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Mythic Imagination Today: The Interpenetration of Mythology and Science

Alexandra Sedgwick¹

Terry Marks-Tarlow takes us on a journey through historical discoveries in her latest creative publication, *Mythic Imagination Today*. Filled with fantastic images and thought-provoking passages, she doesn't fail to offer a text that pulls readers in. *Mythic Imagination Today* highlights the link between myth and story, offering a valid case for story within facets of life that are too logical for emotion.

Marks-Tarlow has her roots in psychology, having received her bachelors from Stanford University and her Ph.D. from UCLA. While she had a focus on cognitive-behavioral theories, she has since expanded her repertoire. She has been teaching and practicing yoga for over thirty years. Not only does she have experience in Gestalt practice, she also has training in hypnosis, guided imagery, analytic self-psychology, and interpersonal neurobiology and regulation theory. All these unique facets allow Marks-Tarlow to bring imagination, creativity, and play within her works and interactions.

Mythic Imagination Today is divided into four sections. Marks-Tarlow begins with a hefty introduction demonstrating her point that this publication is more about her ability to construct a creative piece rather than an argument. The first full section focuses on the different facets of "Myths and Mythmaking"; those that are interested in the origin of myth and much of the different ideas at play will truly enjoy this beautiful "birds-eye" view. Not only does she demonstrate an understanding of myth creation, she offers

passages that get the gears turning in favor of a need for story within roles, rules, and relationships. Take this passage, for example:

Unconscious processes of projection and priming go on invisibly and automatically, beneath the level of conscious awareness. To use a mythic metaphor, our unconscious minds operate like Tricksters on conscious experience, partly by concealing underlying mechanisms and machinations, and partly by leading us to believe and act as if our sensations of brightness, color, shape, sound, and taste literally reflect the world outside us, when instead they are projected products of our own perceptual and neural organs (p. 33).

Already she has made connections to experiences most readers can relate to. This technique is no stranger to Marks-Tarlow, which makes her books truly engrossing.

Second, she addresses science and its latest fad to be reductionistic and discounting of its mythic origin. Here, she plays heavily into some of her strengths. Fractal geometry, Chaos theory, and literary formulas are all on display in this section. She offers telling descriptions:

Fractal geometry is a new branch of mathematics invented/discovered in the late 1970s by Benoit Mandelbrot, a Polish born, French and American mathematician. As the title of his manifesto suggests, Mandelbrot (1982) considered fractals to be the geometry of

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Nature, because their recursively enfolded, complex shapes capture the irregularities, complexities, and idiosyncrasies found in clouds, branches, mountainscapes, and other natural patterns (pp. 49-50).

As if to exemplify how both science and myth influence each other, Marks-Tarlow goes deeper into the myth of Psyche and Eros. Earlier in the publication, she notes that she wishes to demonstrate her storytelling in a way that truly reaches the reader. She does just this when recounting the popular tale:

Psyche was the youngest and most beautiful of three daughters. But her hand was unbound in marriage, and she took little joy in her charms. This was partly because her sisters were very jealous of all the attention she received, for Psyche's beauty had become legendary. When the Goddess of Beauty, Aphrodite, learned that men the world-over were flocking to worship a mere mortal, the Goddess became enraged. Envious and full of indignation, Aphrodite cooked up a plot to destroy her young rival. She instructed her own son Eros, God of Love, to inflict Psyche with an arrow that would eternally bind her to the vilest of all men (p. 79).

Her description of the myth reads almost like a young adult fiction; this is a relaxing change of pace from the previous section. This gives readers who may be unfamiliar with the myth a baseline, and those who have experience in psychology a narrative to play with the namesake origin.

Lastly, "Foundations: Curiosity, Memory and Metaphor" wraps things up with several short subsections that only further demonstrate the more apparent link between story and science:

The very word "mnemonic" traces back to Greek myth and the Goddess of Memory, Mnemosyne, daughter of two Titans, Uranus and Gaia, and mother of the nine Muses. This is another way the

mythic imagination lives on today—through etymology, or the study of the origins of words. By immortalizing memory in this way, the ancient Greeks recognized its importance; indeed, in the early Greek cosmogony of the Gods, Mnemosyne's birth occurred close to the origins of the Universe itself (p. 114).

She has written about concepts that seem like common knowledge. After presenting what has previously been stated in the publication, she takes these trivial subjects to new levels once again.

Although *Mythic Imagination Today* provides stunning Imagery, much of which Marks-Tarlow has illustrated herself, there are still some sections that may remain confusing to an inexperienced reader. Explanations are given for topics such as the process of projection and fractal geometry, yet some of the terminology may be lost on some readers. Because of such a distinct contrast between science and myth, there may not be enough exposure for interested parties to understand quotes like, "Not only do fractal elements appear in timeless fairytales, they are also rampant in contemporary children's literature, especially within the animal, house, and landscape drawings of Dr. Seuss. *The Cat in the Hat* is a prime example of a self-similar series of ever-smaller cats emerging out of the hat of the main character" (p. 53). With current changing of media as things are worked and reworked, *The Cat in the Hat* descriptor may be lost to some readers. Her publication, however, seeks to offer new ways of thinking, not to explain. It may take time to chew through, but the material is ultimately worth sitting with. The idea of *The Cat in the Hat* analogy constantly changing with current times is also relevant to her idea that science (and mythos) are reworked to fit current paradigms.

Marks-Tarlow brings two seemingly different subjects together in a fusion of intellectual fun. Despite her main goal not being a call for immediate change in understanding, she

produces a beautiful build up for any reader to articulate the reciprocal nature of science and myth. While they remain separate within their own right, both are needed in the world of today. She brings about her personal

experiences melting science, history, mythos, and inquiry; Marks-Tarlow's *Mythic Imagination Today* is a delight for more than just the hungry mind.

Reference

Marks-Tarlow, T. (2020). *Mythic imagination today: The interpenetration of myth and science*. Brill