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Myth, Soul, and The Feminine

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Abstract:

What are some of the root causes that have caused the subjugation of women? Could it all have begun with the fantastical and alluring myths we were told? If so, how does myth become truth for societies as a whole? If that does happen, then it must be true that the mythic is where the emergence of the soul is found; the soul of humanity? Thereby, creating the realities found in the society of today. Even more intriguing is how consciousness and art find their way in merging with myth producing awareness, wonder, and connection in society. Thus, revealing the conduct of society in which it lives by. Art, consciousness, and myth come together to reveal the oppression of women in today's world.

Keywords: art, consciousness, myth, mythic, mythopoetic, the feminine, subjugation, soul, society, women, Jean Gebser, structures of consciousness, Lilith, Eve, Satan, serpent.



Figure 1: John Collier, *Lilith*, 1887



Figure 2: Pantaleon Szyndler, *Eve (Temptation)*, 1889

Introduction

Above, so gloriously painted, is said to be a tempestuous, a seducer, a demon, and the reason for the Fall of Man; Lilith and Eve; otherwise known as the wives of Adam. These women, mythical characters, have allegedly been called the causes of men's uncontrolled desires for women and/or the

justification for the subordination of women. These two women have been the focus of religious teachings, arguments for why women are not equal to men, and the rationale for the control over women's bodies.

How is it that myth becomes true? How do art, myth, and consciousness collide, and

how do they inspire individuals and societies to evolve and emerge into the cultures they are today? By examining art, consciousness, and the mythic, they will demonstrate how the emergence of the soul shaped today's feminine, which vilified them from myths created over 6,000 years ago. Yet, first, some understanding and awareness need to be built to address these questions.

What is art?

Art is the expression of consciousness. Art expresses itself through the mediums of music, painting, sculpture, poetry, dance, theater, and more creative avenues. Art exhibits the relationship between the artist and the stimuli they are affected by, whether consciously known or unknown. Art emerges forth from the artist; it is a creation; it is intentional. The power of art allows the experiencer to create their own relationship to the artwork. It empowers the experiencer to emerge forth in new perspectives of self and/or self within society or the world. To understand art clearly, one can seek to understand what consciousness could be.

What is consciousness?

According to consciousness theorist Allan Combs (2016), consciousness is "like a light that illuminates, but is not seen. It is a clear stream, through which we see the brilliantly colored stones on the bottom. It is emptiness itself, translucent, transparent, yet somehow filled with objects of the world...it is intentional...it is always about something" (p. 1).

The ancient Greek philosophers believed one's consciousness to have derived from the heart (Combs, 2009). Leonardo da Vinci saw consciousness as a "symbol of the divine spirit" (Gebser, 1953, p. 19). Also, we have come to understand consciousness

to have developed from the emergence of linear perspective, beginning during the Renaissance. Gebser (1953) states, "the basic concern of perspective, which it achieves, is to 'look through' space and thereby to perceive and grasp space rationally." The artwork entitled *The Tribute Money*, painted by the Renaissance artist Masaccio, is said to be the first piece of work to have used perspective and three-dimensional human figures (Strickland, 2007). The emergence of perspective within artworks and the use of shadowing and other art techniques aided in giving rise to the awareness of "personal or ego-consciousness," through which the use and exploration of the first-person pronoun and subjectivity increased (p. 19).

Consciousness has had many different meanings throughout time, and in many respects, consciousness is an abstract term. Abstract, because scientists and philosophers cannot definitively state where consciousness is to be found. Given that, the study of consciousness has created numerous definitive terminologies on how it is to be perceived and understood. Consciousness philosopher Jean Gebser theorized five structures of consciousness (which will be discussed in the following subsection), providing us with a foundation to understanding consciousness. Moreover, other scholars have also attempted to define and structure consciousness. For instance, Ken Wilber created quadrants of consciousness, developmental lines, and the eight zones of consciousness found within the quadrants (Combs, 2009, pp. 17, 47, 117).

Furthermore, according to psychologist Imants Baruss (2020), there are three ways in which consciousness can be seen: physiological, cognitive, and experiential (p. 5). Additionally, Baruss has furthered

defined four meanings of consciousness: consciousness one, behavioral consciousness two, subjective consciousness two, and consciousness three (p. 6). He has also created 14 dimensions of consciousness that range from attention to inner speech to self-control and body image. Yet, consciousness is abstract.

As shown, philosophers have given defining qualities to what consciousness could be, yet it is still abstract, a concept that cannot be defined. Combs (2016) describes consciousness to be something that can only be explained through metaphors because consciousness is not a noun, meaning “something produced” (p. 2). Philosopher Robert Pirsig declared, “It is impossible to define, but ‘You know what it is!’” (p. 1). By intuitively knowing what it is, consciousness takes on different forms and meanings because it is subjective. Further, Combs elaborates on William James, the father of psychology, how he, in 1904, ultimately rejected the word consciousness and replaced it with the word experience (p. 2).

Another way of looking at consciousness can be viewed from the lens of an educator. Marla Morris (2002) sees consciousness as “emergentist,” meaning that consciousness is within the body and that it emerges with the world. Morris states, “consciousness is embodied, it seeps outward, it is intentional, and it is always about something and comes into existence in response to surroundings” (p. 578). Therefore, consciousness becomes or is “co-emergent and co-conscious,” meaning that our ego-consciousness exists in relation to others, society, and the world in which our consciousness emerges within its surroundings (p. 579). Consciousness, in this way, is interconnected.

To sum up, this elusive term consciousness or awareness or experience is present due to stimuli that enable the self to enter inward to come to realizations objectively or subjectively to relate those ideas/thoughts/expressions outwardly. Or maybe consciousness is, as Cognitive Neuroscientist Anil Seth (2017) sees it, “[as] your brain hallucinating your conscious reality,” where he defines hallucinations as uncontrolled perspective, perspective as controlled hallucinations, and reality as socially agreed-upon controlled hallucinations. Or maybe, simply put, consciousness is awareness within our experience, whether one believes it to be reality or illusion.

In relation to art, consciousness expresses the experience of one’s reality and/or illusion. Art, how it is conveyed and/or symbolized, has evolved and emerged within the structures of consciousness, thereby shaping humanity’s process of seeing, understanding, and knowing. By way of this evolution, Jean Gebser’s structurization of consciousness shows how art and consciousness are relational.

Structures of Consciousness

German philosopher Jean Gebser’s first publication of his book in 1949, *The Ever-Present Origin*, established and defined five structures of consciousness: archaic, mystical, mythic, mental, and integral; in which these structures describe the gradual formation and growth of consciousness within human beings. The first structure, the archaic, meaning origin, is represented as “zero-dimensional...a time where the soul is dormant, a time of complete non-differentiation of man and the universe” where consciousness begins to simmer (p. 43). As the structures of consciousness gradually move into their forms, for

instance, the developing physical human form, Gebser warns against seeing the archaic structure as primitive but instead to see it as man emerging into their own awareness. In other words, as “true men [or] holy men of calling” as described by the ancient Chinese (p. 44). Through this emergence from the archaic, the magical structure comes into form and begins to take dominance.

Within the magical structure, symbolized by a straight line, Gebser (1953) describes this structure as being one-dimensional because man’s ego had not yet developed. This epoch has portrayed the ancestors as unified and a collective tribal force seen as “resting in the world” (p. 46). The ancestors have now moved beyond the zero-dimensional in which their soul began to materialize and became conscious of itself. Our ancestors began to divine the power of nature and soon began to use witchcraft and totems to try to harness this power and control nature themselves. During this period, cave paintings emerged, depicting the magical elements surrounding them, their relationship towards nature, and their quest to try and dominate it.

The gradual progression into the third structure, mythical, symbolized by the circle, is where the emergence of the soul is found (Gebser, 1953, p. 66). The origin of the mythic comes from the Greek language word *mythos*, meaning “to discourse, talk, speak,” it is from here where we in today’s Western world have come to learn about Zeus, Hades, Athena, and all the Greek gods, goddesses, and mythical stories (Shaw, 2017). This period is full of imagination, and all things have meaning.

The emergence of the fourth structure, mental, symbolized by a triangle, is where perspectivity gives birth. Perspectivity is

said to be found in the year 1500, wherein the rational mind, social laws, the ego, individualism, and the use of the pronoun “I” began to materialize. In this epoch, the mental has shifted from two-dimensional to three-dimensional. Expressing itself through the symbol of a triangle, this three-dimensional represents the Trinity, the religious: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. During this period, the patriarchy became more solidified hence, shaping the world where we find ourselves today (Shaw, 2017).

The progression from the mental begins to merge into the fifth structure, the integral, symbolized by a “sphere in motion,” moving from three-dimensional to “four dimensionality” (Gebser, 1953, p. 100). The integral is an “intensification of consciousness” where the individual can expand their mind to encompass and use all structures of consciousness simultaneously (p. 99). Settegast (2001) calls integral consciousness “the free expression of all the other structures without being captured by any of them” (p. 108). Coming into integral consciousness opens one’s perspective into being well-balanced and one’s mind to seeing and understanding the layers that enfold self and society—manifesting and embodying co-emergence and co-dependence, relationality.

This cohesive merging of the different structures is a gradual integrative process that enables the blending of the structures to come into the integral. However, to blend into the integral, understanding of the mythical structure needs to be shown in order for self and society to mature and grow. Therefore, the emerging sections will concentrate on the mythical structure to demonstrate its power and impact on society regarding gender, the female gender.

What are myth and the mythical consciousness?

How does one understand themselves to be real? How do truths get shaped within the psyche? How does a society come to accept and hold on to universal beliefs? An awareness of mythopoetics needs to be addressed to answer these questions. The meaning of mythopoetic reveals myths' imaginative creation and development and understanding of their impact and influence on self and society. Myths are stories created fiction designed to teach society to see and learn how to handle and overcome life struggles. They teach society principles to live by, what to believe in, and how to have belief. Myths are found within the stories of the Bible; the iconic myths of Zeus, Athena, and Ishtar; or in ancient figurines; or heroes/heroines; and found in all religions, stereotypes, gender norms, conspiracy theories, and so on.

Furthermore, when the renowned mythologist Joseph Campbell (1988) was confronted with the statement that myths are just "other's people's dreams," implying that it seemed implausible for myths to have a profound impact on society. In response, Campbell illuminated how myths are not just other people's dreams but "are the world's dreams... They are archetypal dreams and deal with great human problems [and how] the myth tells me about it, how to respond to certain crises of disappointment or delight or failure or success. The myths tell me where I am" (p. 15). Moreover, as described by Leslie Stoupas (2015) in her dissertation *The Myth of the Feminine: Problematic Fictions*, myths are "believed to be one of the significant vehicles through which the archetypes and the psyche commune. Because myth is an attempt to explain how one encounters the experience

of the world, phenomenal or not, myth often can be accepted as truth" (p. 8).

Moreover, Stoupas (2015) incorporates the theories of historian and philosopher Paul Veyne from his book *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths?: An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination* in her dissertation. Veyne attempts to reframe the underlining belief structure of mythologies and argues that the truth behind these ideas comes from the perceptions of human lived experiences and observations, which then truth becomes the "products of the imagination... a vulgate authenticated by consensus over the ages." As a result, myths are linked and connected to thinking in metaphorical ways that help establish reality to the viewer of her/his lived experiences and/or lived observations. So then, the idea of truth is the "combination of one's perception of the experience one has of reality, and the label used for the way received information is, and already has been, understood" (p. 9). This concept brings forth the notion that the creation of truths we or humanity or society have created is "the imagination repond[ing] to lived reality... [thus] Truth, as a result, is relative to who holds it." (p. 11).

Mythopoesis for the Western mindset began over 4,500 years ago with the Egyptians, then over 3,500 years ago with Mesopotamia, and over 2,700 with the ancient Greeks ("Greek Myths," n.d.). The impact of these stories has shaped our Western civilization to the point where a vast majority genuinely believe and adhere to these teachings in spirit and in action, where "at the heart of a mythology... lies a collective view of society" (Parker, 2016, p. 122).

Lilith & Eve and Mythical Gods

Campbell (1988) describes that they are two different “orders” to mythology. The first is about one’s nature and how one relates to the natural world. The second concerns the sociological that connects one to a society (pp. 22-23). In the Bible, its first book Genesis, “nature is condemned...when nature is thought of as evil, you don’t put yourself in accord with it, you control it, or try to, and hence the tension, the anxiety...” (p. 24).

One of the greatest mythical tales that has immensely impacted, influenced, and conditioned our present-day people’s sociological behaviors, speech, and thoughts is the biblical story of creation, the perceived first two people on earth, Adam and Eve. Adam symbolizes male dominance and affirmation and man’s domination over nature. Whereas for Eve, she symbolizes the treatment of women today. In the characterization of Eve, she is the weaker sex, a woman that is needed to be controlled, yet at the same time, she is needed and somewhat valued for her reproductive capabilities. While Eve signifies how women are treated today, there is another tale, the myth of Lilith, the alleged first woman, furthering the unfolding of the present-day perceptions placed upon women.

Genesis’s Chapters One and Two are said to be two separate creation accounts (Mondriaan, 2005 & Gaines, 2021). The distinction is found in the companions God made for Adam. In the first chapter, God states he created males and females in his own image, “He created them” (NASB, 2020, Genesis 1:27). In Chapter Two, God states that he created a woman out of Adam’s rib (2:22). In these accounts, two different women were fashioned and

created. The Jewish Masoretic Text depicts the Chapter One version of the female as Adam’s first wife, Lilith. The Masoretic Text describes the story of Lilith, a woman who did not want to be subordinated to Adam because she believed they were created equal. After all, they were both formed from the earth. However, Lilith could not get Adam to understand their equality, so she escaped by flying off into the desert. Since Lilith would not comply with Adam, God cursed her by saying, “one hundred of her demon offspring would die every day” (Mondriaan, 2005, p. 765). In her outrage over the curse, Lilith states that she, too, will kill newborn babies. Therefore, Lilith becomes a symbol of Jewish demonology, a monster that kills babies and seduces men (Mondriaan, 2005 & Gaines, 2021). Surprisingly, Lilith’s true roots appeared over 6,000 years ago in the Sumerian myths, which means Lilith did not emerge from Hebrew mythology. Instead, the concept of Lilith was integrated into Hebrew ideologies due to the mixing with other cultures (ibid).

The second wife, Eve, is the cause of the Fall of Man. The Bible tells of the story that Eve wandered off from Adam’s side and neared the tree that God said its fruits could not be eaten. As she came closer to the tree, a serpent told her that she should eat from it, for the tree would open her eyes to reality. As a result, Eve eats, then Adam eats; thus, men and women are condemned for eternity (NASB, 2020, Genesis 3).

Due to Eve, this eternity is vastly different for women. Eve’s perceived weakness for falling under the spell of temptation by the serpent justified the “starting point of Christian misogyny... [for she is] the temptress the destroyer of man and the ally of Satan, the serpent”; therefore, she must be

under the subjugation of men (Chakraborty, 2017, p. 157).

Who is this serpent? Is this serpent really Satan, the one we have come to know today? Prior to the Christianization of the serpent equating Satan, the serpent was seen as a symbol of “sexuality and fertility...knowledge and wisdom... [and] the oldest symbol of female power...[where] women and serpent together were considered holy in preclassic Aegean civilization, since both seemed to embody the power of life” (Chakraborty, 2017, p. 156).

The serpent, today, is still represented on the medical symbol, the Greek Rod of Aesculapius. The rod depicts a snake intertwined on a staff. For the Greeks, snakes meant healing, regeneration, and rebirth. Even in the Bible, directed by God, Moses created a bronze serpent to be used to heal the children of Israel (NASB, 2020, Numbers 21). Throughout the ancient world, serpents had a positive influence on society. Furthermore, there appears to be no direct connection to the current interpretation for the serpent to represent Satan in the Bible. According to Dolansky’s (2021) *How the Serpent Became Satan*, she states that when Genesis 2-3 was written, “the concept of the devil had not yet been invented” (para. 1). She further goes on to claim that the prevailing interpretation of the talking serpent as Satan is not found anywhere in the Old or New Testaments (para. 3).

According to Martin Luther, Eve’s inability to stay at Adam’s side under his “supervision and protection” means that all women “should pay the debt of Eve’s sin by staying at home and doing domestic work” (Chakraborty, 2017, p. 158). Whereas for Lilith, “[she] represents chaos, seduction, and ungodliness,” a demon that kills

innocent babies and is the seducer of men (Gains, 2021, para. 4). These two women’s stories of old represent the treatment of women today. Eve the domesticated and Lilith the undomesticated. The telling and retelling of these myths have shaped and formed the ideologies that evolved into the human consciousness, causing the subjugation, violence, and control over women throughout the ages. Gebser (1953) describes the mythic period as the “emergent awareness of the internal world of the soul...it encompasses, balances and ties together all polarities” (p. 66). Where myths “when read in a non-literal way, helps to render the invisible processes of cultural evolution visible” (Johnson, 2019, p. 101). This is the visible, the state of women today, the continuation of fighting for their rights. In reality, women are fighting to be free from the myths that were created over 6,000 years ago.

Furthermore, the mythic period also shaped the other myths we in the West have come to praise, hold dear, and tell their tales as the heroes we should admire and learn from, Greek and Roman Mythology. As exemplified by researcher Janice Parker (2016), she details 71 rapes of the Goddesses and maidens committed by Zeus, Apollo, Hermes, and other divine mythical Gods (pp. 309-318). Though in the stories that we read, the rapes are not portrayed for what they truly are; they are portrayed as love stories where these Gods believed it was their divine right to possess what they found to be beautiful and to impregnate them. Hesiod’s *Theogony* wrote these tales in the Eighth Century BCE, which is said to be the “fantastic male mythology which gave shape and substance to the Western world” (ibid., p. 119). Hence, the treatment of women today.

The mythic period also created dualities: male and female, good and bad, weak and strong, light and dark, where these dualities defined what one is and what one is not, making the invisible, the interior, visible. Furthermore, this period helped enable the growth into the mental structure in its emergence of the ego, the first-person pronoun use, and reason. Thus, it gave rise to the rationale for women's subjugation and the motivation of the Witch Trials beginning in the mid-1500s and lasting a span of a couple of hundred years. Hence, the emergence of the soul is made visible.

Art, Consciousness, Mythic and the Emergence of Soul

The sensuous paintings of Lilith by John Collier 1887, and Eve (Temptation) by Pantaleon Szyndler 1889, were crafted either during the Witch Trials or some time afterward, portraying these Femme Fatales as beautiful, seductive, enticing, yet dark and dangerous. Art represents the rhythm of life, and the perspective of society, showing us "the human condition, expressing and diagnosing what is present as the given human reality, and just as significantly, influencing and working on that condition" (James, 2001, p. 236). The condition of our human reality shows the powerful effect the mythopoetic has within the human psyche and how the connection of art and consciousness works together to tell/create a story. Therefore, "as long as the myth of the feminine evil is allowed to dominate human consciousness and social arrangements, it provides the setting for women's victimization, by both men and women" (Parker, 2016, p. 161).

These stories birth ideologies, perceptions, and actions that induce the conscious or unconscious individual to align to their conditioning within those stories. Campbell

(1988) states, "We need myths that will identify the individual, not with his local group but the planet" (p. 24). Myths are all about the emergence of the soul, portraying the reality of society. With that kind of power, it is time to change the narrative and create new myths that will help enable a new emergence of interconnectedness, thereby shifting society's soul into harmony to encompass integral consciousness.

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