Mythmaking across Boundaries

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Edited by

Züleyha Çetiner-Öktem

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INTRODUCTION

MYTHMAKING AND STORYTELLING

ZÜLEYHA ÇETINER-ÖKTEM

In the Beginning: The Origin of Things

On 26 June 1995 Gustave Courbet's painting *L'Origine du monde* found its place on the walls of the Musée d'Orsay in Paris where it met the general public for the very first time.[1] Although Courbet's oil-on-canvas depicting the origin of the world came to life in 1866, it would take the painting over a century to be released from private hands allowing the public to finally gaze upon it.[2] Not that the general human population was ready to face the unrelenting nude eye staring back.

Throughout its existence this controversial painting was either covered with cloth or hidden behind moveable panels with other paintings masking the fear of feminine desire that *L'Origine du monde* depicted. This covering, encasing, concealing aspect of feminine desire may be traced back to its biblical roots, specifically to the Genesis where once exposed to sexual desire through the act of eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil Adam and Eve "knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons" (Genesis 3:7); hence, the painting was probably covered in a similar vein of guilt and shame and maybe even fear. Yet, what about the forbidden fruit that was the cause of original sin? What about the apple? In his novelesque book *Elma* (*Apple*), Enis Batur's exploration of Courbet's painting leads him to question the mythic symbolism that lies behind it:

> Is it not sexual intercourse carrying a purpose besides procreation, falling outside its prescribed purpose, the birth of original sin? On the path from necessity to pleasure, the apple is the fruit that negates obligation: eating to live is not enough, one must savour it. Thus the apple has been the source of all, the origin of the world.[3]

According to Batur's Apple Theory, for the past two thousand years, till 1866, although humankind has encountered numerous depictions of the penis neither a single painting nor carving of the vagina was produced; instead, the vagina was replaced with the apple;[4] metaphorically covered so to say. Yet, there is the case of the Sheela-na-gigs of the eleventh and twelfth centuries found across the British Isles, particularly in Ireland. These quasi-erotic stone carvings "openly displaying their genitalia" have been considered to be remnants of ancient fertility goddesses or protective talismans and good luck charms;[5] but the more favoured opinions claim that the Sheela-na-gigs were "copies of French sculptures put on Romanesque churches as warnings against lust, portraying evil in the battle against moral corruption."[6] Nevertheless, Freitag argues "that the Sheela-na-gig belongs to the realm of folk deities and as such is associated with life-giving powers, birth and death and the renewal of life."[7] In other words, they are connected with the beginning and the end of things just like Courbet's *L'Origine du monde*.

"In the beginning was darkness," writes Batur considering the origin of the world to be a place, a location, rather than the female body, "We want to go there, because it is where we came from. This place is a dark cave, a black hole."[8] This reading allows a movement from the female womb to the womb of mother earth where the fear of the unknown and the fear of death exist simultaneously. On a similar note, Erich Neumann in his *The Great Mother* combines the body and world equating both as a vessel:

> If we combine this body-world equation of early man in its first unspecific form with the fundamental symbolic equation of the feminine, woman = body = vessel, we arrive at a universal symbolic formula for the early period of mankind:
>
> $$\text{Woman} = \text{body} = \text{vessel} = \text{world}$$
>
> This is the basic formula of the matriarchal stage, i.e., of a human phase in which the Feminine is preponderant over the Masculine.[9]

The womb as a symbol thus belongs to the elementary containing character of the vessel, to "the underworld that is contained in the 'belly' or 'womb' of the earth. To this world belong not only the subterranean darkness as hell and night but also such symbols as chasm, cave, abyss, valley, depths, which in innumerable rites and myths play the part of the earth womb that demands to be fructified."[10] The womb that *demands* to be fructified, demands also the pleasure principle—for one must also savour it—which brings us back to its metaphorical representation in the guise of the infamous apple. As much as the act of fructifying and/or being fructified connotes life it also implies death: through consuming the

forbidden fruit, the apple, Adam and Eve were introduced to death: "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17). Thus begins the cycle of life and death through the womb: "the Archetypal Feminine is not only a giver and protector of life but, as container, also holds fast and takes back; she is the goddess of life and death at once;" furthermore, "the Feminine contains opposites, and the world actually lives because it combines earth and heaven, night and day, death and life."[11] She is the beginning and end, she is alpha and omega.

Courbet's painting may be seen as a microcosmic creation/destruction myth retold from a nineteenth-century perspective. On the macro level, almost all mythologies exist between the two inevitable bookends of origins and endings: we want to know from whence we came and where we are going. But this myth is only one among many. Through a plethora of recurring images, symbols, motifs, and themes making myths and telling stories that spring from the fathomless fountain of human imagination attempt to account for and comprehend the human condition. Though we may no longer believe in the myths of the past in an age where logic rules supreme we cannot completely eliminate mythical thinking. For the act of mythmaking has transformed stories from "In the beginning" to "Once upon a time" and continues to tell and re-tell mythical tales as it is through stories and not only through logic and reason that we make sense of ourselves and the world we live in.

The Myth of the Great *Mythos*/*Logos* Divide

"Human beings have always been mythmakers" writes Karen Armstrong in her *Short History of Myth*: "when [...] early people became conscious of their mortality, they created some sort of counter-narrative that enabled them to come to terms with it."[12] Moreover, "We are meaning-seeking creatures" and our minds generate "ideas and experiences that we cannot explain rationally. We have imagination, a faculty that enables us to think of something that is not immediately present, and that, when we first conceive it, has no objective existence."[13] Thus they cannot be empirically quantified as they are not observable facts though they may be truths of some sort. It is at this junction that the so-called divide between *mythos* and *logos* presents itself. Ironically the word mythology is derived from the Greek words *mythos* and *logos* which would imply the inseparability of myth and logic; however, with the rise of the scientific method,

specifically with the Enlightenment Project, an illusionary incision seemingly snipped the bond between these two complementary concepts.[14]

> Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity. Enlightenment's program was the disenchantment of the world. It wanted to dispel myths, to overthrow fantasy with knowledge.[15]

The acts of eliminating fear of the unknown, overcoming superstition and, as a result, taming nature were what the scientific method—through reason and logic—brought to the table. Through this self-attained assignment the only possible means to accomplish this task would be by divorcing *mythos* from *logos*: "For the Enlightenment, anything which cannot be resolved into numbers, and ultimately into one, is illusion; modern positivism consigns it to poetry. […] All gods and qualities must be destroyed."[16] Yet myths and enlightenment are intertwined to a point where separating the two seems to be almost impossible: "Just as myths already entail enlightenment, with every step enlightenment entangles itself more deeply in mythology."[17] The most ironic point is that having received "all its subject matter from myths, in order to destroy them, [enlightenment] falls as judge under the spell of myth."[18] Moreover, throughout history human beings have used both methods—myth and logic—to understand and give meaning to the world: the only major difference being where *mythos* tends to be subjective, *logos* is objective:

> *Mythos* is [...] not about generating empirically testable propositions. It is about generating stories, images and symbols which can provide our emotions and life-experiences with meaning, value and structure. *Logos* is about identifying the causal principles by which the world operates and generating methods for controlling these. This includes, in the case of the social world, the formulation of laws and regulations which ensure that society runs smoothly and consistently with the values which it ultimately derives from *mythos*.[19]

In other words, one cannot exist without the other, or rather humankind needs both in order to function properly. We communicate mainly through spoken, written and visual narratives. Through the act of narrativising or storytelling in our day to day lives we intuitively comprehend and communicate through symbols, images and archetypes. We speak through words not mathematical equations—at least not yet. So myth and logic as two sides of the same coin, are two different ways of obtaining truth, of explaining the world and all that it encompasses. The great divide between

mythos and *logos* then is nothing but an illusion. As forms of expression, myths and stories strum the strings that resonate with aspects of human experience that reason and logic alone cannot explain. In the words of Karen Armstrong:

> In most pre-modern cultures, there were two recognised ways of attaining truth. The Greeks called them *mythos* and *logos*. Both were crucial and each had its particular sphere of competence. *Logos* ("reason; science") was the pragmatic mode of thought that enabled us to control our environment and function in the world. It had, therefore, to correspond accurately to external realities. But *logos* could not assuage human grief or give people intimations that their lives had meaning. For that they turned to *mythos*, an early form of psychology, which dealt with the more elusive aspects of human experience.[20]

It is no wonder then that mythmaking has considerably and gradually gained momentum even though the success of the modern period discredited myth in favour of *logos*. Refusing to be left on the backburner, mythmaking as an integral component of the human imagination accounts for many aspects of the human condition that are otherwise incomprehensible. The continuous return to and reinvention of myths and stories not only indicate that these sources are inexhaustible but also suggest that they contain elements that are inherently alluring. Terri Windling provides one possible answer to the appeal of myths and stories: "Why are so many of us enspelled by myths and folk stories in this modern age? Why do we continue to tell the same old tales, over and over again? I think it's because these stories are not just fantasy. They're about real life."[21] Thus myths not only hold ontological significance as they shed light onto fundamental questions regarding human existence, but they also shape our understanding of life and the universe.

The Art of Mythmaking: Collected Articles

The articles in this volume explore the diverse aspects of myths across time and space by analysing the dynamics of the mythmaking process within cultures, literatures, and various fields ranging from cultural studies to the history of arts.

The articles in Part I theorise and speculate the interpretation of mythmaking. Marek Oziewicz examines four myth theories that have not been included in the canon of myth theory. He explores how these theories might shed light on the resilience of myth and mythic structures in literature. Slobodan Dan Paich deals with the re-occurrence of similar

mythological motifs evinced in art. Through an analysis of underground chambers, stone carvings and paintings, he argues that verbal and non-verbal narratives are elements of mythmaking across time and geographies.

Part II is concerned with how myths shape and re-shape historical perspectives. Aikaterini Delikonstantinidou discusses how ancient Greek tragedies have undergone mythical revisions in Latin American theatre corresponding to not only panhuman, timeless questions but also specific, multicultural backgrounds. In her reading of Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, Begüm Tuğlu provides an example of how Beckett's play surpasses the boundaries of nations and defies the limits of the stage by mythicising WWII. Yasemin Güniz Sertel explores how Susan Glaspell deconstructs national patriarchal American myths by presenting a more liberal and pluralistic vision in tune with a new historicist and feminist standpoint. Erkin Kıryaman investigates how the Turkish nation and national identity are legitimised through the mythmaking process.

The articles in Part III investigate how mythmaking operates in spatial dimensions. Sameerah Mahmood explores the functions of mythically oriented landscapes in Jim Crace's novels. Chilka Ghosh analyses how juvenile magazines as a form of space incorporate images of childhood that resonate with Bengali youth. Ercan Afacan examines how national myths are destabilised and how frontiers shift to the interstitial space between self and other. Cüneyd Atamal relates how the American landscape functions as mythical space.

Part IV explores the dynamics of mythmaking and storytelling. Klárá Kolinská discusses the discursive concept of the trickster figure in a version of the Genesis myth retold from an Indian perspective. Carla Comellini deals with the fictionalisation of the myth of Noah's Ark. The flood myth also foregrounds Özge Özkan's analysis of the postmodern version of Noah's Ark narrated through the perspective of a woodworm. Meltem Uzunoğlu-Erten analyses how mythical and epic characters are transformed into the modern hero.

Part V contemplates mythmaking on a more meditative and personal level. Jim Savio discusses how modern mythic narratives satisfy a pedagogical function alongside the aesthetic experience. Anca Munteanu addresses the notion of limit in William Blake's mythological cosmogony and Ramazan Saral analyses Blake's prophetic work through a comparative lens indicating how the romantic perception of the unity of contraries necessitates progression. M. Önder Göncüoğlu considers how an inhuman anti-hero dons multiple identities from animal to prophet to God but never a human being.

The articles in Part VI are concerned with the myths of gender. Feryal Çubukçu investigates the role of women in various Native American myths comparing them with contemporary versions. Gül Koçsoy explores the roots and development of the hunter-hero myth in early American literature. Işın Sacır analyses the pornographic narration of Angela Carter's *The Sadeian Woman* allowing for a re-evaluation and reconsideration of the gender myth of women. Fauzia Janjua investigates the resistance of females against patriarchal constructions in the Pakistani context and considers how a Pakistani female poet restructures the notion of feminism in her writings. Mubina Talaat analyses the feminist history of Pakistan where the prevailing myth of the silent eastern woman is dismantled. Murat Göç explores how masculine constructions reinforce mythologies prevalent in American culture.

The authors in Part VII reflect on how the genre of science fiction and fantasy create new forms of mythmaking. Selin Yılmaz focuses on how metanarratives are reconstructed as new myths in a futuristic setting. Ayşen Demir-Kılıç probes the myth of immortality through the symbolism of the phoenix in the Harry Potter series. Meryem Ayan relates how the traditional vampire myth is recreated in the Twilight series. Eleni Boliaki explores the myth of the heroic voyage in quest of a noble cause through a comparison of *Argonautica* and *Star Wars*.

Notes

[1] Enis Batur, *Elma: Örgü Teknikleri Üzerine bir Roman Denemesi* (Istanbul: Sel Yayıncılık, 2012), 11.
[2] Originally believed to be commissioned by Halil Şerif Paşa the provocative painting travelled from hand to hand over the span of 129 years finding its way to the wall of Jacques Lacan's study before it rested in its new home in the museum.
[3] Batur, *Elma*, 125. Translation mine.
[4] Batur, *Elma*, 142. I believe the transition from earth cult to sky cult may be one of the main reasons for the gradual decimation of female depictions of the kind discussed here. Ironically the most illustrated scene from the Genesis is when Adam and Eve are both naked and unaware, the scene right before they shift from innocence to experience, from the state of naiveté to the state of knowledge. But if we look to prehistorical times that revelled in the mysteries of the earth, there are countless examples of female depictions both as pictorial representations and as carvings or sculptures. Palaeolithic caves, for example, housed mural paintings with an emphasis on the human female along with female figurines carved with "great loins, the pubic triangle, and the nourishing breasts;" these figurines were dubbed *Venuses* as Palaeolithic erotica. See Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* (New York: Arkana, 1991), 313.

[5] Barbara Freitag, *Sheela-na-gigs: Unravelling an Enigma* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 1.

[6] Freitag, *Sheela-na-gigs*, 1.

[7] Freitag, *Sheela-na-gigs*, 2.

[8] Batur, *Elma*, 106. Translation mine.

[9] Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Princeton University Press, 1991), 43.

[10] Neumann, *The Great Mother*, 44.

[11] Neumann, *The Great Mother*, 45.

[12] Karen Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books Ltd., 2005), 1.

[13] Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth*, 2.

[14] The attempted elimination of myth by reason has its roots in the Classical period specifically within the arguments presented by the Sophists and Plato. For a more detailed study on the subject see Robert L. Fowler, "*Mythos* and *Logos*," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 131 (2011): 45-66.

[15] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 1.

[16] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 4-5.

[17] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 8.

[18] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 8.

[19] Graham Richards, *Psychology, Religion, and the Nature of the Soul: A Historical Entanglement* (London: Springer, 2011), 11. Italics in the original.

[20] Karen Armstrong, "Metaphysical Mistake," *The Guardian*, July 12, 2009, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2009/jul/12/religion-christianity -belief-science (accessed June 24, 2015).

[21] Terry Windling, "Terry Windling's Studio: Art, Myth, Stories," http://www.terriwindling.com/entrancehall/ (accessed June 24, 2015).

PART I

THEORETICAL SPECULATIONS

CHAPTER ONE

INTERPRETING MYTHMAKING OUTSIDE OF THE BOX: FOUR THEORIES YOU HAVE ALMOST CERTAINLY MISSED

MAREK OZIEWICZ

If there is anything that radically set the twentieth century apart from what had gone before, it is the two unprecedented developments: the birth of psychology and the rise of the fantastic. The two processes were not unrelated: psychology came in the wake of discovering that the human mind contains a dimension that is only partially accessible to consciousness. The literary fantastic, in turn, was an attempt to explore this dimension and its influence on the human mind. Both psychology and the fantastic identified myth to be foundational for their fields, either as a record of alternative modes of thought or as a narrative strategy hardwired into human cognitive architecture. One result of this rediscovery of myth has been the proliferation of myth theories.

In this chapter I look at four approaches to myth that have not made it into the myth theory canon. These include Immanuel Velikovsky's euhemerist reading of world myths as a memory of cosmic catastrophes and near-extinction events witnessed by various human societies in the past; Julian Jaynes' proposal about Greek myths—especially those recorded in the *Iliad*—as narrative accounts of bicameral consciousness that preceded our modern subjective consciousness; Sean Kane's comparative perspective on world mythtelling traditions as forms of humanity's dialogue with nature; and Jonathan Gottschall's social Darwinist reading of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* that positions these texts as narrative testimonies of a struggle for Darwinian fitness within an exacting eco-cultural niche. Starting with a brief taxonomy of myth theories, their types, and contexts in which they emerged and functioned, I call attention

to the fact that any theoretical approach to myth is inescapably mythopoeic. Theories of myth are attempts to recreate the meaning of myths once their literal account is "no longer accepted,"[1] and also attempts to identify the source and urgency of specific myths both to the people who lived them and to the modern reader of these tales. Throughout, I follow Puhvel in taking mythology to mean "originally and literally 'storytelling,'"[2] and myth theories as a type of creative storytelling about the nature, function, or purpose of myths. Examining the four theories for how they shed light on the resilience of myth and mythic structures in literature, I discuss their strengths and possible openings for further investigation. I do not believe that any of these theories are correct or exhaustive. However, since even the canonical theories have only limited claims to scientific validity, I suggest that these less known theories merit attention for the insights they offer. Proposed in the 1950s, 1970s, 1990s, and 2000s, these four theories enrich the gene pool of our thinking about myth. Each goes some way to explain why stories reflecting beliefs that died out millennia ago continue to appeal to modern readers. Each strikes at our complacent thinking that we have finally figured the myth out.

Myth Theories: An Offbeat Taxonomy

Paraphrasing the title of James Hillman's 1993 study *We've Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy—and the World is Getting Worse*, I suggest that even after two centuries of theorising about myth we have not gotten closer to understanding what myth is and how it works. There is no single correct definition of myth, as different, yet legitimate understandings of myth can be found across disciplines and across time. Most scholars agree, however, that myth is a type of story that expresses "the thought patterns by which a group formulates self-cognition and self-realization, attains self-knowledge and self-confidence, explains its own source and being and that of its surroundings, and sometimes tries to chart its destinies."[3] Being such a large structure, myth absorbs nearly all explanations, its definition dependent on the assumptions one brings into the inquiry process. This is even more true to myth theories. Always historically and culturally situated, almost all myth theories have claims to limited validity. If and when they are seen as popular or canonical—as was the case with Max Müller's solarism or Joseph Campbell's myth criticism—ultimately depends on the dominant assumptions of the period that constitute what Thomas Kuhn has called a paradigm. In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) Kuhn defined a paradigm as a model "from which spring particular coherent traditions of scientific research,"

and a set of givens adopted "for further articulation and specification under new or more stringent conditions."[4] This model of scientific canonisation has two implications for this chapter. One, that myth has always been theorised in specific interpretive contexts. Two, that theories of myth have been assessed against dominant assumptions.

For example, it is impossible to understand nineteenth-century debates about myth without placing them in the context of the search for evidence for the existence of the Indo-European proto-language originally suggested by Sir William Jones in 1786. As early linguists laboured on the grammar and structure of this *Ursprache*—from Schlegel's idea of comparative grammar proposed in 1808, through Grimm's Law (1822) and Verner's Law (1875) that explained the sound-changes which occurred in every language descended from Indo-European—a scientific method for the study of mythology presented itself.[5] Outlined in Max Müller's essay on "Comparative Mythology" (1856), comparative philology offered a promise to help scholars determine whether the similarity of mythic plots and names of characters from different myth cultures was a coincidence or gestured at some common source of all myths. Considering the intellectual and cultural context in which it appeared, Müller's book-length essay catapulted him to instant fame not just because it offered a key to the understanding of Aryan myths, legends, and folk traditions—a key being his claim that "[t]he mythology of the Veda is to comparative mythology what Sanskrit has been to comparative grammar."[6] It became so widely embraced because it fit well with the popular expectation of the day. If all Indo-European languages have a common source, why should it not be possible to trace all myths to a single source? Moreover, underlying this focus on the original Ur-story from which all other variants sprang, was an implicit racist hierarchy that positioned modern European white culture, with its science and rationality, as the pinnacle of human development, which non-European and non-white cultures have yet to reach. Hitler's idea of the hierarchy of races, shared in its less radical forms by many Europeans in the first part of the twentieth century, was an unforeseen by-product of Müller's line of argument.

When a powerful alternative to Müller's solarism emerged—in the form of comparative evolutionary anthropology—it drew on a different conceptual metaphor, but retained the white supremacist underpinnings. Instead of looking at myths as misremembered versions of a single Ur-myth whose diversification would recapitulate the distension of languages from Indo-European, it looked at similarities among myths as reflecting similarities of the human experience shaped by the same or similar beliefs. The guiding metaphor for the anthropological and ritualist school—

represented, among others, by Edward B. Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871), Andrew Lang's *Custom and Myth* (1884), and culminating in James G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890 through 1922)—was that of a biological evolution. What comparative philology was to Müller, Darwin's theory, soon to become social Darwinism, was to ritualists and comparative anthropologists. Their premise was that the history of mankind follows a uniform development from savagery to civilisation—a progress arc often described as starting with magic, unfolding through religion, and culminating in science—and their interest in myth was thus an interest in reconstructing the earliest stages of human culture.[7] Relics of primitive belief and customs—to be found among contemporary "savages" and in myth—were seen as the best way to reconstruct the earliest stages of human life and culture, much as the fossil bones of a prehistoric creature are the best clues to conjure up an extinct species. Although this perspective is not entirely false—and indeed helped expand comparative myth studies to include myths from other cultures than merely Indo-European ones—its appeal was based on the prevailing acceptance of social Darwinism that endorsed white European supremacy and presented colonial conquests as the white man's burden toward the moral uplift of mankind. In sum, both philological and anthropological/ritualistic theories had political implications that chimed in with the dominant trends of the time. The nineteenth century was one of white colonial conquests: conquests of foreign myths and conquests of foreign lands. When Queen Victoria celebrated her Diamond Jubilee in 1897 there were only 57 independent states in the world—an all-time low and about one fourth of the current number.

Theories of myth that emerged in the twentieth century have been equally embedded ideologically. The more they spoke to the dominant trends of their day, the more likely it was for them to become canonical. Also, as more voices joined the discussion, myth theories became more diverse, each engaging in a dialogue with others.[8] Among the many taxonomies that have been applied, one useful distinction I have found is that between WHAT and WHY theories. WHAT theories see myth as a subcategory, derivative, or forerunner of something else—such as science, ritual, philosophy, or religion; WHY theories interpret myth as the expression of the human mind. As Schelling, following Vico, formulated this idea: myth "must be understood on its own terms as an autonomous configuration of the human spirit, with its own mode of reality and a content that cannot be translated into rational terms without an irretrievable loss of inner force."[9] Schelling was an exception though and most nineteenth-century theories—Müller's idea that myths are stories

woven around misremembered words, Tylor's view of myths as primitive science or, as Malinowski would have it: applied science, Lang's and Frazer's take on myth as narrative survivals of old customs or rituals— were all WHAT theories that interpreted myth literally. The twentieth century, by contrast, was dominated by WHY theories that saw myths as predominantly symbolic. In WHAT theories myth is something modern rational humans have outgrown or ought to grow away from; in HOW theories myth is something one should cultivate or grow toward.[10] WHY theories include psychological theories offered by Sigmund Freud, Carl Gustav Jung, Erich Neumann, Erich Fromm, Alan Dundes, Karen Horney, James Hillman and others, religious and philosophical theories developed by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Ernst Cassirer, and Mircea Eliade, structuralist theories such as those by Vladimir Propp, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Georges Dumézil, Jean-Pierre Vernant, and Marcel Detienne, as well as comparative literary myth criticism and ritualism theories known from the writings of Otto Rank, Lord Raglan, Joseph Campbell, Northrop Frye, Evans Lansing Smith, Victor Turner, and Walter Burkert. Determining what theories of myth are deemed canonical today—a classification that may differ across academic disciplines—is something I would not attempt here, as it would explode the scope of this chapter. Instead, I assume that one indicator of canonicity is inclusion in such influential overviews as Alan Dundes' edited collection *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth* (1984), Jaan Puhvel's *Comparative Mythology* (1987), William Doty's *Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals* (2000), Eleazar M. Meletinsky's *The Poetics of Myth* (2000), Doty's *Myth: A Handbook* and Robert A. Segal's *Myth: A Very Short Introduction* (both 2004). What I propose to explore is four theories of myth not found in any of these collections.

Why? Although unknown or debunked, each of these theories is fascinating as a mythopoeic activity. Even when they are incorrect in their specific assumptions, generalisations, or conclusions, each of these theories raises questions that move some way toward explaining the resilience of myth in literature—its peculiar unrootedness that has been the delight of readers and a despair of commentators since at least the Enlightenment. Before I embark on this perilous journey, two caveats are in place. First, I do not want to suggest that the canonical theories are lacking. It is my belief that almost all myth theories offer at least some valid insights, even if no single theory holds answers to all the questions we can ask. Validity, moreover, is not an objective criterion and is always constructed within a dominant paradigm. It involves cultural assumptions that reflect the scholar's situated perspective and may not apply to other

angles. Second, sharing Doty's dedication to "postmodern pluralism, hermetic double- and triple-sighting, and open-ended semiotics and hermeneutics,"[11] I want to celebrate the many theories of myth as a form of mythopoeic activity—"a sort of creative poetizing that is based materially in both classical mythological materials *and* the contemporary world"[12]—not essentially different from the practice of mythtelling. Like the canonical theories, each of these four narratisations creates a lens for interpreting literary fiction and our storytelling practices in the past and present. Myth, like literature, is a conceptual framework to project meanings on the social, ideological, material, and political aspects of our everyday life. So too are the four theories I discuss.

Immanuel Velikovsky: Myth as Misinterpreted History

The first group of WHY theories of myth to appear in the twentieth century were psychological theories: Freud's and then Jung's. Grappling with the question of why myths have exercised an unbroken authority over people's imagination up to the present, psychological theories offered two types of answers. According to Freud, myths are residues of unconscious processes, stories that embody and conceal the suppressed sexual desires of the human unconscious.[13] According to Jung, myths are "original revelations of the preconscious psyche [and] involuntary statements about unconscious psychic happenings" that reflect a deeper, universal level of the collective unconscious.[14] For all their differences, Freud, Jung and other psychologists agreed that myth is a window into the human psyche, reflecting some hidden content.

It is this interest in what is embedded in our psychological make-up as hidden, suppressed, yet powerful in determining our lives and thus destabilising the sovereignty of consciousness that places the Russian omnibus psychologist Immanuel Velikovsky in the same group as Freud and Jung. Unlike theirs, however, his reflection on myth is both a WHAT and WHY theory. It is a WHAT theory because Velikovsky sees myths as distorted historical truths—a trend in myth studies identified as euhemerism. It is also a WHY theory because as a psychologist Velikovsky believes these cataclysmic events were indelibly imprinted on the subconscious memory of the survivors—i.e. our ancestors. According to Velikovsky, myths are narrative records of catastrophic, near-extinction events that shed light on the working of the human psyche. Specifically, human tendency to read myths metaphorically is the collective, post-traumatic psychological reaction to cultivate what the title of his last book Velikovsky dubbed a state of *Mankind in Amnesia*.

Velikovsky's hypothesis of collective amnesia is derived from his life's work: a theory of cosmic catastrophes. The fundamental tenets of this theory, counterintuitive as they may sound, are as follows. Our planetary system has not always been as it is now. Our evolution has been punctured by a number of near-extinction cataclysms, local and global, recorded in diverse traditions as world ages—ranging from four in the Greek, Mayan, and Hindu tradition, seven in the Etruscan, Rabbinical, and Toltec records, and even ten ages in the Chinese count.[15] Each period has different skies and a new earth; it ends with what the Greeks called *kataklysmos* and *ekpyrosis*—deluge and combustion—when the old world is literally washed away and/or burned out.[16] In some cases, the new age then adapts a new calendar, based on the motions of the "new" sun.[17] According to Velikovsky, cosmic factors such as meteor hits, close brushes with comets, or the tilting of the Earth's axis account not only for the extinction of dinosaurs 65 million years ago, but also for the onset and recession of the Ice Ages[18]—a claim that was vehemently opposed when Velikovsky first made it, but has since been recognised as the most probable explanation.[19] According to Velikovsky, a number of such cosmic events that involved a heavenly body coming into a close-encounter with Earth occurred during the living memory of humankind and they have been noted in myths all over the world as "wars in the celestial sphere."[20] These cosmic events explain, in Velikovsky's view, a number of otherwise bizarre claims preserved in the mythological and religious traditions: fiery stones falling from the sky, prolonged darkness, spectacular visual and electrical discharges in the atmosphere, rising seas, volcanic and seismic activities, fiery hurricanes and so forth. The last two such cataclysms, he claims, occurred in the 15th and 7th centuries BC.

There are two faces of Velikovsky's theory: the astronomical and the psychological. The astronomical has received immense attention and has been the reason to ban Velikovsky as an insane heretic—especially for his claims that Venus was initially a comet and only in the 1st century BC stabilised in our solar system as a planet.[21] I will not discuss the astronomical since other authors have done it more extensively, but I want to mention that recent studies suggest that even in his astronomical guesses Velikovsky was not as totally wrong as it initially seemed.[22] For example, the Electric Universe Theory proposed in the early 2000s by David Talbott and Wal Thornhill—which challenges mainstream astronomy's standard theory of planet formation as well as the standard account about the origin and composition of comets,[23] a view now called into question by the Rosetta mission—confirms many of Velikovsky's insights that he was not able to test or demonstrate during his lifetime.[24]

From the perspective of myth studies, however, a far more interesting aspect of Velikovsky's theory is the psychological one, in which he considered the collective trauma cosmic catastrophes have produced. In his first book, *Worlds in Collision*, Velikovsky barely touched upon this idea in one chapter and then spent the next five books focusing on the astronomical side of his theory. Only in the last book, *Mankind in Amnesia* (1982), did he return to his early insight. Although much less known than Freud's theory of primordial urges, when examined through the lens of the logical principle called Occam's Razor, Velikovsky's hypothesis of collective amnesia seems to make more sense than Freud's. "Freud was nearly correct in his diagnosis when he wrote that mankind lives in a state of delusion," Velikovsky declares, "but he was unable to define the etiology [… and] the nature of the traumatic experience."[25] According to Velikovsky, the great trauma of humanity is not the suppressed desire of patricide and incest, but the suppressed trauma of repeated near-extinctions of the human race as a result of cosmic catastrophes. Even if Velikovsky's mytho-cosmology is amiss in terms of exact dates or scale of these events, in the light of such happenings as the still unexplained Tunguska event or the Chelabynsk meteor that crashed into Russia in February 2013,[26] it is not unthinkable that similar events happened in the past. If so, they would have seemed like the end of the world to the human populations whom they affected.

When he considers to what extent such events may have become part of the human unconscious, Velikovsky speaks not as an amateur astronomer or an armchair world historian, but as a trained professional with long clinical experience. In his view, the traumatic memory of past catastrophes—what today would be treated in terms of cultural post-traumatic stress disorder—has been imprinted and suppressed in the human collective mind. "The memory of the cataclysms was erased," Velikovsky claims, "not because of lack of written traditions, but because of [a psychological mechanism] that [made] entire nations […] read into these traditions allegories or metaphors where actually cosmic disturbances were clearly described."[27] Arguing that this psychological mechanism produces two reactions to trauma—endeavours to remember or relive it and endeavours to forget and erase it—Velikovsky claims that mankind in amnesia is caught up in a conflict it cannot resolve.[28] Although etymologically the English term disaster derives from "*dis-astron*, which literally means a dysfunctional, rebellious, or otherwise unpredictable star,"[29] our fear of cosmic phenomena is beyond human conscious control. In a process of "codification of the oblivion,"[30] human beings have been denying the utter terror of cosmic destruction. As Velikovsky contends, we

have created Axial Age religions, with their theologies and cosmologies that validate the idea of carefully calibrated teleological celestial machinery. We have created science based on "astronomical uniformitarianism"[31] designed to eliminate the possibility of planetary near-collisions in a rational and predictably-moving universe. This Ptolemaic-Aristotelian idea of the harmony of the spheres, Velikovsky claims, was then adopted into the Newtonian clock-wise universe and still informs much of modern science with its focus on rations, measurements, and exact data. Even Darwin's theory, in Velikovsky's account, was so quickly accepted because evolutionism is based on ascribing all changes in the natural world to a very slow evolution over millions of years and is predicated on the assumption about the peaceful history of the Earth.[32] In short, according to Velikovsky, our science appears to be a large-scale attempt to reassure humanity that the universe is rational and predictable, that the planet we live on is not an accident-prone vessel, and that cosmic catastrophes are so improbable they do not need to be considered.[33]

Julian Jaynes: Myth as a Record of Bicameralism

The second forgotten theory of myth is that put forth by Princeton University psychologist Julian Jaynes in his *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (1976). Jaynes' book was an attempt to explain the origin of subjective consciousness in the context of human evolution that would also answer questions about how ancient people's mentality was not just culturally but biologically different from ours. Jaynes' hypothesis is a WHY theory that sees myth—especially the *Iliad* which he takes as "the first writing in human history in a language of which we have enough certainty of translation"[34]—to be a psychological document that sheds light on the working of the early human mind.

Jaynes gets to myth as evidence for his larger claim, and that larger hypothesis is derived from three premises. One, Jaynes claims that all ancient civilisations were able to develop only after the emergence of language, which he posits as a tool for social control and communication necessary to make a transition from small hunter-gatherer groups of up to thirty individuals to large agricultural/urban communities, specific to humans, where the number of people is too large for everyone to know everyone else. Agriculture, as is now assumed, emerged only about 9000 BCE, with the first cities 2-3 millennia later. Two, he claims that consciousness is based on language, and is "of a much more recent origin than has therefore been supposed."[35] According to Jaynes, first sentences with a noun subject and a predicative modifier emerged somewhere

between 25,000 and 15,000 BCE. Three, Jaynes claims that a side-product of language evolution was the development of auditory hallucinations, or voices, that kept pre-conscious people engaged in time-consuming work. With the emergence of names, sometime around the same time as the emergence of agriculture, the nature of auditory hallucinations radically transformed social interaction; the "voice" heard in the head—named and recognised as originating from a particular person—was now the voice of the chieftain, the god-king, or god. In other words—and this is Jaynes' central thesis—before human beings could develop introspective self-awareness, they went through an intermediary stage of a bicameral mentality, where "human nature was split in two, an executive part called a god, and a follower part called a man. Neither part was conscious."[36] In effect, Jaynes claims that for about ten millennia up to about 2000 BCE the human brain worked bicamerally, with the right hemisphere that appeared to be speaking, and the left one that listened and obeyed.[37]

According to Jaynes, bicameralism provided early humans with the evolutionary edge over other animals and enabled the emergence of the social organisation called civilisation.[38] The bulk of his book is thus devoted to integrate the worldwide evidence that bicameral mentality did in fact exist wherever and whenever civilisation first began. All of his evidence for bicameralism is circumstantial, but Jaynes claims that the divinisation of kings, elaborate burial of their corpses, which were later replaced by idols, the emergence of temples, religion, beliefs in afterlife, even megalithic architecture that required hundreds of thousands of man-hours to complete—all of this he sees as suggesting a bicameral mentality. Then, in the latter part of the second millennium BCE, bicameralism collapsed under pressures precipitated by the eruption of Thera, vast geological catastrophes, wars, mass migrations, and invasions.[39] Civilisations that had thus-far been organised bicamerally, with God leading the King—as Jaynes interprets the rock relief of Yazilikaya from about 1250 BCE—were now in chaos. They yearned for the voice of God, which they could no longer hear: a situation Jaynes sees reflected in the Tukulti altar mural from about 1230 BCE. The empty throne, he argues, "before which the first of the cruel Assyrian conquerors grovels" signals the absence of god, and the representation of king as kneeling is unprecedented.[40] And it was only when the bicameral mind had broken down, a place was created for the emergence of the modern introspective self-awareness, with its doubts, a sense of alienation, and uncertainty.

Although bicameralism disappeared in the Middle East about 13th to 10th century BCE, Jaynes suggests that much of our history since then makes sense when seen as a transition from a previous mentality to

modern consciousness. "At the end of the second millennium AD," he reflects, "we are still […] deep in this transition to a new mentality. And all about us lie the remnants of our recent bicameral past."[41] These include religion, its language and concepts; the idea of inspiration and the phenomenon of possession, artistic or otherwise; the existence of poetry and music—which began, according to Jaynes, on "the god-side of our ancient mentality, [… which] usually, or perhaps always, spoke in verse,"[42] and finally such mental phenomena as hypnosis[43] and such mental disorders as schizophrenia, which Jaynes sees as vestiges of bicamerality.

Fascinating as Jaynes' argument is to read, recent cognitive studies leave no doubts that he did not get the picture right. Steven Mithen's ground breaking *The Prehistory of the Mind* (1996) suggests a completely different route toward the development of modern consciousness characterised by cognitive fluidity—a consciousness that emerged about 40,000 to 30,000 BCE and so millennia earlier than Jaynes had posited. "[I]n both development and evolution," says Mithen, "the human mind […] has undergone a transformation from being constituted by a series of relatively independent cognitive domains to one in which ideas, ways of thinking and knowledge flow freely between such domains."[44] Another correction to Jaynes' perspective can be found in the landmark study of two hemispheres, Iain McGilchrist's *The Master and His Emissary* (2009). According to McGilchrist,

> [Jaynes'] insight that there was a connection between the voices of the gods and the mental world of those who heard them, that this might have something to do with the brain, and indeed that it concerned the relationship between the two hemispheres, remains, in my view, fundamentally correct. However, I believe he got one important aspect of the story back to front. His contention that the phenomena he describes came about because of a *breakdown* of a "bicameral" mind—so that the two hemispheres, previously separate, now merged—is the precise inverse of what happened. The phenomena came about because of a relative separation of the two chambers, the two hemispheres.[45]

With all that, Jaynes' argument that mythic narratives such as the *Iliad* represent a state of existence—and a state of mind—that does not recognise distinctions between one's subjectivity and the larger world of nature is not incorrect. In light of McGilchrist's description of the work of the two hemispheres, myth is the language of the right hemisphere, a language of wholeness and belonging that predates the schism between individual consciousness and the world one inhabits.