

# Myth and Story

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The purpose of this book is to explore how human beings think. The scope is world historic, but the focus is on the present and the future. The theory is that all human thought can be reduced to three methods: myth, story, and science. The first two terms are explained at length to avoid the unfortunate overlap and confusion which commonly exists. This book is not for the superficial reader. Although not written in technical terms, it demands concentration and an interest in history in the broadest sense.

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# Chapter 1: The Lost World

## Foreword

When cats ruled the world our ancestors were a sorry lot. They had little going for them but their potential - of which they were, of course, totally unaware. This human potential was almost a kind of black magic, involving what had never developed in any other species. It consisted of a mind able to dive into itself, not simply to pull out memory but to creatively alter interior views of the world. Certainly it is counter-intuitive to imagine that seeing the world as it is not could be anything other than a massive disadvantage over seeing the world as it is. But on this seeming absurdity, humanity rose to global dominance.

Our ancestors assumed that changes in their environment had causes - intelligent causes. The grass did not just move; something made it move, and that something was thinking - maybe thinking about them. This attitude is, perhaps, genetically implanted. If your ancestor assumed a big cat was moving the grass and watching, then your ancestor could escape to become your ancestor. And what if it wasn't a cat but just the wind which had moved the grass? But better safe than sorry.

Assuming intelligent design in events would be advantageous only by being close to all-pervasive. Therefore, even if the wind did move the grass, what moved the wind? Some other living thing, bigger than any cat, invisible and mighty beyond comprehension. But a living thing which *thought* and had designs. And because no one had ever seen that thing dead, apparently it could not die. Thus the immortals. Beyond the cats, the super-cats.

This way of thinking persisted even when our ancestors displaced the big cats from the top of the food chain. What they could not see was more important than what they could see. For what they could not see could still see them. The spirits. The gods. They were important not because they were symbols but because they were real; and their reality manifested in what they did. They controlled the cosmos. They imposed order; without them there was only chaos. They were as real as their actions, and the intelligence behind their actions was not grasped logically - not broken down into constituent parts, or contrasted with alternatives, or extrapolated from antecedents, or interpolated from context. No, the designs of the supernatural could only be grasped as a whole. This is what we mean by a *myth*. It has no cognizable purpose. It simply *is*.

This way of thinking has never gone away but has changed over time. To have some understanding of it is fundamental to understanding human organizations, most of which are based upon shared myths.

Much later came a new way of thinking, which is narrative. As far as we know, this first appeared in civilized centers of the Middle East in the Second Millennium BC. Narration - or *story-telling* - has also changed over time, but less so than myth. Also, the two have interacted. Myth and story are the two principal ways that human beings have of looking at the world, looking at each other, and looking at themselves.

Later they were joined by a third way. This is science, which began in Western Europe shortly after 1600. Science has never displaced myth or story, but has interacted with both. In some respects this makes life more complicated; in other respects, it makes life easier. We simultaneously have more to think about and less to think about. More in the sense that there is more we *can* think about if we are so inclined; less in the sense that there is less we *have to* think about.

You have been told that people need stories to live by. This is a complete lie. People need stories to *die* by. To live your life by a story is to set yourself up for failure and bitter disappointment. To band with others and live collectively by a story is to invite disaster. Yes, and afterwards to ignore the lessons of the disaster as you sucker yourself into another story.

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Just as there are some people who go from one failed relationship to another, so it is that people, individually and collectively, believe they are *this time* living the right story or are just about to. The disasters awaiting them over the not-very-distant horizon of futurity can be financial, military, cultural or biologic. But whatever they are, they will be disasters; and next time you will be less likely to get off the hook than last time.

At the start of the Third Millennium AD science co-exists with pseudo-science, rationalism with mystical mumbo-jumbo, and empirical truth with delusions going back to the Old Stone Age. This is not due to a gap between intelligent people and *hoi polloi*, nor between the educated and uneducated. Very intelligent people can believe very stupid things - because they are determined to. But why are they so determined?

This work explores why human beings are simultaneously intelligent and stupid, and why we always seem to find new and ever more impressive ways of being intelligently stupid. It is an explanation of whatever you read in today's newspaper beyond the sports section and the funny pages. (At least they both speak for themselves). And it is an elaboration on the theme of how supposedly brilliant people with the active support of millions manage to lead those millions to disaster, more often than not get away with it, and then set them up for bigger and better disasters.

It is a timely account - regardless of the time.

### Introduction

In his novella *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, H.G. Wells introduces us to a character called the Monkey Man. He is a creature which the imaginative Dr. Moreau created out of a living monkey, together with a menagerie of other creatures called the Beast People. The Monkey Man is more advanced than the others, as he has five digits and his speech is a bit more sophisticated. He has even developed a theory of semantics, dividing words into two groups. Those which deal with ordinary things ("the sane everyday interests of life") the Monkey Man calls "little thinks." But it is the second category of words which truly fascinates Monkey Man: the "big thinks." The narrator who explains this to us describes these "big thinks" as:

the most arrant nonsense. He had an idea, I believe, that to gabble about names that meant nothing was the proper use of speech. If ever I made a remark he did not understand, he would praise it very much, ask me to say it again, learn it by heart, and go off repeating it, with a word wrong here or there, to all the milder of the Beast People. (p.96 Dover edition)

This is not a bad description of how myths operate, although it avoids the question of *why* they operate at all. The Monkey Man's "big thinks" are not exactly myths, but they are on their way to being myths. "Higldy pigldy!" is not a myth, unless a holy man takes to shouting it at his congregation and starts to "explain" what it "means." That meaning might be something quite mild, such as wash your hands before you eat. Or it could mean to start killing the people who live over the ridge.

The odd thing is that people are *more* likely to do something strange because of nonsense than because of sense. Some people still tell their children to eat everything on the plate "because of" starving children in Africa, or wherever - with a mystic assumption that those starving children will starve a little less once that plate is clean.

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Our myths are not entirely nonsense. There is some logic in trying to persuade your kids to eat their veggies, and if you can do it with crazy arguments rather than wrenching their little arms out of their sockets, the former is generally preferable.

We use myths because myths are useful. That is why people have always used myths. The problem is that myths at some point use us. Actions control thoughts more often than thoughts control actions. Myths are first about actions, later about thoughts. We may act for good reasons, but good reasons are seldom good enough. Myths are better than mere good reasons, for our good reasons force us to reason while our myths free us from reasoning.

But let us get back to the beginning. Why myths?

Before the why, the when.

It is impossible to say when myths first appeared. Do they predate symbolic thought? This seems to have originated in Europe between 35,000 and 40,000 BC. Evidence of decorative design is much older, being found in South Africa circa 70,000 BC. Here it is worthwhile to consider what we mean by a "symbol" and how it differs from mere decoration. The latter seems to have been intimately connected with the human body. Geometric patterns gouged into stone were direct extensions of the hands which made them, and were perhaps meant more for tactile than visual effect. Snail shells with holes drilled in them were pretty clearly to be strung together as necklaces. That these Middle Pleistocene humans also painted and perhaps tattooed their bodies is possible. But if we ask what this meant, it probably did not mean anything beyond itself. Just as human beings are attracted or repelled by certain smells, they are attracted or repelled by certain sights. Artificial creation which results in an extension of the body is not limited to our species. Other hominids engaged in it routinely, such as the Neanderthal, who used thrusting spears with stone heads. Even chimpanzees commonly strip the bark from twigs to make digging tools to obtain ants which they then eat.

The nature of all primitive tools is that they seem to be perceived by their users as bodily extensions and nothing more. For early humans, parahumans and anthropoids, "nothing more" means that they could not conceive of anything more. When we get to symbols we get to the "more."

A symbol which is perceived as a symbol is sensed having a kind of autonomous life within it. The symbol then exists apart from its creator and apart from anyone exploiting it. Although one can use a symbol there is always some perception that this use is reciprocal - in other words, the symbol is also using you. So when we think in words, we use the words to "express" our thoughts - but the words are also shaping our thoughts and directing them toward points we might never access without the words.

In all accounts which we have, myths use symbols. But as the accounts are themselves made up entirely of symbols, this does not tell us a great deal. In the old myths - the first generation myths - the symbols are tied directly to practice. A mythic symbol then tells you either to do something or not to do something. "Thou shalt!" and "thou shalt not!" are the alpha and omega of these early myths. If reasons are given, they are always direct reasons immediately touching basic needs of the myth-believers. There is nothing abstract in the early myths apart from the distortion in looking at them from what is for us a vast mental distance. A sun god in pagan times was not a symbol of the sun, rather he was the sun. A spirit might live "inside" of something (a tree, a river, an animal, a flame, or just about anything) but the spirit was as much a part of this thing as your lungs are a part of you. If the spirit left, then the thing was dead and would quickly decay (a dead tree, a dried up river, the corpse of an animal, the ashes of an extinguished flame, etc.).

Symbols preserve ideas, but they also create ideas and destroy ideas. The last process is the trickiest of the three. A symbol destroys an idea by purporting to answer a question and then precluding further inquiry. This is essentially a mythic process, for a myth in mandating or prohibiting practices also prohibits inquiry into

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anything which could lead to alternatives. This is how myths use symbols. But some myths could be older than the invention of symbols. Prohibitions against eating certain things may be mythic in the sense that even if rational at the outset they soon took on an irrational life of their own. Symbols were not needed here. A forbidden food originally did not symbolize anything; it was just a forbidden food. But when symbols were invented they allowed myths far greater scope. They also made possible a new position: the myth-guardian.

The original myth-guardians were probably close to what we call a *shaman*. We think of a shaman putting himself into a trance, often with the help of natural drugs, and then communicating with a spirit world. The idea of a spirit world as opposed to this world is a corollary to the concept of symbols. A symbol is a substitute. Therefore, it must substitute for something. But in a mythic world all symbols are magically connected to what they symbolize. We don't believe that by defacing a person's image or written name that we can magically harm the person; but until the 18th Century in western Europe (and a good deal longer in most other places) this is what people believed, including many educated people. Nor should that last observation cause surprise - for education is nothing more than training in the use of symbols.

Throughout most of history, people believed that things are symbols. This means that everything we think of as real and naturally occurring was once thought part of an immense system of interlocking symbols. As late as the 17th Century this outlook was still dominant in the West; only with the rise of scientific thought was it precluded.

We mentioned earlier that in pagan times a sun god was the sun and not merely a symbol for the sun. So what about the sun in the sky? What was it? It was a symbol for the sun god. A picture of the sun could also be a symbol for the god. A picture, a word, a thing perceived in nature - they were all symbols and they were all magically connected to what they symbolized. It did not make any difference that a man had made the picture. You might even know the man who made it. But you could know a man who planted a tree or a man who cut a hole in a wall to let light through. Men did not make trees or light or faces shown in pictures. And it was believed that men did not make symbols. They discovered symbols, found them, or were given them, but they did not create them. In the same way, myth-guardians did not claim to create anything but rather to tap into a numinous world. That world was not separate from this world. It *was* this world, but it was the deeper aspect of this world - just as the front of a house is not the whole house. The sun was as much the sun god as your name is you. But again we must try to realize that this was a world of pure myth. Therefore it was a world suffused with magic. Which meant your name could be conjured with. For this reason, everything had a secret name - including gods. To give up your secret name was to give up power over you. Only he who controlled the real names was really in control. Thereby power and control are also mythic concepts in their origins. And to their origins, these concepts always return.

But myths, for all we know, are older than the gods, older than spirits, older than words. In the beginning, myths did not need guardians. The myths guarded everyone. Or they seemed to guard everyone. They were mental shorthand - a way of remembering - even when people had long forgotten why they needed to remember. But myths are never about *whys*. They are always about *whats*. What you should do and what you should not do. The *whys* got thrown in much later, after story was invented well into historic times; then the *whys* of story were used to tart up the *whats* of myth.

Some things changed, so that other things would remain the same. This is the same as saying that people change their minds only to avoid changing their minds. We change some things we are aware of, in order to avoid changing other things we are not aware of; and this avoidance depends upon our remaining unaware of those other things. The best way to preserve a prejudice is never to see it as a prejudice. What we don't see we cannot deny.

Before a world controlled by invisible gods there must be minds controlled by invisible thoughts. It is less accurate to say we think those thoughts than to say the thoughts think us. An idea can have a man just as a

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man can have an idea. Plato, who was the first person to write of the modern concept of God, also wrote of ideas existing independently of conscious men and women. The most influential ideas are the ones people are unconscious of because our consciousness shies away from them. If we start to mentally wander toward these ideas, we become easily distracted. Man's supreme achievement in the art of distraction is *story*. Thereby all story-telling is fundamentally conservative. Even stories which challenge authority do not challenge the *idea* of authority. When stories shatter illusions it is to replace them with super-illusions.

While stories suggest what we may think, myths dictate what we do think - and they do this by dictating what we *don't* think. Only one who is outside a myth can see it as a myth. On the inside, the myth does our seeing for us; and where we are blind is where the myth makes us blind to our blindness.

But myth did not begin with blindness. It began with sight. What our ancestors wanted to see was the future. That is the deepest root of myth for it is the oldest dream of man. And when we interpret our dreams, we interpret them hoping to see what is yet to come.

Here I am hard up against a problem noted (but not solved) by Bertrand Russell: using vocabulary invented in the New Stone Age to discuss philosophy. The root for modern words for "future" seems to be an Old Indo-European word meaning "to become." Apparently to our ancestors, each thing or event had its own future, and there was no overall future. The earliest indication of this seems to be Upper Paleolithic bone carvings which record and predict the phases of the moon. Seeing the moon's future perhaps suggested the possibility of seeing anything's future, including your own. But when we see the moon's future we clearly cannot do anything to change it. On the other hand, it can be highly useful to know when moonless nights are coming. This could even have been a matter of life or death.

In the old myths, men did not seek to change the future but they did seek to exploit foreknowledge. In stories this exploitation is pushed to its ultimate limit, because the story-teller has total foreknowledge of where the tale is going. We are back to the old idea of future as becoming. A story is something which becomes itself.

When stories got together with myths, a new concept of futurity resulted: the narrative future. This is the future as the next chapter in an on-going story. We are characters in the story, but we are also telling the story to ourselves and to others. Thereby we feel that we can influence the outcome. We have power, or so we think, and we consider this to be a good thing. But it is also an odd thing. How can a character inside a story also be making the story up as he goes along? There is a certain contradiction in this but no one seems bothered by it - for if we are to believe in power at all we have to accept this nonsense. The alternative is to admit that power in the context of human events is an illusion. Curiously, Tolstoy hit upon this idea and wrote of it in an appendix to *War and Peace* which almost no one reads; but he wrote in such a confused way as to shoot his own argument in the foot. The very word "future" is an oddity (even odder than "the past"), and to explain it at any length reduces us to using metaphors - the yellow warning lights of linguistic desperation.

The old polytheistic myths (the first generation myths) were rather straightforward about the future. The new monotheistic myths (the second generation myths), starting about the First Century AD, had to weave and bob in handling the future. The same myth will tell us that God wants certain events to happen and, therefore, they *must* happen, *but* unless we make them happen they won't. No contradiction is seen between these positions. We must have faith - which is to say here, the state of mind of seeing an absurdity, knowing it to be an absurdity but denying what we know and then acting on the denial - again without seeing any contradiction.

Starting in the 18th Century about the North Atlantic rim, a new kind of myth gave its believers a new sense of the future. This is the future as a kind of autonomous force drawing us on, or sucking us in. It is also the future as source of partisan division, because you must be on the "right side" of the future, as otherwise you are on the "wrong side." In the second generation myths, right and wrong (or to use the Greek-derived terms *orthodox* and *unorthodox*) all had something to do with God. These new third generation myths were mainly

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secular. God might be invited along for the ride or he might be left in the dust. The new myths also differed from the old religious-based myths in assuming that reality itself is accessible only to myth-believers. This was a major change. In the old days those who followed Christ or Antichrist were all part of the same reality and expected to know it. Inclusion of the *Revelation of John* in the New Testament attests to this, as does the Islamic concept of Iblis (the Muslim "Devil") as adversary of man due to love of God (an idea which also underlies the Book of Job). To us moderns these ideas are hopelessly old fashioned. We believe that only the politically orthodox can see reality and have knowledge of both past and future. ("Global warming" comes to mind here.) And as our orthodoxies change, the old past and future are replaced by a "new and improved" past and future.

In any event, we might shed a myth here and there but we never shed our proclivity to mythic thought - because that proclivity is fundamental to our nature. Nietzsche, who understood as much about myth as any man who ever lived, gave expression to this truth when he wrote that man must transcend himself before he can see reality.

The path of transcendence is steep.

### **Book One**

Man builds His World

Preface to Book One

*"I will reveal to you, Gilgamesh, a thing that is hidden,*

*a secret of the gods I will tell you!"*

He Who Saw Deep, the Epic of Gilgamesh, Tablet XI (standard Akkadian version)

Why does myth persist?

*Myth is a mnemonic device.* Myth helps us remember what we might otherwise forget or not remember quickly enough. Saying a god lives in the river and does not want you relieving yourself on him, might be easier to remember than the fact that your people draw drinking water downstream.

*Myth is a Lethetic device.* Myth helps us forget things we might otherwise remember or not forget quickly enough. If you killed an animal which is touched with divinity, you want to forget; if you make a picture of the killing and hide it deep within the earth, then the thing is over and done with and you can begin to forget it - because your people need to go on killing animals to survive.

*Myth gives a roadmap for the future.* This is similar to memory but not exactly the same. Many aspects of the past which we take for granted as repeated in the future apparently were not taken for granted by our prehistoric forebears. Every sunset may have been tinged with fear that a new sun would not rise. Every autumn as the days grew shorter seems to have summoned real dread that the last day was coming. Even when people could remember what had happened, they could not necessarily extrapolate a likely future from those memories. Myths were then needed for people to map things out in time; which leads into:

*Myth is an oneiric device.* Through myth we integrate dreams with waking life. This is not an easy concept. Dreams we remember we turn into stories, thereby giving them "meaning." We think a narrated dream gives insight to who we are, what really interests us, etc., but this view of dreams did not exist in ancient times. Records we have from then of dream interpretation show it as purely practical. A dream either told one

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nothing or told one something about the future. A narrated dream can be about the future, but a dream seen mythically is always this way. Myth gives a dream meaning by directly connecting it with a call for action.

*Myth assuages our fears.* The time roadmap is an example of this, but myth goes further. This is because certain futures should not be part of the future at all. We may not want the dead to be part of our future; certainly we do not want the angry dead to be part of our future. Myths explain how to placate the dead, ward off disease, avert curses, etc. Whether myths really do any of these things is less important than that they do make us feel better.

Something must be said about the vast misunderstanding of "myth." This word covers everything from deliberate lie to "sacred narrative," yet all distorts what myth truly is. A myth is *not* a narrative - although it may later generate a narrative. Nor does a myth have more than tangential connection to lie or truth. The oldest myths did not even involve symbols as we think of symbols, for a symbol by definition symbolizes *something*; first the something, then the symbol. But gods and other numinous beings were not symbols of anything; they were real. However, even the word "real" oversimplifies here. A stone, a tree, the heat of the sun - these things were always real just as we know them to be. But behind them was something more than real - a kind of hyper reality. This hyper reality was magical as it was dynamic but did not operate in accord with anything comparable to the laws of physics. The gods themselves were invisible although they could be symbolized; however, the gods were not symbols of anything beyond themselves. Only in late Classical times did the idea of a god as symbol gain ground; this was a sure sign that the old myths were dying and a new myth was needed. For men and women have always needed myths.

Above all, myth gives us a sense of place. Without myth, people experience a kind of cognitive free fall. Believing in nothing we are then open to belief in anything. But by first telling us *where* we are, a myth then tells us *what* we must refrain from doing. Try to imagine a world in which people have electricity but no idea of what electricity is; a myth then tells you not to put your finger in a light socket. The myth might give no reason for this except that some unspecified badness will follow, or it may say that you will be poking a god in the eye. Such a myth is not a bad idea, and we tell our children myths to make them avoid dangers which they are too young to understand. It is hard to imagine a whole world run on this principle, but for thousands of years - and probably even for tens of thousands of years - the world was run this way. It would be as if at some time somebody did poke a finger in a light socket, and something very bad did happen, and people either never knew why or got it all mixed up afterwards - but they remembered that there was something important enough to remember here. By analogy people might conclude that poking a stick into the earth is dangerous; but you have to poke a stick into the earth to plant a seed - so you need a magic ritual to placate the god whom you might poke with the stick - and if the crops come up then the ritual worked, and if the crops die, then it didn't - but it is better to have the ritual and maybe even back it up with another ritual - so if you kill your first born child as part of the ritual then you are really doubling up on your crop insurance and going for the triple A rated policy. Even a genius such as Blaise Pascal helping to lay the foundations of the scientific age believed that one should wager on belief in an all-powerful god rather than wager that there is no god as there is no evidence of one - which is exactly the same mindset that justified human sacrifice from pre-history to the Aztecs. For life *is* cheap, and we can always afford to lose a few lives (or a few million, when the population increases) in a wager to get the things we love.

That is what myth is ultimately about: getting what you love. There is no myth without love. Even the modern myths - the myths exalting hate to the skies - begin with love. A computer has no myths because it has no love. In story love is always indirect; love glimpsed through a stained glass window. Only in myth have we the courage to face love in the face. Our species cannot do it any other way. Stories are pale affairs by comparison; we love them as we may love a stillborn child who never really had a human life. If the truth be told, we do not really love them at all - we love only the love they make us feel - so it is all about us, and never about them.

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Having circumambulated the periphery of myth, we might now try our hand at definitions:

*The oldest myths were ideas seen as conferring practical advantage but inspiring irrational attachment.*

Myths always have their reasons and employ rational elements, but the myth itself is fundamentally irrational. To say that a myth is "believed" is not entirely accurate. I may believe my shoes are tied and then look down and discover otherwise. I may believe that my lucky charm, guardian angel, or personal savior god will protect me and then discover otherwise. The two situations are not the same. My belief that my shoes are tied is based on rational assumptions concerning my personal habits. The other belief is less important as something I posit being true and more important as something which controls my conduct. Perhaps I refuse to go on a trip without my lucky charm, or I say prayers to my guardian angel, or I at least attempt to live according to the rules supposedly set by my personal savior god. In any of those endeavors I may only barely and inadequately be able to articulate a reason for my actions. The myth, being fundamentally irrational, *cannot* be articulated by one under its influence. Then my actions are not fully or even mainly *my* actions but manifestations of myth. However, actions also feed myth; less do the actions flow from belief than belief flows from the actions.

That is not rational, is it? It makes human beings sound like marionettes with myth holding the strings. But that is how myth works. We can cut the strings at any time; we choose not to. We are always free to choose our myths, but in so doing we choose to be free of freedom.

Why make such a choice? Because the way of freedom is hard. Making choices everyday, not letting the good choices go to your head, and recognizing that bad choices were never forced upon you - this is hard to accept and very hard to go on accepting indefinitely. Freedom is a heavy burden and sooner or later most people want to put it down - usually sooner. And once down, we are disinclined to pick it up again.

With myths we follow the leader. The leader is not flesh and blood. The leader is an idea or a collection of ideas. The leader promises to defend us but we have no means of holding him to that promise. The one thing the leader indisputably can do is absolve us from sense of responsibility for our acts - but that is all he (really *it*) needs to do, and that is why we follow. *Myth is following*. He who actually goes ahead is likely following something of his own: his own myth.

To go without a myth is to wander. The wanderer always inspires mixed feelings. It was once believed that a wanderer might be a god in disguise. The chance of this was very slim but could not be entirely discounted. The wanderer evokes feelings of suspicion, fear, envy, pity, sometimes sympathy, rarely indifference until modern times - we may even say that indifference to strangers is a sign of modernity (when the real stranger is replaced by the imaginary stranger). Few feel empathy for the wanderer because few can imagine themselves as wanderers. Our myths insure that we do not have to wander. Because of myths we know where we are and we know where we are going - which is to say we think we know these things, which is emotionally much better than really knowing them.

This leads into another function of myth which we have already touched upon:

*Myth gives us a sense of place*. Human beings fear being disoriented. Even our word "orient" has etymology grounded in myth. The orient is the east, and on medieval European maps the east was commonly shown at the top; it was the most important direction because it was the sacred direction. Christ as sun god came from the east. Jerusalem was seen by Christians as the center of the terrestrial world. Dante places the summit of the mountain of purgatory in the southern hemisphere directly opposite Jerusalem.

Without myth all spaces are essentially the same, and there can be no sacred direction, no sacred point of the compass, no holy city or holy mountain. A scientific view of the universe is impossible until myth is banished

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from topography.

But the topographic function of myth is not just mystical and hyperbolic. Any sense we have of *belonging* to a place is essentially mythic. Our perceptions are markedly different according to whether our environment is familiar or unfamiliar. Set in the midst of the familiar, our perceptions soften and somewhat blur; we do not notice things a stranger would spot quickly. Our sense of depth largely vanishes when surrounded by the familiar, for what is at a distance from us then seems inconsequential. But if anything has changed, is out of place or missing or added, we likely sense this almost instantly even if we cannot specify the change. We feel that a familiar environment is an extension of our body, even as our body is just another familiar thing. It is a comfortable feeling and when we lose it we miss it badly. We do not think of this as being mythic, but this state of mind is no different from that inspired by any other myth.

In many ways myth is merely an extension and elaboration of habit. Anything done or perceived on a regular basis and then invested with emotional significance is a kind of myth. An important aspect here is that certain things are seen as open-ended. We feel that these habits are necessary to our existence. Maybe they are, maybe they are not. But we are unlikely to critically inspect them.

When time is encased in habit, everything becomes "now" - effectively without beginning or end. A habit (if our habit) is something we are always in the middle of. This is how myth works; a myth is all middle. "Now," which we are always in the middle of, operates by fixed rules. How the rules came to be and what they ultimately produce are matters not addressed by the rules, which exist solely to maintain the myth. Of course, the rules only exist because we make them exist; but this is not perceived. Such an outlook makes science impossible.

This is also a worldview very different from story. A story has a beginning, a middle and an ending. These three component parts are both continuous and discontinuous; the continuity of a narrative is its most salient feature, whereas its discontinuities tend to be subtle and even subliminal. Rules established at the outset of a story must continue to the end. If a story-teller changes the rules within the story he fractures the narrative; it is sometimes possible to do this without the audience spotting the fracture but that tends to be difficult.

Story is an alternate view of the world from myth. It is *not* a competing view because stories deal to issues not addressed by myth. As we will see, stories usually have little or no influence on how people live - with one big historic exception: when story is used to strengthen myth.

Our initial discussion of myth would be incomplete without considering how story has influenced myth. Not anywhere as old as myth, the first stories appeared in historic times more than a millennium after the origins of civilization in Mesopotamia and Egypt. For roughly the first thousand years, stories had scarcely any impact. Over the following thousand years, story's influence was increasingly felt in terms of how myths reacted and adapted to this alternate worldview. By about 400 AD, a new outlook had appeared in the vast arc of civilizations extending from Britain to Japan. That outlook was based upon an alternate form of myth. We may call these *second generation myths*; they interwove stories with myth, but always with myth predominant. Myths of the first generation then disappeared, or were transformed, or in some cases persisted - just as ferns, among the most ancient of land plants, persist beneath the trees which evolved later.

We may define a second generation myth as *an idea (or a system of ideas) seen as conferring practical advantage but with emotional attachment to the myth being inversely proportional over time to any practical advantage conferred by the myth.*

This definition should be qualified by adding that at some point the disadvantage of accepting a myth may be so great that attachment to it will waiver or snap completely. However, people are strongly inclined to cling to their myths not in spite of their impracticality but because of it. The less people have in real terms, the more

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their myths become all they have.

Yet both first and second generation myths had something in common: both were accepted because they were seen as providing a personal gain. Rightly or wrongly, the individual believed he benefited from his myth, and would not have embraced it otherwise. In this sense, myth stood in continuum with our pre-human ancestors; myth was a *tool* accepted for the perception of its utility and for no other reason. This would not change until the 18th Century in the West, when the first *third generation myths* appeared.

We may define a third generation myth as *an idea (or constellation of ideas) not seen as conveying any practical advantage to the believer but with emotional attachment to the myth being inversely proportional to the absurdity (manifested over time) of the myth.*

Note that a third generation myth involves a constellation of ideas but not a system. A constellation consists of an assemblage put together perhaps haphazardly, whereas a system entails logic of some sort. In other words, third generation myths do not need *any* logic. The triumph of third generation myths took about two hundred years, being pretty much complete in the second third of the 20th Century.

We are so mentally distanced from first generation myths that we can perceive them only indirectly. If we see them at all, it is as images reflected imperfectly by what came next; therefore, we must contrast them with second generation of myths.

The birth of second generation myths is the birth of fanaticism. This was unknown in the earlier period, which we call broadly *the pagan world*.

### **PRELUDE TO THE LOST WORLD**

We are told of a beautiful and innocent young woman who, through no fault or neglect of her own, was raped. The woman was under the protection of a powerful person, who was made aware of the crime. The identity of the rapist was known and beyond dispute. The powerful person decided to take action.

Here we pause. You have heard many stories along these lines: innocent victim, terrible outrage, evil-doer at large, avenger at hand, justice to be done. Without knowing exactly how we will get there, you can clearly see where we must end up: the villain must be punished, the score made even or something like that, with the avenger avenging.

But let me give you an alternate scenario. The avenger does not punish the villain, and makes no attempt to do so. Instead, the avenger punishes the victim. A horrible fate is inflicted upon her - by her protector. The story ends with the villain Scot free and the blameless woman victimized beyond belief.

Not much of a story! I agree. Essentially not a story at all for it has nothing even remotely like a proper ending. It seems like a badly failed attempt at a story. But that is because it was not meant to be a story. It is a myth. The young woman is named Medusa. She was a virgin priestess of the virgin goddess Athena. No man could touch her. But Poseidon, god of the sea, saw her and lusted for her. The god entered Athena's temple and raped Medusa. These actions had consequences, but they were mythic consequences and not the consequences that a story-teller would create.

In a mythic world, gods are elemental forces and act with the inevitability of any force of nature. Poseidon wrecks ships and drowns coastal villages because his nature is to do so, and in the same way is his nature as a male Greek god to lust after comely women. Sex is also an elemental force, also magical, also potentially destructive. Poseidon did no wrong by following his own nature. Medusa, strictly speaking, did no wrong either. But a wrong occurred. A virgin priestess is not supposed to be raped, and certainly not in the sacred

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precincts of a temple! If we look for the cause (and myth-minded people do look for causes - more so than story-minded people) it was the excessive beauty of Medusa which led inevitably to a breach of cosmic order. Medusa had taken an oath to Athena to never marry, never bear children, never have sex. But she cannot keep this oath because her beauty invites rape. Therefore, Athena must solve the problem the only way possible: she must replace Medusa's beauty with something very different. And this the goddess does. Medusa is transformed into a gorgon - a monster of ugliness whose sight literally petrifies men. Then Medusa may keep her oath until her death.

This is an example of how a myth differs from a story. The myth of Medusa originated before stories existed. It is nothing like a story. There is no moral or lesson, except that gods keep order in their own way. The myth leads into other myths, as all the myths of a culture are interconnected. Poseidon and Athena keep popping up if you live in a world where the forces they control are periodically controlling you. Medusa also, to a lesser extent, keeps popping up. Her head severed by the hero Perseus becomes a magical object to ward off evil, and the symbol of Medusa's head complete with snaky locks appears over and over again in Classical antiquity as a magic talisman for this purpose. Thereby Medusa was useful in much the same sense as a bottle of aspirin is useful to us.

This is another quality of myths: they are useful or at least purport to be so. A myth without use is no myth at all. But there is no moral dimension to myth. It is neither good nor evil. Nor, for those who accept a myth, is there any need to go hunting after meaning. Myths have no depth, they are all surface. We may say this myth means this and that myth means that - but we never say so about our myths, only about some else's. No one in ancient Greece asked for an explanation to the myth of Medusa. The myth explained itself. Once the myth was known it was clear, just as use of a knife or a hammer is clear once you see one used.

Please note that myth makes no pretense at making you a better person. What we learn from a myth is practical for us. Others might not see it that way. We regard them as disadvantaged by ignorance. If we serve our myths it is only because we are convinced they serve us. No matter what they demand of us, we suppose that we would face far heavier demands without them. Even a myth demanding our death spares us from something worse than death. Thereby even myths which touch directly upon death are not really about death; they are about life.

Stories are opposite to myth in these respects. Stories are meant to improve us, even if the improvement is just to drive away the blues. Serious stories aim at serious improvement. But all improvement is relative, and in story it is relative to the absence of life. A story "affirms" life only in opposition to something else. Stories revolve about this something else as a planet revolves about the sun. At the center of all stories is the black sun of death.

Now you know something about myth and something about story and something about the difference between the two.

But a lot more remains to be told.

### CHAPTER ONE

#### THE LOST WORLD

It is possible to lose an entire world.

The pagan world is lost to us. The world of polytheism, of gods and myths, is a landscape of the mind that we can never enter. When we view it, we view it from a distance. But to walk in it, to be environed by it, to breathe its fragrances and know that wherever we turn we turn *within* it - this is as much denied us as the

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ability to reverse time and relive our lives.

The closest we will ever come to approximating people who lived in a world of pure myth is by observing our household domestic animals. Not that cats and dogs believe in myths, but they act with the limited practicality of humans who do. If they had opposable thumbs and larger brains they would be more likely to construct idols and voodoo dolls than steam engines and electric motors.

Certainly these animals do not confuse *belief* with practice. An animal may sit before an empty water dish because of established practice that it will eventually be filled - not because the animal believes it is somehow already full of invisible and intangible water. In the same way, the oldest myths were inseparable from practice. The term "belief," as we know it, does not apply here. To worship a god was to sacrifice to the god, but there was no such thing as worship through state of mind alone. Gods need *things* not thought. Only the One God already has everything and wants the *thoughts* of believers. This attitude was alien to the pagan world, as that world is alien to us.

Try to look back beyond the penumbra of monotheism, to an age when there was no concept of a single God. What you are gazing into is a world without narrative. A world of myths but no stories.

Only when men began to tell stories did they could conceive of a God who creates the world as his story - who literally *tells* the world, just as any story-teller tells a tale. Above all, the world of the One God is an articulated world. The God speaks! And if he does not speak to us, he speaks to others and they speak to us. Their words are written down so that they may be spoken even in distant future days. And the words tell us that *we* are inside a story.

God's world is God's story. We know nothing of God beyond this story. We cannot know what God was doing *before* he created the world. Nor do we ask what God will do when the world-story is finished.

The world-story, like any story, has a beginning (the Creation), characters (man, woman, the devil, etc.), plot, plot twists (some of them pretty twistedâ!), heroes, villains, chills, spills, prat falls, the Fall of man, tragedy, comedy, adventure, misdirection, reaffirmation of the main theme, with everything leading to a conclusion.

What we Occidentals think of as our Creation stories have documented antecedents going back to the Sumerians circa 3000 BC. But these antecedents are myths and do not assume narrative form until considerably later.

The oldest stories appear in the Second Millennium BC. For nearly two thousand years, men wrote things down in the Old World. But they did not write stories. The first stories that we have give little or no sense of inner life of the characters. Instead, events occur in a kind of comic book style. One thing follows another. Long stretches of time are simply omitted. Action is highlighted - especially personal combat. Genealogy is sometimes given at great length - which we could not care less about. Bizarre phrases are repeated again and again. Minor details which do nothing to expound character or further the plot are given inflated importance while (almost to the point of being maddening) we are denied information of what most interests us: issues of motivation, of *why* a character acts in a certain way at a crucial moment. In these proto-stories, things tend to happen without rhyme or reason.

But if we consider more deeply, we see that there are reasons. It is just that the reasons never make it into the narrative. They hover beyond the margins. And the fact that they are never brought in, never explicitly stated, strikes us as weird.

Consider the Egyptian Story of Sinuhe. Set during the Middle Kingdom\*, the earliest existent versions of the story date from the early Second Millenium BC. Sinuhe tells the tale in the first person. He is an official of the

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inner court of Pharaoh Amenemhet I, and is part of a military expedition in the Libyan Desert led by Crown Prince Sesostris. The expedition is successful and is returning when messengers inform Sesostris of the death of his father. It is at this point that we would dearly like some details that we never get.

Sesostris leaves the army immediately (apparently to return to the capital, although this is not made explicit). He leaves at night without informing anyone of his departure other than his "attendants" whom he takes with him. Sinuhe is not among them.

\*By accepted dating, the tale is set in the 20th Century BC. But I have my doubts about historical dating for anything before the 7th Century BC. Only from then on can we trace things forward without gaps.

Something happens that same night involving other royal sons who remain with the army. In some versions, a second messenger arrives and confers with them. Sinuhe overhears part of this conversation. He is standing "a little way off," and makes it sound as though he was eavesdropping.

Why did Sesostris leave so suddenly and without telling the army? How is Sinuhe able to eavesdrop on such an important conversation? Does anyone know that he has heard it? Exactly what has he heard? Common sense questions. None of them are answered.

Instead, we are told only what Sinuhe *does*. He runs away. Maybe the audience was expected to already know the reason for this, such that it would be tedious to state it. Apparently there is real danger of civil war. Sinuhe tells us that he did not go to the capital because he feared civil disorder and "I did not expect to live after him." The "him" is apparently Sesostris. As later developments indicate, Sinuhe is loyal to Sesostris but does not want to join what he thinks will be the losing side. Instead, he runs and keeps running, crossing the whole country from west to east. Reaching the Asiatic border, he hides behind a bush until nightfall when he slips away. In the desert he nearly dies of thirst and thinks that all is lost. Then he meets a group of Bedouin. As luck would have it, their sheikh has been in Egypt in the past, recognizes Sinuhe and helps him!

Sinuhe passes from one foreign country to another, ending up in what is now Lebanon or Syria. There are other Egyptian expatriates, and the local ruler hears well of Sinuhe. Our man does okay, and marries the eldest daughter of the ruler. Now he lives on land of his own, has a family and a prosperous life. This goes on for many years. His sons grow up. He is the ruler's right-hand-man and commands the army. Life is good.

During this time, Sinuhe entertains many travelers from Egypt, including messengers from the capital. Sesostris is firmly on the throne. We are not told that Sinuhe sent messages to him, or that Pharaoh made inquiries about Sinuhe. However, Sesostris must have received word concerning Sinuhe; and Sinuhe, as later becomes clear, must have hoped for an invitation back to his native land. But for many years, this does not happen.

A crisis comes when Sinuhe is challenged by an Asiatic chieftain. This is, presumably, a younger man, and Sinuhe's own friends feel that he is no match for the Asiatic. But Sinuhe defeats his enemy in personal combat - shooting him through the neck with an arrow and finishing him off with an axe. "I gave praise to Montu," our hero declares, crediting the battle god of Upper Egypt with the victory.

Following this, Sinuhe receives a letter from Sesostris inviting him home.

The story concludes with Sinuhe's appearance at Pharaoh's court. At first, Sinuhe cannot speak:

I knew not myself in his presence, (although) this god greeted me pleasantly. I was like a man caught in the dark; my soul was departed,

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my body was powerless, my heart was not in my body, that I might

know life from death.

Sesostris tells Sinuhe that he has grown old traveling in foreign lands, but in Egypt he may find honorable burial. Sinuhe is treated as well as one of Pharaoh's own sons. He lives to see a fine tomb constructed for him, so that he may be guaranteed eternal life.

"(So) I was under the favor of the king's presence until the day of mooring had come." The "day of mooring" is the day of death, when the solar bark of Re is moored so that the souls of the blessed may board it. With this line, the story ends.

Any approach to this tale should begin with the question of why it has survived. Something in it that appealed to people. But what?

To us, the most important elements are missing. Why does Sinuhe leave Egypt? Why does Sesostris not invite him back? Why does Pharaoh change his mind?

Like Sinuhe, we should give praise to Montu if we could answer these questions!

But I will hazard an answer; and one commensurate with the longevity of the tale.

This is a story about a good man who in a moment of supreme crisis fails. Instead of joining Sesostris, the rightful king, Sinuhe runs away. Does he do so out of cowardice? But this man is not a coward. His flight is prompted more by intelligence than fear. Clearly the rebels would not stage their rebellion unless they thought they would be successful. Clearly whatever caused them to think this caused Sinuhe to reach the same conclusion. Perhaps even Sesostris thought as much.

When trying to explain his flight to his father-in-law, Sinuhe says "it was like the plan of a god." In other words, he cannot explain it. It just happened. There was no careful deliberation (no time for such, anyway!). A snap decision determined that Sinuhe would spend most of his life in a foreign land.

There he became a kind of king. Certainly a lord. And he proved his honor and personal bravery beyond all doubt. But it was as inconceivable for an ancient Egyptian as it would be for us that the story should end here. That would not really be an ending, and then the story would not really be a story. Sinuhe must come home to die, and to be resurrected, so that the divine order may be upheld. One could not say, "There was once a man who died in a foreign land, and so he was forgotten." Then how could we have a story at all?

Going on four thousand years later, Joseph Conrad retold the story of Sinuhe as his novel *Lord Jim*. The ending is different, but must be. No homecoming. No tomb. Unless the tomb is the tale itself.

The universal theme is that good men can do bad things, but without becoming bad. This should come to everyone of us as a great relief. (Although the alternate road - from superficial badness to bone-deep badness - is always open. Conrad's alter ego narrator Marlow, who tells the story of Lord Jim, also introduces us to Mister Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*.)

The Story of Sinuhe does not lead into a great Egyptian narrative tradition. It towers like a lone monument in the desert. Not until the First Millennium BC does a continuous narrative stream begin. And not in Egypt, but among the quasi-barbaric peoples of Greece.

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With the word *menin* - anger - the Western narrative begins. And in 2800 years it has not been possible to improve upon Homer's *Iliad*.

When the gods are spoken of in essentially the same way you speak of your neighbors, then the gods' days are numbered. Homer probably sang in the halls of wealthy men as after-dinner entertainment. During the meal, people talked about the same things they always talk about with friends. Who is up to what? Who's sleeping with whom? How's the health of so-and-so? How is that project of yours going? Did you hear the latest about you-know-who?

Such conversations are not exactly stories, but they often come pretty close. They may even follow a tripartite structure: some preliminary remarks leading into a question - a more or less elaborate answer - and then some final remarks. (Well fancy that!... You don't say!...I saw it coming all along!...Serves him right, if you ask me!) These conversational snips may even have a moral axis, as people often speak not just to convey information but to "prove a point." Comparing gossip to Homer might be like comparing a spark to a fire-storm, but the two have things in common.

We should avoid confusion. Homer did not bring the gods down to earth; in a mythic world the gods are already on earth, as well as over it and under it. Nor did Homer invent intimacy with the gods; again, the gods had always been intimate with mortals. (See *Genesis* 6:2-3, where the "sons of God, looking at the daughters of men, saw they were pleasing, so they married as many as they chose.") Nor was Homer talking to his audience about gods in a chatty fashion. Remember it was the goddess who spoke through him. Homer's innovation was that he allowed ordinary people to eavesdrop on divinities. A straight path leads from that to eavesdropping on kings and generals - in other words, history.

The important point here is this: even if members of the audience seek useful information from a story, that is not their main motivation in listening to it in the first place. They expected entertainment, and that is never the motivation for being drawn to a myth. Entertainment is a kind of escape. It is also, where story is concerned, escape of a considerably complex kind, as we shall see - and with some consequences not involving escape at all.

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About the time of Homer, or perhaps a century later, the Epic of Gilgamesh appears in Mesopotamia. (The oldest complete texts come from late Assyrian times, although the antecedents probably go back more than five hundred years.) The great Hindu epics are more difficult to date, but there is no reason to place them earlier. While in East Asia an indigenous narrative tradition comes only later. Perhaps it was imported from the west, like the wines of the Tarim Basin brought by travelers during the Early Han Dynasty.

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What first strikes anyone about ancient Greece, even without knowing a word of the language, is the richness of "Greek mythology." I put that in quotes because what we style myths are usually stories, and, therefore, not really myths. If I say I can introduce you to the Queen of England but I tell you a story about the Queen of England, the two are not really the same, are they? What we think of as Greek myths are actually *stories about myths*.

However, these stories date from antiquity and seem to have existed as stories from the Seventh Century BC if not earlier. Stories may not be told for amusement, but they are generally listened to for amusement. A myth, by contrast, is neither told nor listened to for amusement. Myths are not always deadly but they are always deadly serious, and need the one kind of deadly before they can get to the other kind. This is why to make fun of a myth is blasphemy. You are only allowed to make fun of *other people's* myths - meaning the myths of

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people other than the ones who hear you.

The actual Greek myths are largely beyond us. They seem to have consisted of localized practices involving sacred spaces and sometimes sacred plants and sacred animals. The myths were practical, in the literal sense of being inseparable from practices. The purpose of these practices was to maximize good fortune, minimize bad fortune and foresee the future. Good fortune and bad fortune are, of course, future oriented. Mythic practices were not, as far as we know, meant to change the past nor even to change the present; no one expected a ritual to instantly change anything. Man is perhaps a unique creature in his desire to know the seemingly unknowable future. We all want to pull it off. With the ancient myths, people were convinced they were pulling it off. (Not until what I have called *second generation myths* do we see people using myth to change the past.)

The Greeks were no different from any other people in these regards. But they were different in that the

## Chapter 2: Chapter One- continued

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A new form of story-telling appears about 430 BC with Herodatos' histories. These stories assume a reader with curiosity about real people and events. One may argue that the Trojan War was (in some sense) a real event, as was the reign of Sesotris. But with Herodatos the time and place in which the story transpires is directly connected to the audience. The story-teller's oral tradition of distancing the tale from the audience ("once upon a time" - "there was, there was not") is deliberately eschewed by Herodatos. In doing this, his stories must be secular stories. Gods do not figure in them, nor does he claim to have written under divine inspiration. (The division of his work into nine books named after the Muses occurred in Roman times.)

Herodatos describes his work as *istoria* - research. But he says the work is made up of *logoi* - stories. This is the first step on the road to monotheism. *En arche en o logos*. In the beginning was the story. The all-purpose Greek word *logos* means word, oath, proverb, saying, story, Christ. All are *logos*.

In Herodatos we see a consistent theme extended in the narrative over great expanses of time and space. But the dimension of *depth* (present in the earlier quasi-religious narratives of Homer and the Gilgamesh epic, as well as in the god-infused world of Aeschylus and Sophocles) does not enter secular story-telling until Thucydides.

Consider these two authors and you will see a fundamental difference in the presentation of the "*reason why*" of their stories.

Herodatos gives his "reason why" at the outset. His history is devoted to the great conflict between Europe and Asia - terms which seem to have scarcely any intellectual meaning before him.

Worth noting is that Herodatos' geographic nomenclature is very different from ours. His "Asia" extends into our Africa; its border being either the Nile or the Libyan Desert. Herodatos prefers the latter, as it places Egypt within the Asiatic world. (When Harold Macmillan called Gamal Nasser an "Asiatic Hitler," the British PM was perhaps having a flashback to his public school days of learning Classical Greek under a headmaster's rod.) Herodatos' "Europe" includes all of our Europe but does not stop at the Urals (of which he apparently does not know). The "Europe" of Herodatos includes all the land *north* of civilized Asia - in other words, the steppe lands of what we call Central Asia, and the whole of Siberia. Herodatos' Europe is not the smallest but the biggest continent! But it is also the land of freedom, whether the barbaric freedom of the steppe nomads or the freedom of the Greek polis. Thus Herodatos dwells upon four great defeats of the Persians: that of Cyrus in his (perhaps legendary) war against the Massagetae; Darius in his abortive expedition against the Scythians; Darius again (this time by proxy) in the defeat of his landing force at Marathon; all leading up to the center piece of the narrative: Xerxes' great invasion of Europe and subsequent retreat.

The lesson is that between free Europe and enslaved Asia there can be no peace. The *hybris* of the Asiatic tyrants - displeasing to the gods, although they make no personal appearance in the narrative - contrasts with the simple humility of the Greeks, who fight to preserve their poverty simply because it is *their* poverty. That the Greeks might have been better off submitting to the Persians and becoming part of a great economic commonwealth never enters into discussion. Nor could it. Our concept of "economics" did not exist in Classical times. Although the etymology of the word is Greek, its antecedent meaning went no farther than the running of a household. The Persians in coming to Europe were trying to tell the Greeks how to run their households - an idea as repellent as a state agent coming between a man and his wife. (Although the Persians would have been equally repelled by the latter.)

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A formidable number of ideas appear in Herodatos for the first time. The idea of property as something sacred and essential to man being a man. (You do not let others simply take your property, regardless of how mean the property is.) The idea of fighting for "principle." (Even if the principle is never articulated.) The idea of peoples divided into "nations." (Even if the definition of your nation is up for grabs.) The idea of freedom itself (which for Herodatos does *not* mean license to do as you please - but freedom to do as you *must*, because your way of life is at stake.)

And yet Herodatos' narrative never explains any of these ideas. The author takes them for granted even as they flavor the story like condiments flavoring a dish.

With Thucydides we see something very different. His entire story of the Peloponnesian War is a "reason why." Herodatos would agree with Jefferson's phrase, "We hold these truths to be self evident." But the purpose of Thucydides narrative is to show that *nothing* is self evident. To find out why the Greeks are slaughtering each other, why cities are raised to the ground and their populations sold into slavery, why battles are won and lost, why revolutions occur, why leaders are thrust into power only to be later dragged down by the same people who once supported them - to find all this out we have to read the whole story. And even then we might not know the answers. (Bear in mind that Thucydides died with his history incomplete. Did death cut him short? Or did he give up on what had become the 13th Labor of Hercules?)

Herodatos stands to Thucydides as Aeschylus stands to Sophocles: the one, confident and as well rounded as a circle; the other, questioning and pointing to an open-ended vision with a horizon that always recedes from us. Herodatos says, "this is what I know!" Thucydides says, "this is what I would *like* to know!" The tenor of your time shows in the prevalence of one over the other. Confident ages prefer Herodatos. Times filled with doubt and anxiety turn to Thucydides.

And yet both men lived in a polytheistic world. Even the Jews of their age believed in the existence of many gods. Monotheism was first put forward as an intellectual, not a popular, concept. Plato is the first man to write of one God. But he made no claim for originality in the idea. The Indian Upanishads tell us of Brahman, the all-God. From the Aryan peoples of both the East and West (at least from amongst their elites) the idea of the one God began to spread.

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Something we overlook when we consider ancient times is that the surface of the earth was very different then. Our image of nature is largely artificial. We see landscapes neatly divided between dry and wet, soil and water. It was not always so. Vast areas which now consist of cities, suburbs, farms and forests were once a chaos of swamp, bog and fen. Patches of dry earth were islands set in these waterlogged stretches, or peninsulas, or land bridges. Human communities were more cut off from each other because of this, each one being in effect a little world.

Nature was far more sinister than we imagine. The "deserts" were not just dry places but wet places. Rivers periodically overran their banks. Dry depressions became raging torrents overnight. Boundaries shifted at random as water chronically found new courses. It was a world designed for mosquitoes.

A river having a fixed course is a recent idea. Not until the 20th Century was the concept so established in the West that people are astonished when a river changes course, as if it had no right to do so! But throughout most human existence, people were astonished if a river did *not* change its course, and do so repeatedly in their lifetime. Rivers were gods or goddesses precisely because they acted with a will of their own and their actions were mightier by far than the hand of man. The Seven Hills of Rome were seven places of refuge on high ground when the Tiber flooded. Water more than fire was the element people feared; fire could be mischievous, but water was literally overwhelming.

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In Chinese and Japanese paintings we often see figures that rise up out of mist, and mountains which look like islands in the clouds. Even experts in East Asian art do not realize that these are all based on actual depictions of ancient landscapes. The most thickly inhabited areas of China, Japan and Korea were wetlands or interspersed with wetlands well into civilized times. These are created countries, and it was the hand of man which created them.

But the same is true of most densely settled areas of the planet. Historians are fascinated by the struggle of man against man - less concerned with the greater struggle of man against nature. The latter struggle was the main business of government from pre-dynastic Egypt until the last half of the 19th Century. Frederick the Great believed that his work draining the marshlands of eastern Germany was more important than his victories on the battlefield. German consciousness of "the East" was of a barbarous landscape extending indefinitely, untamed and unconquered by man, with land and water indiscriminately mixed. It followed that peoples living in this chaos were less than human. The natives were simply part of the landscape; both had to be conquered and ordered.

European colonists throughout the Western and Southern Hemispheres had the same philosophy. Rivers would be straightened and confined to predetermined channels, marshes drained, bogs filled in. Look at a map of the city of Boston in the 18th Century and you see a peninsula with the old city connected to the mainland by a narrow isthmus. Later the hills were excavated and dumped into the fens creating the urban topography of today. This is only one example of many which can be found all over the globe, and many of the great "Third World" cities of our time were nothing but tiny villages set in swamps until European engineers went to work.

We cannot begin to understand the old myths until we put them in their geographic setting. Chaos was not a theory of the origin of the universe; it was a visible fact. The creation of an ordered landscape was the work of gods or those who acted under the direction of gods. These views were not bizarre but sensible. Mythic thought is always set against a background of chaos. The rise of new myths in our time (or any time) invariably begins with wide spread assumption that order has either broken down or is shortly about to. The important point is that myths are never for fun. They are deadly serious because they arise out of perception of deadly serious necessity. Sometimes this necessity is real, sometimes not. But it is the perception which grounds the myth.

What made a landscape of intermixed land and water dangerous was human population increase. One can live advantageously in such a natural landscape - provided that human numbers are kept small and stable. When those numbers increase, the landscape must be ordered so as to make it subservient to the needs of man. But this physical ordering must keep pace with a mental ordering. In his myths, man maps out a world which favors his expansion. For this reason, myth is as vital to man as claws to a tiger or horns to a ram. We are myth-bearing creatures.

Stories do not arise from chaos, but rather from pre-existing order. The landscape must be civilized before people have leisure to tell stories. But more importantly, story has its own landscape. Everything in it is manmade. People exposed only to a natural environment cannot conceive of stories. The idea of creating an artificial world by stringing words together is impossibly farfetched until you have been exposed for long periods to an artificial physical world. First man domesticates nature, then man domesticates the inside of his own head.

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In the second book of the *Iliad*, Agamemnon receives a dream promising easy victory over Troy after nine years of failure. When he recounts the dream to the Greek elders, they all agree to a purely mythic interpretation: the dream is god-sent and means exactly what it says. On this totally irrational basis they intend

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to continue the war. But Agamemnon shrewdly understands that after nine years of fruitless hardship the common soldiers may not be mythically swayed with the same blind faith as their lords. He gathers the troops (Homer compares them to swarming bees) and, in a surprising move, tells them the exact *opposite* of the message in the dream. Agamemnon announces that the cause is hopeless and nothing remains but to return home in shame. Homer makes explicit Agamemnon's intention to "first make trial of them in speech, as is right" (*protá d' egon epésin peiresomai, e themis esti*); but the result exceeds anticipation as the rank and file rush to the ships. This is a greater crisis than the desertion of Achilles. Agamemnon cannot eat his own words, and his army is disintegrating because of them!

What occurs next is a crucial transition in world history. The mythic world view which motivated and sustained the Greeks has become insufficient. (Even Homer does not believe in it - for he tells us that the dream of easy victory sent by Zeus was a *false* dream.) Agamemnon temporarily passes his staff of command to Odysseus - the wiliest of the Greek generals - who tells the Greek commanders one by one that Agamemnon was not serious and meant to speak further - or as our politicians would say, "place his words in proper context." When Odysseus meets a common soldier determined to take Agamemnon's words at face value, he uses the staff to hit him. Now Homer has made special note of this staff, reciting its provenance from the gods: it was made by Hephaestus, given to Zeus, who gave it to Agreiphontes, who gave it to Hermes, who gave it to Pelops "driver of horses" who gave it to Atreus "shepherd of the host" who left it to Thyestes "rich in flocks" who left it to Agamemnon. But whatever mystical import attaches to the divine staff has vanished, as Odysseus can do no more with it than beat people over the head.

Finally *in extremis*, Odysseus uses something more compelling than the staff; he uses a story. He tells the rank and file that when they were sailing to Troy nine years earlier, an omen occurred: a sacred snake climbed a sacred tree and ate nine sacred birds, or something to that effect. And only now do we realize that the nine birds were nine years; and how long have we been at Troy - nine years! And with the nine years up that means we will take the city! Homer says that the common men "praised the words of the godlike Odysseus" (*mython epainesantes Odysseos theoio*). The same men who minutes earlier were eager to give up the fight are now just as eager to continue it.

Homer has presented a perfect example of an effective story. Note how Odysseus' account of the snake and the birds mimics the format of myth, but it is not a myth. In two significant ways it departs from a mythic account. First, because the omen is nine years old, and apparently in all those nine years no one took any note of it; in myths omens announce themselves as soon as they occur. Second, because mythically it is a woefully incomplete omen. Even if the nine birds mean nine years of hardship, so what? In a proper omen some dramatic sign would signal that after the nine years Troy must fall.

Odysseus uses mythic elements because his audience is familiar with those elements. But he recasts them as a story both disarmingly simple and amazingly complex. The beginning of the story is rooted in the past: the bird incident of nine years ago which no one remembers - and which *because* no one remembers it can be presented by the story-teller in any way that suits his purpose. The ending of the story is in the future: the fall of Troy - which the audience cheers as if it has just happened even though it hasn't. The middle of the story is where the audience finds itself at that moment. They are like men on a bridge; the pylons supporting the bridge are in the past and the future. Because the audience is already on the bridge it has only one way to go.

Here we may ask why Odysseus did not add some detail to the omen to include the fall of Troy. But this was the most brilliant move of all! A good story-teller knows what to say; a great story-teller knows what not to say. Completion by omission is the most difficult move in telling a tale, but employed correctly it is the acme of narrative skill. Using an ending which does *not* logically follow from anything earlier in the story - a *non sequitur* the audience is asked to believe precisely because it does not follow from what went before - Odysseus the master story-teller insures that his audience will complete the story for him.

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Why did the little birds die? To tell men after nine years of hardship that it was all for nothing? What kind of a story would that be? No, the only narrative ending which fits is the *payoff*: it was all for the best and now their fondest dreams will come true! No one has to suspend disbelief to embrace this ending. Rather the audience need only suspend belief in reality. And the fact that most people don't want to believe in reality, that they would vastly prefer to believe in fantasy and then believe that their belief has nothing to do with their own wishes - *that* is the most powerful weapon in the armory of the story-teller.

In the interceding three thousand some odd years, audiences have become more credulous for narrative payoffs - certainly not less so. No one wants to be told their sacrifices are not part of a glorious story. Still less do we wish to learn they may all be part of *someone else's* glorious story. No, the stories which inspire our enemies are blatant falsehoods. Anyone can see that! We give zero credulity to those stories. Meanwhile, the intellectual watchdogs of our lords and masters sniff out anything hinting at "moral equivalency" between the black lies of the other side's story and the white truths which make up ours.

After all we've been through we've got to have a happy ending. Even if that means we must go through a little bit more â and a little bit moreâ and a little bit moreâ.

## Chapter 3: Chapter One- continued

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In our time we take for granted that a successful story leads to a sequel. In some obvious ways this makes sense, especially if the story ends with many issues unresolved and many principal characters still alive. However, as a story by definition has an ending, this seems to go against resuming the story as if it had not ended.

Sequels are tricky. They cannot simply extend the original story, and if a story-teller attempts this he merely repeats the original tale with variations which fool no one. Many bad movie sequels come to mind here. The true art of the sequel is to take some characters from the original story and put them in a new story, using not as many elements from the original story as possible but as few as necessary.

Anyone interested in sequels should study the first and greatest one: Homer's *Odyssey*.

To continue the story of the siege of Troy would be presupposed, but Homer avoids this. Instead he jumps ahead many years and shows the sorrows of the family of Odysseus - the man who did not come home.

Departing from the mainly linear time-line of the *Iliad*, much of the *Odyssey* is told as flashbacks. Sequels demand more sophisticated structure than the original work. They should also be able to stand independently from the original work. Had the *Iliad* been lost, the *Odyssey* would yet stand on its own.

To stand on its own a sequel needs a central idea which either does not appear in the original work or is treated there peripherally. In the *Odyssey* this is the idea of Odysseus as *story-teller*. Touched upon in the *Iliad*, this idea is now plowed deeply. We hear Odysseus telling stories almost by second nature; whenever he encounters an obstacle his first reaction is to tell a story to get around it. His ability to disguise his intentions is without equal in world literature. The one time Odysseus is tripped up is when listening to a story about the fall of Troy and his role in it. Curiously this is the story which Homer's audience would have expected to hear. By making it a story within the story, Homer's narrative sophistication is breath-taking.

Deception is largely absent from the *Iliad*; it is central to the *Odyssey*. Odysseus is a thinking man's hero. Over and over he wins against all odds because he *out-thinks* his opponents. His secret of success is that he regards everyone with suspicion; together with ruthlessness and the favor of the gods, that is all one needs.

By substituting false information for true information and doing this at the outset of every encounter, Odysseus always has the upper hand. Dealing with potential friends, he conceals his identity until safe to reveal it. Dealing with enemies, he conceals his identity until too late for them to act against him. This is in sharp contrast to how nearly every character acts in the *Iliad*, yet develops a theme only lightly touched upon there: how honesty gets you into trouble.

Homer's Odysseus - the man of "many wiles" - is the ideal story-teller, as Achilles is the ideal warrior. In every crisis he faces. Odysseus's first impulse is to tell a story. Even when he has come home to Ithaca and meets his father, Laertes, his reaction is not to embrace dear old dad but to fabricate a story on the spot.

No model is better for a story-teller than Odysseus; he leads the way, and there has truly been nothing added to the art of story-telling since him. We see Odysseus unarmed, without gold or silver, without friends, without knowledge even of where he is, and literally naked among strangers - but he clothes himself with a story and we, too, listen as raptly as Nausicaa.

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Here we perceive that the master story-teller takes his art with the greatest seriousness. It is a matter of life or death. For you, my friend, as for Odysseus, the right story at the right time will save your ass.

But the *Odyssey* has a deeper level. Homer ascribes the *Iliad* to the goddess who sings through him and, apparently, cannot lie (a limitation which male gods are never under). Much of the *Odyssey* quotes or paraphrases Odysseus himself - making it the story of a man who tells stories. But are stories lies? That depends on what you mean by "truth." Implicit in everything Odysseus says is a definition of truth which we might call the misplaced heritage of Western man: *truth is what works*.

The *Odyssey* was a hard act to follow. It did not inspire an extensive literature about trickster heroes, but grew out of a very old tradition of trickster gods. Because we know these gods only as seen in stories, it is impossible to know how they were regarded in a purely myth-minded world. Myths are not about opposition between true and false, but about opposition between success and failure. Thereby the gods never tell "falsehoods" as we understand the term. Homer's contemporaries must have regarded Odysseus in this spirit. But as stories proliferated and narrative-based thought became widespread, this earlier mindset was pushed out of mind. Then people came to believe there must be an absolute difference between truth and falsehood. As all story-tellers are the bastards of Odysseus, increasingly elaborate means had to be invented to give people the trickery they silently demand.

This segues into the last great trickster hero in the literature of the Classical world. The stories about him are well known, even though we do not see him the same way as when his character was invented. He is Jesus.

Regarding tricks as frivolous or disreputable, we are unaccustomed to think of Jesus as a trickster. It was not always such. Throughout most of history trickery was seen as a sign of intelligence indicating divine favor. The gods smiled on the trickster. The idea of governments and their ruling elites having a monopoly on trickery (like a monopoly on violence) is a modern concept.

Note that trickery is not the same as lying. When we lie, we walk; when we trick, we dance. Anyone can lie; only a few can trick. Whereas the liar denies truth, the trickster pays homage to it by saying "the truth is too precious to get involved here!" You can lie to people who do not want to be lied to, but you can only trick people willing to be tricked. And it is no exaggeration to call trickery the distaff side of justice. Anyone willing to trick others is open to being tricked himself. Thereby a master trickster - who could almost consistently trick without being tricked - inspired awe and admiration.

Jesus's role as magician is well known (even if seldom so acknowledged). But the world which Jesus is set in is chock-a-block with magicians. Something about this story character made him stand out - and it was not healing the sick or even raising the dead. Jesus avers any exclusivity in these powers, which can be freely conferred upon others and are never claimed as his alone. What makes Jesus unique is his constant arguing for the *deceptiveness* of appearances. Saying the last shall be first, the meek shall inherit the earth, the smallest seed produced the biggest tree etc. - all bespeaks a worldview where nearly everything is opposite to what it seems. Jesus even tricks his own parents when he is twelve years old. His story is a narrative of trickery as he conceals his identity as Messiah.

Significantly, Jesus cannot die until his trick is exposed when Pilate orders a placard put atop the Cross identifying this particular malefactor as "King of the Jews." The Crucifixion then becomes the supreme act of trickery in world literature. Jesus appears down and out, but is really setting the scene for the greatest come-back of all time. The subsequent resurrection stories (which do not appear in the earliest versions of the Mark Gospel) show Jesus tricking people right and left even *post mortem*.

As the Christian movement gathered steam, Jesus went from human trickster to trickster god. But consider the roots of the story:

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At the beginning of the tale is the slaughter of the innocents by Herod and the Holy Family's flight into Egypt. At the beginning of Homer's tale about Odysseus (if we transpose it into linear time) is the slaughter of the innocents during the sack of Troy; while earlier in the *Odyssey*, as it is actually structured, is the tale of Telemachos' visit to Egypt in search of information on his missing father.

When Odysseus enters the cave of the Cyclops, he has twelve companions. Jesus has twelve apostles. Odysseus' companions are mariners. Jesus' apostles are mainly fishermen. Odysseus is imprisoned in the cave for three days. Jesus is in his tomb for three days. The cave of the Cyclops is sealed with a heavy stone. The tomb of Jesus is sealed with a heavy stone. The Cyclops is blinded with a wooden spear. Jesus is crucified on wood and pierced with a spear as darkness covers the land; while in later Christian legend, Longinus, the Roman centurion who pierces the side of Christ, is going blind until vision of the Holy Blood miraculously restores his sight.

Odysseus and his surviving men escape the Cyclops's cave by tying themselves to lambs. Jesus is the Lamb of God. Odysseus conceals his identity from the Cyclops, then reveals it. Jesus conceals his identity, then reveals himself as Messiah. Odysseus calls himself "no man" - although he is a man. Christ, in a matter of theological ambiguity - is both man and no man.

Other points of identity:

Odysseus is of royal descent. Jesus is of royal descent.

Odysseus makes wine. Jesus' first miracle (in the John Gospel) is making wine for the wedding at Cana.

Odysseus calms the sea after Aeolos gives him a bag confining the winds. Jesus calms the wind during a storm on the Sea of Galilee.

Odysseus' men are turned into swine by Circe but are redeemed by their master. Jesus redeems the demoniac by casting his demons into swine.

Odysseus is tempted by Sirens. Jesus is tempted by Satan.

Odysseus is reviled and mocked when he returns home. Jesus is reviled and mocked when he returns to Nazareth.

Odysseus' true identity as master of the house is revealed to his nurse, Euryclea, as she washes his feet. Jesus' feet are washed by a woman who knows him as master.

Odysseus finds his house a den of thieves; he resorts to violence. Jesus finds the Temple, his father's house, a den of thieves; he resorts to violence.

Odysseus' servant Melanthios betrays his master; for this, Melanthios is hung from a roof beam and then killed by having his guts ripped out and fed to dogs. Judas betrays his master and dies in the Matthew Gospel by hanging himself, but in *Acts* we are told that after falling his insides burst open "and all his bowels gushed out."

Odysseus visits the land of the dead, converses with souls of the dead, and returns to the living. Jesus descends into hell, frees souls of some Old Testament figures, and returns to the living.

Odysseus in the land of the dead spurns his own mother (he will not let her ghost drink blood from a sacrificed ram). Jesus in a passage in the synoptic Gospels which most Christians prefer to pass over, spurns

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his mother when he is busy addressing a crowd. (Significantly, Jesus here breaks completely with the Old Testament, as he not only violates the Fifth Commandment but crows about it.)

Odysseus returned home to Ithaca in disguise but is transfigured by Athena and reveals his true nature to three men of his household. Jesus is transfigured and reveals his true nature to three of his Apostles.

When Odysseus wishes to reveal his identity to disbelievers, he asks that a scar on his body be inspected to dispel all doubt. When Jesus returns from death he is disbelieved until he asks that the scars of his crucifixion be inspected to dispel all doubt.

Odysseus' second coming sees a bloody judgment imposed on all who have defiled his house, which is then purged with sulfur. Jesus promises a second coming to be followed by a Last Judgment with sinners cast into sulfurous flames.

Athena appears to Odysseus as a sparrow. The Holy Spirit appears to Jesus in the Matthew Gospel descending like a dove.

The most important commonality of Odysseus and Jesus is that both are constant and masterful story-tellers - who "exist" only as characters in story.

But are you surprised that stories were recycled as often in antiquity as in your time?

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Odysseus and Jesus have something else in common: both are motivated by faith in a personal mission - both are presented as voyagers - and both tell us that voyaging is hardship.

Faith in a purely mythic world is based on practicality. One has faith not through wishful thinking but through necessity. *Sea voyages* are the origin of faith - for to travel by sea one needs faith in the vessel one uses.

To ancient man the sea was terrifying - not only in scale but in its feminine unpredictability. A calm sea could within minutes become a raging caldron of wind and waves. To be lost at sea was to be truly lost; no helplessness exceeds that of having the horizon all around you with no land in sight and no sense of place. The best of ships was frail before the awful immensity of the ocean. But even a small body of water was not small to men who ventured upon it. The Sea of Galilee and the Sea of Middle Earth is each big enough to drown you, and liquid two meters deep might just as well be bottomless. Man was waterborne not just by wood and rope and canvas but by act of faith; all faith is meant to keep man afloat.

In the Gilgamesh Epic the hero crosses the Sea of Death to reach the secret of immortality - a secret arising from an earlier voyage when one of the gods saved a man and a woman from a universal flood by telling them to build a boat. The Egyptians believed that the sun made a daily voyage by boat across the sky, and nightly through the terrors of the netherworld. The tribes of inner Arabia, who had no knowledge of seafaring, believed the ocean to be an absolute barrier no man was meant to cross. Rivers, being fingers of the ocean, were also touched with fearsome respect. To the Greeks the souls of the dead crossed the river Styx to reach the kingdom of Hades, and the gods themselves were bound by oaths invoking this river. Throughout Eurasia rivers were associated with dragons, and it was common practice to sacrifice a virgin to the deity of a river and bury her corpse beneath the pilings of a bridge, which, otherwise, could not be expected to stand - even as taking a woman to sea was bad luck, because the god of the ocean would demand her in sacrifice and claim the entire ship. The heavens themselves were compared to rivers, but there were also secret rivers, underground rivers, rivers arising at the end of the world, rivers in paradise, rivers in hell.

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This mindset explains one of the greatest oddities of world history: why did it take so long to discover America? If we look at reproductions of the 15th century vessels which first made the voyage, we are scarcely impressed by their sturdiness. Men could have made the trip thousands of years earlier. Some may have done so - but by accident and without returning. It was not technology which kept the hemispheres apart; it was lack of faith in the ability to make such a voyage. Shakespeare's *The Tempest* begins with a shipwreck to show the audience its own fear - a fear which held men back for millennia from Prospero's world. For hard by faith was always fear, and to shed the latter is to lose the former. In a world without fear, faith withers like a flower in a desert.

The modern myths of our time (which began to appear in the 18th Century) are not fear based and, therefore, not faith based either. But viewed from without, these new myths tell us that as bad as fear is, there are things much worse. The worst monsters are not those we fear but those we should.

### Post Script to The Lost World -

#### Prelude to God: The Early Years

We take as granted the idea of one past and not multiple pasts. It was not always so. In polytheistic cultures, just as there are multiple gods there are multiple pasts. Even when geographic areas comparable to modern nation-states were brought under a single government, this unity did not embrace a unified past. Thus pharaonic Egypt had multiple creation myths in different respective cult centers, all under common political control but with no contradiction seen. The gods had different pasts depending on where you were, just as different places had different gods. To us this seems absurd, but it was no more absurd than people having different accents, different regional dress, different cooking. Why not different pasts?

Precisely because myths did *not* change the past, different pasts persisted. Here we must counter the idea that as we look further back in time people are less sophisticated or "simpler" than we moderns. Nothing is further from the truth. Acceptance of multiple pasts shows a sophistication of thought not to be recaptured until the 20th Century invention of quantum mechanics - yet once upon a time everyone thought this way. More complicated still, they did not conceive of any past as historically distanced from them; rather they saw everything as variegated aspects of contemporary reality - which was the only reality they knew.

What we accept as the Greek revolution in thought did not in this respect involve more complex thinking but a radical simplification of thought. The idea of one past begins with the Greeks. It predates the rise of monotheism, yet the two are intimately connected. One God demands one past. But this puts the cart before the horse. First one past, *then* One God.

And from whence does the idea of one past come? It comes from *story*. For in story events unfold as the audience witnesses generation of a past - a single past which makes up the narrative and is vivified by a moral. As part of this process the audience is introduced to a complexity of thought as it holds in mind simultaneously two contradictory ideas: that the story is unreal, the characters made up, the moral a fabrication of the story-teller - *but* the story is real, the characters exist and the moral is a force of nature. We have been trained to hold in mind these contradictions without seeing them as contradictions. This is the only way we can experience story, but it is also an experience which refashions our minds - not in the experience of any particular story but in the experience of story in general. Our minds become *narratized* when we hold diametrically opposed concepts and do so effortlessly.

In polytheistic times, a goddess may grant you an abundant harvest - but some other god blasts your crop with a hailstorm. You had placated one deity and failed to placate another. It all made perfect sense. But if there is One God who gives and takes, who makes the crops grow but then mysteriously annihilates them, how do you square that? You do it by holding in mind two contradictory ideas without being aware of the contradiction. In

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other words, you apply to theodicy the training you have already received in your abundant experience of narrative. In this spirit, an almighty God possesses absolute foreknowledge of human acts, which he has ordained from the creation of the universe; but man has free will and is fully responsible for his acts, which he fully controls.

A loving and merciful God allows rape and murder just as we listen to tales of rape and murder, which we abhor but at the same time cannot get enough of. Thus we love story-tellers who tell of the unlovely. And even as the story-teller presents a moral which explains everything in the end, so the One God - supreme story-teller - must likewise have a moral to his tale which will likewise come at the end. And because we *are* the tale, we are in no hurry to reach the end.

Faith in One God is no more nor less than the faith we all have in listening to a story not knowing how it will end, not knowing how good it will be, but determined that it *must* be good enough for us to go on listening.

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