

LESSONS IN MYTHOLOGY



A Comparative Approach

EDITED BY

Edmund P. Cueva and Deborah Beam Shelley

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INTRODUCTION

When I was a little girl, I feared “Tall Betsy” more than just about anything. Tall Betsy was a hateful creature who would come to take away bad children when they misbehaved—or so my grandmother told us. When we got a little out of control, my grandmother would call out in terror, “Oh, Lordy, look! Here comes Tall Betsy! I told you she would come if you didn’t start behaving.” One glance out the window at a tall, skinny, white presence coming down the street toward my grandmother’s house was enough to send us screaming and running to hide in the little closet in the back of the house. The closet had a tiny window that we could peek out of just enough to see Tall Betsy. Fortunately, once we ran and hid, terrified into submission, we would see Tall Betsy would turn around and walk back down the street. Once she was beyond our sight as we cowered in the little closet, my grandmother would come to tell us that we had been spared Tall Betsy’s wrath once again.

Oh course, Tall Betsy wasn’t real, although she seemed real enough to us at the time. She was a myth—a story that my grandmother had created to keep her unruly grandchildren in line. It was years before I figured out that Tall Betsy was actually the lady who lived down the street; when my cousins and I got a little out of control, my grandmother (who everyone called “Tom,” although no one seemed to know why, but that’s another myth) would call up her neighbor to say that it was time for Tall Betsy to make an appearance. The neighbor would get her broom, drape a white sheet over it, and carry it so that the broom was as high up as possible; with the sheet covering the lady’s face, it made her look about 10 feet tall. She would then come out into her yard and start walking down the street toward my grandmother’s house. This story, this myth, had a purpose, a specific function, and it worked very well in accomplishing what it was intended to do, and that was to help my grandmother keep her unruly little darlings in line. We didn’t know where Tall Betsy came from or what she would do to us if she ever made it to our house, but we quickly learned when our behavior was inappropriate, and we also learned that our actions always involved consequences. My grandmother’s myth helped to explain one inexplicable aspect of a world filled with wonder and mystery for a bunch of noisy children, and such is the stuff from which myths are created.

The word “myth” comes from the Greek word “mythos,” meaning story. Humans, by nature, have always been storytellers, from the very first people to communicate with gestures and signs to those who drew elaborate paintings on cave walls to the 12th century minstrels with their bawdy poems and songs to the modern-day storytellers with their evocative words and vivid imagery that can carry us away to far-off places and fanciful times just as easily as their graphic descriptions can bring us right back down to earth to confront the horror that exists here today. Myths are the stories of us; they tell us how we got here, where we came from, what we are supposed to do, why it rains some days and not others, why grass turns green and flowers bloom in the spring, and why leaves turn colors before they die in the winter. They have helped us comprehend the incomprehensible, explaining the more perplexing aspects of our lives, not necessarily with truths but with justifications, rationalizations, and clarifications that make it easier for us to understand the world in which we live. They have helped us learn about others since the elements of human stories—death, life, beauty, courage, friendship, betrayal, etc.—transcend time and space, making them universal and creating a connection among all human beings. Myths are not just about explaining different aspects of life; they are our lives.

In looking at various definitions of the word “myth,” one such definition I encountered described myth as “...a *traditional narrative usually involving supernatural or imaginary persons and embodying popular ideas on natural or social phenomena*...” I remember, as a little girl, asking my father if Santa Claus was real, and I will never forget his answer: “As long as you believe in Santa Claus, he will continue to come.” Well, that was all the justification, rationalization, or clarification that I needed! I continued to believe in Santa and do so until this day, and as sure as my father said it, Santa Claus does come to my house every year. He may not come down the chimney in a red suit and with a bag of toys, but he is surely there. The Santa Claus myth is certainly a traditional narrative in that stories told of Santa (in some form) have been passed down from one generation to another for hundreds of years. By necessity, the Santa Claus myth involves a supernatural or imaginary person since any version of Santa would have difficulty traveling the 122 million miles necessary to visit all good children of the world in just one night. Finally, if you consider that Christmas is celebrated by almost 45% of the world’s population, it is safe to say that the myth embodies a popular idea about a social phenomenon. Santa represents the very spirit of Christmas—the idea of giving (whether gifts, our time, or ourselves) as a symbol of love for those around us, even for those we may not know. And that spirit is

definitely there with us, without fail, every single year, just as my father promised. So while Santa Claus (the man) may not be real, Santa (the myth) will play an important role in my life forever.

People utilize myths for a myriad of reasons, and the very concept of myth evokes different responses for different people. For some, the word may elicit memories of fairy tales read to them by their parents when they were children. Others may visualize mysterious or exotic locales—foggy swamps and trees dripping with moss or dark forests with rustling leaves and strange un-human sounds to abandoned houses with creaky stairs or starships fighting with laser swords and death rays. Some may recall hazy visions of pleasant experiences from days gone by while still others may recollect stories that were not even close to being accurate representations of their experiences in life. Some myths exist only in our imaginations while others remind us much too clearly of pain and suffering that is all too real. People have created, changed, passed on, and abandoned myths from the beginning of time and will probably continue to do so for whatever function those myths serve in their lives.

We each have our own special reasons for keeping myths alive, reasons that are very important to us but that may not seem that significant to others. We often forget that myths can serve so many distinct functions and that their use and interpretation can be so unique and even dissimilar for different people. This book attempts to take some of those unique and distinct functions and interpretations into consideration as we look at myth and how it is applied, used, and interpreted in a variety of ways and in numerous contexts by individuals from different backgrounds and disciplines and with very different points of view.

Chapter One, “Your Personal Myth,” compares the ancient myth to contemporary personal narratives. Are they the same, and do they serve the same function for the people who use them? Ancient myths were created to explain the inexplicable; do today’s individuals use their stories as a way of understanding their own lives? Quoting from Chapter One, personal narratives are told “so the teller...can heal and reconcile the inexplicable circumstances that painted his/her life,” and, hopefully, “can confront traumas...and put them to rest...” The author of Chapter One believes in the power of journaling as a pathway to personal healing.

Chapter Two, “Nothing There,” takes a modern approach to myth as the author explains the creation of the Rothko Chapel, located in Houston, Texas and designed by artist Mark Rothko. In this chapel, Rothko has created a sacred, spiritual space, a “tranquil place of contemplation on a mythic scale” so that, upon entering, one is almost compelled to silence and meditation in a most intimate fashion. What makes the Rothko Chapel

mythic is that the space is completely devoid of anything remotely related to religion. There is no cross, no altar, no paintings or sculptures, nor any form of religious iconography present anywhere within the chapel.

Chapter Three, “Mythmaking in the Franco Regime,” attempts to demythologize the extensive effort to establish Franco as a brilliant Spanish military strategist, when, in fact, his actions unnecessarily prolonged the 1936–1939 civil war. This essay mainly focuses on a mural of Franco, appearing as a triumphant medieval crusader, with an image above him of St. James the Moor-Slayer (who fought for the Christians of Spain against the Moors in the Battle of Clavijo in 844). The pairing of the beloved and highly revered St. James along with Franco projects the image of a triumphant Franco who saved Spain rather than the cruel and sometimes clumsy general who made numerous military mistakes.

Chapter Four, “Beowulf’s Weapons: Origin and Animism,” takes an ancient approach to myth in literature. Primarily drawing on examples from *Beowulf*, this chapter discusses the ancient belief in animism and, in particular, the belief that an inanimate object could be spiritual, possessing a soul. This object could then take on a life of its own, involving itself with human affairs and helping or harming human interests, as with various swords, shields, and other weapons used by warriors in ancient battles.

Chapter Five, “Abjection in Grimms’ ‘Rumpelstiltskin’: A Mythic Paradigm of Masculinity’s Countertype,” looks at myth in literature from a completely different standpoint than that taken in the previous chapter. Using the definition of myth as a “naturalized particular and formulaic way of thinking about individuals and social relationships,” the author looks at Rumpelstiltskin and the construction of an identity of abject masculinity that drastically deviates from the 18th century ideal of German masculinity, leaving Rumpelstiltskin a distinctly ambiguous countertype.

Chapter Six, “Living the Myth: The Authorial Life of Walt Whitman,” again focuses on the use of myth and the construction of identity—in this case, the identity of the relatively unknown poet, Walt Whitman. In 1855, Whitman published his first edition of a volume of poems entitled *Leaves of Grass* that included a description of his enjoyment of the sensual pleasures of life. He was immediately criticized and rejected for that very same reason: his writings were considered too sexually explicit for the time. Whitman then spent the rest of his life rewriting *Leaves of Grass* while creating the myth of himself as the beloved “America’s Poet.”

Chapter Seven is about The Myth of Beauty and Goodness: Why is Evil so Sexy? This essay focuses on the strong belief that we have come to

accept, at least in this society, that beauty and goodness are synonymous and that it is more important to look good than to be good. Not only are attractive people privileged, often with feelings of entitlement, but their attractiveness can sometimes act as a shield to hide their evil behavior, all because we cannot get past the myth that just because someone looks good doesn't mean that they are.

Chapter Eight, "A World without Myth," discusses the concept of myth and its meaning today. There is so much violence, destruction, unnecessary deaths, and unspeakable torture, and for what? The author contends that much of the depravity present in today's world is myth-inspired—that people take myths and use them and twist them around for their own purposes to justify and even condone their actions and then, when necessary, blame the myth for what they have done.

These eight chapters take the reader full circle in terms of the uses and purposes of myth, from viewing personal narrative as a form of healing myth to observing the atrocities committed daily arising from the most destructive form of myth. Myths have existed from the beginning of the human race in a myriad of forms and serving a myriad of functions. Humans have always been storytellers and always will be. They are a part of the lives of every single person; they are the story of us.

Deborah Shelley

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CHAPTER ONE

YOUR PERSONAL MYTH

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Your Personal Mythology can bring you Peace

Just as the most pronounced purpose of a myth is to explain the inexplicable, so is the unmistakable function of personal narratives. Are they similar? Is there a relationship between the ancient myth and the contemporary personal narrative? Researchers in rhetorical studies suggest that the individual mythology of modern men and women is a synonym for their collective psychology. We tend to experience unusual states and step into troubling dilemmas. Dilemmas ignite tension, and tension is a component of every myth—at times, even parallel myths because we search for answers that often do not exist. A friend recently reflected about his mother's death. He was seventeen at the time. I will paraphrase:

I guess her last days, the days when she was conscious, were the hardest. Her bed was downstairs to make it easier for family and friends to visit her. I remember one morning; early morning; very early in the morning, my great aunt came over, along with some cousins. You know what my mother asked me to do? She told me to make coffee. Coffee? You want me to make coffee? I did, but I hated it. I was mad at my relatives for being alive and being able to drink coffee. I was angry with my mother too. I couldn't believe she wanted me to make coffee because I thought she'd want me with her every moment. I made coffee. The dog howled. I felt strange. I went back into my mother's room. She was dead. I think she waited for me to leave the room before dying. I think about that every night. I don't know what to do with it. But I can't let it go.

This oblique deliberation came from nowhere. There was no prompting from me. There was no logical segue into his narrative. He simply told it to me. He wanted to explain the inexplicable. My friend's revelation was

not unlike the one made by Apollo in *Phaethon, Son of Apollo* by Olivia Coolidge.¹ To summarize:

You are indeed my son and Clymene's, and worthy to be called so. Ask of me whatever thing you wish to prove your origin to me, and you shall have it. Phaethon swayed for a moment and was dizzy with excitement. He felt truly divine. He looked up at his radiant father and said, "Let me drive the chariot of the sun across the heavens for the day." Apollo frowned and shook his head. I cannot break my promise, but I will dissuade you if I can. How can you drive the chariot, whose horses need a strong hand on the reins? The climb is too steep. It is treacherous. Phaethon's pride was stubborn. When his father saw that nothing else would satisfy the boy, he bade the Hours bring forth his chariot and yoke the horses.... At the first the fiery horses sped off to the accustomed trail, but behind them the chariot was too light. It swayed. Phaethon could not keep control.... Phaethon and the horses fell like stone to the earth below. The chariot broke into pieces. Unhappy Clymene, the grieving god, and his sisters turned Phaethon into poplar trees. And Apollo, the great god, was tender like a father. He cried. He cried forever.

The significance of these illustrations must be made clear: they are told so that the teller (or protagonist) can heal and reconcile the inexplicable circumstances that painted his or her life.

Sometimes a personal narrative can smack more of a confession than a testimonial. Such is the case in journal entries. The very act of writing can be an avenue to that interior place where, free of pain and doubt, we can confront traumas or, if you will, our Greek tragedies, and put them to rest so we can then heal both body and mind. The words we write in a journal may be raw, but they can have a healing power even if they are never read by another human being. Still, they are stories. They contain those necessary particles that make a story and, more importantly, contain the overwhelming desire by the teller to understand, absorb, and gain clarity from the paralyzing circumstance that first fueled the need to journal. Like the myth, we rely on the power of the past tense for perspective and for providing a profound voice.

Rhetorical theorist Kenneth Burke reinforces the human need for telling stories to explain the troubling and perplexing episodes in our lives. Like others, he sees these stories "as resembling myth" since we structure our past experiences much like the structure in a myth. In a sense, Burke views a human narrative like a personal mythology: a story of a life seen

¹ Olivia Coolidge, *Greek Myths* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2001), 12–14.

looking backward.² The application is in the form of dramatism. Burke sees life as one dramatic episode after another, with each episode forming its own structured story. To Burke, a set of basic terms (Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, Purpose) describes how people discuss human motives. The “act” refers to all human action (e.g., I always take candy from the bowl). The “scene” is the context—another physical or abstract setting that has bearing on the action (e.g., the candy was too tempting, sitting there in the bowl). The “agent” refers to the people who perform the action (e.g., my sister told me you’d say it was alright). The “agency” is the channel or vehicle used to perform the act (e.g., the stool was next to the counter where the bowl was sitting, so it was easy to snatch the candy). Finally, the “purpose” explicitly names the motives of a given agent (e.g., I needed the candy because I was starving). When each term is applied correctly, one’s myth is formed, thus making it easy to construct a past experience in story form.

Walter Fisher concurs. The intellect, he believes, has a propensity for storytelling. We are indeed natural storytellers. It’s the way we structure our past experiences and, in some ways, create reality.³ We view and shape our lives largely through the process of storytelling and thus become mythical beings. When someone asks, “What happened?” Fisher claims we construct a story around the question. Such constructs are, according to several scholars, an attempt not only to portray but also to find meaning.

In her book, *Storycatcher: Making Sense of Our Lives through the Power and Practice of Story*, Christina Baldwin helps us to better grasp the notion of our personal myth. She writes,

Something is happening in the moment. Something is happening in our story and we don’t yet know it. We are just in it. We live in a story like a fish lives in water. We swim through words and images siphoning story through our minds the way a fish siphons water through its gills.⁴

Baldwin’s insight is remarkably close to the premise behind the film, *Big Fish*. The movie centers on Edward, an affable and spirited man whose stock in trade is the tall tale. However amplified his stories appear to be throughout the film, his tales turned out to be not as tall as they first seemed. Edward’s tales reflected the colorful range of experiences that

² Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968), 421–423.

³ Walter R. Fisher, “The Narrative Paradigm: An Elaboration,” *Communication Monographs* 52 (1985): 347–367.

⁴ Christina Baldwin, *Storycatcher: Making Sense of Our Lives through the Power and Practice of Story* (Novato, California: New World Library, 2005), 77.

touched the lives of countless characters who beautifully unfurled in each of his stories.

Edward's son, Will, thought of his father as a fraud whose inflated tales represented his inability to show his authentic self. Because Edward's fragmented life (catalogued into memorable episodes) was the heart of the film, it was at the end of the story, or, with poetic symbolism, at the end of Edward's life, when Will and Edward finally connected. While sitting by his father's hospital bed, Edward presses Will to retell the story about how he (Edward) would die. It was a story Edward told Will many years ago.

Edward claimed that when he and his friends were very young, they learned how they would die by glaring into the glass eye of the most feared witch in Alabama. To appease his father, Will agrees to retell the story. As he begins, Will responds to his own telling with a surprising blend of warmth and humor, as if he was hearing the story for the first time. The definition of Edward's life peaked when Will recounts the part of the story when he and his father reached the river. To paraphrase:

I gently carry you from the car to the riverbank, and you wave to the cheers of your loving friends who have gathered to convey their final farewells to the man they love so dearly. Everyone and I mean everyone was there. And the thing of it is no one looked sad. Everyone was so happy to see you. Then, I carry you into the river, you hand your ring to Mom who is waiting in the river for us, and I gently place you in the water.⁵

After the retelling, we return to the hospital room as Will, reflecting on the end of the story, smiles, wipes the tears from his eyes, and whispers to his father, "You became what you always wanted to be, a big fish." "Exactly," Edward answers. And he passes peacefully. Moments later we see Will and his wife at the funeral as they see the same characters his father described in his stories. Each character is just as his father described, only not as fantastic as Will had imagined them. This can be seen as the consummate human connection.

Stories help people connect with one another. It is that simple, and it is that profound. I remember an old Hassidic quotation that says it best: "What's truer than truth? The story."

⁵ *Big Fish*, directed by Tim Burton and Daniel Wallace (United States: Columbia Tristar Home Entertainment, 2003).

The Case of a Storyteller Searching for Truth: Explaining the Inexplicable

To claim that myths can help us find answers to perplexing life questions in a very challenging and often confusing world is a bold statement. However, focusing on the case of one person can sometimes be enough to offer the depth and detail necessary to become more accepting of such a defiant proposition. As a result, it might be easier to see how the myth and personal narrative share the primary function of trying to explain the inexplicable.

Author and storyteller, Joel Ben Izzy, compiled a series of myths from China, India, Russia, and Israel and included them in *The Beggar King and the Secret of Happiness*, a project that spawned from his unfortunate life-changing twist in the summer of 1997 when he was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. Usually treatable, the case of this storyteller's illness manifested into a strange complication when Izzy awoke from surgery to discover that he could no longer speak.

To one who relied on telling stories in oral form as a living, this complication begged the question about something for which there was no true answer: "Why me?" The tension and intense personal conflict from which Izzy harnessed the courage to seek answers wasn't even disclosed in the book he wrote for the purpose of finding those answers. The tension within his soul was indeed secondary to the explicit themes (e.g., loss, luck, love, persistence, pride, etc.) that mounted the myths. Rather than conveying the raw, debilitating emotions that ignited this frightened and perplexed storyteller to produce the book, each theme is exquisitely camouflaged by cultural wit and wisdom, with each representing the self-imposed inquiries asked relentlessly by Izzy during his journey into self-discovery. As Joel Ben Izzy says in the prologue:

Sit back and let me tell you my tale, of a journey that took me through dark times, yet gave me a gift that I treasure. That gift is this story, which I now pass on to you a tale of lost horses and found wisdom, of buried treasures and wild strawberries, of the beggar king and the secret of happiness.⁶

Unless we research Izzy's past, there are no clues that a bout with thyroid cancer was the impetus behind the collection of themes discovered within the numerous myths found in this book. In fact, when you begin to read his collection, it's hard not to feel that you are being taken on a

⁶ Joel Ben Izzy, *The Beggar King and the Secret of Happiness* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2005), 1–2.

fanciful journey into the unknown, meandering from one story to another without any apparent destination. None of the myths contained in the *Beggar King* reveal Izzy as the protagonist. None of the stories disclose any kind of health scare as the incentive for including it in the book. None of the plots of any of the stories are remotely similar to Izzy's life. There are no clear parables that surface conveniently near the end of a story to make the lesson behind the myth clear to the casual reader. What each story does provide are reasons to laugh, to cry, and to hope.

The protagonist, plot, conflict, and even the mandatory components to every story (the punch line), along with the tension that defined the writer's purpose for constructing the book, are not within waving distance of the reader's perceptual threshold when compared to the deliberate and descriptive themes woven brilliantly into each myth. What Izzy does so poignantly is to take his readers on a journey, then return them safely to the present. We are compelled to reflect alongside Izzy, contemplating answers to the puzzling dilemmas that dot our daily lives. And Izzy brilliantly offers a collection of myths that end abruptly, much like the unforeseen and frightening personal scrimmage we may encounter when receiving shocking news that could change our lives dramatically. "The Strawberry," a Zen Buddhist tale found in the *Beggar King*, is an example of such a myth. To paraphrase:

A Zen master had traveled to a distant village. As he was running late for his return train, he decided to take what he thought was a shortcut. He found himself walking along a steep path, staring off into the distance. So taken was he by the beauty of the view that he did not notice where he was walking. At that instant, he kicked a small stone and, a moment later, realized that he did not hear it land. He stopped, only to discover that he stood atop a huge cliff. Another step and he would have walked right off, to a hundred-foot drop below. As he stood there, gazing out at the mountains in the distance, he was suddenly shaken by a loud roar. He turned around to see a huge tiger slowly approaching. He took a step to the side, only to have the ground crumble beneath his feet. Falling off the edge of the cliff, heels overhead, his hands reached out to grab whatever might save him. An instant later, he found himself clinging with one hand to a thorny vine, growing out of a crack in the rock. He looked up to the top of the cliff, where he saw the tiger, licking his lips. His eyes searched far below him, to the bottom of the cliff. There, looking up at him waited a second tiger. With one tiger above and another below, he looked again at the vine, its sharp thorns cutting into his hand. Near the vine, he saw a tiny mouse crawl out. It scampered along a tiny ledge to the vine, looked at him for a moment, then looked at the tiger, and finally began to gnaw at the vine. The monk searched for anything else he might grab, but there was nothing. Then, far off to his side, he spotted a tiny plant. Surely, it was too

small to hold his weight, but he reached for it just the same. It had green leaves, and as he parted them, he glimpsed something small and red. It was a wild strawberry plant, with one perfectly ripe strawberry. He plucked it from the plant and ate it. And as he did so he thought, "Isn't life sweet?"⁷

The ever-present, single, and very solitary moment that one must live without wavering, or not at all, is a common theme found throughout the *Beggar King*. The question "Why Me?" is never once asked, even implicitly, in any of the myths found between the covers of this volume. After all, it isn't a question that can adequately field the inexplicable.

The case of Joel Ben Izzy isn't a profound one. In fact, it represents the simplest of cases: a man turns to myth as a method for engaging in self-talk, and by enticing readers to travel on the abstract and ambiguous roads with him, he engages us in dialogue of the richest kind. When we read Izzy's story, we are compelled to ask, "Why?" whereas some rhetoricians historically ask, "Why Not?" An example is narrative theorist Walter Fisher. He views myth as getting us ready for anything, especially the fear of the inexplicable that alone can impoverish the existence of the individual. Fisher's contention is to be prepared for whatever life brings. His advice would be to "expect everything and be surprised by nothing." To be accepting of troubling times is what Fisher insinuates. Still, most of us want answers. Myths give us "mythical" answers to how the world began, how creatures and plants came into being, and why certain things in the cosmos have certain qualities. They may also help us to understand why monkeys look for trouble, why rabbits have wiggly noses, and why the sun and moon live in the sky. However, finding ways in which myths can help humans reconcile even the most devastating, most inconceivable episodes in their lives, as in the case of Joel Ben Izzy, could be the most valuable function of the well-crafted myth.

Summary and Final Remark

What is pronounced in a myth is its function as a potentially responsive and resourceful set of answers to perplexing questions. If used wisely, the myth can heal the human heart, mind, and soul.

The pieces that mold a myth aren't scientific. They are more powerful than science. They are about knowing that the story of our lives makes us mythical, and that's a good thing. It allows us to understand who we are and to what we have to ascribe some meaning. Knowing the stories of our lives mandates that we are able to document the stories of our lives.

⁷ Ibid., 156–158.

For me, telling stories is one of the most human of all acts. Each time we retell stories, they evolve, as does all myth. Sometimes the evolving nature of telling and retelling has us wondering if our lives are nothing more than distorted episodes, prone to fabrication and the like. In truth, when our mind constructs a story, we crystallize memorable images of our lives. Sometimes those images change based on the audience. What does not change is the awesomeness of it all.

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CHAPTER TWO

NOTHING THERE: THE MARK ROTHKO CHAPEL AND ITS MODERN APPROACH TO MYTH

SUSAN J. BAKER

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON-DOWNTOWN

Tucked away between a tall hedge and a low trimmed grass lawn, sheltered from the hot grey urban noise of Houston, rests the Rothko Chapel.¹ (Fig. 1) The building, first designed by Phillip Johnson and then completed by Howard Barnstone, is specifically styled after the Church of Santa Fosca in Torcello, Italy, and is like any number of such shaped Christian structures.² In every other feature, however, the chapel is unexpected, particularly the fourteen large non-figurative canvases by Mark Rothko, perhaps his most difficult paintings to understand, yet which transform the interior into a tranquil place of contemplation on a mythic scale. (Fig. 2)

Plans for this somber yet spiritual space began as early as 1962 when John and Dominique de M enil first met the artist. A warm friendship with Rothko was forged when the De M enils admired a group of paintings that Rothko had done for a New York restaurant, a commission from which he had withdrawn largely because of his dislike of the intended light and commercial environment for the work. Rothko found the De M enils more sympathetic to his pictorial aims than his previous patron had been, and before long they were in discussions about the creation of a Houston chapel.

¹ My thanks to Mark Cervenka, Associate Professor of Art and painter, for his insights on experiencing the Rothko Chapel.

² See Dominique de M enil, "The Rothko Chapel," *Art Journal* 30, no. 3 (Spring, 1971): 249–250.

The commission offered Rothko the opportunity to create something equivalent to a secular hymn in physical form, a place only peripherally religious in any traditional sense. As a site for mystical contemplation, this modern chapel is comparable only to Henri Matisse's Chapel of Our Lady of the Rosary in the southeast of France, realized some twenty years earlier. The Houston chapel installation of paintings is the culmination of three decades of Rothko's pictorial quest for an expression of the mythic in contemporary pure plastic form (plasticity meaning the building blocks of colors, forms, and arrangements that an artist uses to evoke a psychic idea). The large color fields that define the interior space of the chapel replace the need for Christian or other religious iconography to evoke the mysteries of the divine. Here, the color interaction and placement of the large-scale canvases convey something mythic without reliance on symbolism or narratives. As will become evident, Rothko's chapel allows the viewer to experience, in a directly perceptible way, the dichotomies between the physical and the mystical, the earthly and the heavenly, the real and the mythic. The worshipper is also obliged to confront a divinity that, if it exists, is impossible to know with any certainty. For Rothko, the chapel was an opportunity to clarify, in architectural language, the primitive emotions perpetuating man's mythic search for meaning.

Not everyone likes what Rothko built, but he did not expect that many would. He told a colleague he wanted "to make something you don't want to look at."³ Visitors often react to the interior of the Rothko Chapel with confusion. Others find it depressing or at least gloomy. Individuals adhering to fundamental religious beliefs can find it irreverent in its lack of commitment to any institutionalized doctrine. The problem may be that, at first, there seems to be nothing there; the chapel houses no typical icons from the Christian or any other religious or mythic traditions. It seemingly contains only dark vacuous canvases hung around a quasi-octagonal interior.

Can a dim, ostensibly empty space, void of any iconography, be (or at least occupy the same place in the human imagination) an illustrated myth? Traditionally, myths have been defined as narratives or stories that rise up from the collective that help societies make sense of themselves, their origins, and their existence. Mythic narratives frequently contain heroes, sometimes with miraculous births and endowed with superhuman abilities, who confront adversity, either leading to triumph or death. Traditional Christian chapels have been decorated for generations by the myths of sacred heroes of the faith—champions of the godly life often

³ According to Ulfert Wilke in *Mark Rothko, A Biography*, ed. James E. B. Breslin (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 469.

martyred for their beliefs. Could nonfigurative, broadly painted grounds of color, as found carefully arranged within the Houston chapel, evoke the mythic without such glorious story telling? Rothko found a way to do so.

From his early career, Rothko was fascinated with how myths captured primordial human emotions, especially feelings of terror and loss. Born in 1903 to Russian Jewish parents, Rothko witnessed, along with the rest of the world, increasing aggression against Jewish peoples, culminating in the Holocaust. While his parents had very early on immigrated to America, Rothko found mythic stories of violence and tragedy increasingly relevant, given news from Europe. Rothko most admired how primitive art depicted mythic tragedies. He wrote:

Primitive art is the “manifestation of terror, the symbolization of man’s basic horror of insecurity, in which the environment was a mist of terrors, darkness, and evil forces in both his waking and sleeping state while conscious life was the eternal fending off the powers of evil who would destroy him.”⁴

It is not surprising that Rothko’s career would culminate in an installation of fourteen nearly black paintings that so perfectly express the tragic events of the twentieth century.

The De Ménils were devout Catholics, yet they felt comfortable commissioning a Jewish artist to realize the chapel, perhaps because they valued Rothko’s life-long curiosity about expressions of spirituality from ancient to modern times. Dominique de Ménéil understood,

It might be an important sign that we cannot represent Jesus or his apostles anymore.... Only in the exaltation of the Renaissance was it possible for Michelangelo to still represent God as a bearded man, but nobody is visually naïve any longer. We are cluttered with images, and only abstract art can bring us in the threshold of the divine.⁵

The De Ménils were also content to establish the chapel as interdenominational. For Rothko, all religions and myths had their origins in primitive experience, as did the subsequent symbolisms invented to express understandings of the divine. A review of Rothko’s development as an artist will clarify how he came to design the chapel to capture a

⁴ Mark Rothko in *Mark Rothko: The Artist’s Reality, Philosophies of Art*, by Christopher Rothko (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 108.

⁵ Dominique de Ménéil quoted in David E. Brauer’s “Space as Spirit” in *Image of the Not-Seen: Search for Understanding: The Rothko Chapel Art Series*, eds. K. C. Eynatten, Kate Hutchins, and Don Quaintance (Houston: The Rothko Chapel, 2007), 43.

collective human wisdom and to provoke questions that all religious expressions ask about the nature of their gods.

Rothko's interest in primitive religions began with his studies of ancient Greece. Rothko was especially curious about the perseverance of Greek myth into modern times. He believed that the Greek stories or images, like those illustrated on Geometric and Archaic style ceramic vases, captured primal emotions tied to early man's experiences. The subsequent narratives and symbols were invented to carry those memories. The powerful emotions sustained in these myths served as impetus for these narratives to be passed on from generation to generation into modern times. In a radio address, Rothko stated that myths endured,

because they are the symbols of man's primitive fears and motivations, no matter in which land or what time, changing only in detail but never in substance.... And modern psychology finds them persisting still in our dreams, our vernacular, and our art, for all the changes in the outward conditions of life.⁶

Rothko believed, however, that it was the abstract elements found in the earliest realizations of these myths (the Geometric or Archaic periods of Greece, for example, rather than the later more naturalizing Classical or Hellenistic) that evoked the greatest emotions in the viewer. The plastic elements alone (the forms used rather than the story being told) could act upon the viewer to weld up in him the same emotional memories triggered by the reading of mythic tales; thus, abstractions offered a uniquely powerful and collective expression when compared to realistic illustrations of specific mythic narratives.

How did Rothko come to the conclusion that the earliest abstract renderings of Greek myths, like the pure color fields of his chapel, were equal in their ability to express the human emotions and desires typically evoked by the mythic narratives themselves? The answer in part lies in Rothko's artistic training when he was exposed to European modernist art movements that also embraced the primitive. Rothko's beginnings as a painter were not traditional; he did not major in art at college, spent only two years at Yale studying liberal arts, and did not go to one of the fine arts academies. Instead, he stumbled into the more loosely organized Art Students League of New York which had the reputation for being a place where artists could experience greater expressive freedom. Students were

⁶ Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb, "The Portrait and the Modern Artist," WNYC broadcast, October 13, 1943.

not required to follow a certain curriculum; instead, they competed to sign up for classes with an admired instructor, simply for the opportunity.

While at the League, Rothko ran across a fellow Russian Jew, Max Weber, a painter associated with the Stieglitz circle. Alfred Stieglitz was a photographer who, early in the twentieth century, had opened up a radical New York gallery representing a group of avant-garde artists known for their alliance with European modernist artistic movements. Weber was especially interested in German Expressionism and French Cubism, modern styles that rejected naturalistic form in favor of abstraction. Weber professed a love for the primitive, as did many European intellectuals at the time. He collected African tribal works, pre-Columbian art, and Native American objects. In 1910, Weber had contributed an article to Stieglitz's art magazine, *Camera Work*, praising the power of so-called "savage" arts, including Chinese dolls, Hopi images, and Native American quilts. These, he argued were "finer in color than the works of modern painters."⁷ According to Dore Ashton, (one of Rothko's most respected biographers), by the time Rothko met Weber,

Weber was already celebrated for his early works in a primitivistic manner, where echoes of tribal arts were frequent, and for his adaptation of the cubist spatial canon to an essentially expressionist vision.⁸

For Weber, the abstract quality of primitive art proved that naturalistic representations were not imperative for expressing human experience. In fact, distortions of what the eye sees externally allowed the artist to present an interior, psychological reality, carrying with it waves of emotion similar to those evoked by narrative myth.

Weber thought that abstract form resonated perceptible vibrations that explained their impact on the human soul. Such theories stemmed from new scientific studies (Albert Einstein's being the most popularly known) that increasingly described the material world as a flux of molecular atomic energy. For the art world, this meant that traditional paintings that represented the world as comprised of isolated solid objects, arranged in intervals within an illusionistic space, looked obsolete. A more subtle understanding of the physical world was now available. Artists began to view objects, along with the intervals between them, as comprised of the same atomic matter: energy. The goal in modern art was to depict a new reality whereby the form of one object appeared to bump into the

⁷ Max Weber, "Chinese Dolls and Modern Colorists," *Camera Work* 31 (July 1910): 59.

⁸ Dore Ashton, *About Rothko* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 12.

surrounding air, and that air then flowed into the next object in constant, integrated motion at the molecular level. Terms like “continuity of space” or “simultaneity” were commonly used by artists to describe the immersion of foreground into background, seen in Expressionist and Cubist art—styles that were developed in an effort to express this flux of indivisible energy at the atomic level of reality.

Weber was influenced by these new scientific understandings of the molecular composition of the physical world, as well as by theories of the fourth dimension, stating the

immensity of all things exists outside and in the presence of objects, and is the space that envelops a tree, a tower, a mountain, or any solid; or the interval between objects or volumes of matter if receptively beheld.⁹

Weber believed there was expressive power embedded in these forms that caused resonance in the human psyche. He stated how this “immensity” “arouses imagination and stirs emotion.”¹⁰ “The flower,” Weber argued, “is not satisfied to be merely a flower in light and space and temperature (because) it wants to be a flower in us in our soul,” and that “things live in us and through us.”¹¹ In this manner, the human soul was indivisible from surrounding sensations because the vibrating world made a perceptible and emotional connection with the viewer. Weber believed the distorted proportions and exaggerated colors found in primitive art were capable of inadvertently tapping into the interconnectedness of animate and inanimate things because abstract art avoided mimicking the mere surfaces of the natural world as seen by the naked eye and instead revealed nature’s inherent atomic fluctuations.

Weber’s theories about primitive art’s unique emotional power rang true for Rothko and his own convictions about myth. He stated,

Why the most gifted painters of our time should be preoccupied with the forms of the archaic and the myths from which they have stemmed, why Negro sculpture and archaic Greek should have been such potent catalyzers of our present day art, we can leave to historians and psychologists. But the fact remains that our age [is] distinguished by its distortions, and everywhere the gifted men whether they seat the model in their studio or

⁹ Max Weber, “The Fourth Dimension From a Plastic Point of View,” *Camera Work* 31 (July 1910): 25.

¹⁰ Weber, “The Fourth Dimension,” 25.

¹¹ Max Weber, *Essays on Art* (California: William Edwin Rudge Publisher, 1916), 15.

seek the form within themselves, all have distorted the present to conform with the forms of Nineveh, the Nile or the Mesopotamian plane.¹²

It was Wassily Kandinsky who provided an explanation as to why primitive and modern abstract art forms were able to generate such powerful emotions in the viewer. Kandinsky wrote a justification for non-figurative art in his book, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, published late in 1911. Many of Weber's views about the primitive paralleled ideas in Kandinsky's book, excerpts of which were published periodically in Stieglitz's *Camera Work*, beginning in 1912. Kandinsky turned to the essentially nonmaterial characteristics of music to explain the power of abstraction. While a musical tune might sound like something in nature (perhaps the wind or a bird), a melodic composition was not required to have a specific connection with the natural world in order to be enjoyed. A pleasing arrangement of notes could cause the listener to well up with emotion, not only because the sounds triggered an emotional memory of a beautiful or tragic time when similar sounds were heard, but because of the physical reaction of the human brain to the musical vibrations themselves. Kandinsky argued that color and music are similar in that both are, essentially, measurable energy. Musical notes reverberated sound that, upon being absorbed by the ear, acted upon the soul of man (a scientist might describe it as fired synapses that trigger a psychic response). Color, inasmuch that it was also essentially energy (or radiating light), stimulated the senses in a manner similar to music, only with the receptors being in the eyes instead of the ears. Kandinsky argued that while a painter might illustrate a story in his composition, it was the color and form that he used, the plastic elements and not the story itself, which contributed the greatest toward achieving the necessary emotional sensations. The stories stimulated the imagination via associations the reader had formed over time, but color was immediate, similar to how the body reacts instantly when touching a hot stove before becoming fully conscious as to why. Kandinsky argued that for "a more sensitive soul the effect of colors is deeper [than the narrative] and intensely moving."¹³ It was more direct than an object that merely created a memory or an association because, instead, it produced a "corresponding spiritual vibration" in the soul of the body. One color was not enough to sustain a significant impression, but a

¹² Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb, "Manuscript drafts of a letter to the editor," in *Mark Rothko Writings on Art*, ed. Miguel López-Remiro (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), 30–31.

¹³ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1977), 24.

composition of colors, along with the lines and forms created by those colors, could create a strong emotional effect, especially within the sensitive viewer, like a symphony that combined numerous individual sounds. Throughout his theorizing, Kandinsky used the language of music and its ability to express emotion without relying on associations. He stated,

No more sufficient, in the psychic sphere, is the theory of association. Generally speaking, color is a power which directly influences the soul. Color is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand which plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul.¹⁴

Kandinsky titled many of his paintings with terms associated with music, such as “symphony” or “improvisation.”

Many artists of Rothko’s generation studied Kandinsky, and Rothko’s interest in his work was well known.¹⁵ In his own theories on art, Rothko also used the language of music to convey the impact of the “plastic” element in painting. Rothko stated,

Now, in the world of the painter, his sense of the essential and the infinite must be realized plastically. He must express his notions of reality in the terms of shapes, space, colors, rhythms, and the other plastic elements which we have previously described, for they constitute the language of painting, just as sound, timbres, and measures constitute that of the musician, or words and sentences that of the linguist. Or rather, the painter must represent them by the means of colored shapes arranged in certain rhythms constituting certain ideated and controlled movements toward a particular effect, this effect or end being the subject of the picture.¹⁶

Rothko redefined “subject matter” in art, shifting content from the illustration of a narrative text or story to the direct psychic effect triggered in the viewer upon perceiving the plastic elements of the painting. This is why, for Rothko, the more abstracted archaic imagery from ancient Greece was more powerful than were the later naturalistic ones because the essential plastic elements were not disguised behind illusionism.

Rothko’s appreciation for ancient myth was linked to his belief in the psychological impact of abstracted form. Myths were comprised of “the eternal symbols upon which we must fall back to express basic

¹⁴ Ibid., 25.

¹⁵ Ashton, *About Rothko*, 75.

¹⁶ Rothko, *The Artist’s Reality*, 98.

psychological ideas,” he argued.¹⁷ Of the many influences in Rothko’s development—including Kandinsky and Expressionism and Cubism via Weber—Rothko’s theories show the effect of modern psychoanalytical theory. His study of psychology came largely through the European Surrealists whose creative impetus for their art was seeped in the writings of Sigmund Freud. Surrealist artists were equally interested in the primitive and the mythic, and examples of their art were readily available in the United States. As early as 1931, numerous art journals, such as *Creative Art*, had reproduced Surrealist work.¹⁸ Examples of Surrealist objects were available for view at New York’s Julien Levy gallery in the mid-thirties.¹⁹ In 1936, The Museum of Modern Art in New York held the exhibition, “Fantastic Art, Dada, and Surrealism,” offering a significant venue for the radically new art.

While exposure to Surrealism did not initiate Rothko’s interest in the primitive and in myth, Surrealist theory provided a psychoanalytic explanation for the persistence of ancient mythology in the human imagination. Perhaps more significantly, Surrealism offered pictorial strategies that led Rothko to eventually find plastic forms appropriate to his vision. The configuration and imagery of his early work, *Antigone*, 1938–1940, (Fig. 3), simulates Surrealist creations of what they called “exquisite corpses,” the production of which involved multiple artists and resulted in an absurd distorted human form drawn across three or more horizontal bands. Reminiscent of an old parlor game, a piece of paper folded into three or more sections was passed around from artist to artist. The first individual drew the upper part of the body, usually in some absurd way. The drawing was hidden from the second artist by folding the paper before the second individual then completed the mid-section. Still a third person drafted the bottom portion, the work of the previous two artists being out of sight to him. When the paper was unfolded, the result was a fanciful, only slightly recognizable human form that the Surrealists jokingly described as “exquisite” because such an invention was beyond anything nature could produce and, in theory, reflected a collective unconscious reality instead.

Rothko’s *Antigone*, while indicative of Rothko’s early interest in Greek tragedy, also explores the potential of the Surrealist exquisite corpse to allow for direct links to the inner psyche of the viewer. Although executed by the artist alone, *Antigone* is similar to the exquisite corpse in how the composition is organized into three long bands depicting an absurdly

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ According to Ashton, *About Rothko*, 26.

¹⁹ Ashton, *About Rothko*, 32.

disjointed figure. The upper band contains the multiple heads of the god Janus, a representation of both the creative and destructive forces within the tragic story of Antigone. The middle band shows body fragments (a breast, phallus, and symbolic heart, perhaps recalling the dead bodies of Antigone's brothers and her love for them), and the lower band depicts disembodied legs, feet and toes. *Antigone* is one of several early paintings from the early 1940s that explore this pictorial strategy including *Oedipus*, *A Last Supper*, *Crucifix*, and several untitled works. Such images testify to the influence of Surrealist techniques on Rothko as well as his admiration of images of Greek tragedy. The banding in *Antigone* is like that found on Geometric and Archaic style Greek vases, and the imagery is similar in its level of abstraction. The banding predicts Rothko's later, more famous compositions in which he enlarges the three horizontal layers into broad color fields.

The Surrealist movement challenged traditional notions about how art expressed meaning. Surrealists encouraged a shift in focus from narration and mimesis in art making to expression, seeking imagery that would evoke psychic dissonance on the one hand or ecstasy on the other. The emphasis was not on outward appearance or subsequent intellectual associations produced by the observation of realistically drawn things but on the fantastic or the dream (and only inasmuch as the absurd created a significant psychological and emotional reaction in the viewer). When the famous Surrealist Salvador Dalí juxtaposed a dripping clock with a dead tree limb, for example, he prevented his audience from reading the images in any traditional way. Gone from paintings were a series of illusionistic figures pantomiming the story of a saint or the triumph of a Greco-Roman god like actors on a stage. Instead, the viewer was invited to consider an absurd juxtaposition of objects in terms of its effect on his/her psyche.

While interested in Surrealist pictorial strategies that sought to reach the unconscious, Rothko thought that Surrealist art had not gone far enough. The Surrealists still relied on the audience to craft associations from the objects before them, and, therefore, the work still lacked an immediacy of emotional effect that Rothko desired. He complained,

The Surrealists...preoccupy themselves with symbolism, and the study of dreams and other atavistic, subconscious repositories of this, at once, new and old demonology, hoping that through ordering the symbols they can reconstruct the expression of this essence. In a sense they are attempting to bridge the impassable darkness between the world of the mind and the world of emotion.²⁰

²⁰ Rothko, *The Artist's Reality*, 108.

Rothko reached back to the primitive because he saw there forms that offered a more direct connection to profound human emotion. The greater level of abstraction in those images was suggestive of something pre-symbolic and, therefore, more emotionally immediate. In primitive art, he argued,

The artist has found the most elemental and direct expressions, and the least prolix of all plastic forms. Seeking the basic in both—that is, the most elemental feelings and the most elemental expression—and viewing them through the lens of objectivity in the age which gave him life, the modern artist finds the two amalgamated in primitive sculpture.... These basic emotions are expressed in the essential plastic elements, whose nakedness is commensurate with the basic quality of man's reactions.²¹

Of the Surrealists, Rothko preferred the non-figurative work of Juan Miró. Miró's work lacked what Rothko must have seen as the burden of literary associations among the figurative Surrealists such as Dalí or René Magritte. Instead, Miró, at one point, played with automatic drawing, a technique that allowed the artist, according to Surrealist theory, to trick his own psychic defense mechanisms to reveal the true processes of his thought. Doing this technique required that the artist place lines or colors randomly onto the canvas or paper. The artist then pulled from the random marks various images according to his needs or desires, unaware at first of the underlying reasons for doing so. The resultant imagery amounted to a portrait of the artist's psyche. The process worked much like a patient's sessions with a psychoanalyst. The patient rests on a couch, speaking freely and at length, until the analyst is able to identify repeated narratives of significance. The analyst then helps the patient to be more cognizant of his/her psychic habits, removing the defensive layers preventing his/her awareness of hidden fears and desires. Likewise, looking at a large number of paintings by Miró revealed stylistic patterns unique to him that acted as a kind of map of his inner emotional life.

At the time Rothko began painting, the psychoanalyst Carl Jung was supplanting his teacher, Sigmund Freud, for most artists, largely because Jung offered a more collective understanding of consciousness and was, himself, fascinated with primitive signs and myths and their psychic resonance in the collective imagination. Jung's theory on archetypes was especially of interest to many of the Abstract Expressionists, an artistic group with which Rothko was associated. Jung defined archetypes as reappearing symbols, such as those found in myths, which embodied basic human desires and beliefs and that were carried within each individual's

²¹ Ibid., 107–108.

unconscious mind so that they appeared and reappeared throughout time and across cultures. The recognition of the existence of archetypes allowed Rothko to believe that his large color areas on canvas said more than just something about his individual personality. Instead, they could be collectively appreciated and, thereby, were potentially mythic. Rothko suggested that his color fields embodied an “archaic prototype.” He stated,

Ever since this inception the most gifted men of our time, whether they seated their models in their studios, or found within themselves the models for their art, have distorted these models until they awoke the traces of their archaic prototype and it is their distortion which symbolizes the spiritual force of our time.... The truth is therefore that the modern artist has a spiritual kinship with the emotions which these archaic forms imprison and the myths which they represent.²²

Reading Friedrich Nietzsche solidified Rothko’s belief that he could induce emotions with his non-figurative art that paralleled those evoked by primitive art and myth. Nietzsche’s writing had been published in *Camera Work*, and his theories were frequently discussed by the Surrealists.²³ Nietzsche traced the origins of ancient tragedy as resulting from the marriage of reason and nature as embodied in the myths of Apollo and Dionysus. Together, the stories of these two Greek gods acted to embody the entirety of human experience, at once beautiful and destructive. The myth of Apollo, a god both youthful and strong, embodied man’s desire for perfection: the heroic. Driven by rationality, the Apollonian sought to bring order to experience and cloak it in ideal form. The Apollonian represented culture or the structuring of the untamed according to man’s dominant will to produce something of collective human significance that was superior to ordinary nature. The Dionysian, on the other hand, sought integration with nature, something often inexplicable and uncultivated. The Dionysian represented primordial emotions and lost itself in orgiastic intoxication. It sought integration with wild nature and was often self-destructive. When confronted with the Dionysian, the Apollonian must face reality, and in doing so, the hero falls. For Nietzsche, this dynamic defined tragedy. Tragedy was not just something terrible that happened but something that defined life’s vacillating struggles, a battle between Apollo and Dionysus, an inevitable human struggle of spirit.

Rothko believed that the source for artistic expression was decidedly Dionysian. The Dionysian was associated with music, and it was here that Rothko found affinity with Nietzsche. Rothko owned a copy of

²² Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb, “The Portrait.”

²³ See Ashton, *About Rothko*, 51–52.

Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* whose original title included the phrase "*from the Spirit of Music.*" Rothko and Nietzsche shared a love of music and their appreciation echoed Kandinsky's theories about the similar expressive properties of music and color. Nietzsche thought of music as a universal language. He argued that music allowed an audience to comprehend, at the most basic level, the inner significance of an idea. The Dionysian sought out music because its resonance was integrated with the natural world, something the Dionysian also desired. Nietzsche stated,

This deep relation which music has to the true nature of all things also explains the fact that suitable music played to any scene, action, event, or surrounding seems to disclose to us its most secret meaning.... When the composer has been able to express in the universal language of music the stirrings of will which constitute the heart of an event, then the melody of the song, the music of an opera is expressive. But the analogy discovered by the composer between the two must have proceeded from the direct knowledge of the nature of the world unknown to his reason, and must not be an imitation produced with conscious intention by means of concepts, otherwise the music does not express the inner nature, the will itself, but merely give an inadequate imitation of its phenomenon.²⁴

For Rothko, the Dionysian was closer to the primitive in spirit than was the Apollonian. He saw the elemental impulses of the Dionysian to be lacking in French modernism, especially Cubism (which seemed to borrow from the primitive in order to innovate form), but he had little empathy for the underlying emotional impulses embodied in those forms. It could be argued that the Cubists aligned themselves with the Apollonian, but Rothko preferred something raw. He stated,

To say that the modern artist has been fascinated primarily by the formal relationship aspects of archaic art is, at best, a partial and misleading explanation. For any serious form is significant only insofar as it expresses the inherent idea.²⁵

Calling the Rothko Chapel Dionysian might strike the reader as odd at first. The sober no-frills ambiance seems like the opposite of Dionysian excess, a label more likely to bring to mind a Baroque creation, perhaps Pietro da Cortona's ceiling for the Barberini palace. But Rothko followed the assumption that the impetus for creativity was essentially irrational,

²⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 88.

²⁵ Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb, "The Portrait."

less about formal manipulation as the French modernists (or Apollonian) would have it and more like the outpourings of a drunken profusion.

Understanding Rothko's artistic background—his time with Weber, his study of Kandinsky, the impact of Surrealist theory, and his reading of the philosophies of Jung and Nietzsche—makes the Houston chapel more accessible. The enveloping palette of Rothko's chapel springs from Weber's words that "things live in us and through us." The paintings must be experienced as part of a total visual environment that includes the building, interior lighting, and canvas colors. Rothko's paintings are not just works of art hanging independently from one another like a row of works in a commercial gallery but, instead, constitute a complete installation. Void of iconography, the chapel's only means for communication is the totality of its color and form. Rothko's assistant, Roy Edwards, reported that Rothko would spend months experimenting to find the needed color for a single inch of canvas.²⁶ Edward's statement testifies to how important color was to Rothko for the needed expression. The worshipper enters into a dynamic of hues. He is not residing in the chapel nor is he separate from it but is a player within. One's perceptions complete the symphony being played here in color as long as one is sensitive to its orchestrated, vibrating elements, as Kandinsky insisted. There is nothing to read symbolically, and no saint or god's story is told. Instead, the chapel is experienced at a psychological level, as one would a Surrealist object, but without the need to make associations. The viewer absorbs mythic meaning by way of the color and formal relationships alone.

The experience begins opposite the entrances of the chapel where a grouping of three large panels (each fifteen feet high) hang in a niche slightly recessed like the area usually reserved for the high altar, but there is no altar here. (Fig. 2) The panels fill the space like an enormous Renaissance triptych (a three-piece altarpiece), but its leading character is absent. Closer examination of the surfaces of the paintings show only the working hand of the artist as he pushes and pulls the pigment, sometimes in deep medium, sometimes like stain, the effect of which dissolves the surface, making it difficult to locate. The immensity of the color within the three enormous panels can overwhelm the viewer, and the effect is what elevates the group to one of myth.

The value of the central panel in this group of three is slightly lighter than the rest. This is where an image of the divine should be but is not. Like Nietzsche, one questions whether God is dead. The viewer is drawn to this central panel, challenged to figure out its contents or at least to find

²⁶ According to de Ménéil, "The Rothko Chapel," 251.

its surface, only to fall visually into a luminous absence. According to David Brauer, “The artist did not want the paintings to come out to you; he wanted them to draw you in.”²⁷ Brauer quotes Dominique de Ménéil who claimed “their dark surfaces do not stop the gaze,” but instead elicit something “intimate and timeless.”²⁸

At the back of the chapel, exactly opposite this lighter panel, stands a single thinner one remarkably different in palette and composition than any other painting in the room. (Fig. 4) About a fifth of the bottom of the canvas contains a mixture whose base is reddish alizarin, that color continuing up along two inches of each side and top of the painting like a frame. Dominique De Ménéil described the palette of Rothko’s paintings to be likened to the wine of the Eucharist, absorbed and then dried into cloth.

The colors in the Rothko paintings are those of blood and wine. As you stand in the chapel they are close, very close, even warm and comforting. Yet they do not oppress.²⁹

Her description is especially true about this individual painting that stands alone as if emblematic of the bleeding Christ at Calvary. It would be a mistake, however, to read it literally.

Inside the borders of this same canvas is contained a nearly black rectangle, its opaque solidity in direct contrast with its more luminous partner in the triptych across the chapel. This panel at the back evokes something more physical than that central panel at the front, bringing to mind the real flesh and blood of Christ, with a surface that is a dense block of color and has overall proportions comparable to the human body. It has the effect of drawing the viewer back from the void of the lighter canvas at the front of the chapel, the location of whose surface is uncertain, to a surer solid form. Rothko’s paintings are so large for the scale of the chapel that it is impossible to consider them as separate works. The viewer cannot step back from the art for a distant look. Instead, one is enveloped, visually compelled forward in an effort to comprehend the contents of the front triptych only to be brought back by the solidity of the surface in the one behind. It becomes clear that one is caught up in something mythic on a grand scale. The viewer is pushed forward into luminous etherealness and

²⁷ Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, “The Rothko Chapel Paintings: A Personal Account,” in *Image of the Not-Seen: Search for Understanding: The Rothko Chapel Art Series*, eds. K. C. Eynatten, Kate Hutchins, and Don Quaintance (Houston: The Rothko Chapel, 2007), 87.

²⁸ Dominique de Ménéil, February 26, 1971, address, cited in cited in Mancusi-Ungaro, “A Personal Account,” 87.

²⁹ de Ménéil, “The Rothko Chapel,” 249.

then pulled back into solidity as if a participant in a battle between Apollo and Dionysus. Rothko talked about “making east and west merge in an octagonal chapel,”³⁰ implying, not so much some Taoist philosophy of yin and yang, but certainly spiritual complexity, a balancing act to understand both the good and bad of experience, an earthly dichotomy many myths convey. The chapel was envisioned as a site where Catholic, Orthodox, Jewish, and Protestant people could come together for contemplation. The triptych form inevitably conjures Christian altarpieces, but the push and pull of the visual elements is more Eastern in philosophy, and the lack of iconography is distinctly modern.

The central triptych is reiterated in groups of paintings standing eleven feet high, placed on the left and right walls of the chapel. (Fig. 5) These canvases differ from the main group in that now the end panels fall down slightly from the central one, clarifying the reference to traditional altar triptychs. These side triptychs are much darker but are framed with the lighter color of neighboring panels that separate the triptychs from the main recessed group of paintings at the front. This part of the chapel aids the viewer in recognizing the three parts of the front canvases, that group’s separate entities perhaps otherwise lost in vast color. The overall tonality of the side paintings is browner, making the area warmer, and providing a transitional area from back to front. The side groups act as a pathway marking the way from the back dark panel to the more luminous one at the front of the chapel, creating something like a walk from something physical to something nonmaterial, something akin to the Stations of the Cross.

During the day, the chapel is naturally lit. An architectural concrete parachute drops down from the center to allow windows above it to bleed in light without glass being seen from anywhere in the room. The parachute keeps the light that is entering soft and even, preventing direct beams onto the paintings. The effect differs depending on whether the outside weather is sunny or cloudy. Artificial light is used during the evenings which, in turn, creates still another atmospheric mood. Understanding the essential meaning of the chapel requires the viewer to be sensitive to these light changes. The diffusion of light into the chapel prevents the canvas surfaces from being located. Except for the panel in the back, the painted surfaces hardly seem solid at all but instead create a misty glowing environment much like a Dan Flavin (Rothko’s colleague) installation. There are no visible windows to allow a visual connection to outside nature or to the universe, as in, for example, the Pantheon with its oculus opened to the sky. The aura is from within, and the mythic

³⁰ Dore Ashton, Journal, July 7th, 1964, in Breslin, *Mark Rothko*, 460.

experience is thus turned inward. The original architect, Phillip Johnson, had argued with Rothko over how to achieve the light play in the chapel. Rothko wanted it to be exactly as in his New York studio where he completed the paintings, perhaps to guarantee how light would hit the pieces once installed.³¹ It is the play of color that is key to the mythic properties evoked here, and so Rothko had to get the lighting right.

The details of the chapel also manipulate the interior light. The floor of the chapel is formed from dark square bricks, soothing in their texture and color, upon which are arranged simply designed mahogany-stained hewn benches and gray pillow kneelers. The walls are off white and recede behind the fourteen large color field canvases. The paintings resonate together to create a profound experience through light and color alone. Following Kandinsky's theories, light is meant to directly reverberate in the viewer.

Colors and textures work together to resonate, in the psyche, emotions on a mythic scale. All the salvation imagery more familiar in such chapels is put aside like Apollonian heroes no longer able to speak convincingly of confident truths. Instead, a darker luminosity fills the room like a symphony of tragic notes in a humanistic sense where the Apollonian and the Dionysian form a balance, both logical and irrational. Some of the dim panels weep like a sad song or primal dread while others vibrate in quiet contemplation. The mythic narratives of the Christian God are absent, and the worshipper is left with the question of His whereabouts. The chapel is not without hope; the center canvas whose luminosity differs slightly from the other two panels in the triptych at the front of the building suggests something infinite, eternally full of possibilities not yet in focus. Rothko's chapel must be seen as an installation that resonates in the psyche, a single work where each painting is in musical harmony with all the others like a grand symphony, pushing and pulling the audience through an emotional dynamic that runs them through the entirety of human experience, illuminating a range of feelings, both positive and negative. The viewer is left with unadulterated emotion and the open-ended question asked by all great myths about whether anything lies within a seemingly infinite abyss of eternal darkness.

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Fig. 2-1. Rothko Chapel Exterior. Photo by Hickey-Robertson. Rothko Chapel, Houston, Texas.³²



Fig. 2-2. Interior View Northwest-North Triptych-Northeast paintings. Photo by Hickey-Robertson. Rothko Chapel, Houston, Texas.

³² Permission for the use of the Rothko Chapel illustrations was granted by the Rothko Chapel, 1409 Sul Ross Street, Houston, Texas 77006.

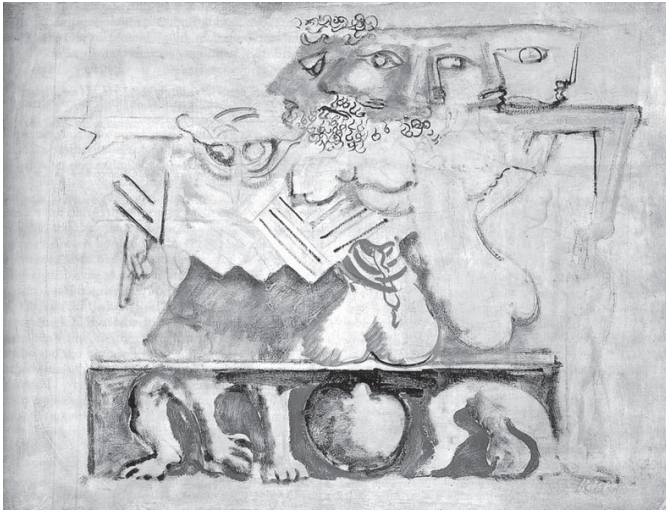


Fig. 2-3. Mark Rothko, *Antigone*, 1941, oil and charcoal on canvas, 34 x 45 3/4 in. Copyright © 1998 Kate Rothko Prizel & Christopher Rothko / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

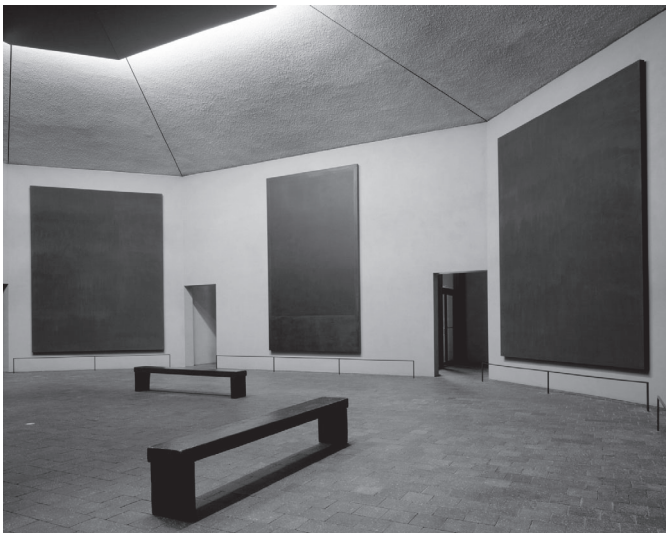


Fig. 2-4. Rothko Chapel Interior view West triptych-Northwest-North paintings. Photo by Hickey-Robertson. Rothko Chapel, Houston, Texas.

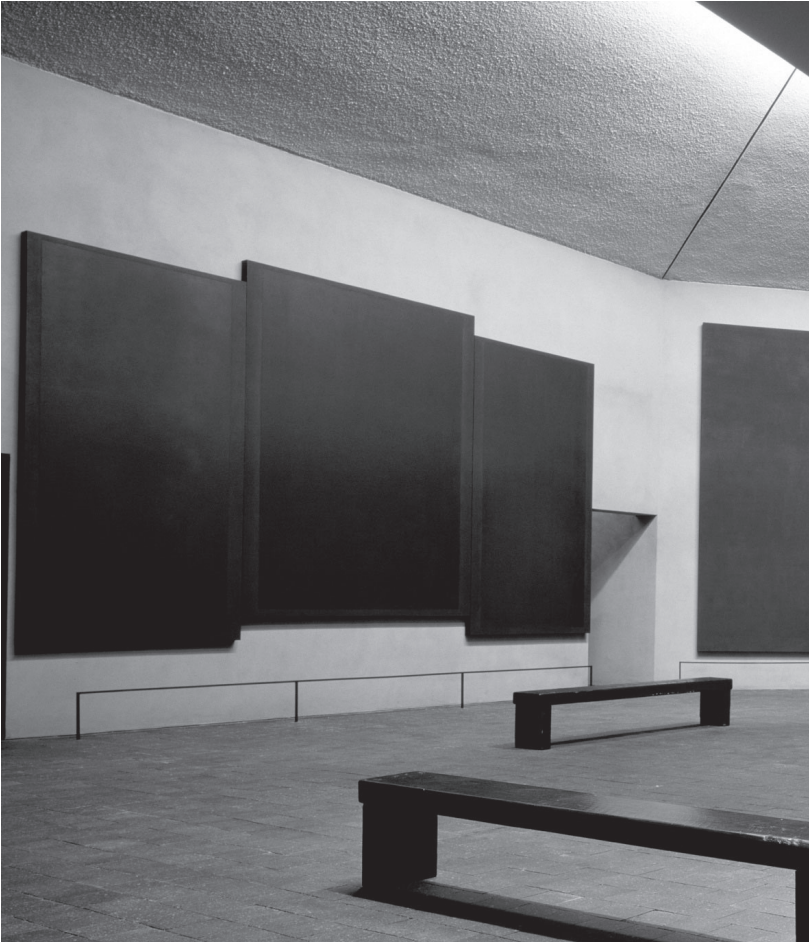


Fig. 2-5. Rothko Chapel Interior North Triptych. Photo by Hickey-Robertson. Rothko Chapel, Houston, Texas.



Fig. 2-6. Rothko Chapel Interior View Northwest-North Triptych-Northeast paintings. Photo by Hickey-Robertson. Rothko Chapel, Houston, Texas.

CHAPTER THREE

MYTHMAKING IN THE FRANCO REGIME

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What is meant by the word “myth” when it is used today in the field of Hispanic cultural studies? Are the modern stories we call “myths” equivalent to those of classical antiquity? For many, the mythic in the modern world undoubtedly retains its positive value as a metaphorical discourse for explaining the world in culturally expressive and intuitive rather than scientific ways. Modern writers, artists, and filmmakers, for example, often assert their license to tap into the ancient powers of myth, understood here as a sacred narrative that references the supernatural or mystical origins of the universe and of humankind, according to Alan Dundes’s definition of the concept.¹ And yet, in most of these cases, a modern myth is deemed acceptable because it acts as an artifice or a self-conscious metaphorical strategy that asserts the limitations of scientific thinking and upholds the ongoing validity of spirituality or universal intuitions as a means of describing our experience of the world. One respects ancient mythologies as records of past human struggles to come to terms with the nature of the “human” in the context of a dimly understood, pre-modern universe.

But it is in the nature of modern cultures that myths, old and new, are constantly being challenged and declared outdated as the frontiers of human knowledge expand. For Joseph Campbell and his many followers, to cite one of the most influential schools of modern myth criticism, myths are unexamined metaphors that were once taken as ontological truths because their stories resonated with something universally felt in the human psyche. Any literalization of ancient mythic discourses betrays their original poetic power to express how human beings perceived the

¹ Alan Dundes, “Binary Opposition in Myth: The Propp/ Lévi-Strauss Debate in Retrospect,” *Western Folklore* 56 (1997): 39–50.

world during a given historical period. The attempt to understand mythic stories as science or history, Campbell argues, disconnects these metaphors from their original purpose of linking waking consciousness to the mysteries of existence beyond the cognitive limitations imposed by the state of science at the time of their creation.² In order to be valid today, modern myths would thus have to recognize their basic metaphorical nature and be capable of continual transformation in order to keep up with our ever expanding science. The implication is that the time of myths has passed.

Outside the usages of myth in the fine arts, literature, and philosophy cited above, the word myth currently almost invariably carries a negative connotation that stems from its propagandistic use. When a politician or a historian in the modern period is said to create or rely on mythical discourse, it is tantamount to accusing that person of lying or at best of relying on unexamined religious or political conviction, either due to naiveté, to nostalgia, or to self-interested mendaciousness. Myth, in this context, is generally synonymous with ideological manipulation and primitive thinking about the world. While those in the creative arts and philosophy may have needed to use myths, those who accept or promote the validity of myths in non-fictional and historical contexts confuse the appearance of historical truth garbed in religious language or imagery with true history.

Nonetheless, since mythical politics and history build upon emotion and deeply-held political or religious convictions rather than critical reason, they have long been powerful tools for persuasion. Mythical discourse has been, in fact, common practice in propaganda of all stripes, as the many critical studies that address various “foundational myths” across Hispanic cultures will attest. Foundational myths are stories or images that seek to create an ontological or spiritual foundation story for a community or nation. Those cultural critics who use the word “myth” to describe such politically-informed histories about the purportedly sacred origins of national communities or other types of movements usually understand their own discourse as an antidote to such unscientific approaches. Cultural critics usually seek to “de-mythologize” and deconstruct the unexamined explanations of the world that they find in the cultural expressions they study. Their work tries to reveal the historical (factual and material-based) reality that the modern propagandistic myth seeks to explain away with convenient fictions that intertwine spiritual and historical elements.

² Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

The following analysis exemplifies this de-mythologizing tendency in the field of Hispanic cultural studies through a consideration of the mythmaking undertaken by the Franco dictatorship in Spain (1939–1975). The main focus of the analysis will be a mural representing the dictator himself, Francisco Franco Bahamonde (1892–1975), who appears as a triumphant medieval crusader on the walls of the Civil War Hall (Sala de la Guerra Civil) in the building that, at the time, was called the Archivo Histórico Militar. Known by different titles but commonly called *Allegory of Franco and the Crusade* (Fig. 1), this painting was completed by the Bolivian artist Arturo Reque Meruvia in the late 1940s; it was conceived to form part of the decoration of Franco's grand monument to the Spanish Civil War, the Valle de los Caídos (Valley of the Fallen), but in the end it was rejected for that project by the authorities, either due to Reque Meruvia's non-Spanish origins or, perhaps, due to the painting's extreme deification of Franco. Despite the mural's failure to pass muster for inclusion in an overtly religious site like the Valle de los Caídos, it was considered appropriate for the more militaristic context of the Archivo Histórico Militar. The mural exemplifies how supporters of the Franco regime were using foundational myths to bolster the dictatorship's legitimacy at that point in its history. Reque Meruvia ties the figure of the victorious dictator at the center of his painting to one such foundational myth, the medieval story of Santiago Matamoros (St. James the Moor-Slayer), whose image flies through the sky directly over Franco's head.

The portrait of Franco as the crusading national savior, bathed in sacred light and crowned by the figure of Santiago, is surrounded on the left side by scenes recalling his victory over the Second Republic in the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and on the other side by visions of a bright new future made possible by his regime. As a whole, the composition projects the image of a triumphant Francoism that has transformed Spain, helping it pass from the darkness of its chaotic, war-torn past to the light of a Nationalist paradise achieved through the agency of the dictator himself. In what follows, the focus will be on the central section of the painting (shown in Fig. 1) which projects the nucleus of the mural's ideological message. Franco's inner circle of adoring followers symbolizes the movement and is composed of Nationalist soldiers with various political affiliations, Catholic clergy, a few dedicated civilians (including a self-portrait of Reque Meruvia himself, armed with a pickaxe), and, most curiously, a number of Moroccan mercenaries who stand ready to build the

new Francoist state.³ As a group, they evoke the idea that the Spanish nation, now purged of insidious Republican⁴ influences, has united under the light of Francoism. Anyone remotely familiar with modern Spanish history will recognize immediately the propagandistic intentions of this Nationalist iconography, but let us begin to unravel its mythic depiction of the Franco regime's origins by recalling some background information about the comparison at its heart: that between Franco and the myth of Santiago Matamoros.

Santiago (St. James) was one of Jesus's twelve apostles, but he is also known as the patron saint of Spain's Christian Reconquest (*Reconquista*). This was the centuries-long struggle waged by the Christians of northern Spain, following the Muslim invasion of 711, in order to reclaim all the Iberian lands for Christianity. Official Spanish history (both conservative and liberal) highlights this conflict between Christian and Muslim hegemony over the Iberian Peninsula as the seminal process through which the Spanish nation was forged. Alongside the history of the Muslim conquest and the resulting Arabization of Iberian cultures that occurred during the seven centuries of Muslim government over parts of the peninsula, there also emerged many myths and legends about the Christian struggle to re-conquer Moorish Spain that helped shape Spain's national identity. According to one such widely-accepted Spanish story about Santiago's life and afterlife, the apostle left the Holy Land and founded the first Christian communities in Spain before returning to Jerusalem where he was martyred in the first century AD. After his death, his body was miraculously transported by the angels across the seas to be buried in an unmarked grave in Galicia, the northwestern-most region of Spain.

Centuries later, when the Christian Reconquest was already under way in the ninth century, Santiago is said to have returned from the dead, mounted on a great white horse so that he might do battle against the Muslims at the battle of Clavijo in the La Rioja region in northern Spain. Santiago's miraculous apparition at this legendary (but historically unsubstantiated) battle is supposed to have helped turn the tide of the

³ Ángel Quintana, "El caudillo quiso hacerse hombre. La retórica épica e iconográfica en 'Franco, ese hombre,'" *Archivos de la filmoteca. Revistas de los Estudios Hispánicos sobre la Imagen* 1.42–43 (2002): 74 note 12.

⁴ US readers should note that in Spain "Republicans" are those who supported the Second Republic during the Spanish Civil War. Most Republicans were either centrist liberals or leftists, which can be confusing for Americans unfamiliar with this part of Spanish political history. Francoists or Nationalists, as the other combatants in the Civil War are called, included conservative Catholics, rightwing traditionalists and fascists. Franco's unifying figure helped this coalition hold together during and after the war.

conflict in favor of the Christians. This otherworldly intervention, on behalf of the early medieval Christian kingdoms of Spain, exemplifies the mythical historiography that, since the early Middle Ages, had informed Spanish perceptions of their own national history as something both apocalyptic and divinely inspired. By crowning Franco's portrait with the figure of Santiago, Reque Meruvia's allegory ties the dictator's victory over his twentieth-century enemies during the Spanish Civil War to this revered symbol of Christian Spain's victory over the foreign invaders of the Middle Ages.

In many examples of Francoist mythmaking during the first two and a half decades of the regime, both an intervening God and militant Catholicism play similarly important roles. This mural's representation of the triumphant *Caudillo* (the Spanish equivalent of the German *führer* or the Italian *duce*) makes that foundational connection between a divine plan and Francoism in order to infuse its version of modern Spanish history with a supernatural stamp of approval. It re-appropriates Spain's myth about Santiago Matamoros as a divine precursor for Franco, inserting medieval mythology into modern history. By doing so, the mural imitates the most common rhetorical trick used in propaganda created by Franco's National Movement, which constantly asserted for itself a myth-based legitimacy that claimed to transcend history and politics and to base its authority on the eternal will of God.

The Spanish Civil War that brought Franco and the Nationalists to power had represented a pivotal conflict in the modern history of Spain. The democratic and leftist political forces that had founded Spain's Second Republic in 1931 suddenly found themselves, five years later, struggling against Franco's rebellious Nationalists to protect their constitutional democracy. Franco's supporters, on the other hand, fought what they called a "National Uprising" or "Crusade" against Republican secularism and Marxism to re-impose traditional, Catholic values on the nation and to undo the progressive social and economic reforms that the Republic had begun to implement. Almost as much as it was a fight for control over territory, political agendas, and resources, the Spanish Civil War was a struggle to define the national identity. Would Spain continue into the twentieth century as a liberal democracy, governed by the rule of a secular constitution, like the Second Republic's? Or would it reassert its pre-modern identity as a nation chosen by God to defend Catholicism against its enemies? Reque Meruvia's mythical approach to the Civil War in this mural creates a perfect visual representation for wartime Francoist ideology, concerning this struggle over the nation's identity. As in so much modern, mythical propaganda, the sacred "enhances" the historical in this

mural, lending its rendition of the Franco victory in the Civil War a supernatural authority it would not otherwise enjoy. Many would describe the origins of the Franco regime in the Civil War as the triumph of the will of one rebellious minority faction over the entire nation. Instead, this mythical portrayal of Franco rewrites national history to assert that his defeat of the Republicans had been ordained by God and that it was, in fact, a confirmation of the eternal destiny of Spain.

It is certainly ironic that this type of mythical representation of the regime—said to be the result of a crusade to protect the “unchanging” nature of Spain—would not even survive the first decade or so of the forty-year dictatorship. By 1950 Franco’s regime already hoped to end its international isolation by toning down the most radical elements in the fascist rhetoric it used during the Civil War and in the immediate post-war period. By the 1960s, the rhetoric of a mythical spiritual crusade would be phased out by the regime. The Spain of the 1960s was a society in flux. Although unwilling to allow the political reforms that Western Europe insisted upon as a condition for greater cooperation with the West, the Franco regime was desperate to reintegrate the country into Western Europe’s prosperous economic sphere. To achieve this goal, they recognized that the fascistic propaganda of the past would have to be replaced.

The National Movement, therefore, abandoned most of its earlier mythical discourse about its own origins in favor of newly devised “historical” and “ethnographic” arguments for an authoritarian Spain, born out of the “collective madness” that had provoked the fratricidal conflict that they now called the “Guerra de España” (the War of Spain) rather than a “crusade.” The old depictions of the Civil War faded into the background or evolved into something more amenable to the powers of the Cold War West. The rhetoric of the Crusade, against all the ills of modernism (including liberal democracy as well as communism), was replaced with arguments about the idiosyncratic national character of the Spaniard (who was described as hotheaded and passionate and constantly in need of stern leadership to keep him in line and to prevent civil unrest). The foundational struggle against Marxism did not disappear, but it would now be presented in more historical and less religiously charged language. Changes in 1960s Spanish society and in the political objectives of its governing elite made clinging to the overtly anti-modern and anti-democratic myths untenable.⁵ But relics from earlier periods of the Franco

⁵ Cf. Michael Richards, “Grand Narratives, Collective Memory, and Social History,” in *Unearthing Franco’s Legacy: Mass Graves and the Recovery of Historical Memory in Spain*, eds. Carlos Jerez-Farrán and Samuel Amago (Notre

regime, like Reque Meruvia's mural, remain as testaments to the National Movement's original myth-based propaganda and its enduringly anti-modern ideology. In the following sections of the analysis, we will consider several of the historical and discursive contexts that can help us better understand how this mural reflects Francoist mythmaking in the post-war period.

The Nationalist Myth of the Crusade: Demonizing the Republican Enemy as Anti-Spanish

It is undeniable that the enemies on both sides of the Spanish Civil War were dehumanized and denigrated by their enemies as traitors to the Spanish people. Among Nationalist forces, this demonizing of Republicans as the enemies of God and the Nation was particularly virulent. It sprang from a rightwing intellectual culture that had long imbued its discussion of Spanish politics with a racist rhetoric that spoke of political opponents as non-Christians and non-Aryans, which, in their eyes, defined them as non-Spanish. By portraying Republicans as descendants or servants of Jews and Muslims, conservative opinion-makers in the press, the military, and the Church had created an atmosphere that engendered bloody persecution of their enemies. The logic of the crusade sanctioned violence against the "infidel" in the name of God, and the Catholic Church of Spain allied itself from the beginning of the Civil War with the Nationalist rebels and against the secular Republic that had stripped it of its old privileges. Unlike the spontaneous mob violence against Nationalists and their allies in the Church that occurred in some Republican areas but was never officially condoned by the Republican government or its army, the Nationalist atrocities were encouraged wholeheartedly by the rebel leaders as part of their total war strategy. According to Jean Grugel, Tim Rees, and others, the wave of persecution against civilians, seen as Nationalist collaborators in Republican zones, mostly came to an end by December of 1936, but it

Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 134–135. The more historical arguments based on Francoist anti-communism that came after the shelving of the most radical of Nationalist rhetoric retain their vigor for some even today. Without the multiple re-enforcements of the Nationalist machinery to sustain them, however, the Francoist Crusader myth of the Civil War and the divine origins of the dictatorship crumbled completely in the post-Franco period. Cf. Juan Pablo Fusi, *Franco, autoritarismo y poder personal* (Madrid: Santillana, 1985), 17.

would continue unabated throughout the Civil War in Nationalist zones.⁶ It has been argued that this was because the most extreme Nationalist ideology did not view civilians who had supported the Republic as compatriots with different political ideas who might be persuaded to change those ideas. Instead, they were seen as corrupted followers of an “Anti-Spain” who needed to be utterly crushed.

In order to illustrate this aspect of rightwing thinking, informed by a warped fetishization of Spain’s Reconquest, we might consider the following passage from a Spanish fascist essay titled “El regreso” (“The Return”), written by Onésimo Redondo in May 1933, in which the labyrinthine and mythical reasoning of the Spanish rightwing concerning their leftist enemies is on display:

Marxism, with its Mohammedan utopias, with the truth of its dictatorial iron and the pitiless lust of its sadistic magnates, suddenly renews the eclipse of Culture and freedoms like a modern Saracen invasion.... This certain danger, of Africanization in the name of Progress, is clearly visible in Spain. We can state categorically that our Marxists are the most African of all Europe.... Historically, we are a friction zone between that which is civilized and that which is African, between the Aryan and the Semitic.... For this reason, the generations that built the fatherland, those that freed us from being an eternal extension of the dark continent, raised their swords against attacks from the south and they never sheathed them.... Isn’t there a risk of a new domination of the African element?.... For this reason, the great Isabella ordered Spaniards always to watch Africa permanently, to defeat Africa and never be invaded by her again. Was the Peninsula entirely de-Africanized? Is there not a danger of a new kind of domination of the African factor, here where so many roots of the Moorish spirit remained in the character of a race in the vanguard of Europe? We ask this important question dispassionately and we will answer it right away by underlining the evident danger of the new Africanization: “Marxism.” Throughout the world, there exists the Jewish or Semite conspiracy against Western civilization, but in Spain it can more subtly and rapidly connect the Semitic element, the African element. It can be seen flowering in all its primitive freshness in our southern provinces, where Moorish blood lives on in the subsoil of the race. There, bloody and materialist propagandas feed off the southern fire of “holy war.” The follower of Spanish Marxism, especially the Andalusian, soon takes the incendiary torch, breaks into manor houses and farms, impelled by the bandit subconscious, encouraged by the Semites of Madrid; he wants bread without earning it, he wants to laze around and be rich, to take his pleasures and to take his revenge...and

⁶ Cf. Jean Grugel and Tim Rees, *Franco’s Spain* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 24–28, as well as Chapter 6, “Culture and Society under Francoism,” 128–156.

the definitive victory of Marxism will be the re-Africanization of Spain, the victory of the combined Semitic elements—Jews and Moors, aristocrats and plebeians who have survived ethnically and spiritually in the Peninsula and in Europe.⁷

Redondo's depiction of Republicans, both of the revolutionary left and of the liberal democratic center, as a reincarnation of the "African" enemies of medieval Christian Spain (Moors and Jews), authorizes and even facilitates their future expulsion, persecution, or destruction. Political differences are portrayed here in racialized terms to suggest that medieval Spanish history was repeating itself in the early twentieth century. The descendants of medieval Moorish invaders, the "subsoil" of the Andalusian peasant population, are said to have been stirred up by political leaders in Madrid to commit heinous acts of violence and class warfare. Those leaders are described as "Semite," suggesting that they are the spiritual or even biological heirs of converted Jews who married into the Spanish aristocracy in the 15th and 16th centuries to avoid the Spanish inquisition. By labeling liberal democrats and Marxist leftists as "African" Moors and Jews, this rightwing discourse attempts to resurrect the nation's crusading past and equates its political goal of resisting democracy and Marxism with the foundation of the nation through Reconquest and inquisition. The terrifying "Africa" in this rhetoric exists, not across the Straits of Gibraltar, but inside the Spanish people. It is the remnant of the cultural and racial "bastardization" that took place during the Middle Ages when Christians, Jews, and Muslims coexisted in most parts of the peninsula. This coexistence led to the race-mixing and the cultural syncretism that rightwing ideologues like Redondo saw as a shameful legacy of Spain's history.

Such convoluted racist thinking had also informed Franco's use of Moroccan troops from Africa in his campaign to crush the revolutionary strikers of the northwestern Spanish region of Asturias in 1934. At that time, Franco had no compunction about unleashing the same ruthless techniques of war against Spanish working class opponents that he had used against the Moroccans in the Spanish protectorate. He had made a name for himself there as a military genius, a sort of modern-day El Cid, the medieval Christian hero whose soldiers had also included both Spanish Christians and faithful Moorish mercenaries. Franco made this clear in his

⁷ Cf. Paul Preston, "The Theorists of Extermination: The Origins of Violence in the Spanish Civil War," in *Unearthing Franco's Legacy: Mass Graves and the Recovery of Historical Memory in Spain*, eds. Carlos Jerez-Farrán and Samuel Amago (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 58–59.

statement comparing the campaign to crush the Asturian miners' strike in 1934 to the Reconquest-like colonial war he had fought against Moroccan rebels:

The war in Morocco, with the *Regulares* and the [Spanish Foreign] Legion, had a certain romantic air, an air of Reconquest. But this war is a frontier war and its fronts are socialism, communism and whatever attacks civilization in order to replace it with barbarism.⁸

During the Civil War, Franco again decided to import his Moorish *Regulares* and war-hardened Spanish Foreign Legionnaires to Spanish national soil to terrorize the Spanish working-class population into submission. Such official policy on the Nationalist side resulted in the pillaging of villages, raping of women, killing of prisoners of war, and mutilation of fallen combatants. This type of ruthless total war against the civilian population and armed opponents was a calculated move that aimed at eradicating or cowing all Republican resistance.⁹ In an ironic reversal of the dominant interpretation of Spanish national history, Franco brought Moorish troops across the Straits of Gibraltar to save Catholic Spain from a homegrown but, nonetheless (in his eyes), “foreign-imposed” secular and progressive Spain. Since European liberalism, at the behest of the Jews, had corrupted Spain in the estimation of so many rightwing Spanish ideologues, the use of *Africanista* war tactics and Moorish fighters to save the fatherland and Spanish Christianity from the corrupted working class or liberal Spaniards, could easily be justified in Nationalist circles.¹⁰

Systematic terror thus became the order of the day. One of the original coup-plotters, General Emilio Mola y Vidal famously told Nationalist forces on July 19, 1936 that “We must sow terror.... We must set forth a sensation of domination, eliminating without scruples and without

⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁹ Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994), 146.

¹⁰ Due to the presence of Moroccans among the Nationalist forces during the Civil War, this anti-Muslim rhetoric was toned down even though the terms “Cruzada” (Crusade) or “Guerra de liberación nacional” (War of National Liberation) were the favored ways of referring to the Civil War until the 1960s. The regime’s official textbooks and propaganda for civic and youth groups fostered the idea that the conflict had been won by Spain against a foreign-led force that had sought to implant Soviet domination in Spain through a satellite communist state that Republican collaborators were planning to install before they were stopped by the *Caudillo*. Cf. Michael Richards, “Grand Narratives,” 130–133.

vacillation all those who do not think like us.”¹¹ Extra-judicial assassinations of known Republicans and their sympathizers (often denounced to authorities by local priests or disgruntled neighbors for detention and the dreaded nighttime walk or *paseo* to a summary execution) became the official policy of Nationalist forces as their control expanded over ever widening swaths of the country. This policy of involving the civil population itself in the purge of the enemy within led to the slaughter of thousands of union leaders, intellectuals, and government workers, including municipal politicians, doctors, nurses, and schoolteachers, as well as many Republican soldiers who fell into Nationalist hands. Herded into makeshift concentration camps across the Nationalist-controlled territories, many thousands of Republicans faced military trial without legal representation and swift execution or, if they were lucky, long prison sentences at hard labor.¹² The bodies of the executed were often buried in unmarked mass graves so that the very memory of their “traitorous” existence could be expunged from the national record. Those Republicans not killed or imprisoned either fled the country or survived in silent, terrorized compliance with the new order imposed by the Nationalists and suffered social ostracism and persecution for decades.¹³

When Franco’s Nationalist forces won the Spanish Civil War after three years of bloody conflict in 1939, the new regime continued to use violence and coercion to destroy all vestiges of the progressive Spain it had overthrown. As Julián Casanova has pointed out,¹⁴ the terror unleashed during the war continued long afterwards and was understood as a necessary strategy for consolidating the Nationalists’ authority over Spain. A time of silence descended on Spain as all became wary of expressing any opinions that might expose them to arrest and severe

¹¹ Ignacio Fernández de Mata, “The Rupture of the World and the Conflicts of Memory,” in *Unearthing Franco’s Legacy: Mass Graves and the Recovery of Historical Memory in Spain*, eds. Carlos Jerez-Farrán and Samuel Amago (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 301.

¹² Julián Casanova, “The Faces of Terror: Violence During the Franco Dictatorship,” in *Unearthing Franco’s Legacy: Mass Graves and the Recovery of Historical Memory in Spain*, eds. Carlos Jerez-Farrán and Samuel Amago (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 102–107.

¹³ As late as the 1970s, the Franco regime was still executing anarchists and radical labor activists, though the vast majority of killings occurred during and in the years immediately after the Civil War. Cf. Ángel Herrerin López, *La CNT durante el franquismo: clandestinidad y exilio (1939–1975)* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2004).

¹⁴ Cf. Julián Casanova, “The Faces of Terror,” 90–120.

punishment by the authorities. On the social and cultural aspects of the post-war Francoist regime, Grugel and Rees (1997) write that

...the Nationalist rhetoric of “true Spain” and “Anti-Spain” was as much directed at cultural and social forms and practices as at political ones. This holistic approach also suggested that simply suppressing the organisations that sustained the ideologies of liberalism, anarchism, socialism, communism and regionalism would not be enough. Society had to be rebuilt in such a way as to eliminate the possibility of their resurgence. Construction of the New State was therefore not merely a response to an immediate threat; it was an attempt to wield cultural and social power in order to rewrite the evolution of Spain and make Francoism an unquestioned part of the natural order of things.¹⁵

In order to install Francoism as an “unquestioned part of the natural order of things,” the legacy of Republican progressive politics, the “Anti-Spain,” was to be completely eradicated at all costs.¹⁶ In place of political dialogue between opposing factions aimed at national reconciliation, a mythical symbolism of the so-called “Eternal Spain” was constructed and inculcated in the population by terror and through a concerted propaganda campaign orchestrated with the cooperation of the Catholic Church and the educational system.

In effect, a culture war that began years before the Civil War (and that had shadowed the armed conflict) would continue well into the 1960s in the form of the ideological manipulation and propaganda machine of Franco’s “New Spain.”¹⁷ Nationalist mythmakers like Reque Meruvia had to invent a suitable history that would be plausible enough for their supporters to recognize as truthful and yet exalted enough to be considered “sacred” or “unquestionable.” We should remember that the force of myths in propaganda lies in their non-rational and ahistorical persuasiveness, when the authority of the mysterious and the spiritual preclude debate or analysis. Propagandistic foundational myths like those used by the Franco regime demand that those who accept them refrain from inconvenient questions about the origins they are designed to “explain.” For Franco’s enemies, all of this Nationalist propaganda amounted to a tapestry of ridiculous lies designed to authorize the repressive dictatorship. But for the

¹⁵ Grugel and Rees, *Franco’s Spain*, 128.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ On the pre-Civil War development of this kind of rightwing discourse in Jesuit-led Marian Catholic youth groups, see Mary Vincent, “Gender and Morals in Spanish Catholic Youth Culture: A Case Study of the Marian Congregations, 1930–1936,” *Gender & History* 13.2 (2001): 273–297.

Nationalists themselves, at least in the first several decades of the dictatorship, the metaphysical historiography that formed the official government story of Spain was indeed truth because it reflected the spiritual mission of the Spanish people that existed on a higher plain than mere history or political conflict. The myth of the crusade to save Spain's soul was calculated to put an end to all the disorderly questioning of tradition that had marked the Republican period.

Franco's Cult of Personality and the Crusade for Post-War Legitimacy

As the centering of the composition on Franco's figure in Reque Meruvia's mural suggests, the *Caudillo* became, almost from the beginning of the Civil War, the glue that held the Nationalists together. Franco became the symbol of their collective hatred for the Republic and the champion of the traditionalist and rightwing faction of the ongoing culture war. A key piece of this Francoist culture war to erase Spanish progressivism was, in fact, the all-important image of the dictator himself, the great *Caudillo* who, as we have seen, was constantly portrayed as the savior of the nation, just as in Reque Meruvia's mural.¹⁸

Throughout the long years of the dictatorship, Spaniards became very familiar with the visage of their leader, no matter how the details and symbolic props surrounding him might have evolved. Repeated endlessly on everything from monuments to documentary newsreels to currency to postage stamps, Franco's image became emblematic of the ideology of Spanish traditionalism that the Nationalists were attempting to impose. The visual representation of the *Caudillo* and the ideology to which his image was tied were designed to create a seamless icon of the Nationalist

¹⁸ According to Angel Llorente Hernández, "La construcción de un mito. La imagen de Franco en las artes plásticas en el primer franquismo (1936–1945)," *Archivos de la Filmoteca. Revistas de los Estudios Hispánicos sobre la Imagen* 1.42–43 (2002): 46–75, the *Caudillo*'s iconography was set during and immediately after the Civil War and would change little for the remainder of the dictatorship. Other critics, however, have noted a concerted effort to humanize Franco's image as early as the 1950s when his official representations on television and in the popular press exchanged some of his martial airs for more folksy and sportsmanlike attributes (cf. Vicente Sánchez Biosca and Rafael R. Tranche, *NO-DO: El tiempo y la memoria* [Madrid: Cátedra, 2001]). Later on in the 1960s, the dictator would eventually be portrayed as the kindly grandfather of all Spaniards in order to suit the political realities of that time (cf. Manuel Palacio, "Francisco Franco y la televisión," *Archivos de la Filmoteca. Revistas de los Estudios Hispánicos sobre la Imagen* 1.42–43 [2002]: 91).

Movement, and that image never disappeared from public life until he died. As Pascal Lardelier has pointed out, this type of political portrait of an authoritarian ruler usually has little concern for aesthetics and reflects, instead, the desire to create a surrogate presence for the ruler whose likeness can be reproduced and distributed across the country to create an impression of ubiquity and omnipotence.¹⁹ As the supreme leader of the new regime, Franco's medal-festooned and uniform-clad image perpetuated the memory of his victory in the Civil War throughout the 1940s.²⁰ As we will note when we look more closely at Reque Meruvia's mural, much of this Francoist propaganda was, in fact, designed to revise that memory in ways that not only lionized the dictator's victory but also perpetuated what he represented by making his image an inescapable fact of life in Spain.

One Francoist textbook for schoolchildren can serve as a perfect illustration of the hagiographic treatment of Franco that was so ubiquitous in Spanish popular and academic cultures:

A *Caudillo* is a gift that God makes to the nations that deserve it and the nation accepts him as an envoy who has arisen through God's plan to ensure the nation's salvation.²¹

As we see in this statement about Franco's divinely-sanctioned authority, in order to justify the regime and its violent beginnings, the Nationalists evoked a mythical and anthropomorphized history of the Spanish nation that presents it as having a soul and a higher purpose overseen by God. At the head of this renewal of Spain's spiritual purpose stood the *Caudillo* himself. Spanish history classes would emphasize the long list of Christian

¹⁹ Pascal Lardelier, "Image incarnée. Une généalogie du portrait politique," *Médiation et Information* 7 (1997): 26.

²⁰ In his analysis of a NO-DO (Francoist propaganda newsreel) produced to exalt Franco's image for Nazi Germany, Ramón Sala ("Retrato de Familia. Historia de un fracaso," *Archivos de la Filmoteca. Revistas de los Estudios Hispánicos sobre la Imagen* 1.42–43 [2002]: 126–139) compares that modern filmic representation of Franco to the medieval typology of the "God-blessed king" seen in a ninth-century Frankish portrait of King Charles the Bald. He finds that the 1940s NO-DO representation of Franco, hard at work protecting "indomitable Spain" from the red hordes, reproduces many of the compositional elements of this medieval royal portrait: the king is surrounded by a court that includes not only his ministers, important dignitaries, and allegorical representations of different regions in his realm, but also angelic figures, all of whom are arranged around the central unifying point of the king, crowned and enthroned by the will of God. This is an obvious model for Reque Meruvia's mural too.

²¹ Paul Preston, *Franco*, 5.

warriors and kings who contributed to that grand spiritual plan, from medieval Reconquest heroes like El Cid and Fernando III to the great leaders of the Golden Age, the Catholic Kings, Charles V, and Phillip II who prefigured, in different ways, the exalted figure of Spain's twentieth-century *Caudillo*. In fact, many portrayals of Franco over the decades (in portraiture, newsreels, biopics, and the popular press) would constantly tie his persona to one or several of these historical precursors, depicting him as the culmination of Spanish national authority.

In the middle of this kind of nationalistic mythmaking about the Civil War and the origins of the Francoist regime, the physical reality of Franco himself stood out almost as a sore spot that could not be entirely covered over by the grandiose imagery draped around it. As many commentators have noted over the years, unlike his fellow dictators in Germany or Italy, Franco lacked personal charisma, an effective speaking style, and a physical presence that could be easily displayed so as to bolster rhetoric about his exalted role in the national story. Short of stature and with a high voice, a perennially jowly face, and a growing paunch, Franco's middle-aged physical presence of the Civil War period and later can seem almost like a cartoon figure designed to satirize when it is placed amidst a mythology that exalted him to the heavens.²² The Catholic insistence on privileging the spiritual over the physical may help explain the regime's insistence on including the anti-heroic physical form of Franco as its central self-justifying propaganda. Mary Vincent's study²³ of the representation of heroic masculinity in Nationalist art of the period points out that heroic idealizations of the muscular male form were dear to Soviet Realists, as well as to Nazis and Italian fascists. Although this type of idealization was used in the Spanish Civil War to celebrate the fighting man (on both sides of the conflict), there was also an opposing tendency (due to Catholic influences) to imitate El Greco's ethereally elongated masculine forms of saints and martyrs by some Nationalist artists like Carlos Sáenz de Tejada. We do not see this El Greco-like approach in portrayals of Franco's body, but in Reque Meruvia's mural we do see another of Sáenz de Tejada's favorite techniques for exalting the Nationalist fighting man: his allegorical identification of the Nationalist hero as a neo-medieval crusader which gives the fighter's physical strength and virility the requisite justification with overtones of abnegation

²² Sánchez Biosca and Tranche (*NO-DO*) refer to the difficult task faced by those charged with sanctifying the figure of Franco for the regime's mythical history due to his physical shortcomings.

²³ Mary Vincent, "The Martyrs and the Saints: Masculinity and the Construction of the Francoist Crusade," *History Workshop Journal* 47 (1999): 68–98.

of the flesh and patriotic sacrifice. Also, ensconced in a crusader's armor as in Reque Meruvia's mural, Franco's physical limitations mostly disappear, and the metaphysical (and mythical) pretensions of his heroic persona come to the fore.

Nationalist Mythmaking in “Allegory of Franco and the Crusade”

We have seen that Reque Meruvia's mural engages with the Franco regime's foundational myths in ways that recall, however implicitly and allegorically, some of the more racist elements of the Nationalist tradition that adhered to its rhetoric about a Nationalist Crusade against the Republic. The nostalgic celebration of the past that characterized Francoist propaganda is apparent here, a conscious rejection of modernity and of the “Africanized” progress we heard about in Onésimo Redondo's article. A similar rejection of twentieth-century revolutionary progressivism and of nineteenth-century liberal democracy is echoed in less overtly anti-Semitic and anti-Moroccan but still xenophobic ways in the following passage from Nationalist writer Federico de Urrutia, written during the immediate post-Civil War period:

This is our ultimate guideline. To be what we were before rather than the shame of what we have been recently. To kill the dead soul of the nineteenth century, liberal, decadent, Masonic, materialist, and Frenchified, and to fill ourselves once more with the spirit of the sixteenth century, imperial, heroic, sober, Castilian, spiritual, legendary, and chivalrous.²⁴

Spiritual, legendary, and chivalrous, the myth of Franco's victorious “Crusade” against an “Anti-Spain” was the ground stone of the regime's self-justification. The mural we are analyzing gives Franco's supernatural role in the restoration of Spanish national integrity an unmistakably religious aura (just like that of the medieval “God-blessed king” that Ramón Sala²⁵ has compared to another 1940s treatment of Franco in a propaganda newsreel). As noted at the outset, the juxtaposition of historical reality (Franco) and foundational myth (Santiago) at the center of the mural fosters an understanding of the universe in which historical reality and the spiritual are inextricably bound together.

²⁴ Stanley G. Payne, *The Franco Regime, 1936–1975* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 119.

²⁵ Ramón Sala, “Retrato de Familia,” 126–139.

Reque Meruvia makes no attempt in his allegorical mural about Franco and the Civil War to distinguish between historical event and spiritual symbol or myth. The Francoist worldview and its rhetoric would have rejected any such constructions of historical vs. religious-metaphysical truth. For most of the ideologues of the regime, the victory of Santiago at the battle of Clavijo was just as real and unquestionably historical as Franco's triumph over the Republicans. Viewers of Reque Meruvia's mural are expected to realize that this is an allegorical scene, not a historically accurate portrait of any one moment in the Civil War; however, the use of a mythologized history as the referent for Franco's victory in that conflict is meant to be taken seriously for its underlying message: God intervened in both of these historical triumphs of an "Eternal Spain" over an "Anti-Spain." For most Francoists, the belief in God's intervention in this world on behalf of Spain was neither myth nor metaphor but undeniable fact.

Franco's power to assure and direct the future of Spain according to its divine plan is perhaps best represented in this allegory through the eye-catching Moorish figures that celebrate his victory and march rightward, into the future, along with his other faithful followers. We have seen that, in traditional foundational myths of Spain, the Moor is the perennial Other, the enemy that defines Spanishness most clearly. Their smiling faces in this composition might almost be seen as a contradiction to the overall ideology on display. The clash between the Moor-killer in the skies over Franco's head and the *Caudillo's* happy Moorish mercenaries in his victory parade is hard to ignore. Nevertheless, the common rightwing demonization of working-class Republicans as Spanish "Moors" allows the force of Reque Meruvia's mural to reappropriate these Moorish mercenaries to play a symbolic role in the allegory about the Civil War and its place in the unfolding of Spanish history. Franco's Moors seem to have two functions in the mural. Firstly, they serve as historical reminders of that detail of the *Caudillo's* military victory and of his *Africanista* roots in Spain's colonial wars in Morocco, making him into a reincarnated Cid. But secondly, and more symbolically, they recall the defeated Republican "Moors," those working-class and peasant-bred Spaniards who had threatened the nation's soul with the anti-Catholic ideologies of the Republic. Now, following Franco's victorious crusade, these same enemies of the true Spain are shown to be faithful servants of Eternal Spain once again.

The purge of Republican elements from Spanish national life and the re-subjugation of the Spanish working classes planned by the regime in the 1940s prompted Francoist mythmakers like Reque Meruvia to use mythic

discourse to erase any historically accurate image of Republicans and replace it with something more manageable. The regime needed to free itself from modernist historiography and from the discourses of scientific, social, and economic progress that had grounded Republican politics. The eternal verities of a medieval foundational national myth offered the perfect solution. Under Franco, there were to be no more politics (in any real sense) and no messy wrangling over class or regional interests like that which led to the Civil War. The figure of the dictator, armored in an unassailable nationalist rhetoric, was to replace all of that un-Spanish democratic chaos with discipline, religious piety, and the grand illusions of a mythical past.

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Fig. 3-1. Arturo Reque Meruvia, *Allegory of Franco and the Crusade* (1948-49) (detail). Instituto de Historia y Cultura Militar, Madrid.

CHAPTER FOUR

BEOWULF'S WEAPONS: ORIGIN AND ANIMISM

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A hero's relationship to effective weapons has always been important. In Thomas Malory's *Le Mort D'Arthur*, Morgan Le Fay creates a fake Excalibur for Arthur and gives the truly magic weapon to a man who has more recently been the sorceress' lover, Accolon, and these weapons, like the justice of the cases of the men carrying them, are difficult to tell apart.¹ Actually, there are many Excaliburs: the one drawn out of stone, only to break, the replacement from the Lady of the Lake, and one from another sorceress, Nyneve, enemy of Le Fay. The first sword is set in stone, the second is found in water, and the third is traded between men but destined to be taken away from men and returned to water. There are many ways that a weapon can be magic; in the case of Excalibur, it is moved around by sorceresses; and he who wields it will be king. Wielded by men, it is exchanged by women.

There are other ways a weapon can be activated, if not animated. James Frazer noted that early man believed that an object could be the home for an animated and animating spirit which, totemically, would change the nature of what that object could do. A magic weapon can have special qualities because it was made by a god or at the request of a god for a hero (like Achilles' armor in *The Iliad*). It can be appropriate to the strength of a great man, like Hercules' club or Gilgamesh's ax (which he saw in a dream) or even like Enkidu who is, at different times, Gilgamesh's shield. The weapon can need special narcotic leaves to put it to sleep when a warrior returns home, like the Scandinavian sword. If it can be put to sleep, by implication, it can also be awakened.

¹ Kenneth Hodges, "Swords and Sorceresses: The Chivalry of Malory's Nyneve," *Arthuriana* 23, no. 2 (Summer, 2002): 78–96.

Animism is different from fetishizing—attributing mystical qualities to inanimate objects. To the believer in animism, an object is not inanimate. Rather than a god entering the object and thereby giving that object a particular ability, the object has a spirit and ability without the extra visit from a god, the depiction of a god (Athena, Hercules), or depiction of some animal strength (snake, lion) or super strength (giant, hero). Animism speaks to the imputing of a soul, by a person who believes that only human beings can have souls, to an object that is forbidden by theology to have a soul. Still, the depiction of a god or goddess on a weapon visually suggests that it would not hurt if a god could be narcissistically attracted to a weapon. I am not suggesting that, in every instance of the depiction of a god on a weapon, the maker self-consciously attempts to attract that god into the weapon and the strength and aid of that god into his own handling of the weapon or that the depiction reminds the warrior of strategies and tactics used by that god. However, I am suggesting that these ubiquitous depictions of gods on weapons often denote the hope that the god will guide and favor the warrior carrying the god with him on the weapon. The animated weapon creates a situation where the warrior is not alone. The non-animist believes that there are fewer souls, less vitality on earth, and fewer immediate and effective allies at the scene of battle. The medieval limiting of souls is not an easy thing (even for Aquinas), and animism is certainly worthy of consideration among Germanic and Celtic peoples and in Scandinavian myth.²

Beowulf comes into possession of a great sword, Hrunting, from Unferth, though Hrunting is not useful either against Grendel or Grendel's mother. It is a sword that he sees on the wall that is destined to slay Grendel's mother, a sword not given to him by anyone, but a Giant's sword placed on the wall. Perhaps, as Kent Gould suggests, God is the magical donor,³ but animism assumes that we have relationships with objects, and there exists the presupposition in many religions that animism implies that an object has a soul when it does not. The idea that one goes into battle, not only with one's human allies but also with that which can become animated in battle, is found in the many images on swords that

² Though Aquinas worries about whether women have souls and finally decides they do and then laments the fact that dogs cannot have souls, the term "animism" has come to reflect religions where the soul of objects can be deliberated, and this has its own advantages in warfare and weaponry.

³ Kent Gould, "Beowulf and Folktale Morphology: God as Magic Donor," *Folklore* 96, no. 1 (1985): 99.

range from snakes to Gorgons.⁴ No consideration has been given to the idea that a shield, more than a sword, or a breastplate can inspire fear in one's enemies and perhaps cause them to lose heart and flee. Instead, a sword and its scabbard are more likely to be in the thoughts of the person who wields it. Arthur's amazing scabbard, for one of the incarnations of Excalibur, is meant to keep Arthur from having a bleeding wound and offers its own protection separate from that of the sword that it surrounds while that sword is inactive. The scabbard is a corresponding microcosm of Arthur's own armor. Here, not only the sword but also the scabbard has magical powers to defend its owner. Arthur's scabbard is, to the sword, what the unwounded skin covering is to the body. Finally, the design on the scabbard is not merely decorative but functional, empowering, and animating.

Although animism has been diagnosed as a "failed epistemology,"⁵ it actually advantages the believer by exemplifying successful warrior practices. This could be, not just a useful delusion, but a Darwinian advantage, a tool in the creation of hero culture and mnemonic skills. Perhaps the most interesting complex use of animism in medieval literature's magic weapons is in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, where the animism of the magic weapon is turned upon itself. The weapon, the girdle of life, should be denied and returned to Bercilak because of the honor of one's word and the laws of hospitality. The dishonorable keeping of the weapon actually causes the hero to repeat the fall, and while it does protect his life, it shows the retention of the earlier Germanic and classical values and traditions and points out the imperfection of Gawain as a true Christian knight who ought to see this life as an anti-room and proving grounds. A hero's desire for self-preservation is dangerous to his Christian and heroic self, though sometimes useful to his actual biological continuance. Thus, we are not surprised when the heroic trials in *Gawain and the Green Knight* turn sneaky. On the third day, the fox is hunted, so we should suspect the deception traditionally personified by the sly, demonic fox. The knowledge that this is the day the fox is hunted is a warning, if not a shield, while Gawain's actual shield with its famous five pointed star should remind us, not of Christ escaping his wounds, but of the actual five wounds of Christ. At some level, the shield-girdle defeats

⁴ This was wonderfully analyzed over a hundred years ago in a study of shields: George Henry Chase, "The Shield Devices of the Greek," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 13 (1902): 67.

⁵ Nurit Bird-David, "Animism Revisited: Personhood, Environment and Relational Epistemology," *Current Anthropology* 40, Supplement (February, 1999): 67-91.

the true shield as Gawain places his trust in animated nature and magic, not in God, the joys of the Virgin, or the wounds of Christ.

Since, in *Gawain*, we are very interested in the origin of the magic weapon, how interested are we in its origin in *Beowulf*? We are interested enough to have the epic narrator tell us that a helmet is dwarf-made or a sword comes from a giant but now is owned by a monstrous female, Grendel's mother. Is the magic weapon a part or an extension of the hero once taken or gifted, given the fact that the weapon can be lost, destroyed, or stolen? As in Milton's epics, in *Gawain* we are as interested in the nature of the giver as in the gift. Neither Milton nor Spenser would be fooled for one instance about the nature of the Girdle of Life because of the seductive elements of the giver. The very fact that the gift comes from a woman who has behaved less than appropriately might give us a clue as to the nature of the weapon. Where, or from whom or when, did the hero get the magic weapon, and what can that magic weapon do? How long has the weapon been in its present state? Must it be reforged, as in *Sigurd the Volsung*, and become useful only after some level of change or even awakening or must it be put back to sleep, like Arthur's Excalibur, or returned to The Lady of the Lake now that the great man will no longer wield it?⁶

So does this same surety work in *Beowulf*? If we fault Gawain for not knowing from the giver that the gift of the Girdle of Life is a seduction, can we return to the gift of Naegling in *Beowulf* with the same surety that the gift will not work against *Beowulf*'s enemy because it was given by someone who wishes the hero no good? Naegling is not like *Beowulf*; the sword is like the *comitatus* at the end of the poem in that it does not accomplish the task for which it was made. *Beowulf*'s refusal to carry any sword at all seems to turn the classical tradition of magic weapons upon itself.⁷ Is it *Beowulf*'s swimming match with Brecca that teaches the hero to trust in his arm strength? Culbert says that Hrunting and Naegling are "close and trusted companions" that acquire their "own reputations as if they were human beings," furthering the history of scholarly suggestions concerning the animistic nature of these swords.⁸ Does the fact that *Beowulf* does not employ a weapon other than his arm strength suggest, as it might in *Sir Gawain*, that *Beowulf* has put his trust in his true shield, his god? If so, the narrator is silent on this. In addition, how can we then

⁶ Patrick Gerard Cheney, "'Secret Powre Unseene': Good Magic in Spenser's Legend of Britomart," *Studies in Philology* 85, no. 1 (Winter, 1988): 21.

⁷ However, Hercules must eliminate all his weapons in one of his labors.

⁸ Taylor Culbert, "The Narrative Functions of *Beowulf*'s Swords," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 59, no. 1 (January, 1960): 20.

explain Beowulf's plan to use Hrunting against Grendel's mother, even though the sword breaks, and Beowulf is fortunate, able, or blessed enough to spy a sword that can be trusted on the wall.

The process that the early modern hero uses to discern which weapon is most likely to work inspires a myriad of evaluative actions in a brief and dangerous period. Culbert says that the use of Hrunting suggests that the combat with Grendel's dam will be more difficult than that with Grendel and not just that the place suggests the appropriateness of arm strength.⁹ We are told that Hrunting is reliable; we know from where Hrunting came. Are we meant to contrast our knowledge of the giver with the narrator's testimony and discount the narrator's gullibility? Given the culture for whom the poem was written and the history of Hrunting's good performance, should we remember the giver when the great sword cannot wound Grendel's mother and must be replaced with the nameless sword Beowulf sees, through whatever agency, hanging on the wall? Is a sword received from the hand of no one from a wall's armory gathered by giants more effective than a sword from an erstwhile enemy? Is a sword, directly from no human, actually, providentially, or fatefully from God? And how is this not Grendel's or Grendel's mother's sword? Could this be an early relative of the famous Ulfberht swords, obtained through the Volga trade route? These swords were made of clean, high carbon steel weighing about two pounds and forged at such a high temperature that rock separated from metal, and the swords bent but did not break. Or does the narrator simply want to talk about weapons? More likely, we are meant to see Beowulf's tactical ability a second time in the defeat of Grendel's mother and, thus, to see Beowulf himself as the true weapon. Forged by Giants and, by implication, for Giants, Beowulf's choice of the sword illustrates his heroic strength through his ability to use this weapon effectively, no matter the origin or recent ownership of that weapon.

We are a long way from *Gawain* here. Two swords have been used, and the sword of Giants has accomplished its task, although this is not the last sword used in *Beowulf*. There is Naegling, the sword that must be used to slay the fire-breathing dragon. Naegling not only has a history as a weapon, but it has a history with Beowulf. As Culbert notes, the former great deeds of Naegling are reviewed before the final fight.¹⁰ In some ways, Naegling contrasts with Beowulf as the weapon is "sharp," "gleaming," and "strong"; in other ways, it is like Beowulf, "the old heirloom." Like Hrunting, this sword of great history and dependability shatters and fails. Like the comitatus that has abandoned Beowulf,

⁹ Ibid., 16.

¹⁰ Ibid., 16.

Naegling fails him as Beowulf's strength and the scales of the dragon shatter the erstwhile trustworthy sword. This allows for a contrast of sword and wielder of sword as Beowulf performs, but Naegling breaks, foreshadowing that both sword and man are vulnerable. At first, we see Naegling, like the comitatus, as untrustworthy. Then we see Naegling, like the hero, capable of being destroyed by the fire-breathing, scaled dragon even with its history of persecution of the enemies of its wielder.

The readers of *Beowulf* are now far from the place we were when, like the Danish coastguard, we just see the general concept of Geatish men having landed in armor and with arms. George Clark notes that, like that coast-guard, we see "armed strangers."¹¹ Even while the Danes of the coastguard allow Beowulf's armed men to go forward, they are looking at their weapons and armor, swords, shields, and spears. When Beowulf leaves, he takes with him the treasure that has swords in it, while in *Gawain*, the hero falls because he takes with him what he believes is the weapon. When Beowulf leaves Hrothgar, he departs by boat and takes great treasure with him. Later, when he is mortally wounded by the dragon, he asks Wiglaf to bring the treasure to him so that he can be comforted by looking upon it. Then when he dies, that treasure goes with him. This is not just a statement that Beowulf likes treasure. It is a statement by the epic narrator that treasure follows Beowulf, even treasure that is cursed. Whether that treasure is trophy or compensation, tribute or borrowed, it follows him. Is that following animated? It does not seem to be as it is decided that the treasure cannot be kept among living men, yet the epistemology of early modern man often accepts that animism might resort to such a ploy.

The results we get, over and over, have these treasures following Beowulf, though Beowulf is unable to use the treasure to achieve what he hopes to accomplish with it. The burial of the treasure is a symbol of the passing of glory and wealth from Geatland, but it is also a symbol of the passing of the king who could bring that treasure and glory to Geatland—a king who has been associated with treasure because of his willingness and ability to bring a boatload of treasure.¹² Even Beowulf's first epic epithet, "the wielder of wonder," suggests that he is essentially defined by what he can move or manage with his arms, be it sword or the arm itself. The word "manage" comes from the Latin for hand, and "to wield" suggests to

¹¹ George Clark, "Beowulf's Armor," *ELH* 32, no. 4 (December, 1965): 416.

¹² Hrothgar's scope notes that Sigemunde has done this—moreover, it is also like what Scyld has done. Cf. Richard J. Schrader, "Succession and Glory in 'Beowulf,'" *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 90, no. 4 (October, 1991): 494.

handle or manage something. However, Beowulf knows the difference in taking treasure and “borrowing.” Unferth’s sword is returned unless it was actually exchanged for the sword that Beowulf receives for ridding the Danes of Grendel.¹³ Indeed, Beowulf has one of the Geat warriors keep his sword for him and actually gives a sword to one of the members of the coastguard. We assume the reason for the great gift of a sword to a member of Hrothgar’s coastguard is because of the seminal importance of the coastguard’s protection of Beowulf’s ship.

Of course, there is one sword that we have not discussed, and that is the sword that Beowulf gives to the Boat-Guard: “A sword to the boat-guard Beowulf gave, / mounted with gold” (*Beowulf*, XXVII.13–14). This reward was to illustrate the incredible importance of the boat-guard, both for being honest (because they are around the treasure) and for protecting the boats that will get them and their treasure back home. None of this needs to be said when we are told that the sword is an ancient heirloom mounted with gold, as the great reward fits both the great service and the generosity of a future king. The emphasis on how valuable the gold sword is suggests that Beowulf has begun his role as a giver of valuable gifts but not necessarily animated gifts.

We have seen the plundered sword on the wall that Beowulf used to fight Grendel’s mother. We have seen the given sword, the stolen sword, the inherited sword, the secretly saved sword, the buried or drowned sword, the sword given by a man, and the sword given by a woman, suggesting widely variant relationships between the given and the gifted. David C. Van Meter argues that great weapons can be wielded by unproven warriors, but that storied steel suggests potential nobility in battle.¹⁴ He notes that the giving of a weapon puts the receiver under “social obligation” and thus reproduces an inheritance ritual, particularly when presented in a public ceremony. Unlike Malory’s patterns of war gear distribution, in *Beowulf* no father presents war gear, unless it is Hrothgar himself, and no sorceress brings war gear—indeed Hrothgar’s wife is particular as to what these prizes do and do not represent in terms of inheritance. Rather, there is the lamentation that Beowulf has no son to inherit, according to tradition. Van Meter notes that the ritual of giving a weapon gives permission and even obligation to use that weapon to defend land for a king.¹⁵

¹³ *Ibid.*, 486.

¹⁴ David C. Van Meter, “The Ritualized Presentation of Weapons and the Ideology of Nobility in ‘Beowulf,’” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 95, no. 2 (April, 1996): 176.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 179.

As in the Roman Cult of Mithras, the taking of the weapon implies that a maturity and self-control has been reached and that at least a foster son relationship between the young man and the “Father” has been attained. The obligation of having been given another man’s weapon builds an oligarchical structure but is particularly interesting when the weapon becomes animated under new or old wielding. Van Meter notes that, among the ninth century Thuringians, war gear was not considered movable property; instead, war gear was inherited with the house or property that it would defend,¹⁶ like the sword on the wall that Beowulf uses to kill Grendel’s dam. This makes Beowulf’s taking of the sword off the wall particularly interesting as he may have symbolically captured Grendel’s Dam’s property for Hrothgar and then given the reward for this deed to his own Geat king upon his return. By taking the sword, he has created a claim to the real estate.

The social patterns and larger social construct are ritualistically creating a warp and wolf of obligation and defense. Like the Roman Barracks emperors that preceded them, the Anglo-Saxons were sensitive to the potential flaws in a strictly hereditary basis for the military defenders of the tribe or clan. Nobles sometimes run away when confronted with dragons; great swords sometimes fail; apparently unpromising young people sometimes learn resilience and fortitude from their afflictions, remain pure in Arthurian Romance, or go through a Herculean purification ritual. A sword is potentially great and enlivened only when wielded by someone who has not run away and is brave enough to fight a dragon or giant. Authority over land through presentation of weapons does not necessarily mean ownership of that land but does suggest the role of defense of that land, and it may have subregum meaning. Unferth’s giving of Hrunting is disturbed by Beowulf’s reminding the court that Grendel still attacks and is like the comitatus at the end of the poem that fails to protect their king, yet has the weapons that could be used for that protection. Unferth has had a great sword but has been unwilling to give it animation. It is only in his passing it to Beowulf that the sword moves. Would Unferth have gained or lost status if his sword had killed his society’s enemy in the hands of Beowulf? Beowulf, after reminding Unferth that his swimming match with Brecca has included slaying sea monsters with “naked swords,” calls Unferth, ironically, “Terror of Swords,”¹⁷ again emphasizing the “feeling” nature of swords and the relationship between the hero and both the sword of his adversary and his

¹⁶ Ibid., 184.

¹⁷ Paul Beekman Taylor, “Searonithas: Old Norse Magic and Old English Verse,” *Studies in Philology* LXXX, no. 2 (Spring, 1983): 112.

own weapon. If a sword can feel terror, Unferth cannot make an enemy's sword feel it; rather, the sword may feel the terror of disuse in the hands of a coward. The idea is that other warriors can actually be "Terror of Swords."

Does Unferth's previous ownership of a sword that may kill his society's enemy confer any honor other than sword-giver? It does not matter, as the sword will not kill Grendel even in Beowulf's hand. It does not avenge Aeschere, Hrothgar's thane. In contrast, Beowulf offers Unferth a sword if he dies. If Beowulf is dead, he will not be able to animate a sword but alive, his courage is such a contrast to the cowardice of Unferth that only dead will he not need a sword or his arm strength. However, Beowulf will not die in the mere because he is used to fighting in such a place, and he will not need the sword in the mere either, ironically, because he and Brecca trained with the "naked swords" in the sea until his arm-strength was sword-like. It is what animates the erstwhile apparently inanimate. Even if Beowulf cannot necessarily animate Hrunding sufficiently, is it because Hrunding is the gift of or loan from Unferth or is it because Hrunding, the borrowed sword, is simply not destined to work against Beowulf's enemies? The power relationship between the giant's sword on the wall, perhaps related to the famous hot-forged swords, and Beowulf has its own destiny, focusing on a relatedness of choice. *Beowulf* is not Christian enough for it to be the Girdle of Life. People animating inanimate objects explain a difference in performance in those objects as well as a relationship between the object being wielded and the wielder by implying multiple parts in the wielding.

The sword is not necessarily passive. It is difficult not to attribute life to an object that can appear to be so life-like, so sustaining of life, and creating of death of the other. The weapon is anthropomorphized as well as animated by giving it a name, by putting it to sleep in its scabbard with narcotic leaves, by giving it a kind of historic life, or by personifying it and suggesting what it can do and what sort of creature it may be able to vanquish with its forged-in or conferred magic. Is a plundered sword better than a borrowed sword or a sword given by someone with whom you have been enemies? Certainly, the sword hilt is sufficiently precious to Beowulf that he takes it with him back from Grendel's Dam, along with Grendel's head. The sword hilt becomes worthy of being a trophy that is not just proof of his kill but also treasure in and of itself. There is a great deal of uncertainty about what is alive and what is not in many early modern cultures, and Beowulf's culture is no exception. The very process by which a sword is placed in its scabbard suggests the weapon is awake and active or the reverse, the weapon is asleep as it ought to be within the non-

endangered home, and the relationship to male sexual organs is obvious. But the flat nature of the sword as it slides into and out of its scabbard reminds many an epic narrator of dead/alive and asleep/awake, bed and tomb, as well as erect and hidden.

The movement of objects between people, particularly men is dangerous, has many rules, and requires practice, for at some level, what we are creating are relationships and relatives. Unferth's weapon is then Beowulf's. If Beowulf dies, his sword goes to Unferth, although they are relatives only in that they interrelate through the weapon. They are not connected by blood though they may be by the history of the blood that the sword has drunk. Paul Beckman Taylor says that "The name Beowulf indicates a force as it designates a person"¹⁸ and reminds us of the last poem in the Codex Rwegius 2365 "the Old Lay of Hamdir" where the brothers Hamdir and Sorli are "immune to man-made weapons by virtue of their magical armor"¹⁹ and thus are stoned to death by the king who knows this secret. Often, when we look at magic weapons, we are also looking at the nature of the trophy. If the Giant's sword melts and cannot be taken into the world, except for its jeweled hilt, it would have been useful in that world where Beowulf, facing the dragon, would be abandoned by his comitatus and unprotected by his armor. But it is not there for him, following the pattern that all good things, like Heorot itself, cannot last. Grendel is not destined to die by metal.

The choice of the Giant's sword on the wall is in the nature of a trophy, but is it providential, and, if so, from what gods? Norse and Germanic gods seldom intervene directly. They place a weapon in the area to see if the hero is clever enough as well as adaptive enough to find and use it. The old god of war is also the god of wisdom, and Thor's hammer can look a lot like a Viking type 9 sword and can be findable in an underwater cave, just as a body of water is the gateway to the pagan otherworld. The arm of Grendel is, for a time, a trophy. Unferth's gift of Hrunting is not a trophy; rather, it is a peace offering. There are early modern examples of David killing Goliath with a sword; likewise, the Beowulf poet has Cain killing Abel with a sword.²⁰ Turnus breaks and finds a sword in the *Aeneid*, though finally to no avail. Even the sea monsters killed during the swimming match with Brecca were slaughtered by swords brought along for the eventuality, though no doubt great arm strength was amassed in the swimming itself as well as the wielding of those swords while swimming.

¹⁸ Ibid., 110.

¹⁹ Ibid., 118.

²⁰ H. L. Rogers, "Beowulf's Three Great Fights," *The Review of English Studies New Series* 6, no. 24 (October, 1955): 345.

We are told that the battle with Grendel's Mother is a more difficult battle, although it is against a weaker enemy. We must assume that Grendel's mother has brought her "A" game to avenge her child, beginning a progression of ever more difficult battles that require a hierarchy of weapons from bare hands to historic sword to giant's sword. The disappearance of the Giant's sword happens because the narrator wants to remind us that all good things vanish. Like the disappearance of Excalibur, is the Giant's sword so great a blade that it can be used once in a hard won victory to defeat Grendel's Dam and then burns up with the heat of battle? There is a difference in the sword that breaks and the sword blade that disappears. How unfortunate that the sword cannot be around to protect Beowulf when yet another sword disappoints, his armor does not do its job, and the comitatus abandons their king. Beowulf fights the dragon with Naegling, though he might prefer to fight the dragon with his arm strength if only he could do that. Wiglaf also has a sword, an ancestral one, so one can imagine the possibility that it is also a sword that has been at least known to Beowulf. Wiglaf is finally useful to Beowulf in that he comes back, is weaponed with an ancestral sword, and is capable of defending Beowulf. However, the great king is already mortally wounded at this point, and this treasure will also have to be buried rather than enjoyed because of the curse.

Beowulf's request that he be allowed to die gazing at the dragon's treasure is a testimony of his appreciation of the material world. If Beowulf appreciates swords, he also must be open to abandoning them. Wiglaf carries the sword of Eadmund who first escaped his uncle and then was killed by Onela, his kinsman. Thus, Wiglaf's sword allows an interruption of the chronological narrative to tell of the history of the sword as it has been a part of a deadly blood feud and now belongs to Wiglaf to use to defend his uncle. The story suggests changing patterns of allegiance between uncle and nephew, as Eadgils then took the throne. If it is impossible to follow exactly how this sword has traveled, perhaps it is because we have not heard this story as often as would have been the case if we had been original listeners to the narrative, or perhaps there are shameful reasons to confuse the pattern of travel of Wiglaf's sword, implying Wiglaf's shame in not immediately defending Beowulf. From whom did Wiglaf receive the sword and what does this carefully suggest about Beowulf's own relationship with his deceased royal nephew? Why are we not allowed to see this sword travel as we have seen others? Again, swords have histories that can be told to intensify the action that is about to take place with them.

Though Beowulf does not search for the dragon's treasure, he wants to see it; he asks Wiglaf to bring the treasure so that he may die happily, gazing at it, hardly a Christian end of life. To ask for Hegelian logic in this work is foolish, but the irony that Beowulf believes that he has served his people again by enriching them with loot taken in conquest is laid to rest as the dragon's hoard must be buried with Beowulf to avoid the curse.

From the very beginning of the poem, swords are a double-edged weapon. The Ingeld story has Beowulf correctly noting that the attempt to make peace among enemies through marriage will not work. Freawara is accompanied by a Dane who has his father's sword as an heirloom, but the sword is also booty and trophy in that the Heathobards are reminded that the sword was part of the plunder from Heolobard's father's death. What is heirloom for the Dane is stolen patrimony to the Heathobards. The understanding of the origin of the sword causes these men to fight again, despite all the work they had done, attempting to weave peace. Like Aeneas seeing Turnus's scarf in the *Aeneid*, it is almost as if this sword prevents the peace from being concluded, and through the knowledge of its history, is able to animate the desire for revenge and retribution among men. The very presence of the sword makes the possibility of peace hopeless. Wiglaf is carrying a sword given to him by his father who took it from Eadmund, a man he has killed. The only clarity we are given is that the trophy sword causes the peace to be broken.

To the present Danish wearer, the sword represents his father's love, but to the Heathobard, it represents his father's death and his father's inability to hand down the heirloom to his son because it has been taken as trophy by another. The very presence of one sword does so much to destroy the peace. The yielding of weapons, or any treasure for that matter, is an act of obedience, whether it is done in the *Sundiata* by the kings in the federation of Old Mali and the remains of the Ghana Empire or whether it is done in *Beowulf*. In the *Sundiata*, Sundiata immediately returns the weapons to the kings, and it is the actual movement of the weapons from the sub-regnum to Sundiata as regnum that is significant. Sundiata never takes the weapons away from the place where they are ceremoniously yielded. He immediately returns the weapons to the sub-regnum that is now regnum once again. It is the process of handing over the weapons that confers emergency hierarchy to Sundiata and perhaps Hrothgar. It is the glory-gatherer turning over what he has won as surely as Achilles did this to Agamemnon. There is great potential for anger in the subregum nature of warriors who are also kings. As Schrader notes, Beowulf does not seek the Geat throne; rather, the kingdom "passed" to his control when Hygelac and his son Heardred died, as the sword

“passed” to Hrothgar.”²¹ Just as Beowulf has moved the treasures from Hrothgar to Hygelac, so these treasures also suggest that the Geat Royal family is so small that it aims to increase by other methods than marriage and birth. Beowulf does not only move property between men. He has received Wealhtheow's necklace as a present, and he brings that ornament to Hygd. Given Hrethel's sword and land, Beowulf has moved far away from his original position through serving Hrothgar. The weapons we find in *Beowulf* possess elements of personhood, though to allow those elements to be too distinguished threatens the new Christian ontology in which only human beings can possess souls. We might assume that the further Christianity takes hold in Europe, the less the new ontology would allow these weapons to be distinguished by their retained, even increased, personhood. Is there a fear in Beowulf that interacting with these swords is interacting with an agent that threatens, in some way, that absoluteness of self, as well as threatens the boundaries between a self devoted to God and a self that holds a weapon? Heorot itself, though destined for destruction, has animistic qualities.

The ancient debate concerning “How Christian is the Beowulf poem?” has importance to our question of how animistic are the weapons in *Beowulf*. The hero has always had an unusually informal division between self and other as he is able to save the other and put himself in danger. There is no doubt that a sword, held by a man, can act. The question is the potential agency of the personified object. Performance characteristics can change or remain the same, influenced by the person carrying the sword, as well as by the sword itself. That the giant's sword is on the wall of Grendel's dam's cave is important, but so is Beowulf's noticing the sword on the wall. In animism, objects can have agency. We are not limiting our discussion to only who can act because there is the potential that “what” can act also. Although, after a process of personification, if we come to expect a certain result related to the history of the weapon's performance, we are punished for that expectation in *Beowulf*.

Animism helps us pass judgment on an object as to whether that object is likely to help us if we depend upon it. Making decisions related to the continued use, dependability, and likelihood of success with a weapon is important for the hero as objects are tried and found true or wanting. Beowulf cannot give Hrungling success; indeed, he abandons the use of the sword. He cannot keep Naegling from breaking since Naegling breaks because Beowulf can still strike so hard and the dragon is so hard, itself, or maybe Naegling breaks because of the local or recent nature of its forging. Most likely, it is not broken for the reason that Vikings break swords and

²¹ Schrader, “Succession and Glory in ‘Beowulf,’” 301.

place them in graves so that the sword could not be used against the dead warrior in the afterlife, although death follows Beowulf so closely after the breaking of Naegling that one is tempted to dangerous conjecture by *pro hoc ergo propter hoc*. In *Beowulf*, there is a kind of denial of accountability of the agency of objects. The tactical lesson, that just because a sword has done great deeds in the past does not mean that the wielder will be able to count on it this afternoon, is not lost on the careful listener. Neither is the concept that a sword that is conferred on a newcomer and gives him insights of relationship, even ownership, may not be useful to vanquish a now common enemy. The sword cements the relationship, but it may not do the deed. An object may be “socially” successful and important without being militarily useful in a fight, and knowing the difference in the early modern period was essential.

The object class of swords, even by the time of *Beowulf*, is formulaic enough to allow some breaking of the formula. Throwing a sword off its previous historic trajectory of success is one of the ways that the poet varies from the traditional, perhaps even the tired, tradition. Taking care of objects, giving objects, and receiving objects all suggest creating, accepting, and confirming a relationship of obligation. Chris Gosden suggests that not only do people create things, but things create and change people:²² Beowulf often has to discard the weapon in order to win or the weapon must break and be replaced by Beowulf’s choice, rebalancing perhaps the relationship between warrior and weapon that we might have found in a completely non-Christian poem. The swords of Beowulf do not get to function in the relationship the way they might have otherwise. The material world is somewhat reduced by the failure of the historic and relationship-conferring weapons that maintain their relationship-conferring nature while literally and figuratively shattering the relation as weapon against mutual enemies. In the death of Grendel, Beowulf alone is the weapon. The relationship between people and things is adjusted and rebalanced; concepts of agency are changed, complicated, and simplified; and, in the object class of swords, Hrunting and Naegling are not allowed to progress hierarchically, though Beowulf is. There is constant change in the relationship between sword and warrior, and the possibility of a great sword helping to create a great warrior is definitely available in the literature, just as is the possibility that a sword can disappoint or be turned aside, thrown off, rejected, or replaced with something found on the wall of a cave. This denies the offending object the result that might otherwise be available to it—lack of success of the

²² Chris Gosden, “What Do Objects Want,” *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 12, no. 3 (September, 2005): 209.

warrior. Beowulf twice denies the offending artifact this result and thus denies the material the ability to create or destroy the person, reducing the importance and agency of that material world caught between the philosophical Scylla and Charybdis of Germanic materialism and Platonic dualism. So the sword or object is made more passive, its actions have fewer outcomes and negative or positive results, and its agency is denied. Any attempt by the object to channel, limit, or constrain human success is defeated, along with the monster.

A sword has certain characteristics that limit, even channel, human agency, so it has potential agency within its material grasp. Because it was made by humans to function in particular ways, an object bears responsibility beyond its symbolic conference of power. It must have actual power, but can it have motive? When Beowulf tosses aside Hrunting for the giant's weapon, he lessens the ability of the sword to determine what happens to Beowulf, just as he has already done when he depends only on his actual arm strength to kill Grendel. The interstice is a small crack, opening, or gap between parts of something, including between parts of the body. A sword has a relationship to an arm; it is connected, like an arm, from the torso. Its interstice is not different from an arm, just lower, although it is higher than other parts of the body. The interstice between objects is created when Beowulf uses the sword on the wall. An unsuccessful weapon is replaced by a successful weapon, and man's agency is increased in relation to the agency of weaponry, just as when Beowulf defeats the dragon. The agency of age is reduced by the fact that the dragon is conquered, though the death of Beowulf mitigates that. As Gosden notes "things place obligations on people."²³

Does the fact that the broken sword is in Grendel's dam's cave at the time that Beowulf spies the unbroken sword cause us to compare the two in a particular way? Does this suggest a reality of change rather than continuity? The sword is directly attached to the body, not unlike the arm. Even in the beginning of the poem, when Beowulf is with the men of the coastguard, they command him to march, bearing "weapons and weeds" (*Beowulf*, IV.291–292). The coastguard comments on the new association of Beowulf's weapons, which have not been taken from him, with the weeds of leaving the boat in a way that mixes the two, makes them share space with our notion of clothes and covering, perhaps suggesting the Scandinavian tradition of weed-covered weapons to keep warriors from killing their allies and families. Even Beowulf's helmet has the boar on it. During Beowulf's recitation of the events of the swimming match with Brecca, he names the "naked sword" (*Beowulf*, VIII.540) that he and

²³ Ibid., 202.

Brecca carry with them to defend each other from sea monsters as well as to increase their arm strength. At what point these examples move beyond personification into animism is a difficult question, perhaps an unanswerable one. In the case of Freyr, from Norse paganism, Beowulf wears the dwarf-made helmet with the boar image of Freyr. Like Beowulf, Freyr cannot use his magic sword, but Freyr's sword is much more magic and much more animated than any of Beowulf's. Freyr's sword does not need the arm of the hero to fight on. If the hero who wields the sword is wise, the sword will fight on its own, animated by the wisdom of its owner at a level not seen in Beowulf. Like Beowulf, Freyr finds weapons (in the case of Freyr, it is an antler), but without their great swords, Freyr and Beowulf will be killed. There is no doubt that Freyr's sword is absolutely animated and capable of working on its own while Beowulf's is not. The kenning for sword, as translated in the University of Virginia Beowulf e-text, is "relict-of-files." This is very interesting given the notion that relict means not only a remnant of what barely remains but also one's widow. Both suggest an earlier age when swords were more plentiful than they are at this point, just as the Freyr sword reminds us that the earlier level of sword animism is never reached in *Beowulf* and gives us a conclusion about the limits of animism in *Beowulf* compared to the Freyr story. No sword in *Beowulf* approaches the Norse animism of the Freyr story. Only the image of Freyr's boar on Beowulf's helmet suggests a sword so animated that it fights alone. Animism has retreated from the spoken to only the described. With Hrunting, Beowulf has announced limited possibilities: "And let Unferth wield this wondrous sword, / earl far-honored, this heirloom precious, / hard of edge; with Hrunting I / seek doom of glory, or Death shall take me" (*Beowulf*, XXII.1493–1496). There seems to be only two possibilities: either Beowulf dies or Hrunting does the necessary work. The next section suggests that Grendel's Dam is "sword-hungry" (*Beowulf*, XXII.1503) which, given the fact that we will find an armory on her cave wall, foreshadows that event as well as continuing the pagan concept that women are a source of weaponry. It is not just that Hrunting does not kill Grendel's Dam: "The light-of-battle was loath to bite" (*Beowulf*, XXII.1528). Finally, people animating inanimate objects explains the difference in performance in those objects and fixes, phenomenologically, the relationship between the object being wielded and the wielder by implying that the wielded plays a part in the wielding.

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CHAPTER FIVE

ABJECTION IN GRIMMS'
"RUMPELSTILTSKIN":
A MYTHIC PARADIGM OF
MASCULINITY'S COUNTERTYPE

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Grimms' "Rumpelstiltskin" belongs to a corpus of extraordinarily influential fairy tales. Grimms' *Children's and Household Tales*, which has become commonly known as *Grimms' Fairy Tales*, is one of the most widely read books in the world. Of the 211 fairy tales included in the 1857 final edition,¹ "Rumpelstiltskin" has long been recognized as one of the best known tales, along with "Cinderella," "Little Red Riding Hood," "Snow White," "Sleeping Beauty," "Hansel and Gretel," "Rapunzel," "Bluebeard," "The Frog King," and "A Tale About the Boy Who Went Forth to Learn What Fear Was."² Of the numerous scholars who have attempted to articulate the far-reaching influence of this select group of popular tales, Jack Zipes's contention that each of these classical fairy tales has been transformed into myth is particularly important. Utilizing

¹ Although the 1857 final edition of Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* [*Children's and Household Tales*] consisted of 211 tales, the number of tales in subsequent edited collections varies, especially in translated versions. For example, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, the most commonly available collection in English translation, includes eight selected tales from *The Annotations of 1856* and thirty-two omitted tales, which brings the total number of tales to 250. See Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, trans. by Jack Zipes (New York: Bantam, 1987), xxvi–xxxii.

² For a discussion of the ten most popular Grimms' tales, see James M. McGlathery, *Grimms' Fairy Tales: A History of Criticism on a Popular Classic* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1993), 63–79.

Roland Barthes's well-known theorization of myth as a cultural artifact that presents itself as natural and eternal, Zipes asserts that popular tales such as "Rumpelstiltskin" have become mythic insofar as "they have naturalized particular and formulaic ways of thinking about individuals and social relationships."³ This essay approaches "Rumpelstiltskin" as a masculinity myth and examines how Grimms' revision of the tale constructs what have become formulaic ways of thinking about men and their relationship to hegemonic masculinity.

Comparative studies of Grimms' "Rumpelstiltskin" typically focus on spinning tales, tales in which lying or deceit is a major thematic element, or tales classified as Name of the Helper tales in the Aarne-Thompson motif index (AT 500).⁴ This essay charts a different course by treating Rumpelstiltskin's masculinity as the primary focus of comparative study. Although early scholarly treatments of the tale focused predominantly on Rumpelstiltskin's role as a helper figure and the riddle of identity posed by his name, feminist scholarship later shifted critical attention from Rumpelstiltskin to the Miller's daughter. In an influential 1994 essay, Zipes argued that female oppression, creativity, and economic productivity constitute the major themes of the tale.⁵ Since the publication of Zipes's essay, many—if not most—critical treatments of the tale have focused on the dynamics of female victimization. While acknowledging that female oppression plays a significant role in the tale, the following analysis seeks to refocus attention on Rumpelstiltskin and the problem of his identity by examining the Grimms' editorial practices as a process of gender construction that configures Rumpelstiltskin as a figure of abject masculinity, a distinctly ambiguous countertype that deviates from the ideal of masculinity that emerged in Germany in the second half of the eighteenth century.

³ Jack Zipes, "Myth/Mythology and Fairy Tales," in *Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales: The Western Fairy Tale Tradition from Medieval to Modern*, ed. Jack Zipes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 330–331; Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth: Myth as Fairy Tale* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 4–7.

⁴ Maria Tatar discusses "Rumpelstiltskin" in relation to spinning tales in *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 106–133. Sheldon Cashdan examines the theme of deceit in "Rumpelstiltskin" and other tales in *The Witch Must Die: How Fairy Tales Shape our Lives* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 129–149. The most extensive comparative study of Name of the Helper tales in English is Edward Clodd's "The Philosophy of Rumpelstiltskin," *The Folk-Lore Journal* 7, no. 2 (1889): 135–163.

⁵ Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth*, 49–71. Zipes analyzes the oppression of the Miller's daughter within the historical context of the intensification of linen manufacture and the subsequent decline of spinning in the nineteenth century.

German Nationalism and Normative Masculinity

Extensive scholarship has established that the Grimms substantially revised the tales presented in the seven editions of the *Children's and Household Tales*. The overarching goal of these changes, which included eliminating sexual references, adding Christian symbolism, and delineating clearly defined patterns of behavior for female and male protagonists, was to make the tales more appealing to German middle-class readers.⁶ Numerous studies have explored the myriad ways the Grimm brothers, especially Wilhelm, changed the behavior and attributes of female characters to reflect the dominant patriarchal norms of nineteenth-century bourgeois culture. Although male protagonists in Grimms' tales have received considerably less critical attention, critics such as Maria Tatar, Ruth Bottigheimer, and Zipes have identified significant patterns of male behavior that resulted from Grimms' editorial practices.⁷ These critics have made important contributions, but their exclusive focus on male protagonists has prevented them from addressing deviant masculinity as an integral component of the masculine norm.

Owing in large part to Michel Foucault's influence, critical theorists in the humanities and social sciences have extensively studied the complex dialectic between dominant and subordinate elements: conformity / deviance, center / margin, inside / outside, normal / abnormal. What has emerged from these studies is an understanding that the deviant or marginal is an essential constituting component of the dominant. In one of the most important studies of the construction of masculinity in modern European culture, George Mosse has theorized the development of normative masculinity in relation to its deviant countertypes. Mosse's configuration of the normative ideal of masculinity is, in many ways, a historically specific theorization of Judith Butler's heterosexual matrix which she defines as a

⁶ Jack Zipes, *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 10–15.

⁷ Tatar identifies two kinds of male protagonists: naïve heroes whose compassion and humility qualify them to receive the assistance of helpers and fearless heroes who perform heroic feats without helpers. See *The Hard Facts*, 85–105. Zipes argues that Grimms' male protagonists are driven by self-interest and tend to be "adventurous, cunning, opportunistic, and reasonable." See *The Brothers Grimm*, 65. See also Ruth B. Bottigheimer's analysis of "bold boys" in *Grimms' Bad Girls and Bold Boys: The Moral and Social Vision of the Tales* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 51–56 and 81–94.

hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality.⁸

The normative ideal of masculinity outlined by Mosse is of particular importance to the analysis of masculinity in Grimms' tales because it emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century and continued in its formative stages throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. As is well known, the first half of the nineteenth century (specifically, 1806–1857) is the period during which the Grimms collected and revised their tales.

Mosse's analysis of the integral relationship between the rise of German nationalism and the emergence of the ideal of masculinity is deeply relevant to the construction of masculinity in Grimms' tales. Modern European nationalisms, according to Mosse, were "built upon the ideal of manhood."⁹ That the Grimms conceived of their collection of tales as a national enterprise that would contribute to establishing a unified national literature for a unified Germany is a long-acknowledged fact that has most recently been rearticulated by Bottigheimer, who writes that Wilhelm Grimm, the brother most responsible for revising the tales, "believed that the tales not only embodied German-ness, but that they showed Germans how to be German."¹⁰ The goal of showing Germans how to be German is in distinct alignment with Wilhelm Grimm's description of the 1819 edition of the *Children's and Household Tales* as an *Erziehungsbuch* (an educational book or training manual). Within the context of nationalism, this goal is intrinsically tied to hegemonic masculinity: training for manhood.

In an attempt to emphasize the enormous extent to which the Grimms sought to ensure that their tales both reflected and shaped middle-class morality, Zipes has described the two brothers as "bourgeois missionaries."¹¹ As a result of the alliance between nationalism and

⁸ Judith Butler, "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification," in *Constructing Masculinity*, eds. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, and Simon Watson (New York: Routledge, 1995), 194.

⁹ George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985), 64.

¹⁰ Ruth B. Bottigheimer, *Fairy Tales: A New History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 38.

¹¹ Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization* (New York: Methuen, 1988), 48.

middle-class morality, the Grimms were also—both simultaneously and inevitably—missionaries of nationalism. Mosse has shown that the alignment between nationalism and middle-class morality worked to define modern standards of respectability. Nationalism sought to impose respectability from above through the ideal of masculinity, while the family was the central socializing agent from below. The enforcement of this respectability created an increasingly marked division between normality and abnormality, especially in matters of gender and sexuality.¹²

Mosse's description of normative masculinity as "the foundation of the nation and society" underscores the essential link between national culture and masculinity, a link that binds the health of a nation to the health of its masculine ideal.¹³ The masculine ideal was comprised of medieval concepts of courage and honor and Greek-influenced notions of beauty, will-power, self-restraint, and virility. Individuals who failed to conform were viewed as enemies of the nation and were often configured as agents of disease and disorder. Mosse refers to these marginalized outsiders as countertypes to emphasize that they were viewed as threatening figures that existed in opposition to the norms of middle-class respectability and the German nation. The countertypes of masculinity included effeminate men; men perceived as foreign, especially Jewish men; sexual deviants, especially homosexual men; vagrants; Gypsies; habitual criminals; the insane; and manly women.¹⁴ Of course, the marginalization of these groups did not begin in the second half of the eighteenth century; they had been relegated to the margins of society throughout history. What began in the latter half of the eighteenth century was a complex and far-reaching systemization of exclusion grounded in the alliance of masculinity and nationalism.

Mosse identifies a number of historical developments responsible for the codification of normative masculinity and its countertypes: medical definitions of health and disease; the rise of visual culture; anthropological classification systems that categorized men based on standards of classical beauty; theories of human physiognomy that stipulated the human body's ability to serve as a sign of moral character; and the rise of gymnastics as a form of physical and moral education. Mosse observes that popular nineteenth-century German novels, such as Gustav Freytag's *Debit and Credit* (1855) and Friedrich Hackländer's *Trade and Change* (1850), also

¹² Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality*, 1–22.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁴ George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 9–13 and 56–57.

contributed to the codification of masculinity and its countertypes.¹⁵ The omission of Grimms' *Children's and Household Tales* from the discussion is significant. The following analysis seeks to work toward correcting this omission by demonstrating that the final version of Grimms' "Rumpelstiltskin," which appeared in the 1857 edition of *Children's and Household Tales*, is a cautionary tale of deviant masculinity and the normative order of the masculine ideal.

The Construction of Object Masculinity: Rumpelstiltskin as Countertype

Scholars have variously argued that the 1857 version of Grimms' "Rumpelstiltskin" is a montage of sources that include Johann Fischart's imitation of Rabelais's *Gargantua* (1575), Giambattista Basile's "The Seven Little Pork Rinds" (1634), Marie-Jeanne L'Héritier's "Ricdin-Ricdon" (1798), at least two oral tales from two different sources, and various folkloric antecedents.¹⁶ Grimms' "Rumpelstiltskin" was first published in 1812, in the first edition of *Children's and Household Tales*, but the Grimms' first version of the tale appeared in the 1810 Ölenberg manuscript. The 1810 tale, which can be viewed as a starting draft of sorts, is entitled "Rumpenstünzchen" and is believed to be based on an oral tale recorded by Jacob Grimm in 1808.¹⁷ In order to demonstrate the extent to which the Grimms (whether consciously or unconsciously) revised the 1810 tale in accordance with the normative ideal of masculinity and its countertype, it is necessary to compare the 1810 tale with the final version published in 1857. Brief summaries of the 1810 and 1857 tales will clarify the points of comparison.¹⁸

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 57–65.

¹⁶ Zipes discusses the literary and oral sources of "Rumpelstiltskin" in *Fairy Tale as Myth*, 55. Bottigheimer addresses "Rumpelstiltskin's" relationship to the *Pentamerone* in *Fairy Tales*, 63. For a discussion of "Rumpelstiltskin" in relation to medieval Germanic dwarf-stories, see Paul Battles, "Dwarfs in Germanic Literature: *Deutsche Mythologie* or Grimm's Myths?" in *The Shadow-Walkers: Jacob Grimm's Mythology of the Monstrous*, ed. Tom Shippey (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), 67–70.

¹⁷ Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth*, 53.

¹⁸ All references to the 1810 tale are based on Zipes's translation of the tale in *Fairy Tale as Myth* and are identified by page number in the body of the paper. All references to the 1857 tale are to Zipes, *Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm* and are identified by page number in the body of the text.

In the 1810 tale, a girl who is supposed to spin flax into yarn instead spins it into gold thread and is unable to produce yarn. After she spends three days failing to spin the flax into yarn, Rumpenstünzchen appears and offers to help her spin the flax into yarn in return for her first child. The girl agrees. Soon thereafter a prince marries her, and she gives birth to a male child. One year later Rumpenstünzchen returns and demands the child. The princess offers him everything as an alternative to the baby boy, but he declines and tells her if she does not know his name in three days, he will return to take the child. The princess spends two days trying to think of his name and then orders one of her maids to search the forest. In the forest, the maid sees Rumpenstünzchen. He is riding a cooking ladle around a fire and is yelling, "If the princess only knew that my name was Rumpenstünzchen" (53). The princess guesses a number of different names (which are not specified in the tale) before correctly guessing the name. Rumpenstünzchen accuses the devil of telling her his name and then flies out of the window on a cooking ladle.

In the 1857 version of the tale, a poor Miller boasts to the king that his beautiful daughter can spin straw into gold. The king immediately decides to test the daughter's ability. He orders that she be locked in a straw-filled room in his castle and informs her that if she does not spin the straw into gold by morning, she will die. When the helpless girl begins to weep, Rumpelstiltskin suddenly appears in the room and saves her life by spinning the straw into gold in return for her necklace. The greedy king moves the girl to a larger room and again puts her under threat of death to spin straw into gold. Rumpelstiltskin saves her life again in return for a ring. The king moves the girl to an even larger straw-filled room and promises to marry her if she spins the straw into gold. Rumpelstiltskin appears again and offers to spin the straw into gold in return for her first child. Rumpelstiltskin spins the straw into gold, and the girl becomes queen. When Rumpelstiltskin appears a year later to collect the child, the queen offers him any treasure in the kingdom, but he insists upon the child. When she begins to cry, he informs her that if she can guess his name within three days, she can keep her child. The queen sends a male messenger to search for names and then presents Rumpelstiltskin with three incorrect guesses: Kaspar, Melchior, and Balzer. On day two she sends the servant to search for names and then offers three more incorrect guesses: Ribsofbeef, Muttonchops, and Lacedleg. On the third day the messenger sees Rumpelstiltskin dancing around the fire, screaming his name, his anticipation of receiving the child, and his plans to cook and brew. When the queen correctly guesses Rumpelstiltskin's name, he

accuses the devil of telling her. In a fit of rage, he stamps his foot into the ground, grabs the other leg, and tears himself into two pieces.

Clearly, the Grimms made extensive changes to the 1810 tale. As previously noted, critics have established that many of the changes that appear in the 1857 tale increase male patriarchal power, with a concomitant increase in female oppression. The increase in female oppression is accompanied by a devaluation of female labor. As Zipes points out, the fact that the desired product in the 1857 tale is gold rather than yarn renders the female art of spinning flax into yarn completely irrelevant.¹⁹ Gold occupies a central place in the 1857 tale, and it functions as both a means and an end for the male characters. The father lies about his daughter's ability to spin straw into gold in an attempt to increase his wealth and status. As a result of his desire to acquire as much gold as possible, the king puts the girl under threat of death in order to force her to spin straw into gold and then offers to marry her in order to motivate her to spin even more straw into gold. Rumpelstiltskin uses his ability to create gold as a means to obtain the queen's child.

From the standpoint of the construction of masculinity, some of the most significant differences between the 1810 tale and 1857 tale stem from the addition and deletion of male characters. In the 1810 tale, a nondescript prince marries the girl. In the 1857 tale, the prince is replaced with a king concerned with accumulating wealth. The king is firm and resolute: the straw must be spun into gold or the girl will die. The king conforms to the norms of patriarchal culture by choosing a bride who will increase his wealth and power and by demonstrating his ability to control her. The 1857 tale also contains the addition of a father who is concerned with boosting his reputation and increasing his wealth through his daughter's reputed ability to spin gold. The father's lie puts his daughter's life in immediate jeopardy. However, since a peasant woman's value as a potential marriage partner was often determined by her ability to spin flax, the dynamics of the tale present the father's boastful lie as a wise business gamble that results in a royal marriage for his daughter. The Grimms also replace the maiden who discovers Rumpelstiltskin's name with a male messenger.

The reconfiguration of male characters, especially the addition of the father and the king, creates a distinct normative masculine presence against which to measure Rumpelstiltskin's deviation. The masculine norm dictates the channeling of male desire toward wealth and marriage. As numerous scholars of Grimms' fairy tales have observed, wealth is the overarching goal of most fairy tale heroes, and it is usually accompanied

¹⁹ Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth*, 57–58.

by marriage.²⁰ The king and the father operate within these patriarchal norms of male behavior and desire. The male messenger protects these norms by discovering Rumpelstiltskin's name; his discovery of the name ensures the child will remain within the heterosexual union as property and potential heir (or heiress) to the throne. The masculine norm established by these three male characters constructs Rumpelstiltskin as a representative of deviant masculinity, a countertype who does not operate in the paradigm established by the other male characters in the tale. He wants neither wealth nor marriage; he wants a child. Significantly, the 1810 tale identifies the child as male, which creates a situation in which Rumpelstiltskin is bargaining for a potential heir to perhaps carry on his own name and lineage. In contrast, the gender of the child is not specified in the 1857 tale which creates a situation in which Rumpelstiltskin is bargaining outside the framework of patriarchal values. In other words, the 1857 tale leaves open the possibility that Rumpelstiltskin is bargaining for a significantly less valuable female child.

Rumpelstiltskin's desire for a child threatens the social order on several different levels. On the most obvious level, Rumpelstiltskin threatens the boundaries of the nuclear family. His desire to obtain another man's child threatens to destroy the essential bond of father-son kinship and thereby threatens to destabilize the identity of the nuclear family's status as an inviolable unit of biological patrilineal connection. Moreover, although Rumpelstiltskin negotiates for the child with the girl who later becomes queen, the child is the legitimate issue and legal property of the king. Because kings were viewed as the literal embodiment of their kingdoms, the king's child is, by extension, a manifestation of that embodiment. Consequently, Rumpelstiltskin's desire for the child not only threatens the most basic unit of the kingdom (the family) but also poses a direct threat to the kingdom itself.

Rumpelstiltskin's desire for a child is central to the construction of his identity in the 1810 and 1857 versions of the tale. His desire to obtain a child without engaging in sexual intercourse announces his lack of virility; it also represents one of the numerous ways he is inscribed with abjection. According to Julia Kristeva, abjection is caused by "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite."²¹ Consequently, the object is constituted by the violation of boundaries, the transgression of borders, and the collapse of distinctions. In a frequently cited analysis of abjection

²⁰ See, for example, Tatar, *The Hard Facts*, 103.

²¹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

in the horror film, Barbara Creed argues that the abject can be created by the violation of one of several different kinds of borders: the border between abnormal and normal sexual desire; the border between good and evil; the border that distinguishes those who perform their proper gender roles and those who do not. Creed echoes Kristeva in acknowledging that regardless of the nature of the boundary, the function of the abject remains constant: “to bring about an encounter between the symbolic order and that which threatens its stability.”²² Although Rumpelstiltskin is a threatening figure in both versions of the tale under discussion, the Grimms’ revisions significantly intensify his encounters with the symbolic order of normative masculinity. As a result of these intensified encounters, he is significantly more threatening in the 1857 tale.

In both versions of the tale, the Rumpelstiltskin figure is associated with the forest. In Grimms’ tales the forest is an ambiguous space of danger, forbidden desire, and transformation. Some of the well-known inhabitants of Grimms’ forests include the wolf in “Little Red Riding Hood,” the witch in “Hansel and Gretel,” and the dwarves in “Snow White.” Although forest dwellers assume diverse forms, they fall into two basic categories: helpers / rescuers and obstructionists / persecutors. For male protagonists, the forest is most often a space of transformation, a place where boys are tested and become men.

In a study of the representation of space in the European fairy tale, Alfred Messerli describes the male protagonist as “a person in motion who moves back and forth through and to otherworldly spaces” such as forests, caves, and mountains.²³ Rumpelstiltskin deviates from this norm in that he does not just pass through the forest; he is a denizen of the forest. In the 1810 tale, the only information given about the forest indicates that Rumpelstiltskin emerged from the forest, which suggests that he lives within this space: “On the third day, [the princess] ordered one of her faithful maids to go into the forest from which the tiny man had come” (53). In the 1857 tale, Rumpelstiltskin’s dwelling place is associated with the *edge* of the forest. The messenger sees Rumpelstiltskin’s cottage as he (the messenger) is “climbing a high mountain at the edge of the forest, where the fox and the hare say good night to each other” (212). By specifying that Rumpelstiltskin lives at the boundary that separates nature (the forest) from culture (the norms of society that govern the behavior of the other characters in the tale), the Grimms emphasize his identity as a

²² Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 11.

²³ Alfred Messerli, “Spatial Representation in European Popular Fairy Tales,” *Marvels and Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies* 19, no. 2 (2005): 276–277.

border figure. They also specify that Rumpelstiltskin dwells in the space where the predatory fox says goodnight to the hare instead of killing it as prey, which indicates that he inhabits a space in which natural laws governing relations between predators and prey do not hold. This aligns him with the suspension or corruption of natural law which associates him with the markers of abjection outlined by Kristeva.

In both versions of the tale, Rumpelstiltskin is constructed as a morally ambiguous figure who confuses distinctions between good and evil. In the 1810 tale, he designs a bargain in which he helps the girl gain a husband by taking away her child. He articulates his offer to help as follows: "I'll help you out of all your troubles. Your young prince will come by and marry you and take you away, but you must promise me that your first child will be mine" (53). In the 1857 tale, Rumpelstiltskin's goodness as a helper figure is significantly heightened. As a result of the king's threats, Rumpelstiltskin's helpful acts of spinning save the girl's life twice; Rumpelstiltskin's spinning also enables her to marry a king, a higher ranking and thus more valuable male than the prince in the 1810 tale. The Grimms also heighten Rumpelstiltskin's potential for evil by inscribing him with the threat of cannibalism, a violation of boundaries that further aligns him with abjection (in this case, with religious categories of abjection). As he dances around the fire, he screams, "Today I'll brew, tomorrow I'll bake. Soon I'll have the queen's namesake" (212) which introduces the possibility that he plans to eat the child.

As a result of heightening Rumpelstiltskin's goodness and intensifying his potential for evil, the Grimms sharpen and more clearly define the contrast between his goodness and his potential for evil. Since ambiguity is constituted by the refusal to occupy one or the other position—in this case, the refusal to be defined as either good or evil—Rumpelstiltskin's abjection is significantly increased in the 1857 version of the tale. As a result of the Grimms' revisions, he is constructed as an intensified in-between figure in whom the boundaries of good and evil are collapsed. He is neither helper nor villain but is, instead, both. In the words of Kristeva, he occupies "the place where meaning collapses."²⁴

The incorrect names the queen presents in her attempt to keep her child constitute another set of revisions that function to construct Rumpelstiltskin as a border figure of abjection. The queen's incorrect guesses are not specified in the 1810 tale, but the Grimms specify all the names she guesses in the 1857 tale. Ann Schmiesing has persuasively argued that the incorrect names the queen guesses in the 1857 tale articulate the queen's perception of Rumpelstiltskin. The first set of names

²⁴ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 2.

(Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar) are the names of the three wise men who journeyed to Bethlehem to see the Christ child and are thus associated with the benevolence of the Magi; the second set of names (Rippenbiest, Hammelswade, and Schnürbein) are associated with malevolent elements of disease and deformity.²⁵ The queen has directly experienced Rumpelstiltskin as a life-saving force of benevolence and as a malevolent force that wants her child. Consequently, she tries to name him first as a helper and then as an agent of disease and destruction. However, because Rumpelstiltskin is a figure in which the meaning of helper and destroyer collapses, he cannot be named using the nomenclature of either of these categories.

Departing from the long line of literary critics, psychoanalysts, and folklorists who have unsuccessfully attempted to determine the meaning of Rumpelstiltskin's name, Zipes and others have concluded that the name is meaningless.²⁶ Within the context of abjection, Rumpelstiltskin's name is indeed meaningless but not because it is without meaning. Instead, the name is meaningless because it signifies an incongruent figure in whom meaning collapses. In other words, the name is a signifier of abjection.

Rumpelstiltskin also occupies the space that separates those who perform their proper gender roles from those who do not. The gender roles of male protagonists in Grimms' tales typically involve facing tests that demonstrate physical and/or moral strength and include rewards of wealth and marriage to beautiful, obedient women. Rumpelstiltskin's performance is not in accordance with these roles. One of his major roles is spinning, a domestic vocation associated predominantly with women. His ability to spin straw into gold establishes him as the richest man in the tale. However, his wealth is undercut by the fact that he is so deeply marked with femininity. In the 1810 tale, he travels on a cooking ladle, which obviously aligns him with female tasks performed in the domestic sphere.

Although the references to Rumpelstiltskin riding on a cooking ladle are deleted in the 1857 tale, he is, nonetheless, significantly more feminized. The addition of the father and the king to the 1857 tale not only creates a contrast between their gender appropriate desire for wealth and marriage and Rumpelstiltskin's aberrant desire for a child, it also sets up a contrast that feminizes Rumpelstiltskin's interactions with the girl who becomes queen as a result of his spinning. The 1857 tale contains two business transactions. The first transaction takes place between men in the

²⁵ Ann Schmiesing, "Naming the Helper: Maternal Concerns and the Queen's Incorrect Guesses in the Grimms' Rumpelstiltskin," *Marvels & Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies* 25, no. 2 (2011): 303–307.

²⁶ Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth*, 49.

public sphere, a space historically populated exclusively by men. When the miller asserts his daughter's ability to spin straw into gold, he initiates a marriage contract by making a public statement to the king about the economic marriage value of his daughter. The king eventually finalizes the marriage contract after (he mistakenly believes) the miller's daughter has spun three increasingly large rooms of straw into gold. The second business transaction takes place between Rumpelstiltskin and the miller's daughter in a locked room with a spinning wheel. In this transaction, Rumpelstiltskin negotiates with a woman in the private sphere, a domestic space historically associated with women. The contrast between the two business transactions aligns Rumpelstiltskin with the feminine and also positions him outside the masculine world of public commerce.

Rumpelstiltskin's inability to enforce his oral contract with the queen also stands in feminized contrast to the king's resolute interactions with the girl who becomes his queen. When the king twice tells her she must spin straw into gold or lose her life, she responds in silent submission to his orders. Her silent submission reflects the king's ability—both as a king and as a man—to exercise his masculine power, most notably to control the women in his sphere of influence. However, when Rumpelstiltskin appears and announces to the queen that she must now give him the child as promised, she does not respond in silent submission. Instead, she talks back, so to speak, and tries to extricate herself from the agreement by “[offering] the little man all the treasures of the kingdom if he would let her keep her child” (211). Not only is Rumpelstiltskin unable to silence the queen into submission by exercising male authority, he is also unable to enforce the oral contract that entitles him to the child. Rumpelstiltskin backs down from the confrontation with the queen and offers to let her keep the child if she can guess his name, which again stands in contrast to the king's resolute fulfillment of his promise to marry the girl if she spins the third room of straw into gold.

Rumpelstiltskin's failure to stand his ground by enforcing his contract with the queen constitutes a failure to conform to the manly ideal of honor. Instead of making good on his word, as stipulated in the oral agreement with the queen, Rumpelstiltskin performs the unmanly role of the coward and backs down in the face of her tears: “the queen began to grieve and weep so much that the little man felt sorry for her” (211). Rumpelstiltskin's decision-making is based entirely on an emotional response; he decides to rescind the oral contract because the queen cries, and he feels sorry for her. Consequently, he does not conform to the rational decision-making traditionally expected of men in patriarchal

culture. Once again, Rumpelstiltskin performs on the feminine side of the masculine/feminine binary.

Rumpelstiltskin and the Ideal of Male Beauty

Rumpelstiltskin's construction as a countertype of masculinity in the 1857 tale is also grounded in his opposition to the ideal of male beauty that emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century. As Mosse points out, this ideal was based on a presumed identity between physical appearance and moral character: "Modern masculinity defined itself through an ideal of manly beauty that symbolized virtue."²⁷ Within this logic, the male body stood at the center of the symbolic order of masculinity as a concrete representation of virility, strength, courage, and moral rectitude. The ideal of masculine beauty was grounded in Winckelmann's study of Greek sculptures of young athletes, most notably Laocoön. Winckelmann's influential definition of male beauty included elements such as virility, power, harmony, proportion, and self-control.

In his analysis of Laocoön, Winckelmann praised the fact that even though the pain rippled through all the muscles of Laocoön's body, his body and comportment did not show any signs of rage.²⁸ Winckelmann's emphasis on self-control as an integral component of male beauty is manifest in the following frequently cited statement from *Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks* (1755): "Just as the depth of the ocean remains tranquil even if a storm rages above, just so the expression of the Greeks in spite of their passions indicates a great and tranquil soul."²⁹ Winckelmann's belief that the ideal male body projected tranquil grandeur, self-restraint, and harmony exerted a far-reaching influence on notions of male beauty throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and his ideal of male beauty resulted in an equally pervasive opposing norm—the normative standard of ugliness—that was used to judge and condemn men who differed from the masculine ideal. Male ugliness, as Mosse points out, was constituted as the reverse of male beauty, and it was viewed as a sign of various forms of moral depravity.³⁰

Donald Rinsley and Elizabeth Bergmann note that early woodcuts and drawings often represent Rumpelstiltskin as "an aged dwarf or gnome, wrinkled, ugly, deceptively playful, possessed of arcane alchemical knowledge, whose funny or comical appearance belies his devilish

²⁷ Mosse, *Image of Man*, 5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 27–36.

²⁹ Cited by Mosse, *Image of Man*, 32.

³⁰ Mosse, *Image of Man*, 59–60.

powers."³¹ The scholarship devoted to Grimms' "Rumpelstiltskin" also includes numerous references to Rumpelstiltskin's ugly physical appearance. *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*, which recognizes Grimms' version as the best-known version of "Rumpelstiltskin," offers a general description of Rumpelstiltskin as an "ugly little man."³² Rumpelstiltskin's close relationship to ugliness is also echoed by Tatar, who describes Rumpelstiltskin as "one of the least attractive of fairy tale figures, a misshapen gnome of questionable origins."³³

Although numerous critics have referenced Rumpelstiltskin's ugly appearance, neither the 1810 nor the 1857 tale describes him as ugly. The only physical description in the 1810 tale refers to him as a "little man" (53). The 1857 tale describes Rumpelstiltskin as a diminutive version of a man as well as a ridiculous version of a man. When the messenger reports to the queen that he has overheard Rumpelstiltskin's name, he describes Rumpelstiltskin as a "ridiculous little man" (212), which calls attention to Rumpelstiltskin's highly problematic relationship to manhood and concomitantly serves as a multivalent sign of his deviant moral character: his aberrant desire to have a child instead of a wife, his aberrant desire to have "something living" (211) instead of the treasures in the world, and his incongruence as a border figure.

Rumpelstiltskin's physical appearance is not the only thing that marks him as incongruent with the ideal of male beauty. His agitated behavior also situates him in opposition to the ideal. In the 1857 tale, the messenger describes Rumpelstiltskin as "hopping on one leg" (212) as he dances around a fire "screeching" (212) his name. Rumpelstiltskin's spasmodic movement around the fire, accompanied by a screaming voice, reflects anything but tranquility and calm.

Rumpelstiltskin's deviation from the ideal of male beauty reaches its highest point of visualization at the conclusion of the 1857 tale, which radically differs from the 1810 tale. When the princess guesses Rumpelstiltskin's name in the 1810 tale, the tale states that "he became horrified and said, 'The devil must have told you,' and he flew out of the window on the cooking ladle" (54–55). In the 1857 tale, Rumpelstiltskin's response when the queen correctly guesses his name reads as follows:

³¹ Donald B. Rinsley and Elizabeth Bergmann, "Enchantment and Alchemy: The Story of Rumpelstiltskin," *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic* 47, no. 1 (1983): 4.

³² Zipes, *Oxford Companion*, 429.

³³ Tatar, *The Hard Facts*, 127. Miller's psychoanalytic reading of the tale also refers to Rumpelstiltskin as a "misshapen dwarf." See Martin Miller, "Poor Rumpelstiltskin," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 44 (1985): 73.

“The devil told you! The devil told you!” the little man screamed, and he stamped so ferociously with his right foot that his leg went deep into the ground up to his waist. Then he grabbed the other foot angrily with both hands and ripped himself in two. (212)

Rumpelstiltskin’s behavior epitomizes a lack of self-restraint, a lack of measured movement, as well as a lack of tranquility. The raging Rumpelstiltskin reflects, as in a convex mirror, the reverse of the ideal of male beauty outlined by Winckelmann, and in so doing he embodies—quite literally—the countertype of masculinity.

In the 1857 tale, the little man who silently rides out the window on a cooking ladle is replaced with a raging hysteric who erupts into a screaming and stomping tantrum that leads to suicide. Within the context of the Grimms’ attempt to Christianize the tales, the introduction of suicide clearly marks Rumpelstiltskin as a sinner since suicide was prohibited by Christian doctrine. Moreover, according to nineteenth-century medical theory, the mania associated with suicidal rage was produced only in extreme cases of hysteria.³⁴ Hence, Rumpelstiltskin’s suicide marks him with the disease of the wandering womb in its most extreme form.

The abjection caused by Rumpelstiltskin’s extreme feminization is compounded by the abjection that results from his ripping his body apart, a gruesome act that transgresses the boundaries of the body by tearing it into two pieces. Kristeva identifies the corpse as the ultimate manifestation of the abject because it marks the site where control between inside and outside collapses, the site where death infects life and the body falls outside the symbolic order.³⁵ At the end of the tale, Rumpelstiltskin represents an extreme collapse of inside and outside. Because he tears himself in two, his skin literally no longer serves as a boundary that retains bodily fluids inside the body. Consequently, he dies as a puddle of disgusting bodily fluids: an exemplar of abjection.

“Rumpelstiltskin” as Myth: A Paradigm of Brutality

Tatar has observed that one of the main thrusts of the Grimms’ editorial practices involves the explicit condemnation of deviant behavior, a goal often achieved through intensifying the violence and cruelty of the

³⁴ Lizbeth Goodman, “Madwomen and Attics: Themes and Issues in Women’s Fiction,” in *Literature and Gender*, ed. Lizbeth Goodman (New York: Routledge, 1996), 117.

³⁵ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3–4.

punishment visited upon those deemed as villains.³⁶ Although Tatar cites the punishment of Rumpelstiltskin as an example of such intensified brutality, she does not address the extremity of his punishment in relation to the interrelated threats he poses. This essay has argued that the essence of Rumpelstiltskin's criminality resides in his deviation from normative masculinity, a deviation that poses a threat to the nation, to bourgeois values, and to the bonds of child ownership that constitute the enduring economic structure of the patriarchal family. The tale's moral lesson—that men should not act or look like Rumpelstiltskin—is delivered through the brutal punishment that results in Rumpelstiltskin's abject self-destruction. As a result of the self-hatred that can be read into Rumpelstiltskin's suicide, the moral of the tale is doubly delivered. Through the act of self-punishment, Rumpelstiltskin himself affirms that he is an abomination that must be destroyed. Here it must be emphasized that Rumpelstiltskin's gruesome suicide creates the happy ending of the tale. Because he is constructed as a multivalent threat, his death invites multivalent applause.

As previously noted, "Rumpelstiltskin" is one of the classical fairy tales that has undergone a process of mythicization. According to Zipes, the tales in this group have become mythic insofar as they have become grand narratives of Western culture, i.e. narratives that present themselves as bearers of uncontested meaning and universal values. More specifically, these tales have entered into the realm of myth because they have naturalized specific ways of thinking about individuals and their social relations.³⁷ Although the Grimms constructed "Rumpelstiltskin" within the relatively narrow confines of German nationalism in the first half of the nineteenth century, the tale has been transformed into a universal narrative of male oppression that both justifies and encourages violence toward men and boys who do not conform to normative masculinity. As a myth that permeates contemporary culture, "Rumpelstiltskin" functions as a cautionary tale that seeks to keep boys and men inside the rigid confines of hegemonic masculinity by authorizing the condemnation, as well as the brutalization, of those whose behavior or appearance deviates from masculine norms.

The Rumpelstiltskin myth also presents a path of suicide to those who are cast out of the circle of manhood with contemporary epithets such as "bitch," "pussy," and "fag." Rumpelstiltskin is not a homosexual. He does not exhibit same-sex desire at any point in the tale. However, he does exhibit a marked failure to repudiate femininity, and this failure marks his failure to become a man. In discussing the logic involved in "becoming a

³⁶ Tatar, *The Hard Facts*, 5–20.

³⁷ Zipes, *Oxford Companion*, 330–31.

man,” Butler has persuasively argued that the repudiation of the feminine is a precondition of the heterosexualization of male sexual desire.³⁸ Within this logic, Rumpelstiltskin’s failure to overcome his feminine traits marks his failure to achieve heterosexuality, an achievement that hinges on the foreclosure of homosexuality. Hence, although Rumpelstiltskin is not a homosexual per se, he is a feminized figure who fails to foreclose the possibility of his homosexuality. This failure constitutes yet another component of his abjection and further justifies his exile in the forest, as well as his violent death. The happy ending constituted by Rumpelstiltskin’s gruesome suicide is part of the grand cultural narrative that circulates as myth in the twenty-first century. Because Grimms’ editorial practices continue to exert such a deleterious influence on the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity, there is a continued urgent need to demythologize the mythic matrix of the masculine ideal.

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³⁸ Butler, “Melancholy Gender,” 25–26.

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CHAPTER SIX

LIVING THE MYTH: THE AUTHORIAL LIFE OF WALT WHITMAN

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“Great is the dignity of authorship: I magnify mine office.”
Martin Farquhar Tupper, *Proverbial Philosophy*

“Great are the myths—I too delight in them.”
Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 1st edition

Fore note: As I approach the notion of Walt Whitman as a mythic figure, I see him evolving from an historic legend, anchored in a particular historic setting, into an American myth that is not bound to a definite time and place. In doing so, I follow Jorge Luis Borges, whose remarks on Whitman I will turn to near the end of this essay, as well as such commentators as S. E. Schlosser, who distinguishes a legend as a tradition “handed down from earlier times and believed to have an historical basis” and a myth that “serves as fundamental type in the world view of a people.”

Up until the date when *Leaves of Grass* appeared (July 4, 1855), no one could have accused Walt Whitman of leading a “purpose driven life.” That year he turned thirty-six years old, and he had held numerous jobs, including teacher, newspaperman (both printer and writer), and carpenter. He had traveled a bit in the northeastern United States but mostly just the environs of Manhattan, Brooklyn, and other parts of Long Island beyond Brooklyn, and he had taken a brief trip to New Orleans and back for a newspaper job that did not work out. As a writer for the New York area papers, he covered the arts, baseball, politics, and stories of domestic tragedy. He made an attempt at being a temperance novelist, and he wrote

occasional poems in the style of mid-nineteenth century newspaper doggerel.

Although some, who were personally familiar with Walt Whitman since his return from New Orleans in 1848, might have known that his reading habits and intellectual preoccupation had been largely occupied with his rediscovery of the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, few could have foretold what the product of this immersion into Transcendentalism would be. The archives of the *Brooklyn Eagle*, a paper that he had once edited, show that those who continued to publish the paper after he had left it considered Whitman a local character—the kind of fellow who might be up to something interesting or surprising—but not necessarily someone to be taken seriously. He was mocked as eccentric, and he was criticized as unmannerly.¹

His hometown paper maintained this assessment of Whitman even after he produced the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*. In fact, the odd nature of the purported poetry in the book seemed to harshen the mildly skeptical and amused attitude that the editorial voice of the *Eagle* had already assumed. To previous charges of his being “vulgar,” there appeared further assertions that he had grown indecent.² But there is no evidence that Whitman was wounded or surprised by the criticism of his self-published and hand-crafted book of poetry. The large thin quarto-sized book, with a green leather cover, contained twelve poems, the longest of which would eventually be entitled “Song of Myself,” and it included an engraved picture of the author in work clothes. His former newspaper colleagues of the *Brooklyn Eagle* and other critical voices in New York and elsewhere showered the book with notices that ranged from scorn to cries of injured sensibilities. Whitman’s response was to capitalize on the controversy. He wrote anonymous positive reviews and placed them in various publications, heralding this new breakthrough in literature.

In the early days after *Leaves of Grass* was put into the hands of the public—Whitman literally gave most of the copies away—Walt Whitman launched a marketing campaign that he continued to wage the rest of his life. The first portion of this campaign included connecting himself to the major literary thinker of the day who just happened to be Whitman’s main inspiration, Emerson. Emerson and his ideas on poetry were known to Whitman quite a bit earlier than the publication date of the first edition of

¹ For example, see unsigned article, “A Good Bye,” *Brooklyn Eagle* (September 11, 1849): 2. This and all quotations and citations from the *Brooklyn Eagle* are from the web site Brooklyn Eagle Online.

² See unsigned article, “‘Leaves of Grass’—An Extraordinary Book,” *Brooklyn Eagle* (September 15, 1855): 2.

Leaves. Writing for the *New York Aurora* in 1842, Whitman had said, in a review of a lecture by Emerson, that “the business of the poet is expression—the giving utterance to the emotions and sentiments of the soul.”³ The article does not indicate whether or not Whitman was paraphrasing Emerson. Having uttered that noble sentiment in his early twenties, Whitman would live and write for more than a decade before launching the project that would absorb the rest of his life.

If one were to have read Emerson’s essay “The Poet” (1844) and then come across the first edition of *Leaves* or any edition that followed, it would have been impossible to mistake Emerson’s impact on Whitman’s stance as an artistic embodiment of Emerson’s ideal, the new poet speaking for the New World in new language. Emerson’s writings were clearly close to Whitman’s hands in those days and later. When Whitman published the essay, “Slang in America” in the *North American Review*, November, 1885, based on research he had done earlier, it included several unacknowledged references to Emerson’s essay, “Nature.”⁴ According to his friend, John Townsend Trowbridge, Whitman claimed that it was, indeed, Emerson who set him on his career as America’s Poet. In the *Atlantic Monthly* (February 1902) Trowbridge said,

He freely admitted that he could never have written his poems if he had not first “come to himself,” and that Emerson helped him to “find himself.” I asked if he thought he would have come to himself without that help. He said, “Yes, but it would have taken longer.” And he used this characteristic expression: “I was simmering, simmering, simmering; Emerson brought me to a boil.”

It was in that summer of 1854, while he was still at work upon his houses, that he began the *Leaves of Grass*, which he wrote, rewrote, and re-rewrote (to quote again his own words) and afterward set in type with his own hand.

Whitman’s interest in forming a connection to Emerson is well documented. He sent Emerson a copy of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, and the 1856 edition had a quotation from Emerson’s laudatory letter written to Whitman, in response to that gift, emblazoned on its cover: “I greet you at the beginning of a great career.” Emerson recognized immediately that the younger man was setting about doing what the elder man had urged in his essays and lectures. So the assertion by Trowbridge,

³ Walt Whitman, “Mr. Emerson’s Lecture,” *New York Aurora* (March 7, 1842): 2.

⁴ Michael R. Dressman, “Another Whitman Debt to Emerson,” *Notes & Queries* 26 (August, 1979): 305–306.

a man once close to Whitman, would be otherwise unremarkable except for what follows that assertion on the page in *The Atlantic Monthly*:

I make this statement thus explicit because a question of profound personal and literary interest is involved, and because it is claimed by some of the later friends of Whitman that he wrote his first *Leaves of Grass* before he had read Emerson. When they urge his own authority for their contention, I can only reply that he told me distinctly the contrary, when his memory was fresher.⁵

All these years later, despite any demurrals by Whitman, it is clear that he had utterly absorbed Emerson's writings, including the essay on the definitive American poet, and made it the blue print for his life and his life's work, *Leaves of Grass*. That title ultimately came to stand for all of Whitman's collected poems. It is clear, then, that Trowbridge's statement rebuffs some of Whitman's supporters, as well as the poet's putatively inaccurate memory, for claiming that *Leaves* had achieved its first success without aid or inspiration from Emerson.

We have here, in small, what is a constant in Whitman biographical and literary scholarship: the confused trail, the assertions and denials, the contradictions. As if anticipating the charge that he could not keep his story straight, Whitman included in *Leaves* this oft-quoted defense:

Do I contradict myself?
 Very well then . . . I contradict myself,
 I am large . . . I contain multitudes.
 (Section 51, "Song of Myself")⁶

Whether "The Poet" by Emerson triggered the change in Whitman or not (and there is no reason to believe otherwise), *something* happened in the early 1850s that transformed him into the figure that America and the world still honor as Walt Whitman. Along with that intense desire to create *Leaves*, the poet also embarked on the creation of the legend of Walt Whitman. What contradictions there are in the attribution of influence appear to arise from the intense desire of Whitman and his supporters to establish the place of *Leaves of Grass* as the chief ornament of American literature. When that task involved claiming Emerson as a source, that was

⁵ John Townsend Trowbridge, "Reminiscences of Walt Whitman," *The Atlantic Monthly* 89, no. 2 (1902): 163–175.

⁶ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn, 1855): 55. All quotations from "Song of Myself" are from the first edition, although the title of this initial poem and the section numbers do not appear until later editions.

what was done. When Emerson was no longer pre-eminent, he could be dismissed.

It might seem cynical, but it would not be original to accuse Whitman and some of his admirers of making claims or creatively dealing with events to burnish Whitman's reputation or achievements. Ego and the personal are always at the forefront of Whitman's writings, even his journalism. What starts, however, as a book of poems, *Leaves of Grass* evolves from a publication into a cause. Perhaps that was the excuse for overstatements or deceptions in his early career. He was claiming things to be true with the desire that they be taken to be true because he hoped they would someday become unassailably true. He was laying down the foundation for the legend of Walt Whitman.

In this tracing of Whitman's growth from celebrity to legend and, eventually, to myth, I am following the definitions offered by folklore writer S. E. Schlosser, who defines a legend this way: "A legend is a traditional tale handed down from earlier times and believed to have an historical basis."⁷ As Whitman developed the body of poetry that would come to be known as *Leaves of Grass*, there likewise developed the story of the projected hero-speaker in those poems:

Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos,
Disorderly fleshy and sensual . . . eating drinking and breeding,
No sentimentalist . . . no stander above men and women or apart from
them . . . no more modest than immodest.
(Section 24, "Song of Myself")⁸

Today, except for the new or naïve reader of Whitman, the issue of whether the persona in *Leaves* actually did or saw all the things claimed in the poems of that volume is not a matter for contention. It was so long ago that charges of hoax seem pointless. But for contemporaries, such questions about what was in the poems or what was said about the poems or the poet were not so easily dismissed. Just as today, the reading public is still capable of shock and disappointment when autobiographies or memoirs that play on our sympathies are found to contain fabricated crucial events. The personality in the poems is a crucial aspect of Whitman's art, and in his lifetime he did not spend much time distinguishing between that personality and the poet.

Whitman knew that what he was doing was new. It was meant to be, in response to Emerson's call for a new poetry for a new land. The form was

⁷ S. E. Schlosser, Web site: American Folklore. Accessed February 20, 2013. <http://americanfolklore.net/folklore/myths-legends/>.

⁸ Whitman, *Leaves*, 29.

new, long passages of unrhymed lines, not in conventional meter, with ellipses punctuating the lines to mark pauses for the speaker. It was unlike what anyone had seen, although some did see similarities in form with Martin F. Tupper's *Proverbial Philosophy*. Nevertheless, no one could mistake the subject matter or diction in *Leaves* for Tupper's proper Victorian contents. In the 20th and 21st centuries, much of the attention that *Leaves* has attracted concerns its statements about manly love. The narrator's stance as a homosexual or bisexual celebrator of orgasm and sensual experiences captures the most attention. But an excellent and less cited example of the sexual contents of *Leaves* is the following passage, Section 11 of "Song of Myself," that portrays female sexual fantasy, part of which is quoted and condemned in the *Brooklyn Eagle* review:

Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore,
 Twenty-eight young men and all so friendly;
 Twenty-eight years of womanly life and all so lonesome.

She owns the fine house by the rise of the bank,
 She hides handsome and richly drest aft the blinds of the window.

Which of the young men does she like the best?
 Ah the homeliest of them is beautiful to her.

Where are you off to, lady? for I see you,
 You splash in the water there, yet stay stock still in your room.

Dancing and laughing along the beach came the twenty-ninth bather,
 The rest did not see her, but she saw them and loved them.

The beards of the young men glistened with wet, it ran from their long hair,
 Little streams passed all over their bodies.

An unseen hand also passed over their bodies,
 It descended tremblingly from their temples and ribs.

The young men float on their backs, their white bellies bulge to the sun . . .
 . they do not ask who seizes fast to them,
 They do not know who puffs and declines with pendant and bending arch,
 They do not think whom they souse with spray.⁹

Whitman was fully aware from the first that his book would challenge its audience and that there would be detractors. He was counting on that.

⁹ Ibid., 19–20. The *Brooklyn Eagle* review appeared on September 15, 1855.

Selling that conflict was an essential part of his marketing plan. The initial shock that the first edition made got the project off the ground. Later, biting critiques, especially on charges of indecency in 1860, 1865, and 1882, would continue the momentum of *Leaves of Grass* into permanent orbit as, at the very least, a *succès de scandale*.

As successive parcels of poetry appeared from Whitman's pen in small editions, he characteristically included poems from those briefer publications in his next edition of *Leaves*. He made arrangements in 1860 with Boston publishers Thayer and Eldridge for the compilation of poems—old and new, some revised, with many previously published in smaller collections—that would be the latest edition of *Leaves*. This volume included such major poems as “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking” and “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry.”

While in Massachusetts, Whitman called on Emerson and spent time with him and others in his circle. The recognition by Emerson and (through Emerson) much of the Transcendentalist literary establishment gave Whitman and *Leaves* a boost into the contemporary consciousness. Nevertheless, as any student of literary history can attest, many authors are famous briefly. Nineteenth-century America fostered thousands of literary figures who are now remembered or studied only by specialists. But Walt Whitman has endured to our time in such a way that one can use the term “Whitman-like” or “Whitmanesque” and expect that a reader catches the allusion fully.¹⁰

The 1860 edition of *Leaves* appeared, and reviewers, critics, and literary figures took stances for and against the poetry it contained. Some lauded its freshness and perspective; others deplored its style or content. Emerson openly worried about some parts. There were renewed howls from the reviewer for the *Brooklyn Eagle*.¹¹ In the history of building the legend of Walt Whitman, however, the 1860 edition would play a major role. It was this edition that was in circulation during the years of the American Civil War, a time during which Whitman would leave the New York area and relocate to Washington, DC to be of service to his brother George, a soldier in the Union Army. In the nation's capital, Whitman's poetry became a danger to his well-being, but there was also the increased

¹⁰ See, for example, Randy Malamud, “The Hazards of Inaugural Poetry,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (January 22, 2013). Malamud refers to “Whitmanesque images of determination and progress” in Elizabeth Alexander's poem read at the first Obama inauguration. Accessed February 17, 2013. <http://chronicle.com/blogs/conversation/2013/01/22/the-hazards-of-inaugural-poetry/>.

¹¹ See unsigned article, “Walt Whitman,” *Brooklyn Eagle* (July 24, 1860): 1.

opportunity for its notoriety to launch *Leaves* more securely into public notice.

This historical nexus of America's Poet in America's capital city at the time of the great American crisis would result in another step in building the legend and, eventually, the myth of Walt Whitman. That Whitman was aware of the importance of the confluence of these forces is asserted by Roy Morris: "The Civil War saved Walt Whitman. *Saved* was his word, and like all great poets, Whitman chose his language carefully."¹² Whitman had felt that he was stagnating in New York. The move he was about to make to Washington would propel him forward.

A report had reached New York that George Whitman had been wounded, and the Whitman family sent Walt south to ascertain how badly. After searching hospitals in the Washington area, Walt located George who had suffered a minor injury from a shell fragment and who was actually still with his regiment near Falmouth, Virginia. Walt was able to spend about a week with George near the battle front before returning to Washington. Because of its closeness to the battle lines, the Washington area was a major site for military hospitals for both Union and captured Confederate troops. The sight of all that suffering and the many needs of those men touched Whitman's heart, and he determined to stay and offer what help he could. He read to the wounded and wrote letters for them. He offered comfort and gave of his time and attention. He was apparently a striking figure among the hospital cots, with his long gray hair and flowing beard. We know these details because they were observed and transcribed by admirers of Whitman.

When Whitman had arrived in Washington in 1862, he brought with him a minor literary reputation, with supporters back in the New York area and among some of New England's Transcendentalists. He found in Washington, however, that there was already present in the city a small coterie of admirers of *Leaves of Grass*, including some people whom he had met previously in Boston, such as William O'Connor and Charles Eldridge. These Washington admirers became the witnesses to Whitman's immense charitable dedication to the wounded.

To support himself while in Washington, since much of his time was spent among the war-wounded in various hospitals, Whitman worked occasionally as a clerk or copyist. He was partially supported by those Washington friends who also helped to fund some of his charitable distributions of food, money, and clothing to the hospitalized men among whom Walt spent many hours. His family in New York sent money too,

¹² Roy Morris, Jr., *The Better Angel: Walt Whitman in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 32.

but he was less successful among the Boston elite, despite their general charitable orientation. According to James Redpath,

There is a prejudice agst [sic] you here among the 'fine' ladies and gentlemen of the transcendental school.... It is believed that you are not ashamed of your reproductive organs.¹³

All the while, Whitman was continuing to add to his canon of poems, many of which now had themes and scenes of the war. He also was working on a series of prose pieces about his experiences among the wounded and his observations of Abraham Lincoln, whom he greatly admired. It is clear that, despite the horrors that Whitman witnessed, he was exhilarated by his hospital work and his presence in an historic place at an historic time. He felt needed and successful. He recalled later about his visits to the hospitals:

I found it was in the simple matter of Personal Presence, and emanating ordinary cheer and magnetism, that I succeeded and help'd more than by any nursing or delicacies, or gifts of money, or anything else.¹⁴

As the war was winding down, Whitman finally was able to secure continuous appointment with a government job. Although this might have been a minor immediate success for him financially, it proved to be the springboard to a major leap in his reputation. The sequence of events makes one think of the adage that there is no such thing as bad publicity.

Secretary of the Interior James Harlan, identified by one of Whitman's friends as "formerly a Methodist clergyman, and president of a Western college," dismissed Walt from his position as clerk in the Bureau of Indian Affairs because it had come to Harlan's attention that this clerk was the author of a notorious book, "full of indecent passages." Practically speaking, Whitman's firing caused a minor personal outrage, but in short order a friend found him a new government job in the Office of the Attorney General. The real impact of the action by Secretary Harlan was, however, a minor bombshell of a book—a pamphlet really and, perhaps, written with suggestions and advice by Whitman¹⁵—entitled *The Good Gray Poet: A Vindication* that was published nine weeks after the incident

¹³ Justin Kaplan, *Walt Whitman: A Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980), 276.

¹⁴ Walt Whitman, *Memoranda During the War*, ed. Peter Coviello (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 30.

¹⁵ See the Walt Whitman Archive at <http://whitmanarchive.org>.

by Whitman's friend and fierce supporter William Douglas O'Connor. The piece is utter hagiography.

The Good Gray Poet portrays Walt Whitman as the Savior and Secretary Harlan as Pontius Pilate, as Roy Morris observes.¹⁶ Those passages that Harlan and others find objectionable in *Leaves* are compared by O'Connor to passages that appear in the works of Tacitus, Lucretius, Aeschylus, Dante, Plutarch, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Spenser, Montaigne, Hugo, and a host of others, including Isaiah and Solomon's contributions to the Holy Bible. Although Harlan had fired others for better or worse reasons than he fired Whitman, O'Connor focused on the dismissal as a singular event perpetrated against "one of God's men." O'Connor's pamphlet assisted in public notice and acceptance of Whitman's publication of his war poems and tribute poems to President Lincoln, compiled in a collection called *Drum-Taps and Sequel*. That small volume includes two of Whitman's best known poems, "When Lilacs Last in the Door-Yard Bloom'd," his elegy to Lincoln, and "O Captain, My Captain!," his best known poem in his own time, remarkable because of its rhyme and meter.

O'Connor's defense of Whitman was not an instant best seller, but it had some impact and did not go away, for the need would again arise for *Leaves* and Walt Whitman to be defended. By 1882, Whitman had retired for health reasons to live near his brother in Camden, New Jersey. While he was arranging to publish a seventh edition of *Leaves*, he had contracted with the Boston publishing house of Osgood & Company. After the book was set in type and a preliminary run had been produced, the authorities, in the person of Oliver Stevens, Boston District Attorney, acting on the request of Massachusetts Attorney General George Marston, informed the publishers that *Leaves of Grass*

is such a book as brings it within the public statutes respecting obscene literature, and [we] suggest the propriety of withdrawing the same from circulation, and suppressing the edition thereof.¹⁷

Once again Whitman found himself confronted with the Victorian judgment of his explicit lines about human sexuality. There was some negotiation, and Osgood was able to get the state officials to lessen their demands for editorial deletions or changes, but Walt was having none of it and refused any changes whatsoever. Osgood dropped the project, did not

¹⁶ Morris, *The Better Angel*, 234.

¹⁷ Richard Maurice Bucke, *Walt Whitman* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1883), 148.

pay Whitman, but did release to him the printing plates of the edition. Just as years before, things turned out just fine or even better for Whitman. A Philadelphia publisher was able to take over the publication, using the plates from Osgood, and the seventh edition of *Leaves* was barely delayed at all.

Regardless of the relatively successful conclusion of this “banned in Boston” affair, the camp of Whitman true believers moved into action to produce a defense. This time it was Dr. R. Maurice Bucke, a Canadian physician, who published a spirited but oddly arranged biography, *Walt Whitman*. Bucke’s book included a worshipful retelling of Whitman’s life story, with letters of praise and admiration from many sources. It also has somewhat precious little chapters with such titles as “His Fondness for Children.” The meat of the book is its second half that describes the account of the “Attempted Official Suppression” of *Leaves*, the complete text of *The Good Gray Poet*, as well as Bucke’s own retelling of the Harlan incident in 1865. Also included was a new salvo by William O’Connor against the Massachusetts authorities that was originally printed in the *New York Tribune* in May 1882. It is the opinion of recent scholarship that Whitman had a hand in composing both the Bucke biography and the original *Good Gray Poet*.

The reappearance of O’Connor’s fervid defense of Whitman may have helped fix a certain image of America’s Poet in the popular imagination. As Roy Morris reflects, “*The Good Gray Poet*—particularly its title—defined Whitman for an entire generation of American readers,”¹⁸ and it provided the headline for Whitman’s obituary in the *Brooklyn Eagle*. After his death, the devotion to Whitman did not abate on the part of the Whitman supporters, called by some “the hot little prophets” or, more tactfully and accurately labeled, “disciples.” Just the title of William Sloane Kennedy’s 1926 book about *Leaves*, *The Fight of a Book for the World*, indicates that more than thirty years after his death, there were those still worshipping at his shrine.¹⁹ And recent studies, such as, “Hot Little Prophets: Reading, Mysticism, and Walt Whitman’s Disciples” by Stephen Jay Marsden and “Worshipping Walt: The Whitman Disciples” by Michael Robertson, demonstrate that the role Whitman’s supporters played in building his legend is still a matter for scholarly inquiry.²⁰

¹⁸ Morris, *The Better Angel*, 235.

¹⁹ William Sloane Kennedy, *The Fight of a Book for the World: A Companion Volume to Leaves of Grass* (Folcroft, PA: Folcroft Library Editions, 1974). This is a reprint of the Stonecroft Press (West Yarmouth, MA, 1926) edition.

²⁰ Steven Jay Marsden, “Hot Little Prophets’: Reading, Mysticism, and Walt Whitman’s Disciples.” Dissertation, Texas A&M University, 2004; Michael

Scandal alone, however, clearly does not explain how Walt Whitman has managed to succeed beyond his time with his reputation and influence continuing to grow. His supporters saw and felt something essentially different in his work that they found nowhere else. It touched people directly and individually. As Maurice Bucke observed, “*Leaves of Grass* is curiously a different book to each reader.”²¹

How does one account for this sense of individuation in the reader’s response to Whitman’s poetry? To an extent, it may be explained by the reader’s perception of the personal in *Leaves*. Mark Van Doren, in his introduction to *The Portable Walt Whitman*, is at pains to point out that the legend of Walt Whitman, perhaps the lingering impression of the “Good Gray Poet,” clouds for some readers the reality of his success as a poet. Van Doren’s position in history, in the era of New Criticism, requires him to show some discomfort with the enthusiastic linking of the poet’s biography and his art. Nevertheless, even Van Doren cannot escape the fact that intertwined persona in the poem and the historical Walter Whitman exist in the public perception as one.²²

Other critics have been drawn to deal with the question of voice, identity, and purpose in *Leaves*. There is a power in the relationship of the speaker and the audience that sets Whitman’s poetry apart. Peter Coviello remarks on Whitman’s attempt to unify American nationality. The Whitman ideal of nationality was rooted in a “sense of passionate connectedness that, with the aid of his poetry, would join together even citizens as dispersed and disparate as America’s.”²³

A most convincing commentary that captures an essential ingredient in the sense of individual relationship in *Leaves* is in the transcript of a lecture by Jorge Luis Borges at the University of Chicago in 1968. The talk, in its published form, bears the title “Walt Whitman: Man and Myth,” in which Borges analyzes the way in which Walt Whitman has come to stand for *America*—that beacon of hope and democracy perceived by the world. Borges goes over the usual ground in distinguishing between the “divine vagabond,” “the epic hero,” who speaks in *Leaves*, and the “rather seedy journalist and man of letters who had read many great books but

Robertson, *Worshipping Walt: The Whitman Disciple* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

²¹ Bucke, *Walt Whitman*, 182.

²² Mark Van Doren, “Introduction,” *The Portable Walt Whitman*, rev. Malcolm Cowley (New York: Viking, 1973).

²³ Peter Coviello, in *Walt Whitman: Memoranda During the War*, ed. Peter Coviello (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), xv.

who had no very fine literary judgment.”²⁴ But he adds to the equation a telling third identity:

It is not enough that Walt Whitman [the speaker in the poems] should become the dream image of Mr. Whitman of Brooklyn *and* Mr. Whitman of Brooklyn, also. He needed something else. The book had to include all men. And so Whitman somehow found a third person, a third person to his poetic trinity. And that third person is the reader, himself.²⁵

Whitman, through his words, models the behavior and reaction of his own ideal reader. It is in this way that Borges explains the power in passages in *Leaves* where the speaker is addressing the reader individually and personally, as in the assertion, “This is no book, who touches this touches a man,” followed by the intimate questions, “Is it night? Are we here together alone?”

Leaves is full of these moments, and Borges’ concept of the third identity helps clarify how the psychological literary process works. And here I return to the definition of “myth” by S. E. Schlosser:

A myth is a traditional, typically ancient story dealing with supernatural beings, ancestors, or heroes that serves as a fundamental type in the worldview of a people. The purpose of myths is to account for the origins of something, explain aspects of the natural world, or delineate the psychology, customs, or ideals of society.²⁶

Walt Whitman has become the necessary American poet. He is the original, and yet he is still with us and ever present. Take for example, these lines from “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry:”

Closer yet I approach you;
 What thought you have of me, I had as much of you—I laid in my stores in
 advance;
 I consider’d long and seriously of you before you were born.
 Who was to know what should come home to me?
 Who knows but I am enjoying this?
 Who knows but I am as good as looking at you now, for all you cannot see
 me?²⁷

²⁴ Jorge Luis Borges, “Walt Whitman: Man and Myth,” *Critical Inquiry* 1, no. 4 (June, 1975): 711.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 713.

²⁶ Schlosser, American Folklore web site.

²⁷ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Boston: Thayer and Eldridge, 1860), 384–385.

This special knack of the poet to reach his reader and identify with that reader, to explain the world and its workings in personal terms—this is what has cemented the myth of Walt Whitman.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE MYTH OF BEAUTY AND GOODNESS: WHY IS EVIL SO SEXY?

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“Judge nothing by the appearance. The more beautiful the serpent, the
more fatal its sting.”
William Scott Downey, *Proverbs* (1854)¹

Your psychopathic stare has captivated me
Your emotionless expression is strangely alluring
 You have a strange power over me
 The more I think about you
 The more I long for you
My dreams at night give me just a small taste of you
 I long for something I can never have
 I can't help but hold out hope
 For the tiniest chance to be near you
I can't help but wonder if I'd feel this way
 If I had met you in a conventional way
 My physical attraction tells me yes
 But there are so many hot guys out there
And I don't feel for them like I do for you Luka
 The ultimate bad boy is what you are
Beauty and evil all wrapped up in one perfect package
 L. Mancini, *Beauty and Evil*, 2012²

This poem was written about Luka Magnotta and posted on a blog that Lexa Mancini began in order to express her feelings about him. She confessed, “I’ve always been attracted to bad boys. Good boys are

¹ William Scott Downey, *Downey's Proverbs* (Massachusetts, 1858), 25.

² Lexa Mancini, “Beauty and Evil,” *Luka Magnotta Dedication*, June 18, 2012.

boring.”³ From what she has written about being captivated by Magnotta, it is obvious that she was obsessed with this *ultimate bad boy*, but she was certainly not alone in her obsession. *Good girls* have been attracted to *bad boys* for generations.

In general, the term *bad boy* refers to someone who lives outside the boundaries of society. *Bad boys* can range from abusive, criminal, and evil to more like

mischief-makers who enjoy breaking rules and pushing the edge. They have unusually high testosterone levels but haven’t learned how to channel the resulting aggression in a constructive way, so they drive too fast, engage in risky behaviors, and seek out danger.⁴

Sometimes they act more like little boys who have tantrums when they don’t get their way. So why are we so attracted to them? Langley gives us some of those reasons:⁵

1. **Bad boys are forbidden.** We always want what we can’t have, but there’s a reason why bad boys are forbidden: they are jerks.
2. **Bad boys are hot.** They are good looking and well-built, often with a killer smile, but even if they are total studs, they are still jerks.
3. **Bad boys are confident.** However, what comes across as confidence can sometimes be conceit. They are *hot* and *cool* at the same time, and they know it, and so do the other girls waiting in line for them.
4. **Bad boys are exciting.** They are different and thrilling, but along with the thrill often comes danger.
5. **Good girls think they can change a bad boy.** A bad boy can’t be changed or controlled. He does what he wants and makes no excuses for it. He’s called bad for a reason.

For generations, we have willingly developed delusional relationships with *bad boys* and *girls* because there is something so magnetic about them that we are drawn to them, even when we are aware of the potential for danger that might lie ahead. This magnetism seems greatly enhanced as they become more and more attractive; in fact, their very attractiveness seems to blind us to any realization of just how evil they could be, despite their good looks.

³ Russell Goldman, “‘Cannibal’ Luka Magnotta Attracts Obsessed Female Fans,” *ABC News*, July 11, 2012.

⁴ “4 Reasons Women are Attracted to ‘Bad Boys,’” www.eharmony.com/dating.

⁵ Nia Langley, “5 Reasons why Good Girls find Bad Boys Irresistible,” *Thought Catalog*, December 5, 2014.

At the time that Lexa wrote the poem about Magnotta, he was a 30-year-old Canadian male escort who desperately craved public attention. He was well-known from the hundreds of pictures of himself that he posted online and that generated thousands of comments from his *fans* about how *good-looking*, *sexy*, and *hot* he was. In May 2012, he posted a video of himself killing his gay lover with an ice pick. He then dismembered, defiled, and devoured parts of the body, sending other parts to several elementary schools and government agencies in Canada.⁶ Yet, despite his committing this unfathomable act, his supporters remained true because they just couldn't accept the fact that someone so gorgeous (in their minds) could do something so horrible.

Magnotta, The Myth

"Most people tend to think the best of those who are blessed with beauty; we have difficulty imagining that physical perfection can conceal twisted emotions or a damaged mind."

Dean Koontz, *Odd Thomas*, 2003⁷

Even though Lexa was aware of the accusations against Magnotta, she found that his actions only made him that much more desirable. She wrote, "It's just impossible to reconcile the beauty and the beast within him,"⁸ but how could she? This was a real-live human being she wanted to save, not the illusion of a dream romance that she had created in her imagination. While she could control her dreams and illusions, she had no control over the real thing.

In another blog entry, Lexa wrote, "I don't really care whether or not you're guilty...you're so damn hot!!"⁹ Reading about Lexa, one might imagine her to be a love-struck, 15-year-old girl. Instead, like Magnotta, she was 30 years old; she was also married with two children. Despite the fact that she believed Magnotta probably did kill his lover, she added, "...that only adds to his mystique."¹⁰ Another female supporter named Sophie said, "He is a beautiful man, but it isn't that. I'm attracted with who is inside of him. I'll support him no matter what."¹¹

⁶ Marcos Townsend, "Photo of the Day: June 18, 2012—Luka Rocco Magnotta returned to Canada," *The Montreal Gazette*, June 18, 2012.

⁷ Dean Koontz, *Odd Thomas* (New York: Bantam Books, 2003), 375.

⁸ Lexa Mancini, "The Duality of Luka," *Luka Magnotta Dedication*, July 10, 2012.

⁹ Lexa Mancini, "Obsession," *Luka Magnotta Dedication*, June 15, 2012.

¹⁰ Goldman, "'Cannibal' Luka Magnotta Attracts Obsessed Female Fans."

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Whether or not Magnotta had anything good hidden deep inside, he certainly did have supporters, as well as numerous defenders. His largest Facebook page had over 1400 subscribers. Another Facebook fan page called “Support Magnotta” was started by a 21-year-old woman; knowing that Magnotta was charged with a vicious crime, she stated, “I support him because he is a human being who deserves love, respect, and affection just like anyone else.”¹² She claimed that she and Magnotta had become friends when she reached out to him through Facebook, but Facebook friends are not always *real friends*. Instead, sometimes they are just names—people who will tell others anything they want to hear. They can present themselves as anyone they want to be, and without actually having face-to-face interactions with them, we have no way of knowing whether or not they are telling us the truth. All we really know is what they choose to share with us, all of which could be total fabrication. People online frequently lie about their ages, height, weight, and looks, among other things; according to a study by MSNBC, over 30% of men who use online dating websites are already married.¹³ Instead, real friendship develops slowly over a period of time as partners self-disclose, getting to know each other and building trust, usually through face-to-face interactions but not by reading words that strangers have written to create whatever impressions they wished to make, as Magnotta so casually did.

What is even worse about this young woman who claimed to be friends with Magnotta is that she said she befriended him on Facebook *after* watching online videos of him killing kittens. She then argued, “What he did is his business! No one is in the position to judge him.”¹⁴ We might ask how it is possible that this woman could watch videos of someone deliberately killing kittens and still be interested in him rather than repulsed by him or honestly believe that such a cold-blooded killer should not be judged. Actually, the courts exist expressly for the purpose of judging people like this cannibalistic murderer, and most people would agree that someone who posted videos of himself killing kittens does not deserve love or respect.

So what would possess women, not only to overlook the sick, twisted behavior of someone like Magnotta, but to actually support and defend him to the point of developing fantasy obsessions about him? Having never met Magnotta, all they really knew about him was from the pictures he had posted online, so their obsession with him had to be with the myth he had become rather than with the man that he was. He was no longer an

¹² Ibid.

¹³ “Spotting Married Men and Cheaters Online,” OnlineDatingSafetyTips.com.

¹⁴ Goldman, “‘Cannibal’ Luka Magnotta Attracts Obsessed Female Fans.”

ordinary human being to them; instead, Magnotta had taken on mythic proportions for these women, many of whom created blogs to write about their feelings for him, so strong was their belief in the myth that *beauty equals goodness*. Simply put, they felt Magnotta was too attractive to be capable of such evil.

Using the Bible, mythology, and pop culture as references and Magnotta and his fans as examples, this essay looks at the meaning of myth and the Greek concept of *kalos kagathos* to understand that, despite physical attractiveness, beauty and goodness do not always go together.

What Is Myth?

“The great enemy of the truth is very often not the lie, deliberate, contrived and dishonest, but the myth, persistent, persuasive and unrealistic.”

John F. Kennedy¹⁵

To understand what it means to say that Magnotta had *become a myth*, we must first understand *myth* itself. From the Greek word *μῦθος* (*mythos*, meaning story),¹⁶ myths are stories that were supposed to teach the ancient Greeks about things that were important or significant to them, and they were often used to explain things that people didn't understand. Myths are referred to by Campbell as “stories about the wisdom of life.”¹⁷ Galician says that myths are stories that were created to help us understand the world around us and to create order out of chaos by explaining why things are the way they are.¹⁸ Calame describes myth as “...a traditional story with social implications that, within a transcendent time-frame, sets on stage characters with supernatural and hence fabulous qualities” and “a traditional tale...(with) elements with a ‘collective’ importance.”¹⁹ Calame echoes Galician when she states that myths transcend time and space because their themes are universal.²⁰ That would certainly apply to Magnotta since the themes surrounding his story (evil, attractiveness, obsession, and murder) are present in all generations.

¹⁵ John F. Kennedy, “Commencement Address at Yale University,” June 11, 1962.

¹⁶ *Bible Hub*, 2013, biblehub.com/hebrew/2898.htm.

¹⁷ Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyer, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Anchor Books, 1991), 11.

¹⁸ Mary-Lou Galician, *Sex, Love, and Romance in the Mass Media* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), 34.

¹⁹ Claude Calame, *Greek Mythology: Poetics, Pragmatics and Fiction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1.

²⁰ Galician, *Sex, Love, and Romance*, 43.

Myths reflect human nature and are always about power and control. According to Rosenberg,

Myths were originally created...either to explain the nature of the universe or to instruct members of the community in the attitudes and behavior necessary to function successfully in that particular culture.²¹

The Greeks were logical, rational people, and myths helped them understand what behavior was considered by their society to be acceptable and what was not.

Myths frequently centered on a hero. According to Rosenberg,²²

Heroes (part human/part god) are the models of human behavior for their society. They earn lasting fame—the only kind of immortality possible for humans—by performing great deeds that help their community, and they inspire others to emulate them.... In spite of their incredible abilities, no hero is perfect.... Their imperfections allow ordinary people to identify with them and to like them....

Dowden goes on to say, “But a myth is also enticing: it lures not just a stray, mistaken individual, but whole groups and societies into believing it.”²³ This would certainly explain how over 1400 individuals could so willfully hold onto their delusions about Magnotta, even when those delusions flew in the face of the obviously factual and incriminating evidence against him.

Myth and Beauty

“Beauty is the greatest seducer of man.”

Paulo Coelho²⁴

In general, beauty refers to a quality that creates in us a sense of pleasantness or goodness. In Hebrew, the word **טוֹב** (good) refers to something perceived as pleasing or beautiful;²⁵ therefore, we assume that goodness is associated with people who are pleasing or beautiful. Beauty

²¹ Donna Rosenberg, *World Mythology: An Anthology of the Great Myths and Epics*, 2nd ed. (Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Company, 1994), xvi.

²² Rosenberg, *World Mythology*, xvii.

²³ Ken Dowden, *Approaching the Ancient World: The Uses of Greek Mythology* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 3.

²⁴ Paul Coelho, goodreads.com.

²⁵ *Bible Hub*, 2013.

may be in the eye of the beholder, and like the Greeks, our perceptions of beauty today are based on the assumption that beauty is good.

The study of beauty dates back to a time when perceptions of beauty had to do with proportion and symmetry. Symmetrical features were seen as an indication of good health that, at the time, indicated attractiveness and vice versa; the more symmetrical and proportionate someone was, the more attractive he/she was judged to be.²⁶ Although perceptions of beauty are quite subjective, researchers have shown that there are cross-cultural commonalities among these perceptions. For example, in addition to the importance of symmetrical features, all cultures find large eyes and a clear, smooth complexion attractive in both men and women; most cultures would perceive youthfulness as a virtue in women while height would be an important quality in the attractiveness of a man.²⁷

McLeish stated, "All myth-traditions treated physical beauty as one of the absolutes of existence."²⁸ Galician agreed, stating, "Throughout the ages, beauty and goodness are frequently linked together in mythology and legend so that being beautiful or handsome equates to being good."²⁹ The idea of equating beauty and goodness was so strong for the ancient Greeks that they had a special term for it: καλὸς κἀγαθός (*kalos kagathos*), derived from the words καλός (*beautiful*) and ἀγαθός (*decent*).³⁰ While καλός referred to *beautiful* in terms of being *healthy and physically attractive*, ἀγαθός was used to describe a person's *virtue or excellence of character*. Combined, the words referred to the belief that the ideal human being would be both physically and morally beautiful, with physical beauty being an outward sign of inward goodness and virtue.³¹ For the ancient Greeks, these terms were inseparable; if someone was beautiful on the outside, he/she was, by necessity, good on the inside as well. Likewise, someone who was ugly on the outside would be considered ugly on the inside. The concepts of beauty and goodness were so inextricably bound

²⁶ Rowland S. Miller, *Intimate Relationships*, 6th ed. (New York: The McGraw Hill Companies, 2012), 78.

²⁷ Peter Andersen, *Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions*, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2007), 34.

²⁸ K. McLeish, *Myth: Myths and Legends of the World Explored* (New York: Fact on File, 1996), 87.

²⁹ Galician, *Sex, Love, and Romance*, 38.

³⁰ Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmann Publishing Company, 2003), 402.

³¹ Jaeger Werner, *Paideia: The Ideal of Greek Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), 13.

that to imagine one without the other was as inconceivable as imagining life without air.

The association of beauty and goodness is so important to us that, for thousands of years, humans have attempted to manipulate the body's natural appearance to make it more attractive and to compensate for lack of symmetry. For example, there is archeological evidence that Egyptians were using makeup (especially heavy eye makeup) over 6000 years ago.³² Roman soldiers would polish their nails and weave golden threads through their beards while Native Americans applied heavy *war paint* before going into battle. Today, we go to extreme lengths to improve our physical appearance, including starvation, tattooing, piercing, plastic surgery, and other forms of body modification and/or mutilation. Americans spend about \$40 billion per year on cosmetics, making it one of our most financially stable industries, even during times of economic stress, proving that people are willing to do almost anything to look good.³³ The University of the West of England discovered that 30% of women would be willing to give up at least a year of their lives to achieve their ideal body weight and shape, and 3% were willing to give up as much as 10 to 20 years of their lives to look their best.³⁴

One reason we want to look good is because humans seem to have a natural preference for that which is attractive, and, for the most part, attractive people are given preferential treatment throughout their lives.³⁵ Babies as young as 2–3 months will look longer at an attractive face than an unattractive face because of its symmetrical appeal.³⁶ Mothers of cute babies pay more attention to their babies than mothers of unattractive ones, and parents are more tolerant of physically attractive children. Teachers are more lenient with attractive children, seeing them as more intelligent and capable and expecting them to be more successful.³⁷ In general, attractive people are liked better, seen as more desirable, and are approached more often than unattractive people. They are 3–4 times more likely to be hired for any type of job, have more opportunities to interact

³² *British Museum Egyptian Exhibit*, British Museum, London, 1999.

³³ Perry Romanowski, "A Cosmetic Industry Overview for Cosmetic Chemists," April 14, 2014.

³⁴ The University of the West of England, "Thirty percent of women would trade at least one year of their life to achieve their ideal body weight and shape, UK study finds," *Science Daily*, May 26, 2011.

³⁵ Daniel Hamermesh, *Beauty Pays: Why Attractive People are More Successful* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 87.

³⁶ Unknown, "Beauty Equals Goodness," TVTropes.com, November 17, 2011.

³⁷ Virginia Richmond and James McCroskey, *Nonverbal in Interpersonal Relations*, 7th ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2012), 24.

with members of the opposite sex, and are generally more satisfied with those interactions.³⁸

Hamermesh says that a good-looking person will earn an average of \$230,000 more over the course of his/her lifetime than a similarly qualified person who is perceived as less attractive.³⁹ So it's not unusual that we want to identify with, associate with, and be similar to attractive people. Being physically attractive only seems to work against someone who takes obvious advantage of his/her appearance, as do those whose evilness hides behind a pretty façade.

We tend to accept the pairing of beauty and goodness because mythology, religion, and pop culture are full of examples of goodness and beauty existing hand-in-hand. The Bible tells of God's creation of humans: "So God created human beings, making them to be like Himself. He made them male and female...and he was very pleased..." (Genesis I: 27–31).⁴⁰ In traditional Christian belief, Satan was once considered the highest among angels and the brightest angel in the sky. The Bible refers to Satan as a heavenly being (Job 1:6; Job 2:1), and we infer that it also refers to him in Ezekiel 28:15: "You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created..." and in Isaiah 14:12: "King of Babylon, bright morning star..."

To the ancient Greeks, "In appearance they (the gods) were thought of as being like men, only far more beautiful and with infinitely nobler minds...idealized and perfect."⁴¹ Helen of Troy's beauty, this "face that launched a thousand ships," was so great that it led to the Trojan War.⁴² In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (Act I, Scene V),⁴³ when Romeo sees Juliet for the first time, he exclaims:

O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiope's ear;
Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!
Did my heart love till now? forswear it, sight!
For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night.

³⁸ Richmond and McCroskey, *Nonverbal*, 25–28.

³⁹ Hamermesh, *Beauty Pays*, 40–41.

⁴⁰ All Bible verses from *Good News Bible* (New York: American Bible Society, 1978).

⁴¹ Richard Patrick, *All Color Book of Greek Mythology* (London: Octopus Books Limited, 1972), 14.

⁴² Rosenberg, *World Mythology*, 42.

⁴³ William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (San Diego: Canterbury Classics, 2014), 277.

Fairy tales also provide countless examples of beauty and goodness. In *Rapunzel*, the handsome prince who tries to rescue Rapunzel thinks she is “the most beautiful girl he had ever seen.”⁴⁴ *Beauty and the Beast* begins with “Once there was a merchant who had three lovely daughters. The youngest one was so beautiful that her father called her Beauty.”⁴⁵ The first line of *The Twelve Dancing Princesses* reads, “Once upon a time, there was a King who had twelve beautiful daughters...”⁴⁶ *The Red Shoes* starts with, “There was once a little girl; a very nice pretty little girl.”⁴⁷ Time and again, these stories tell of a beautiful young girl or a lovely princess who is always good and kind, so it is easy to see how we would naturally associate beauty and goodness.

Beauty—or Lack Thereof?

“It is amazing how complete is the delusion that beauty is goodness.”

Leo Tolstoy⁴⁸

If someone does not create perceptions of pleasantness or beauty for us, we perceive them as ugly since we consider ugly to be the opposite of beautiful. We then naturally draw the conclusion that if attractive people are good, then unattractive people must be bad. Likewise, if someone is perceived as ugly, that person must also be evil since we associate ugliness with bad and evil. According to Sarah Howell, author of *THE FAST I CHOOSE*,⁴⁹

Of course, that just begs the question of our standards of beauty...but the fact remains that although we should always honor beauty in the natural world, in people, in worship, in the arts, etc., we should also be cautious of its seductive power and be able to distinguish true beauty from false beauty.

⁴⁴ Eric Kincaid and Lucy Kincaid, “Rapunzel,” in *Book of Classic Fairy Tales* (Cambridge: Brimax Books, 1984), 7–11.

⁴⁵ Madame Leprince DeBeaumont, *Beauty and the Beast* (Racine, Wisconsin: Western Publishing Company, Inc., 1985), 35.

⁴⁶ Eric Kincaid and Lucy Kincaid, “The Twelve Dancing Princesses,” in *Book of Classic Fairy Tales* (Cambridge: Brimax Books, 1984), 12–17.

⁴⁷ Hans Christian Andersen, “The Red Shoes,” in *Andersen’s Fairy Tales* (New York: J. H. Sears & Company, Inc., n.d.), 238–244.

⁴⁸ Leo Tolstoy, *Dover Thrift Editions: The Kreutzer Sonata and Other Short Stories* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1993), 100.

⁴⁹ Sarah Howell, “Beauty, Good, and Evil,” *The Fast I Choose*, July 4, 2010.

According to mythology, when the gods wanted to punish someone for evil deeds, they would take away his/her beauty. In *Beauty and the Beast*, the Beautiful Enchantress turns the handsome Prince into a beast when he refuses to give her refuge for the night.⁵⁰ Likewise, in *The Frog Prince*, a fairy turns a handsome prince into a frog after he lies to her.⁵¹

As with beauty and goodness, there are numerous examples in which we find ugliness and evil combined. In Greek mythology, Medusa was a terrible monster whose hair was made of hissing snakes and who was so evil that anyone who looked at her would instantly turn into stone.⁵² The Chimera was a horrible, fire-breathing monster whose body was part lion, part goat, and part dragon and who caused so much destruction that King Iobates searched for a hero to destroy it.⁵³

The Bible also speaks of evil, explaining how evil came into being when Satan rebelled against God. Genesis 3:14 states, “Then the Lord God said to the snake, ‘You will be punished for this: you alone...must bear this curse.’” Romans 3:23 says, “...everyone has sinned and is far away from God’s saving presence.” According to John 8:44, “You are the children of your father, the Devil, and you want to follow your father’s desires.”

Fairy tales have their share of ugly/evil beings as well, such as *Snow White*’s evil queen,⁵⁴ *Cinderella*’s wicked step-mother,⁵⁵ and *The Little Mermaid*’s Ursula, the evil Sea Witch.⁵⁶ But real life can produce some of the worst examples of ugly/evil. Unlike the good-looking Luka Magnotta, there are people like Aileen Wuornos whose life was portrayed in the 2003 film *Monster*.⁵⁷ Wuornos was an unattractive street prostitute, hustling in Florida, when she was beaten up by a client. Something inside her snapped, and over the next few years, with no concern for her actions, she brutally killed six men before she was apprehended and later executed.

⁵⁰ Amy Betz, *Beauty and the Beast* (New York: Disney Press, 2010), 1–2.

⁵¹ Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, “The Frog King,” in *Grimm’s Complete Fairy Tales* (San Diego, CA: Canterbury Classics, 2011), 1–3.

⁵² Thomas Bulfinch, *Bulfinch’s Mythology* (New York: Random House, Inc., n.d.), 97.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁵⁴ Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, “Snow White and the Seven Dwarves,” in *Grimm’s Complete Fairy Tales* (San Diego, CA: Canterbury Classics, 2011), 187–194.

⁵⁵ Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, *Cinderella* in *Grimm’s Complete Fairy Tales* (San Diego, CA: Canterbury Classics, 2011), 81–86.

⁵⁶ Hans Christian Andersen, *The Little Sea Maid* in *Andersen’s Fairy Tales* (New York: J. H. Sears & Company, Inc., n.d.), 53–75.

⁵⁷ *Monster*, directed by Patty Jenkins (Los Angeles; Media 8 Entertainment, 2003).

When Beauty Hides Evil

“Temptation wouldn’t be tempting if it didn’t look good. If evil always showed its true face, we wouldn’t have this whole sin problem.”

St. Augustine⁵⁸

We learn from a very early age that the *good guys* are the ones in white hats. Fairy tales teach us that princesses are always beautiful and evil step-mothers and wicked witches are always ugly. Admittedly, these stories contain false and unhealthy stereotypes, but Dyer states that sometimes “the use of stereotypes has to be acknowledged as a necessary, indeed inescapable, part of the way societies make sense of themselves....”⁵⁹ Adults understand what it means to say you can’t judge a book by its cover, but children frequently have not acquired significant knowledge or the experience necessary to successfully distinguish between good and evil. Instead, they fall back on physical appearance as a scale by which to judge someone because that is all they have to go on. The media, especially television, often reinforce in children this reliance on appearance as a means of judging character. In the cartoon series, *Adventure Time with Finn and Jake*, Finn (the dog) and Jake (the boy) use appearance alone to label people. In the “Hot to the Touch” episode,⁶⁰ Flame Princess is a teenager who seems innocent, yet acts evil, but Finn insists that “She ain’t evil. She’s passionate,” just because she’s pretty. In “To Cut a Woman’s Hair,” Jake says (referring to the Tree Witch), “If she was good, she wouldn’t be so ugly...”⁶¹

Evil might be easier to identify when it comes in an ugly package, but what about *the wolf in sheep’s clothing*? How can we tell the good guy from the bad guy when they are both wearing white hats? Sometimes evil comes to us wrapped up in a very pretty exterior that hides a black heart, and while we are distracted by the pretty exterior, we might be risking serious damage from the black heart. From the story of *Beauty and the Beast*, we know the Beautiful Enchantress places a curse on the Prince, removing his beauty and turning him into a Beast when he refuses to give

⁵⁸ John Lockwood Huie, “Quotes by St. Augustine in *Inspirational Quotes About Life*,” n.d.

⁵⁹ Richard Dyer, “The Role of Stereotypes,” in *Media Studies: A Reader*, 3rd ed. Sue Thornham, Caroline Bassett, and Paul Marris, editors (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 207.

⁶⁰ *Adventure Time with Finn and Jake*, Season 4, Episode 3, “Hot to the Touch,” directed by Pendleton Ward, April 2, 2012.

⁶¹ *Adventure Time with Finn and Jake*, Season 2, Episode 10, “To Cut a Woman’s Hair,” directed by Kent Osborne and Somvilay Xayaphone, January 10, 2011.

her shelter for the night. But the real danger here was not from the Prince but from the Beautiful Enchantress herself who appears to him as an ugly old hag so that she could test his virtue.⁶² When he fails the test, she sentences him and his household to a curse that lasts for 10 years. But the curse includes finding someone to love and be loved by him before his 21st birthday, which means the Prince was really just eleven years old when The Enchantress cursed him. But how can you test the virtue of an eleven-year-old boy? Did The Enchantress really think a child would let an ugly, old stranger into his house (or, in this case, his castle) for the night, in exchange for a rose? It was a cruel trick played on a child by someone who was evil, despite her normal outward beauty.

Complicating the problem of distinguishing between good and evil based on appearance is the tendency to believe that certain physical characteristics and social behaviors naturally go together. Referred to as *implicit personality theory*, this leads us to assume that if individuals display certain behaviors or characteristics, they naturally possess other associated behaviors and characteristics.⁶³ For example, if a woman referred to her boyfriend as *tall, dark, and...*, one would most likely finish the sentence with the word *handsome* because society and the media have created in us some inner sense of *rightness* that tells us that those characteristics fit well together, just as the Greeks believed that beauty and goodness were inseparable. Granted, in this society, the description *tall, dark, and handsome* has become cliché, but such is the power of implicit personality theory; characteristics that we associate with each other seem so *right* to us that they frequently do become cliché. However, if we perceive the description of tall, dark, and handsome (or any other cliché) as positive, we are likely to assume that someone with these characteristics would naturally possess other positive characteristics as well, such as caring, understanding, and trustworthiness. Such was the case with Luka Magnotta; because he was physically attractive, his followers naturally assumed that he possessed other positive characteristics as well. Likewise, because he was attractive, they couldn't possibly imagine that he could also be evil.

Sometimes people are placed in situations where they must judge others quickly, and the easiest way to do that is by using physical appearance since it provides us with the most readily available information about others. However, a snap judgment will, undoubtedly, lead to

⁶² Betz, *Beauty and the Beast*, 1–2.

⁶³ Kathleen Verderber and Rudolph Verderber, *Inter-Act: Interpersonal Communication Concepts, Skills, and Contexts*, 10th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 49.

misjudgments about people from time to time. If a woman said her boyfriend was *tall, dark, and fat*, does that mean he couldn't also be caring, understanding, and trustworthy, simply because *tall, dark, and fat* don't go together? By the same token, if her boyfriend is *tall, dark, and handsome*, does that mean he couldn't possibly also be a serial killer because that just doesn't fit with the rest of his description? So, while we may occasionally misjudge someone through this form of stereotyping, we may, just as easily, be protecting ourselves from a dangerous situation.

In addition to implicit personality theory, we are also subject to the principle of complementarity or *opposites attract*.⁶⁴ For example, if someone has been in a relationship with a partner deemed *boring*, there is something inherently exciting about being with someone new who is different from the previous partner or even from oneself. Sometimes one individual has some characteristic or trait that another lacks or admires and to which he/she is drawn. The *strangeness* of this new relationship could provide something so exciting and stimulating for the recipient that it becomes almost addictive and not something that he/she is easily or willingly going to give up because of the previously unknown thrill that it provides. This new relationship might also create the novelty necessary to break out of the rut of predictability into which someone may have fallen and from which he/she doesn't have the energy or incentive to escape. Whether it is the lure of intrigue or the rush of adrenaline or the thrill of excitement that accompanies someone who just might be a little dangerous, our curiosity about this *opposite* is stronger than our sense of caution, and we just can't stay away.

However, being caught up in the appeal of this *opposite* may prevent us from noticing the warning signs that all is not right. This type of attraction usually only lasts until the novelty wears off and the excitement starts to fade, and then we may be left with the realization that we actually have nothing in common with this other person. Someone who seemed irresistible in the evening after a few drinks might not be quite as attractive or appealing in the harsh light of day. Carrie Underwood's 2007 hit song "Last Name" tells the story of a woman who, after a wild night in Las Vegas, wakes up to find herself married to a man whose last name she doesn't even know because of her intense, yet reckless, attraction to a *bad boy*.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Verderber and Verderber, *Inter-Act*, 63.

⁶⁵ Carrie Underwood, "Last Name" (vocal performance) by Carrie Underwood, Luke Laird, and Hillary Lindsey, recorded August 30, 2007, on *Carnival Ride* (Nashville: Artista).

As adults, we may acknowledge that people, like books, can't always be accurately judged by their appearance; however, in reality, we continue to judge. There are so many stories that have a witch or a sorceress who usually appears as an ugly old hag that we accept that ugly things are evil just as we learn that beautiful things are good. The real problem occurs when we are so taken by external beauty and social behavior, especially when forming first impressions, that we overlook the more important internal characteristics of others because that is what our society, and especially the media, have taught us to do. Magazines, TV, and billboards all present us with images of beautiful people, and the idea is repeatedly reinforced for us that, to be loved, we need to be beautiful. Ads abound that tell us what makeup or hair products or perfume to use so that we will be irresistible, and others will be attracted to us, but how often do we see ads that tell us how important it is to be honest or caring or kind? Instead, we get the message, loud and clear, that the only thing that matters is how good we look on the outside.

How Can Evil Be So Attractive?

“The evil are pathologically attached to the status quo of their personalities, which in their narcissism they consciously regard as perfect.”

M. Scott Peck⁶⁶

Dr. Scott Bonn said Magnotta is “a narcissist who absolutely craves public attention.”⁶⁷ *Narcissism* involves an overly-inflated positive concept of oneself; narcissists are egotistical, vain, proud, and extremely selfish, and their arrogance leads them to feelings of entitlement.⁶⁸ But according to Goldman,⁶⁹

A certain degree of narcissism is perfectly natural and even healthy. A moderate measure of self-esteem contributes to positive behaviors such as assertiveness, confidence, and creativity, all desirable qualities for an individual.... At the other end of the spectrum, however, extreme narcissism is characterized by egotism, self-centeredness, grandiosity, lack of empathy, exploitation, exaggerated self-love, and failure to acknowledge boundaries. In this severe form, narcissism can do serious damage.

⁶⁶ M. Scott Peck, *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), 74.

⁶⁷ David Moye, *Huff Post Crime*, July 3, 2012.

⁶⁸ Miller, *Intimate Relationships*, 128.

⁶⁹ Alan Goldman, *Destructive Leaders and Dysfunctional Organizations: A Therapeutic Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 11.

On a website entitled *My Luka Magnotta Database*, an author known only as *Jimmy* reprinted a number of excerpts that had been written by Magnotta. The following are a few of those excerpts:

Its Hard Being So Hot 6/23/09 8:56: I'm extremely hot.... Just trust me on that one.... So I know what it's like having to live with the burden of extreme hotness. All you lucky ugly people just don't understand the pressure we're under....⁷⁰

People Hate Me Because Im Beautiful 6/23/09 9:51: Why do people hate me just because I am beautiful?... People don't ask me out because they are intimidated by how beautiful I am.... I am just being honest, I know that I am beautiful...my beauty is a gift but also a curse?⁷¹

People Are Intimidated By My Looks 6/24/09 10:20: People feel bad 4 themselves cuz their ugly. Try being naturally beautiful. It can be harder. people feel sorry 4 ugly people. They don't feel sorry 4 beautiful.⁷²

From these few examples, it is obvious that Magnotta, despite his good looks or maybe because of them, exhibits a severe form of *narcissism* that fits Goldman's description perfectly. But in terms of beauty and goodness/evil, the matter of trying to decide what other characteristics to assign to an attractive person becomes further complicated by the concept of *ὕβρις*, the Greek word for *hubris* or the extreme pride, self-love, and self-confidence that often lead to arrogant behavior.⁷³

Proverbs 16:18 states, "Pride leads to destruction, and arrogance to downfall," which seems to explain our modern understanding of *hubris*. It is pride that is so extreme that the arrogance accompanying it seems to blind people to common sense, leading them to behave in foolish ways. Their over-inflated egos create in them such a sense of entitlement that they think they can do no wrong. In Greek mythology, people who strived for physical perfection often exhibited extreme *hubris*, which angered the gods and often led them to punish or even destroy the guilty party. In

⁷⁰ Luka Magnotta, "Its [sic] Hard Being So Hot," *My Luka Magnotta Database*, June 23, 2009.

⁷¹ Luka Magnotta, "People Hate Me Because Im [sic] Beautiful," *My Luka Magnotta Database*, June 23, 2009.

⁷² Luka Magnotta, "People Are Intimidated By My Looks," *My Luka Magnotta Database*, June 24, 2009.

⁷³ David Ronfeldt, "Beware the Hubris-Nemesis Complex: A Concept for Leadership Analysis," RAND: National Security Research Division, 1994.

Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Satan's hubris led him to believe that he could overpower God, and his actions resulted in his banishment to Hell.⁷⁴

The story of Luka Magnotta is similar in that he was so obsessed with his own appearance that, not only did he begin to think of himself as superior, but he actually expressed pity for those who were not as attractive as he thought he was. The hubris and entitlement he felt led him to behave in reprehensible ways, and, as in Greek mythology, his behavior would eventually lead to his downfall. Magnotta craved public attention and was desperate to receive it, as evidenced by his attempts to secure that attention through his heavy-handed Internet campaign. When that campaign didn't yield the degree of attention to which he felt entitled, Magnotta took more drastic action. After killing his lover with an ice pick, he didn't conceal it from the police or try to hide the vicious act he had just committed. Instead, he video-taped himself carrying out the crime and, believing he was invincible, flaunted it by posting it on the Internet for the world to see while taking credit for actions that were contradictory to any kind of common sense, and that was his undoing.

If *hubris* is considered a severe form of narcissism, then Magnotta is the *ultimate narcissist*. However, his fans didn't know this when they formed their initial impression of him based on his physical appearance since appearance alone may or may not accurately convey what a person is really like. In every one of her blogs, Lexa Mancini asked how a monster could be so beautiful and so intriguing. She obviously couldn't reconcile Luka Magnotta's good looks with his ability to commit such terrible crimes. She posted:⁷⁵

I've come to realize that I tend to overlook any unattractive qualities Luka possesses and focus only on the good, or on the person inside who just needs help. I am somehow able to discard thoughts of all the things that don't fit in with the perfect image of Luka that I have in my head, the fantasy man I obsess over. I haven't yet figured out why I'm able to do this when there is such a vast amount of information about Luka that ranges from unattractive to downright despicable.

⁷⁴ John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (London: Penguin Publishing Group, 2003), Book 1, 3.

⁷⁵ Lexa Mancini, "Only Seeing What We Want to See in Luka," *Luka Magnotta Dedication*, July 20, 2012.

Beauty and Evil

“That which is striking and beautiful is not always good, but that which is good is always beautiful.”

Ninon de L’Encles⁷⁶

According to *The New Answers, Part 2*, sin originates in one’s own desire.⁷⁷ As already mentioned, several books in the Bible refer to Satan as an angel and a son of God, but unlike the other angels and because of his pride and arrogance, Satan refused to bow down to God. Genesis 3:1 says, “Now the snake was the most cunning animal that the Lord God had made,” but when the snake sinned, God cursed him and turned him into a lowly, despised creature condemned to crawl in the dirt for eternity. In a similar fashion, Isaiah 14:12 states (referring to Satan), “...bright morning star, you have fallen from heaven! In the past you conquered nations, but now you have been thrown to the ground.” Hodge adds, “It was by Satan’s own desire that his pride in his own beauty and abilities overtook him.”⁷⁸ Therefore, we could say that Satan was the first true narcissist whose beauty, while initially hiding his evil, eventually led to his downfall. Likewise, Luka Magnotta’s arrogance led him to rebel against life, and in a desperate cry for attention, he knowingly committed a crime when he viciously killed his lover, leading to his own fall from grace.

In Greek mythology, the association between beauty and evil can be traced back to the time when only man existed. Zeus was angry with Prometheus, the protector of mankind, who had stolen fire from Olympus and given it to man. As punishment, Zeus ordered Hephaestus, the god of fire and metal work, to create a woman to bring misfortune to both Prometheus and mankind. According to Hamilton,⁷⁹

He (Zeus) made a great evil for men, a sweet and lovely thing to look upon, in the likeness of a shy maiden... When this beautiful disaster had been made, Zeus brought her out and wonder took hold of gods and men when they beheld her. From her, the first woman, comes the race of women, who are an evil to men, with a nature to do evil.

There are many examples of the beautiful/evil combination, both male and female. Mermaids were beautiful creatures who inhabited rocky

⁷⁶ Ninon de L’Enclos, *Search Quotes*. 2014.

⁷⁷ Bodie Hodge, *The New Answers, Part 2*, October 10, 2014.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Edith Hamilton, *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes* (New York: Penguin Books, 1969), 74.

islands and used their beauty to cause sailors to shipwreck; similarly, the intoxicating song of the beautiful Sirens would seduce sailors with the same effect.⁸⁰ The Succubus was a beautiful demon who would lure sleeping men into having sex with her so that she could devour their children.⁸¹ Hera, the wife of Zeus, was quite beautiful, but she was also prone to angry tirades and fits of jealous spite, usually aimed at the women who consorted with her husband.⁸² One of the most handsome, yet evil, men in history was a young Joseph Stalin, and Libya's Colonel Gaddafi may have been a tyrant, but in his younger years, he was extremely good-looking as well.⁸³

In many of the noir films of the 1940s, the purpose of the beautiful, sexy *femme fatale* was to serve as a sexual distraction for the protagonist, as Lauren Bacall did for Humphrey Bogart in 1946's *The Big Sleep*.⁸⁴ In 1987's *Black Widow*, Catherine was an extremely attractive woman who seduced and married rich, older men and then killed them for their money.⁸⁵ "Evil takes a human form in Regina George," according to the 2004 film *Mean Girls*.⁸⁶ Regina is rich, beautiful, very nice when she wants to be, and incredibly mean when she doesn't. She intentionally uses her looks and sex appeal to manipulate people into giving her what she wants, just as most narcissists do. In the video for Carrie Underwood's 2007 song, *Last Name*, the girl falls for a very attractive man who flirts with every girl he sees while also seducing her with his gorgeous smile in typical narcissistic fashion.⁸⁷

How is it, time and time again, that evil people, male or female, are successful in their conquests? According to Christian philosopher J. P. Moreland, "Evil is a lack of goodness. It is goodness spoiled. You can have good without evil, but you cannot have evil without good."⁸⁸ According to an article in *The Independent*,⁸⁹

⁸⁰ Bulfinch, *Mythology*, 195.

⁸¹ Micha Lindemans, "Succubus," April 2, 2002.

⁸² Patrick, *All Color Book*, 29.

⁸³ "Every Evil Man in History used to be Really, Really Handsome. *Work in Prowess*," TVTropes.com, November 29, 2013.

⁸⁴ *The Big Sleep*, directed by Howard Hawks (Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers Studio, 1946).

⁸⁵ *Black Widow*, directed by Bob Rafelson (Los Angeles, CA: Amercent Films, 1987).

⁸⁶ *Mean Girls*, directed by Mark Waters (Hollywood, CA: Paramount Studios, 2004).

⁸⁷ Carrie Underwood, "Last Name."

⁸⁸ "What is the Definition of Evil?" gotquestions.org?, n.d.

⁸⁹ Terry Eagleton, *The Independent*, May 7, 2010.

Evil is the flipside of human existence.... Virtue may be admirable, but it is vice we find sexy.... When did evil start to look so alluring? One answer might be when goodness began to look boring. We can blame this on the puritanical middle classes...who redefined virtue as thrift, prudence, meekness, abstinence, chastity and industriousness.... Goodness came to seem negative and restrictive.

Lexa Mancini admitted that she thought good boys were boring and that evil ones were so much more exciting. Perhaps Lexa and others like her have confused fiction with reality, the difference being that "...in real life, the good people are interesting and the bad people are boring; in fiction, it's the other way around."⁹⁰ In real life, bad people are truly bad. They aren't sexy and exciting; they are not our friends; they don't come over for dinner; they break the law; they might be mentally unstable and possibly violent; they are more focused on having sex than having a relationship; and they think nothing of cheating on their partners. These are not the kind of people with whom we should become involved, and they are certainly not the kind of people that we should be attracted to *because* they are bad.

However, the truth is that we generally do find the evil character to be more appealing because evil does strange things to people; if we find the evil exciting and desirable enough, it almost becomes addictive. The fact that we often perceive the evil character as appealing proves just how tempting and seductive evil can be. Genesis 2:15–3:24 tells the story of how God made Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden where everything they could want or need was provided for them. Yet even though she lived in Paradise, Eve still could not resist the temptation provided by Satan, whose demonic soul was hidden behind an angel's face. Little did Eve realize the evil that confronted her, and she easily succumbed to its devastating appeal. If Eve, the first woman, couldn't resist the temptation of a beautiful being, what chance do the rest of us have?

The Paradox of Myths

"No object is so beautiful that, under certain conditions, it will not look ugly."

Oscar Wilde⁹¹

⁹⁰ "Good is Boring," TVTropes.com, n.d.

⁹¹ Paulo Coelho, goodreads.com.

According to Wilkinson and Philip, myths are sacred in their originating cultures because they tell us the truth about ourselves.⁹² As mentioned earlier, myths are stories, and as such, we think of them as being fictitious; at the same time, they possess some degree of truth since they were originally created to explain some phenomenon and to tell us the fundamental truth about ourselves. According to Dowden,⁹³

This is the paradox of myths. They are not factually exact: they are false, not wholly true, or not true in that form. But they have a power which transcends their inaccuracy, even depends on it. I do not think this is just a fact about modern use of the word “myth.” It lies at the heart of all myths and in particular of ancient myths: myths are believed, but not in the same way that history is. Those who, let us say, “subscribe to” a myth may well express their acceptance of it by asserting its “truth.” Certainly they will not wish to call it “false.”

It is impossible for us to know the true version of an originating myth. After being passed down through many generations, first orally and then in writing, the original stories most certainly will have been changed or altered in some way. Some myths may have been ambiguous from the start and easily took on new meanings as they were passed along. Barthes felt that we could always change a myth by eliminating the parts of it that didn't fit with our own ideas and interpretations.⁹⁴ We could then add a new and/or different meaning to the myth that held a greater significance for us. However, we can get into a great deal of trouble when we change the meaning of a myth by ignoring significant parts of it, as when we ignore the fact that an individual's positive characteristics or negative warning signs don't fit together in a way that makes sense to us. In the video for Taylor Swift's 2012 song *I Knew You Were Trouble*, in which she sings about a broken relationship, she begins by saying, “How can the devil be pulling you toward someone who looks so much like an angel when he smiles at you?”⁹⁵ The girl in this video knew the man she was with was no good, but she began a relationship with him anyway, even referring to him as an *angel*, perhaps in an effort to convince herself.

This is exactly what Magnotta's fans did. His anti-hero behavior forced them to change his image into what they wanted it to be so that it was easier for them to see him in a more favorable light. Because they couldn't

⁹² Wilkinson and Philip, *Visual Reference*, 14.

⁹³ Dowden, *Approaching*, 2.

⁹⁴ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 230.

⁹⁵ Taylor Swift, “I Knew You Were Trouble” (vocal performance), by Taylor Swift, recorded October 30, 2012, on *RED* (Big Machine Records).

comprehend the fact that their *idol* was actually a cold-blooded psychopath, they simply chose to delete that part of his history and substitute it with their own versions of his *perfection*. A few lines from another poem Lexa Mancini posted read:⁹⁶

Beautiful monster so thinly veiled
Your crimes have not your beauty paled.
It's just so hard to reconcile
Your beauty and your crimes so vile
I'd rather just discard the latter
Your beauty, to me, is all that matters

The various Facebook pages and blogs written about Magnotta were his followers' attempts to draw public attention away from his flaws and focus it in a more socially acceptable fashion so that he could be seen, not as a heartless killer, but as a poor, misunderstood victim of societal pressure to conform.

The Greek aristocracy often used *kalos kagathos* to refer to their version of the perfect man.⁹⁷ In Magnotta's case, it seems obvious that his fans were so blinded by the concept of *kalos kagathos* that they actually came to think of him as their ideal man, as evidenced by how they described him, using phrases such as *one perfect package*. They thought that, since he was so attractive, he had to be good; however, as Moreland stated earlier, "Evil is a lack of goodness."⁹⁸ Because Magnotta's followers couldn't comprehend the fact that anything evil could be hiding behind such a beautiful face, they chose to ignore or overlook the possibility that he could have done such atrocious things and, instead, focused all their attention on his good looks. As Campbell says, "Whether you call someone a hero or a monster is all relative to where the focus of your consciousness may be."⁹⁹ For Magnotta's fans, there was no monster—just a beautiful, perfect—and, therefore, good—man.

Lest we begin to think of Magnotta as an exception, we should also consider the case of Jeremy Meeks. Meeks served 2 years in a California state prison for grand larceny and 9 years for grand theft auto.¹⁰⁰ In June 2014 30-year-old Meeks, now a convicted felon, was arrested during a gang sweep in Stockton, CA and charged with illegally possessing a

⁹⁶ Lexa Mancini, "Beautiful Monster," *Luka Magnotta Dedication*, June 17, 2012.

⁹⁷ Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, 402.

⁹⁸ "What is the Definition of Evil?" [gotquestions.org?](http://gotquestions.org/), n.d.

⁹⁹ Campbell and Moyer, *The Power of Myth*, 156.

¹⁰⁰ "Jeremy Meeks—Hot Convict—Used to Look Pretty Different," *Huffington Post*, June 23, 2014.

firearm and violating parole. He was arraigned on 11 felony counts, and his bail was set at \$1 million. That should have been the last we heard about Mr. Meeks except for the fact that his mug shot, showing his chiseled cheek bones, piercing blue eyes, and tiny tear-drop tattoo beside his left eye (which usually indicates that the possessor has killed someone), went viral. In response, the police department was flooded with thousands of texts and emails, including remarks such as “OMG, he’s hot!!” “He’s too fine to be a criminal,” and “He’s too pretty to go to jail.” Quickly known as “the hot mugshot guy,” Meeks was offered numerous media and modeling contracts that were put on hold when, in February 2015, he was sentenced to 27 months in federal prison.¹⁰¹ However, he was released in March 2016 after serving only one year of his sentence.¹⁰² He has now signed a modeling contract and is preparing for a new career. Why? Because he looks good. Any other 3rd time felon would probably be sent to prison for life, yet we are willing to overlook this criminal labeled by Stockton police as “one of the most dangerous criminals in the Stockton area,” all because of how he looks.

Plato’s Theory of Love

“Maybe we judge people too much by their looks because it’s easier than seeing what’s really important.”

Alex Flinn¹⁰³

In the *Symposium*, Plato explained his theory of love as the desire to possess the beautiful, but he also said that the most admirable lovers were those who moved from the love of the physical to the love of the intellectual.¹⁰⁴ We can interpret Plato’s words to mean that, although we might initially be attracted to others based on their physical appearance, this is a poor basis for building a long-term relationship since physical beauty is superficial and can easily change. We can also infer that we must move past someone’s external appearance to examine the beauty that is within: the kind of person someone is; the personality characteristics, values, goals, and beliefs that he/she possesses; the degree of commonality

¹⁰¹ J. Freedom Du Lac, “‘Hot mugshot guy’ Jeremy Meeks has been sentenced to 27 months in federal prison,” *Washington Post*, Feb. 6, 2015.

¹⁰² “Hot Mugshot Guy Jeremy Meeks Finally Out of Prison—You Gotta See Him Now,” *toofab*, March 10, 2016.

¹⁰³ Alex Flinn, “Beastly,” *Inspiration Nation*, May 24, 2011.

¹⁰⁴ M. C. Howatson and F. C. C. & Sheffield, *Plato: Symposium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 49–50.

that we share. These are the kinds of things upon which successful relationships are built. It's natural for us to want extremely attractive partners, but when the beauty fades, what do we have left?

Obviously, Lexa and others like her failed to grasp Plato's entire philosophy, focusing instead only on the desire to possess the beautiful. They were so attracted by Magnotta's good looks that they supported him, despite knowing what he had done, because they equated his looking good to being good. One fan even defended his cannibalistic behavior by claiming he was a very nice person (as if that was supposed to make it all right), even though she had never even met the man.¹⁰⁵ This focus on being attracted to someone's external appearance can be traced through evolution back to the days of the cave man. In studying human mating behavior from an evolutionary perspective, social psychologist David Buss and his associates in the 1970s and 1980s concluded that survival of the fittest meant that only humans with certain genetic advantages were able to survive and reproduce.¹⁰⁶

Evolutionary psychology was based on Charles Darwin's theory of sexual selection. According to Darwin, evolutionary change occurs because of preferences and competition for a mate.¹⁰⁷ For a male, survival meant finding a mate who could reproduce, so he looked for characteristics that were good indicators of a woman's health and fertility such as youthfulness, large breasts, wide hips, and long, shiny hair—many of the same characteristics that males find sexually appealing today. Having a young, attractive mate who was capable of producing multiple healthy children meant that there was an increased chance that some of those children would have the genetic advantages that would enable them to survive to adulthood and reproduce, thereby ensuring successful continuation of the species. So for the caveman, it was much more important for a woman to look good than to be good—hence, the focus on physical attractiveness rather than on personality characteristics. Of course, choosing a mate was a calculated risk on the part of the male because a woman's youth and attractiveness were no guarantee of her reproductive ability or her character.

A female's preference in choosing a suitable mate involved finding someone capable of protecting and providing for her and the children she would produce. In searching for a mate, a male might find himself having to compete for the female's attention. Competition between males would

¹⁰⁵ Goldman, "'Cannibal' Luka Magnotta Attracts Obsessed Female Fans."

¹⁰⁶ David Buss, ed., *The Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology* (Hoboken New Jersey: Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2005), 46.

¹⁰⁷ Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (New York: Bantam Books, 1999), 75.

improve the female's chances of choosing the mate with the strongest genetic advantages, depending on the strength and virility he displayed in his efforts to beat his competition. But there was no guarantee that just because he won the competition that he would be willing or able to provide for a family, so in choosing her mate, a female who looked for strength and stamina over character was also taking a calculated risk.

So evolution, to a certain degree, depended on the risk-taking behavior of both males and females, especially in terms of reproduction. Sex is essential to evolution, and the sex drive is so hard-wired into our brains that it can override our better judgment, sometimes pushing us into unnecessary risk-taking behavior. For example, a couple in the throes of passion who suddenly realize they don't have a condom will probably decide to *chance it* rather than stop mid-action to protect themselves. They know the risks involved, but at that moment, they decide it's worth taking the chance because they are being driven by emotion and hormones rather than logic. Magnotta's fans behaved in a similar manner; his physical attractiveness stimulated their sex drive which would then override their good judgment. Like the couple in the throes of passion, it was easier for them to continue to focus on Magnotta's good looks rather than let go of their obsession with him and logically consider all the evidence indicating his guilt.

Human behavior is frequently the result of a spur-of-the moment decision rather than a well-thought-out one, especially when something or someone is overwhelmingly attractive; we act, taking a risk, and then we think of a way to justify our actions to ourselves and others. Certainly this is the case when we are with someone we perceive as attractive and sexy. We take the risk now and worry about the consequences later. Under the right circumstances, we could easily fall for a *bad* person, finding him or her physically and sexually attractive. Because it might be the *badness* that attracts us in the first place, this could lead us into unnecessary and sometimes dangerous risk-taking behavior simply because of the thrill it provides. But anytime we rely solely on someone's physical attractiveness as a measure of his/her character, we are engaging in extremely dangerous risk-taking behavior.

The Imperfect Hero

“Rarely do great beauty and great virtue dwell together.”

Petrarch, *De Remediis*¹⁰⁸

Contrary to Rosenberg’s assertion that heroes were models for human behavior, Luka Magnotta never seemed to get the hero part quite right, becoming, instead, the very antithesis of a hero. For years, Magnotta had attempted to fashion himself into a modern-day hero, but he didn’t know how to go about it the right way. Craving attention, he legally changed his name from Eric Clinton Newman to Luka Rocco Magnotta, something much more interesting and *exotic*-sounding. He altered his appearance at least five times through various plastic surgeries. He tried to solicit public attention by posting hundreds, if not thousands, of pictures of himself on the Internet and starting various rumors and stories about himself, some true and some false, but all adding to the myth he became. Magnotta created over 20 websites and 70 known Facebook pages under various aliases in an attempt to cultivate an online presence for himself. In person, he worked as a stripper and male escort, appeared in several pornographic films, and auditioned unsuccessfully for several TV shows. His egotistical self-concept made him ever increasingly bold in his behavior and obviously somewhat mentally unstable.

Despite his intense efforts, Magnotta’s bizarre behavior made it so impossible for him to function successfully within a societal structure that a segment of the population found it necessary to create a myth to explain his behavior in a way that allowed them to make sense of it. He certainly earned lasting fame, as Rosenberg suggests that heroes do, but not through great deeds or inspiring others. Instead, his behavior was nothing like a hero’s, although it certainly earned him the public attention he desperately craved. Finally, when he committed an unfathomable atrocity, his arrogance led him to flaunt his crime by posting it on the Internet, and yet even this wasn’t enough to change the attitudes of his followers. Instead, it seemed to make them all the more devoted to him.

Taking on such a mythic quality should have placed Magnotta beyond the reach of his fans and supporters, but as Rosenberg stated about heroes, “In spite of their incredible abilities, no hero is perfect... Their imperfections allow ordinary people to identify with them and to like them.”¹⁰⁹ So perhaps Magnotta’s actions proved that he wasn’t the epitome of perfection his fans believed him to be. Despite the fact that those

¹⁰⁸ Francesco Petrarch, “Petrarch Quotes,” Quotes.net, November 3, 2014.

¹⁰⁹ Rosenberg, *World Mythology*, xvii.

actions were deplorable, disgusting, and greatly disturbing, perhaps they served to humanize him, bringing him back down to a level where his fans could more easily relate to him, as indicated by their protestations of love and their desire to have sex with him. Some felt he deserved sympathy for his unrelenting quest for fame, and some acknowledged that, even though it was definitely Magnotta in the video, they still found him *inspirational*.

Ignoring Evil for Beauty

“Beauty is indeed a good gift of God; but that the good may not think it a great good, God dispenses it even to the wicked.”

St. Augustine¹¹⁰

We can easily wonder how such admiration for Magnotta was even possible and who these deluded, irrational people were, but we can find hundreds, if not thousands, of them on the Internet. As Dowden said, “...a myth...lures not just a stray, mistaken individual, but whole groups and societies into believing it.”¹¹¹ This would certainly explain how over 1400 individuals could so willfully hold onto their delusions about Magnotta even when those delusions flew in the face of the obviously factual and incriminating evidence against him. In addition to Magnotta’s biggest fan page on Facebook, there were dozens of other such pages, as well as numerous support groups such as “Support Luka Magnotta” whose members wanted to visit him at the detention center where he was being held and write him letters of support and encouragement. Others defended him, saying that perhaps he was mentally ill or that he was being set up for his alleged crimes.¹¹² Another support group with about 200 members claimed it was “for people who are fastiated [sic] with luka, or anything that goes against society and thier [sic] morals, or who would just want to have sex with him.”¹¹³

The administrator of “Support Luka Magnotta” was Destiny, a 21 year-old woman who said in an email,

I like Luka Magnotta because he is inspirational, nice, and very, very good looking. I have seen the video over 20 times. I do think that was him, and I liked it. He is inspirational because he is not afraid to be himself.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Huie, “Quotes by St. Augustine.”

¹¹¹ Dowden, *Approaching*, 3.

¹¹² Josh Visser, “Fans, defenders line up to support Luka Magnotta,” *National Post*, June 21, 2012.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Having the courage to be oneself is inspirational when one's behavior is admirable, but that was not the case with Magnotta. Was Destiny implying that she was so inspired by Magnotta that she might start to kill kittens? When asked about how the victim's family would feel about her Facebook page, Destiny was unapologetic when she said,

I couldn't care less about that dude (referring to Magnotta's victim). I think that if anyone is a victim in this case, it is Luka...because of all the bullying he had to endure before the murder.¹¹⁵

Destiny thinks Magnotta was the victim because he was bullied, but what about his lover who is dead? When fans start to declare that they just want to have sex with a murderer or that they couldn't care less about his victim, one has to wonder if some of them aren't as crazy as the murderer himself. Could attractiveness alone really have this profound an effect on people?

It's easy to look at photographs of an attractive person in sexy poses and admire, desire, and maybe even *fall in love* with him/her, but that's just fantasy; it's *lust*, not real love. Under normal circumstances, it is not always easy to get to know someone for whom he/she really is; when there is no opportunity to interact face-to-face or spend time together, it's impossible. When you take away the pictures and the publicity, what did Magnotta have left? He was egotistical and extremely vain, he wasn't happy with his attempts to make himself famous through his online campaign, and he had a series of unsavory and even illegal jobs—none of which adds up to much in the way of character. So perhaps it was easier for his fans to continue to lust after him from afar than it was to confront the reality of who their *hero* really was.

As Rosenberg said, it is a hero's imperfections that enable others to identify with him.¹¹⁶ However, being aware of Magnotta's horrific actions created more than enough cognitive dissonance for his followers; they didn't want or need to openly acknowledge them as well. Instead, their way of coping with the reality of Luka Magnotta was to support him, defend his actions, and make excuses for his behavior by claiming that he was the real *victim*. Indeed, Magnotta's fans never really denied his guilt but rather justified, accepted, or just ignored his behavior as they talked about how it added to his mystique, how he was beauty and evil wrapped up in one, and how they didn't care whether or not he was guilty.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Rosenberg, *World Mythology*, xvii.

Lexa, and others like her, had developed one-sided relationships with Magnotta in which they felt as if they actually knew the real man behind his public image, and the support they offered through their blogs contributed to the attention that a true narcissist craves. Lexa wrote, "...in all honesty it's the person inside him that absolutely fascinates me. I feel a strong need to know him, to be his friend, to provide some comfort that he never had,"¹¹⁷ even though all she really knew about him came from his pictures. But how much can you tell about a person from pictures alone? Ted Bundy, one of the most famous serial killers in history, was an intelligent, attractive man. During his last interview before his execution on Jan 24, 1989, Bundy looked good and was very composed and articulate as he spoke.¹¹⁸ Watching and listening to him, it was hard to believe that Bundy was capable of, much less carried out, so much violence. Yet after his incarceration and during the months leading up to his death, Bundy received an average of 200 letters a day from women he did not know but who claimed to love him, despite the fact that he was on Death Row for the rape and murder of over two dozen women.¹¹⁹ Likewise, Lexa was so obsessed by Magnotta's physical appearance that she was not only willing to overlook his barbaric behavior but to actually offer him kindness—a luxury that he certainly never offered his unfortunate victim.

One reason for the strange behavior of some of Magnotta's followers is that they may have been victims of *hybristophilia*,¹²⁰ also known as *The Bonnie and Clyde Syndrome*, after the famous American bank-robbing couple of the 1930s, Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow.¹²¹ According to sex therapist Dr. Ian Kerner, *hybristophilia* is a fetish in which sexual arousal and attainment of orgasm are contingent upon being with a partner known to have committed an outrageous crime such as armed robbery, rape, or murder, especially if the person is attractive and well-known.¹²² Both Ted Bundy and John Wayne Gacy, convicted serial killers who raped and murdered dozens of young people, were in committed relationships before they were executed—relationships that did not begin until after they had

¹¹⁷ Lexa Mancini, "The Duality of Luka," *Luka Magnotta Dedication*, July 10, 2012.

¹¹⁸ James Dobson, "Fatal Addiction: Ted Bundy's Final Interview," *Pure Intimacy*, January 23, 1989.

¹¹⁹ Rogene Fisher, "ABC News: What Draws People to Marry Prison Inmates?" August 10, 2005.

¹²⁰ Aina Hunter, "15 Strangest Sex Fetishes: Do You Have One?" CBS News, August 12, 2010.

¹²¹ Jennifer Rosenberg, *Bonnie and Clyde: Their Life and Crimes*, n.d.

¹²² Hunter, "15 Strangest."

been convicted and sentenced to death.¹²³ In Gacy's case, he was not even physically attractive, and yet the lure of the viciousness of his crimes was enough to attract admirers. Erik and Lyle Menendez both developed and married pen-pals after they were sentenced to life in prison for the murder of their parents; Lyle has even divorced his former pen-pal and remarried while behind bars.¹²⁴ Scott Peterson, awaiting death in the execution chamber of San Quentin State Prison for the murders of his wife and unborn son, is reportedly flooded with letters from admirers.¹²⁵ Even convicted Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh received marriage proposals before he was executed,¹²⁶ so this strange-sounding fetish really does exist.

Anna Friedman, married to a convicted murderer for seven years, explained, "I've found that most men in prison—even those guilty of the worst crimes—are not monsters."¹²⁷ Friedman firmly believes in the power of love to stop prisoners who have committed crimes from turning into "real, honest-to-god monsters."¹²⁸ Really? What about people who were already monsters, even before they went to prison, like Bundy, McVeigh, and Peterson? How can anyone claim that these murderers were anything less than monsters? If love is that powerful, how did these men become such monsters? And if beauty and goodness really do go together, why are there any attractive *monsters* at all?

In milder cases such as Lexa's, *hybristophilia* manifests itself as an intense attraction to the *bad boy* (since hybristophiliacs are much more likely to be female).¹²⁹ Unfortunately, anyone attracted to a *bad boy* is likely to find that he is emotionally unavailable and unable or unwilling to commit to a satisfying, monogamous relationship, no matter how attractive he is. While this fetish (in any form) sounds unlikely, singer Britney Spears had a 2011 hit song entitled *Criminal* in which she describes *The Bonnie and Clyde Syndrome*.¹³⁰ The following is the first verse of that song:

¹²³ Fisher, "ABC News."

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Anna North, "Women Who Marry Prisoners Aren't Just 'Crazy Ladies,'" February 8, 2011.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Hunter, "15 Strangest."

¹³⁰ Britney Spears, "Criminal" (vocal performance), by Max Martin, Shellback, and Tiffany Amber, recorded July 2009, on *Femme Fatale* (Maratone Studios).

He is a hustler, he's no good at all.
 He is a loser, he's a bum, bum, bum, bum.
 He lies, he bluffs, he's unreliable.
 He is a sucker with a gun, gun, gun, gun.
 I know you said that I should stay away.
 I know you said he's just a dog astray.
 He's just a bad boy with a tainted heart.
 And even I know this ain't smart.

But Mama, I'm in love with a criminal
 And this type of love isn't rational, it's physical.
 Mama, please don't cry; I will be alright.
 All reason aside, I just can't deny, I love the guy.

As with Lexa, the girl in this song knows that the man she is with is no good, but she doesn't care. She seems to be attracted all the more, not in spite of his bad behavior, but almost because of it. Lexa said,¹³¹

I can't remember one other time I've become infatuated with someone's appearance. But then there's the darker, more complex side of Luka. I'm not just talking about the actual crime he allegedly committed, because that's just the culmination of everything. I'm talking about his life and who he is inside. He is tremendously fascinating! This is the part that keeps me interested. If it was just about a pretty face, I would have been over him in an hour I'm sure!

Lexa referred to the crime Magnotta *allegedly committed*, even though the police had him on videotape as he actually committed the murder. She dismissed it as *the culmination of everything* and as something she was willing to overlook because of his good looks.¹³² She referred to her fascination with his darker, more complex side—the side that Carl Jung refers to as *The Shadow* or the rejected, inferior, but potentially amoral side of oneself that most of us deny.¹³³ Lexa so easily focused on Magnotta's *good* while ignoring his *bad* that it's as if she didn't realize that his darker side was the part responsible for his heinous actions. Instead, she saw his dark side as captivating, mysterious, and strangely alluring instead of recognizing that his dark side had overpowered any potential good that may have once existed in that beautiful exterior.

¹³¹ Mancini, "The Duality of Luka."

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ C. G. Jung, "The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious" in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung, Vol. 9, Part 1* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 270.

Another important factor contributing to our choice of beauty over evil is belief in the *beauty and the beast* myth: the idea that it is possible to change another person, especially that person's character.¹³⁴ The oldest version of the beauty and the beast myth comes from the Greek story of Psyche and Cupid.¹³⁵ Psyche was so beautiful that men flocked to her to behold her loveliness, all the while neglecting the goddess Venus. Out of jealousy, Venus sent her son Cupid to shoot Psyche with an arrow so that she would fall in love with the vilest creature in the whole world. But when Cupid saw her, he was so overwhelmed by her incredible beauty that he shot himself with an arrow instead and married her himself.

Belief in the *beauty and the beast* myth seems especially appropriate for a woman who thinks there is a heart of gold hidden somewhere underneath a man's rough exterior that no other woman has been able to uncover. She finds a man whom others think of as *the bad boy*; perhaps she's even seen him breaking hearts and possibly even breaking the law, but she is convinced that if she loves him enough, she will be able to change him into the *prince* he was always meant to be. After all, Belle did it in *Beauty and the Beast*.¹³⁶ Perhaps Lexa Mancini thought she could do the same with Magnotta, especially when she had the added incentive of being so sexually attracted to him.

Actor Warren Beatty, known as Hollywood's most legendary ladies' man, dated thousands of actresses, models, princesses, and other women, before marrying actress Annette Bening in 1992.¹³⁷ Imagine the ego boost that Bening received from succeeding with Beatty where all those other women had failed, but Bening's success is not the norm. It is, however, the kind of thing that gives a woman hope that she can accomplish the same thing, and so she takes a giant leap of faith, confident of her success in changing her man, even though that leap is fraught with danger. The real problem for her is that when she doesn't succeed, she will probably blame herself for not being good enough or not trying hard enough to change him while failing to understand that the fault was really never hers. She sees herself as a failure without realizing that she didn't stand a chance from the beginning. People don't change just because we want them to, including beautiful people whose good looks have allowed them to get away with evil behavior. As individuals, we have enough difficulty trying

¹³⁴ Galician, *Sex, Love, and Romance*, 178.

¹³⁵ Bulfinch, *Mythology*, 68–77.

¹³⁶ DeBeaumont, *Beauty and the Beast*, 39.

¹³⁷ Reed Tucker, "How Warren Beatty Fell in Love after 12, 775 Women," *The New York Post*, July 19, 2014.

to change ourselves without thinking that we are capable of changing someone else, especially someone who doesn't want to change.

A final reason for the possible combination of beauty and evil is the expectation of *entitlement*.¹³⁸ Attractive people sometimes feel they are entitled to the best of everything, and certainly better than what others get, simply because they are attractive and have probably been privileged their entire lives. Cute brunette Audrey had a tantrum in front of her friends and cancelled her 16th birthday party, calling her mother a *bitch* who ruined the entire celebration, just because her mother gave Audrey a new Lexus before her party rather than during it.¹³⁹ Tall, blond-haired Alicia says she feels sorry for people who aren't attractive; she has no chores, her parents do her homework, and they keep their Christmas tree up all year long because Alicia receives a present every single day.¹⁴⁰ The problem is that people become extremely resentful of others who act entitled like this, but when children are brought up this way, they expect special treatment, do what is necessary to make sure they get it, and react poorly when they don't. As a result, it is not unusual to see a woman use her sexuality or a man flaunt his virility to seduce and manipulate others. So does this work or is this unnecessarily risky behavior? In the case of Audrey, it was. When she created a scene, cursing her mother for giving her a new car on the wrong day, her mother simply returned the car to the dealership.

But then we have the case of beautiful, blue-eyed, blond-haired MacKensie who refused the new Saab convertible her father bought her because it was red rather than the blue she wanted. So when he bought her a blue Saab instead and asked her to sell the red one, she did—on eBay for \$9.99.¹⁴¹ She sounds like another entitled, spoiled brat, but in response to her video, “Mickey Blue” posted the following remark, “She may also have trouble getting a date,”¹⁴² to which another reader responded, “Please, she looks like she's pretty, and she's rich... Somehow I think she'll get by in life just fine.”¹⁴³ And therein lies the problem—we excuse atrocious behavior when it comes from a person who is very attractive. When someone is allowed to behave this way, not only does this person

¹³⁸ Jean Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled—and More Miserable Than Ever Before* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 70.

¹³⁹ “Audrey: the Biggest and Most Spoiled Brat in the World!” Yahoo.com, June 25, 2007.

¹⁴⁰ “The Most Spoiled Girl in the World!” snotr.com, 2007.

¹⁴¹ “MacKensie: My Birthday Disaster,” YouTube.com, December 20, 2006.

¹⁴² Mickey Blue, “Spoiled Rich Girl Throws Tantrum,” Snopes.com, January 25, 2007.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

develop a sense of entitlement but quickly learns how to use his/her appearance to manipulate others, sometimes in very evil ways.

Looking Beyond Beauty

“Misunderstanding is generally simpler than true understanding, and hence has more potential for popularity.”

Raheel Farooq¹⁴⁴

Evil always has and always will be a part of life. Genesis 3:18 says, “Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to live alone. I will make a suitable companion to help him.’” But evil was revealed when Satan encouraged Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge (Genesis 3:23). Likewise, in Greek mythology, Zeus created Pandora, the first woman, but she brought misfortune to mankind when she allowed all evil things to escape from the urn she had been given.¹⁴⁵ So why is evil so sexy? Why wouldn’t it be when there are so many factors working in its favor? According to the website *TVTROPES.org*,¹⁴⁶

There is a reason actors fight for the chance to play the bad guy. The lines are great, the costumes are awesome, the songs are spectacular, the villains often look much sexier than the heroes, and they don’t have to spend the whole shoot pretending they are nicer than anyone they’ve ever met. So why does the bad guy get all the cool stuff? The more interesting the bad guy, the more interesting the story. It really is that simple. You don’t have a story unless you have conflict, and in most cases, the bad guy *is* the conflict.

Every drama, whether in books, on TV, at the movies, or in real life, has at least one evil character that can be counted on to cause conflict, and all too often, that character’s evil side is well concealed. Packaging it in a beautiful exterior doesn’t make it any less vile, but it does make it easier for the evil to hide. Many plants and animals that exist today are very beautiful and yet extremely poisonous. Unfortunately, the same is true for humans. The heroine in a romance novel might be young and beautiful, but so is her rival; the difference is that the heroine is good and virtuous while her rival uses her beauty to seduce and manipulate.

The self-assurance of a narcissist can be very appealing to others at first, making it difficult for them to recognize the character flaws that

¹⁴⁴ Raheel Farooq, goodreads.com.

¹⁴⁵ Bulfinch, *Mythology*, 16–17.

¹⁴⁶ “Evil Is Cool,” TVTropes.com.

actually exist within the narcissist; however, those flaws are still there, waiting to surface. According to Peck, “It is not their sins per se that characterize evil people.... The central defect of the evil is not the sin but the refusal to acknowledge it.”¹⁴⁷ In 1987’s *Fatal Attraction*, Dan, a New York lawyer, loves his wife and family but is physically attracted to Alex, a colleague. While his wife is out of town, Dan has a one-night stand with Alex, assuming she understands the parameters of their relationship. But Alex’s narcissistic personality couldn’t handle any kind of rejection, so when Dan returned home to his wife, Alex’s excessive pride led her to overact to the point that she stalked him and his family with tragic results.¹⁴⁸

Such stories are not just the realm of fiction but all too frequently exist in real life as well. Jim Jones was attractive and religious and so charismatic that he founded and led a cult called the Peoples Temple. In 1978, he convinced his people to move to the jungles of Guyana where he encouraged the mass suicide of 914 of its members, including over 200 children.¹⁴⁹

We will always encounter evil, and it will often be disguised by beauty. Evil may be unavoidable, but we don’t have to fall victim to it. One way to prevent that is to understand that we can’t rely on looks alone when judging people. It really is what’s on the inside that counts. External looks are not permanent and will fade and diminish over time. No one looks like they did at 20 by the time they turn 40. Those who attempt to hold on to their looks easily become obsessed with makeup, cosmetic procedures, and even plastic surgery, but in the end, they are all going to lose. As beauty fades, we are left only with our morals and values—what’s on the inside—and if that is ugly also, we are no better off than the wicked old witch or the evil step-mother.

We must learn that beauty comes from within. Without a good heart and good intentions, no amount of makeup can make someone truly beautiful, so we must look past the exterior to discover what lies beneath. Sometimes what we find may be evil, but at least we can be ready for it and better able to resist its enticing lure.

To an extent, Lexa Mancini was right when she said good boys were boring; many of them avoid conflict in their lives as much as possible, and as a result, they lead boring lives. It’s not that we want conflict in our

¹⁴⁷ Peck, *People of the Lie*, 69.

¹⁴⁸ *Fatal Attraction*, directed by Adrian Lyne (Hollywood, CA: Paramount Studios, 1987).

¹⁴⁹ Laurie Goering, “Guyanese Jungle Reclaiming Jonestown,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 10, 1997.

lives; it's that conflict is a normal, inevitable part of life that most of us don't know how to handle very well, so we try to avoid it. But conflict creates drama, and drama is what gives meaning to life. A life with no drama would be a very boring life indeed. Like the lyrics to the song *Heaven* say: "Heaven is a place where nothing ever happens."¹⁵⁰

On December 10, 2012, Lexa Mancini posted her "Final Blog Post." In it, she writes,¹⁵¹

I no longer support Luka Magnotta, nor does he give me "warm fuzzy feelings" anymore. In the beginning I was very much aware that Luka is a monster, but as I read more about him and spoke to other "fans," I began to feel not just infatuation for Luka but deep sympathy as well.... I wanted to be his friend, and thought that if enough people offered him love and support that the lost little boy inside him could be saved somehow.... Then one day in the midst of the constant drama, something just clicked in my head.... No matter what Luka has been through in his life, he does not deserve support! Luka is not some little lost boy who can be saved. He chose this path. He is a liar and a manipulator and he willfully committed murder purely to gain attention and fame. Luka will never change! He will always be a shallow and vile human being. He is cold and empty inside and anything that people think they see inside him is purely manipulation on his part.

Although it took a while, Lexa finally saw Luka Magnotta for the monster that he is, and that is the way that evil works. Just like Satan, evil can be attractive, alluring, seductive, and extremely tempting, but in the end, it is still evil—no matter how pretty it is on the outside. Fortunately, Lexa realized that before she permanently fell victim to the dark side of the beautiful Luka Magnotta. He may be extremely handsome, but underneath, Magnotta is really just another wicked old witch.

Although Magnotta admitted that he killed his lover, he pled *Not Guilty* at his trial, claiming mental illness at the time of the murder.¹⁵² The Prosecutor claimed that Magnotta had planned the murder for at least six months and acted with premeditation before, during, and after the event. The jury deliberated for eight days before returning a verdict of *Guilty* of

¹⁵⁰ Talking Heads, "Heaven" (vocal performance), by David Byrne and Jerry Harrison, released August 3, 1979, on *Fear of Music* (Brian Eno).

¹⁵¹ Lexa Mancini, "Final Blog Post," *Luka Magnotta Dedication*, December 10, 2012.

¹⁵² Amy Minsky, "Magnotta admits to killing Jun Lin, but pleads not guilty," *Global News*, September 29, 2014.

First Degree Murder. On December 23, 2014, Magnotta was sentenced to life in prison with a possibility of parole after 25 years.¹⁵³

Dowden says, "...myth is actually history, merely damaged and distorted by the passage of time."¹⁵⁴ The Magnotta myth was just like any other myth; it was about power and control, and it served the purpose of allowing Magnotta *fans* to continue to adore him and fantasize about him while blocking out the evil things he had done, but with the passage of time, his myth fell apart. Every story has to come to an end, and so did Magnotta's, regardless of how attractive he was. It was the evil inside the man that caused the slamming of the prison doors behind him, and no amount of beauty could keep that from happening.

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¹⁵³ Charmaine Noronha, "Luka Magnotta Sentenced to Life for Killing Chinese Lover, Mailing Body Parts," *Huff Post Crime*, December 23, 2014.

¹⁵⁴ Dowden, *Approaching*, 23.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

A WORLD WITHOUT MYTH

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The Nigerian folklorist and storyteller Amos Tutuola begins his novel *My Life in The Bush of Ghosts* with this phrase: “I was seven years old before I understood the meaning of ‘bad’ and ‘good.’”¹

This is the admission of an African boy forced to flee his village to escape insurgent slaver-trading armies. As soldiers advance, the young narrator takes cover in the Bush of Ghosts, a place “so dreadful that no superior earthly person ever entered it.”² He then goes off on a 24-year odyssey—told in Tutuola’s inimitable, hallucinatory, stream-of-consciousness style—during which this child-refugee travels from the witcheries of the “Rev. Devil” in the 8th Town of Ghosts, to the hut of the Television-Handed Ghostess outside of the 18th Town, and finally to a reunion with his brother and mother in a chapter eerily titled “Gladness becomes Weeping.”

In his insightful foreword to *The Bush of Ghosts*, the late Geoffrey Parrinder, who was a Methodist minister as well as professor at King’s College in London and the University College in Ibadan, Nigeria, uses words like *nightmarish*, *bewilderment*, *repugnance*, and *intoxication* to describe Tutuola’s uncanny masterpiece. Parrinder insists that this is more than a surreal and engaging ghost story (although that alone, in Tutuola’s hands, makes *The Bush of Ghosts* a matchless work of literature). “The anthropologist and the student of comparative religion,” writes Parrinder, “will find here much of the unrecorded mythology of West Africa.” Tutuola’s novel is thus of some “scientific value,” Parrinder claims, in that it is myth-making, or at least myth-embellishing, before our eyes.³

¹ Amos Tutuola, *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (New York: Grover Press, 1954), 17.

² Tutuola, *Bush of Ghosts*, 22.

³ Parrinder, “Foreword,” *Bush of Ghosts*, 12–13.

My most recent rereading of this highly addictive book was motivated by a much different account of mythology and its consequences. In June 2015, Chris Stein of the *Voice of America* reported the case of an eight-year-old girl who had been burned to death as punishment for witchcraft in Sabon Layi, a town in the Gongola region of Tutuola's native land.⁴ The witchcraft angle in the Sabon Layi affair is the stuff of myth. It is part of a commonly-held, socially-constructed *Weltanschauung* that is utterly divorced from reality. The torture and murder of a child, on the other hand, are very real, and reality is what ultimately interests anthropologists and others who study mythology for its "scientific value." It's one thing to read Tutuola's work simply as an example of skillful story-telling; that would be the meaning of "good." It's something different altogether to view mythology stripped of its sentimentality and placed in the service of shamans and clerics. That would be the meaning of "bad." In the real world, grown-ups do not always own the discernment of Tutuola's seven-year-old protagonist.

Sadly, the real persecution of imaginary witches is not rare in Nigeria and other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2014, Leonardo Rocha Dos Santos, who runs a Nigerian orphanage under the auspices of Brazil's Way to the Nations, claims first-hand knowledge of 400 cases of Nigerian children abused or murdered as a result of witch hunts. In 2010, Katharine Houreld of the Associated Press calculated the number of child victims of Nigerian witch hunts in the first decade of the new century at around 15,000, of which about a thousand were killed. Nigerian human rights activist Leo Igwe, currently a research fellow at the James Randi Educational Foundation, tells the story of Gambian president Yahya Jammeh, who in 2009 became convinced that one of his aunts had fallen victim to witchcraft. Jemmeh sent witch doctors, under the protection of his security agents, to round up and arrest suspected witches, most of whom were, predictably, impoverished subsistence farmers. A number of them died while in custody. UNICEF estimates that as many as 23,000 children accused of witchcraft have been left homeless in the Democratic Republic of Congo's capital city of Kinshasa. The United Nations Office of Human Rights puts that figure as high as 50,000. The U.N. also estimates that as many as 1,000 elderly women are killed as witches *every year* in Tanzania. Cameroon still considers the practice of witchcraft to be an offense against the state, under article 251 of its Criminal Code.⁵

⁴ Chris Stein, "Girl Burned to Death in Nigeria after Witchcraft Allegation," *VOA News*, June 19, 2015.

⁵ See Tihomir Kukolja, "Saving Witch Children in Nigeria," *Huffington Post*, June 17, 2014; Katherine Houreld, "African Children Denounced as 'Witches' by

Children with unusual conditions like autism, Down Syndrome, stuttering, or albinism are especially vulnerable to the accusations of witch hunters. Those who are *different* are singled out as demonic, an attitude common among those who take mythical religious traditions to be objectively real.

Both UNICEF and Igwe link the rise of African witchcraft hysteria in part to the expansion of evangelical Christianity. The newest African missionaries have apparently glommed onto a single biblical verse, Exodus 22:18: “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.” Thus in Eket, Nigeria, in 2011, a nine-old boy accused of witchcraft by the Christian Mount Zion Lighthouse Church died after his father poured acid down his throat in the course of an exorcism. Evangelical Christians are not the sole offenders, as witch hunts continue to haunt parts of the world outside of Africa. India’s National Crime Records Bureau reported 160 homicides resulting from accusations of sorcery in 2013, a typical annual toll. Saudi Arabia, like Cameroon, has laws against witchcraft. In December 2011, a Saudi woman named Amina Nassar was publicly beheaded for practicing sorcery. On June 29 and 30 of 2015, ISIL, which now proudly wears the mantle of the most morally execrable organization on the planet, beheaded two men and two women for witchcraft.⁶

Witch persecutions are the least of ISIL’s sins. The *New York Times*, *Human Rights Watch*, and *Amnesty International* have all documented a “theology of rape” rampant among ISIL’s rank-and-file.⁷ Girls from the small Yazidi sect, primarily of the Nineveh Province of Iraq, have been

Christian Pastors,” Associated Press, reported in the *Huffington Post*, May 25, 2011; Leo Igwe, “Understanding Witchcraft Accusations in Africa,” *JREF*, October 24, 2014; Aleksandra Cimpric, “Children Accused of Witchcraft: An Anthropological Study of Contemporary Practices in Africa,” UNICEF, April 2010, 14 (footnote 20); Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Witches in the 21st Century,” United Nations, August 24, 2009; and Eric de Rosny, *Justice et sorcellerie: colloque international de Yaoundé* (Yaoundé, Cameroun: Université Catholique d’Afrique, 2005), 210.

⁶ See Houleld, “African Children Denounced as ‘Witches’”; India’s National Crime Records Bureau, “Table-3.2: Motives Of Murder And Culpable Homicide Not Amounting To Murder (C.H.) During 2013,” Ministry of Affairs; Agence France-Press, “Saudi Arabia: Woman is Beheaded after being Convicted of Witchcraft,” *New York Times*, December 12, 2011; and Gianluca Mezzofiore, “Isis in Syria: Islamic State Beheads 2 Women for Sorcery, Reports Syrian Observatory for Human Rights,” *International Business Times*, June 30, 2015.

⁷ Rukmini Callimachi, “ISIS Enshrines a Theology of Rape,” *New York Times*, August 13, 2015; Human Rights Watch, Iraq: “ISIS Escapees Describe Systematic Rape Yazidi Survivors in Need of Urgent Care,” April 14, 2015; Amnesty International, Iraq: “Yezidi Women and Girls face Harrowing Sexual Violence,” December 23, 2014.

singled out for the harshest abuse. The number of victims is likely in the thousands, so far. Says Rukmini Callimachi of the *NY Times*:

The systematic rape of women and girls from the Yazidi religious minority has become deeply enmeshed in the organization and the radical theology of the Islamic State in the year since the group announced it was reviving slavery as an institution.⁸

This awful misogyny is as firmly established in mythology as is modern African witchcraft. Its origins are tales from the Sixth Century CE about an illiterate merchant who regularly went into hermitage in a cave in the Jabul Nur hill near Mecca, where he was visited by an angel—as was Lot of the *Hebrew Bible*, Jesus in the *New Testament*, Joseph Smith in the *Book of Mormon*, and evangelist John Hamel in Tennessee—and then traveled from Mecca to Jerusalem on a flying horse. While slavery horrifies the lost boy in the *Bush of Ghosts*, the *Koran*, the *Hebrew Bible*, and the *New Testament* all rejoice in it. The fourth sura of the *Koran* (Ash-Shura 4:24) specifically grants Muslim men the right to take as a wife any slave-woman, regardless of her standing marital status. Slave-wives enjoy an advantage (if you dare call it that) over their free counterparts, in that “if they fall into shame, their punishment is half that for free women.”⁹ We must leave it to apologists to explain what half of death-by-stoning might be, since that is the punishment prescribed for adulteresses in the *Sahih Muslim* (17:4209). According to the *Koran*, men “are the protectors and maintainers of women,” and therefore reserve the right to beat their wives, slaves or not, for “disloyalty and ill-conduct.”¹⁰ In Islam’s holiest book, women of any status are merely fields to be cultivated at the discretion of their male owners.¹¹

There is no particular reason for my choice of the African witchcraft epidemic or ISIL’s collective psychopathy as a point of departure for my discussion of mythology’s dangers. It is not difficult in the least to find other examples of myth-inspired atrocities. Pick a culture, any culture, and you will almost certainly find in its history stories that equal or exceed in their depravity those I described above. The farther back in history you look, the more depraved the stories will likely be. The French historian François Guizot tells the story of the wool-carder and Protestant sympathizer Jean Leclerc, who in July 1525 apparently took myths in the

⁸ Callimachi, “ISIS Enshrines a Theology of Rape,” *New York Times*.

⁹ *The Koran*, An-Nisa 4:25, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Project Gutenberg, October 27, 2005, EPUB (Nook) version, 122.

¹⁰ *The Koran*, An-Nisa 4:34, 124.

¹¹ *The Koran*, Al-Baqara, 2:223, 51.

Pentateuch too seriously. Leclerc brazenly vandalized graven images, which are forbidden by the second commandment, during a Catholic procession in Metz. Says Guizot:

He was sentenced to a horrible punishment; his right hand was cut off, his nose was torn out, pincers were applied to his arms, his nipples were plucked out, his head was confined in two circlets of red-hot iron, and, whilst he was still chanting, in a loud voice, this versicle from the 115th Psalm—"Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands"—his bleeding and mutilated body was thrown upon the blazing fagots.¹²

Leclerc's savage torture and murder were a portend of the violence to plague Europe during its religious wars. The *Zweiter Kappelerkrieg* in the Swiss Confederacy, which pitted Protestant cantons against their counterparts loyal to the Church of Rome, would break out within four years of Leclerc's excruciating death. The best known casualty of that inaugural conflict was the Protestant reformer Ulrich Zwingli, who was burned alive, along with two dozen other Protestant leaders. This savagery would drag on for more than a century. There is no reliable way to calculate the death toll from the horror of those decades, but it is easily in the millions.

It is not a coincidence that the Reformation and its wars overlap the prolonged period of witch hunts in Europe that Africa's current hysteria has yet to match. Estimates of tortures and executions of witches during Europe's 300-year insanity range from 30,000 to 45,000.¹³ Barring a massive change of culture and attitudes, Africa could well approach that dubious record within a generation.

While religious fundamentalists in the USA have enjoyed some success in exporting their madness to developing countries, their influence stateside is waning. It has not disappeared, however. In 2014, Herbert and Catherine Schaible of the Pentecostal First Century Gospel Church near Philadelphia were found guilty of third-degree murder in the death of their two-year-old son Brandon. Mother and father decided to rely on faith-healing rather than on science-based medicine to cure their son's very treatable pneumonia. First Century Gospel is one of two churches linked to

¹² François Guizot, *A Popular History of France from The Earliest Times, IV*, Project Gutenberg, July 21, 2014, EPUB (Nook) version, 153; See as well H. M. Bower, *The Fourteen of Meaux* (London: Longman, Green, & Co., 1894), 78–81.

¹³ See Brian Levack, *Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 3rd Edition, (White Plains, NY, USA: Routledge, 2013), 20–22.

more than 24 deaths in Pennsylvania due to useless faith-healing rituals. Another dozen children in Idaho have suffered a similar fate.¹⁴

Again, we can thank religious myths for inspiring the abuse of innocence at the hands of adults who ought to know better. The Pentecostals in Pennsylvania and Idaho were reenacting the supposed deeds of Jesus of Nazareth who, according to the disciple Matthew (who did not actually write the Gospel of Matthew, for what that is worth¹⁵), “went throughout all Galilee...healing every disease and every affliction among the people” (Matthew 4:23). Yes, *every* disease and affliction. Modern-day fundamentalists have taken it upon themselves to embellish these myths by claiming absurdly that Jesus of Nazareth somehow *forbade* the use of science-based medicine, of which he would not have had the faintest concept. Leprosy was among the most common and most serious afflictions of the time. Let us suppose for a moment that, by some miracle, dapsone, rifampicin, and clofazimine, all of which are highly effective treatments against leprosy (a disease that has nearly vanished thanks to modern medicine), had been available in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee (not to mention Upstate New York, if the *Book of Mormon* is also more than a collection of myths) during the late Iron Age. Can a rational person seriously entertain the possibility that, under those circumstances, lepers and parents of sick children would have flocked to an itinerant exorcist anyway, or that Jesus would have cursed such treatments, regardless of the positions on ministering to the sick that he takes elsewhere in the gospels? Delusions like these are precisely what one would expect from a cult that has anchored its worldview in “First Century Gospel.”

In other cases, modern delusions arising from myths are not so deadly but are costly and obnoxious all the same. In 2011, the Kentucky Tourism Development Finance Authority approved a \$43 million tax break for the Ark Encounter theme park, the brainchild of the non-profit Answers in Genesis (AiG), which has earned a not-so-stellar one star out of four from the watchdog organization CharityNavigator.org.¹⁶ An AiG subsidiary is presently trying to build a replica of Noah’s Ark on its property in northern

¹⁴ See Maryclaire Dale and Dan Stamm, “Faith-Healing Parents Get up to 7 Years for Infant Son’s Death,” *NBC 10 Philadelphia*, February 19, 2014; Vince Lattanzio, “Faith-Healing Churches Linked to 2 Dozen Child Deaths,” *NBC10 Philadelphia*, May 24, 2013; Jerry A. Coyne, “Faith-Healer Parents Who Let Their Child Die Should Go to Jail,” *New Republic*, August 20, 2015.

¹⁵ The gospel attributed to Matthew is anonymous; the author never calls himself Matthew (and, in fact, twice refers to one of the apostles by that name) nor does the author ever claim to have witnessed any of the deeds attributed to Jesus.

¹⁶ Beth Musgrave, “\$43 Million Tax Break Approved for Ark Encounter Theme Park,” *Lexington Herald-Leader*, May 20, 2011.

Kentucky. The state has plans to sink another 11 million tax dollars into highway improvements to facilitate access to the park. The flood myth from *Genesis* Chapters Six through Eight is what has inspired this bizarre project.

The reasons why this is an utterly pointless undertaking are probably obvious, although they do merit some discussion, if only to underscore just how yawning the gap between myth and reason can be. First, even if this project were to prove wildly successful, it would only demonstrate that an ark *could have* existed; not that one did. In the 1940s, the Norwegian explorer Thor Heyerdahl famously built a raft called the Kon-Tiki and sailed from Peru to the Fangatau Atoll to prove that, contrary to received ideas of the time, Amerindians could have been the original settlers of Polynesia. Heyerdahl's trip was a success; however, subsequent DNA studies demonstrated that Polynesia had, in fact, been colonized by Asians. Although this is what the scientific and linguistic communities thought all along, such things happen in the course of rational inquiry.

Second, the Kon-Tiki actually floated. AiG's Kentucky Ark is not remotely close to any large body of water, so we must simply take AiG's word that its vessel, if it is ever finished, will be seaworthy. The Ark Encounter's website includes this promise:

Concrete on Decks 2 and 3 in the center and east towers has been completed. Ground-level concrete floors and the gift shop floor will be poured this week. Following that, the concrete pad foundations for the stern and bow will be poured.¹⁷

It has not yet occurred to AiG that, by hiring a contracting firm (with cranes, concrete mixers, and all at a cost already in the tens of millions of dollars), they are not exactly replicating a feat supposedly done by Bronze Age nomadic tribesmen who had not a single power tool to their name.

Third, we already know that the ark is nowhere near large enough to hold all plant and animals species, living and extinct, as well as (per *Genesis* 6:21) "food for them," which presumably would have been distributed every day at meal time by a crew consisting only of Noah and his kin. The San Diego Zoo, larger than a thousand arks, is nowhere near large enough to house all of the world's plant and animal species. That impressive facility houses a pitiful 640 species, while beetle species alone surpass a quarter of a million. Along with their partners and another quarter of a million hymenoptera, those beetles would have infested a vessel that was about 185 meters long and 27 meters wide. A single

¹⁷ AiG, *Making Progress*, July 29, 2015.

misstep by a crew member or any of the 10,000 mammals aboard would have extinguished an entire species forever. Among the survivors was *Oulema melanopus*, a pest who, to this day, can wipe out as much as a quarter of a farmer's wheat crops.

Fourth, the conclusion to this wildly improbable tale is itself wildly improbable. Noah and his crew could not simply have found dry land after forty days and set free "every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, and whatsoever creepeth upon the earth" (Genesis 8:19). They must have first made a stop in present-day Australia, where they would have released about 70% of marsupial species, which are found nowhere else on the planet. Another 30% or so would have been released on a second stop to the Americas. More stops had to be made on the islands of Borneo and Sumatra where orangutans would debark, since they live there and nowhere else. Since only two were on board, it is difficult to see how they could have repopulated both islands, which are separated by about 600 km of ocean (orangutans are not natural swimmers). After the orangutans, a million or so other genera would have to be properly distributed.

Finally, since we now risk belaboring a point, this myth never made sense to begin with. After his thousand-year experiment with living things had gone sour, God decided to destroy his own creation and start anew. When the flood was over, he inexplicably repopulated the earth with the very creatures he had just annihilated. Following this miraculous do-over, presumably intended to improve on mistakes made during the initial creation, the life expectancy of humans seems to have plummeted. Pre-Noachian characters like Adam, Seth, Enos, and Methuselah supposedly lived to be 930, 912, 905, and 969 years old, respectively. Abraham, on the other hand, died "in a good old age, an old man, and full of years" (Genesis 25:8) at 175. Kings Solomon and David never reached their centenary. This entire story unfolded in a way consistent with another collection of myths found in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which was in circulation about a millennium before the flood story appeared in Genesis. AiG's crews are thus hard at work trying to prove a pagan myth rather than a Judeo-Christian one, which strangely reduces the entire Ark Encounter project to a defilement of fundamentalist Christian dogma. A 2014 Gallup Poll shows that a gobsmacking 28% of Americans believe that biblical stories like these are literally true.¹⁸

Scholars of mythology will find this circumstance all the more dreadful when they recall their studies of the Enlightenment, a time when European intellectuals were supposed to have put an end to superstition and the

¹⁸ Lydia Saad, "Three in Four in U.S. Still See the Bible as Word of God," *Gallup*, June 4, 2014.

barbarity it engenders. How could we have forgotten arguments from the likes of Hume, who warned us that errors in philosophy are ridiculous, while those that come from religion are dangerous? Whatever became of Voltaire's simple advice: "Less superstition, less fanaticism; and less fanaticism, less misery?" What about Thomas Jefferson's admonitions to his nephew that he "fix reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion," and that he "question with boldness even the existence of a God?"¹⁹ In the history of the USA, the delusions of faith have risen and receded since the establishment of our republic, usually following currents that historians ironically call the "Great Awakenings," when religious fervor soared and new cults set up shop.

In academic circles, Enlightenment values were supposed to have been transcended by the "postmodern" period that began in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This was a profoundly relativist and anti-scientific fad whose intellectual hubris nearly rose to the level of the nihilists who preceded Socrates. As postmodern devotee Frank Lentricchia wrote, the postmodern turn was the "summing up, for listing debits and credits, for casting out the old and welcoming the new, a time and place for self-renewal."²⁰ By the mid-1990s, however, it became clear that postmodern philosophy was more like a panicky retreat from Enlightenment values. We can see this in the work of postmodern hero Paul Feyerabend who, in the mid-1970s, offered the following cringe-making insipidity about science and magic:

[Science] still reigns supreme because its practitioners are unable to understand, and unwilling to condone, different ideologies, because they have the power to enforce their wishes, and because they use this power just as their ancestors used their power to force Christianity on the peoples they encountered during their conquests. Thus, while an American can now choose the religion he likes, he is still not permitted to demand that his children learn magic rather than science at school.... And yet science has no greater authority than any other forms of life. Its aims are certainly not more important than the aims that guide the lives in a religious community or in a tribe that is united by myth.²¹

¹⁹ See David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Project Gutenberg, 2012), EPUB (Nook) version, 204; Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary* (Project Gutenberg, 2006) EPUB (Nook) version, 199; Thomas Jefferson, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (Project Gutenberg, 2007) EPUB (Nook) version, 157.

²⁰ Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 208.

²¹ Paul Feyerabend, "Against Method," in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas II*, ed. Robert Graham (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2009), 427.

Apart from the meaningless concatenation of words (science is a “form of life?”), Feyerabend’s *Against Method* is an embarrassingly sophomoric justification for crimes of superstition, like those documented above, which Feyerabend offers in the name of a far-left political agenda that continues its knee-jerk opposition to the Western influence in developing countries. The good news is that postmodern philosophy is, at long last, in sharp decline. The bad news is that it may have taken much of the humanities down with it. David Brooks of the *New York Times* has pointed out that a half-century ago—roughly when postmodern philosophy was getting ready to take flight—about 14% of American college students majored in the humanities. The number has since gone down by half.²²

And yet more recently, a remarkable transformation about how we understand myths has begun in both popular culture and in academic circles. Since the 1970s, the Pew Research Center has been monitoring the religious affiliations of Americans in its U.S. General Social Survey. When it started, Pew invented the category “Nones” for those who did not declare any religious affiliation. It was a useful cover-term at the time, since dividing the unaffiliated further into atheists, agnostics, spiritual but not religious, nothing in particular, not interested, and so forth, would have created imperceptibly small slices of the demographic pie. The Nones’ numbers ranged between 5% and 7% of the U.S. population for most of the 1970s. By 2007, however, they had grown to 15%. At that rate of change, the irreligious seemed to be on track to become 20% of the U.S. population by 2020. When Pew surveyed Americans again in 2015, the Nones were already above 22%, and growing at an accelerated rate.²³ Huge numbers of Americans are turning away from traditional, myth-based religious doctrines whose teachings are incompatible with our scientific understanding of our world.

Among academics, meanwhile, the study of how myths are spread and maintained took on new life with Noam Chomsky’s 1986 *Knowledge of Language*, which framed belief-systems as “Orwell’s Problem.” How is it possible, Chomsky asked, that humans can have beliefs, like the story of Noah’s Ark, “that are firmly held and widely accepted, even though they are completely lacking in foundation and plainly at variance with obvious facts in the world around us?”²⁴ Post-postmodern researchers are approaching Orwell’s Problem from a number of angles, including

²² David Brooks, “The Humanist Vocation,” *New York Times*, June 20, 2013.

²³ Michael Lipka, “Five Key Findings about the Changing U.S. Religious Landscape,” Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015.

²⁴ Noam Chomsky, *Knowledge of Language: Its Nature, Origins, and Use* (New York: Praeger, 1986), xxvii.

psychology, anthropology, neuroscience, rationalism and skepticism, moral philosophy, evolutionary biology, and sociology. This collective, interdisciplinary program seems to be narrowing its focus on three factors that account for myth-based delusions: (1) patternicity, (2) agenticity, and (3) altericity, all of which hint at Darwinian explanations.²⁵

Patternicity is the cognitive error of imposing patterns on the random turbulence of our environment. We encounter numberless stimuli at every waking moment of our lives. Pattern-recognition allows us to derive useful generalizations about those stimuli. For example, our hunter-gatherer forebears observed that herds of quarry animals migrated in a certain direction, following the changes of seasons. From this, they deduced that those animals would likely do the same in the future. This left our ancestors better situated to plan their hunts, which in turn improved their odds of survival. Other prehistoric peoples built solar and lunar calendars that helped them predict the best time for planting crops, something that would not be possible if they had not been able to discern a relationship between the position of celestial objects and the changing of seasons. Our ability to recognize faces—and so distinguish between friend and foe—is so important to our species that there is a well-defined region of the brain, the fusiform gyrus, that specializes in facial recognition and little else.

Pattern-recognition is ubiquitous among other sentient creatures as well, as is demonstrated, for instance, by the counter-measures called “camouflage” that have evolved in many animals. It is not, however, a set of optimal traits. In fact, among Darwinists, the expression “optimal trait” has no meaning. There is no such thing as the best possible eyesight, the best possible moral judgment, or the best possible discernment of patterns. If a cognitive trait works more often than not, it will safely pass through the evolutionary thresher, limitations and all. Pattern-recognition that works half of the time is still better than no pattern-recognition at all.

Patternicity manifests itself when we mistake weak correlations for strong ones, conflate correlation with causation, pigeonhole exceptions inside rules, remember confirming but not disconfirming examples, and so on. It leaves us vulnerable to bouts of pareidolia, our bad habit of seeing things that are not there, like the image of Jesus’s mother on cheese sandwiches, tortillas, or on the plate glass windows of the Shepherds of Christ Ministries in Clearwater, Florida. More recently, after Curiosity began sending photos from Mars back to Earth, those particularly susceptible to pareidolia found images of rats, squirrels, traffic lights,

²⁵ See Michael Shermer, *The Believing Brain: From Ghosts and Gods to Politics and Conspiracies—How We Construct Beliefs and Reinforce Them as Truths* (New York: Macmillan, 2011).

skeletal remains, and the like all over the Martian landscape. Some errors in pattern-recognition get corrected over time. Others do not.

Agenticity is the cognitive error of attributing events whose causes are purely natural to the intentional and malevolent planning of spiritual agents. For about 99% of our history, the things most detrimental to human survival—natural disasters, pestilence, and diseases—were not within the scope of our understanding, much less our control. The only dangers early humans could prevent were those resulting from the deliberative acts of others, which early humans surely did understand, given that all were just as capable of committing them.

Those dangers were far from negligible. From his studies of the Yanomamö, the American anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon calculated that nearly half of all males had taken part in at least one homicide.²⁶ Lawrence Keeley's jarring and superbly documented *War Before Civilization* shows that violence was pandemic in early human cultures.²⁷ "What is it about the ancients," asks psychologist Steven Pinker, "that they couldn't leave us an interesting corpse without resorting to foul play?"²⁸ In a world that nasty and brutish, it is not surprising that agenticity would evolve as a coping mechanism in our species. It is essentially an attempt to drag natural phenomena within the sphere of volition where we imagine they can be controlled through ritual and social sanctions. What is certain is that we continue to reserve our harshest verdicts for those who have violated rules of social control through planning and premeditation, and we often enshrine those verdicts in sacred scripture. The fourth sura of the Koran (4:92–93) admonishes Muslims that "it is not for a believer to kill a believer unless by mistake," while "whoso slayeth a believer of *set purpose*, his reward is hell for ever." (Note, too, the division between believers and non-believers, a subject we return to shortly). Distinguishing between accidental and deliberate acts is a morally defensible position when it controls internecine violence. Yet this same principle brings misery to countless others when it is applied as supernatural justice to beings who are incapable or just plain innocent of devising such plans, as when President Jammeh imputed malevolence to the impoverished subsistence farmers in Gambia.

Altericity is a term I am using, admittedly in an unconventional sense, to refer to our mental disposition of drawing sharp distinctions between

²⁶ Napoleon Chagnon, "Life Histories, Blood Revenge, and Warfare in a Tribal Population," *Science* 239 (1988): 985–992.

²⁷ Lawrence Keeley, *War before Civilization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

²⁸ Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (New York: Penguin, 2011), 3.

“us” and “others.” The most familiar examples of altericity are tribalism and xenophobia, the rigid and disdainful views of otherness that apply inter-culturally. Altericity can also manifest itself intra-culturally, as in the examples of the stigmatization of unusual children as witches mentioned above. Tribalism and xenophobia are so common among human cultures that they too count as universals and, therefore, hint at evolutionary explanations. This conclusion has long been a political minefield in academia, mostly because it implies something about human nature that we would rather not hear. In the environment of evolutionary adaptation of early *H. sapiens*, tribalism almost certainly did work to the advantage of aggressive and invasive groups. One has only to imagine Rousseauian tribes of hunter-gatherers (pacifist, compassionate, welcoming of strangers) competing for scarce resources with Hobbesian tribes (violent, expansionist, ruthless) in a world where starvation was a constant threat. The indifferent logic of natural selection would have favored the latter, for self-evident reasons. The morally deflating lesson we learn from our prehistory is that warfare and conquest probably were once effective survival strategies. Belligerent, expansionist cultures simply ended up with access to more resources than those whom they conquered.

The criteria one uses to separate *us* from *others* can be fluid, and sometimes change with the formation of inter-group alliances, which typically arise from the selfish interests of each party involved. It is, nevertheless, beyond dispute that this disposition has lingered long after we left our hunter-gatherer heritage behind. Human cultures, again virtually without exception, have separate moral standards for us and others. How else can one explain the solitary exhortations “Thou shalt not kill,” in Exodus and Deuteronomy of the *Hebrew Bible*, which seem so incongruous in a book brimming with tales of slaughter and genocide? The *Bhagavad-Gita*, the *New Testament*, and the *Koran* all have their own lessons according to which violence, when meted out to others, does not provoke a second thought, even as it is strictly forbidden within one’s own group. There remain religions all over the world—the Amish, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, Bahá’ís and Scientologists among them—that persist in the institutionalized practice of shunning or “otherizing” wayward members, with the understanding that this dehumanizes them and, therefore, amounts to one of the cruelest punishments allowable under civil law.

The interplay of patternicity, agenticity, and altericity goes a long way in explaining how myths make their logic-defying transition into delusion. Igwe points out that in the minds of magical thinkers, misfortunes that are unusual, like failed harvests or outbreaks of illnesses, are typically linked

to other unusual events, such as the birth or even the presence of a child with Down Syndrome or albinism. This is not any different than, say, the American evangelist John Hagee's claim that the unusually devastating Hurricane Katrina in 2005 was causally linked to New Orleans's unusually prevalent (in Hagee's mind, at any rate) promiscuity. The mere coincidence of unusual events is not enough to establish supernatural causality, however. In a world ignorant of natural explanations, whether that world is an underdeveloped nation in Africa or Hagee's congregation in San Antonio, Texas, the agency of a supernatural being must be posited to complete the argument.

Over time, illusory correlations and the equally illusory agents responsible for them become integrated into a culture's cosmology, where their self-evident nature will be reinforced every time there is a new misfortune. The psychology of confirmation bias will ensure that true-believers will remember hits but not misses, will take note of the times that misfortunes followed some example of witchery and will either dismiss counter-examples or imagine *post hoc* some act of witchcraft that had gone unnoticed before a catastrophe arrived. Mythology thus morphs into reality in the mind of the true-believer. Frantz Fanon, in his classic *The Wretched of the Earth*, explains the power myths hold over believers:

The atmosphere of myth and magic frightens me and so takes on an undoubted reality. By terrifying me, it integrates me in the traditions and the history of my district or of my tribe, and at the same time it reassures me, it gives me status.... In underdeveloped countries the occult sphere is a sphere belonging to the community which is entirely under magical jurisdiction.²⁹

In his ruminations on Orwell's Problem, anthropologist Jared Diamond posits an intriguing explanation of Fanon's observations about the power of myths to reassure and give status. Diamond speculates that belief in the irrational is really another example of altericity in that it reinforces one's commitment to the group and one's contempt for others. Fundamentalist Christians will readily dismiss Scientology's creation myth—an unintelligible space opera about a god named Xenu and something-or-other about hydrogen bombs dropped inside a volcano—as preposterous taken at face value. Yet those same fundamentalists will accept tales about Noah's Ark and the virgin birth of Jesus as truths not open to dispute. As Diamond says, it's no big deal to believe that your Messiah and Redeemer was born as the result of normal sexual intercourse. If, on the other hand,

²⁹ Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 55.

...you insist, despite all evidence to the contrary, that he was born of a virgin birth, and nobody has been able to shake you of that irrational belief after many decades of your life, then your fellow believers will feel much more confident that you'll persist in your belief and can be trusted not to abandon your group.³⁰

Understood in these terms, a worldview built on mythological delusions is not a matter of moral reasoning—a concept that has eluded every discipline that has tried to track it down—but has to do instead with one's understanding of how the universe works. As skeptic Michael Shermer puts it, if you are genuinely convinced that witches have the power to spread deadly contagions, crop failures, and the like, then you have not only the moral right but the moral obligation to kill them.³¹ The better news is that eliminating the scourge of persecutions arising from superstition will ultimately follow the growth and progress of science. Many of the events likely to provoke witch hunts are already within the scope of applied science and technology. The selective breeding of crops during the Sasakawa Global 2000 Program likely saved about 8 million families in Sub-Saharan Africa from starvation.³² The number of lives that have been spared thanks to vaccines and antibiotics is well into the hundreds of millions. All of that has come about without spells, incantations, or rituals. Once people understand what really causes diseases and disasters, they lose interest in things supernatural. Once technology puts us in constant touch with the world community, we become less likely to see significant differences between us and others and fewer reasons for suspicion and contempt. Proselytizing against superstition is not only ineffective, it is unnecessary.

There is some evidence that a global transformation along these lines is underway, even if it appears to be moving at a glacial pace. The European Union is currently one of the least religious and the least violent political entities on the planet. Its member nations also have the highest life-expectancy rates in the world; 83 years in the case of Switzerland (the highest of any nation in the world), 82 for Spain, Liechtenstein, Italy, France, Luxembourg, and Sweden; and 81 for Norway, Netherlands, Ireland, Germany, the UK, Austria, Finland, and Greece. The USA is not far behind, with a life expectancy of 79. The USA remains an outlier among developed nations with respect to internecine violence and

³⁰ Jared Diamond, *The World Until Yesterday* (New York: Penguin, 2012), EPUB (Nook) edition, 337.

³¹ Michael Shermer, *The Moral Arc* (New York: Holt & Co., 2015), 111.

³² Kenneth Quinn, "About Dr. Norman Borlaug," *World Food Prize Organization*, October 1, 2015.

religious devotion. Yet both are in steep decline. Gun violence in the USA has dropped by an astonishing 49% since 1993, but the more religious states tend to have the highest homicide rates.³³ In his sweeping opus *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, Pinker shows us graph after graph, dataset after dataset, all demonstrating that violence, bigotry, and superstition are trending downward across the developed world and have been for some time.

At the same time, Pinker admits that we have no guarantees that these trends will continue nor any that they will spread across the planet. Sub-Saharan Africa in particular remains mired in poverty, disease, and violence, having never recovered from the colonial era and the abrupt abandonment of its exploiters during the 1950s. While American homicide rates are off-the-scale higher than those of any other nation in the developed world, they are low by Sub-Saharan standards. According to the World Bank, these range from a middling five homicides per 100,000 in Niger and six per 100,000 in Kenya (comparable to American rates) to truly frightening rates like 20 homicides per 100,000 in Nigeria and 31 per 100,000 in South Africa. Swaziland's homicide rates are almost seven times as high as America's. Twenty-four of the 25 nations with the highest rates of infant mortality are in Sub-Saharan Africa,³⁴ and of the 30 nations with the lowest life-expectancy rates, all are Sub-Saharan.

More ominous, maybe, are the trends in religious affiliation that the Pew Trust predicts for the coming decades of the new century. While their numbers will increase in Europe and North America, Pew predicts that the religiously unaffiliated will decline as a percentage of the world's population from now on due to higher birth rates in the developing world. By 2050, about 40% of Christians will live in Sub-Saharan Africa.³⁵ One can hope that Christianity and Islam will be more enlightened religions by then.

³³ See The World Bank, "Life Expectancy at Birth, Total (Years)," October 20, 2015; D'Vera Cohn, Paul Taylor, Mark Lopez, Catherine Gallagher, Kim Parker, and Kevin Maas, "Gun Homicide Rate Down 49% Since 1993 Peak," Pew Research Center, May 5, 2013; and Phil Zuckerman, "Atheism, Secularity, and Well-Being: How the Findings of Social Science Counter Negative Stereotypes and Assumptions," *Sociology Compass* 3, 6 (2009): 949–971.

³⁴ And even these rates pale in comparison to those of Central America. Honduras has a mind-boggling homicide rate of 90 per 100,000; 18 times higher than America's. See The World Bank, "Intentional Homicides (per 100,000 People)," October 20, 2015; and Central Intelligence Agency, "Country Comparison: Infant Mortality Rate," *CIA World Factbook*, October 20, 2015.

³⁵ Pew Research Center, "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010–2050," October 20, 2015.

But here too, we have no guarantees. Neither religion has served the developing world well in the past. As recently as 2009, the leader of the Church of Rome condemned the use of condoms during a papal visit to Cameroon, either unaware or unconcerned that about 22 million in Sub-Saharan Africa are HIV-positive. As if that were not bad enough, Igwe points out that witches and wizards in Malawi commonly get blamed for the spread of HIV and AIDS.³⁶ This prohibition against birth control is founded on teachings about the sanctity of marriage in the New Testament, which is a collection of tales the Christian historian Burton Mack has rightly characterized as “conventional myth.”³⁷ There are twice as many Catholics in Sub-Saharan Africa as there are in North America. Their numbers will grow substantially in the decades to come. Absent a dramatic change in papal policy, disease and overpopulation will continue to plague the continent because of this senseless prohibition. In 2003, in three states of the predominantly Muslim northern Nigeria—including Zamfara and Kano, where sharia law holds—religious leaders brought polio immunization programs to a halt with obscene claims that the vaccines spread HIV, cancer, and infertility. Nigeria, at the time, accounted for 45% of the world’s cases of polio. Nigerian agronomists, meantime, have been busy fending off another unforgivably uninformed export from the West, the current hysteria against genetically modified crops which hold great promise in alleviating Nigeria’s chronic food insecurity. Fortunately, the Nigerian government has rejected calls for a ban on GMOs and is assuring farmers that “there are little or no health risks” associated with them.³⁸ Even so, the anti-vaxxer and the anti-GMOs lobbies are gaining traction, both in Europe and the USA. Gladness may yet become weeping again.

In the meantime, witch persecutions continue unabated. In October 2015, Amir Manento of Tanzania’s Commission for Human Rights and Good Governance told the *Guardian* about the truly horrific practice of killing and mutilating albinos that has been going on for decades in Sub-Saharan Africa. “We see an increase of witchcraft and the use of human body parts, particularly albino body parts, in the run-up to the general

³⁶ Leo Igwe, “Skeptical Look at African Witchcraft and Religion,” *Skeptic* 11, 1 (2004): 72–74.

³⁷ Burton Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament: The Making of Christian Myth* (New York: HarperOne, 1996), 8.

³⁸ See BBC News, “Pope Tells Africa ‘Condoms Wrong,’” March 17, 2009; Pew Research Center, “The Global Catholic Population,” February 13, 2013; Ayodele Samuel Jegede, “What Led to the Nigerian Boycott of the Polio Vaccination Campaign?” *PLOS Medicine* 4, 3 (2007): 0417–0422; and AgroNigeria, “The GMO Rally: Matter Arising,” July 2014, 4–6.

elections,” said Manento.³⁹ The Tanzanian government took the threat so seriously that it publicly warned politicians against turning to witch doctors to sway elections.⁴⁰ The practice is part of an occult tradition according to which albinos are inhabited by ghosts of European colonists. Their body parts are supposed to have superpowers that can bring fortunes of all sorts. Only about 13% of children with albinism understand its genetic causes. The remainder attribute it to supernatural powers like witchcraft, or simply to “God’s will.” Those who are not physically abused are aware of the social stigma attached to their condition, and commonly endure insults like *nguruwe* (“pig”) or *zeru* (“ghost”).⁴¹ As Tutuola’s brave narrator says after leaving the Bush of Ghosts: “This is what hatred did.”⁴²

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³⁹ *Guardian*, “Albinism in Tanzania: Slow Progress in Combatting Violence and Discrimination,” October 20, 2015.

⁴⁰ Morgan Winsor, “Tanzania Elections 2015: Politicians Urge against Witchcraft to Win Polls amid Increased Albino Killings and Attacks,” *International Business Times*, June 2, 2015.

⁴¹ Andres E. Cruz-Inigo, Barry Ladizinski, and Aisha Sethi, “Albinism in Africa: Stigma, Slaughter and Awareness Campaigns,” *Dermatologic Clinics* 29 (2011): 79–87.

⁴² Tutuola, *Bush of Ghosts*, 174.

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