

The Economist as Parsifal

by Cyril Morong

"Do you know what will happen if the King does not hold his land and is not healed of his wound? Ladies will lose their husbands, lands will be laid waste, maidens, helpless, will remain orphans, and many knights will die. All these calamities will befall because of you."-An old woman reproaching Parsifal for failing to ask the healing question, "whom does the Grail serve?" while in the castle of the Grail King.

"The best he could think of for his economics technique was to "build a better stereo speaker." He apparently was serious. Such comments-and one elicits them with little effort-suggest that the shield behind which the professional elite enforces current practice is thin. Although irony and cynicism reinforce the shield, they also enhance the sadness about a discipline that is losing its intellectual vigor."-On the attitude of a graduate student in economics, from *The Making of an Economist* by David Colander and Arjo Klamer.

The modern economist is Parsifal, naively blundering about the Waste Land in search of the Holy Grail. Cynicism and despair reign in the discipline.

The myth of Parsifal's search for the Holy Grail has great meaning for modern man. This is no less true of economists. Perhaps it is especially true because the economics discipline exalts rational thinking at the expense of feeling and intuition, emotions that are symbolized by the Grail itself. Although there are many versions of this myth, as well as interpretations, it does have a few basic themes which are, at least in part, played out in the profession of economics. Some interpretations of this myth that help explain the current state of economics come from mythologist Joseph Campbell and Jungians, who are concerned with the symbolic meaning of stories and how they represent the archetypes of the collective unconscious. This approach will help understand what happens to economists psychologically as they progress in their profession because in myths "symbolic expression is given to the unconscious desires, fears, and tensions that underlie the conscious patterns of human behavior" and that understanding the myth puts us in touch with "the deep forces that have shaped man's destiny and must continue to determine both our private and our public lives" (Campbell, 1968, 255-6). In fact, the myth of

a simple fool, like Parsifal, is really a universal story, found in many cultures. (Jung and Von Franz, 39) Also, Parsifal is a symbol of modern man. (Jung and von Franz, 159) Furthermore,

"In the myth of Parsifal's search for the Holy Grail we have such a prescription for our modern day. The Grail myth arose in the twelfth century, a time when many people feel that our modern age began; ideas, attitudes and concepts we are living with today had their beginnings in the days the Grail myth took form. One can say that the winds of the twelfth century have become the whirlwinds of the twentieth century." (Johnson, 1989, ix)

It has been argued elsewhere (Morong 1994) that understanding myths and mythology is important for the new discipline of socio-economics because they are one way in which values are communicated and expressed and socio-economics assumes that individuals act on the values of their communities as well as their self-interest. If scholars are to understand the myths that shape and reflect the values of different communities, they should first understand how they themselves are shaped by myths and how myths can

illuminate the lives they lead as scholars and researchers.

Others in economics have used or mentioned myths and mythology in their work. Nobel prize winning economist Douglass North has suggested that understanding a society's myths are necessary for understanding its economic ideologies. (North, 51) Morris Silver has edited a book called *Ancient Economy in Mythology: East and West* which finds the economic meaning in myths. Jack Hirshleifer invoked mythological themes in his 1993 presidential address to the Western Economic Association. This is discussed in more detail later. Two business professors at Stanford, Lorna Catford and Michael Ray have written a book called *The Path of the Everyday Hero* which uses myths, including Parsifal, to help people get along in the modern world. Finally, Amitai Etzioni, the founder of socio-economics, was compared to the Roman god Janus at the Society for the Advancement of Socio-economics banquet in 1994 because Janus was two-headed. This was meant in a positive sense, that Etzioni could look in both directions, to economics and to sociology.

Many parallels between life in the economics profession and the myth of Parsifal are found in this paper. It is not being suggested that these parallels explain all of what ails the profession. Certainly those in the profession behave as they do at least in part because of the monetary incentives they face. But all behavior is complex and has many motives. This paper presents a psychological view of the behavior of economists in their training and careers.

Before summarizing the story of Parsifal, the state of economics is given. Many of the social and psychological conditions found in this story can be seen in economics today. These are summarized in Wisman, although they are based on a large number of other studies. These conclusions are also based on the book *The Making of an*

Economist by David Colander and Arjo Klamer.

The State of Modern Economics

Economics relies heavily on rigorous theory, advanced mathematics and computer generated statistical analysis. These areas make up the graduate level training of economists. Yet they restrict the economist's ability to see the real world and the reality of human nature. People are not always rational and concerned with their material well being. Economies are imbedded in larger social systems which are influenced by institutions and history as well as cultural, religious and philosophical values.

Many students *and* economists are dissatisfied with this state of affairs. Economists continue to use mathematical models *and* restrictive assumptions about human behavior (i.e., people are always rational) because this is how one gets published and advances in the profession. They personally doubt the validity and power of the models to explain the real world. Very often, prominent economists, whether in Presidential addresses to their respective economic associations or in Nobel Prize acceptance speeches, question the relevance and severely criticize the overuse of mathematical models in economics even though they themselves achieved success by using math extensively in their work. Why can't economists at the beginning of their careers aim their research at a broader view of the world, one that encompasses history, sociology, philosophy, etc? Why not ask the big, meaningful questions early on rather than later? Wisman suggests it is the need to publish and society's own emphasis on things that are rational and quantifiable. There is a psychological explanation for this Waste Land state found in the myth of Parsifal.

The Myth of Parsifal

Parsifal was a simple, poor and naive boy who is dazzled by the sight of five knights. He wants to be one and goes to the court of King Arthur. He does so against the wishes of his mother who he sees collapse as he rides away. She soon dies. At Arthur's court, Parsifal is told he can be a knight if he slays the evil Red Knight who has boldly taken a silver cup from Arthur and his knights while they were dining. Parsifal kills him and then puts on the armor of the Red Knight. But he soon learns that knighthood is arduous and is truly attained after much valor and noble work. He must learn a great deal and be versed in knightly arts of battle, to live by certain social rules and rituals, and that it is childish to ask too many questions. Parsifal eventually does become a good knight, defeating others and sending them to serve King Arthur. One day he enters the Grail Castle and meets the wounded Fisher King whose kingdom has become a wasteland. "The cattle do not produce; the crops won't grow; knights are killed; children are orphaned; maidens weep; there is mourning everywhere-all because the Fisher King is wounded." (Johnson, 1989, 1) Parsifal sits at a banquet and sees the Fisher King sitting before the Holy Grail. If Parsifal can but ask the question "whom does the Grail serve?" the king will be healed and the kingdom will again flourish. But Parsifal was told by his mother not to ask too many questions. He is expelled from the castle for not asking. Shortly after this, he meets a woman who realizes where he has been and admonishes him for his failure to ask the question. He then goes on to slay many dragons and defeat many knights (this moves him beyond his mother complex so he is later not afraid to ask questions) until finally, in his middle age he has again earned the right to go back in to the Grail Castle and has the opportunity to ask the question. In some versions of the story, he does so, and then takes the place of

the Grail King (or Fisher King) as guardian of the grail.

To understand how this story can be used to analyze the profession of economics, some of its themes and symbols need to be discussed in more detail.¹

The Holy Grail

The story of the Grail has many influences which include Celtic myths and legends, Christianity and even themes from Islam which penetrated Europe as a result of the Crusades. These sources and influences will not be dealt with since the purpose here is to use the myth's symbolism to shed light on modern economics. Both Matthews and Jung and von Franz trace the historical origins of the legend.

The grail symbolizes many things (Jung and von Franz).

"If all its various aspects are summarized, whether as a wonderful stone, as a vessel or as a relic, the Grail is found to possess the following characteristics. It dispenses material food according to taste and imparts spiritual solace. It preserves youth and generally maintains life. In one instance it heals knights wounded in battle. It radiates light and a sweet fragrance, it rejoices the heart, and whoever sees it can commit no sin that day. It discriminates between good and evil. To the unbaptized it remains invisible. It makes known the will of God by means of writing which appears upon it. Only he who is destined by heaven and whose name is written thereon can find the Grail. Nor does it allow its defender to have any loves other than the one the Grail prescribes for him." (Jung and von Franz, 114)²

It is also capable of harmonizing or bringing together conflicting opposites like male-female, rationality and emotion, dark and light, good and evil, etc. (Jung and von Franz, 194) It is the conflict of opposites in

his own psyche that Parsifal needed to discover in order to finally make it back into the Grail castle the second time. This is a long psychological process of self-discovery that Jungians call individuation. Parsifal needs to have an expanded consciousness, he needs to travel, psychologically speaking, far beyond the naive fool that he is at the beginning of the story. To find the Grail is to really find and discover yourself, to be conscious of and reconcile the opposites in your own psyche. It calls us to discover ourselves. (Jung and von Franz, 134) It facilitates consciousness. (Jung and von Franz, 145)

The Grail castle itself symbolizes the underworld, the spirit and the unconscious. (Jung and von Franz, 68) Therefore, it is a potential source of creativity.

The Fisher King and the Waste Land

The Fisher King, or the Grail King³,

". . . personifies the principle of Christian consciousness confronted with the problem of *physis* and of evil. It is as if the dark aspect of divinity had attacked him in order to awaken him to a more conscious religious attitude. But he cannot himself solve the problem within the structure of the outlook he personifies. He therefore has to await a successor who shall free him." (Jung and von Franz, 212)

He was wounded when he was young in his generative capacity and has lost the capacity for enjoyment and relationship. The wound came in a battle with a Muslim knight, who represented sensuousness while the Fisher King represented vision. "Hardly a modern man escapes this collision in his own life and he may end up in the sad state described in our story. His passion is killed and his vision is badly wounded." (Johnson, 1989, 3) Also, "It is a wound intimately connected with his feeling function and affects every sense of value in his psychological structure.

This is the price we have paid for the cool, precise, *rational*, (emphasis added) and scientific world that we have won at so high a cost." (Johnson, 1993, 16) He is suffering because an unconscious impulse is not conscious. (Jung and von Franz, 91) A person is possessed by something he is not conscious of. (Jung and von Franz, 222) The Fisher King, like Parsifal, is too masculine in consciousness (see below). This disdain for the feminine, for the natural world which is the source of joy and creativity, is what has left the kingdom a wasteland. (Jung and von Franz, 204) The Fisher King is "too ill to live but unable to die." (Johnson, 1989, 7)

The successor who will free him was prophesied to be a wholly innocent fool who would ask a specific question. "The myth is telling us that it is the naive part of a man that will heal him and cure his Fisher King wound." (Johnson, 1989, 11)

Joseph Campbell provides a vivid description of the Waste Land that can be found in any age:

"It is the land where the myth is patterned by authority, not emergent of life; where there is no poet's eye to see, no adventure to be lived, where all is set for all and forever: Utopia! Again, it is the land where poets languish and priestly spirits thrive, whose task it is only to repeat, enforce, and elucidate clichés. And this blight of the soul extends today from the cathedral close to the university campus." (Campbell, 1976, 373)

Furthermore,

"The Waste Land, let us say then, is any world in which (to state the problem pedagogically) force and not love, indoctrination, not education, authority, not experience, prevail in the ordering of lives, and where the myths and rites enforced and received are consequently unrelated to the actual inward realizations, needs and potentialities of those upon whom

they are impressed." (Campbell, 1976, 388)

It will be obvious how well this describes the profession of economics later in the paper when the findings of Colander and Klammer (from their book *The Making of an Economist*) are summarized. It is no accident that Campbell mentions the university campus.

Psychological Analysis of Parsifal

Parsifal represents a man moving from a low level of consciousness to a higher level of consciousness. Through his adventures, he is constantly, although at times very slowly, becoming more aware of the conflict of opposites within himself. He also suffers and much of what happens to him is because of his low level of consciousness.

His quest starts in covetousness, by envying and wanting to be like the knights, and ends in finding the Grail. The symbol of the Knight is used in these stories because the Knight was the symbol of higher, more conscious man. (Jung and von Franz, 54) By leaving his mother, he takes his first step towards consciousness. (Jung and von Franz, 45) This, however, is simply a move towards male consciousness, the consciousness of rational thinking and outward achievement that is often alienated from the natural world. It dominates much of Parsifal's life. The death of his mother also represents the death of his soul. (Jung and von Franz, 222)

The Red Knight represents Parsifal's shadow, "the sum of emotion and barbaric thoughtlessness which Parsifal must overcome before he can become a Christian Knight." (Jung and von Franz, 56) The shadow also "brings the energy to live as a human being" and "consists of those aspects of your character that belong to you but that have not been given any conscious place in your life." (Johnson, 1991, 59) The killing of the Red Knight represents emotional

growth. (Jung and von Franz, 57) When he puts on the armor of the Red Knight he adopts his persona, or mask, the face he shows to the public, which is not his true face. (Jung and von Franz, 59) But by putting on this armor it means that Parsifal now has control of his shadow and can use its energy. (Johnson, 1989, 24)

There is one more important point about Parsifal's wearing of the Red Knight's armor. He puts it on over a homespun garment made by his mother. His mother wished to make him look like a fool so he would not be taken seriously and become a knight like his father and brothers who died in battle. This garment symbolizes his mother complex, his wish for the world to be secure and take care of him. This limits his consciousness which in turn prevents him from asking the question.

After the Red Knight battle, Parsifal meets Gurnamond, who will become his godfather in a figurative sense. He learns more about knighthood from him but soon wishes to see his mother again, although he does not know of her death. He comes upon a castle besieged by an evil knight. He defeats this knight and falls in love with the mistress of the castle, Blanche Fleur. She represents the anima in his psyche, the animating principle which inspires his knight errantry.

As a knight, Parsifal would have been expected to help women in distress. This he does quite often, but it is an attempt to compensate for his overly masculine consciousness. (Jung and von Franz, 64) According to the Jungian analysts, the women in the story represent different aspects of Parsifal's anima, the part of his psyche that is creative and feeling. He often decides to leave a woman after only a short stay. The most notable is his putting off marrying Blanche Fleur. (Jung and von Franz, 270) This symbolizes his difficulty with expanding his consciousness to include this aspect. Often he is aided by a woman, symbolizing the benefit from expanding the

anima's role in his psyche. (Jung and von Franz, 179) Rather than seeing women as ends in themselves and as equals, capable of their own contributions and capable of teaching Parsifal, his consciousness is too masculine to see them as anything but a prize to win. (Jung and von Franz, 184)

His failure to ask the important question in the Grail castle was a result of a lack of consciousness. He had not adequately integrated his anima so he could not ask a compassionate, healing question. (Jung and von Franz, 181) But, because at that time he is not conscious enough to understand the inner problem of the conflict of opposites that the Grail represents, he is not capable of assessing what he did and therefore does not understand why he is expelled from the Grail castle. (Jung and von Franz, 182) By not asking he no longer understands himself and is cut off from his inner being. He later learns of the spiritual nature of the Grail from a hermit, someone more focused on the inner world. (Jung and von Franz, 222)

There is another reason for not asking the question. "The young knight's concern for reputation as one worthy of that circle was his motive for holding his tongue when his own better nature was actually pressing him to speak." (Campbell, 1976, 454) Also, "he allowed concern for his social image to inhibit the impulse of his nature-which, of course, was exactly what everyone else in the world was doing in that period and was the cause of all that was wrong." (Campbell, 1973, 169) His failure to ask the question has a negative effect on Parsifal. "His decision to act in that intelligible sphere, not according to the dictates of his nature but in terms of what people would think, broke the line of his integrity." (Campbell, 1976, 454) Again, these quotes from Campbell should be read right after reading the summary of the Colander and Klammer findings that appear later in the paper. They describe the economics profession as well.

When Parsifal makes the decision to search for the Grail Castle again after much knight errantry, he and the other Knights each go their own way rather than search in groups, as they had in other adventures. (Johnson, 1989, 70) This symbolizes the beginning of Western individualism. Perhaps it is no coincidence that economics is based much on individual decision making.

From the hermit, who represents the inner, reflective voice, Parsifal learns that no one who spills blood may find the Grail. (Jung and von Franz, 271) He moves away from the masculine way of dealing with evil Knights, simply fighting and slaying them, to negotiating with them and showing them mercy. (Jung and von Franz, 273) This is part of his individuation process of expanding his consciousness to include his anima. After a long period of doing a Knight's work, and with the hermit's help, he finally has an opportunity to enter the Grail castle again because of his expanded consciousness. By this time he has shed the homespun garment from his mother. He is either middle aged or nearing it. In some versions of the story he does ask the question "whom does the Grail serve?" It is a question about raising consciousness, caring about the realm and something larger than the individual and his ego. (Jung and von Franz, 292) In fact, it is the last step in the process. In some versions of the story he does ask the question. The kingdom again flourishes and Parsifal takes over as the guardian of the Grail.

The Economist as Parsifal

Young economists, as they enter graduate school, are excited about the chance to study important questions about the nature of the economy and economics such as what is the proper role of government and how can it be based on human nature? Or what are the historical forces acting on the economy? We soon

learn that we must undergo arduous study of mathematics and statistics, moving far away from the questions that got us interested. Like Parsifal, we must learn a great deal and overcome great obstacles (like comprehensive exams and a dissertation). We can subdue difficult mathematical theorems and techniques and put them in service of our careers and research. This has been referred to as the "knightly conduct in the *quest* (emphasis added) for knowledge." (Stigler, 15) We become engaged in the appropriate work in the midsection of our lives as Parsifal did after he failed to ask the right question. We are unable to ask the relevant questions about economics in our youth like what is the purpose of the economy and the discipline of economics.

In fact, the formalization process has been crowding out the "self-reflective process that might clarify whether in fact formalization has gone too far." (Wisman, 3) This is exactly the problem faced by Parsifal. He was so busy on attaining outer, worldly success, that he had very little time to reflect on who he was or what his life meant. There is a "deep human need that formalism might satisfy." (Wisman, 7) This is also an "intolerance toward ambiguity." (Wisman, 8) Parsifal, being a simpleton, sees everything as black or white, right or wrong. It is important to note here that Wisman himself thinks part of the explanation for excessive formalism may be found in sociology or psychology. (Wisman, 8) This is what is being done here by using mythology since myths are symbolic representations of the psyche but also communicate a sociological message, namely the values of a community. The Grail legends of the 12th and 13th centuries were doing just that. One of the sociological reasons that Wisman gives for the excessive formalism is that scientists do not always just seek the truth, they also seek the approval of their fellow scientists. (Wisman, 9) This is one reason why Parsifal stopped

asking so many questions-it was just not what a good knight did.

The avoidance of ambiguity also spills over into teaching. "Because economists are trained in techniques rather than substance, teaching models is easier than teaching institutional complexity or ideas." (Wisman, 12) This teaching leaves graduate students uncreative and lacking in communication skills. (Wisman, 14)

The real comparison between economists and Parsifal is the lack of balance. Wisman quotes Morishima here: "Morishima, pushing the date back a few years, has argued that 'so deep and extensive has been the mathematization of economics since 1940 that it has lost all sense of balance, becoming divorced from knowledge of economic systems and economic history.'" (Wisman, 25)

Finally, after slaying many figurative dragons (math, difficult research projects, etc.), the economist has risen to the top of his profession so that he again has the chance to question the purpose of economics. It should be reported here that when Wisman presented his paper at the annual meetings for The Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics in 1993, the question was asked why does someone have to wait until they win a Nobel Prize in economics using math before they can criticize the over use of math in economics? The answer, at least in part, is that economists are like Parsifal, having to make it into the Grail castle a second time. The accumulated knowledge and theories are the Grail for the profession in that they sustain those in the profession. Perhaps these eminent economists now feel the obligation not just to do good economics, to be good knights, but to watch over or guard the discipline so it may flourish in the future, just as Parsifal himself becomes a guardian of the Grail.

A recent example of this questioning by prominent economists is the presidential address made to the Western Economic

Association in 1993 by Jack Hirshleifer titled "The Dark side of the Force." (Hirshleifer, 1) His major point is that the economics profession "has almost entirely overlooked what I call *the dark side of the force* (emphasis in the original)-to wit, crime, war and politics." (Hirshleifer, 2) Three things are pertinent here. One is that he takes inspiration from the *Star Wars* movie trilogy. These films in turn were inspired by mythology, namely Joseph Campbell's book *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. The second is that the main character, Luke Skywalker, is a young, naive fool who becomes a knight (a Jedi Knight in his case) like Parsifal. The third is that Hirshleifer is another economist making it to the top who is asking what is basically a grail question, how can we expand the consciousness of economics. But in this case, it is particularly interesting because it is aimed at integrating the darker side of human nature. As noted above, this is one of the functions and abilities of the Grail. It brings together light and dark. This is what Hirshleifer is doing. For him it is an integration of the cooperation between people analyzed in the work of Coase and the exploitation described in Machiavelli. (Hirshleifer, 3) In fact, cooperation by some is usually done for aggression against others. (Hirshleifer, 4) He also stresses the need to include irrational factors like hatred, xenophobia, and uncontrollable anger. (Hirshleifer, 5) Again, the rational and irrational are opposing forces brought together by the Grail.

What these economists realize when they become recognized for their achievements but then criticize the discipline's excessive use of math is that they finally made it to the top of the ladder but it was against the wrong wall all the time. Mythologist Joseph Campbell said this happened to many of his friends. Psychologist Robert A. Johnson also said this in his book *Transformation: Understanding the Three Levels of*

Masculine Consciousness. Perhaps it is no coincidence that economics is a profession that has been dominated by men. In fact "It is the accomplished man who is most capable of asking unanswerable questions about the worth and the meaning of his life." (Johnson, 1989, 69) To a certain extent, many of the questions raised about economics by Hirshleifer and others are unanswerable by our current methods and practices. How would the "dark side" be added to a utility or profit maximizing model?

The failure of the profession to ask the big, important questions (until a long record of achievement is established) leads to many problems. According to the research summarized by Wisman, businesses are less interested in hiring economists, we have an inability to provide the government with good advice on the economy, good students who enjoy philosophy and history don't go into economics while those who know math do and we don't understand how institutions work. The entrepreneur, the agent of creative destruction (change, the essence of capitalism according to Joseph Schumpeter), is not part of any mathematical model because entrepreneurship is intuitive and is based on irrational "animal spirits" according to John Maynard Keynes. These, like courage and creativity, cannot be measured or quantified too easily, if at all. Like the kingdom of the Fisher King, economics has become a wasteland, full of despair and cynicism.

Many of the problems mentioned by Wisman are also mentioned in the Colander and Klammer book on graduate training in economics. They found that "graduate students are experiencing an identity crisis-a conflict between their idea of what an economist is and the identity that their graduate training imposes." (Colander and Klammer, 170) This is in part because of the formalization. They ask if the students like this:

"The students tell us they do not. They resist the identification with engineers and do not like the preoccupation with techniques in graduate school and in the literature. They want more ideas, more policy relevance, more discussion of the fundamental assumptions, and more serious consideration of alternative approaches." (Colander and Klamer, 170)

The students are more likely to see themselves as the "Intellectual." "This character gets associated with single-minded pursuit of the truth and the love of ideas." (Colander and Klamer, 180) This is just like Parsifal being dazzled by the first knight he sees as a young man. In our modern rational, economic and scientific world, intellectuals and scientists, including economists, have a special status and mission: to make the world a better place through ideas and truth seeking. To read and understand the work of a creative, successful and influential economist for a young, intelligent student surely must be dazzling, just as it was dazzling for Parsifal to see a knight for the first time. The pursuit of truth and the love of ideas is certainly an exciting quest to set out on when you are young. But graduate school does play this role, as well as that of Social Activist and Teacher. (Colander and Klamer, 180-1)

The role that *is* accepted and allowed for graduate students is that of Academic Professional. In this case "The profession was understood to be a calling that could be followed only after intensive training by individuals who had already professed." (Colander and Klamer, 182) This recalls Parsifal learning that a knight has to go through long and arduous training. What is the Academic Professional?

"As prospective Academic Professionals, the students learn the tools of the trade; they learn furthermore that they will apply

those tools to impress, edify, and perhaps entertain their fellow economists. Academic Professionals write for academic journals, attend academic conferences to address fellow Academic Professionals, work hard to get academic tenure, and generally dedicate their lives to academia. Academic Professionals are careerists who judge the performance of themselves and colleagues on the basis of where they teach, where they publish, and how many items they add to their curriculum vitae each year.

The character of the Academic Professional suppresses many of the values and qualities that the students see in the characters they would like to be. The overriding commitment of the intellectual, for example, concerns the pursuit of ideas and truth; if that pursuit demands the excursion into foreign territory, such as history or sociology, the Intellectual takes the trip. By contrast, Academic Professionals who trespass outside the economics department-put their tenure and professional standing at risk. They are therefore committed first to interests of their own profession. Academic Professionals are expected to be Kuhn's normal scientists-that is, scientists who will work with the current tools of research approved by other normal scientists." (Colander and Klamer, 182)

To where does this lead? "Ultimately, mastery of the technique is what matters to their lives as Academic Professionals. They are not expected to question the fundamental assumptions or to develop serious interest in alternative approaches. The students also learn that the Academic Professional avoids interests that distract from the ultimate purpose in life-the production of scientific papers" (Colander and Klamer, 183) The result is cynicism and a lack of faith in the discipline. Academic life is just a game. They find this lack of faith and cynicism in those in the

profession as well as in the graduate students. They see a discipline that is losing its vigor. The parallel to the wasteland of the Grail King's realm is too striking not to notice. The kingdom was nearly lifeless, incapable of providing for and sustaining its inhabitants. The discipline of economics now seems to be in the same state. There is little intellectual sustenance for its citizens.

Four important parallels to the Parsifal myth come up here. One is that graduate students learn not to *question* fundamental assumptions. This is just like Parsifal being told that a good knight does not ask too many questions. The second is that in giving up the role of Teacher, Intellectual and Social Activist and accepting that of Academic Professional, they are putting on a mask, just as Parsifal did after he put on the armor of the Red Knight. In this way economists lose some of their humanity and this contributes to the wasteland, although completing a dissertation, which is like a Red Knight battle, is necessary for survival and future work. The third relates to the wound of the Fisher King mentioned earlier. Our feeling capacity is wounded because we in economics are too rational. In fact, "Generally the more intelligent the person and the more highly educated, the worse is the wound." (Johnson, 1993, 27) Here we need to ask the question of why we live and why we do economics. There is no rational answer. "No one ever succeeded in finding a reason for living by the reasoning process." (Johnson, 1993, 31) The fourth is that Parsifal, in wearing the homespun garment from his mother, had an immature wish to find safety and security in the world. Perhaps this is why economists prefer the safety and security of their models to more holistic thinking, as was discussed in the summary of the Wisman paper. Human beings have a deep need that formalism might satisfy and there is an intolerance toward ambiguity.

The earlier quotes from Campbell describe this state of affairs with surprising insight even though that was not their purpose. Students are not allowed to follow their hearts and they are afraid to ask challenging questions for fear of being stigmatized and losing status within the community of economists.

Another quote for Campbell is appropriate here because it reiterates what was said earlier and helps to summarize the comparison of the economist and Parsifal:

"For it was in the legend of the Holy Grail that the healing work was symbolized through which the world torn between honor and love, as represented in the Tristan legend, was to be cured of its irresolution. The intolerable spiritual disorder of the period was represented in this highly symbolic tale in the figure of a 'waste land'-the same that T. S. Eliot in his poem of that name, published in 1922, adopted to characterize the condition of our own troubled time. Every natural impulse in that period of ecclesiastical despotism was branded as corrupt, with the only recognized means of 'redemption' vested in sacraments administered by authorities who were themselves indeed corrupt. People were forced to profess and live by beliefs they did not always actually hold." Campbell, 1973, 167)

The problem of the wasteland, full of despair and cynicism is not peculiar to economics. It is a modern problem. This is why T. S. Eliot wrote his poem. Earlier it was stated that Parsifal is symbolic of modern man. It is interesting to note that Colander and Klamer also see the problems of the economics profession as part of the larger problem alienation in the over rationalized, spiritless modern world. About the cynicism and lack of faith found in graduate students they say "They are not unique in this. Common conditions throughout the Western world are the

cynicism and lack of faith associated with the unraveling of "modernism," the twentieth century cultural movement that invested faith in science as the successor to God." (Colander and Klamer, 183)

McCloskey sees this as well when he speaks of the education of economists in formalization:

"The problem of training in technique that does not deal with life appears to be a widespread modern problem. Look at modern art, School of Manhattan, if you can, or modern architecture, from Bauhaus to our house. In a recent essay the critic John Aldridge attacks what is known in English departments as the "workshop writer," that is, the product of one of the numerous programs that teach writing in imitation of the University of Iowa's original workshop. His description of "that odd species of bloodless fiction so cherished by the editors of *the New Yorker*" would fit most graduate programs in economics." (McCloskey, 15)

McCloskey feels that this is true for economists as well. The economists and writers, are, again quoting Aldridge, "not only estranged from their culture but seem to have no impressions of, or relations to it at all." (McCloskey, 15) His conclusion is a hope for the future. He quotes Walras who had a vision of "an undivided economics" made up of men of "culture who are accustomed to thinking both inductively and deductively and who are familiar with reason as well as experience." (McCloskey, 16)

But this is exactly the kind of person Parsifal becomes, one with an expanded consciousness and ability. By attaining the Grail, he can reconcile and integrate opposing forces like creativity and rational thinking. Such an integration is needed in economics today. This is partly what socio-economics is trying to do. It is amazing to realize that one of the meanings of the name Parsifal is he who brings opposites together. Socio-economics is trying to bring opposites together by trying to synthesize economic and sociological theory. It is not surprising that this movement has come from outside economics. "When the established hierarchy fails in its duty, it is as though the angelic powers inspire humankind to produce those who will continue them." (Matthews, 45) The movement for socio-economics is trying to breathe some spirit back into economics. This input that economics is receiving from sociology is very necessary because "opposites temper and restore each other." (Johnson, 1991, 65) But even the leading economists writing about the future of economics think it should and will become more interdisciplinary. (*Economic Journal*, January, 1991; special 100th anniversary edition)

The economist *is* Parsifal. "A true myth teaches us the cure for the dilemma which it portrays." (Johnson, 1989, 11) The dilemma portrayed is the alienation in the wasteland. The cure is a more holistic, integrative approach to economics. Such an expanded consciousness is what Parsifal achieves. It is now time for economists to expand their consciousness by integrating economics with other fields. The vitality of the kingdom of economics hangs in the balance.

Notes

1. The two versions of the story which are being used here are the one by Chrétien de Troyes and Wolfram von Eschenbach. In Chrétien the main character is called Perceval and in Wolfram he is called Parzival. Parsifal is being used here because that is the one used by Johnson in *He: Understanding Masculine Psychology*, which is the inspiration for this paper.

2. In some versions of the story, the Grail is a magic stone while in others it is the cup in which Joseph of Arimethea collected the blood of Jesus after he died on the cross.
3. He is called the Fisher King because when Parsifal first meets him he is fishing and because of his wounding, he is only happy when he fishes. His fishing represents "inner work," that is, working on his consciousness. (Johnson, 1989, 8)

Bibliography

- Campbell, Joseph. 1968. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Campbell, Joseph. 1973. *Myths to Live By*. New York: Bantam.
- Campbell, Joseph. 1976. *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology*. New York: Penguin.
- Catford, L. and Ray, M. 1991. *The Path of the Everyday Hero: Drawing on the Power of Myth to Meet Life's Most Important Challenges*. Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher.
- Colander, David, and Arjo Klamer. 1990. *The Making of an Economist*. Boulder, CO.: Westview.
- Hirshleifer, Jack. 1994. "The Dark Side of the Force: Western Economic Association International 1993 Presidential Address." *Economic Inquiry*, January, 1994, 1-10.
- Johnson, Robert A. 1989. *He: Understanding Masculine Psychology, Revised Edition*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Johnson, Robert A. 1991. *Transformation: Understanding the Three Levels of Masculine Consciousness*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Johnson, Robert A. 1993. *The Fisher King and the Handless Maiden*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Jung, Emma and Marie-Louise von Franz. 1970. *The Grail Legend*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.
- Loomis, Laura Hibbard and Roger Sherman Loomis. 1957. *Medieval Romances*. New York: Modern Library.
- Matthews, John. 1990. *The Grail Tradition*. Rockport, MA: Element, Inc.
- McCloskey, Donald N. 1991. "Economic Science: A Search Through the Hyperspace of Assumptions?" *Methodus*, 3 (1), June, 6-16.

Morong, Cyril. 1994 "Mythology, Joseph Campbell, and the Socioeconomic Conflict," *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, Winter.

North, Douglass C. 1981. *Structure and Change in Economic History*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Silver, M., ed., 1991. *Ancient Economy in Mythology: East and West*. Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Stigler, George. 1984. *The Intellectual and the Marketplace*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Wisman, Jon D. 1993. The Excessive Formalism Charge in Economics. Paper presented at the annual meetings of the Society for the Advancement of Socio-economics.