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Reluctant High Priest | Inter Views by James Hillman with Laura Pozzo

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tent as a clever textual trickster. Hoban wants more from his words and over-

reaches with them. I hope he hits upon the formula.

Reluctant high priest

INTER VIEWS

James Hillman with Laura Pozzo
Harper and Row, \$10.95, 198 pp.

Philip Novak

TEN YEARS AGO I read James Hillman's erudite and brilliantly original *Myth of Analysis* sensing psychological genius. Since then my enthusiasm has steadily dwindled, though his popularity it seems has gone the other way. This former director of the Jung Institute of Zurich, now something of a renegade among Jungians, has been hailed as the most original psychological thinker of our time and the founder of a new school: archetypal psychology.

Hillman's originality lies in having taken the psychology of the unconscious to its logical term. Whereas Freud and Jung assumed the superiority of a conscious, analytical standpoint from which the irrational forces of the psyche could be conceptually mapped and rationally understood, Hillman argues that such supposed superiority is but another fantasy, another psychic posture, no freer of unconscious determinants than any other. For Hillman, the psyche is not a hierarchy but an egalitarian pantheon, a field of archetypal patterns, or "god," whose ceaselessly shifting constellations shape our thought, our behavior, and our world. We can never stand above the gods, and psychologically speaking, we are quite unfree. In everything we think and say and do, we do their bidding.

The reluctant high priest of a new polytheism, Hillman thus counsels recognition of all the gods of the psyche. The implications are radical. We thrive psychologically by befriending and communing with our images (the speech of the gods) not by subordinating them to rational interpretation. To the Jungian goal of wholeness Hillman prefers "falling apart" into multiplicity, the psyche's natural mode. Traditional spiritual paths are rejected as soul-

negating because of their one-sided preference for unity and light. Only when life is lived in and through the soul's pathologies (his word) is soul-making, the central opus of archetypal psychology, furthered.

Working in this vein, Hillman has been prolific and provocative. He has also been annoying. Obscurity, loose ends, and inconsistency are as readily apparent in this work as his massive learning. For example, he will denounce views that dare to prescribe how we "ought" to be, yet his own work distinguishes psychically healthy and unhealthy modes of being, thereby implying oughts right and left. He urges respect for all the "gods" but in practice he neglects all but the Greek gods. His writings regularly contain polemics against other views (such as the Hebrew) which, by his own logic, are but other archetypal voices ("You can't open your mouth without an archetypal perspective speaking through you"). If one charges him with philosophical incoherence, ethical shallowness, or blatant contradiction, he will respond that consistency is not important to him and that, in any case, such charges indicate that one is afflicted with the disease of "monotheistic thinking" or "literalism," epithets Hillman hurls with irritating frequency. There appears to be little ground upon which archetypal psychology can be challenged.

The volume under review is a book-length interview with Hillman tenaciously conducted by a pseudonymous "Laura Pozzo" — rumored by some to be Hillman himself in anima disguise. It contains the same mixture of provocative observation and insubstantial musing that characterize Hillman's work in general. None of the insubstantiality is Pozzo's fault; indeed, one could hardly ask for a more intelligent or informed questioner. Time and again she presses the elusive Hillman on such weak points as have been mentioned. But Hillman often dodges her or takes refuge in one of his

metaphorical fugues. He meanders, engages in straw man critiques (e.g., of fundamentalist Christianity, which often stands for the whole), and offers generalizations about human life and culture that are vapid as often as they are perceptive. We may lay some of the blame for this on the interview format itself. Hillman shows himself aware of its constraints and observes that the interview, like the talk show and the panel discussion, is a modern contrivance that tends to render trivial that which is entrusted to it.

Nevertheless — and this too seems generally characteristic of his work — there are aspects here interesting enough to offset the dissatisfactions, and merit for the whole a cautious recommendation. To mention but three favorable impressions: first, *Inter Views* contains many pithy clarifications of the main ideas and attitudes of archetypal psychology's theory and practice, quite helpful for the newcomer as well as for us more plodding students. Second, it becomes clearer here than in any other work of which I'm aware that archetypal psychology has no pretensions whatever to being a science and that one errs, at least slightly, in criticizing it on that basis. In no less than fourteen places, Hillman indicates that he is not a scientist but an artist, not a *psychologist* (for *logos* connotes rational systematization) but a *psychopoetiker*, a poet of the psyche. His work is part of an "aesthetic revolution," and is nourished by the hope that "we could rebuild psychology on an aesthetic basis." In a telling passage, Hillman discloses the link between aesthetics and healing: ". . . if we imagine ourselves engaged as artists in life, . . . then we would work with the daily mess in our lives as material for psychological creativity. And that is what therapy, as I try to do it, is all about: to get people to live their lives more from an artist fantasy of themselves [which] . . . accepts the mess, likes it, needs it."

Finally, there is Hillman in an anecdotal and confessional mode — an unexpected delight. He appears candid, self-effacing, witty, and utterly charming. I happily admit that my antipathy toward the man, the residue of intellectual dis-

agreement, melted as I read. How can one help but like a writer with whom one has had difficulty when he admits that clarity is hard for him, that his style is uneven because he himself is "mixed, *meshugge*," and that he writes "about all sorts of things — like reflection — I don't necessarily *do* but might wish I could do or think I should do . . . [My] books are deceptive." Hillman even says that he once "began a little book called 'Why I Don't Read Hillman' . . . I made notes on all the dodges in my own thinking, all the loopholes and cover-ups — everything I couldn't bear in my own work."

For Hillman and his *Gemeinschaft* there is a large remainder of the bearable, and yes, of the worthwhile. After all is

Home-grown, full-bodied philosophy

A STROLL WITH WILLIAM JAMES

Jacques Barzun
Harper & Row, \$19.95, 344 pp.

Michael Kellogg

"**A** AMERICAN PHILOSOPHER," like "English wine," is close to a contradiction in terms. Despite the label, one expects little more than a watered-down import. All the more reason, then, to cherish those few products, like the philosophical writings of William James, that are both home-grown and full-bodied. Unfortunately, James, who died in 1910, is still known largely for his pioneering work in psychology. His philosophical writings, despite their

Therapy aims at bringing a person back to an unreflected way of working, an instinctual way . . . It's a crazy thing because the whole procedure is insight and reflection and conversation in an armchair, yet the intention is unreflected responsiveness, just plain old working . . . without neurotic encumbrances.

—James Hillman
Inter Views

said and done, archetypal psychology strikes its own blow against the forces of repression and fosters psychological maturity through the differentiation of psychic life. It seeks to relieve us of the misery of the divided self in this unique way: not by unifying it but by teaching us how to live creatively within its natural (so the theory goes) fragmentation. And like a great religious tradition it offers, albeit idiosyncratically, the holy promise of liberation from the narrow prison of ego. But whether archetypal psychology will become a lasting force in human reflection or be remembered as an *avant-garde* vocation of belletrists seeking to bear, ennoble, and even sacralize ordinary human foibles — this remains to be seen.

range, subtlety, and concreteness, are little read, even by academics.

This neglect is due in part to the unfortunate label with which he saddled his

thought. "Pragmatism" seems to imply in the crudest sense that what works is good and true. As Professor Barzun puts it, "James and Pragmatism have been branded as typically American, a mind and a doctrine to be expected from a nation of hucksters."

A deeper reason for the oversight, however, lies precisely in James's virtue of concreteness. He had an artist's love for the jumbled details of life and refused to take refuge in generalities that would "house and hide the chaos." As a consequence, he left no set of easily digestible doctrines upon which students and scholars alike could feast. In fact, his most persistent theme is the need to resist the tyranny of abstract thought.

Such a refrain may sound curious when intoned by a philosopher. Abstractions, senseless or not, are his stock in trade and, as the saying goes, "It's a poor carpenter who criticizes his tools." But James's point is simply that, as we move from one level of generality to a higher one, we must ensure that no details crucial to the point at hand are left behind.

"If you ask me to recommend the best contemporary discussion of marriage and divorce for the busy pastoral minister, I would name Kevin T. Kelly's *DIVORCE AND SECOND MARRIAGE*. In this clear and concise but small book, Kelly brings to his subject the wisdom of a widely read theologian, the compassion of a prudent pastor, and the articulateness of an experienced teacher."

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