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A Rhetorical Approach to Mythology

I. Introduction

Mythology is ancient; it dates back to the oldest tale of which humanity has access, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. However, mythological studies are relatively young, with one of the oldest works being *Bulfinch's Mythology*, originally published in 1867. As these studies have evolved, research methods have improved, and an abundance of reliable work has been produced in differing areas of study. One such area is known as Comparative Mythology. Comparative mythology is the study of mythoi as they relate to each other "by way of explicit or implicit comparisons of mythologies or cultural expressions of myth" (Leeming 79). A standard manner of comparing mythology is through parallelisms. In this context, parallelism is the correspondence and similarity between two or more myths, some of which to such an extent that a relationship can be drawn. Johannes Haubold explains the multiple manners of approaching mythology in this sense as he breaks down the previous studies performed on Mesopotamian and Greek mythoi. First, there are the experts on the mythoi being discussed, in Haubold's case, Assyriologists and Classicalists. These experts sift through the constantly emerging material, establish knowledge on the items, then begin debate surrounding the relationships of the texts, determining parallelisms that Haubold calls "crude but effective" (2-3). On the other hand,

Haubold writes his book on the analysis of the texts through Comparative Literature. He uses Apter and Bernheimer as inspiration for the examination, seeking "multicultural recontextualization" and "equality-in-diversity" pertaining to the cultural perspectives applied during the investigation (Haubold 4).

The research conducted by experts and through comparative literacy has led to discoveries that show the interconnection of mythologies. It has allowed modern man to look back and recognize the contextuality of the ideas and works. However, it lacks an in-depth explanation of the ecology and development of the individual mythoi in tandem with each other. Research still needs to be conducted to elucidate how these mythologies functioned in their mutual rhetorical ecology and their reciprocal influence. A rhetorical analysis of the individual mythologies, the genres inhabiting those discourse communities which comprise the mythologies, the discourse communities in and of themselves, and the functioning of mythologies within their rhetorical ecology would clarify this interconnected contextuality of the mythoi. That is precisely the research I propose; A rhetorical approach to the texts coupled with genre analysis, analysis of discourse communities, and analysis of the rhetorical ecology. This research would grant insight into the mythoi that has brought about the current religious culture and illuminate more about the culture of ancient civilizations. It would create a map of the interconnection of mythoi and why mythoi developed and are still developing, as it pertains to current religious/ mythological culture, in the manner it is. As this investigation would grant insight into both ancient culture, ancient history, and contemporary culture, it is not only important but necessary.

The ongoing conversations in the applied fields of study must be explicated to understand the gaps this research would fill. The first conversation involves rhetorical studies and includes

research performed by Anis Bawarshi, Amy Devitt, and Ken Hyland. Bawarshi provides an overview of why writing is ecological explaining,

It is not that a writer merely functions within a context, but that a writer participates in the construction of that context. Writing is both constituted by, and constructed of, ever-changing social contexts. (70)

Bawarshi provides the groundwork for this research proposal; with the knowledge that writers both participate in the creation of their context and are within the context, it follows that writers of mythological text were influenced by the tales that had already been written and were creating a new social context as they wrote. Likewise, because their culture was influenced by the rhetorical ecology in which it existed, those authors brought concepts from that ecology into their work, thereby reflecting the ecology in which they lived. The mythological works of the past reflect the ecology in which they were born and the ecology that was being created. To properly examine this rhetorical ecology of ideas, however, one must further break it down. Within a rhetorical ecology, there are structures one can analyze to attain a firm grasp on it and its ideas: Discourse Communities and Genres. Bawarshi elucidates what it means for something to be a genre, stating that genres are "the sites in which communicants rhetorically reproduce the very environments to which they in turn respond"... "the habits and habitats for acting in language" (71). Genres are the items found within discourse communities that facilitate information and ideas; Devitt describes it elegantly, "Genre functions for people in their interactions with one another in groups and through social structures; they are social actions" (34). One can analyze these genres to grasp how a discourse community functions, particularly in an ecology. According to Hyland, they can be evaluated "based on two central assumptions"; that, to some extent, the texts depend on the social context in which they were created, and that

those features found through the first can relate to other texts of the like (114). With the knowledge of what genres are and how they can be analyzed, there then comes the question of how one can investigate a discourse community. Devitt provides insight into this, affirming, "[discourse] communities thus are better defined by their common goals, values, or identities than by their common discourse or genres" (39). With the full scope of the conversation, genres compliment goals, values, and identities in comprising discourse communities. Discourse communities are diverse groups of beings with the same objective within a rhetorical ecology. A rhetorical ecology is the social context born from the past, combined with the social context being created. This the mannerism in which my research will breakdown mythoi, particularly mythological texts.

The other conversation essential to mythology research is the previous research done on the mythologies within the ecological system. The primary ecological system of mythology with an abundance of research stems from ancient Greek culture and ancient Near Eastern culture. However, researchers must deal with the smaller mythological ecologies because encompassing larger ecological systems, such as Near Eastern mythology, includes mythologies like Mesopotamian, Biblical, Egyptian, etc. Therefore, the scope of research may differ depending on the researcher; nevertheless, these ecologies have been investigated by academics Johannes Haubold, Fumi Karahashi, Bruce Louden, and Charles Penglase. For the most part, these scholars search for parallelisms between the mythoi, a device for identifying a connection between these mythological discourse communities to connect the ancient world of ideas. Karahashi investigates the parallelisms found between the story of Hippolytus, a Greek hero, and *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, an ancient Mesopotamian tale about the king of Uruk, Gilgamesh. She concludes that the connection between the Near east mythos of Gilgamesh and Hippolytus should be

seen as an effect of the nations' (Those within the Greek and Near Eastern regions) cultural exchange during the late bronze age (97). Louden performed two separate investigations on parallels between Near Eastern and Greek mythoi, each respectively based on Homer's tales *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. His work on *The Odyssey* precedes his work on *The Iliad* and draws parallelisms from the Greek mythoi to Biblical, Egyptian, Ugaritic, and Mesopotamian mythoi; However, Louden makes a point that parallelisms between *The Odyssey* and the *Old Testament* are the greatest (314). He also proposes "that *The Odyssey*, in some form, served as a model for individual parts of Genesis (particularly the myth of Joseph)" (324). However, like Karahashi, Louden stresses that it was not a dialogue in one direction, but that the Near Eastern and Greek culture had an ongoing dialogue (12). In his later work on *The Iliad*, he claims that Homer learned specific "narrative vehicles" from near eastern culture (Louden 6). Louden emphasizes Ugaritic texts for *The Iliad*, claiming they offer the closest parallels (7). Penglase analyzed Mesopotamian and Greek mythoi and concluded that the Greek's knew the ancient Mesopotamian tales of Enki and the like and were "intimate" with them (Penglase 199). Furthermore, he postulates that Mesopotamian myth must have been, at least, partially influential on Greek mythoi (199). Last is Haubold, who analyzes the classicalist and Assyriologist approaches to drawing parallelisms and offers his own comparative approach. The ongoing conversation surrounding mythological parallelisms has, if nothing else, presented a single concept: The mythologies and their similarities were an outcropping of the ecological exchange of ideas occurring within and between Greek and Near Eastern society. This concept also provides the groundwork for this research proposal. This investigation is based on the assumption that these two societies, Greek and Near Eastern, exchanged ideas and were part of the same rhetorical ecology.

The last conversation that needs to be mentioned is the primary source texts elucidating the individual mythologies used for analysis, such as *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *The Odyssey*, *The Iliad*, etc. However, with hundreds of stories, it would become a redundant task to explain them fully. These works are the foundation for the rhetorical analysis, and understanding the texts is crucial to the proposed research.

This research proposal is dedicated to understanding each respective mythology through a genre analysis of their texts and parallels that can be drawn between mythoi's genres. It is a fraction of a larger research project with a total of three parts. The next research project will be dedicated to analyzing the mythologies' discourse communities and their parallels. Following will be the third and final project, connecting the mythologies in the rhetorical ecology through the previously founded parallels accompanied by the studies previously conducted by experts, creating a united mythological ecology. However, it must be understood that the objective of this particular research proposal is to analyze only the genres of the mythologies.

I. Methods

The manner of genre analysis conducted in this investigation takes inspiration from *Scenes of Writing: Strategies for Composing with Genres* authored by Amy Devitt, Mary Jo Reiff, and Anis Bawarshi. Genres for this investigation will be found in mythological texts. These texts are not limited to but include the following:

- Prayers
- Epics
- Stories
- Inscriptions
- Doctrines

After the desired text has been selected, the analysis will begin. Genres are responses to rhetorically recurring situations, so the genre and the rhetorical situation the genre responds to should be identified first.

- Setting:
 - Where does the genre appear?
 - When does the genre appear?
 - Around what genres does this genre appear?
- Subject:
 - Around what items does the genre interact?
 - What subject matter does the genre address?
- Participants:
 - Who uses or interacts with the genre?
 - What writers use the genre?

- What are the circumstances that implore authors to use this genre?
- Who reads this genre?
- What are the circumstances that implore readers to read this genre?
- Purpose:
 - Why do authors and readers engage with this genre?
 - What is the purpose of the genre? / To what end does the genre serve?

With the identification of the rhetorical situation in which the genre appears, there must be an analysis of the genres' recurring features.

- Content:
 - What is included/ excluded from the content?
 - What are examples of the content?
 - What affirms the validity of the content?
- Rhetorical Appeals
 - What rhetorical appeals can be found in the genre?
 - Ethos?
 - Pathos?
 - Logos?
- Structure
 - What is the structure of the texts in the genre?
 - How are the structures organized?
- Format
 - In what format does the genre appear?
 - Is there a common appearance of the genre?

- Is there a common length to the texts in the genre?
- Sentences
 - How are sentences structured within the genre?
 - What kind of sentences can be found in the genre?

After identifying the recurring features found within the genre, one must analyze the recurring features to determine what it reveals about the genre. In other terms, what can one derive from the identifiable patterns in the genre? The focus questions are the following:

- What is required to understand and adequately comprehend the genre?
- What roles are encouraged/ discouraged for the participants (authors/ readers) of the genre?
- What values, ideologies, beliefs, or assumptions are implied through the genre?
- What values, ideologies, beliefs, or assumptions does the genre encourage?
- How is the genre's subject treated?
- What content is shown to be important/ ignored?
- What items does the genre support?
- What items does the genre undermine?
- What perspectives are implied?

The first few steps of the methods will be applied to the Greek myth of *Pandora's Box* to display how the genre analysis will be conducted. The narrative can be found in Appendix B for reference. The text can first be identified as a Greek story rather than an Epic due to its short nature. Three genres first become apparent when reading the text; that which deals with the happenings on Olympus, that which deals with the mortal realm, and a unique closing at the end which addresses the happenings of the story and the reader directly. The genre of Olympus is

focused on Zeus, analyzing his motivations in-depth, and following his actions as he bids the other gods to enact his will. The transition from the Olympian genre to the Mortal genre occurs as the story follows Pandora, a manifestation of Zeus's will. Yet, even in the mortal plane, the subject of conversation is Zeus, that is, until the story again follows Zeus's will and the plagues that will imposes upon the Earth. Even in the last genre, Zeus is still the topic of conversation as the narrator tells the viewer that no one can escape Zeus's will. It follows that the subject of the story is Zeus and his will.

Following the analysis of the subject is the participants. Each genre has a definite intention by the author and for the reader. The Olympian genre details the gods' glory, going in-depth to illustrate how each god participated in Pandora's creation. It also describes their functioning's to the readers and how Zeus, the god above all other gods, enacts his desires. The writer participates in this genre with his creative freedom to depict the gods to the viewers. The genre dealing with the mortal realm illustrates to the participants why the world functions in the manner it does. Religious texts require explication of the world's functioning and why it is as it is, and this seems to be the genre that does just that. Hesiod must write this so the believers have grounds for understanding why plagues and items of the like exist. The final genre is authored for a transition from one story to the next as Hesiod says that he will "sum you up" another tale (105). It also serves to encapsulate the main idea of the story. It provides a brief transition with a message that is short enough for guaranteed remembrance for the viewer; "there no way to escape the will of Zeus" (105).

Further analysis is required for a comprehensive investigation; however, this illustrates the procedure that will occur during the examination of texts and genres.

Appendix A

Schedule: The first 20 weeks of research

Week 1: Greek Mythological Text 1 Analysis

Week 2: Greek Mythological Text 2 Analysis

Week 3: Greek Mythological Text 3 Analysis

Week 4: Greek Mythological Text 4 Analysis

Week 5: Greek Mythological Text 5 Analysis

Week 6: Mesopotamian Mythological Text 1 Analysis

Week 7: Mesopotamian Mythological Text 2 Analysis

Week 8: Mesopotamian Mythological Text 3 Analysis

Week 9: Mesopotamian Mythological Text 4 Analysis

Week 10: Mesopotamian Mythological Text 5 Analysis

Week 11: Biblical Mythological Text 1 Analysis

Week 12: Biblical Mythological Text 2 Analysis

Week 13: Biblical Mythological Text 3 Analysis

Week 14: Biblical Mythological Text 4 Analysis

Week 15: Biblical Mythological Text 5 Analysis

Week 16: Egyptian Mythological Text 1 Analysis

Week 17: Egyptian Mythological Text 2 Analysis

Week 18: Egyptian Mythological Text 3 Analysis

Week 19: Egyptian Mythological Text 4 Analysis

Week 20: Egyptian Mythological Text 5 Analysis

Appendix B

The following is the story of Pandora's box taken from *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica* by Hesiod.

But Zeus in the anger of his heart hid it, because Prometheus the crafty deceived him; therefore he planned sorrow and mischief against men. [50] He hid fire; but that the noble son of Iapetus stole again for men from Zeus the counsellor in a hollow fennel-stalk, so that Zeus who delights in thunder did not see it. But afterwards Zeus who gathers the clouds said to him in anger: "Son of Iapetus, surpassing all in cunning, [55] you are glad that you have outwitted me and stolen fire—a great plague to you yourself and to men that shall be. But I will give men as the price for fire an evil thing in which they may all be glad of heart while they embrace their own destruction." So said the father of men and gods, and laughed aloud. [60] And he bade famous Hephaestus make haste and mix Earth with water and to put in it the voice and strength of human kind, and fashion a sweet, lovely maiden-shape, like to the immortal goddesses in face; and Athena to teach her needlework and the weaving of the varied web; [65] and golden Aphrodite to shed grace upon her head and cruel longing and cares that weary the limbs. And he charged Hermes the guide, the Slayer of Argus, to put in her a shameless mind and a deceitful nature. So he ordered. And they obeyed the lord Zeus the son of Cronos. [70] Forthwith the famous Lime God moulded clay in the likeness of a modest maid, as the son of Cronos purposed. And the goddess brighteyed Athena girded and clothed her, and the divine Graces and queenly Persuasion put necklaces of gold upon her, [75] and the rich-haired Hours crowned her head with

spring flowers. And Pallas Athena bedecked her form with all manner of finery. Also the Guide, the Slayer of Argus, contrived within her lies and crafty words and a deceitful nature at the will of loud thundering Zeus, [80] and the Herald of the gods put speech in her. And he called this woman Pandora,¹ because all they who dwelt on Olympus gave each a gift, a plague to men who eat bread. But when he had finished the sheer, hopeless snare, the Father sent glorious Argus-Slayer, [85] the swift messenger of the gods, to take it to Epimetheus as a gift. And Epimetheus did not think on what Prometheus had said to him, bidding him never take a gift of Olympian Zeus, but to send it back for fear it might prove to be something harmful to men. But he took the gift, and afterwards, when the evil thing was already his, he understood. [90] For ere this the tribes of men lived on Earth remote and free from ills and hard toil and heavy sicknesses which bring the Fates upon men; for in misery men grow old quickly. But the woman took off the great lid of the jar¹ with her hands [95] and scattered, all these and her thought caused sorrow and mischief to men. Only Hope remained there in an unbreakable home within under the rim of the great jar, and did not fly out at the door; for ere that, the lid of the jar stopped her, by the will of Aegis-holding Zeus who gathers the clouds. [100] But the rest, countless plagues, wander amongst men; for Earth is full of evils, and the sea is full. Of themselves diseases come upon men continually by day and by night, bringing mischief to mortals silently; for wise Zeus took away speech from them. [105] So is there no way to escape the will of Zeus. Or if you will, I will sum you up another tale well and skilfully—and do

you lay it up in your heart,—how the gods and mortal men sprang from one source.

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