 1963 :26). So what do we hold sacred now? If our attention grows significantly more secular then is it possible the gods are adored in disguise? The impulse to worship could be channeled towards the temple of worldly success and prestige in the myriad of forms it offers itself. Within this remit, the ritual aspect could be presented in the weekly screening of a television programme that amplifies the values that society holds to be of use.

G. S. Kirk (Kirk 1986 :55) offers a caution of this kind of generalisation, even those of Doty’s, Barthes’s, or Honko’s:

Each of these universal theories (and none of them is presented as stipulative, or as valid for only one particular kind of myth) can be negated by citing many obvious instances of myth that do not accord with the assigned origin or function. Indeed the looseness of the word ‘myth’ itself, and its wide range of applications in common usage (even apart from the vulgar meanings such as “fabrication”, together with the failure of specialists to offer acceptable special definitions, suggest that it is a diverse phenomenon that is likely to have different motivations and applications even within a single society - let alone in different cultures and at different periods.

The urge to monotheism, to create ‘one’ mythic voice, contains an empirical undertow, claims Kirk. He emphasises its nebulous aspect; that to restrict its flow of association is to lose contact with mythic thought entirely. Kirk alerts us both to the attempt to create a didactic system that binds a myriad of complex beliefs together, and to the very real situation that the very word ‘myth’ has such a variety of associations. We place a web of denotation around it and witness it rip

free, rupturing our attempts to wrestle cohesion onto its form. How monotheism accommodates rupture is an interesting question - the word rupture indicates a break or fissure in the surface of appearances: "For religious man, space is not homogeneous; he experiences interruptions, breaks in it; some parts are qualitatively different from others...in the homogeneous and infinite expanse, in which no point of reference is possible and hence no orientation can be established, the hierophany reveals an absolute fixed point, a centre (Eliade 1963 :21). Eliade claims that we orientate ourselves through hierophany - a sacred rupture - rather than a consensual and unrealistic 'one' way of viewing reality. Myth could be said to be a collision of ruptures, all holding echos of one another whilst resisting easy generalisation. From this perspective, our rupture is our axis mundi, our place of orientation, our holy hills, our cathedral.

The power of a place speaking

The looseness of the word myth spills out from entirely societal dictates in the writing of Sean Kane (Kane 1994 :45-79). The previous implications of myth as primarily manipulation or control is turned on its head: "the terms for a definition of mythtelling involve a concept of ecological patterns which elude, or should elude, human manipulation, and are therefore coded as sacred ". He goes on to suggest that even seeing a human consciousness at the centre of the narrative is mistaken: "brought up as we are on human centred literature, events in myth often do not make much sense. We like to follow the destiny of the human protagonist. However, with myth it is a good idea to assume that the story is being told from the viewpoint of the supernatural. Some myths, like the events they recount, are given to humans by spiritual beings. In this respect, a myth is the power of a place speaking".

How does a place speak? How many polyphonic expressions pour over us daily from any number of environments - do they qualify as stories if only we had the ears to hear? Are myths literally issuing from rocks, lightning storms and snowflakes? Is it possible that what we call myth is an arc of imagination that rises from the awakened mind and at some invisible moment collides with the arrival of plant, mineral or star consciousness? What also is the sound issuing from concrete, fumes or electricity? Do they engender a kind of dark mythic arch, or does the vital, truly mythic synthesis require contact with an unmanipulated natural force?

Kane also isolates dreaming as a possible crossroads where this arch of relationship can create new myths: "Myths are cross sections through the interweavings of nature where various points intersect or are amplified. Storytelling interprets these mental energies of nature. And the normal place of these mentalities is dream". So is the storyteller to create an image - language from the velocity of their night eruptions, that, polished to lustre through generations of tellings, one day becomes a myth? There seems to be an implicit trust in the dream-image, that its arrival is magical, and remains so by the telling of the image rather than the explicating of a concept. "Hillman does not recommend bringing a dream up into the light and air of conscious light for interpretation, translation, and application. Rather, he suggests we

stay with the dream, letting it take us to places rarely glimpsed, except perhaps in complexes and compulsions.” (Moore 1989 :239). So we follow where the myth is leading rather than shaping its unwieldy frame for our daily, daylight ambitions.

Myth, folktale, legend

The grip of precision grows ever more acute when the question is asked: what is the difference between a myth, a folktale or a legend? In this instance I draw upon the work of anthropologist William Bascom (Bascom 1965 :5). I include Bascom’s definitions as they appear most commonly shared amongst mythologists, folklorists and anthropologists.

A myth, in its localised setting, is seen as factual, and from a remote past, its principle characters are non-human and the attitude towards the stories would be of a sacred narrative. A legend would also be fact, from the recent past, in our world, involving humans and could be seen as secular or sacred. Finally the folktale - a fiction, occurring in anytime and place, involving either human or non-humans and is secular in origin.

As we can see, the religiosity of the story grows from the folktale up to the efficacy of the myth. Within the confines of the main text I have broken ranks with Bascom’s categories by use of the word myth to sometimes describe what he may perceive as fairy tales, although not the kind of folktale he describes. Of course, there are arguments that certain fairy tales we enjoy today are but ancestral cousins of earlier myths, containing their implicit patterns within. A romantic would argue that it is those implicit patterns that imbue the story with a kind of eternal currency.

I use the word myth, whether in legend or fairytale, to describe an imaginal spaciousness located in certain images - i.e. a poet dancing on the tip of a spear, a princess thrown from the back of a great white bear, that produce both an intimate, emotional reaction and at the same time a wider range of relational awareness, Gastor’s sense of the ‘eternal’. These glimpses of what we are calling eternity, or outside daily time, seem to have little regard for categories.

Myth also seems less about the past and more concerned with an intense present that the storyteller invokes. It is less ‘once upon a time’ and more ‘once below a time’, or ‘a time before time’. The eternal is not time-bound, not ‘everlasting’. As Eric Dardel (Dardel 1954 :230) says: “the mythic is not the past”. A positive element in the work of Barthes, for example, is his ability to interpret myth not as whimsical, primitive fantasy, but as a very tangible current in the political and psychological conditions of modern life.

The thesis also questions the sentiment that indigenous peoples would all assume that their myths were factual. In fifteen years of meeting a number of ethnicities and sharing stories, I encountered a variety of response to the question of factual validity.

Gary Snyder concurs:

I suspect that primary peoples all know that their myths are somehow 'made up'. They do not take them literally and at the same time they hold the stories very dear. Only upon being invaded by history and whipsawed by alien values do a people begin to declare that their myths are 'literally true'.
(Snyder 1990 :112)

Even a casual reader of myth theory will recognise its many strands of discourse and its ambivalence to commonality. Joseph Campbell, despite, or possibly because of his popularity, is a controversial figure amongst mythologists. In his highly critical essay on Campbell, 'Joseph Campbell's Theory of Myth', Robert A. Segal (Segal 1978 :256) attacks Campbell's generalisations and attempt to unite seemingly disparate myths: "His amassing of myths from all over the world presupposes that the myth of meaning is universal...myths themselves fail to reveal that their meaning is universal but also that it is symbolic, psychological, and Jungian"

This thesis acknowledges the problematic nature of Campbell's claims, specifically the belief that his comparative approach eradicated other theories of myth and the near impossibility of validating what remains a theory. His emphasis on symbolism, psychology and Jung is, however, crucial to the nature of this thesis. The thesis does not support a unified myth theory in anything but the most general of terms, but will follow the emphasis that myth can be seen to contain symbolic; psychological and metaphorical elements, and without an amplification of those elements, lacks certain keys for a modern reader. However, myth is a beast in flux, and this theory of its implications may well cease to be of use in decades to come. The mistake is to present this as entirely defining of, or as the climax of, mythic investigation.

What then of myth as offering a conduit to more than the power dynamics of a localised, human community? The stories that I have chosen to explore in the session text are far more engaged with the leaving of community infrastructure, of a disintegration of cultural identity, the entering of what Victor Turner describes as 'liminality'. Referring to Turner is the beginning of a narrowing of the mythic field, that the stories contained are directly attached to initiatory practice, the area which Turner now addresses:

All rites-of-passage are marked by three stages: separation, margin (or limen), and aggregation. The first phase of separation comprises symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions (a 'state'); during the intervening liminal period, the state of the ritual subject (the 'passenger') is ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state; in the third stage the passage is consummated.
(Turner 1967 :5)

He goes onto say: "Liminality is the realm of primitive hypothesis, where there is a certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence...there is a promiscuous intermingling and juxtaposing of the categories of events, experience, and knowledge, with a pedagogic instruction."

What constitutes wilderness initiatory practice shall be discussed later in the thesis. What is vital to note is that certain myths mirror an identical process in their structure, that there is a direct relationship between this specific form of initiation and myth. Rather than myths entirely designed to keep order, they actually create a complete experience of disintegration of former structures, of openness to chaos, of appreciation that growth can involve a rending asunder. I offer seven examples of these kind of stories.

The Village and The Forest

I remain cautious of trying to define myth as a whole. As we have seen, it contains many permutations, but as an acknowledgement of that complexity the session text draws upon what it calls 'The Village' and 'The Forest'. Later in this chapter two writers will be examined as representatives of either strand. 'The Village' represents associations of order, structure, tradition, control, the pastoral. 'The Forest' is the experiential, chaotic, nebulous and prophetic - Turners 'liminal'. The session texts argue that wilderness rites-of-passage (as a specific form of initiatory practice) is attempting to form a crossroads position between the Village and the Forest. To be clear, this thesis does not set one in a hierarchical position to the other, or is attempting to diffuse this complexity into an either/or situation. Logic and imagination are not distant positions, rather pulsing dynamics within the crossroads motif. This is not an attempt to separate thought from feeling. It is clear from this opening review however, that many writers on myth appear to gravitate to one category or the other.

A crossroads is a point of intersection, a place of meetings and partings, a juncture where different worlds exchange different meanings. Reaching a crossroads implies a journey has been underway and the course of life has reached a significant point where choices must be made. It is a place of change and exchange, of lost and found, of discovery and revelation. It is a space for invention and for sacrifice.
(Meade 1996 :xxiii)

This thesis is a mythography of the crossroads.

Back and forth

It can be seen to discriminate among mythical objects according to substance would be entirely illusionary: since myth is a kind of speech, everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse. Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way it utters the message: there are formal limits to myth, there are no 'substantial' ones.
(Barthes 1957 :109)

Myth telling assumes that the stories already exist in nature, waiting to be heard by humans who will listen for them. Such stories have a semi-wild existence; they are just barely domesticated and so are free to enact the patterns of the natural world.
(Kane 1994 :35)

I refer in this section to two writers, who, in their own way, would likely disagree with the position of this thesis, and for very different reasons. Barthes and Kane, writers with profoundly different perspectives, are tugging at something porous and malleable in story, an element that indicates a kind of language or speech at its origination.

Kane also states:

History has been brutal to nature and therefore brutal to myth, which it has defined by the Latin equivalent of the Greek word Fabula, a persistent lie...the assumption of human power we loosely call anthropocentrism. As far as myth telling is concerned, the term implies a shift from the authority of plants and animals, each the spirit-children of supernatural progenitors, to the authority of man, considered to be god-like at the centre of the world he constructs for himself. Once this anthropocentrism settles in the outlook of a people who have learned to domesticate animals, the animals stop talking in myth.
(Kane 1994 :34)

So Kane's focus is pre-history: we don't have the image of Gods with the face of mankind (like classical myths), but narratives that arise from the earth itself. In his view there is receptivity to the animistic, and a resistance to housing mythic impulses into an entirely human supremacy.

It is less that Barthes and Kane are opposed to each other rather that they are drawing on differing elements of the word myth. In the session text I draw a comparison between what I referred to as the rhizomic and Olympian universes - indicative of the 'Forest' and the 'Village'.

We see that the rhizome is de-territorial, that it stands apart from the tree structure that fixes an order, based on radiancy and binary opposition. Trees are organised with universal principles of hierarchy and reproduction. We could say that the tree contains the classical, village, solar organised model from which we define most of our stage, language and society. The

anthropological fixation on world trees as immovable centres in which the Shaman/Coyote ascends or descends to objectified territories is actually a blurred picture. This tree, seen through the eyes of an initiate is actually a vast rhizome, pierced through with a million branches and roots; not stratified realms but alternating degrees of intensity experienced as plateaux, interconnected, riddled with gateways. So Coyote or Enkidu as strange heroes are not pulled into dogmatic gestures of the glittering prize.
(Shaw 2010 :58)

Extended exploration of the word rhizomic can be found in the work of Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze and Guattari 1984). It is also wise to heed Guattari when he also emphasises this contrary notion: “take note that rhizomes can branch out from the heart of generative trees.” (Genosko 1996 :19) To the subtle eye, one mode of being should not necessarily cancel out the other. Guattari’s comment is actually a kind of initiatory ideal: a glue that binds Village and Forest. I share an emphasis for Kane’s de-focused view of the human to be visible. When you draw on depth psychology (with its focus on the human) as a supporting resource this can obviously become problematic, but is not, I believe, impossible to resolve. What becomes of great value is the intelligence of shape shifting; a place where the aspirations of Forest and Village collide and cause all kind of interesting tensions. A root story in the session texts, “*The Birth of Taliesin*”, begins with an illustration of the movement between forms that originates from the Welsh Goddess Ceridwen’s cauldron. The expansion into a salmon or hen is actually a raised position; it ignores the imagined limits of a consensual biology. Part of Barthes’s contribution to writings on myth is a connection with what we might today call ‘spin’; the amplification of an image or idea for the manipulation of some form of political or financial gain. As we have noted, he bemoans the lack of the ‘true’ historic legacy of what that object originally was. We are back to Kane’s Fabula, and a fundamental sticking point in approaching myth.

Barthes’s perception leads us to the role of myth as distortion, an un-truth. This is anthropocentric as it places the cunning of human ambition at the centre of the myth-world; all is horizontal; the metaphorical implications don’t figure. Myth lives in human speech and can settle on any object, regardless of whether it is regarded as ‘sacred or profane’. He describes the deterioration into myth thus:

An abnormal regression from meaning to form, from the linguistic sign to the mythical signifier.
(Barthes 1957 :117)

It can be argued that a sign is something that has literal significance laced upon it; a symbol has a far wider web of connection. Within the realm of story, a sign usually denotes, a symbol connotes. When images from the unconscious or myth are seen only as signs then they are robbed of their transformative power; their use as psychic guides is redundant. It can only point towards a breakdown of the imagination when we interpret a symbol as a sign. We will address Jacques

Derrida, another philosopher who has written influentially on the nature of signs and signification (Derrida 1998), in chapter three.

I would suggest that mythic understanding is subterranean - it lives underneath. A woman who is really a seal, a dragon obese with conquest, a bridge that is a razored sword - it is unwise to suggest these doorways are thin falsehoods. They provide a poetical space for the imagination to flood into. Rather than frozen, they are vast, collapsing and refiguring with every consciousness that encounters them. Barthes's position arises when we are deprived of the real encounter, when the myth stiffens into religion, or certain ritual techniques are used to subvert the consciousness of large groups - this seems to me his real bone of contention. Barthes states: "What I claim is to live to the full contradiction of my time, which may well make sarcasm the condition of truth". (Barthes 1957 :12)

By committing to live in 'the full contradiction of my time', he makes an interesting assumption. Many storytellers suggest that two types of time exist. One, Barthes knows well - the 24 hours. The shave, the café, the deadline; but numinous time is outside the grumblings of the everyday. Myth can be numinous time, pin-pricking through the horizontal, honouring the currency of the shape shifter, generation after generation. Shape shifter in the sense of its willingness to crumble and reshape to the complex terrain of that generation or individual's consciousness. It doesn't negate the 24 hours but renegotiates its rhythm. It takes us to 'once upon a time'; the *illud tempus*, the timeless eternity.

Much revivalist mythology is really psychology, cutting across cultural differences with the mistaken assumption that there is a universal world of myth that is true to all peoples past and present because it is true to eternal powers in the human psyche. This mix of anthropology, literature and psychology - in combination with the huge information gap about actual myth telling raises a greater question than it can answer.
(Kane 1998 :14-15)

Kane quite rightly fears the attempted domesticating of mythic symbols through the lazy appropriation of the New Age movement or the arid deconstruction of an inept therapy.

In 1798 Friedrich Hölderlin wrote:

I'm sick of you hypocrites babbling about gods!
Rationality is what you have, you don't believe
In Helios, nor the sea being, nor the thunder being;
And the earth is a corpse so why thank her?
As for you gods, be calm! You are decorations in their poems
(Hölderlin 1980 :39)

With Kane, we read here a pronounced warning against generalisations. However, implicated in his writings is a sense that what he is seeking belongs to a specific moment in time - pre-history. He seems to be attempting to isolate an original mystical ember - a way of seeing - in denial of the steady flowing ebullience of mythic thought. Myth is not frozen and it certainly is not pure.

Would not a variant of psychology have existed in tribal societies, albeit with a different title? We need only to examine Native American medicine wheels (Foster 1998) to see supremely sophisticated forms of psychology existing within tribal communities for centuries.

I imagine depth psychology as a mediation of the metaphors of the Village and the Forest - it is a ground of exchange between the cosmological and the personal, the rational and the visionary. The term depth psychology places great emphasis (as previously noted) on the notion that contained within pathologies are certain configurations in the unconscious that psychologists name archetypes, that the ancients would have called Gods. So within each of us is the influence of these archetypes, to a greater or lesser degree. In the role of analyst you would hold the position of the priest - with assumptions of study, learning, reserve, and the prophet - openness to dreams, visions and epiphanies. So again we find a junction between associations of Village and Forest.

As a student and teacher of mythology, and as a rites-of-passage guide, I have witnessed psychology ground and stabilise the huge emotional openings that wilderness initiations can offer. This stabilisation is what brings this particular approach to myth off the page and into direct visceral relationship to the participant. It appears to work. It succeeds in the sense that it creates a tangible relationship between the psychological patterning of the initiate, the rite-of-passage they have experienced, and the old stories.

We interpret for the same reason as that for which fairy tales and myths were told; because it has a vivifying effect and gives a satisfactory reaction and brings one into peace with one's unconscious instinctive substratum, just as the telling of fairy tales always did...the best we can do is to circumscribe it on the basis of our own psychological experience and from comparative studies, bringing up into light, as it were, the whole net of associations in which the archetypal figures are enmeshed.
(Von Franz 1970 :1-4)

Von Franz is claiming that myth gives a sense of context for our lives, and therefore 'peace' with the impulses of our subconscious, whilst also intimating that each generation brings as much intelligence and cross-cultural information to it as they are capable of at that moment in time.

In the ever decomposing and re-assembling world of myth, the relationship to psychology is neither an aberration nor a completion, merely a stage. It is hugely useful and widely open to abuse. It has transformed millions of people's

relationship to story by its use of personal symbolism. Of course, a danger is the complete personalising of the myth, of interiorising it so completely that one has it in a stranglehold.

In the future, the societal climate may require something completely different. This is no great shame - mythic perception will reconfigure. What is problematic is not that myth is 'true to eternal powers in the human psyche', but the idea that the concerns of myth are universally static: this is historically inaccurate and is a denial of myth's essential porosity.

The shadow of the 'pan-global' perception of myth is a very real cultural shrinking, a moment when all indigenous inflections get flattened into an imagined overview that is hugely over simplified. Whilst anthropology and psychology hold some of the responsibility for that, they are also learned and valued tributaries of myth, crucial for a contemporary appraisal.

Anthologies of cultures - The Golden Bough in whatever literary or performative redaction - strike me as either premature or polly-annish efforts at one-worldliness or worse, expressions of Western hegemony: attempts by Western minds to synthesise - that is to bring under Western dominance - all of the world's cultures.
(Schechner 1986 :16)

Chapter Two

Selecting the stories

My primary relationship with the stories is the practice of performing them as an oral narrative and with this a certain promiscuity is accepted. Promiscuity in the sense that it's telling has been shaped by many performances – unscripted - that have preserved the skeleton of the myth, whilst being linguistically influenced by the mood of audience and character of the evening. This sets it apart from a line by line literary translation and exegesis of a Grimm's tale, for example.

I had several parameters for choosing the stories:

1. That the stories were initiatory in tone, that they followed the form of the severance/threshold/return motif. Despite the initiatory theme, each story retains a distinct, individual quality. To provide a continuum of narrative, the three most comprehensive narratives had a man, woman and adolescent as the central characters. This was crucial for the weaving of my personal narrative concerning the practice of wilderness rites-of-passage and its relationship to the stories. Much of this next section will make explicit that relationship.
2. A specific focus on 'shape leaping' stories. We find this in The Birth of Taliesin, Ivan the Bear's Son (his dismemberment and reconfiguration), Valemon and the Wild Third Daughter, The Deer Woman and the Velvet Antlered Moon, and The Birth of Ossian. In the remaining two, we encounter speaking animals and much bartering and dependency on both animals and wilderness. The relationship between metaphor and shape - shifting will be discussed later in this chapter.
3. The final emphasis is on relationship to the earth itself. Many of the characters have time in solitude, experience wilderness and vulnerability, are far from any fixed societal identity. A familiar mythic motif would be the befriending of an animal in some moment of wandering or distress. The animal is indicative of a fracturing of armoured rationality, a resolute break from the rules and constraints of the previous identity. Contained within these three headings are issues of ageing, leadership, cunning, betrayal, power, longing and sacrifice.

4 Key Themes

The triadic crisis in wilderness rites-of-passage

What is the vision quest? On a mythical level, the vision quest is a story about a hero or heroine (in other words, you) who leaves everything behind, including the childhood home, and goes off alone to seek vision, insight or meaning. Alone, fasting in a state of expanded awareness, the hero/ine endures through a long, dark night, facing the monsters of childhood. At the darkest time of the night, supernatural powers confer a gift, or a boon, on the seeker. This gift is of great use to the hero/ine and to the people. The hero/ine returns to the community and performs the vision so the people can see. (Foster and Little 1987 :87 - 88)

As stated, I have long been involved in the rite-of-passage known as 'Vision Quests' - a five-year apprenticeship and then twelve years leading them. At the heart of the experience has always been Severance/Threshold/Return; it is one of the first elements elucidated when preparing to fast. As we have read, the traditional dynamic would appear to be a dramatic rupturing from the domestic, a period of receptive, dreamlike and challenging vulnerability, and a warm and compassionate reintegration to the wider whole on your return, acknowledging your growth into a new stage.

It must be stated early on that the wilderness rite-of-passage is not a 'cure' for wayward adolescents or a new-age fixative for a simpler life. The words 'cure' and 'healing' have an inflammatory centre, and should not be readily used as regards to this experience. On the contrary it tends to make life more complex, as the world you return to often seems far less sane than when you headed for the mountain. The difference is a relishing of that complexity. Certain complications inflame a latent imagination – the *Gloria duplex* of the Renaissance. Assisting this is an awareness of the inner – assemblage of personal, psychoactive, mythic figures, and also an appreciation of myth's appearance in contemporary culture. What it offers is an unremitting experience of both the beauty and potential fierceness of the natural world. In the cradle of this ordeal (which it can be), is also a lucid mirror of our own condition – it all its conflicted, disparate glory.

No recurrent event in human culture gives clearer evidence of the archetypal structure of the human psyche than the initiation rituals or ceremonies that accompany the transition from one social stage to another. In 1909, Arnold van Gennep first identified the common structure that underlies virtually all such "rites of passage". Since then, his schema has influenced every cross-cultural study of the initiation process. (Mahdi 1987 :3)

I would argue this ancient process is in a major transition. In this next section I will map out this "common structure" whilst illustrating how they can appear in a contemporary setting.

SEVERANCE

Trouble is always part of this arrival. An event has occurred that has pulled us from the trance of comfort, whether crisis or opportunity, and sets us out from the village gates. The greater our investment in security and status, the more savage the underworld dogs can appear, the more baleful the moon.
(Shaw 2010 :14)

In Western culture we are actually experiencing an addiction to a form of Severance. We sever from relationships, jobs, friendships, towns, ideas about our community identity. Many elements of our lives that were once viewed communally as offering a reassuring permanence now carry the societal possibility of stagnation. The once heavily ritualised act now seems an oddly contemporary form of dislocation, almost familiar, accepted.

When an experience lacks sacred reference, is 'liminoid' rather than 'liminal' (Turner 1967), it becomes superficially easier to pass through because the society at large requires less of you, no deep understanding is necessarily required, just an impetus to reach a more settled environment as swiftly as is possible. 'Liminal' means to open up to its religious implications, its ritual flavour, its call to investigation; 'liminoid' means to have the same crisis but only perceive the betrayal, illness, bad luck. When initiatory experience is not central to the intelligence of that community, its implications stay unconscious, and slowly distort into that society's (often unconscious) initiatory mimic - street gangs, hoodies, drug abuse. I use the word mimic because fundamental characteristics are crucially missing: 1. Elders to ensure that whatever challenge the individual undergoes it is unlikely they will die in the process. 2. That at a certain point the individual is brought back from the liminal to function in the wider (i.e. not just sibling or gang) community. 3. Initiation is also designed to create a sense or encounter of the sacred (see Eliade in chapter one), not a leading concern in much gang initiation. Gang culture can create the Severance and Threshold stages but is ill-equipped for the Return; it wishes to stay in the liminal, marginal state – hence again my description of it as a mimic. Initiation, in its first aspect of Severance, used to require a profound stilling, a taking stock. If that taking stock is no longer societally or personally present, then we become well versed in severing without engaging in the emotional terrain the experience creates. As individuals we become less engaged, less able to commit. As the session text says:

We touch with gloved hands, passions become hobbies, we have an eye always fixed on the door. If feeling does come it comes with the desire for possession, and then we wonder why another relationship crumbles in our hands. (Shaw 2010 :106)

Initially, whether an at-risk youth or CEO, this stage has often created less distress than anticipated. Whilst loss of status still appears to disarm, the process of walking away from the established has often appeared less dramatic than one might

assume. In everyday society, the genuine grief attached to severance can be deflected; new relationship, application for a job or raise, keeping our eyes firmly fixed on a new horizon, a kind of hysterical optimism. It can be difficult to recognise the opportunity in entering grief, what Robert Bly calls 'the descent'. Bly's work on initiation can be problematic – specifically due to his generalisations on a very varied process, but his work on the descent in modernity appears accurate in the context of Western participants in the wilderness fast.

The descender makes an exit – from ordinary and respectable life – through the wound. The wound now is thought of as a door.
(Bly 1990 :72)

To attend to a wound requires a focus and a slowing down. To not immediately try and hobble to the next 'opportunity'. Loss can give us time to attend what many call the soul, or inner world. We could connect an addiction to severance to Attention Deficit Disorder. I remember speaking to a young man preparing to fast who had just had the diagnosis and he said: "When I was a kid I had a deficit of attention and now I have a disorder!" He found the long, unbroken concentration required in the preparation to fast almost impossible, his fractured nature continually desiring to change subject, location or physical posture. In a later chapter I will briefly draw attention to this condition and the Persian Ghazal poetry structure – changing subject with each stanza – as a simple contribution to re – visioning the condition. Like the word "symptom", I would view "disorder" as a doorway into a temple. Dis - order. In this instance the deity must be the trickster. Put simply, the trickster in myth is a boundary crosser. So wherever boundaries are erected – between Village and Forest - tricksters nature is to cross them. Whether as Loki, Raven, Brer Rabbit, Coyote, Eshu or Reynard the Fox, trickster brings a disruption of the status quo, a contrary and sometimes humorous multiplicity of perspectives. As the writer on trickster William Bright (Bright 1993 xi) reminds us, trickster was part of the "first peoples" – the deities that created the world and humans, and is integral to the very fabric of culture, not just a 'simple' thief or animal. It is trickster wisdom that reveals the sacrality in the seemingly disturbed, abandoned or broken.

As children grow ever smarter in IQ, their emotional intelligence is on the decline. Perhaps the most disturbing single piece of data comes from a massive survey of parents and teachers that show the present generation of children to be more emotionally troubled than the last. On average, children are growing more lonely and depressed, more angry and unruly, more nervous and prone to worry, more impulsive and aggressive.

In the previous quote from Daniel Goleman (Goleman 1998 :11) we encounter a mirror of dislocation, "more lonely and depressed...more nervous and prone to worry". The psychologist Marie-Louise von Franz, speaking on myth and emotion says: "If emotion becomes too great, one becomes cold, and if it goes a few degrees further still, one is petrified." (Von Franz 1974 :250) It is emotional petrification that creates the capacity for the addiction to Severance.

The implication is that this then annuls any capacity to be fully engaged with community. With this dis-engagement we sense the first tremor in the initiatory stages - what is there to return to?

However, when you experience Severance in the context of a rite-of-passage, the individual is encouraged to dwell in the deeper implications of the act, to move from Von Franz's being 'petrified'. Even in the days before the wilderness fast, an initiate would sit fully in the emotional impact of having left the familiar - to have actually 'died' to a former stage. The common thread between participants is actually a tangible grief, a grief that is often curtailed or suppressed in their everyday life. At this stage there is often a desire to make 'right' some element of their life that had been ignored. Often letters are written (even on the side of a mountain), and sent to an ex-lover or employer, teacher, friend or enemy. So a rite-of-passage such as a Vision Quest involves a 'dropping down' into the emotional terrain connected to Severance.

The dazzling speed in which information is now presented to us engenders this sense of rapid movement. The days of watching a musical band develop over several albums or decades are generally over; we are deluged by wave after wave of new contenders eager to grab our attention. Progress can seem more important than loyalty. This has advantages as well of course; freshness, movement, a sense of activity, but what is becoming lost in the process?

Culturally our experience of Severance is radically different to how it would have appeared three hundred years ago. You will not be ostracised till death; it is now often financially possible to dwell in a very contemporary form of isolation. This is not a Luddite cry for a return to a previous generation's values, but awareness of the darker side of the search for individuation. When there seems to be so little to hold on to, when religion has collapsed or frozen into fundamentalism, when previous generations are viewed with suspicion, when our main point of reference is our peer group, then there seems to be little incentive to stay with anything for long. So fundamentally, the shock of Severance is gone (at least in a mimic form) - for many it has become habitual.

This process lifts us from the greenhorn, the unseasoned, into a character of weight and resonance...Severance: an event that causes you to expel, or be expelled from your daily routine. The normal frames of reference are no longer paramount in your mind - earning a living, tending your relationships, applying yourself to the life of the community. You are projected out.

(Shaw 2010 :14)

THRESHOLD

One departs the home to embark on a quest into an archetypal wilderness that is dangerous, threatening, and full of beasts and hostile aliens...loneliness is your bread...it grants freedom, expansion, and release. Untied. Unstuck. Crazy for a while. It breaks taboo, it verges on transgression, it teaches humility. Going out – fasting – praying - singing alone - talking across species boundaries – praying - giving thanks - coming back.
(Snyder 1990 :191-192).

Practical experience of this process has shown that it is still possible to have a profound opening in nature; relationship to tribe or so-called primitive societies is not essential for this part of the process. Any individual, deprived of certain staples and placed into a ritually held disorientation, can open up to the time-honoured fruits of the experience. With Vision Quests, the focus is not on ostentation or complex ceremony, but rather the three stages; its ritual markings are highly defined but visually simple.

The fear or loneliness that you might feel at this point is a significant adult emotion...traditional peoples always performed a simple celebration or ceremony at this point. You may feel weak, dizzy, and experience nausea or vertigo.
(Foster and Little :98-99)

Within a Vision Quest, what the Threshold period entails is a four day fast completely alone in a wild place. You have a tarp, sleeping bag and plenty of water. You have no watch, books, friends, phone or distractions. You have cut many strands that give you a sense of structure in your life, that give you the ability to manage time. Now a day stretches ahead, in all its epic nature.

At some point in this period of liminality, perceptions of community are radically expanded; personal mirrors are held in the natural world as well as the family and marketplace. The experience of separation from the earth diminishes, and suddenly it has information for you, you are related. This relational experience comes with a price: rather than a ceremony as a form of aggrandisement, the threshold offers a pulling away from social status or prestige; the hunger, nightmares and uncertainty that can mark the threshold period whittle away much of what the previous decades of your life have been trying to implicate.

They have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing, rank, kinship position...their condition is the very prototype of sacred poverty...in the words of King Lear they represent "naked, unaccommodated man"
(Turner :8-9)

This stripping away encourages the solitary within; that the loosened mind can prowl past the previously established criteria of the Village and its values, and into the panoramic epiphanies of the Forest. For the mythologist Daniel Deardorff, this is actually a return rather than departure.

Anyone who has perused a handful of the world's creation myths could know that the "constant", the primordial condition, is not structure, it is, rather, undifferentiated chaos, the abysmal waters. Creation, life, consciousness, intelligence, all begin in liminality.
(Deardorff 2004 :44-45)

Again we return to the image of rupture, a husk breaking, so the Village/Forest relationship can provoke deep transformation in the participant. However, it is a relationship, a strange tension, and after a finite amount of time the initiate must gather themselves to return to society. To some, this descent is incongruous, in fact a form of deviancy. Outside the form of rites-of-passage, Deardorff makes associations of "contentiousness, civil-disobedience, defiance, resistance, and revolt move us from the Confucian program of civility to the Taoist path of the wild man Lao Tzu...the deep politics of the "edgepeople" who mediate wildness, chaos, and sacrality back into the structure" (Deardorff 2004 :29). Many of the original creators of rites-of-passage may have concurred that such resistance to the wants of the mainstream was inevitable, and so by placing liminality at the centre of a societally blessed ritual it integrates some of the wildness, rather than it erupting in the form of civil disobedience.

Deviance is a fact of life. In any human community exist those who simply will not conform to prevailing standards...the way in which a society uses its authority to deal with dissenters offers an intimate glimpse into its inner workings - its values, assumptions, and spirit.
(Francis 1995 :xiii)

To many, simply abiding in a wild place without constructing fire or sleeping within the soothing confines of a plastic tent can be seen as an act of deviance. The participant sleeps under a sloping sheet of tarpaulin, hung from two trees. The night appears to creep up to the very nose of the individual in such a setting; the sound of a moving fox or the leap of a squirrel hugely amplified. It is interesting to note that the process has never become generic, the response to the experience and the challenges encountered remain as varied as the individuals themselves.

What wilderness mirrors back at you can be gentle, rough, or downright terrifying, but it informs the body before the intellect has a chance to frame it...each initiate receives a different set of experiences, trails, signals, epiphanies that are bespoke to them. The vision is flowing, not static.
(Shaw 2010 :83)

One of the few unifying factors in the experience is a growing awareness that the wild seems to have some kind of rough organising quality to it; that the forest and mountain - and the plant, animal and mineral life on it – find some way of surviving, battling for primacy maybe, but appearing less chaotic in design than may seem at first. Without the firm hand of a human, over time the area takes on a shape and atmosphere all of its own; it dictates its own terms. The hemlock, willow and blackthorn bush are all involved in some epic dance with each other, involving territory and compromise. The specific animals, trees and minerals of that place have been challenging boundaries with each other for thousands of years, without a human voice in the debating chamber.

The order of the garden may be easier to see, but it is fragile and superficial. It is artificial and unnatural in a very convincing way: it cannot take care of itself. The order of the wild is self-sustaining, flexible and deep. (Bringham 2008 :275)

For some, this creates a fresh perspective on tangled and fierce moments in their own evolution; our garden years (tranquility, steady, constant) may be more fragile than the strange, quick moments when the wild (abrupt change of circumstance, uncertainty, drama) steps in, and with it an aspect of our own psyche that rises to negotiate its rapid currents. Without those moments, we are unlikely to encounter our own capacity for wild stabilisation. That stabilisation may appear to be a frantic juggling act to those still doing garden work, but encountering the wild brings otherness with it - the terms are stranger, the stakes higher. Irish myth has the image of Finn MacColl's warriors dancing on the tips of spears to illustrate such a nimble endeavour.

RETURN

Hostility and indifference. That most crucial of stages - the need for blessing and witnessing. In a related move to the addiction to Severance, the return 'home' can be more hazardous and fraught with peril than the movement into wilderness. There is rarely a long-term container of support for the returning initiate. By definition, they have gone where the community held back, therefore they return carrying an 'otherness'. When the ceremony is taken out of the context of a wider cycle of community, what happens? The potency remains but the whole process shifts emphasis. The fragility of vision is in a process of stages - it needs protection and nurture. No matter the epiphany on the mountain, without profound support it can prove almost impossible to integrate. This is when the lack of community or tribal perception becomes acute.

So another reversal. No dancing elders but a society often indifferent or actively hostile to your experience. In initiation, the Return is not an afterthought, a full stop tacked on the end of the adventure, it is crucial. The modern

initiate represents a process at odds with mass-civilisation. In the 21st century, I believe the greatest stage of disorientation is not the Threshold but the Return.

Even as we culturally forget the form and boundaries of these initiatory roads, our cities and youth, bereft of depth and sustenance, fall into even darker waters...without elders to help decipher the trail through, the dark passage becomes an ending in itself rather than a process.
(Shaw 2010 :26)

The ingredients of this crisis are our contemporary resolve to sever, our distance from grief and a wilful resistance to liminality and its associations of suffering, chaos, hallucination and wildness. Initiation is a process dependent on grief, that engenders emotional literacy and focuses on a descent, a pulling away, a going down. When we refuse this descent, we run the risk of becoming emotionally 'petrified'. Societal anaesthetics of wealth and comfort could be described as creating a resistance to the process, and so the shining and uncertain face of the returning initiate carries a legacy of an experience society at large is not keen to follow. As previously commented, the legacy of not following that experience is writ large in the faux-initiations of gang culture. So the propensity for a kind of profane Severance ensures that there is no informed community for the initiate to return to – the ceremony is operating out of a shattered circle.

When you descend without context or boundaries, you can find a burning ground rather than a Maiden of the Flowers.
(Referring to a bride of the Underworld found in the story 'Ivan the Bear's Son')
(Shaw 2010 :27)

After both participating in, and witnessing this process in others, I have re-focused my perception of it. The attention, if wilderness rites-of-passage are to continue, surely has to be on the establishing of a coherent community to return to and blossom in, even if they do not live in our immediate geography. The genius of story is that it refers to an inner - community. Study of myth on the Return is a practice that assists in a kind of internal literacy. The intelligence of the image is placed within the range of emotions a returning participant encounters, and a growing language emerges to articulate these often warring factions within the psyche. Study of myth reveals that these inner impulses are not easily 'managed', (even Arthur struggles to hold the Round Table together), but contribute towards a sense of relational awareness in our conscious life, of Plato's 'fittingness' (Plato 1997). So the Return is a dedication to an 'inside' as well as 'outside' community. The attention to the Return is an admission that the purely visionary is not enough, it requires the meeting with other characteristics of the psyche (all the attributes of the Village we have discussed – and yes, its attendant mythic figures) if it is to be truly useful to a wider group.

It is also part of keeping the notion of community partially imaginal, to not continually be presented as an earnest pursuit of like minded individuals to live within murderous proximity. This then opens the possibility that part of an

individual's community can be long dead poets, oak trees, the music of Charles Mingus. It is wide in scope. Part of the problem in the Return is being adrift in a sea of the literal. However, we are following a literal process, but a process that indicates an amplification of metaphor to integrate this third stage. My concern is not whether we can 'create' an experience that feels authentic enough to facilitate transformational leaps, it is the acknowledgement that the process continues and changes shape on the return. This is not 'after-care', we are still fully in the experience - what the participant requires is support and tools. Tools? The ability to incubate and then create some expression that elucidates the intensity of the process that the initiate is involved with.

The truth is that the journey continues on the return, there are more false giants, any number of sleeping potions, alleys full of starving dogs. But to remain forever on the margins is a refusal to the call to vocation, to develop the armour and facility to combat the lethargy we detect. The old adage that we seek initiation for the good of the community is a hard pill if we've felt rejected by it all our lives.
(Shaw 2010 :81)

Within the session texts, the three largest (*Ivan the Bear's Son*, *The Serpent and the Bear*, *Valemon and the Wild Third Daughter*) all contained very different reasons for starting on the initiatory journey. For Ivan, he is expelled from the community for his aggression; for Anga, he leaves out of compassion to seek a cure for his ailing mother, and the Wild Third Daughter leaves out of desire for a golden wreath.

For Ivan the journey contains many allies - giant brothers, small birds, a maiden who helps him outwit Baba Yaga, the great witch of the North Woods. Anga takes a more solitary, less mentored route; he has to contact certain inner resources to survive the experience. The Wild Third Daughter, although left abandoned in a great forest, eventually meets three crones who give her three gifts (symbolic of a growing maturity and wisdom). Whilst the Severance and Threshold experiences differ, all return to a celebration or wedding, their journey is both celebrated and integrated, as indicative of both a healthy psyche and community.

Longing

In the later sections of the session texts, once the main themes and relationships between rites-of-passage and myth are established, the theme of longing through stories from Siberia, Ireland and Romania is explored. The focus on longing was specific to the suggestion that the structure of contemporary rites-of-passage is in a state of crisis. The process of Severance in secular society often originates in a sense of disappointment – hence the desire to sever. As we have seen, within ritual initiatory practises that very sense of the untenable is seen as the instigating moment that opens up a rite-of-passage. However, as stated, for the process to function efficiently, a period of contemplation is required. If we were to stay in the discomfort of the original position we may see that, rather than attempting to devour a new experience, or flee

the pain, we are in a state of longing for something just out of reach. To be only partially conscious of longing creates undue pressures on the physical world - a world more focused on wants and desire than the more intangible domain of longing.

By exploring the motif of longing in these three stories - stories with very different motivations for longing - the text was illustrating that longing, even longing for something you will never physically possess, opens life to a spiritual sensibility, rather than a movement into disappointment. The initial crisis can be identical, but how we choose to interpret it is the deciding move into either the liminal or the liminoid. With longing provoked, we have the beginning of a return to the triadic initiatory process in a model that can function today. For some, longing is encountered on a Vision Quest, as we find in the story of "*The Deer Woman and the Velvet Antlered Moon*" in chapter seven:

Solitude opens the door of longing – longing is invisible – which connects to the Otherworld, which calls down the Lord of the Moon...when we live in a society determined to sate longing instantly, a door to the myth - world closes. Some incubation is lost, our messages are never carried to the tundra and the moon because the village instantly supplies the gift.
(Shaw 2010 :96)

The next story is the Irish tale "*The Birth of Ossian*". In it, a young chief, Finn MacColl, wanders Ireland for seven years searching for a wife that he knows he will most likely never see again:

The story tells us that as long as we deny the sorrow road, neglect the chamber of crow feathers, we refuse the God contained in the experience speaking back to us...the currency of longing is replaced for the malignancy of disappointment. Longing pushes the imagination out – towards deeper inflections of insight, peculiar creative leaps – disappointment is a diminishment, a closing, a reduction. We deny the incubation by refusing to grieve, and anticipating this we never fully invest anyway.
(Shaw 2010 :106)

The final story was the Romanian folktale, "*The Red King and the Witch*". The central character, Peter, is a man on the run from both death and old age. It is only after a hundred years, and an experience of longing kept at bay, does he return to face his legacy and family:

To stop running is to enter the field of longing, to be fragile, to incarnate fully. Our longing is like Blake's "golden string", a barometer, a psychic timepiece that connects us to feeling, memory and landscape...to step beyond The Red King and The Witch is the moment when want becomes longing - the want of immortality opens into our longing for relationship and intimacy.
(Shaw 2010 :115)

The session text's attention to longing is placing emphasis on time and waiting. I am suggesting that a move from the addiction to Severance is a renewed commitment to staying loyal to difficult sensations; to not sate too quickly, to have a deeper sense of what is truly of value in your work. The session text states that longing carries us both towards the initiatory mountain and sustains us on the return. Its very intangibility is a kind of preservative. A preservative in the sense that it stays, slightly from our view, it quickens our arts, sharpens our eye, but stays just beyond our grasp. The many images of pursuit of a white deer in myth are illustration of this very engagement - the 'questing beast' of the forests of Camelot. In the Arthurian stories, Camelot, an image of order, society and chivalry, always has an eye for what lies beyond its grasp - that could be the '*Lady of the Fountain*', or a hundred different quests. There is an understanding that we need to range out past familial borders. Of course, the deepest understanding is that the '*Lady of the Fountain*' - the source of bountiful renewal lives inside us - but that complex inner journey is mapped out through the outer tapestry of the stories

Just like the Knights of the Round Table there is a need for armour - a kind of protective toughness that marks out a space for longing that preserves time for its subtle inner connections, even for an hour a day. In Persia, this would be "time in the lovers' garden". (Barks 2010 :100)

Rationality and Intuition

The polarisation between fully rational thought (which is usually held to begin, in the Western tradition, at some point after Thales) and non-rational or "mythopoeic" thought is logically indefensible and historically absurd. (Kirk 1984 :58-59)

Having now established the session text's position concerning rites-of-passage, I now wish to consider the image of initiation as a crossroads between the Village and Forest. The story of "*The Birth of Taliesin*" in the introductory session is an example of the mythic desire to reach beyond oppositional thinking. Ceridwen's cauldron contains the very crossroads that initiation seeks to illumine; when the potion is spilt the binding is undone, and poisons all who consume it. In the session text, I used this story as an early example of the Druidic ideal and how it perfectly mirrored initiatory process worldwide. I then imagined the two ingredients (what Lady Charlotte Guest's translation calls "Science and Inspiration") becoming oppositional forces down the centuries rather than complementary energies. As Kirks quote illustrates, this is an absurd position and against the mythic spirit, but frequently this very polarisation seems superficially encouraged.

In societies where, with the advent of Logos, nature has come out of her darkness, the myth has been driven back into the shadows...but even so it has not disappeared. It subsists, it subsists in the depths and continues to enliven many of the forms of our culture...it inspires poets, novelist, and orator. The mythic does not exclude the rational, it does not precede it in time, it does not entirely disappear before its advance. It co-exists and is complementary to it. (Dardel.1954 :241-242)

The Village represents the 'Science' aspect to the potion, the Forest the 'Inspiration'. The session text resists giving one credence over the other, and talks of the Druidic apprenticeships that involve both aspects of the psyche: "We think of extended periods in the forest of Caledon or by the hard coasts of Anglesey, but also the reciting of tribal histories, feeding a community through a fierce winter with cycles of old stories" (Shaw 2010). The university, though carrying a strong psychic history of 'approved knowledge', should not be the enemy of the visionary – at its best it is a meeting ground between inspiration and rigour. As soon as this becomes oppositional, the initiatory ground is lost. The initiatory crossroads, this cauldron, this extraordinary cradle, is Novalis's "seat of the soul" (Hardenberg 1798) – the place where inner and outer worlds meet. The muscle of scholarship meets the reflexivity of internal epiphany. At points in Western culture this discourse appears to have become strained:

That crucial statement from Descartes, "I think therefore I am" is a breath from the science dragon. In its era, the seventeenth century, it represents a cutting from this earlier relationship to the natural world. That world lacks reason; it is the job of man to tutor the native and domesticate the wild. Nature requires handling, enlightening, not dialogue. (Shaw 2010 :10)

The four points I examined from the story were:

- 1.The need for boundaries (three drops, no more)
- 2.The original complementary mix of instinct and intellect.
- 3.The need for gestation through the interior of these ingredients (the role of Morda, the blind man who stirred the cauldron.)
- 4.The fluidity of forms that arose.

All four elements - boundaries, crossroads, patience and shape shifting, surface repeatedly in the session texts stories.

As mentioned, one section of the session text compares the rhizomic and the Olympian states - another variant of Forest and Village motifs. Rhizomic and Olympian structures appear to differ, one with a fixed hierarchy, one not; on one side the intense mental creations of the magician (the Village), on the other the ecstatic rupture of the shaman (the Forest). One could associate the magician with boundaries, structure and inherited texts, and the shaman as receiving undiluted, wild contact with undomesticated, primeval forces.

In this section I address the mythic form of trickster in the form of Coyote or Loki, to walk between these arenas, and give several examples of how that has manifested in story, i.e. the incubation in Zeus's thigh of Dionysus as an unborn child. I also draw again on the image of the crossroads; this time through Ramon Lull's work on chivalry and the notion that Apollo would give his temple at Thebes over to Dionysus for three months of every year. In this case the temple became the crossroads. I suggest that we are not Gods, but can we be a temple for these divine influxes to occasionally inhabit? A lack of the Dionysian (in his aspects of spontaneity, wildness, curiosity) I describe thus:

We can link fear of vital expression to a fear of nature (the Forest), both of our own untapped depths and the earth itself. We know in both places landslides, tornados and rain are possible, so we draw up a tense drawbridge, refusing to go 'in' to feeling and the expression of those emotions, or 'out' into the wild and uncertain terrain of nature.
(Shaw 2010 :53)

The session text contains a short re-examination of the idea of the Hero - an image that I propose has become confused with the idea of the 'Champion'. I perceive the Hero as a far more radical energy, the Defender simply as a preserver of the status quo. The role of a hero is one fully engaged with the initiatory journey, not just a sentry of tradition. The triadic phases we have discussed were made famous in Joseph Campbell's work as 'The Heroes Journey' (Campbell 1948). I refer to the hero in the session text:

We could say that Enkidu (the wild man figure in the Epic of Gilgamesh) rose to challenges but was not hypnotised by collective causes. He continually refers back to a psychic independence and intimacy with the divine that cannot be bought. Carrying the elemental energies of the woods with them, Enkidu's relatives emerge through the centuries: Herne the Hunter, Robin Hood, John Barleycorn. So something of the hero's independence relies on connection to wildness, to fresh, strange ideas and keeping an eye upwards towards god. The champion is the one who rolls out endlessly to battle, not the hero.
(Shaw 2010 :56)

Wildness in language: tone

The Hopi word for wild, tumpqa, means hard to approach, hard to get hold of.
(Bringhurst 2008 :269)

In the introduction to this text I described a cross-disciplined approach to the research into initiation myths and their relationship to rites-of-passage. It became clear that the session text's ebullient, metaphorical, many-voiced tone should be regarded as a large component of the thesis's art practice rather than an analytical text.

The session texts have a great emphasis on metaphor as a crucial key to drawing a sense of personal correspondence to the mythic narrative. Metaphor proves a linguistic turn of the head, also a form of imagistic relief when surrounded by theory. In the terminology of the session texts it could be described as 'Forest language' - unwieldy, tangled, but offering the resonance of an image as well as an idea to the reader.

Paul Ricoeur (Ricoeur 1975 :13) claims that metaphor has a unique structure but two functions - it exists either in the realm of rhetoric, as an aide to persuasion; or tragedy, to establish a poetic sentiment. The poetic is not attempting to offer proof but representation, whilst metaphor in service to rhetoric becomes caught up in the configuration of rhetoric-proof-persuasion. When metaphor dwells in poetry the triad is poesis-mimesis-catharsis.

Within the session texts it appears that the function of metaphor oscillates between the two - rhetoric as the voice of the Village, poetry as the voice of the Forest. To place undue emphasis on either creates an unrealistic perception of the whole. Of course an element of persuasion exists - if only to suggest that poetry can hold deeper reflections than just the literal. In that light, the two streams Ricoeur offers are mutually supportive of one another.

"Metaphor is the rhetorical process by which discourse unleashes the power that certain fictions have to redescribe reality. By linking fiction and redescription in this way, we restore the full depth of meaning to Aristotle's discovery in the Poetics, which was that the poesis of language arises out of the connection between muthos and mimesis." (Ricoeur 1975 :5-6) To redescribe something is to change its shape - in the language of the thesis, metaphor provides a form of shape shifting.

Ricoeur: "Metaphor is defined in terms of movement. The epiphora of a word is described as a sort of displacement, a movement 'from...to'..." . This movement is fundamental to every story explored in the session texts, whether Russian, Siberian, Irish, Norwegian, Welsh or Romanian Gypsy. Metaphor's encouragement to reconfigure made it vital for any prose description of either the process of rites-of-passage or mythic thought.

A symbol is a metaphor which does not have a restrictive first term and which consequently has an indefinite number of meanings. (Yeats W.B. 1962 :4)

With the emphasis on the word 'wild', it felt appropriate to allow a level of animation and poetry into the session texts language. Gary Snyder (Snyder 1990 :107) notes landscape as offering a form of mirror:

While the Buddhist tradition of North India and Tibet made the mandala-painted or drawn charts of the positions of consciousness and cause-and-effect chains their visual teaching aids, the Chan tradition of China (especially the southern song) did something similar (I will venture to suggest) with a landscape painting. If a scroll is taken as a kind of Chinese mandala, then all the characters in it are our various little selves, and the cliffs, trees, waterfalls, and clouds are our own stations and changes.

The landscape/language I sought to create in the session texts would have similar variety; thunderous metaphors, clear streams of analysis, small ponds of emergent ideas, stony trails of personal narrative. Within this landscape, my hope was that the story would feel free to roam, that it could be glimpsed in many dimensions. The return from the wild open spaces can be hard to articulate however, especially in language;

That inflamed perception can also be a kind of vision...what emerges is not the language of the masses, it is a torrent, containing angular, magical trains of energy. Like a collapsing iceberg or a fox in the hen house, it is volume, tearing, biting, smashing; how does such an experience fall into the confines of everyday language? (Shaw 2010 :84)

Some writers on wildness would see any attempt to renegotiate the old forms as a compromise; the writer Hugo Ball regarded language as so entrenched in the rhetoric of politics and warfare he claimed that the binding force of syntax must be entirely broken, so a poetry beyond words could be born. He goes on to say: "One relinquishes, lock, stock, and barrel the language which journalism has polluted and made impossible. You withdraw into the inmost alchemy of the word. Then let the word be sacrificed as well, so as to preserve for poetry its last and holiest domain." (Ball 1975 :194) Whilst admiring the intensity of Ball's position, for the sake of the mythological text it goes too far from the Severance/Threshold/Return motif we are exploring. Ball's argument indicates too severe a break from 'Village' thought and mode of expression. The role of the initiate as they wander into physical landscape or the obtuse terrain of poetry is to add and challenge the existing pantheon of village expression, not deny it completely. George Steiner, in *After Babel*, makes an explicit link between language and the erotic:

Eros and language mesh at every point...are there affinities between pathological erotic compulsions and the search, obsessive in certain poets and logicians, for a 'private language', for a linguistic system unique to the needs and perceptions of the user? (Steiner 1975 :38-40)

In the context of the session texts, I was not seeking for a specifically 'private language', otherwise its very contribution to knowledge would be rendered void by its unintelligibility to all but the speaker. However, I would suggest that with the use of metaphor, especially utilising Ricoeur's association with poetry, the text certainly seeks to encourage the imagination, and where can the erotic begin except with imagination?

The session texts utilise the Jungian idea that masculine and feminine characteristics dwell in both men and women, which then begs the question, which aspect is influencing this pursuit of metaphor? Steiner goes on to suggest: "Women's speech is richer than men's in those shadings of desire and futurity known in Greek and Sanskrit as optative; women seem to verbalise a wider range of qualified resolve and masked promise" (Steiner 1975 :41). In preparing to tell "*The Birth of Ossian*", one resource was the poetry of the twelfth century poets of southern France, the Troubadours.

Whilst predominantly male, a small group, around twenty, were female, often referred to as the 'Trobairitz'. The writer Meg Bogin, in her book, *The Women Troubadours*, claims that far from Steiner's "shadings of desire", the women troubadours were far more direct and less disposed to symbology than that of their male counterparts.

She adds: "The language is direct, unambiguous and personal...unlike the men who created a complex poetic vision, the women wrote about their own intimate feelings." (Bogin 1980 :67-68)

When shall I have you in my power?
If only I could lie beside you for an hour
And embrace you lovingly -
Know this, that I'd give almost anything
To have you in my husband's place,
but only under the condition
that you swear to do my bidding

The Countess of Dia
(Bogin 1980 :89)

The Countess of Dia sounds clear. It is worth noting that all of the Trobairitz came from aristocratic backgrounds, and would have experienced ad infinitum the intricacies of their male counterparts verse, often having been the very object of their affections (within the restrictions of verse and courtly love at least). This thesis speculates that the women, enjoying a far more respected role within the confines of court, would have felt freer to explore a more literal approach when surrounded by men constructing verse laden with mysticism and double-meaning.

So it may be that Steiner would regard the "shadings of desire", hopefully imbued in the metaphor of the session text, as the feminine aspect of the author communicating itself. Steiner continues his associations of the feminine with loquacity: "The alleged outpourings of a women's speech, the rank flow of words, may be a symbolic restatement of men's apprehensive, often ignorant awareness of the menstrual cycle." So a possible masculine resistance to the feminine in language could relate to deeper unease concerning blood and the moon.

(Steiner 1975 :42)

To think mythically around Steiner's idea, we would now associate verbosity and, I suggest, eloquence, with the passage of the Moon. The medieval phrase "to drink down the moon" suddenly becomes the chant of all storytellers in this light. However, as the session text states:

The word "moon" actually derives from the German *der mond*, connected to the word "Man". We find male moon deities frequently, Tecciztecatl of the Aztecs, Mani of the Germanic tribes, Thoth of the Egyptians, Tskuyumi of the Japanese and Rahko of the Finns are just a small selection.
(Shaw 2010 :92)

Whatever cultural associations we have with the Moon, or whether which gender we regard as the most subtle in verbal nuance, the session text certainly placed metaphor as its key tool. In some respect we are returning to connotation and denotation. Metaphor contains generosity towards the reader's imagination. It is a set of open doors impacted within the text, an offering from the storyteller to the reader.

Of course, the reader integrates theory and idea within the unique strata of their own intelligence, but the image as a form of flight or associative opening seems a move towards the imaginative activity one undergoes as a listener in the telling of an oral narrative. Metaphor engenders the visual in a way that other forms of prose expression do not. By engaging with metaphor in the commentaries of the session texts, I maintain a complementary relationship with the symbolic constructions of the stories themselves.

In all metaphor one might consider not only the word alone or the name alone, whose meaning is displaced, but the pair of terms or relationships between which the transposition operates - from genus to species, from species to genus, from species to species, from the second to the fourth term (and vice versa) of a proportional relationship. This has far reaching implications. (Ricouer 1975 :23)

Here we see metaphor as an agent of disturbance, but a disturbance that instigates an associative discipline within the mind of the reader - we are now in the realm of pairs, rather than a solo line of prose. It is this very disturbance of line that causes the many-voiced characters of myth to flood the senses, to forge unlikely relationships between man, animal, and weather. It is like an underground web of connection suddenly rearing up onto the page, a discursive amplification.

Ricouer: "The metaphor has to disturb a whole network by means of an aberrant attribution. At the same time, the idea of categorical transgression allows us to fill out that of deviation, which seems to be implied in the transposition process." (Ricouer, P 1975 :23). It is the 'aberrant attribution' that instigates the perfect amount of disruption to create a linguistical meeting place between the 'Village' and 'Forest', and in doing so creates a genuine discourse for initiatory myths and rites-of-passage.

The African image is not then an image by equation, but an image by analogy, a surrealist image. Two and two do not make four, but five, as Aime Cesaire has told us...all language which does not tell a story bores them. (Senghor 1983 :120)

So metaphor offers the wider net of analogy rather than simply the logic of the equation. In our study of finding an inclusive relationship to wildness in language and ritual, it is clear that it plays a crucial role, least of all to keep language interesting (see above), so that the narrative current remains energised.

Chapter Three

Relationships between oral narratives, literature and the role of the storyteller

This section draws attention to two major areas of this cross-disciplinary enquiry; the literary tradition and the oral tradition. It also examines the role of the storyteller and suggests that the initiatory development previously examined offers it a wider frame of reference. It is appropriate to begin by addressing an immediate paradox:

How does one stay true to the spontaneity of the oral tradition of storytelling whilst committing a written exegesis of the same stories to paper?

A paradox is something that appears self-contradictory, a thing that at some time, or from some point of view, appears to be what it is not...our ability to accept this ambiguity is also fundamental to our recognition and signification of change.
(Napier 1986 :1)

I contend that the oral tradition and literature are problematic but ultimately complementary resources. We could use the motif of Coyote, found in the session text, as a symbolic example of this interplay.

(As a figure in mythology) Coyote's movement through the worlds is both potent and fractured...He diffuses righteousness, laughs at tribalism, steals fire from the gods and is ever present as circumstance, cultures and weather patterns jostle with the inevitable changes of time. (Through study of Native American myths) we know that Coyote is a decentralised zone, that his life force exists in the tip of his nose and tail, not the broad central plain. We see he is elusive in texture and not located in geographical location or specific point in history but remains epistemic.
(Shaw 2010 :58)

This intimates a decentralised position for oral telling, that it resists anchoring too avidly to a written form, that it retains a freshness by living on the tongue rather than the page. However, it is almost entirely due to literature that we have these stories at all, so it is unwise to attack it too harshly. A tension does arise in the aspiration of both mediums however. Literature has often defined, marked out and emboldened both the author and the culture it arises from. In the deliberate assemblage of words an agenda appears, an agenda that is defined and pristine within the mind of the writer.

Writing is discourse as intention-to-say and that writing is a direct inscription of this intention, even if, historically and psychologically, writing began with the graphic translation of the signs of speech. This emancipation of writing, which places the latter at the site of speech, is the birth of the text. (Ricoeur 1986 :107)

Of course the issue of ownership arises, and the compartmentalising of wild image. We have the strange thought of the upheaval and then preservation of oral stories in the literary tradition of the conquerors. However, conquerors have a habit of being clumsy with the myths of the conquered, and much gets lost in translation. Stanzas, verses, chapters, can appear to be prisons for the mythic impulse, reflecting the hoeing and toiling impulse of the human against nature, rather than arising from the earth itself. This instigates grief, but also a gratitude that we are able to experience them at all, even if it feels we are peering through glass. Myth offers secret histories; the geographical, religious and political developments of a particular region. Even when we encounter effectively the same story in a variety of landscapes, certain moments will rise and fall in emphasis, which offer valuable perspectives on the concerns and desires of that society, as opposed to their neighbours.

A concern is that the strongly muscled history of literature loses these inflections; there is only one version of "*The Serpent and the Bear*" and this is its only interpretation. The story now bears the ambition of the writer, often without others in the community who have held the story most of their lives.

Dialogue is an exchange of questions and answers; there is no exchange of this sort between the writer and the reader. The writer does not respond to the reader. Rather, the book divides the act of writing and the act of reading into two sides, between which there is no communication...the text thus produces a double eclipse of the reader and the writer. It thereby replaces the relation of dialogue, which directly connects the voice of one to the hearing of the other. (Ricouer 1986 :107)

However, what it lacks in dialogue it may gain in sharpness of execution; certain processes of thought require expanded, uninterrupted plains of exegesis; a constant back-and-forth may dilute or subvert the original question. The book can also be utilised as a source of discussion when read by a number of readers. Ricouer is correct, however, in his initial sense of division between writer and reader. Writing is also more than just the transcribing of the oral to the page. As any public speaker will attest, the phrasing of effective oratory can be quite different to the inflections delivered to the written word. Literature offers other opportunities with language; it can sustain complexities that delivered orally would be almost impossible to digest. The reader also has the luxury of returning to certain key phrases - the integration of ideas can be slowed, repeated. Both offer related, but different, processes.

In Jack Zipes essay 'Breaking the Disney Spell' (Zipes 1979 :352), he starts to examine a period and place in Western history (the 18th century) when literature started to surpass the oral tradition in popularity:

Unlike the oral tradition, the literary tale was written down to be read in private, although, in some cases, the fairy tales were read aloud in parlours. However, the book enabled the reader to withdraw from his or her society and

be alone with a tale. This privatisation violated the communal aspect of the folk tale, but the very printing of a fairy tale was already a violation since it was based on a separation of social classes. Extremely few people could read, and the fairy tale in form and content furthered notions of elitism and separation.

However, Zipes goes on to say: "In some cases, the literary tales presented new material that was transformed through the oral tradition and returned later to literature by a writer who remembered hearing a particular story...there was always tension between the literary and oral traditions. The oral tales have continued to threaten the more conventional and classical tales because they can question, dislodge, and deconstruct the written tales."

In some complicated way, both traditions are now feeding the other. There have been great losses on the side of the spoken word, but in the same moment it is literature that carries the skeleton of stories to a new generation. It is the job of the storyteller to continually reanimate these literary 'bones', with a linguistically mutable oral re-telling of these very stories. The implication that we need to make a choice – the quiet of reading or the polyphonic scuffle of an oral telling, is to deny the trickster present in these very paradoxes, that, in the sometimes ungainly combination of orality and literature, even with wildly differing ambitions, lies the very crossroads between the Village and Forest present in the text. I believe we must be wary about too much nostalgia of an imagined oral purity - it is an insult to the possibility that Coyote is still very much involved in the discourse between humans, a ploughed field, a waterfall, an opera house, a newspaper. The story is not over yet.

In short, trickster is a boundary - crosser. Every group has its edge...and trickster is always there. Trickster is the mythic embodiment of ambiguity and ambivalence, doubleness and duplicity, contradiction and paradox (Hyde 1998 :7)

Jacques Derrida holds an echo of the trickster in his work concerning speech and literature. The philosopher maintained that for over 3,000 years of Western philosophy, philosophers have claimed phonocentrism – that the voice is the centre, from Plato to Aristotle, to Rousseau, Hegel and Husserl. Rousseau says: "Languages are made to be spoken. Writing serves only as a supplement to speech." (Collins Mayblin 1996 :40). This has also been called "logocentrism", from Derrida's wider "metaphysics of presence". It would regard speech as exterior to thought, and writing as exterior to speech. There is a clear and distinct sense of hierarchy – a regression from mind to voice to letter. Within logocentrism, a linguistic sign is a signifier whose origins of meaning are in a signified idea. So if writing just represents speech, then writing must be a 'signifier of a signifier'. So writing becomes marginalised, quite opposed to Derrida's notion that the development of modern language actually derives from an interplay of speech and writing, therefore one cannot claim primacy over the other. This interplay between orality and writing is key to the very essence of this thesis. From the

perspective of logocentrism, presence is implicit in the communication of speech, but for writing, absence is the defining characteristic. So with speech, the listener and speaker are both present in time, and present to the succession of words from the mouth (later in this chapter we will examine the imaginative implications of that in the telling of an oral narrative). However, Derrida states: "To write is to produce a mark...which my future disappearance will not in principle, hinder in its functioning...for a writing to be a writing it must continue to 'act' and to be readable even when what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written." (Reynolds Roffe 2004 :10). The image of letters on a page, wrapped in an envelope, and sent to a distant figure, also illustrates the suggestion of absence.

Derrida makes a trail through oppositional thinking by identifying what he calls "undecidables". They are propositions that do not conform to binary logic. They unsettle. An example would be a phrase like *Pharmakon*, which means both poison and remedy. So, inside/outside, logos/mythos, are brought into relation with the nebulous realm of indeterminacy. It is worth recalling G.S. Kirk's quote from chapter two; "The polarisation between fully rational thought (which is usually held to begin, in the Western tradition, at some point after Thales) and non-rational or "mythopoeic" thought is logically indefensible and historically absurd."(Kirk 1984 :58-59). An "undecidable" within the context of a wilderness rite-of -passage would be contact with a spirit – rarely conforming to a hegemonic form – something neither male or female, a disruption to normality. Indeterminacy indicates no precision, clarity, or easy definition. Initiatory process indicates that it is only in the surrender to this difficult awareness that any real vision can ultimately arise (hence the severing from certainty that takes place). We have noticed a variant of this in the notion of the 'crossroads' in relationship to Village and Forest. Like the crossroads motif, encountering this mired and unpredictable ground can feel distinctly uncomfortable. It is far from a 'sure thing'. However, this is crucial terrain for our discussion, especially when we place trickster in the frame. We can see clearly qualities of orality and literature without having to choose.

The nature of the session text's evolution; from writing to language to transcript – but bearing the influence of oral syntax - suggest that language is more than simply presence and writing is more than simply absence. The thesis's position is one of intense interplay; a shuttling between. Speech is occurring within the writing and writing is occurring within the speech. What arrives seems to have a liminal edge, a betwixt and between. For the thesis to work within what Derrida - and Heidegger before him (Heidegger 1927) - refers to as "the metaphysics of presence", the crossroads motif cannot exist, no matter how nebulous. Interestingly, the logo centric is a position many oral storytellers would support, but is untenable here. It would be a conscious fiction to hold that position and quite out of step with the very character of initiation in myth and ritual that this thesis is establishing. What I do emphasise however is the call for the spontaneous within an oral telling, the wild intelligence that arrives in the moment – but that does not belittle writing or its influence, just a script used inappropriately.

Like trickster, Derrida is not interested in an eradication of what came before, but helping to engender some new constellation: "What interests me is not strictly called either philosophy or literature. I dream of a writing that would be neither, while still keeping – I've no desire to abandon this – the memory of literature." (Collins Mayblin :100) He also draws from the past – writing about literary texts – whilst using such a contrary linguistic style it appears that the sentences are breaking down and reconfiguring in front of your very eyes. In this function, Derrida stands in the position of initiator, recalling Eliade's idea in chapter one: "We may note the redeeming function of 'difficulty', especially as found in the works of modern art...it is because such works represent closed worlds, hermetic universes that cannot be entered except by overcoming immense difficulties, like the initiatory ordeals of the archaic and traditional societies." (Eliade 1963 :188) Derrida certainly brings "difficulty" to the table, not as the end in itself, but to create new ways of seeing.

By working with host texts, Derrida actually requires the oppositions of past literature to find the instabilities that open the ground of uncertainty. Think again of trickster: "The god of the roads (trickster) needs the more settled territories before his traveling means very much. If everyone travels, the result is not the apotheosis of trickster but another form of his demise." (Hyde 1998 :13). This is an ancient ritual arrangement; the trammelling of boundaries to ensure that vitality tickles the status quo and life continues to grow. Trickster is nothing without something to rub up against.

As Derrida shakes the foundations of both structuralism and phenomenology, there is a loyalty to some wild spirit of investigation that is both troubling and refreshing. As an old oak collapses, at the same moment a green shoot leaps from the earth. His notion of 'the trace', an 'undecidable' that is neither quite present or absent, is a hint towards the arguments between orality and literature, and another image of rupture and reconfiguring. 'Trace' could effect the phonocentrism of earlier philosophy - the traditional top-heavy primacy of speech is dragged into greater relationship with literature. Phrases like *trace*, *difference*, *pharmakon*, are obscure and hard to define, even (or maybe deliberately so) by Derrida, but they appear to do away with purity. Speech and writing always hold the energies of history, influence and repetition between them. Derrida is in the business of hints and diffusion, traditional attributes of the Underworld journey, rather than brightly lit sound bites.

By questioning Plato's handling of oppositions (See 'Plato's Pharmacy' 1969), but not refuting him entirely, Derrida infuriates but does not entirely overturn. What he does is reduce the assurance of the ancient texts, and in doing so, assists in their re-animation. It is a tense arena, especially (as previously mentioned) because of his handling of prose. The baffling cut and thrusts of his syntax play with something that we have huge investment in - everyday language. Still, when the young initiates are led from the village, they are blindfolded, spun round, turned up side down – they are now in submission to a fiercer dynamic, this is all in the nature of rupture. Derrida is being true to his work.

He was, of course, a man, not a mythic figure, but, as we have investigated, collision points seem possible. It is not to claim that Derrida was at all times tricky, but to see what stands behind him. What drives the relationship still further is the aspiration of his work: the trickster is not concerned with mundane thieving, or getting rich from lies (that's just a crook), but carries fire to culture, opening the road to the fertile imagination.

It is undeniable that many myths have been compressed, misunderstood (one of the great problems when they are plucked from a far off culture), cut up. The rhythms that we find in Palaeolithic narratives, inspired by the seasons, were soon channelled by the Neolithic into patterns that mimic the human reaction to the seasons – the trends of agriculture and the emergence of versification (Kane 1994). We become more influenced by the Village than the Forest. But if we are to stay with this notion of promiscuity, then surely to a large extent we are to ruefully accept the messy accord of words in the air and words on paper. It seems to me that greatest impoverishment comes not just from the practical transition from orality to literature but, by implication, from a growingly didactic approach to the natural world. What Western literature can seem to represent. A form of empowerment, licence for whatever is the heroic, dominating impulse of the era. In this sentiment, the discourse between Sean Kane and Roland Barthes from chapter one re-open. What seems embedded in orality, or what some wish to believe does, was an efficacious relationship to the earth that we feel we may have lost. But was that very sacrality partially an acknowledgement of the place of death? The oral tellers suggest that in some way each telling is unique, that between tellings it isn't latent, isn't a fixed star, is certainly not imprisoned on a piece of paper. It flies through the hut, hamlet or hall and is gone. To our world it dies and re-animates, like winter into spring. From this perspective, to commit the story to the page is to keep it in a frozen summer, denying the earthy tangle of seasonal movement.

With literature it is also the spacing between words that establishes its significance. Within an oral telling, timing has great effect, but cannot easily be revisited except by repetition (an old technique in oral cultures). There is the gift of longevity to literature; by scripting it you have anchored it, it can be revisited. The written word cheats death, at least for a while. In this cheating do we meet the desire for immortality? Is the significance of a written word the attempt to unshackle ourselves from the primeval arrangement of life and death, witnessed seasonally and in all other animals?

The words delivered in an oral telling have a greater diffusion than the heavy ink edges of a letter on a page. They are less bricks creating a house of definition, more winged language quickly crossing the river of death, flaming for a moment and then bending into the inevitable silence that follows voice. It is not however, my ambition to imply that all is lost by the arrival of written language. The Anglo Saxons had a word, *giedd*, (Niles 1999 :30) to describe the intensities and beauty of language at its most transcendental, what John Niles calls "wordpower", regardless of whether it was found in speech or on paper, in a fireside ballad or epic saga recited in the longhouse. It was what they regarded as the true poetic spirit. The *giedd* is the delicious scent that trickster seeks in this confluence of influence.

The role of trickster is always to re-open dialogue to the sacred (his speciality, as discussed, being disintegration, disappointment and rupture), so the tensions between disciplines attract his tuning fork; to conduct the dichotomy into something we call art. Trickster delights in showing us the sacred in the seemingly profane.

These arguments are not new of course: the Athenian philosophers rounded on orally recited myth in favour of an individual's mental resources to objectify the images personally. Recall Socrates' reluctance to leave the city gates: "I am a lover of knowledge, and the men who dwell in the city are my teachers, and not the trees or country" (Kane 1994 :248). On the other hand, field work into South Slavic oral poetry has revealed that amongst illiterate Yugoslav oral bards, when becoming literate and working with a fixed text, they lost the skill and devices to create oral poetry (Beye 1993 :74). There seems a superstitious quality to both these illustrations, and a magnetic compulsion to separate out the two modes of communication. What binds the two forms is the ability to concentrate. It is a growing lack of concentration that is a truly disarming characteristic of modern life, whether reading a book or gathered by a fire hearing a story. (Goleman 1998 :11).

In mythic terms, the lack of ability to concentrate is a break, or opening, or rupture – all firmly trickster territory. It is sensitivity to associative openings in language and thought that creates the poetry of the Spanish surrealists, or the Ghazals of Hafez. That very swiftness and ability to move quickly from image to image is a vital attribute to the creation of their poetry. However, this means a strong awareness of that moment when language ascends to giedd, without that awareness we are left with the break but not the art. It requires an ear that is tuned. The ruptures in Lorca's poetry (1998) points towards rapid shifts in image rather than a complete breakdown of concentration. It is also combined with a later sustained intention that shapes the wider poem. When working with adolescents with Attention Deficit Disorder (on return from a wilderness fast), it was the Ghazal form (with its stanza by stanza shift in topic) that opened the door into poetry for them. By writing their own, they saw it as turning this 'condition' into an 'invitation'; to fine tune their propensity towards a disciplined form of art. It honoured the situation, worked into it, rather than shame it. In a situation where an appreciation of giedd has been severely compromised however, the bridge between images is severed, and minute spans of attention become the norm in themselves rather than aid to intense expressions of image (see severance section of chapter two). Trickster's contrary, playful push towards sacred rupture gets lost without awareness of giedd.

Third possibilities

It is unrealistic to imagine that a Lakota Native American cannot derive pleasure from a written Jungian exegesis of a traditional story; the world of the primary peoples (indigenous cultures) are in just a state of rapid movement and influence as what we call 'the West'. In travelling with oral narratives, my experience is that humans of many cultural

backgrounds seek connections between self and story, recognise shared mythic symbolism when it emerges, and can be quietly open to the mutable aspect of mythic consciousness.

However, caution is recommended in the generalisation of the word 'literature'. Native American poet Paula Gunn Allen (Allen 1983 :174) opens its associations from her cultural perspective:

American Indian literature is not similar to western literature because the basic assumptions about the universe, and, therefore, the basic reality experienced by tribal peoples and westerners are not the same, even at the level of 'folk lore'...the purpose...is never one of pure self-expression. The "private soul at any public wall" is a concept that is so alien to native thought as to constitute an absurdity. The tribes do not celebrate the individual's ability to feel emotion, for it is assumed all people are able to do so, making expression of this basic ability arrogant, presumptuous, and gratuitous...the tribes seek, through song, ceremony, legend, sacred story (myths), and tales to embody, articulate, and share reality, to bring the isolated private self into harmony and balance with this reality.

This does superficially appear to strike a different note to the cry for individuation we locate in the European myth of Parzival (Eschenbach 1980) - the great Grail story of Western literature: the leaving of Camelot (the tribe), the rejecting of shared values and advice in the seeking of one's own vision, and the notion that true empathy can only arise from that search and elucidation of that vision in the world. That is, until you recognise its similarity to the process of the Vision Quest, an act that much of Native American religious life is suffused in. The point of contrast is the world the initiate returns to.

In some regards, Allen's sense of the Native approach to literature seems rather like the oral tradition's position, in seeming opposition to early eighteenth century French literature. Jack Zipes:

The emphasis in most folk tales was on communal harmony. A narrator or narrators told tales to bring members of a group or tribe closer together and to provide them with a sense of mission, a telos. With the rise of literacy and the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century, the oral tradition of storytelling underwent an immense revolution. (Zipes 1979 :333)

Zipes then goes on to write about the move towards individuation, solitude and hierarchy we have already noted. Allen's appraisal suggests that the personal awakening of the Native 'quester' can still be easily integrated into the wider pantheon of song, ritual and story, whereas the Westerner is far more likely to be at odds with the society at large that they return to, even if the experience was very similar. Could it be that at this point in time Western literature requires more of an emphasis on the individual than to allow a more radical, inter-relational dialogue with the earth to emerge, because, unlike Allen's picture of the American Indian world, it lacks the binding glue of "song, ceremony, legend"? It may be that this thesis, which is truly Allen's reviled "self-expression", is seeking to open a door to a series of values she

would understand very well, and that within the paradoxical collision of literature (in all its forms), oral narrative, and art practice is to orientate towards a ground of research that appears less polarised, and open to new expressions of what myth could constitute for us today.

Story is quite capable of accommodating both the communal and the solitary and the twenty first century mind is able to comprehend the subtle differences of experience that both offer. It is quite correct to offer caution in the way both Zipes and Allen do, and at the same time hold that the contrary spirit of myth finds ways to flourish in both, and possibly as yet unimagined configurations.

What is needed is, not the merely logical, but the mytho-logical - a leaping consciousness, the generative tension...between the "unspeakable visions of the individual" and "the reconstructed tale of the tribe".
(Deardorff 2004 :40)

The triadic relationship of oral storytelling

He (the storyteller) has counsel, not for a few situations, as the proverb does, but for many, like the sage.
(Walter 1995 :25)

I now wish to address the use of spontaneity in storytelling, and to examine the storyteller as an individual offering some of the insights that can emerge through initiatory experience. In this light, the storyteller is less for the entertainment of children and more as a carrier of wild intelligence, presented through images, for the older community.

Whatever the reasons for the historical ambivalence towards this fundamental human art, the undeniable fact remains that a traditional storyteller sits at the cradle of almost every literature in the world (see the seminal three volume 'Growth of Literature' by Munro and Chadwick). Charged with dealing backward-looking archaism - irrelevant to modern times - I send critics to the surrealist essays of Daumal and Mabille, to the 'beat' essays of Rothenberg and Snyder.
(Haggarty 2003 :9)

I was involved in the act of oral narration - storytelling - a long time before I was a writer or student of mythology. Stories have always appeared robust; a traditional rule in European storytelling being, rather like cooking, that you can add one element to the recipe, normally something subtle. This rule of possible addition is not something I would apply to great sagas like the Upanishads or "*Beowulf*", but in more localised stories and told over time, some strange detail floats up from the unconscious and adds itself to your telling of the story. There is an inherent relationship in actually

performing the stories that changes your dialogue entirely, the whole experience becomes less precious (this is not a word-perfect recital) but reaches greater depth. The depth is registered as a move into a vitalising present – from the unscripted quality – rather than a journey into the ancient past. As we have discussed, the mythic is not the past. A triad of possibility opens up between you, the story and the listener that maintains a markedly different quality to the hermetic intimacy of reading.

Reading is a journey entirely inwards. Much of the work has already been done. Many novels will carry detailed description of the characters, the authors thoughts distilled to a polished tip of eloquence. We desire silence, comfort, any number of things. With storytelling the experience is different. For a start it is communal; even if we don't know the person next to us, we are aware of bodies, opinions, mass. The room is full of histories. Of course, so is a library, but in a library the reader is engaged with an entirely different set of images than that of their neighbour.

I have told stories in many locations: on the sides of mountains, by fires, with dogs loping around and cats peering in, in Yurts with rain thrashing the canvas, in lecture theatres, in deserts, by oceans, in bear-laden forests, in a Brownstone apartment in Brooklyn. Always people, animals, tears, conjecture, animation - the weather of the room will not allow 'the one true version'.

I have told stories to the dying, the rich, leaders of industry, medicine people and at risk-youth, Pueblo, Welsh, African, Lakota, Tibetan, English, Russian, Mayan, Scottish, Romanian and Irish. No one has ever failed to enter the story or been anything but delighted when they found an element from their own culture. I must admit that I've told stories poorly on occasion, but what I do trust is this inherently triadic relationship between the teller, the story and the listener. Something happens.

From the outset, the listener has to work harder, to push further with their imagination. The story will give less descriptive details of the characters and scenes. So the visual perception of the audience is pronounced; if called upon all know the shade of the 'wild third daughters' hair, the exact part of the chest the spear entered, the colour of Finn's tunic. Their eyes may sometimes be closed but they are extremely active. So the story ambles through the many cultures present and offers each a glimpse of the living story - one saw the brush of tail, another a flash of teeth, another a row of nipples, another a laughing eye. No one hears quite the same story. Of course, no one quite reads the same story either, but with an oral telling the nuances change nightly, it is continually told for the first time.

Actually, only the man with writing seems to worry about this, just as only he looks for the nonexistent, illogical, and irrelevant "original".
(Lord 1983 :161)

For the individual seeking copyright this is most frustrating. For the man or woman seeking 'the pure form', disappointment lurks (the only potential being locating a story before it leaves its tribal setting and enters the wider

confluence of stories. But who knows where it may have come from – the Gods? A neighbouring tribe many centuries before? There is also the possibility that someone hearing the story that evening will wander off and tell it as best they remember it, never referring to a written narrative. Yet again, the story has jumped into bed with another's imagination.

In the raucous and often intense conversing that follows the story, the dialogue serves as container for all the imaginations present in the room. The storyteller will be awash with the images that arise from the audience. I should clarify that I rarely tell stories as purely entertainment. My specific way of working involves an unusual amount of participation from the audience. A ritual question I would ask is normally simple: "What caught you? Where are you in the story right now? Did you ever pick a thorn from your father's hand? Or refuse to pick up the firebird's feather?"

This is in no way an attempt to diminish or make a story entirely personal; that is not their sole function, but it is a factor. I have never encountered a group that had difficulty with the idea that the myths both referred to them, and had some elemental life that was entirely their own. The psyche seems to settle into that notion quickly, and jumps happily between its differing emphasis.

By not utilising a rehearsed script you enable the image movement, it is in relationship to the environment, the fire, the audience. It will never be told in quite the same way and is in lively accord with the moment. The moment is not Roland Barthes's 'time of sarcasm', but the eternal 'once upon, beside and underneath a time'. This invocational quality should not be mere rhetoric but a stepping beyond our normal frame of reference and receptivity.

What is lost in polish you can gain in authentic dialogue; and this is something also sensed in the listener – this is not acting. This is images coming off the tongue in new and sometimes uncertain expression. It is far more connected to the inner life of the storyteller than the cluster of techniques they may have acquired to hold an audience's attention. The words should feel at home in the atmosphere of the teller.

'Never trust the artist. Trust the tale,' D. H. Lawrence's famous dictum, fails to notice how intertwined the teller and the tale always are.
(Warner 1995 :25)

At the same time we are looking to feel more than personality: we are looking to see who or what stands behind them. What powers will step into the room? This all is implicit of a receptivity in the storyteller; the receptivity lives in the story that chose to be told in the first place, the awareness of atmosphere and audience, the openness to the insights and emotions of the participants, the honouring of all the men and women who have told this story long before you and will tell it after you. So we are not impacting a story in concrete, but bearing witness to its inflections and colour.

We are more aware of change than the singer is, because we have a concept of the fixity of a performance or of its recording on wire or tape or plastic or on writing. His idea of stability, to which he is deeply devoted, does not include

the wording, which to him has never been fixed, nor the unessential parts of the story. He builds his performance, or song in our sense, on the stable skeleton or narrative, which is the song in his sense.
(Lord 1983 :159)

So stability is an inner resource, not anchored to oral recitation but the procession of images that move through the storyteller's mind – they have a beginning, middle and end, just like the story, but keep a door open to fresh descriptive language. This also leads to exploring wider commentaries on the story, rather than attempting to wrestle a completely interpretative shape on the stories life in the room. Let it find a wider body in the intensity of the audience's response, their passion or annoyance. The storyteller has every right to offer insights, should indeed be encouraged to do so, but the story flourishes in a larger confluence. In the triad configuration some surprise waits that the story, teller or participant could never have anticipated! This surprise - an observation or insight - is all part of the life-preserving aspect of myth that it is once again living right in the heart of things.

Without these two elements that loosen the grip of control, we risk (as is often the case) word perfect 'preservations' of story, with a fixed destination and an uncomfortable sense of excavated ground - like peering into a Pharaoh's tomb as the guide shines his flashlight. In this world, the storyteller nervously fingers their script as they try not to offend the anthropologists. At the same time, most Western storyteller's have researched and studied written texts intensively before their performance, so it is naïve to suggest too extensive a distance from the written. It is both the combination of study and then openness to the atmosphere of spontaneity that creates the performance. This is not pure, but a mongrel activity. Interestingly there is often a progression from text to image at this moment in the storyteller's imagination (from many discussions with practitioners in this area) – they describe an emerging set of images rather than lines on a page. So the visual becomes significant after having initially lived on the page, then integrated into the tellers imagination and then elucidated from that position. On the matter of too self-conscious a preservation of story, here is Zipp;

To a certain extent it was engendered by Grimms and other folklorists who believed that the fairy tales arose from the spirit of the folk. Yet, worship of the fairy tale as holy scripture is a petrification of the fairy tale that is connected to the establishment of correct speech, values, and power more than anything else. This establishment through the violation of the oral practices was the great revolution and transformation of the fairy tale. (Zipp 1979 :337)

Zipp senses a danger in the hands of the 'Village', when, through the power of literature, they get an opportunity to freeze the ebullience of oral stories into a narrative that reflects only anthropocentric values; the old stories become a promotional campaign for whatever traditions society at large are trying to instil. The dialogue with the natural world,

the description of myth as Sean Kane's "The power of a place speaking", becomes lessened, inconvenient, finally removed.

As traditional rites-of-passage become forgotten, so to does the deeper implication of relationship to the natural world. A return to the primary ground of the wilderness fast (and the hoard of images and perceptions that arise from it), then cultivated into an oral narrative and told over time, could be a move towards Kane's position. It is a slow un-shackling from overly domesticated, allegorical story. It cannot instantly become myth - that takes a great deal of time - but it is a re-orientation to the prophetic energies of wildness, a re-orientation that would require generational commitment to its practice.

The joy of an oral culture is the old bones of story reconnecting to the inflamed tissue of spontaneous language. It is a specific kind of animation, an incantational convergence of narrative tracks worn smooth by a whole line of storytellers, and giddy new vistas of linguistic image, that are only glimpsed in that telling, in that moment. Oral culture suggests that the voice spoken in this attunement tries to reach towards the harsh thinking of the wind moving over a fissured moor, the excitement of the bat as it senses dusk. So does nature think? A large aspect of a Vision Quest was to create an axis of experience that somehow accommodated the thought-ripples of nature.

This is a complicated business - the 'thinking' of nature could well seem inexpressible - to truly encounter it involves a coming adrift from entirely village-centred ambition. What we are left with is a secondary, strange image - language that seems (by its handling of the shape shifting metaphor), open to the possibility of wide (and wild) associations.

The myth teller somehow articulates the story from many positions (rather than just the position of the village's moral compass); its empathies are generous, its community oceanically wide. To hold rigidly to the script is to deny what Finn MacColl calls 'the music of what is'. The more defended we are, the more 'in dominion', the more linguistically scripted, the more wildness shrinks from us.

The patterning of crows over a winter field could be an oracular thought of the mud, sky and bird; the elegant procession of the reindeer across a spring meadow a part of some epic train of imagination that has been running for tens of thousands of years. The swift dive of the killer whale a new vision from an ancient sea. The hundred ways the otter gleefully crosses a stream is the same way the storyteller splashes their route through a story: the same destination but differing currents, details and varying intensities of stroke. The animals are myth tellers in the way that they are.

We detect a warning of this diminishing of myths' wild edges from mythologist William Doty: "(David) Miller argues that the leveling effect by which myths become tales is a result of the collapse of the mythic narrative, with the subsequent pluralising of single heroines and deities into a plurality of deities (usually referred to merely as "the Bride" or "the Ogre") who no longer have the open-ended context of myth but become merely moralistic ciphers" (Doty 1986 :228) Doty seems to indicate an unease at the psychological multiplicity of mythic figures - that it is easier to separate

the villains from the heroes - rather than engage with the concept that one character (and our own psyche) could contain both. This 'separating out' also pulls the notion of the myth teller further from one of an engagement with a speaking earth.

Efficacy and entertainment

Director Richard Schechner, whilst writing on the theme of the relationship of ritual to theatre, breaks up performance into two sections - what he terms 'efficacy' and 'entertainment'. His distinctions are as follows:

Efficacy	Entertainment
Performer possessed, in trance	Performer knows what he's doing
audience participates	audience watches
audience believes	audience appreciates
criticism is forbidden	criticism is encouraged
collective creativity	individual creativity

(Schechner 1977 :322)

Schechner recognises that very few performances belong entirely to the one description, and uses the image of a braided structure "constantly interrelating efficacy and entertainment". He refers to Fifth century Athenian theatre and Elizabethan theatre as moments in time when they worked most efficiently together. His 'braided structure' is my mythographic 'crossroads' between Village and Forest. Certainly, in the performative description I have just been illustrating, it would be impossible to fit entirely into either category. Whether a contemporary audience 'believes' in the way a medieval audience would have is debatable, but, speaking from the author's relationship to storytelling, audience participation is encouraged by interactive dialogue at certain stages, but then so is criticism.

The element of possession, or mediumship, requires further discourse. It could be suggested that trance is the very moment when language breaks down, or more accurately, reconfigures (into sound rather than collectively shared language), so to suggest that a storyteller could articulate a story with inflections and nuance seems unlikely. However, it can similarly be argued that storytelling involves an altering of consciousness, or how else does one brush up against the 'eternal' discussed in chapter one? The question appears to be one of degree. The degree, and efficacy, of the event is also dependent on the unique arrangement of that night's performance; the concentration of the participants can be the very element that, in turn, engineers greatest lucidity from the teller. However, many storytellers recount moments when

it appeared that the story itself especially desired to be told: the images were at peak vivacity, the voice truly a bridge between the story and the participants. At moments like that, the story appears to have a strength all of its own, rather than contained neatly in the repertoire of the performer.

When you watch the magician at work...then you realise how serious is the belief that the magic is in the breath and that the breath is the magic
(Malinowski 1983 :109)

In the widest association, one can compare storytelling to an act of magic. As Malinowski indicates, breath is crucial - no breath, no story, no breath, no spell, no breath, no life for any of us. The breath is the incantational core, the primordial seed that binds every living being in the room; to be unaware of breath in such a moment is to build your story house on sand. It is useful here to take account of the indigenous practices of breath control – faster and slower – to alter consciousness (Kalweit 1992).

The breath also forms a landing strip for the memory of the story and the spontaneous images and reflections of the teller. In a split second, the two negotiate territory on the tongue, a wild terrain not wrestled into a 'garden' by use of a recited script, but kept fluid and curious by honouring the convergence of the two streams. Just as we detect a self-regulating principle in the organising of the natural world, the storyteller can facilitate an in-the-moment confluence of energies in the power of a true oral telling. When this has already been hoed, planted and weeded into shape by unswerving repetition of language, then this convergence, and thus relationship to wild nature, is lost. Although the practitioner may claim this is an act of oral narrative, its deepest gift - its relationship to spontaneity and the living world - has gone.

Storytelling is an interpretative improvisation; it is jazz; it is primordial, immediate responsive theatre...the storyteller is simultaneously Author/Adaptor, Performer and Director of his or her own work.
(Haggarty 2003 :9)

Ben Haggarty declares a loyalty to the moment, that something fresh is birthed, its impact being dependent on the skills and wit of the performer. But what of the story itself? We have just suggested that it is possible that some independent energy in the story itself is involved in the performance. That the storyteller, as personality, is a conduit for something larger? I fall short of describing this as an act of mediumship, but it is certainly an internal collaboration.

Religious understanding and ritual awareness (so far as is emotive) are, by this view, antithetical to critical knowledge; for, strictly speaking, knowledge without reason is not knowledge at all.
(Napier 1986 :30)

Certainly, exploration of ritual awareness is crucial to this thesis, with an understanding that experiential intelligence involves wandering into nebulous and contrary areas. Knowledge should never be entirely associated with light: what of cave, damp, night, hidden, gnostic, shadowy, dream and subterranean knowledge? Persephone and many other mythic figures spend half the year wandering the Underworld. To ignore this descent is to over-amplify characteristics of the psyche whilst others wither. The storyteller defined simply by technique and outer appearance, contributes to this ill-balanced appraisal.

Variants of teller

A sentence that enters the body through the eye is taking the long road, not a shortcut. It has to travel through the ear as well to do its proper work.
(Bringhurst 2008 :48)

Ben Haggarty makes a distinction between the fireside teller of hamlets and small communities, and the professional, travelling storyteller (Haggarty 2003 :9). However, I would suggest that there is a third element that can be present in both traditions, that is to do with the interiority of the practice, the animistic tradition of the storyteller, a position far more complex than something defined by financial gain or professional standing. The above description is an informed clarifier, but loses some magical connotation. This emphasis is referring story back to its oldest origins; its relationship to Shamanism.

Haggarty's associations are valid, but to build on them I would have to suggest a more nebulous, tricksterish quality to the storyteller (to allow the role of spiritual teacher into the description.) Stories in their earliest form were vehicles to express localised cosmologies, but also touched beyond the limits of tribal life, and in doing so, created a connection between wider perceptions of community, a community that incorporated nature and certain spiritual energies that were imagined to abide in it. The storyteller was seen to sometimes hold that information, and passed knowledge of herbalism, dreams and ritual through the images contained. With the breakdown of cohesive rites-of-passage, this prophetic connotation has largely left our associations of myth. I use the term prophetic here to describe a consciousness that invokes swift new thoughts, a breaking of stagnant boundaries and a profound openness to the as yet unseen. If the teller has not been exposed to the velocity, or even concept, of this function, then how could they honestly embody it?

Culture is remirrored by one of its own extensions - ritual or art. And this may even result in the demirroring of the human incumbents of status roles in the quotidian culture.
(Turner 1974 :340)

Turner claims that ritual practitioners (and this would certainly include storytellers) in a tribal setting, were able to present images of what he calls 'otherness' to the wider community. That, in fact, the stories that would return with an initiate from a rite-of-passage "may help to free us from their dominion over our deep self" (by 'their' he is referring to societal roles). Turner, when specifically addressing the area of ethnopoetics, is clear that he views such practitioners as alive and well in the present day, offering: "the new technicians of the recovered "sacred," which is now aware of all that science can tell it, must recover also the magic of the word and break it out of its dull academic integument." (Turner 1974 :342). The thesis places emphasis on this distinction, rather than whether you sit by a fireplace or prowl a theatre set 'projecting one presence', those are merely exterior gear-changes; the real barometer is the level of interior relationship to the images invoked. Repertoire and location are secondary functions.

The storyteller Hugh Lupton hints at such an echo:

As a storyteller I am fascinated by this language of place, by place-names and their etymology - the Thwaites, Thorpes, Duns, Bourmes, Combes - and all the mysterious composites: Hetty Peglars Tump, Grimes Graves, Wookey Hole, the Gog Magog Hills...(!) encircle myself with a personal poetry of place
(Lupton 2001 :6)

The imagination of Lupton is now, fired by language, moving downwards into associations of both localised history and folklore, and, as a storyteller, makes an assumption that this is a natural point of enquiry. Ted Hughes invokes the element of the wind:

Almost every poet, when he mentions the wind, touches one of his good moments of poetry...the Old Testament prophets were often carried off to their visions in a great wind, or heard extraordinary things out of unnatural stillness.
(Hughes 1967 :33)

Hughes's quote is grandiose, but maybe, I wonder, perhaps not inflated enough! I contend that Lupton and Hughes could go further in their ruminations. As the session text continually suggests, the doors towards that archaic relationship with nature are far from bolted. Associations of shamanism are problematic; both concerning cultural differences (the term - actually Siberian - and the function it describes varies from country to country), and the potential sense of inflation it could create in an individual 'claiming' the role. For these reasons I use the term sensitively.

It is not the role of this thesis to make a sweeping denotation that the role of storyteller inevitably carries with it the role of shaman (Kalweit 1987), our conception of what story offers is too wide for that, but it does seek to re-emphasise a primary function - as an intermediary between society's shared languages and an invitation to 'otherness' to present itself, imagistically, to the group, and, in doing so, expand our capacity for knowledge. The largesse of the role I describe is certainly problematic - it is a call for something to burst open in the individual.

The German artist Joseph Beuys can be considered partially a storyteller, even if his medium of communication was cross-disciplinary; his lectures, drawings, sculptures and ritual events sought to create bridges between the considered wisdoms of the art world and his versions of certain forms of magical practice used in tribal communities - the use of felt and wax for example. This invoked some scepticism: "He was a bullshit artist of unrivalled ambition and stamina...pure hokum, and yet we readily succumb to its lyricism." (Storr 1995 :32)

"We readily succumb to its lyricism" indicates Storr's awareness of the desire for enchanters, even in the late twentieth century. His wider essay on Beuys is appropriately conflicted: "he was able to inject energy into outmoded roles and replenish a poetically bankrupt mysticism".

Storr opens the controversial ground of shaman and showman, acknowledging a cultural desire for the former and the reality of often receiving the latter. We know the often repeated 'story' of Beuys's being shot down as a Luftwaffe pilot, lacerated with shrapnel, and then being rescued by a nomadic people, the Tartars, and brought back to health by being wrapped in felt. This conspicuously mirrors elements of the descent, rupture and renewal process we locate in myth and rites-of-passage. Rather too well, claims Storr.

In certain shamanic initiations young shamans are invested with 'medicine bones' that are placed into the reshaping of the initiate's body; items such as rock crystals replace the previous body part - the anatomy now containing information from the mineral world, a wrenching and distortion bringing life into a new, expanded harmonic. One account from the Unamatatjera recalls the climax of this process:

In the morning the old man came and looked at him and placed some more atongara stones inside his body, and in the joints of his arms and legs and covered his face with leaves. Then he sang over him till his body was all swollen up. When this was over he provided him with a complete set of new inside parts, placed a lot more atongara stones in him, and patted him on the head, which caused him to jump up and live."
(Spencer and Gillian 1904 :457)

A positive appraisal could suggest that Beuys's "medicine bones" were the shrapnel lodged in his physical form, elements that collided biology and machinery, colluding in his descent into illness and the rapture of his renewal. The breaching of the skin also perforates ideas of unequivocal containment. In shamanism, these new attachments to the body are seen to contain distilled consciousness of the arena they originate from: mineral, plant, animal etc, so we encounter Beuys

receiving concentrated knowledge of the atmosphere of war, the shadow of his own people's psyche, appalling in its intensity. In one infinite moment Beuys is suspended in the death space, is split open by the projected violence of combat and is left changed, holding, through experience, a key to the new images, new art, new stories.

Beuys is an exceptional figure for bringing an explicit ritual sensibility to modern art that didn't feel hackneyed and clumsy. He refused the one-sided, faux-myth of thirties Germany and became a Grief Man (see January session text) for some of the distorted and poisoned mythology of that era. The rawness of his work, but also the intelligence and ambition he presented, has caused him to become a totemic figure in a very complex field. Of course, distorted myth is not purely a German problem, but an international dilemma of how a society subverts and distorts its mythologies - no one has clean hands. It is interesting to note Stoor's use of the word 'bullshit' - we see trickster imagery entering the picture with the controversy around Beuys, all sorts of shadowy, scatological, half-formed suspicions form a noose for his heretical neck.

But Beuys was nothing if not cunning (a very tricksterish quality), and understood that controversy will always accompany true art - maybe his scar tissue toughened his skin. Of course, cunning derives from cunnen - to know (Websters :66). So how would Beuys's knowing gaze towards the esoteric appear within the field of contemporary storytelling? I wish to return again to the field of oral telling.

The beautiful thing about traditional tales, the thing that makes them interesting, and endlessly adaptable, is that they do not speak their truths directly. Traditional tales use the hidden language of metaphor...you could say it might be said that there are as many hidden stories within a narrative as there are tellers and listeners.
(Pomm Clayton 2008 :7)

A concern with much contemporary storytelling is a hesitancy to explore metaphor, that a superstitious code prevents any deeper implications being explored. In a society that often ignores depth and metaphor in favour of the shallow and literal, Pomm Clayton's 'hidden stories' are not always accessed.

Without this push to the edge of our understanding, the storyteller merely recites the pastoral; tales over-polished to assure and titillate the human community, lacking a Blakeian edge to allow the truly visionary to push at the boundaries. The pastoral offers a salve, an affirmation of old, shared values, a reiteration of the power of the herd. The prophetic almost always brings some conflict with it - it disarms, awakens, challenges and deepens. It is far less to do with 'enchantment' and much more to do with 'waking up'.

The prophetic engages the intelligence of the adult, is suffused in paradox, carries perceptive weight from unusual angles and is not designed to reassure. It is not designed purely for stability, but for growth. It seeks not to destroy old forms for the sake of it, but rather to reanimate their propensity for holy thought. We could say that the pastoral re -

affirms village persona, where as the prophetic is transformative in nature, with all the trouble that can involve. The pastoral contains the ceremonies of permanence, the prophetic the wild ritual of new emergence. The Village boundaries are re – animated by the Forest initiate, and ground the image - leap by witnessing and confirming its weird poetics.

A certain sense of excitement is generated by the liminal...feelings close to disquiet and discomfort are experienced...liminal performance strives to play at the edge of the possible, continually challenging not only performance practice but also traditional aesthetic concepts. (Broadhurst 1999 :1)

When the emphasis is too pastoral, otherness is not touched, and myth becomes merely a defensive cluster of societal anecdotes. To allow precedent for the anthropocentric is to deny the contrary tensions of the truly bardic. This very crossroads is the highest gift that story can offer, and implicit in its performance is incantation, a kind of efficacious opening, something only made possible by an interior awakening in the myth-teller.

The question, then, for the theatre, is to create a metaphysics of speech, gesture, and expression...an appeal to certain unhabitual ideas, which by their very nature cannot be limited or even formally depicted...they are able to create a kind of passionate equation between Man, Society, Nature, and Objects.
(Antonin Artaud 1958 :90-91)

Conclusion

We know that Coyote is a decentralised zone, that his life force exists in the tip of his nose and tail; not the broad central plain. We see he is elusive in texture and not located in a geographical location or specific point in history but remains epistemic.
(Shaw 2010 :58)

In the five years of research that has gone into both the session and analytical texts, the oral recordings and paintings, the above image of Coyote has been crucial for my methodology. To even begin to approach myth I believe you have to utilise what the poet William Stafford (1993) called 'Smokes Way'. A contrary, receptive route, allowing the mythic breeze to guide you. Any other approach could lead to the situation that G.S. Kirk isolated in chapter one – easy generalisations. The idea of myth is mutable by nature, so to approach it one needs to be both specific in ones personal connotations, and continually aware that those connotations will never be definitive, or fixed. To fix them is to aim an arrow at the heart of Coyote, and, of course, that's not what his power lives. It lives on the margins, on the tail and the nose, in glimpses and epiphanies. At the end of this text, myth seems less to do with concrete belief and more to do with a form of perception, a form of thinking.

The very notion of the word wild implied a need for variety - the spontaneous and the unusual - at the centre of the methodology. There is, of course, a head scratching paradox about how to approach wildness within an academic context. Rather like stalking an animal (for study not conquest), charging into the clearing waving a spear would not work. The analytical text's observational distance; the session text's cross associations between personal narrative, poetry and psychology; the oral recordings; the paintings' attention to silence and crossing new thresholds; all glimpse differing elements of initiatory myths and their relationship to rites-of-passage. Without this cross-pollination I would have been unequipped to approach the research question. Underneath this main research many other areas of discourse have bid for attention, but I have tried to stay true to the main investigation whilst allowing tributaries to emerge now and then.

The research has both challenged and finally confirmed where my own position rests in all of this. Not as a purist for the oral tradition do I stand, but as a seeker of giedd - the clear poetic spirit. I have grown to appreciate the work of Barthes, Ricouer and Derrida as crucial to images of myth in modernity, but am still intrigued by Kane's notion that myth is "the power of a place speaking". My own practice, through storytelling, exegesis, leading wilderness retreats, writing or painting, is an attempt to place myself in a position of receptivity for that possibility.

For the research to have validity I have also had to distance myself from old positions at times and witness long cherished ideas be queried or even fall away. I also wish to emphasise the role of painting in this process. It is possible for the paintings to seem marginal or secondary to the session and analytical texts, but the silence of the studio whilst creating them has proved a vital in breath to the out breath of speech and writing. Of course, the paintings are ultimately

visible too, but appeared to diffuse mythic images in quite a different way (see appendix), and enabled me to experience initiatory process within the confines of a studio. The phrase mythography intimates the visual as part of its expression, and so I feel that all four investigative tools have been complementary to one another.

Robert Bringhurst refers to Diego Velazquez as a myth-teller. When referring to *The Kitchen Maid and The Supper at Emmaus* he writes: "The light cast by the myth permeates everything around it; everything within the frame of the painting, and everyone who comes up to the painting and allows it to keep saying what it says." (Bringhurst 2008 :92) It is possible that Velazquez's paintings would fit a Western bid for the immortal, rather than the impermanence of an aboriginal sand painting, in which case my Western inheritance is clear. The paintings are a record of an intensely personal engagement with the very core of this research – how does the severance/threshold/return reveal itself in the practice of a working artist today? The research has brought my visual expression alongside the oral and written in a way I could not have anticipated. I recall Ball's quote from chapter two:

One relinquishes, lock, stock, and barrel the language which journalism has polluted and made impossible. You withdraw into the inmost alchemy of the word. Then let the word be sacrificed as well, so as to preserve for poetry its last and holiest domain.
(Ball 1975 :194)

At periods it appeared I needed to "let the word be sacrificed as well", that my methodology needed to be broad enough to shift into plasticity when the enquiry seem to be almost grounded by words, unable to move forward. To my surprise, the process of painting would almost always reveal something I couldn't quite glimpse in the written. An occasional reverie in the process of making would illuminate some issue in the written research. It appeared that by not continually addressing an issue head on, but in a peripheral or deflected way (through the process of painting), the issue resolved itself, like gazing at Medusa by her reflection on a shield. However, this was not its deliberate function, the painting was primarily a process of its own. Gary Snyder says: "the word wild is like a gray fox trotting off through the bushes, going in and out of sight" (Snyder 1990 :9) So a methodology that chooses to incorporate wildness is going to have to get good at tracking. I would suggest the word myth is equally shifty, so the methods chosen were not arbitrary, but carefully picked for trails disappearing into the mist.

The contribution to knowledge is two-fold. One is the re-animating through oral narrative and exegesis seven myths – and creating the contextualisation that this analytical text offers. Second is the overt relationship established between these seven stories and wilderness rites-of-passage. I also believe that other, subtler contributions exist underneath these two wider headings. Specifically, the isolating of a crisis within wilderness rites-of-passage, and also the attention to storytelling as a key to re-animating the practice. This crisis - arising from what the thesis calls "an addiction to severance", which then creates a ripple effect in the problematic 'return' of the initiate - has not been identified, to the

best of my knowledge, by other specialists in the field. Neither has the use of story as a device to integrate and nurture the experience when faced with the 'return' and its attendant challenges.

This material has now been explored at conferences in the United Kingdom, Europe and the United States. I conclude that the relationship between myth and initiation practice is complicated but vital, specifically in the progression of severance, threshold and return, and specifically in what the session text has named 'shape leaping' stories. I present the possibility of storytelling in dialogue with rites-of-passage as a way of embracing the prophetic attributes associated with initiation and making them communicable. Finally, I feel strongly that a metaphorical appraisal is the crucial ground of relationship between initiation and myth, and that both hold a vital mirror to the business of living well on a troubled earth.

APPENDIX

Thresholds crossed: finding initiatory motifs in art practice

As the thesis has maintained, to approach creation of a mythography requires a number of disciplines. Alongside the written text a series of supporting paintings were created, not as 'illustrations' but as examples of how the initiatory motif of severance, threshold and integration can appear in the process of making a painting. This is not a review of that possibility through art history - a vast undertaking, requiring an entirely new thesis - but a more intimate account of its imprint in my own practice. So here again are the three initiatory stages seen through the discipline of my own art practice - a wordless, speechless outlet. Many of the paintings took place over a four day period in complete isolation - the same length as the wilderness fast.

No revolution, no heresy is comfortable and easy. Because it is a leap, a rupture of the smooth evolutionary curve, and a rupture is a wound, a pain. But it is a necessary wound.
(Zamyatin 1988 :141)

SEVERANCE

Any artist needs an awareness and sensitivity to certain habitual patterns in the construction of their work, that mannerisms, can become a self - made cage in which the individual finds themselves caught. This is a subtle position, and only an artist with a developed reflective ability may sense which side of that line they find themselves on. Repetition can imply a deepening of enquiry, rather than necessarily stagnation. In my own practice this was not the case. It indicated a residual collection of techniques that seemed almost obliged to manifest once I entered the ritualised area of the studio, canvas and oils.

Of course, repetition as a storyteller walks hand in hand with innovation - as this thesis has explored - but requires fresh, in the moment, turns of language to re-animate old themes. However, in the painting studio, what happens when all you have is the grand old gestures without the spirit of further enquiry?

The emotional enquiry once engendered in the process of making was absent. Although the daubs of paint and scribbled graphite resembled earlier work, it no longer constituted investigation, it constituted a designated territory, one I understood well. If wildness was present, it was taking a habitual and rather polished form. The works connection to past eras of art history also mimic the thesis's notion that 'Village knowledge' comprises of inherited information rather than being primarily experiential.

It was clear that a form of severance had to take place within the paintings if they were to be a true component of the research question. Specific elements I had lent on had to be subdued, transformed or abandoned altogether. A self

conscious reliance on the attitude and painterly landscape of the abstract and post-abstract expressionists had to be examined for its validity. Philip Guston, Marcus Lupertz, Franz Kline and Jean Michel Basquiat had all impacted themselves in my art education, initially liberating but then becoming restricting, an aping of an emotional range that may have rung true in their own practices, but were becoming a kind of prison in my own - the echo of all the old heroes was causing a genuine investigation to become restricted, bound, self-conscious. At the same time, I was not looking to create work that seemed entirely free of all influence. The real emphasis needed to be on an internal re-ordering, a freshness within, a desire to take risks, to dissolve old structures if necessary - with these elements established in the enquiry, the visual manifestation of the work would gain in flexibility, and if they occasionally invoked previous approaches to painting, that would engender my interest rather than self-consciousness.

So Severance would involve an abandonment of overly mannered techniques in favour of openness to accident, inspiration and tension.

Sometime in the late 1960's, Motherwell succumbed to dangerous inaction. The only way he could extricate himself was to turn his back on the "careful disorderliness" of his epic canvases. (Ashton 1997 :39)

THRESHOLD

A strong element to this leaving of the Village was to find a paint that would itself create a reaction on canvas that I could only partially control. The combination of black gloss and white, household emulsion paint, provided just that. Over a period of a day, once gloss was covered by emulsion, it would go through a series of visual responses I could witness and then respond to. I would have no way of dictating its appearance, or would want to. This felt like engagement with a form of wildness, a foreign form landing in the ritual field - the canvas, that would push me into new vistas of seeing. It was a way of diverting my normal flow of engagement with the work, slowing it (the drying process often meant hours waiting for certain sections to dry before continuing) 'tripping up' a certain habitual form of approach.

This slow drying paint brought with it an aesthetic that appeared sometimes ugly, cramped and ambivalent to my sensibilities. In mythic terms, I was wandering swamps and deserts, with many familiar motifs absent. To write less enigmatically, I often experienced a sense of being lost in the practice, the work did not provide the old emotional range of reassurance. Working on the paintings upside down also helped amplify an inherent discomfort. The aim was not to lose all personal investment in the image, but to allow a kind of disintegration to occur, and a willingness to accommodate greater uncertainty within the painterly field.

Even in such an abstract field, a symbolic language could not be avoided, some form of tenuous narrative. In the five years of researching and writing this thesis, I became so engaged with the symbolic language of myth, it would have

been an act of artifice to claim that a similar 'way of seeing' did not occur in the painting, a perception that I would not have been conscious of before the research began.

A strange ship emerges in the paintings, almost flesh-like, dragging itself through many different landscapes; odd, sharp columns of flame emerge in empty, white space, slurries of grey paint jump between more formal images, seeking relationship. The ship, or is it an anchor, or serpent, seems like the stories themselves - formidable but hard to pin down, slowly moving from view, the flames, the moment when the stories echo bursts up through and into a community. There seems to be bows appearing and gateways of bone. The slurry of grey, and the free drying of the gloss and emulsion, rejects any empirical positioning, engages with wildness, can't help but dispel ebullience and bring forth an unsettling new landscape. A landscape appearing in the slow, difficult, ritualised world of the studio, by losing the old maps of reference and forgoing easy comforts. How else do we extend painterly language? It does not fit my 'village eyes', but brings hard and awkward questions to my practice, the skree and scat of the forest. Visually, a previously wider range of colour seemed to naturally move towards off-white, muddy brown, orange and ranges of green.

The slowness of the gloss/emulsion mix drying affected my relationship with space and time: adrenaline would slowly leave my body to be replaced by a greater critical faculty. I was seeking new elements from my practice. Rather than the emotional high of completing a painting at speed, I was forced into a layered, more analytical practice. Yet again I encountered paradox – in seeking to take greater risks I found the necessity of systems and patience. If the paint, or mark making, felt purely habitual, it was removed - this was now the only reward, rather than the old, short-lived, euphoria. This instigates a much wider range of emotional response to the practice of painting: curiosity, frustration, removal. When I read a painting from this series now, I locate these layered tensions, and their changing relationship to time.

There is an anti-spectacularity and humbleness in the labour of the work - it's hard to feel as if you have ever had a good day's work as so little is achieved every day. The kind of improvisation that is happening in the work... I start out with what I think the work is, but then it tells me something and I may not be the first to know. That is what I mean by humiliation-something that is Unconscious and a willingness to play with something that is ugly. Making a cosmology out of these things that are so awful. (Gallagher 2001 :23)

RETURN

So the image-language creeps back to the village, maybe in the form of exhibition or book. Those familiar with the creative excursion required may look closely, whilst others not at all. How many times must the artist open themselves to these demanding steps to maintain a certain primordial freshness to their work? In this sense, many artists hold this crossroads, and the active process of not manipulating their work to appease the village's 'favourite' representation of the forest - i.e. mimicking earlier work that established a reputation.

In the wake of abstract expressionism, all subject matter, especially all personal narrative, was looked upon with suspicion.
(Musa 1988 :153)

I got sick and tired of all that purity! I wanted to tell stories.
(Guston 1988 :153)

The written research and storytelling has influenced this return to painting. As described, certain images do resonate a symbolic language; i.e. snake figures, small triangles of flame, boats, half-concealed tracks - the difference is that they are images not shared by an entire community, but by a much smaller, disparate group, probably engaged with their own practice or criticism. Even then, that is not to imply that they are unifying, just that other practitioners may recognise something of the process of creation, rather like a dream analyst nodding encouragingly as they hear of some new nocturnal display.

I, like Guston, 'want to tell stories', but the stories may be obscure, challenging and remote. The difference is a new recognition that they hold that possibility at all. Five years ago I would not have been conscious of that idea. The narratives they hold do not claim the wider emotional panorama of the oral stories, but hold fragments of atmosphere; they communicate moments rather than extended dramas. They could not provide a shared language, or myth, for society at large, but it is entirely possible they illuminate moments of recognition for a few that have walked similar roads. They are illustrative of rupture and fragments, like Coyote, moments before he reassembles and scampers on his way (many North American myths feature Coyote as a mythic character that can be destroyed and reassembled). They are stories, stories with new implications of time attached, possibly with whole stanzas or verses missing, stories that echo this ancient cycle and its seeming impossibility in the current era. To present a more unified field of narrative would also have felt disingenuous; maybe they are 'initiation paintings' designed, as Eliade said, at the beginning of our mythic review, to recreate the hierarchical vision of ritual 'seeing'. Without having undergone the process their painterly language remains gnostic.

The paintings are not purged entirely of any previous gestural language, but how they arrived there is altered, they entangle and confuse me. They offer me little comfort, and the symbolic images feel only half mine - half belong to the paint, the process and the myths. The paintings lead me, yet again, into a new cycle of initiation.

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Conferences and Events

2010

8th October, '*Myth and its Relationship to Psychology*', given at Christchurch University, Kent, U.K.

13th – 19th September, '*Storytelling and the Ecstatic Image*', given at the 'Bringing Back The Fire' Minnesota Men's conference; U.S.

2–4th September, '*Storytelling and the Ecstatic Image*', given at the 'Myth, Literature and the Unconscious' conference, University of Essex, U.K.

27th – 30th August, '*Interpreting Parzival*', given at 'Stories For Change' Westcountry Storytelling Festival, U.K.

19th June, guest storyteller for the Miwok: Native American Solstice ceremony, U.S.

18th June, '*Leaving the Village, Finding the Forest*', (collaborative lectures and performances with Coleman Barks) Miwok reservation, U.S.

12th June, '*Ivan and the Grey Wolf*', (collaborative lecture with mythologist Daniel Deardorff) given at Frank Lloyd Wright's Ranch, U.S.

1–6th June, '*Storytelling and the Ecstatic Image*', given at 'Taking Hold of the Wildcat's Fur', The Great Mother conference, U.S.

2009

30th October, '*The Feminine Trickster in Arthurian Stories*', given at The Westcountry School of Myth conference on Mythology and the Arts, UK

8th – 13th September, '*Three New Aspects To The Story Of Iron John*' (collaborative lectures and performance with Poet Laureate of Minnesota Robert Bly), given at 'Where is Iron John Now?' Minnesota Men's conference, U.S.

18th – 20th September, '*Interpreting Parzival*', given at the 'Culture of Wildness' conference, U.S.

1st July, '*Myth and the Voyage*', given at the Land/Water Symposium, University of Plymouth

30th May - June 7th, '*The Ecstatic in Gaelic Myth*', given at 'What Was Said To The Rose', The Great Mother conference, U.S.

27th January, '*Inside an Arthurian Myth*', given at Jungian gathering, Divonne, France

26th January, '*Literature, Myth and the Imagination*', given at Geneva Writers Association, Switzerland

2008

30th September - October 5th, '*Generosity in Myth*', given at; 'Rekindling the Unselfish Way', Minnesota Men's conference, U.S.

27th September, '*The Mythology of Leadership*', given on Desmond Tutu leadership programme, Templeton College, Oxford, U.K.

5th September, 'Inside a Norwegian Myth', given at the 'Way Out West' Westcountry Storytelling Festival, U.K.

10th May, 'The Mythology of Leadership', given on the Strategic Leadership Programme, Templeton College, Oxford, U.K.

25 –28th April, 'A Culture of Wildness', given at the 'Culture of Wildness' poetry conference, Rhode Island. U.S.

2007

4 – 9th September, 'Relationships between the Hag and the King', given at 'Keeping our Feet on Human Ground' Minnesota Men's conference, U.S.

2nd September, 'The Mythology of Leadership' given on Desmond Tutu leadership programme, Templeton College, Oxford, U.K.

21nd June, 'The Bones of Initiation', given at the University of Puget Sound, U.S.

20th June, 'The Bones of Initiation', given at the Unitarian Church, Ashland, U.S.

18th June, 'The Bones of Initiation', given at the Unitarian Church, Oakland, U.S.

8- 9th June, 'Tasting the Milk of Eagles' given at Methodist Hall, Santa Fe, U.S.

6th April, 'The Mythology of Leadership', given on the Strategic Leadership Programme, Templeton College, Oxford

Please note: these are just a fraction of the lectures, workshops and wilderness retreats taken place over the research period. Many were in non-academic or institutional settings – the Snowdonia mountain range, the deserts of New Mexico, the backwoods of Oregon, the forests of Vermont, and bars, bookshops, front rooms and even a prohibition style 'speak- easy' in New York's Lower East Side. I do not rank any of these events – either on the list or in this footnote – as more significant than the other. The list highlights events that involved a paper being read or extemporised from, the others either involved the wilderness just itself or were of a more informal nature.

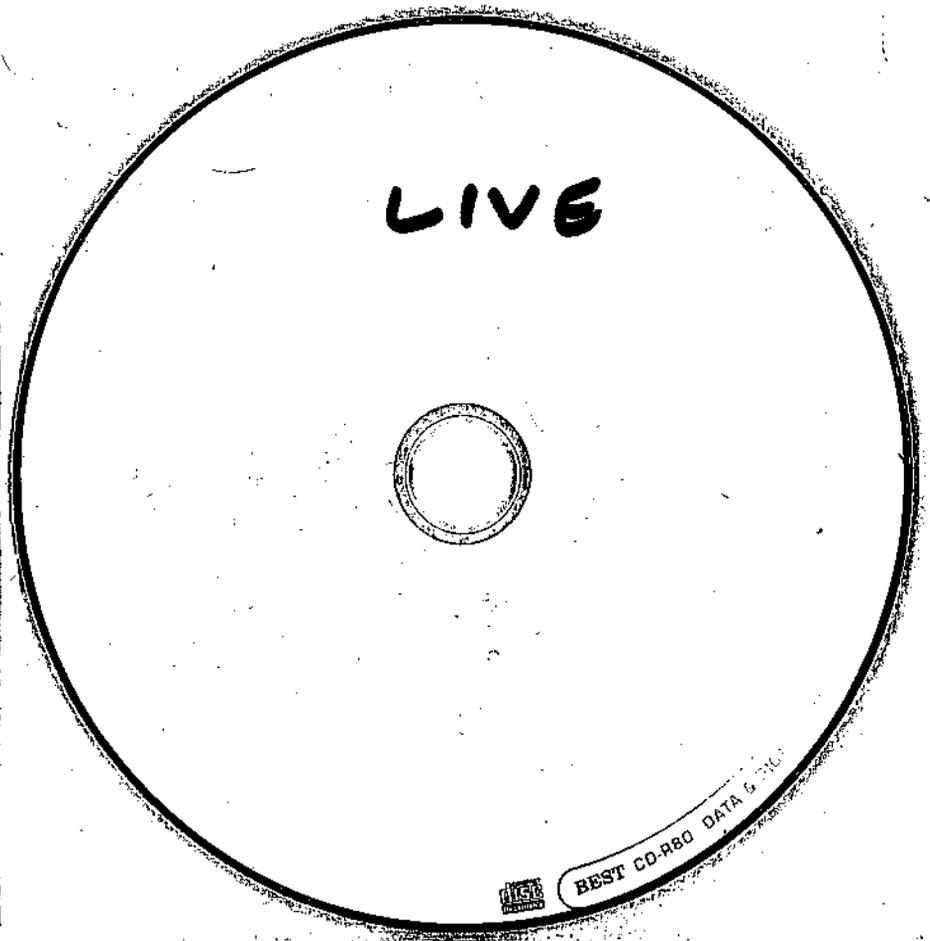




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