



# Thinking Deep

*Pacifica Graduate Institute digs into literature, myth, and dreams to understand humankind's troubled heart and soul.*

BY HILLARY HAUSER

Most hangs over the Santa Barbara Channel as Stephen Aizenstat, sitting at the round conference table in his office at Pacifica Graduate Institute, talks about life: his life, my life, your life, our collective life, and what it is that moves us all through the human experience.

Tousled and youthfully energetic, Aizenstat is the founding president of Pacifica, a world-renowned graduate school of depth psychology and mythological studies that occupies the former Max Fleischmann estate in the Carpinteria foothills.

At a time when physicists' string theory is doing away with fundamental notions of space and time, energy and matter, says Aizenstat, the investigation of the troubled heart and soul of humankind is moving toward a more metaphysical approach, too. The depth psychology being taught at Pacifica is a mix of old and new. Traditional psychology is studied together with archetypal myth, classical literature, and dreams as students learn to listen "with a metaphoric sensibility to the subtleties of human experience."

Perhaps we have within us the deceptiveness of Iago, the jealousy of Othello, the obsessiveness of Ahab. Perhaps we are disoriented and yearning for home, like Alice in Wonderland or Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. Studying literary masterworks can give us clearer insight into what drives us. At the very least, there is liberation in realizing one's personal struggle is a story that has been told before and will be told again.

Our behavior and relationships might even be linked to the gods and goddesses. Could it be that a violent, failing marriage is ruled by Hades, the god of the underworld? Or are we moving through the realm of the unconscious—the sea—toward Poseidon, the god whose rages flooded the Olympian household?

Today Aizenstat is focusing on his pet subject, working

The ranch home of wealthy sportsman Max Fleischmann has been sensitively restored as the campus of Pacifica Graduate Institute. A recent graduating class donated the Buddhist prayer wheel. Founder Steven Aizenstat leads the unique institution.

with dreams to nourish the soul. Our dreams reflect a deep intelligence, he says, "like a two-million-year-old person deep inside us forever commenting, if only we had ears and eyes to listen."

In his classes at Pacifica, Aizenstat introduces methods of remembering and listening to dreams, offering interpretations of such dream symbols as animals, birth and death, finding and losing valuables, being chased, falling, and flying. "Dreams offer an intelligence as potent as the rational approach," he maintains.

Growing up in the San Fernando Valley, Aizenstat often asked his parents to take him to the ocean, and a family outing to Zuma Beach when he was twelve set the course of his life. Disobeying his parents, he walked down the beach past a big rock, leaving behind the "big signs, parking lots, lots of cars, filth," sat down, and listened to the rock. "As I was contemplating," he recounts, "a sixteen-year-old walked up to me and said, 'You know, rocks can talk.' I had been listening to that rock! Someone else, other than me, knew that rocks could talk!"

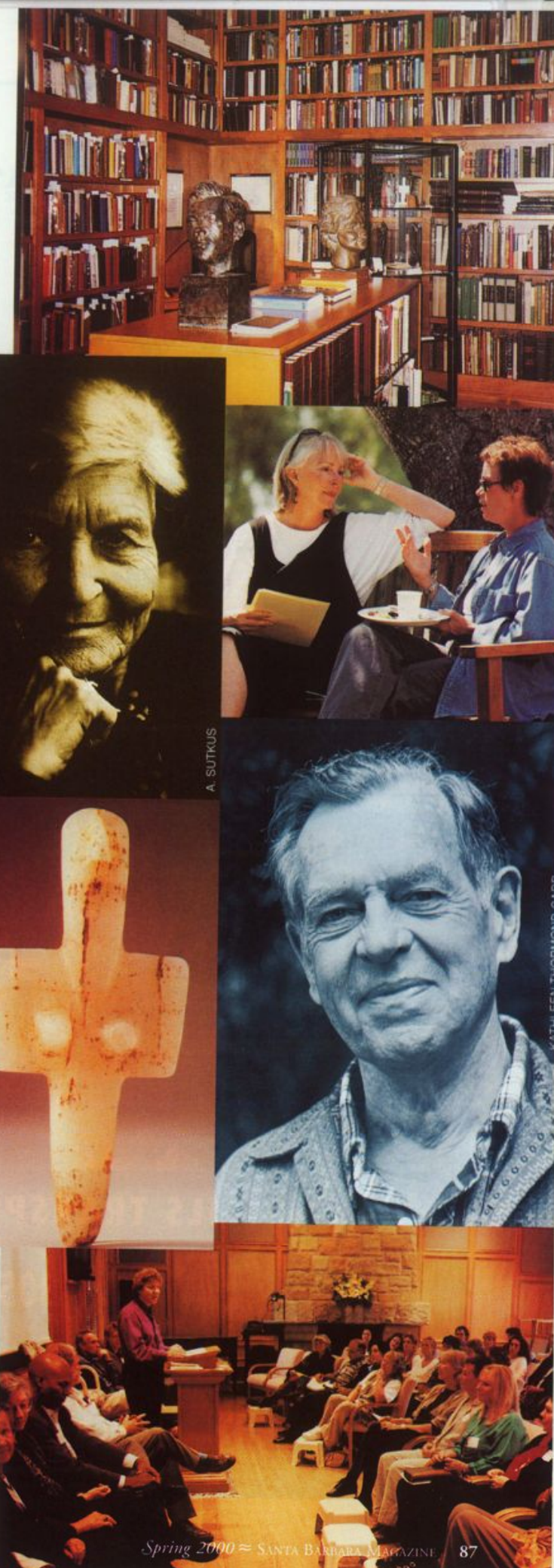
"If anything contributed to the development of Pacifica, it's that story," he says.

Another key moment for Aizenstat was the horror of Robert Kennedy's assassination. As a staff member of Students for Kennedy, he had been flying around the country organizing campaign rallies at schools, and he was in the room off the kitchen in L.A.'s Ambassador Hotel where Kennedy's murder occurred. He was eighteen. "There was horror, terror, I heard the sound," he recalls. "There was screaming, hysteria, confusion—and Rosey Grier grabbing Sirhan Sirhan."

After the assassination, Aizenstat wandered the hills of Bel Air for two days "in complete despair—it came apart for me." After completing his B.A. at UCLA, in sociology and political science, he taught social studies in Santa Monica, where he brought the Chinese ping pong team and Angela Davis to Lincoln Junior High School. "The students got very enthusiastic!" he recalls. But when his students took the initiative to launch a petition against the building of a resort island in Santa Monica Bay, he was called on the carpet by the mayor. At twenty-two he moved to Santa Barbara to attend graduate school at UCSB.

The seeds of Pacifica were planted in the early seventies when Aizenstat helped start the Isla Vista Community Counseling Center, one of UC Santa Barbara's programs to cope with student protest after the burning of the I.V. branch of the Bank of America. Offering peer counseling, drug and alcohol treatment, individual and family counseling, and continuing education, the center became autonomous and evolved into a school, offering training in counseling psychology in rented space

Pacifica's archive-library preserves and makes available the books, papers, and artifacts of archaeologist Marija Gimbutas (shown in 1993) and mythologist Joseph Campbell (shown in 1986). Right: a class in the main hall.



A. SUTKUS

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at La Casa de Maria in Montecito. It was renamed Pacifica Graduate Institute in 1988, the same year Aizenstat and associates bought the present campus.

A unique center of intellectual inquiry, Pacifica has been growing steadily in stature and today attracts students from all over the world, as well as stellar writers, teachers, and researchers, to its bucolic thirteen-acre campus, which blends into the oak-studded landscape like a gentle country home.

Over the fireplace in Aizenstat's office hangs an imposing portrait of Joseph Campbell, the legendary scholar-mythologist and godfather of Pacifica. Before his death in 1987, Campbell lectured here many times and helped guide the institute through its infant stages. Pacifica now proudly houses Campbell's personal library—nearly three thousand volumes of literature, the arts, philosophy, religion, and mythology, many containing Campbell's underlinings and annotations. "His family wanted his archives to land in one place," says Aizenstat, "to make his material accessible and relevant to what's going on in the world."

Campbell's passionate intellectual journey took him to the Arthurian Grail myth, where he discovered themes that resembled the basic stories of American Indian folklore. Combining this insight with the ideas of Freud, Jung, Joyce, Mann, and modern art, Campbell found parallels between mythic themes in literature and psychological lessons such as those revealed in dreams.

Aizenstat encountered Campbell at Esalen Institute in Big Sur and was influenced deeply by Campbell's ideas. "He was my introduction to Jung," Aizenstat says. "He was fiery, gracious, a strong storyteller, with an incredible perception of the world and the universal themes of myths."

Last year the BBC filmed inside the library for a documentary on Campbell that aired in Britain just

prior to the release of *Star Wars Episode One*. George Lucas, who created the *Star Wars* films, credits Campbell as his mentor for these cinematic myths.

In addition to Campbell's books, papers, and manuscripts, the archives showcase the late Marija Gimbutas's collection of archaeological works, figurines, manuscripts, and lecture notes. Gimbutas, professor emeritus of archaeology at UCLA and author of *The Language of the Goddess*, discovered a female-centered European prehistoric culture that worshipped a Mother Goddess as giver of all life. Her work has great import for feminist theologians, who have found in her vision of a peaceful, egalitarian, nature-revering society a blueprint for the future. Other Pacifica collections include

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the books and papers of Joseph Wheelwright and Jane Hollister Wheelwright, pioneering Jungian analysts who trained with Jung himself.

Another intellectual pillar of Pacifica is James Hillman, who lives in Connecticut but regularly lectures here. Hillman is the originator of post-Jungian "archetypal psychology" and author of groundbreaking works that offer new, imaginative approaches to life. In his bestseller *The Soul's Code*, Hillman advances the "acorn theory of growing down," proposing that each of us is called to a destiny before we are born, just as the mighty oak's destiny is written in the tiny acorn. The *daimon*, as Hillman calls this identity, requires the circumstances of life we find ourselves in, and our original soul-intent can be rediscovered by reexamining childhood impulses, fantasies, thoughts, and even accidents.



## THINKING DEEP

"We must attend very carefully to childhood to catch early glimpses of the daimon in action, to grasp its intentions and not block its way," Hillman suggests.

In this light, it makes no sense to blame parents for what they did to you thirty years ago. Hillman cites the life of Hungarian writer George Lukacs, who reported hating his "conventional, shallow" mother from the start. According to Hillman's acorn theory, the mother was "necessary for his genius: he needed an enemy within the walls who represented the values his daimon innately abhorred," giving Lukacs the springboard to develop his anti-bourgeois rebelliousness and Marxist sympathy for the oppressed.

The Pacifica bookstore, which occu-

*The teaching schedule at Pacifica enables active professionals to deepen their knowledge while continuing their careers.*

pies the former wine cellar in the main house, is no small operation. On the close-packed shelves are many books by Campbell, Hillman, Gimbutas, and core faculty members at the institute, including several recent publications:

—*The Soul in Grief*, by Robert Romanyshyn.

—*Angry Young Men: How Parents, Teachers and Counselors Can Help "Bad Boys" Become Good Men*, an astonishing volume by Aaron Kipnis, Ph.D.

—*The Wounded Body: Remembering the Markings of Flesh*, by Dennis Patrick Slattery, which discusses the body as a central metaphor, "a language, a gesture, a sign, and a form of speaking in and to the world."

—*Soundings: Seventy-Five Reflections on Love and Romance, Personal Development, and the Search for Meaning*, Pacifica provost Charles Asher's comforting book of short essays on almost every aspect of human

relationships.

Powerful stuff, this healing work.

The teaching schedule at Pacifica enables active professionals to deepen their knowledge while continuing their careers. Students in the two-year master's and three-year doctoral programs come from far and wide to attend a three-day weekend of lectures and seminars once a month. Extended sessions are held in the summer months, and periodic lectures and conferences are open to the public. Pacifica is an accredited institution, and students in the counseling program are eligible to apply for a state license to practice as therapists. But most of them, Aizenstat

says, are at Pacifica just because they want to learn.

Walking around the campus, one senses a peace that transcends the quiet setting. Perhaps it comes from the modus operandi of the institute, but certainly it comes from the environmental protocol initiated by Aizenstat in the creation of this special place. Gazing out to the Pacific from its gentle knoll, surrounded by horse farms, the ranch home of wealthy sportsman Max Fleischmann, a major player in Santa Barbara in the 1920s, fits Pacifica like a glove. In addition to restoring and repurposing the buildings that flank Fleischmann's surprisingly unassuming main house, and adding a lec-

ture hall, Aizenstat initiated a policy that the gardens and "people paths" are arranged to invite birds, insects, and animals of the area to make their homes here. Expansive vegetable and herb gardens and orchards are maintained organically, their produce enjoyed in the campus dining room.

About the environment, Aizenstat is passionate. Everything in the world, he says—mountains, rocks, trees, ocean—is alive and connected to the human psyche. "When you scar a landscape, it hurts—it sends out a message that people pick up.

"We emphasize that psychology is not only in the consulting room, but with mountains, oceans—these voices

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"If the way of your dream is long, it is not a dream, it is a goal. If the way is short, it is not a goal, it is a dream. If the way is long and the goal is short, it is a dream. If the way is short and the goal is long, it is a goal."

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**Coming Events •** *Pacifica Graduate Institute will sponsor the following public events in Santa Barbara in spring 2000:*

**March 16.** James Hillman benefit lecture, "The Place of Depression in a Manic Civilization." Victoria Hall, 33 West Victoria Street.

**March 17-18.** James Hillman seminar, "The Roots of Psychotherapy in the Ground of the Soul: Looking Backward from Jung to Heraclitus." Victoria Hall.

**April 13-15.** "Mythic Imagination: Embodied Soul," seminar with Marion Woodman, Richard Tarnas, Stephen Aizenstat, Maureen Murdock, Dennis Slattery, Ginette Paris, and Diane Zuleikha. Lobero Theatre.

For information about attending these events, call Pacifica at 969-3626.

need to be heard," Aizenstat says in his distinctive, packed-with-meaning verbal shorthand. "Once we can get out of an exclusively ego-centered orientation and into the eco-psychological essence of all life, we'll see each thing has its place. The ocean has a life of its own, a voice, a rhythm."

When nature appears in a dream, he says, it can be signaling something about the human psyche, but it can also be speaking for itself. "The ocean has all kinds of associations with human imagination," he explains. "Tears and sadness—ocean of tears, something overwhelming—waves of emotion, good or bad. Our feelings are as full as the rising tide. The ocean represents primal instinct, drive, the ocean represents Mother. Creative! Stormy! Wonder, mystery, under the surface. The ocean is used as representation of the unconscious. It is where our night sea journeys take place."

But the ocean might also be speaking of its own plight. "Dreams talk about the imbalance in us," he says, "and creatures or things will also speak of themselves. By paying attention to them, and particularly in our dreams, we can experience the world more fully." ≈

*Writer Hillary Hauser is the cofounder of Heal the Ocean.*