



The Mythic Dimension: Selected Essays 1959-87 (Collected Works)

Joseph Campbell, Antony Van Couvering (Editor)

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In these pages, the Collected Works of Joseph Campbell presents twelve eclectic, far-ranging and brilliant essays exploring myth in all its dimensions: its history; its influence on art, literature, and culture; and its role in everyday life. This second volume of Campbell's essays (following *Flight of the Wild Gander*) brings together uncollected writings from 1959 to 1987. Written at the height of Campbell's career — and showcasing the lively intelligence that made him the twentieth century's premier writer on mythology — these essays investigate the profound links among myth, the individual, and societies ancient and contemporary. Covering diverse terrain ranging from psychology to the occult, from Thomas Mann to the Grateful Dead, from Goddess spirituality to Freud and Jung, these playful and erudite writings reveal the threads of myth woven deeply into the fabric of our culture and our lives.

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From Reader Review The Mythic Dimension: Selected Essays 1959-87 (Collected Works) for online ebook

David Melbie says

Finally! It has been three years since a [new] release of Joe's works. What's the holdup? Of course, this was my second reading of these essays and I am very fond of this collection. . . had to pack it up -- we're moving! Picked it up again on February 10, 2009. --From *A Reader's Journal*, by d r melbie.

Nikki says

The only thing that prevented me from wholeheartedly loving every page of this text as with all previous Campbell texts I have read was the section, and then later reflection, on numerology. A brief synopsis of his conclusions on the continual re-appearance of "432" across time and culture would have sufficed. Though the historicity was compelling, Campbell's writing style was more scientific here than in his other sections and other texts. This is, of course, because of the presence of mathematical equations. Nevertheless, I found it less gripping than his usual conversational tone. What I always enjoy most about Campbell's texts is that there is a feeling that he is sitting right there, with the feeling of a casual conversation that magically captures the most important concepts of life and myth. His ability to achieve such comfort and familiarity with the reader has always impressed and delighted me.

Campbell's knowledge of various traditions is, to say the very least, impressive. Throughout his many texts, Campbell focuses on various religions and myths. In "The Mythic Dimension," when discussing religion, Campbell primarily focused on Christian and Indian traditions- the two I am most familiar with. I was raised as a Christian, and I took the "Hindu Traditions" course in Fall '08. I enjoyed looking at the parallels between the two. I have always appreciated Campbell's notion that religion is myth and is not to be read literally, which he reaffirms in "The Mythic Dimension." I believe that, with this application, we can readily accept all religions as performing the same function – giving us a path or guidelines to follow while in the mortal coil, and giving us a glimpse of what we came from and what we are headed toward. Furthermore, it gives us the ability to accept all religions as valid and not deem one religion "better" than another or deem any one religion as the "correct" religion.

Another element that stood out in this text was the discussions on both suffering and compassion (Campbell 83, 85). I now see not only how greatly the two are related, but how they are two of the greatest gifts to humans. According to Campbell, suffering gives us the ability to gain wisdom (83). I see this in direct correlation with compassion- the ability to truly connect to others. If we did not know suffering, how could we empathize with others? Furthermore, suffering and compassion are two unique elements that make us truly human (different from other creatures on this planet). Campbell quotes Eckhart and leads us to understand that, without love, suffering is essentially meaningless (216). In understanding how the concept of love unites with the concept of compassion, I see that, together, it is love, suffering, and compassion that unite both the myths and our experience of humanity. After all, the myths are both a reflection of a guide for our human experience. Campbell asserts: "Truly tragic pity unites us with the human - not with Communist, Fascist, Muslim, or Christian – sufferer" (238). It is important to recognize that is our humanity that unites us, not our titles or differing beliefs. It is from this global humanity that comes the creation and sustenance of the myth. It is both from and for humanity that we fight, live, and die.

Campbell also, of course, discusses other elements of our humanity. He touches on one of my favorite concepts of humanity - that we are born too soon. As he indicates, we are raised for roughly two decades with an idea of dependence, with this reliance on mother and father. It is a shocking release for many to

venture to the new role of independent adult, suddenly expected to be fully responsible and to fulfill the role of mother or father (221, 222). Campbell reminds us, though, that we have the myths to show us how to be adults and maintain our given “roles” (79). This shows how, in today’s society, we continue to need myths. Finally, Campbell reminds us that this existence is not a permanent one. He instructs us on how to perform in this game of life with an attitude akin to child-like play, keeping in mind that “The laws of life in time and space - economics, politics, and even morality - will dissolve” (37). Of course, when this life dissolves, the life of the spirit is just beginning. There is something bigger, something beyond, something unnamable that all the religions and all the myths point towards.

Meg says

This summation of a comparative mythology class as an introduction to cross-cultural studies (largely within the collegiate system of over fifty years ago) was incredibly interesting. As an avid fan of mythology and anthropology, this gave me a few pointers in refining my own self-directed lessons and an unique perspective on schooling from a bygone era. Definitely worth a read!!

Tami says

If you have any sort of interest in mythology, then you have heard of Joseph Campbell. His works such as *The Hero's Journey* and *Myths of Light* are required reading for university studies. His presentation of the cycle of the hero is absolutely legendary. He is one of my absolute favorite authors.

When a copy of *The Mythic Dimension* arrived at my door for me to review, I was thrilled. This book reprints a variety of Campbell's essays and articles, originally published between 1959 and 1987. Amongst these pieces are solid foundational presentations that provide a really good overview of the study of mythology and the associated symbolism. I can see this book becoming a very popular text for university classes.

Mike says

When a religion is demythologized, when believers see a historical figure rather than a symbol, that's when a religion ceases to be viable, closing minds instead of opening them. Campbell's essays are all about remythologizing religion, about recognizing God as “a metaphor for that which transcends all levels of intellectual thought.”

Matt says

A collection of Campbell essays, probably only for diehard fans of his, which I obviously am.

Rae Coleman says

Fantastic!!!!
