

MYTH, GNOSIS, AND MODERNITY

THE MIDCENTURY MYTHIC TRINITY

Myth, mythology, and the idea of myth have had a remarkable place in the intellectual and spiritual awareness of the twentieth century. Amidst the troubled days and nights of those years have been heard sweet and seductive words from out of the past, not seldom transmitted and interpreted by men widely regarded as living sages. Tales of creation, of heroes and timeless love fascinated many actors on the stage of a world bound by time and history, by war and cold war. "Myth" took its place in contemporary consciousness alongside expanding economies and genocidal horrors.

To be sure, events of the contemporary drama itself reached nearly mythic proportions in the century's battles of light against darkness, and the introduction of weapons drawing their power from the same awesome energies that light the sun and stars. Myths provided models for the world around, yet at the same time offered avenues of eternal return to simpler primordial ages when the values that rule the world were forged.

Three "sages" above all were foundational figures of the twentieth-century mythological revival: C. G. Jung, Mircea Eliade, and Joseph Campbell. Their work stimulated belief that the recovery of meanings enigmatically encoded in ancient mythologies could do much to heal deep midcentury wounds in both individual and collective psyches. Moreover, the words they transmitted from out of the past resonated with an antimodern counterpoint to the century's giddy devotion to "progress," with its terrible shadowside of war, devastation, and destructive ideology.

Their teachings in the twentieth century had a role rather like that of gnosticism in antiquity. Both eras confronted dazzling change and baffling contradictions that seemed unmanageable in their world's own terms. Whether in Augustan Rome or modern Europe, democracy all too easily gave way to totalitarianism, technology was as readily used for battle as human comfort, and immense wealth lay alongside abysmal poverty. Faced with a time of rapid changes some accounted progress, yet also surveying suffering too profound to be self-healing, gnostics past and present sought answers not in the course of outward human events, but in knowledge of the world's beginning, of what lies above and beyond the world, and of the secret places of the human soul. To all this the mythologists spoke, and they acquired large and loyal followings.

The elder of the modern popular mythologists was the Swiss analytic psychologist Carl G. Jung (1875–1961). In his later years, his gentle, white-haired features suggested a modern master of forgotten wisdom as he prodded a troubled world to look inward through widely read books like *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (1933) or *The Undiscovered Self* (1958). They inevitably pointed to sicknesses of the contemporary soul that could well be diagnosed and alleviated through recourse to the lore of myth. For have we not all within us, struggling to declare and rightly align themselves, something of the "archetypes" he identified in both myth and modern dream? Far too often, hardly knowing what we are doing, therefore doing it badly and without balance, we and the tormented human world around us act out the parts of the Warrior, the Wizard, the Mother, and the many sinister guises of the Shadow.

By the late 1950s, Jungian interpretations of myth were ascendant forces in the intellectual and spiritual worlds, even as the regnant

Freudianism was beginning to fade. The distinguished literary critic Northrop Frye, who read Jung assiduously in the late forties, did much to make "myth analysis" of Shakespeare and other literature an academic vogue.¹ Theologians like Victor White (*God and the Unconscious*, 1952) and David Cox (*Jung and St. Paul*, 1959) took Jungian ideas seriously in relating Christianity to contemporary consciousness.

Nor was regard for Jung limited to academic circles. *Time* magazine, in 1952, did a story on the sage of Zurich that presented him as "not only the most famous of living psychiatrists," but also as "one of the few practitioners of the craft who admit that man has a soul." Jung was "an unabashed user of the word 'spiritual,' " who held that the "religious instinct is as strong as the sexual," though the news magazine did acknowledge that Jung was odd, in a perhaps lovable though perhaps also slightly disturbing way: "His home is filled with strange Asiatic sculptures. He wears a curious ring, ornamented with an ancient effigy of a snake, the bearer of light in the pre-Christian Gnostic cult."²

This piece, and the general tendency to adulate Jung as one of the world's wise men in the fifties and after, was much in contrast with a notorious article only three years before in the *Saturday Review of Literature*. Robert Hillyer's "Treason's Strange Fruit" was mainly a protest against the awarding of the Bollingen Prize by the Library of Congress to Ezra Pound for his 1948 *Pisan Cantos*. Hillyer's impassioned essay raised the matter of Pound's well-known anti-Semitism and apologetics for Mussolini, but also pondered the curious fact that this prestigious American prize was named after Carl Jung's home in Switzerland, Bollingen.

The reason was that the award was funded by the Bollingen Foundation of New York, which also happened to be the sponsor of the Pantheon Press, Jung's major American publisher. Joseph Campbell was editor of the Bollingen Series of Pantheon books on mythology and comparative religion. All these Bollingen works were offered ultimately by grace of the wealthy Paul Mellon, son of Andrew Mellon, Twenties-era Secretary of the Treasury. Paul Mellon's first wife had been a patient of Jung's, and Paul was dedicated to the Swiss doctor's name and fame.

But Hillyer, unimpressed, remarked caustically that it was appropriate to give Pound a prize with a Jungian name, given his perception that they were two of a kind; what was shocking was that the award was granted by an American committee. Hillyer went on to

claim that Jung was hardly less pro-Axis than Pound, citing a number of sayings by the former, not all in context, to support the notion that "for a time Dr Jung's admiration for Hitler was warm," and that this enthusiasm also included "racism in general, the superman, anti-Semitism, and a weird metaphysics embracing occultism, alchemy, and the worship of Wotan." The article provoked a barrage of letters to the editor, largely but not entirely in defense of Jung.³

Quite interesting also was Hillyer's mention of a new "literary cult to whom T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound are gods." Jung presumably was virtually a third member of what would then have become a divine trinity. This was the "cult" of the "New Criticism" which, in profound reaction against the brutal ideological wars of thirties and forties literary discourse, sought to see only what was in a poetic or fictional text itself, in its own texture of mood, image, and internal allusion. It deliberately detached the printed page from social and doctrinal context. The imagist Pound and the nostalgic Eliot (who had been a member of the controversial Bollingen Prize committee, and whose political and social views have also not gone unquestioned), both considered consummate craftsmen on the level of words and sentences, fitted into the New Criticism canon well despite their baggage of ideas unsavory to holdover Depression-era liberals. Jung, or works influenced by him like Joseph Campbell's 1949 book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, were then able to make modern poets speak the "timeless truth" of archetype and myth. In the immediate postwar period Jung and the New Criticism were only parts of a larger mood of selective nostalgia for times and values, including forms of spirituality, out of ages past before the disastrous upheavals of the twentieth century: one also recalls Aldous Huxley's perennial philosophy, the pilgrimage of Thomas Merton to his Trappist monastery, and Zen. Moreover, after 1945 the Nazis and fascists had been replaced by another enemy, communism. All lovers of traditional things, though they might have equivocated before the half-archaic, half modern world of fascism, could freely hate this foe with singleness of heart.

The fifties were only an anticipation of the heady countercultural atmosphere of the sixties. Then Jung and the mythological mood definitely won out, over both Freud and the pragmatic style of modernism that saw progress measured by elongated freeways and better bombers, in the decade's flourishing countercultural circles. But that triumph required a curious movement of myth, archaism, and

Jungianism from political right to left in its perceived place in the intellectual spectrum, leaving behind people like Eliot and Campbell. In those days when, in the image of a popular song, magic was afoot, revolutionaries even more than reactionaries were likely to dream of earlier times when myths were strong. According to a 1967 *Time* essay on the "New Left" of those days, the radicals wanted to repeal "bigness"—the mark of modernity—and yearned for small, self-contained idyllic villages of such nineteenth-century visionaries as Charles Fourier and Robert Owen—"New Harmony computerized." This would be "the totally beautiful society," and the article categorized the movement as really "not political but religious."⁴ Extremes of consciousness met, and found common ground in opposing what passed for modernity. Talk of archetypes and return to the archaic world seemed to fit when people dressed like figments of myth or dream, and wanted to establish communes where they could live close to the earth.

It was during the sixties that I had the privilege of studying the history of religion with the second of the three mythologists under consideration in this book, Mircea Eliade (1907–1986). The Romanian-born scholar came to my attention in 1962, when I was a Marine chaplain stationed on Okinawa. Okinawa and Japan had been my first experience of a non-Western culture, and I had naturally been at pains to come to an understanding of the relation between Western religion and the Shinto and Buddhism I saw around me. I could not help but believe that some indefinable spiritual presence lingered in the lovely sylvan shrines of Shinto, or that there was more than mere atmospherics in the great peace that filled temples of the Buddha. One day I came across a review of one of Eliade's books. Something about the account led me to believe it might help. I ordered the slim volume, read it, and suddenly the significance of a wholly new way of looking at religion rose into consciousness: not theological, but in terms of its phenomenological structures, its organization of sacred space and time, its use of myth as models of how things were done in the ultimate sacred time of origins. It was one of those books that make one think, "This was really true all the time, but I didn't realize it until now." Soon I had left the chaplaincy and enrolled as a graduate student under Mircea Eliade at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

Eliade was a kindly and conscientious teacher, at his best in a small seminar of highly motivated docents. I recall engrossing discussion of such fascinating topics as shamanism and initiation rites. His

luminous books taught that myths were from out of *illud tempus*—that time, the other timeless time when the gods were strong and made the world, and when the primordial “gestures” of heroes set the patterns for what is still sacred in our fallen “profane” world. Few rumors had as yet arisen concerning the aging professor’s relation to the profascist and anti-Semitic Iron Guard in his native Romania thirty years before, and I recall remarkably little discussion of concrete political implications of his concept of history of religions, despite the intensely political nature of the sixties decade. It was as though Eliade’s world was a place of welcome escape from the turmoil all around.

The third mythologist, Joseph Campbell (1904–1987), was American born and bred. He was of Irish Catholic background, and a natural rebel who early began to make his own way in religion and life. But he ended up an academic, teaching at Sarah Lawrence College in suburban New York. On the mythological front, he early made his mark with *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), a tendentious if brilliant and sometimes magical study of the hero myth in all its varieties and commonalities; it was followed by a four-volume series on myths, *The Masks of God*. Fundamentally Jungian in temperament and approach, Campbell was for a time also under Freudian influence, chiefly by way of Géza Róheim, the psychoanalytic anthropologist. A widely traveled lecturer as well as a popular writer, Campbell acquired a large following, above all from the posthumously aired series of television interviews with Bill Moyers. The response to that series of six interviews was remarkable. It seemed as though the world was waiting for someone to tell stories that undercut the modern narratives of urbanized meaninglessness and despair, and yet at the same time reinforced the worth modern times put on heroic individual achievement and realization of selfhood. But questions were also asked about how much of the mythic meaning was Campbell and how much was in the myths themselves, and what a world of Campbellite heroes would really be like. For Campbell, the mythic hero was a timeless model of an original ideal humanity that could be set against modernity’s fall into ambiguity.

For Jung, Eliade, and Campbell, mythology was nothing less than a grand, ultimate source for the “timeless truth” undertow against the modern tide. Even older and more universal than the great religions, than Trappist monasteries or Huxley’s “perennial philosophy,” myth seemed a true voice of the primordial and eternal world, the ultimate

nonmodern pole of human experience. Then, at least in the eyes of the exemplary mythologists and their docents, the human psyche was fresher and purer, and timeless truth could be hidden in its stories. Yet the mythologists, essentially both academics and curés of the soul, were in an ambivalent posture between the primordial world and modernity. They were not dropout Beats or monks, but professors and physicians, inside the modernist camp, credentialed by its most characteristic institution, the modern university. For them, in the end, myth had to become mythology to be useful; it had to be studied and analyzed, and from it extracted what was universal and as applicable today as ever. This was tricky, for in fact myth in its original packaging is *only* particular and one dimensional. It is always a myth of a particular tribe or people, originating from some particular time in history, full of allusions to matters that would be best known to people of that time and place. Moreover, except in later literary versions ancient or modern, myths do not usually spell out the moral at the end. The reason why it is told, what it is about, must simply be *known*, perhaps without words.

Jung, Eliade, and Campbell, however, spent countless words in the telling both of the stories and the meanings. Like the nineteenth-century romantics, whose world of the spirit was their true home, they believed first and final truth to be located in the Distant and the Past, or in the depths of the self. The return to the supposed world of mythology was a return really to the premodern world *as envisioned by the modern world*. Mythology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was grounded on the modern world's fantasy of the premodern. For the mythologists, as for their romanticist progenitors, the mythological revival meant spirituality that was close to nature and the soil, that was symbol based, that expressed itself in accounts of heroes and other archetypes rather than individual figures. It was the world of Plato's cave, and the shadows on the wall were cast by the pure light of primordial dawn. The mythologists' myths were myths selected and related to fit modern need.

This is not unusual; religion reconstructs itself in every generation and must. The question is, what were the needs of the modern world understood to be? It is significant that in their own mythological reconstruction of religion, these three, especially Carl Jung, paid particular attention to ancient Gnosticism; and that a recent literary critic has provocatively argued that modern America, which by far contained

the three mythologists' largest and most enthusiastic audiences, is fundamentally gnostic in spiritual style. We will now turn to the matter of gnosticism in the modern world, in this writer's view a touchstone for interpretation of the modern mythological vogue and much else as well.

MODERN GNOSTICISM

The answer to the "needs of the modern world" question was, in mythological eyes, that what the world needed was a wisdom outside itself, for its problems could not be resolved on their own terms. What human wisdom from outside the human present could better be received and applied by modern humans than that contained in myth? It came from elsewhere, yet it did not require the difficult faith of dogmatic, exclusivist religion. It seemed rather, as packaged and interpreted by modern mythologists, to be universal and self-validating. This is the kind of wisdom known as gnosticism: a saving wisdom telling a universally important secret, but one which has to be received by one who has undergone right initiation (or perhaps has sufficiently suffered, and has right intent and sincerity), and which has been revealed by the right savior.

Ancient gnosticism was generally part of the Christian movement though related to Neoplatonism, Zoroastrianism, Mithraism, and other activities stirring in the spiritual melting pot of the Hellenistic world. A traveler to marketplaces of ideas like Alexandria or Athens would have heard of the various gnostic schools of teachers like Valentinus, Basilides, or the Ophites, and would also have found related Jewish movements inculcating the sort of mysticism that would eventuate in the Kabbala. Manichaeism, commencing in the third century C.E., put gnostic-type beliefs on a world-religion basis.

What were the core beliefs of the ancient Gnostics? Typically, that this world was created by a "demiurge," a lesser god somewhere on the chain of intermediaries between the ultimate Light and material earth, who bungled the job. The true God is pure uncreated light, utterly transcendent and without parts or passions. The inner nature of at least some humans is the same as that of the true God but, owing to the Bungler, the uncreated light is entrapped in our physical envelope. We humans are suffering because we were not made for this world but are caught in it anyway. Salvation releasing us back to the

light from whence we came is attained through knowledge, or gnosis, of our true origin, nature, and destiny. This knowledge must first be shown to us by a savior or enlightened being, whose revelation then enables us to discover its truth within ourselves; as we shall see, Richard Noll has argued that Carl Jung believed himself to be such a gnostic savior for the modern world.

This gnostic “monomyth,” to borrow Joseph Campbell’s term, was then populated with numerous colorful if not bizarre names and details. Gnosticism speaks the language of myth even as it helps one understand the modern fascination with myth. But the fundamental point is always the same: salvation is essentially inward or intrapsychic, and entails the possession of secret, saving knowledge. Its basic assumptions then are:

1. We are inwardly of a different nature from the surrounding evil world, in which we are entrapped through no fault of our own.
2. Salvation must come from a source outside the present evil environment, which cannot overcome its contradictions on its own terms.
3. Salvation is in the form of secret knowledge or gnosis.

The “secret” aspect meant that gnosticism was often taken to be, in the words of a modern authority, “a knowledge of divine secrets which is reserved for an elite.”⁵ Some gnostic schools taught that only certain humans had the divine light within; most held that only some were now ready to receive the fullness of wisdom. At the same time, an authority like Hans Jonas, in his classic *The Gnostic Religion*, stresses the universality at least of the gnostic quest, comparing the gnostics’ desperate search for meaning in an alien world to that of existentialism in modern times.⁶ The widely read scholar of gnosticism Elaine Pagels has emphasized gnosticism’s compatibility with contemporary psychological and therapeutic thought. She quotes, for example, this strikingly modern-sounding passage from the gnostic teacher Monoimus:

Abandon the search for God and the creation and other matters of a similar sort. Look for him by taking yourself as the starting point. Learn who it is within you who makes everything his own and says, “My God, my mind, my thought, my soul, my body.” Learn the sources of sorrow, joy, love, hate. . . . If you carefully investigate these matters you will find them *in yourself*.⁷

Such lines make the likelihood that modern gnosticism could come to us in the form of a combination of mythology and popular psychology appear not at all far-fetched. Why is it that ancient gnosticism sounds both distant and contemporary? The thought-worlds generally are different, despite the above, but the historical settings display similarities. In both, people experienced rapid change and some degree of progress. The Romans, for all their faults, had brought relative peace and prosperity to the Mediterranean world, and built their famous roads and spectacular cities. The “progress” of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries goes without saying. Enough progress had been experienced to suggest that someday, just past the cutting edge of the most advanced physics, we might learn the innermost secret of the universe and its manipulation—the ultimate gnosis.

Yet these were also times of anxiety and despair—Rome’s routine cruelty and enslavement, modernity’s wars and holocausts—suggesting that the secret was not in plain sight, but must be found through cunning, and needed a larger stage than the present. The new gnostics, like those of old, thus came to conclude that the great secret was not to be found *within* the same world that brought mixed progress and disaster in their hopelessly self-contradictory entanglement. It could not be located in the same science, engineering, social science, or medical-based psychology that made the roads and staffed the schools. It would need to come from sources far deeper and older than the one-dimensionality of the present, even if such a message might be capable of reaching no more than an elite. This was the role that the modern mythologists, well aware of gnosticism and quite sympathetic to it, saw for ancient myths recovered by them.

Actually, for several centuries Europe and America have harbored a veritable gnostic underground of intellectuals ready to sabotage any too facile celebration of progress and materialism. Writers like William Blake, Herman Melville, and Friedrich Nietzsche are among the spokespersons of a gnostic strand in Western thought that is temperamentally antimodern. This current sought to undermine exoteric belief in the world’s ever-increasing technical knowledge with the help of secret but eternal wisdom.

Mainstream thinking, from Voltaire and de Condorcet to Herbert Spencer, believed that an age of rationality had dawned with the eighteenth century, bringing an end to superstition and injustice. Rational religion based on science would replace priestcraft, democracy would

overthrow aristocratic tyrants, and in time vastly improved machines and medicines would bring a far better life to all. But the underground had its doubts.

Blake decried the emerging modern world's "number, weight, and measure." He was frankly gnostic in his exaltation of the eternal human Christ over against the tiresome old God called Urizen or Nobodaddy, he of the staunch loins and frozen scowl in Blake's drawings, who represented Enlightenment "reason" no less than patriarchal tyranny. Melville was also a gnostic who took for granted that this world was wrongly made by an incompetent spirit, and most of its quests like Captain Ahab's ultimately vain searches for white whales. Finally, nothing could be more at odds with modernity's essentialist view of progress and universal knowledge than Nietzsche's notion of eternal recurrence, in which all that we make is unmade and remade, over and over in a world without end, and all that is truly of worth is the eternal affirmation of the hero in the midst of change and decay.

Nor is the modern gnostic spirit necessarily precious or cultic. The literary critic Harold Bloom asserted:

And the American religion, for its two centuries of existence, seems to me irretrievably Gnostic. It is a knowing, by and of an uncreated self, or self-within-the-self, and the knowledge leads to freedom, a dangerous and doom-eager freedom: from nature, time, history, community, other selves.⁸

The idea that American religion is fundamentally gnostic in structure, as unexpected as it may sound, is based on consideration of the importance of the conversion experience, the subjectivizing of religion that goes with religious freedom and separation of church and state, the prevalence of new revelations and inspirations, and the general importance of inner feeling and inner reward in the republic's religious life. The United States is indeed a wholly different religious environment, far more different than many Americans realize, from the religious situation almost anywhere else past or present since the Hellenistic age of the first gnosticism. Elsewhere one usually found only a single religious institution, a state church, or at the most two or three violently clashing bodies, dominating the situation. Here arises opportunity for rampant diversity, and with it the need to anchor faith not in a historic church, but above all within the depths of oneself. Though the inner self may also be shifting and elusive to the grasp, it

is at least more firm a foundation than a myriad of sects. Together with this was the American theme, also addressed by Eliade, of return to the beginning, to the time of origins. Nineteenth-century churches wanted to return to the New Testament, abolishing if possible the legacy of the many centuries between then and now. Literature was full of the theme of reversing history and starting over in a new Eden. The mythologists, then, claimed to be bearers of stories direct from that time when the human world began. They said that, even if Eden cannot be rebuilt of modern brick, at least one can recover it in the inward places well known to American gnosticism. It is little wonder, then, that the gnosis of the mythologists, addressed to the self from out of time far behind either the modern puzzle or sectarian proliferation, was in the end especially well received in America.

But the sword of gnosis is double edged. We need to take into account another perspective on the term, that of Eric Voegelin's 1952 work, *The New Science of Politics*.⁹ Voegelin, a political philosopher seeking to discover the root causes of the ills of the twentieth century, pointed his finger at troublemakers he labeled "gnostics." They were those who strove to rise above nature and find salvation through hidden knowledge of the political and psychological laws by which history secretly works. Modern examples of the gnostic were Comte, Nietzsche, Sorel, and of course the Nazis and the Communists, with their ideological credence that through understanding the "secret" laws of history and nature—those of, say, the metaphysical meaning of race or "dialectical materialism"—human nature could be radically changed and perfected. According to Voegelin, Gnosticism led to World War II and Russian armies in the middle of Europe, all because gnostic thinkers and leaders refused to see moral barbarism when it was there, preferring instead their dreams of how the world should be. Political gnosticism substitutes dreams for reason because it disregards the facts of the world that actually exists. The gnostic elite, no doubt fired by ideological myths, fantasizes that by human effort based on suprarational knowledge of the ultimate goal, their kind can create a society that will come into being but have no end, an earthly paradise equal to God's.¹⁰ On the other side are those who recognize sin and the limitations of human nature, and for that reason are on the side of freedom, limited government, and a society unburdened by an imposed totalistic ideology. They believe, we are assured, in some kinds of "progress" but not in human perfectibility.

Voegelin went so far as to define all modernity as gnosticism, a term which encompassed such diverse phenomena as progressivism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, fascism, and National Socialism.¹¹ Later he clarified the position to the extent of revealing that modern persons who hold to “the Gnostic attitude” share six characteristics: dissatisfaction with the world; belief that the ills of the world stem from the way it is organized; surety that amelioration is possible; belief that improvement must evolve historically; belief that humans can change the world; conviction that knowledge—gnosis—is the key to change.¹² In his most memorable statement, Voegelin, who had himself lived under the Third Reich before going into exile and knew Europe’s ideological wars at close range, put it well enough when he alluded to “the massacres of the later humanitarians whose hearts are filled with compassion to the point that they are willing to slaughter one-half of mankind in order to make the other half happy.”¹³

Were the mythologists gnostic in Voegelin’s negative sense of the word? Some of the same attitudes, even some of the same people (Nietzsche), appear in both his catalog of modernist gnostics and in our account of antimodern gnosticism. In both cases one finds the theme of secret knowledge of how the universe really works that is accessible only to an elite, and the idea that by the power of this knowledge one can reverse, or at least stand outside of, the stream of history. The basic problem with Voegelin, of course, is that he applies the term *gnostic* to speculative nostrums that were essentially political, whereas ancient Gnosticism, together with gnosticism as revived in the modern era by antimodern poets and mythologists, was apolitical if not antipolitical, scorning any this-worldly salvation.

In a real sense, Voegelin is not at odds with the mythologists, for what he calls gnosticism is what they might have called, in Jungian language, “ideological inflation.” Both regarded the ills of modernity as fundamentally spiritual diseases. As Robert Segal has pointed out, Voegelin recognized that what defined modernity is confidence in its ability to master the world. The modern “gnostics” of Voegelin’s demonology, from Sorel to Lenin and Hitler, shared that confidence even as they rejected ordinary nonspiritual, nonideological modernity’s means of saving itself—science, technology, industry, and democracy. Like the poetic and mythological gnostics, they knew that modernity could not be saved on its own terms. They contended that the social cost of those means was too high; they had seen the ravages of bourgeois capitalism

and the anomie behind modern urbanization and "democracy."¹⁴ As technological antimodernists and totalitarian futurists, they wanted to combine the best of what modern science and secular thought had to offer with some form of a secret, gnostic, "spiritual" wisdom and power, whether of Marx or Mussolini.

For Voegelin held, that at base, modernity's confidence did not rest in science and technology so much as in a gnostic belief that supreme power lay in knowledge of the true nature of the world. That knowledge, ultramoderns assumed, could now be within the grasp of at least a modern elite. Physical science gave modernity part of that ruling knowledge, of course. But the human engineering aspect of managing history called for another science and other means of knowing. To the true gnostic, ancient or modern, the ultimate knowledge which is power is not about elemental forces but is intrapsychic; it is knowledge of the true nature of humans and so of right politics and social organization. But these studies were also becoming "sciences" in modern times.

Assuming that the idea that humans can irreversibly change the world for the better is essentially modern, the social ideology of the political antimoderns is paradoxically very modern at the same time, for the fascist and the communist takes to the ultimate degree the notion that by secret knowledge—*political* and *historical* gnosis—they could transcend history and make a new and irreversible paradisaical world. They had a true believer's confidence in their ability to know the world secret, whether enshrined in Marxism or myth. As Stephan A. McKnight has put it, for Voegelin the key gnostic belief is that the gnostic has direct knowledge of ultimate human nature, and so knows how to overcome alienation. Therefore thought such as that of Comte or Marx is no more than political gnosticism, and modernity is not truly secular but a new form of religion, with its appropriate myths and rituals.¹⁵

A comparable situation can be seen in Japan, where the Marxist infatuation of many intellectuals came rather abruptly to an end with the triumph of militaristic nationalism in the 1930s. A congruent romantic literary cult emerged emphasizing classical Japan, the aesthetics of death, and the denial of modernity; it was clearly aligned to the neo-Shinto that envisioned a primordial Japanese paradise of simple living and heroic virtues, practiced close to the kami or gods, and now accessible primarily through myth and ritual.¹⁶

It is clear that these romantic dreams were not so much archaic as a way of both protesting modernism and preparing a nation spiritually for success in the thoroughly modern contemporary world of political and military power. The secret of such success, Japanese at the time felt as well as Europeans and others, lay in the gnosis of a past accessible through myth and an antimodern mood capable of generating power for modern triumphs. The mythologists obviously were in the same camp so far as the value of myth was concerned; the question is, how concerned were they with its political, in contrast to its personal, application?

The political world of the Roman Empire in which the ancient gnostics lived was rarely named in their writings; it was clearly and utterly part of the realm of fallen power and matter from which they sought escape. To them gnosticism was the opposite of a this-worldly ideology. It was a way *out* of the world of society, politics, and power into higher realms of being. Or, in the translation of modern mythological gnostics, it was a way to uncover realms within the psyche that can never be touched by the powers of the outer, political world.

The gnosticism of the mythologists, of Jung, Eliade, and Campbell, then, turns Voegelin on his head; what Voegelin means by gnosticism is what mythological gnosticism, closer to the ancient meaning of the term, seeks to save people from. It saves them from entrapment in the false hopes of worldly political fantasies. It instead unfolds compensatory fantasies, or intrapsychic realities, which show the self that its true recovery of wholeness lies within. If the mythologists' neognosticism had lasting political ramifications, they lay in the way that any ostensibly nonpolitical psychotherapy by default supports the existing order. Or, at best, it sustained spiritually the efforts of those prepared to make changes on the grubby level of everyday, nonideological politics by helping them get their lives clarified, and so do their useful work better.

The three mythologists under study, C. G. Jung, Mircea Eliade, and Joseph Campbell, were no doubt modern gnostics all the way through, and they were not unacquainted with both political and intrapsychic gnosticism. But my sense is that in the end, and only after some unfortunate dallying, they came down to an intrapsychic, not a political, gnosticism. They were certainly tempted at times by some version of the political gnostic myth in Voegelin's sense, usually in its fascist form. But they came through bitter experience to agree implicitly with the

ancient gnostics that gnostic wisdom was intended for the soul rather than the state, and they did not present any full-blown mythical models that could be enacted on the political stage. Their political philosophy was finally that the state and society can do no more than safeguard the practice of intrapsychic gnosticism, and they wished of them only that they and their sort of people remain free to read and teach mythology, practice mythology-based therapies, and act out their personal myths in their private lives.

But to understand why they dallied and may have come close to presenting political models based on myth and gnosis, it is necessary to look at their social context and intellectual heritage.

ANTIMODERNISM

Why mythological gnosticism? And why did political gnosticism become inner gnosticism? We must look again at the social and intellectual world of the mythologists. Despite war and worldwide depression, in the first half of the twentieth century the prevailing wisdom was that the future would be better, perhaps almost unimaginably better, than anything humanity had so far known. Somehow, after the wars and depressions, after the problems had been solved, a shining new world like that adumbrated by the 1939 World's Fair in New York would appear: a world of democracy, of ever-expanding scientific knowledge, of humming factories and universal prosperity, perhaps even space flights to other worlds. This was the vision, in caricature, of what has been called "modernism."

There was, of course, another side. This was the modernism of mind-numbing assembly-line jobs cursing the lives of people uprooted from familiar fields and villages. Now faceless in their bleak smoke-stack environments, these "masses" were less paragons of democracy than "atomized" individuals without extended family or significant place, prey to any demagogue who came along. Conservative observers bemoaned the loss of local cohesion found in common myths and sacralities, the loss of social hierarchy, the loss of moral and traditional values amid the modern wastelands.

What then did *modern* mean? Here it will suffice to present some qualities of modernism particularly useful for understanding the mythologists; these can be summed up in the two "metanarratives" Jean-François Lyotard has offered as the essence of modernism: the

metanarrative of the emancipation of humanity by progress and the metanarrative of the unity of knowledge.¹⁷ The first means, briefly, that cadres of educated elites since the effective beginning of modernism in the Enlightenment have believed that history controlled by persons like themselves was capable of freeing humanity from all its shackles through more and better knowledge and its application. The second metanarrative tells us that this knowledge which emancipates is found through the generalized, abstract, rational ways of thinking characteristic of science and social science. Under this rubric the particular is subordinated to the abstract category; the old is generally inferior to the new; the local submits to the universal.

The mythologists were far from alone in sounding alarms at excesses of modernism, though they may be regarded, in a particular but authentic sense, as the most radical of antimoderns. Others also sought to call those wandering on the spiritually stony ground of modernism back to some true faith, or to take vengeance upon its hateful philistines through a cause like fascism. But difficulties lay along the path of those, from T. S. Eliot to Billy Graham, who sought to correct modernity by appeal to one of the "great religions" like Christianity. For those faiths had fraternized with the enemy—indeed *were* the enemy as much as not. Actually the "great" religions, above all Judaism and Christianity, with their ancient founders and long histories, are world prototypes of what modernism really means. Before state or university went modern on anything like the same scale, they had their reasoned universal truths, their elites and bureaucratic institutions, their beliefs that history was, despite often dismal appearances, an arena of emancipation through progress: in this case through revelations of God or universal truth at specific historical moments, leading up to a supreme consummation.

The Hebrew scriptures present God as revealing law and truth successively to Noah, Abraham, Moses, and the prophets; to this Christianity adds the manifestation of God in Jesus Christ; both traditions look to an ultimate historical and metahistorical fulfillment in God's creation of a new heaven and earth. Beyond doubt Western modernism is to no small degree the secularization of Judaism and Christianity. At the same time, fascism was patently no less half modern and half antimodern, using radios, railroads, and bombers, together with dreamily utopian visions of paradisaical racial futures, on behalf of Atilla the Hun agendas.

Moreover, on the local level, modernism was often experienced as only the newest mask worn by exploitation. Peasants who had common lands taken from them to make factory sites, and whose children then had to work for pennies in front of pitiless machines in that factory, did not see the modern dream at its best. Although themselves of different background, the mythologists were temperamentally attuned to the rhythms and values of the rural, peasant life in which living folklore seemed to have best survived. They were therefore at odds with all that was destroying that heritage.

The other side was not seldom comprised of the sort of modernist capable of imposing progress regardless of cost and whether desired or not. Although democracy was among the most deeply held ideals of modernism, the modern regimen also called for effective power by knowledge-holding elites. These were people particularly adept at the second of Lyotard's criteria of modernity, the unity of knowledge, pointing toward ability to organize all particular knowledge under universal and abstract categories like those of law, science, or social science, and to utilize that knowledge through industrial or social engineering. The kind of education that did this well prepared modernity's professionals, industrialists, enlightened civil servants, teachers, and often religious leaders.

There were also those whom modern progress left behind in the byways of rural life and local folklore, and they had their advocates. The mythologists were persons of modern education, really more interested in literary mythology than local folklore. But their sympathies were understandably often with those outside the progressive mainstream, from Native Americans to Romanian peasants.

The rural-roots-versus-modern-industry divide paralleled a more strictly in-house mythological chasm. Some students of myth, heirs of the Enlightenment, saw the mythical world as quaint and interesting, but long since superseded as a serious intellectual force. Others, including our three mythologists, protested that myth contained a powerful critique of modernity, one to which the world must listen. The divide was clearly between the Enlightenment spirit and romanticism.

Romanticism is as slippery a term as any to define precisely. As a school of thought and literary or artistic expression, it is based on the conviction that what excites the feelings and inspires the imagination is as valid, and even as true, as factual or rational knowledge. Its political expressions have ranged from romantic revolutionary ardor to reaction-

ary dreams of an idealized medieval past. What both have in common is the characteristic romantic sentiment that political truth, like artistic truth, is known less by rational considerations than by its capacity to fire the passions and configure awesome visions of the heavenly city in the imagination. Political truth, along with artistic and spiritual truth, is therefore very apt to be found, at least in its ideal type, in the distant and the past, or the future, for that which is other serves well to charge the visionary imagination of the romantic temperament. Romanticism is not quite modern gnosticism. While it has a feeling for the reception of truth from the distant and the past, unlike the gnostic the romantic does not necessarily have a definite social or intrapsychic message from far away or long ago; sufficient is the sense of wonder evoked by that which is far away and long ago. Pure romantics would be more in tune with the musings of Henry David Thoreau:

While the commentators are disputing about the meaning of this word and that, I hear only the resounding of the ancient sea, and put into it all the meaning I am possessed of, the deepest murmurs I can recall, for I do not in the least care where I get my ideas, or what suggests them.¹⁸

THE ROMANTIC ROOTS OF MODERN MYTHOLOGY

This is the source from which modern mythology sprang. The three mythologists arrived well after the first and most powerful wave of the romantic movement, but they were heirs of its spirit and, indeed, benefited from being able to receive from it living but mature doctrine, already hardening into partisan positions over against the confident progressive, scientific world of late Victorianism.

The modern revival of interest in myth began in the study of classical Greek and Roman texts, which was foundational to the early modern university. That in itself reminds us that myth in the European mind has never been free from ideological agenda. The medieval and early modern divide was between biblical "truth," and the human and divine worlds of myth "back then" in the classical writers or "out there" in India or elsewhere. Distinguishing myth from accepted belief enabled one to fabricate from myth an "Other" offering context, contrast, and profound corrective to the foreground spiritual patterns. Patristic and medieval religionists set the inferior temper of the pagan gods over against the claims of Christ.

The renaissance brought a major shift in the politics of myth, one that really laid the foundations of something like Joseph Campbell's view of myth. Unlike the serious Christians of the middle ages, the renaissance humanists who busily revived mythological learning often hardly bothered to conceal their enthusiasm for the robust sensuality and passion of the Greek gods and heroes, and their disdain for the asceticism of the saints except as an occasional subject of pious art. The tension between the sensual and the ascetic impulse was next expressed in the Puritan's inner asceticism versus outer prosperity, and the romantic poet's proverbial inner spiritual abundance versus outer deprivation. The energies generated by tensions like these were among the wellsprings of modernity.

The romantic mythological revival of the nineteenth century, insofar as it held up the romantic/mythological way of thinking as an antithesis to modernity, often continued the Christian/classic conflict by viewing much of the Christian past as antagonist, just as it saw the modern present in the same adversarial role. Both cross and smoke-stack seemed repressive and hard compared to the simple, joyous and free life promised by pagan myth. Mythology's pilgrimage might nonetheless pause to admire the middle ages, whose art and knightly spirit they often appreciated when presented in the spirit of Sir Walter Scott romanticism. But then the quest drove still deeper into the mists of lost Edens. During the Enlightenment religion as a major unifying cultural reality had steadily disappeared to become either philosophy or superstition. Romanticism, and the romantic view of myth, endeavored to salvage the inner and cultural meaning of religion under other names, as art, as nationalism, as mythology. This whole enterprise very much lived on the three mythologists here under study; Joseph Campbell, for example, was full of praise for both primal and medieval myths. He liked above all the quest for the Holy Grail, while scarcely hiding his dislike of much of Judaism and Christianity. But where he, and others, looked for the best of any religion was not in its preaching or rites, but in its art and stories.

The romantic founders of modern mythology took the quest behind the Renaissance by seeking out not only "classical" Greek and Roman myth, but increasingly myth from Germanic, Asian, and "primitive" sources. They accepted the romantic view of myth of German thinkers like Johann Gottfried von Herder, Friedrich W. J. Schelling, and the "folk psychology" of Wilhelm Wundt. That position, often

embraced far too uncritically, insisted that myths stand apart in an entirely different category from other styles of folklore, such as legends, fables, or allegories. Those were stories; myths were collective creations of an entire people, and expressed in story form the basic worldview, and view of human nature, of that people.

It is important to realize that the categorization of myth as different from folklore and fairy tale is *modern*. It comes out of a modern need to see, in the archaic world, societies unified by common foundational stories believed by all. Unlike mere fables, these stories present a comprehensive cosmogony and model of the social order. Moderns yearned to believe that their ancestors perceived unity between the human and natural orders, a symbiosis pregnant with symbols and alive with significance—all unlike the painful modern schisms they sensed between the city and nature, or the human and the “dead” cosmos. In this belief in the uniqueness of myth they were influenced by Kant, for whom faith lay in the realm of emotion, not of reason. Faith and knowledge were therefore separate, as they were for Luther, at least as his beliefs were understood in nineteenth-century interpretations of the great reformer.

Thus faith could have its own nonrational but emotively powerful means of expression: myth. As interpreted by Jan de Vries, the romantic mythologists considered that “the spiritual power of myth over the human soul is precisely what makes it impossible to see in myth something invented or thought up by poets or philosophers.”¹⁹ Myth, now a powerful instrument of romantic consciousness, became a magic potion by which one could again drink of the rejuvenating power of humanity’s primal vision. A second-rank representative of this perception, Joseph von Görres (1776–1848) offered this rhapsodic if confused recovery of the first humans admiring the wonders of their cosmos; he placed this scene in India, on the banks of the Ganges and Indus:

They looked from the earth upward. There in heaven was the real realm of fire. There was the sun burning continually. There the stars, the planets and the fixed stars both, pierced through the darkness like flames. There the fires which only shine sparsely on earth were burning for ever unconquerable. Then the cult of fire became a cult of stars and the religion became pantheism. . . . And because all the nations were together in this great primordial state, these world views . . . form the inheritance which they bore with them on their long, later journeys.²⁰

According to romantic mythology, myths were not the products of individual poets or philosophers but of "the people." They presented a deep wisdom, based on experiences of nature and the cosmos, and of human feeling often conflated with nature, that in humanity's earliest stage of development could only be communicated in stories. Myth instilled a sense of wonder and an almost indefinable kind of insight, like mystical experience. In the end its exaltations transcended the individual, and even the dualism of the human and the natural.²¹

The "folk psychology" of Adolf Bastian and Wilhelm Wundt postulated that collective folk wisdom adhered in all distinctive, "rooted" peoples. The idea of "rootedness," suggesting the superior worth and wisdom of peasant agricultural peoples who lived generation after generation on the same soil, was important and was to have a baleful influence. Different folk, according to Bastian and Wundt, have diverse national or cultural ways of thinking, expressed in national myths.²² A community is more than a collection of individuals. It has a life of its own, and its products are distinctive both from individual creativity and from those of other nations. This was believed to be supremely the case among primitive peoples, who at the time were assumed to have only a collective mentality. Pronounced individuals were rarely if ever found among them, although hero figures in myth could singly embody a "people's" characteristics.

One illustration of this sort of romanticism that was politically reactionary, and important to our study, is the German movement known as "volkish thought," familiar to many through its reflection in the operas of Richard Wagner and in the propaganda of the Third Reich. Originally a romantic reaction against the international world of reason, science, and progress adumbrated by the Enlightenment and reinforced by the industrial revolution, volkishness called for Germanic distinctiveness and a simple, close-to-the-soil way of life.

Here are a few examples. In the 1860s Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, in *Land und Leute* [Land and People], argued that the German Volk constituted an organic society that could not be separated from the native landscape on which they dwelt. Moreover, this society was to be hierarchical, patterned after medieval feudalism; the commercial, bourgeois tasks, of which Riehl was more suspicious, were to be managed by craft guilds fashioned on medieval lines. To be sure, the former exploitative relation of lord and peasant, or master and apprentice,

could be improved upon; Riehl admired the idealistic British industrialist Robert Owen for his experimental enterprise at New Lanark, in which that capitalist cared for the welfare of his family of workers in the manner of a kindly patriarch. Workers, in turn, were not to be the dehumanized automatons of the modern factory, but creative individuals rooted in the Volk like the artisan of old.

The shapeless proletariat of the upstart modern industrial city, Riehl argued, was unstable, removed from the soil, antivolkish and almost beyond redemption. That class could only be repressed if not destroyed. The rootless urban mass included not only the wandering job-seeking worker pulled away from soil, kin, and native village, but also such products of modernity as the journalist and the ideologist who argued against the ancient ways of the Volk. Jews were particularly to be found in this group, which had to be extirpated before healthy volkish life could be recovered.²³

The establishment of the German empire in 1871 gave a boost to volkish thought, both because it was a triumph of long-held dreams of German patriots, and also as a consequence of reaction against the disappointingly unromantic, bureaucratic, commercial nature of Bismarck's imperial state. There were those who yearned for something more, something medieval, oriented chiefly to rural peasant life, and at the same time deeply spiritual. As volkish motifs developed, these spiritual yearnings found voice in efforts to isolate a distinctive German religion apart from the universalistic aspects of Christianity and its Judaic roots. Volkish writers like Julius Langbehn (1851–1907), before his ultimate conversion to Roman Catholicism, embraced Swedenborgian and other doctrines of the theosophical type. Emanuel Swedenborg appealed to Langbehn particularly because of his belief that societies and the world as a whole constituted real organisms, while the individual reflected the living universe within.

Meister Eckhart, the great medieval German mystic in the neoplatonic tradition who spoke of a gnostic kind of idea of "God above God," was viewed by radical Germanic religionists as a representative of a deeper perspective than that of the Judeo-Christian scriptures. Indeed, in their eyes, all authentic Germanic mystics, imbibing the pure volkish spirit and living close to nature and the common people, like the gnostics of old dwelling on a plane far above that of the literalist and legalist, were attuned to a direct and intuitive realization of the oneness of being.²⁴

Spirit, *Geist*, was an important idea. It was embodied not only in the world of ancient myth but also in a current figure like Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche was interpreted by German volkish writers like Karl Joel as a supreme embodiment of *Geist* or spirit. No less significantly, his doctrine of eternal recurrence undercut as profoundly as any could modern notions of progress as eternally or eschatologically significant.²⁵ The deeply anti-Christian character of Nietzschean thought was also seminal. For Nietzsche as for his sometime friend, the brilliant recreator of myth on the operatic stage Richard Wagner, myth was the distinctive archaic medium of communication, the true voice of *Geist* and *Volk*. So well was the job done that the mere mention of Germanic myth all too easily now suggests the entire world of nineteenth-century, antimodern, volkish values.²⁶

Such sentiments, at their height in the century roughly from 1850 to 1950, were by no means limited to the Germanic world. Everywhere, amid the dramatic scientific, technological, and political changes of that era, sensitive souls, Januslike, looked forward and backward, forward to the vistas of progress without end promised by modernity, then, seized with anxiety, back to the spiritual comforts of mysticism, medievalism, nationalism, and myth. One need think only of Slavophilism in Russia, Shinto nationalism in Japan, the Hindu renaissance in India, the "Celtic twilight" mystique of Yeats and others in Ireland, and the combined Arthurian cult of chivalry, empire, and the English gentleman in Britain.²⁷ In England the late Victorian and Edwardian periods to which we are chiefly referring were also the high point for the cultural influence of theosophy and Christian mysticism in the spirit of Evelyn Underhill. In the United States, it was the heyday of the schoolbook apotheoses of such heroes as Columbus and Washington, and of a glorification of the westward-marching frontier that gave little more consideration to the aborigines behind that frontier than any Germanic quest for *lebensraum*. In most of these and many other examples, one finds a rediscovery of founding myths and national heroes, an idealization of rural "rootedness" and peasant or pioneer life, an exaltation of feudal hierarchies and values, and a sense that the nation is not just a political entity but a spiritual reality as well. Some of these patriotic mysticisms are now in better odor than others. Some were certainly brought into the service of national independence movements and democratic reform in the progressive era ("make the nation truly worthy of its heroes") as well as of reactionary

agendas. German volkish thought, though it contained much nonsense and will always be stained in retrospect by its association with the evils of the Third Reich, at the beginning was often no better or worse than the others.

By the last decade of the nineteenth century, however, volkishness was acquiring an ominous harshness, especially in its attitude toward Jews. Popular novels like Wilhelm von Polenz's *Der Büttnerbauer* (1895), in which a peasant loses his land through debt to a Jew and sees it turned into the site of a factory, pictured Jews as exploiters, as bringers of the evils of capitalism, industrialism, and modernity. Above all, whatever their virtues or vices, they were increasingly portrayed as irretrievably Other, alien to the organic unity of the Volk. Hitler once said that this work had influenced him. The nationalistic historian Heinrich von Treitschke claimed that Germany was a young state searching for self-awareness, and therefore Jews should not complain if that awareness was sometimes expressed in making distinctions between Germans and Jews.²⁸ It was von Treitschke who also first uttered the oft-repeated line, "Die Juden sind unser unglück" [The Jews are our misfortune].

Anti-Semitism was by no means limited to Germany. Until the rise of the Nazi regime it took its most brutal forms in Russia and eastern Europe. At the same time, it was hardly unknown in the English-speaking world. "Restrictions" in housing, education, and club memberships affected "Semites" everywhere, and one could hear endless anti-Jewish "jokes." Anti-Semitism was a dark side of the glorious mythic dimensions of race and nation. Against their bright images Jews were alien, dark shadows on the margins of social reality. One could praise them, do business with them, resent them, hate them: whatever the attitude, they were regarded them as different, other, and so a problem or potential problem.

In the German-speaking world anti-Semitism gathered with ominous force. Not all "real Germans" advocated the physical elimination of Jews. But the idea that they were different, foreign, "other," not real Germans, in a land that truly belonged only to real Germans, was widely accepted. How one should respond to the reality of their presence—whether to like them or hate them, welcome them or make them unwelcome, tolerate them or exterminate them, were secondary matters, though of course crucial to Jews, and on them one might find differences of opinion.

Eugen Diederichs, a notable volkish writer, editor, and publisher from the turn of the century until his death in 1927, espoused one possible opinion. Carl Jung had on his shelves several books on Gnosticism published by Diederichs. A colorful personality who lived in the small university town of Jena, this individual reportedly held court at the legendary Greek feasts of his "Sera circle" wearing zebra-skin pants and a turban as he proclaimed a "new romanticism" to counter the simplistic naturalism and rationalism of the times. His new romanticism emphasized the oneness of the world, and within it the unity of land and Volk; but Diederichs also rejected anti-Semitism as he understood it. While he portrayed Jews in accordance with current stereotypes as given over to arid legalism and intellectualism, he also saw them as a distinctive people with their own spirit and organic cohesion, a culture to be set alongside others. As we shall see, the vacillations of Jung, and in their way also of Eliade and Campbell, on the Jewish issue seem at root to reveal an internal cognitive struggle between some degree of liberal democratic sensitivity and a visceral feeling that the Jew is "other." Enthusiasts of the "rooted," traditionalist, organic society, so closely aligned to the world evoked by mythology, sensed that Jews were in its terms alien and different, more a part of the forces destroying traditionalism than an antidote to the evils of modernity. But like Diederichs they were pulled both ways on the matter, unable to give up either volkishness or liberalism, or to follow either firmly and consistently to its ultimate logical outcome.

Diederichs's new romanticism could see in other peoples besides Jews counterparts to what volkishness meant to Germans. Slavs, Celts, and even non-Europeans like Indians, Chinese, and the Islamic peoples could also be "rooted" in their own land, culture, and myths. Here lay an opening to another significant dimension of the new mythology: its attitude toward non-European and non-Christian peoples. This terrain has been disputed in the wake of Edward Said's much-discussed *Orientalism*, with its argument that European scholars essentially constructed the East they purported to study in the colonial period.²⁹ Did Europeans approach Asian cultures with genuine openness, or did they seek there only what they wanted to find—exotic civilizations with values quite different from those at home, reservoirs of ancient wisdom like that embodied in myth, perhaps, but whose people were barely capable of abstract, rational thought? Did they merely project

onto them the primitive world or the Orient that Europe required for its own completion? Did they want to see along the Ganges or in the Congo societies "arrested" yet for that very reason less fragmented than their own, offering visions of constricted wholeness which, while obviously not to be taken in their entirety by more advanced persons, presented resources for the healing of the West?³⁰

Any "organic" society calls insistently for an Other to clarify its self-definition. But the Other can be, perhaps must be, both alien and reinforcing. It can function as a negative confirmation of one's own "organic" identity and values, as the Jew so served the Volk. Occasionally—but significantly—the Other can offer a superior model of civilization that confirms one's aspirations, and pointedly reinforces criticism of one's own society, as did the idealized Orient for some romantics from Thoreau to Diederichs. Luis O. Gomez has noted that Carl Jung, in his studies of India, was "also seeking in the other, in India, a self-confirmation . . . almost as if one needed to recognize in an other parts of oneself that could not be seen as self, and would otherwise remain totally other, inaccessible, and unacceptable."³¹ India represented something hidden in the European psyche, that needed the experience of India to be discovered and held up as a mirror to Europe.

The idea of the primitive and the archaic obsessed romantic mythologists. On the one hand the lost world was a glory hole holding all the most profound and most authentic sentiments of the human race, or of particular races, with which what is best today must resonate. On the other hand the primal world was too undifferentiated to be brought over whole. But there could be selective reaction.

One could of course proclaim a radical political eschatology like the utopian or Marxist envisioning a consummation that, like all great eschatologies, was mythology-fueled return to the paradise of ultimate beginnings. But political radicalism had a destructive side with which the romantic was not entirely comfortable. Furthermore, twentieth-century futuristic utopias required confidence in the scientific, industrial, democratic, and cultural "progressive" tendencies of the modern world they would presumably fulfill, and that was a confidence the real romantic lacked. Political reaction is and was a more immediate possible consequence of modern romantic thinking. If the modern world was fallen, the shortest road to paradise might lead backward. Either way, myth contained something modernity needed.