6

Now, You Tell Me About Yourself: Why Do We Tell Stories?

Myth is an attempt to narrate a whole human experience, of which the purpose is too deep, going too deep in the blood and soul, for mental explanation or description.
—D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930)

Let's go back to the scene discussed in Chap. 4 on Martha's video, namely, the scene in which Ted asks Cheryl to tell him something about herself. After reciting her brief autobiography, Cheryl turns to her partner and says, "Now, you tell me something about yourself," obviously wanting to know a little about his life story.

To the semiotician, the telling of life stories is not simply a way to make idle conversation. On the contrary, in such courtship situations the semiotician would see it as yet another way of presenting an attractive persona to a romantic partner. However, that is not the only, or primary, reason why people tell their life stories to each other. They do so to make sense of who they are by weaving the various episodes and events of their lives into a story with a plot, with characters, and with settings. This imparts structure, purpose, and meaning (or lack thereof) to one's life in the overall scheme of things.

Stories of all kinds give coherence and continuity to the thoughts and experiences that people find important by connecting them narratively. It would be no exaggeration to claim that narrative structure might mirror human consciousness itself. This would explain why, early in life, children learn abstract concepts through the stories they are told. It might also explain why, throughout history, humans have produced narrative accounts—factual and fictional—

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to explain who they are, why they are here, and to make sense of otherwise random and chaotic events.

Interest in the origin and nature of storytelling is as old as history. In ancient Greece, the philosophers Xenophanes, Plato, and Aristotle criticized stories, especially myths, as artful and deceitful, exalting reason and logic instead as the only trustworthy ways to gain access to the nature of reality. However, the exaltation of reason and its use in various disciplines has not eliminated the need for stories. On the contrary, people everywhere are constantly seeking engagement in stories (through movies, television programs, novels) not only to be entertained, but also to gain insights into life through the eyes of the storyteller.

Narrative

The term *narrative* refers to anything that has a recognizable story structure, which is essentially a sequence of events involving specific characters that unfold in time and that move towards some resolution. It is anything told, written, related, or exposed that shares that structure. The narrative may be construed as *factual*, as in a newspaper report or a psychoanalytic session, or *fictional*, as in a novel, a comic strip, or a film. It is often difficult to determine the boundary line between fact and fiction, given the interplay of many psychological and social factors that coalesce in the production and interpretation of narratives.[1] Some narratives have had a great impact on how people come to view human nature and the cosmos, including the earliest ones, known as myths. Storytellers have always enjoyed an important status in all cultures across time, be they soothsayers or writers of fiction. Even today, fictional works are felt by people as somehow revealing something intrinsic about the human condition. As the writer David Lodge has phrased it, creating narratives "is one of the fundamental sense-making operations of the mind, and would appear to be both peculiar to and universal throughout humanity."[2]

Narrative gives structure and logical coherence to a series of what would otherwise be perceived to be random actions. Animal programs on television sometimes exemplify how this mode works even in areas of scientific understanding. Unedited, the actions of the animals caught on film—eating, hunting, mating—would hardly make up a meaningful story line. However, with the intervention of editors, scriptwriters, and ethological consultants, such programs always produce an intriguing account of the actions connecting them thematically and chronologically. The result is a scientific narrative of animal behavior that has been put together on the basis of ideas from scientific sources.

The narrative is compelling to the viewer because it explains the animals' actions in a cohesive way that imbues them with an inherent sense and meaning. There may be no meaning in these actions; but by narrating them it somehow crystallizes by itself.

Narratives are texts that function as composite, but unitary, meaning-making forms. This is why we understand a novel or a movie, for example, not in terms of its parts but in terms of what it means overall. Narrative texts are constructed according to what some semioticians call a *narrative grammar*, which has universal properties. The Russian scholar Vladimir Propp was among the first semioticians to put forward this view with his analysis of Russian folktales in 1928.[3] Moreover, Propp argued that ordinary discourse was built on the same units that make up the narrative grammar. So, fictional texts and conversations are equally narrative in form because they tap into the same narrative grammar. This idea was pursued further by Algirdas J. Greimas, who labeled the narrative units or signs in the grammar as *actants*, including "hero," "opponent," "journey," "battle," and so on. These surface not only in novels, but also in a wide range of texts and, as Propp maintained, in ordinary discourse.[4] Indeed, life without heroes, opponents, journeys, and battles would be inconceivable, regardless of culture or era of human history. These are narrative signs standing for people, events, things, and places in the real world. Greimas claimed that differences in detail, and especially in how the final resolution or clarification of a narrative unfolds, are due to the specific ways in which these categories are "textualized" linguistically into actual narratives or discourses. In a mystery novel, for instance, the hero may have several opponents, all of whom are the "opponent"; in a love story, a lover may be both a "hero" and an "opponent"; the dénouement of a love plot may end in a "battle"; and so on.

The concept of narrative grammar would explain why the plots, characters, and settings that are found in stories across the world are remarkably similar. Although one may lose some of the semantic nuances in translating stories from one language to another, one can easily transfer the basic narrative categories across languages with little or no loss of meaning. A story told in India is as understandable as a story told in Arkansas because their actants are the same, Greimas would claim, even though their linguistic forms are different.

In biographies, too, there are heroes, opponents, journeys, battles, just as there are in novels and movies. Biography is as old as recorded history. The rulers and nobles of ancient Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon had their deeds incised in stone and clay. The Old Testament tells of the lives of many patriarchs and prophets, and the four Gospels of the New Testament are essentially parallel biographies of Christ. Until about the middle of the seventeenth century, biography was generally commemorative, dealing with the exemplary

lives of heroes and heroines, especially saints and martyrs, as well as with the lives of malefactors and tyrants—all of whom were depicted less as individuals than as actors in a narrative drama of salvation. The publication in 1791 of *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* by James Boswell (1740–95) is generally thought to be the first biography that moves away from this tradition, constituting a biography about someone other than a hero, leader, nobleman, or saint. During the nineteenth century, biographical writings of this kind proliferated. In the subsequent twentieth century, the Austrian psychiatrist Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) provided a further impetus for the exploration of personality through oral autobiographical narrative with the invention of a clinical technique known as *psychoanalysis*, which consists, essentially, in patients retelling their life stories. We can know ourselves only if we construct and recount our biography. Like a story, it is something we put together consciously to make sense of who we are on the basis of our life events.

Myth

The desire to know the life stories of people who stand out (artists, scientists, actors, politicians, and so on) goes back considerably in time. However, in early cultures, people sought to know about the gods, the supernatural beings who they imagined ran the world and to whom they looked for knowledge and wisdom. The stories they told about these supernatural beings are called *myths*, which are essentially early folk stories. Myths were created to provide reassuring metaphysical explanations for the reason of things in the world—how the world came into being, who or what is responsible for it, how humans and animals were created, and how cultures originated. The language of myth is metaphorical, which, as we saw, allows the human mind to make connections based on sense. Myths were thus the first "theories" of the world, which, to this day, are somehow felt to bear intrinsic meaning, even if we may no longer believe them as true. Each character in ancient myth is a sign standing for some idealized human character or some actant. Take, for example, the Greek gods. Each one represented something in nature or human society. Zeus was, essentially, a sky and weather god associated with rain, thunder, and lightning; Poseidon (brother of Zeus) represented the sea and earthquakes; Hades stood for the underworld, the dispenser of earthly riches, and the god associated with death; Apollo was the god of archery, prophecy, music, healing, and youth; Artemis was the goddess of wild animals and hunting (twin sister of Apollo); Hermes was the messenger of the gods, the god of business, of thieves, and the guide of the dead to the underworld; and Aphrodite (to

mention one more) represented love, sexual desire, and beauty. The gods were thus metaphorical names used to stand for human and natural referents.

An insightful discussion of myth, from the perspective of semiotic theory, is the one put forward by anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. For Lévi-Strauss, all the oppositional clusters we find meaningful—life versus death, good versus evil, mother versus father, god versus the devil, day versus night, existence versus nothingness, and so on—are first articulated in mythic stories. If we were asked what evil is, we would tend to explain it in terms of its opposite (good), and vice versa. Similarly, if we wanted to explain the concept of right to someone, we would invariably tend to bring up the opposite concept of wrong at some point. Crucial to Lévi-Strauss' conception of myth is the Saussurean notion of value (*valeur*). Rather than carrying intrinsic meaning, Saussure argued that signs had value only in differential relation to each other.

In ancient Greece, myth (*mythos*) was seen to be in opposition with reason (*logos*), although Aristotle concluded that in some of the creation myths, *logos* and *mythos* often overlapped. Plato saw myths simply as allegories, as literary devices for persuasively developing an argument. In the Judeo-Christian tradition the notion of *history* has frequently been opposed to *myth*. Complicating this opposition was the concept that God, although existing outside of ordinary time and space, was revealed to humanity within human history. *Mythos*, *logos*, and *history* overlap in the prologue to the Gospel of John in the New Testament; there, Christ is portrayed as the *Logos*, who came from eternity into *historical* time.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, myth caught the interest of the emerging academic disciplines of anthropology and the history of religions. Scholars tried to make sense of the world's mythic stories as products of imaginary thinking and as attempts to construct models of ethical, moral, and spiritual behavior. The hypothesis that gained a foothold in these new disciplines was that the earliest myths were genuine nonscientific attempts to explain nature and human behavior, in the same fashion that we impart knowledge of the world to children. The mythic tales we tell children are universally understandable as theories about the metaphysical world and of human character and destiny. The mythic imagination, these scholars claimed, ascribed lightning, thunder, and other natural phenomena to awesome and frightful gods. Only in succeeding stages did people look for more scientific ways to explain such phenomena—that is, only later did *mythos* give way to *logos*.

In his *New Science*, Giambattista Vico saw the birth of culture in the mythic imagination (or *fantasia* as he called it). Recall that Vico viewed the "life cycle" of cultures as unfolding according to three stages—the age of the gods, the age of heroes, and the age of equals. During the first age, the mythic fantasia created

"poetic images" of the world that ascribed to it a metaphysical structure. If there was thunder in the sky, then the mythic fantasia would hear it as the angry voice of a god; if there was rain, then it would see it as the weeping of a sorrowful god. During the second age (of heroes), the mythic fantasia gave way to a more heroic form of imagination. The tales that it impelled were no longer of gods and their supernatural exploits, but of human heroes and their feats. This is an age of legends—stories that document the deeds and accomplishments of heroes, of their lives, of their journeys. The mythic fantasia is still operative during this age, Vico affirmed, but less so than previously. For this reason, legends are still highly imaginative, but at the same time also refer to actual events in history. Among the most famous legendary tales are the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of ancient Greece and the *Aeneid* of ancient Rome. It is during the third age (of equals) that the fantasia becomes dim, and the stories that people tell are no longer about gods or legendary heroes, but about ordinary human exploits and frailties. It is an age of rational history, of objective facts and knowledge (dates, treaties, social movements, political ideologies, and so on) behind which the tellers of history can hide their personal perspectives. Indeed, the reason why histories are constantly being revised is not only because they are by their nature incomplete, but also because they can never be totally free of the historian's perspective. On the other hand, myths and legends, like all works of the fantasia, are perceived to enfold eternal truths about the human condition. For this reason, they are handed down and preserved unrevised for posterity.

The primary function of the early myths is to explain how the world came into being in imaginary terms. In some cultures, the creation is said to proceed from a state of nothingness. The deity who created the world is portrayed as all-powerful and may come to the forefront so as to become the center of social life, or else may withdraw and become a distant or peripheral being. In other cultures, the deity is seen as giving order to a universe that finds itself in a state of chaos, separating light from darkness, and assigning the sun, moon, stars, plants, animals, and human beings to their proper roles in existence.

Among the Navajo and Hopi societies of North America, creation is thought to unfold as a progression upward from the underground. The emergence of the human world is said to be the final stage in this progression. A Polynesian myth places the various phases of human emergence in a coconut shell, equating these to a form of metamorphosis in other creatures. In many African and oriental mythic traditions, creation is imagined as breaking forth from a fertile egg. The egg is the potential for all life and, sometimes, as in the myth of the Dogon people of West Africa, it is referred to as the "placenta" of the world.

A common theme of mythical traditions is that of the first parents. In the Babylonian creation story, for instance, the first parents, Apsu and Tiamat, bore offspring who later defeated their parents in a battle. From the immolated body of Tiamat the earth emerged. In other world-parent myths, such as those of the Egyptians and Polynesians, the parents beget offspring but remain in close embrace; the offspring live in darkness, and in their desire for light they shove the parents apart, creating a space for the deities to create the human world. In several Romanian and Indian myths, creation comes about not through parents, but through the agency of a bird, which dives into the primordial waters to bring up a small piece of earth, which later expands into the world.

Related to such cosmogonic myths, but at the other extreme, are myths describing the end of the world (so-called eschatological myths). These presuppose the creation of the world by a powerful deity who in the end destroys the world, having become angry at the very creatures that he made. Meanwhile human beings are supposed to prepare for an afterlife existence of happiness or of eternal anguish, according to how they have lived their lives on earth. A universal conflagration and a final battle of the gods are envisioned. In an Aztec myth, several worlds are created and destroyed by the gods before the creation of the actual human world, which is also destined to end. In other myths, death is not present in the world for a long period of time, but enters it through an accident or because human beings have overstepped the proper limits of their knowledge.

Myths that describe the actions and characters of beings who are responsible for the discovery of a particular cultural artifact or technological process are called myths of the culture hero. Prometheus (in Greek mythology) is a classic example of this kind of hero. Prometheus was one of the Titans and worshiped by craftsmen. When Zeus hid fire from humanity, Prometheus stole it by trickery and returned it to earth. As punishment, Zeus chained him to a rock where an eagle fed each day on his liver, which grew again each night. Prometheus was eventually rescued by Hercules, and the world has never been the same since. In the Dogon culture of West Africa, the myth of the blacksmith who steals seeds from the granary of the gods is similar to the Prometheus story. In Ceram (Indonesia), Hainuwele is yet another Promethean figure—female this time; from the orifices of her body she provides the community with essential and indulgent goods.

Usually related to initiation rituals, myths of birth and rebirth tell how life can be renewed, time reversed, or humans transmuted into new beings. Such myths are found in the cultures of Europe, Africa, South America, and Melanesia. They typically describe the coming of an ideal society or of a savior

who will bestow new life among the people. Since the beginnings of cities, in the fourth and third millennia BCE, some myths were designed to describe the founding of cities. Foundation myths, as they are called, tell of how cities developed out of ceremonial centers that were seen to possess sacred power that could be summoned in a specific sacred place; or else they tell of particular personages (real or mythical) who were the founders of the cities. The myth of Gilgamesh in Babylon and that of Romulus and Remus in Rome are typical foundation myths. Gilgamesh was the legendary king of Uruk who was supposed to have ruled during the first half of the third millennium BCE. His exploits in quest for immortality ended up being unsuccessful. Romulus is the mythic founder of Rome, one of the twin sons of Mars. He and his brother Remus were abandoned at birth in a basket on the Tiber River, but were found and suckled by a she-wolf and later brought up by a shepherd family.

A German scholar who spent most of his life in England in the nineteenth century, Friedrich Maximilian Müller (1823–1900), claimed that the categories of myth were, in fact, primordial linguistic categories, constituting the blueprint from which language evolved. Following an in-depth study of the religions and myths of India, Müller posited, for example, that the gods and their actions did not represent beings or events, but rather incipient nouns and verbs standing for natural referents (such as thunder or the sea).[5] Lévi-Strauss pursued this line of reasoning further, pointing out that there are certain clusters of relationships in myth that, although expressed in the content of the story, conform to the structure of the language in which they are framed. Later, he contended that the same mythic structural blueprint is at work in all languages and cultures.[6] As Csapo puts it: "Myth relates to language in two ways: it is like language; it is also part of language."[7]

If such scholars are correct, then myth, language, and culture came into being at the same time. This would explain why ancient mythic rituals continue to be performed to this day (in contemporary versions, of course). Indeed, there seems to be a high level of isomorphism between social ideologies and mythic themes. Male gods who come forth to dominate the world are found in myths told in patriarchal cultures, by and large, and those that put the focus on goddesses are found mainly in matriarchal cultures.[8] Whereas Superman and Batman are paragons of patriarchal mythic thinking, their female equivalents, from Wonder Woman and Batgirl to Superwoman, are modern-day equivalents of the ancient goddesses, rebranded to fit in with the changing times and the ever-adaptive views of the role of women in society.

In pop culture, the culture hero myths and legends abound, especially those revolving around the father-son theme. Spider-Man's father died when he was

young, and it was the death of his surrogate father that prompted him to take up the task of fighting crime. As a young boy, Batman saw his parents murdered, resolving to defeat injustices and evil as he grew older. Superman's father and mother perished on his home planet and he was saved by being sent away; when Superman became older he discovered a recording of his father urging him to fight for truth and justice. The Hulk's father is not deceased but is at odds with his son, and the Hulk carries much angst against him. Hellboy was rescued from the bowels of hell and he now fights against the forces of evil. He was adopted by a professor with whom he has a shaky relationship; the professor serves as Hellboy's "supervisor" in the fight against evil, a relationship that nonetheless works well. Hellboy does not know who his biological father is, but later comes to know that he was fathered by the devil himself; Hellboy has no compunction in killing his devil father at the behest of his adoptive one in order to end the reign of evil upon Earth.

Perhaps the best-known myth of this type is the one of Oedipus (discussed briefly earlier on). In one version of the story, the child Oedipus was left to die on a mountain by Laius, his father, who had been told by an oracle that he would be killed by his own son. Oedipus was saved by a shepherd. Returning eventually to Thebes, he encounters a man on his way to the city. They get into an argument and this leads to Oedipus killing the man. That man was Laius, his father. Oedipus then solved the Riddle of the Sphinx. As a result, he was made king of the city and he married the widowed Jocasta, who was his mother. On discovering what he had done, he put out his own eyes in a fit of madness, and Jocasta hanged herself.

Freud termed this mythic father-son theme the "Oedipus complex." He defined it as an emotional complex that afflicts boys as young as four years old who may want unconsciously to eliminate the father in order to have a closer relationship with the mother. Boys typically feel guilty about the complex of emotions aroused by an unconscious sexual desire for the parent of the opposite sex and a wish to exclude the parent of the same sex. The equivalent in girls was called the Electra complex. Freud saw in myths veritable theories of the human psyche in narrative form. Carl Jung (1875–1961), too, developed his theory of archetypes from the observation that people living all over the world possess remarkably similar mythic rituals and symbols. He saw the unconscious part of the mind as a "receptacle" of primordial images, memories, fantasies, wishes, fears, and feelings that are too weak to become conscious. Therefore, Jung claimed that they manifest themselves by their influence on conscious processes and, most strikingly, by the symbolic forms they take in dreams, art works, and rituals. For instance, the phallic coming-of-age symbols and themes that cultures incorporate into their rites

of passage, that they represent in their works of art, and that find their way into the stories that are communicated in cultural context, are understandable in approximately the same ways by all humans because they derive from the same archetype in the collective unconscious.

As an illustration of the Jungian notion of archetype, consider his example of the "trickster." In every person there lies a certain instinct for childlike mischief. On one hand, this may be expressed as a playful desire for capriciousness or by the need to play devil's advocate in a conversation. On the other hand, it may manifest itself as a malicious urge to mock or ridicule someone else's achievements. It might cause us to contemplate stealing something for the sheer thrill of it or to torment someone by hiding their belongings. At such times, the "trickster archetype" is directing our behavior. Jung looked at the ways archetypes gain expression not only through everyday behaviors, but also through images and symbols contained in dreams, fairy tales, myths, legends, poetry, and painting. The trickster archetype surfaces, for instance, as Dickens' Artful Dodger, as the fabled character known as Rumpelstiltskin, as Shakespeare's Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and in the art of many contemporary comedians. Archetypes can take any form according to Jung; they can be an object or an animal in stories and in art.

The gist of the psychoanalytic work on myth is that the characters, themes, and events of mythic tales are part of a pre-scientific psychology of the human mind. They are attempts to harmonize the human mind and its emotional nature with the patterns of nature by connecting human experience to such fundamental phenomena as the daily rising and setting of the sun, the alternation of the seasons, the changing phases of the moon, and the annual planting and harvesting of crops. Ritual, as found in primitive religions, is a performance of mythical themes, expressing and celebrating humanity's meaningful participation in the affairs of the universe.

Fairy Tales

Folktales, fairy tales, and fables are descendants of myth. Like myth, these do not mirror what happens: they explore reality and predict what can happen in an imaginary way. They not only recount states and events; they also interpret them.

Take, for example, the kind of story told commonly to children known as the fairy tale. Taking place in a wonderland filled with magic and unusual characters, fairy tales (which rarely have to do with fairies) have a powerful emotional appeal over every child, no matter what culture in which the child is reared. The

persistence of stories such as *Cinderella*, *Snow White*, or *Little Red Riding Hood*, and their different versions, attest to this enduring fascination. These tell of an underdog hero or heroine who is put through great trials or must perform seemingly impossible tasks, and who, with magical assistance, secures their birthright or a suitable marriage partner. Frequently, such stories begin with "Once upon a time" and end with "And they lived happily ever after," formulas that imbue them with a sense of eternity and transcendental meaning.

A fairy, in folklore, is a diminutive supernatural creature who typically has a human form and lives in an imaginary region called a fairyland. Stories abound of the magical interventions of fairies in mortal affairs, from ancient legendary tales to modern-day cinematic portrayals. The childhood imagination not only conceives of fairyland as a distinct extra-worldly place, but one that nonetheless has everyday surroundings such as hills, trees, and streams. The sirens in Homer's *Odyssey* are fairies, and a number of the heroes in the *Iliad* have fairy lovers in the form of nymphs. The *Gandharvas* (celestial singers and musicians), who figure prominently in Sanskrit poetry, were fairies, as were the *Hathors*, or female genies, of ancient Egypt, who appeared at the birth of a child and predicted the child's future. In European literature, fairies appear in works such as Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet* (in Mercutio's "Queen Mab" speech), *The Faerie Queene* by Edmund Spenser, *L'Allegro* and *Comus* by John Milton, *Tales of Mother Goose* by Charles Perrault, *Grimm's Fairy Tales* by the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, and *Irish Fairy Tales* by William Butler Yeats. In these stories, fairies are generally considered beneficent towards humans—like the "tooth fairy" that we teach about to our children today. They are sensitive and capricious, however, and often inclined to play pranks; so, if their resentment is not to be aroused, they must be spoken well of and always treated with obedience. Bad fairies are portrayed as being responsible for misfortunes such as the bewitching of children, the substitution of ugly fairy babies, known as changelings, for human infants, and the sudden death of animals.

Today, fairy tales continue to be invented and told through different media (such as the movies). The *Shrek* movies, for example, are really modern-day fairy tales. The quintessential movie fairy is, of course, Disney's Tinkerbell. However, she is not your average fairy—she did after all try to kill Peter Pan's pal Wendy in a jealous rage in the original movie. People today like her because of her sassy attitude and looks. She is a fairy for the times.

Fairy tales were once passed on by word of mouth. It was a Frenchman named Charles Perrault (1628–1703) who wrote them down, publishing them in a book called *Tales and Stories of the Past with Morals: or Tales of Mother Goose* in 1697. The collection included *Sleeping Beauty*, *Cinderella*,

Red Riding Hood, and *Puss in Boots*. Jacob (1785–1863) and Wilhelm (1786–1859) Grimm also wrote and published fairy tales, starting in 1812. The story of Cinderella has been told and refashioned to meet the requirements of modernity, starting with Disney's 1950 animated version and morphing into contemporary versions with titles such as *Ella Enchanted*, *The Prince and Me*, and *The Cinderella Story*. In the latter, it is a lost cellphone that leads Prince Charming to the girl, not a misplaced glass slipper. The former (*Ella Enchanted*) is a spoof of the tamer Cinderella characters of the past. The title character wants to free herself of the curse of obedience, to become independent and free of the enslaving past. It is a powerful declaration of women's liberation. In fact, in virtually all contemporary versions of the Cinderella tale, the girl strives to control her own destiny; the prince good-naturedly accepts this and abides by it; and from this liberation is achieved. The Internet Movie Database lists around 40 movies with the title *Cinderella* (at the time of the writing of this book). In some ways, the movies have become our modern storytellers. As Segal observes, "Cinema-going combines myth with ritual and brings gods, hence myths, back to the world."[9]

The Persistence of Myth

Even if we live in a modern world that does not accept myth, by and large, as true, the mythic form of thinking has not disappeared. Its remnants are everywhere: we give cards with poetic, mythic messages on them; we tell nursery rhymes and fairy tales to our children; we read the horoscope daily; and so on. From our mythic heritage, we have inherited the names of the days of the week and months of the year. Tuesday is the day dedicated to the Germanic war god Tir, Wednesday to the Germanic chief god Wotan, Thursday to Thor, Friday to the goddess of beauty Frigga, Saturday to the Roman god Saturn, January to another Roman god Janus, and so on. Our planets bear a nomenclature similarly derived from myth: for example, Mars is named after the Roman god of war, Venus after the Greek goddess of beauty. Mythic themes, like that of the earth as a mother, of life as a journey, of an eternal battle between the forces of good and evil, reverberate in our spectacles, our modern narratives, and our discourses.

As the semiotician Roland Barthes argued, the presence of myth can be detected everywhere in contemporary pop culture and advertising.[10] In early Hollywood westerns, for instance, the mythic good versus evil theme was often symbolized by having heroes wear white hats, and villains black ones. In sports events, the "big game" is typically portrayed by announcers as a mythic battle between the forces of good (the home side) and those of evil (the

intruder or visiting team). The fanfare associated with preparing for the big game, like the World Series of baseball or the Super Bowl of football, has a ritualistic quality to it similar to the pomp and circumstance that ancient armies engaged in before going out to battle. The symbolism of the home team's (army's) uniform, the valor and strength of star players (the heroic warriors), and the tactical leadership abilities of the coach (the army general) all have a profound emotional effect on the home fans (one of the two warring nations). The game (the battle) is perceived to unfold in moral terms—as a struggle of righteousness and good against the forces of ugliness and evil. The players are exalted as heroes or condemned as villains. Victory is interpreted in moral terms as a victory of good over evil, or as a crushing defeat from a conquering army. The game is, as television and radio announcers were wont to say a few years back, "real life, real drama!"[11]

Myth is also recycled in modern media such as the comic book. Consider the figure of Superman—introduced in 1938 by *Action Comics*, and published separately a little later in *Superman Comic Books*. What or who does Superman represent? Why is he so popular (from time to time)? As a hero in the tradition of mythic heroes, Superman is a modern-day figment of the mythic imagination in which heroic figures, as we have seen, are archetypes of goodness and rightness. As a heroic figure, Superman has, of course, been updated and adapted culturally—he is an American hero who stands for "truth," "justice," and "the American way," as the 1950s TV series used to put it. Like the ancient heroes, Superman is indestructible, morally upright, and devoted to saving humanity from itself. But, like Achilles, he has a tragic flaw—exposure to kryptonite a substance that is found on the planet where he was born, renders him devoid of his awesome powers.

In mythology and legend, a hero is an individual, often of divine ancestry, who is endowed with great courage and strength, celebrated for bold exploits, and sent by the gods to Earth to play a crucial role in human affairs. Heroes are, thus, character signs embodying lofty human ideals for all to admire—truth, honesty, justice, fairness, moral strength, and so on. Rather than being sent by the gods from the afterworld to help humanity, Superman came to Earth instead from a planet in another galaxy; he leads a "double life," as hero and as Clark Kent, a "mild-mannered" reporter for a daily newspaper; he is adored by Lois Lane, a reporter for the same newspaper who suspects (from time to time) that Clark Kent may be Superman; and he wears a distinctive costume when he becomes Superman. This "Superman code" was (and continues to be) an adaptation of the ancient hero code. It changes in newer versions of Superman, because the times dictate it. For example, Superman has always been apolitical. Today that is no longer possible. America is no longer

perceived (by itself) as espousing the only version of truth and justice. So, the Superman code is adapting, incorporating social justice themes within it and relating these to the world of globalization.

Many of the ancient hero myths had several recurring themes that are worth mentioning here, since these are recycled in modern-day versions. First, like the Babylonian king Gilgamesh, heroes were sent typically away from their birthplace to avoid death, just as Superman had to leave the dying planet Krypton where he would have perished. Second, ancient heroes led an obscure early life, as does Superman. Third, many heroes lose their parents. Batman, Captain Marvel, Black Panther, and Cyclops have suffered this fate; Superman, actually, was given away by his parents, so that he could be saved, recalling the Oedipus legend. Fourth, heroes have superhuman powers. This is probably what we admire most in Superman, Spider-Man, and all the other action heroes of today. The tragic flaw is a fifth element in the code. Achilles had a weak heel; Superman had a fatal aversion to kryptonite; and Daredevil is weakened by blindness. Sixth, some heroes were protected by a magic weapon. The Norse god Thor possessed a hammer that could obliterate anything in the world. Spider-Man has web shooters, spider-tracers, and a versatile belt that creates an image of his mask, among other accoutrements and gadgets. Finally, the hero is unusually dedicated to help people and set things right in the world, since humanity is flawed by nature and needs guidance and help from a moral superior.

Although the foregoing discussion is a simplification of the hero code, not to mention that there is more than one hero code in mythological traditions, the main point is that myth has not disappeared from modernity. It is recycled in figures such as Superman. Movie adventurers and detectives too are cast like ancient heroes. Even in a modern urban world, we seemingly need myths to "make things right" in human affairs, at least in the realm of the imagination.

A classic remake of ancient hero mythology is the Hollywood western. In its prototypical form, the plot of the western revolved around a lonesome cowboy hero who wins a "high noon" gun duel and then rides off into the sunset, after making things right or righting wrongs. The cowboy hero is strong, handsome, honest, but also vulnerable. The cowboy villain has all the opposite traits—cowardice, physical ugliness, dishonesty, and cunning. The hero is beaten up at some critical stage, but against all odds he prevails through a test of superhuman strength and valor, becoming a champion of justice. Movie cowboy heroes such as Roy Rogers, John Wayne, Hopalong Cassidy, and the Lone Ranger have become part of cultural lore and nostalgia. The western myth is America's ersatz founding myth, extolling individualism and deriding weakness. The same mythological theme is present in movie and television heroes and heroines,

from Wonder Woman to James Bond. The details of the stories might change and might be updated in narrative detail, but the mythic code is the same.

As a final example of how myth continues to have emotional power consider the case of the *Star Wars* set of movies, which started under the directorship of American motion-picture director and producer George Lucas (b. 1944) and now are produced by the Walt Disney Company. Echoes of Greek dramatic style as well as classical mythical referents permeate this series of blockbuster movies. In a Greek tragedy, the story began typically with a prologue or monologue, explaining the topic of the tragedy. Episodes of *Star Wars* begin in the same manner through the use of rising text against the background of space: "A long time ago in a galaxy far away…." The *Star Wars* saga is also divided into individual episodes, released in a sequence that starts in *medias res* with the fourth episode being the first one released. Homer's *Iliad* is structured narratively in this manner. Significantly, the unifying theme of the series is the universal struggle between evil (the tyrannical Empire) and good (the Rebel Alliance). The villains appeared originally in futuristic white armor, covering the entire body from head to toe. Their leader, Darth Vader, stands in marked opposition semiotically, being entirely clothed in black and speaking with a low menacing tone of voice. White and black are not portrayed as opposing sides, but as forming a mythic code.

The hero of the movies cannot be identified as one particular figure, since a group of characters must work together for good to prevail. Luke Skywalker was one of them. As the story unfolds, Luke discovers that his father was a Jedi Knight, protecting the Old Republic. A Jedi Knight is one who has the ability to fight advantageously by using "the Force." Since Luke's father was once a person who possessed the Force, he is a descendent of the "other world." Luke's tragic flaw is, in effect, his yearning for a father. In line with the Greek tradition of tragic irony, Darth Vader turns out to be Luke's father—a fact suggestive of the Oedipus myth.

As a modern-day mythic tale based on the good versus evil opposition, *Star Wars* simply renames it as a battle between the Jedi and Sith. Members of the Jedi Order have dedicated themselves for thousands of generations to mastering the knowledge and tranquility found in the benevolent light side of the Force. They have pledged their lives to fight against evil, training physically and emotionally to live an austere life. By using the Force, they can manipulate the minds of the weak-willed, move objects telekinetically, peer into the future, move around at enormous speeds, and survive death with their consciousness intact. Recalling the biblical story of Lucifer, a renegade Jedi who succumbed to the dark side recruited other disenfranchised Jedi to his cause, declaring war on the Jedi Order. After a devastating battle, the fallen Jedi are

banished, settling in a far-flung planet (Korriban), becoming known as the Sith. Fueled by hatred and a never-ending thirst for power, the Sith and Jedi clash constantly. The collateral damage from these battles has devastated entire star systems. The Sith believe in conquering others, drawing their strength from the dark side of the Force, but are ultimately enslaved by it. As the popularity of *Star Wars* saga brings out, myths—ancient or recycled—continue to play an important role in human life, whether it is realized or not.

Urban Legends

The Internet has now entered the mythological realm, producing its own mythic stories and legends, known broadly as urban legends. Like the ancient myths, these are stories that are often portrayed as factual by those who circulate them, through the Internet, but that turn out typically to be not exactly as recounted. An urban legend may be untrue or true in part, recalling the ancient legends. Often, the events it describes are explainable in different ways. For example, a story about missing hitchhikers may be initiated by someone on Facebook, based on events that the originator had actually witnessed or experienced. When the narrative starts to circulate and is retold by different people, the story gathers momentum and an expanding narrative life of its own, becoming an urban legend. It may turn out to be totally untrue, or else explained as a series of disappearances with rational explanations (such as the possibility that the hitchhikers were homeless people who could not be located easily). But it often persists and continues to be told and retold, much like the ancient legends.

An example of an Internet-based urban legend is Slenderman, a fictional scary character, portrayed as a slim and very tall man with a featureless face. Slenderman was created on the Internet in 2009 and quickly became a Creepypasta Internet meme copied and pasted an enormous number of times throughout the Internet. Like the traditional stories of the bogeyman and other sinister characters of children's fable literature, Slenderman is in fact a scary and menacing figure who stalks and abducts children. There are variant narratives, depictions, and videos online that relate to the Slenderman legend. But as the legends of the past, Slenderman is believed by some children to be true. The near-fatal stabbing of a twelve-year-old girl in Waukesha, Wisconsin is attributed to the Slenderman meme. As this case showed, the world of the hyperreal, as Baudrillard claimed, is more real and perhaps more meaningful to people today than is the real world.[12] Two twelve-year-old classmates of the Wisconsin girl stabbed her nineteen times claiming under interrogation that

they had become proxies for the Slenderman, fearing that he would kill their families if they did not obey his behest to murder their classmate. The victim fortunately survived, and the two perpetrators were deemed to suffer from mental illness. One wonders, though, whether the illness was not induced by the Slenderman meme. As Richard Dawkins, the originator of the term *meme* long before the Internet, claimed, memes are just as transferable to others as are genes.[13] It could well be that nasty memes such as the Slenderman one are particularly transferable to susceptible individuals, like pubescent children whose emotions may be out of whack and needing balance.

This possibility is corroborated by the fact that the same meme "infected" other young people. On September 4, 2014, a fourteen-year-old girl in Florida allegedly set her own house on fire while her mother and little brother were inside. The teenager had been apparently inspired to do so by the Slenderman stories online. Alarmingly, a 2015 epidemic of suicide attempts by young people aged twelve to twenty-four years took place on the Pine Ridge Valley Indian Reservation. Slenderman was identified as a direct influence. It was not coincidental, according to tribal elders, that the Slenderman myth was consistent with the Native American belief in a suicide spirit similar to the online meme. Clearly, cyberspace and its memetic structure might be changing—or mutating—human mentality, taking it back to its primordial mythic form of consciousness where anything that appears in cyberspace is believable, whether or not it is real or true.

Food and Culture Myths

In many of the ancient mythic stories, food plays a prominent role as a symbolic artifact. This mythological association persists to this day. In American society, we tend not to eat rabbits, keeping them instead as pets. The reason is that rabbits have a mythic or archetypal status in our groupthink—think of all the stories we tell our children with rabbits in them (for example, the Easter Bunny and Bugs Bunny). Similarly, we do not eat cat and dog meat because such animals resonate with narrative-mythic meanings. Movies with cats and dogs in them as principal characters, in effect, show how deeply rooted our mythic connection to such animals is.

Claude Lévi-Strauss referred to the meanings associated with food as falling into two domains—"the raw" and "the cooked."[14] Raw food is just that—raw uncooked food. Cooked food is food that has been "humanized," so to speak; it is evidence of the human ability to transform nature into culture. According to Lévi-Strauss, this transformation was accomplished by two processes,

roasting and boiling, both of which were a result of the first technological advances made by humanity. Roasting implies a direct contact between the food and a fire and, thus, is technologically primitive. It is also associated initially with "the raw." Boiling reveals an advanced form of food treatment, since the cooking process is mediated by a pot and a sophisticated cooking process. Boiling is thus associated with "the cooked."

To get a firmer sense of the interconnection between culture and food, imagine being in a "Robinson Crusoe" situation. Robinson Crusoe, the hero of Daniel Defoe's 1719 novel of the same name, was a shipwrecked English sailor who survives for years on a small tropical island. Let's suppose that you have somehow been abandoned alone on an isolated island in the middle of nowhere, cut off from the rest of the world, to fend for yourself. Without the support and protection of society, your instincts will urge you on to survive in any way that you can. Clearly, your need for food and water will take precedence over everything else. In a basic sense, your state of living will be dependent on a purely biological level of existence. When your hunger becomes extreme, your tastes in food will hardly be guided by "good taste," notions of cuisine, or by any desire to have the food cooked. You will consume any raw flora or hunt any fauna that will satisfy your hunger. Eating food in such a drastic situation has only one function—survival.

Now, let's suppose that you discover other similarly abandoned people on another part of the same island. Since there is strength in numbers, you all decide to stay together as a group. To reduce the risk of not finding food and of not eating, the group decides to assign specific roles to each person for hunting food and for its preparation. After a period of time, what will emerge from these agreements is a proto-culture. As time passes, other social contracts and arrangements will undoubtedly be made, and the cooking of food will become more and more routine and subject to communal taste preferences.

The purpose of this vignette has been to argue that the cooking of food in prehistoric groups was the likely basis for the foundation of early culture. No wonder then that in early tribes, food—the source of survival—was offered to the gods. Food continues to be imbued with mythic and sacred meanings. Virtually all of the world's religious and folk traditions are centered on food, such as turkey meat at Thanksgiving, lamb at Easter, and so on. Food is a symbolic constituent of communal rituals and feasts such as weddings. The story of Adam and Eve in the Bible revolves around the eating of a forbidden fruit—subsequently portrayed in narratives and paintings as an apple, which is not coincidental. The discovery and cultivation of the apple date back to 6500 BCE in Asia Minor. Ramses II of Egypt cultivated apples in orchards along the Nile in the thirteenth century BCE. The ancient Greeks also cultivated apple trees

from the seventh century BCE onwards. They designated the apple "the golden fruit," since Greek mythology, like Christian doctrine, assigned a primordial significance to the apple. An apple from the Garden of the Hesperides was given to Hera as a wedding present when she married Zeus. The point of this excursus into the symbolic history of the apple is to underscore the point that some foods are imbued with mythic meaning across all cultures. Bread and lamb, for instance, invariably evoke latent mythic symbolism. This is why we talk of the *bread of life*, of *earning your bread*, of *sacrificial lambs*. Indeed, in some languages the same word is used for bread and life, such as the Egyptian Arabic word *aish*, which means in fact both "bread" and "life."

The origin of human culture is, arguably, the result of efforts to secure a stable source of food for a group and then to acknowledge its communal importance in rituals, rites, customs, and early myths. The critical importance of food as a sign system within a communal system of meaning-making was noted by the Greek historian Herodotus, who spent a large part of his life traveling through Asia, Babylon, Egypt, and Greece, recording the differences he perceived (with respect to Athenian culture) in the language, dress, food, etiquette, legends, and rituals of the different people he came across. As Herodotus discovered, food is an index of a culture's origins and a symbol of its mythic beliefs. These are carried unconsciously forward to present times. In American society, by and large, beef has value as food and is therefore part of cuisine; rabbit does not and is thus excluded from it, although it is as edible as beef. The reason is, as mentioned, that rabbits are defined as pets and thus as inedible as other companionship animals (dogs and cats, for example).

As prehistoric people began to interact with one another, they learned to behave in ways that made life easier and more pleasant. As they learned to plant crops and farm, the ability to store food led to communal eating events, acknowledging the value of food as a bond within the tribe. Early civilizations subsequently developed rules for proper conduct at meals and for including or excluding certain animals (or plants) from the rules. So, animal meats such as pork, beef, and lamb were defined in social terms, not as alternative sources of nourishment. Such rules became more formal during the Middle Ages, when young men training to become knights learned a code of conduct called *chivalry*. According to this code, a knight was devoted to the Christian church and his country and expected to treat women with great respect. He also was obligated to eat only certain "noble foods." Some aspects of this code became a traditional part of table manners throughout Europe, spreading to the emerging bourgeois middle classes. Much of today's formal etiquette originated in this way. The word "etiquette", incidentally, is traced to the French royal courts during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. King Louis

XIV drew up a daily list of events, organized around a specific time frame, place, and proper dress. It was posted in his palace at Versailles as an *etiquette*, French for "ticket," to assist the nobles in what to do. In time, upper classes throughout Europe adopted the code.

Cuisine is a style of cooking that defines food preparation and consumption in a specific region or country. It informs us not only as to what certain people eat, but also how they make it, and ultimately what it reveals about them. So, when one thinks of "Italian cuisine," for example, images of pasta, antipasti, and the like come to mind. Italian cuisine is, thus, indistinguishable from Italian ethnic identity and culture. To use the earlier example of the rabbit, many Italians perceive rabbits as a delicacy (in some regions). This shows that a specific food is part of a semiotic code. American society does not eat rabbits (outside of some rural areas), but it eats the meat of other animals such as cows and pigs. It also does not perceive foxes or dogs as edible food items; but the former is reckoned a delicacy in Russia, and the latter a delicacy in China.

It is interesting to note, parenthetically, that the ancient Romans were the ones who had domesticated the rabbit, which flourished throughout their empire as a source of food. In sixteenth-century England, rabbits were prized instead for their fur. For this reason, they were bred selectively in order to enhance their rich coats. In the nineteenth century, England passed strict game laws prohibiting rabbit hunting. In the remainder of the previous Roman Empire, however, rabbits continued to be perceived as food sources. By the turn of the twentieth century, rabbits were redefined in Anglo-American culture as household animals. The reinforcement of the anthropomorphic connotations that the rabbit has since taken on can be seen in the popularity of fictional rabbit characters (Bugs Bunny, the Easter Bunny, Benjamin Bunny) that have become a part of American childhood. Clearly, all this has nothing to do with the edibility of rabbits, but with their cultural value. Outside of those that have a demonstrably harmful effect on the human organism, the species of flora and fauna that are considered to be edible or inedible are very much the result of history and tradition. We cannot get nourishment from eating tree bark, grass, or straw. But we certainly could get it from eating frogs, ants, earthworms, silkworms, lizards, and snails. Most people in American culture might, however, respond with disgust at the thought of eating such potential food items. However, there are cultures where they are not only eaten for nourishment, but also as part of symbolic traditions.

So, how does the contemporary fast food, and even junk food, that we eat every day fit in with all this, the reader might legitimately ask? In a society where "fast living" and "the fast lane" are metaphors for the system of everyday life, everything seems indeed to be "moving too fast," leaving little time

for classic traditional food rituals. Is this the reason why people go to fast-food restaurants, where the food is affordable and the service fast?

Junk food constitutes an anomaly when it comes to notions of cuisine and even edibility. So, the question of what function it has in modern societies is hardly a trivial one. Hamburger is beef and eating beef has always been a common occurrence in traditional meals. But whereas a beef steak is part of the historical food code, hamburger is not. In other words, a beef steak and a hamburger form a cultural opposition. Several decades ago hamburgers were hardly construed as part of a viable cuisine; they were termed part of "junk food culture," aimed at young people by the fast-food industry. This situation has changed today. Hamburger is no longer viewed as "junk," but as a simple food option for people of any age or class, even if it still somewhat harbors the meaning of "unhealthy dietary food." Restaurants and various eateries now offer hamburgers as part of regular fare. The cultural definition of junk food has changed and the reason lies not in any scientific discovery related to any previously undetected nutritional benefits of junk food, but to shifts in the sociocultural order.

Some historical accounts of the hamburger indicate that it was sold at fairs, amusement parks, and other recreational venues in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The hamburger was produced for a specific purpose—to be part of a recreational venue. Any food item can be reconceptualized in this way. Take fried chicken. As such, it is part of traditional southern American cuisine where it would hardly be classified as fast food. But in the context of a Kentucky Fried Chicken food outlet, it would fall, even today, under that rubric. That same rubric would include not only fried chicken and hamburgers, but also candy bars, hot dogs, cupcakes, and the like.

It is believed that the term "junk food" was coined by Michael Jacobson, the director of the Center for Public Interest, in 1972. But, to the best of my own recollection, the term was being bandied about already in the 1950s, when a fully formed youth culture came into being. The term was used to refer to the perception that food such as hamburgers and hot dogs was injurious to health, but that teenagers ate it anyhow because it was cooked quickly, it was inexpensive, and it united adolescents as a distinct social group. It was commodified food for fast consumption and connected symbolically with youth culture.

Diners and fast-food eateries generally started appearing in the 1920s. They were locales serving mainly young people: hot dogs, milkshakes, and other fast foods were the core of the menu. Adults would visit such diners only on occasion, perhaps to treat their children. By the 1950s, the teenagers had their own burger and milkshake joints—locales designed to be socializing sites for adolescents. The food served at such places was viewed, correctly, to be "junk" injurious to one's health and only to be consumed by young people, since their

metabolism could ostensibly break it down more quickly and since they could purportedly recover from its negative health effects more easily than older people. However, very soon, junk food, promoted by effective advertising campaigns, became an indulgence sought by anyone of any age, from very young children to seniors. The compulsion to consume junk food has, consequently, became a fact of contemporary life, inducing unhealthy eating habits.

Today, restaurant chains serving fast food have been rebranded as casual dining chains. They have thus been renamed quick-service restaurants (QSR). The total revenue of QSRs is estimated to amount to more than 200 billion US dollars annually. Junk food is no longer "junk." It is part of popular cuisine—a cuisine with few if any historical ties to either the American settlers or to European cuisine traditions. The exception has become virtually the norm.

As indirect proof of this, it is interesting to note that fast foods or beverages have become themselves signs in pop culture. Pizza, for example, has played roles in movies such as *Mystic Pizza* (1988) and *Pizza* (2005). Coffee too has played a semiotic role in the movies. In the 1998 film *You've Got Mail* coffee is everywhere. The coffee bar in the bookstore offers a variety of flavors and preparations, mirroring the flavors and modalities of modern romance. As Tom Hanks explains in an email to Meg Ryan:

> The whole purpose of places like Starbucks is for people, with no decision- making ability what-so-ever, to make six decisions, just to buy one cup of coffee! Short, tall, light, dark. Café, decaf, low fat, non-fat, etc…So people don't know what they are doing or what the hell they are getting, and only for $2.95, not just a cup of coffee but an absolute defining sense of self. Tall, decaf cappuccino.

Analogously, in the 2000 film *What Women Want*, Mel Gibson meets up with Marisa Tomei in the coffee shop where she works. Gibson orders a "mochaccino" with extra foam. Tomei then asks him to specify the size he wants: "tall" or "grande." At this point there is a pause, allowing us to realize that the question is laden with sexual innuendoes. Gibson proceeds to tell Tomei that he is getting a promotion: "Come with me, celebrate, I'll buy you a cup of coffee." She replies: "Memo, for you: I work in a coffee shop!"

Quentin Tarantino chose a diner for the opening scene of his 1994 movie *Pulp Fiction*, introducing the main characters sitting across from each other as they sip coffee. The waitress politely interrupts by asking, "Can I get anyone more coffee?" Suddenly discussions of criminal activity between two characters become loud and a robbery ensues. We are taken back to the coffee shop at the end of the movie, where we see the conclusion of the first scene. Coffee is indeed a symbol of modern-day society. The coffee shop is an oasis in a

barren human wasteland, where conversation and social interaction can return to a previous dignified state (at least according to Hollywood). From an intimate encounter in an upscale bistro between two past and future lovers in *The Family Man* (2000), to a seedy dark corner of a ghetto in *A Man Apart* (2003), coffee is a vehicle of conversation and human warmth—at least in the world of fantasy.

In sum, the story of food is a side story of human history itself. It shows that the only way to grasp the meaning of something is to relate it to its narrative and mythic functions. These are constantly at work in human life, as Freud and Jung certainly understood.

Notes

1. Nigel Hamilton, *Biography: A brief history* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 2.
2. David Lodge, "Narration with words." In *Images and Understanding*, edited by H. Barlow, C. Blakemore, and M. Weston–Smith, 141 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
3. Vladimir J. Propp, *Morphology of the folktale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1928).
4. Algirdas J. Greimas, *On meaning: Selected essays in semiotic theory*, translated by Paul Perron and Frank Collins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
5. Friedrich M. Müller, *Lectures on the science of language* (London: Longmans, Green, 1861).
6. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962).
7. Eric Csapo, *Theories of mythology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 220.
8. A good analysis of this is found in David Leeming, *Myth: A biography of belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
9. Robert A. Segal, *Myth: A very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 142.
10. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957).
11. In *The meaning of sports* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2005), Michael Mandelbaum aptly characterizes the reverence for sport as a quasi-religious experience.
12. Baudrillard, *Simulations*, op. cit.
13. Richard Dawkins, *The selfish gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).
14. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The raw and the cooked* (London: Cape, 1964).

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