

STRUCTURE AND DECONSTRUCTION IN THE ELECTRA MYTH AND BEYOND

A Thesis by

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in Liberal Studies.

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“J’ai seul la clef de cette parade sauvage.”

“Parade,” Illuminations and Other Poems, Arthur Rimbaud

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Without you all this work would not be possible.

## ABSTRACT

This research examines the ideas of myth and intertextuality. The Electra myth is utilized and various versions of the Electra myth are examined from different cultures through the world starting with the earliest known version of the Electra myth up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century before focusing on Jean-Paul Sartre's telling of the Electra myth, *The Flies*. A structural analysis according to Lévi-Strauss is conducted on *The Flies*. A deconstruction according to Derrida is then performed not simply on the ideas presented by Sartre in *The Flies*, but on the entire idea of myth, itself. This deconstruction then leads to the idea that myth is nothing more than a metaphor, providing further evidence to Lévi-Strauss' idea that all problems are linguistic ones. When viewed as existing within Derrida's idea of *espacement* one finds that myth isn't simply a metaphor, or the "beginning," but there exists a co-constitution of both μύθος and λόγος.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

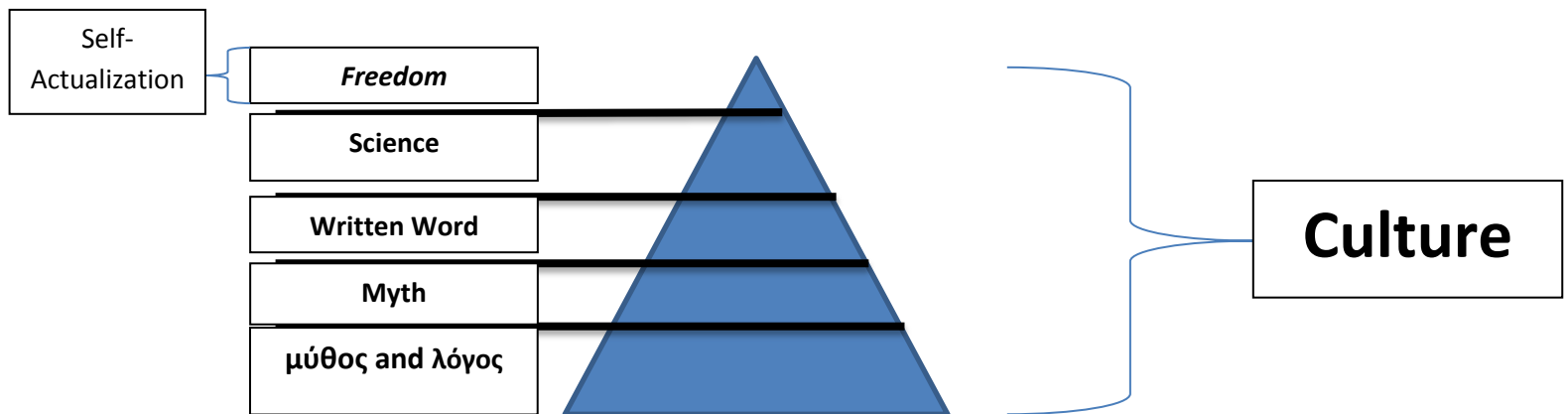
If men have always been concerned with only one task-how to create a society fit to live in-the forces which inspired our distant ancestors are also present in us. Nothing is settled; everything can still be altered. What was done, but turned out wrong, can be done again. 'The Golden Age, which blind superstition had placed behind [or ahead of] us, is in us.' The brotherhood of man acquires a concrete meaning when it makes us see, in the poorest tribe, a confirmation of our own image and an experience, the lessons of which we can assimilate, along with so many others. We may even discover a pristine freshness in these lessons. Since we know that, for thousands of years, man has succeeded only in repeating himself, we will attain to that nobility of thought which consists in going back beyond all repetitions and taking as the starting-point of our reflections, the indefinable grandeur of man's beginnings. Being human signifies, for each one of us, belonging to a class, a society, a country, a continent and a civilization (Lévi-Strauss 393).

This quote comes from Lévi-Strauss' *Tristes Tropiques*. When I read this quote, I see the works and ideas of Lévi-Strauss, Malinowski, Sartre, Hegel, Rousseau, and Derrida all at play. I have chosen to open the introduction with this quote by Lévi-Strauss because for me it so eloquently describes what this research and work is about:

- 1) Examining the work of "our distant ancestors" which is "present in us."
- 2) Examining "our own images."

3) Going back to the beginning, “...beyond all repetitions.”

In this work I have chosen the subject of myth because myth is one of the building blocks of culture. To better understand this, I refer the reader to Maslow’s hierarchal pyramid. At the very top of the pyramid is “self-actualization” and every building block is nothing more than a step towards self-actualization. If one were to apply Maslow’s hierarchal pyramid to the subject of culture, then it would look something like this:



**Figure 1: Hierarchal Pyramid of Culture**

Figure 1 makes things much easier for the reader to see what it is that I am discussing. All things, as can be seen, are descended from myth, which in turn descends from μύθος and λόγος, or very simply language and thought, respectively. Any one point in time, a culture is at one of these levels, with the most “primitive” of cultures being towards the bottom and the most “advanced” at the top. Therefore to understand a culture, one must understand the myths of that culture, which is why it is so important.

This work commences with an abbreviated discussion of the various ideas and theories surrounding this term ‘myth’ from different cultures and time periods before stopping to turn attention to one researcher Claude Lévi-Strauss. Lévi-Strauss was selected because he

understood that in order to understand ourselves, “modern” man, we needed to take a trip back in time and look at “primitive” man. Lévi-Strauss understood that through “primitive” man’s myths one was able to go back to the very beginning. Lévi-Strauss did not develop his own theory, per se; because he realized that in order to go back to the beginning, one needed to disregard all boundaries and let things speak for themselves. Instead Lévi-Strauss developed a method of analysis which would enable myth to speak for itself. He was successful in developing this method and showing how myths speak and how when broken down it comes down to the question of nature versus culture, but at the same time; however, he was unsuccessful because through his research, he did nothing more than create new categories, culture and nature, the very thing that he was against in the first place. This downfall came in the form of the incest taboo, which Lévi-Strauss could not quite explain because it could fit into both categories, not either, as Derrida has pointed out. The question then becomes how does one escape this repetitious pattern and go back to the very beginning?

Next, I turn my attention to the idea of ‘intertextuality,’ but still focusing on myth. Unlike Lévi-Strauss I did not go into the field and collect a number of different myths, analyze them, and let the myths speak for themselves. Rather I chose one myth, the Electra myth from within Greek mythology. Then using the ideas surrounding intertextuality, I traced that myth throughout the centuries through different genres, drama and poetry, namely, and through different cultures, Greek, French, American, Cuban, and Chilean, and continents, Europe, North and South America. I have presented a brief summary of each, except in the cases of the poems where the poems themselves are reproduced, along with a brief commentary on some of the

differences and similarities between the work being reviewed and the works already reviewed to that point following a pattern used by Edmond Leach in his volume on Lévi-Strauss.

Using Lévi-Strauss' approach I was able to break down each one of these versions of the Electra myth down to their mythemes and chart them, just as Lévi-Strauss has done. Rather than go into too much detail, an abbreviated version is published in this work. I have included charts and graphs to help the reader further understand how I was able to arrive at the conclusion that although these versions of the Electra myth come from different cultures and centuries, they are indeed the same Electra myth that existed over 2,000 years ago in Greek mythology just in a different shape and form. Further, this work supports Lévi-Strauss' idea the term 'myth' cannot be defined because 'myth' has, as Lévi-Strauss said, continued to evolve and encompasses more than what is traditionally thought of as 'myth,' e.g. Greek or Roman mythology. It is not simply archaic, but alive and well today in various shapes and forms.

Then I focus on one version of the Electra myth that was examined in the previous chapter, *The Flies*, by Jean-Paul Sartre. I have chosen *The Flies* for two reasons; 1) although Lévi-Strauss often spoke against the work of Sartre, I find some of his ideas embedded within the work of Sartre, and 2) *The Flies* provides some insight as to how to get back to the beginning. Like Lévi-Strauss, Sartre called for a self-reflection of oneself through which all things become *possibilized*; this idea of 'Freedom' is achieved. In the end though Sartre's work, like Lévi-Strauss' is unsuccessful in that he did not go far enough because this idea of 'Freedom' then creates another repetitious circular pattern much as Lévi-Strauss' work did.

Following the work of Jacques Derrida a deconstruction is performed, not on the work of Lévi-Strauss, as Derrida has already done, or on the Electra myth, but on the term 'myth.' It is

through this deconstruction that one is able to see how myth descends from both μύθος, yet adding proof to Lévi-Strauss' idea that all problems were linguistic ones, and λόγος. μύθος and λόγος are both the beginning and the end because there is nothing further.

Finally the last part of this work is two-fold. I start by concluding where I left off in the previous chapter and taking things further by showing how myth doesn't just descend from μύθος, but λόγος, as well. Further, I return to hierarchical pyramid of culture, discussed above, to offer my own insights into culture and myth. I conclude by offering, a new "theory," using this term very loosely, of myth which encompasses all of the work that has been done to this point.



CHAPTER 2  
THE IDEA OF MYTH

**2.1 Introduction to the Idea of Myth**

In his book, *Culture and Personality*, Victor Barnouw states that “unfortunately, the terms *culture* and *personality*... are hard to define in clear-cut unambiguous fashion. Both are associated in popular usage with older colloquial meanings which differ from those given in social science literature” (Barnouw 4). I would argue that the term ‘myth’ is in the exact same category as the terms culture and personality. The word ‘myth,’ itself, is as old as the written word and can be traced back to the Greek, ‘μύθος.’ Throughout the years, the meaning of the word has changed, not simply in terms of popular usage, but in terms of the Humanities.<sup>1</sup> Each one of these fields and subfields of the Humanities have added their own unique perspectives, ideas, and definitions which further complicates the matter. In this section, I shall discuss some of the ideas behind this term ‘myth’ before turning my attention to the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss.

**2.2 Myth and Popular Usage**

In contemporary times, myth is traditionally associated with stories, e.g. Greek myths, or something which is fictitious which is exemplified by the definition of the word according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary,

- 1 a: a usually traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the worldview of a people or explain a practice, believe, or natural phenomenon

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<sup>1</sup> Here I have chosen the word ‘Humanities’ because the term ‘myth’ does not appear in simply one field, but in so many different fields of the Humanities, if not all of them.

- b: parable, allegory
- 2 a: a popular belief or tradition that has grown up around something or someone; especially: one embodying the ideals and institutions of a society or segment of society <seduced by the American myth of individualism- Orde Coombs>
- b: an unfounded or false notion
- 3 : a person or thing having only an imaginary or unverifiable existence<sup>2</sup>

This idea of 'myth' has been held in common usage for at least the past 60-plus years when Roland Barthes, for example, compiled together and discussed what could be deemed 'contemporary myths' in his book, *Mythologies*.

### **2.3 Theories of Myth**

'Myth' when discussed in terms of popular usage is rather simplistic. With the Humanities on the other hand, the term 'myth' has been discussed for generations. As mentioned above, each individual with the various fields and subfields of the Humanities has added their own perspectives and ideas to this term 'myth' so that it cannot be defined or described as simply as it has in terms of popular usage. In fact even some of the various schools of thought do not even have one single definition, complicating things further. It is rather impossible to discuss every theory or idea of myth in this context therefore in this section I shall simply highlight some of the many theories and ideas surrounding myth from different cultures and time periods.

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<sup>2</sup> "Myth," 2012. Merriam Webster Dictionary. 16 Dec. 2012. <http://www.merriam-webster/dictionary/myth>

### 2.3.1 The Greeks and Myth

Nearly every study of the theories and studies on myth begins with a section about the Greeks. In fact the Greeks are perhaps the most written about with regard to the topic, not simply in areas of anthropology, but literature and philosophy, as well, among others. In his essay "Uses of Classical Mythology," which appeared in *The Theory of Myth: Six Studies*, John Creed says that with regard to myth, there are two things at hand, Greek mythology and *μύθος*. Within Greek mythology there are two different kinds of stories; 1) There are stories about the gods and 2) "[there are]... stories about a supposed period in the human past when men were in some sense supermen and gods hobnobbed with them in a manner unfamiliar to the persons living at the time in the stories recounted" (Cunningham 2). Creed's position is that at one time the Greeks did actually believe in their mythology, whether entirely or partly and uses the example of Hesiod's belief that the Muses inspired his work.<sup>3</sup> He goes on to say that a change came under way in this way of belief with Pindar and Xenophanes. With Xenophanes in particular myths started to be viewed as untrue. In the time of Aeschylus and Sophocles, Creed says that myths were looked at as moral tales. Creed then turns his attention to Plato, who can be described as the father of the theory of myth. With Plato myths started to be examined philosophically which led to a discussion of *μύθος* and *λόγος*. According to Creed, Plato says that myths could be divided up into two branches, *λόγος*, which were "rational and accurate accounts," and *μύθος*, which were stories which were not necessarily true, but not necessarily false either, their "...purpose was symbolic" (Cunningham 13).

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Veyne devoted an entire book to this subject only to come to the conclusion of an indecisive answer. According to Veyne this entire subject leads to yet another discourse between the terms 'truth' and 'belief.'

### 2.3.2 The Beginning of Modern Thought on Myth

Most works surrounding the ideas and theories of myth simply skip from the ancient Greeks to the works of Sir Edward B. Tylor and Friedrich Max Müller, although the “scholarly” study of myth originated in the Renaissance.<sup>4</sup> Depending on the work that one reads, some works put Tylor’s work first, others put Müller’s work first and in one instance the work of Ernst Cassirer was discussed first. Truth is they were writing about the same time, but had very different opinions of myth. With Tylor, myth was something that was equated with the past. Myth was utilized by “primitive” man in the stages of savagery as a form of thought and explanation. Eventually man evolves and progresses passed that point. With Müller on the other hand, myth was related to language and tied to naturally-occurring phenomenon so one ended up with such things as “solar mythology,” “lunar mythology,” “wind mythology,” et. al. Cassirer’s work on myth was focused entirely on origin and showing how the myth provided the foundation of the modern-day State. *The Myth of the State* and *Language and Myth*, very simply, explains how myth serves as an ancient explanation of the world.

### 2.3.3 Myths and Fiske

Nearly all volumes on the theories of ideas of myth, as mentioned above, discuss the Greek, then the Europeans, before progressing into more contemporary times; however, one area that is often overlooked is the United States which is why I have decided to include Fiske, an American philosopher and historian, in this examination. Fiske wrote a book titled *Myths and Mythmakers* which was originally published in 1871. In this volume Fiske discusses myths

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<sup>4</sup> “Mythology,” 1979. 01 Dec. 2012. <http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Mythologists>

from different regions of the world, rather than focusing on one region. What is interesting about this particular book on myth is that in the first chapter, rather than focusing on individual ideas of myth, Fiske starts by briefly introducing the character William Tell and tracing the story through the years. This leads Fiske into a discussion of what is myth. Put very simply, Fiske defines myth as an explanation. Like Tylor, he states myth was used by “primitive” man and seems to suggest that is merely a stage that man will evolve from. He does not simply stop there, but he goes on to state that “primitive” man was just as capable as “modern” man of intellectual thought, an idea that he attributes to Renan; “Their minds, we may be sure, worked like our own, and when they spoke of the far-darting sun-god, they meant just what they said, save that where we propound a scientific theorem, they constructed a myth” (Fiske 21).

#### **2.3.4 Malinowski and Myth**

In the *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, originally published in 1922, Malinowski questioned whether the ideas of myth, as understood by the Western world, could be applied to “primitive” peoples. He starts by asking “what is myth to the natives? How do they conceive and define it? Have they any line of demarcation between the mythical and the actual reality, and if so, how do they draw this line?” (Malinowski 299). What Malinowski finds is that the Trobriand Islanders do in fact possess this thing known as myth, which they refer to as *lili’u*. *Lili’u* is different from folktales and historical accounts, but it is difficult to tell which is which because of the fact the *lili’u* is believed in and held to be true and at the same time they have a different attitude towards time. The Trobriand Islanders describe *lili’u* as not happening within their father or grandfather’s time, but long ago. For Westerners this could easily be something that could be viewed as an historical account, thus one sees Malinowski’s problem. Malinowski

then attempts to define myth according to the Trobriand Islanders even further by defining it as a “—narrative of events which are to the native supernatural” (Malinowski 303). Further he says that in the present time, these events do not occur, but they are strongly believed to have occurred, “—a myth is for the native a living actuality” (Malinowski 304) and he says this is possible because the myths themselves reference and make use of the same families, kinship systems, and places which still exist today. Malinowski continues and says that the Trobriand Islanders have their own method of categorizing myths;

- 1) The Oldest Myths- These myths deal with Man’s origin and the origin of social structures, kinship systems, and the like.
- 2) Kulur Myths- These are myths about individuals who have established particular customs and certain aspects of their culture, as well as, myths about the start of what Malinowski deems “certain institutions,” e.g. garden making and cannibalism.
- 3) Myths in which figure only ordinary human beings- Malinowski says that these particular myths discuss the origins of “definite” institutions or types of magic, e.g. the origin of sorcery, the origin of love magic, the myth of the flying canoe and many Kula myths (Malinowski 305-6).

Malinowski then goes on to discuss these different categories of myth in detail and provides examples. He concludes by stating that to these people in particular the past is more important than the present or the future because “it is the behavior of the past generations that the Trobriander instinctively looks for his guidance... myth possesses the normative power of fixing

custom, of sanctioning modes of behavior, of giving dignity and importance to an institution” (Malinowski 327-8).

In an essay, “The Life of Myth,” in a book, *Sex, Culture, and Myth*, which was later published by his wife, Malinowski used these ideas to form his own theory of myth. Apart from what was discussed above, he says that “myths in primitive culture are told with a purpose, and they are deeply rooted in the savage’s interest and his social organization and culture” (Malinowski 290). These myths are not told for the purposes of entertainment, but instead because they are viewed as “sacred.” He arrives at the conclusion that “...no myth, no part of folk-lore can ever be understood except as a living force in culture” (Malinowski 292). In an even earlier work, “Observations on Friedrich Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*,” written between 1904 and 1905, Malinowski defined myth as:

—a basic category of reference to the historical past. In contrast with pure history, which is satisfied with the reconstruction of facts, and with scientific history (sociology), which wishes to find the laws of historical becomings-myth searches the past for the embodiment of ideals; the phantoms resurrected by it shed strong lights across the perspective of centuries which colour the present. The images of the past created by myth are incommensurate with the present reality; they are, so to speak, drawn from another dimension. At one pole myth touches artistic creativity, for its constructs are to fill a certain void left by the world around us; they are to be the complement to present reality, not according to scientific principles but according to the demands of our inner longing. At the other pole myth leans on religion, for the past recreated by it

entwines the present in a net of norms and subordinates the present to itself ethically. But a close connection exists between the myth and the religious aspects of myth. As the soul of dogma, myth is its artistic complement; it is the form in which the artistic experience of faith merges with faith crystallized in pure concepts (dry theological dogma) (Malinowski 70).

The work of Malinowski and those before him paved the way for the future generations of theorists.

### **2.3.5 The 1950s-1980s- An Explosion of Myth**

During the 1950s through 1980s, as the title of this section suggests, there was an explosion or a flood of ideas, theories, and critiques all related to myth; I shall discuss some of them briefly starting with Campbell. Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* was published in 1949. In this volume the focus is on the role of the hero and the journeys that he/she must take. Campbell, on myth in general, states that the very essence of the world, "— religions, philosophies, arts, the social forms of primitive and historic man, prime discoveries in science and technology—" (Campbell 3) all descend from myth. For Campbell myth was the very essence of man. He states that "there is no final system for the interpretation of myths, and there will never be any such thing" (Campbell 381). In another volume, *The Power of Myth*, which was a conversation between Bill Moyers and himself published in 1988, Campbell would elaborate upon these ideas stating that these stories allow Man to come to grip with reality, and that, in America, especially in modern times, as Man has moved away from myths, there has been an increase in violence. For Campbell, myths provide the "ethos" of a culture and without "ethos" violence takes over.



In the 1950s Roland Barthes' book *Mythologies* was published in French, later to be translated and republished in the 1970s. The majority of the book is a collection of modern-day scenarios, which Barthes discusses in context with myth and this idea of being representative of modern-day myths. What is most important about this book is the final chapter in which Barthes discusses his own ideas relating to myths. He starts the chapter very simply by stating that "myth is a type of speech" (Barthes 109).<sup>5</sup> Further, as speech, myth evolves, as does the meaning of not simply the myth itself, but the words contained within the myth, so that there is no such thing as what Barthes calls the "eternal myth." He describes myth as a "—system of communication [not] ...an object, a concept, or an idea..." (Barthes 109). He goes on to describe that as a system of communication it is nothing more than a system within the overall linguistic system, it does not exist on its own. He provides further information and support to this idea before moving on to the next idea that myth "...transforms history into nature" (Barthes 129). This then, as stated in a footnote, is nothing more than an extension of Marx's ideas, but this is important to note because as Liliane Welch says "...Barthes grounds his study in contemporary French life. He sees things robbed of their historicity...as they enter into myths..." (Welch 563). This explains the purpose of this particular book and why it was written in the order that it was.

In 1957 René Girard's article "Man, Myth and Malraux" appeared in *Yale French Studies*. In this work Girard did not define myth, rather he looked toward Malraux for an understanding of myth from which he was able to say what myth is not; "It is not truth, not even partial truth since myths contradict each other, since no synthesis, not even peaceful coexistence is possible in them" (55). In 1959, Roger Caillois wrote in the *Man and the Sacred* that "mythology in one

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<sup>5</sup> This idea of course was not new. Jean-Pierre Vernant traced the idea of myth being language originally to Mauss, then Granet, and then Gernet in 1917, in his volume *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*.

form or other frequently opposes ... [the] ... antithetical elements of the sacred, which seem to illustrate the temptations to passivity and activity respectively” (Caillois 129). Claude Rivière would sum up the work of both of these gentlemen in 1991;

René Girard, qui voit dans le comportement mimétique la nature de base des relations sociales, dans le sacrifice du bouc émissaire, l’expression d’une violence fondatrice et la source du mythe, nous pensons Roger Caillois plus à même d’expliquer notre tendance moderne à fabuler d’une certaine façon, par son recours à l’inscription biologique des mythes (Rivière 8).

In *Myth and Reality* (1962), Mircea Eliade states that myth “...is always an account of a ‘creation’” (6). That is not to say that myth tells only about creation, i.e., the origins of Man, but how things came about in this world, as well. Eliade seems to suggest that myth is dead, it was something of the past that pertained to ‘primitive’ man and as “modern” men we have since evolved. He states that this particular study deals with “...societies in which myth is- or was until very recently-‘living’ ...To understand the structure and function of myths in these traditional societies not only serves to clarify a stage in the history of human thought but also helps us to understand a category of our contemporaries “ (Eliade 2). Later he states that “...in ‘primitive’ societies myths are still living, still establish and justify all human conduct and activity” (Eliade 5).

Percy S. Cohen examined many of the current, “major” theories of myth at the time in his paper “Theories of Myth” and does a good job summarizing what others have discussed up to that point in time, 1969. Through his research he was able to conclude that myth is characterized by the following:

- 1) A myth is a narrative of events
- 2) The narrative has a sacred quality
- 3) The sacred communication is made in symbolic form
- 4) At least some of the events and objects in the myth neither occur, nor exist in the world other than that of myth, itself.
- 5) The narrative refers in dramatic form to origins or transformations.

Further, Cohen identifies and explains briefly seven types of myth:

- 1) Myth as a form of symbolic statement (See Cassirer).
- 2) Myth as explanation (See Frazer and Tylor).
- 3) Myth as an expression of the unconscious (See Jung).
- 4) Myth as a function in creating and maintaining social solidarity (See Durkheim).
- 5) Myth as a function in legitimating social institutions and practices (See Raglan).
- 6) Myth as a form of symbolic state about social structure (See Leach).
- 7) Myth as explained by the structuralist theory (Cohen 338).

For Cohen, it is the quality of narration that sets apart myths from general ideas. The sacredness, origin references, and transformations differentiate myths from legends and folktales. The narrative and references to mythical beings and people differs myth from history, yet at the same time he does state that myth could be a possible substitute for history or pseudo-history (Cohen 337/352). The reason that the narrative is of such importance is that it provides a specific order of events. This order then provides a specific beginning and ending

which “anchors” this series of events in a set moment of time. According to Cohen, “[it is this]...that anchors the present in the past” (Cohen 349) which in turn is the most important function of myth. By “...anchoring the present in the past, then it will draw to it the symbols and images of primordial awareness which, in most human minds, will be linked with what is infantile and repressed in the unconscious” (Cohen 350). Cohen ends by stating that “...if myth anchors the present in the past, then prophecy anchors it in the future. Prophecy is a sort of myth in reverse” (Cohen 351).

Like Cohen, E. Thomas Lawson examined the theories of myth of the “present,” the late 1960s, early 1970s at the time, nine years later in his paper *The Explanation of Myth and Myth as Explanation*. In particular he looked at the ideas of:

- Robin Horton and the *Theory of Formal Continuity but Idiomatic Discontinuity Between Myth as Explanation and Science as Explanation*.
- Peter Winch and the *Theory of Conceptual Relativism*.
- Steven Lukes and the *Theory of Rational Dualism*.
- I C Jarvie and the *Theory of Situational Logic*.

According to Lawson, the aforementioned are four different versions of myth as explanation that “...take myths at their face value and then, by various means, attempt to show how such explanations are to be understood” (Lawson 507). For Lawson, none of these theories are able to sufficiently support their claims. The theorist who Lawson does feel provides the best theory and explanation of myth is Claude Lévi-Strauss.

Raphael Patai in *Myth and Modern Man* (1972) compiled together one of the more comprehensive volumes on the ideas and theories surrounding myth before examining more

contemporary ideas, e.g. the “Playboy” appeal and James Bond, similar to what Barthes was doing, to show how myths still exist in and influence contemporary society. Georges Dumézil on the other hand in his work *From Myth to Fiction: The Saga of Hadingus* (1973) did not attempt to arrive at a new theory or definition of myth, instead he showed what role myth has played in the field of literature by demonstrating the transformation of myth into fiction utilizing Scandinavian myths. Joseph Baumgartner in “Myth and Mythology” (1974) agrees with Eliade that myth tells about origins, but where he differs is that he says that “the primary function of myth is to ground present events in the primordial divine acts and by ritual re-enactment, to establish them ever anew” (Baumgartner 196). He then goes on to categorize myths according to type, e.g., -anthropogonic myths deal with Man’s creation, soteriological myths deal with divine intervention, theogonic myths address the gods’ beginnings, etc.

In Jean-Paul Vernant’s work *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece* (1980), he does not offer a new definition or theory of myth, but he does support the idea that myth is language and that changes occur within myths in every society- It seems as though Vernant was discussing more evolutionary changes in how myths are developed and interpreted, much in the same way language itself is, as discussed by Barthes. Vernant calls for a distinction between oral and written myths because for him they are very different and the manner in which one analyzes them is also different, e.g. Lévi-Strauss’ methodology is only applicable to oral myths according to Vernant.

Stephen C. Ausband introduced a “new” definition of myth in *Myth and Meaning, Myth and Order* (1983). In this work he defines myth as “...tales, that are accepted, on the whole, as either true to historical fact or as reinforcing and demonstrating a society’s understanding of

the truth about natural phenomena, and which are treated seriously by most members of society” (Ausband 6). Like Lévi-Strauss he believes that myths originated from Man’s need for order within the world. Unlike Barthes and Vernant, he believes that “...myths die as societies change, but the need for the myth does not die because man’s need for order does not change or die” (Ausband 2).

For Ivan Strenski on the other hand, myth simply does not exist, which he states in his book *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth-Century History* (1987). According to Strenski, the only thing that does exist is the “industry” of myth, not myth, itself. Norman Austin in *Meaning and Being in Myth* (1989) reiterates that the purpose of myth is explanation, but adds to it that myth is “...the medium for the articulation of our experience in the world and for the world’s revelation of its own inner dynamic to the human mind” (Austin 5).

### **2.3.6 Myth in Recent Years**

The scholarly research and discussion of myth is still very much alive, but I would argue that it is nothing like the explosion of myth theories and ideas seen from the 1950s to the 1980s. More often than not, researchers are using the definitions and theories set out by their predecessors and unlike their predecessors rather than establishing new theories and definitions, they are building upon their predecessors’ original ideas. Further, there seems to be a shift from examining myth and the “primitive man” to myth and the “modern man.” Some of the more recent scholarly publications are discussed below.

Claude Rivière in his article “Mythes Modernes au Coeur de l’Idéologie” (1991) states that “les mythes modernes ont pour caractéristique d’être sociogoniques et non cosmogoniques...ils s’énoncent en des supports comme le cinéma, la science-fiction, la

publicité” (Rivière 5). Mildred E. Mathias in her article “Magic, Myth and Medicine” (1994) defines myth as “A...story, the origin of which is forgotten, that ostensibly relates historical events, which are usually of such character as to serve to explain some practice, belief, institution or natural phenomenon” (Mathias 3). Erich Kolig in his article “A Sense of History and the Reconstitution of Cosmology in Australian Aboriginal Society” (1995) does not propose to offer a new theory of myth or attempt to define myth, rather his purpose is to show how the traditional myths of an Aboriginal group in the Kimberleys have become “...metamorphosed into history consciousness, i.e., into a perspective which attributes significance to social and historical process” (Kolig 50). Jed Deppman in his article “Jean-Luc Nancy, Myth, and Literature” (1997) argues that myth is not literature, it is simply myth which he says in popular culture is a “...lie which others believe” (Deppman 17). Patrick D. Nunn in his article “On the Convergence of Myth and Reality: Examples from the Pacific Islands” (2001) borrows his definition of myth from G. S. Kirk and defines them simply as “traditional oral tales” (Nunn 125).

## **2.4 Claude Lévi-Strauss and Myth**

### **2.4.1 Interpretations and Criticisms of Lévi-Strauss**

Whether they are criticisms or interpretations, many individuals have written on the work of Lévi-Strauss. In the following section, I shall examine some of these interpretations and criticisms.

Claude Lévi-Strauss, Lawson states, “...defines his project as a theoretical description of the formal properties of mythic systems” (Lawson 518). Lawson says that Lévi-Strauss accomplishes this by utilizing the previously discussed work of Ferdinand de Saussure and R. Jakobson. Lévi-Strauss identifies myth as a sort of “system,” or “structure” in the Saussure

tradition and utilizes Jakobson's theory of how phonological rules operate to "...develop a hypothesis that underlying particular myths there lies a system of relationships very similar to the kind of structure underlying acts of human speech" (Lawson 518). Lawson continues to elaborate stating that according to Lévi-Strauss, myths are systems of homologies and that "... [they] exist because human beings have discovered the conceptual and practical importance of developing elaborate taxonomies...in the canonical form A:B::C:D" (Lawson 519). For Lawson, Lévi-Strauss' greatest accomplishment was identifying myths as "structures" or "systems." Lawson states that Lévi-Strauss' attempt to identify the meaning of myth was not very successful. The weakest aspect of Lévi-Strauss' work is the idea that "...just as meaningless sounds are combined to form meaningful words, so meaningless mythic and ritual constituents are combined to form meaningful homologies" (Lawson 520). Lawson agrees with Sperber in that "...any natural language consists of three components, the phonological, the syntactic and the semantic" and that it is utterly impossible to derive semantic theory from phonological theory (Lawson 520).

Cohen on the other hand disagrees with Lawson. For Cohen, Lévi-Strauss never fully defined or explained his theory of myth. Instead, as Cohen demonstrates, Lévi-Strauss utilizes the same myth continuously to attempt to explain what myth is and what myth is not, but never fully identifies a theory or attempts to support it. Cohen states that Lévi-Strauss will propose a question, answer it briefly, and that is it. Lévi-Strauss does not follow up with additional questions, questions that would be utilized to formulate a proper theory. Cohen does credit Lévi-Strauss with identifying myths as a "structure" or "system", but he states that "...Lévi-Strauss is not ...interested in structure as something opposed to theme, motif, or



content...” (Cohen 346). He continues by stating the work of Lévi-Strauss merely “—results in a narrative of events—,” which —“are of relatively little importance in the process of communication” (Cohen 347).

Michael Carroll offers a critique of Lévi-Strauss’ work with the Oedipus myth. Carroll goes on to describe what Lévi-Strauss has done and says that Lévi-Strauss has developed four categories in which the structure of myth is divided: 1) the undervaluation of blood relations, 2) the overvaluation of blood relations, 3) the denial of man’s autochthonous origins, and 4) the affirmation of man’s autochthonous origins. Carroll proceeds to describe how Lévi-Strauss divided some of the events in the Oedipus myth into these different categories. According to Carroll the first category makes sense, but the other three do not and for Carroll this is a weakness in Lévi-Strauss’ idea. In examining the second category, according to Carroll, only one of the events truly matches this description. As for the rest, Carroll says when one looks at the full story, one will see that the events from the Oedipus myth that Lévi-Strauss has listed as being in category 2, actually fall in category 1, the undervaluation of blood relations. Carroll disputes the events that Lévi-Strauss has listed in category 3 because, referencing Greek mythology; he argues that Cadmus and the Sphinx were both born of man and woman. Carroll does the same for the fourth category. He says that Lévi-Strauss has made up the meanings of these names to qualify his idea because Carroll can find no evidence of said translations. Finally he goes on to state that he cannot find any evidence of “lameness” amongst the Greek myths. In the second part of the article, Carroll provides an analysis of the entire Theban Saga which includes the Oedipus myth. He starts by pointing out that he is not meaning this article as an attack on the structural approach, itself, because he believes the structural approach can

actually be quite useful in examining the Theban Saga. Carroll points out that a number of events point to the idea of the devaluation of patrilineal kin ties and goes on to provide 11 examples of such. Specifically he says that there are two types of devaluation of patrilineal kin ties; 1a) the hostility of a Theban ruler towards a patrilineal relatives and 1b) a female relative of a Theban ruler, not necessarily patrilineally related, who causes the death of her son, either directly or indirectly, which Carroll sees as a threat to the patrilineal line of the ruler. Finally he says, and provides examples, where there is an affirmation of patrilineal kin ties. In concluding, Carroll summarizes his ideas in stating that Lévi-Strauss was wrong in that the four categories he described do not exist for the Oedipus myth. Further by examining the Theban Saga in its entirety, then one sees that the two major categories are the devaluation and the affirmation of patrilineal kin ties.

Mosko is rather critical of the work of Lévi-Strauss. He mentions how Lévi-Strauss, himself, has never fully developed his idea or theory of myth. According to Mosko, Lévi-Strauss only mentions it in passing in his works. Mosko describes Lévi-Strauss' work as:  $f_x(a):f_y(b)=f_x(b):f_a^{-1}(y)$ . Further he states that if Lévi-Strauss had accurately defined myth or developed a proper formula, then his ideas, his formula should be relative to other ideas. The example that Mosko refers to is kinship. Mosko then goes on to attempt to interpret Lévi-Strauss' formula to which he comes to the conclusion of "I/II::II/IV" which he describes as "hairsplitting logic." Mosko then introduces the work of Pierre and Elli Kongas Maranda who he calls "authorities" on the interpretation of Lévi-Strauss' formula. For them the problem with Lévi-Strauss' formula is that it is nonlinear and the analogy is attempting to make it linear. The Marandas use a discourse similar to something seen in a calculus text to explain. In short what

they say is that Lévi-Strauss' formula does explain how myths are created in order to provide an answer to a contradiction. Pierre and Elli Kongas Maranda and then Mosko, use examples of servants to explain how this formula is what seems to be backwards in their minds. Maranda, Kongas Maranda, and Mosko move their discussion to that of non-myth in which they state that Lévi-Strauss' formula is not applicable as written. By making some slight adjustments, what Mosko interprets as  $fx(a):fy(b)::fx(b):fx(a)$ , then and only then is Lévi-Strauss' formula applicable to myth, but it is important to note this is only applicable within the proper boundaries.

Marcel Hénaff in his book *Claude Lévi-Strauss and the Making of Structural Anthropology* says that Lévi-Strauss has identified three different approaches to the study of myth:

- 1) For certain approaches (with philosophical or psychological tendencies), myths are the expression of fundamental human emotions and the dramatization of their conflicts.
- 2) For others (with symbolist tendencies), myths are the metaphorical translation of natural phenomena (meteorological, astronomical) that are difficult to explain.
- 3) For still others (with sociological tendencies), myths reflect the structures of the society and offer, in the imaginary, a solution to problems that cannot be resolved in reality (Hénaff 159).

Hénaff says that these approaches make myth seem outdated, or "archaic" and goes on to state that Lévi-Strauss "...posits the hypothesis that myths from the same cultural area make up a system (as a language is said to do) (Hénaff 160). Again, no specific definition of myth is

provided and Hénaff continues his work by criticizing various aspects of Lévi-Strauss' use of structural analysis.

According to Dr. Mary Klages, of the University of Colorado at Boulder, Lévi-Strauss' principal aim was to utilize structuralism in order to explain why myths seem so similar, not to define what myth is. René Girard states in "Shakespeare's Theory of Mythology," that "Lévi-Strauss primarily operates with one principle, his principle of binary differentiation—which Lévi-Strauss realizes [is a] failure [later on and] in the last chapter of *L'Homme nu*, he implicitly acknowledges it, but in the case of ritual only" (Girard 1).

No discussion of the works of Lévi-Strauss would be complete without mention of the volume written by Edmund Leach on Lévi-Strauss. It is a rather short book which attempts to put Lévi-Strauss' ideas into more simplified terms. Leach in the very beginning says that he has attempted to withhold any bias towards Lévi-Strauss and does so for about the first 2, 3 chapters before he really begins to criticize his work. I am not going to go into detail about these criticisms. What is important in Leach's work is Leach's interpretation of Lévi-Strauss' ideas. For Leach, "Lévi-Strauss' thesis is that by noticing how we apprehend nature, by observing the qualities of the classifications which we use and the way we manipulate the resulting categories, we shall be able to infer crucial facts about the mechanism of thinking" (Leach 21).

As I have shown above, there are a number of possible different interpretations with regard to the work of Lévi-Strauss and there are number of criticisms. The common recurring ideas seem to be that; 1) Lévi-Strauss never defined myth, 2) Lévi-Strauss never wrote a theory

of myth, and 3) Lévi-Strauss was concerned with the analysis of myth using a structural methodology. Now I shall turn my attention to the source, himself, Claude Lévi-Strauss.

#### **2.4.2 Lévi-Strauss: The Source**

As suggested by the title of this section and as mentioned at the end of the previous section, in this section, I am going to examine the works of Lévi-Strauss. This section will consist of two parts. In the first, I will discuss Lévi-Strauss' ideas and in the second, I will discuss Lévi-Strauss' methodology. In this section, I intend to argue that:

- 1) Lévi-Strauss did define myth and did discuss myth in great detail.
- 2) Lévi-Strauss did not have an overall theory of myth, but there was a reasoning and purpose behind this.

*Tristes Tropiques* (1973) was written by Lévi-Strauss during the years 1954-1955. In a sense this book could be said to be an ethnography of the indigenous peoples of Brazil, on the other hand Lévi-Strauss does go in to some detail about his travels and experiences in Asia which don't always seem to relate. If that is not confusing enough, then much of the beginning of the book is very biographical and explanatory which is helpful because it does assist in understanding Lévi-Strauss' logic, but does not necessarily fit in. What is important about his book is that Lévi-Strauss defines myth. He says that myth “—has survived only in fragmentary form but, as it has come down to us refined by succeeding centuries, it has a splendid

simplicity, and presents in the most concise form the obvious truth—” (Lévi-Strauss 182).<sup>6</sup>

Later, Lévi-Strauss adds to that by saying:

In that mythic age, man was no freer than he is today; but only his humanness made him a slave. Since his control over nature remained very limited, he was protected- and to some extent released from bondage- by a cushioning of dreams. As these dreams were gradually transformed into knowledge, man’s power increased and became a great source of pride... (Lévi-Strauss 391).

Summing up Lévi-Strauss, myth was nothing more than an archaic way of explaining the world. As such, myth was an archaic form of knowledge, the truth, as known to a people. His definition seems to suggest that myth continues to evolve and still exists in the present, but in a greatly altered or fragmented state.

The translated version of *A World on the Wane* was published in 1961. Overall this book could be described as partly biographical, how he “loathes” travelling and travelers, to how he became an anthropologist, and partly ethnographical, having discussed various villages and peoples he visited in Brazil, yet at the same time it is not too descriptive. In this particular volume he has this to say about myth: “in that myth-minded age, man was no more free than he is today; but it was his humanness alone which kept him enslaved” (Lévi-Strauss 390). *Conversations with Claude Lévi-Strauss* was originally published in 1961, but the translated version followed in 1969. This work is a collection of conversations between Georges Charbonnier and Claude Lévi-Strauss, much as the title implies with regard to a number of

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<sup>6</sup> This definition was, also, mentioned in his journal article, “The Structural Study of Myth” (1955), in which Lévi-Strauss simply stated, “...we define myth as consisting of all its versions; to put it otherwise: a myth remains the same as long as it is felt as much” (Lévi-Strauss 435).

different topics. In these conversations, Lévi-Strauss does not discuss myth, but he does discuss culture, which of course is related to his work with myth. When asked by Charbonnier if culture originated in nature, Lévi-Strauss replied “let us say that it implies a number of factors which belong to the realm of nature” (Charbonnier 148). Lévi-Strauss discusses a lot about systems in his conversations. He sees art as not only language, but as a “system of signs.” In one of the last conversations, Lévi-Strauss says “I think all problems are linguistic ones... language seems to me to be the cultural phenomenon par excellence, for several reasons...” (Charbonnier 150). On language Lévi-Strauss says that language is part of culture and that language is the essential instrument, the special means by which we assimilate culture (Charbonnier 150).

*The Savage Mind* (1966) was originally written in 1962 and does not define myth, per se. This book discusses three different subjects; 1) The argument of the “bricoleur” and the engineer, 2) Totemism, and 3) the argument against Sartre. I am going to focus just on the first subject. With that said, Lévi-Strauss’ entire argument is that “primitive” man was just as capable as “modern” man of intellectual thought. Lévi-Strauss describes “modern” man as an engineer due to his use of science and “primitive” man as a “bricoleur.” The term ‘bricoleur’ has a long history and the meaning of the word cannot be accurately translated, but as many have done, to make things simple, the term ‘jack-of-all-trades’ is utilized when describing the “bricoleur.” Just as the “jack-of-all-trades” make do with the resources available to him, so does the “bricoleur.” Rather than use science to explain the world and the things in the world as the “engineer” does, the “bricoleur” uses myth. Although, the “bricoleur’s” explanations may not be technical and full of theory, they do the same job as the scientific theories and ideas of the “engineer.” It is also in this book that Lévi-Strauss, in the same section on the “bricoleur” and

the “engineer” that Lévi-Strauss identifies myths as being structures, although he does not go into too much discussion, saving that for *Mythologiques*.

Of course no discussion of the work of Lévi-Strauss could be complete without mention of his *Mythologiques*. The *Mythologiques* are a four-volume set written between the years 1964 and 1971. The first volume, *The Raw and the Cooked*, is the most important volume of the entire set because it really establishes what Lévi-Strauss is setting out to do. On the very first page of the book he says that “the aim of this book is to show how empirical categories... can... be used as conceptual tools with which to elaborate abstract ideas and combine them in the form of propositions” (Lévi-Strauss i). In this volume, as with the others, Lévi-Strauss does not define myth, nor does he attempt to establish a theory of myths, in fact early on he says,

I cannot accept overhasty pronouncements about what is mythology and what is not; but rather I claim the right to make use of any manifestation of the mental or social activities of the communities under consideration which seems likely to allow me, as the analysis proceeds, to complete or explain the myth, even though it may not constitute or obligate accompaniment of the myth in a musician’s sense of the term (Lévi-Strauss 4).

Further, he says that he does not categorize myths because he wants to let the myths reveal themselves (Lévi-Strauss 4). After establishing what it is he is and is not going to do, then Lévi-Strauss begins a discussion of how myth and music are related. Lévi-Strauss moves on to his examination of the myths and in this particular volume he focuses on myths from various indigenous people in South America. In this volume Lévi-Strauss, also, establishes *le triangle culinaire* which then shows binary opposites at work and shows how nature becomes culture.



In *The Raw and the Cooked*, Lévi-Strauss focuses on food, raw and cooked. In the second volume, *From Honey to Ashes*, Lévi-Strauss does the exact same thing, but this time with honey and tobacco working again with myths from South America. The most important bit of information from this volume comes from the forward, in which he establishes the idea that “...the world of mythology is round, and therefore does not refer back to any necessary starting point” (Lévi-Strauss 13). *The Origin of Table Manners* is once again a continuation of the previous two volumes, but it is interesting because at the very beginning he does suggest that one could start with *The Origin of Table Manners* and then work their way backward, or go back to the first volume. Unlike the second volume, it was not necessary to go in order. Again, just as with the previous two volumes Lévi-Strauss is working with South American myths from different indigenous groups and follows with the idea that “no one myth is completely explicit, but by shuffling them round one over the other until, they coincide, I have made them reveal as through a grid, the common message of which each conceals a fragment or an aspect” (Lévi-Strauss 180). It is idea of allowing myths to speak for themselves rather than trying to categorize them. In this volume, though, he does come to the following key points:

- 1) When the myths look at the things from the human point of view, the primary opposition is between nature and culture, which coincides with the geographical pole of the cosmic dichotomy (Lévi-Strauss 186).
- 2) Thus, in mythic thought the category of time appears as the necessary means for revealing relations between other relations already given in space. The genre of the novel, which as has been seen, has its source in seriality, following on the reduction of differential features, also derives from an

increased complexity in the logical nature of the separated terms (Lévi-Strauss 190-1).

The final volume of the *Mythologiques* is *The Naked Man* in which Lévi-Strauss is not trying to introduce any new material, in fact he states in the book that one of the overall purposes of this book was to tie up any and all loose ends with regard to the three previous volumes and in the final chapter of the book, he spends a great deal of time addressing the number of criticisms that he had received from the previous three volumes. What is different about this volume is that rather than working with myths from indigenous cultures in South America, he shifts his attention to myths from indigenous cultures in the Northwest and Arctic regions of North America. For Lévi-Strauss this provides further support that myths of any culture are related and when broken down structurally and examined all myths can be broken down to one dichotomy, culture versus nature. He offers the explanation for this conclusion that the South American Indians and the North American Indians were related, having crossed the Bering Straight at different times in their pre-histories, hinting that all peoples were related, but not actually stating it.

*Myth and Meaning: Cracking the Code of Culture* was a book based on a series of talks that were broadcast in 1977 on the CBC program, *Ideas*. In these talks, Lévi-Strauss never defines myth or identifies a theory of myth, as suggested previously. In one of the discussions Lévi-Strauss, and this goes back to *The Savage Mind*, discusses the idea that myth precedes science which replaced myth around the seventeenth and eighteenth century. In another talk he reiterates what he says in *The Savage Mind*, in that “primitive” man is indeed capable of intellectual thought. Finally in the last talk, which is simply a different version of the first, Lévi-

Strauss discusses how myth precedes history and how history has currently replaced myth, yet they both serve the same function in a society.

The rest of the 1970s, the 1980s, and into the 1990s, Lévi-Strauss published works that were written either further supporting the ideas already established or he branched off into new areas and applied his ideas to those new areas. For example, there is the work *The Way of the Masks* (1982) which was originally published in 1971. In this work, Lévi-Strauss examined the masks used by Indians of the northwest coast region of North America. He took his ideas of myth and the structural study of myth to apply them to help support his hypothesis with regard to the masks:

For this individuality to stand out against that of another mask, it is necessary that the same relationship exist between the message that the first mask has to transmit or connote and the message that the other mask must convey within the same culture or in a neighboring culture (Lévi-Strauss 14).

Again, it was Lévi-Strauss' idea that an individual myth, or in this instance a mask, could not be studied on its own. It had to be studied within the context of all myths, or all masks, in order for the true message, the relationship, to be established. In *The View from Afar*, originally published in 1983, translated in 1985, Lévi-Strauss takes a turn and touches on a number of different topics from kinship to race and culture to the anthropologist. He does mention myths briefly, but it is nothing more than a reiteration of things said already; "...different myths result from a transformation that obeys certain rules of symmetry and inversion: myths reflect each other according to axes on which one can construct the list" (Lévi-Strauss 108). In *The Jealous Potter*, which was written in the mid-80s and translated in 1988, Lévi-Strauss returns to his

structural study of myth. In this volume he is intent on proving that jealousy, the potter, and the goatsucker are all related and in turn there is a link between pottery and the origin of man. In a very brief mention in a footnote, he returns to his formula,  $F(x)(a):F(y)(b)::F(y)(x):F(a)-1(b)$ . Finally, in *Look, Listen, Read*, which was originally published in 1993 and translated in 1997, Lévi-Strauss turns his focus to art and music. In this volume, there is only the slightest mention of his work with myth and that is a brief notation with regard to the conclusion of *The Naked Man*.

Early on in his career, Lévi-Strauss may have defined myth, but this definition changed, his ideas evolved. Myth then became this thing that could not be definable because for Lévi-Strauss myth encompassed everything from art and indigenous masks, to music, to kinship, to the very origins of the world. Lévi-Strauss wanted myth to speak for itself, not he for it. At the same time this was not his theory of myth. Lévi-Strauss did not write a theory of myth, nor did he intend to. In an article, "Structuralism and Myth," published in *The Kenyon Review*, Lévi-Strauss states that:

The preceding remarks do not amount to a theory, and still less are they meant as the preliminary outline of a philosophy; I hope they will be taken for what they are: the free-ranging intellectual musings, tinged with confusion and error, that the subject indulges in, during the short time when, having been released from one task, he does not yet know in what new one he will again dissolve his identity (Lévi-Strauss 86).

### 2.4.3 Lévi-Strauss: The Method

Lévi-Strauss discussed the gathering of myths at the beginning of *The Raw and the Cooked*. The first step in his method was to select one myth from one culture and analyze it. He then took other myths from the same culture and analyzed them before moving on to a neighboring culture and analyzing their myths. All of the myths that he collected, however, were then referenced to the “original,” i.e. the first, myth which he started working with. (Lévi-Strauss 1-4).

Lévi-Strauss first discussed the analysis of myths in “The Structural Study of Myth” which he then applied to the myths discussed in *The Raw and the Cooked*. In “The Structural Study of Myth,” Lévi-Strauss analyzed the Oedipus myth because according to him most everyone is familiar with this myth and no explanation of the myth would be needed. In his analysis he examines a myth one at a time. He breaks down each myth into the smallest sentences and writes each on a notecard. That notecard is then assigned a number which pertains to which part of the story the sentence corresponds to. Once this is completed, then the note cards are sorted and placed into groups according to the number assigned by each. He likens the outcome to an orchestra score. The results are then charted on a graph. (See Table 1: Oedipus Mythemes)

TABLE 1

OEDIPUS MYTHEMES

1	2	3	4
Cadmost seeks his sister, Europa, ravished by Zeus			
		Cadmos kills the dragon	
	The Spartoi kill one another		
			Labdacos (Laios' father)- lame (?)
	Oedipus kills his father, Laios		Laios (Oedipus' father)= left- sided (?)
		Oedipus kills the Sphinx	
			Oedipus=swollen foot (?)
Oedipus marris his mother, Jocasta			
	Eteocles kills his brother, Polynices		
Antigone buries her brother, Polynices, despite prohibition			

Lévi-Strauss continues and says that the story can be read either straight across, one row to the next, or it can be read top to bottom, one column to the next. With these sentences, what Lévi-Strauss deems “mythemes,” laid out on a chart, the relationships become obvious.- This is what Lévi-Strauss meant by letting the myth tell its own story. For Lévi-Strauss, the first column represented the overrating of blood relations and the second column was the underrating of blood relations. This is the first relationship. The third column is the denial of the autochthonous origin of man and the fourth column is the persistence of the autochthonous origin of man. This is the second relationship. This leads Lévi-Strauss to the conclusion that “the myth has to do with the inability, for a culture which holds the belief that mankind is autochthonous, to find a satisfactory transition between this theory and the knowledge that human beings are actually born from the union of man and woman” (Lévi-Strauss 434).

## CHAPTER 3

### THE IDEA OF INTERTEXTUALITY

#### 3.1 The Idea of Intertextuality

Researchers have traced the idea of 'intertextuality' to Ferdinand de Saussure and his work *Cours de linguistique générale* (1915.) In said work, Saussure stated:

La langue est un système de signes exprimant des idées et par là comparable à l'écriture, à l'alphabet des sourds-muets, aux rites symboliques, aux formes de politesse, aux signaux militaires, etc. etc. Elle est simplement le plus important de ces systèmes. On peut donc concevoir une science qui étudie la vie des signes au sein de la vie sociale. Elle formerait une partie de la psychologie sociale et par conséquent de la psychologie générale. Nous la nommerons sémiologie-du grec sémion, signe- elle nous apprendrait en quoi consistent les signes, quelles lois les régissent. Puisqu'elle n'existe pas encore, on ne peut pas dire ce qu'elle sera.

Mais elle a droit à l'existence, sa place est déterminée d'avance (Saussure 3).

According to Graham Allen in *Intertextuality*, Saussure was concerned with the question of "what is a linguistic sign?;" Saussure, broke a sign down into individual parts and doing so led him to conclude that a sign can be viewed as a "two-sided coin" in which one side is a "signified," or a concept, and the other is a "signifier," or a sound or image. This idea then "...emphasizes that its meaning is nonreferential: a sign is not a word's reference to some object in the world but the combination, conveniently sanctioned, between a signifier and a signified" (Allen 8).



Saussure's ideas paved the way for the research of the Russian literary theorist M. M. Bakhtin, who focused on the specific area of intertextuality, although he is not credited as the "founder" of intertextuality- that credit goes to Julia Kristeva, who first coined the term. In his "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin describes the language of a novel as a "system." After identifying this, he moves on to talk about the style of a novel in which he says "...whether to a disclosing of the novelist's individual dialect (that is, his vocabulary, his syntax) or to a disclosing of the distinctive features of the work taken as a 'complete speech act,' an 'utterance' (Bakhtin 264). These "utterances" were what he was most concerned with, as Graham Allen points out;

Bakhtin along with Volosinov argued that "...all language responds to previous utterances and to pre-existent patterns of meaning and evaluation, but also promotes and seeks to promote further responses. One cannot understand an utterance or even a written work as if it were singular in meaning, unconnected to previous and future utterances or works, no utterance or work...is independent...or "monumental" (Allen 19).

In the Kristeva's work *Revolution in Poetic Language*, she states that:

As we know, Freud specifies two fundamental "processes" in the work of the unconscious: *displacement* and *condensation*. Kruszeski and Jakobson introduced them, in a different way, during the early stages of structural linguistics, through the concepts of *metonymy* and *metaphor*, which have since been interpreted in light of psychoanalysis. To these we must add a third "process"- *the passage from one sign system to another*. To be sure, this process comes about through a combination of displacement and condensation, but this does not account for its total operation. It also involves an altering of the thetic *position*- the destruction of the old position and the formation of a new one. The new signifying system may be produced with the same signifying material; in language, for example, the passage may be made from narrative to text. Or it may be borrowed from different signifying materials: the transposition from a carnival scene to the written text, for instance. In this connection we examined the formation of a specific signifying system-the novel- as the result of a redistribution of several different sign systems: carnival, courtly poetry, scholastic discourse. The term *inter-textuality* denotes this transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into

another...If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an inter-textuality), one then understands that its “place” of enunciation and its denoted “object” are never single, complete, and identical to themselves. In this way polysemy can also be seen as the result of a semiotic polyvalence—an adherence to different sign systems (Kristeva 59-60).

In “Chapter 3: Word, Dialogue, and Novel,” of *Desire in Language*, Kristeva elaborates further on this idea. She utilized the ideas of Bakhtin and Saussure to further develop this new idea of ‘intertextuality.’ It was especially Bakhtin’s work with dialogical relationships<sup>7</sup> and ambivalence<sup>8</sup> which led Kristeva to conclude that “...within the interior space of the text as well as within the space of texts, poetic language is a ‘double.’ For Kristeva, “the notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least *double*” (Kristeva 66). In this section, Kristeva is focused on poetry and according to Kristeva, Saussure’s idea of the signifier and the signified does not work because it overlooks what she describes as the “unit,” or the individual word. To put this into context the word ‘tree,’ referencing one of Saussure’s own words from his work, does not always mean a ‘tree,’ there is a form of duplicity at play which Saussure’s ideas do not explain because according to Saussure, one is supposed to think of a tree, the object, when seeing the word ‘tree.’ This is where Bakhtin’s work comes into play because he broke things down into individual words or what he deemed “utterances.” Just as

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<sup>7</sup> “While insisting on the difference between dialogical relationships and specifically linguistic ones, Bakhtin emphasizes that those structuring a narrative (for example, writer/character, to which we would add subject of enunciation/subject of utterance) are possible because dialogism is inherent in language itself. Without explaining exactly what makes up this double aspect of language, he nonetheless insists that ‘dialogue is the only sphere possible for the life of language.’ Today we can detect dialogical relationships on several levels of language: first, within the *combinative* dyad, langue/parole; and secondly, within the systems either of langue (as collective, monological contracts as well as systems of correlative value actualized in dialogue with the other) or of parole (as essentially ‘combinative,’ not pure creation, but individual formation based on the exchange of signs” (Kristeva 67-8).

<sup>8</sup> “The term ‘ambivalence’ implies the insertion of history (society) into a text and of this text into history; for the writer, they are one and the same. When he speaks of ‘two paths merging within the narrative,’ Bakhtin considers writing as a reading of the anterior literary corpus and the text as an absorption of and a reply to another text” (Kristeva 68-9).

with Saussure, Kristeva did not feel that Bakhtin had gone far enough because once again using the example of “tree” when viewing it as a “word” or an “utterance,” then one thinks simply of the “definition” of the word “tree,” which could be defined as “a plant that is tall and comprised of bark and has branches with many leaves.” As Kristeva points out that is not always the case with poetry because the poet may be describing a tree, but at the same time this tree also takes on the role, i.e., it is a symbol, of a mother who provides food and shelter. Taking this a step further, that tree could also be representative of, or a reference to, another literary work for example. A text’s meaning is understood as its temporary arrangement of elements with socially pre-existent meanings. For Kristeva, “any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Becker-Leckrone 155).

Intertextuality is not simply a system of references or quotes, but it is a “semiotic superstructure” that is required in order that language systems may function (Becker-Leckrone 156). In later years, intertextuality has been defined in a number of ways, oft times more simplistic than those of Kristeva. Jeffrey Fischer in “Killing at Close Range: A Study of Intertextuality,” defines intertextuality as “the current and comprehensive literary term for the concept that each text exists in relation to others and is framed by other texts in many ways” (28). Dr. Renata R. Mautner Wasserman in “Mario Vargas Llosa, Euclides da Cunha, and the Strategy of Intertextuality,” defines intertextuality as “...when literary texts connect with other literary texts, with nonliterary texts, and with broadly conceived cultural contexts” (460). Lucie Hotte-Pilon in “L’autre texte/Le texte de l’Autre” states simply “un texte n’existe jamais seul. Il s’inscrit dans une constellation de rapports d’analogie, de ressemblance ou d’opposition avec d’autres textes” (67). Drs. Bloome and Egan-Robertson in “The Social Construction of

Intertextuality in Classroom Reading and Writing Lessons” define intertextuality as not a “juxtaposition of texts,” but a social construction which is a “...grounded broader view of social interaction as a linguistic process” (305, 308).

Others like Jonathan Culler in “Presupposition and Intertextuality” states that there are two ways to approach intertextuality. The first is to look at the “specific presuppositions” of texts. By doing so, one is approaching intertextuality in much the same way as other researchers; looking at the text as relating to other texts. The second is to look at intertextuality as the study of “rhetorical or pragmatic presupposition” which in turns leads to a discussion of poetics. Further he goes on to state how both of these approaches leave a vast middle ground which he calls “application” and which he describes as “...the bringing to bear of one body of discourse on another in an effort to release energy” (1395).

The vast majority of individuals cite the work of Kristeva or Bakhtin in order to describe intertextuality, as Valderez Helena Gil Junqueira does in “A intertextualidade em processo:”

O termo ‘intertextualidade’ designa essa transposição de um (ou mais) sistema(s) de signo(s) para outro, mas como este termo foi usualmente empregado na acepção banal de ‘critica’ das fontes de um mesmo termo, nós preferimos um outro à *transposição*, que tem a vantagem de especifica que a passagem de um para outro sistema significativo exige nova articulação do tético-da posicionalidade enunciativa e denotativa (13).

{The term ‘intertextuality’ denotes that transposition of one (or many) sign systems into another, but as this term [intertextuality] was typically used in its original meaning as the source of a new word, we prefer another, *transposição*

[or transposition], which has the specific advantage of making the transition from one system of meaning to another requiring a new proposition- the enunciative and denotative positionality.}

Intertextuality is a process of systems for these researchers and writers.

Kristeva's definition and description of intertextuality is that which will be concentrated on for this particular research project. Using these ideas, the Electra myth will now be traced throughout different cultures and periods in history.

### **3.2 The Earliest Known Version of the Electra Myth**

This research will focus on the myth of Electra. It will start with the earliest known version of the "myth" or story which was first presented in the *Nostoi* and continues through time and through various cultures and ends with Jean-Paul Sartre's *The Flies*, a work that clearly demonstrates how a work can be both an exemplification of myth and intertextuality.

Dr. Jennifer March in the *Cassell Dictionary of Classical Mythology* states that Electra is the daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra and the sibling of Orestes, Iphigeneia and Chrysothemis. Her father, Agamemnon, was killed by Aegisthus, Clytemnestra's lover. Depending on the version of the story Electra is either a maiden residing in misery in her mother's home who marries and has a family after the death of Aegisthus and her mother, or she was married off by Aegisthus and doesn't have a family. Either way, she yearns for the day when her brother Orestes, who was sent away as a child by his mother, will return. Upon that day the two of them will take revenge in their father's name on Aegisthus. As to her role in this particular event, it depends on which version of the story that you read, as most give Electra a minor role, whereas others give her a direct hand in this plot of revenge. Dr. March continues

“Electra, like Antigone, is one of the great female figures of Greek myth and has proved a powerful influence on later works” (March 145).

### 3.2.1 The *Nostoi*

The story of Electra and her family can be traced to the *Nostoi*, otherwise known as *The Returns*. The *Nostoi* was composed sometime in the seventh or sixth century BC by an unknown author. *The Online Medieval and Classical Library* attributes the work of Hesiod, whereas the *Project Gutenberg* states that it has been attributed to Agias of Troezen. Only fragments of the *Nostoi* still exist; thus, many details are not provided. In Fragment #1 it is learned that Athena caused a conflict between Agamemnon and Menelaus and in return Agamemnon stayed to please Athena. When Agamemnon is leaving, he is visited by the ghost of Achilles, who foretells what lies ahead. Then it states that Agamemnon is murdered upon his return by his wife, Clytaemnestra, and Aegisthus, in turn is “...followed by the vengeance of Orestes and Pylades.”<sup>9</sup> No further details are revealed.

### 3.2.2 The *Odyssey*

The earliest, most detailed account of the story of Electra and her family can be traced to *The Odyssey*. In *The Odyssey*, Electra is not actually mentioned, it is her brother, Orestes. In

Book 1: Athena Inspires the Prince, Homer states:

But the other gods, at home in Olympian Zeus’s halls,  
met for full assembly there, and among them now  
the father of men and gods was first to speak,  
sorely troubled, remembering handsome Aegisthus,  
the man Agamemnon’s son, renowned Orestes, killed.  
Recalling Aegisthus, Zeus harangued the immortal powers:  
Ah how shameless-the way these mortals blame the gods.  
From us alone, they say, come all their miseries, yes,  
but they themselves, with their own reckless ways,

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<sup>9</sup> The Returns (fragments), Project Gutenberg- <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/348/348-h/348-h.htm>

compound their pains beyond their proper share.  
Look at Aegisthus now...  
above and beyond his share he stole Atrides' wife,  
he murdered the warlord coming home from Troy  
though he knew it meant his own total ruin.  
Far in advance we told him so ourselves,  
dispatching the guide, the giant-killer Hermes.  
'Don't murder the man,' he said, 'don't court his wife.  
Beware, revenge will come from Orestes, Agamemnon's son,  
that day he comes of age and longs for his native land.'  
So Hermes warned, with all the good will in the world,  
but would Aegisthus' hardened heart give way?  
Now he pays the price-all at a single stroke" (1:31-52, Fagles 78-9).

Robert Fagles notes that "throughout the *Odyssey*, the events in the House of Atreus... provide a continuous background to Homer's narrative... [to] not only encourage the prince but also to caution him..." (Fagles 503). Again, the story is told, but rather briefly this time; later in the *The Odyssey* in Book 3: King Nestor Remembers:

So Menelaus, amassing a hoard of stores and gold,  
was off cruising his ships to foreign ports of call  
while Aegisthus hatched his vicious work at home.  
Seven years he lorded over Mycenae rich in gold,  
once he'd killed Agamemnon-he ground the people down.  
But the eighth year ushered in his ruin, Prince Orestes  
home from Athens, yes, he cut him down, that cunning,  
murderious Aegisthus, who'd killed his famous father.  
Vengeance done, he held a feast for the Argives,  
to bury his hated mother, craven Aegisthus, too,  
the very day Menelaus arrived, lord of the warcry,  
frightened with all the wealth his ships could carry. (3:341-52, Fagles 117)

In Homer's version of the story, not only is Electra not mentioned, but Orestes is the protagonist. In Homer's telling of the story, Aegisthus had his sights set on Agamemnon's kingdom and seduced Clytemnestra to gain entrance into this kingdom. Upon successfully doing so, he kills her husband and takes over the kingdom. Although it is not mentioned, it is assumed that after taking over Agamemnon's kingdom, Aegisthus sends Orestes away, as in the aforementioned version of the story, Orestes is said to have come home from Athens. There is

a prophecy that he will indeed return one day to reclaim his rightful throne, but there are no details as to when, where, and how. Homer's version doesn't make it seem as though Orestes was plotting revenge all of his life more so than he was simply fulfilling a prophecy that had been foretold years prior. It is Orestes who is solely responsible for the deaths of his mother and Aegisthus. After their deaths, Orestes takes control of the kingdom and like any good fairytale; he "lives happily ever after." His tale then was to be told throughout the kingdoms for centuries to come.

### **3.2.3 The *Oresteia* – The Story**

The next mention of the story of Orestes comes in the trilogy, *The Oresteia*, by Aeschylus, which was produced in 458 BC. This trilogy consists of three plays: *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *The Eumenides*. Robert Fagles states that "The *Oresteia* is not a restatement of a tale of murder and revenge; it is a *mimesis*, a re-enactment, a recreation of it in a new mode that concentrates and builds its older epic power..." (Aeschylus 37).

*Agamemnon*, the first in the trilogy, discusses the death of Agamemnon and Aegisthus' rise to power. At the beginning of the play everyone, Agamemnon's family and the townspeople, is awaiting news from Agamemnon, who is away at battle. Clytaemnestra claims to have heard word from the gods that Agamemnon was victorious and is on his way home to celebrate, but none will believe her. As they are discussing this message, "she is a female Odysseus waiting at home to murder her husband and marry the suitor—" and "—becomes infernal, the terror that walks in the darkness, and what speeds her husband home is the tempest she releases in effect" (Aeschylus 19). Upon Agamemnon's return, Clytaemnestra has learned that he has brought back Cassandra, a priestess of Apollo, to be his concubine. This



further enrages Clytaemnestra. As the play continues, Cassandra becomes a clairvoyant of sorts who sees their deaths and tells the tale of a boy who will return to avenge the death of his father and take revenge on his mother. In the end Clytaemnestra murders Agamemnon herself with three blows from her sword, the last of which was accompanied with a prayer to the gods. She presents his body to the people, standing next to him, stating "Here is Agamemnon, my husband made a corpse by this right hand-a masterpiece of Justice" (Aeschylus 157). She then goes on to state her position, how the murder was in part revenge for the death of their daughter, Iphigeneia. As they continue to talk it is later revealed that Clytaemnestra has also murdered Cassandra. Aegisthus returns to join her and make a speech before the two of them run off together, as Clytaemnestra states in the last line of the play "Let them howl- they're impotent. You and I have power now. We will set the house in order once for all" (Aeschylus 171).

Then commences *The Libation Bearers*, the second play in the trilogy, with Orestes at the tomb of his father. He is praying to Hermes and placing two locks of hair on his tomb, one for the death of his father and one for Inachos who "...nursed [him] into manhood" (Aeschylus 177). Shortly after he sees a group of women adorned in garments of mourning who arrive at the same tomb, praying to Hermes and asking for the return of Orestes so that he might seek revenge on the "murderers" and take the throne to his rightful kingdom. Electra, the sister of Orestes, sees the locks of hair on the tomb and begins to question where they have come from, knowing that only she or Orestes could have put the hair there. She quickly identifies them as the curls of Orestes. After which Orestes, who had been hiding nearby, appears and Electra and he becomes reacquainted. Their praying to Hermes has stopped and now Orestes prays to Zeus,

“Zeus, Zeus, watch over all we do...” (Aeschylus 191). Orestes and Electra are informed that Clytaemnestra had bad dreams and sent libations to the grave of Agamemnon. They continue talking and begin to establish their plan for revenge; praying for strength and courage. Electra returns home. Thereafter, Orestes appears at the gates of the house announcing that he has news for the “masters of the house.” Clytaemnestra appears inquiring what Orestes wants and assures him that it will be his. Orestes identifies himself as “...a stranger from Caulis, close to Delphi” (Aeschylus 212) who has come to inform Clytaemnestra that her son Orestes is dead. He asks for a night’s stay in return for bringing the news and Clytaemnestra obliges him. Aegisthus has been alerted to the news and rushes to greet his visitor, not fully convinced by the news. The Chorus then begins to state “now they swing to the work, the red edge of the cleaver hacks at flesh and men go down” (Aeschylus 222). Next a scream is heard and a servant appears, wounded, declaring that Aegisthus is dead. Clytaemnestra appears inquiring as to what all the noise is about. The servant attempts to inform her of the news, but she feels it is only a riddle and the servant rushes out. The doors open and Orestes is standing over the body of Aegisthus with a bloody sword in his hand, stating “It’s you I want. This one’s had enough” (Aeschylus 224). Orestes pulls his mother over to Aegisthus’ corpse and pushes her face in his blood. He questions what to do only to have his companion Pylades inform him that “let all men hate you rather than the gods” (Aeschylus 224). Clytaemnestra then begins to beg her son for her life. They engage in conversation going back and forth, Orestes upholding the fact that his mother was no mother to him and that she is nothing more than an adulteress and a murderer. In the end steaming with vengeance he takes the same sword and kills his mother behind closed doors only to reappear standing over the bodies of his mother and Aegisthus just

as his mother had years before over the bodies of her husband Agamemnon and Cassandra. He unwraps the robes and displays the bodies of the two just as his mother did before making a speech. In the end he goes before Apollo, the god who has sent him in this prophecy, for advice on what to do with the situation because Orestes now has the blood of both parents on his hands. This blood forces Orestes to leave the house of his parents and continue on his journey.

The final play in the trilogy, *The Eumenides*, opens with Orestes at the temple of Apollo in Delphi and the Furies close by. The priestess of Apollo opens the scene with a prayer to Apollo. Orestes is shown before Apollo, while the Furies are sleeping. Apollo sends Orestes with Hermes to Athens to go before Athena. Clytaemnestra's ghost appears to awaken the Furies. After several attempts the Furies finally awaken only to find that Orestes has disappeared. They very quickly seek out his tracks and find him having gone to Athens. In Athens they end up at the temple of Athena, but cannot locate Orestes, who is hiding behind the statue of Athena. Athena becomes aware of the commotion outside and inquires as to what is going on. It is Athena who decides to hold a tribunal to decide whether Orestes is indeed wrong or not. During the tribunal, Orestes makes his case, while the Furies, representing Clytaemnestra make theirs. They all decide to vote and in the end the final decision is Athena's, who holds the deciding vote. Apollo intervenes and convinces Athena that men are more important than women. Athena then casts her vote declaring,

"I will cast my lot for you.

No mother gave me birth. I am

all for the male, in all things but marriage.

Yes, with all my heart I am my Father's child.

I cannot set more store by the woman's death-  
she killed her husband, guardian of their house.

Even if the vote is equal, Orestes, wins"

By that, Orestes is freed of the blood on his hands. He returns home to Argos to live out the rest of his days. The Furies become angered by the decision and are not happy at all with Athena. After much convincing, Athena persuades the Furies to accept the decision. By doing so, the Furies lose their fury and are encouraged to "...take root in the land and win [themselves] new friends" (Aeschylus 284). Athena then becomes the new leader of the Furies.

### **3.2.4 The *Oresteia* – Comment**

In Aeschylus' version of the story Orestes is indeed the protagonist and hero of the story, but he is aided by many other individuals. It is as if Aeschylus took Homer's basic story and filled in all the gaps for the reader. In this version, though, Clytaemnestra is the sole individual responsible for the murders of Agamemnon and Cassandra, not Aegisthus. Clytaemnestra was not seduced in any way by Aegisthus, for if she had been in this version, Aegisthus, might also been killed, as well. Clytaemnestra is indeed a much more powerful woman in this version. Electra helped her brother, Orestes, plan out the murder of their mother and Aegisthus, but it is Orestes alone who is responsible for the deaths of his mother and Aegisthus. Unlike Homer's version where Orestes is portrayed as "living happily ever after," in this particular version, Orestes is more humanized in that he did seek vengeance for his father's murder, but after the killings he struggled with the fact that he had committed the very same act, thereby repeating the same cycle. It is as if he feels shame or guilt for having committed the acts that he has committed and seeks out some sort of pardon. He needs to be reassured

that what he did was alright before he can even continue on with his life. The main idea, the main story, the same characters are all there, but in a much more colorful manner. Aeschylus' version is almost the Greek equivalent of the *telenovela* of the time.

### **3.3 The Greeks: Euripides and Sophocles**

The next two known versions of the story of the family of Agamemnon appear in the early 400s BC: *Electra* by Eurpides, which was first performed in 413 BC and *Electra* by Sophocles, which was written around 400 BC. These two plays both build upon the traditional story as told by Homer and, like Aeschylus, they add additional materials to the story. The primary difference from the *Nostoi* is that they place a greater emphasis and role on Electra, the sister of Orestes.

#### **3.3.1 *Electra*- Euripides- The Story**

*Electra* by Euripides opens at a peasant's cottage on the edge of Argolis. The peasant begins by telling the story of Agamemnon and his family. According to the version by Euripides, Agamemnon was "tricked" by Clytaemnestra and killed by Aegisthus. Aegisthus wanted to kill Orestes so his father's tutor sent him to the land of the Phoenicians to live with Strophius. Electra stayed behind with Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus until she was old enough to wed. Aegisthus was going to marry her off, but was afraid that she would marry a nobleman and produce an heir who would seek revenge in the name of his grandfather. Aegisthus decided that it was best to simply kill Electra instead, but her mother intervened and stopped Aegisthus. Instead Aegisthus married her to a poor peasant. Meanwhile Aegisthus offered a gold reward to anyone who would murder Orestes.

Electra later enters the scene and like Aeschylus' version, she is praying for her father. It is revealed that not only did Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra marry, but she bore him more children. Further, Electra is shown as not having a grudge towards her husband for the marriage, but considers him to be her equal and is willing to assist him with the household chores.

Orestes and Pylades enter the scene, Orestes has returned to avenge his father. He has gone to his father's tomb to offer prayers and a lock of hair. They then "retire" and Electra arrives at the tomb saying her prayers and becomes extremely excited upon seeing the lock of hair at the tomb, as she knows it can only be that of Orestes. Next enters the Chorus to announce that the day after tomorrow has been declared a festival day and all are to go to Hera's temple.

After the Chorus leaves, Orestes and Pylades return not revealing themselves, but instead identifying themselves as friends of Orestes who have brought news of him. Electra then proceeds to inform this "stranger" of the events which have occurred within their father's household since Orestes was sent away.

Electra and her husband invite Orestes and Pylades to stay and rest at their home. Meanwhile, she sends her husband to get her father's tutor so that she can inform him of the news that these "strangers" have brought of Orestes.

After the tutor has arrived, Electra and he reminisce about the past before Orestes and Pylades enter the scene. Electra introduces the two and the tutor and Orestes begin speaking. Thereafter, it is the tutor who identifies the "stranger" and informs Electra. He recognizes him by a scar on his head that he received after falling as a child whilst chasing a fawn. Electra

shocked and in disbelief, questions Orestes, as well, who then identifies himself as her brother, Orestes.

Orestes asks the tutor what he must do to avenge his father's death. To which the tutor replies: "You must kill Thyestes' son [Aegisthus] and your own mother" (Euripides 251). Orestes accepts this and inquires how to go about the task. The tutor informs him that he must not enter the palace. The tutor states that he had seen Aegisthus in the fields on the way to Electra's house. He was preparing to slay an ox for the festival, but his mother was not with him, as she stayed behind in Argos. It is then that Electra says that she will kill their mother while Orestes kills Aegisthus. In order to do so, she sends the tutor to Clytaemnestra to inform her that she has given birth to a boy. Electra says she will then come to her house and it is then that she will die.

With their plan in place, Orestes offers prayers to Zeus, Electra to Hera, and both to their father and "Queen Earth." They then part ways.

Later a death cry is heard and a messenger has been sent to Electra to inform her that Orestes was victorious. The messenger then proceeds to provide the details of Aegisthus' death. Orestes and Pylades again posed as strangers on their way to offer homage to Zeus. Aegisthus invited them to join in his offering. As Aegisthus looked upon the innards of the animal, he saw a bad omen. As he bent down, Orestes "...rose upon tiptoe and smote on his spine and crashed through the joints of his back" (Euripides 258). The servants were prepared to take up arms against Orestes and Pylades, but after identifying themselves the servants held back and instead crowned Orestes. Orestes was to return with Aegisthus' head.

After Orestes' return, Orestes and Electra offer prayers to the gods, Electra praises her brother, and Electra curses and damns Aegisthus. As the body is being brought in, they see Clytaemnestra's caravan. At this point Orestes begins to question what to do with their mother. She gave birth to him and now Orestes does not know if he can continue on with their original plan. It is Electra who steps in and attempts to convince Orestes of what he must do. Orestes and Pylades go and hide as Clytaemnestra arrives.

Clytaemnestra summons a slave to help her out of the carriage, but Electra intervenes and declares that she too is a slave cast out of her father's home. Clytaemnestra interrupts and attempts to guilt Electra by stating that she had to do what she did because her husband ignored her, took up with other women, and killed their daughter. Electra calls her –plea– “shameful” (Euripides 264). Electra then proceeds to tell her side of the story to which Clytaemnestra replies, “my girl, it has always been your nature to love your father” (Euripides 265). Clytaemnestra and Electra continue until Clytaemnestra inquires why she has been summoned.

Electra informs her that she has given birth and wants Clytaemnestra to give offering. Clytaemnestra says that it is not her job, it is Electra's nurse's. Electra says she had not a nurse. Clytaemnestra inquires about friends or neighbors. Electra then states that “no one wants the poor for friends” (Euripides 266). Clytaemnestra then agrees to give offering and enters the home.

Inside the home Clytaemnestra can be heard pleading for her life until silence. Orestes and Pylades then exit the home revealing the bodies of Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra. Orestes



then offers prayers to Earth and Zeus. Orestes and Electra both continue to plead their case to the Chorus.

Clytaemnestra's brothers arrive to decree that Clytaemnestra has received justice, but what Orestes and Electra have done is not just. They are told that they must do what Zeus and Fate desire. Electra is to wed Pylades and they must leave Argos. Orestes is ordered to Athens to stand trial for his mother's murder. Orestes is to be followed by and harassed by the Furies.

### **3.3.2 *Electra*- Euripides- Comment**

The main story of Agamemnon and his family does not differ in Euripides version. The major difference is the main role given to Electra. In Euripides' version of the tale all of the women are strong, powerful and deceitful. The men are all portrayed as weaklings. Even though this might appear to be a more feminist approach to the story of Orestes and Electra, it is not. When one reads this version carefully, there are lines that indicate how men are still to be considered "better" than women.

### **3.3.3 *Electra*- Sophocles- The Story**

*Electra* by Sophocles begins with Orestes' tutor telling briefly the story of Agamemnon and how Orestes came to be. Orestes speaks to the tutor, telling him that he asked the oracle with regard to his future and Apollo replied. Orestes then goes to the tomb of his father and does as he is instructed.

Electra enters and is giving libations to her father and the gods. She then proceeds with her ode in which she engages the Chorus. This continues for 284 lines. Electra is shown as a very troubled woman who has been destroyed emotionally and physically by their mother's actions. William Sale said in his introduction:

–The tragedy of Sophocles' *Electra* is the death of young womanhood: the heroine, who would normally have fulfilled herself as wife and mother, must fulfill instead a grim course of action imposed upon her by the murder of her father at the instigation of her mother– (Sophocles 1).

At line 328, the reader is introduced to Chrysothemis, who is another child of Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra. Chrysothemis, it would seem, does not harbor any ill feelings towards either Aegisthus or their mother. Instead she seems to be rather annoyed by Electra's lamentations.

Chrysothemis reveals that their mother has had a dream. In turn she has asked Chrysothemis to go and offer libations at her father's tomb to which Electra objects. Electra attempts to persuade Chrysothemis to kill Aegisthus, but she will have nothing to do with such acts stating that their father will understand and forgive her actions.

From that conversation, Electra begins yet another conversation, but this time with her mother. Clytaemnestra and Electra go back and forth just as Electra and Chrysotehmism had. They are interrupted by the tutor who informs them both that Orestes is dead. He then proceeds to tell both of them how exactly Orestes died. Again, Electra and Clytaemnestra argue back and forth as Electra begins lamenting. She is even more depressed as she feels there is no longer any hope for her. Clytaemnestra and the tutor leave and Electra begins with another ode.

Electra is interrupted by Chrysothemis, who is overjoyed. She explains to Electra that Orestes is alive and in Argos. Electra thinks that Chrysothemis is doing nothing more than mocking her, but Chrysothemis reassures her that Orestes is indeed alive. She explains to

Electra that she has seen Orestes' lock of hair, flowers and "streams of milk" (Sophocles 59) atop the tomb of their father.

Electra then explains to her sister that Orestes is dead. She retells the account of the tutor who had just left and surmises that someone left those items on the tomb of their father as an offering for Orestes. Again, Electra attempts to persuade her sister to join her cause, but her sister will have nothing of it. Chrysothemis leaves and Electra goes into another ode.

Orestes, whose true identity has yet to be revealed, appears before Electra and he states that he has come to bring news of her brother, Orestes. This time Orestes has brought an urn which he says are the remains of Electra's brother. Electra and Orestes continue to speak before she goes into another ode. In the midst of her ode, Orestes reveals himself to her.

They are joined by the tutor who urges Orestes to act while Clytaemnestra is alone and before Aegisthus returns. Orestes enters the palace and kills his mother. Outside, her screams can be heard. Orestes returns outside to announce that he has fulfilled the prophecy.

Aegisthus returns shortly after, as he has heard that "strangers" have brought news of Orestes. Electra confirms what he has heard and demands to speak to these guests. Electra leads Aegisthus inside and upon opening the doors, he finds Orestes and Pylades standing over a body. Aegisthus thinks this is the body of Orestes, but upon pulling the robes back he discovers that it is the body of Clytaemnestra. Aegisthus is in shock as he learns the prophecy has come true. Orestes is eager to kill Aegisthus, but Electra insists that he be allowed to speak first. After which, Aegisthus is ordered to lead Orestes to the place where Aegisthus murdered Agamemnon before Orestes kills him in the same exact spot.

### 3.3.4 *Electra*- Sophocles- Comment

Sophocles' version of the story is perhaps the shortest of all the ancient accounts of the story. Sophocles spends the majority of the time focusing on Electra and her pain and suffering. The deaths of Agamemnon, Clytaemnestra, and Aegisthus are not gone into very much detail. Orestes is still the hero of the story, but his actions are overshadowed by the lamentations of Electra.

### 3.4 The Americans: Ezra Pound and Rudd Fleming<sup>10</sup>

*Elektra* (1949) by Ezra Pound and Rudd Fleming is a retelling of the story of Electra as written by Sophocles. The Pound/Fleming version of the story is very similar to that of Sophocles in that Elektra is the main character that the story is built around. The story itself follows the same chronology of Sophocles version. The major difference between the two plays is that the Pound/Fleming version offers more details about what occurred, as if to fill in the blanks where Sophocles left off, and in other instances it offers fewer details.

#### 3.4.1 *Elektra*- The Story

The play opens with the Tutor setting the scene and providing the background details. According to this version of the tale, it was the Tutor who had picked Orestes off the bloody body of his father and took him away. Orestes states that he went to Pythoness and spoke to Phoebus who had told him to kill his father.

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<sup>10</sup> The original spellings of the names, i.e. Klytemnestra instead of Clytemnestra, have been kept to distinguish between the Sophocles version and the Pound/Fleming version.

The play then shifts to focus on Elektra. She is offering libations to her father and the gods. She is portrayed as a mentally distraught young woman who has aged beyond her years physically. It is revealed that Agamemnon's head was split open with an axe.

Elektra argues with her sister, Chrysothemis and Chrysothemis is annoyed, irritated with Elektra and her mourning. Chrysothemis warns Elektra that if she continues behaving as she has, she is going to be taken away and imprisoned for the rest of her life when Aegithus returns.

Elektra has a heated discussion with her mother, Clytemnestra. Clytemnestra admits to killing her husband Agamemnon. She doesn't simply state that she killed him, but she does so with an air of pride and joy. She counters Elektra's sorrows by stating that Agamemnon was not the "hero" that Elektra portrays him to be and that in fact he was nothing more than a murderer himself, having sacrificed her daughter, Elektra's sister. Elektra then goes on to make excuses for him. Clytemnestra and Elektra are interrupted by the news that Orestes is dead. Clytemnestra and the Tutor leave and Elektra is left to start another ode.

Elektra is interrupted by her sister Chrysothemis. Chrysothemis is excited because she says that Orestes is still alive and Elektra says no he is dead, the Tutor just announced it. Chrysothemis has seen Orestes with her own two eyes. Elektra then tries to persuade Chrysothemis to join her cause, but she will have nothing of it. Elektra says that she will take care of things on her own. Chrysothemis goes on to ask Elektra why she would do a man's work because revenge is the task of a man not a woman, a woman's place is in the home.

### 3.4.2 *Elektra*- Comment

Although chronologically the events surrounding the end of the plays are the same the details surrounding the deaths of Clytemnestra and Aegithus are different in the Pound/Fleming version. Pound/Fleming end with Elektra leading Orestes into the palace to kill Klytemnestra, which he does with two blows. They wait for Aegithus and surprise him. Aegithus calls out to Klytemnestra, but she does not answer. Orestes points out that she is lying right over there. Aegithus panics, if not freaks out, and Orestes simply asks him “what you haven’t seen your wife before,” in a mocking tone. Then Orestes said that Aegithus killed his father and he kills Aegithus.

### 3.5 The Latin Americans: Gabriela Mistral and Magaly Alabau

The next versions of the story of Electra come from the Latin Americans Gabriela Mistral (Chile) and Magaly Alabau (Cuba). Rather than utilize theatre to tell the story, they use poetry. Whereas some versions concentrate on Orestes and others concentrate on Electra, the Latin Americans focus on Electra. This poetry offers a new, feminine perspective that is completely different from the European perspective.

#### 3.5.1 *Electra en la niebla*- The Poem

En la niebla marina voy perdida,  
yo, Electra, tanteando mis vestidos  
y el rostro que en horas fui mudada.  
Ahora sólo soy la que ha matado.  
Será tal vez a causa de la niebla  
que así me nombro por reconocirme.

Quise ver muerto al que mató y lo he visto  
o no fue él lo que vi, que fue la Muerte.  
Ya no me importa lo que me importaba.  
Ya ella no respira el mar Egeo.  
Ya está más muda que piedra rodada.  
Ya no hace el bien ni el mal. Está sin obras.

ni me nombra ni me ama ni me odia.  
Era mi madre, y yo era su leche,  
nada más que su leche vuelta sangre.  
Sólo su leche y su perfil, marchando o dormida.  
Camino libre sin oír su grito,  
que me devuelve y sin oír sus voces,  
pero ella no camina, está tendida.  
Y la vuelvan en vano sus palabras,  
sus ademanes, su nombre y su risa,  
mientras que yo y Orestes caminamos  
tierra de Hélade Ática, suya y de nosotros.  
Y cuando Orestes sestee a mi costado  
la mejilla sumida, el ojo oscuro,

veré que, como en mí, corren su cuerpo  
las manos de ella que lo enmallataron  
y que la nombra con sus cuatro sílabas  
que no se rompen y no se deshacen.  
Porque se lo dijimos en el alba  
y en el anochecer y el duro nombre  
vive sin ella por más que está muerta.  
Y a cada vez que los dos nos miremos,  
caerá su nombre como cae el fruto  
resbalando en guiones de silencio.

Sólo a Ifigenia y al amante amaba  
por angostura de su pecho frío.  
A mí y a Orestes nos dejó sin besos,  
sin tejer nuestros dedos con los suyos.  
Orestes, no te sé rumbo y camino.  
Si esta noche estuvieras a mi lado,  
oiría yo tu alma, tú la mía.

Esta niebla salada borra todo  
lo que habla y endulza al pasajero:  
rutas, puentes, pueblos, árboles.  
No hay semblante que mire y reconozca  
no más la niebla de mano insistente  
que el rostro nos recorre y los costados.

A dónde vamos yendo, los huidos,  
si el largo nombre recorre la boca  
o cae y se retarda sobre el pecho  
como el hálito de ella, y sus facciones,  
que vuelan disuelta, acaso buscándome.

El habla niña nos vuelve y resbala  
por nuestros cuerpos, Orestes, mi hermano,  
y los juegos pueriles, y tu acento.

Husmea mi camino y ven Orestes.  
Está la noche acribillada de ella,  
abierta de ella, y viviente de ella.  
Parece que no tiene palabra  
ni otro viajero, ni otro santo y seña.  
Pero en llegando el día ha de dejarnos.  
¿Por qué no duerme al lado del Egisto.  
Será que pende siempre de su seno  
la leche que nos dio será eso eterno  
y será que esta sal que trae el viento  
no es del aire marino, es de su leche?

Apresúrate, Orestes, ya que seremos  
dos siempre, dos, como manos cogidas  
o los pies corredores de la tórtola huida.  
No dejes que yo marche en esta noche  
rumbo al desierto y tanteando en la niebla.

Yo no quiero saber, pero quisiera  
saberlo todo de tu boca misma,  
cómo cayó, qué dijo dando el grito  
y si te dio maldición o te bendijo.  
Espérame en el cruce del camino  
en donde hay piedras lajas y unas matas  
de menta y de romero, que confortan.

Porque ella- tú la oyes- ella llama,  
y siempre va a llamar, y es preferible  
morir los dos sin que nadie nos vea  
de puñal, Orestes, y morir de propia muerte.

-El dios que te movió nos dé esta gracia.  
-Y las tres gracias que a mí me movieron.

-Están como medidos los alientos.  
-Donde los dos se rompan pararemos.

La niebla tiene pliegues de sudario  
dulce en el palpo, en la boca salobre  
y volverás a ir al canto mío.

Siempre viviste lo que yo vivía  
por otro atajo irás y al lado mío.

Tal vez la niebla es tu aliento y mis pasos  
los tuyos son por desnudos y heridos.

Pero por qué tan callado caminas  
y vas a mi costado sin palabras,

el paso enfermo y el perfil humoso,

Si por ser uno lo mismo quisimos  
y cumplimos lo mismo y nos llamamos

Electra-Oreste, yo, tú, Oreste-Electra?

O yo soy niebla que corre sin verse

o tú niebla que corre sin saberse.

-Pare yo por que puedas detenerte

o yo me tumbe, para detenerte con mi cuerpo  
tu carrera;

tal vez todo fue sueño de nosotros

adentro de la niebla amoratada

befa de la niebla que vuela sin sentido.

Pero marchar me rinde y necesito

romper la niebla o que me rompa ella.

Si alma los dos tuvimos, que nuestra alma

-siga marchando y que nos abandone.  
-Ella es quien va pasando y no la niebla.  
Era una sola en un solo palacio  
y ahora es niebla-albatrós, niebla-camino,  
niebla-mar, niebla-aldea, niebla-barco.  
Y aunque mató y fue muerta ella camina

más ágil y ligera que en su cuerpo  
y así es que nos rendimos sin rendirla.  
Orestes, hermano, te has dormido  
caminando o de nada te acuerdas  
que no respondes.

### 3.5.2 *Electra en la niebla*- Comment

In this poem Electra has already killed Clytemnestra and Aegisthus and she has fled with Orestes, but in the end she is left alone, desperate, depressed, and haunted by their mother. The poem starts with Electra lost in a mist, “En la niebla mariana voy perdida,” but it is not clear what this mist is. In the first stanza Electra identifies herself as the killer, “Ahora solo soy la que ha matado.” In the second stanza, she starts by saying that she wanted revenge. She goes on to describe the dead being her mother, Clytemnestra. In the verses that follow she describes a sense of freedom and relief now that her mother is dead. She has been released from her prison. Then she describes how Orestes is by her side and how they are forever scarred by this woman and they will not forget their pain. In the third stanza, Electra looks back on how Clytemnestra only loved her “amante” and her “Ifigenia,” Electra and Orestes’ sister. At this point Orestes is gone and she does not know his future. In the fourth stanza she goes on to describe this mist and being lost. In the fifth stanza Electra identifies herself as a fugitive and the name “Clytemnestra” lingers in the background. In the sixth stanza there is a return to youth. In the seventh stanza Electra cries out to Orestes and she is haunted by Clytemnestra, “¿Por qué no duerme al lado del Egisto?” For which she offers the explanation, “Será que pende siempre de su seno/la leche que nos dio sera eso eterno/ y sera que esta sal que trae el viento/ no es del aire marino, es de su leche?” In the eighth stanza she tells how Orestes and Electra are bonded together forever and she does not want to be alone. In the ninth stanza she tells



Orestes to wait for her. In the tenth and final stanza she describes how their mother needs to die and talks to Orestes as if he is there, but he is not. In the end it is then revealed that the mist is death, it is uncertainty, it is Clitemnestra: “Era una sola en un solo palacio/y ahora es niebla-albatrós, niebla-camino,/niebla-mar, niebla-aldea, niebla-barco./ Y aunque mató y fue muerta ella camina/ más ágil y ligera que en su cuerpo/ y así es que nos rendimos sin rendirla.”

### 3.5.3 *Clitemnestra*- The Poem

Saben las bestezuelas por el aire  
y las diez fuentes por el gran grito  
que Agamenón echó sobre la hoguera  
como pino-ciprés o vil mastuerzo  
a la cordera que durmió en mis brazos,  
que mi leche mamó como el cervato  
y, por mi leche, blanca fue y ligera.

Vino el rasgado grito de la plebe  
falto de brisas hacia estas mil puertas,  
cuando su espalda de color de los mirtos  
cayó a la llama y la tomó la llama.  
La plebe aúlla contra el cielo  
como ebria, azuzada por el fuego,  
el nombre de su Rey y no el de mi cordera,  
danza y eructa gritos de victoria,  
hormiguea sorda de tambores,  
eructa, baila berreando a sus dioses,  
y la Ifigenia cae, cae, cae,  
mientras yo, enmurallada en torno de la  
hoguera,  
me rasguño las puertas atoradas del palacio.

Pero yo veo, veo, veo, veo  
a despecho de leguas y humaredas,  
veo brincar las llamas de la hoguera  
que cabritos la trepan o la bajan  
o en lienzos retorcidos de humo y fuego  
que esconden y me dan a la Cordera  
y son sus brazos de gaviota al vuelo,  
son sus cabellos de suspiro ardiente  
y veo hombros y el cuello de su gracia.  
Y el Oso helado que me llevó al lecho  
mira al cielo respirando la alta llama.

La plebe en hebra oscura respuntea  
toda la costa, más saciada, con la cara al viento,  
babeante, hipando el nombre de sus dioses.  
Pero yo aquí, detrás de mis cerrojos,  
reniego con mi cuerpo y mis potencias  
de los dioses que dan y que arrebatan  
y del Leopardo Real que engendra y mata.

Las fuentes grávidas más que él entienden.  
Sólo me oyen los siervos apiñados.  
Puro el grito he de dar que oigan los dioses  
si no son sus oídos conchas muertas  
y no es su pecho escudo como escarcha  
y no son celos polvo del camino.  
Mi Ifigenia, partida y devastada,  
hecha y deshecha, camina con llama  
pura, volteando azules y dorados  
y el Rey Leopardo, Agamenón, vuelta la cara  
congestionada de soberbia de su loco triunfo  
ahora se vuelve al viento y los veleros,  
a la vez vencedor y ya vencido.

No te vea yo más, no más yo duerma  
tocándote las sienas; no más abras  
estas mis puertas arranques de los brazos  
a Electra y Orestes para otra hoguera.  
Siento como que va de mí subiendo  
otra alma y que me viene como al árbol  
otra carne y que las llamas  
de Ifigenia me alcanzan y me visten.

Yo no te vuela a ver, Rey de los hombres,  
no subas más las escaleras donde  
en triángulo de luz jugaban nuestros hijos.  
No me traigas tu gloria de timbales,

ni tus carros crujiendo de trofeos,  
ni llegarás a llevarme de rodillas  
hacia tus dioses que aúllan cobrando  
con el belfo de lobos carne de hijos.

La llama de Ifigenia ya se aleja,  
ralea, lame sus propias cenizas.  
Yo andaré, sin saberlo, mi camino

hacia el mar cargando en estas manos,  
en pez encenizado, la hija mía,  
ahora más ligera que sus trenzas,  
y de esta brasa todos arderemos,  
Agamenón hasta el última día:  
tu palacio, tus mirtos, tus palomas,  
con un Rey de hombres y una Reina loca.

### 3.5.4 *Clitemnestra*- Comment

This poem appears after *Electra en la niebla* in the collection, “Locas Mujeres.” It is interesting that this poem appears after *Electra en la niebla* because the poem is almost like an explanation for the behavior and actions of Clytemnestra. Rather than portraying Clytemnestra as a cold-hearted murderer as the other versions of the Electra myth does, this version humanizes her and portrays her as a woman who is deeply depressed and distraught. She is a woman who has lost a child and in a sense gone mad. In stanza one she describes her daughter, Ifigenia, as a lamb and talks about holding her and nurturing her. In stanza two she discusses how Ifigenia is offered as a sacrifice to the gods and her daughter is dead, yet the crowds are happy.

The third stanza is perhaps the worst because Clitemnesta is describing with detail watching her daughter burn alive. This stanza is perhaps the most important in the entire poem because after reading what Clitemnestra has witnessed, it is no wonder that she did not kill her husband then and there! Anyone who reads this understands why Clitemnestra was the way that she was. This was a woman in terrible pain.

In stanza four the crowd is thankful to the gods and chanting their names, but Clitemnestra is cursing the gods. In the fifth stanza Clitemnestra describes how she suffers in private, no one hears her cries except her slaves. The sixth stanza is important because it

describes how from this point on Clytemnestra has decided to push away Electra and Orestes because she fears that if she continues to love them and that if their bond grows stronger, then there will always be the chance that one or both of them could end up like Ifigenia: “No te vea yo más, no más yo duerma/ tocándote las sienes; no más abras/ estas mis puertas y arranques de los brazos/ a Electra y Orestes para otra hoguera.” In stanza seven Clytemnestra says she does not ever want to see her husband again and finally in stanza eight, the fire has died down and nothing is left but ashes. She curses Agamemnon.

### 3.5.5 *Electra, Clytemnestra- The Poems*

I- Electra  
 I, like a voice  
 a wailing ewe  
 understand that if I am Ulysses  
 you will have to do away with me.  
 Iphigenia  
 Orestes who swiftly draws the knife  
 Orestes  
 Iphigenia  
 Clytemnestra bites down on her daughter’s  
 death  
 and the sun hides  
 Electra, Electra, Electra runs, her passion  
 transfiguring.  
 Electra flies  
 Electra contracts  
 and crosses  
 Clytemnestra, how can you give your hand to  
 Aegisthus?  
 How can you gore me?  
 How can you?  
 Yes, Electra engraves on her memory  
 Ulysses’ ships leaving harbor  
 when the boat sprinkling water on its oars  
 surrenders  
 and waves lap envy toward Helen  
 Clytemnestra, Electra wails  
 What are you looking at?  
 The horror so great  
 Iphigenia on the pyre that turns and turns

Iphigenia and Electra  
 A splinter pierces their eyes  
 Iphigenia crosses between the two.  
 Bled: venom the sight as father kills daughter  
 The pyre  
 Iphigenia  
 Electra envies her sister  
 Iphigenia  
 The blood flows  
 A gush of red my vein in yours, Clytemnestra.

II- Clytemnestra  
 The stone steps turn to stones  
 Slowly.  
 When he returns  
 my daughter will be washed in blood  
 Aegisthus, nail yourself into my legs  
 Corrupt my womb  
 Rip the night away  
 Sink fury deep in me  
 Strike at a gallop  
 Exile me  
 Jolt the pact between man and woman  
 Sow terror, execute.

III  
 They never saw each other again.  
 On the stone stairway, two red lines  
 crossed  
 each on tugging rage behind it.

Swollen eyes scrutinize each other.  
Clytemnestra's exhale purple  
Electra scrunches the violet eyelids on her  
thighs  
The sewn mouths  
suffocate.  
On the stone stairway they know each other  
and move,  
red whips ascending, descending,  
descending.  
One is a trunk between legs.  
Horns thrusting inward, the other threa.  
That's how mother and daughter unite  
and crouch, stoning each other  
to clean the stones of Mycenae.

#### IV

Electra  
at 5 in the morning  
a spider seizes her face.  
Black, black, black, black spider  
and red  
like a hook in the ear  
gnaws at her head.  
Worms in caves cower;  
orifices foreboding of danger.  
Electra howls omens  
from one side to the other  
pupils slash at the mystery.  
One side of the head splinters wood;  
the other gyrates, spinning what?  
the honed hand  
rehearses and crunches  
and closes.  
Electra is male.  
In the center of her breasts are tongues:  
a knife, an axe, a great mast.  
Clytemnestra is water, sea, lake,  
well  
Electra rises, ready, reaches the door,  
hears the moans.  
Clytemnestra in her ritual does not wait  
bathing her lover in saliva  
tadpoles suckling shame from her mouth  
Electra hears her mother  
and begins to pint circles and craters  
In the doorway  
fingernails are devoured by teeth.

Electra acts, Electra bites.  
She becomes her father,  
trembles, falls in front of the door.  
Like a shackled wolf she whirls and turns and  
turns.  
She can't.  
Bettered, she throws herself into a wave. It is 7.  
She bathes.  
Stones swirl against her feet, crabs put her to  
sleep.  
Tomorrow is Thursday. I will return to this door  
every night.

#### V-Clytemnestra

Year after year till the victor's phallus returns,  
there where I gave birth, daily a setting of  
flowers;  
lamps of smeared  
semen.

Electra, I sense you  
one eye in your mouth peers at me.  
You have that monster's face.  
Don't spy on me,  
through every one of your listenings  
I will fall 100 times to a spew of milk sea.  
Don't spy on me,  
hide your face.  
Empty your child eyes into my womb.  
I don't want to lose you.  
Swim, sink into the pillow.  
Ignore my howls  
my swoons, they will crucify you.  
Each time you stop in the doorway I fail to see  
you.  
I see a trunk, some eyebrows  
bear paws holding a little girl.  
Leave, listen to me: get out.

#### VI-The Remains

The sea is a tattered web  
with a lone ship hauling the dead.  
The ship veers gray,  
nears its fearful prow.  
Electra at the window.  
Orestes at the window.  
Mute clusters crouch in the doorways.  
Clytemnestra

averting herself down the stairs.  
Solitary shadow against the sand.  
Perplexed, the Tiresians lower the cargo.  
They place a rectangle  
in the circle.  
The last witness renders Clytemnestra  
Iphigenia's last message:  
a blindfold

The tools lie in the sand.  
Nothing remains but Clytemnestra  
and a hollow pit.  
Now she goes back;  
eyes do not see, do not wail, do not meet.  
Eyes are two cloths  
effigy eyes.  
The room is waiting.

### 3.5.6 *Electra, Clytemnestra*- Comment

Magaly Alabau wrote about the story of Electra in her collection of poetry, *Electra, Clytemnestra*. Alabau did not write one or two poems about Electra or her story, but the entire book is a series of poems that are woven together to tell the tale of Electra. In Alabau's version, Electra is the main character and Orestes plays a minor role. These poems offer a very new, very distinct, very sexual version about the story of Electra. Alabau's poems have been dubbed a "lesbian love story" of sorts because in Alabau's version, Electra is transformed into Agamemnon who then engages Clytemnestra sexually and kills her.

The first poem tells the story of Electra. Although Electra is the one who kills, it is Orestes who pulls out the knife. Electra is an extremely troubled young woman who is extremely jealous of her sister, Iphigenia, and the love that Clytemnestra has for her. It is in this first poem that Electra is transformed into Agamemnon when she, speaking on behalf of Agamemnon, asks "Clytemnestra, how can you give your hand to Aegisthus?" Electra continues speaking of things that only her father could have seen.

The second poem tells the story of Clytemnestra after the death of Iphigenia and at the commencement of her relationship with Aegisthus. She tells him "Aegisthus, nail yourself into my legs/ Corrupt my womb/ Rip the night away/ Sink fury deep in me." The third poem describes how Agamemnon and Clytemnestra never saw each other again and then describes

his death. In the fourth poem after the death has occurred, Electra is in mourning. She becomes Agamemnon permanently, "Electra is male." Aegisthus moves in and Clytemnestra continues their affair. Electra "...hears the moans. / Clytemnestra in her ritual does not wait/ bathing her lover in saliva/ tadpoles suckling shame from her mouth/ Electra hears her mother." The poems continue to describe Clytemnestra's sexual escapades which only enrage Electra further. In Alabau's version of the story the jealousy of seeing and hearing Clytemnestra with Aegisthus is the reason for Electra killing her mother. It was not Electra that killed her mother per se, it was Agamemnon who was overcome with jealousy and rage combined with the already pain and suffering of Electra for the death of her father and the jealousy she felt towards her mother's love of her sister, Iphigenia.

### **3.6 The French: Jean Giraudoux and Jean-Paul Sartre**

The final versions of the myth of Electra to be examined come from the French writers Jean Giraudoux and Jean-Paul Sartre. These versions like the Latin American versions are very distinct. The Giraudoux version is rather warped and more comedic and the Sartre version is more philosophical. The Giraudoux version centers around Electra, whereas the Sartre version focuses on Orestes.

#### **3.6.1 *Electra*- Giraudoux- The Story**

The Giraudoux version of Electra starts with a stranger, Orestes, who encounters three little girls, the Eumenides. Although they are disguised as little girls, they by no means act like little girls- The first line starts with "look how handsome the Gardner is!"(159). As the conversation between the Eumenides, Orestes, and the Gardner continues, the reader learns that "the window [of the palace] with the roses ... is the window of the bath where ...

Agamemnon, Electra's father, slipped, the day he returned home from the war, and killed himself by falling on his sword" (161).

The Eumenides begin to sing about the family; singing about Electra, Clytemnestra, and Orestes. As the Eumenides exit the scene, Orestes learns from the Gardner that he is to be wed to Electra in exactly one hour. Electra is being wed to the Gardner not because she is not attractive or unintelligent, but because it was commanded by King Aegithus. Her only crime, according to the Judge who is to marry her is that she goes to her father's tomb nightly to mourn.

Orestes leaves the scene and Aegithus enters. Aegithus is alerted that a beggar has arrived. The reader learns that the judge who is going to perform Electra and the Gardner's wedding is opposed to the marriage and is only performing the ceremony because Aegisthus has ordered so. Rather than turn the beggar away, Aegisthus opts to entertain him in case he may be one of the gods in disguise. The beggar, the judge, and Aegisthus then get into a religious discussion in which Aegithus, his religious views, and opinions are questioned and compared to his actual actions and deeds in life.

Clytemnestra and Electra enter the scene. It is learned that Clytemnestra "...has already surrendered one daughter as a sacrifice" (179) and Electra and Clytemnestra not only have a strained relationship, but barely speak. Electra and Clytemnestra then get into a heated debate where it is learned that Orestes was dropped on the floor, according to Electra, but according to Clytemnestra, Electra is the one who pushed him. The quarrel continues only the Gardner has now entered the scene. The plot of land the Gardner was supposed to receive as a dowry is

not the land he is going to receive and the land that he will receive instead is barren. The quarreling continues until Clytemnestra and Aegisthus leave.

Orestes returns, shortly after which the Gardner leaves and Orestes' true identity is revealed to Electra. Orestes and Electra devise a plan to be wed instead of Electra and the Gardner. They then find Clytemnestra who does not believe their announcement. Clytemnestra leaves and Orestes and Electra engage in a discussion about Electra's hatred for Clytemnestra which turns into a discussion as to why Electra hates women in general.

Electra and Clytemnestra then begin to have a conversation. Aegithus interrupts them to inform Clytemnestra that Orestes was not dead and was on his way. Shortly thereafter, Orestes identifies himself to Clytemnestra and they discuss the matter. Clytemnestra goes to bed, followed by Electra and Orestes. The Eumenides return only to mock what had just occurred and the act ends with the Gardner giving a monologue.

Electra and Orestes converse at times with the Eumenides. It is revealed by Electra that their father had been "stabbed by assassins" (210). Electra claims to have learned this through a vision. She says that she also had a future vision of her mother's corpse as well. Clytemnestra enters and Orestes asks for his sword. Orestes confronts her. She of course denies it. Orestes then leaves and Clytemnestra begs for Electra's help, but this again turns into an argument between the two of them.

Electra and the Gardner were not married, but instead Orestes and Electra were imprisoned. Eventually Orestes was freed and killed Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. In the end Orestes leaves Argos with the Eumenides who intend to "never leave [him] and start to hound



him. [They] shall never leave him until he begins to rave then kills himself, cursing his sister” (Giraudoux 247) and Electra inherits and rules Argos.

### **3.6.2 *Electra*- Giraudoux- Comment**

Giraudoux meant the play to be comedic, but there are times when the play is absolutely warped and demented. For example, when telling the story of the death of Atreus’ nephews, the first little girl states “the meal at which he served their hearts took place in the room next door” (159). She continues, “I would love to know how they tasted” (159). In the beginning the Eumenides, who are supposed to be little girls at this time, are very lustful. This is by far the most “interesting” telling of the Electra myth, but it really does not provide any new details or information pertinent to the overall study.

### **3.6.3 *The Flies*- Sartre- The Story**

*The Flies* by Jean-Paul Satre opens in Argos with Orestes accompanied by his tutor. They approach an old woman to ask for directions but are ignored as they are paying homage to the statue of Zeus. Orestes and his tutor are searching for the home of Aegisthus.

They run into another traveler who they have run into thrice before and he identifies himself as Demetrios, but it is really Zeus. He tells how he was in Argos the day Agamemnon returned and Clytemnestra was there waiting with Aegisthus. The reader learns that the people wear black for their dead king. A brief discussion ensues of how the gods are not taking care of Aegisthus and how the entire city has to repent for his sins. It is at this point that Zeus almost reveals himself. He tells Orestes not to judge the gods and Orestes inquires if Agamemnon has a daughter, Electra. Zeus confirms this and says she lives in the palace and points it out. He also mentions that there was a son Orestes, but he is dead now. The tutor reminds Orestes how

they were told at Nauplia that Aegisthus had him murdered after the death of Agamemnon. Zeus interrupts the tutor and says how some say he is still alive and the men who were supposed to kill him had pity on him because he was a child and simply left him in the forest, but some Athenians found him and took him in and raised him.

Zeus says if he were alive, he'd tell Orestes to leave this place that he had no business here. He had no part in the crime and he would only make things worse. The only thing he would bring is "disaster." It is at this point that Orestes identifies himself as Philebus from Corinth. Zeus then leaves. The tutor says that even though Orestes identified as Philebus, Zeus really knew who he was. Orestes questioned the fact that he really was a man and the tutor suggests that it was one of Aegisthus' spies. Orestes and the tutor then engage in a long conversation and in the end Orestes says he would love to take revenge on Aegisthus, but he does not intend to and heeds Zeus' warning.

Electra enters the scene cursing Zeus. She notices Orestes and apologizes. They exchange introductions. Orestes asks the tutor to leave them. Electra says she is a servant. In fact she is one of the lowest servants because she has to wash the King and Queen's soiled under clothing and goes on to describe what life is like for her. She then inquires about life in Corinth for Philebus.

Electra then poses a what-if question with regard to Orestes, but they are soon interrupted by Clytemnestra who is calling her. Orestes sees his mother for the first time in 15 years. Clytemnestra tells Electra that she needs to get ready for the ceremony and then the two of them begin to argue. Clytemnestra inquires who Orestes is and Electra identifies him as Philebus of Corinth. Clytemnestra asks about his family and why he left his mother all alone. He

says that he's on his way to Sparta to enlist in the army. She asks if he did not hear the warnings of Argos and tells him briefly about her and their story. She welcomes him and introduces herself and Electra tells him not to pity her. Clytemnestra then goes on to mention that she would have had a son Orestes' age and is interrupted by Electra who reminds Clytemnestra that she also has a daughter and they begin to argue. In the end Electra refuses to attend the ceremony which Clytemnestra says she will attend either voluntarily or by force. Electra leaves and Clytemnestra says she fears Orestes, or Philebus, will only bring disaster and begs him to leave.

Zeus returns and says he heard from the tutor that he is leaving and offers to get him horses. At this point Orestes says that he has changed his mind. Zeus then offers to stay with him and be his host and that concludes the first act of the play.

The second act opens with the crowd gathered at the steps of the temple. The crowd is gossiping when Zeus, the tutor, and Orestes enter the scene. Orestes comments on how bad things look. Everyone is still waiting for Aegistheus to arrive. During this time the crowd admits to being worthless. While back at the palace Aegisthus and Clytemnestra are waiting on Electra who cannot be found. They decide to make their appearance at the temple anyway and deal with her later. Orestes has decided he has heard enough of the town's gossip and self-pity when he decides to leave, but Zeus tells him that he cannot go. When Orestes asks Zeus exactly who he is, Zeus' only reply is that he will find out soon.

The crowd and the "royal family" continue with the procession. Orestes interrupts and draws his sword. Zeus tries to stop him. Electra then appears. Everyone is stunned by Electra's appearance because she is dressed in her nicest, brightest, whitest, clothing. The crowd finds

this very insulting and calls for her sacrifice. Electra then declares that Agamemnon speaks to her, to which the crowd is shocked beyond belief. If that is not enough, then Electra begins dancing at the temple and begins cursing the people of Argos. Orestes calls out to her and Zeus stops her charade.

Aegistheus ostracizes her from Argos and Orestes goes to speak to Electra. Electra reveals that she feels betrayed by Orestes. Orestes wants Electra to run away with him to Corinth, but Electra refuses to go. She says she'll take refuge in Apollo's shrine which is where criminals go because they cannot be harmed there. Electra begins to mock Orestes because the only thing he wants to do is run away with her, but she wants revenge. Orestes pleads to Zeus for an answer and Zeus replies with a sign. Electra mocks this sign and his god. They continue, but in the end Electra persuades Orestes to stay and seek revenge and Zeus leaves.

Electra then leads Orestes to the palace where they hide out overhearing the guards mock Agamemnon. In another room of the palace Clytemnestra and Aegisthus speak briefly before she leaves. Zeus then appears before Aegisthus and warns him of his impending death. Zeus says his reason for appearing is that he wants to save him and then Zeus leaves.

Orestes then enters the room and kills Aegisthus, but not before Aegisthus warns Orestes of the flies. Orestes then asks Electra where the Queen's room is. Electra is hesitant because in her opinion the revenge they sought was already done and Clytemnestra could do them no further harm. Orestes then goes into the bedroom to kill Clytemnestra. Electra is left waiting in the hallway wondering how Clytemnestra will die and goes on to examine Aegisthus' body. Orestes returns and the queen is dead. He said that she died cursing the both of them. Orestes feels free, but Electra does not. The flies start to surround them. Electra says the flies

are the goddesses of remorse. As they are in there, they hear a voice calling for them to open the door, but they do not and instead flee to the shrine of Apollo and that ends Act II.

The beginning of the third and final act opens with Electra sleeping at the Shrine of Apollo and the Furies talking. They vow revenge. Electra is awakened by Orestes and she is in shock and disbelief. She does not recognize herself. The Furies tell Electra how Clytemnestra died a tragic death and go into details about her murder. The Furies do their best at trying to divide Electra and Orestes and Electra is left feeling lost and alone.

As Zeus returns and Orestes stands up to him and mocks him. Zeus offers them a deal, they can live a life of “mourning” and “atonement,” just as Aegithus and Clytemnestra did and continue to live or suffer the consequences. Orestes chooses instead to blaspheme Zeus. Electra begs him not to do so and to take the deal, but Orestes refuses. Electra wants Orestes to leave her alone, but Orestes wants her to come with him. Electra then flees begging for Zeus’ mercy. The Furies act as if to go after her, but then stop and let her go realizing that it is Orestes that they want.

The doors to the Shrine of Apollo open and the people of Argos are gathered outside. They want Orestes killed for what he has done, but then Orestes makes a speech. He calls them his “subjects,” but says that he intends not to rule over the kingdom. Instead he is going to do them a favor and leave and by leaving he will take these flies with him just as the flute player did with the rats. After he has concluded his speech he walks down the steps of the shrine and starts to leave Argos and as he does, all of the flies go with him, leaving the town in peace.

### 3.6.4 *The Flies*- Sartre- Comment

Read at face value, *The Flies* is more similar to the *Oresteia* unlike many of the other versions. There really are not any new characters introduced. The details do not vary much. Probably the biggest difference between the two plays is that whereas Aeschylus uses the words 'Eumenides' and 'Furies,' Sartre chooses to use the word 'the Flies.' Franco Maiullari offers a possible explanation for this in his article "La mosca, un parodistico simbolo del doppio in Omero:" "...perché non esiste un altro insetto che esprima meglio l'idea di qualcosa caratterizzato da un movimento vorticoso, incessante, opprimente, un marasma come lo sono il senso di colpa e il rimorso" [...because another insect does not exist which best exemplifies the idea of something characterized by an incessant, overwhelming whirling movement, a decline, or decay, as the fly, much like the emotions associated with guilt and remorse.](Maiullari 66).

## CHAPTER 4

### MYTH AND INTERTEXTUALITY

#### 4.1 Myth and Intertextuality: An Introduction

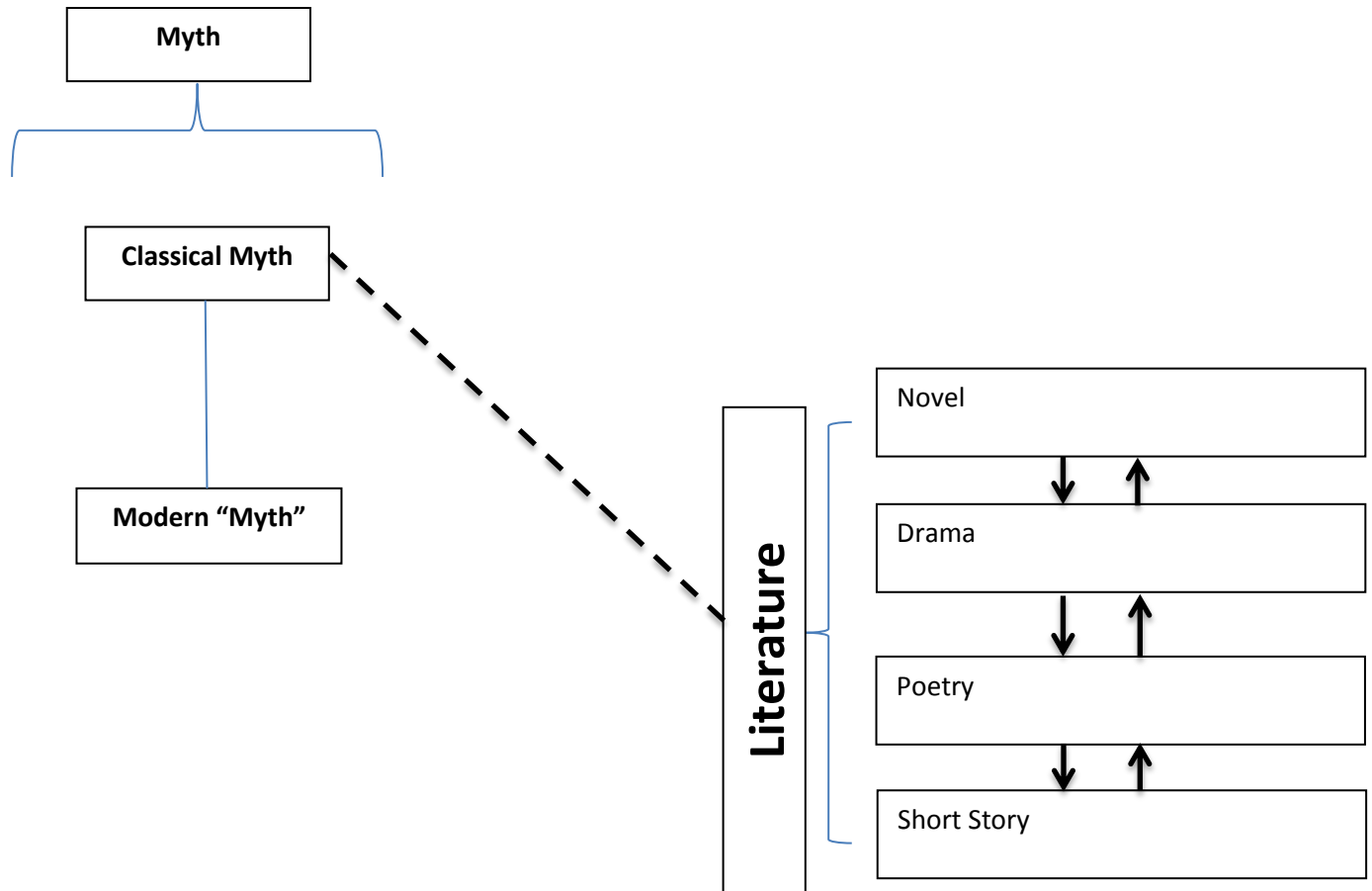
In Chapter 2, the theories and ideas surrounding the term 'myth' were discussed concluding with an in-depth examination of the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss. Chapter 3 followed suit, discussing the theories and ideas surrounding the term 'intertextuality.' In Chapter 4, it is my intent to discuss the two aforementioned terms and the "relationship" that they may share.

As stated previously, Lévi-Strauss did not have a theory of myth and although he did define myth, his definition was very "loose." That worked for Lévi-Strauss because that was his intent. He did not want to define things; he wanted to let the work speak for itself. That is of course problematic for researchers because every researcher can interpret the work of Lévi-Strauss very differently. As for me, I shall say, very simply, that according to Lévi-Strauss myth was nothing more than an archaic way of explaining the world, as discussed in Chapter 2, that only exists in the present, i.e., "modern," contemporary times, -in "fragmentary form"<sup>11</sup> this is why Lévi-Strauss studied "primitive" peoples because for them myth was still "alive."<sup>12</sup> Using this definition it can be said that any telling of the Electra myth discussed after the Ancient Greeks in this work is not myth, but is rather intertextually related to the myths (See Figure 2).

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<sup>11</sup> Barthes work supports this idea because as he has shown "modern" myths have lost much of their original meaning.

<sup>12</sup> See footnote 5.



**Figure 2: Myth and Intertextuality at Work According to Lévi-Strauss and Kristeva**

On the left is an abbreviated version of Lévi-Strauss' approach to myth: Traditional myths, i.e., Classical Greek Mythology and the myths of "primitive" peoples, which have evolved into "fragmentary form" as modern "myth" which is noted by using quotation marks. On the right is Kristeva's ideas about intertextuality in that no one work of literature exists on its own, thus, the arrows showing the transfer of ideas and information. The dotted line represents intertextuality, again, as literature relates to myth; literature is related to myth, not descended from it, which is suggested by their work.



## 4.2 *The Flies*, the Incest Taboo

Lévi-Strauss' and Kristeva's definitions seem to work for the various retellings of the Electra myth, but one runs into a problem when a work such as *The Flies* is introduced. *The Flies* could be thought of as Lévi-Strauss' incest-taboo because on the one hand *The Flies* is drama and on the other hand *The Flies* is myth.

As drama, *The Flies* is a retelling of the Electra myth, just like the other retellings discussed in Chapter 3. If one were to insert *The Flies* into Figure 2, it would look like the following:

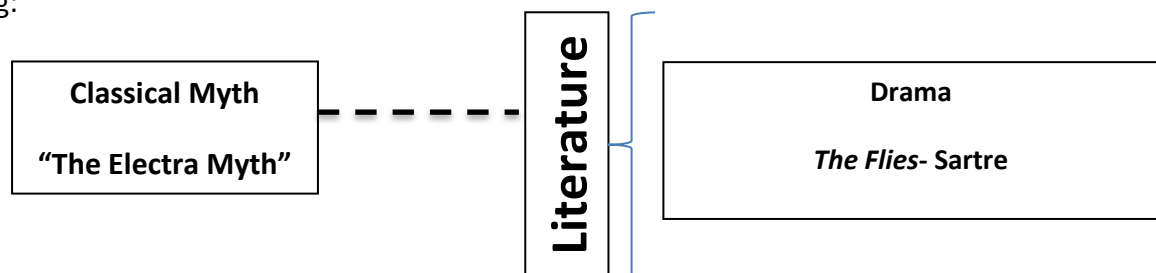


Figure 3: *The Flies* as Drama<sup>13</sup>

The playwright, Sartre, has written the story much in the same fashion as the Aeschylus in the *Oresteia*. The major difference is that the Flies replace the Furies, or Eumenides.

As myth, *The Flies* is classical myth and not modern “myth,” again using Lévi-Strauss' definition of myth<sup>14</sup>, because its original meaning<sup>15</sup> has not been lost. This myth is written in the present, in the now; it is very much “alive.”<sup>16</sup> To explain this better, one needs to look at the

<sup>13</sup> Note: Figure 3 is an oversimplified version because one could insert all of the various retellings and show how they are all intertextually connected, as well.

<sup>14</sup> It is not just the application of Lévi-Strauss' definition of myth, either. One can apply a number of the previously discussed ideas of myth to *The Flies*, e.g. the work of Cohen. According to Cohen, a myth is comprised of 5 things, as previously discussed; a narrative of events, it has a sacred quality, it has sacred communication in symbolic form, some of the events and objects only exist in the world of the myth, and the narration refers in dramatic form to origins or transformations, all of which *The Flies* is or does.

<sup>15</sup> Although Lévi-Strauss defined myth rather loosely, based on all of his works it seems as though “meaning,” or purpose, is the key distinction between myth and non-myth.

<sup>16</sup> The present, the now, the livelihood of myth was not only one of Lévi-Strauss' descriptors, but Malinowski, Eliade, et al.

other retellings of the Electra myth first and then reexamine *The Flies*. Jean Giraudoux's retelling of the Electra myth for example is meant to be comedic; its purpose is entertainment, whereas, *The Flies* was written to not simply tell a story, but to provide a message, that message being Sartre's idea of Freedom.<sup>17</sup> If Sartre had left out this underlying idea of Freedom, then and only then, would *The Flies* be modern "myth."

#### 4.3 Structural Analysis of *The Flies* and the Electra Myth

If one conducts a structural analysis of *The Flies*, as laid out in Lévi-Strauss' "The Structural Study of Myth," what one will find is: 1) when compared to the analyses of the other versions of the Electra myth that *The Flies* is indeed the same myth as the earliest known version of the Electra myth and 2) that ultimately *The Flies* is the story of the struggle of culture versus nature.

In my research, I followed Lévi-Strauss' instructions as outlined in "The Structural Study of Myth." All quotes in this section from Lévi-Strauss will refer to said article and all examples will come from *The Flies* by Jean-Paul Sartre. Lévi-Strauss starts his analysis with the following:

3.2 The technique which has been applied so far by this writer consists in analyzing each myth individually, breaking down its story into the shortest possible sentences, and writing each such sentence on an index card bearing a number corresponding to the unfolding of the story (Lévi-Strauss 431).

Following this method, one arrives at the following sentences from *The Flies* for the first few pages:

3) Orestes and the tutor arrive in Argos searching for the home of Aegistheus.

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<sup>17</sup> This idea of Freedom is the very "essence" and "ethos" which Campbell discussed in his works. It is through this myth, *The Flies*, that man was able to come to terms with reality.

- 4) Orestes and the tutor encounter Zeus, who states he is Demetrios from Athens.
- 5) Zeus provides the background information for the story.
  - 1a) Agamemnon was returning home from battle.
  - 1b) Agamemnon was killed.
  - 1c) Aegisthus was instilled as the king.

The purpose of this task is to "...show that a certain function is, at a given time, predicated to a given subject" (Lévi-Strauss 431). In Section 3.4, Lévi-Strauss goes on to state that one cannot simply study the cards of simply one myth because: 1) the sentences or "constituent units" "...on all levels are made up of relations and the true difference between our gross units and the others stays unexplained" (Lévi-Strauss 431) and 2) the numbers on the cards correspond to the telling of the myth according to the individual narrator of that particular telling, not the actual story.

The next step in the process, which is discussed using two different analogies in sections 4.1 and 4.2, is to lay out all of the index cards.

Once that task is completed, the next task is described in section 4.4:

The myth will be treated as would be an orchestra score perversely presented as a unilinear series and where our task is to re-establish the correct disposition. As if, for instance, we were confronted with a sequence of the type: 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 1, 2, 5, 7, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8..., the assignment being to put all the 1's together, all the 2's, the 3's, etc.; the result is a chart:

1	2	4	7	8
	2	3	4	6
1		4	5	7
1	2		5	7
		3	4	5
			6	8 (Lévi-Strauss 432-1)

Using the example above with *The Flies*, the cards would appear as follows: 3, 4, 5, 1a, 1b, 1c. The cards were then shuffled, according to Lévi-Strauss' method, so that they appear in order as 1a, 1b, 1c, 3, 4, 5.

Once that is done, the next task is to plot them on a graph. Again, using the example from *The Flies*, the chart would look something like:

TABLE 2  
STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF *THE FLIES*

1	2	3	4
			Agamemon is returning home from battle.
	Agamemnon is killed.		
Aegisthus is instilled as King of Argos.			
			Orestes and the tutor arrive in Argos
		Zeus intervenes	

Next one would then repeat the process for every known version one is working with of the myth. Finally, the tables would overlap one another and the task is to once again find the commonalities, ignoring the minor details, and plot them on another graph until one ends up with something that looks like Table 3, which is the mythemes for the Electra myth.

TABLE 3  
ELECTRA MYTHEMES

1	2	3	4
	Agamemnon is killed.		
Aegisthus is instilled as King of Argos.		The revenge of Agamemnon's child(ren) is foretold.	
			Orestes is banished only to be found and raised by another family.
			Electra is "enslaved" and leads a horrible life.
		The gods intervene- Orestes returns to Argos.	
Orestes seeks out and locates Electra.			
	Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are killed.	Orestes and Electra find refuge with Apollo.	
			Orestes and Electra develop a guilty conscious.
		The Furies/Flies haunt Orestes and Electra.	

In order to understand this graph, Lévi-Strauss states:

4.6 Were we to *tell* the myth, we would disregard the columns and read the rows from left to right and from top to bottom. But if we want to *understand* the myth, then we will have to disregard one half of the diachronic dimension (top to bottom) and read from left to right, column after column, each one being considered a unit (Lévi-Strauss 433).

He goes on to state that the first column represents the overrating of blood relations and the second column expresses the underrating of blood relations. These two columns are binary opposites of one another. The third column then is the denial of the autochthonous origin of man, whereas the fourth is the persistence of the autochthonous origin of man, again binary opposites of one another. These two sets of binary opposites then provide an answer to Lévi-Strauss' "...original problem: born from one or born from two? born from different or born from same?" that is that "...cosmology is true" because "...experience contradicts theory, social life verifies the cosmology by its similarity of structure" (Lévi-Strauss 434).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Interestingly enough the question of "born from one or born from two" is the very same question which Sartre addresses in *The Flies*, q.v. p. 93.

## CHAPTER 5

### SARTRE'S *THE FLIES*

#### 5.1 Introduction

*The Flies* is a work<sup>19</sup> that has been discussed and analyzed for decades and will continue to be discussed and analyzed for decades to come. The reason that this piece is so important is because of the way that it was written and the time period in which it was written. The play was written during World War II in Nazi-occupied France when an individual was not able to freely speak out against the government. People were seeking answers, as Frank Snowden, Jr. points out; "Classicists should not overlook the fact that both in France and America thinkers were turning to the ancient Greeks for guidance in understanding today's problems" (Snowden 201). At the same time people were seeking an outlet in which they could express their thoughts and ideas and pass those messages on to other individuals. Sartre not only found answers through myth, but used myth to relay his thoughts and ideas.

I have chosen Sartre's *The Flies* specifically to focus on not simply because of the fact that it is both representative of intertextuality and myth, nor due to its historical and literary importance, but instead I have chosen to focus on *The Flies* because of the relationship, or lack thereof, between both Sartre and Lévi-Strauss. It is well known that Lévi-Strauss did not agree

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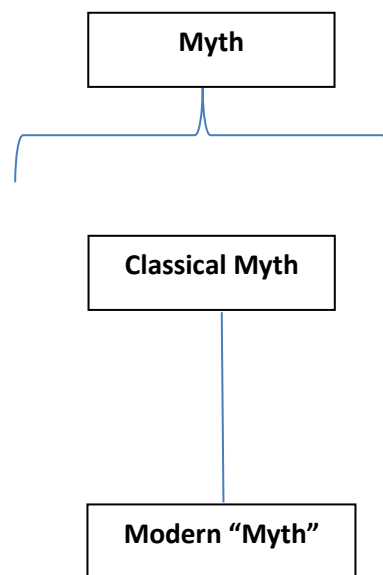
<sup>19</sup> I have chosen to use the word 'work' here because over the decades one of the arguments with regard to *The Flies* is what is it? Is it a play or is it a call to resistance or is it more? In Chapter 4, I have shown how *The Flies* is intertextually related to the Electra myth as a dramatic piece; however, *The Flies* is more than simply a dramatic piece. In the same chapter, I suggested that *The Flies* was myth, according to the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss. Other researchers (Snowden, Post, et al.) find that *The Flies* was not simply a dramatic piece, but have found it to be a call to resistance. Still others (Weisert, et al.) have found *The Flies* to be a philosophical work. This debate of course is not the focus of this work.



with the work of Sartre and was rather open about it. In fact Lévi-Strauss devoted the entire last chapter of *The Savage Mind* (1966) to arguing against the work of Sartre.<sup>20</sup> Rather than arguing against one another's work, they should have been working with one another because after having studied both the works of Lévi-Strauss and the works of Sartre, I have found that there are actually similarities between their ideas and that Sartre's work would seem to be an extension of Lévi-Strauss' work, yet their end results were very much the same.

## 5.2 The Beginning

Both Lévi-Strauss and Sartre were concerned with the "beginning," but under different circumstances. Lévi-Strauss was concerned with myth and identifying, to put it very simplistically, what is nature and what is culture. To understand this better, I shall return to Figure 2. In Figure 2, I stated that very simply Lévi-Strauss' ideas with regard to myth looked something like the following:



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<sup>20</sup> Jean Pouillon would go on to devote a work himself on the disagreements between Sartre and Lévi-Strauss.

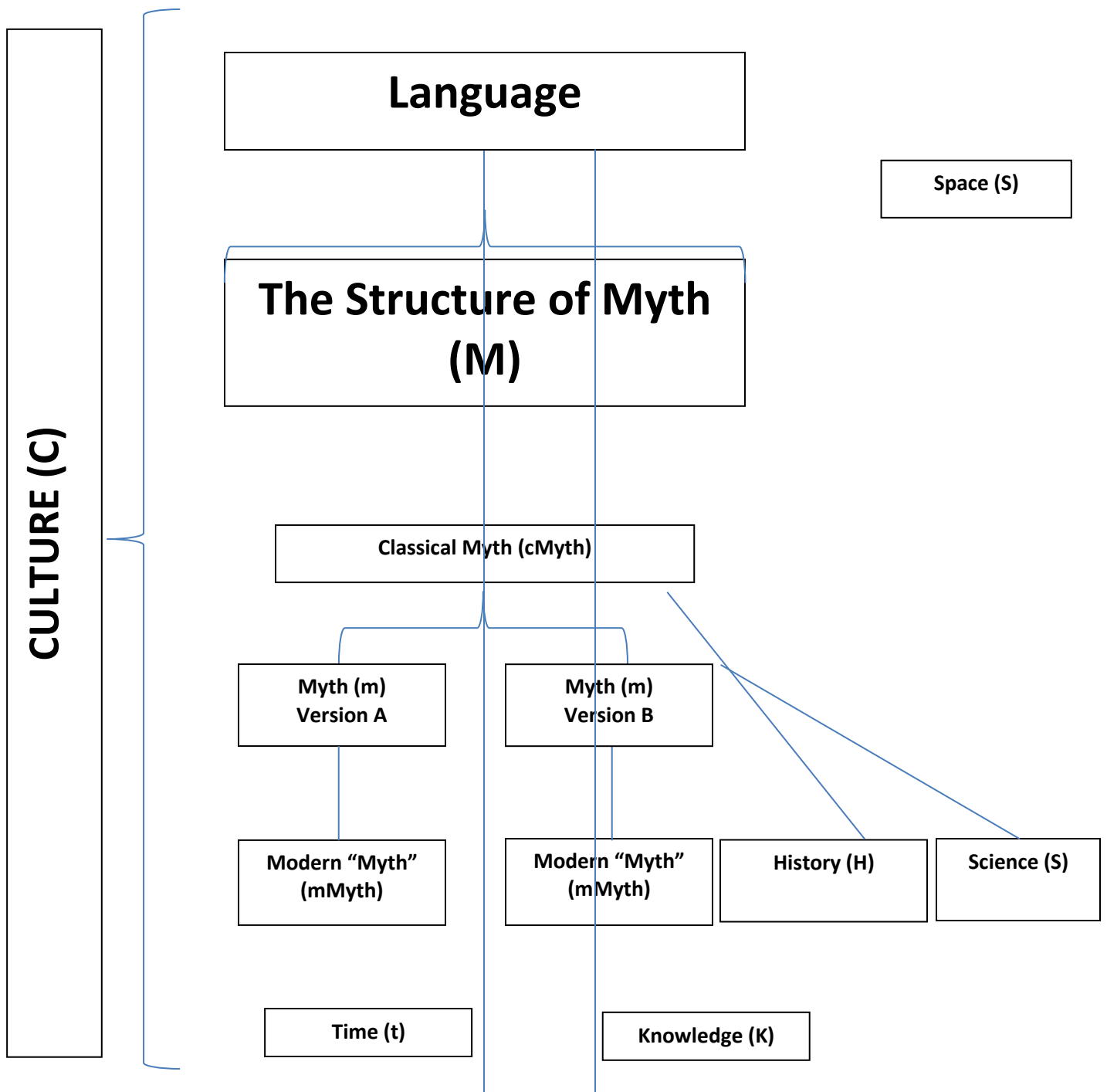
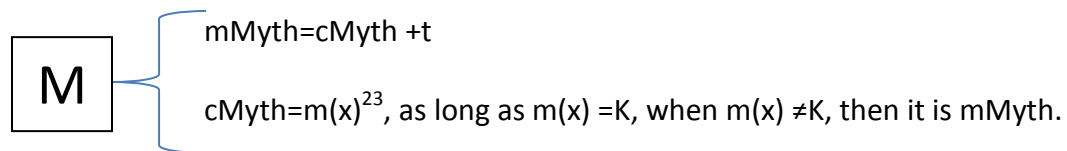


Figure 4: A Detailed Interpretation of Lévi-Strauss' Work on Myth

As the name suggests, Figure 4, is my interpretation of the work of Lévi-Strauss, with regard to myth, in detail. On the right, one will see there is a box marked “Space (S).” That is not to suggest that that particular box is “S.” It is difficult to show with a two dimensional diagram, but one need imagine a three dimensional diagram and everything surrounding it is “S.” So for this work, one will need to imagine that the sheet of paper that this two dimensional graph is printed on and everything in between is “S.” This figure shows culture according to Lévi-Strauss. Language was the very beginning for Lévi-Strauss as he identified all problems as “linguistic ones.”<sup>21</sup> As the figure shows “Time (t)” is the unifier between the other items within this space.<sup>22</sup> Although not a unifier, “Knowledge (K),” parallels time because as time progresses, so too does knowledge evolve. One of Lévi-Strauss’ descriptors of myth was knowledge or explanation and as the figure shows then, as the knowledge progresses, myth no longer becomes myth in the traditional sense, but it becomes modern myth which Lévi-Strauss says is fragmented and as he has suggested in *Myth and Meaning: Cracking the Code of Culture* that history and science have replaced myth. Alternatively another way of putting all of this is:




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<sup>21</sup> q.v. p. 27

<sup>22</sup> q.v. p. 30

<sup>23</sup> x representing the various known versions of a myth

Lévi-Strauss was able to achieve all of this through his work with the indigenous peoples of the Americas. For Lévi-Strauss it was important to work with these people the most because they gave the researcher a look into the past. It was what Sartre described as bearing witness to oneself, particularly in *The Flies*;

Orestes: This is *my* palace. My father's birthplace. And it's there a whore and her paramour foully butchered him. I, too, was born there. I was nearly three when that usurper's bravo's carried me away. Most likely we went out by that door. One of them held me in his arms, I had my eyes wide open, and no doubt I was crying. And yet I have no memories, none whatever. I am looking at a huge, gloomy building, solemn and pretentious in the worst provincial taste. I am looking at it, but I see it for the first time (Sartre 58).

One can clearly see how Orestes has grounded himself, his person, in the present and established that he is alive, he is real. Orestes removes himself, his reflection, from himself, his person, so that he, as well as everyone else sees the Orestes of the Present. We know that he is standing in front of the Tutor, in front of the palace, and he goes on to describe other objects in his surroundings, Orestes, who is living in the present moment. Orestes in *The Flies* is bearing witness to himself, a key component of Sartre's thinking, just as Lévi-Strauss bore witness to Man by working with indigenous people.

### **5.3 Time**

Another key component to both Lévi-Strauss' and Sartre's thoughts was the idea of time. Referring back to Figure 4 and Lévi-Strauss' work, time was the component which connected all relationships within Space. In his discussions of mythological time, Lévi-Strauss

said that as *parole*, myth was “unilateral,” it consisted of “non-reversible time.” He went on to say that only as viewing myth as a “structure,” or *langue*, was it then able to consist of “reversible time” and only then was it able to exist both in the present, the past, or the future.

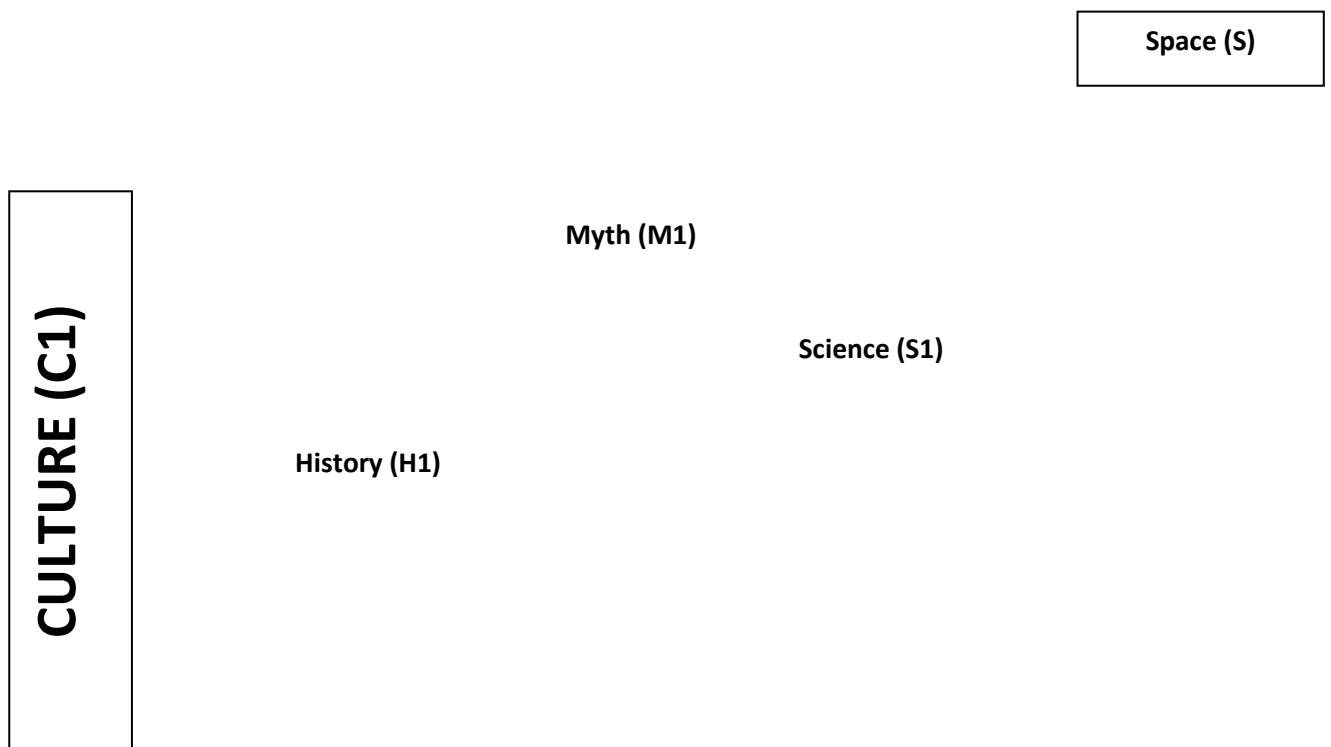
In Sartre’s work on the other hand time exists, but to the extent that it only exists in the present, i.e., it is not linear.<sup>24</sup> (That is summarizing Sartre very simplistically, but it avoids a 20 page discussion of Sartre’s ideas of temporality.) Sartre is removing t, or time, from the equation mentioned above. Since “K,” or knowledge, parallels “t,” then it is removed, as well. Applying these ideas to Figure 4, one then arrives at Figure 5: Sartre’s ideas of time applied to Lévi-Strauss’ ideas of Myth.

As one can see in Figure 5, the structure of myth ceases to exist because as stated previously time was the unifier. Additionally, the structure of myth no longer becomes a linguistic “matter,” or “problem.” All that is left is this thing very loosely known as “Culture” (C1) which encompasses “Myth” (M1), “History” (H1), “Science” (S1), et al. that exists inside this space. There really is no distinction made between myth and history and science, etc. because if only the present existed, then one could not rely upon or base one’s definitions or descriptions on past events. The “idea” or “definition” of myth or the “idea” or “definition” of history, as one knows and understands the terms today, would only exist to a particular individual or group of people within the present within this space. In this manner something which is traditionally thought of as “myth” in the Western World could be “history” to an individual or a group of peoples, i.e., there would no conceived boundaries set forth as are today and many areas could possible even overlap one another. This is what Lévi-Strauss was

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<sup>24</sup> u “Ch. 2 Temporality,” pp. 159-237 of *Being and Nothingness*.

attempting in the first place because he wanted to remove the ideas of categorization and let each individual myth speak for itself<sup>25</sup> which is why he developed his methodology of breaking myths down into their individual mytheme in the first place, but as one can see by Figure 4, including t, or time, only limits what can and cannot be done; Myth whether it be mMyth or cMyth is determined by t and always fixed at a set given point in time.



**Figure 5: Sartre's Ideas of Time Applied to Lévi-Strauss' Ideas of Myth**

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<sup>25</sup> q.v. p. 28

#### 5.4 The Idea of Freedom in *The Flies*

Another important aspect of the work *The Flies* is the idea of Freedom. Freedom of man is central to the theme of *The Flies*, as mentioned above. The first example is but one of many times when this idea of Freedom is mentioned. Later in Scene II of Act II, the reader finds the following conversation:

Aegistheus: Are they so dangerous?

Zeus: Orestes knows that he is free.

Aegistheus: He knows he's free? Then, to lay hands on him, to put him in irons, is not enough. A free man in a city acts like a plague-spot. He will infect my whole kingdom and bring my work to nothing. Almighty Zeus, why stay your hand? Why not fell him with a thunderbolt?

Zeus: Fell him with a thunderbolt? Aegistheus, the gods have another secret.

Aegistheus: Yes?

Zeus: Once freedom lights its beacon in a man's heart, the gods are powerless against him. It's a matter between man and man, and it is for other men, and for them only, to let him go his gait, or to throttle him (Sartre 102).

Later in that same scene Orestes declares: "I am free, Electra. Freedom has crashed down on me like a thunderbolt" (105). Again in Act III, one will find more references to this idea of Freedom:

Zeus: And you? You, too, are free, no doubt?

Orestes: Yes, and well you know it.

And again later in the same act:

Zeus: Orestes, I created you, and I created all things...

Orestes: Let it crumble! ....

Zeus: Impudent spawn! So I am not your king? Who, then made you?

Orestes: You. But you blundered; you should not have made me free.

Zeus: I gave you freedom so that you might serve me.

Orestes: Perhaps. But now it has turned against its giver. And neither you nor I can undo what has been done.

Zeus: ah, at last, so this is your excuse?

Orestes: I am not excusing myself.

Zeus: No? Let me tell you it sounds much like an excuse, this freedom whose slave you claim to be.

Orestes: Neither slave nor master. I am my freedom. No sooner had you created me than I ceased to be yours (Sartre 117).

That leads then to the question of what is freedom and why is it so important to not only Orestes, but to Sartre himself. Ludwig W. Kahn provides a response to the question at hand:

In a lecture, subsequently published as *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, Sartre declared that by our free acts we choose what kind of men we ourselves want to be and, by implication, express a wish as to how we want other men to be: "En effet, il n'est pas un des nos actes qui, en créant l'homme que nous voulons être, ne crée en meme temps une image de l'homme tel que nous



estimons qu'il doit être." There is no ideal; we create one, however, as we act  
(Khan 9).

With regard to Orestes, Khan says that

...Orestes grows to understand that to live essentially and fully means to act, to accept involvements, and that to be free means to determine one's conduct on one's own responsibility and to make a choice that can neither be lightened nor legitimized by any a priori values: man has to take upon himself the burden of freedom and to reject orders and suggestions from others, be they men or gods  
(Kahn 8).

Weisert wrote much the same thing in his article when describing Orestes and this idea of Freedom. Both Weisert and Khan loosely interpret Sartre's views of Freedom. They both discuss how this idea of Freedom leads man to the belief that mankind, once free, is able to do whatever he wants whether it be good or evil, but the fact remains that that is not the entire picture of Sartre's ideas of Freedom, there are certain "conditions," if you will that clarify this idea of Freedom without making freedom, itself, seem like some sort of alternate "restraint," e.g. religion, culture, which dictates one's life. David Banach of St. Anselm College describes these three "conditions:"

- 1) In choosing our own nature, we must choose human nature for all humanity.  
In order to act freely, we must not let our action be determined by any of our particular desires or interests. We must act as any free agent would act, hence we must act as we would like other people to act.

2) In order to be free ourselves, we must desire the freedom of other people.

To treat another person merely as an object for my use is to make an object of myself. To be free I must respect the freedom of others.

3) Even though my actions are free, they are not completely arbitrary. Just as the artist, while free to create, follows the constraints imposed by her medium, so our actions, while not governed by rules, are constrained by the choices we and others have made. (Banach 3)

This is exactly what Orestes has done in *The Flies*. He is not merely free in the sense that he is free from “restraints,” e.g., culture and religion, but he is free in the sense that he is acting within the interest of his fellow man.

Orestes: The folk of Argos are my folk. I must open their eyes

Zeus: Poor people! Your gift to them will be a sad one; of loneliness and shame.

You will tear from their eyes the veils I had laid on them, and they will see their lives as they are, foul and futile, a barren boon.

Orestes: Why, since it is their lot, should I deny them the despair I have in me?

Zeus: What will they make of it?

Orestes: What they choose. They’re free... (Sartre 119)

Orestes is not killing out of revenge, he is killing in the name of Freedom. Orestes wants Electra to be happy and he wants her to be free just as he is. He wants the people of Argos to be free.<sup>26</sup>

In a sense one could almost argue that Orestes is killing in the name of harmony or peace.

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<sup>26</sup> It is interesting to note here that in a way, even though existentialism was “anti-religion,” per se, Orestes was almost a modern-day Jesus Christ.

Finally, Orestes accepts responsibility for his actions which is central to Sartre's ideas of Freedom.

Although Lévi-Strauss argued against this idea<sup>27</sup> and he has never used the term 'freedom,' for me this is what Lévi-Strauss was attempting to do in his work. Lévi-Strauss early on said, as mentioned above, that he did not want to walk into a culture and say that this myth spoke about this, that, and the other, nor did he want to categorize myths according to established European methods of categorization. Rather, Lévi-Strauss collected the myths and developed the methodology that he did in order to let myths speak for themselves. That is these myths needed to be analyzed without any preconceived notions or ideas. It was only in this manner that the myths would be able to be interpreted as they should be.

## 5.5 Problems with the Idea of Freedom

In *The Flies*, Sartre writes:

Zeus: I gave you freedom so that you might serve me.

Orestes: Perhaps. But now it has turned against its giver. And neither you nor I can undo what has been done.

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<sup>27</sup> In his work "Structuralism and Myth," Lévi-Strauss wrote "Man is not free to choose whether to be or not to be. A mental effort, consubstantial with his history and which will cease only with his disappearance from the stage of the universe, compels him to accept the two self-evident and contradictory truths which, through their clash, set his thought in motion, and, to neutralize their opposition, generate an unlimited series of other binary distinctions which, while never resolving the primary contradiction, echo and perpetuate it on an ever smaller scale: one is the reality of being, which man sense at the deepest level as being alone capable of giving a reason and a meaning to his daily activities, his moral and emotional life, his political options, his involvement in the social and the natural worlds, his practical endeavors, and his scientific achievements; the other is the reality of non-being, awareness of which inseparably accompanies the sense of being, since man has to live and struggle, think, believe, and above all, preserve his courage, although he can never at any moment lose sight of the opposite certainty that he was not present on earth in former times, that he will not always be here in the future and that, with his inevitable disappearance from the surface of a planet which is itself doomed to die, his labors, his sorrows, his joys, his hopes, and his works will be as if they had never existed, since no consciousness will survive to preserve even the memory of these ephemeral phenomena, only a few features of which, soon to be erased from the impassive face of the earth, will remain as already canceled evidence that they once were, and were as nothing" (87-88).

Zeus: ah, at last, so this is your excuse?

Orestes: I am not excusing myself.

Zeus: No? Let me tell you it sounds much like an excuse, this freedom whose slave you claim to be.

Orestes: Neither slave nor master. I am my freedom. No sooner had you created me than I ceased to be yours (Sartre 117).

Thus, the answer to the age-old debate of Nature versus Nurture is Nature. C. Fred Alfred sums up Sartre best when he says "...There is no such thing as human nature. 'Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself'" (Alfred 130-1). In *The Flies*, however, Orestes may have been born free, according to Orestes, but the fact remains that he had had culture instilled upon him as a young man. This idea of Freedom was not innate, he had to be taught how to become free of this idea of culture later in life by the Tutor. Once he learned this idea of Freedom and learned to live life as a free man, then he wanted to spread that freedom to others. So for Sartre, the idea of Freedom may be innate and may be Nature, but if it is indeed Nature, how then does one recognize it? Where does this idea of Freedom come from? It has to start some place, just as it did with Orestes in *The Flies*. Further, if Orestes did in fact stay in Argos and teach these people how to be free then the idea of Freedom, itself, would have become ingrained into the culture and in turn become Nurture and not Nature. Alas, with *The Flies* a new dilemma arises.

CHAPTER 6  
LA CLÉ SELON DERRIDA

**6.1 La Structure et Derrida**

Throughout this work there has been mention of this word ‘structure,’ and myths have been identified as a sort of ‘super structure,’ but this term has not actually been defined, nor explained. In Derrida’s essay this is the very first thing that he discusses. For Derrida the problem with the word ‘structure’ is the word itself! By naming this concept, one has already established its boundaries. By establishing boundaries the possibilities then become limited, *reduced*. These boundaries then create a center, which can be substituted over and over again. Derrida demonstrates this by showing how the center can be linked to many different names, including, but not limited to *eidos, archè, telos, energeia, ousia*. This, according to Derrida, is the very essence of the problem at hand; “...all these destructive discourses and all their analogues are trapped in a sort of circle” (Derrida 250). How should one define, or better yet, think of, since defining something limits its possibilities, this idea called ‘structure?’ Derrida defined, or described, this idea of ‘structure’ at the end of his essay. Derrida states that this new ‘interpretation’ of the term ‘structure’ “...is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms *freeplay* and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name ‘man’ being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology– in other words, through the history of all of his history– has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of the game” (Derrida 264-5).

## 6.2 *Freeplay* and Structure

According to Derrida,

*Freeplay* is the disruption of presence. The presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain. *Freeplay* is always an interplay of absence and presence, but if it is to be radically conceived, *freeplay* must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence; being must be conceived of as presence or absence beginning with the possibility of *freeplay* and not the other way around (Derrida 264).

James S. Hans in his review of Derrida's essay elaborates on this idea of *freeplay*. Hans says that:

"We have these three shifts, of course, because *freeplay* for Derrida is at once all of these descriptions and yet none of them. Because *freeplay* is unnamable, Derrida is forced to surround the notion through exclusion, as he does here and frequently elsewhere. Only by doing this can he separate *freeplay* from ontotheological notions of an origin, of pure presence, that which *freeplay* is not. And as such, his strategy seems to work, though it forces us to focus on the unsaid in the description" (Hans 810).

Hans is doing exactly what Derrida does not want someone to do and that is to "define" '*freeplay*' because in doing so one creates limits, which in turn repeats this circular pattern. This is why Derrida does not attempt to define what '*freeplay*' is, instead he describes it to the reader. Further he uses the work of Lévi-Strauss to show the reader what *freeplay* really is.

### 6.3 *Freeplay, Derrida, and Lévi-Strauss*

Derrida specifically chose Lévi-Strauss' work because he was the only one at that time who had come close to doing what Derrida was attempting to describe. Lévi-Strauss does this with his work on binary opposites. Derrida chooses the "concept" of *sign* to demonstrate what he is discussing. For Derrida a traditional approach to the "concept" of *sign* would be to approach it as being "...comprehended and determined, in its sense, as sign-of, signifier referring to a signified, signifier different from its signified" (Derrida 250). Further if one eliminates the difference between the two, *signifier* and *signified*, then Derrida suggests the entire idea of the *sign* be thrown out of metaphysics (Derrida 250). He discusses Lévi-Strauss by quoting his preface to *The Raw and the Cooked* in which he says "that he has 'sought to transcend the opposition between the sensible and the intelligible by placing [himself] from the very beginning at the level of signs" (Derrida 250). Derrida continues "...the necessity, the force, and the legitimacy of his act cannot make us forget that the concept of the *sign* cannot in itself surpass or bypass this opposition between the sensible and the intelligible. The concept of the *sign* is determined by this opposition: through and throughout the totality of its history and by its system" (Derrida 250). According to Derrida this concept of the opposite is completely unattainable without this concept of *sign*. Derrida concludes that in order to reduce the concept of *sign*, the opposite must be included as part of that reduction, rather than attempting to get rid of it as the traditional approach dictates. Further he says that this idea can be applied to all metaphysical ideas and concepts.

To put these ideas into context, Derrida chooses to focus on the Nature versus Culture debate which was, according to Derrida, discussed in Lévi-Strauss' work *Elementary Structures*.

According to Derrida, in this work nature is described as “...universal and spontaneous, not depending on any particular culture or on any determinate norm,” whereas culture was that “...which depends on a system of norms regulating society and is therefore capable of varying from one social structure to another” (Derrida 253). These two definitions are in effect applicable in nearly every case, except one and that is incest: “This scandal is the incest-prohibition. The incest-prohibition is universal; in this sense one could call it natural. But it is also a prohibition, a system of norms and interdicts; in this sense one could call it culture” (Derrida 253). This may be very scandalous to Lévi-Strauss, but for Derrida, this represents what he has been talking about. For Derrida, this “scandal” is exactly what is wrong with the world, in that everyone is trying to fit everyone and everything else into a category with defined boundaries and when one cannot do so.

#### **6.4 The Missing Link**

The missing link or piece of the puzzle is not really missing. According to Derrida, that “piece” can be found in another work by Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*. In *The Savage Mind*, Lévi-Strauss discusses *bricolage*, which Derrida likens as the missing piece. Derrida says that the *bricoleur*, according to Lévi-Strauss “...is someone who uses ‘the means at hand,’ the instruments he finds at his disposition around him, with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt them, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary, or to try several of them at once, even if their form and their origin are heterogenous and so forth” (Derrida 255). Derrida likens “every discourse” to the *bricoleur* whereas the engineer, the opposite of the *bricoleur*, –he likens as “...the one to construct the totality of ...language syntax, and lexicon” (Derrida 256). He goes on to state that



Lévi-Strauss says that “*bricolage* is mythopoetic” and that “the notion of the engineer who had supposedly broken with all forms of *bricolage* is therefore a theological idea...” (Derrida 256). Derrida goes on to discuss the idea of *bricolage* a bit further, but what is important here is his conclusion, “in effect, what appears most fascinating in this critical search for a new status of the discourse is the stated abandonment of all reference to a center, to a subject, to a privileged reference, to an origin, or to an absolute *archè*” (Derrida 256). For Derrida, the inner workings of *bricolage*, mythopoetics, exemplifies freeplay because there are no constraints; there’s no point of view, time does not exist, science cannot be applied, there are no reference points, there is total freedom, in the sense of Sartre’s idea of Freedom. This Freedom is what Derrida refers to as *différance* and this *différance* at work is *freeplay*. It is Freedom, it is *différance* through which all is *possibilized*.

## 6.5 *Différance*

Derrida devoted an entire essay to the “subject” of *différance* and much of his work centers around this “thing” called *différance*. Here I use the terms “subject” and “thing” very loosely in reference to *différance* because in actuality neither of these terms describes *différance*. In fact *différance* as described by Derrida “...is literally neither word nor a concept” (Derrida 3). If one reads Derrida’s essay on *différance*, what one will find is that *différance* both exists and does not exist all at once, yet at the same time it has always existed. Structure cannot exist without *différance*. Opposites cannot exist, nor have meaning without *différance*. What then is *différance*? I liken *différance* to “space,” or better yet to use Derrida’s term *espacement*. This *espacement* is likened to the term “origin,” the beginning. In order to fully understand how the world operates, one must take a step back and bear witness to the inner

workings, or the *freeplay*, of the world. This is what Lévi-Strauss was doing with myths and why he opted to focus on the myths of the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

## 6.6 *Espacement*

Before I shall commence this section, I should refer the reader to the previous figures, Figures 4 and 5. In each figure the reader shall see that in each instance the term ‘space’ exists.<sup>28</sup> From here onward, as mentioned previously though, I shall utilize the term ‘*espacement*,’ instead because it encompasses more than ‘space’ and it is endless, infinite. It both exists and does not exist all at once. I refer the reader to –Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* in which he says:

Der räumliche Gegenstand muss im unendlichen Raume liegen. (Der Raumpunkt ist eine Argumentstelle.)

[A spatial object must lie in infinite space. (A point in space is a place for an argument.)] (Wittgenstein 2.0131)

And he also says:

Wie wir uns räumliche Gegenstände überhaupt nicht außerhalb des Raumes, zeitliche nicht außerhalb der Zeit denken können, so können wir uns keinen Gegenstand außerhalb der Möglichkeit seiner Verbindung mit anderen denken.

[Just as we cannot think of spatial objects at all apart from space, or temporal objects apart from time, so we cannot think of *any* object apart from the possibility of its connexion with other things] (Wittgenstein 2.0121)

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<sup>28</sup> This interpretation of course was based entirely on the works and research of the Lévi-Strauss and Sartre.

This is *espacement* and everything within *espacement* is connected by *différance* and the interworkings of these objects is *freeplay*.<sup>29</sup> To attempt to better clarify things and to proceed forward rather than dragging things out, I shall now turn my attention to the Choctaws.

## 6.7 *Espacement* and Myth

With regard to the origin of the Choctaw people, Pistonatubbee states:<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> That is not to say that Wittgenstein's words are a definition for *espacement*, because they are not, rather they are merely an example of *espacement*. *Espacement* cannot be defined because defining it would be contradictory to the "idea" of *espacement* in the first place.

<sup>30</sup> "Aiamona," 2013. Choctaw Nation, Indian Territory. 03March2013.  
<http://www.felihkatubbe.com/ChoctawNation/>

Hopahki fehna kash hattak vt atoba vmmona kvv Nvnih Waiya yo atobat akohcha tok oke. Mvskoki yosh tikba Nvnih Waiya akohcha mvt Nvnih Waiya yakni banaiya yo illaiohofka mvt shilvt taha mvt hvshi akohchaka ilhkoli tok oke. Atuk osh Itombikibi ola ho afoha mvt hakchma shunka mvt luak bohli tok oke.

Mihma Chelaki yosh atuklan Nvnih Waiya akohcha tok oke. Mihmvt yakni banaiya ya illaiohofka mvt shilvt taha mvt akni vt atia tok a iakaiyvt ilhkoli tok oke. Mvskoki vt afohvt hakchuma ashunka cha ia tok o, luak vt itonla tok o, kowi vt lua tok o Chelaki vt Mvskoki vt atia tok a ik ithano mvt yoshoba cha filami cha falvmmi imam ko ilhkoli tok osh falvmmi imam ko ont aioklachi tok oke. Atuk osh Chickasha vt Chelaki vt ont aioklachi tok a ona mvt Chelaki bilinka aioklachi tok oke.

Mihma Chahta yosh ont aiushta ma Nvnih Waiya yvmma ishtaiopi akohcha tok oke. Mihmvt yakni banaiya ya illaiohofka mvt shilvt taha mvt kanima ik aiyo hosh yakni ilap akinli ho abinohli tok osh Chahta vt aiasha hoke.

A very long time ago the first creation of men was in Nanih Waiya; and there they were made and there they came forth. The Muscogees first came out of Nanih Waiya, and they then sunned themselves on Nanih Waiya's earthen rampart, and when they got dry they went to the east. On this side of the Tombigbee, there they rested and as they were smoking tobacco they dropped som fire.

The Cherokees next came out of Nanih Waiya. And they sunned themselves on the earthen rampart, and when they got dry they went and followed the trail of the elder tribe. And at the place where the Muscogees had stopped and rested, and they had smoked tobacco, there was fire and the woods were burnt, and the Cherokees could not find the Muscogees' trail, so they got lost and turned aside and went towards the north and there towards the north they settled and made a people. And the Chickasaws third came out of Nanih Waiya. And then they sunned themselves on the earthen rampart, and when they got dry they went and followed the Cherokees' trail ; and when they got to where the Cherokees had settled and made a people, they settled and made a people close to the Cherokees.

And the Choctaws fourth and last came out of Nanih Waiya. And they then sunned themselves on the earthen rampart and when they got dry, they did not go anywhere but settled down in this very land and it is the Choctaws' home.

If one were to examine this from Lévi-Strauss' point of view, then one could say that this is an example of "myth," i.e., classical myth. (See Figure 4)<sup>31</sup> This "myth" exists today as part of the people's culture, but it does not serve any purpose, per se. The majority of Choctaws are

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<sup>31</sup> q.v. p.87

Christians. They are more educated, thus, their ideas of the origins of their people are going to rely upon the ideas and theories of scientists, historians, and religious figures rather than their traditional beliefs. Just as Figure 4<sup>32</sup> shows, as time passes, people progress, their knowledge increases; thus, these myths that were once relied upon are “dead” in a sense and have been replaced, i.e., they do not play any significant role in one’s “modern” culture.

If one were to examine this from Sartre’s point of view, then what one finds is that this “myth” has even less meaning. In fact one could not apply the term ‘myth’ to this because using Sartre’s ideas ‘myth’ does not exist. This is again oversimplifying Sartre, but with Sartre’s ideas only the present exists and, as has been shown above, myth has a past. Therefore one could only take this “thing” at face value, which would be nothing more than a “story” of sorts.

If one examines this “thing,” this “myth,” this “story,” from Derrida’s perspective, then what will one find is everything and nothing all at once. This “thing” can be viewed as “myth,” an inanimate, dead object of the past, or it can be viewed as “myth” as a living, breathing “thing” that is the heart and soul of a culture. One can examine these various connections through the use of ‘freeplay.’ With ‘freeplay’ the various connections between “myth” and the world are revealed. Upon examining the aforementioned “myth” what one finds is that this is not merely the story of the origin of a people, but it is a metaphor which reinforces the relationship between Man and Nature and their inseparable unification as one.

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<sup>32</sup> q.v. p.87

## 6.8 Myth as Metaphor

It is not enough to say that myth is “*espacement*.” In order to better understand this, one needs to break down or reduce the term myth, itself. I refer to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, once again, which defines (signifiers) myth (sign) as:

A usually traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon.<sup>33</sup>

Taking this definition into consideration then, it can be said that myth is nothing more than a metaphor for the *Weltanschauung* of a people or of a culture. Then that leads to the question of what is metaphor? Put simply, and again referencing Merriam-Webster, metaphor is

A figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them.<sup>34</sup>

With these two terms defined, let's return to the statement that was just made, myth is a metaphor for *Weltanschauung*. If one were to stick strictly to the definitions of the terms myth and metaphor, then this statement would not be able to be made. It is through *différance* that this statement becomes *possibilized*. Merriam-Webster's definition is at best mediocre because what Merriam-Webster fails to mention is that myth can either be oral or written. In fact all myths began as oral. Instead of saying oral, however, I am going to follow Derrida's path and use Heidegger's term, *Sprache*. Derrida notes *Sprache* “...is a word I will not translate, so as not

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<sup>33</sup> “Myth,” 2012. Merriam Webster Dictionary. 16Dec 2012. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/myth>

<sup>34</sup> “Metaphor,” 201. Merriam Webster Dictionary. 16Dec2012. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/metaphor>

to have to choose between language, tongue, and speech” (Derrida 60). – This, again, is *différance*. Myth is metaphor as metaphor is myth and *Sprache* is myth, just as metaphor is *Sprache*, A:B::C:D.

Derrida takes this term *Sprache* further by saying that there are two forms of *Sprache*, *Sprachwesen* and *Metasprache*. To understand this best Derrida quotes and interprets

Heidegger:

Heidegger says that *das Sprachwesen*, the essence or being of language, is rooted in the “dialect” (another word for *Mundart*), in the idiom, and if the idiom is the mother’s language, then also rooted there is “das Heimische des Zuhaus, die Heimat.” And he adds, “Die Mundart ist nicht nur die Sprache der Mutter, sondern zugleich [und] zuvor die Mutter der Sprache,” the idiom is not only the language of the mother, but is at the same time and above all the mother of language” (Derrida 61-2).

*Metasprache* on the other hand is simply interpreted as “formal language.” Myth is not simply *Sprache*, it is both *Sprachwesen* and *Metasprache* all at once, just as metaphor is, again, keeping in line with the idea of A:B::C:D.

Using the Electra myth itself, it is easy to put this into context. The Electra myth itself is nothing more than *Metasprache*, it is language. Every variation of that myth then becomes the *Sprachwesen*, dialect, or idiom. This is very important because this also addresses the age old debate of Nature versus Culture. The answer of course is Nature because “language is one of the givens in our lives” (Gay 1). It was Paul Ricoeur, in his *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*, who noted that “[it was impossible to

reach] a social reality prior to symbolization” (Ricoeur 237). It is language that gives meaning to signs, to words. It is therefore language which creates culture. This idea of course is only *possiblized* by bearing witness to the world, by looking at the world as everything within it did not exist as theories, ideas, or definitions, but as “things” that exist within this infinite space known as “*espacement*.”



## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

#### 7.1 λόγος

Friedrich Nietzsche stated that “Gott ist tot!” [“God is dead.”] Many have taken this statement out of context to mean that God is literally dead (Philosophy 1). In order to fully understand what Nietzsche is saying one must read the entire passage:

Gott ist tot! Gott bleibt tot! Und wir haben ihn getötet! Wie trösten wir uns, die Mörder aller Mörder? Das Heiligste und Mächtigste, was die Welt bisher besaß, es ist unter unseren Messern verblutet – wer wischt dies Blut von uns ab? Mit welchem Wasser könnten wir uns reinigen? Welche Sühnefeiern, welche heiligen Spiele werden wir erfinden müssen? Ist nicht die Größe dieser Tat zu groß für uns? Müssen wir nicht selber zu Göttern werden, um nur ihrer würdig zu erscheinen? (Nietzsche 141).

[God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? (*The Gay Science*, Section 125, The Madman)]

With that said, what Nietzsche is discussing or what he is showing is that this concept or this idea of “God” is nothing more than an invention or creation of man. The purpose then of this

“God” is to merely create order and stability within a society because without such there would be instability or “chaos” (Philosophy 1). The average man cannot comprehend this idea that he is nothing more than an object that exists within an infinite space. Some form of this “God” exists within every culture. Myth is the exact same. Myth was created to provide explanation to the unknown, much as this “God” has been created. Approaching myth from a structuralist perspective will show that all myth when broken down to its mythemes is the same regardless of time and culture, as has been reaffirmed in this paper.

It is not enough though to say that myth provides explanation, in a sense it also provides order and stability, as well. These of course are not the only “definitions” or “purposes” of myth, however. Myth has many different layers. Myth exists within this infinite space which is known as *espacement*. It is only through *différance* and *freeplay* that myth is grounded in “time.” Further myth has been shown to be a metaphor for the *Weltanschauung* of a culture. As metaphor myth has also been shown to be *Sprache*, both as *Sprachwesen* or *Mundart*, and *Metsprache*. Finally it has been argued that *Sprache* or language is the root of culture. Language gives meaning to symbols which build or define a culture. Language is the foundation of the world. It is this idea of language which I am going to address further here in these concluding remarks.

To aid in this discussion I shall turn to the work of Martin Heidegger. In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Heidegger starts the section on language by summarizing the work of Wilhelm von Humboldt:

Man speaks. We speak when we are awake and we speak in our dreams. We are always speaking, even when we do not utter a single word aloud, but merely

listen or read, and even when we are not particularly listening or speaking but are attending to some work or taking a rest. We are continually speaking in one way or another. We speak because speaking is natural to us. It does not arise out of some special volition. Man is said to have language by nature. It is held that man, in distinction from plant and animal, is the living being capable of speech. This statement does not mean only that, along with other faculties, man also possess the faculty of speech. It means to say that only speech enables man to be the living being he is as man (Heidegger 189).

Heidegger then goes on to state that “to reflect on language means- to reach the speaking of language in such a way that this speaking takes place as that which grants an abode for the being of mortals” (Heidegger192). In this instance Heidegger is attempting to take a step backwards, to bear witness to this idea of language, itself. To go back to the very beginning, that is. He continues by stating that:

First and foremost, speaking is expression.

Secondly, speech is regarded as an activity of man.

Finally, human expression is always a presentation and representation of the real and the unreal (Heidegger 192).

Following these remarks then it is no longer possible to simply refer to language as “language,” but instead one must revert to the German, *Sprache*, which encompasses all of these ideas that Heidegger is referring to. Heidegger then goes on to discuss all of this within the context of the Bible. He cites the second line of the *Gospel According to John*, “In the beginning the Word was with God.” This is of course nothing more than an attempt by Man to explain the world,

according to Heidegger “the attempt is made not only to free the question of origin from the fetters of a rational-logical explanation, but also to set aside the limits of a merely logical description of language” (Heidegger 193).

Heidegger has not taken things far enough back though. *Sprache* is not the true origin of language. The true origin of language, however, cannot be identified because one cannot know scientifically whether speech or thought came first. Rather what can be said is that there exists a co-constitution of both *μύθος* and *λόγος*. Just as many have done with Nietzsche, Heidegger has taken one line from a passage out of context. One must examine the entire passage in order to grasp the full understanding of it:

In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God. (John, 1:1)

Of course as with any translation, the translation does not do justice; thus, the focus shall now be turned to the Greek version of the aforementioned passage:

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος,  
καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν,  
καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.<sup>35</sup>  
[En archeé eén ho logos  
καὶ ho logos eén pros ton Theón  
καὶ Theos eén ho logos]

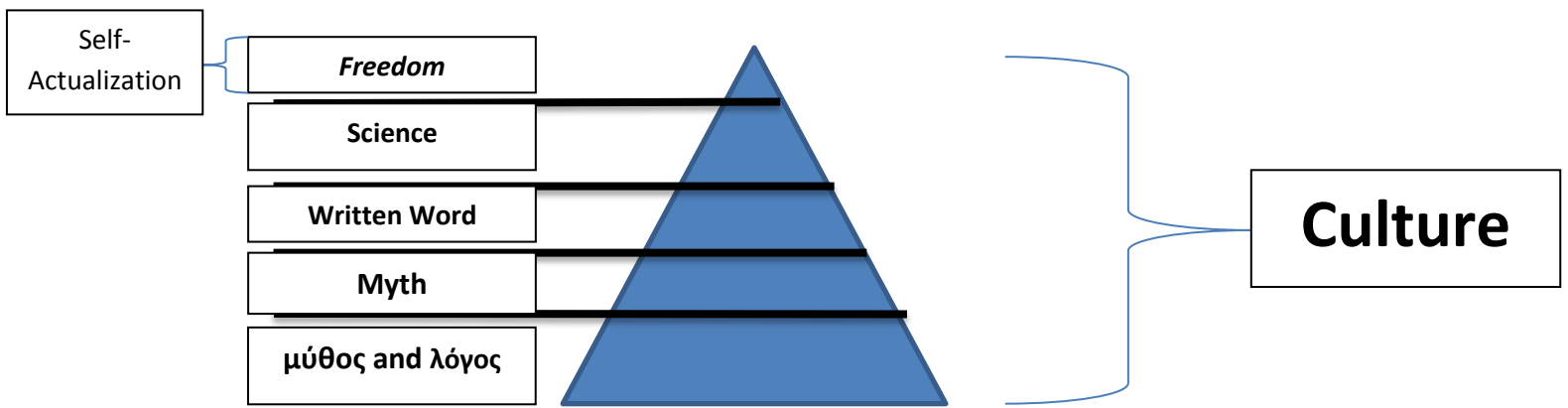
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<sup>35</sup> “John, 1:1,” 2013. The Online Greek Bible. 05May 2013. <http://www.greekbible.com/index.php>

Further it is important to look at two other words within this same passage, θεόν and θεός. These two words have been translated as the word “God.” To understand the true meaning of this word I refer to the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*. This particular volume traces the origin of the words θεόν and θεός to the word θεωρέιν [theoréo]. This word, θεωρέιν then means “to look at,” “to view,” “to contemplate,” and so forth (707). With this knowledge and a rereading of the aforementioned passage, then this passage takes on an entirely different meaning. This word or idea of θεωρέιν is in line with Sartre’s idea of bearing witness to the world. By stepping back and bearing witness to the world, freedom is achieved in the sense that limits and boundaries no longer exist and one is able to fully understand the very interworkings, the *freeplay*, of the world. This is exactly what has been done in this paper. In doing so, it has been shown that the very origin of all things is both μύθος, that is “speech” or “language” and λόγος, that is “reasoning” or “thought.” There is nothing further.

## **7.2 A Return to the Beginning**

At the introduction I stated that myth was one of the building blocks of a culture and that to better comprehend this that one could utilize Maslow’s hierarchal pyramid to the term ‘culture.’ In doing so, it would appear as Figure 1, which has been reproduced below:



**Figure 1: Hierarchal Pyramid of Culture**

Further I briefly explained that, as can be seen, all things are descended from myth, which in turn descends from μύθος and λόγος, respectively, which is what I hoped to have shown in this research. Man is born with this innate ability to think and speak, how he thinks and speaks depends upon his culture which is taught through the use of myth. Myth has always existed, but in its earliest form it was oral, traditional stories passed from one generation to the next until the “written word” was produced.

I use the term “written word” very loosely because I do not want one to think that the only “written word” is somewhat similar to say what one sees on these pages, i.e., an alphabet with letters and/or characters. Within these words ‘written word,’ I am including the early cave paintings such as those seen at Altamira and Chauvet, the tapestries produced by the Indians of the Plains in North America, as well as, the hieroglyphics of Egypt, and everything in between. Individuals in the field of early childhood research and education use the phrase “invented spelling” because even though what a child has reproduced on a sheet of paper does not resemble what most would call “written word,” it does have meaning to that child, just as those

paintings and tapestries had meaning for the earliest cultures and civilizations on this planet. They aided in telling the stories of their people. They had meaning for their people.

The next building block is science. I am not attempting to suggest that science is mythical in any aspect, but I am saying that science does descend from myth. Man needs order and explanation. As such Man in his earliest times has had “science,” although in more mythical proportions. Returning to the Indians of North America, I shall use the example of the Choctaw and Cherokee. Both cultures have a story about the opossum. For the Cherokee it’s “How the possum lost his tail” and for the Choctaw it’s “Possum and Raccoon.” Both of these tales provide an explanation as to why the opossum’s tail is the way that it is. My proposition is that it was these tales and the thousands others like them that provoked an individual to dig even further to find out the “scientific” reasoning behind such phenomena.

Finally the last building block is “Freedom.” This is the “Freedom” that both Lévi-Strauss and Sartre discussed in their works; the process of bearing witness to not just oneself, but to their culture, to the world in which they live and examining it further and producing ideas, theories, and hypotheses. Certainly the numbers of individuals who call themselves and who have been called philosophers, thinkers, theorists, and so forth fit into this category, but any individual or culture can reach this final step. Many of the individuals within a number of cultures in the majority of the industrialized, modern nations of the world today have already reached this step. They are no longer guided by the traditional myths of their culture, or even their religion. They are constantly looking for more information and answers. They tend to “think outside the box.”

As said earlier at any one point in time, a culture is at one of these levels, with the most “primitive” of cultures being at the bottom and the most “advanced” at the top. Therefore to understand a culture, one must understand the myths of that culture, which is why myth is so important.

### **7.3 Rapprochement: A New “Theory” of Myth**

As I mentioned with the example of science, I am not saying that science is mythical, but I am saying science is descended from myth, but that does leave the question of “what is myth?” This is something that as I have shown in this paper has been argued for generations. Morris Freilich touched on this matter in his article “Myth, Method, and Madness” and called for a standardized “theory” of myth. He even stated that “...we must distinguish myth from other genres of oral literature” (Freilich 219).

The reason for this debate is because a theory of myth cannot be written, nor established, nor can myth be accurately defined. Throughout this paper when referring to myth, I have used the classical, traditional definition of myth discussed above unless otherwise noted, but as this research has shown the term ‘myth’ encompasses much more than what is traditionally thought of as myth. This entire argument reminds me of Derrida’s argument with regard to *différance*. Like *différance*, myth both exists and does not exist. Myth cannot be defined, it can only be described. Therefore one cannot have one genre or one category labeled ‘myth.’ In doing so one limits the possibilities.

*The Flies* is a perfect example of this. If myth were defined and limits imposed, then one could only say that *The Flies* was nothing more than drama, but as I have shown above that is not the case. This is the same situation for the majority of literary works today because the



majority of them are nothing more than the same story repeated (See the works of Joseph Campbell, et al.). which ultimately traces its connection to myth and in some instances, like with *The Flies*, is in fact myth, itself, along with being something else whether that be drama or poetry or whatever the case may be. By defining myth, by writing theories of myth, ultimately what one ends up with is this “new” sort of “incest-taboo,” in which this particular thing or work being analyzed does not fit neatly into one category.

In concluding, I would argue that rather than thinking about myth in terms of categorization or theories, that myth needs to be thought of more as a building block, or a stepping stone, as shown above in Figure 1 in the hierarchical chart of culture. It is only in this manner that one does not simply find myth as it is traditionally thought, but everything else that it encompasses.

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