

Joseph Campbell's Functions of Myth in Science Fiction: Modern Mythologies and the
Historical and Ahistorical Duality of Time

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ABSTRACT

This document explores the relationships between science fiction and mythology, utilizing the theories of Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung in particular. Conclusions are then drawn that argue that science fiction performs the same functions as mythology in the modern world. The author provides examples of these functions being performed in science fiction by analyzing two novels: *The Forest of Hands and Teeth*, and *Strange in a Strange Land*. Finally, the document explores the narratives' uses of time in historical and ahistorical modes as a vehicle for its functions, and argues that the various uses of time are key to science fiction acting as modern mythology.

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Introduction: Why Science Fiction?

In the past century there has been increasing interest in speculative fiction as the genre branched from primarily novels and short stories into additional media. In more recent decades, the technological revolution has jump-started the cultural imagination and led to further development of the genre. Television series and adaptations such as *Game of Thrones*, *The Walking Dead*, and *Battlestar Galactica* have become enormously popular, even gathering cult classic followings. The entertaining, action-packed plots may initially draw people to these series; however, they remain popular because they draw on basic human needs.

Speculative fiction is generally divided into two categories, science fiction and fantasy. On the surface level, fantasy is usually set in the past, and focuses on elements of medieval romance. Science fiction, on the other hand, tends towards settings in the future or on distant worlds not bound by our current technological limits. Joanna Russ, in her article “Towards an Aesthetic of Science Fiction,” describes the distinction between subgenres based on the works of Darko Suvin¹, Stanislas Lem, and Samuel Delany:

...standards of plausibility—as one may apply them to science fiction—must be derived not only from the observation of life as it is or has been lived, but also, rigorously and systematically, from science. And in this context “science” must include disciplines ranging from mathematics...through the “hard” sciences (physics, astronomy, chemistry) through the “soft” sciences (ethology, psychology, sociology) all the way to disciplines which as yet exist only in the descriptive or speculative stage (history, for example, or political theory)...

¹ Darko Suvin was one of the first people to attempt a definition of science fiction for critical study in his essay “On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre,” published in *College English* in 1972. Suvin describes science fiction as “the *literature of cognitive estrangement*” (372). Most other critics continue to draw from his original definition with variations.

Science fiction is not fantasy, for the standards of plausibility of fantasy derive not from science, but from the observation of life as it is—inner life, perhaps, in this case. (112)

While both genres have become increasingly popular in past decades, science fiction in particular responds to current cultural needs, adapting to the changing situations of the readers. These needs are often responsive to questions that have existed for millennia: what is my place in the universe? What is death? What is morality? While fantasy works may seek to address some of these questions, they do so from a perspective limited to an inner space. This inner space allows authors to draw from fantastic settings that do not need to address reality in a physical sense (think for example of Tolkien's fantasy masterpiece *The Lord of Rings*, and the prevalence of Orcs, Hobbits, and Elves living in Middle Earth). Science fiction is bound by different limitations because there is an expectation of plausibility: "Science fiction must not offend against what is known. Only in areas where nothing is known—or knowledge is uncertain—is it permissible to just 'Make it up.' (Even then what is made up must be systematic, plausible, rigorously logical, and must avoid offending against what is known to be known.)" (Russ 114). Because science fiction must respond to current scientific knowledge (at the time of authorship), it is able to communicate with the readers in different ways by drawing on the context of their current environments. Primitive mythology generally relied on information that was readily observable by the audience, such as the relationship between thunder and lightning, making the stories seem as though they were based on a logical progression of conclusions. Because these myths drew from natural phenomena, they were necessarily reliant on a plausible description of the universe. Therefore, there are many similarities between these contemporary works and much older mythologies which are also based upon a foundation of real-world plausibility.

Despite these definitions of science fiction and fantasy, there is still much debate as to how the subgenres should be separated from one another, or if it is even possible. Because science fiction often includes fantastic elements (alien creatures, time travel, etc.) and romantic ideals², the line between the two genres is blurred. Because there is a wide range of differences between subgenres, I have selected two works to apply Joseph Campbell's theories to. The first, *Stranger in a Strange Land*, is a classic work of science fiction by Robert Heinlein. The second, *The Forest of Hands and Teeth*, by Carrie Ryan, includes elements of science fiction and fantasy. The principles of myth's functionality can be applied to both works, thereby diminishing the importance of a hard division between subgenres.

In order to examine the similarities between science fiction and mythology, as well as the various functions that they serve, one must understand theories espoused by both Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung. These men help to explain the ways that mythology contributes to human communities and the personal development that can occur as a result of myths' influence. In particular, Campbell outlines four functions of mythology essential for mythic narratives' successful impact on communities: metaphysical, cosmological, sociological, and psychological. Jung is an expert psychologist and worked closely with myth theory as well. Most of his theories further help to explain how the psychological function of myth (and science fiction) relates to larger principles in the field. Because Jung's work focused more heavily on practical clinical treatment than on theory, it only indirectly illuminates our understanding of myth theory. Compared to Jung, the works of Joseph Campbell have been applied to many other literary

² Romantic ideals include idealized or overly-perfect representations of women and other characters as well as elements of the hero's quest. These themes are present in many works of science fiction including but not limited to Arthur C. Clarke's *Fountains of Paradise*, Philip K. Dick's *Ubik*, Joe Haldeman's *Forever War*, and Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (Hume).

works, mostly through his concept of the hero cycle, or monomyth³. Recently, such critics as Donald Palumbo⁴ and Samuel Kimball⁵ have recognized the impact that myth theory has on our understanding of science fiction in all mediums, whether film or print.

Though Campbell's theories can be applied to many modern works, for the sake of this discussion, we will focus on two works of science fiction: *Stranger in a Strange Land* and *The Forest of Hands and Teeth*. These works exemplify many of the elements of mythic narrative while establishing a range of contrast within the science fiction genre. Robert Heinlein's 1961 classic, *Stranger in a Strange Land*, centers on a young man's philosophical awakening and the impact he has on his community. Heinlein's work has widely been acknowledged⁶ as one of the great novels of science fiction, having sold over five million copies (and that was in 1991). There is a wealth of criticism addressing Heinlein's novel, ranging from sexual controversy⁷ to Messiah symbolism⁸. The second novel, *The Forest of Hands and Teeth*, by Carrie Ryan, is a contemporary young adult novel that focuses on a single girl's journey through a plague-ridden world. It has yet to receive academic criticism but provides a contrasting narrative to Heinlein that helps show how the principles of myth theory continue to apply to science fiction fifty years

³ Campbell summarizes the monomyth as a series of actions or events that proceed in the following order, with various complications occurring along the way: Flight, Conflict (brother-battle, dragon-battle, offering, charm, dismemberment, or crucifixion), Tests and Helpers, Supreme Ordeal, Reward (sacred marriage, father atonement, apotheosis, or elixir theft) (*Hero with a Thousand Faces* 210-11). The monomyth forms the basic structure for the plot of mythology, while we are concerned more with the functions of myth and the impact on the audience.

⁴ Palumbo has written several articles that apply myth theory to specific works of science fiction, including but not limited to *Flowers for Algernon*, *Dune*, *The Stars My Destination*, and *The Terminator*. He has been published in several science fiction-oriented journals.

⁵ "Not Begetting the Future: Technological Autochthony, Sexual Reproduction, and the Mythic Structure of *The Matrix*." *Journal of Popular Culture* 35.3 (2001): 175-203. Electronic.

⁶ "Heinlein Gets the Last Word." *The New York Times*. (December 9, 1990, Sunday, Late Edition - Final): 1372 words. LexisNexis Academic. Web. Date Accessed: 2013/04/25.

⁷ Posited as a possible reason for the delay in publishing by Carole Cusack in "Science Fiction as Scripture: Robert A. Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* and the Church of All Worlds."

⁸ See Julia List's "Call me a Protestant': Liberal Christianity, Individualism, and the Messiah in *Stranger in a Strange Land*, *Dune*, and *Lord of Light*."

later. Both novels have vastly different themes and questions that they attempt to answer, and both fulfill all four functions of myth, as defined by Campbell, effectively.

There is one final element that one needs to consider when examining science fiction as a new mythology: the way that time can function within the text. Though the examination of time in science fiction has generally been limited to the temporal anomalies of the plots, science fiction as a genre utilizes time differently than most other genres, and represents a critical similarity to mythology. In both science fiction and mythology, time works in historical and ahistorical modes. In order to illuminate this essential characteristic, the dual functioning of time, one may draw from the work of theorist Claude Lévi-Strauss⁹. He argued that mythology works in both historical and ahistorical ways and that it is the duality of time that allows the many different versions of myth to successfully tell the same story. It is the same dual function of time in science fiction that allows the reader to experience all four functions of myth fulfilled, as different functions utilize different aspects of time. This division is usually drawn on the line between the plot of the story and the situation of the reader who interacts with the text. Science fiction's creation of a plausible physical world, while still utilizing fantastic elements, creates a dynamic in which time acts differently within the text than it does with the reader. Most science fiction is set in an imagined future, while drawing upon the context of the reader's present environment. Though other works of fiction outside of the speculative fiction genre may use time in dual modes as well, it is especially important for science fiction because it affects the works' ability to fulfill all four functions of mythology. In other genres, the functions of mythology may still not all be present despite the fictions' utilization of historical and ahistorical modes.

⁹ Lévi-Strauss's work *The Structural Study of Myth* explains a method by which the critic applies linguistic principles to the understanding of mythology in order to reconcile multiple versions of myth, from all different cultures, into an essential story. See pages 48-50.

First, this essay will explain the requisite parts of the theories of Campbell and Jung, which form the foundation for the purposes science fiction and mythology need to fulfill in order to be successful texts. Second, we will examine two novels in order to look closely at how science fiction is able to fulfill Campbell's functions. Finally, we will apply the duality of time to those novels, and see how the functions of myth would succeed or fail if the duality were not present.

Chapter 1: Joseph Campbell's Four Functions of Myth

In order to understand how mythology and speculative fiction work in similar ways, one must first make note of some of the work already completed in the field of myth theory. Myth theory has been a growing and evolving field for many decades now, and along the way it has faced constant questions of why myth deserves to be studied. In an interview with Bill Moyers, Joseph Campbell explained why people should study myth:

It used to be that these stories were in the minds of people. When the story is in your mind, then you see its relevance to something happening in your own life. It gives you perspective on what's happening to you... These bits of information from ancient times, which have to do with the themes that have supported human life, built civilizations, and informed religions over the millennia, have to do with deep inner problems, inner mysteries, inner thresholds of passage, and if you don't know what the guide-signs are along the way, you have to work it out yourself...

Read myths. They teach you that you can turn inward, and you begin to get the message of the symbols. (*Power of Myth* 2-5)

Joseph Campbell devoted his life to studying the mythologies of various cultures and applying their lessons to the lives of modern people. He believed that there are some psychological problems (reconciliation with death, personal growth from dependent to individual, etc.) that are constant, and that these problems can be reflected in the myths of various cultures. Campbell believed that by examining these similarities, distilled from the less important differences in myths, we could find “the common strains of a single symphony of the soul” (*Mythic Dimensions* 221). Though Campbell was a professor at Sarah Lawrence College, he published a large body of work in an effort to inform the general population about mythology and how it ought to be applied to our lives today.¹⁰ Because the lessons that he found in mythology applied to large populations, he did not restrict his work to scholarly study.

Campbell described the field of myth theory as being divided between those theorists who focus on the differences among myths and those who focus on the similarities. Campbell’s work places the importance of myth primarily on the similarities. He emphasizes that each myth is individually constructed; that is, the myths were primarily developed by minds without the influence of similar myths in other cultures. Though we do not know who those individuals were, geography alone supports the isolation of several cultures with similar mythologies. In fact, despite their individual authorship, myths are so similar in nature and message that Campbell has boiled them down into the monomyth: the essential elements of mythology that constitute common features of the human mind. The approach that Campbell advocated when examining mythology required a psychological and sociological perspective. He drew on Jung’s

¹⁰ Amongst the most well-known of his works are *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, *The Masks of God*, and *The Power of Myth*, a television interview conducted with Bill Moyers. Campbell was a professor at Sarah Lawrence College and hosted a number of symposiums and published a series of lectures as well, all intending to educate the public about the ways that myth informs our lives. After his death the Joseph Campbell Foundation was formed, one aim of which is to publish and disseminate his enormous body of work for the enrichment of individuals’ lives.

theory of archetypes to help express the social construction of myths and the influence that symbols have on the unconscious mind¹¹. Essentially, Campbell teaches that mythology provides a set of rules for understanding the universe and our individual places within it. These rules in turn help to guide societies so that they can grow into functional communities.

As this thesis examines the functionality of myth and science fiction, it is important first to formulate a clear understanding of what those functions are. In this case, an examination of the four functions defined by Campbell is most critical. Those functions are the psychological, sociological, cosmological, and metaphysical. Each of these purposes acts as a guide for people on an individual level, whether in understanding their universe or their place within a smaller society. In addition to describing these functions, in many of his works Campbell discusses change in these functions due to the influence of science. As science has influenced the ways that people view the universe, mythic narratives have had to evolve in order for their messages to remain relevant to communities. The influence of science has also changed the ways that we construct rituals in modern societies. Campbell says, “A ritual is the enactment of a myth. By participating in a ritual, you are participating in a myth” (*Power of Myth* 103).

The increasing dominance of science over religion in our construction of rituals causes many of the old processes of myth to be turned upside down. In *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology*, Campbell outlines a series of historical events that eventually led to Christianity’s inability to function as an effective mythology due to conflict with science (611-20). He “think[s] of the year 1492 as marking the end—or at least the beginning of the end—of the authority of the old mythological systems by which the lives of men had been supported and inspired from time out of mind” (*Myths to Live By* 6). Included in the list of significant events

¹¹ See chapter on Carl Jung, following.

are the works of Copernicus and Galileo, whose advancements in astronomy directly contradicted literal readings of biblical scripture. The changing power dynamic between science and mythology can further be seen in the writings of Immanuel Kant, who said, “*Enlightenment is mankind’s exit from its self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to make use of one’s own understanding without the guidance of another*” (qtd. in Zakai 126). The trend of people’s growing faith in science has only continued with the implementation of modern technology and our increasing ability to prove scientific facts that directly deny literal readings of religious texts. A similar phenomenon occurs as scientific knowledge advances and replaces older theories. Science is treated as a series of hypotheses, thereby allowing for the continual evolution of mythic narrative.

Because of the diminishing returns of religious mythology, Campbell places new emphasis on what he calls “Creative Mythology.” Creative mythology addresses the construction of new myths and symbols in literature in response to changes in society. Campbell was particularly interested in how the works of James Joyce acted as creative mythology¹². The need for creative mythology occurs because for myth to fulfill its four functions it is necessary for that myth to be current with the science of its time. Campbell pegs this as the biggest flaw in the mythologies of modern religion. Zakai states that “in the medieval scholastic world, theology was defined as the ‘Queen of Sciences’ and science as ‘handmaiden to theology.’ The natural sciences and philosophy were thus assigned a subordinate and servile role... The revealed, undemonstrated truths of faith thus had priority over demonstrated truths of reason” (Zakai 129)¹³. Since many of the older dominant mythologies rely on archaic world views, it has

¹² Campbell, Joseph. *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology*. New York: Penguin Compass. 1968. 38-40, 653-58.

¹³ According to Zakai, the view of science as the handmaiden to theology originated with Augustine (Zakai, 129).

become necessary for people to write new versions of myth that can help carry them through life. Science fiction, due to its necessarily plausible universe and reliance on scientific invention, has acted as modern mythology, fulfilling all of the same roles and functions without conflicting with what people already know about their physical world.

Each function of myth is centered on a different sphere of a person's life: universe, world, society, self. The metaphysical function of myth is meant to "evoke in the individual a sense of grateful, affirmative awe before the monstrous mystery that is existence" (*Pathways to Bliss* 6) or to reconcile "consciousness with the preconditions of its own existence" (*Mythic Dimensions* 219). The mysteries of the universe include most profoundly those relating to the existence and worship of deities, and the role that they play in continuing human existence. One of the great mythologies that serves the metaphysical function is what Campbell calls "The Great Reversal." These myths tell the story of mankind's fall from grace, or greatness, depending on the culture. Each of the myths, the most well-known of which in the West is the fall of Adam and Eve, addresses the problem of why life is difficult. The brutality of existence cannot be denied, regardless of advances in survival. The Great Reversal myths are meant to provide some reconciliation for why survival is difficult, while instilling mystery in the universe by the proposal that there are higher beings that control our world.

Creatively, the metaphysical function of myth inspires curiosity. Science has had a great impact on how people view the universe, in many ways removing the mystery. Campbell states that science has not had a negative effect on this function, however, citing the experience of man's exploration into space.¹⁴ Though many myths utilize the moon as a symbol or character,

¹⁴ In *Myths to Live By* pages 233-37, Campbell discusses the affect that the moon walks had on people's perceptions of the universe, and how it inspired different, but no less potent, awe.

and men had now set foot upon the moon and revealed it as rock, the powerful awe evoked by the images of earth from space far outweighs what was lost. People can be inspired by the questions that remain unanswered, and science has revealed that there is much more of our universe to stand in awe of than what is present on our planet. In *The Mythic Dimension*, Campbell tells us that “the marvels of our universe, and even of man’s works today, are infinitely greater both in wonder and in magnitude than anything reported from the years B.C. of Yahweh” (224). The questions that are inspired by the mysteries of the universe can serve as a creative stimulus, as is seen in the advent of science fiction as a genre and the many stories centered on exploration into space.

Closely tied to the metaphysical function, the cosmological function of myth “present[s] an image of the cosmos, an image of the universe round about, that will maintain and elicit this experience of awe [or]...present an image of the cosmos that will maintain your sense of mystical awe and explain everything that you come into contact with in the universe around you” (*Pathways* 7-8). These two functions work together to foster a sense of wonder, while allowing people to make sense of the world they inhabit. In other words, interacting with the physical mysteries of the environment can inspire mystical awe while allowing for exploration of world phenomena. Primitive cultures constructed several myths in order to explain natural phenomena, for example. These myths may have maintained that thunder was the clashing of the gods. The thunder is explained by the fulfillment of the cosmological function, while wonder and reverence for gods espouses the metaphysical. As our understanding of science increases, mystical awe is not diminished, but instead rests on the various questions that arise from scientific discovery. The cosmological function is meant to provide an image of our world, often very specific and concrete in nature, which acts as the vehicle for metaphysical thought.

One of the rules that Campbell provides as necessary for myth to work well is that it must be current with the science of the time. Even very old religions that are still practiced, Judaism, Buddhism, etc., have been affected by the impact of science. People have had to either change their interpretations of the religious mythology, or else deny the relevance of scientific facts. In *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology*, Campbell outlines several scientific revolutions that greatly impacted the way that myth can be interpreted.¹⁵ Campbell views these revolutions as working positively towards the fulfillment of the metaphysical and cosmological functions of myth. The cosmological function is served by science better explaining the workings of the Earth. The metaphysical function is impacted because of the lack of certainty that results from changing science. The mystery of the universe is maintained because the scientific mind processes information as theories rather than fundamental truths. Campbell describes this:

For the really great and essential fact about the scientific revelation—the most wonderful and most challenging fact—is that science does not and cannot pretend to be “true” in any absolute sense. It does not and cannot pretend to be final. It is a tentative organization of mere “working hypotheses”...that for the present appear to take into account all the relevant facts now known. (*Myths to Live By* 17)

What is accepted scientific truth today may be disproven tomorrow. While this acceptance of uncertainty in our understanding of the physical world has allowed people to continue to wonder and question what they know of the universe, it has also had a negative impact on the third function of myth.

¹⁵ He begins with Columbus encountering the new world, and ends with the acceptance of biological evolution, even though the wealth of scientific discoveries indicates that there will be further revolutions. Columbus’s voyage literally changed the image that people had of the shape of the earth. This in turn affected their metaphysical point of view, since Dante’s Paradise was no longer located in the ocean.

The third function of myth is the sociological. This is the function that Campbell sees as being most changed by the implementation of science. The sociological function is meant to “validate and maintain a certain sociological system: a shared set of rights and wrongs, proprieties or improprieties, on which your particular social unit depends for its existence” (*Pathways* 8). Before the shift towards scientific ways of thinking, people were encouraged to believe whatever authorities told them. The acceptance of authorities created a dynamic where people discouraged questioning and therefore helped to maintain the status quo. Scientific ways of thinking generally prominent in the twenty-first century encourage questioning what you are told, rather than emphasizing the importance of the group over one’s self. This can be seen in universities’ emphasis on critical thinking as a primary goal of education. Though there are a range of responses between individual and group mentalities, modern Western thinking has shifted along that continuum in favor of the individual. This way of thinking fundamentally undermines the primitive function of myth to “authorize[e] its [society’s] moral code as a construct beyond criticism or human emendation” (*Mythic Dimension* 221). Here too, creative mythology serves the greater purpose. Creative mythology has adapted this function by reversing the role of authority. Traditionally, authority lies with society, as myth helps to indoctrinate the individual as part of the group, expecting the individual to maintain the established order. This was especially true in primitive societies, where the cohesion of the group was necessary for survival. In creative mythology, which Campbell sometimes refers to simply as art as a distinction between creative mythology and primitive mythology, the authority lies with the individual and then echoes outward: “Not the forms first and then the experience, but the experience first and then forms” (*Mythic Dimension* 226). So art allows people to have a thought, idea or belief and then share it with society, possibly producing echoes in other individuals until

it becomes part of the accepted doctrine. This removes authority from society, and undermines the sociological function of myth. As the necessity of unity within communities is diminished, a greater emphasis is placed on individualism and each person's effect on society. A good example of this would be movements towards tolerance. In the past, society sought to maintain homogeneity and strictly enforced taboos against mixing races or homosexuality. However, the influence of individuals who stood in protest has created echoes that have since changed society. Now tolerance is expected, and the lack of tolerance has become socially unacceptable.

In the final function of myth, Campbell describes the psychological function as "carry[ing] the individual through the stages of his life, from birth through maturity through senility to death" (*Pathways* 9). Because myth acts as a guiding philosophy that governs man through developmental stages in life, it is therefore also known as the pedagogical function. This function must help the individual to make sense of the other three, since the stages of life cannot be understood without some reflection on one's community and larger universe. Mythology helps people to consider their places within communities, and to identify their places within them. As put by Richard Kradin, "from a psychological perspective, it may be argued that tribal and family myths tend to devalue autonomous thinking and decision-making, as these may be at odds with the prescribed mores" (227). Whereas the sociological function of myth has changed with the times and typically does not unquestioningly support the established social order, the psychological function of myth focuses on those aspects of community necessary for personal growth. The constancy of the psychological function has resulted in its being the least changed by advances in science and technology. Regardless of these advances, people still are born and die in the same cycle, and they struggle with the same basic issues of existence. It is in examining this function that Campbell finds the common strains of mankind's soul. The primary

impact of science on the psychological function rests in our ability to analyze and understand the impacts after advances in modern psychology.

In *Flight of the Wild Gander*, Campbell examines human biology in order to describe the psychological function. He says:

Society, as a fostering organ, is thus a kind of exterior “second womb,” wherein the postnatal stages of man’s long gestation—much longer than that of any other placental—are supported and defended...

Rites, then, together with the mythologies that support them, constitute the second womb, the matrix of the postnatal gestation of the placental *Homo sapiens*.
(35-8)

One of the flaws in modern society that Campbell points to is that we lack many of the initiation rituals of primitive cultures. The rituals that people continue to maintain often do not carry the same weight as they once may have due to the influences of law and other authorities. For example, the Jewish ritual of the Bar Mitzvah celebrates the passing of a boy into manhood. However, that ritual’s impact is diminished by the fact that the law does not recognize the child as an adult for five more years. Though many primitive rituals were brutal, they served the vital task of defining for people the point at which they moved from being children to adults without any ambiguity; “stimuli are no longer to produce responses either of appeal for help or of submission to parental discipline, but of responsible social action appropriate to one’s social role” (*Mythic Dimensions* 222). Essentially we are now missing one of the fundamental experiences that help people to define stages of life. Defining these stages can allow people to develop identities founded on archetypal principles.¹⁶ Each person forms an identity that cannot

¹⁶ Principles developed primarily by Carl Jung, and discussed in the next chapter.

allow for all aspects of Homo sapiens. Differences in gender, age, and profession clearly place each person as part of a whole. Rituals help people to understand their place as part of a whole, and therefore feel the support of the “superindividual” and cope with changes in life. Death is easier to accept as a certainty when you know that the world will continue, possibly changed by your presence in it.

Campbell’s work intersects with that of Carl Jung, a psychologist and myth theorist in his own right, leading them to even partner in authorship on occasion. In his introduction to *The Portable Jung*, Campbell remarks that “Jung was not only a medical man but a scholar in the grand style, whose researches, particularly in comparative mythology, alchemy, and the psychology of religion, have inspired and augmented the findings of an astonishing number of leading creative scholars of our time” (vii). Jung’s work not only helps to explain the psychological function of myth in particular, but has influenced our interpretations of Campbell’s theories in a number of ways, as seen in the following chapter. Jung’s work with archetypes illuminates Campbell’s ideas about the origin and purpose of myth, and helps to define his concept of the hero. Meanwhile, the integration of anima and animus is an essential aspect of the hero’s journey in Campbell’s monomyth. Examining the connections between Campbell and Jung makes it increasingly clear that one cannot study myth theory without some base of psychological knowledge as well.

Chapter 2: Jung’s Theory of Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious

"The collective unconscious—so far as we can say anything about it at all—appears to consist of mythological motifs or primordial images, for which reason the myths of all nations

are its real exponents. In fact, the whole of mythology could be taken as a sort of projection of the collective unconscious” (“Structure of the Psyche” 39).

Jung’s theories of archetypes and the collective unconscious constitute his major contribution to the field of myth theory, though he also applied what he learned to clinical psychology. His theories also impacted the work of other theorists, especially Campbell’s psychological function of myth, which serves as the foundation for the other three. Jung’s work can therefore be directly applied to the psychological function of myth, while indirectly influencing our understanding of the metaphysical, cosmological, and sociological. Campbell and Jung agreed that there were aspects of human experience that transcended culture and time. Jung described these aspects as manifested in archetypes of the unconscious, and they can be found in mythology.

Jung breaks the psyche into two broad categories: the interior unconscious and collective unconscious. The interior unconscious is concerned with aspects unique to each individual. Most clearly the interior unconscious controls how we perceive our surroundings and how we respond to them based on a double axis. On one axis lie thought and feeling; on the other intuition and sensation. Each person leans towards one end or the other for each pair, and this in turn can describe how the person interprets surrounding sensory information. The interior unconscious forms as a direct response to those stimuli and therefore is affected by the experiences of the individual. The collective unconscious relates to mythology. The collective unconscious is “a part of the psyche which can be negatively distinguished from a personal unconscious by the fact that it does not, like the latter, owe its existence to personal experience and consequently is not a personal acquisition” (“Concept of the Collective Unconscious” 59-60). The collective unconscious is unaffected by the experiences of individuals, but instead indicates consistencies

across cultures, seemingly inherited from birth. The collective unconscious is described as having four primary parts: the Self, Ego, Persona and Shadow.¹⁷

The Self is what Jung calls our central being, the core of our identity that we are not even aware of. This is the symbolic location of the unconscious and the repository for archetypes. Surrounding the Self is the Ego. The Ego is our conscious idea of our identity. It encompasses all of the parts of our lives that we are aware of and respond to. Moving further outward, the Persona, or Personas depending on the person, is the mask that is developed in response to societal stimuli. The Persona suppresses the parts of the Self that do not correspond with social norms. It is particularly sensitive to moral standards. However, those suppressed parts of our psyche do not simply disappear. They are condensed into the Shadow. The Shadow is the opposite of the Persona, and often it is the Shadow manifesting itself that results in prejudices or even simple dislike of another person; we are recognizing aspects of our Shadow in his or her Persona.

These parts of our identities are formed from our various experiences and under the influence of society. Contrasting these fluid forms are the fixed structures which Jung calls archetypes. Archetypes “indicat[e] the existence of definite forms in the psyche which seem to be present always and everywhere” (“Concept of the Collective Unconscious” 60). Jung argues that archetypes are formed in a manner similar to biological evolution. The collective unconscious “does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes, which can only become conscious secondarily and which give definite form to certain psychic contents” (“Concept of the Collective Unconscious” 60). Essentially they are collective representations of the ideal, which can often be seen in romantic representations of

¹⁷ Information was taken from *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche, Collected Works Vol. 8*, by Carl Jung.

character types in fantasy and science fiction. There are many archetypes that can be identified, but the most important aspect of them is that they are the same across cultures. These archetypes are "the deposit of all human experience right back to its remotest beginnings" ("Structure of the Psyche" 44). This makes them useful when discussing myth theory, since they provide a common psychological language with which to discuss mythologies across the world.

The most common archetypes, and the ones that Jung describes as the most foundational for human development, are the Mother and Father. These archetypes influence the interpretation of male and female and can result in a number of dysfunctional complexes. Psychological disorders (such as the *puer aeternus*, or adult-child),¹⁸ according to Jung, occur when people experience too great a difference between the archetype and the actual. For example, the archetype of Mother as nurturer would be completely undermined if the actual mother were abusive. These archetypes also help us to understand our own gender roles, through the unconscious elements of the anima or animus. Throughout mythology and science fiction, character development is driven by archetypes, as we will see later in this essay.

Related to people's experience with archetypes, either the confirmation or denial of them, is the process of individuation. The process of individuation occurs when a person begins to challenge social norms in order to harmonize the various components of the psyche. During the process a person:

becom[es] a psychologically conscious individual within society...moving toward wholeness rather than remaining neurotically stuck in one-sidedness...

battling with a fuller sense of oneself (other conscious and unconscious complexes, - these comprising the personality as a whole: the Self.) [sic] In such a

¹⁸ Discussion from Kradin, page 226.

battle more, not less, comes into being. A symbolic reality manifests, which unites (without reducing) distinct aspects of the person, conscious and unconscious, a new reality, an organic reality... (Fogarty 28-9)

For example, a person must challenge what he or she believes is morally right before harmonizing the Shadow and the Ego. Because the Shadow consists of suppressed fears and unacceptable personality traits that are formed based on learned social rules, the act of questioning societal norms can lead people to a better understanding of what they are repressing and why. In many instances the process of individuation leads to a breaking away from support structures such as the parents' home. Individuation is a uniquely Western phenomenon, as other cultures place emphasis on continuing care of an extended family or obedience to elders.

Just as Joseph Campbell utilizes the language of psychology to interpret myth, Carl Jung “deliberately and consciously give[s] preference to a dramatic, mythological way of thinking and speaking, because this [way of thinking and speaking] is not only more expressive but also more exact than an abstract scientific terminology” (“Aion” 151). This manner of speaking is used in particular when Jung discusses the anima or animus as a means of avoiding such terminology as the soul while maintaining the idea of the unconscious’s evolving nature. The anima is the unconscious embodiment of female character traits that men suppress in order to maintain gender roles. The animus serves the same role by defining male characteristics. The healthy drive of the anima/animus leads to people’s forming relationships based on desirable characteristics: first with the mother/father, and later with the wife/husband. Campbell understood the conflict between anima and animus as one of the foundations of the hero’s journey.¹⁹ He describes the

¹⁹ In *Joseph Campbell: Mythos*, a filmed series of lectures by Joseph Campbell, he describes how the structure of the psyche according to Jung, including an explanation of the anima/animus, impacts our understanding of the psychology of myth.

typical hero's journey, or monomyth, as a series of obstacles that the hero must overcome. One of these trials is the integration of male and female traits, thereby forming a complete rather than a disjointed psyche. Usually in myth this is accomplished through marriage, a symbolic union of male and female halves. Psychologically, the anima or animus is usually experienced in a personified form, whether within dreams or fantasies ("Aion" 151). This unconscious understanding of male/female psychological characteristics as embodied leads naturally to their representation as characters in mythology and science fiction, with few exceptions.

So, returning to the psychological function of mythology, one of the primary ways in which myth serves to guide people through the stages of their lives is by acknowledging archetypes and allowing them to be incorporated into the Ego. Archetypes can also become a means of relating to abstract concepts, such as death, in a tangible way by providing it with a personality. In the following close readings of *Stranger in a Strange Land* and *The Forest of Hands and Teeth*, we will also see how processes of individuation and the harmonization of the psyche are furthered by the functions of myth.

Chapter 3: The Impact of Science on Mythological Functions

The manner in which mythology fulfills its four functions has changed drastically with innovations of science and technology. The modern world is very different from the one in which traditional myths were formed, whether Christianity, Buddhism or Aztec ritual. Campbell acknowledges these changes and the impact that they have had on our interpretations of mythology, and therefore on myth's ability to perform the necessary functions. The effectiveness and interpretation of each function of myth have been impacted differently.

The psychological function of myth has been the least impacted by advances in science. People continue to grow in the same ways that they did before science, advancing through birth, puberty, old age and death. The psychological function is meant to carry people through these stages. The biggest changes have been that we have more tools with which to analyze psychological impact, due to the theories of Freud, Jung and others. The other major change is that modern society lacks many of the rituals that make myth tangible, leaving people without the means to communicate the advancing of stages of life. The missing rituals are one of the critiques that Campbell levels at modern society, explaining that the functions that the rituals are meant to serve are still relevant, and refusing to engage them leaves people without a definitive role. He states that:

Myths are the mental supports of rites; rites, the physical enactments of myths. By absorbing the myths of his social group and participating in its rites, the youngster is structured to accord with his social as well as natural environment, and turned from an amorphous nature product, prematurely born, into a defined and competent member of some specific, efficiently functioning social order. (*Myths to Live By* 45-6)

This leads to situations such as the man-child, who has difficulty taking responsibility for his actions and commitments.

The metaphysical function of myth has changed due to science, but not in a negative way. The metaphysical function of myth is meant to instill a feeling of awe in the face of our universe. This used to be easily accomplished due to the tremendous amount of unknown information regarding our surroundings. Now we not only have explanations for most natural phenomena, we have even left our planet in order to expand that knowledge. It seems as though there is little

information that cannot be uncovered by human ingenuity. However, it would be a mistake to see the increase in knowledge as being contrary to instilling awe. Instead, consider that people have expanded their curiosity in order to embrace a much wider cosmos. Campbell recommends that people who intend to begin a journey of mythological reflection start by sitting and contemplating illustrations of our universe, especially those of space and the galaxy at large (*Inner Reaches* 2-3). This will place you in a mindset open to understanding the metaphysical function of myth, and it is the influence of science and advances in technology that have made it possible. Similarly, consider the shift in perspectives of our own planet. Because there are few places that remain unexplored, those that we cannot reach are filled with more mystery than ever. What is it about the deep ocean that makes it unreachable? These places stimulate the imagination more than ever due to the contrast between what is known and what is not. Science fiction takes advantage of this contrast by creating worlds based on plausible facts, while expressing fictional accounts of what might be.

Hand in hand with the metaphysical function of myth, the cosmological function has been changed. The cosmological function of myth is meant to explain the mysteries of the universe, establishing a safe haven of understanding. Yet just as we learn more about Earth and the larger universe, it seems that the answers inspire more questions. The cosmological function must therefore be adapted in order to encompass both what is known about the universe and the questions that remain without answers. This is sometimes a difficult balance to strike, especially in science fiction, as the author must imagine situations beyond what is currently known while ensuring that the new concepts do not defy existing scientific knowledge. One of the critiques most often leveled at science fiction is that the author has created technologies that clearly defy laws of physics, time, and space. Those works that are the most successful focus on grey areas of

science: those theories that cannot be proven with current technology, but have not been rejected as impossibilities either. In many ways science fiction must respond to the cosmological impressions of the reader much more heavily than mythology. Russ says that “science fiction bridges the two cultures [scientific and literary]. It draws its beliefs, its material, its great organizing metaphors, its very attitudes, from a culture that could not exist before the industrial revolution, before science became both an autonomous activity and a way of looking at the world” (116-7).

The function of myth that has changed the most drastically is the sociological. The sociological function of myth is meant to affirm the established social order, elevating the laws of society beyond question. It is from this function that such tenets as the divine right of kings stem. The Christian myth of the divinely established king means that his laws are the same as God's and are therefore beyond question. The myths were meant to maintain homogeneity in society. Today, we encourage individualization, a concept completely contrary to the sociological function of myth as explained by Campbell. Campbell looks to the influence of science on mythology to explain the decline of Christianity:²⁰ “Not only has it always been the way of multitudes to interpret their own symbols literally, but such literally read symbolic forms have always been—and still are, in fact—the supports of their civilizations, the supports of their moral orders, their cohesion, vitality, and creative powers” (*Myths to Live By* 10). Science fiction attempts to bridge this gap by examining questions of social responsibility, rather than God-given rights. Early mythologies were meant to be taken on faith, regardless of whether or not they were religious in nature, because they could not be disproven. Now, people have embraced

²⁰ For example, in England there are projections that people self-identifying as Christians will become the minority population by 2018, and there was a drop of 4 million people no longer identifying as Christians during the most recent census (“Christians Could Be Minority by 2018, Census Analysis Reveal.” *The Guardian*. Web. 14 May 2013.).

scientific process and expect some degree of proof to be given before accepting limitations. Science fiction again exploits grey areas that still ask important questions. Rather than affirming the right of a king, science fiction would focus on the question, what is the king's responsibility to his people? How should he determine right from wrong, or make decisions for the good of the many at the detriment to the few? By exploring these more difficult questions, science fiction affirms the rules of modern (mostly Western) societies that expect people to question the social order for the sake of progress. Science fiction addresses these issues while often making use of themes different from fiction as a whole.

One of the most important aspects of an effective mythology, according to Campbell, is that it must be relevant to the science of its time. In *The Mythic Dimension* he outlines several major scientific revolutions that have rendered many traditional mythologies irrelevant. So if mythology is so important to the structure of society and the human psyche, how do we fill the gap? Campbell addresses this factor in *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology*. He acknowledges that people can write new mythologies that better fulfill the four functions of myth. One of his favorite examples is that of Stephen Daedalus from Joyce's *Ulysses* as the new wandering hero, though even that myth would no longer maintain its initial relevance in the face of rapid technological change.²¹ Advances in transportation have revolutionized travel in such a way that wandering is a far less common venture. I would propose that the most effective form for new mythology lies in science fiction, and the exploration of those grey areas of philosophy. Science fiction acts as a vehicle for mythic themes and archetypes that have continuously

²¹ Campbell uses examples from the works of James Joyce throughout *Creative Mythology* in order to make comparisons between modern works and traditional mythology. Generally, he is examining patterns of plot structures and symbols that have persisted across centuries.

evolved in the face of historic change. Creative mythology therefore refers to the construction of new myths, and sometimes new genres that can fulfill the purposes outlined by Campbell.

Chapter 4: *Stranger in a Strange Land*

When looking at the similarities between myth and science fiction, one sees that science fiction is one path for the logical progression of mythology in response to advancements in science. As mythic themes evolve in the face of history, people find new ways to communicate these themes that are in keeping with a plausible universe. While the principles of myth theory can be applied to virtually any work of science fiction, the novels presented here cover a broad range of both time and authorship, being written fifty years apart and by authors from different demographics, for separate audiences. *Stranger in a Strange Land* was published in 1961 as a modern interpretation of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. The idea was suggested to Heinlein by his wife in 1948, but was not developed until years later when Heinlein wrote *Stranger in a Strange Land*.²² The idea was to adapt Kipling's Mowgli by playing off the idea of a human raised by another species (in Mowgli's case he was raised by wolves, while Valentine Michael Smith was reared by Martians). The displacement of the main character from his "natural" surroundings opens the door to ask questions regarding the nature of humanity, the role that human society plays in development, and whether humanity's influence is a positive thing. In *Stranger in a Strange Land*, Heinlein tells the story of a young man named Valentine Michael Smith who was raised on Mars, by Martians, but has recently journeyed to Earth. Throughout the story Smith is required to adapt to Earth's customs and limitations, and seeks to expand the

²² <http://www.heinleinsociety.org/2011/08/robert-a-heinlein-a-biography/>

knowledge of those people whom he encounters. In this way Smith forges a new culture that acts as a blend between Martian and Earth societies.

In *Stranger in a Strange Land*, Valentine Michael Smith is the driving force of all four of the mythological functions. This is caused not by the fact that he is the main character of the novel, but rather by his acting as an archetype within the text. The physical character allows for the functions of myth to be acted upon him, while Smith's role as an archetype serves as a conduit for more complex functions. The setting of Heinlein's novel is also responding to the need to be scientifically plausible, and therefore successful science fiction. At the time of the novel's reception, America was in the midst of the Space Race, and the cultural imagination was geared heavily towards space exploration. Therefore, Heinlein maintains themes of cultural expansion and domination while creating a setting scientifically relevant to his readers. The setting also factors in the necessity of abstract time that will be discussed in chapter six.

As illuminated by Kenneth Golden in his essay "*Stranger in a Strange Land* as Modern Myth: Robert A. Heinlein and Carl Jung," Smith's character is a recreation of the Christ, or God-figure, archetype outlined by Jung in "Aion: Phenomenology of the Self." Golden noticed certain similarities between Smith and Christ, namely:

Using his psychokinetic powers to dispose of that in which he "groks wrongness," with even human beings disappearing and not returning, Smith's actions seem to represent an ironic parallel to the miraculous powers of Jesus in healing illness and resurrecting the dead. Similarly, he initiates ritual cannibalism which ironically parallels Jesus' instituting the Last Supper. (296)

It is important to note, however, that Golden is not arguing that Smith is representing Christ in the usual literary sense. Instead, he is acting as a compound figure that embodies an archetype of

Christ intimately caught up in the archetype of the Self. Smith therefore serves a dual function within the text. First, he acts as a Messiah figure for the other characters, even literally becoming dismembered as he disincorporates and is consumed by the members of his church, therefore fulfilling “one variation of the archetypal Being who in communion services throughout world myth is dismembered and scattered forth to renew the cosmos” (Golden 297). Second, the archetype of the Self is present in Smith’s character. The Self refers to Jung’s psychological description of the unconscious, wherein the Self is the center. This archetype is related to the Christ archetype, as the Self is that part of each person tied directly to creation; it is the essence of a person’s identity, some might say the soul (though Jung would turn away from such terminology). The archetype of the Self is shared with the Old Ones of Mars, who are the purest version of Self, removed even from a physical body. Smith’s role then is to bridge the gap between the people of Earth, who have not fully reconciled the Self with the rest of their psyche, and the Old Ones who are an unattainable ideal.

Though there are several different ways to interpret the role of myth in *Stranger in a Strange Land*, we will focus on interpretations that revolve around Valentine Michael Smith and his transformation as he attempts to “grok” the various aspects of Earth people and culture. Smith’s role in the novel is extended by his representation of two archetypes, allowing his character to serve as the filter for our discussion of mythic elements in the novel. Either through his actions or the actions of others upon him, Smith is able to communicate to the reader the metaphysical, cosmological, sociological, and psychological functions of myth.

The metaphysical function of myth is seen most clearly in Smith’s teachings to his water brothers, and by the contrast between Earth and Mars customs. As Smith develops and adapts to Earth culture, he gathers people around him with whom he shares a close bond. These are his

water brothers, those people with whom he has literally shared life-giving water. In describing the different stages of Smith's life, Heinlein utilizes various rites to act as clues to the reader. One such rite is the sharing of water. In the beginning, Earth natives approach Smith with water without knowledge of the significance, but Smith accepts them because he is "only an egg" (Heinlein 34). Despite their initial confusion, these people act as his protectors while Smith discovers his place on a new world, and overcomes his status as a celebrity. By the end of the novel, Smith is in the position of guardianship and power over his water brothers, having founded the Church of All Worlds. At this point Smith has moved on from receiving the rite of water-giving to presiding over the ritual for others, signifying another step in his development. The group follows Smith's lead because he is able to teach them the many abilities and perspectives of the Martians, views so different from those common on Earth that they completely change human capability as well as understanding, leading them to a happier and more fulfilling life.

The water rite is a ritual that serves the metaphysical function of myth. It is only one representation of the ways in which Smith challenges the world views of his friends. In addition, the rite serves a sociological purpose, as it creates unbreakable bonds between water brothers. Issues of confidentiality, state secrets, and conspiracy theories are openly shared so long as the discussion is among water brothers. The relationship formed during the ceremony is "an obligation more binding than that owed to the sons of one's father's brother" (Heinlein 193). Even this sociological component is related to the metaphysical, as the concept of such a bond is initially foreign to the people of Earth, as made evident by Duke's initial confusion (Heinlein 121).

The first change that people have to overcome in *Stranger in a Strange Land* is that they cannot think of the differences in ability as resulting from different races. Were Smith not human, this would be a story about an alien species altering the shape of human society. Instead, Heinlein tells his readers about how a completely foreign outlook can change our perceptions. This is a critical point in the novel because without Smith's humanity, which a significant portion of the novel focuses on, it would not be possible for him to create his following.

The metaphysical function of myth is meant to instill a sense of awe in the universe, and a means of understanding our place in the wider scope of human experience. Smith's impact on others can clearly be seen as awe-inspiring, given the following that forms around him. Initially people are amazed at his child-like innocence, later by his ability to transform their ways of thinking. The contrast can be seen most clearly by looking at one aspect of Heinlein's world, the Fair Witness. *Stranger in a Strange Land* is set in an indeterminate future time period, which has clear hold-overs from familiar American culture, though many things have changed. Throughout the novel Heinlein presents the reader with doctors, lawyers and journalists, all of whom fill familiar roles. In addition to these professions, there is the Fair Witness: people who are trained and employed to serve as absolutely credible and unbiased reporters of information. Among Smith's family group, Anne acts as a representative of the Fair Witness, and is called upon several times to serve in her official capacity. One such time is when Jubal attempts to understand Smith's ability to make objects disappear or move, seemingly with supernatural abilities. When asked to describe what she is seeing Anne says, "That ash tray is five inches from the ceiling. I do not see anything holding it up...I *think* that's what I'm seeing...but if the cameras don't show the same thing, I'm going to tear up my license" (Heinlein 113). What we see from Anne's interpretations is an outlook that values the concrete. Fair Witnesses make no

assumptions about what they see; even those things that most people would take as logical conclusions, such as the color of the back of a house matching the front (100). Anne's character creates a clear contrast to Smith, whose abilities and philosophies rest on abstract concepts. Smith's focus is on conveying the awe that he feels for the universe and expanding the knowledge of others. While Anne does not lie when acting as a Fair Witness, neither is she capable of understanding the metaphysical purposes that Smith attempts to serve. It is also significant to note that Anne does not serve as a Fair Witness after joining the Church of All Worlds²³. The Fair Witness allows Heinlein to present the reader with a symbol for the current status of human society in his future world, and provides a physical obstacle for Smith to break through when reshaping minds.

The most all-encompassing of Smith's philosophies evolves when he begins his religious education. Smith has no concept of religion or God, as the words do not even exist in the Martian language. His first encounter with Earth religion comes in the shape of the Fosterites, who closely resemble money-driven televangelists. Heinlein may have chosen to model the Fosterites after this group because of the general aversion that people have towards them, an attitude that is mimicked in *Stranger* by Jubal Harshaw:

But emotionally he disliked some [religions] more than others and the Church of the New Revelation set his teeth on edge. The Fosterites' flat-footed claim to gnosis through a direct line to Heaven, their arrogant intolerance, their football-rally and sales-convention services—these depressed him. (Heinlein 138)

Over time Smith, helped in part by his conversations with Jubal, is able to develop an understanding of religion on Earth and ultimately interprets it as the Martian philosophy "Thou

²³ The only exception being when she dons her robe in order to witness Smith's sacrifice at the end of the novel.

art God” (Heinlein 144). This simple statement comes to form the foundation for his group and helps Smith to explain many other Martian concepts. Though the statement is quite complex, the simplest way to explain it is that all life forms are part of creation and therefore contribute to the concept of God. People’s understanding and interaction with each other deepen their connection with other living things, reinforcing this notion. Rather than thinking of God as an overarching deity who created the world, Smith encourages people to see their own actions as being equally significant and contributing to creation. This leads to a deliberate interaction with the rest of the world, and a complete reinterpretation of relationships. When Smith explains the concept of “Thou art God” he is directly drawing attention to his role as the Self archetype.²⁴ The philosophy “Thou art God” therefore has a profound effect on the metaphysical, psychological and sociological functions of myth in the novel. Metaphysically, it forces people to change their perspective of the universe from one that revolves around an unreachable, intangible deity, to one in which their own actions are worthy of awe. Sociologically, the philosophy changes the rules for interactions between people. Psychologically, Smith is steering people towards a greater consciousness of the Self, and therefore towards a fully integrated unconscious.

Though *Stranger in a Strange Land* is now a bestselling novel in large part due to its treatment of mythic themes, its initial release in 1961 sparked some controversy. One of the most controversial aspects of *Stranger in a Strange Land* is its approach to sexual interactions. Though Heinlein sets the stage for a society less concerned with modesty, as seen when Gillian’s clothes are described as “demure, barely translucent, with bustle and bust pads so subdued that they merely re-created the effect she would have produced wearing nothing” (Heinlein 18), there

²⁴ Notably, the Self archetype and not the Christ archetype, which is concerned with the salvation of a larger population through sacrifice. The Self archetype represents the creative aspects of individuals.

still seems to be the expectation for monogamous relationships and discernment when choosing sexual partners. After Smith's religious/ philosophical revolution, however, the norm changes completely. When Jubal visits the "nest" in which his old family now lives, he discovers an entirely different means of viewing sex, as his encounter with Dawn was psychically shared with the entire nest. This is only one example of how Smith's interpretations of myth have sociological consequences.

Generally, the sociological function of myth is meant to enforce the rules of society by placing them above questioning in some way. In this case, Heinlein shows the reader how the introduction of a new mythology can change the established order by opening new possibilities. This goes back to Campbell's concept of society as a second womb, as described in *Flight of the Wild Gander* when he says that "Mythology is the womb of mankind's initiation to life and death" (34). Psychologically and sociologically, mythology and associated rites serve the development of humans into fully actualized adults. In *Pathways to Bliss*, Campbell describes the purpose of myth in terms of marsupial anatomy: "I think of mythology as the equivalent organ [to the marsupial pouch] for man. We need mythology as the marsupial needs the pouch to develop beyond the stage of the incompetent infant to a stage where it can step out of the pouch and say, 'Me, voilà: I'm it.'" (18). In *Flight of the Wild Gander* he puts it differently, in terms of society as a whole. Because we do not in fact have a marsupial pouch in which to develop, society must serve (and ideally society would come with associated myths and rituals necessary for development): "Society, as a fostering organ, is thus a kind of exterior 'second womb,' wherein the postnatal stages of man's long gestation—much longer than that of any other placental—are supported and defended" (*Flight* 35-6). Therefore, the changes that Valentine Michael Smith made to society, especially for those within his church, have created a different

kind of womb in which people can develop, and can support the societal change necessary in Heinlein's world.

Another example of how Smith establishes new social rules based on his experience on Mars comes in the views regarding cannibalism. Though cannibalism has been practiced across many cultures on Earth, as Jubal reminds us, it is still considered a taboo custom. However, for Smith and the Martians, cannibalism is a natural part of the life cycle, and it does the deceased honor to eat the flesh. Several times in the novel Smith expresses concern that he has "wasted food" by disappearing people who threatened his new family. The taboo against cannibalism is something with which the Earth people struggle throughout the novel, but the transformation in people's way of thinking is made clear at the end of the novel, when Jubal agrees to take part in the eating of Smith's body after his self-sacrifice. Looking at this same issue from the Martian perspective also exhibits how the sociological function of myth is working in Heinlein's novel. Rather than enforcing a taboo, the Martians' belief in the Old Ones, spirits of those who have died that directly guide the living, rests in part upon the eating of their bodies. Therefore, in Martian culture it is an honor and a duty to take part in this cannibalism. The practice is reinforced by the beliefs in the Old Ones.

The sociological function of myth can be seen to further affect Smith's decisions with regards to civil law and order. There are two primary examples of this. The first comes in the major concern of Earth's government—the fact that under a law generally acknowledged to be flawed, Smith could be understood to own Mars. Smith never fully understands this concept, but is instead represented by Jubal Harshaw. Under his advisement, Smith becomes the ambassador for Mars, and they are able to protect the planet's sovereignty. This case is similar to that of the Fair Witness. In a society where religion is relegated to a primarily economic practice,

government and law dictate moral judgments to the people. According to law it is a rightful fact that Smith owns Mars.

The second and more prominent problem of law and order comes through Smith's disappearing of several people and objects. This problem, of course, affects people's beliefs in physical permanence, but the issue goes further than that. Smith essentially takes law and judgment into his own hands when he "groks wrongness." If Smith understands something to be harmful or to serve a negative function, then it should not exist, and Smith makes it so. This is clearly removed from conventional theories of law and order in the United States, which require that no single person pass judgment. Smith's ability to do so is tied to his mythic abilities and his role as the Christ archetype, which also has supreme power and judgment over others. Though the word "grok" appears throughout the novel, it is never given a clear definition. This is because the word does not have an English equivalent. The concept is similar to that of understanding, but on a different philosophical level; it is an understanding of something or someone's essential being. Because Smith has the god-like ability to understand the core of something's existence very quickly, he passes sentence on people without deliberation with others, without serious ill effect. The people that he disappears are violent soldiers, who seek to disrupt the family life at Jubal's home. Guns are objects of destruction and therefore wrong. Though others are concerned about Smith's abilities and his judgment, especially while he is still trying to grasp Earth culture, they are not devastated by any of his decisions.

Clearly, Smith's ability to alter people's ways of thinking is not restricted to the philosophical, but rather extends into the physical world. This is where he has influence over the cosmological function of myth, which seeks to provide understanding of the physical world. The most obvious way that Smith changes the way in which people view the physical world is

through his abilities. Telekinesis and the ability to make people disappear force people to change what they define as possible or impossible. Science fiction novels push readers to think past the limits of current scientific progress, and Heinlein's work is no exception. In addition to Smith's seemingly psychic abilities, he also has mastery over his body, allowing him to shut down to such an extent that people believe him dead, or staying at the bottom of a swimming pool for hours without air. The differences between Smith and Earth-raised humans change as the novel progresses, however, eventually leading to a kind of hive-mind psychic link among water brothers. All of these abilities defy laws of nature, whether of physics or biology. However, even Anne, the Fair Witness, cannot deny what she sees, and must reevaluate her understanding of the physical world as a consequence.

The psychological function of myth may be one of the clearest in the novel. We have discussed before how the psychological function of myth often is used to help people cope with or understand death. In *Stranger in a Strange Land*, Smith's understanding of death evolves slowly over the course of the novel, beginning with his grasping the concept of a permanent or feared death (an Earth person's death) compared to his initial understanding of discorporation. We learn from the narrator that Martians rarely discorporate unexpectedly, but rather discorporation is a deliberate transfer from a physical state of being to a purely psychic one as the Martian becomes an Old One. Martians "called for life to be a rounded whole, with physical death at the appropriate selected instant" (Heinlein 92). Because Smith does not understand death as a permanent ending, his greatest concern after disappearing his attackers was that he had wasted food, reflecting the Martian tradition of eating the dead.

Later, Smith's understanding of death changes as he begins to understand that the people on Earth do not have any Old Ones to consult with on difficult issues. This revelation is closely

ted to his experiences with religion and the Fosterites, as Smith views their founder, Foster, as an example of a human Old One. Heinlein would seem to confirm this viewpoint through the strange scenes in which we view Foster as an angel watching over the group and noting their movements. For the people of Earth, the Old Ones would act as mythic figures akin to angels and ghosts. Smith's belief in the Old Ones²⁵ provided stability when he thought of death, and the removal of this possibility required him to discover new means of understanding. Smith begins to focus more on the "growing closer" between water brothers, which could be seen as a shift towards emphasis on the Self and the concentration of the unconscious. The Old Ones are entities that exist as pure consciousness, without bodies. Rather than focusing on death, Smith begins to seek for a means to reach a similar psychological state.

Smith's acquisition of knowledge follows the same pattern for most aspects of Earth culture: no understanding followed by an epiphany of sorts, which leads him to relate the new concept to a Martian one, and finally a deliberate application of Martian beliefs onto what he has learned. This is true of Smith's groking death as well. By the end of the novel Smith has affirmed many of his Martian beliefs through the help of his nest, which allows him to maintain what he was taught as a child, without the child-like naivety he possessed at the beginning of the novel. Applying his beliefs regarding discorporation, Smith is able to defend the nest, effectively becoming a martyr, but also the group's first Old One. His actions also affect the rest of the group, who completely understand his voluntary discorporation and are honored to eat his body.

The second major psychological function in *Stranger in a Strange Land* revolves around Smith's sexual awakening. As a mode of learning, Smith's awakening follows the same pattern

²⁵ Though it does not rely purely on belief, since in science fiction a greater weight is placed on what is factual, and Smith has heard directly from the Old Ones of Mars.

described above. It is also significant from a psychological perspective, as Smith fulfills one of Joseph Campbell's requirements for the hero's monomyth: the incorporation of the anima and animus.

The anima and animus are basically the female and male aspects of the human mind, respectively. Part of what the hero must accomplish during his journey (an integral part of the monomyth) is to find a way to incorporate both aspects into his identity. This usually occurs through marriage, as the wife is meant to represent the female aspects of the hero. For Smith, a psychologically complex character, the incorporation of anima and animus presents a greater problem due to the fact that Martians are not a gendered species. Smith's initial caretakers were so concerned about his reactions to women that they isolated him from all females for the first stage of his recovery and introduction to Earth.

Arguably, Gillian represents Smith's anima. This could be said in part because she is the first woman that Smith meets, and he shows an immediate interest in biological differences, though from a scientific perspective (he wants to grok genders). From that point on, Gillian becomes essential to Smith's development, both at Jubal's home and later, as he breaks away from the others. The eventual sexual relationship that they share seems to be the natural advancement of their understanding of one another. Though the act of sex is itself significant, the more important step towards integration of anima and animus occurs as Smith teaches Gillian how to use psychic abilities like his own. As she learns to master these skills, there are several moments when the two characters are literally sharing one mind, such as when Smith helps Gillian to see herself through the eyes of other men while she performs as a chorus girl.

The psychological link between Gillian and Smith is forged through their understanding of one another, and does not reach completion until they have created their new nest. The

establishment of this new home is an act similar to that of marriage in traditional myths, and symbolizes the culmination of their relationship. After that point, the focus no longer lies on Smith and Gillian's relationship, but rather on how it has expanded to bring others into the nest as well. Smith and Gillian are of one mind, and the anima and animus crisis has been resolved by that point in the novel.

Stranger in a Strange Land models the importance of mythology for its readers by exhibiting the effects that mythologies have on the novel's characters. Valentine Michael Smith is not only the central character of *Stranger in a Strange Land*; he is also the mythic center of the novel. Though Heinlein does not restrict the advances of the human race to this one character, Smith still acts as a god-like figure and Christ archetype, given his martyrdom at the end of the novel and the spreading of his body to his followers. However, the more important aspect of Smith is his influence upon other humans, and the ways in which he is able to change Earth society. Heinlein even goes so far as to suggest that Smith may have deterred the Martians from the destruction of Earth. Whichever way you view his character, Smith rises above the expectations for humans, and takes on the qualities of influences of mythology.

Chapter 5: *The Forest of Hands and Teeth*

Moving from the classic science fiction novel of the 1960s, *Stranger in a Strange Land*, we will now examine a contemporary young adult novel published in 2009, *The Forest of Hands and Teeth*, by Carrie Ryan. Whereas *Stranger in a Strange Land* has received a wealth of attention from critics, both welcome and not, Ryan's novel remains relatively unexplored. The

small amount of available scholarship²⁶ focuses on the work as a young adult novel and its pedagogical applications rather than the rich thematic elements. This novel also incorporates fantastic elements, helping to illustrate that the blurred line between science fiction and fantasy subgenres does not affect the applicability of Campbell's theories. *The Forest of Hands and Teeth* tells the story of Mary, a teenage girl who lives in a small village surrounded by a forest. Within the forest lie hordes of the Unconsecrated, creatures that have risen from the dead and lie in wait for human victims. Carrie Ryan draws on the rich and increasingly growing tradition of zombie apocalypse tales²⁷ to create a setting in which survivors have lived for several generations, and the world before the Return, the original apocalyptic event, is one remembered by only a few. The village is ruled by the Sisterhood, a holy order that acts as spiritual and civil leader. The novel itself illustrates humanity's will to survive, while telling the story of the girl seeking her place in a physically and mentally constraining world.

The story itself is rich in situations that illustrate the importance of myth in society, again providing a model from which the readers can draw. Metaphysical, cosmological, sociological, and psychological functions are all represented in one way or another, and form a key part of the reconstruction of the survivors' world. In particular, the characters in Ryan's world utilize the cosmological and sociological functions of myth in order to maintain the village. The characters who are most involved in these constructions are the members of the Sisterhood, a group of nun-like women who also act as the governors of the village. Members of the Sisterhood have the privilege of controlling knowledge flow in the village, and use it to their benefit. The Sisterhood

²⁶ Even this is mostly limited to reviews in journals such as *Publishers Weekly* that examine the novel as part of larger young adult novel trends (see works consulted, Karen Springen and "The Forest of Hands and Teeth").

²⁷ Zombie stories grew out of the English plague writing tradition, an early example of which is Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*. In more recent years there has been a rash of new zombie stories, ranging from survival guides to television series such as *The Walking Dead* (adapted from graphic novels), and even reinterpretations of classic literature in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*.

sets the basis of their power in the Scripture, which seems to be a slightly distorted version of the Christian Bible. The distortion of the Scripture is represented physically when Mary finds secret rooms in the basement of the church, apparently used to hold people prisoner before giving them to the Unconsecrated for unknown reasons. There, Mary finds a copy of the Scripture that has “all the margins, every blank space on every sheet...filled with cramped writing” (Ryan 108). The writing in the margins consists of research notes as the Sisterhood conducted experiments regarding the nature of a person’s Return. The notes of these vile experiments clearly defile the Scripture, serving as a representation of the Sisterhood’s influence and interpretation of the Christian text. Using the Scripture, the Sisterhood has created a set of rituals that helps control the people of the village. Some of the rituals help the people make sense of the world they live in and can act as coping mechanisms. Other rituals affirm the power of the Sisterhood, and set their rules as essentially infallible.

The rituals that help the people understand their world are fulfilling the cosmological function of myth. The cosmological function serves to construct a world view in keeping with the other functions of myth. This means that the understanding that the people have of the larger world cannot conflict with what they know about the Sisterhood and their social order. In medieval England this concept was illustrated by the heavenly spheres, a cosmological model that directly mirrored their social hierarchy, while providing a means of explaining the construction of the universe²⁸. In Ryan’s world the cosmological function is best illustrated in the myths of the Return. The myths of the Return seek to explain how the people came to be in the village, and set some reasons for why the world is in such a monstrous state. Throughout the

²⁸ Later disproven by the Copernican model of the universe; another example of science undermining the impact of religion (as religion and hierarchy were closely related at that time).

novel different versions of myth come into conflict, usually Mary's myths versus the Sisterhood's. This is significant in that the conflicting myths serve different environments: the Sisterhood's myths support the social structures of the village and maintain order, while Mary's myths provide comfort and illumination once the safety of the village is taken away. Myths necessarily change; some are abandoned, and new myths are written as the need arises.

The Return, according to the teachings of the Sisterhood, was caused by scientists, who flouted God's laws and sought power outside of their control; "They were trying to cheat God. Trying to cheat death. Trying to change his will... This is what happens when you go against God's will. This is His retribution. This is our penance" (Ryan, 63). The people who founded their village saw that the epidemic was God's punishment, and so established a place in which they could be safe and insure the survival of the human race. The myth thereby establishes cause, places blame on a group of inaccessible people, and affirms the power of the Sisterhood. The Sisterhood seeks to insure that people do not anger God again, and thereby bring the downfall of the village, as can be seen when Mary questions their rules and Sister Tabitha responds by saying, "We all live for God. It is only through His grace that we survive... Remember where we came from, Mary. Where we all came from. Not the Garden of Eden, but the ashes of the Return. We are the survivors... We have to continue to survive. And I will allow nothing to jeopardize this" (Ryan, 64). The Sisterhood derives the sociological power of their position from their ability to dictate the villagers' cosmological understanding.

The myth of the Return also helps physically to construct the villagers' world. The origin of the village helps to explain the presence of the fences, which no one living saw built, and helps support the importance of the Guardians who patrol it. The protagonist, Mary, is unique in her curiosity regarding what lies beyond those fences, and the gate that leads outside them.

Others accept the word of the Sisterhood, when they are told that the world, for all intents and purposes, ends past the gate. They are taught that the villagers are the chosen few, because of their devotion to God, and that belief helps affirm the boundaries of the village. If they are chosen, what reason do they have to believe there is anything or anyone else outside? All of these aspects of the myth of the Return serve to explain the world the villagers survive in, and are direct responses to the world as well, thus serving the cosmological function of myth.

As previously mentioned, the other primary purpose of ritual and the mythology of both the Return and the Scripture is to affirm the power of the Sisterhood. The sociological function of myth is meant to establish a social order and to maintain the rules of society. Often the sociological functions of myth go so far as to make the leaders of society infallible, such as the divine right of kings. The myth of the Return places power in the hands of the Sisterhood because it places the blame for the epidemic on those who defied God. As the interpreters of the Scripture and the educators of the village, the Sisterhood is able to define what counts as an act of defiance, and what actions are in accordance with divine law. This effectively makes them the governors of the village, and their interpretations of the Scripture serve as the village laws. The villagers affirm their compliance with these laws with the Scripture verses inscribed in their doorways. Mary tells the reader of the importance of these verses when she first returns to her family home:

As with every building in our village there is a line of Scripture there, carved into the wood by the Sisterhood. It is our habit and duty to press a hand against these words every time we cross a threshold, to remind us of God and His words...

The wood under my fingertips is smooth from generations of villagers
pressing their hands in this one spot. (Ryan 21-2)

The ritual acts as a reminder of the origin of the Sisterhood's power and the need for obedience, while providing comfort and reassurance to the villagers. While the ritual used to provide comfort for Mary, after her mother's death the inscription is a reminder that she has lost her faith in God, and by extension in the Sisterhood.

The Sisterhood has also instituted rituals that help to maintain the village, especially those regarding marriage and birth. Several times in the novel we are told that they must maintain the bloodlines, that even their "ancestors knew that in order to survive we had to persevere. They knew to keep strong bloodlines. That creating each new generation was the most important task beyond keeping the village safe and fed" (Ryan 113). The Sisterhood is the keeper of bloodlines. This aspect furthers the Sisterhood's importance, but is also acting upon the reader. One of the essential elements of mythology is that it must be current with scientific knowledge in order to be effective. *The Forest of Hands and Teeth* uses references to modern scientific knowledge in order to make the story more relevant to the readers. In incorporating a direct discussion of bloodlines, Ryan addresses problems of in-breeding that could occur in such a small community. In addition to serving cosmological functions of myth within the novel, *The Forest of Hands and Teeth* also contains warnings for the reader, especially with regards to the sociological function. Ryan clearly illustrates the dangers of placing too much power with one group of people when she describes the Sisterhood, and delves into problems of censorship as well when she shows the dangers that arise when Mary alone questions the Sisterhood's control. The members of the Sisterhood make it clear that questions are not welcome when they threaten Mary with expulsion into the forest of Unconsecrated. Mary recognizes that she is "not to be

trusted because I didn't come to the Sisterhood willingly and because I ask too many questions and seek too many answers" (Ryan 64).

The metaphysical function of myth can be seen most clearly in Mary's relationship with the village. Whereas the other villagers accept their place in the world and the teachings of the Sisterhood, Mary's curiosity leads her to questions about the world beyond the fences. These questions were instilled in her in part through her mother's stories, which took on the significance of myth. The competing myths of the Sisterhood and Mary's family lead to different outlooks with regards to the world beyond the fences. The Sisterhood's stories of the Return reinforce the gift that they have in their village, whereas Mary's myths express hope for a larger world and a place untouched by plague. The metaphysical function of myth is meant to instill a sense of awe in the face of the wider universe, and to help us understand our place within it. For most of the villagers, the metaphysical function of myth is served by the teachings of the Sisterhood; they are awed by the fact of their survival, grateful to their ancestors for creating the fences, and understand their place in the world through their devotions to the Scripture. Mary's myths, however, focus on a larger world that existed before the Return. In particular she is inspired by the myth of the ocean. Mary acts as storyteller throughout the novel, "repeat[ing] the stories of life before the Return that have been passed down by the women of my family" (Ryan 13).

That Mary is retelling stories in an oral tradition limited specifically to the women in her family indicates one role that Jungian archetypes play in the construction of myth. Mary has learned her gender role as a storyteller and keeper of history based on the mother archetype of her family. Yet conflict occurs because Mary's understanding of this archetype is not in keeping with the views of the other villagers, and especially the Sisterhood. Indeed, Mary recalls that,

“Once, her [Cass’s] mother forbade her to speak with me because she said I was filling Cass’s head with lies and blasphemy” (Ryan 13). In the small confines of the village, resources are limited, and Mary even remembers the impact that a year of drought had on her village. In comparison she feels awed by the image of so much water, when she is presented with a photograph of her ancestor at the ocean. At that time Mary was younger, and still abided by the mythology of the Sisterhood. Despite being faced with seeming proof of the ocean’s existence, Mary tells the reader that she:

asked my mother why, if so much water existed, were there years when our own streams ran almost dry? She told me that the ocean was not for drinking—that the water was filled with salt.

That is when I stopped believing her about the ocean. How could there be so much salt in the universe and how could God allow so much water to become useless? (Ryan 1-2)

The myth of the ocean is significant not only as a physical place that instills awe, but also as a symbol. To Mary, the ocean is a place untouched by the Return. Though we later discover that the ocean is not an untouched haven, it is symbolic of her hope that there are better places in the world, and that the people do not need to stagnate in the village. The later images that she finds of New York City help to affirm her beliefs. The cities before the Return show Mary that the limits of mankind are not so small as the Sisterhood would have them believe. These objects later serve to help her spread the mythology as an oral history when she tells the stories to Jacob and Travis.

Because Mary’s metaphysical mythology differs from that of the rest of the village she cannot understand her place in the same way. This is what leads her to travel beyond the fences,

and along the way she begins to use her mythology to affect her friends as well. Once the village is destroyed, the others cannot interpret their place in the world in the same way. Instead, they must find a new place. Because Mary's mythology about the ocean is not tied to the village, it allows them to continue to feel hope, and provides a goal towards which to travel. Essentially, it helps the others to redefine their place in the universe. As they journey, the mythology of the ocean is supplemented by other relics of life before the Return. These relics, newspaper clippings and photographs, show aspects of life that the Sisterhood denied, thereby undermining the villagers' mythology while supporting Mary's. This speaks again to the importance of scientific relevance and modern myth. Whereas the Sisterhood's mythology is based on faith and the expectation of obedience, Mary's mythology acknowledges proof and allows for curiosity. That Mary's mythology clearly dominates the Sisterhood's in this novel indicates which model better serves modern people.

Finally, the psychological function of myth is prominent throughout the novel, both in the interactions between the characters and in the ways that the novel communicates with the reader. The psychological function of myth is meant to guide an individual through the various stages of life, from birth to death. We have already seen some of the ways that myth accomplishes this in Ryan's novel when we examined the rituals put in place by the Sisterhood. One of the purposes of ritual is to clearly define transitions in life. Ritual provides structure which, in a world as chaotic and dangerous as the villagers' could often be, is sorely needed. One of the rituals described in the most detail is the ceremony of Brethlaw and the Harvest Celebration:

The Harvest Celebration is the time in the fall when those of marrying age declare themselves to one another. It is the beginning of the courtship, the time during the short winter days when the couple determines whether they will make a suitable

match. Almost always the courtship will end in spring with Brethlaw—the weeklong celebration of wedding vows and christening. (Ryan 4)

These rituals dictate a series of events required for courtship in the village. One of the effects of these strict rules is that the Sisterhood is able to maintain bloodlines by approving or disapproving of any marriages in the village. However, the Harvest Celebration also provides a time in which to acknowledge the birth of new children to the village. The villagers are constantly surrounded by death, directly outside the fences, but their celebrations are life-affirming. As Mary reminds the reader when faced with crisis, “It [the Harvest Celebration] won’t be canceled, even in light of my mother’s death. As the Sisterhood always reminds us: this is the way after the Return—life must continue. It is our cycle to bear” (Ryan 12). They provide coping mechanisms by placing emphasis on what is new and beautiful instead of mourning what they have lost. One of the most important tasks of the psychological function of myth is to help people cope with death.

One of the ways in which myth communicates with its audience is by telling stories that mirror real life, only in a more dramatic fashion. The characters then become examples for the audience to follow, or learn from, depending on their fate. Here, Jungian psychology can help illuminate how the story accomplishes its goal. In *The Forest of Hands and Teeth*, Mary illustrates the process of individuation as she breaks away from Travis and her family. The process of individuation is described by Carl Jung as, “the process of forming and specializing the individual nature...[and]...the development of the psychological individual as a differentiated being from the general collective psychology” (qtd. in Frieda Fordham 1). Individuation requires that we come to know, give expression to, and harmonize the components of our psyches. In order to accomplish this, one must break away from support structures, as the

adolescent does when moving away from the parents' home. In the beginning of *The Forest of Hands and Teeth*, Mary is attempting to fit in with the rest of her village, and anticipates her initiation into the Brethlaw ceremonies, as is expected. The first major change that sets her on the path of individuation is the death of her mother. Rather than moving away from home, which would be a less dramatic change in a small, fenced-in village, the transition is changed so the parent figures are forcibly taken from Mary; first when her mother and father die, and then when her brother abandons her. The novel is rife with forced separations, from family, friends and homes. Nothing is stable in the world of the Unconsecrated.

The Forest of Hands and Teeth is essentially a coming-of-age story, as Mary evolves from an adolescent girl to an adult and accepts that her dreams are not the same as those she was told to have. Ryan taps into typical adolescent fears of not belonging and places them in a setting where being an outcast could cost you your life. Despite the dramatic, end-of-the-world setting, Ryan provides a mythology that mirrors the struggles of everyday life.

Chapter 6: The Important Function of Time

Time is an essential element in both mythology and science fiction. Each of the functions of myth relies on mythology's ability to have an impact on its audience, whether with regard to their understanding of the physical world or more philosophical concepts. The concept that has the greatest impact upon myth's ability to convey its messages effectively rests upon the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, specifically his essay "A Structural Study of Myth." In the essay, Lévi-Strauss argues that myth exists in both historical and ahistorical times, simultaneously. Just as myth and science fiction can perform the same functions, they also both rely on this concept of dual time to perform the functions effectively.

The importance of time in mythology can be seen in part through Joseph Campbell's insistence that mythology must be current with the science of its day. This issue has rendered much of the older mythology irrelevant because vital aspects have been disproven by science. Though it is acceptable to take the reality of myth with a large grain of salt, the audience still needs to relate to the myth without being hindered by disbelief. Basically, the world that the myth is set in must be plausible, even if it is not completely logical. Science fiction resolves this problem by focusing upon future events instead of past. By utilizing a hypothetical future, science fiction makes it considerably more difficult to disprove its statements. It places the readers in a mindset where all things are potentially possible, an outlook that has become more prevalent as advances in technology break boundary after boundary. Of course, there are still problems with science fiction creating technologies that defy basic laws of physics and nature, but in general people are still willing to suspend disbelief. One has only to look at the works of H.G. Wells to see that some technologies that were thought impossible at the time of the novel's release became reality years later. He anticipated technologies ranging from flying machines to atomic warfare, all before the turn of the century²⁹. The problem lies in science fiction that contradicts current science in order to integrate creative technologies. This would render the work incompatible with the science of its day (since it would disregard it) and would therefore be an ineffective mythology.

Whereas mythology focuses primarily on past events, this is no longer effective as modern science discovers increasingly accurate information. Instead, science fiction uses a hypothetical future in order to convey its messages. In both cases, the stories are being presented

²⁹ Achenbach, Joel. "The World According To Wells." *Smithsonian* 32.1 (2001): 110. *Humanities International Complete*. Web. 14 May 2013.

in both historical and ahistorical manners, consistent with the theories of Claude Lévi-Strauss. Lévi-Strauss discusses mythology in terms of structural linguistics. This aspect of his theory is less useful in this situation, as it has since been criticized by more recent theorists³⁰. What is of value is Lévi-Strauss's realization that mythology cannot be described with the use of only two terms (*langue* and *parole*, in his linguistic argument). Because mythology is an oral tradition it must be told in order to be experienced in its original form. It is a living language in itself, and therefore cannot be described by *langue*, structural language, and *parole*, statistics of language. Instead, he posited that a third dimension of language is present in mythology, one that combines aspects of the first two and could reasonably be referred to as patterns of relationship.

Beginning with this concept, Lévi-Strauss shows how these aspects of language render mythology into a state where it exists in both historical and ahistorical modes. The historical aspect of mythology lies in its plot; the sequence of events being described that happened long ago. The ahistorical aspect lies in the fact that "the specific pattern described is everlasting; it explains the present and the past as well as the future" (Lévi-Strauss 430). Relating this to his ideas regarding linguistics, the ahistorical aspects of the myth, the story as a singular object, would tie to *langue*. *Langue* is the structural aspect of language, where you can look at a single word or sentence in order to better understand a sound. Contrasting, the historical aspects of myth lie along the same lines as *parole*; they both rest on patterns of occurrence whether in language or in plot events and themes.

More important than either single aspect is the notion that mythology exists in both states concurrently. If you were to separate the myth from either the historical or ahistorical aspects, it

³⁰ Though the work of Lévi-Strauss remains relevant, other critics have since conducted critical surveys of his theories. Notably, Dan Edelstein and Stephen Wieting have questioned aspects of Lévi-Strauss's theories in "Between Myth and History: Michelet, Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, and the Structural Analysis of Myth" and "Myth and Symbol Analysis of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Victor Turner" respectively.

would no longer be able to perform the four functions outlined by Joseph Campbell (metaphysical, cosmological, sociological, and psychological). In myth, the historical setting often serves as a warning to not repeat the mistakes of the past. Myths explain the creation of the world in order to help people understand their surroundings. However, no warning or explanation would be effective if it is considered to exist only in the past. Repetition of mistakes would no longer be a concern, as the pattern of repetition would not be established. The importance of past events in people's current lives would be lost. Patterns reinforce the ideas of a single myth until the four functions can be served. Lévi-Strauss sometimes described the situation as myth existing both diachronically and synchronically. That is, he uses further linguistic terminology to express the dual existence of mythology in time. A diachronic analysis of language pertains to "changes in a linguistic system between successive points in time" (dictionary.com). It expresses the historical changes that a language system has undergone, with clear boundaries set in time. A synchronic evaluation, on the other hand, refers to "the facts of a linguistic system as it exists at one point in time without reference to its history" (dictionary.com). So if mythology is functioning both diachronically and synchronically, then it has a place in a larger pattern within a system across time and exists as a single point as well.

Science fiction relies on the same principles of historical and ahistorical existence in order to fulfill the functions of myth. In mythology the historical aspects tend towards a literal interpretation. The events in the myth took place in the past. In the case of science fiction, the present-day world has been relegated to the place of history in order to make room for a new and more flexible setting that still responds to current fears and concerns. In this way, science fiction uses futuristic settings to fulfill the ahistorical purposes of the stories, and it is here that one can find patterns of thought over time. This often reveals itself in the fears of a certain generation,

such as the xenophobia associated with Cold-War-era writing. Even though the works of science fiction are set in the future, the fears that they respond to affect the present-day readers. While it is true that not all science fiction is set in the future, it is an extremely common genre convention. Most speculative fiction stories that take place in the past would be categorized as fantasy instead, and as we have seen in *The Forest of Hands and Teeth*, the inclusion of fantastic elements in science fiction does not render the application of Campbell's theories irrelevant.

At this point it has already been established that science fiction and mythology both can perform the same four functions: metaphysical, cosmological, sociological, and psychological. However, let us look for a moment at how those interpretations would change if the works could not exist as both historical and ahistorical accounts. Though both mythology and science fiction function in both historical and ahistorical modes, they do so in subtly different ways. The primary distinction lies between the telling of the story and the plot within the story.

In *The Forest of Hands and Teeth*, Carrie Ryan sets the stage with a world that has already been decimated by a zombie plague. The tradition of zombie or plague writing goes back centuries, but has become increasingly popular, due in part to people's growing fears of biological warfare. Additionally, Ryan draws on perceptions of scientists as people with God complexes who lack moral integrity. This is clearly seen in the teachings of the Sisterhood, who place full blame on those scientists who created the plague. Ryan uses our present-day world to create a picture of her novel's setting's history. This allows these present cultural fears to remain relevant in the writing: the event that we fear now is right around the corner in the readers' world. This timing lends the novel a sense of urgency that would otherwise be lacking. In addition to playing off cultural fears, Ryan also uses our time as a historical setting in order to provide contrast to the post-apocalyptic environments. Ryan places glimpses throughout the

novel when her characters discover artifacts of the 21st century, such as a post card of the Empire State Building. These artifacts ensure that the reader understands that the Unconsecrated plagued world is in fact our own, and helps to show how much has been lost. People no longer know what a city looks like, and do not believe that the ocean exists.

Though Ryan could still write a compelling adventure story had the setting not used the present day in a historical manner, many of her themes would have been diminished. She shows the reader the relevance of her warnings through the historical/ahistorical dichotomy. Her choice of setting serves as the diachronic aspect of time in the novel by creating a historical context. The synchronic, or ahistorical, aspect of the novel lies in the story itself, especially the psychological function of myth (and science fiction) which we find in Mary's struggles for individuation. The novel still exists as a single artifact that can be read at any point in time and interpreted differently, even after the present generation's cultural fears have passed.

While Ryan uses the historical setting of her novel to increase the impact of her themes, Heinlein uses time somewhat differently in *Stranger in a Strange Land*. One of the primary reasons why his classic novel was written to work in both historical and ahistorical modes is because of the need to create a world where the situations presented are believable. For example, the novel is set far enough in the future that people do not question the ability of people to travel to and live on Mars. Here, Heinlein is also responding to the time in which he was writing, especially when considering the space race between the United States and Soviet Union. Though the space race lasted many years, both countries managed to send people into outer space only months before Heinlein's novel was first published. Clearly, the culture's imagination was ready to contemplate what might be found with further exploration.

One interesting aspect of Heinlein's novel is that the story is told as though it has already taken place. Though this narrative setting is not unique to Heinlein or science fiction, it is essential to *Stranger in a Strange Land* being able to function as myth (while other narratives are not serving this purpose). This helps Heinlein to explain events that happened over several years, from the original mission to Mars, to Smith's return to Earth and eventual demise. In this case, Heinlein has set his novel as history in much the same way that mythology does. Smith becomes a God-like figure that should be emulated. By setting the novel in the past, Heinlein also focuses his readers on the events of the novel, rather than placing the emphasis on the possibilities of the future world. True, people's imaginations were fascinated by space travel in the early 1960s, but Heinlein, rather than positing a potential for expansive travel, addresses the possibility as a matter of fact. People have already visited Mars; it does not need to be questioned in this instance.

Heinlein uses the historical/ ahistorical dichotomy somewhat differently than Ryan, but in a manner more similar to classical mythology. In *Stranger in a Strange Land* the diachronic aspect of the novel lies in the telling of the story, as it responds to a posited history. That is, the story of Valentine Michael Smith, though we acknowledge it as fiction, is still told in a manner that styles it as historical fact. The story itself is responding to history and exists only within that context. In Ryan's novel the telling of the story is the synchronic element, since the majority of the themes would remain unchanged if the reader did not understand the historical context. In contrast to Ryan, Heinlein's novel relies on its ability to present the plot as history. The synchronic element would then lie in the events of the story. Heinlein has constructed his story where it is set at a specific point in history, even though that point is in the present-day readers' future. Though the manner of the telling places it as historical, the events within the novel are not

necessarily responding to aspects of history. Instead, the importance is placed on the characters' ability to change their philosophies and understanding of the physical world.

The key here is that science fiction must work in both historical and ahistorical modes in order to fulfill all four functions of myth. While some functions could be served by having only one method of storytelling or the other, science fiction could not be a completely successful mythology. In *The Forest of Hands and Teeth*, the psychological function of myth can be served by the ahistorical mode alone, as the story of a girl discovering a new stage of her life remains relevant regardless of the point in history. However, the cosmological and sociological functions speak directly to present-day concerns, and therefore rest heavily on the historical aspects of storytelling.

Conclusion

In his book *The Future of Eternity*, Casey Fredricks says, "The loss of myth is equated with the loss of the ability to think creatively about the universe we live in" (3). The importance of myth and ritual to both societies and individuals is commonly accepted and supported by the many works of Joseph Campbell and others. Mythology can illuminate our understanding of the universe and our places within it, can help enforce or break down social rules as necessary, and can guide people through stages of development. But there has been an increasing problem with mythology's ability to remain socially relevant after the advent of a scientific age. The answer lies in the creation of a new mythology, science fiction.

The works of Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung have helped illuminate what mythology can accomplish while providing a standard by which to judge whether it is successful. A good

mythology can serve all four functions of myth; metaphysical, cosmological, sociological and psychological. It should remain scientifically relevant to its audience. And an effective mythology will stimulate a culture's imagination. Science fiction does all of these things, and will continue to do so for years to come, just as Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* has remained relevant for 53 years and shows no signs of waning. Each generation of writers responds to different cultural fears and writes characters based on the societal norms of their nation. By remaining responsive to these aspects of life, and by utilizing a scientific imagination, science fiction is able to become a new mythology.

The duality of time in mythology and science fiction is an often overlooked point, but no less essential than the stories' ability to fulfill all four functions of myth in terms of its success. Historical aspects of these myths can provide context for the reader, allow the plots to be influenced by those generational concerns, or instigate change across a society. In contrast, the ahistorical aspects provide stability, affirming the fact that each story exists as an artifact in its own right. These parts of mythology, both new and old, draw attention to what has remained universal across time and cultures. People still struggle through stages of life and must learn how to cope with death. They must learn how to function within a community, or else find their place outside of it. When reading science fiction as a new mythology, one must keep the idea of dual time in mind. Without the contrast of time, the new mythology would not be able to fulfill its functions and be as successful as it needs to be.

My hope is that these concepts can be applied to any work of science fiction. The only question lies in how successful each individual story is as mythology. Just as there are myths that have faded or been lost over time, so too are there works of science fiction that are no longer remembered. However, the classics, or those works that may be recognized as classics in the

future, resonate across generations. They respond to the four functions of mythology, utilize the dual impact of time, and have successfully realized Joseph Campbell's vision for a creative mythology.

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