

(Chapter 1 from **John Carroll: *THE WESTERN DREAMING***, HarperCollins, Sydney, 2001.)

FOR WANT OF STORY

This story is an enigma. Two men set forth on the most fateful journey of their lives. Clueless as to what is happening, their instinct is to flee Jerusalem, along the road to the village of Emmaus, twelve kilometres away.

They could be anyone, anywhere, at any time. Yet it is a Sunday afternoon in early Spring, some year around 30AD in a remote province of the Roman Empire. The steel-blue light dulls the greys and browns of the arid and craggy hills, making of this a cheerless, unwelcoming journey. High cloud drifts grandly across the heavens, its eternal procession mocking the puny mortals inching along far below, sandalled foot before sandalled foot gingerly plodding the stone-strewn rutted track. Gusts from across Holy wasteland chill the men as they glance at each other out of dilated, haunted eyes—blank, apart from a dark flicker hinting at the void underneath, of dread. Their faces are gaunt and set, as they stammer out their shared versions of recent events. Over and over they retell it, that they might understand—and to hold off the silence which threatens to consume them.

Can it be true it had only been today, early on this very same morning, that the terrified women found the dead body gone, the rock tomb empty? Winds of violation eddy through the stagnant Jerusalem streets. The sacred veil in the Temple hangs in shreds. The three crosses still stand on Calvary hill, outside the walls, their silhouette towering over the transgressive city, taunting. Little wonder two men seek asylum.

On the open road, a stranger is with them. How can this be? Where has he come from? Some nobody, they hastily suppose, some intrusive vagabond going nowhere. Failing to read their own fear, and forgetting the significant events pressing upon them, they make the normal human assumption. This moment, the here and now they inhabit and look out upon through their blurred minds, is nothing, just another arbitrary speck in time, another indistinct smudge on the scratchy meandering line of their bit-part scripts. Irritated by this one further jolt to the fracturing order of their lives, they note with disgust that his cloak is fouled with grime and age, his long hair unkempt. In his ordinariness he looks a bit like Matthew, the tax collector, or a gardener, such as the one Magdalene saw.

The third man queries their conversation. They stop in their tracks, gloomy, amazed that the stranger does not know what has just come to pass in Jerusalem. They tell

him, ending with the empty tomb. Berating them as fools, he launches into a long lesson.

At last they draw near the village. The stranger gives the impression he is going further, but as it is toward evening they persuade him to rest. So what is to be just happens, in the tiny public room of a local roadside inn where he joins them at a rough-hewn slab table set for three. They watch with mounting apprehension, by the wildly flickering light of an oil-lamp, as he takes the bread. Suddenly his presence shimmers, filling the shadowy room. Bathing them in a pained and knowing look, he breaks the bread and gives it to them. As in a spell, they become their vision, hovering at a remove out in front of their physical selves, and dissolve into His eyes, hands and the broken bread. Now they see clearly. It is Jesus himself, who on the instant disappears.¹

The darkness of this night is in keeping with recent events, and they are left alone and bewildered, hunched over the table. Mark's *Life of Jesus* had ended without any risen Christ, with three women outside the empty tomb, trembling and amazed. 'Neither said they anything to any man, for they were afraid', so run Mark's last words. Of the death that killeth death—not a sign. The frantic women do not even report back to the disciples.² If that is true of them, the ones with the surest knowledge, then what can the two men in Emmaus, who had a sign, have made of it? In their shoes, what would you or I make of it? In fact the two around the flickering oil-lamp soon reconstruct: 'Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way.' Within the hour they set off back to Jerusalem.

How are we to read this story—the dramatic finale to Luke's *Life of Jesus*? Christ is also leaving Jerusalem. Perhaps he has had enough of human injustice and dim, fickle disciples. The drift is that he will keep going. But where to? Then the two he has lectured so vigorously invite him to join them. This has been the last time he will teach, and he is bad-tempered and perhaps even long-winded, as if sick of explaining the truth to the obtuse and the resistant—to everyone. And why these two? Why has history shone its immortalising spotlight, if only for a moment, on these insignificant beings, as they made their solitary and fitful way along the donkey route to Emmaus? Are they not us, one and all?

The story poses the ultimate question: On the journey of journeys, the road open, who is it that he or she may meet? This is the spot at which they yearn for the person who will point the way. Not that it is clear in the story that He has done this—the two unnerved men simply decide to return to Jerusalem, and it is far too early to tell how their lives have been transformed, if at all. And what does the right stranger *do*? If he saves them, then saved from what, into what? Furthermore it may actually be the gardener, only the gardener, or an accountant, or the girl next door. It could even be a road of misfortune,

such as the one on which fate decreed that Oedipus, believing that he fled from his father, unwittingly met his real father, and killed him, thus sealing his own doom.

This thread leads directly to the question that is at the basis of all serious enquiry: What is truth? When the Greeks designated truth by their word, *alētheia*, they built in a narrative. Truth is that which is *a-lēthe*, not *lēthe*, *Lēthe* being the place of oblivion or forgetfulness, later the river running through the underworld. To drink its waters was to extinguish memory. Oblivion is thus the natural human state, one in which individuals have forgotten what they know. They know everything, but are constitutionally blind and comprehensively so, containing within themselves a huge reservoir of Unknown. It would be identified in the twentieth century as the Unconscious, following Freud, who also taught that they are inwardly driven to resist the unseen truth, as in the two men's instinct to flee Jerusalem and deny the stranger. Plato's version was that the all-knowing soul entering into a human form loses its memory.³

At the most, in times of gravity, when the 'heart burns within', they may *remember*. Truth tears them out of the oblivion of being. The philosopher, Heidegger, translates *alētheia* into German as *Unverborgenheit*, meaning 'unconcealedness' or 'disclosedness', drawing on the sense of the *hidden* but not the *forgotten*.⁴ Truth is a shaft of light breaking through to illuminate the mist-shrouded river. A mere broken piece of bread may do the trick, and the mists rise from off the eyes. In Magdalene's case it was the voice that she recognised, when the gardener addressed her by her own name, intimately: 'Mary!' Moreover, as English has picked up, to be without Truth is *lethal*, death in life, its condition that of *lethargy*, a weariness of spirit in which all vitality has drained away.

A range of energies surface in the story, firstly the panic that drives the men away from Jerusalem, then the burning in the heart when the stranger speaks, the shock and awe around the table, and finally the resolve to return to the site of the horror.⁵ But 'energy' is a feeble word for the demons that drive. What the third man *does*, if he does anything that will endure, is to arouse 'sacred rage'.⁶ Sacred rage is the energy of truth. It is the fire that burns within, waiting to be piped forth by the music of *alētheia*. It is the stranger's medium.

So, the question becomes, who or what bears the Truth. Will the stranger be in disguise? We have assumed that the two men are rattled in their perplexity, and thereby too anxious and self-absorbed to notice who is with them. They may, alternatively, be shrewd, and resist the call, sensing with dread what it will ask of them. For as we are told they stop abruptly, their mood suddenly gloomy—surprising, for there is no reason for this, apart from a stirring in the inner Unknown, where of course the stranger is recognised. The normal human reflex out on the open road is to avoid risk, stick with what is known, pretend one is at home and dream on through life, and on, wedded to the security of oblivion. But

the two men cannot help themselves, poor fools, inviting him in to join them for supper.

And is it that once they have seen him, he may disappear, for he is no longer needed? Is he now alive in the two who have been torn out of forgetfulness? This is less obscure in the case of Magdalene, told by the gardener, after she has recognised him: ‘Touch me not!’ He is now untouchable, and what is more, although she wants to hang on to this moment of all moments in her life, keep it for ever, in fact she no longer needs to cling to the past, for the charisma of being has entered into her.⁷

On that fateful journey it need not be a man—perhaps rather an image. When an image truly becomes an *icon*, it lights up with remembering. In the story the nature of the stranger’s presence is not specified. Is it a ghost, is it a flesh-and-blood Jesus, is it some form intermediate between body and spirit, or do the men hallucinate? A mountain of Christian theology would futilely debate just this point. John follows his *Touch Me Not* story with Thomas, who is sceptical of all this mumbo-jumbo, boasting that he will believe only when he has stuck his fingers inside the real live physical wounds. In other words, there is confusion and fear in all quarters about who or what is the third man.

We receive him, if at all, in the form of a story. If that story is told in the right way, painted or sculpted in the right form, composed in the right key, and the people on their own road to Emmaus are receptive—the story cryptically intersecting with their own—then the very foundations of being may be illuminated by the light of Truth. That is what Culture does. It may be the thing that saves, that taps the sacred rage. It is the subject matter of this book.

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The Western world is in the process of being thrown back onto its deepest resources. The stories are close by, ready to lift us out of our lethargy. Some have unwittingly found them, their lives driven, as it were, by a hidden god, or demon. Even they, however, the fortunate ones, would gain a poise and a fortitude if they knew. For the rest, it is a question of life itself.

The spirit cannot breathe without story. It sinks to a whimper, deflating its housing characters, and condemning them to psychopathology—literally, disease of the soul. So it is for the young in the contemporary West—teenagers, those in their twenties, the hope and pride of their societies—and with them swathes of their more seemingly assured elders. A malaise holds them in thrall, struggling to live in a present without vision of any future, or connection to even the organic tissue of being, their own personal past.

He is eighteen, a year out of school and still no regular work. There have

been casual jobs, bartending, clearing gardens, that sort of thing. Girls are too strange and threatening; he never learnt to talk to them. Sometimes when drunk with his mates his eyes will glaze over and another self will slur abuse across a bar. He doesn't seem to care. He keeps his head lowered to avoid looking forwards, and the closest he comes to reflection is to scorn his parents for the monotony of their half-hearted pursuits, just getting through the day, with the help of television and, he suspects, sedatives other than alcohol—scorns them for being like him. Catch him unawares and stunned eyes, an embarrassed grin and a spirit flailing around inside an alien body implore: 'Tell me what to do; Tell me how to live; Have pity on me, I am lost.'

She is twenty-five and successful, her schedule crammed with bright moments—nights out, ecstatic affairs, a new car, skiing in picturesque mountains, a swirl of acquaintances, and she has travelled some of the world. While she cannot be sure she will keep the one stable thing in her life, her job, that doesn't matter much, for she doubts she wants to, the solid professional path of her father unattainable, but also unappealing. So she surfs the days, the months and the years, with each episode soon forgotten, as if it were but a passing wave returning spent, into the timeless ocean out of which it rose. She induces oblivion, as if to wipe out the shadow she fears looming up inescapably over her.

They are dying for want of story. So they taunt each other: 'Get a life!' So they mock each other: 'You are a waste of space.' The more hopeful among them question at the end of the day, if they are honest, and at the end of the most intense of days—a day of love, of adventure, of calamity—they question: 'Is that all there is?'⁸ Indeed, *Is* that all there is? The less hopeful have closed themselves off to expectations, lest they be disappointed.

They are dying for want of story. Some delve into the East, drawn by its depth of spirit, or become fascinated by indigenous peoples like the Australian Aborigines who appear to live by their ancient stories and sacred sites, sustaining a blood bond with Nature. If there is political passion, a sense that I too am responsible for the world I inherit, then it will almost certainly centre on that same Nature, where it is believed that the gods still move. But the Western myths that animate sky, sea, mountains and bush have dimmed. On another front, many found in the life of Diana, Princess of Wales, a tragic story which they could scrutinise for clues as to how to live with dignity and value in their own time.

They are dying for want of story. Contemporary slang provides a clue, in the mock serious ideal of the 'living legend'. A legend is a story with such gravity as to defy time, its subject entering the Halls of Fame, joining the immortals there. Clark Kent, popular cultural hero through the twentieth century, humiliated by a real life of bungled journalism and failure to attract the woman he loves, dreams himself a completely different story, that of *Superman*. Thus it is that paranoia drives its victims into either delusions that they are

men who had unequivocally powerful direction, such as Napoleon and Superman, or delusions of persecution—‘I am followed therefore I am!’—another fabrication of story to impute meaning to the chaos. The modern age’s most sophisticated hero, Hamlet—the one it has most read, discussed, and watched on stage and cinema-screen—has as his dying request to his friend, Horatio: ‘Tell my story.’ This is the man whose own incapacity to do what he should has left the stage littered with corpses, a dithering paralysis in relation to life that makes him, once again, the hero of the time. Hamlet’s final absurd hope as he sprawls across the wreckage of his life is that there might have been a form, justifying his existence. He dies for want of a vindicating story.

For both parent and child the old bedtime ritual is often the one most warmly remembered. It was then that the world was given magical shape, the child identifying with fairy-tale characters and mythic heroes, enraptured by the story in which it is Me who rides through the enchanted forest and kills the fiery dragon, Me whom the glass slipper fits. The spirit soars, there is a place, a mission, a way of living, the monstrously huge world outside not so daunting. Once upon a time!

Without the deep structure of archetypal story a life has no meaning. Take Odysseus. His many trials on his ten-year voyage home at the end of the Trojan War—a boys’ own adventure series, cowboys and Indians stuff—make sense to him, and become interesting to us, only because he has an overarching story, which tells him where he is going, and why. In his particular case it is the narrative of Homecoming, told in such a way that it became the canonical story of the long voyage home in the Western tradition.

Then there was Antigone, gaining the courage to defy the State and risk her own life, in order to bury the decomposing body of her outlaw brother, left out as carrion for birds and dogs. She is the only one big enough to take on the dread of being the daughter/sister of Oedipus, who killed his father and married his own mother, with whom he sired four children, Antigone one of those four. She is driven by a sense of definitive story, that of her own family and her obligations to it, which it is left to her to bring to fitting completion. She is the last one able to restore sacred order to the horror of her family saga. We humans can bear almost any pain if we can find purpose in it.

Western culture runs on stories, starting with Homer’s mythic recounting of a few episodes from the tenth year of the Trojan War. The Greek formula put it: *mythos* is *pathos*. ‘Pathos’ comes from the verb, *paschein*, meaning both to experience and to suffer—hence its other modern English derivatives, passion, sympathy, pathology, apathy and empathy. Experience requires wholehearted engagement, that is passion, with suffering its ever-present companion—hence the tragic vision. If you want to live you must accept the totality. Furthermore, this is only possible under the authority of myth. Take away the

charged archetypal story, fail to keep it animated, and you take away life.⁹

Roberto Calasso captures some of this ancient Greek understanding:

When something undefined and powerful shakes mind and fibre and trembles the cage of our bones, when the person who only a moment before was dull and agnostic is suddenly rocked by laughter and homicidal frenzy, or by the pangs of love, or by the hallucination of form, or finds his face streaming with tears, then the Greek realises he is not alone. Somebody else stands beside him, and that somebody is a god. He no longer has the calm clarity of perception he had in his mediocre state of existence. Instead, that clarity has migrated into his divine companion. A sharp profile against the sky, the god is resplendent, while the person who evoked him is left confused and overwhelmed....

What conclusions can we draw? To invite the gods ruins our relationship with them but sets history in motion. A life in which the gods are not invited isn't worth living. It will be quieter, but there won't be any stories. And you could suppose that these dangerous invitations were in fact contrived by the gods themselves, because the gods get bored with men who have no stories.¹⁰

It is not just the sacred stories that have faded. In the closing decades of the twentieth century the orthodox life-narratives also crumbled. A changing economy made it increasingly unlikely that many could count on a life-long career, awaiting on entry into adulthood, a vocation which was secure and would provide the financial basis for a comfortable life. At the same time, belief withered in a life-long marriage companionship, building a family, leading into a contented old age, the rocking chair in front of the fire. *Necessity*, in one of her recurring guises, was closing in once again.

What was left was making the most of the little things, a job here done with heart and soul thrown into it, an intimacy there, in which love rose above the petty concerns of the egos involved. But even for such modest achievements there had to be a story behind the scenes lending authority to each step taken, the story that fits, linking to the higher truth which could release the sacred rage.

Without story the temptation has been withdrawal into self, chit-chat about the everyday, as if describing how I drank coffee at nine-twenty-seven this morning anchors existence. Complaint comes too, how bad my mother was when I was a baby, my father in teenage years, my society thereafter. The temptation is exacerbated by a surrounding culture of therapy and counselling. Behind its caring façade the reality is that each puny ego is left alone to whimper *me-me-me* at the void.

There arose a linked fear of big story—archetypal, classical, what some called 'grand narrative'—that it would show *me* up as of no consequence. If I am a nobody then I would rather fail in peace, in oblivion, and deny that heroes exist. The wiser response has come from Popular Culture, with film, television and tabloid press taking the boy or girl next door and recasting their lives as something special. These 'real-life' stories address the vital unconscious knowledge in each person that the local and particular, ordinary old *me* is

shadowed by a grand story, a truth shaping and vindicating its existence.¹¹

John Ford set out deliberately in his Westerns to give mythic weight to ordinary lives. He spelt his vision out in a narration over the concluding images to the cavalry film, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949):

So here they are, the dog-faced soldiers, the regulars, the fifty-cents-a-day professionals, riding the outposts of a nation. From Fort Reno to Fort Apache, from Sheridan to Stark, they were all the same: men in dirty-shirt blue and only a cold page in the history books to mark their passing. But wherever they rode, and whatever they fought for, that place became the United States.

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Once upon a time—so start the favourite stories that children ask to hear over and over again. With adults it is not different. Mark opens his *Life of Jesus* with the Greek word, *Archē*, John with *En archē*. The translation is ‘in the beginning’, ‘at the foundation’—or perhaps, rather, quite simply ‘the fundament’. We are being told that we will be led to the ‘sacred site’¹² where the presiding stories were created—the *archetypes*, types formed in the beginning, once upon a time.

One is tempted, when standing back to survey the vast span of Western culture, to imagine chiselled over its portal, as motto: ‘In the beginning was the story.’ Indeed this is a permissible translation of the original Greek of the first line of John: ‘In the beginning was the word (*logos*).’¹³

A culture is its sacred stories. In each case it has one or two, perhaps three, major channels, which in turn are diffused through a myriad tributaries forming the beliefs of a society, right down to the petty habit that may have given us wayfarers our excuse to visit Emmaus. Without it there is no map, just the mists of oblivion. Humans, like the gods, get bored when they have no stories, and sink into lethargy. Culture is the power to lift them up, from their prone animal state, the power to reveal the truth. That truth may engage universal moral laws, as in the case of Antigone. Then again it may be pure in the spirit which ‘bloweth where he wills, and thou hearest his sound; but canst not tell whence he cometh and whither he goeth.’

The Australian Aborigines call their sacred stories *The Dreaming*. It comes from the time before now, before ordinary time, yet a time ‘everywhen’. The central task of each individual is to tap into those eternal stories, find a right relationship to the powers they represent. *Mythos* is *pathos*, or as they put it, not to live the Dreaming is to die. One interpreter has called the process the ‘obliteration of the ephemeral’:

Dreaming can be conceptualised as a great wave which follows along behind us, obliterating the debris of our existence and illuminating, as a synchronous set of images, those things which endure.¹⁴

Here is a people who know the truth about story, the truth about culture.

Midrash, the Hebrew tradition called it, the process of each age taking up the ancient and sacred stories and retelling them in a way that spoke to the new times. Every living culture is inwardly driven to *midrash*. One of the major protagonists in what is to follow in this book, Nicolas Poussin, was referred to in these terms. His most successful contemporary, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, called him ‘the great story-teller’.

So what was in the beginning? *Necessity* was there, as the ancient Greeks conceived of her, the supernatural force more powerful than any of the gods, she whom they held in such awe that they never personified her in their art—such would have been the sacrilege. In her control over human destiny she determined the grand as well as the particular patterns. Her three beautiful daughters, the Fates, wove the thread of each individual’s destiny, a thread that could be neither cut nor loosened, however powerfully heroic (Achilles) or wilfully crafty (Odysseus) the poor human yoked to that merciless tale which was his life. Fate binds. We can imagine them, those three ravishing nymphs, dancing gaily around in a circle together, and glancing down on their handiwork far below, at the moment two poor creatures tramping the track to Emmaus realise they are not alone.

Necessity—that chilling, pitiless name the Greeks gave her—in order to stress their own impotence over anything of significance in life, and in recognition of its force, far more coercive than anything biological or sociological—inherited genes or confining social institutions. Modern English usage reveals an enduring faith in *Necessity* and the inviolable thread it spins for each individual destiny, in such expressions as ‘it is *bound* to happen’ and ‘poor boy, you’re *bound* to die.’¹⁵

In the beginning *Necessity* also dictated the stories through which we humans would be able, if we were so inclined, to interpret our own singular lives, make sense of them, and even find some consolation for the torment inflicted upon us by the yoke of that same *Necessity*, herself. A small stock of stories they were, finding their completion in the Jesus cycle, told like most of the others, in the beginning, in Greek. Together they staked out the sacred site which would found the West, and make it great.

Or was it Athena? The cool one with the flashing grey eyes, she was patron of the arts, crafts and sports, of just wars, of the olive tree—She, above all, goddess of Truth. Statues of her would appear, as if on cue, as if rising out of the Western Unknown, during every great phase of *midrash*, starting with the temples dedicated to her on her own Acropolis, the one that oversaw fifth-century classical Athens.¹⁶

Homer opens *The Iliad* with the three words: ‘Wrath, sing, goddess...’ letting

us know that only the voice of a divinity may carry what is to follow, and in song. The Dreaming is too big for mere mortals to tell, the *mythos* of those superhuman beings who strode the earth in the days before ordinary time, who established the types for everywhen. Homer does not name the goddess, but it could only be Athena.

In *The Odyssey* he is more explicit:

From some point
here, goddess, daughter of Zeus, speak, and begin our story.

Or, as another modern translator opens his version:

Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the story.¹⁷

So, we may also presume, it is the goddess Truth who from the beginning has presided over the Western Dreaming.

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This book assumes a background argument. It draws heavily upon a period roughly pivoted around the sixteenth century, during the last great turning-point of Western culture. This was the Rebirth, the last fundamental *midrash*. There were three new world-views that came into existence. Together they have governed what has followed. It has been orthodox to recognise only two. Firstly there was Humanism, at the core of the Renaissance, with its credo of reason, free-will and the pre-eminence of the human individual, a culture founding modern science and technology, and producing later liberal and democratic derivatives. Secondly there was the Protestant Reformation of Luther and Calvin, with its reorientation of Christianity around doctrines of faith and grace alone, individual conscience, and this-worldly vocation, with its own later secular derivatives.

Concurrently, the Old Masters were rethinking the formative stories, and producing in their art an earthly tragic picture of the human condition. The visual image becomes the messenger of truth. This might be called the Third Reformation. The place is principally Italy. The time starts around 1440 with Donatello and has ended by 1670 soon after the death of Poussin.

This was not just a reworking of stories that were all presented whole in the beginning. A feature of archetypal story, as Frank Kermode has pointed out, is that it compels those who come under its thrall to bring it to its logical completion.¹⁸ It demands to be filled out. That the *Lives of Jesus* provide no more than fragments of the Magdalene story forced those artists who retold it fifteen hundred years later to fill in the gaps, including how she spent the rest of her life.

Keeping the argument in mind, the book sets out to present the fundamental

themes of the Western Dreaming—they come in the form of stories. There are nine. They will be pieced together from the major works which gave them narrative flesh, around half of their number receiving their most telling *midrash* to date from the Third Reformation.

Why the term, ‘Reformation’? Because it is almost always the *forms*, as Plato introduced them, that matter.¹⁹ *Reformation* is thus a more exact and fitting term than *Renaissance*, the focus on forms underlining the ever-present need to rework and thereby reinvigorate them.

The assumption used in selection holds that with any story it is the major telling that counts.²⁰ All of importance, for instance, that may be known about Achilles is to be found in *The Iliad*—Homer establishes the archetype of Hero and does so definitively. Similarly the principal dimension of the story of Fate is determined once and for all time by Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King*. The form is never improved upon, every later *midrash* lesser. Everything is to be gained by concentrating on the best, and forgetting the rest. There is a canon, and a ranking.

The task requires method. From the outset the method is that of *midrash*, to retell the stories, in the company of some interpretation. When the authoritative source is a work of art this involves translation from the visual images into words, in effect continuing the spiralling motion of the culture forwards, just as the painters and sculptors had themselves taken up written narratives, together with philosophy and commentary, and metamorphosed them into pictures.

These stories are not at a distance, of largely academic interest, some detached account of the mess and the glory fictitious others have made of their lives. A principle governing what is to follow is that we ourselves are all on stage, plunged into the thick of the action, inhaling the stench, receiving the blows, sighing the sighs—the protagonists. Archetypal story has that special immediacy, demanding participation, obliterating the debris of our existence, illuminating the things that endure. Or it is dead. Nevertheless, when from time to time we are forced to interpret, to make better sense of where we are, we shall gain a little distance. The scholarly baggage, essential to keep the caravan in provisions, will be displaced into endnotes, which are not peripheral.

The reason for choosing to open this book with the road to Emmaus is simple: as parable, it is the key to the nature of our enterprise.²¹ As parable, it insists on the inescapability of mystery. Every detail remains obscure—open to question and doubt. All we are left with is the inner confidence that this story is important, that somehow and somewhere it bears a deep and central Truth. The story hounds us, it haunts us, yet it will not reveal any clear formula. It says do not press too hard for a definite shape, for a definitive reading. I am not like that. Do not ask to know who or what power moves behind

the scenes—you will not find God or whatever through me. Indeed any urgency in the drive to interpret will be a symptom of lack of knowing, and the insecurity that leads to doctrine. The story in itself is all. Relax and let it be! Then it may work its fill.

The Australian Aborigines from time to time say to Westerners: ‘You have lost your Dreaming!’²² They are, of course, right in part. The Christian churches are custodians of a treasure lost to themselves, and the universities are tending the same way. As these institutions founder in metaphysical emptiness, their words as dead leaves, all the texts and icons are there in their midst, waiting to have life breathed back into them.

Third Reformation art is the major modern contributor to the Western Dreaming as it might speak today. It is far from the whole. Not all the retelling has been through painting and sculpture. The other great tradition in Reformation story is ‘classical’ music, exemplified in such works as Bach’s *St Matthew Passion* (c.1727-44). And ever present are the great ancient texts, waiting to be taken up once more.

Those who find art obscure may experience archetypal story through other media, music for instance. The *St Matthew Passion* reveals what forces may be unleashed by tapping into the Dreaming. While Bach is literal with Jesus’ last day—Matthew’s written account unchanged—his *midrash* is into sound. A volcano of controlled passion rages for three hours as the choruses—solo and collective—act out and reflect upon the unfolding story. Through the fury there are pockets of stillness, and grace notes.

The Dreaming is like the stranger on the track to Emmaus, but silent—not haranguing or even tutoring. The wayfarers of the modern West do not really know where they are going, or why—perhaps just *away*. They sense he has come from afar, and now accompanies them for a long stretch of their road. He is just there, a presence. Indeed, does he speak at all? From time to time they seem to listen, and occasionally their hearts burn within. Somehow they know, and that he is there to guide their journey, but for much of the time they behave as if they have forgotten what they know, and do not even notice him.

He will keep going, as in the story, whatever they do, and even for another five hundred years if necessary. For them, however, entering a new millennium, they who have come to realise that neither the Humanist nor the Protestant Reformation are more than secondary guides, incapable of tapping the sacred rage, for they had no stories, his time has come. How else might they recover their Dreaming? ‘The gods get bored with men who have no stories.’ As it is toward evening they should invite him in, to abide with them for supper.

¹The theme of the god manifesting on earth in the form of *the stranger* is already to be found in Greek mythology, Zeus for instance appearing on a number of occasions disguised as an unknown guest (Roberto Calasso: *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, trans. Tim Parks, Vintage, London, 1994, p. 53).

²Frank Kermode reflects at length on the ending to Mark's *Life of Jesus*, in *The Genesis of Secrecy* (Harvard University Press, 1979, especially ch. 3).

The term 'Gospel' will not be used in this book. The original Greek titles, as in *KATA MARKON*, which are 2nd century AD in any case, simply mean 'According to Mark'. In reality the four canonical works are *Lives of Jesus*, and whereas 'gospel', etymologically 'good news', does pick up one theme it is far from the major one. Raymond E. Brown in his study of the core of the Jesus story, the Passion—*The Death of the Messiah* (Doubleday, New York, 1994, vol. 1, p. 11)—stresses that what he is dealing with is *narrative*.

³*Phaedrus*, 250a.

⁴For example, Martin Heidegger: '*Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit*', *Wegmarken*, Klostermann, Frankfurt, 1967, pp. 109-44. Drawing on the same Greek, he also refers to *beauty* as that which 'tears us out of the oblivion of being (*der Vergessenheit des Seins*) and grants us a view of that being' (*Nietzsche*, vol.1, Neske, Pfullingen, 1961, p. 228).

⁵'Energy' was an important category for Aristotle, who for instance taught that 'we exist by energy' and that 'happiness is a form of energy' (*Nicomachean Ethics*, with trans. by H. Rackham, Heinemann, London, 1934, book 9, chs. 7-9).

⁶Plato's term, used in his *Symposium* (215e), at least as rendered in a very free translation of *ta paschontas* by Michael Joyce (*The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton & Huntington Cairns, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1963, p. 567). Henry James introduces the term explicitly in his masterpiece, *The Ambassadors*—see John Carroll, *Humanism*, Fontana, London, 1993, ch. 11.

⁷The famous '*Noli me tangere*' phrase in the original Greek is *Mη μου haptou*, with the range of scholarly translations ranging from 'Cease from clinging to me' through 'Do not hold me' to Tyndale's 'Touch me not', continued in the King James Bible. As we shall consider at length later on, if the whole Magdalene story is taken into account, Tyndale's three-word invocation is the most apposite—its economy and pungency also telling.

In general, Tyndale's translation of the *Lives of Jesus* will be used throughout this book. Occasionally the King James or Authorised Version did make improvements, and when its rendition of the original Greek appears flawed I will draw on the Revised Standard Version, or, with an eye on modern Biblical scholarship, provide my own translation.

⁸As the Peggy Lee hit song from 1969 put it. 'Is That All There Is?' draws upon a story titled 'Disillusionment' by the twenty-year old Thomas Mann.

⁹This is close to one aspect of Jung's theory of archetypes. Jung argues, for example, that the authority and numinosity of a particular mother draws much of its force from the 'mother archetype' projected by the child on to her—'Psychological Aspects of the Mother Archetype', *Collected Works*, vol. IX, part 1, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1959, pp. 80-84.

One of a number of principal ways in which this book is at odds with the Jungian schema is in its working hypothesis that each culture has its own sacred sites and its own sacred stories, rather than there being a common source of all human archetypes—a 'collective unconscious'.

My use of 'archetype' is in some senses closer to that of Northrop Frye, who defines it as a 'typical or recurring image...which connects one poem with another and thereby helps to unify and integrate our literary experience.' (*Anatomy of Criticism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1957, p. 99). However, my basic unit is *story* not *symbol*, and Frye's definition does not include any primordial 'sacred site' force.

¹⁰Calasso, pp. 243 & 387.

¹¹The genre of 'reality television' does the opposite—shows in which ordinary people, not actors, are pitted against each other in contrived situations, for example on an island competing to survive or find buried treasure, or in an exotic villa to find their perfect match. Without the guiding hand of story the participants tend to stumble around, their everyday selves humiliated, their normal pursuits shown up as even more absurdly profane than they feared.

¹²The first appearance of this term with which I am familiar was in 1872. The German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, in Section 23 of his book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, argues that culture is founded on myth, and myth depends on 'a fixed and sacred primordial site' (*ein fester und heiliger Ursitz*).

¹³Among the multitude of possible meanings for *logos* there is 'tale', a usage found in Herodotus and Heraclitus, 'fable' as in those of Aesop, 'grand narrative' as in Luke's *Life of Jesus* considered as a totality—and 'story' (H.G.Liddell and R.Scott: *Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th edition with Supplement, Oxford University Press, 1996). For a thorough scholarly overview of Johannine *logos*, see Raymond E. Brown: *The Gospel According to John*, Doubleday, New York, 1966, vol. 1, appendix II.

¹⁴Deborah Bird Rose: 'Ned Kelly Died For Our Sins', in Max Charlesworth (ed.): *Religious Business*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 111.

¹⁵R. B. Onians notes the presence of Necessity in modern English usage (*The Origins of European Thought*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1951, p. 333).

¹⁶For example, two of the greatest of eighteenth-century English landscape gardens—Castle Howard and Blenheim—accompany houses capped by statues of Athena.

¹⁷Robert Fitzgerald's translation of Homer: *The Odyssey*, Heinemann, London, 1962, line 1. The first translation is Richmond Lattimore (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1967, ls. 9-10). 'Muse' does appear in the first line of the Greek original, as does 'goddess, daughter of Zeus' in the tenth. That daughter may be merely the muse who sings through the poet, but this seems too literal, the goddess in the tenth line speaking directly, not through some human intermediary. Athena, protector of Odysseus, is writ everywhere in the story that follows.

¹⁸Kermode, pp. 81-96.

¹⁹*The Republic*, book 10, is the principal reference.

²⁰Michael Grant employs this same principle in his overview, *Myths of the Greeks and Romans* (Phoenix, London, 1994).

²¹The Emmaus story failed to inspire any great paintings, in spite of a number of attempts by Caravaggio, Velazquez and Rembrandt, amongst others. However, the theme of the two lost wayfarers, unaware of what they carry, was picked up obliquely in Raphael's *Deposition* and Poussin's *Autumn*, both singular masterpieces.

²²The anthropologist, W. E. H. Stanner, titled a book of his essays, *White Man Got No Dreaming* (Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1979). The second essay in that collection remains the classic outline of 'The Dreaming' (pp. 23-40)—there Stanner coins the word 'everywhen'. Judith Wright includes the line, 'We too have lost our dreaming', in her 1973 poem, 'Two Dreamtimes'.

1. God is Dead—*Pneuma*