Foreword to *Pedagogies of the Imagination: Mythopoetic Curriculum in Educational Practice*[i]

William F. Pinar

I have long admired the mythopoetic tradition in curriculum studies. That admiration followed from my experience as a high-school teacher of English in a wealthy suburb of New York City at the end of the 1960s. A "dream" job – I taught four classes of 15-20 students during a nine-period day – in a "dream" suburb (where I could afford to reside only by taking a room in retired teachers' house), many of these often Ivy-League bound students had everything but meaningful lives. This middle-class, Midwestern young teacher was flabbergasted. In one sense, my academic life has been devoted to understanding that searing experience.

Matters of meaning seemed paramount in the curriculum field to which Paul Klohr introduced me at Ohio State. Klohr assigned me the work of curriculum theorists such as James B. Macdonald. Like Timothy Leonard (who also studied with Klohr at Ohio State) and Peter Willis, Macdonald (1995) understood that school deform was part of a broader cultural and political crisis in which meaning is but one casualty. In the mythopoetic tradition in curriculum studies, scholars labor to understand this crisis and the conditions for the reconstruction of meaning in our time, in our schools.

In the United States at least, the most known recent reference to the mythopoetic was not educational but gendered, associated with the controversial men's movement of the 1990s (see Savran 1998, 169). Robert Bly's *Iron John* (1990) stayed on the hardback bestseller list for more than a year; Bill Moyers' PBS profile of Bly ("A Gathering of

Men") sold twenty-seven thousand videocassette copies and ten thousand transcripts. No one-man phenomenon, by the mid-nineties, Peter Filene (1998, 241) reports, men could read twenty-four different "mythopoetic journals" and walk into more than forty men's centers. In the classified ads of *Wingspan: Journal of the Male Spirit* (circulation: 120,000), men were invited to attend various kinds of men's events (Filene 1998).

Brooke/ Bly's figure of the archaic "Wild Man" represented an essence of atavistic masculinity presumably all men could reclaim. The "men's movement" was a response to the recurring crisis of masculinity (see Pinar 2001, 321-416, 855-860, 1139-1152), engendered this time by the post-Fordist family structure with its two working parents, by the stress and alienation of contemporary corporate life, and by the feminist movement. Bly asserted men must get back in touch with their male psyche and "the nourishing dark[ness]" (1990, 6) within. During the first decades of the twentieth century, Pamela Caughie (1999, 155) points out, D. H. Lawrence had expressed ambivalence toward the healing processes Bly endorsed - those conducted through rural retreats and so-called "native" rituals, such as drumming and dancing – but "he [Lawrence] too associated a primal maleness with a nourishing darkness, figured as paternal, and attributed the crisis of masculinity in his day in part to women's self-assertion." (Indeed, David Savran (1998, 196) asserts that "Bly's 'mythopoetics' remains a 'white mythology,' firmly rooted in imperialistic fantasies," themselves gendered [see Stoler 1995].) Like the "mythopoetic men's movement," Caughie (1999, 155) argues, Lawrence's cosmography imagined new gender relations in terms of "spiritual renewal, not social and material change" (see Caughie 1999, 155).

Not so this collection. Timothy Leonard and Peter Willis introduce the collection by acknowledging the urgency of such change. Through the processes of mythopoesis, they suggest, such change may be stimulated. The choice is not, then, spiritual renewal *or* social-material transformation: the argument here is that the former can occur *through* the latter. It is only a spiritually impoverished people who could mistake standardized examinations as measures of educational progress. It is a people bereft of meaning who could cast about for external representations of it. This analysis is reminiscent of those subjective senses of colonialism and of postcolonial reparation legendary activist Frantz Fanon theorized (see Oliver 2004, 15; Sekyi-Otu 1996, 238).

That the human mind is a function of imagination is, Leonard and Willis tell us, the unifying thread of the mythopoetic project. Threatened by certain forms of hyper-rationality and intensified by placelessness (see Bowers 2000, 65), simply releasing the imagination is no solution, as the history of the racist imagination (see Pinar 2001, 1129ff.), for example, reminds. Perhaps that is why Patricia Holland and Noreen Garman (this volume) emphasize the moral in the mythopoetic, why Leonard and Willis underscore its political and progressive character, and why, in another volume, Mary Aswell Doll (see 2000, xiv) associates the mythopoetic with women visionaries. The curricular forms such a moral mythopoetics can take are outlined in several of the essays in this volume.

In their conclusion to the collection, Timothy Leonard and Peter Willis summarize these forms. I supplement these with one outlined by Mary Aswell Doll in her remarkable study of Samuel Beckett. "Beckett's work," Doll (1988, 5) suggests, "lends itself wonderfully to a mythopoetic method precisely because it breaks form." It rejects

the "gridlike certainty" (1988, 5) that Leonard and Willis associate with the current cult of abstraction and hyper-rationality, materialized in standardized examinations. In this rejection, Doll (1998, 5) tells us, Beckett's mythopoetics neither denies the past nor clings to it, allowing us to "read patterns afresh." Through the study of this text, we can read patterns afresh and in so doing, reconstruct the meaning of curriculum. As Timothy Leonard and Peter Willis remind, that project is urgent.

<div align="right">William F. Pinar
University of British Columbia</div>

References

Bowers, C.A. (2000). *Let them eat data: How computers affect education, cultural diversity and the prospects of ecological sustainability*. Athens: University of Georgia.

Bly, Robert (1990). *Iron John: A book about men*. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley.

Caughie, Pamela L. (1999). *Passing and pedagogy. The dynamics of responsibility.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Doll, Mary Aswell (1988). *Beckett and myth: An archetypal approach*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Doll, Mary Aswell (2000). *Like letters in running water: A mythopoetics of curriculum*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Filene, Peter G. (1998). *Him/her/self: Gender identities in modern America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Macdonald, James B. (1995). *Theory as a prayerful act: Collected essays.* [Edited by Bradley Macdonald; introduced by William F. Pinar.] New York: Peter Lang.

Oliver, Kelly (2004). *The colonization of psychic space: A psychoanalytic social theory of oppression*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Pinar, William F. (2001). *The gender of racial politics and violence in America*. New York: Peter Lang.

Savran, David (1998). *Taking it a like a man: White masculinity, masochism, and contemporary American culture*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

5

Sekyi-Otu, Ato (1996). *Fanon's dialectic of experience*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Stoler, Ann Laura (1995). *Race and the education of desire: Foucault's history of sexuality and the colonial order of things*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

---

[i] Pinar, William F. 2008. Foreword. In Timothy Leonard and Peter Willis (Eds.) *Pedagogies of the Imagination: Mythopoetic Curriculum in Educational Practice* (v-vii). New York: Springer.