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Part I: Theoretical Perspectives and Cultural Traditions

(a) Theoretical Perspectives: Gaston Bachelard and James Hillman

(b) Cultural Tradition: Greek Mythology: Hestia

Last and First

When I speak of “image”...
I do not mean the psychic reflection
of an external object,
but a concept derived from
poetic usage, namely,
a figure of fancy or fantasy-image,
which is related only indirectly
to the perception of an external object.”
(Jung, *CW* 6.743ff)

By returning to Greece and choosing Hestia as a particular goddess to dive into, I primarily intend to look at her myth, and move from the literalism that may be seen represented toward an expansion of an imaginal world that restores the mythical perspective itself, as a manner of making soul. For the theoretical perspectives I chose Gaston Bachelard and James Hillman, both poets and evokers of soul within. They will also help us to see through and to enrich the hidden aspects of Hestia.

Before I had knowledge of James Hillman’s work, I was fascinated by Gaston Bachelard’s thoughts. Perhaps because Bachelard has a psychoanalytical look at rational thinking, I find that he makes such thinking very special and opens windows to a deeper, poetic and joyful ensouled language. I will try to describe very briefly how I understand his method.

He proposes a creative evolution by making a reformulation of reality, in and against science. That is, science can be seen as his matrix thought; yet he is not a thorough-going rationalist. He is a philosopher of science and an analyst of the imagination of matter, dwelling between personal intuitions and scientific experiences. In this way, his approach is neither rationalism nor realism, neither idealism nor materialism. What Bachelard suggests is an interaction between reason and experience itself. It is by being engaged in a process of reverie, where imagination, along with reason, makes this interaction happen. Moreover, to him, those are the dual creative forces in knowing. By being objective in the reverie, it brings an outstanding objectivity of literary criticism because the image becomes subject *and* object. In this way, the image allows not only transformation, but decomposition as well. It commences an immense poetic production. Of course, it depends of us to provoke it.

By making this reformulation, the vital gift is the recovery of imagination, so very necessary for the twentieth century, in both literature and psychoanalysis. Moreover, to see it with a larger view, I find it a crucial conception to humankind because it leads to an achievement of psychological richness. My thanks to Bachelard, as well as Carl Jung and Gilbert Durand. And of course, to James Hillman as well.

Hillman indicates this move in his entire theory in an assertive inquiry to re-find the soul – we can say his matrix is the imaginal world. Since he is aware that psychology itself may block the soul's vision, he re-visions psychology with a kaleidoscopic move through history, philosophy, and religion. To him, the main soul's enemy is literalism. He believes that "literalism prevents mystery by narrowing the multiple ambiguity of

meanings into one definition.” Quoting Barfield, he completes: “It also hardens the heart, preventing deeper penetration of the imagination.” (Re-Visioning Psychology 149)

I cannot help in not calling attention to the word *heart* that is so forgotten. The heart is a place of true imagining.¹ I call attention to that because I must recall it to myself. Heart is a very persistent muscle, and I am glad for that. When it has already reached the hard circumstances that makes it difficult to be touched and we no longer feel we have soul, the medicine to make it open again is to imagine; and when that happens it pulsates in manner that reaches not only the microcosm of our singular bodies, but also the microcosm of the other, and the macrocosm of Others. A real gift.

Bringing the concept of archetypal psychology, James Hillman does not see archetypes as only mental structures, but structures of our consciousness - he gives permission to call them Gods. He demonstrates how necessary it is to speak of both gods and archetypes in metaphorical language, as suggested by Jung. The Gods and Goddess of mythology became movements of consciousness, and the archetypes of psychology are mythological Gods. Myths to James Hillman have the power of telling about specific images of figures and places in a universalized form, and more than that, it is an infinite psychological perspective and source for us to *play*² with in everyday life. He quotes Karl Otto Muller, saying that myth is where “the marvelous is truth.”³ Yet, it becomes alive only when seen through. To him, a mythic metaphor is not only a way of speaking, but also of perceiving, feeling, and existing. Hillman says, “Entering myths means recognizing our concrete existence as metaphors, as mythic enactments,” and he warns: “Remember, the mythic is a perspective and not a program” (158). Moreover, we must let it go as a dance, as a music; letting go is a movement of soul-making.

Those complex concepts being translated very briefly, are pointed here as provocative insights, and they suggest to me that what geniuses those artists are to indicate to us to be open to the multiplicity, to have an idea to imagine, to give ourselves permission to imagine into an open unknown, for it may ground ourselves back to our bodies – to imagine is to embody! By following mythic metaphors we may go beyond the existing norms of mythology itself by re-imagining and reversing oppressive models that we may find; and, going a bit ahead it may lead us towards a creative awakening of mythopoesis⁴, a freedom *within*: “reverie” that softens mind and “soul” that softens heart, *to express*.

Hestia, being simultaneously the oldest and the youngest of Cronus’ and Rhea’s children, was honored in the traditions associated with libations and processions. Her motif of *first and last* was presented at those traditions as well as daily life in Greece. She was the one who was the first and last to receive libations; the only one, among all gods, who was claimed every day, probably three times a day. Every meal prepared on fire revived a grateful sense of a community gathered with feelings of regards for this goddess. Yet, she doesn’t have a seat among the Olympians, and very little has been written on her, maybe because she doesn’t have exciting adventures in love triangles affairs nor has she a warrior essence. Besides that, she deliberately chose to be a virgin and not have children – not engaging us with truths about mothers and daughters either. It is noted by the etymology that the common term, *estia* is *hearth*⁵; this motif is also represented as a Hestian manifestation in the daily domesticity in Greece. The Greek houses had a circular altar-hearth placed at the center, as a clue of a communal and

familial existence. Hestia, however, didn't belong only to the center of a domestic space, but was represented as the community hearth, the fireplace of the city, as a meeting place where decisions could be made by keeping the sacred fire of the city - warm, welcoming and peaceful.

By now, it looks like Hestia does not help us very much. If we only see Hestia as the stereotype literally presented, it suggests she is not interesting, being probably confined at the kitchen, as a housekeeper. Maybe, not even the gods were interested on her since she does not have even a seat! Above all, virgin?! Hidden sexuality? As an old maid? The "aunt"? Or, the "saintly" wife? We could bring at least that sense of community suggested by the Greeks, but we do not have time for libations, processions or welcomings! We are not very interested in that either. Or are we?

At least two clear motifs were left: the first and the last, and, her manifestation as hearth. Barbara Kinsley says that "place becomes her body."⁶ Are we starting to perceive her image, a bit of her embodiment? It looks like her embodiment became the fireplace itself. May we reduce a goddess into a hearth? Is it a fallacious approach? A logical impossibility? Is the figure of Hestia an image already transformed and decomposed? What's the point, then? What is hidden? How to see through? May we look it as a metaphor of a metaphor?

If we are able to see it as a mythic metaphor that eludes literalism, I will take the risk. In this way, it may lead us to a space of experiencing concrete particulars into a depth double beat in acknowledging the contradictions and expanding its pulsation to our inner-outer world. What I am suggesting is to see Hestia, not only as a symbol⁷, but as an image in operation that catches us in a complex and intra-related soul's logic of imaginal

richness, and to go beyond the useful and shortcuts of the stereotype, reaching the inner psychological structures as we talked above. To hear it metaphorically, *in value* (including the clash of values), we hopefully may present to and be presented by Hestia.

What a challenge! Hestia has no place in our overwhelmed mercurial world, as Ginette Paris says “the center of the home is sullied”⁸... Hestia is already fired! Did I say fire? It may be a beginning! Fire is a violent heat that we don’t touch. It would be a mistake to make an approach to Hestia through fire since she has nothing to do with violence. Although, there are different fires, and her fire is the fire of hearth - balsamic, calm, regular. Little flames come from thick woods; it is monotonous, as Hestia is. Interesting, I really like it: the fire of hearth invites reverie, it is in that phenomenon of flickering monotony that I let myself go into a complete absorption, as if I am flying, yet apparently not moving. And so warm! Hestia.

Ginette Paris says that “she [Hestia] does not leave her place; we must go to her.”⁹ The hearth is really an invitation that we usually do not refuse to seat around it. Hestia doesn’t have a seat at Olympus probably because she wants us to be matured. It is us who must go to her. Once seated, welcomed. Welcomed to our own warmth in a communal sense, excluding the egoistic and ingenuous ideal - Hestia is precise on that, no doubt about this. The hearth brings reverie, and the heart is like a flame that brings the inner to the surface, and vice versa. Gaston Bachelard eloquently says:

The *dreaming man* seated before his fireplace is the man concerned with inner depths, a man in the process of development. Or perhaps it would be better to say that fire gives to the man concerned with inner depths the lesson of an inner essence which is in a process of development: the flame comes forth from the heart of the burning branches. (The Psychoanalysis of Fire 56)

The “development” mentioned by Bachelard can also mythically be seen as Paola Pignatelli sees Hestia presiding the progress “from raw to cooked.”¹⁰ I emphasize: to be shared. Ginette Paris also says “what matters to Hestia is the group, the “we.”¹¹

This “we” in Hestia may be seen as a contradiction, if we are not seeing through yet. Hestia is a virgin, and virgin in the Greek concept means complete within oneself. Yet, it does not mean it doesn’t have resonance to others; all the virgin Greek goddesses have their particular ways of how to be touched. One of Hestia’s particularities is that it is us who must reach her (but please, not by “direct rampant sexuality”¹²!). Her virginity, not being moral, but psychological, suggests that her fire, private and public, is sacred in a sense that it holds the center, so she enables soul to have a home¹³, that sense of inviolability, the inner flame of all things.

If we displace her, the loss of centeredness is clear: no food for the soul! The world is asking for our attention, our soulnessness is asking for our attention. If we are feeling “off base, off-center, unable to find a place, can’t settle down, spaced out, and off the wall,”¹⁴ these are negative Hestian values and are worth our attention. Perhaps Hestia is suggesting to us to look at her true essence, her final beginnings: if we are finally now becoming to be interested at the *last and first* of Hestia but not knowing how to make it, I suggest making a journey into reverie, into imagination (“Hestia is able to *guard images!*”¹⁵), and connect with the heart. Making our hearts to feel at home once again inside this world, with others, at the Hestian hearth – to make this fire is necessary an other. *And express it!* The soul may dream in peace once again if we let the hearth and its dancing flames light the hidden reaches of our hearts.

Notes:

¹ For instance, see James Hillman, "The Thought of the Heart." (Frankfurt: Insel Verlag, *Eranos 48*, 1979) pp.133-182.

² The word "play" has been long discussed by so many great figures, such as Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Schiller, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Huinzig, Durand, Deleuze, Derrida, Wittgenstein, Kuchler, Mihai Spariosu, just to mention some. Freud, Jung, Piaget, Lacan, Hillman, Guggenbuhl-Craig, David Miller and others follow the psychology area. I suggest the joyful and brilliant shortcut essay weaved by David Miller "The Bricoleur in the Tennis Court: Pedagogy in Postmodern Context" (1996 Conference on Values in Higher Education, <http://web.syr.edu/~dlmiller/IronysArrows.htm>).

³ K.O. Muller, *Introduction to a Scientific System of Mythology*, trans. J. Leitch (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans 1844), pp.44. James Hillman, in *Re-Visioning Psychology* (New York: Harper & Row. 1976), pp. 154, adds in his notes: "For opinions against this perspective, by eighteenth-century critics who would banish the marvelous and the mythic from poetry so that it should conform truthfully to modern theory of mechanical nature, see "Truth and the Poetic Marvelous" in Abrams, *Mirror and Lamp*."

⁴ According to Harry Slochower in his book entitled *Mythopoesis*, he says: "Mytho-poesis (from the Greek *poiein*, meaning to make, to create) re-creates the ancient stories. And, while mythology presents its stories as if they actually took place, mythopoesis transposes them to a symbolic meaning. Indeed, *the mythopoeic works examined in the study arose when the literal account of the legend could no longer be accepted*. They arose *in periods of crisis, of cultural transition*, when faith in the authoritative structure was waning. It is at this juncture that our great prophets and artists would redeem the values of the past and present in their *symbolic* form, transposing their historic transitoriness into permanent promises." (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1970) pp.15.

⁵ Hearth in Latin is *focus*. For further discussion on *focus*, together with Hestia's etymology, see Barbara Kirksey, "Hestia: a Background of Psychological Focusing," *Facing the Gods* (Dallas, Texas: Spring Publications, 1980), pp. 108, and James Hillman, "In" (Spring) pp. 9-21.

⁶ Barbara Kirksey, pp. 104.

⁷ To a better understanding about symbol and image, see James Hillman, "An Inquiry into Image" (Zurich: Spring Publications, 1977) pp. 42-88.

⁸ Ginette Paris, *Pagan Meditations* (Woodstock, Connecticut: Spring Publications, 1986) pp. 172.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 167.

¹⁰ Paola Coppola Pignatelli, "The Dialectics of Urban Architecture" (Dallas, Texas: Spring Publications, 1985) pp. 43.

¹¹ Ginette Paris, pp. 170.

¹² James Hillman, "In," pp. 19

¹³ For a full presentation of the value of house image, see Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994)

¹⁴ Barbara Kirksey, pp.105

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 107

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