MYTH AND FEMINIST THEORY

BEAUVOIR, DALY & HARAWAY

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Myth and feminist theory

Beauvoir, Daly & Haraway

Adam Kjellgren

Doctoral Thesis in History of Ideas at Stockholm University, Sweden 2025

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Abstract

Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986), Mary Daly (1928–2010) and Donna Haraway (1946–) are three prominent feminist theorists, all of whom assign an immense – yet often overlooked – importance to phenomena they themselves call myth (fr. *mythe*). By examining how these theorists conceptualize the nature and function of the various phenomena thus named, the present study offers new insights into their most influential works and overall feminist thought.

To conduct a productive analysis of Beauvoir's, Daly's and Haraway's writings on myth it is necessary to situate these within a wider and hitherto unexplored context: one that encompasses large parts of the nebulous academic field known as mythology (i.e., the study of myth). This recontextualization, in turn, enables insights of a more general nature. One the one hand, it reveals how mythology has served a resource, from which Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway have drawn to articulate arguments and analyses of great significance for the historical development of feminist theory. On the other hand, it makes visible that the same feminist arguments and analyses at times challenge the very premises on which much modern mythology rests. Thus, this study sheds new light not only on the work of these individual theorists, but on the (entwined) histories of both feminist theory and mythology. By demonstrating the difference a feminist perspective on myth might make, it also helps clarify the value of feminist theory to mythology's future.

Keywords: *Beauvoir, Daly, Haraway, Myth, Feminist theory, Mythology, Feminism, Political myth, Law, Religion, Science.*

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“The question is”, said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.”

LEWIS CARROLL, Through the Looking-Glass (1871)

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~

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PART I.
ORIENTATIONS

1. Introduction

This is not a book about myth (*mythos*), but one about the study of myth (*mythology*). Thus, it constitutes a "metamythology", though centered on scholars not usually read as mythologists.[1] More specifically, I examine works by three feminist theorists: Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986), Mary Daly (1928–2010) and Donna Haraway (1946–), all of whom attribute an immense – yet often overlooked – importance to the various phenomena they themselves term myth (fr. *mythe*).

~

That the vast significance ascribed to myth in influential works of feminist theory has so far failed to arouse much scholarly interest is perhaps partly due to how familiar the word "myth" feels. While more obscure concepts capture our attention and compel us to contemplate their meaning, "myth" is so mundane, so ingrained in everyday language, that one may be excused for overlooking its prolific presence or assuming to already know what it denotes.

The truth, however, is that no consensus has ever been established as to what "myth" means. Today, this word is often used to denote supposedly unfounded or false beliefs, the harmful influence of which many commentators claim has recently increased.[2] Yet "myth" might also refer to a sacred narrative, thought to embody an "ultimate" truth.[3] Historically, it has typically been said that myths revolve around gods, goddesses and other superhuman beings.[4] But the word is now repeatedly employed (with or without prefixes such as "social", "political" or "national") to name narratives centered on

[1] "While 'mythology' is the study of myth, a look at the history of mythology is a study of the study of myth, thus a sort of 'metamythology' not unlike the history of science or the history of any other branch of scholarly endeavor." Jaan Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 7.

[2] On the growing power of myth, see this thesis, chapter 16.

[3] Conrad Hyers, *The Meaning of Creation: Genesis and Modern Science* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), 107. See also Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 102–107.

[4] "For over two thousand years myths have been identified, interpreted, debated; and on only one point have scholars agreed: myths are forms of literature (in the broad sense of the word) about gods or demigods." Earl W. Count, "Myth as Worldview: A Biosocial Syntheses", in *Culture in History, Essays in Honor of Paul Radin*, ed. Stanley Diamond (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 595.

secular phenomena.[5] Although some mythologists hold that myths are stories that deal with the past – with origins and beginnings, or events unfolding *in illo tempore,* outside of profane time[6] – the same word has been used to designate images of the future, which might or might not come true.[7] Again and again, myth has been described as a "primitive" phenomenon and modernity as devoid of myths.[8] Nevertheless, there are those who speak of this very idea as a myth in itself.[9] Since the Second World War, (political) myths have primarily been associated with totalitarian politics, but today it appears to be an open

[5] On "social" and "political" myths, see for example Alf Ahlberg, *De sociala och politiska myterna* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers förlag, 1937); Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946); Henry Tudor, *Political Myth* (London: Macmillan, 1972); Christopher Flood, *Political Myth: A Theoretical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Chiara Bottici, *A Philosophy of Political Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Roland Boer, *Political Myth: On the Use and Abuse of Biblical Themes* (London: Duke University Press, 2009); Gerard Bouchard, *Social Myths and Collective Imaginaries*, trans. Howard Scott (University of Toronto Press, 2017). On "national" myths, see for example George Schöpflin and Geoffrey Hosking, ed., *Myths and Nationhood* (London: Hurst, 1997); Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Gérard Bouchard, ed., *National Myths: Constructed Pasts, Contested Presents* (New York: Routledge, 2013). For an attempt to differentiate and define the relation between social, political and national myths, see Radek Chlup, "Conspiracy Narratives as a Type of Social Myth", *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 37 no. 2 (2023).

[6] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. R. Williard Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc, [1957] 1987), 68–113; Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963), 5–6.

[7] Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1908] 1999), 20–31.

[8] "Modernity has always understood itself either as an effort to live without or after myth, or as an effort to recover the lost wholeness of myth." Steven Connor, "Modernity and Myth", in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature*, ed. Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 267. On modern societies as devoid of myth, see Rue D. Loyal, *Amythia: Crisis in the Natural History of Western Culture* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989); Rollo May, *The Cry for Myth* (London: Souvenir Press, 1993); Sofia Heller, *The Absence of Myth* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).

[9] On "the myth of mythlessness" (Coupe), "the myth of mythless modernity" (Josephson-Storm) and the myth of "the myth-free world" (Pawlet), see Laurence Coupe, *Myth* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 9–12; Jason Ā. Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 7, 67; William Pawlett, *Myth, Society and Profanation* (New York: Routledge, 2025), 2. See also Milton Scarborough, *Myth and Modernity: Postcritical Reflections* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

question whether liberal democracies might not have – or otherwise need – myths of their own.[10]

This excess of meaning, embedded in "myth", is both the result and source of conflicts that involve much more than the correct definition of that particular word, although definitions and redefinitions constitute one of the weapons with which these larger battles have been and are fought. At stake, ultimately, are the boundaries that separate truth from falsehood, enlightenment from ignorance, civilization from savagery, sanctity from blasphemy, "us" from "them"; contested and highly consequential distinctions, with which that between "myth" and its many antonyms seem to be forever entangled.[11]

If definitions and redefinitions of "myth" serve as weapons in greater (epistemological, historiographical, theological and political) struggles, the scholarly field generally known as mythology – alternatively "mythography" or "myth studies" – constitutes the main arena where these battles are waged. But what, then, is mythology?[12] As scholar of religion Robert A. Segal notes, it does not form a distinct, academic discipline. This means that few researchers referred to as mythologists have self-identified as such, but instead as anthropologists, psychologists, folklorists, philosophers or historians of religion.[13] Nor does mythology seem to be held together by a shared object of inquiry. Though most scholars labelled mythologists write about what they term "myth", we have already observed that there is no agreement as to what this term means.[14]

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[10] On the tendency to associate political myth with totalitarian politics, see Carmen Dege and Tae-Yeoun Keum, "Editors' Introduction: Political Myth in the Twentieth Century", *History of European Ideas* 49, no. 8 (2023). On the role of myth in liberal democracies, see this thesis, chapter 16.

[11] Cf. Russell T. McCutcheon, "Myth", in *Guide to the Study of Religions*, ed. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Casell, 2000), 192.

[12] Confusingly, the word "mythology" can mean both *the study of myth* and *a set of myths*. I almost always use the word in the former sense.

[13] Robert A. Segal, "Series Introduction", in *Theories of Myth: From Ancient Israel and Greece to Freud, Jung, Campbell and Lévi-Strauss. Volume 1. Psychology and Myth* (New York: Garland, 1996), vii. See also *The Rise of Modern Mythology*, in which the editors state that "it is usually not remembered that Hume or Isaac Newton or Marx were also mythologists." Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richardson, "Introduction", in *The Rise of Modern Mythology: 1680-1860*, ed. Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richardson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), xix.

[14] I write "most", since works surveying the history of mythology usually include references to theorists who use the term "fable" instead of myth. Cf. this thesis, 22.

So as to not reproduce at once arbitrary and reifying demarcations of this nebulous field, the present study rejects all delineations of mythology that presuppose a particular definition of myth. Instead, it understands mythology as an interdiscursive network (*the mythological network*), made up of all scholarly texts that deal with different phenomena *called* myth: a network whose nodal points consists of a large but still delimited set of particularly oft-invoked works almost always mentioned when the history of mythology is discussed (*the mythological canon*).[15] To use an expression borrowed from political theorists Kevin Duong, one may also say that the mythological network consists of scholarly texts that contain "myth-talk", or talk (*logos*) of phenomena labelled myth (*mythos*).[16]

The present study proceeds from the assumption that the mythological network constitutes a productive but hitherto unexplored context for Beauvoir's, Daly's and Haraway's most influential works. Indeed, it suggests that these works *form part* of this network. Hence, much stands to be gained from reading Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway as mythologists – which, more precisely, means concentrating on and taking seriously their writings on myth.[17]

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Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway all place "myth" at the very center of their writings. Although none of them use this word in the same way, each agrees that it denotes a potent but often disregarded social force, with tremendous power over modern society. Broadly speaking, they discuss myth in relation to law (Beauvoir), religion (Daly) and science (Haraway), but always with a particular focus on how it affects the lives of women. Most importantly, I will demonstrate that all three theorists invoke what they term myth both to explain the persistence of patriarchal oppression and to theorize the preconditions of emancipation. A rigorous analysis of their respective writings on myths can thus enable a deeper understanding of their most influential works, as well as their overall feminist thought.

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[15] On the relation between the mythological canon and the much larger mythological network of which the canon is part, see this thesis, 28.

[16] Kevin Duong, "The Sorcerer's Apprentices of Interwar France", *History of European Ideas* 49, no. 8 (2023): passim.

[17] The expression "writings on myths", used throughout this thesis, does not refer to a set of works by Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway entirely devoted to myth, but to those parts of their larger works that deal with phenomena termed myth.

However, to carry out a productive analysis of Beauvoir's, Daly's and Haraway's writings on myth, one cannot examine their work in isolation. All three theorists use "myth" to characterize a wide variety of phenomena, ranging from the mundane to the extraordinary. But in contrast to how the word is used in everyday speech, they seldom equate myths with widespread misconceptions or lies (i.e., "mere myths") that one can easily dismiss. That is, when they describe something as a myth or as being mythical, this is rarely just a statement about its epistemic status, although it is usually that as well.[18] While they at times do characterize certain myths as deceptive or false, I will show that Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway tend to employ more specific and analytically productive concepts of myth, often appropriated from other mythologists.[19] To make sense of their writings on myth, it is therefore necessary to read these in the context of the larger mythological network.

This recontextualization will, in turn, enable insights of a more general nature, which shed new light on the history of both feminist theory and mythology. One the one hand, we will see that mythology has served as a resource, from which Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway have drawn to articulate arguments and analyses of great significance for the historical development of feminist theory. One the other hand, it will make visible that the same feminist arguments and analyses at times challenge the very premises on which much modern mythology rests. In other words, I will demonstrate that Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway both appropriate concepts of myth from other mythologists to build feminist theory, and contest received mythological concepts from a distinctively feminist perspective.

This important fact has rarely been acknowledged. Studies that purport to deal with the history of mythology almost never mention the names of Beauvoir, Daly or Haraway. Indeed, such studies tend to include very few women and no feminist theorists whatsoever. As historian of religion Sîan Melvill Hawthorne explains:

> Contemporary mythology […] has been the study of a male line of thought and as such it has itself produced a patrilineal narrative that has traced the protean meanings of myth – its functions, forms, structures and implications – through

[18] Bruce Lincoln argues that "whenever someone calls something a 'myth,' powerful – and highly consequential – assertions are being made about its relative level of validity and authority vis-à-vis other sorts of discourse." Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), ix.

[19] For a more detailed discussion on how I use "concepts of myth" and "appropriation", see this thesis, 29–32.

> the work of male scholars, naming them either as the fathers of the field or as the male inheritors of a paternal legacy. The story that mythologists have conventionally told about the origins and development of the field has been an entirely male script […].[20]

This androcentric tendency has produced and perpetuated an inadequate understanding of the history of mythology. It has also obscured the ways in which a feminist perspective, by raising questions that most canonized mythologists ignore, can contribute to mythology's future.

Yet, if scholars studying the history of mythology have overlooked the importance of feminist theorists, those attentive to the history of feminist theory can be said to have overlooked the importance of mythology. At the very least, the latter have hardly ever examined any feminists in the context of the mythological network. Instead, they have continued to read writings on myth by theorists like Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway in isolation, or only alongside that of other feminists, rendering invisible the many links that exist between these theorists and non-feminist mythologists.[21]

In sum, a divide can be said to separate research on the history of feminist theory from that focused on the history of mythology. The present study represents a first attempt at bridging this divide.

Purpose, aims and research questions

The purpose of this study is to read Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway as mythologists, with a particular focus on how their writings on myth relate to other texts in the mythological network. Thereby, it seeks to achieve three more general aims, briefly outlined above. First, by facilitating a fuller understanding of Beauvoir's, Daly's and Haraway's writings on myth, it aims to produce new knowledge about their most influential works and overall feminist thought. Second, by clarifying what role concepts of myth appropriated from other mythologists serve in the works of these three theorists, it aims to shed new light on the historical development of feminist theory. Third, by revealing how these three theorists challenge received concepts of myth derived from the mythological network, it aims to provide

[20] Sîan Melvill Hawthorne, *Origins, Genealogies, and the Politics of Identity: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Myth* (Doctoral thesis: University of London, 2006), 26.

[21] On how I use the epithets "feminist" and "non-feminist", see this thesis, 33 n83.

new insights into the history of mythology, as well as to make visible the value of feminist theory to mythology's future.

The study is guided by the following research questions: How do Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway use the word "myth"? How do they conceptualize the nature and function of the various phenomena thus named? How does myth-talk allow them to articulate feminist arguments and analyses? How do they appropriate and challenge concepts of myth derived from other texts in the mythological network?

Why Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway?

Writing in 1986, literary theorist Kari Lokke states that there "is perhaps no more controversial subject in contemporary feminist theory than the role of myth in the development and expression of a feminist world view."[22] Although slightly exaggerated, this claim points to the enormous weight feminist theorists have attached to different phenomena called myth. As literary theorist Barbara Godard notes: "Myth is a key term in feminist discourse."[23] Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway are thus far from alone in having engaged in myth-talk. Other influential feminists who have done so are Adrienne Rich (1926–2012), Luce Irigaray (1930–), Audre Lorde (1934–1992), Hélène Cixous (1937–), Paula Gunn Allen (1939–2008), Julia Kristeva (1941–), Gloria E. Anzaldúa (1942–2004), Carol P. Christ (1945–), Adriana Cavarero (1947–), Rosi Braidotti (1945–) and Drucilla Cornell (1950–2022), many of whom I will return to in the following analyses.[24] Yet there are several reasons why the works of Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway form the main focus of this thesis.

To begin with, these three theorists are interesting to read as mythologists because they ascribe a particularly great importance to phenomena termed

[22] Kari Lokke, "Women as Mythmakers (Book Review)", *Contemporary Literature* 27, no. 1 (1986): 85.

[23] Barbara Godard, "Feminism and/as Myth: Feminist Literary Theory between Frye and Barthes", *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice* 16, no. 2 (1991): 4. On the prevalence of myth-talk among feminists, see also Sophie Smith, "Poetry, Myth and Storytelling in the History of Political Theory", *Critical Review of International Social & Political Philosophy* 28, no. 2 (2025): 353.

[24] In addition, there are many works by less well-known feminist theorists that also deal with myth. One of the more interesting is Elizabeth Janeway, *Man's World, Woman's Place: A Study in Social Mythology* (New York: Morrow, 1971). See also Marilyn Strathern, *Before and after Gender: Sexual Mythologies of Everyday Life* (Chicago: HAU Books, 2016), authored in the 1970, but published just recently.

myth – while it, at the same time, is far from obvious what they have in mind when they use this word. As we will see, Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway employ many different concepts of myth, the various functions of which previous research has failed to fully capture, leaving us with a flawed understanding of some of their most influential arguments and analyses.

It is important to emphasize here that this thesis does not, primarily, focus on how Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway use *what others have called myths*, but on how they use *the word "myth"* and relate to the various phenomena they themselves refer to by this name. There are already several studies that examine how feminist theorists revise, retell or reinterpret those stories traditionally referred to as myths (studies on what is sometimes called feminist "re-visioning" or "revisionist myth-making").[25] In contrast, I will demonstrate that Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway expand the meaning of "myth" beyond its usual domain, turning the word itself into a rhetorical and analytical tool, while simultaneously challenging long-held assumptions about what myth is and does.

Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway are also particularly interesting to read together. Although they are alike in some decisive respects – all three are, for example, white women from Catholic backgrounds – their works are

[25] See for example Alicia Ostriker, "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking", *Signs* 8, no. 1 (1982); Estella Lauter, *Women as Mythmakers: Poetry and Visual Art by Twentieth-Century Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); Rachel Blau Duplessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 105–122; AnnLouise Keating, "Myth Smashers, Myth Makers: (Re) Visionary Techniques in the Works of Paula Gunn Allen, Gloria Anzaldua, and Audre Lorde", *Journal of Homosexuality* 26, no. 2-3 (1993); Ellen Heather Douglass, *Myth as Muteness, Myth as Voice: Feminism, Quest and Imperialism* (Doctoral thesis: Brown University, 1994); Kristin Mapel Bloomberg, *Tracing Arachne's Web: Myth and Feminist Fiction* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001); Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard, ed. *Laughing with Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Lee Bebout, *Mythohistorical Interventions: The Chicano Movement and Its Legacies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Veronica L. Schanoes, *Fairy Tales, Myth, and Psychoanalytic Theory: Feminism and Retelling the Tale* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014); Muskaan Kapoor, "The Present-Day Medusa: Foregrounding L'ecriture Feminism in the Contemporary Retellings of Mythology", *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* 44, no. 1 (2021); Soni Wadhwa, "Feminist Literary Criticism Meets Feminist Theology: Yashodhara and the Rise of Hagiographical Fiction in Modern Feminist Re-Visioning", *SAGE Open* 11, no. 4 (2021); Nicoletta Mandolini, "Retrieving or Revising? Using Mythology in Contemporary Italian Literature against Femicide", *Italian Studies* 76, no. 3 (2021); Shelby Elizabeth Helen Judge, *Contemporary Feminist Adaptations of Greek Myth* (Doctoral thesis: University of Glasgow, 2022); Sigrid Schottenius Cullhed, *Filomelas förvandlingar: Myten om det outsägliga* (Lund: Ellerströms, 2024).

sufficiently diverse to enable an analysis whose sum is greater than its parts, in the sense that it can make visible some of the highly diverse functions that feminist myth-talk have served. Beauvoir was a French philosopher and novelist who began work on *The Second Sex* (*Le Deuxième Sexe,* 1949) – sometimes referred to as the "feminist bible"[26] – in the wake of the Second World War, at a time when there was neither a strong feminist movement nor a robust tradition of feminist theory. Daly is a U.S. theologian and philosopher who wrote her most influential works in the 1970s, during the heyday of what is typically referred to as the "second wave" of feminism. Haraway, finally, is a U.S. biologist turned historian of science, still active today, but in whose case I focus on texts produced between 1978 and 1985; texts often associated with feminism's so-called "third" wave. The study is chronologically organized, but does not purport to trace a progression (or decay) in feminist writings on myth. It does, however, aspire to demonstrate that Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway seek to answer different questions, actualized by different historical circumstances, in dialogue with different intellectual traditions – yet using the same conceptual tool: myth.

A further reason why I focus on Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway pertains to the positions they have been assigned within the historiography of feminist theory. When the history of this field is written, these three theorists are typically framed as representatives of widely divergent, perhaps incompatible, forms of feminism, called "existentialist", (Beauvoir), "radical" or "cultural" (Daly) and "postmodern" (Haraway). Gender studies scholar Clare Hemmings notes that labels of this sort often structure stories that tend to "oversimplify" the feminist past by framing all events as episodes in larger narratives on the theme of progress, loss or return.[27] Although this is true, I have not sought to remove all such epithets from the following analysis.[28] However, by concentrating on "myth" – allowing the presence of this word to guide my gaze – I have been able to identify continuities usually overlooked by other scholars who discuss these different feminisms. In effect, the present study will

[26] Judith Thurman, "Introduction", in *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 11.

[27] Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 3–5.

[28] Ibid., 1. As tentative guideposts, such labels still serve a purpose. In addition, they often appear in my material. I will not, however, approach these intellectual contexts as "boxes", in which Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway can be placed to explain, for example, their writings on myth. On the contrary, I will demonstrate that these theorists have used myth-talk to create the very feminisms thus named. For a critique of the tendency to approach contexts as "boxes", see Rita Felski, "'Context Stinks!'", *New Literary History* 42, no. 4 (2011): 575–581.

make possible what Hemmings speaks of as a "different vision" of the feminist past.

One last reason for focusing on Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway is that their writings on myths enable me to synthesize a broader metamythological narrative, which can also be read as a story about some of the most contentious issues of Western modernity. To better understand Beauvoir, I situate her work against the backdrop of late nineteenth and early twentieth century evolutionary anthropology, psychoanalytical theories of myth, the French *mythomanie* of the 1930s and 1940s, and postwar discussions about modern society's alleged relapse into mythical thinking. I examine Daly's work alongside major twentieth century theologians and religious historians (with a particular focus on the demythologization debate), the Romantics of the late eighteenth century and the neo-Romantics of the mid-twentieth, as well as feminist proponents of the original matriarchy thesis. Finally, I read Haraway in conjunction with representatives of the 1970s anthropological turn in science studies, twentieth and twenty-first century theorists of political myth, and structuralist thinkers who equate myths with codes. Together, these disparate contextualizations cover much of the established history of modern mythology, which serves as a backdrop for the lesser-known aspects that I explore. However, for scholars interested issues such as primitivism, secularization, disenchantment, origins and identity this narrative should also prove interesting on its own terms.

Source material, translations and abbreviations

This study does not consider all texts by Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway, but focuses on those in which myth receives the most attention, which includes, but is not limited to, their most influential works. In Beauvoir's case, my analysis centers on *The Second Sex.* When it comes to Daly, I prioritize her first three books: *The Church and the Second Sex* (1968), *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Woman's Liberatio*n (1973) and *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978). As for Haraway, I concentrate on "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1985) and a number of additional articles published between 1978-1984, most of which have been republished in her second monograph: *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (1991).[29]

[29] An early version of the manifesto was published in German as Donna Haraway, "Lieber Kyborg als Göttin! Für eine sozialistisch-feministische Unterwanderung der Gentechnologiee", in *1984*, ed. Bernd-Peter Lange and Anna Maria Stuby (Berlin: Argument-Verlag, 1984). The

As far as possible, I make use of the high-quality translations of Beauvoir's work that already exist. At times, I modify the translation of specific words or phrases. I then indicate this in the footnote and provide the French original for the modified word or phrase in parentheses in the main text (in addition, I have reproduced the French original in parentheses whenever Beauvoir engages in myth-talk, even if I have not modified the word or phrase in question). The passages that I have translated myself are from Beauvoir's autobiographies – the available English translations of which are older and somewhat less accurate than those of her academic work – and an essay titled "La femme et les mythes" (1948), of which no English translation exists. Only three titles have been abbreviated in the footnotes: the most recent English translation of *The Second Sex* (*TSS*), together with the first and second volume of the French original (*DS-1* and *DS-2*).[30]

Thesis outline

The next chapter covers background, theory and methodology (chapter 2). It is followed by a chapter on previous research (chapter 3), which concludes the first part of the study. This thesis' main body consists of three part-studies of varying length, dedicated to Beauvoir (chapter 4–7), Daly (chapter 8–10) and Haraway (chapter 11–14). Each part-study ends with a summary, in which I discuss my main findings. The fifth and final part consists of two shorter chapters. In the first one (chapter 15), I present more general insights made possible by studying Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway together. In the second and concluding chapter (chapter 16), I turn to discuss myth today, emphasizing the value of a historical, rather than philosophical-normative, approach to myth. At the end of the book, readers will find a brief, less technical summary of the entire thesis, written in Swedish.

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first English version of this text was published as Donna Haraway, "Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s", *Socialist Review* 80 (1985). For the sake of simplicity, I will refer throughout this thesis to the more accessible version of this article published as "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century", in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

[30] The editions I refer to are *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany Chevallier (New York: Vintage Books, 2011); *Le Deuxième Sexe I. Les faits et les mythes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976); *Le Deuxième Sexe II. L'expérience vécue* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).

2. Background, theory and method

This thesis reads writings on myth by Simone Beauvoir, Mary Daly and Donna Haraway as part of the mythological network, a context in which they have seldom been studied. The primary aim of the present chapter is to specify the theoretical assumptions and methodological choices that support and structure this recontextualization. But to clarify the rationale behind these assumptions and choices, it is necessary to begin with a brief history of mythology – one that will be expanded and at times destabilized in the analyses.

A brief history of mythology

According to folklorists Gregory Schrempp and Tok Thompson, myth is one of "the oldest subjects of scholarly inquiry", having "captivated the worldly-minded" for thousands of years.[31] Its beginnings, writes Robert A. Segal, can be traced all the way back to ancient Greece.[32] But it was only in the mid-nineteenth century that mythologists laid claim to representing a science.[33] Since then, mythology has grown into an enormous field, to which representatives of several academic disciplines have contributed. Yet there is no coherent mythological paradigm, nor has there ever been one. On the contrary, almost all commentators emphasize how diversified mythology is. "The study of myth has abounded in confusions", writes historian of religion

[31] Thompson Tok and Gregory Schrempp, *World Mythology in Theory and Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 1.

[32] Robert A. Segal, "Introduction", in *Myth: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies. Volume 1*, ed. Robert A. Segal (New York: Routledge, 2007), 1. On ancient mythology, see Robert L. Fowler, *Early Greek Mythography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Claudio Meliadò, "Mythography", in *Brill's Companion to Ancient Greek Scholarship*, ed. Franco Montanari, Stephanos Matthaios and Antonios Rengakos (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Ilaria Andolfi, "An Ambiguous Literary Genre: The Origins of Early Greek Mythography", *Mnemosyne* 70, no. 2 (2017).

[33] Segal, "Introduction", 1. See also Marcel Detienne, *The Creation of Mythology*, trans. Margaret Cook (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 2. Note, however, that Meliadò argues that the birth of "scientific mythography" can be traced back to the Hellenistic age, at which point arose "the necessity of an approach to mythical traditions […] that was of a philological nature and scientifically based". Meliadò, "Mythography", 1067. According to Feldman and Richardson, the beginning of "modern" mythology can be placed around the end of the seventeenth century. Feldman and Richardson, "Introduction", xix–xxv.

Jeppe Sinding Jensen.[34] "Multiple, competing theories have arisen within disciplines as well as across them", Segal notes.[35]

This plethora of conflicting theories coexisting under the umbrella of mythology has, in turn, been linked to the ambiguousness of myth itself. "There is no doubt", asserts historian of religion Daniel Dubuisson, "that the theoretical richness of the domain of mythological studies has been fed by the paradoxical nature of myth. As an indeterminate and uncertain object, myth allows for the widest of interpretations."[36] Already in 1945, philosopher Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945) thus likened myth to a "magic mirror", in which scholars from different disciplines see nothing but that with which they are already most familiar.[37] One might ask, however, whether it is at all appropriate to speak of mythology as the study of a single (albeit "indeterminate and uncertain") object called myth?

The word "myth" derives from the Greek *mythos,* which appears already in the epics of Homer and Hesiodos, the oldest extant works of Western literature. There, *mythos* means word, speech or story. The same is true of *logos*, against which *mythos* has often been contrasted and defined. But whereas the bards tend to use *logos* and its plural form *logoi* when they refer to the adorned, seductive and thus potentially deceitful speech of women and other individuals deemed unable to persuade through their status or physical strength, *mythos* and *mythoi* are more often employed to denote the blunt, generally trustworthy speech of powerful men.[38]

Over time, the meaning of both these terms changed. This becomes apparent if one turns to Plato, who employs *logos* to denote the supposedly rational, truthful and conceptual speech of philosophers, but *mythoi* when he refers to the figurative stories that poets tell about gods, goddesses and other

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[34] Jeppe Sinding Jensen, *Myths and Mythologies: A Reader* (London: Equinox, 2009), 4.

[35] Segal, "Series Introduction", vii. See also Harvey Birenbaum, *Myth and Mind* (Lanham: University press of America, 1988), xi.

[36] Dubuisson Daniel, *Twentieth Century Mythologies: Dumézil, Levi-Strauss, Eliade*, trans. Cunningham Martha (London: Equinox Publishing, 2006), 3. See also Frank E. Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 11–12; Tok and Schrempp, *The Truth of Myth*, 3.

[37] Cassirer, *The Myth of the Stat*e, 6. "The linguist found in it [myth] a world of words and names – the philosopher found a 'primitive philosophy' – the psychiatrist a highly complicated and interesting neurotic phenomenon." On myth as a "magic mirror", see also Elizabeth M. Baeten, *The Magic Mirror: Myth's Abiding Power* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 161–189; Heller, *The Absence of Myth* 7.

[38] Bruce Lincoln, "Gendered Discourses: The Early History of 'Mythos' and 'Logos'", *History of Religions* 36, no. 1 (1996): 1–10.

superhuman beings; stories that he claims seldom encompass any truth.[39] This shift also affected the word's gendered connotations. Because the *mythoi* of poets activate the desiring, rather than the rational, part of the soul, Plato asserts that they cause men to behave in a feminine manner, which he deems highly problematic.[40] By contrast, the rational *logos* spoken by philosophers are presented as fully compatible with masculine coded virtues. The very word "mythology" thus suggests that we are dealing with a masculine, rational and truthful speech (*logos*) about one that is neither of those things (*mythos*). Which utterances are placed in which category has nonetheless remained open to change.

Initially, most mythologists focused on stories from ancient Greek, which they did not speak of as myths, but as "fables" (from *fabula*, the Latin translation of *mythos*).[41] It was only in the seventeenth century, following the increased influx of reports from missionaries and colonialists encountering non-European, indigenous peoples, that they began to examine the cultural artifacts of contemporary societies. Among these indigenous peoples – often referred to as "savages" or "primitives"[42] – the Europeans came across stories that, in their eyes, had so much in common with ancient fables that they must

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[39] Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth*, 38–42; Maurizio Bettini, "*Mythos/Fabula*: Authoritative and Discredited Speech", *History of Religions* 45, no. 3 (2006): 199. See also Kathryn A. Morgan, *Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3.

[40] "Listen to this and think about it: you see the best of us, I imagine, listen to Homer and any of the other tragic poets representing the grief of one of the heroes as they pour forth a long speech in their lamentation, even singing and beating their breasts, and, you know, we enjoy it, we surrender ourselves to it and suffer along with the characters as we follow and eagerly applaud whoever thus affects us in this way the most as a good poet. […] But whenever a private affliction arises in any of us, do you again notice that we are proud of ourselves on doing the opposite, if we can stay calm and resolute as *this is the manly thing to do, while what we approved of before is what women do*." Platon, *Republic. Books 6-10*, trans. C. J. Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 605c–e, p. 433, italics added. See also Wendy Doniger, *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 125.

[41] Andrew Von Hendy, *The Modern Construction of Myth* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 2. Today, the word "fable" is primarily used to denote a short story with a clear moral, usually featuring anthropomorphized animals. *Oxford English Dictionary*, "Fable, n., sense 2" (Oxford University Press, 2024). But the word's initial meaning was much broader, in that it was used for any "fictitious" narrative about "extraordinary" persons or events. *Oxford English Dictionary*, "Fable, n., sense 1.B".

[42] Throughout this thesis, I use terms such as "primitive", "primitives" and "savages", because these are the terms used in the material I study. Having emphasized that these are empirical rather than analytical concepts, I will not continue to place them in quotation marks, unless it is necessary to clarify that they appear in a specific text.

belong to the same genre. Since savages were deemed stuck at an early stage in the evolution of civilization, the hypothesis also arose that all fables, ancient as well as contemporary, were the product of a particular, underdeveloped state of thought.[43]

Typically, seventeenth and early eighteenth century mythologists maintained a sharp distinction between false fables and truthful biblical narratives.[44] But in the latter half of the eighteenth century, around the same time that "myth" entered the European vernaculars, this boundary grew increasingly unstable, as commentators instead began to emphasize perceived similarities between these two types of stories.[45] By 1835, this development had reached a point where Protestant theologian David Friedrich Strauss (1808–1874) could characterize even the biblical story about Jesus Christ as mythical.[46] As a result of this trend, the domain of mythology was eventually broadened to include both pagan and Judeo-Christian narratives, which in turn came to be called myths instead of fables.[47]

This conflation of myth and religion eventually gave rise to a new and ultimately immensely influential distinction. Whereas fable (in the sense of pagan story) had been set against the biblical message or religion in general, myth (in the sense of religious story) was more often contrasted with philosophy and science. When mythology sought to assert itself as a science in the second half of the nineteenth century, its representatives thus framed it as a science of the un- or pre-scientific.[48] In particular, late nineteenth and early twentieth century mythologists focused on the oral literature of so-called savages, which they – in line with their seventeenth and eighteenth-century

[43] Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods*, 10–20; Tae-Yeoun Keum, *Plato and the Mythic Tradition in Political Thought* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020), 7, 12–13. On the history of terms such as "savages", "savagery" and "civilization", see Mark B. Salter, *Barbarians and Civilization in International Relations* (London: Pluto, 2002), 15–24; Maria Boletsi, *Barbarism and Its Discontents* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 60–68.

[44] Feldman and Richardson, "Introduction", 3; Bottici, *A Philosophy of Political Myth*, 44–50.

[45] Comparisons between paganism and Catholicism commonly grew already in the late seventeenth century, after the Reformation had made Catholicism fair game among Protestants. Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods*, 21–23. See also Tok and Schrempp, *The Truth of Myth*, 45.

[46] David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined 1–2*, trans. George Eliot (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1835–1836] 2010).

[47] Von Hendy, *The Modern Construction of Myth*, 2–3.

[48] Detienne, *The Creation of Mythology*, 2–3.

predecessors – presented as the product of a primitive state of thought, vanquished in civilized societies.[49]

Not all mythologists have framed myth as a thing of the past, however. Writing towards the end of the eighteenth century, the early Romantics argued that it should be possible to invent completely new myths.[50] And in the twentieth century, some commentators claimed that this had at last happened, but with a different result than the Romantics had hoped for. Whereas the latter had envisioned the emergence of enlightened myths, fully compatible with modern philosophy and science, twentieth century mythologist instead spoke of modern myths to denote the stories propagated by totalitarian movements – stories that the representatives of these movements sometimes termed myths themselves.[51] Soon, though, the meaning of "myth" grew even wider, which the writings on myth by Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway all testify to.

The myth industry

This short overview demonstrates that the object of mythology has changed and multiplied over time. To resolve the ensuing ambiguity, mythologists have produced numerous definitions of "myth", intended to specify what mythology really is the study of. The problem is that almost no one has defined myth in the same way. These endless attempts at definitions have consequently increased, rather than reduced, the uncertainty about what myth actually is. "The first thing that one realizes in trying to grasp the semantic implications of myth", one scholar notes, "is that myth can cover an extremely wide field."[52] "Indeed", complains another, "[…] myth is now so encyclopedic a term that it means everything or nothing."[53] This has led some commentators to assert

[49] Keum, *Plato and the Mythic Tradition in Political Thought*, 196–201.

[50] "The Oldest Systematic Programme of German Idealism" [1796/97], in *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics*, ed. and trans. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). See also Keum, *Plato and the Mythic Tradition in Political Thought*, 164–167, 173–174; Von Hendy, *The Modern Construction of Myth*, xii.

[51] See for example Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts* (München: Hoheneichen-verlag, 1935). See also Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, trans. Keith Botsford (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 80–86; Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, trans. George Staunton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 45–55.

[52] Honko Lauri, "The Problem of Defining Myth", in *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth*, ed. Alan Dundes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 41.

[53] Eric Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 5. See also H. Robert Ayers, "'Myth' in Theological Discourse: A Profusion of Confusion",

that mythology lacks a definable object altogether: that myth is something that mythologists produce, rather than study.

"Delusion about myth", writes historian Marcel Detienne, "glories in making modern inventors of mythology believe that nothing is more concrete, more real, more obvious than myth." But in fact, nothing "warrants attributing to myth a literary genre or a specific type of tale."[54] This view is echoed by historian of religion Ivan Strenski. Having listed a host of incompatible definitions of "myth", he exclaims:

> Such confusion indicates graphically enough that there is no such "thing" as myth. There may be the word "myth", but the word names numerous and conflicting "object", not a "thing" with its name written on it. […] Thus, instead of there being a real thing, myth, there is a thriving *industry*, manufacturing and marketing what is *called* "myth". "Myth" is an "illusion" – an appearance conjured or "construct" created by artists and intellectuals toiling in the workshops of the myth industry.[55]

Of course, this is not to say that, for example, those pagan stories about supernatural beings invoked by many mythologists do not exist. Strenski's point is simply that the categorization of all such stories, or any other phenomenon, as being myths is arbitrary, or at least conditioned by contingent circumstances.[56] To call a phenomenon myth, Strenski writes, "is to *mark* it as special, to separate it off from things considered to be of a different nature", like religion or science.[57] Such distinctions can be productive, even necessary. But one should not pretend that they are self-evident. A similar argument is advanced by Sinding Jensen. Citing the difficulties mythologists have had in defining the word "myth", he claims that this, in part, follows from the fact that scholars of myth are not merely studying physical realities out "in the

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Anglican theological review 48, no. 2 (1966): 200. "Indeed, it may not be too strong to say that this word is one of the most widely traveled semantic hobos of our time. This would be confusing enough in itself, but confusion is added to confusion by the fact that any one author may use the word ambiguously and equivocally within one work."

[54] Detienne, *The Creation of Mythology,* 130–131. See also Charles Delattre, *Manuel de mythologie grecque. Pratiques du mythe* (Rosny-sous-Bois: Editions Breal, 2005), 6–15.

[55] Ivan Strenski, *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth-Century History: Cassirer, Eliade, Levi-Strauss and Malinowski* (London: Macmillan, 1987), 1–2, italics in original.

[56] Ibid., 2.

[57] Ivan Strenski, "Introduction: Malinowski and Myth", in *Malinowski and the Work of Myth*, ed. Ivan Strenski (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), xi, italics in original.

world" (quotations in original), but objects that "to a large extent" are "created" by the very categories and theories these scholars employ.[58]

As will be discussed below, the present study adopts a similar, constructivist understanding of the relation between mythology and myth, according to which mythology constitutes a set of conflicting discourses that form the different objects of which they speak. It is crucial to note, however, that these mythological discourses are not without ties to the material world. To begin with, the fact that the speech of some groups has been defined as mythical more often than others cannot be understood without considering the very concrete procedures of exclusion that long prevented all but white, Western men from inhabiting the spaces where scholarly discourses on myth are produced. These discourses have, in turn, reinforced a range of oppressive structures, with highly material – indeed, fatal – effects. Most concretely, by delegitimizing non-Western epistemologies and lending scientific legitimacy to the notion of indigenous peoples as culturally and intellectually inferior, the definition of "their" speech as mythic has helped justify colonialism and other forms of imperial violence. As literary theorist Gordon Brotherston notes: "From the very first moment it entered the lexicon of the Western academy, 'myth' has been fraught with the ideology of global domination."[59]

As a historically male-dominated field, mythology has also reflected and helped reproduce the privileged social position of men vis-à-vis women. Mythologists have generally treated female figures that appear in the material they study more reductively than male ones.[60] The potential usefulness of this material as a source of knowledge about women's experiences and perspectives has also been largely overlooked.[61] Furthermore, although many have

[58] Sinding Jensen, *Myths and Mythologies*, 11. Sinding Jensen nevertheless objects to assumptions that the category of myth constitutes an "academic concoction, something that has been invented, for the sake of scholarship and ideological domination", a view he does not ascribe to Strenski but Detienne. Ibid., 11–12, 28 n10.

[59] Gordon Brotherston, "The West and the People with Myth", in *Myth: A New Symposium*, ed. Gregory Allen Schrempp and William F. Hansen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 139.

[60] Carolyne Larrington, "Introduction", in *The Feminist Companion to Mythology*, ed. Carolyne Larrington (London: Pandora, 1992), ix. See also Lillian Doherty, "Putting the Women Back into the Hesiodic Catalogue of Women", in *Laughing with Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought*, ed. Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[61] "As generally understood and undertaken, mythology [...] concerns men's myths and rituals. Most extant documents, field data and interpretations come from male scrobes, scholars, artists and 'informants.' Thus, we know a fair amount about women *in* mythology, about the female figures who people men's narratives, enactments, philosophies and analyses, and almost nothing

exhibited a clear interest in sexual difference, few mythologists have addressed the relationship between the material they study and gendered inequalities.[62] Certain long-standing mythological discourses can, however, be said to have helped *legitimize* such inequalities by, for example, lending scientific legitimacy to the notion of men's treatment of women as biologically predetermined.[63] Finally, parts of mythology have been structured by an androcentric narrative of modernization, according to which Western societies' alleged development away from myth towards a disenchanted modernity – a development frequently conceptualized as one from *mythos* to *logos*[64] – has simultaneously entailed a shift from a feminine to a masculine existence, made possible by masculine coded means, such as philosophy, science and reason.[65]

In sum, mythology is no mere academic curiosity, but a persuasive social and political factor. Philosopher Elisabeth Beaten even argues that theories *about* myth wield such an immense influence over how we understand and relate to ourselves and others – who we, for example, perceive and treat as fully human – that they can be said to function *as* myths.[66] Hence, mythology may be an "industry", but if so, it is an industry that manufactures very powerful goods.

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about women *and* mythology". Marta Weigle, *Spiders & Spinsters: Women and Mythology* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), vii, italics in original.

[62] According to Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard, the reception of classical myths has "repeatedly reinforced the idea that gender is the central preoccupation of myth." Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard, "Introduction", in *Laughing with Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought*, ed. Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 10–11.

[63] See this thesis, 100.

[64] Wilhelm Nestle, *Vom Mythos zum Logos: Die Selbstentfaltung des griechischen Denkens von Homer bis auf die Sophistik und Sokrate* (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1940). See also Glenn W. Most, "From Logos to Mythos", in *From Myth to Reason?: Studies in the Development of Greek Thought*, ed. Richard G. A. Buxton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 25–31.

[65] On this narrative, see for example Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2002). It is no coincidence that several theorists of modernity, following the lead of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, have turned to the story of Odysseus to discuss what it means to become an enlightened, modern subject. In this narrative – which traces "the path of the subject's flight from the mythical powers", according to Horkheimer and Adorno – the hero's alleged escape from myth is, at the same time, a flight from the feminine, represented by the Sirens and Circe. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Stanford: Stanford University Press, [1947] 2002), 37; Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Harvard University Press, 1995), 4–7; Nina Björk, *Sireners sång: Tankar kring modernitet och kön* (Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 2011), 19–28.

[66] Baeten, *The Magic Mirror*, 19. This statement, too, is of course based on and contributes to naturalizing a particular, historically contingent concept of myth.

Acknowledging that mythologists themselves have remained unable to agree upon what it is they study, this thesis does not treat myth as an extradiscursive *thing* to which all mythological utterances refer. Rather, it considers "myth" a name assigned to many different discursive objects, formed by the discourses that together constitute mythology. This theoretical assumption supports the recontextualization that I propose. If mythology is understood as the study of a specific entity, then relatively few theorists qualify as mythologists. But if one instead views mythology as a multitude of contradictory discourses devoid of a unifying object, it is reasonable to regard mythology as an interdiscursive network that includes all scholarly texts that deal with phenomena *called* myth.

The mythological network differs from "technical" networks (like, for example, telecommunication networks) in that the links connecting the nodes of which it is composed are not pre-drawn by actors who do not themselves form part of the network. Nor is it a "social" network, as its nodes are texts rather than humans.[67] First and foremost, the network metaphor is meant to capture that the texts in question are connected, which is to say that they refer to each other, either explicitly or in the sense that one text invokes a discursive or ideational element derived from another. Obviously, not all texts in the network refer to all the others. Between some texts, there are thousands of links, between others only a few. The former are, or have often been, particularly influential. Such texts can therefore be said to form part of the mythological canon.[68] Yet their influence is not innate or immutable but follows from their position in the network – that is, from the very fact that many other texts refer to them.

This study is structured by the assumption that the mythological network is open to change. Among the factors that can help reconfigure the network are metamythological studies, as these may affect which texts in the network are read and how. However, as most studies of this kind focus on the same set

[67] Cf. Bruno Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications", *Soziale Welt* 47, no. 4 (1996): 369.

[68] For an idea of what these frequently invoked texts are, see for example Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richardson, ed. *The Rise of Modern Mythology: 1680-1860* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972); Eric Csapo, *Theories of Mythology* (Malden: Blackwell, 2005); Robert A. Segal, ed., *Theories of Myth: From Ancient Israel and Greece to Freud, Jung, Campbell and Lévi-Strauss. Volume. 1–6* (New York: Garland publisher, 1996); Robert A. Segal, ed., *Myth: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies. Volume. 1–4* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Sinding Jensen, *Myths and Mythologies*; Tok and Schrempp, *The Truth of Myth*.

of canonized texts, they instead tend to reproduce and reinforce the network's prevailing composition. The study at hand seeks to counteract this tendency, both by considering texts often overlooked by other metamythologists and by conceptualizing the authors of these texts as mythologists. In other words, the recontextualization that this study carries out constitutes a deliberately disruptive (partly performative) act, which both presupposes and attempts to accomplish a different understanding of what mythology is and can be.

Upon meeting Humpty Dumpty, the Alice of Lewis Caroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871) – from which this thesis' epigraph derives – is puzzled by the former's claim that the words he employs mean "neither more nor less" than he chooses them to mean. Can one really, asks Alice, make words mean so many different things? The history of "myth" suggests that the answer is yes; some words can be made to carry an almost endless variety of meanings. But how, then, do words take on new meanings? Humpty Dumpty's reply is well known. "The question is […] which is to be master – that's all."[69] Put differently, Humpty Dumpty argues that it is a question of power. This study does not ignore the role power plays in determining which definitions of words become influential, nor the power that comes from having one's definition widely accepted. But again, what the network metaphor seeks to suggest is that power, in this context, is relational: something a text achieves through its connection to other texts. Hence, by making mythologists interested in hitherto overlooked texts in the mythological network, metamythological studies such as this one can help to *empower* these texts.

Concepts of myth

Strenski goes so far as to argue that the theories of myth he studies have nothing in common but the word "myth", meaning that they are not theories of the same phenomenon.[70] The present study takes into consideration that this may often be the case, wherefore it is misleading to approach all statements about myth as interventions in a transhistorical debate centered on an ahistorical constant. Yet, a rigorously nominalist approach runs the risk of rendering invisible those continuities that actually do exist. For this reason, it is imperative to note that the mythological network, although heterogenous, is still full of clusters, or sets of texts in which the word "myth" is used in similar

[69] Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1872), 124.

[70] Strenski, *Four Theories of Myth*, 3.

ways, to express similar ideas about the nature and function of the phenomena thus named. When this is the case, I will speak of recurrent or received *concepts of myth*.

One scholar who has applied a constructivist perspective on myth without succumbing to nominalism is literary theorist Andrew von Hendy. In *The Modern Construction of Myth* (2002), he notes that myth has been defined in countless ways, but that it remains possible to identify "four major conceptions of what myth is and does", which have been particularly influential historically and still hold sway today. The first of these is the "romantic" conception, represented by those who use the word "myth" to mean a "belief around which a culture coheres" and ascribe some form of "transcendental sanction" or timeless truth to this belief. The second is the "ideological" conception, according to which myth denotes a widely believed lie. The third conception of myth is the "constitutive" one, the proponents of which define myth as "any foundational belief within a given culture", but who differ from romantics in that they describe this belief as a (necessary) fiction. Finally, the fourth conception is called the "folkloristic" and entails that one defines myth "as a genre of story told in traditional oral societies and distinguished by its reference to matters of collective, usually sacred, importance."[71]

The reason why I speak of "concepts" rather than "conceptions" (of myth) is that the former, in my opinion, better conveys that these ideas are *linguistically* mediated, which is to say that I am not studying mental representation of myth, but different ways in which the word "myth" is used. Apart from that, I find von Hendy's taxonomy useful and often utilize it as a heuristic tool. Even so, by highlighting ways in which Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway combine, expand or negate already established concepts of myth, this study also makes visible tensions that this kind of metamythographical, historiographical categorizations tend to conceal. An important part of my argument is that Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway both appropriately received concepts of myth and develop new, highly idiosyncratic ones of their own, which fall outside von Hendy's generalizations.

[71] Von Hendy, *The Modern Construction of Myth*, xi–xiii.

On "appropriation"

The term "appropriation" derives from the Latin *appropriare*, which means *to make one's own*.[72] As art historian Robert Nelson observes, it is often used to designate an "improper" taking.[73] The expression "cultural appropriation" is, for example, defined as the "unacknowledged or inappropriate adoption of the practices, customs, or aesthetics of one social or ethnic group by members of another (typically dominant) community or society."[74] But this is not what I have in mind, when I claim that Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway "appropriate" received concepts of myth.

My use of "appropriation" is, instead, loosely inspired by that of philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, who employs this term to denote the act of utilizing a word or discourse (ru. *slovo*) already uttered by others in a way that serves one's own intentions. This is not an improper act, but a relatively mundane activity in which anyone who desires to express themselves must engage (at least if they wish to be understood), simply because language is something we inherit.[75] Only the biblical Adam was free to name the world as he saw fit. Prior to "the moment of appropriation", writes Bakhtin, the word "exists in other people's mouths, in other people's context, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own."[76]

Drawing on this description, one could say that the study at hand examines how and with what results Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway take the word "myth" out of "other people's mouths" and make it serve new ends. Yet, it is necessary to further specify what this entails. At times, Bakhtin seems to understand

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[72] Moises Esteban-Guitart, "Appropriation", in *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology*, ed. Thomas Teo (New York: Springer New York, 2014), 128.

[73] Robert S. Nelson, "Appropriation", in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 162.

[74] *Oxford English Dictionary*, "Cultural appropriation, n" (Oxford University Press, 2024).

[75] Cf. David K. Danow, *The Thought of Mikhail Bakhtin: From Word to Culture* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 32.

[76] Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" [1941], in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 293–294. Julia Kristeva, who was among the first to introduce Bakhtin to Western readers in 1966, invokes the latter's claim that to speak one must use words already used by others (or even speak *through* others), in support of her assertions that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" – which, in turn, is the basic assumption behind Kristeva's concept of intertextuality. Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel" [1966], in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 37.

appropriation as a cognitive process, through which the subject acquires a language.[77] I instead reserve this term for a textual practice. Furthermore, Bakhtin's metaphors sometimes suggest that a successful appropriation ensures complete control over the words one uses. To appropriate a word, he claims, involves a "seizure" and "transformation" of that word "into private property". "Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process" – but, according to Bakhtin, still a feasible and worthwhile objective.[78] This is reminiscent of Humpty Dumpty's position. In contrast, a theoretical assumption guiding this study is that one can never achieve full mastery over the words one uses, precisely because they have always already been uttered by others, who have imbued them with a meaning one cannot erase.[79] Thus, while we speak a language, it also speaks through us.

Allowing "myth" to guide one's gaze

Contextualization is an integral part of this study's method. On the most general level, I offer a recontextualization of Beauvoir's, Daly's and Haraway's works, by reading these as part of the mythological network. Here, the term "recontextualization" does not – as it does in some settings[80] – denote the relocation of a text or piece of text from its "original" context, but any contextualization that stands out in relation to those previously assigned

[77] Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel", 293–294. This helps explain why Bakhtin's concept of appropriation is more often used by scholars studying pedagogy than those interested in the history and politics of words and concepts. See for example Timothy J. Lensmire, "Appropriating Others' Words: Traces of Literature and Peer Culture in a Third-Grader's Writing", *Language in Society* 23, no. 3 (1994); Miki Mori, "Our Speech Is Filled with Others' Words: Understanding University Student and Instructor Opinions Towards Paraphrasing through a Bakhtinian Lens", *Ampersand* 5 (2018).

[78] Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel", 294.

[79] For an incisive discussion of the fact that we are always obliged to speak through others, see Isabelle Ståhl, *Psykets laboratorium: Skildringar av drogexperiment i Weimarrepubliken* (Malmö: Ellerströms, 2023), e.g., 144.

[80] Per Linell, *Approaching Dialogue: Talk, Interaction and Contexts in Dialogical Perspectives* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1998), 86. See also John H. Connolly, "Recontextualization, Resemiotisation and Their Analysis in Terms of an Fdg-Based Framework", *Pragmatics* 24, no. 2 (2014). Even Peter Burke, who otherwise warns against supposing that things have singular contexts, seems to equate recontextualization with moving a thing from "its" context to a new one. Peter Burke, "Context in Context", *Common Knowledge* 8, no. 1 (2002): 172.

epistemological primacy.[81] The term "context" is, in turn, used to denote any sense-making connection invoked or established by a scholar.[82]

It follows from this broad definition of "context" that contextualization does not only constitute a method used to accomplish the purpose of this thesis. I also contextualize when I specify its object of study; that is, when present this as a study of feminist theorists. In what follows, the prefix "feminist" is used to indicate that the main focus of a theorist, theory or text is on gendered inequalities, conceptualized as a problem that must be addressed.[83] This combined focus and normative stance, which Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway all share, is not the only factor that influences their writings on myth. To read them as feminist theorists is therefore to construct a specific context for these writings, deemed to be particularly productive. It can, for example, help clarify why their writings on myth stand out when compared to that of other mythologists – who, on the basis of the stipulative definition given above, cannot be characterized as feminists.

To read Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway as feminist *mythologists* is also to prioritize some possible contextualizations over others. As mentioned above, I allow "myth" to guide my gaze. I permit the presence of this word to govern which text passages I focus on, as well as what contexts I choose to construct

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[81] In fact, the study at hand proceeds on the assumption that there is no such thing as a singular, original context. As Burke points out, contexts are "not found but selected or even constructed […] by a process of abstracting from situations and isolating certain phenomena in order to understand them better." Ibid. Cf. Kristin Asdal and Ingunn Moser, "Experiments in Context and Contexting", *Science, Technology & Human Values* 37, no. 4 (2012): 300. See also Dominick Lacapra, "Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts", *History and Theory* 19, no. 3 (1980): 254. For an accessible discussion of recontextualization in Swedish, see Staffan Bergwik, "Omkontextualisering: Det kreativa bygget av sammanhang", *Konsten att kontextualisera: Om historisk förståelse och meningsskapande* (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2022).

[82] Such connections can be established between, for example, two or more texts, individuals or places, just as they can and aim to situate one's object of study, oneself or any other phenomenon. "What counts as a context depends on what one wishes to explain", writes Burke. Burke, "Context in Context", 172.

[83] This is a stipulative rather than an analytical definition. It does not represent an attempt to identify the essence of feminist theory, nor the prediscursive referent of all statements grouped together under this category. Rather, the purpose of this definition is merely to enable the construction of a productive context for the work of Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway, by highlighting an important feature that these works have in common and that distinguishes them from that of non-feminist theorists (the prefix "non-feminist" is not to be equated with *anti-feminist*, but used here to denote all theorists, theories and texts that lack the combined focus and normative stance that characterize feminist ones). On the basis of this definition, I argue that it is legitimate to describe Beauvoir as a feminist theorist, even though she did not self-identify as such when she wrote *The Second Sex*.

in order to make sense of these passages. "Myth" thus functions as a beacon, dictating how I move through and between texts. As a consequence, there are many potentially productive passages and contexts, central to other scholars' readings, which I have not explored. But tracking the term "myth" has also led me down uncharted paths, enabling me to see things that others have missed.

I do not read the texts I study against the mythological network in its entirety but construct a series of more limited contexts for each text or set of texts. To choose which contexts to construct, I have both worked from the texts "out" towards the wider network, and from the network "in" towards the texts. I have sought to examine all works in the mythological network to which Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway themselves refer, as well as many works that the available biographical information suggests that these theorists might have come into contact with. I have also spent a considerable amount of time examining the network itself, to learn to identify the presence in my source texts of discourses and concepts with their roots in this network, even when Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway provide no explicit references to other texts or mythologists.

3. Previous research

Research that only deals with one of the theorists at the center of this thesis will be addressed in the context of the relevant part-study. In the following, I focus on works of a more general character, especially metamythological studies that deal with the history of mythology.

Metamythology without women

Metamythology now constitutes a flourishing field. Broadly speaking, publications in this field take one of two forms: they are either centered around specific theorists, or they deal with a broad number of theorists/theories of myth from an overarching perspective. In addition, there are a variety of anthologies and readers that collect texts by mythologists considered to be of particular importance. Although the latter are not studies in their own right, they help define the canon of mythology, studied by metamythologists. One thing that all three types of publications have in common is that they rarely include any women (which also means that they seldom include any feminist theorists, as most, though far from all, feminist theorists are female). To demonstrate this, I will first consider the publication output of Routledge, as they have published a particularly large number of books about mythology.

Under the heading *Myth: Critical Concept in Literary and Cultural Studies* (2007), Routledge has published four volumes. In total, these four volumes, edited by Robert A. Segal, include 78 texts, many of which are excerpts from larger work. Only four of these are written by a woman: two by the classicist Jane Ellen Harrison (1850–1928), one by folklorist Jesse L. Weston (1850–1928) and one by archeologist Henriette Antonia Groenewegen-Frankfort (1896–1962), authored together with her husband Henri Frankfort (1897–1954).[84]

Routledge has also published twelve titles in the "Theorists of Myth" book series.[85] These are all authored by men and focus primarily on the works of

[84] Robert A. Segal, ed., *Myth: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies. Volume. 2* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 28–39, 105–114 (Harrison), 137–145 (Weston); Robert A. Segal, ed., *Myth: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies. Volume. 4* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 23–41 (Frankfort).

[85] Ford Russell, *Northrop Frye on Myth: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Eleazar Moiseevič Meletinskij, *The Poetics of Myth* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Robert Ackerman, *The Myth and Ritual School: J.G. Frazer and the Cambridge Ritualists* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Flood, *Political Myth*; Douglas Allen, *Myth and Religion in Mircea Eliade* (New York: Routledge, 2002);

other men. The one exception is philosopher Williams Schultz's *Cassirer and Langer on Myth: An Introduction* (2016), half of which is dedicated to the philosopher Susann Langer (1895–1985).[86] The other eleven titles mention almost no women whatsoever, except for Harrison. This is particularly noteworthy in the case of Segal's *Myth Analyzed* (2020), as this collection of essays is said to offer an "overview" of mythological theories from both the social sciences and the humanities.[87]

Finally, Routledge has published two introductions to mythology outside the above-mentioned series, written by literary scholars: Laurence Coupe's *Myth* (2009, first edition 1997) and Kenneth Knowles Ruthven's *Myth* (2018, first edition 1976).[88] The only woman Ruthven mentions is, again, Harrison.[89] But Coupe's work defies the general pattern. Besides Harrison, he refers to at least eight additional women, many of whom can be classified as feminist theorists.[90] However, the vast majority of these women are mentioned on the same two pages. It is only historian Marina Warner's (1946–) theory of myth and novelist Margaret Atwood's (1939–), according to Coupe, "mythopoetic" novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) that are given closer attention.[91] In the end, more than nine-tenths of this book remains devoted to men.

Routledge's publication history is no exception but reflects a more general trend. The now defunct publishing house Garland Publishing has published six volumes under the title *Theories of Myth: from Ancient Israel and Greece to Freud,*

Richard Golsan, *Rene Girard and Myth: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Steven F. Walker, *Jung and the Jungians on Myth: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Daniel Merkur, *Psychoanalytic Approaches to Myth: Freud and the Freudians* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Laurence Coupe, *Kenneth Burke on Myth: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Angus Nicholls, *Myth and the Human Sciences: Hans Blumenberg's Theory of Myth* (New York: Routledge, 2015); William Schultz, *Cassirer and Langer on Myth: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Robert A. Segal, *Myth Analyzed* (New York: Routledge, 2021). Some of these titles were previously published by Garland Publishing.

[86] Schultz, *Cassirer and Langer on Myth*.

[87] Segal, *Myth Analyzed*, i.

[88] Laurence Coupe, *Myth*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009); Kenneth Knowles Ruthven, *Myth,* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2018). Ruthven's book was originally published with Garland Publishing.

[89] Ruthven, *Myth*, 36–38, 70.

[90] These women are Elinor W. Gadon, Juliet Mitchell, Jacqueline Rose, Kate Millet, Hélène Cixous, Margaret Atwood, Estelle Lauter and Marina Warner. Coupe, *Myth*, 175-176.

[91] Ibid., 92, 176–180 (Atwood), 84, 169–175 (Warner).

Jung, Campbell and Lévi-Strauss (1996), all edited by Segal.[92] Together these volumes are said to provide "a comprehensive and systematic selection of the most important writings on myth."[93] In total, they include 113 essays. Of these, only twelve are written by women.[94] Another anthology, which also features a lengthy introduction to the study of myth, is Sinding Jensen's *Myths and Mythologies: A Reader* (2009). This work encompasses 21 previously published texts, out of which only two are authored by women: Langer and the anthropologist Mary Douglas (1921–2007).[95] One of the most recent works on the history of mythology is *The Truth of Myth Life: World Mythology in Theory and Everyday Life.* (2020), wherein Gregory Schrempp and Tok Thompson claim to provide "an overview of the development of the scholarly study of myth, from its earliest times to its most contemporary", centered on around 60 different theorists.[96] Of these, only four are women: Harrison, the archeologists Margaret Murray (1863–1963) and Marija Gimbutas (1921–1994), as well as the literary theorists Gayatri Spivak (1942–).[97]

Other frequently cited works on mythology, listed in the order of their publication, are historian of religion William Doty's *Mythography: The Study of Myth and Ritual* (1986), historian of religion Bruce Lincoln's *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology and Scholarship* (1999), Segal's *Theorizing About Myth* (1999), Von Hendy's *The Modern Construction of Myth* (2002), classicist Eric Csapo's *Theories of Mythology* (2005), historian of religion Robert S. Ellwood's *Myth: Key Concepts*

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[92] Segal, ed., *Theories of Myth, vol. 1–6*. The subtitles of these volumes are *Psychology and Myth* (vol. 1); *Anthropology, Folklore, and Myth* (vol. 2); *Philosophy, Religious Studies, and Myth* (vol. 3); *Literary Criticism and Myth* (vol. 4); *Ritual and Myth* (vol. 5); *Structuralism and Myth* (vol. 6).

[93] Segal, "Series Introduction", vii.

[94] These texts are by Frances Herskovits (together with Melville Herskovits, vol. 1), Ruth Benedict (author of two texts, vol. 2), H.R Ellis Davidson (vol. 2), Henriette Groenewegen-Frankfort (author of two text, vol. 3 and 5), Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty (vol. 3), Lilian Feder (vol. 4), Lilian R Furst (vol. 4), Jane Ellen Harrison (vol. 5), Phyllis M. Kaberry (vol. 5), Mary Douglas (vol. 6).

[95] Sinding Jensen, *Myths and Mythologies*, 64–85 (Langer), 200–236 (Douglas).

[96] Tok and Schrempp, *The Truth of Myth*, 1. See especially the chapter titled "Highlights in the History of Mythological Research", 37–98.

[97] Ibid., 86–89. The only work by Spivak that Schrempp and Thompson mention is "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), a text in with the word "myth" does not figure. Yet, this work prompts them to ask an interesting question: "As the world globalizes, will the scholarly discourse globalize as well, away from the 'dead white men' coterie of previous generations of scholarship, or will the colonial gaze continue to sweep other mythologies under its own convenient ideology?" Ibid., 91–92.

in Religion (2009) and Segal's *Myth Theorized* (2023).[98] All of these works purport to offer an overview of the history of mythology. Together they mention hundreds of different names, but almost no women and definitely no feminist theorists.

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There are a few metamythological studies *informed* by a feminist perspective. But even these tend to focus on male, non-feminist mythologists (the most important exceptions are discussed in the next section). In the introduction to *The Magic Mirror: Myth's Abiding Power* (1996), Elizabeth Baeten explains that her interest in myth was fostered by feminists like Estelle Lauter – author of *Women as Mythmaker* (1984) – whose study seemed to suggest that myth and myth-making where "important elements" of certain feminist theories.[99] And yet, Baeten's own study is not centered around the work of feminist theorists like Lauter, but that of Ernst Cassirer, literary theorist Roland Barthes (1915–1980), historian of religion Mircea Eliade (1907–1986) and psychologist James Hillman (1926–2011), each of whom is dedicated their own chapter.

Likewise, in the introduction to *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth* (2001), classicist Lillian Doherty explains that it "would have been possible to write an account of myth interpretation based entirely on feminist theory" and that she does not "mean to give the impression that feminist thought is merely reactive, a kind of supplement to the concerns of male scholars."[100] Still, her own book focuses almost exclusively on male non-feminist mythologists, a fact that Doherty seeks to justify in the following way:

> In keeping with a Western intellectual tradition that has only recently begun to change, most established systems of myth interpretation are founded on the work of "great men": Freud, Jung, Eliade, Lévi-Strauss. Because this book is a reflection on the "state of the art" – an overview and critique of *existing* systems – a disproportionate amount of it will be devoted to the work of these men.[101]

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[98] William G. Doty, *Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1986); Robert A. Segal, *Theorizing About Myth* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1999); Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth*; Von Hendy, *The Modern Construction of Myth*; Csapo, *Theories of Mythology*; Robert S. Ellwood, *Myth: Key Concepts in Religion* (London: Continuum, 2009); Robert A. Segal, *Myth Theorized* (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2023).

[99] Baeten, *The Magic Mirror*, 8–9; Lauter, *Women as Mythmakers*.

[100] Lillian Eileen Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth* (London: Duckworth, 2001), 13.

[101] Ibid., 13, italics in original.

By contrast, the study at hand focuses on feminist theorists who *challenge* the theories of these canonized, male mythologists.

Metamythological studies of feminist theorists

One of the first studies to discuss the role of myth in works of feminist theorists is theologian Emily Culpepper's doctoral thesis *Philosophia in a Feminist Key: Revolt of the Symbols* (1983). This is a work written from the "inside", by a self-proclaimed radical feminist who is herself engaged in what she terms feminist myth-making.[102] It makes visible that the aspiration to create new feminist myths is shared by many feminists, among which Culpepper mentions Mary Daly and Gloria Anzaldúa.[103] Yet, this study does not offer an *analysis* of writings on myth by feminist theorists, only an argument that invokes such writings.

Another relatively early study that draws attention to the fact that many feminist theorists have discussed the value of what they themselves term myth is cultural theorist Jane Caputi's "On Psychic Activism: Feminist Mythmaking", published in *A Feminist Companion to Mythology* (1992).[104] As was the case with Culpepper, Caputi – who stands as the co-author of Daly's fifth book, *Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language* (1987) – is no mere onlooker, but actively engaged in the pursuit of new feminist myths. It is therefore no surprise that Caputi's text also develops into more of an argument than an analysis. As an overview of what I will call *the myth-affirmative feminist tradition,* it is, however, useful. Among the feminist theorists that Caputi makes reference to are Daly, Culpepper, Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde and Paula Gunn Allen. Importantly, she also brings up Haraway, whose writings on myth few scholars before her have read alongside that of the previously mentioned.[105]

The most numerous examples of feminist myth-talk are provided by literary theorist Ellen Heather Douglass, in her dissertation *Myth as Muteness, Myth as Voice* (1994). The main focus of this study is on various forms of feminist

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[102] Emily Culpepper, *Philosophia in a Feminist Key: Revolt of the Symbols* (Doctoral thesis: Harward University, 1983). 229. See also Emily Culpepper, "Female History/Myth Making", *The Second Wave* 4, no. 1 (1975).

[103] Culpepper, *Philosophia in a Feminist Key*, 229–230.

[104] Jane Caputi, "On Psychic Activism: Feminist Mythmaking", in *A Feminist Companion to Mythology* ed. Carolyne Larrington (London: Pandora Press, 1992).

[105] Caputi, "On Psychic Activism", 437.

revisionist myth-making (with a particular focus on "the quest myth"), but it also encompasses more normative sections on the premises of such practices. Unfortunately, this is a quite difficult read, which lacks all elements a thesis usually contains, including a stated purpose, specified material and a discussion on theory, method and previous research. But as an almost encyclopedic collection of statements on myth by feminists it remains useful as a point of departure.

An especially perceptive study of feminist writings on myths is "Feminism and/as Myth: Feminist Literary Theory Between Frye and Barthes" (1994) by Barbara Godard. Godard does not discuss Beauvoir, Daly or Haraway. But she emphasizes what she speaks of as "the diversity of feminist engagements with myth" and develops a language to conceptualize this diversity.[106] In particular, Godard highlights the difference between women who seek to "break into the myth" to demythologize the world and those who "take on the mythmaking role" in order to create "countermyths" meant to serve the aims of feminism.[107] To develop her analysis, Godard draws on two canonized male mythologists: Barthes and literary theorist Northrop Frye (1912–1991). The former's name also appears in my study. The difference is that I do not use Barthes' concept of myth as an analytical tool to discuss feminist writings on myth. Instead, I place Barthes and all other canonized mythologists on the same empirical level as Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway, focusing on how these theorists engage in dialogue with each other.

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The most significant study to date of feminist theorists' writings on myth is philosopher Pamela Sue Anderson's "Myth and Feminist Philosophy" (2002). Again, one should note that Anderson is herself an advocate of feminist mythmaking.[108] Already in the introduction to her study, she concludes that myth is no "mere falsehood" and that myths "can become the means for individual philosophers and philosophical communities to constitute themselves, i. e., create their own qualitative identity."[109] Thus defined, the

[106] Godard, "Feminism and/as Myth", 6.

[107] Ibid., 6.

[108] See Pamela Sue Anderson, *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion: The Rationality and Myths of Religious Belief* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1998).

[109] Pamela Sue Anderson, "Myth and Feminist Philosophy", in *Thinking through Myths: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Kevin Schilbrack (New York: Routledge, 2002), 102–103.

value of myth to feminists seems to be settled in advanced. And indeed, the aim of Anderson's study is not to examine how different feminist philosophers have defined myth, but to determine how myth should be approached. In total, Anderson lists four different "approaches to myth" taken by feminists: the "essentialist" approach, the "liberal" approach, the "progressive-poststructuralist" approach and a "social-epistemologist" approach (the last of which is advanced by Anderson herself).[110]

The first approach is divided into two subcategories: the "conservative-essentialist" approach and the "radical-essentialist" one. According to Anderson, representatives of both attitudes insist on the existence of "timeless" truths about women, which can be found or captured in myth.[111] But whereas conservative essentialists believe that these truths can be discovered in myths rescued from the past, radical essentialists argue that feminists must create "new versions of old myths" to apprehend it. As proponents of the conservative-essentialist position, Anderson names Harrison and Adrienne Rich, both of whom she describes as seeking to "conserve essentially timeless images of women's embodiment" found in myths believed to stem from a pre-patriarchal, "original" matriarchy.[112] The radical-essentialist approach to myth is exemplified by Daly.[113] The latter's approach, Anderson writes, is radical because she "digs deep to create new versions of old myths", but essentialist in the sense that she still believes that these (revised) myths can capture the truth of woman.[114]

Anderson argues that the "dangers and problems" with the essentialist approaches, of which she herself is highly critical, are tackled by the liberal feminist approach to myth.[115] Like the essentialist one, this approach is divided into two subcategories: the "liberal-existentialist" approach and the "liberal-culturalist" one. About the former, which is said to be represented by Beauvoir, Anderson writes:

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[110] Ibid., 103.

[111] Ibid.

[112] Ibid., 104.

[113] Somewhere in between or beyond the conservative-radical dichotomy, Anderson locates Adriana Cavarero. With reference to the latter's *In Spite of Plato* (1995), Anderson states that Cavarero strives to "return" the mythical female figures she studies "to their original context in a matriarchal order", which might "appear conservative" – but that her refiguration of these figures is "wholly positive for women" as it gives "each female mythic figure an autonomous role in the social order." Ibid.

[114] Ibid., 104–105.

[115] Ibid., 107.

> The existentialist feminist task is to disclose and transcend the myths that have served as the justificatory apparatus of patriarchal society in order to give women their humanity. For the liberal, this humanity is equated with individual autonomy and formal equality. Basically, then, the liberal-existentialist feminist maintains that myth only reinforces the false conceptualization of women as the other who lacks autonomy and equality.[116]

According to Anderson, liberal-existentialist feminists like Beauvoir seek to abolish both myth and gender – or rather, they seek to eliminate gender through the elimination of myth. "The assumption is that gender-neutrality would restore to women their autonomy and so their subjectivity as rational beings."[117] As we will see in the part-study devoted to Beauvoir, this reading appears to be inspired by one previously advanced by philosopher Drucilla Cornell, to whom Anderson also refers.[118]

Anderson argues that the difference between liberal-existentialists and liberal-culturists is that the latter recognize that the liberal notion of a gender-neutral universal subject is as mythical as "the myth of woman", discussed by Beauvoir. As a proponent of this approach, Andersons names philosopher Carole Pateman.[119] Yet both Pateman and Beauvoir are said to share the same end goal, namely to "expose and eliminate" myth.[120]

By contrast, Anderson claims that proponents of the progressive-poststructuralist approach to myth hold that "myth cannot be simply retrieved, exposed or negated."[121] In addition, progressive-poststructuralist feminists reject the notion of a gender-neutral universal subject, which is why they turn to myth to disrupt all "universal" identities and produce "sexually specific" ones. But unlike representatives of the essentialist approach to myth, progressive-poststructuralist feminists do not seek to revive or rewrite older myths in order to unearth a pre-existing female identity. Instead, they work through patriarchal myths or invent new myths to produce alternative types of subjectivity. This approach is, Anderson claims, represented by Luce Irigaray and Haraway. Whereas the former "disruptively mimes" older myths, the latter seeks to create a novel myth, centered around the cyborg. Both can

[116] Ibid., 107.
[117] Ibid. 108.
[118] Ibid., 117.
[119] Ibid., 109.
[120] Ibid., 107.
[121] Ibid., 109.

nevertheless be said to "rely upon the possibility of refiguring myths as a way out of conventional, philosophical accounts of subjectivity."[122]

Although it is clear that she prefers the progressive-poststructuralist approach to the essentialist and liberal one, Anderson is not uncritical of the former either. For example, she lists several potential problems with Haraway's so-called cyborg myth, including the very fact that it is centered around cyborg images.[123] More generally, Anderson states that the progressive-post-structuralist approach to myth might entail the "loss of certain values from past myths". It is to address this concern that Anderson advances her own social-epistemologist approach to myth – which I will not discuss here, as this part of her text is more mythological than metamythological.[124]

The great merit of Anderson's study is that it helps make visible the prominence of myth-talk in works of twentieth century feminist theory, while it also establishes how diverse this talk has been. Still, the present study differs from Anderson's in several respects. To begin with, Anderson's study is structured by the assumption that all feminists who write about what they term myth write about the same thing, which they nevertheless "approach" differently. By contrast, the study at hand will show that Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway use the word "myth" in many different ways, to accomplish many different ends.

Another difference between Anderson's study and the present one is that I construct other contexts for Beauvoir's, Daly's and Haraway's writings on myth. Anderson at times presents these three theorists as part of an utterly detemporalized, intra-feministic discussion on myth (somewhat anachronistically, she can thus claim that the problem with Daly and other essentialists' approach to myth is "addressed" by that represented by Beauvoir).[125] In that my study stresses the fact that Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway operate in different times, seek to answer different questions and make use of different intellectual resources, it constructs more specific contexts for their writings on myth. But because I read these writings as part of the mythological network, my study can also be said to constructs a much wider context, which encompass large parts of mythology's long history.

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[122] Ibid., 111.
[123] Ibid., 112.
[124] Ibid., 119.
[125] Ibid., 107.

Finally, because I approach Beauvoir's, Daly's and Haraway's writings on myth differently than Anderson, many of my conclusions differ from hers. For example, I question whether it is accurate that Beauvoir wants to eliminate all myths and that (all) Daly's writings on myths are essentialist. I will not, however, elaborate on these objections here, but return to them within the relevant part-study.

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One last group of texts deserves to be mentioned. It consists of studies that focus on how women and/or feminists have used what the author of these studies call myth, even if the studied actors do not always do so themselves. One of the most influential studies of this kind is "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking" (1982) by literary scholar Alicia Ostriker.[126] Another noteworthy study is "Women's Rewriting of Myth" (1992) by historian Diane Purkiss, which examines how women authors and poets have engaged with "classical" myths.[127] This is also the subject of classicist Vanda Zajko's "Women and Greek Myth", published in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology* (2007), as well as the anthology *Laughing with Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought* (2008), edited by Zajko and Miriam Leonard, who is also a classicist.[128] What all these studies have in common is the fact that they start from an already established definition of "myth", instead of asking how the feminists they study have defined this word. This also applies to *Satanic Feminism* (2007) by historian of religion Per Faxneld, which studies "*oppositional reworkings of myth*" by satanic feminists.[129]

[126] Ostriker, "The Thieves of Language."

[127] Diane Purkiss, "Women's Rewriting of Myth", in *The Feminist Companion to Mythology*, ed. Carolyne Larrington (London: Pandora Press, 1992).

[128] Vanda Zajko, "Women and Greek Myth", in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology*, ed. Roger D. Woodard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Zajko and Leonard ed., *Laughing with Medusa*.

[129] Per Faxneld, *Satanic Feminism: Lucifer as the Liberator of Woman in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 13, italics in original.

PART II.
SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

Introduction

The concrete relations between men and women are situated at the confluence of law and myths.

– Simone de Beauvoir, 1948

In the wake of the Second World War, when Simone de Beauvoir began work on what was to become *The Second Sex* (1949) – first initiated in 1946 – French feminists were facing new, difficult questions. By then, a majority of all European and North American democracies had implemented a series of long-sought legal reforms, including women's suffrage. Even in France, where the feminist movement had met particularly strong opposition, women were finally enfranchised in 1944.[1] Further reforms soon followed. When the Fourth Republic was founded in 1946, its constitution even contained a clause granting women equal rights with men in all matters of the law.[2] It thus seemed that most objectives of so-called "first-wave" feminists – who had focused mainly on legal equality – had at last been achieved.[3] In the eyes of some commentators, this meant the battle between the sexes was now resolved.[4] But as the dust began to settle, it soon became clear that the situation of French women in many respects remained disturbingly similar to that which had prevailed prior to the war. "The tremendous hopes of 1944-5, women's belief

[1] Karen M. Offen, *European Feminisms: 1700-1950: A Political History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 381, 384. On the lengthy battle for French women's right to vote, see also Karen M. Offen, *Debating the Woman Question in the French Third Republic, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[2] Offen, *European Feminisms: 1700-1950: A Political History*, 382. However, as Jane Jenson points out, the constitutionally prescribed equality between women and men was contradicted and partially annulled by other laws. Jane Jenson, "The Liberation and New Rights for French Women", in *Behind the Lines*, ed. Jane Jenson et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 275.

[3] Offen, *Debating the Woman Question*, 622.

[4] "Naively", writes Lisa Greenwald, "female postwar authors […] saw universal suffrage as basic proof of equality and of women's liberation." Lisa Greenwald, "Liberationer and Rethinking Gender Roles: 1944–1950", in *Daughters of 1968* (University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 37. See also Claire Duchen, *Women's Rights and Women's Lives in France, 1944-68* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 44.

that the law would ensure that they would become equal citizens, equal partners at work and even (maybe) at home, were gradually disappointed", notes historian Clarie Duchen.[5]

How was this discouraging fact to be explained? What was to be done, when the strategy to which earlier feminists had pinned their hopes proved insufficient? *Why is it that some things stay the same, when everything else seems to change?* The answers given to these questions varied depending on the respondents' political affiliation. Liberal feminists continued to stress the importance of legal reforms, meant to ensure that women, through access to education, employment and political representation, were fully integrated into the public structures of mainstream society.[6] By contrast, Marxist socialist presented patriarchal oppressions as tied to the institution of private property, wherefore they maintained that the former could (only) be eliminated through the abolishment of the latter.[7]

According to historian Judith G. Coffin, it was Beauvoir who offered the first systematic alternative to both liberal and Marxist accounts of patriarchal oppression. Thereby, she helped "make what we now call feminist theory an enterprise in its own right."[8] The quote I have chosen as an epigraph for this part-study points towards one of the ways in which myth-talk helped Beauvoir accomplish this.

This quote is taken from a three-part essay by Beauvoir termed "La femme et les mythes" (Woman and the myths), published in the monthly journal *Les Temps modernes* in the early summer of 1948. Until now, scholars have hardly ever analyzed this text. This is probably due to the fact that it was originally presented and continues to be referred to as an extract from *The Second Sex*, which implies that there is no point in studying these two texts separately.[9] A closer look at the 1948 essay nevertheless reveals that many passages were re-written before they were included in the latter work, while others were omitted altogether. It is from one of those excluded passages that the aforementioned quote is taken. In its entirety, it reads:

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[5] Duchen, *Women's Rights and Women's Lives in France, 1944-68*, 2. See also Greenwald, "Liberationer and Rethinking Gender Roles: 1944–1950", 24.

[6] Ibid., 37.

[7] Ibid., 39. See also Eva Gothlin, *Sex and Existence: Simone de Beauvoir's* The Second Sex, trans. Linda Schenck (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 19–20.

[8] Judith G. Coffin, "Historicizing *The Second Sex*", *French Politics, Culture & Society* 25, no. 3 Winter 2007 (2007): 124. On special the status ascribed to Beauvoir's see also Mary G. Dietz, "Introduction: Debating Simone de Beauvoir", *Signs* 18, no. 1 (1992): 74.

[9] Simone de Beauvoir, "La femme et les mythes I", *Les Temps modernes*, no. 32 (1948): 1921 n1.

> The concrete relations between men and women are situated at the confluence of law and myths. Later on, we will try to describe these relations from the feminine point of view. But since woman appears as "for others", its essential to first define her being-for-men. What place has she been officially assigned, since the advent of patriarchy? And what meaning does she hold in the eyes of men, aside from her legal status? That is what we will now examine. There is something arbitrary about considering laws and myths separately, because they interact. The positive way in which man imposes his supremacy on woman indicates how she appears to him; conversely, woman cannot take on every form under any given legislation. However, without forgetting the link that connects the way in which the subject affirms himself and the reality therethrough conferred on the object, it seems to us more convenient to study these two moments separately.[10]

In the context of the present study, this hitherto overlooked passage is of great interest. Partly because Beauvoir here emphasizes the importance of studying what she terms "myths" (*des mythes*); partly because she relates myths to "law" (*du droit*). As we can see, she claims that the law assigns woman an "official" place, whereas the myths determine what "meaning […] she hold[s] in the eyes of men, aside from her legal status." For the sake of convenience, Beauvoir states that she will analyze these two elements of woman's situation separately. Yet she maintains that there is something "arbitrary" about doing so, because laws and myths "interact". More precisely, Beauvoir argues that the laws of any given society, conceptualized here as the "positive way in which man imposes his supremacy", testify to the way in which woman therein "appears" to men – that is, to the nature of that society's myths. At the same time, she suggests that some laws might make it impossible to challenge certain myths, as "woman cannot take on every form under any given legislation." But we should also note that Beauvoir does not describe myth and law as fully interdependent. Consequently, while the laws of a society may both reflect and reinforce its myths, altering the former will not, by definition, eliminate the

[10] Ibid., 1943, translation mine. [*C'est au confluent du droit et des mythes que les rapports concrets de l'homme et de la femme se situent. Nous essaierons plus loin de les décrire du point de vue féminin. Mais puisque la femme apparaît comme "pour autrui", il est essentiel d'abord de définir son être-pour-les-homme. Quelle place, depuis l'avènement du patriarcat, lui a-t-il été officiellement assignée? Et, en marge des lois, quelle signification revêt-elle aux yeux des hommes? C'est ce que nous allons maintenant examiner. Il y a quelque arbitraire à considérer séparément droits et mythes, car les uns et les autres interfèrent. La manière positive dont l'homme impose sa suprématie à la femme indique en creux le visage sous lequel celle-ci lui apparaît: inversement, la femme ne peut pas prendre n'importe quelle figure sous une législation donnée. Cependant, sans oublier le lien qui rattache indissolublement le mode d'affirmation du sujet et la réalité ainsi conférée à l'objet, il nous semble plus commode et plus clair d'étudier séparément ces dues moments.*]

latter. By extension, this means that legal reforms, no matter how extensive, might still leave one of the two variables that govern the "concrete relations" of men and women untouched. The present study will show that this is exactly what *The Second Sex* suggests has happened. What is more, we will see that Beauvoir, in this work, suggests that myth also possesses a degree of autonomy in relation to that which Marxists typically refer to as the material base.

Thus, this study will establish that Beauvoir invokes myth to develop a theory of patriarchal oppression that challenges both that of contemporary liberal feminists (who held that legal reforms were sufficient to end male supremacy) and Marxist socialists (who argued the abolition of class society would automatically emancipate women as well). In these and other respects, the study at hand will reveal the productive function myth-talk serves in *The Second Sex*. Previous research has often portrayed Beauvoir as "mythoclast", whose main achievement is to have debunked myths in the sense of lies.[11] By reading her as a mythologist, I will instead demonstrate how Beauvoir *makes use of myth* – how she utilizes those ancient stories that she herself calls myths as a source of knowledge, from which she extracts insights into women's past and present; but also how she redefines the meaning of the word "myth" itself – to articulate arguments and analyses that form part of the very foundation upon which modern feminist theory rests.

Three concepts of myth

To make sense of *The Second Sex*, it is necessary to note that this work contains at least three different concepts of myth; a fact overlooked by all previous research. Sometimes, though very rarely, the word "myth" (*mythe*) is used as a synonym for misconception or lie. Borrowing from Andrew von Hendy, this can be called an "ideological" concept of myth.[12] Much more often, Beauvoir employs what von Henry might term a "folkloristic" concept, which is to say that she speaks of myths to denote sacred stories often associated with temporally or spatially removed societies[13] – stories that I with political theorists Tae-Yeoun Keum will refer to as "literary" myths.[14]

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[11] Michèle Le Doeuff, "Beauvoir the Mythoclast", *Paragraph* 33, no. 1 (2010). See also this thesis, 69–70.

[12] Von Hendy, *The Modern Construction of Myth*, xii.

[13] Ibid., xiii.

[14] Keum, *Plato and the Mythic Tradition in Political Thought*, 7–8. For a more detailed discussion of the expression "literary myth", see this thesis, 74–75.

A large part of *The Second Sex* is devoted to pancultural comparisons of literary myths. Most importantly, Beauvoir argues that woman, in all such stories, is represented as "the Other" in relation to man, meaning that man is presented as the subject, while woman is posited as the object, who deviates from the human norm represented by the former. In addition, Beauvoir identifies a large number of more specific images and ideas, which also recur again and again. To give but one example, she notes that woman is frequently portrayed as a threat to the transcendence of man. With reference to literary myths from ancient Greek and elsewhere, Beauvoir writes:

> The man captivated by her [woman's] spell loses his will, his project, his future; he is no longer a citizen but flesh, slave to his desires, he is crossed out of the community, enclosed in the instant, thrown passively from torture to pleasure; the perverse magician pits passion against duty, the present against the unity of time, she keeps the traveler far from home, she spreads forgetfulness.[15]

Beauvoir's most significant assertion, however, is that these images and ideas recur not only in literary myths but in modern novels and films, religious tracts, philosophical texts and scientific theories; indeed, that they – in the form of naturalized metaphors – permeate the very language we speak. In other words, she argues that these images and ideas of woman are not only pancultural but transhistorical. Confusingly, these transhistorical, seemingly ubiquitous images and ideas are also referred to as myths.

This is the third concept of myths at play in *The Second Sex*. When used in this manner, the word "myths" does not denote stories of a particular type (i.e., literary myths) but a set of images and ideas that appear in and structure both such stories and discourses of many other kinds, including everyday language. This idiosyncratic use of the word "myth" has no equivalent in von Hendy's typology. But the images and ideas that Beauvoir calls myths do appear to have something in common with the phenomena Keum speaks of as "deep" myths, by which she means those "tacit imaginative frameworks" that constitute the very lenses through which one views the world.[16] Among such (deep) myths, Beauvoir's devotes most attention to the one she speaks of as "the myth of woman" (*le myth de la femme*), sometimes spelled "the myth of Woman" (*le mythe de la Femme*).[17]

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[15] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 218.

[16] Keum, *Plato and the Mythic Tradition in Political Thought*, 5.

[17] In *DS-1* and *DS-2*, Beauvoir employs the expression *le mythe de la femme* (spelled with a lowercase f) five times (*DS-I*, 241, 304, 306, 395, 404) and *le mythe de la Femme* (with a capital F)

Although this part-study examines several works by Beauvoir, it is *The Second Sex* that takes center stage, simply because it is there that myth is attributed the greatest importance. In what follows, I will briefly summarize this text's structure and the role that myth plays in it.

The Second Sex consists of two massive volumes, called "Facts and Myths" (*Les faits et les mythes*) and "Lived Experience" *(L'expérience vécue*), which together comprise more than 800 pages. These two volumes are, in turn, divided into three respective four larger parts, titled "Destiny", "History", "Myths" (volume one), "Formative years", "Situations", "Justification" and "Toward liberation" (volume two). That myth constitutes an important topic is apparent already from the fact that it has been assigned its own part. Note also the inclusion of the word "Myths" in the very subtitle of volume one. But as we can see, there are still six more parts, which mostly revolve around other themes. The first of these, "Destiny", deals with established explanations for women's subordination, of physiological, psychoanalytical and historical materialist nature; all of which Beauvoir rejects, although she also draws some insights from each. The second, "History", traces the development of patriarchy from prehistoric times to the present, with a specific focus on laws and customs. The latter four, "Formative years", "Situations", "Justification" and "Toward liberation", are all centered around phenomenological oriented descriptions detailing women's first-person experiences of, for instance,

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two times (*DS-I*, 27, 405). In the latest English translation of *TSS*, Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany Chevallier sometimes leave out the definite article and translates *le myth de la femme* and *le myth de la Femme* into "the myth of woman" (*TSS*, 196, 240, 315) and "the myth of Woman" (*TSS*, 322). Other times, they keep the definite article and translates it into "the myth of the woman" (*TSS*, 242, 321) and "the myth of the Woman" (*TSS*, 34). However, as Borde and Chevallier themselves argue that when "used alone without an article" the word "woman" in English refers to "woman as an institution, a concept" (*TSS*, 17), I hold that the article should always be left out.

Beauvoir also speaks of "the feminine myth" (*du mythe féminin*) (*TSS*, 256/*DS–I*, 320) and "the myth of femininity" (*le mythe de la féminité*) (*TSS*, 328/*DS–II*, 9). Yet there is nothing to suggest that these expressions refer to different phenomena. After having used only "the myth of woman" and "the myth of Woman" in the first chapter of "Myths", Beauvoir launches chapter two by stating that she will now seek to "confirm this analysis of the feminine myth" (*TSS*, 256) by studying the works of five authors – only to then begin chapter three by writing that the study of these works has demonstrated that "[t]he myth of woman plays a significant role in literature" (*TSS*, 315). For the sake of simplicity, I will therefore use the expression "the myth of woman" throughout, unless I quote a passage where Beauvoir herself employs a different expression or capitalization.

childhood, education, sex, marriage, motherhood and work life. In addition, *The Second Sex* includes two introductions (one for each volume) and a conclusion. Crammed into the middle, towards the end of volume one, the admittedly extensive "Myths" thus runs the risk of falling out of sight. And yet, there is much to suggest that this part is particularly significant to Beauvoir's overall argument.

To begin with, one should note that Beauvoir, in retrospective, states that *The Second Sex* began as a work entirely devoted to myth. In her memoirs, she explains that she, around 1946, had just read novelist and ethnographer Michel Leiris' (1901–1990) autobiographical *Manhood* (1939), which inspired her to try and write something about herself. This sparked the question of what it had meant for her to be a woman. Because she had never experienced her womanhood as a disadvantage, Beauvoir claims that she first thought of dismissing that query altogether. Her life-long partner and colleague, philosopher and novelist Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980), nonetheless challenged her to reconsider. Since she had been brought up as a girl, Sartre argued that she should take a closer look at what her sexed upbringing had entailed. "I looked", Beauvoir writes, "and I had a revelation; this was a masculine world, my childhood had been nourished by myths forged by men (*de mythes forgés par les hommes*), to which I would have reacted in a very different way, had I been a boy."[18] "I was so interested", she continues, "that I abandoned my project of a personal confession to concentrate on the general condition of woman. I went to do research at the Bibliothèque Nationale and I studied the myths of femininity (*les mythes de la féminité*)."[19]

Initially, then, Beauvoir seems to have considered what she here calls "myths" her main object of study. Later in her memoirs, she notes that a larger investigation, aimed at the situation of woman in its totality, was not part of

[18] Simone de Beauvoir, *La force des choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), 109, translation mine. [*Je regardai et j'eus une révélation: ce monde était un monde masculin, mon enfance avait été nourrie de mythes forgés par les hommes et je n'y avais pas du tout réagi de la même manière que si j'avais été un garçons*.]

[19] Ibid., translation mine. [*Je fus si intéressée que j'abandonnai le projet d'une confession personnelle pour m'occuper de la condition féminine dans sa généralité. J'allai faire des lectures a la Nationale et j'étudiai les mythes de la féminité.*] Beauvoir repeats a version of this story in a later interview. "I wanted to write about myself and he [Sartre] said, 'Don't forget to explain first of all what it is to be a woman.' And I told him, 'But that never bothered me, I was always equal to men.' And he said, 'Yes, but even so, you were raised differently, with different myths and a different view of the world.' And I told him, 'That's true.' And that's how I began to work on the myths." Margaret A. Simons, *Beauvoir and* The Second Sex: *Feminism, Race, and the Origins of Existentialism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 55.

her original plan. It was Sartre, she explains, who encouraged her to develop the analysis further:

> It was in Ramatuelle; we talked about it for a long time and I hesitated. I had not envisaged writing such a vast work. But indeed, my study of the myths (*étude sur les mythes*) would be left midair if one did not know the reality they covered. So I immersed myself in books on physiology and history. [...] I began to look at women with new eyes and found surprise after surprise.[20]

Again, this suggests that *The Second Sex* began as a study of myths.[21] But the importance of "Myths" is also evidenced by the function it serves in relation to the work's other parts.

In the introduction to the first volume, Beauvoir states that what, above all, characterizes the situation of woman is that she is defined as "the Other" in relation to man.[22] As mentioned, this is to say that woman is excluded from the position of the "subject" (who defines and assigns meaning to itself, the world and others) and instead remains trapped in that of the "object" (which is defined by and in relation to the subject). What, moreover, distinguishes the feminine condition from that of other oppressed groups – from "other *Others*"[23] – is that woman has not challenged but come to accept this subordinate position.[24] Although she, "like all humans", *is* a subject, an "autonomous freedom", woman does not *posit* herself as such in relation to man.[25] Another way of stating this is to say the woman has not yet entered into the struggle for recognition: the process that, according to philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), leads to one being recognized as a subject in the eyes of another and oneself.[26] Woman has recognized man, but man has not

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[20] Beauvoir, *La force des choses*, 203, translation mine. [*C'était à Ramatuelle; nous en parlames longtemps et j'hésitai: je n'avais pas envisagé d'écrire un ouvrage aussi vaste. Mais en effet, mon étude sur les mythes restait en l'air si on ne savait pas quelle réalité ils recouvraient. Je me plongeai donc dans des livres de physiologie et d'histoire*. […] *Je m'étais mise à regarder les femmes d'un œil neuf et j'allai de surprise en surprise*.]

[21] Cf. Elisabeth Fallaize, "Simone de Beauvoir and the Demystification of Woman", in *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. Gill Plain and Susan Sellers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 87.

[22] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 37.

[23] Ibid., 197, italics in original.

[24] Ibid., 27.

[25] Ibid., 37.

[26] This interpretation, according to which Beauvoir does not identify woman with the slave in Hegel's master-slave dialectic but asserts that she has not yet entered this dialectic, was first advanced by Eva Gothlin in *Sex and Existence*, 72–73. The extent to which Beauvoir equates or does not equate women with Hegel's slave has remained a matter of debate among scholars.

recognized her. Hence, there is no "reciprocal recognition", which Beauvoir describes as one of humanity's highest, but most difficult, goals.[27]

The first chapter of "History" seeks to explain how this "whole story" began.[28] Beauvoir there concludes that the reason why woman was originally defined and came to understand herself as the Other was that she, due to "the burdens of reproduction", could not devote herself to productive (as opposed to merely reproductive) activities such as hunting, fishing and warrior expeditions, through which pre-historical man transcended the given and thus affirmed his status as subject, both in his own eyes and hers.[29] The rest of "History" is devoted to surveying the man-made laws and customs through which woman was "concretely established" as the Other, which is to say that she, in a very tangible sense, was imprisoned in the position of the object, devoid of every practical possibility, as well as the very right, to realize herself as a subject.[30]

Towards the end of "History", Beauvoir explains that technological and scientific advances have now, in her own day, removed most obstacles that woman's biology initially put in her way. While industrialization has helped abolish the importance of physical strength, at least within the context of factory work, the invention of effective contraception has at last freed woman from "reproductive slavery".[31] Together, these two factors have made it possible for woman to participate in productive labor on the same terms as man. This development has, in turn, enabled woman to see and assert herself as a subject, which explains why she has finally begun to demand that man should also recognize her as such. At the legislative level, this demand has been largely met. Yet, woman is still far from fully liberated. In the very last passage of "History", Beauvoir concludes that women, "on the whole" have remained in a "state of serfdom." It follows that "woman knows and chooses herself not as she exists for herself but as man defines her." For this reason, it is imperative to study woman's "being-for-men", which Beauvoir describes as "one of the

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See for example, Karen Green and Nicholas Roffey, "Women, Hegel, and Recognition in *The Second Sex*", *Hypatia* 25, no. 2 (2010); Kimberly Hutchings, "Beauvoir and Hegel", in *A Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. Laura Hengehold and Nancy Bauer (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), esp. 194–195.

[27] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 193–194.

[28] Ibid., 30.

[29] Ibid., 97–100. Cf. Sara Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference: Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 105–109.

[30] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 193.

[31] Ibid., 171.

essential factors of her concrete condition."[32] This is the purpose of "Myths", the longest of volume one's three parts.

The myth-part is divided into three chapters, all centered around the phenomenon termed "the myth of woman". Early on, Beauvoir asserts: "It is always difficult to describe a myth (*un mythe*); it does not lend itself to being grasped or defined; it haunts consciousnesses without ever being posited opposite them as a fixed object."[33] Beauvoir tries to overcome these difficulties in chapter one, which outlines the contours of the myth of woman with reference to a large number of disparate texts and practices, sourced from a wide variety of contexts. In chapter two, she seeks to "confirm this analysis of the feminine myth (*du mythe féminin*), as it is collectively presented", by studying what she terms "the singular and syncretic form" the myth of woman takes on in works of fiction by five male authors: Henry de Montherlant (1895–1972), D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930), Paul Claudel (1868–1955), André Breton (1896–1966) and Stendhal (1783–1842).[34] Finally, in chapter three, Beauvoir moves on to ask in what way the myth of woman shapes the actual lives of men and women. "The myth of woman", she states, "plays a significant role in literature; but what importance does it have in everyday life? To what extent does it affect customs and individual behaviors (*les mœurs et les conduites individuelles*)?"[35] As we will see, Beauvoir's answer suggests that it does to a tremendous extent.

The evolutionary anthropological concept of myth

Beauvoir is the first theorist in the long history of mythology to discuss myth from a distinctively feminist perspective. This novel standpoint facilitates insights that help challenge long-held assumptions about what myth is and does. But mythology also constitutes an important resource, which Beauvoir makes use of. In particular, I argue that she appropriates a concept of myth popularized by evolutionary anthropologists.

The fact that Beauvoir was familiar with anthropological research is evidenced by biographical data as well as textual references. From her time at Sorbonne, she was acquainted with Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009), who has reported that Beauvoir sought him out at his home when she was finalizing

[32] Ibid., 189.
[33] Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-1*, 196/242.
[34] Ibid., 256/320.
[35] Ibid., 315/395, translation modified.

The Second Sex, because she "wanted to know the latest state of anthropological research before completing her book."[36] While working on *The Second Sex*, she also visited the *Musée de l'Homme*; the anthropological museum of Paris, where she examined ethnographic studies on the relationship between men and women in non-Western, indigenous societies.[37] In the finished work, Beauvoir enters into dialogue not only with Lévi-Strauss, but also James George Frazer (1884–1941) and Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942).[38] She also draws on Sigmund Freud's (1856–1939) *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics* (1913), which contains many references to British anthropologists such as Frazer, Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917) and Andrew Lang (1844–1912).[39] Among these names, scholars interested in Beauvoir's writings on myth have focused almost exclusively on Lévi-Strauss, whose *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949) she read in manuscript form while finishing *The Second Sex*. In contrast, I will demonstrate the presence, in Beauvoir's work, of an older anthropological discourse on myth, developed by evolutionary anthropologists like Frazer and reproduced by, among others, Freud.

According to comparative mythologist Glen Robert Gill, Frazer and Freud were two of the main representatives of what he calls the "first wave" of modern mythology.[40] One hallmark of this wave, which reached its peak in the early twentieth century, was the assumption that myths was an essentially primitive or savage phenomenon. Though neither Frazer nor Freud denied the presence of mythic remnants in modern societies, both agreed that myth did not really belong there. According to them and many other contemporary mythologists, myths were the product of an undeveloped state of thought. This

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[36] Claude Lévi-Strauss and Didier Eribon, *Conversations with Claude Lévi-Strauss*, trans. Paula Wissing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 51–52.

[37] In a letter to her lover, the U.S. novelist Nelson Algren (1909–1991), Beauvoir describes one of these visits, explaining: "I had to go to the library to read books of ethnology about women [...] I read some strange books, these Australian, Indian and African tribes have really funny ways with women." Simone de Beauvoir et al., *A Transatlantic Love Affair: Letters to Nelson Algren*, trans. Ellen Gordon Reeves (New York: New Press, 1998), 145.

[38] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 26, 38 n4, 105–106, 115 n4 n6, 251–252 n8 n10 (Lévi-Strauss) 111, 115 n2, 727 (Frazer), 207, 214, 216, 507 (Malinwoski).

[39] Ibid., 79, 86 n5. Beauvoir also makes many references to societies and phenomena often studied by anthropologists without citing any source. Cf. Françoise Héritier, "Les communautés agricoles primitives", in *Simone de Beauvoir: Le Deuxième Sexe. Le livre fondateur du féminisme moderne en situation,* ed. Ingrid Galster (Paris: H. Champion, 2004), 103–104.

[40] Glen Robert Gill, *Northrop Frye and the Phenomenology of Myth* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 6.

thinking was, in turn, described as characterized by an incapacity to distinguish the products of one's own consciousness (e.g., representations, projections, personifications, metaphors and dreams) from objective reality.[41] Put differently, it was understood as highly *unreflexive*, incapable of self-reflection and self-critique. I will demonstrate that a similar reasoning informs Beauvoir's writings on myths. It is therefore necessary to take a closer look at the evolutionary anthropological concept of myth.

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The evolutionary anthropological concept of myth has its roots in the Enlightenment discourse on fable. In the Age of Enlightenment, "fable" was typically used to denote ancient (especially Greek) stories about gods, goddesses and other superhuman beings. Since the advent of Christianity, such stories had often been criticized as blasphemous.[42] But towards the end of the seventeenth century, a new – epistemologically rather than religiously motivated – concept and critique began to emerge, one that above all denounced fables as false. With theologian Roger A. Johnson, this could also be described as a "historico-epistemological" concept and critique. "For the issue is not simply one of false knowledge, but the falseness of the knowledge is understood to be grounded in the underdeveloped capacity for knowing characteristic of man at a certain stage of history."[43]

An early and influential representative of this, the "historico-epistemological" concept and critique of fable, was Bernard Fontenelle (1657–1757), a Frenchman of letters and academy member. In his *The Origins of Fabels*, published in 1724 but authored many years earlier, Fontenelle declared that the "origin of fables" should be attributed to the ignorance of "the first men", described as "poor savages" whose mental abilities could best be compared to that of a child. Fables were, in part, a product of these early, unevolved

[41] This schematic summary is partly based on my own reading of Tylor, Frazer, Lévy-Bruhl and Freud, whose works are cited below and in chapter 5–6. But it also finds support in earlier research. See for example Von Hendy, *The Modern Construction of Myth*, 77, 85–87, 95–96; Gill, *Northrop Frye and the Phenomenology of Myth* 5–7; Patricia Lorenzoni, *Att färdas under dödens tecken: Frazer, imperiet och den försvinnande vilden* (Göteborg: Glänta produktion, 2008), 103–121; Keum, *Plato and the Mythic Tradition in Political Thought*, 196–202; Tok and Schrempp, *The Truth of Myth*, 57–58, 60.

[42] Tok and Schrempp, *The Truth of Myth*, 42.

[43] Roger A. Johnson, *The Origins of Demythologizing: Philosophy and Historiography in the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 127.

people's attempts to make sense of the world: a rudimentary philosophy or science, marked by savage unreason.[44] "From this crude philosophy, which necessarily ruled in the early ages, were born the gods and goddesses", Fontelle explains.[45]

What also characterized the historico-epistemological concept and critique of fable was the seemingly paradoxical claim that these tales, though primitive, did not belong exclusively to the past. According to Fontenelle and his successors, some peoples – like native Americans – were *still* at that early historical stage from which all fables stemmed, which explained why these peoples continued to produce and believe in such stories.[46] In this respects, the Enlightenment discourse on fable both presupposed and reproduced a linear-progressive understanding of historical time, according to which all societies, historical as well as contemporary, could be located somewhere on a universal temporal scale. This belief in turn gave rise to what present-day anthropologist Johannes Fabian calls the "denial of coevalness": the idea that some peoples are *stuck in the past*, outside or just at the beginning of history.[47]

This temporalized understanding of space was central to the evolutionary anthropological discourse on myth. In his *Primitive Culture* (1871), Tylor – the so-called "father" of British anthropology – describes myth as the product of a particular cognitive phase, assumed to characterize the most primitive stages of cultural evolution, at which he argues that contemporary savages are still stuck. "Savages", writes Tylor, "have been for untold ages, and still are, living in the myth-making stage of the human mind."[48] Reusing the comparison between savages and children – to become a favorite *topos* among evolutionary anthropology[49] – he proclaims:

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[44] Bernard Fontenelle, "Of the Origin of Fables" [1724], in *The Rise of Modern Mythology: 1680-1860*, ed. and trans. Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richardson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), 12, 15.

[45] Ibid., 12.

[46] Ibid., 15.

[47] Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 31. See also Fanny Söderbäck, *Revolutionary Time: On Time and Difference in Kristeva and Irigaray* (Albany: State University of New York, 2019), 16–17.

[48] Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom. Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1871] 2010), 256.

[49] Henrika Kuklick, *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology, 1885-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 85–86.

> The general thesis maintained is that Myth arose in the savage condition prevalent in remote ages among the whole human race, that it remains comparatively unchanged among the modern rude tribes who have departed least from these primitive conditions, while higher and later grades of civilization […] continued it not merely in toleration but in honour. […] To the human intellect in its early childlike state may be assigned the origin and first development of myth. […] Thus, when in surveying the quaint fancies and wild legends of the lower tribes, we find the mythology of the world at once in its most distinct and most rudimentary form, we may here again claim the savage as a representative of the childhood of the human race.[50]

This quote illustrates that the colonial notion of savages as children did not only provide a premise for the anthropological study of myths, but that the anthropological study of myth, in turn, served to support and lend scientific legitimacy to this notion, in that the presence of myths among "the lower tribes" was invoked as proof of the claim that the savage state represents "the childhood of the human race."

This discourse was echoed by scores of scholars from other disciplines, such as philosophy and psychology. As stated, its influence can, for example, be discerned in the works of Freud. This is most evident in *Totem and Taboo,* where Freud establishes a parallel between "the psychology of primitive peoples, as it is taught by social anthropology", and that of "neurotics", taking as the starting point for this comparison "the tribes which have been described by anthropologists as the most backward and miserable of savages, the aborigines of Australia".[51] Citing physiologist and early psychologists Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920), Freud argues that the "ideas" embodied in what he terms the "animistic" or "mythological" system of thought – contrasted with those called "religious" and "scientific" – are a "psychological product of a mythopoeic consciousness", of which the primitive "*Weltanschauung*" may be considered a product.[52]

Returning to Beauvoir, I should point out that she does not use the word "myth" in the exact same way as anthropologists such as Tylor and Frazer, or thinkers influenced by them, like Freud. But there are several similarities. To

[50] Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 257.

[51] Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo. Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics* [1913], in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund* Freud, *Volume XIII (1913- 1914): Totem and Taboo and Other Works*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1958), 1.

[52] Ibid., 77.

begin with, Beauvoir's writings on myth are informed by the same linear-progressive understanding of human history, according to which all societies, historical as well as contemporary, can be placed somewhere on a temporal scale that leads from a "primitive" state to one termed "modern" or "civilized"; terms that Beauvoir herself makes use of.[53] Beauvoir also reproduces evolutionary anthropology's demeaning image of those she refers to as primitives (a word she employs to denote the inhabitants of ancient as well as contemporary societies). Although the inhabitants of civilized societies, according to her, do not always make use of these resources, Beauvoir states that they at least have access to logic, casual reasoning and rational thinking. By contrast, she claims that primitive peoples are governed almost entirely by magical and mythical beliefs. Finally, on two occasions, Beauvoir uses the expression "mythic thinking" (*pensée mythique*), which implies that she, like the evolutionary anthropologists to whom she refers, holds that mythical beliefs are produced and sustained by a particular state or mode of thought – one that I will demonstrate that she too presents as highly unreflexive.[54]

One thing that distinguishes Beauvoir from most evolutionary anthropologists is that she focuses on the presence of myth in modern societies. This, however, is something she shares with other influential mythologists who approached myth from a similar horizon in the 1940s.

The persistence of myth: Mythology in the 1940s

The Second World War marks something of a turning point in the history of mythology. Until then, most mythologists had spoken of myth as a thing of the past. But in the wake of the war, many leading intellectuals drew a different conclusion. In particular, the popularity of fascism's overtly anti-rational political project was seen as a clear sign that the long struggle between *mythos* and *logos* was far from settled.[55] In his *The Myth of the State* (1946), Ernst Cassirer claims that a "rational organization" in modern societies replaces the "mythical organization" that characterizes primitive ones, yet finds himself forced to conclude:

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[53] See for example Beauvoir, *TSS*, 81.

[54] Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-1,* 315/395, 320/403.

[55] The notion of fascism as a particularly mythical political movement can also be discerned in *The Second Sex*, where Beauvoir at one point speaks of the "Nazi mythology" (*mythologie nazie*), mentioning the "cult of the hero" as one of its aspects. Ibid., 266–267/335.

> In quiet and peaceful times […] this rational organization is easily maintained. […] But in politics the equipoise is never completely established. […] For myth has not been really vanquished and subjugated. It is always there, lurking in the dark and waiting for its hour and opportunity. This hour comes as soon as the other binding forces of man's social life, for one reason or another, lose their strength and are no longer able to combat the demonic mythical powers.[56]

According to Cassirer, the West had just lived through such a period, during which the destructive power of myth and mythic thinking had once again made itself felt. A similar assumption structures philosophers Max Horkheimer's (1895–1973) and Theodor Adorno's (1903–1969) *The Dialectics of Enlightenment* (1947), where "enlightenment's relapse into mythology" is invoked to explain why humanity, "instead of entering a truly human state, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism."[57] Both books thus place myth at the very heart of civilization. Yet this leads neither Cassirer nor Horkheimer and Adorno to reconsider the popular notion of myth as a primitive phenomenon. Instead, the continued presence of myth in modernity is taken to mean that the inhabitants of modern societies have maintained or recently resumed cognitive habits still predominantly associated with a more primitive stage, which should have been surmounted. When the authors compare primitive and modern societies in order to highlight similarities, these comparisons should thus be read as acts of accusation: the point is that "we" should not resemble "them", yet do so – precisely because we have failed to break the spell of myth. I will demonstrate that the same logic structures Beauvoir's work.

This is not to say that Beauvoir was directly influenced either by Cassirer or Horkheimer and Adorno. Although we know that she came into contact with the former's work via philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961), there is nothing to suggest that she possessed any deeper familiarity with these famous mythologists' writings on myth.[58] Hence, the reason why I draw attention to the parallels between their works is not to establish a causal

[56] Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, 279–280.

[57] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, xvi, xiv.

[58] Merleau-Ponty refers to Cassirer in *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landers (New York: Routledge, [1945] 2014), 53, 126, 503 n6, 511 n4, 521 n60–62, n67, 526 n1, 531 n12, 532 n30, 538 n67, 546 n88 n92. Beauvoir read and reviewed Merleau-Ponty's book in 1945. Simone de Beauvoir, "A Review of the Phenomenology of Perception" ("La phénoménologie de la perception de Maurice Merleau-Ponty") [1945], in *Simone de Beauvoir: Philosophical Writings*, ed. Margaret A. Simons, Marybeth Timmermann and Mary Beth Mader, trans. Colin Smith (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

relationship, but because it prompts us to ask why this heterogeneous set of philosophers all invoked something termed myth to conceptualize what they saw as the great challenge of their time? There are of course several possible answers to this question. But one worth emphasizing has to do with their mutual interest in anthropology.

We have already seen that Beauvoir is well read in evolutionary anthropology. The same is true of Cassirer, as well as Horkheimer and Adorno. In a letter from 1941, addressed to philosopher Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979), Horkheimer, already at work on what was to become *The Dialectics of Enlightenment*, asks the former to "look out for some useful books on ethnology and mythology." Among the few works on this theme Horkheimer already has access to, he mentions books authored by Frazer and Malinowski, as well as anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857–1939).[59] Frazer's and Lévy-Bruhl's names also appear in Cassirer's *The Myth of the State*, along with that of Tylor and Freud.[60] What characterizes all these thinkers, perhaps with the exception of Malinowski, is that they present myths as a product of a undeveloped state of thought, which has no place in modern societies.[61] In my interpretation, Beauvoir's, Cassirer's, Horkheimer's and Adorno's familiarity with these scholars can therefore help explain why they turned to "myth" to theorize what they perceived as the most unreasonable aspects of modernity (be it fascism, capitalism or patriarchy). Had they not read anthropologists like Tylor, Frazer and Levy-Bruhl, all of whom establish a link between ignorance, primitiveness and myth, they might not have coded what they saw as modern ignorance as being partly primitive and mythical.

Evolutionary anthropology also offered an explanation as to *why* ignorant and mythical beliefs continued to plague supposedly enlightened societies. For although the representatives of this discipline described myths as a primitive phenomenon, they still maintained that (mental) remnants of earlier stages could survive into later ones, like ghosts or specters that continue to haunt a

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[59] Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories and Political Significance* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 321. On Horkheimer and Adorno's relationship to Frazer, see also Aleksander Motturi, *Filosofi vid mörkrets hjärta: Wittgenstein, Frazer och vildarna* (Göteborg: Glänta produktion, 2003), 9–10.

[60] Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, 10-14, 28–34. On the parallels between Cassirer and Tylor, Frazer, Lévy-Bruhl and Freud, see also Keum, *Plato and the Mythic Tradition in Political Thought*, 196–202.

[61] On Malinowski's view of myth as primitive, see Tok and Schrempp, *The Truth of Myth*, 69–70.

time that is not their own.[62] Or, as Freud phrased this same idea in an article from 1937: "Of all the erroneous and superstitious beliefs of mankind that have supposedly been surmounted there is not one whose residues do not live on among us today in the lower strata of civilized people or even the highest strata of cultural society. What has once come to life clings tenaciously to its existence."[63]

The thief as an appropriator

In an interview from 1976, philosopher Susan J. Brison asks Beauvoir whether women should "reject the masculine" universe, including language, or "steal" these tools and use them.[64] Beauvoir dismisses the idea that women must invent a completely new language, to replace the language developed by men. "Language is not voluntaristic. It's something constituted through circulation, in the mass of people", she answers.[65] For this reason, women have no choice but to "seize upon language", even though it "bears the mark of men", which they must keep in mind. "You can, indeed, steal the tools and use them, but you have to use them carefully", Beauvoir asserts. In addition, she notes, "nothing prevents you from changing them at the same time."[66]

This response can be read as a defense of the practice that I call appropriation, which here denotes the act using a word marked by its history in ways that serves one's own interests. My point is not that Beauvoir consciously employs the word "myth" in accordance with this strategy, articulated several decades after the publication of *The Second Sex*. Yet, we will see that she, in this earlier work, proceeds precisely as she, much later, states

[62] Lorenzoni, *Att färdas under dödens tecken*, 40–41.

[63] Sigmund Freud, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" [1937], in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume XXIII (1937-1939): Moses and Monotheism, an Outline of Psychoanalysis and Other Works*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: The Hoghart Press, 1964), 229.

[64] Susan J. Brison, "Beauvoir and Feminism: Interview and Reflections", in *The Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. Claudia Card (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). This was actually a question that Beauvoir had asked Sartre the day before, but which Brison wanted to hear Beauvoir's own answer too.

[65] Ibid., 193.

[66] Ibid., 190.

that women must. To use her own term, Beauvoir will thus be shown to "steal" the word "myth" from men, while she also changes its meaning.[67]

I will demonstrate how this helps Beauvoir articulate arguments and analysis of great importance to the development of feminist theory.[68] However, it could also be argued that Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, is less careful than her older self recommends. Most importantly, because Beauvoir speaks through others, she continues to reproduce the essentially colonial dichotomy between primitive and civilized – perpetuating what one, to again borrow her own terms, might call a myth.[69]

Previous research

"The concept of myth", writes literary theorist Louise Renée, "is […] the conceptual foundation of Beauvoir's entire enterprise in *The Second Sex*".[70] And yet, Renée does not devote much space to what Beauvoir actually writes about myth.[71] This is indicative of a more general trend. Although many scholars mention that Beauvoir ascribes great importance to the phenomenon she terms myth, no one has conducted a systematic analysis of how Beauvoir uses this word. I suspect that it is partly because the word "myth" – unlike, for example, "transcendence", "immanence", "the Other" and "mystification",

[67] In another interview, Beauvoir states that "words are crucial weapons for feminism and must be chosen carefully and used wisely." Cited from Deirdre Bair, "Simone de Beauvoir: Politics, Language, and Feminist Identity", *Yale French Studies*, no. 72 (1986): 151.

[68] For another study who reads Beauvoir as an appropriator (of Heideggerian rather than mythological concepts), see Nancy Bauer, "Being-with as Being-Against: Heidegger Meets Hegel in *The Second Sex*", *Continental Philosophy Review* 34, no. 2 (2001).

[69] By highlighting this fact, this study helps make visible frequently overlooked ethnocentric and colonial tendencies in *The Second Sex*, which scholars – often employing a postcolonial lens – have only recently begun to address to a greater extent. Cf. Sally Markowitz, "Occidental Dreams: Orientalism and History in *The Second Sex*", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 34, no. 2 (2009); Nathalie Nya, *Simone de Beauvior and the Colonial Experience: Freedom, Violence, and Identity* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019).

[70] Louise Renée, "'Les mythes' de Simonde de Beauvoir: Subtle déconstruction de *La Nausée* de Jean-Paul Sartre", *Simone de Beauvoir Studies* 20 (2003): 81, translation mine. [*Le concept du mythe est donc le fondement conceptuel de toute l'entreprise de Beauvoir dans* Le Deuxième Sexe…]

[71] The section *Définition du mythe* consists of just two short paragraphs. It is followed by a page and a half in which Renée discusses the metaphors Beauvoir examines and criticizes in "Myths", before she moves on to demonstrate that the same metaphors are used by Sartre in *Nausea* (1938) – which is why *The Second Sex,* according to Renée, can be read as a "subtle deconstruction" of the former work. Ibid., 81–87. In fairness, one should note that Renée still manages to make several interesting observations in this short space. For example, she highlights that Beauvoir equates myths with projections. Ibid., 81.

which so clearly belong to the realm of existentialist philosophy – is part of our everyday vocabulary, which may encourage the premature conclusion that one already knows what it means and does, no matter the context. For example, many scholars seem to assume that Beauvoir, as is common today, uses "myth" as a synonym for ideology.

The anthropologist Judith Okely and historian of ideas Eva Gothlin both equate Beauvoir's concept of myth with a Marxist concept of ideology. Okely writes that Beauvoir's "section on myths explores a process whereby women's subordination is continually reaffirmed or 'overdetermined' by ideology", while Gothlin claims that "[t]he chapter [sic] on myth in *The Second Sex* […] deals with different ideologies about woman, ideologies which have influenced their self-consciousness."[72] Gothlin also concludes: "In line with a Marxist theory of ideology, Beauvoir emphasizes the function of myth as a justification of the prevailing order, of the fact that man, particularly the upper classes, has the power."[73] Along similar lines, philosopher Debra Bergoffen writes: "Identifying the idea of the eternal feminine as the ideology of a male-dominated social order that legitimated the oppression and exploitation of women […] she [Beauvoir] dissected the pernicious effects of the myth of the eternal feminine and ordered it destroyed."[74]

In contrast, literary theorist Toril Moi claims that Beauvoir's concept of myth is inspired by that which Lévi-Strauss makes use of in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship.*[75] This would mean that Beauvoir, even when she speaks of the myth of woman, employs a rather conventional, folkloristic concept of myth, primarily used to denote a specific narrative genre.[76] Moi also states, however, that myths, according to Beauvoir, "are fundamentally false representations of reality" and that those who "internalize and identify with such myths […] are 'mystified' […], that is to say victims of false consciousness", which is very far from Lévi-Strauss' view of myth, but indeed

[72] Judith Okely, *Simone de Beauvoir* (London: Virago, 1986), 73–74; Gothlin, *Sex and Existence*, 174.
[73] Gothlin, *Sex and Existence*, 175.
[74] Debra Bergoffen, "The Eternal Feminine", in *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology*, ed. Gail Weiss, Ann V. Murphy and Gayle Salamon (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2019), 122.
[75] Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 209.
[76] This work was written before Lévi-Strauss had articulated his famous structuralist theory of myth. See James A. Boon and David M. Schneider, "Kinship Vis-À-Vis Myth Contrasts in Lévi-Strauss' Approaches to Cross-Cultural Comparison", *American Anthropologist* 76, no. 4 (1974).

similar to a traditional Marxist understanding of ideology.[77] Summing up her reading, Moi concludes: "Compared to more sophisticated theories of ideology and language, Beauvoir's understanding of mythology and mystification leaves much to be desired."[78] But this, of course, begs the question as to whether it is with theories of ideology that Beauvoir's writings on myth should be compared.

The anthropologist Elizabeth Fallaize combines these two readings, as does literary theorist Ursula Tidd. The former is one of the few scholars to have focused specifically on myth in *The Second Se*x. She states that Beauvoir *is* inspired by Lévi-Strauss, but that she "parts company with the anthropologist's approach in her adoption of the Marxist conception of myth as ideology, an important tool in her attack on myths as beliefs that work to sustain patriarchy".[79] In line with the same conclusion, Tidd asserts:

> Beauvoir's concept of myth is rooted in part in the Marxist notion of ideology as "false consciousness", or beliefs which conceal the economic basis of society and the oppression wreaked by capitalism. She also draws on […] the concept of myth in Claude Lévi-Strauss's *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, which she read just before finishing *The Second Sex*.[80]

In summary, two contexts are frequently invoked to make sense of Beauvoir's writings on myths: Marxist theories of ideology and Lévi-Strauss' early anthropological work. Both these contextualizations offer something of value. I agree with the assumption that (some) myths, according to Beauvoir, perform an ideological *function,* in that they legitimize and thereby help maintain patriarchal oppression. I also share the conviction that Beauvoir's work is in one sense influenced by Lévi-Strauss. But there are also important aspects of the research discussed above to which I object.

To begin with, I believe that it is misleading to – as Okely, Gothlin and Fallaize do – equate Beauvoir's concept of myth with a Marxist concept of ideology. Indeed, my reading suggests that the argument Beauvoir develops through her writings on myth offers an understanding of oppression that challenges, rather than reproduces, the one upon which the traditional Marxist theory of ideology rests. As for Lévi-Strauss, I hold that his influence

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[77] Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 209–210.

[78] Ibid., 210.

[79] Fallaize, "Simone De Beauvoir and the Demystification of Woman", 88.

[80] Ursula Tidd, *Simone de Beauvoir* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 64. Tidd argues that Beauvoir also draws on the work of Gaston Bachelard. Ibid.

on Beauvoir's writings on myth has been grossly exaggerated. It is true that Beauvoir read Lévi-Strauss's manuscript while finishing *The Second Sex*. But in her memoirs, Beauvoir writes that she did not do so until after she, in the early summer of 1948, published "La femme et les mythes", which contains most of the arguments that later return in the myth-part of *The Second Sex*:

> Since the beginning of May, my study on *la Femme et les mythes* had begun appearing in *les Temps Modernes*. Leiris told me that Lévi-Strauss was criticizing me for certain inaccuracies regarding primitive societies. He was just finishing his thesis on *les Structures de la parenté* [sic] and I asked him to share it with me. I went over to his place several mornings in a row; I sat down at a table and read a typescript of his book; it confirmed my notion of woman as other; it showed how the male remains the essential being, even within the matrilineal societies generally termed matriarchal.[81]

This is not to say that there are no similarities whatsoever between Beauvoir's and Lévi-Strauss' writings on myth. But in order to understand the former argument, I maintain that it is more productive to read her work in the context of the evolutionary anthropological discourse on myth.

Another assumption that structures much previous research, but to which I object, concerns the way in which Beauvoir is said to approach that which she calls myth. As we have seen, Pamela Sue Anderson claims that Beauvoir takes up a "liberal-existentialist" feminist approach to myth, in that she "addresses the danger of false assumptions about women by proposing to expose and eliminate myth."[82] This characterization of Beauvoir as a stark enemy of myth, pioneered by Drucilla Cornell, is reiterated by other scholars as well.[83] In an article tellingly titled "Beauvoir the Mythoclast" (2010), philosopher Michèle Le Doeuff states that, "according to *The Second Sex* there

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[81] Beauvoir, *La force des choses*, 185, translation mine. [*Dès le mois de mai avait commencé paraître dans les Temps Modernes mon étude sur la Femme et les mythes. Leiris me dit que Lévi-Strauss me reprochait, touchant les sociétés primitives, certaines inexactitudes. I était en train de terminer sa thèse sur les Structures de la parenté* [sic] *et je lui demandai de me la communiquer. Plusieurs matins de suite j'allai chez lui; je m'installais devant une table, je lisais une copie dactylographiée de son livre; il confirmait mon idée de la femme comme autre; il montrait que le male demeure l'être essentiel, jusqu'au sein de ces sociétés matrilinéaires qu'on dit matriarcales*.] Fallaize notes this but does not pursue it. Fallaize, "Simone de Beauvoir and the Demystification of Woman", 98 n3. Lévi-Strauss confirms Beauvoir story, repeating that Beauvoir read his manuscript while she was "finishing *The Second Sex*" and that Leiris acted as an intermediary. Lévi-Strauss and Eribon, *Conversations with Claude Lévi-Strauss*, 51–52.

[82] Anderson, "Myth and Feminist Philosophy", 118.

[83] Drucilla Cornell, *Beyond Accommodation: Ethical Feminism, Deconstruction and the Law* (Routledge: New York, 1991), 190–193.

are facts and there are myths, with the myths […] to be stripped away so as to reduce the facts of everyday life to what they are."[84] The same view is echoed by literary scholar Meryl Altman, who argues that Beauvoir "investigates myth in order to demystify" and that her "ultimate goal is demystification, to stop believing lies, lying to oneself, lying to others."[85] Although this reading of Beauvoir as a mythoclast is, in at least one important sense, consistent with her larger philosophical aims, I disagree with it for two reasons. First, a too one-sided focus on Beauvoir's negative ambition fails to make visible the positive aspect of her writings on myth – that is, the many ways in which she makes use of myth. Secondly, we will see Beauvoir does not wish to eliminate all myths; that her argument, on the contrary, suggests that some (literary) myths can serve a progressive political function.

One study of Beauvoir's writings on myth that stands out in relation to most others is sociologist Claudia Gather's "Women, the Second Sex: The Myth According to Simone de Beauvoir" (2017). Above all, this text is important because Gather emphasizes that Beauvoir attributes *explanatory value* to myth. "By using the concept of myth", she writes, "Beauvoir offers a model of explanation for the suppression of women and also describes the mode of its construction."[86] And instead of ideology, Gather likens "Beauvoirian myths" to sociological concept such as "social norms" and "gender characters", although she also stresses that these terms cannot be equated.[87] However, the main purpose of Gather's text is to exhibit how Beauvoir's concept of myth can be utilized as an analytical tool by sociologist, which she demonstrates by using it to develop an empirical study of how heterosexual couples construct femininity and masculinity. In contrast, my study is of a more historical nature.

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[84] Le Doeuff, "Beauvoir the Mythoclast", 91. See also Renée, "'Les mythes' de Simonde de Beauvoir", 81. "Myths are so powerfully harmful that they must be exposed and denounced at all costs. The project of demystification is thus absolutely central to Beauvoir's thought." Translation mine. [*Les mythes sont d'une puissance si néfaste qu'il faut à tout prix les exposer et les dénoncer. Le projet de démystification est alors tout à fait central dans la pensée de Beauvoir.*]

[85] Meryl Altman, *Beauvoir in Time* (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2020), 368, 341. Altman nevertheless continues by stating that Beauvoir, to accomplish this demystification, "passes through an exploration of how powerful these myths are and *how* they are powerful." Altman, *Beauvoir in Time*, 341, italics in original.

[86] Claudia Gather, "Women, the Second Sex: The Myth According to Simone de Beauvoir. A Feminist Approach to Empirical Sociology in Germany," in *Proceedings of the 18th Conference of the Simone de Beauvoir Society*, ed. Andrea Duranti and Matteo Tuveri (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 237.

[87] Ibid., 238–241.

In emphasizing that Beauvoir is not only a mythoclast, my reading aligns with that of philosopher Karen Vintges. In *A New Dawn for the Second Sex* (2017), Vintges states that patriarchy can be likened to a hydra, whereafter she concludes that the myths analyzed by Beauvoir "comprise the hydra's most resilient head today."[88] But she then proceeds to note that Beauvoir "hints at the possible emergence of new myths". For example, Vintges points out that Beauvoir writes that "a new form of eroticism seems to be coming about: perhaps it will produce new myths" (*engendrera-t-elle de nouveaux mythes*).[89] According to Vintges, this suggests that the myths studied by Beauvoir "will change" rather than be "replaced by adequate insight or knowledge" and that this constitutes a positive development.[90] My reading is similar to Vintges' in that it too points to the conclusion that Beauvoir does not hold that all myths must be eliminated. However, it differs in the sense that I demonstrate that the only myths to which Beauvoir (implicitly) ascribes a progressive potential are literary myths.

In my effort to construct a wider context for Beauvoir's writings on myth – one that encompasses a larger part of the mythological network – I follow in the footsteps of three scholars who have made particularly important contributions. The first of these is Vintges, who reads Beauvoir together with

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[88] Karen Vintges, *A New Dawn for the Second Sex: Women's Freedom Practices in World Perspective* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 86.

[89] Ibid., 87; Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-1*, 324/407.

[90] Vintges, *A New Dawn for the Second Sex*, 87. I am skeptical as to whether Beauvoir really believes that the "new myths" discussed here will be beneficial to women. To me, the passage from which this quote derives instead highlights one of the aspects of myths that Beauvoir finds especially problematic: the fact that they are all created by men, whose interests they both reflect and reinforce. In its near entirety, the passage in question reads "A new aesthetic has already been born. Although the fashion for flat chests and narrow hips – the boyish woman – only lasted a short while, the opulent ideal of past centuries has nevertheless not returned. The feminine body is *expected to be flesh*, but discreetly so; *it must be slim* and not burdened with fat; toned, supple, robust, *it has to suggest transcendence*; it is *preferred tanned* […]. Woman's clothes, in becoming more practical, have not made her look asexual: on the contrary, short skirts have shown off her legs and thighs more than before. There is no reason for work to deprive her of her erotic appeal. To see woman as both a social person and carnal prey can be disturbing […]; that a woman could hold a 'man's office' and still be desirable has long been a subject of more or less dirty jokes; little by little, scandal and irony have lost their bite and a new form of eroticism seems to be coming about: perhaps it will produce new myths." Beauvoir, *TSS*, 323–324, italics added. The reason why I do not think Beauvoir sees this as a positive development toward more beneficial myths is the fact that she still describes the new ideal as normative and highly restricted, based entirely on the preferences of men – who *excepts* woman to be flesh, *demands* that she is slim, *needs* her body so suggest transcendence, *prefers* her tanned.

Susanne Langer; a mythologist who Beauvoir herself does not refer to, but whose writings on myth Vintges argues that Beauvoir's writings have something in common with.[91] The second one is Altman. Commenting on the method behind *The Second Sex's* myth-part – which she describes as "deliberately ahistorical […] bringing data from very different cultures and eras into non-hierarchical parallel" – Altman underlines that this method was not invented by Beauvoir, but used by other mythologists before her.[92] Possible influences from which Beauvoir may have been borrowed this method and mode of presentation are, Altman writes, psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung (1871–1965), philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1884–1962), sociologist Marcel Granet (1884–1940) and comparative mythologist Georges Dumézil (1898–1986), all of whom Beauvoir does make several references to.[93] Of these four, I will mainly read Beauvoir in relation to Jung, whom I argue that she challenges rather than draws inspiration from. Yet, Altman's work is imperative, because it makes visible that there are other, potentially productive contexts than those most often constructed, in which Beauvoir writings on myth can be read.[94]

The third scholar who has inspired my recontextualization of Beauvoir's writings on myth is theologian Victoria Barker, who highlights that these writings are informed by an anthropological perspective. Barker begins by underlining the parallels between Beauvoir and the "heirs" of sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917). She argues that Beauvoir follows these scholars in depicting myth as part of a preservative social framework, which both reflects and reinforces the values of the society from which it stems. But whereas Durkheim's heirs saw myth as "an object of collective belief, created by a society that needs to believe it", Barker asserts that Beauvoir's account of myth is "almost exclusively negative", a skepticism she is said to share with Lévi-Strauss.[95] As stated, I do not agree with this conclusion. I do, however, concur with Barker that there are good reasons to speak of Beauvoir's writings on myth as partly structured by an anthropological perspective. The question is what this perspective more precisely entails?

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[91] Vintges, *A New Dawn for the Second Sex*, 69–70, 86–87.

[92] Altman, *Beauvoir in Time*, 395, 399.

[93] Ibid., 399.

[94] In addition, Altman is one of few scholars who has called attention to what I speak of as the positive and phenomenological aspects of these writings. Altman for example notes that the point of "Myths" is to "investigate what we can tell about people – about men, really – from how they imagine Woman." Ibid., 394.

[95] Victoria Barker, "De Beauvoir and the Myth of the Given", in *Women and the Gift: Beyond the Given and All-Giving* ed. Morny Joy (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 169.

When she speaks of an anthropological perspective, Barker does not primarily refer to one promoted by self-proclaimed anthropologists like Tylor and Frazer. Instead, she derives her concept of anthropology from philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872), who begins his *The Essence of Christianity* (1841) by stating that the true essence of religion is "anthropological" in the sense that "man" has invented God by projecting his own human nature outwards, ascribing to this supposedly transcendental entity all the qualities he himself values and would want to possess.[96] According to Barker, the argument developed by Beauvoir suggests that man has invented the entity termed "woman" in the same way and for the same reason.[97] In other words, Barker reads Beauvoir as arguing that the myth of woman, just as "the myth of God", is treasured by man because it assures him that everything he values possess an objective and eternal existence, possible to conquer through women.[98] "Woman […] comes to play a role akin to that of God, instantiating properties that are timeless and absolute, representing fundamental values which support man's self-image."[99] This is an astute interpretation, which helps clarify how the myth of the woman operates according to Beauvoir.

However, as Barker reads Beauvoir mainly in the context of Feuerbach's "theological anthropology", there are also aspects of her writings on myth that she cannot account for. According to the interpretation of Feuerbach said to have inspired Beauvoir, man invented God by projecting "into the beyond, without realizing it, the idea that he had of himself, or the ideal of his own perfection that he pursued."[100] But as philosopher Sara Heinämaa points out, Beauvoir argues that man also projects onto woman those "limiting" aspects of his own nature that he refuses to acknowledge, such as his carnality.[101] As a result, woman is not only or even primarily an object of adoration. She is also, for example, a fleshly menace: a dangerous creature that sometimes arouses man's desire, but at other times disgusts or frightens him. To make sense of this fact, I suggest that we read Beauvoir not in the context of Feuerbach's writings on religion, but in the context of Freud's writings on myth – which, as mentioned above, are influenced by evolutionary anthropology. These two theorists do have something in common. Most importantly, both portray myth

[96] Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. Marian Evans (Lodnon: Trübner & co, [1841] 1881), e.g. 33, 207.

[97] Barker, "De Beauvoir and the Myth of the Given", 167, 173–178.

[98] Ibid., 173. The expression "the myth of God" is not one that Beauvoir herself employs.

[99] Ibid., 170.

[100] Ibid., 174. Barker here quotes Alexandre Kojève's reading of Feuerbach.

[101] Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference*, 128.

and religion as the product of an underdeveloped mode of thought, which tends to mistake the subjective for something objective.[102] But whereas Feuerbach, according to Barker, describes God as an idealization of human nature, Freud argues that myth arises because primitives tend to project both desirable and detestable qualities outside themselves. This is the concept of projection that Beauvoir, according to my reading, appropriates to explain the origin of the myth of woman.

Disposition

This part-study consists of four chapters. In the first of these (chapter 4), I focus on how Beauvoir makes use of and conceptualizes the nature and function of what Keum calls literary myths. In the following two (chapter 5–6), I discuss the myth of the woman. In the fourth and final one (chapter 7), I examine how Beauvoir's conceptualizes the relationship between myth and law.

[102] Feuerbach writes: "Religion is the childlike condition of humanity; […] in childhood a man is an object to himself, under the form of another man. Hence the historical progress of religion consists in this: that what by an earlier religion was regarded as objective, is now recognized as subjective; that is, what was formerly contemplated and worshipped as God is now perceived to be something *human.*" Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 13, italics in original.

4. Literary myths

One circumstance that has made it difficult to specify how Simone de Beauvoir makes use of myth and how she approaches the phenomena thus named is that previous research has failed to clarify that there are several different concepts of myth at work in *The Second Sex*.[103] To remedy this problem, I draw on Tae-Yeoun Keum's distinction between literary and deep myth, detailed in the next section. In this chapter, I demonstrate that Beauvoir conceptualizes what Keum calls literary myths in three different ways: as a historiographical resource, a phenomenological aid and a political tool. To enable a fuller understanding of Beauvoir's writings on literary myth, I read *The Second Sex* in the context of the "mythomania" of mid-century France.

Literary and deep myths

In *Plato and the Mythical Tradition in Political Thought* (2020), Keum identifies two different ways in which the word "myth" is often used. To begin with, "myth" is employed to denote stories thought to belong to "a unique form of orally transmitted narrative fiction, featuring fantastical or supernatural elements, which we tend to encounter as the cultural artifacts of ancient or otherwise remote civilizations".[104] Mythologists typically use the word in this way when they speak of, for example, ancient Greek myths, or the "native" myths of contemporary, often non-Western societies. Because such stories are held to belong to a specific literary genre, Keum calls them literary myths.[105]

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[103] This chapter and the following one are based on a text previously published as Adam Kjellgren, "Must We Eliminate All Myths? Simone de Beauvoir and the Myth-Affirmative Feminist Tradition", in *Beauvoir and Politics: A Toolkit*, ed. Liesbeth Schoonheim and Karen Vintges (New York: Routledge, 2024).

[104] Keum, *Plato and the Mythic Tradition in Political Thought*, 7. Many mythologists argue that every literary myth exists in many variants, which means that a myth should not be confused with a particular retelling or representation thereof. In other words, Sophocles version of the Oedipus myth is precisely a *version* of the myth, whereas *the myth,* according to this view, refers to widely known, culturally available plot that Sophocles adapts. According to Hans Blumenberg, what makes a story a myth is precisely this, that it can be varied almost endlessly, yet be recognized as the same. "Myths", writes Blumenberg, "are stories that are distinguished by a high degree of constancy in their narrative core and by an equally pronounced capacity for marginal variation. Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 34.

[105] Keum, *Plato and the Mythic Tradition in Political Thought*, 9. One should recall that this is by no means a self-evident categorization, but a contested one that, moreover, does violence to many

The word "myth" is also ascribed another, more wide-ranging meaning. "In both theoretical discourse as well as in common usage, 'myth' is a ubiquitous term designating a particularly dense and pervasive form of thought that does not stand up to rational scrutiny", Keum notes.[106] More specifically, she points out that many mythologists tend to use this word to denote "tacit, deeply entrenched imaginative frames" that influence how we experience the world, yet escape critical examination, in part because they are not rooted in verifiable facts.[107] Keum calls such tacit, arational frameworks – held to constitute the "implicit lenses through which we view reality" – deep myths.[108] This is a rather broad category, which can be understood to include everything from prejudices and stereotypes to entire belief systems.[109] But it is still possible to distinguish the category of deep myths from that of literary myths. While literary myths are assumed to exist outside of us, deep myths are generally believed operate within us; meaning that the latter, to a greater extent than the former, are perceived as mental phenomena.

Beauvoir employs the word "myth" to denote what Keum calls literary myths at several locations.[110] For example, she speaks of religious "creation myths" (*mythes de la création*) – naming the "Genesis legend" as an example – the "ancient myth of the Parcae" (*le mythe antique des Parques*), the "Platonic myth" (*le mythe platonicien*) of the androgynes and "the myth of the androgynes" (*le mythe des androgynes*).[111] She also refers to the many "heroic myths" (*de mythes*

indigenous systems of classification. Keum is well aware of this fact. She does not claim that the "elaborated stories" that she terms "literary myths" *are* myths, but that they have often been lumped together and referred to *as* myths. In other words, the term "literary myths" does not refer to an extradiscursive *thing*, but to a historically contingent but naturalized categorization (i.e., "myth"). I use the term in the same way. To emphasize this point, I sometimes write "the stories that Keum calls literary myths" (instead of just "literary myths"). But as this would be all too cumbersome, I do not do so consistently.

[106] Ibid., 5.

[107] Ibid., 9.

[108] Ibid., 5, 7.

[109] Ibid., 6.

[110] On at least two occasion, Beauvoir herself uses the expression "literary myth". In an essay from 1946, she states that Hegel in his *The Phenomenology of Spirit* "resorts to literary myths such as *Don Juan* and *Faust*" and that Kierkegaard, "not only resorts, like Hegel, to literary myths, but in *Fear and Trembling* […] recreates the story of Abraham's sacrifice in a form that approaches the novelistic one". Simone de Beauvoir, "Literature and Metaphysics" ("Littérature et métaphysique") [1946], in *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Margaret A. Simons, Marybeth Timmermann and Mary Beth Mader, trans. Veronique Zytzeff and Frederick M. Morrison (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 274.

[111] Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-1*, 194/239, 227/285 [translation modified], 43/38, 215/269.

héroïques) discussed by the psychoanalyst Alfred Adler (1870–1937), as well as "the myths of Virginity" (*les mythes de la Virginité*) underlying the customs of "deflowering" in societies studied by anthropologist.[112] Furthermore, she speaks of "mythology" to denote a set of such narratives, as when she states that "the burial of the sun god within the sea and its dazzling reemergence is common to many mythologies (*nombreuses mythologies*)", or when she – with a reference to Marcel Granet and Georges Dumézil – argues that the "duality between Self and Other can be found in the most primitive societies, in the most ancient mythologies (*dans les mythologies les plus antiques*)."[113]

Beauvoir thus appropriates an already established concept of myth, employed by uncountable mythologists before her. But what distinguishes her writings on myth from that of all her predecessors is that she makes use of this concept to produce a distinctively feminist analysis.

The mythomania of mid-century France

Beauvoir was not alone among her contemporaries in centering parts of her writings around the stories Keum calls literary myth. If one allows the presence of the word "myth" to guide one's gaze, it becomes possible see that *The Second Sex*, in this respect, is representative of a much broader trend.

During the interwar period, myth emerged as one of the most widely discussed topics among French intellectuals. Indeed, by the late 1930s, enthusiastic references to myth had become so numerous that several commentators reasoned that France had fallen prey to what they termed *la mytomanie*.[114] "This has gone so far", wrote Jean-Paul Sartre in 1939, "that […] we can fear today that there is a myth of myth, which should itself become the subject of a sociological study."[115] The mythomaniacs included leading proponents of fascism, such as Robert Brasillach (1909–1945), but also

[112] Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-2*, 348/38, *TSS/DS-1*, 206/256.

[113] Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-1*, 201/248, 26/16. The word "mythologies" also carry other meanings in Beauvoir's writings. For example, Michèle le Doeuff points out that Beauvoir in *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* (*Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, 1958) uses this word to denote "a set of tastes […] dividing likes from dislikes." Le Doeuff, "Beauvoir the Mythoclast", 92.

[114] Duong, "The Sorcerer's Apprentices of Interwar France", 1–3.

[115] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Denis de Rougemont: L'amour et l'Occident" [1939], in *Situations 1* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), 59, translation mine. [*A telles enseignes qu'on peut craindre* [...] *qu'il n'y ait aujourd'hui un mythe du mythe, qui devrait faire lui-même l'objet d'une étude sociologique*.]

heterodox Marxists and other left-leaning intellectuals.[116] "Mythomania appealed to intellectuals of every stripe", observes Kevin Duong.[117]

On the left, fascination with myth was particularly pronounced among the surrealists.[118] The founder of the surrealist movement, André Breton (1896–1966), even asserted that surrealism itself should be understood as "a method of creating a collective myth".[119] But myth also captivated surrealist "dissidents" like philosopher Georges Bataille (1897–1962) and intellectual polymath Roger Caillois (1913–1978), who together founded the *Collège de Sociologie*: a Paris-based research group active between 1937–1939, with the explicit aim to investigating the role of myth in contemporary societies.[120] This association, in turn, attracted the attention of prominent figures such as Michel Leiris and philosopher Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), both of whom produced significant writings on myth.[121] Even the novelist Albert Camus

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[116] Duong, "The Sorcerer's Apprentices of Interwar France", 1; Nikolaj d'Origny Lübecker, *Community, Myth and Recognition in Twentieth-Century French Literature and Thought* (London: Continuum, 2009), 13. For Brasillach's writings on myth, see for example "Introduction à l'esprit fasciste II: Comment se forment les mythes", *Je suis partout*, June 1, 1938; *Les sept couleurs* (Paris: Plon, [1939] 1965), 209. On the relation between French fascism and myth, see also Mark Antliff, *Avant-Garde Fascism: The Mobilization of Myth, Art, and Culture in France, 1909-1939* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

[117] Duong, "The Sorcerer's Apprentices of Interwar France", 2.

[118] "From its inception, surrealism was intensely preoccupied with mythology", notes art historian Rainer Zuch. "Ancient mythologies, myths of foreign peoples, European fairy tales and legends were taken up everywhere and translated into surrealistic idioms." Rainer Zuch, "Max Ernst, der *König der Vögel*: Und die mythischen Tiere des Surrealismus", *Kunsttexte.de*, 2004, 1, translation mine. [*Der Surrealismus hat sich von Anfang an intensiv mit Mythologie auseinandergesetzt. Antike Mythologien, Mythen fremder Völker, europäische Sagen und Legenden finden sich allenthalben rezipiert und in surrealistische Idiome übertragen.*]

[119] André Breton, "Political Position of Surrealism" [1935], in *Manifestos of Surrealism*, ed. Helen R. Lane and Richard Seaver, trans. Helen R. Lane and Richard Seaver (Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 1979), 210.

[120] For Caillois' writings on myths, see for example Roger Caillois, *Le mythe et l'homme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938). For Bataille's writings on myth, see for example Georges Bataille, "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" [1938], in *The College of Sociology (1937-39)*, ed. Denis Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); Georges Bataille, "The Absence of Myth" [1947], in *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism*, ed. Michael Richardson, trans. Michael Richardson (London: Verso, 1994). On the importance of myth for the *College de Sociologie*, see Roger Caillois, "For a College of Sociology: Introduction" [1937], in *The College of Sociology (1937-39)*, ed. Denis Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 11.

[121] For Benjamin's writings on myth, see Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence" [1921], in *Selected Writings Volume 1: 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Paul Bullock and Michael William Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 248–

(1913–1960), who otherwise had little in common with the aforementioned, developed a strong interest in literary myths, most clearly evidenced by his *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), where Sisyphus is reimagined as a symbol for humanity as a whole.[122]

Among surrealists and surrealist dissidents, one can discern a particular interest in literary myths that, according to their interpretation, deal with sex or the feminine, like myths centered around the praying mantis. Caillois devotes an entire chapter of *Le Mythe et l'homme* (1938) to myths about this insect, famous for the fact that the female sometimes preys on the male after they have mated. He compares these myths to tales about dangerous *femme fatales*, arguing that both types of myths have the same origin: man's fear of castration, which he describes as born out of an animal instinct or drive, rooted in biology.[123]

What mainly interested mythomaniacs, however, was the social and political function of myth. In particular, literary theorist Nikolaj d'Origny Lübecker contends that the obsession with myth – which he claims did not dissipate with the outbreak of the Second World War, but extended well into the post-war period – must be understood as related to the question of "community" or social cohesion.[124] This concern was a central preoccupation

250. See also Hjalmar Falk, "Violence, Divine or Otherwise. Myth and Violence in the Benjamin-Schmitt Constellation", in *The Meanings of Violence: From Critical Theory to Biopolitics*, ed. Gavin Rae and Emma Ingala (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2019). For Leiris' writings on myth, see Michel Leiris, *Manhood: A Journey from Childhood into the Fierce Order of Virility*, trans. Richard Howard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1939] 1992).

[122] Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (London: Penguin Books, [1942] 2013). There are also signs that Camus saw his entire *ouvre* as reworkings of various myths. Camus describes *The Myth of Sisyphus* as centered around Sisyphus, *The Rebel* (1951) as being about Prometheus and *The First Man* (published posthumously in 1995) as inspired by Nemesis and Adam from the Bible. Matthew Sharpe, *Camus, Philosophe: To Return to Our Beginnings* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 41–47; Joseph Just, "Le mythe d'Adam: Le premier homme de Camus", in *Mythes des origines*, ed. Michel Prat and Gérard Peylet (Pessac: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2002).

[123] Zuch, "Max Ernst", 1; Rom S. Mukherjee, "Love, Cannibalism, and the Sacred. Roger Caillois and the Myth of the Praying Mantis", in *Insects in Literature and the Arts*, ed. Laurence Talairach-Vielmas and Marie Bouchet (Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2014); Rosa Eidelpes, "Roger Caillois' Biology of Myth and the Myth of Biology", *Anthropology + Materialism* 2 (2014): 5–6. Two additional mythical figures that captured the interest of surrealists and dissident surrealists were Melusine and The Sphinx, both of which are hybrid creatures (half animal, half female), which these thinkers saw as symbols of the dual and dangerous nature of woman. Zuch, "Max Ernst", 1.

[124] Lübecker, *Community, Myth and Recognition*, 2–3.

among many French mid-century intellectuals. As sociologist Fuyuki Kurasawa notes, these thinkers often reasoned that modern societies had become completely dominated by the logic of instrumental rationality, which recognized no values apart from utility and profit.[125] "Accordingly, it was believed that a state of anomie had appeared: collective consciousness and social solidarity had crumbled, giving way to a society fragmented to an unprecedented degree in which individuals were bereft of any sense of common moral guidance."[126] Lübecker explains that French mid-century intellectuals frequently proposed two solutions to this crisis; solutions that he describes as "*mechanisms for constituting a community*".[127] The first was "recognition" in the Hegelian sense, typically thought to necessitate some form of socialist upheaval.[128] The second was myth. "In the first part of the twentieth century it was a widespread view among authors, politicians and many others that only the reference to a common mythical ground would allow social construction to transcend the level of a merely formal assemblage."[129]

Why, then, were myths thought to foster social cohesion? First, unlike fictions authored by private individuals, such tales were commonly conceived as essentially *collective* creations. Therefore, they were also assumed to possess a high degree of universality. "Myths were believed to express something vital we all have in common", Lübecker explains.[130] In early twentieth century France, this notion was popularized by influential figures such as Émile Durkheim, who argued that "religious representation", including myths, were "collective representations" in the sense that they were "the product of an immense cooperation that extends not only through space but also through time".[131] A similar analysis was advanced by Sigmund Freud (who described

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[125] Fuyuki Kurasawa, "Primitiveness and the Flight from Modernity: Sociology and the Avant-Garde in Inter-War France", *Economy & Society* 32, no. 1 (2003). See also Michèle Richman, "Myth, Power and the Sacred: Anti-Utilitarianism in the Collège de sociologie 1937-9", *Economy & Society* 32, no. 1 (2003).

[126] Kurasawa, "Primitiveness and the Flight from Modernity", 10.

[127] Lübecker, *Community, Myth and Recognition*, 2, italics in original.

[128] Ibid., 3.

[129] Ibid., 2.

[130] Ibid.

[131] Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, [1912] 1995), 15, 79–80. Cf. Georges Bataille, "The Moral Meaning of Sociology" [1946], in *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism*, ed. Michael Richardson, trans. Michael Richardson (London: Verso, 1994), 104. "Interest in myths and the various religious activities of exotic peoples drew attention to the superiority of collective over individual creation, and thereby to sociology and ethnography, in particular to the Durkheimian theory defining

myths as "distorted vestiges of the wishful phantasies of whole nations") and Carl Gustav Jung (who held that all myths sprung from the "collective unconscious").[132] Secondly, myths were usually perceived as representing an especially important aspect of *religion*, which was assumed to constitute a potentially unifying social force, partly lost in modern society.[133] Thirdly and finally, myths were generally believed to be particularly *engaging* stories. Whereas philosophy and science were described as conceptual and logical, myths were said to be figurative and affective.[134]

In support of the claim that myths could counteract social fragmentation, the mythomaniacs often referred to anthropological and sociological studies of non-Western, so-called primitive societies. These societies were believed to enjoy the kind of cohesion modern societies lacked, largely due to their retention of functional, literary myths.[135] In contrast, the mythomaniacs often described modern societies as fully disenchanted, imprisoned in the iron cage of rationality, completely devoid of viable myth ("what we call myth", Lucien Levy-Bruhl asserted in 1910, "is but the inanimate corpse which remains after the vital spark has fled").[136] Thus, the longing for myths in mid-century France

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religious activities and myths as a manifestation of a collective being superior to the individual and named society."

[132] Sigmund Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" [1907], in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume IX (1906-1908): Jensen's "Gradiva" and Other Works*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1962), 152; C. G. Jung, "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious" [1954], in *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung Volume 9. Part 1. Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, ed. Herbert Read, Michael Fordham and Gerhard Adler, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 5–7.

[133] "Myth is, together with the sacred, plainly one of the essential movements with in religious life", claimed Bataille. Georges Bataille, "The Surrealist Religion" [1948], in *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism* ed. and trans. Michael Richardson (London: Verso, 1994), 75. Bataille here echoes Durkheim, who writes: "While there is no doubt that mythology is important to aesthetics as well as to the science of religions, it is nonetheless one of the essential elements of religious life." Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 79.

[134] "Only myth", wrote Bataille, "enters the bodies of those whom it binds together and requires them to have the same expectations." Bataille, "The Sorcerer's Apprentice", 22.

[135] "Myths were a promissory note that things could be otherwise because ancient and foreign societies – those societies Europeans characterized by their exotic myths – *did* seem otherwise." Duong, "The Sorcerer's Apprentices of Interwar France", 2, italics in original. See also Kurasawa, "Primitiveness and the Flight from Modernity", 10.

[136] Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, trans. Lilian A. Clare (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, [1910] 1925), 370.

was partly a longing for a lost primitive past, which the mythomaniacs hoped to revive by inventing new myths or reactivating older ones.[137]

The idea that it might be possible to reactive older literary myths was bolstered by the political development of the 1930s, which seemed to suggest that the days of mythical communities were far from over. In his *Mythes et dieux des Germains* (1939), Georges Dumézil commented on the use of ancient Germanic myths by artists like Richard Wagner (1813–1883), effectively exploited by the Nazis. He observed: "Over the past 150 years, the 'beautiful legends' of the Germans have not only been repopularized but *remythologized*. They have become once again myths in the strict sense, because they justify, sustain and provoke individual and collective behaviors that have all the characteristics of the sacred."[138] Of course, some viewed Nazi Germany's political abuse of literary myths as an example that demonstrated the dangers of mythical politics. Yet others argued that the Nazi's could only be defeated by the same weapon, which meant that the left had no choice but to find – or perhaps invent – myths of their own.[139]

The belief that it should be possible to invent new myths has its roots in early Romanticism. But it was re-popularized in the early twentieth century, in no small part thanks to philosopher Georges Sorel (1847–1922), who was a major source of inspiration for many mythomaniacs, on the right as well as the

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[137] As for example Bataille explained in 1948: "It seems very clear and very distinct to me that the quest for primitive culture represents the principal, most decisive and vital, aspect of the meaning of surrealism, if not its precise definition." Bataille, "The Surrealist Religion", 71. See also ibid., 75 – where Bataille explicitly connects this longing for primitivism in surrealism with a longing for myth.

[138] Georges Dumézil, *Mythes et dieux des Germains: Essai d'interprétation comparative* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1939), 155–156, italics in original, translation mine. [*Depuis cent cinquante ce sont de "belles légendes" des Germains ont été non seulement repopularisées, mais remythisées. Elles sont redevenues, au sens strict, des mythes puisqu'elles justifient, soutiennent, provoquent des comportements individuels et collectifs qui ont tous les caractères du sacré.*] Some have accused Dumézil of harboring a "sympathy with Nazi ideology", while others – including himself – have described him as dispassionate diagnostician. See Arnaldo Momigliano, "Georges Dumézil and the Trifunctional Approach to Roman Civilization", History and Theory 23, no. 3 (1984); Guy G. Stroumsa, "Georges Dumézil, Ancient German Myths, and Modern Demons", *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 6, no. 2 (1998): 127; Carlo Ginzburg, "Germanic Mythology and Nazism: Thoughts on an Old Book by Georges Dumézil," in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

[139] Lübecker, *Community, Myth and Recognition*, 35; Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, "A Left Sacred or a Sacred Left? The 'Collège de sociologie', Fascism, and Political Culture in Interwar France", *South Central Review* 23, no. 1 (2006): 45–46.

left.[140] Sorel, however, did not use the word "myths" to refer to stories of the kind what Keum calls literary myths, but mental images of a desired future scenario, the main purpose of which were to motivate political action in the present.[141] In particular, he championed "the myth of the general strike", according to which this event would deliver the proletariat's final victory over the bourgeoisie. Sorel himself underlined that this idiosyncratic definition of "myth" clashed with the word's historically acquired charge. Interestingly, he also observed that this entailed a communicative problem. "By employing the term 'myth' I believed that I had made a happy choice […]. It appears, on the contrary, that I had a very bad idea, since […] some tell me that myths are only appropriate to a primitive society", Sorel wrote.[142] Yet, he maintained that myth was actually a timeless phenomenon, as important in modern societies as primitive ones.[143]

There were those who objected, however, that invented myths could never become *real* myths. For example, historian and mythologist René M. Guastalla (1897–1841) maintained that both National Socialism and Soviet Communism represented "a return of the tribal religions", yet claimed that the myths utilized by these political movements differed from the "natural myths of former times" in the sense that they had been manufactured by single individuals.[144] Likewise, philosopher Paul-Louis Landsberg (1901–1944), a vocal critic of *la mythomanie,* asserted: "What I reproach modern myths for is less their being myths than their being fabricated, *inauthentic myths*, products of

[140] In 1938, Paul-Louis Landsberg refers to Sorel as "le premier *sociologue du mythe*". Quoted from, Duong, "The Sorcerer's Apprentices of Interwar France", 3. Sorel's importance is also stressed by Sartre in "Denis de Rougemont", 58.

[141] In a letter to Daniel Halévy, included as an introduction to *Reflections of Violence*, Sorel explains: "[M]en who are participating in great social movements always picture their coming action in the form of images of battle in which their cause is certain to triumph. I proposed to give the name of 'myths' to these constructions". Sorel, *Reflections on Violence,* 20.

[142] Ibid., 21.

[143] Sorel's long-standing influence on French intellectual life is attested to by Beauvoir. In an article titled "Right-Wing Thought Today" ("La pensée de droite, aujourd'hui", 1955), she notes that the doctrine that right-wing thinkers invoke to serve their "devious goals" does not "aspire to any truth", as these thinkers have "learned from Sorel that myths are a dynamic force to be evaluated not intellectually but in terms of their efficacy." Simone de Beauvoir, "Right-Wing Thought Today" [1955], in *Simone de Beauvoir: Political Writings*, ed. Margaret A. Simons and Marybeth Timmermann, trans. Véronique Zaytzeff and Frederick M. Morrison (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 126.

[144] Rene M. Guastalla, et al., "Inquiry: On Spiritual Directors" [1939], in *The College of Sociology (1937-39)* ed. Denis Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 58–59.

a cynically conscious, pragmatic mythologism, making use of an apersonal mechanism of propaganda."[145] This demonstrates the extent to which the mid-century discussion on myth was dominated by a particular understanding of myth as a primarily pre-modern and essentially communal phenomenon. Regardless of whether one sought to create new modern myths or, like Landsberg, deemed this impossible, the literary myths of ancient or primitive societies remained an ideal, in large part because these were understood as collective creations.[146]

The notion that there might be modern myths, which are not literary myths, yet have something in common with such tales and therefore warrant the same title, was not only voiced by Sorel. A particularly interesting example revolves around "the myth of the negro" (*le mythe du nègre*). This phenomenon was discussed in the journal *Présence Africaine*, a prominent forum for the pan-African movement. Its second issue, published in 1948, contained a text called "Premières réponses à l'enquête sur le 'Mythe du Nègre'" (First responses to the "negro myth" survey), which was followed by "Autres réponses à l'enquête sur le 'Mythe du Nègre'" (Further responses to the "negro myth" survey), featured in issue five from the same year.[147] In these two articles, a total of seven white writers presented their view of "the negro" and "his" situation.[148] One of these writers was the linguist Georges Mounin (1910–1993), who explained:

> I have perhaps benefited from being much more attentive to the black man of flesh-and-blood than to *the black soul*. I am a little wary – why not admit it – of a certain use of the negro in literature [...]. At present, there is the risk of a mythology of the negro as such, which is merely an escape for the white man from his own problems. There is the danger of a philistine negrophilia, a *negrophilia without obligation or sanction*. I do not like this way of cultivating the negro myth in order to avoid examining the negro reality [...].[149]

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[145] Quoted from Denis Hollier, *The College of Sociology (1937-39)* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 160, italics added.

[146] Cf. Ibid.

[147] Georges Mounin, Dermenhem Emile and Paz Magdeleine, "Premières réponses à l'enquête sur le 'Mythe du Nègre'", *Présence Africaine*, no. 2 (1948); Jean Rouch et al., "Autres réponses à l'enquête sur le 'Mythe du Nègre'", *Présence Africaine*, no. 5 (1948).

[148] A similar text by, authored by Marte Arnaud, appeared in issue seven from 1949. Marte Arnaud, "Le mythe nègre", *Présence Africaine*, no. 7 (1949).

[149] Mounin, Emile and Magdeleine, "Premières Réponses", 196–197, italics in original, translation mine. [*J'y ai peut-être gagné d'être beaucoup plus attentif à l'homme noir de chair et d'os qu'à l'âme noire. Je me défie un peu – pourquoi ne pas l'avouer, – d'une certaine utilisation du nègre en littérature* [...].

An analogous argument was later advanced by philosopher and psychoanalyst Frantz Fanon (1925–1961), who cites Mounin's discussion on the negro myth in his classic *Black Skin White Masks* (1952). Fanon, however, places far greater emphasis on this myth's tendency to devalue and dehumanize, rather than simply idealize, black people.[150]

There were also those who held that modern myths could serve black people's interests. Consequently, black intellectuals engaged in the so-called Negritude movement actively sought to create their own negro myth, designed to change the reality of black people by facilitating the emergence of a "black consciousness" and a black political subject. Political theorist Michel Prat notes that this myth was first and foremost "an ideological myth, of collective origin, developed in response to a historical crisis." But as Prat also points out, it was constructed with the help of literary narratives, often modeled on the stories that Keum calls literary myths.[151]

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Returning to Beauvoir, it is essential to note her many and direct ties to mid-century mythomaniacs. As historian of philosophy Henry Martyn Lloyd observes, she was acquainted with Bataille and had read his work.[152] She was also friends with Leiris – whose interest in literary myth is particularly evident in *Manhood*, a work that she herself describes as having influenced *The Second Sex* – as well as with Camus and Fanon.[153] However, it is particularly

Il y a présentement le risque d'une mythologie du nègre en soi qui n'est qu'une évasion du blanc devant ses propres problèmes. Il existe le danger d'une négrophilie philistine, d'une négrophilie sans obligation ni sanction Je n'aime pas cette façon de cultiver le mythe nègre pour éviter finalement d'examiner la réalité nègre...] Here, "the negro myth" is used to denote an idealized and essentializing image of the black soul, reflected in literature. In the next chapter, I will show that this is akin to how Beauvoir uses of the phrase "the myth of woman", which she too contrasts with beings of "flesh-and-blood".

[150] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto, [1952] 2008), 154. See also ibid, 7, 11, 48, 68, 88, 116.

[151] Michel Prat, "Le mythe 'negre'", in *Mythes des origines*, ed. Michel Prat and Gérard Peylet (Pessac: Presses universitaires de Bordeaux, 2002), 243, translation mine. [*…un mythe idéologique, d'origine collective, élaboré en réponse à des situations historiques de crise.*]

[152] Henry Martyn Lloyd, "The Sovereign Subject and Its Heterogeneous Other Beauvoir's Use and Critique of Bataille/Hegel", *Intellectual History Review* 23, no. 4 (2013): 569–570.

[153] Again and again, Leiris invokes mythical figures from antiquity and the bible; figures that he himself has often identified with, but which he also hopes will help communicate his personal experiences to others. See for example, Michel Leiris, "Afterword: The Autobiographer as

interesting to observe that even Beauvoir's closest companion, her life-long partner Sartre, seems to have succumbed to *la mythomanie*. Before concluding this contextualization, I will therefore devote additional attention to Sartre's writings on myths.

In 1943, Sartre wrote and directed an adaption of the Greek myth of Electra, titled *The Flies* (1943). This seems to have opened his eyes to the progressive potential of literary myths. In 1946, he thus published an essay called "Forgers of Myth" (1946) where he referred to himself and other French playwrights as myth-makers.[154] Sartre begins this essay by noting that many American critics, when reviewing actress and producer Katharine Cornell's production of playwright Jean Anouilh's *Antigone* (1946), seemed puzzled by the choice to stage "such an ancient myth".[155] This, he continues, was probably because the critics were unaware of what the young playwrights of France are trying to achieve. Namely, to "fuse all the disparate elements in the auditorium into a single unit by awakening the recesses of their spirits the things which all men of a given epoch and community care about", which Sartre argues can only be achieved through myth.[156] The goal, he explains, is to transform theatre into "a great collective, religious phenomenon."[157] This does not necessarily mean returning to ancient literary myths. Instead, Sartre argues that it is possible to create new myths that fulfill the same function as the former, in the sense that they express something common to all humans. Seeking to separate "the theatre of symbols", which he says that the French playwrights reject, from that of "myths", he explains:

> The characters in Albert Camus' *Le Malentendu* are not symbols, they are flesh and blood: *a* mother and *a* daughter, *a* son who comes back from a long journey;

Torero," in *Manhood: A Journey from Childhood into the Fierce Order of Virility*, trans. Richard Howard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1946] 1992), 156. Cf. Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 110. "All his life he [Leiris] sets his own experiences against mythic ones: male/female love against the image of Judith or of Cleopatra, after Antony, hurling her lovers to their death; Electra, Salome, Carmen."

[154] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Forgers of Myth: The Young Playwright of France", *Theatre Arts* (1946). On Sartre's ideas about the relation between theatre and myth, see also Kenneth Tynan, "An Interview with Jean Paul Sartre," in *Tynan Right & Left; Plays, Films, People, Places and Events* (New York: Atheneum, 1967), 304, 310; István Mészáros, *The Work of Sartre: Search for Freedom and the Challenge of History* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012), 44–49, 334 n70.

[155] Sartre, "Forgers of Myth", 324.

[156] Ibid., 330.

[157] Ibid.

> their tragic experiences are complete in themselves. And yet they are mythical in the sense that the misunderstanding which separates them can serve as the embodiment of all misunderstandings that separate man from himself, from the world, from other men.[158]

In other words, Sartre argues that a "mythical" drama captures or conveys an experience common to all human beings, which means that it also appeals to and affects all human beings. Accordingly, he declares that the theater, "if it is to address the masses, […] must speak in terms of their most general preoccupations, dispelling their anxieties in the form of myths which anyone can understand and feel deeply."[159]

A similar assumption structures Sartre's *Black Orpheus* (1948), where certain literary myths are framed as stories that can unite not all individuals of "a given epoch and community", but all *black* people. This text was published as a preface to an anthology of "negro poetry", often presented as pivotal to the Negritude movement.[160] Sartre begins by stating that the white worker is oppressed by "technics", which is why "he" must become a "technician" himself: rational, scientific, materialistic and efficient. The white worker therefore has no real use for "poetic myths".[161] In contrast, the negro, who is oppressed because of the color of "his" skin, must first of all become conscious of his race.[162] In this context, poetry is more efficient than science.[163] Myths, in particular, are effective poetic weapons, as they are rooted in tradition and generate emotional responses:

> It is practically impossible for *our* poets to resume some closeness with popular traditions […]. The black men of Africa, on the contrary, are still in the great period of mythical fecundity and French-language black poets are not just using

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[158] Ibid., 330–331, italics in original. This concept of myth can be compared to what Rougemont puts forward in *Love in The Western World*, the work Sartre was reviewing in 1939, when he complained about the excessive interest in myths among French intellectuals. Rougemont there writes: "Speaking generally, a myth is a story […] which sums up an infinite number of more or less analogous situations. A myth makes it possible to become aware at a glance of certain types of *constant relations* and to disengage these from the welter of everyday life." Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, trans. Montgomery Belgion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, [1939] 1983), 18, italics in original.

[159] Sartre, "Forgers of Myth", 330.

[160] Léopold Sédar Senghor and Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1948).

[161] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Black Orpheus", *The Massachusetts Review* 6, no. 1 ([1948] 1964): 16–17.

[162] Ibid., 18.

[163] Ibid., 26.

> their myths as a form of diversion as we use our epic poems: they allow themselves to be spellbound by them so that at the end of the incantation, negritude – magnificently evoked – may surge forth.[164]

We can discern here the influence of the evolutionary anthropological discourse on myth, according to which black Africans are "still" at an early mythopoetic stage, which white Westerners have long since left behind. In his critique of anti-black racism, Sartre thus ends up reproducing a fundamentally racist trope – one that a docteur Pelage, in the very first issue of *Présence Africaine* from 1947, described as a "myth that has become pseudo-scientific" (*un mythe devenu pseudo-scientifique*).[165] Still, it is interesting to note that Sartre presents literary myths, created by and for black people, as a way to challenge what others have called the harmful "negro myth", as they are meant to function as tools in an anti-racist struggle. With the help of such myths, he argues that black people can forge a positive black identity. This raises the question of whether literary myths, according to Beauvoir, could achieve something similar for women; a question I will return to at the end of this chapter.

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The analysis carried out above shows that myth was a much-discussed topic in mid-century France. Furthermore, it demonstrates that these discussions often revolved around the political and social function of myth. Opinion was divided on whether myth represented a threat or a promise, as well as on what the word "myth" actually meant, or should mean. But it is evident that the word in question served as a tool in debates about oppression and emancipation, progress and regression. I argue that *The Second Sex* can be read as a hitherto overlooked contribution to debates of this kind.

To begin with, we may note that Beauvoir's analysis challenges popular interpretations of individual myths, like those centered around the praying mantis and dangerous *femme fatales*. As we recall, Caillois held that such myths had their origin in a biologically rooted fear of castration, stimulated by the insect's mating ritual. By contrast, Beauvoir explicitly states that "the myth of the praying mantis" (*le mythe de la mante religieuse*) – which "has taken shape as

[164] Ibid., 30, italics in original.

[165] Pelage, "La fin d'un mythe scientifique", *Présence Africaine*, no. 1 (1947): 158, translation mine. In particular, this article deals with the evolutionary perspective of Lévy-Bruhl.

the myth of devouring femininity (*le mythe de la féminité dévorante*)"[166] – has no biological basis".[167] According to her, even the behavior of the actual insect is in part a product of social rather than biological factors. Though the female praying mantis sometimes engages in sexual cannibalism, Beauvoir maintains that it only exhibits this behavior in captivity.[168] More importantly, she argues that those literary myths that equate human females with praying mantises must be understood as the product of historically contingent circumstances rather than instincts. Although it is true that woman does sometimes "devour" her spouse (in a metaphorical sense), Beauvoir explains that this is because her societal situation allows her no other choice – just as the female praying mantis, according to her, only consumes the male because it is held captive. With reference to the bourgeoise marriage, Beauvoir thus concludes that this institution must be changed or abolished because it *makes* women "praying mantises" and "bloodsuckers" (quotations marks in original).[169]

Beauvoir does not only offer alternative interpretations of individual myths, however. Her analysis also challenges one of the very premises upon which *la mythomanie* is based. This will become evident in what follows.

Literary myth as historiographical resource

Though Beauvoir maintains that the "world has always belonged to males", she argues that the emergence of patriarchy as a social system was a historical event, with a before and an after.[170] Consequently, she speaks of a pre-patriarchal era, when the supremacy of men was not yet institutionalized.[171] The earliest agricultural communities where actually matrilineal, Beauvoir states, because they were unaware of the father's role in procreation.[172] Since pre-historic man linked the fertility of woman to that of the earth, woman was also ascribed magical (life-giving as well as life-threatening) powers. As a consequence, woman was an object of fear, reverence and worship. In support of the latter claim, Beauvoir refers to archeological discoveries which suggests that the oldest mythologies were centered around a female deity: the Great

[166] Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-1*, 54/5
[167] Ibid., 253 n18/280 n1.
[168] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 54.
[169] Ibid., 591.
[170] Ibid., 96.
[171] Ibid., 101.
[172] Ibid., 102–103.

Goddess or the Great Mother, known under names such as Ishtar, Astarte, Gaea, Rhea, Cybele and Isis.[173]

Beauvoir holds that once patriarchy emerged, it led to the emergence of other myths, which both mirrored and helped legitimize this new order. First, the older myths were modified to also include a male symbol of the fertility principle: a lover or son of the Great Mother, sometimes pictured as a bull. But eventually, the Great Mother was dethroned.[174]

> By the time humankind reaches the stage of writing its mythology and laws, patriarchy is definitively established: it is males who write the codes. […] Only the harmful aspects of the ambivalent virtues attributed to her [woman] are retained: from sacred she becomes unclean. Eve, given to Adam to be his companion, lost humankind; to punish men, the pagan gods invent women, and Pandora, the firstborn of these female creatures, is the one who unleashes all the evil that humanity endures.[175]

Here, Beauvoir invokes the type of stories Keum calls literary myths to map out the history of patriarchy: with their help, she can identify patriarchy's beginning. But she also uses literary myths to say something about the situation of women in pre-patriarchal times. From this era, there are very few reliable sources: not even myths, as the pre-patriarchal goddess centered mythologies were never written down. Still, it remains possible to extract insights about the pre-patriarchal period by studying patriarchal myths, which are said to preserve a "memory" of this earlier period. "The great figures of Niobe and Medea evoke an era when mothers, considering their children to be their own property, took pride in them", Beauvoir writes. "And in the Homeric poems, Andromache and Hecuba have an importance that classic Greece no longer granted to women hidden in the shadows of the gynaeceum."[176]

Beauvoir is not the first to argue that literary myths can provide insight into the historical nature of what one can call gendered relations. She refers to Fredrich Engels (1820–1895), who in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) invoked literary myths to discuss the history of male

[173] Ibid., 104.
[174] Ibid., 110.
[175] Ibid., 114.
[176] Ibid.

supremacy.[177] Engels was in turn inspired by jurist and early anthropologist Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815–1887), who Beauvoir also mentions.[178] Bachofen was one of the first mythologist to argue that literary myths constituted a historiographical resource. In his most famous work, *Mother Right* (1861), Bachofen criticizes contemporary historians, whom he describes as overly quick to dismiss literary myths as "worthless rubbish" and relegate them to "the discard pile whose steady growth marks the destructive progress of the so-called 'critical' approach to mythology."[179] By contrast, Bachofen argued the "mythical tradition" constituted a "faithful reflection of the life of those times in which historical antiquity is rooted" and therefore "a highly reliable historical source."[180]

When Beauvoir invokes literary myth to map out the history of patriarchy and the situation of women in both pre-patriarchal and patriarchal societies, she can be said to appropriate a concept of myth derived from a mythological discourse represented by, among others, Bachofen and Engels. But she also challenges Bachofen's most fundamental assumption, which both he and Engels turned to myth to support: that the patriarchy was preceded by a "matriarchal age", during which all power was in the hands of women. Having discussed the traces of a pre-patriarchal mythology centered around the Goddess Mother, Beauvoir notes that this has given rise to the misconception that women, in "primitive times" ruled society. "But in reality", she states, "this golden age of Woman is only a myth (*n'est qu'un mythe*)."[181]

This is one of the few occasions when Beauvoir uses "myth" as a synonym for misconception or lie. To support the claim that Bachofen's matriarchy-thesis constitutes a myth in this sense of the word, she refers to anthropological studies of contemporary, so-called primitive societies. "Society has always been male; political power has always been in men's hands", she states. This, she continues, is affirmed by Claude Lévi-Strauss "at the end of his study of

[177] Ibid., 88–94, 105; Friedrich Engels, "The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State" [1884], in *Marx and Engels Collected Works. Volume 26. Engels 1882–89*, ed. Jack Cohen et al., trans. Lawrence & Wishhart (London: Lawrence & Wishhart, 2010), 170.

[178] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 105, 774.

[179] Johann Jakob Bachofen, *Myth, Religion and Mother Right: Selected Writings*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 72.

[180] Ibid., 73. On Bachofen's understanding of myth as a source of historical truth, see also Peter Davies, "Myth and Matemalism in the Work of Johann Jakob Bachofen", *German Studies Review* 28, no. 3 (2005): 505.

[181] Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-1*, 105/122.

primitive societies."[182] In addition, Beauvoir emphasizes that the literary myths centered around the Goddess Mother were not created by women, but by men. "The prestige she [woman] enjoys in the eyes of men", Beauvoir writes, "comes from them; they kneel before the Other, they worship the Goddess Mother. But as powerful as she may appear, she is defined through notions created by the male consciousness."[183]

The claim that even literary myths centered around female divinities was actually created by men is also one that Beauvoir develops in dialog with earlier mythologists. She cites James Georges Frazer, who writes: "Men make gods and women worship them" ("it is men", Beauvoir adds, "who decide if their supreme divinities will be females or males").[184] This quote is taken from *The Golden Bough* (1890–1915), in which Frazer furthermore states that "the great religious ideals which have permanently impressed themselves on the world seem always to have been a product of the male imagination."[185] The fact that Beauvoir invokes Frazer to challenge Bachofen demonstrates how well versed she is in nineteenth century anthropology and mythology. At the same time, she challenges Frazer by posing a question the latter passes over in silence: why where all literary myths and all "great religious ideals" created by men?

Patriarchy and the history of myth

Frazer seems to take the aforementioned fact for granted, probably because he sees men as, by definition, superior to women (unless human "nature" itself changes, writes Frazer, society will continue to governed in the future, as it has in the past, "mainly by masculine force and masculine intelligence").[186] By contrast, Beauvoir is among the first to connect the assumed absence of women-produced literary myths with women's *subject position* – or rather, with their lack thereof. In the first chapter of "Myths", she states:

> Any myth implies a Subject who projects its hopes and fears towards a transcendent heaven (*vers un ciel transcendant*). Not positing themselves as Subject, women have not created the virile myth (*le myth viril*) that would reflect their

[182] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 105.
[183] Ibid., 107.
[184] Ibid., 111, 727.
[185] James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1890–1915] 1998), 395.
[186] Ibid., 394.

> projects; they have neither religion nor poetry that belongs to them alone: they still dream through men's dreams. They worship the gods made by males. And males have shaped the great virile figures for their own exaltation: Hercules, Prometheus, Parsifal; in the destiny of these heroes, woman has merely a secondary role.[187]

In the next chapter, I will argue that the first part of the above cited quote is primarily about the myth of the woman, not literary myths. Nonetheless, the second part still makes clear that the lack of women-produced literary myths, according to Beauvoir, follows from the fact that woman has not posited herself as subject, but remained in the position of the object, enclosed in an symbolic order generated by man.

Why does woman not posit herself as subject? One reason, Beauvoir writes, is that she often "derives satisfaction" from her role as a non-subject.[188] But the act of positing oneself as a subject is also portrayed as one that can be facilitated or obstructed by others. And according to Beauvoir, man has actively sought to hamper the subject-becoming of woman.[189] This means that it is impossible to explain the lack of women-produced literary myths without taking into consideration the oppression that women have suffered at the hands of men. Thus, if Beauvoir invokes literary myths to map out the history of patriarchy and thereby formulate a feminist analysis, her feminist analysis also sheds new light on the historical conditions of literary myth.[190] Where

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[187] Beauvoir *TSS/DS-1*, 196/241, translation modified.

[188] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 30.

[189] Ibid., 189. "He is pleased to remain the sovereign subject, the absolute superior, the essential being; he refuses to consider his companion concretely as an equal."

[190] Beauvoir sometimes treats literary myths together with tales usually termed fairy tales; stories between which she herself sometimes differentiates. For example, in "Femininity: The Trap" (1947) she writes: "In mythologies, in the fairy tales read to children, women are always assigned the same roles. They are Ariadne abandoned, Penelope at her needlework, Andromeda in chains. They are Cinderella, or the Sleeping Beauty waiting to be saved by Prince Charming. They are the ones who wait, who cannot find their place in the world except through the love of a man." Simone de Beauvoir, "Femininity. The Trap" [1948], in *Simone de Beauvoir: Feminist Writings,* ed. Margaret A. Simons and Marybeth Timmermann (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 44. See also Donald Haase, "Feminist Fairy-Tale Scholarship: A Critical Survey and Bibliography", *Marvels & Tales* 14, no. 1 (2000): 41 n3; Christine Shojaei Kawan, "A Masochism Promising Supreme Conquests: Simone de Beauvoir's Reflections on Fairy Tales and Children's Literature", *Marvels & Tales* 16, no. 1 (2002); Ashley King Scheu, "Walking in a Man's World: Myth, Literature, and the Interpretation of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*", in *Literature and the Development of Feminist Theory*, ed. Robin Truth Goodman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 86–88. On the relation between (literary) myths and fairy

other mythologists have presented myths as communal products, Beauvoir's analysis suggests that half the world's population have exercised no influence whatsoever on these stories.

In this respect, Beauvoir's analysis also complicates one of the assumptions common to most French, mid-twentieth century intellectuals affected by *la mythomanie*: that literary myths were collective creations and therefore possessed a universal quality. Admittedly, many French mythomaniacs argued that there was a need for new myths, in part because the older ones no longer helped generate cohesion. But their faith in the unifying function of these longed-for new myths still rested on a received understanding of what function literary myths served in primitive societies, where these stories were said to generate the cohesion that modern societies lacked. It is this understanding that Beauvoir's analysis challenges. Or rather, her reasoning suggests that if literary myths create cohesion in primitive societies, this is not because they, as Lübecker phrases it, "express something vital we all have in common", but because they reflect and reinforce the common experience and interests of those in power: men.

Later on, I will demonstrate that Beauvoir does not only argue that the existence of patriarchal oppression has influenced the production of literary myths, but that the existence of (certain) literary myths have helped justify and thereby sustain patriarchal oppression. But first, I shall seek to establish that Beauvoir approaches myth both as phenomenologist and as a comparative mythologist.

Literary myth as a phenomenological aid

The reading of Beauvoir as a phenomenologist was pioneered by Sara Heinämaa.[191] According to her, *The Second Sex* is not, primarily, aimed at "explaining" why women are oppressed. "Instead", writes Heinämaa, "[…]

tales, see Jack David Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth, Myth as Fairy Tale* (Lexington: Univesity Press of Kentucky, 1994).

[191] On Beauvoir as a phenomenologist see also Wendy O'Brien and Lester E. Embree, ed., *The Existential Phenomenology of Simone de Beauvoir* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001). This work includes a bibliography listing primary as well as secondary sources on the topic in question: Ted Toadvine, "Simone De Beauvoir and Existential Phenomenology: A Bibliography", in *The Existential Phenomenology of Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. Wendy O'Brien and Lester E. Embree (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001).

Beauvoir presents a phenomenological description."[192] What, then, does such a phenomenological description entail? To answer this question, Heinämaa invokes the "father" of phenomenology, philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), who is held to define phenomenology as "a study of phenomena, that is, the ways in which the world appears, or presents itself, to us in experience."[193] To be more precise, Heinämaa argues that *The Second Sex* constitutes a phenomenological study of "sexual difference", which explains why Beauvoir "provides detailed descriptions […] of the meanings given to the sexual difference in historical narratives, myths, literature, psychology, sociology and everyday practices."[194]

The last quote is particularly important, as it suggests that the myth-part of *The Second Sex*, according to Heinämaa, constitutes a part of Beauvoir's phenomenological investigation. By contrast, many scholars tend to describe only volume two of *The Second Sex* as phenomenological.[195] For example, philosopher Sonia Kruks claims that Beauvoir proceeds as a phenomenologist in volume two, while she in volume one provides a "Marxist-inflected analysis" of socioeconomic and political structures, as well as "masculinist discourses" such a biological theories and myths.[196] I agree with Kruks that it is reductive to read *The Second Sex* exclusively as a phenomenological study.[197] But my analysis reveals that it is equally misguided to postulate a sharp line between its phenomenological and political parts.

According to my reading, the myth-part of *The Second Sex* is phenomenological in the sense that it aims to specify woman's "being-for-men" – that is, how man "defines" and "dream[s] of" woman (or, as Beauvoir writes in her 1948 essay, what "meaning" woman holds in eyes of man and how she "appears" to him).[198] Put differently, this part is meant to disclose how woman, as a phenomenon, appears or presents itself to men in experience.

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[192] Sara Heinämaa, "Simone de Beauvoir's Phenomenology of Sexual Difference", *Hypatia* 14, no. 4 (1999): 114–115.

[193] Ibid., 115.

[194] Sara Heinämaa, "What Is a Woman? Butler and Beauvoir on the Foundations of the Sexual Difference", *Hypatia* 12, no. 1 (1997): 28.

[195] Johanna Oksala, "The Method of Critical Phenomenology: Simone de Beauvoir as a Phenomenologist", *European Journal of Philosophy* 31, no. 1 (2023): 7.

[196] Sonia Kruks, *Simone de Beauvoir and the Politics of Ambiguity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 64–65.

[197] For a critique of the tendency to overemphasize the phenomenological aspects of *The Second Sex*, see Bonnie Mann, "The Difference of Feminist Philosophy: The Case of Shame", *Puncta: Journal of Phenomenology* 1, no. 1 (2018): 51–53.

[198] See this thesis, 49.

Beauvoir's conclusion is well known: man posits woman as the Other.[199] What is less often observed is that Beauvoir employed literary myths to reach and argue in favor of this conclusion.

In her memoirs, Beauvoir herself highlights the importance of literary myths. Returning to the question of how she came to write *The Second Sex*, she asserts:

> I have explained how this book came about: almost by chance. Wanting to speak about myself, I realized that I had to describe the feminine condition. I first considered the myths that men had forged about it (*les mythes que les hommes en ont forgés*) through cosmologies, religions, superstitions, ideologies, literatures. I tried to find some order in the, at first sight, incoherent picture that presented itself to me: in every case, man posited himself as the Subject and considered woman as an object, as the Other.[200]

In this respect, Beauvoir can be said to have used literary myths as a phenomenological aid, with the help of which she – well before completing *The Second Sex* – identified woman's being-for-men. As we will see, she proceeds in a similar manner in the finished work. To be more exact, I argue that Beauvoir there presents a phenomenological study of mythical experiences, which has much in common with how Maurice Merleau-Ponty holds that such experiences should be approached.

Merleau-Ponty discusses what he terms "myth", "mythical experience" and "mythical consciousness" in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), a work that Beauvoir reviewed and to which she refers in *The Second Sex*.[201] The former describes mythical consciousness as unreflexive, unable to "accomplish a critique of what it thinks it experiences".[202] Today, this consciousness is primarily represented by "primitive" people. As these peoples still "live within

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[199] This does not mean that man *constantly* experiences woman as an object rather than a subject. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate that man, according to Beauvoir, sometimes *defines* woman as the Other even though she *appears* as a potential peer. Still, it is clear that man's tendency to posit woman as the Other always conditions his experience: that it shapes what meaning sexual difference takes on in patriarchal society.

[200] Beauvoir, *La force des choses*, 203, translation mine. [*J'ai dit comment ce livre fut conçu: presque fortuitement; voulant parler de moi, je m'avisai qu'il me fallait décrire la condition féminine; je considérai d'abord les mythes que les hommes en ont forgés à travers les cosmologies, les religions, les superstitions, les idéologies, les littératures. Je tentai de mettre de l'ordre dans le tableau, à première vue incohérent, qui s'offrit à moi: en tout cas l'homme se posait comme le Sujet et considérait la femme comme un objet, comme l'Autre.*]

[201] Beauvoir, "A Review of the Phenomenology of Perception"; Beauvoir, *TSS*, 44, 71 n7.

[202] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 303.

the myth", their experience is interesting to a phenomenologist.[203] But to study this experience, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that the phenomenologists must take it seriously, as something actually experienced, not just made up – which entails accepting that "he who lives something knows at the same time what he lives".[204] This is not to say that the phenomenologists must accept the mythical experience of the world as objectively true. Merleau-Ponty writes that "understanding the myth does not mean believing in it".[205] His point is simply that the mythical experience cannot teach one anything if one, instead of entering into it, remains outside it, seeking to correct it by reference to one's own understanding of the world. To make sense of and learn something from the primitive, mythical consciousness, Merleau-Ponty thus states that "we", as phenomenologists, "have no other means than of awakening in ourselves, in our current perception, the relation between the subject and his world that reflective analysis makes disappear."[206]

I argue that Beauvoir, in a similar manner, seeks to awaken in herself – so to be able to describe – men's mythical experience of woman. To accomplish this, she analyzes literary myths and other forms of literature, all of which reflects the experience of men because they were created by men alone.

Now, if phenomenology is understood as an exercise in introspection, in which the phenomenologist observes and describes his or her own experience of a particular phenomenon, this reliance on literary resources may be seen as a departure from the proper phenomenological method. But one should note that Husserl himself, in his discussion on the "eidetic reduction" and "eidetic variation" (the latter of which has also been termed "free", "imaginative" and "free imaginative" variation), claims that the phenomenologists can benefit greatly from the study of history and literature.[207] Admittedly, Husserl does not

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[203] Ibid., 298.

[204] Ibid., 306.

[205] Ibid.

[206] Ibid., 304.

[207] Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. Frederick Kersten (The Hague: Nijhoff, [1913] 1982), 160. Somewhat simplified, the "eidetic reduction" entails a shift in focus, from the particular to the general, or from the thing to its class: for example, from the individual table in front of one to table as a specific category of objects. The aim is to identify the essential qualities – that is, the *eidos* – of a phenomenon or an experience: that which makes a table a table and not a chair. To accomplish this, the phenomenologist might employ the method of "eidetic variation", which involves using the imagination to vary one's mental representation of an object, until it becomes possible to determine what qualities it must possess to still be that same object (for example, one might come to realize that a table is still recognizable as a table

hold that literature can serve as a substitute for first-person experience. Rather, his point seems to be that one should study history and literature to "fertilize one's phantasy", so that one will be able to carry out more varied variations in one's imagination.[208] Philosopher Bonnie Mann nevertheless argues that Beauvoir's use of literature can be understood as a radical form of imaginative variation. "For her, imaginative variation involves the perspective of a plurality of others, which she constantly moves into and retreats from. Beauvoir's infamous practice of citation, in which long paragraphs, sometimes pages, are borrowed from other authors, can be understood in this light."[209]

The fact that Beauvoir makes use of literary resources to study lived experiences is particularly evident in the second volume of *The Second Sex,* the part traditionally read as a phenomenological investigation. The aim of this volume, Beauvoir writes, is to "describe the world from the woman's point of view such as it is offered to her".[210] It therefore includes many first-person descriptions of feminine experiences. But as Mann points out, these are rarely Beauvoir's own. Instead, she borrows her descriptions from novels and other texts. Hence, philosopher Johanna Oksala states that if Beauvoir "appropriates the phenomenological method, she appropriates mainly the methodological tools of imaginative variation and eidetic reduction: she moves through a variety of feminine experiences in order to distil from them an essentially feminine way of relating to the world."[211]

My argument is that Beauvoir proceeds in a similar manner in volume one. To demonstrate this, allow me to cite a longer passage, where Beauvoir seeks to show that man, because he defines her as the Other, often equates woman with (passive) nature:

> Demeter makes corn multiply, but the origin of corn and its truth are in Zeus; woman's fertility is considered merely a passive virtue. She is earth and man seed […]. Creation has often been imagined as a marriage of fire and water;

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even if one imagines it as having a different color, but not if one imagines it without legs). Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, [1950] 1999), 70–71; Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 78, 154–155.

[208] Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*, 160.

[209] Mann, "The Difference of Feminist Philosophy", 56.

[210] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 38.

[211] Oksala, "The Method of Critical Phenomenology", 7. Note that Oksala in using the phrase "essentially feminine" refers not an unchanging feminine essence assumed to pre-determine how women relate to the world, but the essence (i.e., *eidos*) of their experience under the prevailing circumstances.

> hot humidity gives birth to living beings; the Sun is the spouse of the Sea; Sun and Fire are male divinities; and the Sea is one of the most universally widespread maternal symbols […] An Indian prophet advised his disciples not to dig up the earth because "it is sin to hurt or cut, to tear our common mother in agricultural works […]." In central India the Baidya also thought that it was a sin to "rip the breast of their earth mother with the plow." Inversely, Aeschylus says of Oedipus that he "dared to sow the sacred furrow where he was formed." Sophocles spoke of "paternal furrows" and of the "laborer, master of a remote field that he visited only once during the sowing." The beloved in an Egyptian song declares: "I am the earth!" In Islamic texts, woman is called "field … grapevine." In one of his hymns, Saint Francis of Assisi speaks of "our sister, the earth, our mother, who preserves and cares for us, who produces the most varied fruits with many-colored flowers and with grass."[212]

Just as Beauvoir in volume two, with the words of Oksala, "moves through a variety of feminine experiences", derived from literature, "in order to distil from them an essentially feminine way of relating to the world", it can be argued that she here moves through a variety of masculine experiences, drawn from literary myths and other texts, to distil an essentially masculine-mythical way of relating to woman. Of course, Beauvoir does not believe in these myths; but as Merleau-Ponty advises, she does take the experience they reflect seriously. This helps her identify woman's being-for-men.[213] Again, this is not a feminine experience, but a (mythical) experience of the feminine. Yet, it could be argued that Beauvoir's greatest insights is this: that the survival of patriarchal oppression cannot be understood without taking into account *the lived experience of the oppressor*, as well as the oppressed – especially as the former, according to her, conditions the latter.[214]

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[212] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 198.

[213] This interpretation aligns with that of Ashley King Scheu, who writes that Beauvoir in the first volume of *The Second Sex* "is using her imaginative literary powers to enter into a world of significations that is not her own." This is necessary as we, according to Scheu's reading of Beauvoir, "live our bodies not only with our personal subjective experience but also with the interpersonal layering of meanings that we take from and give to others." Schue continues: "Ironically, then, in order to tell the truth about a feminine *corps vécu* [i.e., a feminine body as a "lived body"], Beauvoir must first explain women's experience of their bodies under patriarchy, and thus […] she must enter into the sexist imaginary that colors their experience." Scheu, "Walking in a Man's World", 89–90.

[214] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 189.

Let us return to the long passage cited above. It resembles a montage: a set of decontextualized quotes and images derived from a wide variety of times and places, assembled into a mosaic that supports Beauvoir's claim. It is representative of the method she employs throughout "Myths", which consists of thousands of examples, often borrowed form literary myths, intended to prove the same argument. In this regard, Beauvoir can be said to use the method of comparative mythology.

According to anthropologists C. Scott Littleton, comparative mythology can be defined as the "systematic comparison of myths and mythic themes drawn from a wide variety of cultures" in order to "abstract common underlying themes".[215] Today, the method of comparative mythology has few followers. But in Beauvoir's own time, the situation was quite different. As political scientist Romi Mukherjee points out, it was "*de rigueur*" for mythologists active in the interwar years to include "lengthy comparative sections" in their studies of myth.[216] The same method had been used by Frazer, who is known for often introducing an abundance of examples taken from very different contexts.[217] It had gone out of fashion by the early twentieth century, but was re-popularized in the 1930s, largely due to Dumézil.[218] This is noteworthy, as Beauvoir in her memoirs states she, around 1941, "became very interested in Dumézil's work on myths and mythologies" (*m'intéressai beaucoup aux ouvrages de Dumézil sur les mythes et les mythologies*).[219] However, because Beauvoir approaches myth from a feminist perspective, she is able to detect "underlying themes" overlooked or willfully ignored by all other comparative mythologists before her. As stated, the one thing that all literary myths, according to her, have in common, is that they represent woman as the Other of man.

How, then, is one to explain this pancultural pattern? Jung's theory of myth offers a potential answer. It is therefore worth examining how Beauvoir's writing on myth relates to the Jungian mythological tradition. According to

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[215] C. Scott Littleton, *The New Comparative Mythology: An Anthropological Assessment of the Theories of Georges Dumézil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 32. Cf. Altman, Beauvoir in Time, 399.

[216] Mukherjee, "Love, Cannibalism, and the Sacred", 135.

[217] Marc Manganaro, *Myth, Rhetoric, and the Voice of Authority: A Critique of Frazer, Eliot, Frye & Campbell* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 20–23.

[218] Littleton, *The New Comparative Mythology*, 1–2; Tok and Schrempp, *The Truth of Myth*, 54–55.

[219] Simone de Beauvoir, *La force de l'âge* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 521, translation mine.

Elisabeth Fallaize, Beauvoir "found that Jung's notion of archetypes – 'the truly amazing phenomenon that certain motifs from myths and legends repeat themselves the world over in identical forms' (Jung, [*On the Psychology of the Unconscious*]) – fitted her purpose."[220] Beauvoir does use the term "archetype", which figures four times in *The Second Sex*.[221] Most importantly, having observed that there exist many "incompatible myths" about woman, Beauvoir states that "every woman enters into many of these archetypes, each of which claims to incarnate its Truth alone".[222] However, the question we must ask is whether the theory of myth and archetypes at play in *The Second Sex* is really a Jungian one. In contrast to Fallaize, I maintain that Beauvoir's writings challenge, rather than draw inspiration from, the Jungian discourse.

According to one Jung-inspired mythologist, the study of literary myths demonstrates that man's "attitude toward woman as it is expressed in his entire recorded history was embedded in his brain before there was writing, and even before men built fires".[223] This quote is from Philip Wylie's *Generation of Viper* (1942), a work we know that Beauvoir read because she makes several (often appreciative) references to it in *The Second Sex*.[224] The assumption on which Wylie's argument rests is that the presence of pancultural patterns in literary myths can only be explained by reference to what Jung calls the "collective unconscious" – that is, the "inborn" part of the consciousness, which Jung describes as "identical in all men" and therefore as "a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us." Whereas the "contents" of the "personal conscious" is portrayed by Jung as a product of "personal experiences", that of collective unconsciousness is described as inherited.[225] It is to denote this, the inherited contents of the collective unconscious, that Jung speaks of archetypes. Archetypes are, in turn, characterized as "universal images that have existed since the remotest times."[226] Jung argues that the reality of these "eternal images" can be deduced from the study of literary myths, in which one finds universally reoccurring patterns that can only be explained if one considers all literary myths as sprung out of the same collective unconscious, populated by the same archetypes. But

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[220] Fallaize, "Simone De Beauvoir and the Demystification of Woman", 88.

[221] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 251 n6, 316, 328, 727.

[222] Ibid., 316.

[223] Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers* (New York: Rinehart, inc., 1942), 37.

[224] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 191 n5, 227, 237, 720.

[225] Jung, "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious", 4.

[226] Ibid., 5. Cf. Steven F. Walker, *Jung and the Jungians on Myth: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 4.

it is important not to confuse the archetype, which is a psychological phenomenon, with its discursive-material expression. "The archetype is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived", Jung writes.[227] In other words, the collective unconscious "contains all the images that have ever given rise to myths", but the figures one finds in myths are still mere reflections of these supposedly primordial, mental images called archetypes.[228] In full, the passage from Jung's *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology* that Fallaize quotes reads:

> There are present in every individual, besides his personal memories, the great "primordial" images, as Jacob Burckhardt once aptly called them, the inherited possibilities of human imagination as it was from time immemorial. The fact of this inheritance explains the truly amazing phenomenon that certain motifs from myths and legends repeat themselves the whole world over in identical forms.[229]

Thus, if the theory of myth and archetypes on which *The Second Sex* relies was a Jungian one, it would mean that the pancultural pattern uncovered by Beauvoir's study of literary myths is to be understood as reflecting eternal and inherited images, embedded in man's psyche since "time immemorial" – which, in turn, presupposes the existence of a collective unconscious: a psychobiological constant, the existence of which also explains man's attitude towards women. Fact is, however, that Beauvoir explicitly discards Jung's theory of "the collective unconscious" (quotation marks in original) thought to "provide man with ready-made imagery and universal symbolism", which she associates with "determinism" and pits against the existentialist notion of freedom.[230]

But if the pancultural pattern identified by Beauvoir does not, as a Jungian mythologist might argue, derive from a collective unconscious, how is one to make sense of its seemingly universal presence in literary myths, as well as modern literature and other cultural products? Beauvoir writes that psychoanalysts believe that recurring, cultural patterns can only be explained if one rejects the idea that human beings are free, in favor of the notion of their

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[227] Jung, "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious", 5.
[228] Ibid., 7.
[229] C. G. Jung, "On the Psychology of the Unconscious" [1943], in *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung Volume 7. Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, ed. Herbert Read, Michael Fordham and Gerhard Adler, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 65.
[230] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 80–81.

behavior as partly pre-determined by something like a collective unconscious, common to all people. "But the idea of freedom is not incompatible with the existence of certain constants", she objects.[231] For although all human beings are free on an ontological level (which means that there is no unchanging, human nature), they still share a "situation", which is similar in at least some respects. "Existence is one", Beauvoir writes, "across and through the separation of existents, manifesting itself in analogous organisms".[232] For example, because one's situation includes one's body, all human situations are similar in the sense they encompass certain universal, physiological features. Since the "meaning" ascribed to these universal, physiological features is conditioned by historically and culturally contingent variables, this fact alone cannot explain the existence of pancultural and transhistorical cultural patterns. But many people also share a similar *societal* situation. "At any given period, technology and the economic and social structure of a group reveal an identical world for all its members […]; analogous individuals, placed in analogous conditions, will grasp analogous meanings (*significations*) in the given", Beauvoir states.[233]

Hence, if in literary myth after myth, novel after novel, woman is associated with, for example, passive nature – or, more generally portrayed as the Other – this is not because this image derives from a collective unconscious, but because most literary myths and novels have been produced by people who have shared a similar situation. Most importantly, we must recall that all literary myths and all novels studied in the first volume of *The Second Sex,* according to Beauvoir, were invented by men and therefore reflect only men's experience. And as men, since the dawn of civilization, have always and everywhere oppressed women, they have remained free to define woman according to their own interests, ignoring how woman appears to herself, as well as how they themselves appear to her. Of course, these interests have varied over time, which Beauvoir points out as one reason why woman has been defined in so many different ways.[234] Yet some interests have nonetheless remained more or less unchanged. Most concretely, man has always felt the need to justify his supremacy over woman.[235] And here, the image (or "myth") of woman as nature has served an important function. "Assimilating her with

[231] Ibid., 81.
[232] Ibid.
[233] Beauvoir, *TSS*,81/DS-1, 89, translation modified.
[234] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 196–197.
[235] Ibid., 31.

Nature is simply a prejudice", Beauvoir writes, but adds: "Few myths have been more advantageous to the ruling master caste than this one: it justifies all its privileges and even authorizes taking advantage of them.[236]

In other words, there is no need to postulate a collective unconscious to explain why women are so often equated with nature: it is enough to look at what interests this image or myth serves. This brings us, finally, to the question of how literary myths function as political tools.

Literary myth as a political tool

As we have seen, Beauvoir argues that the existence of patriarchal oppression has influenced the production of literary myths. But she also asserts that the existence of literary myths has helped justify and thereby sustain patriarchal oppression. For example, Beauvoir claims that men who have sought to rationalize their supremacy have "found ammunition" in the stories about Pandora and Eve, both of which blame women for the suffering of humanity.[237] Having noted that man views woman "as the absolute Other", Beauvoir also states: "All the creation myths express this conviction that is precious to the male", whereafter she gives the biblical story about the Garden and the Fall as an example.[238]

Importantly, the argument Beauvoir develops suggest that such literary myths are not a thing of the past, but continue to influence life even in modern societies. When she discusses the upbringing of young girls, she notes:

> Her historical and literary culture, the songs and legends she is raised on, are an exaltation of the man. […] Eve was not created for herself but as Adam's companion and drawn from his side […] The goddesses of mythology (*déesses de la mythologie*) are frivolous or capricious and they all tremble before Jupiter; while Prometheus magnificently steals the fire from the sky, Pandora opens the box of catastrophes.[239]

In fact, this quote implies that literary myths have done more than justify patriarchal oppression; they have also helped produce the very subject (or non-subject) that suffers it. "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman",

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[236] Ibid., 317.

[237] Ibid., 31. See also ibid., 114.

[238] Ibid., 194.

[239] Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-2*, 350/41, translation modified.

Beauvoir famously states.[240] The above-quoted passage tells us that literary myths, because they condition the upbringing of young girls, shape what this becoming entails. Furthermore, it is not only young girls who come in contact with literary myths. As mentioned, Beauvoir highlights how woman in literary myths is often portrayed as a threat to man's transcendence: as that which enslaves him and drags him down into immanence. "She is the mermaid whose songs dashed the sailors against the rocks; she is Circe, who turned her lovers into animals, the water sprite that attracted the fisherman to the depths of the pools."[241] These stories are part of our cultural heritage. And the same images still circulate in other media. "In Hollywood films the Circe image survives as the bad woman."[242]

In all these respects, Beauvoir suggests that literary myths function as a political tool, through which men legitimate and maintain their supremacy. This part of her writings on myth serves as an important reminder that literary myths are neither neutral nor inconsequential narratives. Whereas Keum claims that literary myths "occupy a comparatively marginal place in contemporary culture", Beauvoir's argument implies that such stories still constitute an important, social factor.[243] Likewise, my analysis demonstrates what Lübecker overlooks, because he only studies male mythologists. As we recall, Lübecker claims that French mid-century intellectuals saw both myth and recognition as mechanisms for constituting community. But if literary myths, as Beauvoir argues, help maintain the notion of woman as the absolute Other, they constitute a direct *obstacle* to recognition in the Hegelian sense. This tells us that there exists a clear tension between the two mechanisms for constituting community often invoked in mid-century France.

The remaining question is whether literary myths may still become a useful political tool in the hands of women?

The myth-affirmative feminist tradition

In her recently published *A Feminist Mythology* (2021), philosopher Chiara Bottici states that "we become women […] by re-telling the myths we have inherited, as well as those we have ourselves created."[244] Instead of trying to

[240] Beauvoir *TSS*, 330.
[241] Ibid., 218.
[242] Ibid., 244.
[243] Keum, *Plato and the Mythic Tradition in Political Thought*, 8.
[244] Chiara Bottici, *A Feminist Mythology*, trans. Sveva Scaramuzzi and Claudia Corriero (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 7.

"bring myth to an end", feminists must therefore make use of myth.[245] Though this proposal may appear controversial to some, Bottici is not the first to argue that feminists ought to approach myth as a resource. Since the early 1970s, several influential feminists have discussed myth in positive terms. Of course, it is far from certain that all who embrace what they refer to as "myth" do so for the same reason, or even that they use this word to mean the same thing. But as long as one remembers that its representatives may only be united by a shared rhetoric, I argue there is good reason to speak of a relatively well-established myth-affirmative feminist tradition.

In "The Thieves of Language", Alicia Ostriker states that some feminists have taken up a "revisionist" approach to (literary) myths, which in her words mean that a mythological figure or a tale is "appropriated for altered ends, the old vessel filled with new wine, initially satisfying the thirst of the individual poet but ultimately making cultural change possible."[246] The revisionist feminist myth-makers that Ostriker herself discusses are all poets, among which we recognize names such as Adrienne Rich, Sylvia Plath (1932–1963), Margaret Atwood, Susan Griffin (1943–) and Anne Sexton (1948–1973). However, to Ostriker's extensive list, which in total encompasses around forty individuals, one could also add a number of scholars. For example, Hélène Cixous is often said to engage in revisionist myth-making in her celebrated essay "The Laugh of Medusa" (1975).[247] A similar approach can be discerned in the works of Christian feminists like Judith Plaskow (1947–). In her "The Coming of Lilith" (1972), the latter explains that her consciousness-raising group "recognized the difficulties of 'inventing' a myth", yet wanted "to tell a story that seemed to grow naturally out of our present history", which is why they decided to re-write the story about Lilith, who the Bible describes as Adam's first wife.[248] By contrast, literary theorist AnnLouise Keating argues that feminists like Audre Lorde, Paul Gunn Allen and Gloria E. Anzaldua – who she characterizes as "lesbians of color" – did not attempt to *re-write* Greek or Biblical myths but to *replace* them, by incorporating into their work non-Western variants, wherein the feminine was already conceptualized

[245] Ibid., 1.

[246] Alicia Ostriker, "The Thieves of Language", 72.

[247] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa", *Signs* 1, no. 4 ([1975] 1976). Cf. this thesis, 217–218.

[248] Judith Plaskow, "The Coming of Lilith: Toward a Feminist Theology" [1972], in *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, ed. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1979), 205.

differently.[249] Other feminist theorists, like Mary Daly, have turned instead toward a supposedly forgotten past, seeking to retrieve a "more ancient, more translucent myth", which the "patriarchal Greek myth-makers (re-makers)", are described as having distorted.[250] A final group of feminists theorists, to which Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti belong, portray themselves as trying to create new "political" myths, centered around figures like the "cyborg" and the "nomadic subject", instead of gods and goddesses.[251]

From this tradition, Beauvoir has been written out. As stated, previous research has portrayed her as a "mythoclast", who turns to myth only to debunk or destroy it. In the above-mentioned article by Ostriker, Beauvoir's name appears but ones. Ostriker begins by stating:

> At first thought, mythology seems an inhospitable terrain woman writer. There we find the conquering gods and heroes, deities of pure thought and spirituality so superior to Mother Nature: there we find the sexually wicked Venus, Circe, Pandora, Helen, Eve, and the virtuously passive Iphigenia, Alcestis, Mary, Cinderella. It is thanks to myth we believe that woman must be either "angel" or "monster".[252]

In a footnote, Ostriker adds: "The case against myth is exhaustively stated by Simone de Beauvoir".[253] Quite often, Beauvoir's alleged rebuttal of myth has been framed as one of the main merits of *The Second Sex*.[254] But there are also commentators who have criticized Beauvoir's approach to myth for being too dismissive, obscuring the progressive potential of myth made visible by later

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[249] AnnLouise Keating, "Myth Smashers, Myth Makers", 74–75. See also AnnLouise Keating, "Making 'Our Shattered Faces Whole': The Black Goddess and Audre Lorde's Revision of Patriarchal Myth", *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 13, no. 1 (1992).

[250] Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, [1978] 1990), 40, 47. Note, however, that this is not the only way in which Daly speaks of myth. See this thesis, part three.

[251] Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 149; Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 29.

[252] Ostriker, "The Thieves of Language", 71.

[253] Ibid., 71 n13.

[254] The back cover of the latest Swedish edition of *The Second Sex* is indicative. Its first sentence reads: "Beauvoir's sober, thought-provoking and amusing rebuttal of the myths of male society was published in 1949." Simone de Beauvoir, *Det adra könet*, trans. Adam Inczèdy-Gombos, Åsa Moberg and Eva Gothlin (Stockholm: Norstedt, [1949] 2002), back cover, translation mine. [*Simone de Beauvoirs sakliga, tankeväckande och roliga uppgörelse med manssamhällets myter utkom 1949.*] See also this thesis, 69.

feminist theorists.[255] In this respect, the development of feminist theory has sometimes been depicted as one from *logos* to *mythos*: from an excessive reliance on reason to the realization of the value of myth.

This reading of Beauvoir, as a sworn enemy of myth, stems in part from an inability to distinguish between the different concepts of myth at work in *The Second Sex.* For while Beauvoir does argue that the myth of woman should be eliminated, she adopts a more ambivalent attitude toward literary myths. In one sense, Beauvoir's argument points toward the same conclusion as that of Bottici. While Bottici states that women become women by "re-telling" inherited or newly created myths, Beauvoir demonstrates that literary myths condition the upbringing of young girls. Obviously, these two theorists differ in the sense that Beauvoir focuses on the damaging effects of literary myths created by men, while Bottici highlights the productive potential of myths created (or re-written) by women themselves. However, as Beauvoir accentuates the relation between myth and subjectivity, her argument could still be read as having something in common with Bottici's. If inherited literary myths, as Beauvoir argues, influence the becoming of women in a regressive sense, does it not follow that new or revised myths could serve a progressive function? Although this conclusion is never made explicit, I hold that Beauvoir can be read as lending it support.

As we have seen, Beauvoir declares that women have not created a "virile myth of their own"; that they "have neither religion nor poetry that belongs to them alone" and therefore "dream through men's dreams."[256] In the introduction to *The Second Sex*, she depicts this absence as one of the factors that sets the situation of women apart from that of other oppressed groups, who have been able to establish themselves as collective subjects. Unlike proletarians and black people, women do not say "we" about themselves, Beauvoir writes. "It is that they lack the concrete means to organize themselves into a unit that could posit itself in opposition. They have no past, no history, no religion of their own", she continues.[257] In other words, Beauvoir suggests that women lack the means to organize themselves because they have not yet developed shared cultural expressions that could help generate a politically productive, common identity. Here, it seems as if she identifies one of the main

[255] Cornell, *Beyond Accommodation*, 190–196; Anderson, "Myth and Feminist Philosophy", 107–109.
[256] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 196.
[257] Ibid., 28.

problems, to which many later, myth-affirmative feminists will offer myth as a solution.

The fact that women have not created any identity-forming, cultural expressions of their own is in part the result of man-made literary myths, as these have helped maintain the oppressive situation that has kept women from partaking in the conceptualization of the world. But because the situation in question is due to an absence, it cannot be solved by abolishing all myths. Because women of today suffer from a lack, it is not enough to dismantle the prevailing, patriarchal mythology. Instead, such negative practices need to be paired with positive ones. When she discusses literature written by women, Beauvoir explains:

> When they pull away the veils of illusion and lies, they think they have done enough: nonetheless, this negative daring still leaves us with an enigma; for truth itself is ambiguity, depth, mystery: after its presence is acknowledged, it must be thought, re-created. It is all well and good not to be duped: but this is where it all begins; the woman exhausts her courage in dissipating mirages, and she stops in fear at the threshold of reality.[258]

One should note that Beauvoir does not state that the re-creation of truth must encompass women-produced literary myths. Yet she never rejects this notion either. In a talk on existential theater, most likely delivered in 1947, Beauvoir even presents revisionist myth-making as a valid, political tactic. To be more precise, she defends Sartre's decision to base *The Flies* on the Electra myth. This play was produced while France was still being occupied by Germany. It was, Beauvoir explains, "intended to bring a message of hope to oppressed people who were reduced to silence and for whom action was only clandestine and very difficult."[259] This message could not, however, be communicated directly, or it would have been censored. "For this reason Sartre chose to take shelter behind a historical myth […] And to all appearances, he tells the story of Orestes who returns to Argos […]. But from this drama, Sartre makes not only a classic story, but […] truly the drama of freedom."[260] This quote illustrates that Beauvoir presents literary myths – or "historical" myths as she here calls them – as stories that can be revised, so that they acquire a different

[258] Ibid., 841.

[259] Simone de Beauvoir, "Existentialist Theatre", in *Simone de Beauvoir: "The Useless Mouths" and Other Literary Writings*, ed. Margaret A. Simons, Marybeth Timmermann and Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir, trans. Marybeth Timmermann (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 138.

[260] Ibid., 138–139.

meaning and can serve new, social or political functions. Indeed, as literary theorist Dennis A. Gilbert points out in an article titled "Forging New Myths" (1997), Beauvoir can be said to make visible "*the need* to update or modernize the myths, classical or otherwise, that surround each one."[261]

To summarize, my analysis suggests that the discontinuity between Beauvoir and the later, myth-affirmative feminist tradition is not as great as previous research claims. Indeed, as Beauvoir, before any other feminist theorist, links literary myth to patriarchal oppression and the issue of collective identity, while she also argues that it is possible to alter their meaning so that they acquire new functions, she might just as well be understood as having provided the fundament upon which this tradition rests.

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If it is true that Beauvoir's writings implicitly lend support to the assumption that literary myths might serve a progressive political function, one might ask why she does not make this position explicit. As we have seen, Sartre maintains that literary myths can help black people construct a collective subject. Why does Beauvoir not draw the same conclusion in relation to women? Here one can only speculate. But one way of answering this question is to acknowledge the presence in Beauvoir's writings of an evolutionary anthropological discourse on myth, which links literary myths to a primitive past. As we have seen, this discourse can also be discerned in Sartre's *Black Orpheus.* Yet it does not prevent Sartre from embracing myth, precisely because he, in this text, argues that black Africans are "still in the great period of mythical fecundity" (where the word "still" suggests that this period is a primitive one), which means that literary myths for them constitute an appropriate political tool. In contrast, by "women" Beauvoir often means white, Western women, who – according to the logic of the evolutionary anthropological discourse – should not concern themselves with myths, just as white workers should not, according to Sartre.[262]

[261] Dennis A. Gilbert, "Forging New Myths: Beauvoir's Recorded Comments on Existentialist Theater", *Simone de Beauvoir Studies* 14 (1997): 119, italics added.

[262] For a critique of Beauvoir's tendency to use the term "woman" to mean white, middle-class women, see Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), 58–81; Kathryn T. Gines, "Comparative and Competing Frameworks of Oppression in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*", *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 35, no. 1/2 (2014): 251, 256; Belle Kathryn Sophia, *Beauvoir and Belle: A Black Feminist Critique of the Second Sex* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024), 165, 263.

The presence of this evolutionary anthropological discourse in *The Second Sex* is the subject of chapter 6. But before that, we must to take a closer look at the myth of woman.

5. The myth of woman

At the center of *The Second Sex* stands a specific myth, which Simone de Beauvoir speaks of as the myth of woman. In this chapter, I discuss what kind of object (the concept) "the myth of woman" creates. This will help clarify how Beauvoir conceptualizes the nature and function of myth, as well as how she employs myth-talk to articulate a feminist argument and analysis. I also examine how Beauvoir relates to the myth of woman, arguing against the claim – advanced by Drucilla Cornell and Pamela Sue Andersson – that she rejects this myth because she postulates a universal, genderless subject, hidden behind the myth in question.

In stating that "the myth of woman" creates – rather than denotes – its corresponding object, I draw upon the work of philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. In their *What is Philosophy?* (1991), Deleuze and Guattari argue that "philosophical concepts" add something to the world, in the sense that such concepts – unlike everyday concepts like "chair" or "table" – make it possible to see or think something previously invisible or unthinkable.[263] With the words of philosopher Elisabeth Grosz, philosophical concepts add "to the world […] an excess that makes it more than it presently is, that imbues it with the possibility of being otherwise, the possibility of dispersal and transformation."[264] My claim is that "the myth of woman" can be understood as such a philosophical concept. In adopting this perspective, I have been inspired by gender study scholar Linell Secomb and philosopher Laura Hengehold, both of whom read Beauvoir through a Deleuzian lens, focusing on her invention of new philosophical concepts, but who have not examined "the myth of woman" as a concept of this sort.[265]

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[263] Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 22. My reading of Deleuze and Guattari is in large part inspired by Daniel W. Smith, "On the Nature of Concepts", *Philosophy Today* 56, no. 4 (2012): 394–396.

[264] Elizabeth Grosz, "The Future of Feminist Theory: Dreams for New Knowledges," in *Becoming Undone* (New York: Duke University Press, 2011), 81. According to Grosz, this – i.e., to invent new concepts, that add something to the world – is the primary purpose of feminist theory. "Feminist theory, at its best, in its ideal form, is about the generation of new thought, new concepts, as much as if not more than it is about the critique of existing knowledges." Ibid., 77.

[265] Linnell Secomb, "Beauvoir's Minoritarian Philosophy", *Hypatia* 14, no. 4 (1999); Laura Hengehold, *Simone de Beauvoir's Philosophy of Individuation: The Problem of* The Second Sex (London:

To provide a context for Beauvoir's writings on the myth of woman, I begin by studying these in relation to a text on the same theme, published around the same time.

Defending the myth of woman

During the latter half of 1948, literary critic Michel Carrouges (1910–1988) published an essay defending what he spoke of as "the myth of woman" (*de mythe de la femme*).[266] Beauvoir mentions this essay three times in *The Second Sex*.[267] This does not mean that Beauvoir got the expressions in question from Carrouges. When the latter's essay saw the light of day, Beauvoir had already published her 1948 "extract", the second part of which (released in June) contains the phrase "the myth of woman" (*le myth de la femme*).[268] Thus, although he makes no reference to her or her text, it may be that Carrouges wrote his essay as a response to that of Beauvoir. Or, the fact that these two texts on woman and myth were published within a few months could be an (unlikely) coincidence. Either way, a closer look at Carrouges' text can enable a deeper insight into the intellectual climate in which Beauvoir's writings on the myth of woman was produced.

The relationship between Carrouges and Beauvoir has not been addressed by previous research. This is probably partly because the former's name only appears in the footnotes of *The Second Sex*, which makes it easy to miss, unless one – as I have done – allows the word "myth" to guide one's gaze. But this oversight might also be due to the English translation, which renders it unnecessarily difficult to understand what point Beauvoir is trying to make

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Edinburgh University Press, 2017). Secomb states that "Beauvoir's significance as a philosopher frequently remains unrecognized because she is read as an insignificant follower of Sartre's existentialism who fails to create her own concepts and instead appropriates […] the work of others." By contrast, Secomb claims that "Beauvoir creates nascent concepts within a pastiche plane of thought constructed from her colleagues' and precursors' philosophies." Secomb, "Beauvoir's Minoritarian Philosophy", 97. Today, the notion of Beauvoir as an unoriginal disciple of Sartre has been largely dismissed. In addition, I argue that the dichotomy between creating one's own concepts and appropriating other's work is false, as every conceptual innovations presuppose something already said. But my interpretation still aligns with Secomb's in that I, like her, emphasize creative moments in Beauvoir's writing.

[266] Michel Carrouges, "Les pouvoirs de la femme selon Nerval et Breton", *Cahiers du Sud* 292 (1948): 422.

[267] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 39 n8, 251 n1 n4.

[268] Simone de Beauvoir, "La femme et les mythes II", *Les Temps modernes*, no. 33 (1948): 2199–2200.

when she invokes Carrouges' writings on myth. The original passage from *Le Deuxième Sexe* reads:

> L'article de Michel Carrouges paru sur ce thème dans le numéro 292 des *Cahiers du Sud* est significatif. Il écrit avec indignation: "L'on voudrait qu'il n'y ait point de mythe de la femme mais seulement une cohorte de cuisinières, de matrones, de filles de joie, de bas-bleus ayant fonction de plaisir ou fonction d'utilité!"[269]

The first thing I must point out is that Beauvoir actually misquotes Carrouges, who ends the cited sentence with a question mark, not an exclamation mark (in addition, she leaves out an comma after *de mythe de la femme*).[270] Beauvoir thereby makes it seem like Carrouges is proclaiming something, when in reality he is asking an (admittedly rhetorical) question. But again, the real difficulties start with the English translation of this footnote, which reads:

> The article by Michel Carrouges on this theme in *Cahiers du Sud*, no. 292, is significant. He writes with indignation: "If only there were no feminine myth but only bands of cooks, matrons, prostitutes, and bluestockings with functions of pleasure or utility!"[271]

Here it sounds as if Carrouges himself wants to get rid of the myth of the woman. But if the sentence Beauvoir cites is examined in its original textual context, to which I will turn next, it is clear that Carrouges pits myth against unenchanted instrumentalism, but favors the former. In other words, the anti-mythical position he describes is not one with which he sides, but one he attributes to someone else (perhaps Beauvoir herself). This is why I suggest that the sentence in question should be translated as: "One would like there to be no myth of women, only a cohort of cooks, matrons, courtesans and bluestockings, with a function of pleasure or utility?"[272]

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[269] Beauvoir, *DS-1*, 27 n1.

[270] Carrouges, "Les pouvoirs de la femme", 422.

[271] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 39 n8. Note also that Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany Chevallier translates *de mythe de la femme* into "feminine myth", whereas I in the following translates it into "myth of woman".

[272] Carrouges, "Les pouvoirs de la femme", 422, translation mine. [*L'on voudrait qu'il n'y ait point de mythe de la femme, mais seulement une cohorte de cuisinières, de matrones, de filles de joie, de bas-bleus, ayant fonction de plaisir ou fonction d'utilité?*] Note that *l'on voudrait*, literally translated, means "we would like", but that that *l'o* is also used to denote the general public (in German and Swedish, the equivalent expression would be *man*).

The essay from which this passage is taken is called "Les pouvoirs de la femme selon Nerval et Breton." It appeared in *Les Cahiers du Sud*, a literary magazine that published many writers with ties to the surrealist movement, of which Carrouges was one. As the title suggests, the essay deals with "the powers of woman" through works of Gérard de Nerval (1808–1855) and André Breton; two authors who Beauvoir also discusses.[273] In its introduction, Carrouges writes:

> In these times when rationalism claims to evade all mystery […] how could there still be room for a fantastic mystery of woman? […] When the age of myth is considered over, who would dare to believe that Ariadne could really lead Theseus through the labyrinth, or that Beatrice could lead Dante into the heart of the mysteries? How can we fail to smile at the enthusiastic passion of Novalis for Sophie, of Hölderlin for Diotima?[274]

Carrouges here invokes the widespread mid-century French intellectual view of modern society as disenchanted and demythologized, discussed in the previous chapter. This development is also said to have affected how woman is perceived: to have challenged the "mystery of woman", reflected in literary myths and novels. Carrouges' point, however, is that the mythical faith in woman as a guide and savoir is still alive in the works of Nerval and Breton. The myth of the woman consequently appears as the last outpost of a pre-modern, enchanted world, the rest of which is lost. In support of the claim that this myth lives on, Carrouges cites several passages from Nerval's posthumously published *Aurélia* (1855) – also referenced by Beauvoir[275] – where the protagonist compares his lover both to Isis, Venus and the Virgin Mary. Commenting on these passages, Carrouges writes: "Underneath this strange syncretism that unites in a single vision all the women of the earth, mothers,

[273] Bréton is one the five authors who Beauvoir discusses in the second chapter of "Myhts". Beauvoir, *TSS*, 289–295. References to Nerval appears at ibid., 235, 289, 290, 839.

[274] Carrouges, "Les pouvoirs de la femme", 419, translation mine. [*En ces temps où le rationalisme prétend escamoter tout mystère* […] *comment y aurait-il place encore pour un fantastique mystère de la femme?* […] *Quand l'ère des mythes est, dit-on, surannée, qui oserait croire qu'Ariane pût vraiment conduire Thésée à travers le labyrinthe et Béatrice, diriger Dante au cœur des mystères? Comment ne pas sourire de l'enthousiaste passion de Novalis pour Sophie, de Hölderlin pour Diotima?*]

[275] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 235.

lovers and prestigious female figures of mythology and religion, it is easy to recognize the fabulous incarnation of the eternal feminine."[276]

Most likely, "the eternal feminine" here is a reference to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's (1749–1832) *das Ewig-Weibliche,* a phrase – also cited by Beauvoir[277] – that appears toward the end of *Faust II* (1832), where it denotes the divine, symbolized by a synthesis of qualities abstracted from a variety of real and mythological female figures.[278] In this play, *das Ewig-Weibliche* is said to draw one "upward" (*hinan*), at the same time as Faust, more concretely, is helped to enter the higher spheres of heaven by three biblical women who plead for his soul, while a forth woman serves as his guide.[279] But according to Carrouges, the idea that woman could ever function as a "mediator between man and earth, as between man and heaven" and lead him towards "salvation" seems preposterous to "modern" man, who rejects Nerval's and Breton's portraits of woman as "out-of-date" idealizations.[280] Today, most men therefore refuse to accept the eternal feminine: the "myth" of woman as their savior. Even so, this does not mean that modern man, according to Carrouges, has freed himself from myth completely. Here we reach the passage that Beauvoir quotes (in part), which reads in full:

> One would like there to be no myth of women, only a cohort of cooks, matrons, courtesans and bluestockings, with a function of pleasure or utility? Yet, if it is true that today the white myth of Mary lies locked away behind double bolts in a sealed vault, then what is this great praying mantis, whose multifaceted image is reflected in a thousand mirrors, if not the black myth of woman?[281]

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[276] Carrouges, "Les pouvoirs de la femme", 421, translation mine. [*Sous cet étrange syncrétisme qui unit en une seule vision toutes les femmes de la terre, les mères, les amantes et les prestigieuses figures féminines des mythologies et des religions, il est aisé de reconnaître une fabuleuse incarnation de l'éternel féminine.*]

[277] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 233.

[278] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: Der Tragödie zweiter Teil in fünf Akten* (Nordsee: Hamburger Leseheft Verlag, [1832] 1987), 117. Cf. J. M. van der Laan, "The Enigmatic Eternal-Feminine," in *Goethe's Faust and Cultural Memory* ed. Lorna Fitzsimmons (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2012), esp. 43.

[279] Goethe, *Faust*, 117.

[280] Carrouges, "Les pouvoirs de la femme", 421, translation mine. [*Suprême médiatrice entre l'homme et la terre, comme entre l'homme et le ciel, Aurélia tient dans ses mains tous pouvoirs de salut.* [...] *Aux yeux de l'homme moderne quelle idéalisation de la femme pourrait sembler un rêve plus vain, plus inefficace, plus inactuel?*]

[281] Ibid., 422, translation mine. [*L'on voudrait qu'il n'y ait point de mythe de la femme, mais seulement une cohorte de cuisinières, de matrones, de filles de joie, de bas-bleus, ayant fonction de plaisir ou fonction d'utilité? S'il est vrai cependant qu'aujourd'hui le mythe blanc de la Mariée gît enfermé à double tour dans un caveau scellé, quelle est donc cette grande mante religieuse dont mille miroirs répercutent l'image multiforme, sinon le mythe noir de la femme?*]

Carrouges refers here to the fact that surrealist and other French mid-century writers, as mentioned in the previous chapter, often likened women to praying mantises, an animal that they in turn portrayed as a symbol of the (devouring) feminine; a tendency also discussed by Beauvoir. His point is clear. Modern man has not actually rid himself of the myth of woman, but merely replaced the "white" myth of the virgin Mary (according to which woman is man's savior) with the "black" myth of the praying mantis (according to which she is his undoing). Carrouges asserts that this is problematic. Not because he himself, as the English translation of the passage cited by Beauvoir might seem to imply, would prefer that there was no myth of woman whatsoever, whether white or black. But because the white myth actually captures something that is true. "Far from being a legendary mirage, Nerval's words on the redemptive mediation of woman between man and nature go to the heart of reality", writes Carrouges. Woman, he continues,

> is not the useless repetition of man, but the enchanted link through which the living alliance of man and nature is accomplished. […] If she disappears, men are alone, strangers without passports in an icy world. She is the earth itself, brought to the summit of life, the earth made sensitive and joyful; and without her, for man, the earth is mute and dead.[282]

A couple of paragraphs further down, he states:

> Dogma or not, legend or simple tale, the great myth of Genesis does not lie when it shows man expelled from paradise, but taking woman with him: the only part of paradise that man takes with him to earth. […] She is truly, in Nerval's words, Isis, the sacred mother and wife, Venus and the Virgin. […] In these days, when the *powers* of woman are denied and rejected as they never were, Nerval's message is of outmost relevance, of greater urgency than ever before.[283]

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[282] Carrouges, "Les pouvoirs de la femme", 424, translation mine. […*la femme n'est pas la répétition inutile de l'homme, mais le lieu enchanté où s'accomplit la vivante alliance de l'homme et de la nature.* […] *Qu'elle disparaisse et les hommes sont seuls, étrangers sans passeport dans un monde glacial. Elle est la terre elle-même portée au sommet de la vie, la terre devenue sensible et joyeuse; et, sans elle, pour l'homme, la terre est muette et morte*.]

[283] Ibid., 425–426, italics in orignal, ttranslation mine. [*Dogme ou non, légende ou singulier vêtement d'une histoire à peine imaginable, le grand mythe de la Genèse ne ment pas lorsqu'il montre l'homme chassé du paradis, mais emmenant avec lui la femme: l'unique quartier du paradis que l'homme emporte sur la terre.* […] *Elle est vraiment, selon les mots de Nerval, Isis, la mère et l'épouse sacrée, Venus et la Vierge.* […] *Durant ces*

Importantly, when Carrouges here speaks of "the *power* of woman", his point is not that she is powerful in a political sense or on the personal plane, but that woman possesses the power to liberate man from the "icy world" represented by inanimate nature. Beauvoir thus quotes the former passage in support of her thesis that woman to man serves as "the perfect intermediary between nature that is foreign to man and the peer who is too identical to him."[284] In this respect, Beauvoir can be said to make use of Carrouges. But the analysis she develops also challenges the very premises upon which his argument rest.

To begin with, Beauvoir's writings on the myth of woman suggests that the "black" myth has not replaced the "white" favored by Nerval and Breton. Admittedly, she too speaks of a shift, stating that "the myth of the industrious honeybee or mother hen" (*au mythe de l'abeille diligente, de la mère poule*) is replaced by that of "the devouring insect, the praying mantis".[285] But a few lines further down, Beauvoir notes that the image of woman as evil has never completely supplanted the opposite image of her as good. Some men only see "the blessed woman they dream of", while other men seek "the cursed woman who belies their dreams."[286] In both cases, the underlying principle is the same. It is because man does not relate to woman as another subject, but defines her in relation to himself, that she so often comes to embody some form of extremity. The "white" and "black" myth are therefore but two aspects of the same myth.

Secondly, the argument advanced by Beauvoir challenges that of Carrouges' because she does not accept that a world freed from myth would be one in which women would be nothing but "cooks, matrons, courtesans and bluestockings, with a function of pleasure or utility". Commenting on this passage, she writes: "So, according to him [Carrouges], woman has no existence for herself; he only takes into account her function in the male world. Her finality is in man; in fact, it is possible to prefer her poetic 'function' to all others."[287] In other words, Carrouges' mistake is to assume that woman, in a world without myth, would still be defined solely in relation to man, as an object with a specific function. By contrast, Beauvoir's argument suggests that this very assumption testifies to how the myth of woman still has a hold on

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jours où pouvoirs *de la femme sont niés et rejetés comme ils ne furent jamais, le message de Nerval est d'une actualité capitale, d'une urgence plus grande.*]

[284] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 194.

[285] Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-1*, 245/310.

[286] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 246.

[287] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 39 n8.

Carrouges. "The exact question", Beauvoir writes, "is why she [woman] should be defined in relation to the man."[288] But this is the one question that Carrouges, because he adheres to the myth of woman, is unable to ask.

The myth's semantic network

If the myth of woman is understood as an extradiscursive *thing*, Beauvoir cannot be said to make use of this myth. In her memoirs, she notes that she first considered naming *The Second Sex* either *Ariane* or *Melusine,* but that she decided against these titles, because she "rejected the myths" (*refusais les mythes*).[289] There she also links the merit of *The Second Sex* to what might be termed its mythoclastic qualities. Having stated that she knows from the letters she still receives from grateful readers that this work has provided many women "some service", Beauvoir writes:

> They have found in my work an antidote to the images of themselves that appalled them, to the myths that crushed them (*des mythes qui les écrasaient*); they came to realize that their difficulties did not reflect a personal disgrace, but a general condition. This discovery prevented them from despising themselves and in some cases gave them the strength to fight.[290]

However, whereas the *object* termed the myth of woman (an object that I will refer to without quotation marks) constitutes an *object of critique* in the sense that Beauvoir treats it as extradiscursive thing that she herself rejects, the philosophical *concept* "the myth of woman" (which I will refer to in quotations marks) can be understood as a *means of critique* in the Kantian sense of the word, meaning that it functions as a discursive tool used to discuss the very conditions of possibility of patriarchal oppression.

Understood as a conceptual innovation, I argue that the "myth of woman" creates its corresponding object. This is not to say that the very practices, experiences, beliefs, emotions, images and discursive expressions that Beauvoir uses to discuss this concept did not exist beforehand. Rather, the point is that she – in a manner akin to a doctor identifying a never before

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[288] Ibid.

[289] Beauvoir, *La force des choses*, 185, translation mine.

[290] Ibid., 210, translation mine. [*Elles ont trouvé dans mes exposés un secours contre les images d'elles-mêmes qui les révoltaient, contre des mythes qui les écrasaient; elles ont réalisé que leurs difficultés ne reflétaient pas une disgrâce singulière, mais une condition générale; cette découverte leur a évité de se mépriser, certaines y ont puisé la force de lutter.*]

named illness by juxtaposing previously dissociated symptoms and disassociating previously juxtaposed ones[291] – establishes a link between phenomena formerly understood as unrelated, or at least not as related in that particular way. The following sections aims to demonstrate what these "symptoms" are and how Beauvoir relates them to each other. To accomplish this aim, I examine what other important concepts figure in passages centered around the "illness" that she speaks of as the myth of woman. By moving from one concept to another, indicating how they relate to or enter conflict with each other, I build something resembling a semantic network.

The Other / The Eternal Feminine

The first time that Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, uses "myth" to discuss the situation of women is in the introduction to volume one. She notes there that men who suffer from an "inferiority complex" in relation to other men are particularly inclined to think of women as naturally inferior, as this thought allows them to feel superior to half the world's population by virtue of just being men. Beauvoir goes on to state: "Those who are not threatened by their fellow men are far more likely to recognize woman as a counterpart; but even for them the myth of Woman, of the Other (*le mythe de la Femme, de l'Autre*), remains precious for many reasons".[292] This tells us that men who believe in or invoke the myth of woman posit woman as the Other, which Beauvoir also equates with postulating the existence of Woman with a capital W.

To posit woman as the Other, is to posit her as object rather than subject: as thing-like and therefore endowed with an immutable nature. "Appearing as the Other woman appears at the same time as a plenitude of being by opposition to the nothingness of existence that man experiences in itself; the Other, posited as object in the subject's eyes, is posited as in-itself, thus as being."[293] The myth of woman thus seems to encompass, as one of its central components, "the myth of the eternal feminine" (*le mythe de l'éternel féminin*), an expression Beauvoir employs to discuss Montherlant's tendency to present femininity as an unchanging essence.[294] Here "the eternal feminine" – which Beauvoir also speaks of as "the Eternal Feminine" – does not refer to Goethe's *das Ewig-Weibliche,* where the feminine is associated with the divine. The latter

[291] I have borrowed this allegory from Smith, "On the Nature of Concepts", 396.

[292] Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-1*, 34/27.

[293] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 195.

[294] Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-1*, 258–259/324, translation modified. Though the expression "the myth of the eternal feminine" is only used once, the shorter expressions "the eternal feminine" appear much more often. See for example Beauvoir, *TSS*, 13, 23, 24, 32, 256.

is but one aspect of the myth of the eternal feminine; a myth that one also reproduces if one, as Montherlant does, speaks of the feminine as something essentially monstrous.[295]

"Perhaps", writes Beauvoir, "the myth of woman will be phased out one day: the more women assert themselves as human beings, the more the marvelous quality of Other dies in them." Immediately after, she nevertheless adds: "But today it still exists in the hearts of all men."[296] This is a startling claim, as it implies that the lives of *all* men are, at least in part, governed by myth. Furthermore, it suggests that the myth of woman is something else than a literary myth. It is not a cultural artifact with a specific origin (like, for example, the myth of Sisyphus), but a more fundamental, truly universal phenomenon, the existence of which helps explain the pancultural pattern her study of literary myths uncovered. It is because the myth of woman "exists in the hearts of all men" that all men represent woman as the Other, in literary myths as well as other cultural products. In this respect, the myth of woman can be said to have something in common with what Keum calls deep myths.[297]

What complicates the matter is that Beauvoir speaks not only of "the myth" (in the singular), but also about "myths" (in the plural). For example, she mentions six "great collective myths" (*grands mythes collectifs*), which equate woman with "*flesh*" or "*nature*", portray her as a "*meditator* between this world and the beyond", as holding "the keys to *poetry*" and/or as "destined to *immanence*".[298] Other myths discussed are "the myth of devouring femininity" (*le mythe de la féminité dévorante*), the myths that equate woman with Altruism, Nature and Mystery, as well as "the oldest and most universal of myths" (*le plus antique, le plus universel des mythes*), according to which woman is devoted to magic.[299]

Yet, all myths about woman have one thing in common. All rest upon and reproduce the notion of woman as the Other – which, as stated, means that they both posit woman as object and ascribe to her a fixed, feminine essence. "In concrete reality", Beauvoir writes, "women manifest themselves in many

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[295] Ibid., 259.

[296] Ibid., 196.

[297] Keum, *Plato and the Mythic Tradition in Political Thought*, 9.

[298] Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-1*, 306/389, italics in original. At another location, where Beauvoir, although in more general terms, discusses man's tendency to equate woman with flesh, nature and/or immanence, she writes that one finds "a synthesis of almost all these myths (*tous ces mythes*)" in *A Night in Kurdistan* (1930), by novelist Jean-Richard Bloch. Ibid., 219/274.

[299] Ibid., 54/53, 317–318/397–399, 217/272.

different ways; but each of the myths built around woman purports to sum her up in her entirety (*chacun des mythes édifiés à propos de la femme prétend la résumer tout entière*)", which is to say that these myths revolve around the Eternal Feminine.[300] At one point, Beauvoir thus speaks of the myth of woman as a "multi-faceted Myth" (*du Mythe aux faces innombrables*), which has many different "aspects" and can be incarnated in multiple forms or "feminine figures" (be it the "mother", the "virgin", the "wife" or the "servant").[301] At another location, she states that "feminine Mystery as recognized by mythic thinking (*pensée mythique*)" constitutes a part of "the mythology of the absolute Other", (*la mythologie de l'Autre absolu*) which again suggests that one is dealing here with a set of myths (i.e., a "mythology"), all of which depict woman as the Other of man.[302]

Stylized images / Collective representations

Eva Gothlin refers to the myths about woman as (false) "images" of woman.[303] This seems reasonable, as Beauvoir herself uses the term "image" to discuss what she elsewhere calls myth. But it is important to note that mythical images appear to be images of a particular kind. At one location, Beauvoir writes:

> Undoubtedly, there are stylized images of man as he is in his relations with woman: father, seducer, husband, the jealous one, the good son, the bad son; but men are the ones who have established them and they have not attained the dignity of myth (*la dignité du mythe*); they are barely more than clichés, while woman is exclusively defined in her relation to man.[304]

This passage suggests that myths are "stylized" images – in French, the verb *styliser* can mean to represent something in a "simplified form, reducing it to its essential features"[305] – that, moreover, possess a certain dignity. Exactly what the "dignity of myth" refers to is difficult to say. But the point seems to be that myths are stylized images with a different status or standing than "clichés", in the sense that there are no alternatives that compete with or

[300] Ibid., 315/396. After having listed the six aforementioned "collective myths" about woman, Beauvoir thus states: "In any case, she appears as the *privileged Other* through whom the subject accomplishes himself". Ibid., 306/389, italics in original.

[301] Ibid., 248/315.

[302] Ibid., 320/403.

[303] Gothlin, *Sex and Existence*, 174.

[304] Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-1*, 196/242.

[305] *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*. 9th edition. "Styliser", translation mine. [… *une forme simplifiée, en le ramenant à ses traits essentiels.*]

challenge the former (while man is sometimes defined in relation to woman and sometimes not, woman is always defined in relation to man). This, in turn, implies that mythical images exert a greater influence on how people think and act than do clichés.[306]

Beauvoir does not always use "myth" for images, however. When she speaks of "the myth of woman" or "the myth of the eternal feminine", the word "myth" instead seems to refer to something resembling an idea or doctrine that gives rise to and is reinforced by a multitude of (contradictory) images, but which is not an image in itself.[307] This is why I refer to the "myths" (in plural) about woman as made up of both images and ideas.[308]

To further clarify what kind of ideas and images we are dealing with here, it is worth stressing that Beauvoir appears to equate myths with "collective representations". In volume two of *The Second Sex*, she writes: "Woman is imbued with collective representations (*représentations collectives*) of the glorious aura of masculine sexual excitement that make feminine arousal a shameful abdication: her intimate experience confirms this asymmetry."[309] Commenting on this statement, Toril Moi asserts that the "collective representations" here alluded to are actually "the myths of femininity" analyzed in volume one.[310] In support of this interpretation, one should also note that there is a paragraph on myths, unexamined by Moi, that both appears in *The Second Sex* and in the 1948 "extract", where the term "collective representations" (used in 1948) has been replaced by "myths" (used in 1949), while the overall meaning of the passage otherwise remains the same.[311]

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[306] With a term borrowed from Yaron Ezrahi, myths could thus be understood as "performative" imaginaries. Yaron Ezrahi, *Imagined Democracies: Necessary Political Fictions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 3.

[307] In her discussion on Stendhal, about whom Beauvoir writes that he "rejects the false poetry of myth" (*la fausse poésie des mythes*), she does not speak about "the myth of the eternal feminine", but states instead that "the idea of an 'eternal feminine' seems pedantic and ridiculous to him" (*l'idée d'un "éternel féminine" lui semble pédante et ridicule.*). In the introduction to volume one, Beauvoir also speaks of "the theory of the eternal feminine" (*la théorie de l'éternel féminin*). Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-1*, 306/389, 296/376, 23/11.

[308] Cf. Gather, "Women, the Second Sex", 237–238. "Beauvoirian myths include ideas on the way women are or the way they are supposed to be."

[309] Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-2*, 546/166, translation modified.

[310] Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 191.

[311] In the 1948 text, the passage in question reads: *Il faut noter d'abord que tout mythe est un luxe* […] *A travers les religions, les traditions, les lieux communs du langage, des contes, des chansons, du cinéma, las représentations collectives s'insinuent dans les existences les plus durement asservies aux réalités matérielles.* Beauvoir, "La femme et les mythes II", 2200. In 1949, the same passage reads: *Le mythe de la femme est un luxe.* […] *Par l'intermédiaire des religions, des traditions, du langage, des contes, des chansons, du*

The expression "collective representation" was coined by Émile Durkheim to discuss the nature of religion and myth.[312] It was later appropriated by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl. But where Durkheim had maintained that all societies had collective representations of their own, Lévy-Bruhl is at pains to distinguish the collective representations of "civilized people" from those of "undeveloped peoples" and "inferior races".[313] In accordance with evolutionary anthropologists like Edward Burnett Tylor and James George Frazer, he argues that primitives, who are said to "have minds more like those of children than of adults", remain unable to separate representation from reality, which means that they cannot establish a reflexive attitude towards the products of their own consciousnesses.[314] "Their mental activity", writes Lévy-Bruhl, "is too little differentiated for it to be possible to consider ideas or images of objects by themselves apart from the emotions and passions which evoke these ideas or are evoked by them."[315] Thus, primitives do not relate to representations *as* representations, but as actual objects, eliciting affective responses:

> The collective representations of primitives […] differ very profoundly from our ideas or concepts, nor are they their equivalent either. On the one hand […] they have not their logical character. On the other hand, not being genuine representations, in the strict sense of the term, they express, or rather imply, not only that the primitive actually has an image of the object in his mind, and thinks it real, but also that he has some hope or fear connected with it, that some definite influence emanates from it, or is exercised upon it.[316]

This is reminiscent of how Beauvoir argues that men relate to the collective representations that make up the myth of woman. As we will see below, her analysis suggests that these are not genuine representations either, but images and ideas evoked by hope and fear, which men seem unable to distinguish from real objects.

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cinéma, les mythes pénètrent jusque dans les existences les plus durement asservies aux réalités matérielles. Beauvoir, *DS-1*, 404.

[312] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 15. For Durkheim's concept of collective representation, see W. S. F. Pickering, "Representations as Understood by Durkheim: An Introductory Sketch", in *Durkheim and Representations*, ed. W. S. F. Pickering (New York: Routledge, 2000), esp. 11-12, 15-16.

[313] Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 13-14.

[314] Ibid., 35.

[315] Ibid., 36.

[316] Ibid., 37–38.

Mirage / Truth / Reality

Gothlin writes that Beauvoir "is critical of the common designation of woman as having a defined essence. She refers to these images of Woman as myths, since according to her the human being has no definite nature or essence and thinking in terms of Woman [with a capital W] is therefore untrue".[317] In other words, Gothlin argues that Beauvoir uses the word "myth" to signal that the images and ideas about woman she examines are false.

I agree with Gothlin that Beauvoir describes the myth of woman as false. At one point, she thus states: "The myth of Woman (*le mythe de la Femme*) substitutes for an authentic relationship with an autonomous existent the immobile contemplation of a mirage."[318] Against the essentialist mirage of myth, Beauvoir sets "truth", "reality" and "flesh-and-blood women". For example, she argues that Stendhal – in whose work woman "barely takes on a mythical value (*valeur mythique*)" – "lives among flesh-and-blood women", which also means that he "rejects the false poetry of myths (*la fausse poésie des mythes*) as much as the mystifications of seriousness."[319] "Human reality", Beauvoir continues, "is sufficient for him. Woman, according to him, is simply a human being: dreams could not invent anything more intoxicating."[320] At another location, she states: "This tender friend of women – and precisely because he loves them in their truth – does not believe in the feminine mystery; there is no essence that defines woman once and for all; the idea of an 'eternal feminine' seems pedantic and ridiculous to him."[321] More generally, Beauvoir concludes that "to reject myths (*refuser les mythes*) […] is only to ask that behavior, feelings and passion be grounded in truth."[322]

In effect, Beauvoir presents us with a sharp distinction between myth and truth/reality. But are the images and ideas called "myths" mythical only in the sense that they are false? Several factors suggest that the answer is no. We have already seen that Beauvoir describes the myths about woman as collective representation, which at the very least suggests that they are collective rather than individual creations (although it is individuals who reproduce them). In addition, the (false) images and ideas referred to as myths are both pancultural and transhistorical. Indeed, this is one of the things that make them interesting

[317] Gothlin, *Sex and Existence*, 174–175.
[318] Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-1*, 322/405.
[319] Ibid., 307/390, 296/376, 306/389.
[320] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 306.
[321] Ibid., 296.
[322] Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-1* 323/406.

to study: they are not ephemeral, but persist even when society at large appears to change. In what follows, we will see that it is possible to identify several additional features that distinguish myths from other false images and ideas.

Fear / Hope / Invention

Men are scared, caught in the clutches of fear. At least that is the impression one gets from *The Second Sex*, where the words "fear" and "fears", appear well over 150 times, often to describe the emotional state of men. According to Beauvoir, the myth of woman is in large part a product of this feeling.[323] As we have already seen, she states: "Any myth implies a Subject who projects its hopes and fears towards a (*vers un*) transcendent heaven."[324] The passage in which this sentence appears is also found in the "extract" from 1948. But there, the first sentence reads: "A myth is the projection of the Subject, of its hopes and fears, through the Other" – which suggests that the passage it not (only) about literary myths, but (also) about the myth of woman.[325]

The question, then, is what is man so afraid of? And what are his hopes? The fact that Beauvoir, both in 1948 and 1949, equates myths with "projections" – a concept that I discuss in greater detail below – tells us that the fears and hopes woman evokes in men cannot be deduced from anything objectively frightening or desirable about woman, but must be understood with reference to man himself.[326]

Above all, man's fears stem from an inability to deal with the fundamental "ambiguity" of human existence: the fact that the human being, as an embodied consciousness, is both subject and object, freedom and facticity, transcendence and immanence, consciousness and flesh. For example, Beauvoir argues that man often remains unwilling to accept his own carnality, because he fears his mortality. "Horrified by death's gratuitousness, man is horrified at having been engendered; he would like to rescind his animal attachments; because of his birth, murderous Nature has a grip on him."[327] It

[323] Cf. Lori Jo Marso, *Politics with Beauvoir: Freedom in the Encounter* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 28. Marso writes that myths, according to Beauvoir, "are not the products of rational thought; instead they spring from men's 'hearts,' inspired by disgust, horror, embarrassment, fear, loathing, and repulsion ([…] all Beauvoir's terms)."

[324] Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-1* 196/241, translation modified.

[325] Beauvoir, "La femme et les mythes IU", 2199, translation mine. [*Un mythe, c'est la projection du Sujet, de ses espoirs et ses craintes, à travers l'Autre*.]

[326] Beauvoir explains that "what I fear or desire is always an avatar of my own existence", yet adds that "nothing comes to me except through what is not my self." Beauvoir, *TSS*, 215.

[327] Ibid., 199.

is this fear that gives rise to the myth that equates woman with flesh. "In all civilizations and still today", Beauvoir states, "she inspires horror in man: the horror of his own carnal contingence that he projects on her."[328]

Man's refusal to deal with the ambiguity of his existential situation in an "authentic" manner is also reflected in what he hopes for. For although he often enjoys thinking of himself as pure freedom, unbound by the facticity of flesh, he is still frightened by the feeling of "nothingness" that any transcendence is doomed to experience, simply because a for-itself is not "being" but "existence": a constant becoming rather than a finished thing. Thus, he hopes for an in-itself (i.e., a thing with an essence) which he can possess or merge with, to overcome the void he senses inside of himself, without having to give up his claims to absolute freedom. This inauthentic hope also generates myths. What man wants from woman, Beauvoir writes "is to be, outside of him, all that he cannot grasp in himself, because the interiority of the existent is only nothingness", which explains why he must "project" himself onto her. "Uniting himself, then, with this other whom he makes his own, he hopes to reach himself. […] And for this she is so necessary to man's joy and his triumph that if she did not exist, men would have had to invent her. […] They did invent her."[329]

The just-quoted passage implies that the myth of woman is centered around an invention. This claim aligns with Beauvoir's assertion that the object of myth is a mirage. But it also establishes a link between the myth of the woman and what Jean Paul-Sartre, in his book *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1946), calls "the *idea*" of the Jew. For it is Sartre – who writes that if "the Jew did not exist, the anti-Semite would invent him" – who Beauvoir refers to in the footnote that follows the paragraph in question.[330] It is thus interesting to note that Sartre claims that the idea of the Jew, like the myth of woman according to Beauvoir, is rooted in a fear of the conditions of human existence. The anti-Semite, Sartre explains, "is a man who is afraid. Not of the Jews, to be sure, but of himself, of his own consciousness […] Anti-Semitism, in short, is fear of the human condition."[331]

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[328] Ibid., 201. This becomes particularly clear in the case of Montherlant, about whom Beauvoir writes that he "never wanted to assume the human condition; what he calls his pride is, from the beginning, a panicked flight from the risks contained in a freedom engaged in the world through flesh." Ibid., 257.

[329] Ibid., 239.

[330] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans. George J. Becker (New York: Schocken Books, [1946]1995), 8, 11, italics in original; Beauvoir, *TSS*, 191 n9.

[331] Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 38.

Transcendent Heaven / Platonic Heaven / Transcendent Idea

Let us return once again to a line already quoted twice. Beauvoir writes: "Any myth implies a Subject who projects its hopes and fears towards a (*vers un*) transcendent heaven."[332] In the context of the post-Kantian metaphysics from which Beauvoir draws, the word "transcendent" refers to entities that, like the "thing-in-itself", lies beyond the reach of human experience and knowledge: a thing whose existence one may postulate, but never confirm. But what does it mean, more precisely, to say that all myths are the product of a subject who projects its hopes and fears towards a transcendent heaven?

Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, responsible for the most recent English translation of *The Second Sex*, translates *vers un* as "of a", which implies that man is afraid *of* and hopes for *a* transcendent heaven. In contrast, I argue that the point Beauvoir is trying to make is that man's (earthly) fears and hopes give rise to myths *centered around* supposedly transcendent entities. This is why I have translated *vers un* not as "of a" but "towards a". In support of this reading, we should note that Beauvoir also writes that the myth of woman,

> projects into a Platonic heaven a reality grasped through experience or conceptualized from experience; for fact, value, significance, notion, empirical law, it substitutes a transcendent Idea, timeless, immutable, necessary. This idea escapes all contention because it is situated beyond the given; it is endowed with an absolute truth.[333]

In the same passage, the "transcendent Idea" is equated with "the Eternal Feminine", which suggests that men who believe in or invoke the myth of woman view femininity as an eternal essence, akin to or perhaps identical with the Ideas or Forms postulated by Plato.[334] As this Idea is "transcendent" in the sense that it is "situated beyond the given", its existence is impossible both to prove and disprove.[335]

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[332] Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-1*, 196/241, translation modified.

[333] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 315.

[334] Ibid. See also ibid., 259, 849.

[335] Borrowing the terminology of Chiara Bottici, the myth of woman can therefore be understood as a myth that attributes "the origins of the social significations of […] society to an *extra-social* source", which means that it covers up "the instituted dimension of society" and thereby withdraw "it from the possibility of interrogation." Bottici, *A Philosophy of Political Myth*, 260, italics in original.

Most likely, Beauvoir does not mean that all men are Platonists in a literal sense: that they actually hypothesize a transcendent world of Form, of which our world, the world of substances, constitutes a mere shadow. Instead, her point appears to be that Plato's theory of Forms can be understood as an emblematic expression of mythic thinking. In this respect, Beauvoir's writings on myth challenge one of the meta-narratives of Western mythology and philosophy.[336] With the words Keum: "For many, that original Platonic accomplishment presented itself specifically as the liberation of philosophy from myth."[337] By contrast, Beauvoir's argument suggests that Plato's philosophy is but myth-making by other means.

One reason why Plato objects to what he calls the *mythoi* of poets is that they only deal with actions and events. By contrast, he argues that the *logos* of philosophers is truthful because it revolves around something immutable: the timeless Forms.[338] In her essay "Literature and Metaphysics" ("Littérature et métaphysique", 1946), Beauvoir refers to this argument, stating that "as long as Plato asserts the supreme reality of the Forms, which this world only mirrors in a deceptive, debased way, he has no use for poets; he banishes them from his republic."[339] In the same text, she explains that she herself, at the age of eighteen, felt that philosophical treaties carried her "beyond the terrestrial appearances into the serenity of a timeless heaven", while literature offered "a concrete, temporal world, peopled with singular characters and events." This leads her to ask: "Where was truth to be found? On earth or in eternity?"[340] Beauvoir's writings on myth can be read as an attempt to answer this question. There, she argues that, when it comes to sexual difference, the essentialist strand of Western philosophy established by Plato offers no *episteme*, only *doxa* – precisely because it fails to recognize that truth is indeed to be found on earth, not in heaven. This explains why Beauvoir, as we will see below, also argues that those who succumb to the myth of woman "leave terrestrial truth behind and spin off into an empty sky."[341]

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[336] Cf. Bergoffen, "The Eternal Feminine", 125. "Calling the eternal feminine a myth and identifying it with the mythical thinking that characterizes Platonic thought, Beauvoir upends the story philosophy tells about itself."

[337] Keum, *Plato and the Mythic Tradition in Political Thought*, 21.

[338] Plato, *Republic. Books 1-5*, trans. C. J. Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 392d p. 249, 479e–480a p. 567.

[339] Beauvoir, "Literature and Metaphysics", 274.

[340] Ibid., 269

[341] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 317.

Experience / Lived experience / Mythic thinking

According to Beauvoir, "the source" of myth is in experience. She begins by stating that the "division" of humanity into men and women is an "immutable aspect of the human condition". It is also true, Beauvoir writes, "that woman is other than man", in the sense that women differ from men and vice versa. This "alterity", she continues, is something "concretely felt", seemingly impossible to deny.[342] The fact that woman is other than man thus constitutes one of the myth's conditions of possibility. Yet, it cannot, on its own, explain the rise of myth. "Yes, most myths have their roots in man's spontaneous attitude to his own existence and the world that invests it: but the move to surpass experience toward the transcendent Idea was deliberately effected by patriarchal society for the end of self-justification." This passage is important, as it suggests that man, when he postulates the existence of a fixed feminine essence (the Eternal Feminine) in some sense moves *beyond* experience. A few lines further down, Beauvoir continues: "The myth is one of those traps of false objectivity into which the spirit of seriousness falls headlong. It is once again a matter of replacing lived experience and the free judgments of experience it requires by a static idol."[343]

The concept of (lived) experience at work here seems to be that of philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), a student of Edmund Husserl. As phenomenological philosopher Dermot Moran points out, Heidegger distinguished himself in relation to Husserl, in that he stressed "the practical, embodied nature" of lived experience, arguing that "lived experiences are practical bodily encounters with things in our environment".[344] In accordance with this concept of lived experience, Beauvoir's point appears to be that men who invoke or believe in the myth of woman surpass or replace (lived) experience in the sense that they disregard their practical experience of what she speaks of as "real flesh-and-blood women", in favor of the Eternal Feminine, of which these men have no such experience. A similar understanding of the relation between myth and lived experience can be discerned when Beauvoir writes:

> The myth must not be confused with the grasp of a meaning (*signification)*; meaning is immanent in the object; it is revealed to consciousness in a living experience, whereas the myth (*le mythe*) is a transcendent Idea that escapes any

[342] Ibid., 315.

[343] Ibid., 322

[344] Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology,* 232.

> act of consciousness. When Michel Leiris in *L'âge d'homme* describes his vision of female organs, he provides meaning and does not develop a myth (*n'elabore aucun mythe*). Wonder at the feminine body and disgust for menstrual blood are apprehensions of a concrete reality. There is nothing mythical (*mythique*) in the experience of discovering the voluptuous qualities of feminine flesh, and one does not succumb to myth by trying to express it through comparisons with flowers or pebbles (*et on ne passe pas au mythe quand on tente de les exprimer par des comparaisons avec des fleurs ou des cailloux*). But to say that Woman is Flesh, to say that Flesh is Night and Death, or that she is the splendor of the Cosmos (*du Cosmos*), is to leave terrestrial truth behind and spin off into an empty sky.[345]

Commenting on this passage, Meryl Altman writes that she does not find the distinction Beauvoir makes "easy to understand", but that her point "seems to be that […] not every use of the female body as metaphor […] is a problem for Beauvoir."[346] In contrast, I argue that the important distinction here is not one between problematic and unproblematic metaphors, but between metaphors and similes (or rather, between there different logics). From the Heideggerian phenomenological perspective that Beauvoir adopts, an individual could very well be understood to experience "feminine flesh" as being flower- or pebble-like. The "feminine body" is a "concrete reality", which exists in one's environment and therefore can become the object of lived experiences. If one seeks to express this experience through a simile (stating that "feminine flesh" is *like* "flowers" or "pebbles"), one does not succumb to myth. But if one instead states that woman *is* something (like "Flesh", "Night", "Death" or "the splendor of Cosmos") – that is, if one abandons the similes in favor of metaphors, which do not uphold but collapse the distinction between the entities in question – one begins to "develop" (or reproduce) a myth. At this point, one moves beyond experience in the sense that one postulates a feminine essence, which is not a "concrete reality" and therefore cannot be experienced in a practical, bodily manner.

So, although Beauvoir argues that the myth of woman has it source in experience, she also establishes a clear distinction between myth and lived experience. At one location, she asserts: "To posit Woman (*la Femme*) is to posit the absolute Other, without reciprocity, refusing, against experience, that she could be a subject, a peer."[347] This – the fact that Beauvoir here maintains that

[345] Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-1*, 317/398, translation modified.

[346] Altman, *Beauvoir in Time*, 296.

[347] Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-1*, 315/396, translation modified.

men who posit woman as the Other do so "against experience" – suggests that man sometimes does experience woman as another subject (an alter ego), but consciously denies the truth of this experience, in favor of the lie on which the myth of woman rests. This reading challenges that of Sara Heinämaa, who writes that man, according to Beauvoir, "fails to experience woman as a conscious being in a reciprocity of perceptions, as a subject for whom he himself is given as the perceived object."[348] Admittedly, Heinämaa then goes on to state that it is "tempting" to reject Beauvoir's claim and argue instead that "men do experience women as alter egos."[349] In other words, Heinämaa suggests that Beauvoir may be mistaken in asserting that man never experiences woman as another subject. In contrast, my reading points toward the conclusion that Beauvoir holds that man, although he always represents and treats woman as the Other, does not always experience her as such.[350]

This is not to say, however, that the myth of woman has no bearing on man's experience. For it still determines what his experience means. Having noted that the myth of woman is a "static myth" (*un mythe statique*), which frames femininity as transcendent Idea, "situated beyond the given" and "endowed with an absolute truth", Beauvoir writes:

> Thus, to the dispersed, contingent and multiple existence of *women*, mythic thinking (*la pensée mythique*) opposes the Eternal Feminine, unique and fixed; if the definition given is contradicted by the behavior of real flesh-and-blood women, it is women who are wrong: it is said not that Femininity is an entity but that women are not feminine. Experiential denials cannot do anything against myth (*contre le mythe*).[351]

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[348] Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference*, 125.

[349] Ibid., 127.

[350] Beauvoir suggests that both modern men and so-called primitives invoke myths if it serves their interests, without always believing them wholeheartedly. Citing Lévi-Strauss, she explains that the difference between "mythical (*mythiques*) beliefs and individuals' lived convictions" is evidenced by the fact that "young Winnebago Indians" visit their lovers even when they are menstruating and are therefore surrounded by mythical taboos. Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-1*, 251-252 n8/249 n1.

[351] Ibid., 315/395, italics in original. This passage is discussed by Tegan Zimmerman in "Simone de Beauvoir's Dialogue with Plato in 'The Second Sex'", *Simone de Beauvoir Studies* 27 (2010): 75. However, Zimmerman only quotes the latter part of the first sentence ("mythical thought opposes the Eternal Feminine"). This leads her to draw the incorrect conclusion that Beauvoir *contrasts* mythic thinking with the Eternal Feminine – when, in reality, Beauvoir's point is that the Eternal Feminine is something that mythic thinking postulates ("to the dispersed, contingent and multiple existence of *women*, mythic thinking opposes the Eternal Feminine"). In

Beauvoir here argues that man, under the influence of what she terms "mythic thinking", maintains that the Eternal Feminine constitute an objective reality, even when his experience of real flesh-and-blood women suggests that (some) women are subjects like himself and therefore embody no fixed essence. Instead of concluding that the Eternal Feminine does not exist, man thus deduces that women who do not embody this postulated essence – women who he experiences as subjects rather than objects – are not feminine. This, in turn, means that he does not experience them as "real" women. Already in the introduction to *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir explains that "not every female human being is necessarily a woman; she must take part in this mysterious and endangered reality known as femininity."[352] This is to say that the myth of woman does not condition the experience of men in the sense that all men experience all women as objects rather than subjects, but in the sense that it determines which human females men experience as feminine and thus as "real" women.[353]

That man, according to Beauvoir, refuses to give up his belief in the Eternal Feminine, even when his experiences indicates that it does not exist, suggests that mythic thinking is an unreflexive mode of thought, characterized by an inability or unwillingness to differentiate between the objective and the subjective, reality and representation, *noumenon* and *phenomenon*. Something similar is implied when Beauvoir writes:

> The asymmetry of the two categories, male and female, can be seen in the unilateral constitution of sexual myths (*des mythes sexuels*). Woman is sometimes designated as "sex"; it is she who is the flesh, its delights and its dangers. That for woman it is man who is sexed and carnal is a truth that has never been proclaimed because there is no one to proclaim it. The representation of the world as the world itself is the work of men; *they describe it from a point of view that is their own and that they confound with the absolute truth*.[354]

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the French original, the relevant passage reads: *Ainsi, à l'existence dispersée, contingente et multiple* des *femmes, la pensée mythique oppose l'Éternel Féminin unique et figé…*

[352] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 23.

[353] Toward the end of "Myths", Beauvoir writes: "In the eyes of men – and of the legions of women who see through these eyes – it is not enough to have a woman's body or to take on the female function as lover and mother to be a 'real woman'; […] the 'real woman' is one who accepts herself as Other." Ibid., 323.

[354] Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-1*, 196/242, italics added.

Another way to frame this is to say that mythic thinking is unable or unwilling to recognize "projections" for what they actually are.

Projection

We have already seen that Beauvoir often associates myth and projection. But what concept of projection is at play in her work? As stated in the introduction to this part-study, Victoria Barker argues that Beauvoir's concept of projection is similar to that of Ludwig Feuerbach, who claims that humans project everything they perceives as desirable onto God.[355] By contrast, Heinämaa maintains that the "core thesis" of Beauvoir's "theory of projection" is that "men cannot accept the finitude of their own existence and thus project it onto women."[356] "Beauvoir's claim", she continues, "is not just that men project their mortality onto women, but more generally that they project everything that they cannot accept as limiting their actions and volitions." In other words, Heinämaa argues that men, according to Beauvoir, project onto woman qualities that they themselves have, but are unwilling to accept. Heinämaa states that this theory was inspired by philosophers Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900).[357] But if her reading is correct, it would mean that Beauvoir's concept of projection also has much in common with that of Sigmund Freud, who – in works such as *Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia* (1911) – uses "projection" to denote a psychological defense mechanism, in which qualities that one possess but cannot accept as one's own are instead attributed to someone else.[358]

At times, Beauvoir does seem to suggest that the myth of woman is the product of a projection of the latter kind. For example, we have seen that she argues that man, to escape the ambiguity of human existence, projects his carnality onto woman, which allows him to indulge in the fantasy of himself as pure consciousnesses. But according to my reading, the myth of woman can also be understood as a projection in a broader sense. In support of this claim, one should note that Beauvoir emphasizes that man projects both positive and

[355] Barker, "De Beauvoir and the Myth of the Given", 174–176.

[356] Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference*, 127–128.

[357] Ibid., 128.

[358] Sigmund Freud, "Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia" [1911], in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume Xii (1911-1913): The Case of Schreber, Papers on Technique and Other Works*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1958), 66.

negative qualities onto woman.[359] Thus, she states that man projects on to woman both "what he desires and fears, what he loves and what he hates."[360] This reveals that Beauvoir does not simply use "projection" to denote a defense mechanism. Rather, she seems to be referring to a more general practice, whereby the subject, without realizing it, places something of itself outside itself, leading it to mistake what is in fact subjective for something objective.[361] In this respect, Beauvoir's concept of projection resembles one that Freud makes use of in works like *Totem and Taboo* – where the term "projection" is associated with the mythological worldview of primitive peoples.[362]

Discussing the role of "projection" within the mythological "*Weltanschauung* of primitive peoples", Freud explains that the belief in "demons" is a result of projection in the sense of a "defensive procedure", where the living project intolerably hostile feelings harbored towards their dead onto the dead themselves.[363] A bit further down, Freud nevertheless states:

> In the case we have been dealing with, projection served the purpose of dealing with an emotional conflict […]. But projection was not created for the purpose of defence; it also occurs where there is no conflict. […] Under conditions whose nature has not yet been sufficiently established, internal perceptions of emotional and thought processes can be projected outwards […]; they are thus employed for building up the external world, though they should by rights remain part of the *internal* world.[364]

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[359] In a later text, Heinämaa seems to acknowledge this fact, as she states that "some projections", according to Beauvoir, "uplift women, while other degrade them." Sara Heinämaa and James Jardine, "Objectification, Inferiorization, and Projection in Phenomenological Research on Dehumanization", in *The Routledge Handbook of Dehumanization*, ed. Maria Kronfeldner (New York: Routledge, 2021), 320.

[360] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 251. As we have seen, Beauvoir also asserts: "A myth is the projection of the Subject, its hopes and fears, through the Other." Beauvoir, "La femme et les mythes II", 2199.

[361] This supposedly primitive tendency has often been perceived as the origin of mythological worldviews. With the words of Horkheimer and Adorno: "Enlightenment has always regarded anthropomorphism, the projection of subjective properties onto nature, as the basis of myth. […] According to enlightened thinking, the multiplicity of mythical figures can be reduced to a single common denominator, the subject." Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 4.

[362] As mentioned, *Totem and Taboo* is among the works of first wave mythologists that Beauvoir refers to in *The Second Sex*. Beauvoir, *TSS*, 86 n5.

[363] Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 61, 64–65.

[364] Ibid., 64, italics in original.

Put differently, Freud claims that projection in the sense of a defense mechanism is but one aspect of a more general psychological tendency, where something "internal" is "projected outwards" and then mistaken for an objective part of the "external" world. I argue that the concept of projection at play in Beauvoir's work is very similar. Indeed, since Freud describes the mythological worldview as a product of projection in this more general sense, it can be argued that Beauvoir appropriates both his concept of projection and his concept of myth – or rather, that she appropriates his concept of myth-as-a-projection – to discuss the mythical experience of modern men.[365] In this respect, Beauvoir's writings on myth can also be said to establish a parallel between modern men and primitive people; a parallel that I will examine more closely in the next chapter.

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By building a semantic network, I have shown which symptoms Beauvoir associates with the illness she terms "the myth of the woman", understood as a philosophical concept that creates its corresponding object. To summarize, we have seen that the myth of woman, according to Beauvoir, is a set of images and ideas that rests on and reproduces a notion of woman as the Other: an object marked by a fixed feminine essence. I have argued that Beauvoir depicts this notion as false, but that she describes this and those other "myths" about woman as mythical in other respects as well. First, the myth of woman is a collective representation that transcends time and space. Second, it has an affective basis, in that it is born out of men's fears and hopes. Third, it is centered on an allegedly eternal entity, situated in a sphere beyond the given. Fourth, even though its object (the Eternal Feminine) cannot become an object of lived experience, the myth of woman conditions the experience of all men. Fifth and finally, the myth of woman is the product of projection in the sense that men project themselves onto woman but mistake these subjective qualities for her objective nature.

[365] On Freuds concept of myths as projections, see also A. Hurry, K. K. Novick, and J. Novick, "Freud's Concept of Projection", *Journal of Child Psychotherapy* 4, no. 2 (1976): 75–76; Merkur, *Psychoanalytic Approaches to Myth,* 1–2.

Having discussed what kind of object (the concept) "the myths of women" creates, it is now time to examine how Beauvoir *relates* to this object. As we have seen, Andersson claims that Beauvoir wants to eliminate this myth because she postulates a universal genderless subject, concealed by myth. This reading harks back to one originally advanced by Cornell. Before presenting my own interpretation, I will therefore analyze Cornell's interpretation in more detail.

Cornell develops her reading of Beauvoir in *Beyond Accommodation* (1991). At the heart of this work is the question of whether feminists should concentrate on the difference or similarity between the masculine and the feminine. Cornell argues that many feminists refuse to talk about sexual difference, either because they assume that no significant differences exist, or because they believe that feminism is best served by focusing on similarities. Against this position, Cornell sets that of Luce Irigaray and other representatives of "French feminism", in dialogue with whom she presents her own approach.

Cornell quotes Irigaray, who argues that men and women who "deny difference" have succumbed to an "unbridled idealism", as difference does indeed exist. The real question, Irigaray continues, is how to discover the "positive characteristics" of difference.[366] This is not to say that feminists should embrace the differences currently said to characterize women in relation to men. According to Irigaray, "the feminine" is not synonymous with some specific attribute associated with women. Instead, it denotes something as of yet unconceptualized, which the patriarchal order has rendered invisible. But the point remains the same: feminists should affirm, rather than dismiss, the difference between the feminine and the masculine. "If the feminine is repudiated", Cornell writes, "[…] no matter how or why we justify doing so, we will be left in the masculine arena in which the old games of domination are played out. There will only be repetition, no re-evolution to the future."[367]

Cornell explains that "the feminine" does not constitute an essence or a "pregiven sexual nature", but a phenomenon that only exists in and through writing.[368] The question, then, is how to write the feminine? It is when we reach this point that Cornell's argument becomes really interesting. With reference to Irigaray, she explains that feminists who want to write the feminine will

366 Cornell, *Beyond Accommodation*, 142.

367 Ibid., 9.

368 Ibid., 3.

have to operate within an already established patriarchal discourse, as it is impossible to situate oneself outside an order that has lasted for thousands of years. To re-write and re-imagine the world requires metaphors and images, but images are always "rooted in the pre-given world."[369] Thus, feminists cannot simply discard all man-made images of the feminine but must take these on in order to change them from within. This also means that feminists should work with rather than reject what Cornell terms myth. "I am […] emphasizing the word 'myth' deliberately", she writes, "to emphasize the hold that myths of Woman and the feminine have over both individuals and cultures."[370] Two feminist philosophers who, according to Cornell, have realized this is Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva.[371]

Only towards the end of her book does Cornell turn to Beauvoir. Under the heading "The Critique of Myth", she addresses "one objection to the affirmation of the need to interpret, rather than reject, the myths of the feminine." Cornell finds this "objection" in *The Second Sex*, wherein Beauvoir is said to argue that "feminism must dethrone, rather than affirm, even if through reinterpretation, myths of the feminine."[372] It is clear that the context Cornell constructs for Beauvoir's writings on myth affects her interpretation. Because she reads Beauvoir as holding a view contrary to that of theorists such as Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous, who she describes as affirming myth because they affirm sexual difference, Cornell assumes Beauvoir's critique of the myth of woman can only be understood as signaling an obsession with similarity. "At the heart of de Beauvoir's analysis of myth is her desire to return Woman to humanity. […] The goal of feminist politics is to be like them", writes Cornell.[373]

> [Beauvoir's] objection to the reinterpretation of the myths of the feminine postulates a universal human subject with certain characteristics […]. In that sense the objection appeals to identity. […] There is perhaps no greater example of the writer who constantly calls us "to be" like them than de Beauvoir. […] Our femininity is our deficiency, an unfortunate imposition. I cannot describe in detail the way in which *The Second Sex* tragically reflects the repudiation of the feminine at the same time that it holds out the hope for emancipation. I only want to emphasize here that de Beauvoir's call to dethrone

[369] Ibid., 171.
[370] Ibid., 172.
[371] Ibid., 171–179.
[372] Ibid., 190.
[373] Ibid., 192.

> mythology is based on an underlying truth that, in spite of the imposition of femininity, we are still subjects *like them.*[374]

There are advantages and disadvantages to every reading. One disadvantage with the way in which Cornell actualizes Beauvoir (as a critic whose "objection" the reader is presented with at the end of her book) is that Beauvoir is construed as an opponent of a type reasoning that she never actively engaged with – indeed, one that she could not have engaged with, because it is rooted in a feminism that emerged only after she published *The Second Sex.*[375] According to this reading, Beauvoir seeks to abolish the myth of woman to make visible that women and men, the feminine and the masculine, are actually identical. This interpretation is reproduced by Anderson.

Cornell is correct in asserting that Beauvoir claims that there is a fundamental characteristic that all human subjects share: namely, that they are (embodied) autonomous freedoms, in the sense that they possess no fixed essence, but become what they make of themselves or – in the case of women in patriarchal society – what they are made into by others. Yet to claim that men and women have something in common is not to argue that they are or should aspire to be identical. On the contrary, Beauvoir writes: "Man is a sexed human being; woman is a complete individual, and equal to the male, only if she too is a sexed human being. Renouncing her femininity means renouncing part of her humanity."[376] Furthermore, though Beauvoir rejects the patriarchal concept of femininity as a static essence (the Eternal Feminine), she does not argue against all attempts to speak about the specificity of the feminine. Hence, we have seen that Beauvoir asserts that Michel Leiris does not succumb to myth, even though he speaks of the feminine, because he adheres to the logic of simile rather than metaphor. Finally, I have already shown that Beauvoir never claims that all literary myths must be eliminated or that revisionist myth-making cannot fulfill a progressive political function.

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[374] Ibid., 193, italics in original.

[375] Cf. Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 203. Moi argues that many feminists who criticize Beauvoir for not emphasizing difference "fail to grasp that Beauvoir's political project is radically different from their own."

[376] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 815–816. Later, Beauvoir also writes that "certain differences between man and woman will always exist; her eroticism, and thus her sexual world, possessing a singular form, cannot fail to engender in her a sensuality, a singular sensitivity: her relation to her body, to the male body, and to the child will never be the same as those man has with his body, with the female body". Ibid., 861–862.

But if Beauvoir does not, *pace* Cornell and Anderson, seek to eliminate the myth of woman in order to erase all differences between the feminine and the masculine, then how might one more accurately describe her position with regard to this myth? In accordance with her existentialist philosophy, Beauvoir denies that there exists such a thing as a static, feminine essence.[377] Yet what makes Beauvoir's argument interesting is that she also acknowledges the impossibility of convincing those who believe in the myth of woman of this alternative, existentialist ontology. For whereas claims about, for instance, women's and men's physical bodies can often, as she herself demonstrates, be either vindicated or refuted with reference to verifiable facts and experiences, Beauvoir argues that there are no facts or experiences capable of proving or disproving the existence of static essences. This is because the myth of woman – like all those phenomena Keum speaks of as deep myths – constitutes the very background against which specific facts and experiences are ascribed meaning and how this meaning is interpreted. The contradictory behavior of "real flesh-and-blood women" will therefore fail to convince most men that there is no such thing as a static, feminine essence. In the eyes of those who believe in the myth of woman, this behavior proves nothing except that some women are not feminine. This is why Beauvoir, as we have seen, concludes: "Experiential denials cannot do anything against myth."[378]

But if we agree with Beauvoir that the myth of woman "still exists in the hearts of all men", while we also follow her in assuming that there are no facts or experiences with reference to which such myths can be effectively challenged, then were does this leave us? If we cannot once and for all refute this myth, must we then accept it? I argue that Beauvoir offers a way out of this dead end by developing an ethically rather than ontologically rooted critique of the myth of woman. In the introduction to *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir explains that the perspective she adopts "is one of existentialist morality." She continues by stating: "Every time transcendence lapses into immanence, there is degradation of existence into 'in-itself,' of freedom into facticity; this fall is a moral fault if the subject consents to it; if this fall is inflicted on the subject, it takes the form of frustration and oppression; in both cases it is an absolute evil."[379] From this ethical standpoint, it is easy to argue that the myth of woman is highly problematic. In that it ascribes to all women a static feminine essence, believed to limit what roles women may play, this myth turns women into

[377] Ibid., 319.
[378] Ibid., 315.
[379] Ibid., 37.

objects instead of subjects, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of men. Hence, it contributes to the oppression of women, as well as to women's complicity in this oppression, both of which Beauvoir describes as absolute evils. In this way, she is able to articulate an ethical critique of men's mythical experience of woman.

"The myth of woman" as a conceptual invention

If one compares Beauvoir's writings on myths with those of Cornell, analyzed above, it is easy to understand why Beauvoir may appear as a mythoclast, whose main merit – or, if one sides with Cornell and Anderson *fault* – is to have dispelled, or tried to dispel, the myth of woman. What this reading ignores, however, is that "the myth of woman" was invented by Beauvoir. Again, this is not to say that Beauvoir invented the very phenomena she gathers under this heading, but that she, by gathering them there, made possible a particular understanding thereof. In this respect, Beauvoir resembles a mythologist more than a mythoclast. At least if we adopt Ivan Strenski's understanding of mythology as an "industry" that "constructs", rather than discovers, the categories it works with, precisely by placing particular stories or other phenomena under the heading of myth.

As a philosophical concept, Beauvoir's "the myth of woman" has made it possible to think something previously unthinkable: that man's attitude towards woman and woman's attitude towards herself is heavily influenced by a set of man-made images and ideas that permeate our entire culture; images and ideas which are mythical in the sense that they transcend time and space, have an affective basis and revolve around a supposedly eternal entity (the Eternal Feminine). As mentioned, Beauvoir herself notes that it is "difficult to describe a myth", because it "does not lend itself to being grasped or defined", but instead "haunts consciousnesses without ever being posited opposite them as a fixed object."[380] In this respect, the myth of woman is akin to a specter: a pervasive yet still elusive force, whose destructive influence is all the more difficult to address because one cannot see its source. Through the concept of the "myth of woman", Beauvoir can be said to have clothed this specter in flesh – making it more visible and manageable.

Several later feminist theorists have benefited from her conceptual innovation. To give but one telling example, even Cornell can be read as appropriating important aspects of this concept, which means that her critique

[380] Ibid., 196.

of Beauvoir remains productively dependent upon the thing it criticizes. Cornell's reliance on Beauvoir's conceptual innovation is obscured by the disposition of her book, in which the Beauvoir only appears towards the end, as a critic of the myth-affirmative feminism Cornell claims that she herself represents. But the assumption that there is a myth about woman permeates Cornell's entire book, from the very beginning. To be sure, Cornell is right to assert that Beauvoir argues that the myth of woman ought to be eliminated. In this respect, Beauvoir's argument differs from that of Cornell, who maintains that the myth of woman, *because* it constitutes a myth – that is, because it has such a strong "hold […] over both individuals and cultures" – must be reinterpreted, rather than rejected. Still, it was Beauvoir who postulated the existence of this myth – and who, thereby, made it possible to discuss how it should be addressed.

Cornell writes: "Of course, to recognize that we are operating within myth and not an 'essential' female nature is already in one sense to dethrone 'myth,' for it denies the myth's claim to an atemporal universality."[381] This chapter has shown that "the myth of woman" can be understood as a conceptual invention that has helped feminist theorists – including Cornell – to recognize precisely this.

[381] Ibid., 196.

6. Mythic thinking

In this chapter, I demonstrate that Simone de Beauvoir uses "myth" and "mythic thinking" to establish a parallel between the way modern (or "civilized") men relate to woman and the behavior of so-called primitives.[382] Beauvoir is thus shown to appropriate a concept of myth derived from evolutionary anthropology, the representatives of conceptualized myth as primitive phenomenon, yet portrayed Western modernity as haunted by its own primitive-mythical past. But this recontextualization also reveals that Beauvoir's writings on myth challenge one of the very premises upon which the evolutionary anthropological discourse rests.

Primitives in The Second Sex

Beauvoir uses the word "primitive" to denote both historical societies (of which almost no traces remain today) and non-Western contemporary ones, studied by anthropologists like Claude Lévi-Strauss.[383] This linguistic ambiguity is no coincidence. It reflects the assumption, popularized by evolutionary anthropology, that contemporary primitives are stuck at the same stage of cultural and technological development as the historical societies and peoples referred to by the same epithet.

Beauvoir identifies both similarities and differences between primitive and civilized peoples. For example, she argues that both tend to "alienate" themselves in material and immaterial objects. "Primitive people alienate themselves in their mana, their totem; civilized people in their individual souls,

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[382] This chapter is based on an article previously published as Adam Kjellgren, "The Myth of Woman. Simone de Beauvoir and the Anthropological Discouse on Myth", *History of European Ideas* 49, no. 8 (2023).

[383] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 26, 105. Cf. Belle Kathryn Sophia, *Beauvoir and Belle: A Black Feminist Critique of the Second Sex* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024), 270. "There are several instances when Beauvoir shifts from general claims about 'primitives' to specific examples of groups that she deems to be perpetually primitive." These groups do not only include people that Beauvoir explicitly labels primitives, but also most Muslims and Arabs. See Alia Al-Saji, "Material Life: Bergsonian Tendencies in Simone de Beauvoir's Philosophy," in *Differences: Re-Reading Beauvoir and Irigaray*, ed. Emily Anne Parker and Anne van Leeuwen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 45. "Islam and Arab cultures in general are seen as without progress; they are stuck in a homogeneous, perpetual past – projected backward in the linear colonial construction of time, which Beauvoir repeats in her narrative and which was part of the self-justification of French colonialism."

their egos, their names, their possessions and their work".[384] However, in accordance with the evolutionary anthropological discourse, she often describes primitives as intellectually inferior to civilized people, arguing that the former are governed by magical and mythical beliefs, while the latter have developed a more rational worldview.

The influence of evolutionary anthropology on Beauvoir's writing is particularly evident in the second chapter of "History", which deals with the goddess centered mythologies of primitive people. As we recall, Beauvoir rejects the claim that the existence of such mythologies proves that political power "in primitive times" lay with women, citing Lévi-Strauss "study of primitive societies" in support.[385] But why, then, do primitives worship female deities? And why do less primitive people abandon this practice? Beauvoir suggests that one, to answer these questions, must understand how primitives think. In the first chapter of "Destiny", she writes:

> Opinions about the respective roles of the two sexes have varied greatly; they were initially devoid of any scientific basis and only reflected social myths (*des mythes sociaux*). It was thought for a long time, and is still thought in some primitive societies based on matrilineal filiation, that the father has no part in the child's conception: ancestral larvae were supposed to infiltrate the womb in the form of living germs.[386]

Here, myth and science are conceptualized as opposites. At the same time, myth is associated with primitive societies, the inhabitants of which are said to give mythical explanations for pregnancies. In the second chapter of "History", Beauvoir repeats this argument, claiming that "many primitives are unaware of the father's role in the procreation of children, who are thought to be the reincarnation of ancestral larvae floating around certain trees, certain rocks, in certain sacred places".[387] This is why primitives, according to Beauvoir, entrust agricultural work to women. Because they postulate a mystical bond between women and the ancestral larvae, primitives also assume that it is woman who gives life to the fields. "In both cases it is a question of a magic conjuration, not of a creative act."[388]

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[384] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 81.
[385] Ibid., 105.
[386] Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-1*, 45/41.
[387] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 102.
[388] Ibid., 103.

This belief in the magical powers of woman "inspires in men a respect mingled with fear", which Beauvoir describes as being "reflected" in their worship of the Mother Goddess.[389] In other words, primitives worship female deities because they lack knowledge of how the world actually works. In the absence of scientific explanations, primitive man resorts to myth and magic:

> At this stage […] he does not yet understand his power; he hesitates between technical skill and magic; he feels passive, dependent on Nature that doles out existence and death by chance. To be sure, he recognizes more or less the function of the sexual act as well as the techniques for cultivating the soil: but children and crops still seem like supernatural gifts; and the mysterious emanations flowing from the feminine body bring forth into this world the riches latent in the mysterious sources of life.[390]

In brief, goddess worship is a consequence and clear evidence of primitive ignorance.

Beauvoir thus describes the Mother Goddess as an "idol", which only exists within the confines of the human mind. "All of the idols invented by man, however terrifying he may have made them, are in fact dependent upon him", she writes. Yet she adds: "In primitive societies, this dependence is not acknowledged and posited", meaning primitives confuse their representation of the world with the world itself.[391] This tells us that life in primitives societies, according to Beauvoir, is governed by an unreflexive mode of thought, unable to separate the subjective from the objective, projection from reality.

The dawn of rational thinking

When thought matures and primitive man begins to develop "a clearer consciousness of self", he comprehends that the Mother Goddess is indeed an idol. At that time, he is able to "destroy" it.[392] Beauvoir argues that this cognitive leap is made possible by the inventions of new tools in the Bronze Age. Through these tools, man becomes able to exert a greater control over his surroundings.[393] As a result, he feels himself less dependent on the whims

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[389] Ibid., 104.

[390] Ibid., 103. Beauvoir adds: "Such beliefs are still alive today among numerous Indian, Australian, and Polynesian tribes".

[391] Ibid., 107.

[392] Ibid.

[393] Ibid., 109.

of nature and the magical powers ascribed to women. Having reached this stage, man consequently abandons the mythologies centered around the Mother Goddess in favor of new myths. "The whole representation of the universe is overturned", Beauvoir writes.[394] In the new "masculine mythology" (*mythologie masculine*)[395] that now emerges, woman is moved away from the center and typically ascribed harmful attributes.[396]

One might have guessed that Beauvoir, as a feminist theorist, would describe this shift, from myths centered around the Mother Goddess to masculine myths that devalue woman, in negative terms. Yet the opposite is true. As we have seen, Beauvoir argues that primitive man only worshipped the Mother Goddess because he felt dependent on nature and feared the magic powers he, due to his underdeveloped mental abilities, ascribed to woman. When he finally developed a clearer understanding of himself and his surroundings, he was able to free himself from this irrational terror – which, according to Beauvoir, was a positive thing:

> Spirit prevailed over Life, transcendence over immanence, technology over magic, and reason over superstition. The devaluation of woman represents a necessary stage in the history of humanity: for she derived her prestige not from her positive value but from man's weakness; she incarnated disturbing natural mysteries: man escapes her grasp when he frees himself from nature.[397]

A few pages later, Beauvoir concludes: "The peoples who remained under the heel of the Mother Goddess where matrilineal filiation was perpetuated were also those arrested in a primitive state of civilization."[398]

As mentioned, the progression leading away from this "primitive state" does not mean that all myths disappear. When the Mother Goddess is dethroned, new masculine myths materialize. Beauvoir nevertheless maintains that man is able to retain a much more reflexive attitude towards these later myths:

> [W]hile he still leaves some place for rituals, applied techniques seem far more important to him; mystical values become secondary, and practical interests take precedence; he is not entirely liberated from the gods, but he distances

[394] Ibid., 109.
[395] Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-1,* 226/284
[396] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 114.
[397] Ibid., 109.
[398] Ibid., 110.

> himself by distancing them from himself; he relegates them to their Olympian heaven and keeps the terrestrial domain for himself; the great Pan begins to fade at the first sound of his hammer, and man's reign begins. He discovers his power. He finds cause and effect in the relationship between his creating arm and the object of his creation: the seed planted germinates or not, while metal always reacts in the same way to fire, to tempering, and to mechanical treatment; this world of tools can be framed in clear concepts: rational thinking, logic, and mathematics are thus able to emerge.[399]

This is a dualistic and hierarchical account, where the "primitive state" is associated with idolism, "immanence", "magic", "superstition", "weakness", "mysteries", "nature", "rituals" and "mystical values", while the path toward civilization is described as one towards self-consciousness, "transcendence", "technology", "reason", "applied techniques", "practical interests", "cause and effect", "mechanical treatment" and "clear concepts". As this shift is framed as one toward "logic" and "rational thinking", it seems reasonable to assume that it also constitutes a move *away* from what Beauvoir elsewhere calls mythic thinking.

In accordance with the evolutionary anthropological discourse, Beauvoir thus provides a developmentalist narrative, founded on a clear distinction between the primitive and the civilized. Or at least, that is how it appears in the second chapter of "History", discussed above. There she postulates a definitive break, separating primitive *mythos* from civilized *logos*. But as we continue reading, we see that supposedly primitive phenomena, according to Beauvoir, persist in the very heart of civilization. The rigid distinction between the primitive and the civilized is thereby destabilized. In this respect, Beauvoir may seem to challenge the logic of evolutionary anthropology. But in fact, the idea of modernity as haunted by the primitive past constitutes an integral part of the evolutionary anthropological discourse.

The savage within

The notion of linear time, so central to evolutionary anthropology, carries within itself its own potential contradiction. It is the linearity of time that makes it possible to separate the past from the present, the primitive from the civilized. At the same time, this notion binds the present to the past, in the sense that the present is understood as a product of what preceded it – which, in turn, paves the way for the assumption that something of the past may

[399] Ibid., 109.

survive into the present. In the case of evolutionary anthropology, this manifests itself in the concern that civilized man, because he was once a savage himself, may still harbor *a savage within*.[400]

This concern is noticeable already in the work of Edward Burnett Tylor, who often speaks of "survivals" of primitive superstitions in modernity.[401] But it becomes more pronounced in that of James George Frazer. Beyond the superficial differences that separate the nations and races of the world, writes Frazer, "we shall find underlying them all a solid stratum of intellectual agreement among the dull, the weak, the ignorant, and the superstitious, who constitute, unfortunately, the vast majority of mankind."[402]

> It is not our business here to consider what bearing the permanent existence of such a solid layer of savagery beneath the surface of society, and unaffected by the superficial changes of religion and culture, has upon the future of humanity. The dispassionate observer, whose studies have led him to plumb its depths, can hardly regard it otherwise than as a standing menace to civilisation. We seem to move on a thin crust which may at any moment be rent by the subterranean forces slumbering below. From time to time a hollow murmur underground or a sudden spurt of flame into the air tells of what is going on beneath our feet.[403]

Commenting on these and similar passages in Frazer's writings, Andrew Von Hendy concludes: "Seen thus, 'savagery' is no longer an abandoned cultural zone, safely confined to the past; we carry it within us".[404] However, it is important to note that the continued presence of savagery in civilized societies, according to Frazer and other evolutionary anthropologists, is particularly strong in certain places and among certain groups. As stated, Frazer argues that it the "the dull", "the weak" and "the ignorant" who keep the primitive past alive in the present.

Who belongs to these categories? Frazer names "the ignorant and superstitious classes of modern Europa", by which he seems to mean peasants

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[400] I have borrowed this expression from Henrika Kuklick, *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology, 1885-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[401] Survivals, writes Tylor, are "processes, customs, opinions, and so forth, which have been carried on by force of habit into a new state of society different from that in which they had their original home, and they thus remain as proofs and examples of an older condition of culture out of which a newer has been evolved." Tylor, *Primitive Culture,* 15. See also Von Hendy, *The Modern Construction of Myth*, 87.

[402] Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 53.

[403] Ibid., 54. See also Ackerman, *The Myth and Ritual School,* 50.

[404] Von Hendy, *The Modern Construction of Myth*, 96.

and workers.[405] He also points towards the countryside as a place where the process of civilization has not yet progressed very far. By contrast, the urban world of middle and upper-class men appears to constitute a protected zone.[406] As emphasized by historian of ideas Patricia Lorenzoni, the evolutionary anthropological discourse moreover tends to represent civilized women as more primitive than civilized men. "The process of civilization is thought to have widened the divide between the sexes", Lorenzoni explains. "Men's social and intellectual capacities benefit and are benefited by it, while woman has continued to live and work in a world that has done little to help her develop her intellectual capacities: that of the home and reproduction."[407] In addition to the "external" savage (the primitives inhabiting societies far away from civilization), the evolutionary anthropological discourse thus postulates a set of "internal" savages, still wandering here among "us", in the midst of civilization: rural residents, workers and women.[408]

A similar tendency characterizes Freud's *Totem and Tabu*. As mentioned earlier, Freud argues that myths are product of a "mythopoetic consciousness" associated with primitive societies. But he also maintains that it is possible to identify numerous similarities between primitives and neurotics. For example, Freud claims that a "paranoic" patient behaves like a primitive person in that he projects his emotional impulses outward, "peoples the world" with products of his mind and thus "meets his internal mental processes again outside himself".[409] In other words, Freud too claims that modern people carry their primitive past within them. It is not eliminated but "repressed", which means that it can return, as the study of neurotics proves. And just like the evolutionary anthropologists, Freud tends to associate primitiveness with the feminine. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), he thus accentuates women's allegedly "retarding and restraining influence" on civilization, toward which they are said to have adopted a "hostile" attitude.[410]

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[405] Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 56.

[406] Lorenzoni, *Att färdas under dödens tecken*, 115–119.

[407] Ibid., 115, translation mine. [*Mäns sociala och intellektuella förmågor gynnar och gynnas av den, medan kvinnan fortsatt leva och verka i en värld som föga hjälpt henne utveckla sin intellektuella kapacitet: hemmets och reproduktionen*.]

[408] Ibid., 40–41.

[409] Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 92.

[410] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* [1930], in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXI (1927-1931): The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and Its Discontents, and Other Works*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (Loondon: The Hogarth Press, 1961), 103–104.

The basic ambivalence of evolutionary anthropology, manifest in a tendency to both separate the primitive from the civilized and destabilize the same frontier, made it possible to appropriate this discourse for different ends. The notion of primitive societies as the mythical antithesis of disenchanted modernity was invoked not only by thinkers who depicted the modernization process as positive (and who, in Rudyard Kipling's words, argued that it was "the white man's burden" to further these beneficial effects through a civilizing mission) but also by commentators who held that the consequences brought about by the advent of modernity constituted a severe problem.[411] Hence, we have already seen that French mid-century intellectuals such as André Breton, Georges Bataille and Roger Caillois actualized what Fuyuki Kurasawa calls "the French sociological tradition's anthropological legacy" in order to critique Western modernity.[412] Overall, writes Kurasawa, primitive people were portrayed by the these thinkers as having "access to a richer and more complex reality, precisely *because* their economic, social and cultural existence was predominantly geared towards the sacred, the magical and the mythical."[413]

In the wake of the Second World War, many European intellectuals, well versed in anthropological scholarship on primitive societies, instead actualized the notion of civilized society as haunted by its own primitive past. One of them where Ernst Cassirer. In *The Myth of The State,* he cites anthropological research which argues that the savage is "hemmed in on every side by the customs of his people; [...] bound in the chains of immemorial tradition", while "civilized man is too restless […] to remain long in the attitude of acquiescence."[414] Cassirer then explains: "These words were written twenty years ago; but in the meantime we have learned a new lesson, a lesson that is very humiliating to our human pride. We have learned that modern man, in spite of his restlessness […] has not really surmounted the condition of savage life."[415] Put differently, Cassirer argues the war has taught us that even civilized people can be persuaded to give up their freedom and fall back into primitive submissiveness. Another sign of the continued power of the primitive over

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411 Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden" [1899], in *Rudyard Kipling's Verse: Definitive Edition* (New York: Doubleday, 1940), 321–323.

412 Kurasawa, "Primitiveness and the Flight from Modernity, 9

413 Ibid., 19, italics added.

414 Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, 285. The book from which Cassirer cites is E. Sidney Hartland, *Primitive Law* (London: Methuen, 1924).

415 Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, 285–286.

modern societies that Cassirer highlights is, as we have seen, the resurgence of myths and mythical thinking.

Beauvoir too actualizes this notion of modernity as a historical present unable to free itself from its primitive-mythical past. But her argument challenges not only that of the French avant-garde – according to which modernity is fully disenchanted and demythified – but thinkers such as Cassirer. For whereas the latter portrays myth and mythic thinking as something that has only recently returned, as the result of a regression (which is, in turn, linked to a crisis and the advent of fascism), Beauvoir's distinctly feminist focus on the lived experience of women in patriarchal society suggests that these and other primitive phenomena have been there all along.

Beauvoir's internal savages

Where are the internal savages in Beauvoir's book? In line with Frazer, she sometimes suggests that rural residents are closer to the primitives than people living in cities. Referring to the punishments inflicted on adulterous and allegedly indecent women, she writes: "This savage severity fades as superstitions diminish and fear dissipates. But in the countryside, godless and homeless bohemian women are still regarded with suspicion."[416] At another location, Beauvoir explains that many "rural populations" have that in common with "Arabs" and "Indians", that "a wife is only a female servant appreciated according to the work she provides", whereas the wife in "modern civilization" is much more individualized.[417]

Beauvoir also presents women as particularly primitive. Indeed, it sometimes seems as if civilized woman, according to her, remains stuck at the stage inhabited by primitive man before the invention of bronze tools. Discussing the difference between Stone and Bronze Age man, Beauvoir writes:

> The [Stone Age] farmer is subjected to the vagaries of the soil, of germination, and of seasons; he is passive, he beseeches, and he waits: this explains why totem spirits peopled the human world […]. On the contrary, the [Bronze Age] worker fashions a tool according to his own design; he imposes on it the form that fits his project; facing an inert nature that defies him but that he overcomes, he asserts himself as sovereign will […] Woman's religion [i.e., that based on myths about the Great Mother] is bound to the reign of agriculture, a reign of

[416] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 244.
[417] Ibid., 647.

> irreducible duration, contingencies, chance, anticipation, and mystery; the reign of *Homo faber* is the reign of time that can be conquered like space, the reign of necessity, project, action, and reason.[418]

Now, compare this with how Beauvoir describes the situation of contemporary woman:

> She has no grasp, even in thought, on this reality that involves her. […] That means she has not learned the technology that would enable her to dominate matter […] Daily cooking teaches her patience and passivity; it is alchemy […]. Housework comes close to a technical activity; but it is too rudimentary, too monotonous, to convince the woman of the laws of mechanical causality. […] Woman's mentality perpetuates that of agricultural civilizations that worship the earth's magical qualities: she believes in magic. […] She feels surrounded by waves, radiation, fluid; […] she introduces primitive superstitions into religion […]. Her attitude will be that of conjuration and prayer; to obtain a certain result, she will follow certain time-tested rites. […] Not only is she unaware of what real action is, that is able to change the face of the world, but she is lost in the middle of this world as in the heart of an immense and confused mass. She does not know how to use masculine logic well.[419]

So, while (Western) man learned to use tools and logic many thousand years ago, woman – like the contemporary savage – "perpetuates" the pre-technological and pre-logical existence associated with early, agricultural society. When man acts, woman waits; while he reasons, she remains at the mercy of magic and rites. "Having difficulty separating reality from play, the act from magical behavior, the object from imagination, woman is singularly likely to presentify through her body an absence", Beauvoir states.[420] Recall also that primitive thinking, according to Beauvoir, was characterized by an inability to grasp the dependence of human "idols" upon human consciousness. This inability is still present among women today. "Men cannot kneel with total conviction in front of idols they themselves have created, but when women come across these imposing statues on their path, they cannot imagine any hand making them, and they meekly bow down before them."[421] The parallel between contemporary woman and the primitive is, finally, made explicit when Beauvoir writes that the former, because she is "unable to grasp"

[418] Ibid., 109–110.
[419] Ibid., 725–726.
[420] Ibid., 804.
[421] Ibid., 727.

the universe she inhabits "through technology, sound logic, or coherent knowledge", still "feels like a child and a primitive surrounded with dangerous mysteries."[422]

In all these respects, Beauvoir can be said to reproduce the evolutionary anthropological notion of civilized woman as an internal savage. In line with the logic described by Lorenzoni, she argues that this, the primitive features of civilized woman, follows from the fact the woman's traditional role as a wife and mother has not required of her to develop her intellectual abilities to the same extent as man. "A syllogism is not useful in making mayonnaise or calming a child's tears; masculine reasoning is not relevant to the reality she experiences."[423]

Beauvoir does not, however, reproduce all aspects of the evolutionary anthropological discourse on the sexes. As Lorenzoni points out, representatives of this discourse described the widened cognitive gap between men and women in modern societies as the unavoidable outcome of a chiefly beneficial civilization process.[424] In contrast, Beauvoir condemns the mechanisms that confine women to the domains of the home as contingent and unjust: the product of an oppressive situation that can and should be changed. In other words, Beauvoir arguments suggests that woman is stuck at a primitive stage because men have imprisoned her there. In the next section, I demonstrate that men, according to Beauvoir, have done so because they themselves are unable or unwilling to abandon certain primitive manners. Thus, she presents man, rather than woman, as the real internal savage, or at least the source of civilized society's remaining savagery: the obstacle that delays the evolution from the primitive past toward a fully civilized society dominated by rational thinking.

This rhetorical strategy, in which the oppressor, rather than the oppressed, is said to exhibit primitive traits, had been used by other intellectuals, before Beauvoir. Cassirer employs a version of it in *The Myth of the State*, when he argues that it is the German Nazis and their followers – rather than the Jews, as the Nazis themselves claimed – who behave like primitives. It is also used in *Anti-Semite and Jew*, where Sartre writes: "They [the bourgeois and "the anti-Semite in particular"] behave toward social facts like primitives who endow

[422] Ibid., 731–732. Beauvoir continues: "She projects her magic conception of reality: the flow of things seems inevitable to her, and yet anything can happen; she has difficulty differentiating the possible and the impossible, she is ready to believe anyone". Ibid., 732.
[423] Ibid., 726.
[424] Lorenzoni, *Att färdas under dödens tecken*, 115.

the wind and the sun with little souls."[425] In all three cases, the intrinsically racist logic of evolutionary anthropology is both challenged and reinforced. It is challenged, in the sense that Cassirer, Sartre and Beauvoir destabilize the very boundary between primitives and civilized men, by pointing to the presence of something allegedly savage at the heart of civilization. At the same time, none of them questions the validity of "primitives" as a category, nor the anthropologists' dehumanizing descriptions of the peoples that this category is usually employed to denote. On the contrary, the critique that Cassirer, Sartre and Beauvoir advance both presupposes and reproduces the evolutionary anthropological idea of primitives as inferior to civilized individuals. It is because "we" should not behave like "them", that the identification of similarities comes across as potentially incriminating. Appropriating Beauvoir's own concept, one could thus say that this argument rests on and reproduces *the myth of the primitive*.

The point here is not that Beauvoir – a vocal opponent of racism and colonialism – consciously embraced the imperialist worldview of evolutionary anthropology. The presence in her text of categories and similes rooted in this worldview does, however, tell us something important about the limits of appropriation, as this concept is understood in the context of this study. Namely, although we can speak through others to articulate new ideas, others at the same time speak through us.

The mythic thinking of modern men

Beauvoir claims that it is not enough to be a "female human" in order to be considered a "real" woman. Already in the introduction to *The Second Sex*, she states that female humans, to be considered real women, must also "take part in this mysterious and endangered reality known as femininity." What, then, is femininity? "In Saint Thomas's time", Beauvoir writes, "it was an essence defined with as much certainty as the sedative quality of a poppy".[426] But, she continues, the belief in such a static essence has since lost its ground. Scientists "no longer believe there are immutably determined entities that define given characteristics like those of the woman, the Jew, or the black; science considers characteristics as secondary reactions to a *situation*."[427] Initially, it thus seems as if Beauvoir presents us with a clear-cut evolutionist narrative, according to

[425] Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 26. Cf. Motturi, *Filosofi vid mörkrets hjärta*, 13.
[426] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 23.
[427] Ibid., 23–24, italics in original.

which the unjustified belief in static essences – a belief explicitly tied (through the figure of Aquinas) to an older, religious worldview – is replaced by disbelief, represented by modern science. But as we have seen, Beauvoir goes on to argue that the belief in essences has not disappeared at all: that it has survived in the form of a myth, still alive in the hearts of *all* men.

The fact that modern men's attitude towards woman reflects a myth rather than science is the first thing they have in common with primitives, as Beauvoir describes primitives in the second chapter of "History", analyzed above. Of course, the myths that modern men believe in differ from the literary and "social" myths that, according to Beauvoir, govern life in primitive societies. Modern men do not believe in the Great Mother, nor that children are conceived when "ancestral larvae" infiltrate the womb. But the myths of modern men still have something in common with those of the primitives. To begin with, both have an affective basis, in the sense that they are born out of fear. We have already seen that this is true for the myth of the woman. When it comes to the mythologies about the Great Mother, Beauvoir writes: "Woman was venerated only inasmuch as man was a slave to his own fears, a party to his own impotence: it was out of fear and not love that he worshipped her."[428] Both myths are also centered around supposedly eternal entities, located in a transcendent heaven: the Eternal Feminine and the Great Mother.

Furthermore, both modern men and primitives are described as unaware, or unwilling to acknowledge, that these entities – the Eternal Feminine and the Great Mother – are products of their own consciousness. Instead, they treat figures of their imagination (mirages or idols, which they themselves invent) as objectively real. In this respect, both modern men and primitives appear to be governed by unreflexive mode of thought, characterized by an inability or unwillingness to distinguish between representation and reality, or between internal perceptions projected outwards and the external world itself. This, in turn, suggests that both in some sense fail to grasp the relationship between specific actions and their result. As we have seen, Beauvoir argues that primitive peoples, pinned "under the heel of the Mother Goddess", postulate the existence of magical forces and a powerful female deity in order to explain, for instance, procreation and the growth of crops. By contrast, the inhabitants of more developed societies are said to understand the influence they exercise on their surroundings (as man's thought matures, Beauvoir writes that he "finds cause and effect in the relationship between his creating arm

[428] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 110.

and the object of his creation").[429] And yet, Beauvoir's analysis implies that modern men do not comprehend the link between their actions and the situation of women. Though they might not argue that women's situation is willed by a god or a goddess, they nonetheless postulate the existence of a transcendental entity, "situated beyond the given", in order to explain this situation.[430]

Because the myth of woman is still alive in the hearts of all modern men, other supposedly primitive beliefs also endure. Most importantly, modern men continue to ascribe magical features to woman. Even after man has dethroned the Great Mother, "the Other retains some of her primitive magic", Beauvoir writes.[431] At another location, she states: "In patriarchal societies, woman kept many of the disquieting virtues she held in primitive societies", which explains the taboos that still surround her.[432] Admittedly, Beauvoir also claims that Christianity put an end to the idea of (maternal) magic.[433] Yet, a few lines further down, she asserts that the mother, within the Christian framework, "loses none of her primitive attributes". Instead, the meaning of these attributes change, so that the mother is associated with "white magic" instead of black.[434] Even today, in modern societies, the mythical notion of woman as having magical powers persists. "The hackneyed vocabulary of serialized novels where the woman is described as an enchantress or a mermaid who fascinates man and bewitches him reflects the oldest and most universal of myths. Woman is devoted to magic."[435] The fact that men still harbor a primitive fear of female magic is, finally, particularly evident when it comes to sex and infidelity:

> Just as in primitive society the male sex is secular and woman's is laden with religious and magic qualities, today's modern societies consider man's failings harmless peccadilloes; they are often lightly dismissed […]. If, on the other hand, the woman deviates from society, she returns to Nature and the devil, she

[429] Ibid., 109.

[430] Ibid., 315. "So the myth (i) explains observable things, events, processes, and relations but (ii) is itself not an observable phenomenon but postulated for the sake of explanation." In private correspondence with Sara Heinämaa, June 1 (2022).

[431] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 115.

[432] Ibid., 223.

[433] Ibid., 225

[434] Ibid., 226. See also ibid., 232. "The Christian world substituted less carnal presences for nymphs and fairies; but homes, landscapes, cities, and individuals themselves are still haunted by an impalpable femininity."

[435] Ibid., 217.

> triggers uncontrollable and evil forces within the group. Fear has always been mixed with the blame for licentious behavior.[436]

To summarize, it is not only rural residents and women who resemble primitives; if one studies the ways in which they relate to women, Beauvoir's analysis suggests that the same can be said about all modern men. For when it comes to woman, the practices of modern men do not seem to reflect a logical and rational mode of thought, but one prone to magical and mythical beliefs.

As this is already implied by the fact that Beauvoir speaks of the attitude of modern men as governed by myth and mythic thinking, "the myth of woman" can be said to function as a conceptual tool, through which she *establishes* a parallel between modern men and primitives. This strategy can also be described as a mimetic procedure, through which Beauvoir appropriates the racist and sexist discourse of evolutionary anthropology, but adapts it by assigning modern, European man the role commonly reserved for the racialized, feminized and temporally removed Other.[437]

This strategy also promotes a specific understanding of Beauvoir's own project. Whereas feminism is sometimes depicted as a political movement devoted to the special interests of certain groups, Beauvoir represents this struggle as the natural continuation of a transhistorical battle, where the main enemy is not men or even patriarchy – but primitive unreason, kept alive by the mythic attitude of modern men.

However, it is important to note that Beauvoir does not only adapt the evolutionary anthropological discourse on myth to discuss another subject. She also challenges one of the premises on which this discourse rests – namely, that the survival of primitive-mythical beliefs in civilized societies is caused by a defiance of rationality. As we have seen, Frazer argues that the continued presence of primitive elements in modernity is best explained by the stupidity of the unenlightened masses, while Freud portrays it as an essentially pathological phenomenon. Likewise, Cassirer suggests that mythic thinking could only reappear in a moment of severe crisis, during which "the rational forces" that normally "resist the rise of the old mythical conceptions" momentarily lost their hold on modern men.[438] Beauvoir, on the other hand,

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[436] Ibid., 244.

[437] Cf. Barker, "De Beauvoir and the Myth of the Given", 169. "*The Second Sex* is a pioneering exercise in what Marilyn Strathern has called 'auto-anthropology,' the exercise of directing the anthropological gaze toward one's own culture, rather than that of another."

[438] Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, 280.

maintains that the presence of primitive-mythical elements in modernity is noticeable not just if one studies exceptional and extreme situations that defy the proper order of civilized societies. On the contrary, mythical beliefs constitute a troublesome but ordinary and well-integrated aspect of life in (patriarchal) modernity, where they are shared by all men.

Indeed, the argument advanced by Beauvoir suggests that modern men have used modern *logos* to defend ideas associated with primitive *mythos*. "To prove women's inferiority", antifeminists have drawn not only on religion "but also on science", Beauvoir writes.[439] In the hands of men, she states elsewhere, "reason becomes an insidious form of violence".[440] The way modern men relate to the myth of woman thus differs radically from how primitives are said to relate to their myths. Whereas the latter are depicted by Beauvoir as *unable* to differentiate between their idols and concrete reality, modern men are described as *unwilling* to do so, because the myth of Woman serves their interests.[441] The primitives who worship the Goddess Mother do not yet have access to rational thinking; as we have seen, this mode of thought was "able to emerge" only after the Goddess Mother was dethroned. In contrast, modern men refuse to make use of a recourse available to them.[442] Or rather, they do make use of this resource, but only to guard their myths.

By extension, this argument challenges the progressivist idea that increased scientific advances, by definition, lead to demythification. Rational thinking might be a prerequisite for questioning myths. But according to Beauvoir, supposedly rational individuals, with access to scientific models of explanation, may still succumb to mythic thinking, if it serves their interests. The question, then, is whether – and if so how – harmful myths can be combated at all? I will discuss Beauvoir's answer to this question in the next chapter.

"Mythic thinking" as an analytical concept

As we have seen, "mythic thinking" is a concept with a troubled history. It has often been used to denote a type of thought conceptualized as backward or

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[439] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 32.

[440] Ibid., 738.

[441] While both groups are influenced by mythic thinking, only modern men can therefore be accused of "bad faith".

[442] "Western men […] have all possible intellectual tools of self-critique available but still fail to use them in their relations with and to women. This is a failure of the will, so a matter of self-deception, failing self-responsibility and self-development, a moral and political issue." In private correspondence with Sara Heinämaa, June 1 (2022).

undeveloped, primarily associated with a racialized Other. Commentators like Cassirer and Beauvoir challenge this tradition by arguing that mythic thinking is present in modern societies as well. But as we have also observed, their point remains that the continued presence of mythic thinking among so-called civilized peoples is highly problematic, as it remains an essentially primitive phenomenon.

Does this mean that "mythic thinking" is too burdened a term to be used as an analytical concept today? I propose that we appropriate it, despite its ethnocentric and colonial connotations. However, drawing on one of the tendencies discernible in Beauvoir's writings, I recommend that we use it to denote not a stage in the evolution of human thought, but a *mode of thought* to which all humans are susceptible. Furthermore, I suggest that we follow Beauvoir in defining this mode of thought as characterized an unreflexive approach to the products of one's own consciousness – which may be the result of either an inability *or* an unwillingness.

Acknowledging that mythic thinking may be the result of an unwillingness, rather than a mere inability, is particular important, as it means that one – for conscious or unconscious reasons – might *choose* to indulge in this mode of thought, even if one has access to alternative cognitive modalities. This, in turn, allows for a discussion on the strategic value of mythic thinking. Are there contexts or objectives that even require one to make use of or promote this mode of thought? This is a question that I argue that Mary Daly's and Donna Haraway's writings on myth raise, albeit in different ways.

7. Myth and oppression

One of the meta-narratives of Western modernity declares that the order of myth and custom, in modern societies, have or should have been replaced by the rule of law.[443] According to philosopher Peter Fitzpatrick, author of *The Mythology of Modern Law* (1992), this narrative has been so central to the self-understanding of Europeans that it can be described as part of "our" mythology. Borrowing from philosopher Jacques Derrida, Fitzpatrick speaks of this as a "white mythology", defined as the "mythology of a whitened Europe", which creates its identity in opposition to a supposedly "myth-ridden" and lawless primitive Other.[444] "Modernity", writes Fitzpatrick, "[…] is not supposed to be about myth. […] The very idea of myth typifies 'them' – the savages and ancestors 'we' have left behind."[445]

An expression of this white mythology can be found in Ernst Cassirer's already cited *The Myth of the State.* "Primitive societies", Cassirer explains, "are not ruled by written laws, statutes, institutions or constitutions, bill of rights or political charters." Still, not even "the most primitive societies we know" lack strict organization. Although they have no laws, these societies are held together by "fundamental and mythical conceptions" that are never called into question. In modern societies, this "mythical organization" is "superseded" and replaced by a "rational" one.[446] As we have seen, Cassirer argues that the latter, in times of crisis, can collapse, allowing "demonic mythical powers" to take over once again.[447] But such periods constitute exceptions, temporary regressions. Generally, civilized societies are governed by law, not myth.[448]

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[443] On the custom-law dichotomy, see for instance Stanley Diamond, "The Rule of Law Versus the Order of Custom", *Social Research* 38, no. 1 (1971). Diamond, who tends to reproduce this dichotomy, writes: "However we project, imagine, or reconstruct the past, we recognize the division […] between primitive and civilized society, between moral and civil order, between custom and law. Ibid., 68.

[444] Peter Fitzpatrick, *The Mythology of Modern Law* (New York: Routledge, 1992), ix–x. See also Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy", trans. F. C. T. Moore, *New Literary History* 6, no. 1 ([1971] 1974).

[445] Fitzpatrick, *The Mythology of Modern Law*, ix.

[446] Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, 279.

[447] Ibid., 280.

[448] This white mythology has always coexisted with another tradition, the representatives of which conceptualize law and myth as entangled. Already in *Laws*, Plato states that the "lawgiver", to enact the law, must make sure to also influence "public opinion", which can only be achieved by "charming" the citizens of the state into "belief" with the help of "myths (*μύθοις*),

Simone de Beauvoir's writings on myth challenges this white mythology. As shown in the introduction to the present part-study, she claims that myths and laws "interact", which means that there is something "arbitrary" about examining them separately. At the same time, her argument suggests that myth and law maintain a degree of independence from each other, which explains why even extensive legal reforms may leave some myths unaffected. In the chapter at hand, I demonstrate that Beauvoir invokes this understanding of myth to articulate a novel theory of patriarchal oppression, which constitutes an alternative to those advanced by liberal feminists as well as Marxist socialists.

To facilitate this analysis, I first specify what role Beauvoir attributes to law, as well as how she conceptualizes the oppressive function of customs.

Abstract rights, concrete possibilities

In an article called "Femininity: The Trap" (1948), published in the U.S. edition of *Vogue*, Beauvoir emphasizes the historical importance of legislation in maintaining the oppression of French women. But she also acknowledges that many laws have recently been reformed in women's favor.[449] Thus, it might seem that the "the old quarrel between feminists and antifeminists" has at last been "settled", at least in France. "Men in France, as in America, think that once and for all women are equal to men and that we must talk of something else." Beauvoir nevertheless object that judicial reforms are far from sufficient to achieve true equality between men and women. "Let us not be dupes", she declares. "It is evident that it is only on legal papers and in civil registries that the two sexes appear as equal."[450]

Beauvoir repeats a version of this argument in *The Second Sex*, published the year after. There too, she underlines the important role law plays in preserving patriarchal oppression. Indicating that laws have served a similar function as do literary myths, Beauvoir writes: "By the time humankind reaches the stage of writing its mythology and laws, patriarchy is definitively established: it is males who write the codes. […] Afraid of woman, legislators organize her oppression."[451] As in her previous article, Beauvoir nonetheless recognizes that

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sentences and songs", directed at all boys from their early childhood days. Plato, *Laws. Books VII-XII*, trans. Robert Gregg Bury (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), 838d p. 159, 840b–c p. 163, translation modified. Bury translates μύθοις (*mythoi*) as tales.

[449] Beauvoir, "Femininity. The Trap", 42.

[450] Ibid., 43.

[451] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 114.

a shift has taken place. Adopting a somewhat more global perspective, she points out that the legal reforms instigated in France have yet not been universally implemented. In fact, even in her home country, men and women are not completely equal before the law. "In no country is her [woman's] legal status identical to man's", Beauvoir notes.[452]

Admittedly, things are moving in the right direction:

> The recent session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women demanded that equal rights for both sexes be recognized in all nations, and several motions were passed to make this legal status a concrete reality. It would seem, then, that the match is won. The future can only bring greater and greater assimilation of women in a hitherto masculine society.[453]

And yet, Beauvoir maintains that women are still oppressed.[454] To explain this disturbing fact, she begins by pointing out that "abstract rights" are far from enough to bring about equality.

By the term "abstract rights", Beauvoir means the rights granted or denied women by law: the right to education, to own property, to vote, to marry whomever one wants, to divorce. Again, she argues that French women, since the Second World War, have been accorded many rights of this sort (the major exception, to which she often returns, is the right to one's own body, to abortions).[455] But she also explains that "abstract rights […] have never been sufficient to guarantee woman a concrete hold on the world: there is not yet real equality today between the two sexes."[456] The long fought-for legal reforms implemented in the post-war period have brought women a large measure a "negative freedom" – that is, freedom from formal restraints, which in theory allows them to choose their own projects. But negative freedom is not worth much unless it is paired with some kind of "positive freedom": a reasonable chance to *realize* the projects one chooses.[457] For example, the abstract right to divorce remains empty (a *mere abstraction*), as long as one lacks all means to support oneself outside marriage. For abstract rights to make a

[452] Ibid., 29.
[453] Ibid., 181.
[454] Ibid., 189.
[455] See for example ibid., 597–606.
[456] Ibid., 186.
[457] Ibid., 182. Beauvoir does not use the term "positive freedom" here, but it figures later in the text. Ibid., 591.

difference, they have to be combined with "concrete possibilities", Beauvoir concludes.

The most vital concrete possibility that women, according to Beauvoir, must secure is economic independence. As long as women remain unable to provide for themselves, they are forced to seek male assistance, either by accepting handouts from their fathers, by entering (or remaining in) marriage, or by becoming rich men's mistresses. This also means that they must continue to adapt to men's mythical notion of what constitutes a "real" woman. Of course, having their own income will not solve all women's problems. As workers, women will still form part of an oppressed class, which will only be fully free in a socialist society.[458] Yet economic autonomy remains a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for freedom.

But do women really lack the possibility to support themselves economically? Beauvoir argues that it has never been easier for (French) women to earn a living. This is mainly due to two factors: the industrial revolution and the invention of effective contraceptives. By significantly increasing the demand for workers, while it also rendered the importance of physical strength largely irrelevant, the former helped open the sphere of productive labor to more women. The latter, in turn, made it practically possible for women to seize this opportunity, by freeing them from their "enslavement" to the reproductive function, which previously tied them to the domestic sphere.[459] "The convergence of these two factors – participation in production and freedom from reproductive slavery – explains the evolution of woman's condition."[460]

Yet these developments have not put an end to patriarchal oppression. How can one explain this disturbing fact? Beauvoir concludes that too few women are taking advantage of the opportunities that modern, industrialized society now offers them. Instead of engaging in productive labor, they continue to devote themselves to the traditional, reproductive tasks associated with marriage and motherhood. Why, then, do women continue to reject this route, the only one that can guarantee their liberation?[461] Could it be that women prefer the domestic sphere after all? Is it in their nature? Beauvoir vehemently

[458] Ibid. 813–814.

[459] Ibid., 168.

[460] Ibid., 171.

[461] "It is through work that woman has been able, to a large extent, to close the gap separating her from the male; work alone can guarantee her concrete freedom", Beauvoir writes. Ibid., 813.

rejects this explanation. Instead, she claims that the answer must be sought in the past. Or rather, in the past's enduring sway over the present.

Patriarchal anachronisms

Women, writes Beauvoir,

> want abstract rights and concrete possibilities to be granted to them, without which freedom is merely mystification. […] This will is being fulfilled. But this is a period of transition; this world that has always belonged to men is still in their hands; patriarchal civilization's institutions and values are still, to a great extent, alive.[462]

A few pages later, Beauvoir asserts: "What determines women's present situation is the stubborn survival of the most ancient traditions in the new emerging civilization."[463] Certainly, the future looks bright. At times, Beauvoir describes it as "wide open", undetermined.[464] At others, as determined but in a positive sense. Toward the end of *The Second Sex*, she claims that "it seems most certain that they [women] will sooner or later attain perfect economic and social equality".[465] Yet, we still live in a "civilization of enduring patriarchal traditions", which continues to prevent this (perhaps inevitable) future from being realized.[466] Women are "heirs to a weighty past, striving to forge a new future"; they are "torn between the past and the present".[467]

Like many evolutionary anthropologists, Beauvoir can thus be said to conceptualize the problem she studies in temporal terms: as the outcome of a conflict between past and present, which delays – but ultimately will not be able to halt – history's inevitable forward movement. This temporal logic can be understood in the light of Beauvoir's partial adherence to Marxism's deterministic philosophy of history (with reference to bourgeois women defending their bourgeois privileges, she writes that "these obstinate examples of resistance cannot stop the march of history").[468] Beauvoir nonetheless differs from most orthodox Marxists in that she rejects the hope of an unambiguous

[462] Ibid., 185–186.
[463] Ibid., 188.
[464] Ibid., 845.
[465] Ibid., 860.
[466] Ibid., 675.
[467] Ibid., 857.
[468] Ibid., 161.

break with the past tied to the Marxist concept of "revolution", arguing instead that – for women, at least – change has and will continue to come gradually. Hence, we have already seen that she speaks not of a revolution, but an "evolution" of woman's condition.

In what precise form does the ancient past survive? What are the specific anachronistic phenomena that prevent women from taking advantage of the opportunities that the new emerging civilization offers them? Above all, Beauvoir emphasizes the enduring special status of marriage. Employing the kind of destabilizing analogies between primitive and civilized we studied in the previous chapter, she concludes:

> Factories, offices and universities are open to women, but marriage is still considered a more honorable career, exempting her from any other participation in collective life. As in primitive civilizations, the amorous act is a service she has the right to be paid for more or less directly.[469]

Having asserted that "masculine guardianship is becoming extinct" as a consequence of women's recent entry into the workforce, Beauvoir also states:

> Yet, from a feminist point of view, the period we are living through is still a period of transition. Only a part of the female population participates in production, and those same women belong to a society where ancient structures and values still survive. Modern marriage can be understood only in light of the past it perpetuates.[470]

No laws require women to marry. But their upbringing and education ensure that many girls still see marriage as the most viable option. "Parents still raise their daughters for marriage rather than promoting their personal development", Beauvoir notes.[471] Consequently, girls rarely develop the desire to pursue a career, nor the skills needed to succeed in doing so. In addition, women who have sex – not to mention those who get pregnant – outside of marriage still face harsh social sanctions.[472] In theory, it is of course possible to combine marriage and work. But the "burdens of marriage" have remained

[469] Ibid., 188.
[470] Ibid., 502.
[471] Ibid., 189.
[472] Ibid., 188.

heavier for women than for men, as the former are still expected to look after the home and raise the children.[473]

This, then, is one of the reasons why legal reforms are insufficient to end male supremacy. In addition to the law, there is something else that governs the lives of men and women: patriarchal anachronisms that cannot be abolished through a political decision. The status allotted to marriage is one such anachronism. But the real problem is much bigger. The questions one must ask are: Why is this status still attributed to marriage and other, outdated institutions? Why do women continue to choose this traditional path, instead of the ones modern society offers? To answer such questions, Beauvoir invokes the power of custom.

Custom as "second nature"

Beauvoir rejects the notion of an unchangeable female nature that condemns women to a particular, feminine fate. Against those who hold that "woman is nature's creation" she argues that "it must be repeated again that within the human collectivity nothing is natural" and that woman is the product not of nature but of culture.[474] This is not to say, however, that women – or men, for that matter – are the sole masters of our own destiny. As social beings, their lives are still conditioned by certain collective "customs" (*coutumes/moeurs*), which form what Beauvoir speaks of as a "second nature".[475] Toward the end of the first chapter of "Destiny", she concludes that "individuals are never left to their nature; they obey this second nature that is custom (*ils obéissent à cette seconde nature qu'est la coutume)*".[476]

The concept "second nature" is derived from Friedrich Hegel. The finer details of Hegel's reasoning need not concern us here. Yet one important circumstance may be noted: Hegel too equates second nature with custom (*Sitte*) – but argues that custom, as second nature, can fulfil an ethical function. With the words of intellectual historian Cat Moir: "What Hegel is arguing […] is that it is a condition for behaving ethically in society that we internalize the rules of the 'actual order' so that it becomes second nature to act in accordance

[473] Ibid., 186.

[474] Ibid., 856.

[475] Borde and Malovany-Chevallier translates both *coutumes* and *moeurs* into "customs". I have chosen to follow them in this.

[476] Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-1*, 70/76, translation modified.

with them."[477] The assumption that custom can promote an ethical life, or at least help prevent unethical actions, recurs in *The Second Sex*, for example when Beauvoir explains that "where customs forbid violence, muscular energy cannot be the basis for domination".[478] But there is nothing in Hegel's argument that precludes the conclusion that custom (as second nature) might also serve as an *obstacle* to ethical, social life. And it is this fact – that certain customs can foster moral wrongs, such as oppression – that Beauvoir emphasizes. According to her, many contemporary customs perform such functions because all customs have been created by men.[479]

What, then, are customs? Beauvoir never defines this word. But it is clear from the context that she often uses it to denote something quite similar to unwritten social norms: that is, shared beliefs that govern the behavior of individuals living in a society by providing a set of more or less informal, collective standards for what constitutes suitable behavior for a specific person in a specific situation. Among the social practices (partly) regulated by customs, Beauvoir mentions some seemingly trivial, such as how one urinates (standing up or sitting down), but also much more significant ones, like how one is brought up, what kind of education one receives, when and with whom one has sex, whether one will marry and if so who will choose one's partner, as well as how many children one will have.[480]

Beauvoir speaks of law and custom as two different "series of constraints" – one "abstract" and one "concrete" – which can coexist, but also fall out of step. Commenting on the situation of the unmarried woman, she claims that "customs hasten to withdraw everything law grants her; she has total civil capacity: but those laws are abstract and empty; she has no economic autonomy, no social dignity".[481] The fact that law and custom does not always "coincide" can therefore help explain the persistence of patriarchal oppression: it is, in part, because the custom has not changed as quickly as the law that patriarchal anachronisms endure even in legally reformed societies.

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[477] Cat Moir, "Second Nature and the Critique of Ideology in Hegel and the Frankfurt School", in *Hegel and the Frankfurt School*, ed. Paul Giladi (New York: Routledge, 2020), 118.

[478] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 69. At another location, Beauvoir writes: "If customs desire […] that girls choose husbands […], the male's sexual aggressiveness does not grant him any initiative, any privilege." Ibid., 70–71.

[479] Ibid., 181. Beauvoir states that men "created the values, customs, and religions; never did women attempt to vie for that empire."

[480] See for example ibid., 335, 342, 450, 457, 506, 644.

[481] Ibid., 144. Elsewhere, Beauvoir writes: "Social customs are never bent to fit the rigor of institutions and laws; love has forever asserted itself against them." Ibid., 242.

It is ancient customs that keep women from taking advantage of the opportunities that modern societies offer them.[482]

Among the customs to which Beauvoir ascribes most importance are those that condition how women are brought up. Here, it is necessary to emphasize just how much weight she attributes to upbringing and education. Early in the second volume of *The Second Sex,* Beauvoir notes: "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman."[483] Much effort has been devoted to trying to specify the meaning of this famous sentence. But if one considers the context in which it occurs, one seemingly obvious reading presents itself. For it is significant that it opens the chapter called "Childhood" (the first of "Formative Years"), much of which revolves around the question of when girls begin to exhibit traditionally feminine coded traits, such as passivity. Beauvoir's point is that girls are not born with these traits, but develop them, largely as a result of how they are brought up. The celebrated sentence quoted above thus continues: "No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine."[484] A few lines further down, Beauvoir writes:

> If well before puberty and sometimes even starting from early childhood she [the girl] already appears sexually specified, it is not because mysterious instincts immediately destine her to passivity […] but because the intervention of others in the infant's life is almost originary, and her vocation is imperiously breathed into her from the first years of her life.[485]

In other words, it is her upbringing that creates the feminine woman as she appears today: she who is the absolute Other, an object that does not demand to be recognized as a subject. And the upbringing of girls is to a very large extent governed by custom. According to Beauvoir, boys are raised to believe in themselves, to become free and autonomous individuals, to educate themselves and pursue careers, to strive for transcendence rather than give in to the lure of immanence. Girls could be raised in the same way and would

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[482] In the introduction to volume two of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir consequently explains that when she, in the chapters that follow, speaks of "woman", the phrase "in the present state of education and custom" almost always constitutes an implied suffix. Ibid., 328.

[483] Ibid., 330.

[484] Ibid.

[485] Ibid., 330–331. Later on, Beauvoir concludes: "Thus, the passivity that essentially characterizes the 'feminine' woman is a trait that develops in her from her earliest years." Ibid.

then achieve the same, or at least very similar, results. "But customs oppose treating girls exactly like boys", Beauvoir notes.[486] "There are many women who, out of custom and tradition, are still refused education, culture, responsibilities", she observes at another location.[487]

The customs that shape the upbringing of girls are not only enforced by parents and teachers, but also by society at large. Beauvoir again links custom to second nature, stating:

> Beyond a lack of initiative that comes from their education, customs make their [the young girls'] independence difficult. If they wander the streets, they are stared at, accosted. […] This self-control imposed on the woman becomes second nature for "the well-bred girl" and kills spontaneity; lively exuberance is crushed.[488]

Importantly, the way women are brought up not only constitutes a part of their past; it continues to condition their future. This is why Beauvoir assigns those customs that govern women's upbringing such great significance. Even as an adult, woman "is still profoundly marked by her upbringing, respectful of the values the older women around her represent, haunted by childhood and adolescent dreams; she has difficulty reconciling the inheritance of her past with the interest of her future."[489] We recognize here the temporal logic that permeates evolutionary anthropology, but also psychoanalysis: since the present is understood as a product of the past, there is always the risk that the past persists in (or haunts) the present. Beauvoir can thus be read as conceptualizing the persistence of the past as a problem on two levels: the micro and the macro. The problems individual women face in the present largely stem from their *personal* past – that is, from the nature of their upbringing. Yet it is because collective customs, which belong to the *historical* past, persist in modern societies, that girls are brought up differently than boys.

But if ancient customs sustain patriarchal anachronisms that prevent women from taking advantage of the opportunities modern society now offer them, then how does one explain the endurance of these customs? This question brings us, at last, back to the main theme of this investigation: myth.

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[486] Ibid., 342.
[487] Ibid., 644.
[488] Ibid., 401.
[489] Ibid., 830.

As has been noted, Beauvoir begins chapter three of "Myths" by asking: "The myth of woman plays a significant role in literature; but what is its importance in everyday life? To what extent does it affect customs and individual behaviors (*les mœurs et les conduites individuelles*)?"[490] The third chapter of "Myths" does not offer a detailed answer to this question. The relationship between myth and custom is nonetheless illuminated in volume two.[491]

We have already seen that Beauvoir argues that customs prevent girls from being raised in the same way as boys: whereas boys are raised to become active subjects, girls are (still) brought up to become passive objects. But why have these customs remained in place? Beauvoir's analysis indicates the myth of women constitutes the main reason. In particular, I read Beauvoir as arguing that women, having themselves internalized mythical ideas about what a "real" (i.e., feminine) woman is, help keep patriarchal customs alive by raising girls to *embody* this myth. Allow me to quote a longer passage in which Beauvoir describes how girls are raised:

> Thus, women given the care of a little girl are bent on transforming her into women like themselves with zeal and arrogance mixed with resentment. And even a generous mother who sincerely wants the best for her child will, as a rule, think it wiser to make a "true woman" of her, as that is the way she will be best accepted by society. So she is given other little girls as friends, she is entrusted to female teachers, she lives among matrons as in the days of the gynaeceum, books and games are chosen for her that introduce her to her destiny, her ears are filled with the treasures of feminine wisdom, feminine virtues are presented to her, she is taught cooking, sewing, and housework as well as how to dress, how to take care of her personal appearance, charm, and modesty; […] in short, she is committed to becoming, like her elders, a servant and an idol. Today, thanks to feminism's breakthroughs, it is becoming more and more normal to encourage her to pursue her education, to devote herself to sports; but […] success is made more difficult for her as another kind of accomplishment is demanded of her: she must at least *also* be a woman; she must not *lose* her femininity.[492]

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[490] Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-1*, 215/395, translation modified.

[491] Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-II*, 328/9. In the introduction to this volume, Beauvoir explains: "Women of today are overthrowing the myth of femininity (*le mythe de la féminité*); they are beginning to affirm their independence concretely; but their success in living their human condition completely does not come easily." This suggests that lives of women, although changing, are still largely shaped by the myths developed by men.

[492] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 343, italics in original.

Here we can observe the myth at work. This passage tells us that the customs that define the upbringing of girls are not just mechanically reproduced, but survive because of this deeply rooted, constantly reinstated, mythical idea of what a feminine woman is.[493] At the same time, customs transform myth into fact. Through customs, girls are metamorphosed into embodiments of the myth of woman.

That the survival of old customs, according to Beauvoir, can only be understood with reference to the myth of woman becomes particularly clear when she states that "through the myths (*à travers les mythes*), [patriarchal] society imposed its laws and customs on individuals in an imagistic and sensible way; it is in a mythical form (*une forme mythique*) that the group imperative insinuated itself into each consciousness."[494] This quote places myth at the very center of Beauvoir's ground-breaking study. Here, the "mythical" is framed as a particular "form", through which the patriarchal, "collective imperative" – which otherwise would have remained something external: a set of "laws and customs" – is internalized and becomes part of the subject's very constitution. Hence, the phenomenological descriptions presented in "Formative years", "Situations", "Justification" and "Toward liberation" both rest upon and expand the argument that Beauvoir begins to develop in "Myths" – a part that functions like a bridge, which ties together the analysis of (physiological, psychological, economic and historical) facts carried out in volume one with that of lived experiences, at the center of volume two.

But if it is true, as Beauvoir states in the passage just quoted, that both laws and customs have been imposed on people by means of myths, how is it that the law, but not the customs, of patriarchal society have been reformed in women's favor, even though the myth of woman has remained in place? In order to answer this question, we must clarify how Beauvoir conceptualizes the relationship between myth, law and material factors. This will also help make visible the difference between Beauvoir's concept of myth and the Marxist concept of ideology.

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[493] Women do not only raise girls to embody the myth of woman. They also seek to embody this myth themselves. For example, Beauvoir states the adolescent girl "will gain value in the eyes of males not by increasing her human worth but by modeling herself on their dreams", which is to say that she has an incentive to try and resemble, rather than challenge, her mythical being-for-men. Ibid., 402.

[494] Beauvoir, *TSS/DS-1*, 322/404, translation modified.

In seeking to explain why the law has been reformed in favor of women, Beauvoir remains faithful to Fredrich Engels' strictly materialist theory. Citing the latter, she writes: "Woman cannot be emancipated unless she takes part in production on a large social scale and is only incidentally bound to domestic work. And this has become possible only within a large modern industry that not only accepts women's work on a grand scale but formally requires it."[495] In other words, the laws that prohibited women from participating in production were abolished because they no longer served the ruling class's economic interests, when material-technological increased the need for labor. All other legal reforms followed as a result of this. Referring to nineteenth century debates between anti-feminists and feminists, Beauvoir consequently asserts that these "theoretical debates" did not influence the course of events.[496] It is, she concludes, "the technical revolution realized by men that enfranchised today's women."[497]

This is where Beauvoir's reasoning becomes particularly interesting. For if it is in the economic interest of the ruling class that women participate in production on a large scale, this means that the myth of the woman – which, as we have seen, causes women to continue prioritizing marriage and domestic chores over productive labor – comes into *conflict* with these interests. Herein lies an important difference between Beauvoir's concept of myth and the Marxist concept of ideology. According to Engels and Karl Marx (1818–1883), the dominant ideology – which is synonymous with the "ideas of the ruling class" – constitutes a "superstructure", that rests upon and reflects a material base, described as the "economic structure of society, the real foundation", determined by the relations of production.[498] This means that the dominant ideology will change when the relations of production do so.[499]

In contrast, the myth of women is no mere superstructure, built on a material base. Questioning what she terms Engel's "economic monism",

[495] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 89.

[496] Ibid., 163.

[497] Ibid., 182.

[498] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The German Ideology" [1846], in *Marx and Engels Collected Works. Volume 5. Marx and Engels 1845–47*, ed. Jack Cohen et al., trans. Lawrence & Wishart (London: Lawrence & Wishhart, 2010), 59; Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy" [1859], in *Marx and Engels Collected Works. Volume 29. Marx 1857–61*, ed. Jack Cohen et al., trans. Lawrence & Wishhart (London: Lawrence & Wishhart, 2010), 263.

[499] "The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life." Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy", 263.

Beauvoir writes: "Underlying […] the economic history of humanity there is an existential infrastructure that alone makes it possible to understand in its unity the unique form that is a life."[500] One import aspect of this existential infrastructure is the universal human need for recognition. But another one is "the imperialism of human consciousness": the fact that "a fundamental hostility to any other consciousness is found in consciousness itself", which means that every human being strives to be recognized, yet remains unwilling to recognize others, which they instead seek to dominate.[501] The myth of woman is, in large part, a product of this existential infrastructure, which remains the same even when the relations of productions undergo fundamental changes.

The first paragraph of "Myths" reads:

> History has shown that men have always held all the concrete powers; from patriarchy's earliest times they have deemed it useful to keep woman in a state of dependence; their codes were set up against her; she was thus concretely established as the Other. This condition served males' economic interests; but it also suited their ontological and moral ambitions.[502]

By "ontological" ambitions, Beauvoir is referring to how man, by trapping woman in the position of the absolute Other, produced a being who recognizes him and thus affirms his subjectivity, but who does not reciprocally demand to be recognized.[503] As stated, this ontological ambition is not caused by an unjust economic system. Instead, it forms part of humanity's unchanging existential infrastructure. Admittedly, the fact that this ambition has conditioned the historical relationship between men and women to such large extent *is* due to certain material circumstances, such as women's original enslavement to the reproductive function. Likewise, it is a recent change in the material circumstances governing the life of women and men – the industrialization and the invention of effective contraceptives – that has now enabled women to curb this ontological ambition, so to perhaps enable a reciprocal recognition. Yet, material changes remain incapable of eradicating

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[500] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 93.

[501] Ibid., 91, 27.

[502] Ibid., 193.

[503] Ibid., 195. "She is nature raised to the transparency of consciousness; she is a naturally submissive consciousness. And therein lies the marvelous hope that man has often placed in woman: he hopes to accomplish himself as being through carnally possessing a being while making confirmed in his freedom by a docile freedom."

the very existential infrastructure from which this ambition stems, which suggests that that such changes cannot, on their own, eliminate the myth of woman, as this myth serves both man's economic interests *and* said ontological ambitions. Consequently, even the abolishment of private property may, ultimately, leave the myth of woman – and, by extension, the patriarchal customs sustained by this myth – in place.[504] Beauvoir's writings on myth thereby challenges the solution to patriarchal oppression proposed by Marxist socialists. Because the myth of woman is no mere superstructure, it may survive and help keep patriarchal customs alive even in a classless, socialist society.

This still leaves one question unanswered. If the customs that sustain the myth of woman are in conflict with the economic interests of the ruling class (who needs women to partake in production instead of prioritizing marriage and domestic chores), why is it that the ruling class does not seek to eradicate these customs, just as it did with laws the stopped women from working outside the home? Beauvoir does not say. But a likely answer seems to be that it is not within the power of the ruling class to do so, simply because customs – unlike laws – cannot be thoroughly reformed through a political decision. Thus, the former will remain in place as long as the myths they reflect remain so.

But how, then, can one ever eliminate the myth of woman, according to Beauvoir? This is the final question I will address in this part-study.

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[504] Cf. Debra Berghoffen, "Menage À Trois: Freud, Beauvoir, and the Marquis De Sade", *Continental Philosophy Review* 34, no. 2 (2001). Although Bergoffen devotes limited space to Beauvoir's concept myth, she begins this text by stating that women's subordinated position, according to the latter, is not only a consequence of "material dependency" or "political disenfranchisement", but "the necessary effect of the desire of patriarchal man" – manifested in and maintained by the myth of woman. Ibid., 151. Bergoffen concludes: "Insofar as the patriarchal myths of femininity and motherhood sustain men's claims, they anchor the patriarchal order. Whatever progress is made in women's economic status will be cosmetic so long as the myths that legitimate these desires/demands prevail." Ibid., 162. See also Thomas Chesworth "Bondage and Dominance: Mythologies of Sex in Beauvoir's Hegel" (paper presented at *The 28th International Conference of the Simone de Beauvoir Society*, Helsinki, August D16–19, 2023). Although Chesworth reads Beauvoir as a materialist thinker who holds that (sexual) myths reproduce a more primary "material truth" (according to which heterosexual intercourse *does* run the risk of enslaving woman), they still emphasize that Beauvoir's writings suggest that material changes are insufficient to liberate woman. "Though produced originally from a set of material conditions, mythologies of sex as violent have come to dialectically reproduce those conditions, and so altering just one of these dialectical components would be insufficient for overcoming this truth."

Since all men – whether they live in a pre-capitalist, capitalist or post-capitalist society – will derive some benefit from the myth of woman, which serves their ontological ambitions, it cannot be expected that they will abandon it voluntarily.[505] Hence, it is women who must *force* men to give it up, by making it impossible to perpetuate the mythical notion of woman as the Other, an object. In other words, women must enter the struggle for recognition, from which they have hitherto been excluded.

But is this possible? Victoria Barker argues that Beauvoir's theory of myth as a projection implies that the answer is no. For if woman, as a mythical entity, is a mere projection, then there is nothing behind the myth for man to recognize, once the myth is removed. According to Barker, this problem ultimately goes back to Ludwig Feuerbach, on whose "projection theory" she argues Beauvoir's writings on myth rest:

> Accounting for the attributes of God purely by reference to the intentionality of the subject, it [Feuerbach's projection theory] collapses into an egological model of subject/other relations, a model in which the other is defined and differentiated by reference to the terms of the subject. […] Adopting this model, Beauvoir interprets man's image of woman in self-reflective terms, having nothing to do with women themselves. [506]

By contrast, I argue that Barker's objection demonstrates the problem of reading Beauvoir's writings on myths only in the context of Feuerbach's theological anthropology. For there is an important difference between women and God. According to Beauvoir, God is a *mere* projection, an invention. But woman is something more. Men, she writes, "did invent her." "But she also exists without their invention."[507] It is true that the myth of woman, according to Beauvoir, has little to do with women themselves. However, this does not mean that there is nothing beyond the myth. On the contrary, the myth of woman is the projection that makes invisible what actually exists: not a true female essence, but the fact that woman is also a

[505] And since even *logos*, as we have seen, can be put in the service of *mythos*, we have no reason to assume that future, philosophical and/or scientific advances will, by definition, entail a demythification.

[506] Barker, "De Beauvoir and the Myth of the Given", 176.

[507] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 240.

subject, lacking an essence of any sort. This is what women must convince men to admit.

This process has already begun. And as stated, Beauvoir seems to hold that it is destined to eventually produce complete equality between the sexes. Yet, it will take time. The more women enter the workforce, the more women will become aware of their own subjectivity and demand that others recognize it. This will make it harder and harder for the myth to survive, which in turn will lead to the emergence of new customs, which will allow even more women of the next generation to enter the workforce – and so on. But the power of the past cannot be broken all at once.

In the next part-study, we will see that it is this slow evolution that Mary Daly cannot accept, which is why she instead calls for a revolution, an unequivocal break with the past, which in turn opens for a different conceptualization of myth.

Summary

When the history of feminist theory is written, *The Second Sex* is frequently portrayed as initiating a definitive break. Indeed, it has been described as constituting the beginning of modern feminist theory as such. "It is not", literary critic Judith Thurman states in the introduction to the latest English translation, "the last word on 'the problem of woman,' […] but it marks the place in history where an enlightenment begins."[508] This quote is interesting, as it has often been argued that enlightenment begins where myth ends. In contrast, I have tried to show that if Simone de Beauvoir achieves a break with the feminist tradition that precedes her, it is partly due to her *use of myth.* Thus, this study challenges the received reading of Beauvoir as "mythoclast" and a sworn enemy of myth, in favor of one that makes visible the many positive or productive functions that myth-talk serve in her most influential work.

Beauvoir's use of myth

Unlike earlier studies, this one has emphasized that Beauvoir employs several different concepts of myth. On a few occasions, she makes use of an "ideological" concept of myth, which is to say that she equates "myth" with a misconception or lie. More often, she employs a "folkloristic" concept, the proponents of which use "myths" to denote supernatural stories typically associated with spatially or temporally distant cultures; stories that Tae-Yeoun Keum terms literary myths. When she employs the word in this latter sense, Beauvoir appropriates a well-established concept of myth used by numerous mythologists before her. But what distinguishes her writings on literary myths from that of her predecessors is that she approaches these stories from a perspective shaped by a distinctively political focus on gendered inequalities. This paves the way for an innovative *feminist critique of literary myth*, which helps make visible the until then overlooked complicity of such stories in perpetuating patriarchal oppression. Thus, she conceptualizes myth as a social factor and attributes to myth an *explanatory value* in relation to an oppressive system. But Beauvoir also makes use of literary myth in two much more concrete ways. First, she employs it as a *historiographical resource* to map the history of patriarchal oppression. Thus, she follows in the footsteps of influential mythologists like Johan Jakob Bachofen, who was one of the first to

[508] Thurman, "Introduction", 8-9.

argue that literary myths could offer historical insights. At the same time, Beauvoir explicitly challenges Bachofen's most famous thesis: that of the original matriarchy. Secondly, she treats literary myth as a *phenomenological aid*, through which it becomes possible to identify the *eidos* of man's mythical experience of woman. This is to say that she studies literary myth to determine how woman appears to man (what Beauvoir in her 1948 essay and in *The Second Sex* refers to as woman's "being-for-men").

Beauvoir does not only make use of literary myths, however. She also uses *the word* "myth" to create a new *philosophical concept*: "the myth of woman", which makes it possible to see and discuss something previously invisible, ghostlike. This expression does not refer to a lie or a literary myth, but a set of pancultural and transhistorical images and ideas that permeate both literary myths and other cultural expressions, including philosophical and scientific works. Whereas at least one prominent scholar has claimed that Beauvoir gathers these images and ideas under the heading of myth to signal that they are false, I have argued that it is possible to identify several additional features that, according to Beauvoir, render the myth of woman mythical. Most importantly, her analysis suggests that the myth of woman is made up of "collective representations", have an affective base, is centered around a supposedly eternal entity ("the Eternal Feminine"), condition the experience of all men and constitute a projection. I have also shown that Beauvoir presents the myth of woman as conditioned by a particular, mythic mode of thought ("mythic thinking"), characterized by an inability or unwillingness to adopt a reflexive attitude towards the product of one's consciousness.

If the myth of woman is looked at as an extradiscursive *thing*, Beauvoir cannot be said to make use of this myth. But this study argues that "the myth of woman", as a philosophical concept, functions as a *means of critique* in the Kantian sense of the word, meaning that it constitutes a discursive tool that Beauvoir makes use of to discuss the very conditions of possibility of patriarchal oppression.

Beauvoir recontextualized

The present study offers a recontextualization of Beauvoir's writings on myth. Renowned scholars have argued that Beauvoir draws upon Claude Lévi-Strauss' *The Elementary Structure of Kinship* and/or that she equates myth with ideology in the Marxist sense. I question both these interpretations. Biographical information indicates that Beauvoir had already completed her study of myth when she read Lévi-Strauss. Equating her concept of myth with

a Marxist concept of ideology, in turn, obscures the fact that Beauvoir uses myth-talk to develop an analysis that challenges, rather than reproduces, the Marxist view of patriarchal oppression.

By constructing a wider context, encompassing larger parts of the mythological network, the study at hand demonstrates that Beauvoir's writings on myth have more in common with "first wave" mythologists like Edward Burnett Tylor, James George Frazer and Sigmund Freud. To be more precise, I have shown that Beauvoir appropriates a concept of myth derived from evolutionary anthropology, the representatives of which conceptualized myth is an essentially primitive phenomenon conditioned by a unreflexive mode of thought. According to my reading, Beauvoir appropriates and adapts this concept to establish a parallel between the way modern men relate to woman and the behavior of so-called primitives, both of which she presents as governed by mythic thinking. This allows her to articulate a novel analysis of and argument against patriarchal oppression (which nevertheless presupposes and reproduces the colonial dichotomy between primitive and civilized). It moreover helps Beauvoir promote a specific understanding of her own project. Whereas feminism in her time was sometimes depicted as a political movement devoted to the special interests of certain groups, her use of myth-talk frames feminism as part of *logos'* ancient battle against *mythos*.

By reading Beauvoir against the wider mythological network, this study has also shown how her writings on myth challenges received ideas about what myth is and what it does. To begin with, Beauvoir argues that all literary myths were created by men, whose particular worldview and interest myths both reflect and help reproduce. This claim calls into question the Jungian notion of myths as sprung from a collective unconscious. It also challenges an assumption embraced by many representatives of *la mythomanie*, who held that myths could generate social cohesion because they expressed something all members of a given community had in common. Beauvoir's writings on myth moreover challenge one of the premises on which the evolutionary anthropological discourse on myth rests. Whereas proponents of the latter typically attributed the survival of primitive-mythical elements in modernity to a deficiency of rationality (particularly evident among rural residents, workers and women), Beauvoir's argument suggests that this fact is better explained by looking at how such primitive-mythical survivals serve the economic and existential interests of those allegedly rational individuals and groups in power – who she describes as having employed rationality to *defend* their mythical beliefs.

This study has shown that Beauvoir's writings on myths can be read as an attempt to answer a pressing question in post-war Europe and North America: Why has the situation of women in many respects remained the same, despite that fact that most legal reforms sought by so-called first-wave feminists have been implemented? By examining a hitherto overlooked text, I demonstrate that Beauvoir in 1948 describes the relation between men and women as conditioned by *two* factors: laws and myths, presented as interacting but not fully interdependent. This implies that legal reforms may leave unaltered one of the factors conditioning the situation of women. According to my reading, this is exactly what Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex,* suggests has happened. More precisely, her analysis indicates that myths have contributed to the persistence of patriarchal oppression by keeping alive conservative "customs", which she describes as a "series of constraints" distinct from that composed by laws. Beauvoir thus uses myth-talk to challenge one of the premises on which much liberal feminism rests.

Beauvoir's writings on myth do not only reveal the shortcomings of liberal feminists' one-sided focus on formal rights: it also challenges the strictly materialist solution to patriarchal oppression proposed by Marxist socialists. To specify, Beauvoir argues that the phenomenon she terms myth, unlike ideology – which orthodox Marxists understood as a "superstructure" that was doomed to perish if the material "base" changed – can endure long after the material conditions under which it emerged have disappeared. The reason for this is that myth reflects both historically specific economic interests *and* transhistorical ontological ambitions. This, in turn, suggests that the abolition of private property may not be enough to eliminate male supremacy.

Thus, if it is true that Beauvoir helped found modern feminist theory by offering a systematic alternative to both liberal and Marxists accounts of patriarchal oppression, one could say that this very theoretical tradition begins with talk of myth: mythology.

PART III.
MARY DALY

Introduction

It may be that we will witness a remythologizing of religion.

– Mary Daly, 1973

During the 1960s and 1970s, feminism grew into a mass movement, mobilizing millions of European and North American women, many of whom were raised in Jewish or Christian homes and still considered themselves believers. While the vast majority of these women seem to have found ways to reconcile their religious faith and feminist convictions, there were also those who struggled. Some thus chose to renounce their religious creed, favoring instead a secular approach.[1] Others tried to reform Judaism and Christianity from within, altering or removing aspects that appeared incompatible with their feminist beliefs, without undertaking apostasy.[2] Still others sought to revive a pagan religion or invent an entirely new faith, which would not only be *compatible* with feminism, but itself become an effective feminist force; a spiritual complement to feminism's profane side, without which some claimed that this movement could never achieve its ultimate goals.[3]

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[1] In 1974, the self-proclaimed radical feminist Ti-Grace Atkinson claimed that "whenever 'religion' […] has resurfaced in a Movement, it has historically been a sure sign of decadence and reaction. *Any* religion is too much religion." Quoted from Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 184, italics in original. See also L. Zwissler, "Feminism and Religion: Intersections between Western Activism, Theology and Theory", *Religion Compass* 6, no. 7 (2012): 357. A useful collection of texts by feminists who take a critical stance toward religion is Annie Laurie Gaylor ed., *Women without Superstition: "No Gods - No Masters": The Collected Writings of Women Freethinkers of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Madison: Freedom From Religion Foundation, 1997).

[2] See for example Valerie Saiving Goldstein, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View", *The Journal of Religion* 40, no. 2 (1960); Mary Daly, "A Built-in Bias", *Commonweal* 81 (1965); Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Is Roman Catholicism Reformable?", *The Christian Century* 82, no. 38 (1965); Phyllis Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 41, no. 1 (1973); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Women in the New Testament", in *Scripture and the Church*, ed. Robert Heye (New York: Paulist Press, 1976).

[3] See for example Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (London: Women's Press, [1973] 1986); Zsuzsanna Budapest, *The Feminist Book of Lights and Shadows* (Venice: Feminist Wicca, 1975); Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*; Carol P. Christ, "Why Women Need the Goddess" [1979], in *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, ed. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992); Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979).

Mary Daly belonged to the so-called "reformists" as well as the "revolutionaries", albeit at different moments in her long and varied career.[4] Today, she is widely recognized as a key figure both in the history of Catholic feminism and the much wider, non-confessional movement known as "feminist spirituality", the representatives of which distance themselves from all major religions.[5] This part-study examines how Daly uses myth-talk to articulate analyses and arguments of great importance to both these movements. At its center stands her first three books: *The Church and the Second Sex* (1968), *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Woman's Liberatio*n (1973) and *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978), on the basis of which I demonstrate that she appropriates several different concepts of myth to advance and defend widely divergent positions.

If compared to the secular, existentialist-phenomenological school of thought associated with Simone de Beauvoir, at the center of the previous part-study, Catholic feminism and feminist spirituality might be perceived as marginal phenomena in the history of feminist theory. But this conclusion reflects a reductive understanding of religion's and religious people's role within the wider feminist movement. As historian of religion Mary J. Henold points out, religious women helped build second wave-feminism from its very inception.[6] A similar argument is advanced by feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti. Although the bulk of European feminism "is justified in claiming to be secular", she concludes that "feminist spirituality and alternative spiritual

[4] Sarah Lucia Hoagland and Marilyn Frye, "Introduction", in *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Daly,* ed. Sarah Lucia Hoagland and Marilyn Frye (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2000), 29.

[5] In an article from 1994, Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki states that Daly's works "span – and arguably inaugurate – the past three decades of feminist reconsideration of God." Marjorie Hewitt Suchoki, "The Idea of God in Feminist Philosophy", *Hypatia* 9, no. 4 (1994): 58. On the influence of Daly on Catholic feminism, see Mary J. Henold, *Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 36–39, 56-57, 60–62, 69–72; Jessica Coblentz and Brianne A. B. Jacobs, "Mary Daly's *The Church and the Second Sex* after Fifty Years of Us Catholic Feminist Theology", *Theological Studies* 79, no. 3 (2018). On feminist spirituality and Daly's contribution to this movement, see Cynthia Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess: The Feminist Spirituality Movement in America* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 47–48. For more general accounts of Daly's contributions to feminist theology, see Lisbeth Mikaelsson, "Religion", in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, ed. Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 768–769, 772; Christopher D. Rodkey, "Mary Daly", in *The Palgrave Handbook of Radical Theology*, ed. Christopher D. Rodkey and Jordan E. Miller (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018).

[6] Mary J. Henold, "Introduction", in *How Did Catholic Women Participate in the Rebirth of American Feminism?* (Binghamton: State University of New York at Binghamton, 2005).

practices have a long and established history in Europe and elsewhere."[7] In addition, Braidotti emphasizes that religion is not only part of feminism's past, but that contemporary feminist theory has undergone a "postsecular turn", which challenges feminists to rethink what role non-secular elements may play within the movement.[8]

It is, moreover, possible to identify significant overlaps between secular and non-secular strands of feminist theory. Representatives of both strands have, for example, sought to explain why age-old patriarchal tendencies persist in otherwise radically transformed societies. In the preceding part-study, we saw that this question was actualized in the first half of the twentieth century, when the limitations of legal reforms – the solution to inequality favored by most liberal feminists – began to become apparent. I there established that Beauvoir helped offer a new answer to this question by stressing the complex relationship between myth and law. In the present study, I argue that Daly accomplishes something similar, but by concentrating on the relationship between myth and religion.

In addressing the link between myth and religion, Daly does not only offer a distinctive contribution to twentieth century feminist theory; she also intervenes in a fierce theological debate, the roots of which can be traced far back in time. Up until about two hundred years ago, the word *mythos*, like its Latin counterpart *fabula*, was primarily used to refer to pagan narratives, which the Christian church denounced as false and blasphemous, the antithesis to God's *logos* as embodied in the Bible. But from the late eighteenth century onwards, more and more commentators began to assert the presence of myths at the very heart of Christianity. By the middle of the twentieth century, when Daly obtained her two doctorates in theology, even Christian theologians generally acknowledged the existence of mythological elements in the Bible. Yet there was no consensus on how such elements should be addressed. In what is arguably the most influential theological tract of the last century, *New Testament and Mythology: The Problem of Demythologizing the New Testament Message* (1941), theologian Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) declared that the Bible had to be "demythologized", lest the Christian doctrine lose all credibility in

[7] Rosi Braidotti, "In Spite of the Times: The Postsecular Turn in Feminism", *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, no. 6 (2008): 3, 7.
[8] Ibid., 2.

modern society.[9] Other theologians – including one of Daly's great influences, Paul Tillich (1886–1965)[10] – protested that myths were an integral part of all religions, which no faith could do without.[11]

There were also those who argued that the age of Christianity was over, regardless of how the Church chose to tackle its mythological heritage. For example, theologian Gabriel Vahanian (1927–2012) claimed that the West had entered a "post-Christian" era, precisely because all Christian myths had been stripped of their former authority. In *The Death of God: The Culture of our Post-Christian Era* (1961), Vahanian writes:

> Our culture is no longer transcendentalist but immanentist; no longer sacral or sacramental, but secularistic or profane. This transition is explained by the fact that the essentially mythological worldview of Christianity has been succeeded by a thoroughgoing scientific view of reality, in terms of which either God is no longer necessary, or he is neither necessary nor unnecessary: he is irrelevant, he is dead.[12]

As is well known, Friedrich Nietzsche had declared that God was dead as early as 1882. Still, one can perhaps say that the consequences of this tremendous "deed", which according to Nietzsche's madman needed time to be "seen and heard", finally became evident in the 1960s.[13] At the very least, it was around this time that the alleged death of God became a more avidly discussed topic, as evidenced by the fact that it in 1966 found its way to the front page of *Time*

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[9] Rudolf Bultmann, "The New Testament and Mythology" [1941], in *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch, trans. Reginald H. Fuller (New York: Harper & Row, 1961).

[10] On Daly's relation to Tillich, see Mary Ann Stenger, "A Critical Analysis of the Influence of Paul Tillich on Mary Daly's Feminist Theology", *Encounter* 43, no. 3 (1982); Laurel C. Schneider, "From New Being to Meta-Being: A Critical Analysis of Paul Tillich's Influence on Mary Daly", *Soundings* 75, no. 2-3 (1992); Laurel C. Schneider, "The Courage to See and to Sin: Mary Daly's Elemental Transformation of Paul Tillich's Ontology", in *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Daly,* ed. Sarah Lucia Hoagland and Marilyn Frye (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2000).

[11] Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 50–51. Tillich did not dismiss the value of demythologization, but he defined it differently from Bultmann. See this thesis, 279–280.

[12] Gabriel Vahanian, *The Death of God: The Culture of Our Post-Christian Era* (New York: G. Braziller, 1961), xxxii.

[13] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, ed. Bernard Willams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1887] 2001), 120.

magazine.[14] It was also then that the idea of God's death gained wider traction among Christian theologians. But though they borrowed his expression, these theologians at times differed from Nietzsche – who valued pagan myths but vehemently rejected all aspects of Christianity – in that they did not celebrate, but mourned, God's demise.[15] Toward the end of *The Death of God,* Vahanian despondently remarked: "Once God is dead and man is deified, man is even more alone and estranged from himself than he ever was before."[16]

In this study, I will demonstrate that Daly appropriates and challenges arguments associated with all aforementioned positions from a distinctly feminist perspective. She responds to Nietzsche that God is indeed dying, but not yet dead; that both "he" and other aspects of Christianity's misogynistic legacy live on, due in large part to the continuing sway of religious myths. But she also argues that it is the responsibility of women engaged in the feminist struggle to complete the murder predicted and hoped for by Nietzsche, so to finally rid the world of God the Father. This will require confronting Christian myths, albeit in a far more radical manner than Bultmann and other proponents of demythologization realize. At the same time, Daly argues that the so-called "women's revolution" offers a solution to the very predicament identified by theologians like Vahanian, who worried that the death of God might breed unbearable darkness and despair. In an article titled "After the Death of God the Father" (1971), she concludes that this revolution is "very possibly the greatest single hope for survival of religious consciousness in the West."[17] A similar argument appears in *Beyond God the Father*, where Daly furthermore links this, the women's revolution's revitalizing impact on the religion, with its potential to accomplish a *remythologization* – that is, a creation of new religious myths.[18] Daly can thus be read both within the context of an intra-theological discussion of the role of myth in Christianity, and the anti-Christian but myth-affirming Nietzschean tradition.

Having established Daly's importance to Catholic feminism, feminist spirituality and a more general Christian theological debate, it is necessary to note that her influence extends far beyond the religious sphere. As a matter of

[14] "Is God Dead?", *Times*, April 8, 1966, cover.

[15] This was not true of all theologians. On the contrary, many representatives of what has been called "God-is-dead-theology" appear to have *embraced* what they spoke of as the death of God. See Philipp David, "The Death of God as a Turn to Radical Theology: Then and Now", *Religions* 15, no. 8 (2024).

[16] Vahanian, *The Death of God*, 230.

[17] Mary Daly, "After the Death of God the Father", *Commonweal* 7 (1971): 8.

[18] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 71.

fact, she was once considered one of the most influential of all U.S. feminist theorists, religious as well as secular. Writing in 1988, cultural theorist Meaghan Morris declares that *Gyn/Ecology* is "probably the most important and influential single work to come out of the American women's movement since Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*." In support of this claim, Morris emphasizes that Daly has "been read by an enormous number of women", while she has also helped shape the wider feminist debate for an extended period of time.[19]

In particular, Daly is often presented as a significant representative of "radical feminism", a movement that emerged in the late 1960s and to which she pledged her allegiance in the early 1970s, around the same time that she renounced her Catholic faith.[20] Even as a self-proclaimed "postchristian" radical feminist, Daly nevertheless continues to emphasize the significance of religion and myth, effectively influencing the direction of this entire movement. On the one hand, she argues that radical feminists must recognize and attempt to remedy the continued influence of patriarchal religions and their derivatives over supposedly secular societies. Here, she uses concepts appropriated from mythology to explain precisely how patriarchal religion and by extension patriarchy maintains its power. On the other hand, she claims that even radical feminists have a need for religion. In this context, Daly describes "feminist myth-making" as a potential progressive political tool, which could serve the movement's emancipatory cause. In fact, I will demonstrate that she seeks to create a feminist myth of her own, offering radical feminism as such a mythical framing.

In that she, as one of the first feminist theorists ever, explicitly speaks of myth-making in positive terms, to denote a practice that women fighting patriarchal oppression should make use of, Daly differs from Beauvoir, who in the 1940s introduced feminist theory to the concept of myth. To make sense of this discrepancy, we must recognize that Daly operates in a different historical context than Beauvoir, where different issues are at stake. But we should also note that Daly approaches these issues with the help of other intellectual resources. To be more precise, I have identified four contexts,

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[19] Meaghan Morris, *The Pirate's Fiancée: Feminism, Reading, Postmodernism* (London: Verso, 1988), 28.

[20] For works in which Daly is categorized as a radical feminist, see for example Josephine Donovan, *Feminist Theory: The Intellectual Traditions of American Feminism* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 158; Valerie Bryson, *Feminist Political Theory* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 2016), 187; Rosemarie Putnam Tong and Tina Fernandes Botts, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction* (New York: Westview Press, 2017), 45–46. Note that Tong and Botts classify Daly as a "radical-cultural" feminist.

against the background of which I argue that Daly's writings on myth should be read. The first two have already been mentioned above: the intra-theological discussion on Christian myths and the anti-Christian, myth-affirming Nietzschean tradition. The third is a neo-Romantic mythological movement represented by theorists such as Carl Gustav Jung, Joseph Campbell (1904–1987) and Mircea Eliade (1907–1986). The fourth and final is a heterogenous but distinctively feminist tradition, which includes both Beauvoir and later feminist theorists, such as Adrienne Rich, Elizabeth Gould Davis (1910–1974) and Kate Millet (1934–2017). Further down, I will discuss these contexts in more detail and specify how Daly relates to each one. But first, I must say something about Daly's status as a feminist theorist today. Or rather, why she essentially lacks such status.

Daly and her critics

Unlike the other two theorists at the center of this study, Daly is not someone with whom contemporary feminists often engage. According to the editors of *Feminist Interpretation of Mary Daly* (2000), her work is frequently presented as "unworthy of re-reading, because it contains error represented as egregious, indeed fatal."[21] Admittedly, one can find several examples of feminists who have hailed Daly's writings as groundbreaking, even life-changing.[22] But today, her work is often rejected as representing an embarrassing but fortunately eclipsed phase in the history of feminist theory. With the words of historian Clare Monagle, Daly is regularly dismissed as "crazy" and as an "essentialist", whose writings only little of value can be extracted.[23] To a certain extent, this is true of most self-proclaimed, white radical feminists who had their heyday in the 1970s. In retrospect, this decade has become strongly associated with gender essentialism – i.e., the belief that "males and females

[21] Hoagland and Frye, "Introduction", 1.

[22] See for example Adrienne Rich, "That Women Be Themselves", *New York Times*, Feb. 4, 1979; Catherine Keller, *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), xi; Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject: Women's Discourses and Feminist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), viii; Judith Plaskow, "Lessons from Mary Daly", *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 28, no. 2 (2012); Helena Reckitt, "Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*", *C: The Visual Arts Foundation*, no. 126 (2015). See also the introduction and most chapters in Sarah Lucia Hoagland and Marilyn Frye ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Daly* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2000).

[23] Clare Monagle, "Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology*: Mysticism, Difference, and Feminist History", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 44, no. 2 (2019): 333. Note that these are not Monagle's own words, but descriptions communicated to her by others.

are born with distinctively different natures, determined biologically rather than culturally"[24] – towards which a fierce opposition developed in the 1980s and 1990s and still persists today.[25] But as literary theorist Elizabeth Hedrick notes, Daly has come under particularly heavy fire from feminist theorists who present themselves as enemies of essentialism:

> Essentialism was of course the central preoccupation of feminist theorists during the 1980s and their attacks on it took many forms. But Daly's work served as the original flashpoint for the issues that came to predominate in these attacks over the course of the decade. By the early 1990s, the rejection of essentialism, as well as the identification of Daly with the concept, was so complete that thereafter Daly's work was widely regarded as irrelevant to feminist theory except as a foundational antitype. At her death, she was more often lauded as a feminist theologian than as a feminist theorist proper.[26]

Precisely because she functions as "foundational antitype" – that is, an Other against whom later anti-essentialist feminists define themselves – Daly has nonetheless continued to influence the development of feminist theory, long after her work was dismissed as devoid of any relevance to its future.[27]

One theorist who helped promote the reading of Daly as an *essentially* essentialist feminist is philosopher Linda Alcoff. In her influential "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism" (1988), Alcoff states that Daly, like Rich, "identifies a female essence, defines patriarchy as the subjugation and colonization of this essence […] and then promotes a solution that revolves around rediscovering our essence and bonding with other women."[28] Alcoff argues that this is indicative of what historian Alice Echols, who also cites Daly as an example, calls "cultural feminism", the representatives of which are said

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[24] *A Dictionary of Media and Communication,* "Gender Essentialism." (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[25] On the role of "essentialism" in the narratives that feminists tell about the history of Western feminist theory, see Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter,* 38.

[26] Elizabeth Hedrick, "The Early Career of Mary Daly: A Retrospective", *Feminist Studies* 39, no. 2 (2013): 458.

[27] Cf. Kathryn Telling, "Quite Contrary: Mary Daly within and without Women's Studies", *Journal of International Women's Studies* 13, no. 6 (2012): 40–41; Monagle, "Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology*", 349–351.

[28] Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory", *Signs* 13, no. 3 (1988): 410. Note that Alcoff states that it is Rich who, "like Daly", takes this position. See also Alice Echols, "The New Feminism of Yin and Yang", in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Ann Barr Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 441–442.

to challenge the essences ascribed to women by men, but not the existence of inherent and immutable, sex-specific natures as such.[29] This is in contrast to radical feminists, who Echols says adopt what we today would call a social constructivist perspective on gender.[30]

I agree with Alcoff that Daly in *Gyn/Ecology* and later works seems to operate on the assumption that men and women have different, innate and immutable natures. In particular, I concur with women studies scholar Julie Kubala that Daly tends to portray men, but not women, as biologically determined to be predatory and violent.[31] But it is important to note that Daly in her first two books, *The Church and the Second Sex* and *Beyond God the Father*, adopts an explicitly anti-essentialist position.[32] Thus, if she abandons the tenets of radical feminism as defined by Alcoff, in favor of those Alcoff associates with cultural feminism, it only happens after 1973. The reason I emphasize this discontinuity is not to establish a distinction between the "good" and the "bad" Daly (so to salvage at least a portion of her work from the critique leveled against her), but because it prompts us to inquire about the cause and effect of this significant shift. It is, furthermore, necessary to highlight this change to see how widely divergent arguments and analyses Daly uses myth-talk to articulate and defend.

Among the few contemporary scholars who have taken an interest in Daly as a feminist theorist one can discern a clear desire to rehabilitate her by disavowing the existence of any essentialist tendencies in her work. Philosopher Marja Suhonen states outright that "essentialist interpretations have no basis in Daly's thinking."[33] Others, such as philosopher Frances Gray, emphasize that Daly never explicitly distances herself from the anti-essentialist

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[29] Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism", 410–414. "Cultural feminism", writes Alcoff, "is the ideology of a female nature or female essence reappropriated by feminists themselves in an effort to re-validate undervalued female attributes." Ibid., 408.

[30] Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 1967-1975, 6.

[31] Julie Kubala, "Teaching 'Bad Feminism': Mary Daly and the Legacy of '70s Lesbian-Feminism", *Feminist Formations* 32, no. 1 (2020): 125. See also Ross S. Kraemer, "*Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* by Mary Daly", *Signs* 5, no. 2 (1979): 356.

[32] Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (Boston: Beacon, [1968] 1999), 70–72, 189–190; Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 124–125. Cf. Marja Suhonen, "Toward Biophilic Be-Ing: Mary Daly's Feminist Metaethics and the Question of Essentialism", in *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Daly*, ed. Sarah Lucia Hoagland and Marilyn Frye (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2000), 114–117; Frances Gray, "Elemental Philosophy: Language and Ontology in Mary Daly's Texts", in *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Daly*, ed. Sarah Lucia Hoagland and Marilyn Frye (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2000), 227.

[33] Suhonen, "Toward Biophilic Be-Ing", 113.

ontology set forth in her earlier works, which to her suggests that the essentializing statements that do appear in *Gyn/Ecology* must be read metaphorically rather than literally.[34] Although both Suhonen and Gray raise important points, these revisionist readings suffer from two shortcomings. First, they are forced to ignore direct statements that are hard to make sense of unless one assumes that Daly, at some point in her career, embraced the notion of inherent and immutable sex-specific natures. For example, in an interview from 2000, Daly declares that there is "something wrong" with males as a "life form" and that she therefore hopes that all individuals with a Y chromosome will disappear.[35] "I'm not a killer. I'm not into killing. I think the earth, being female at core, will take care of it. Or else there's nothing but disaster here", she notes.[36] Second, these revisionist readings are unable to account for Daly's attitude towards transgender people, which feminist theologian Judith Plaskow describes as "deeply interwoven" with her belief in sexed essences.[37]

Daly has been criticized for propagating transphobic and transmisogynistic ideas, the influence of which have caused great harm to transgender and non-binary people.[38] In support of this critique, commentators usually point towards statements found in *Gyn/Ecology,* as well as the fact that Daly was the advisor of Janice Raymond's (1943–), whose *The Transsexual Empire* (1979) is one of the most famous text of trans-exclusive radical feminism.[39] In the former

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[34] Gray, "Elemental Philosophy", 238. See also Schneider, "The Courage to See and to Sin", 70. "Although she is fond of sweeping proclamations […] it is not possible to say that Daly finally essentializes women into a single nature of cultural construction and thereby erases difference." Schneider here seems to equate essentializing with homogenizing, but others might argue that it is perfectly possible to acknowledge the existence of, for example, cultural or racial differences between women *and* assume that all women share a fundamental, biological essence.

[35] Mary Daly and Catherine Madsen, "The Thin Thread of Conversation: An Interview with Mary Daly", *Cross Currents* 50, no. 3 (2000): 346–347.

[36] Ibid., 347.

[37] Judith Plaskow, "Transing and Gendering Religious Studies", *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 34, no. 1 (2018): 79.

[38] Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (Seattle: Seal, 2007), 233, 334; Cameron Partridge, "'Scotch-taped Together': Anti-'Androgyny' Rhetoric, Transmisogyny, and the Transing of Religious Studies", *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 34, no. 1 (2018): 68–70; Max Strassfeld, "Transing Religious Studies", *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 34, no. 1 (2018): 45–50; Kubala, "Teaching 'Bad Feminism'", 120–126.

[39] On the relation between Daly and Raymond, see Partridge, "'Scotch-taped Together'", 70–72; Kyla Schuller, *The Trouble with White Women: A Counterhistory of Feminism* (New York: Bold Type Books, 2021), 200. On Raymond's work as "the archetypal articulation of radical feminist

work, Daly defines trans women as "tokens", men in "pseudofemale" bodies, which "invade" female worlds. She further describes "transsexualism" as one of several technologies that contribute to "elimination" of females by replacing real women with man-made substitutes.[40] In this and later texts, Daly also uses gender-affirming surgery as a metaphor to discuss and problematize other forms of change, such as the choice to speak of the Goddess instead of God. In the new preface to the 1985 edition of *Beyond God the Father*, she writes:

> Such replacement can amount to a "change" as minimal as a transsexual operation on the patriarchal god. Since, as Jan Raymond has shown, a "transsexed" male is still male (a "she-male" or a male-to-constructed female), it is clear that such an operation – whether men perform it on each other or their god – cannot be expected to bring about profound psychic or social change.[41]

In line with Plaskow, I hold that this idea of trans women as mechanically produced false women rests on an essentialist understanding of maleness and femaleness, according to which sex constitutes a biologically innate and immutable factor.[42] This may help explain why Daly's contemporary apologists, anxious to absolve her of any accusations of essentialism, often choose to ignore Daly's comments about trans women all together.[43]

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hostility to transsexuality", see Cressida J. Heyes, "Feminist Solidarity after Queer Theory: The Case of Transgender", *Self-Transformations: Foucault, Ethics, and Normalized Bodies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). 43.

[40] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 68, 71, 88.

[41] Mary Daly, "Original Reintroduction", in *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation. With an Original Reintroduction by the Author* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), xviii.

[42] Daly's dismissive attitude toward trans women can thus be seen as directly linked to what we might term her essentialist turn; an interpretation supported by the fact that she does not express any explicitly trans-exclusive views until after 1973. The latter fact has sometimes been obscured. For example, Max Strassfeld quotes the above-cited passage from 1985 but incorrectly attributes it to the first edition of *Beyond God the Father*, published 12 years earlier. Strassfeld, "Transing Religious Studies", 46 n24. The fact that Strassfeld believes that Daly wrote this passage as early as 1973 may in turn explain why he in another texts concludes that Daly's "transmisogyny was central to her ontology and theology". Max Strassfeld and Robin Henderson-Espinoza, "Introduction Mapping Trans Studies in Religion", *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (2021): 285. In contrast, I maintain that the ontology and theology that Daly develops in her first two books remains largely, if not fully, independent of her understanding of what she terms "transsexualism", an issue there only mentioned in passing. See Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 19, 127, 195, 214 n61.

[43] Issues related to trans are not mentioned in the introduction to or any of the chapters included in Hoagland and Frye, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Daly*. The editors of *The Mary Daly Reader*

Had the purpose of this thesis been to extract definitive truths from the theorists I study, *Gyn/Ecology's* essentialism and dehumanizing remarks about trans women would of course have posed a (perhaps insurmountable) problem. Yet this is not the case. My purpose is to read Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway as mythologists, not to *evaluate* their writings on myth and other issues. Still, the critique directed at Daly's essentialism and comments about transgender people must be addressed. In part because it helps make visible important tendencies that also structure some of her writings on myth. But also because it, as mentioned above, has influenced the current state of research (about Daly as well as the history of feminist theory), meaning that the way in which this critique has been construed and understood has helped frame Daly's work as representative of a now surpassed stage to which contemporary feminist need not return. The same applies to the critique aimed at Daly's writings on race, to which I turn next.

As in the case of essentialism, Daly has become a symbol of what was and remains a more general tendency: the failure of many white feminists to acknowledge the relevance of racial differences and inequalities. That it was Daly's name that became synonymous with this tendency is not only because it is particularly evident in her work. It was also because one of the first influential texts to present this tendency as a problem is directly addressed to her. In her famous "An Open Letter to Mary Daly" (1979), written as a reply to *Gyn/Ecology*, black feminist philosopher Audre Lorde highlights a number of ways in which Daly, according to her, obscures the significance of race.[44] Most importantly, Lorde faults Daly – who states that "the oppression of

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acknowledge that Daly have been criticized for her writings about transgender people and state that they want to "revisit" these issues. Jennifer Rycenga and Linda Barufaldi, "Introduction", in *The Mary Daly Reader,* ed. Jennifer Rycenga and Linda Barufaldi (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 2–3. Yet they provide no account of the critique in question. In the end, their only substantive comment is this: "Daly's position is best understood in its historical context. At that time very few people knew much about the trans world; there weren't many visible or known transfolk at the time. It was also a time in the movement when male-to- female transgenders were experienced by many lesbian-feminists as reluctant to surrender male privilege. That was a long time ago, and much has changed." Jennifer Rycenga and Linda Barufaldi, "African Genital Mutilation", in *The Mary Daly Reader,* ed. Jennifer Rycenga and Linda Barufaldi (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 168.

[44] Audre Lorde, "An Open Letter to Mary Daly", in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg: Crossing Press, [1979] 1984). The origins of and events surrounding this letter are described in Alexis De Veaux, *Warrior Poet: A Biography of Audre Lorde* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 233–238, 248–253.

women knows no ethnic, national, or religious bounds"[45] – for homogenizing the situation of black and white women, which effectively obscures the ways in which misogyny and racism interact. "To imply [...] that all women suffer the same oppression simply because we are women is to lose sight of the many varied tools of patriarchy", Lorde notes.[46]

Lorde moreover reproaches Daly for disregarding the potentially empowering history and mythological heritage of non-white women, whom she claims that Daly depicts "only as victims and preyers-upon each other."[47] Interestingly, this critique also makes visible something that Daly and Lorde have in common: namely, the idea that myth might serve a progressive political function. It is precisely because Lorde shares Daly's understanding of myth that she finds it so problematic that the latter claims to speak for all women yet only discusses white goddess images. Thus, while Lorde states that Daly's writings on the Goddess agreed with what she herself had discovered in her "searches through African myth/legend/religion for the true nature of old female power", she also explains that she felt her own "mythic background distorted" by the absence, in Daly's work, "of any images of my foremothers in power."[48] Daly's problem, Lorde writes, is that she assumes that the "myth of white women" is the only myth available to women in search of strength. "This dismissal", Lorde continues, "does not essentially differ from the specialized devaluation that make Black women prey, for instance, to the murders even now happing in your city."[49] Lorde consequently concludes that *Gyn/Ecology* serves forces of racism.

A similar critique has since been voiced by many other scholars.[50] For example, Kubala – who claims that Daly is "explicitly transphobic" but that her "racism and imperialism are less overt"[51] – argues that Daly's "racism and

[45] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 111.

[46] Lorde, "An Open Letter to Mary Daly", 67.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid., 69. Lorde here refers to the murders of 12 black women that took place in the Boston area in 1979.

[50] Apart from Kubala, see Ellen T. Armour, "Questioning 'Woman' in Feminist/Womanist Theology", in *Transfigurations: Theology and the French Feminists*, ed. C. W. Maggie Kim, Susan St. Ville, and Susan Simonaitis (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 148–149; Spelman, *Inessential Woman,* 123–124; Ambler L. Katherine, "(Re)Reading Mary Daly as a Sister Insider", in *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Daly*, ed. Sarah Lucia Hoagland and Marilyn Frye (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2000), 312–315; Mukti Barton, "Wrestling with Imperial Patriarchy", *Feminist Theology* 21, no. 1 (2012): 14–26.

[51] Kubala, "Teaching 'Bad Feminism'", 121.

colonialism" nevertheless becomes obvious if one studies her derogatory remarks about transgender people.[52] Citing a passage from *Gyn/Ecology* where Daly compares drag queens and trans women to white individuals playing blackface – all of whom Daly says incorporate "the oppressed role without being incorporated in it"[53] – Kubala concludes: "Here, the fact that race is used as the basis of an analogy illustrates the ways in which subjectivity is assumed to be white in the book. If we acknowledge the possibility that these drag queens or transsexuals might themselves be Black, or people of color, then the point about Black face would make no sense, reinforcing whiteness as the default subjectivity."[54] In other words, Kubala is not suggesting that Daly's racism involves any explicit devaluation of non-white women. Rather, she claims that Daly is racist in that she assumes that the female subject is white, while she also homogenizes and victimizes women of color.

What makes Kubala's text especially interesting in this context is that she, despite the aforementioned critique, urges feminists to continue engaging with *Gyn/Ecology*. Partly because sweeping dismissals of historically influential works contribute to the construction of a sanitized feminist history that risks obscuring and thereby help perpetuate the continued influence of the very tendencies one seeks to eliminate.[55] But also because she maintains that this work, which she presents as a particularly ambitious and bold enterprise, remains valuable in itself. "Daly's text is arguably crucial for us to understand the intensity and widespread nature of sexism; her arguments about combatting it are less compelling", Kubala observes.[56]

Again, the thesis at hand does not aim to assess either explanations for or proposed solutions to sexism, but to explore how these explanations/solutions were articulated using concepts appropriated from the mythological network. However, by adopting a historical-contextualizing rather than normative approach, I do believe that this study can contribute new perspectives on the tendencies emphasized by Daly's critics. In particular, I ask what happens between 1973 and 1978, a period during which Daly abandons her earlier anti-essentialist ontology, in favor of a more biologically deterministic theory that pits cis women against both trans women and cis men. There are of course

[52] Ibid., 124.
[53] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 67.
[54] Kubala, "Teaching 'Bad Feminism'", 124.
[55] Ibid., 119–120.
[56] Ibid., 132.

no clear-cut answers here. But a previously unnoticed factor that I emphasize is that Daly, during this period, appropriates a new concept of myth.

The pirate as an appropriator

In the upcoming sections, I present the different contexts from which Daly appropriates the concepts of myth she employs to articulate her feminist arguments and analyses. But first, I want to make a more general point about how she relates to these contexts.

As mentioned in chapter two, I use the term "appropriation" to denote a relatively mundane practice, in which anyone who aspires to say something new is forced to engage, simply because one's words have always already been used by others. Individuals nonetheless differ in terms of how consciously they engage in this activity. What makes Daly interesting is that she herself emphasizes that women, to paraphrase Michael Bakhtin, must take their words from other people's mouths. Although she implies that all scholarly traditions are conditioned by and complicit in the oppression of women, Daly thus makes it clear that she does not want to turn her back on these, but to use them to articulate her own arguments and analyses. The concepts used by male "authorities" (quotation marks in original) are not always problematic, she explains. But women need to remember two things. First, that these concepts do not "*belong*" to the so-called authorities. "We do not need such 'authorities' for legitimation", Daly asserts (which might help explain why she often does not cite her sources). Secondly, that such concepts have "different meanings", when used by women in a feminist context.[57]

In her memoirs, Daly consequently describes herself as a "Pirate", who plunders patriarchal texts in search of treasures to smuggle back to the women.[58] Among these treasures are academic concepts (especially theological ones), but also long list of biblical terms, such as "exodus", "original sin", "demonic", "the Second Coming", "Antichrist", "covenant", "prophecy" and "God", all of which Daly claims to give a whole new, feminist meaning.[59] And it is not only words that Daly consciously appropriates. She also re-writes what she herself calls patriarchal "myths", such as the biblical story of the Fall, to

[57] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 49, italics in original.

[58] Mary Daly, *Outercourse: The Be-Dazzling Voyage: Containing Recollections from My Logbook of a Radical Feminist Philosopher (Be-Ing an Account of My Time/Space Travels and Ideas - Then, Again, Now, and How)* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 129–133.

[59] See for example Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 8, 49, 50, 96, 159, 164.

advance her own feminist message. Hence, while we are all forced to speak through others, I argue that Daly deliberately transforms appropriation into a feminist strategy.

Another important aspect of appropriation, that Daly nevertheless refuses to acknowledge, is that appropriated concepts and tales always carry an excess of historically acquired meaning, which the speaker cannot fully control. As author Catherine Madsen observed after having interviewed Daly in 2000, it "does not occur to her, it cannot be made to occur to her, that words may have consequences that the writer doesn't intend."[60] In this study, we will see examples of both of these tendencies: how Daly consciously appropriates concepts from patriarchal discourses to serve feminist purposes, as well as how these discourses sometimes continue to speak through her, against her will.

The fact that Daly does not simply dismiss, but appropriates concepts from patriarchal discourses, has been emphasized by other scholars. For example, philosophers Sara Lucia Hoagland and Marilyn Frye, who in turn refer to theological Laurel C. Schneider, state that Daly's "radicalness lies not in rejecting Western epistemological and theological traditions, but in her creative and critical appropriation of themes and artifacts from these traditions – taken quite deliberately 'out of context' – for the building of her own systematic philosophy."[61] However, this study is the first to demonstrate how and with what effect Daly appropriates concepts from the mythological network.

Myth, fable and the Christian logos

Daly grew up in a Catholic home, attended Catholic schools and eventually earned doctorates in theology from two different Catholic universities.[62] Despite repeated conflicts, she spent the greater part of her career at the Jesuit-

[60] Daly and Madsen, "The Thin Thread of Conversation", 336. Perhaps the clearest example of this is when Daly, in the introduction to *Gyn/Ecology,* declares that the title of that book "says exactly what I mean it to say." Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 9. For a similar critique, which addresses Daly's use of the word "race" in her 1984 book *Pure Lust,* see Morris, *The Pirate's Fiancée*, 42.

[61] Hoagland and Frye, "Introduction", 2; Schneider, "The Courage to See and to Sin". See also Darlene M. Juschka, "Feminist Christian Theological Engagement with Symbol, Myth and Ritual", *ARC* 30 (2002): 8. "Daly asserts that language […] is under control of patriarchy, but with the help of feminist theorizing language can be wrenched from patriarchal control and be used as a tool for feminists."

[62] Daly, *Outercourse*, 24–26, 51, 53, 68–69, 71, 74. For a brief summary of Daly's upbringings, education and academic career, see Caryn D. Riswold, *Two Reformers: Martin Luther and Mary Daly as Political Theologians* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2007), 35–48.

run Boston College.[63] Therefore, it is hardly surprising that many mythologists with whom she engages are Christian theologians. Theologians, in turn, approach "myth" from a particular horizon, informed by the rich history of intra-theological debates about *mythos* and *logos*. In what follows, I outline some particularly important aspects of these debates, with which we need to be familiar in order to understand Daly's writings on myth.[64]

According to Chiara Bottici, it was only with the birth of Christianity that a distinct epistemological boundary was established between *mythos* and *logos*.[65] In the Gospel of John, *logos* is equated with the Word of God, as embodied in the Bible.[66] And because this Word, according to orthodox Christian doctrine, represents the one and only truth, the Church Fathers denounced all rivaling discourses as false. In particular, this applied to those Greek and Roman tales about pagan deities that were called *mythoi* in Greek and *fabulae* in Latin; tales that some Christians even described as created by demons or the devil.[67] "It was then", Bottici writes, "that the negative connotation of 'myth' was first established: myth became all that the sacred *logos*, the Unique Truth, is not – the enemy to defy, the pagan to be converted."[68]

The distrust of ancient fables introduced by Christianity persisted throughout the Middle Ages. It began to give way in the fifteenth century,

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[63] Daly began work at Boston College in 1966. When *The Church and the Second Sex* was published in 1968, the university sought to terminate her employment, but after widespread student protests she was given tenure. In 1975, Daly applied for promotion to full professor, which the university administration denied her, again leading to widespread protests. The conflict that eventually led to her forced retirement in 1999 was linked to her refusal to allow men to attend certain classes on feminist theory (she did not refuse to give these classes to men but held separate sessions for men and women). Daly, *Outercourse*, 95–97, 206–207, 327–328. See also Pamela Ferdinand, "Feminist Ethics Course: No Place for Men", *The Washington Post*, February 25, 1999.

[64] The standard work on fable and myth in theological discourse is Christian Hartlich and Walter Sachs, *Der Ursprung des Mythosbegriffes in der modernen Bibelwissenschaft* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1952). I have drawn mainly on more recent resources, many of which nonetheless refer to this work.

[65] Bottici, *A Philosophy of Political Myth*, 44–45.

[66] "In the beginning was the Word (*logos*), and the Word (*logos*) was with God, and the Word (*logos*) was God." John 1:1, New Revised Standard Version, Anglicized.

[67] Feldman and Richardson, "Introduction", 3; George S. Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany: Religion and Aesthetic Culture from Romanticism to Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 32.

[68] Bottici, *A Philosophy of Political Myth*, 50. In the First Epistle of Timothy, one reads: "Have nothing to do with profane myths and old wives' tales. Train yourself in godliness." 1 Tim 4:7, New Revised Standard Version, Anglicized.

when the Renaissance helped fuel a renewed interest in ancient deities and in the literature devoted to these. By then, pagan religions no longer posed a serious threat to Christianity.[69] In addition, Renaissance writers often presented these tales as allegories, fully compatible with the Christian doctrine.[70] Interpreted in this way, ancient fables could even be assumed to convey hidden wisdoms or religious truths.[71]

The notion of ancient fables as a source of wisdom or truth was vigorously attacked towards the end of the seventeenth century. This time, the most influential critique came not from the Church, but from Enlightenment philosophy, the representatives of which challenged these stories from a rationalist, rather than a religious, standpoint. The primary objection was not that such tales was incompatible with the Bible, but with the facts established by reason. It was also at this time that the idea of fable as a primitive phenomenon, born out of uncivilized people's fear and ignorance, began to be popularized.[72] Bernard Fontenelle, mentioned in the previous part-study, consequently calls ancient fables "nothing but a pile of chimeras, dreams, and absurdities", concluding that one must "not look for anything in the fables except the history of the errors of the human mind."[73]

Fontenelle claims that there are "no peoples whose history does not begin in fables, *except the chosen people*, among whom a particular care on the part of providence has preserved the truth."[74] In doing so, he upholds the distinction between false fables and the true Christian *logos*. This age-old dichotomy was, however, gradually destabilized in the eighteenth century, around the same time that "myth" began to replace "fable" as the name for ancient tales about gods, goddesses and other supernatural beings.[75] Eventually, even Christian

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[69] Elisabeth Wåghäll Nivre, "Introduction", in *Allusions and Reflections: Greek and Roman Mythology in Renaissance Europe*, ed. Elisabeth Wåghäll Nivre (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 1–2. See also Malcolm Bull, *The Mirror of the Gods: Classical Mythology in Renaissance Art* (London: Allen Lane, 2004).

[70] Williamson, *The Longing for Myth*, 32. On how Renaissance writers interpretated ancient fables, see also Luc Brisson, *How Philosophers Saved Myths: Allegorical Interpretation and Classical Mythology*, trans. Cathrine Tihanyi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 152–161.

[71] Interest in these stories continued to grow over the following centuries, spawning both technical mythological studies and popularizing dictionaries. Frank E. Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods*, 3–9. See also Brisson, *How Philosophers Saved Myths*, 146–149.

[72] Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods*, 42–46; Feldman and Richardson, "Introduction", 3–4.

[73] Fontenelle, "Of the Origin of Fables", 10, 18.

[74] Ibid., 16, italics added.

[75] On the relation between "myth" and "fable", see this thesis, 22–23.

theologians came to insist that there were clear similarities between such stories and certain biblical narratives. "This process can be summarized", writes present-day theologian Roderich Barth, "[…] as the slowly dawning realization that the mythical form of representation cannot simply be opposed as the Other, but rather also determines one's own biblical traditions. Thus, successively, the concept of myth comes to a thoroughly tension-filled self-application within theology."[76] At first, Christian theologians primarily used the word "myth" to refer to stories from the Old Testament.[77] But by the beginning of the nineteenth century, this development had reached a point where David Friedrich Strauss could conclude that the whole story about Jesus Christ should be considered a myth.

What, then, did the word "myth" signify when Christian theologians used it in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century? A particularly influential concept of myth can be traced back to classical scholar Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729–1818), who argued that myths were stories conditioned by an "ignorance concerning what causes appearances." To explain this ignorance, he invoked the unevolved mental capacities that, according to him, characterize the first stage of human history, from which all myths were assumed to stem ("in its childhood", wrote Heyne, "mankind had not yet become skilled in using its own mental powers or in reasoning or observing subtly").[78] In this respect, Heyne's concept of myth obviously has much in common with Fontenelle's concept of fable. The difference is that Heyne, unlike most Enlightenment mythologists, maintained that some myths, especially "*philosophemes*" or philosophical myths, could convey truths, albeit expressed in images instead of abstract concepts, which he claimed that the earliest languages lacked.[79] The first to apply Heyne's concept of myth to the Bible were protestant theologians Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1754-1827) and

[76] Roderich Barth, "Gebrochener Mythos: Tillichs religionsphilosophischer Mythosbegriff", in *Die Macht des Mythos: Das Mythosverständnis Paul Tillichs im Kontext* ed. Christian Danz and Werner Schüßler (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 75, translation mine. [*Man kann diesen Vorgang* [...] *als die langsam dämmernde Erkenntnis zusammenfassen, dass die mythische Vorstellungsform nicht einfach nur als das Andere entgegengesetzt werden kann, sondern vielmehr auch die eigenen biblischen Traditionen bestimmt. Sukzessiv kommt es also innerhalb der Theologie zur durchaus spannungsvollen Selbstanwendung des Mythosbegriffs.*]

[77] Williamson, *The Longing for Myth*, 152–156.

[78] Christian Gottlob Heyne, "From *Inquiry into the Causes of Fables of the Physics of Ancient Myths*" [1764], in *The Rise of Modern Mythology: 1680-1860*, ed. Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richardson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), 219.

[79] George S. Williamson, "Myth", in *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century Christian Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 197.

Johann Philipp Gabler (1753-1826).[80] According to the latter, "a philosophical myth" arose from "mere speculation", or when a "true story" was retold and thus contaminated by "the ideas and opinions of that age's way of thinking."[81] As examples of such philosophical myths in the Old Testament, Eichhorn and Gabler cited the stories about Garden of Eden and the Tower of Babel.[82]

To claim that the Bible contained myths, in the sense of stories marked by a historically specific state of thought and speech (one that is ignorant rather than enlightened, sensuous rather than abstract), naturally challenged the orthodox Christian belief in this text's literal truth. Yet the acknowledgement of the Bible's mythic dimensions was not just something forced upon Christian theologians from the outside, but a tool they could use in ways that served their own ends. The influential notion of myths as natural products of an early, mythopoetic stage in human history could, for example, be employed to defend the Bible against those who – like Enlightenment philosopher Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768) – described improbable stories such as the Garden of Eden as deliberate lies fabricated by scheming priests.[83]

Eichhorn and Gabler argued that the Old Testament contained both myths and historical truths, between which one ought to differentiate. The theologian Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette (1780–1849) went one step further, stating that the entire Pentateuch could be considered mythical in nature. What also distinguished Wette in relation to Eichhorn and Gabler was that he actualized a concept of myth rooted in the writings not of Heyne but philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), who held that each individual mythology was to be understood as the collective creation of an ancient *Volk*, whose spiritual and practical cohesion it had once reflected and helped reproduce.[84] More specifically, Wette claimed that the Pentateuch constituted an "authentic Hebrew national epic, of true nationalism, completely in the spirit of Hebraism", which was untrue from a historical point of view, yet had once served an important social function.[85]

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[80] Horton Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 260.

[81] Quoted from Williamson, *The Longing for Myth*, 152.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid., 30, 32–33.

[84] Ibid., 8, 33–34, 152–153. On Herder's concept of myth, see also Ulrich Gaier, "Myth, Mythology, New Mythology", in *A Companion to the Works of Johann Gottfried Herder*, ed. Hans Adler and Wulf Koepke (Boydell & Brewer, 2009).

[85] Quoted from Williamson, *The Longing for Myth*, 153.

Wette was one of Strauss' main sources of inspirations. But whereas the former focused on the Old Testament, Strauss took on the Gospel. The consequences were far-reaching. "No single theological work ever created such consternation in the theological world as Strauss' *Life of Jesus*. It split the century into two theological eras – before and after 1835", states historian of religion Horton Harris.[86] In accordance with Wette, Strauss is at pains to distinguish myth from history. To be more precise, his main objective is to establish that the story of Jesus, as it is recounted in the New Testament, lacks historical validity.[87] And yet, Strauss maintains that the myth he studies does contain a form of truth. For it constitutes a figurative representation of a true "idea": what Strauss terms "the idea of the unity of the divine and human natures", symbolized by Jesus.[88] As philosopher Frederick Beiser points out, this concept of myth as a figurative or "sensible" representation of an idea has its roots in the work of early Romantic philosophers such as Friedrich von Schelling (1775–1854), to which I return in the next section.[89] But unlike the early Romantics, who believed that certain ideas could only be expressed, or at least conveyed, by means of symbols and myths, Strauss claims the myth of Jesus obscures the real meaning of this idea. It does so by suggesting that the unity of human and divine natures was achieved but once, through the individual named Jesus, when in reality the divine is universally realized through mankind as such.[90]

Like many mythologists before him, Strauss temporalizes myth by inscribing it into a progressivist developmental scheme. In line with Heyne and others, he describes myth as the product of an early and thus undeveloped, figurative rather than abstract, state of thought. Myth, he writes "is the representation of […] an idea […] characterized by the rich pictorial and imaginative mode of thought and expression of the primitive ages."[91] Again, because these primitive ages did not have access to any other form of thought, myths cannot be dismissed as deliberate lies. Myths are not, Strauss explains

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[86] Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Theology*, ix.

[87] Jeffrey F. Keuss, "David Friedrich Strauss and Mythi in *Das Leben Jesu*", in *The Sacred and the Profane: Contemporary Demands on Hermeneutics*, ed. Jeffrey F. Keuss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 53.

[88] David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined Volume 2*, trans. George Eliot (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1836] 2010), 437.

[89] Frederick C. Beiser, *David Friedrich Strauss, Father of Unbelief: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 67.

[90] Strauss, *The Life of Jesus 2*, 437.

[91] David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined. Volume 1*, trans. George Eliot (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1835] 2010), 26.

"premeditated fictions" or "wilful falsehoods", but "the necessary vehicle of expression for the first efforts of the human mind".[92] However, his point remains that the "modern world" has developed another resource, namely philosophy, which offers a better medium for communicating religious ideas.[93] Strauss therefore argues that one must translate religious ideas from the figurative language of myth to the conceptual language of philosophy, which is why he restates the idea of the unity of the divine and human natures in universalist instead of individual terms.[94] In doing so, Strauss can nevertheless be said to move beyond not just myth, but religion as such, at least given how he himself describes the "proper" sphere of religion:

> If religion be defined as the perception of truth, not in the form of an idea, which is the philosophic perception, but invested with imagery; it is easy to see that the mythical element can be wanting only when religion either falls short of, or goes beyond, its peculiar province, and that *in the proper religious sphere it must necessarily exist*.[95]

In other words, Strauss seems to suggest that a religion completely devoid of "mythical elements" is not a proper religion.

The question of whether myth constitutes a necessary element of all religions or, rather, a remnant of an archaic past that must be overcome, has continued to divide Christian theologians. This is particularly evident if one studies the debate about demythologization initiated by Bultmann, to which I return in chapter nine. But what the above-given summary has clarified is that the critique of Christian myths (conceptualized as "myths") emerged from within rather than from outside the field of Christian theology. In this respect, Daly too can be said to operate within an intra-theological, myth-critical tradition, the guiding assumptions of which I will demonstrate that she both expands and challenges from a distinctly feminist perspective.

Romantics and neo-Romantics on myth and Christianity

Daly does not only speak of myths in negative terms. On the contrary, she often employs this word to denote a highly valuable phenomenon that belongs

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[92] Ibid., 25.

[93] Ibid., 71, 73–74.

[94] Strauss, *The Life of Jesus 2*, 437. This is why Williamson argues that Strauss makes use of an "decidedly anti-Romantic use of the term 'myth'". Williamson, *The Longing for Myth*, 151.

[95] Strauss, *The Life of Jesus 1*, 74, italics added.

in the present rather than in the past. This is something that she shares with influential mythologists like Jung, Eliade and Campbell, all of whom she makes many references to.[96] According to Glenn Robert Gill, these three theorists are key exponents of what he calls "the second phase of modern mythography".[97] This phase is characterized by a less dismissive attitude towards myth than that represented by "first wave" mythologists like James George Frazer and Sigmund Freud, who we have seen that Beauvoir drew from. While first wave mythologists approached myth as "an aspect of an Other, an immature if not problematic habit of mind exhibited by cultures distant in time and space, or manifested by a patient or analysand under therapy", Gill states that second wave mythologists view myth as "the voice of a perennial or eternal human spirit or condition that continually whispered through the vagaries of history."[98] To them, myths are not the product of ignorance or superstition, but bearers of timeless truths.[99] In this respect, Jung, Eliade and Campbell have less in common with Enlightenment philosophers such as Fontenelle than with early Romantics like Schelling. This is why they are sometimes referred to as "neo-Romantic" or simply "Romantic" mythologists.[100] To understand the

[96] In her three first books, at the center of this part-study, Daly refers to five works by Jung, some of which are compilations: *Psychology and Religion: West and East* (1938); *Essays on a Science of Mythology: The Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis* (1941); *Psyche and Symbol: A Selection from the Writings of C. G. Jung* (1958); *The Basic Writings of C.G. Jung* (1959); *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1961). See Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 87–89, 210 n30, 210 n32; Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 253–254, 433 n9, 453 n51, 455 n107. Daly, furthermore, refers to four works by Eliade: *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (1948); *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (1949); *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (1957); *Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth* (1958). See Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 35, 67–68, 141, 156, 159–160, 204 n37, 208 n35, 216 n18, 217 n1, 217 n6; Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 44–45, 48, 110, 175–176, 429 n3, 437 n4, 446 n52. Finally, she refers to two works by Campbell: *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) and *The Masks of God: Oriental Mythology* (1962). See ibid., 116, 118–119, 403, 437 n3, 438 n15, 441 n35, 464 n9, 465, 24.

[97] The fourth mythologists that Gill describes as a representative of this phase is Northrop Frye. Gill, *Northrop Frye and the Phenomenology of Myth*, 7, 10–11.

[98] Ibid., 6, 7.

[99] Robert A. Segal, "The Romantic Appeal of Joseph Campbell", *The Christian Century* 107, no. 11 (1990): 333.

[100] Von Hendy, *The Modern Construction of Myth*, 179–186 (Eliade), 196–201 (Campbell). Von Hendy does not speak of Jung as a neo-Romantic mythologist. But he does argue that Jung's theory constitutes "the great conduit" feeding a "stream of romantic thought into the hanging gardens of mid-twentieth-century mythographers", like Campbell. Ibid., 123. See also Robert S. Ellwood, *The Politics of Myth: A Study of C.G. Jung, Mircea Eliade, and Joseph Campbell* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 7, 19–27; Segal, "The Romantic Appeal of Joseph Campbell".

neo-Romantics, we must therefore know a little more about the early Romantics.

When it came to myth, the early Romantics differed from the typical Enlightenment scholar of fable in two particularly important respects. To begin with, they spoke of myth in much more positive terms. In line with Herder, the early Romantics held that each *Volk* had once possessed its own mythology. As these mythologies were thought to have served as the common basis – what Friedrich Schlegel (1771–1889) called the "maternal soil" – for each *Volk*'s literature, religion, customs and laws, they were believed to have helped generate a high degree of social cohesion.[101] This, in turn, was exactly what the early Romantics, operating in an era of increased secularization, industrialization, marketization, division of labor and specialization, claimed that modern societies lacked. Hence the notion of myth as an antidote to the destructive aspects of modernity: a means to (re)create a common national identity and to counter social fragmentation.[102] But the early Romantics did not only value myth for its social function. Equally important was the fact that myths, according to them, could capture and/or convey truths that could not be successfully communicated in any other way. This assumption is partly based on Heyne's above-mentioned notion of myths as a particularly sensuous medium. But whereas both earlier and later thinkers tried to translate the pictorial language of myth into the abstract concepts of philosophy, the early Romantics argued that there were some ideas – concerning the infinite, the absolute and the transcendent – that could only be conveyed through images and symbols.[103]

The second difference between the early Romantics and Enlightenment scholars of fable was that the former argued that it was possible to create *new* myths (by contrast, Fontenelle had written that "no new fables appear; people are satisfied with preserving the old ones").[104] Thereby, the early Romantics can be said to have challenged the notion of myth as per definition primitive

[101] Quoted from Williamson, *The Longing for Myth*, 58.

[102] Ibid., 2–3; Keum, *Plato and the Mythic Tradition in Political Thought*, 152–153.

[103] In the so-called *Oldest System Program of German Idealism*, assumed to be authored either by Hegel or Schelling, one thus reads: "Before we make ideas aesthetic, i.e. mythological, they will have no interest for the people. Conversely, before mythology is rational, the philosopher must be ashamed of it. Hence finally the enlightened and unenlightened must shake hands: mythology must become philosophical to make people rational, and philosophy must become mythological to make philosophers sensuous." "The Oldest Systematic Programme of German Idealism", 5.

[104] Fontenelle, "Of the Origin of Fables", 18.

phenomenon.[105] This is not to say that they described all societies as equally mythical. Actually, the early Romantic discourse on myth was characterized by the conviction that modern era Germans, for the time being, lacked a functional mythology and that this absence posed a serious problem.[106] Indeed, this is why the early Romantics maintained that new myths had to be created.

In the context of this study, it is vital to note that the early Romantics did not necessarily equate myth with Christian myths (although, like Eichhorn, Gabler and Strauss, they did claim that such myths existed). In fact, the early Romantic discourse on myth is permeated by considerable hostility towards orthodox Christianity, which is often contrasted with Greek polytheism. Among other things, the early Romantics accused the Christian church of imposing on Germans an alien and feminine mythology imported from outside, while condemning native German myths as superstitions.[107] Some mythologists inspired by the early Romantics, like Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (1785–1863/1786–1859), thus sought to recover what they thought of as a more original German mythology, rooted in Germany's pre-modern and pre-Christian past.[108] Others, like the early Romantics themselves, argued in favor of a "new mythology", which was to displace both the classical and biblical myths.[109]

Historian of religion Robert Ellwood notes that Jung, Eliade and Campbell "arrived well after the first and most powerful wave of the Romantic movement, but they were heirs of its spirit."[110] As mentioned, this intellectual kinship is evidenced by the fact that the former speak of myths in positive terms and as a transhistorical phenomenon. Like the Romantics, the neo-Romantics also argue that myths may encompass and/or convey eternal truths,

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[105] As a matter of fact, whereas the *philosophes* spoke of fables as a thing of the past, the Romantics claimed that myths could serve as a means for future progress: a tool to realize the Enlightenment vision of freedom and human flourishing. Keum, *Plato and the Mythic Tradition in Political Thought*, 152, 160–165. See also Dieter Sturma, "Politics and the New Mythology: The Turn to Late Romanticism", in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. Karl Ameriks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 319.

[106] Williamson, *The Longing for Myth*, 2–3.

[107] See for example Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "The Positivity of the Christian Religion" [1795], in *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T.M. Knox and Richard Kroner (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 145–146. This critique had a gendered dimension, as Schelling portrayed the shift from ancient polytheism to Christian monotheism as one from the masculine to the feminine. Williamson, *The Longing for Myth*, 64.

[108] Ibid., 104–120.

[109] Ibid., 2.

[110] Ellwood, *The Politics of Myth*, 19.

communicated through symbols. But unlike their predecessors, the neo-Romantics often claim that these truths concern the inner rather than outer world, which is to say that they conceptualize myths as guides to the self or the unconscious. As a consequence, neo-Romantics usually promote myth as a means to self-knowledge and self-realization, instead of social change.[111]

Another thing that Jung, Eliade and Campbell share with the early Romantics is the assumption that their own time is one marked by an absence of functional myths. "Our myth has become mute", writes Jung in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1961), a work that Daly cites.[112] Today, he continues, we stand "empty-handed" and "perplexed", unable to "get it into our heads that no myth will come to our aid, although we have such urgent need of one."[113] Here one can also discern the same conflicted attitude to Christianity that characterized the Romantic discourse on myths. Above all, Jung laments that the Christian "myth" of God as wholly good offers Western "man" no guidance in his quest for psychic "wholeness", which Jung states one can only attain by acknowledging one's own dual nature.[114] Admittedly, he holds that the fault does not lie with the biblical myth itself, "but solely in us, who have not developed it further; who, rather, have suppressed any such attempts."[115] Yet it is clear that Jung too is calling for a new myth that will transcend the myths of orthodox Christianity.

A similar ambivalence can be discerned in the writings of Eliade and Campbell, both of whom follow Jung in presenting contemporary Western society as deprived of functional myths. In Eliade's case, this ambivalence mainly manifests itself in a resistance to the linear temporality of Judeo-Christianity and modernity, which he contrasts with the cyclical temporality sustained by primitive myths. In contrast, Segal points out that Campbell celebrates myth but "revels in the anticipated demise of all Christianity" and

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[111] Ibid., 30, 33, 35.

[112] C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, trans. Richard & Clara Winston (New York: Vintage Books, [1961] 1989), 332; Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 210 n32.

[113] Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 331–332.

[114] Ibid., 332–333, 337–338.

[115] Ibid., 332. Jung also believes that there are indications of a more nuanced image in the original Christian myth. Ibid., 332–338. Elsewhere, Jung states that it would be a "catastrophe" if modern man were to lose "the life-preserving myth of the inner man which Christianity has treasured up for him". C. G. Jung, *The Undiscovered Self* (New York: Routledge, [1957] 2002), 78.

that he in this respect has less in common with Jung than with Nietzsche.[116] I will discuss the Nietzsche's writings on myths in more detail shortly. But first, let me try to specify how Daly relates to the neo-Romantics, whom she enters dialogue with in her second and third book.

The one neo-Romantic mythologist to whom Daly devotes most attention to is Eliade, whose concept of myth she appropriates to explain how patriarchal oppression operates. To be more precise, I argue that Daly draws on Eliade's description of primitive myths as fostering a repetitive or circular, anti-historical existence, governed by "models" reenacted through rituals. However, where Eliade claims that the advent of Judeo-Christianity and modernity entailed a break with this "mythic" existence, Daly objects that women are still caught in the grip of the myth of eternal return, the power of which the "women's revolution" must finally break from. Yet this revolution will not bring an end to myth. Like the early Romantics and their contemporary successors, Daly assumes that it is possible to create new myths, better adapted to the current situation. What she shares with Jung and Campbell is, above all, the assumption that these new myths can serve as guides to self-knowledge and self-realization.

The anti-Christian, myth-affirmative Nietzschean tradition

Given that Nietzsche has influenced both Christian theologians (like Tillich) and anti-Christian neo-Romantics (like Campbell), there is something arbitrary about addressing this tradition in isolation.[117] And yet, I will do just that to better clarify what distinguishes Nietzsche's influential concept of myth from others, as well as what Daly appropriates from him specifically.

To simplify somewhat, Nietzsche represents a distinct concept of myth because he, in accordance with the discourse on fable rooted in the Enlightenment, speaks of myths as fictions or lies without transcendent basis,

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[116] Segal, "The Romantic Appeal of Joseph Campbell", 335. Cf. Ellwood, *The Politics of Myth*, 20. Campbell's dissatisfaction with Christian myths is most evident in *The Power of Myth* (1988), where he concludes: "The story that we have in the West, so far as it is based on the Bible, is based on a view of the universe that belongs to the first millennium B.C. It does not accord with our concept either of the universe or of the dignity of man. It belongs entirely somewhere else." Joseph Campbell and Bill D. Moyers, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 31.

[117] On Campbells relation to Nietzsche, see for example Joseph Campbell, *Reflections on the Art of Living: A Joseph Campbell Companion* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1991), 38, 138–139. On Tillich's relation to Nietzsche, see for example Paul Tillich, "Nietzsche and the Bourgeois Spirit", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 6, no. 3 (1945); Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven, [1952] 2000), 26–30, 142–143.

yet agrees with the early Romantics that myths can serve important social and existential functions. This is what Andrew Von Hendy calls the "constitutive" conception of myth, the representatives of which employ the word "myth" to denote a necessary fiction or vital lie.[118] Nietzsche makes use of this concept of myth in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). There, he presents both myths and theoretical knowledge as "illusions", which protect human beings from having to face the ultimate meaninglessness of existence. But he also argues that these illusions have different results, in that only myths can generate social cohesion. "Without myth […] all cultures lose their healthy, creative, natural energy; only a horizon surrounded by myths encloses and unifies a cultural movement."[119]

Not all myths are equally appreciated by Nietzsche, however. He contrasts the "Aryan" and "masculine" myth about Prometheus with the "Semitic" and "feminine" myth about the Fall. While the first myth asserts that humans obtained what they valued most – fire – through an act of courageous rebellion, the horrible consequences of which they must proudly accept, the second suggests that "the origin of evil […] lie in curiosity, mendacious pretence, openness to seduction, lasciviousness, in short: in a whole series of predominantly feminine attributes."[120]

In accordance with the early Romantics, Nietzsche's main point is that all cultures need their own myths, which he too argues that Germans currently lack. Nietzsche nevertheless maintains that there, beneath the influences of foreign cultures, exists a hidden "German character" – a "magnificent, inwardly healthy, ancient strength" – from which "*the German myth*" can be reborn.[121] In chapter ten of this present study, I show that Daly articulates a similar thought, arguing that behind the "false" feminine self, imposed on women by patriarchy, there exists an authentic, female "Self" (with a capital S), from which "gynocentric" myths – which reflect and reinforce the specific experiences and aims of women – may once again arise.

Whether this argument in favor of sex-specific myths, born out of an authentic female character, is directly inspired by Nietzsche is impossible to

[118] Von Hendy, *The Modern Construction of Myth*, xii–xiii, 74, 304–305.

[119] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* [1872], in *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. Raymonmd Guess and Ronald Speirs, trans. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 108.

[120] Ibid., 50.

[121] Ibid., 109, italics in original

say.[122] But what Daly most certainly does appropriate from Nietzsche is a specific argument against Christian myths and Christianity in general. Namely, one that takes aim at Christianity's valorization of traditionally "feminine" values at the expense of "masculine" ones.[123] Nietzsche mainly developed this critique in works such as *Beyond God and Evil* (1886), *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887) and *The Antichrist* (1895). In these works, Christianity is accused of having helped turn what was once a "beast of prey" into a "tame and civilized animal, a *household pet*", unable to say "yes" to life.[124] It has done so, Nietzsche argues, by promoting a slave morality, which condemns life-affirming and masculine virtues and instincts, but exalts life-denying values like compassion and pity.[125] Christianity is also said to have kept mankind from affirming life by deceiving them into thinking that they deserve to suffer; that they are being punished for having sinned ("in antiquity", writes Nietzsche, "there still existed actual misfortune, pure innocent misfortune; only in Christendom did everything become punishment, well-deserved punishment").[126] To overcome this predicament, Nietzsche preaches a movement beyond "good" and "evil" as these terms are presently understood. What he seeks is a new "*revaluation of all Christian values*", first attempted in the Renaissance, but abolished by the Reformation.[127]

A similar argument appears in Daly's *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*, the very title of which seems to allude to Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. In chapter four, titled "Transvaluation of Values: The End of Phallic Morality" – which

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[122] *The Birth of Tragedy* is included in one of the volumes to which Daly refers, although she does not mention this particular work in writing. Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 437 n3.

[123] Cf. Jean Grimshaw, *Feminist Philosophers: Women's Perspectives on Philosophical Traditions* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1986), 155.

[124] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1887] 2006), 24, 25, italics in original. See also Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ* [1895], in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2005), 5. "[…] the domestic animal, the herd animal, the sick animal: man, – the Christian".

[125] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 7, 20; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, 4, 6, 14, 61, 63; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, ed. Rolf-Peter Hortman and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1886] 2002), 56.

[126] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, ed. Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1881] 1997), 48.

[127] Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, 64, italics in original. See also Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 91.

begins with a quote from Nietzsche's manuscript *The Will to Power*[128] – Daly notes that there is, in the Christian morality now accepted by society at large, a "one-sided emphasis upon charity, meekness, obedience, humility, self-abnegation, sacrifice, service."[129] A few lines further down, she continues: "Basically, then, the traditional morality of our culture has been 'feminine' in the sense of hypocritically idealizing some of the qualities imposed upon the oppressed."[130] The latter quote highlights an important difference between Daly and Nietzsche. While Nietzsche's alleged misogyny is a contentious issue, Daly is much clearer in emphasizing that valued as well as devalued "feminine" characteristics have been "imposed" on women and other oppressed groups (she therefore speaks of the "passive" Christian morality a "pseudo-feminine ethic").[131] In addition, Daly emphasizes that the destructive side of Christian morality mainly affects women, as they are raised and coerced to submit to its passivating, life-denying values to a much greater extent than men. For example, she argues that it is not humanity at large, but primarily women who – because of the myth of the Fall – are seen and experience themselves as evil, guilty of having sinned.[132]

Daly does nonetheless propose the same *solution* to this problem as Nietzsche: a revaluation of all existing values, which she also speaks of as a "movement beyond patriarchy's good and evil".[133] This is not to say that she ends up endorsing a Nietzschean ethic.[134] Instead, what Daly demands is an even more thoroughgoing transvaluation, challenging both the values of Christianity and those of Nietzsche, which she describes as essentially

[128] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 98. "A transvaluation of values can only be accomplished when there is a tension of new needs, and a new set of needy people who feel all old values as painful – although they are not conscious of what is wrong." Daly provides no source for this quote. But the paragraph in question can be found in Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufman, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968), 522. There, the translation reads: "A revaluation of values is achieved only when there is a tension of new needs, of men with new needs, who suffer from the old values without attaining this consciousness."

[129] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 100.

[130] Ibid., 100–101.

[131] Ibid., 102. On Nietzsche's disputed misogyny, see for example Mat Messerschmidt, "Nietzsche's Misogyny and a Feminine Philosophy of the Future", in *Nietzsche on Women and the Eternal-Feminine: A Critique of Truth and Values*, ed. Michael J. McNeal (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023).

[132] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 48.

[133] Ibid., 67. See also ibid., 65–66.

[134] Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, 4. "What is good? – Everything that enhances people's feeling of power, will to power, power itself. […] What is bad? – Everything stemming from weakness."

patriarchal. And this, Daly explains, can only be achieved by the women's revolution. "Nietzsche, the prophet whose prophecy was short-circuited by his own misogynism, wanted to transvaluate Judeo-Christian morality, but in fact it is women who will confront patriarchal morality as *patriarchal*. It is radical feminism that can unveil the 'feminine' ethic, revealing it to be phallic ethic.[135] Thus, it is the women's revolution that will fulfill the function that Nietzsche ascribed to his philosophy: that of the "Antichrist", a term that Daly herself uses to characterize this movement.[136]

As the Antichrist, Daly argues that the women's revolution constitutes a "spiritual uprising that can bring us beyond sexist myths".[137] At the same time, I will demonstrate that she takes it upon herself to rewrite the myth of the Fall so that it more closely resembles the myth of Prometheus, as it was interpreted by Nietzsche.

Feminists on myth in the 1970s

One thing that distinguishes Daly's situation from that of Beauvoir is that she operates within a much more well-established feminist movement; one that Beauvoir helped found. This is particularly evident in *The Church and the Second Sex*, where Daly appropriates several of Beauvoir's key concepts, including her concept of myth. Yet, Beauvoir is not the only feminist theorist from whom Daly draws in her writings on myths. By the early 1970s, there was already a heterogeneous yet distinctively feminist mythological tradition, the representatives of which Daly often enters into dialog with. This is the last context I want to say something about, before I move on to discuss previous research.

As stated, it was in the 1970s that feminism grew into a genuine mass movement. For those involved, this development seemed destined to transform the very fabric of modern society. Consequently, we have already seen that Daly refers to the women's movement as the harbinger of a "revolution", about to bring humanity as a whole into a new historical era.[138] This view differs radically from that expressed by Beauvoir in the 1940s. Beauvoir too spoke of a "new era" in history. But the causality she identified

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[135] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 102, italics in original.

[136] Ibid., 96, 139–140.

[137] Ibid., 140

[138] See also Robin Morgan, "Introduction: The Women's Revolution", in *Sisterhood Is Powerfu: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*, ed. Robin Morgan (New York: Random House, 1970).

was of an opposite kind: according to her, the emancipation of women was the result of a historical shift to which women themselves had not contributed.[139] "Feminism itself has never been an autonomous movement: it was partially an instrument in the hands of politicians and partially an epiphenomenon reflecting a deeper social drama. Never did women form a separate caste: and in reality they never sought to play a role in history as a sex."[140] By contrast, feminist theorists active in the 1970s frequently claimed that women had not only entered history, but become its primary subject.[141] As such, they had a responsibility for history; it was up to them to ensure that the future really did become different from the past. This raised the question of how women, as individuals and as a group, should act; an enquiry that received relatively little attention in *The Second Sex*. It was often in such discussions that the word "myth" appeared.

There was no consensus, however, on what this word meant or how the various phenomena thus labelled should be used. Some feminist theorists active in the 1970s employed the word "myth" to denote a patriarchal residue that kept the past alive in the present. But this word was also used, sometimes by the same theorists, to name a resource with the help of which a different future could be realized. Opinions also differed on what kind of myths could fulfill a progressive function. Some feminists argued the potentially progressive myth stemmed from a distant, non-patriarchal past. Others held that women must invent new myths, which might nonetheless be *about* this perhaps fictitious past. A third group instead sought to rewrite decidedly patriarchal myths to make these serve a feminist function. Some theorists, like Daly, championed all these positions, albeit in different works. In summary, we can isolate four main tendencies, all of which reflect different, but not necessarily incompatible, ideas about the relation between the past, present and future: attempts to (i) forget or repress myths, (ii) remember myths, (iii) invent new myths and (iv) rewrite older myths.

The effort to forget or repress myth is represented by feminist theorists who speak of myths as a remnant of the past, the power of which must be broken in order to realize a different future. The first feminist theorist to articulate this

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[139] Beauvoir, *TSS,* 163.

[140] Ibid., 182. Beauvoir discusses the past, not her own present. But nothing in *The Second Sex* suggests that she imagines that feminism can become a revolutionary movement.

[141] In a discussion that also touches on Tillich's theory of "history-bearing groups", Daly states that "women conscious of the vocation to raise up this half of humanity to the stature of acting subjects in history constitute an ontological locus of history." She continues: "In the very process of becoming actual persons […] women are bearers of history." Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 35.

ambition was Beauvoir, whose writings on myth Daly draws on in her first book from 1968. The same tendency can be discerned in Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970), to which I return to in chapter nine. It is also visible in Rich's essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" (1971), about which I will say a little bit more below.

According to Rich, the present constitutes a period of "awakening", during which women are becoming conscious, of themselves and their situation. Woman, writes Rich, is giving birth to herself, acting as her own midwife, "creating herself anew", partly through writing.[142] But because the past still shapes the present, women cannot afford to look only to the future. For example, Rich points to the presence of "myths" and "images" in the literature women inherit. These myths and images have a particularly strong influence on girls and women who try to write, as they are especially vulnerable to the effects of language. Wherever the girl or woman turns in literature, "she meets the image of Woman in books written by men."[143] Hence the importance of what Rich terms "re-vision", – that is, "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction", to make visible both obstacles that persist and a way forward, past these. "Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. […] We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us", Rich concludes.[144] To paraphrase Nietzsche, one may term this a "critical" mode of regarding myth and history, the aim of which is to "to break up and dissolve a part of the past". As Nietzsche points out, this is achieved by bringing the past "before the tribunal, scrupulously examining it and finally condemning it".[145]

But again, this is not the only use of myth and history that informed feminist theory in the 1970s. To continue borrowing from Nietzsche, it can be argued that feminists who sought to remember rather than forget or repress myth adopted a "monumentalistic" conception of myth and history, which is to say that the memory of a supposedly great past was invoked to inspire acts meant

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[142] Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision", *College English* 34, no. 1 (1972): 25.

[143] Ibid., 21

[144] Ibid., 18–19.

[145] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* [1874], in *Nietzsche: Untimely Meditations,* ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 75–76.

to recreate this greatness.[146] That myths were used in this way is particularly evident if one considers the work of feminist theorists who embraced the so-called matriarchy thesis.

As we have seen, this thesis was first advanced by Johann Jakob Bachofen in the mid-nineteenth century. It gained renewed traction among North American feminist theorists in the 1970s, thanks in part to Davis' *The First Sex* (1971) and Merlin Stone's *When God Was a Woman* (1976), both of whom argue that political power originally laid in the hands of women.[147] Proponents of this thesis, including Daly, make use of several different concepts of myth, two of which are particularly important to mention here. In accordance with Bachofen, they usually conceptualize myth as a trustworthy source of historical knowledge about matriarchy itself. But they also invoke matriarchal or gynocentric myths as a source of inspiration, claiming that such tales preserve a memory of female greatness, consciously repressed by men. In 1982, novelist and essayist Charlene Spretnak (1946–), for example, observes that patriarchal culture tends to describe strong women as freaks of nature, but counters that newly discovered "traditions of mythic and historic women of power" prove that this claim constitutes a lie.[148] "Recognizing myth as 'the pattern to which growth may aspire,' we value its power as a spiritual force. It offers multi-faceted answers to 'What is our true nature?' 'What is possible?' […] Our history of power is a grounding for our present and future evolution."[149] Here it seems reasonable to speak of a "monumental" use of myths and history, where overcoming (or forgetting) the patriarchal past is assumed to require remembering or returning to a repressed, pre-patriarchal heritage.[150]

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[146] "Of what use […] is the monumentalistic conception of the past […] to the man of the present? He learns from it that the greatness that once existed was in any event once possible and may thus be possible again". Ibid., 69.

[147] North American feminists in the 1970s were not the first feminists to be inspired by Bachofen, however. See Katarina Leppänen, *Elin Wägner's Alarm Clock: Ecofeminist Theory in the Interwar Era* (Lanham: Lexington books, 2008), 67–76; Cynthia Eller, *Gentlemen and Amazons: The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory, 1861-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 100–132.

[148] Charlene Spretnak, "Preface", in *The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power within the Feminist Movement*, ed. Charlene Spretnak (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1981), 89.

[149] Ibid., 90.

[150] Cf. Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time", *Signs* 7, no. 1 ([1979] 1981): 18. "In its beginnings", Kristeva writes, "the women's movement, as the struggle of suffragists and of existential feminists, aspired to gain a place in linear time as the time of project and history." In contrast, the second generation of feminists are said to refuse linear temporality and embrace what Kristeva with Nietzsche terms "*monumental time*". Ibid., 14, italics in original. "Such a feminism

Nietzsche also points to a potential problem with the monumentalistic conception, which seems particularly applicable to feminist advocates of the matriarchy thesis. For he notes that when one invokes history to serve as a source of inspiration, one always runs the risk of idealizing and thereby distorting it. Nietzsche even states that "there have been ages […] which were quite incapable of distinguishing between a monumentalized past and a mythical fiction".[151] I will demonstrate that many feminists critical of the matriarchy thesis argue that this is exactly what has happened, meaning that the literary myths and historical artifacts invoked as a source of insights or inspiration have in fact been used to construct a new myth, in the sense of a fiction without a factual basis. But we will also see that similar claims have been advanced by some *supporters* of the matriarchy thesis. For example, in 1974 Rich calls Davis "the first contemporary feminist myth-maker", stating that *The First Sex* is "inaccurate, biased, unprofessional", yet immensely valuable, precisely because it functions as a myth.[152] Rich can thus be read as a feminist theorist who emphasizes that feminists should invent new myths *about* a pre-patriarchal past.

Finally, there are several feminists active in the 1970s who seek to re-write supposedly patriarchal mythes. With Alice Ostriker, this practice can be termed feminist revisionist myth-making.[153] The best known example in this genre is probably Hélène Cixous famous essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975), in which Cixous returns to the ancient myth of Medusa, but presents a comprised, rewritten version thereof, according to which "the Siren were men" and Medusa is "beautiful and laughing" rather than deadly.[154] In the introduction to this text, centered around the importance of women's writing (*écriture féminine*), Cixous characterizes the present as "a time during which the new breaks away from the old", stating: "The future must no longer be determined by the past. I do not deny that the effects of the past are still with us. But I refuse to strengthen them by repeating them […]. Anticipation is imperative."[155] Here it is possible to discern the imprint of the distinctly

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rejoins, on the one hand, the archaic (mythical) memory and, on the other, the cyclical or monumental temporality of marginal movements." Ibid. 20.

[151] Nietzsche, *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, 70.

[152] Adrienne Rich, "The Origins of Feminist Myth-Making", *Boston Phoenix*, September 10, 1974, 15. This text was later republished in Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Norton, [1976] 1986), 91–93.

[153] Ostriker, "The Thieves of Language".

[154] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa", *Signs* 1, no. 4 ([1975] 1976): 885.

[155] Ibid., 875

modern temporality, according to which forward movement, if not "progress", constitutes not just a possibility, but a demand. In a somewhat later text, "Sorties" (1986), which also revolves around the importance of women's writing, Cixous likewise states that writing is valuable because it represents a "somewhere else" that "can escape the infernal repetition" and invent new worlds.[156] And yet, Cixous' use of ancient myths suggest that this, the breaking with the past and the invention of new worlds, still presupposes a return. As Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard points out: "These new worlds are in fact the old worlds of myth […] revitalized by Cixous' revelation of their latent hierarchies and by her championing of those who resist them."[157]

Another well-known feminist theorists active in the 1970s who engages in revisionist myth-making is Luce Irigaray. As literary theorist Brigitte Jandey points out, Irigaray discusses or employs myths in most of her works.[158] In the 1980s, she embraced the thesis of a pre-patriarchal gynocratic order and began to speak of myths as a means to gain knowledge about this forgotten beginning.[159] But her most famous writing on myth is her essay "Plato's *Hystera*", published in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974), wherein she takes on Plato's myth of the cave. Originally an allegory meant to illustrate "our own nature as regards both education and the lack of it", this myth depicts the uneducated as prisoners in an underground cave and the philosopher as someone who ventures up and outside.[160] There, the philosopher learns the truth about the world and realizes that all objects "he" previously took for real

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[156] Hélène Cixous, "Sorties", in *The Newly Born Woman*, ed. Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 72.

[157] Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard, "Introduction", in *Laughing with Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought*, ed. Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3.

[158] Brigitte Jandey, "Mythes et ecriture chez Luce Irigaray", *Australian Journal of French Studies* 34, no. 1 (1997): 48. Philosopher Margaret Whitford suggests that over time, mythology became more important to Irigaray than philosophy. Margaret Whitford, *The Irigaray Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 11.

[159] Luce Irigaray, *Thinking the Difference: For a Peaceful Revolution*, trans. Karin Montin (New York: Routledge, [1989] 1994), 101. "For myth is not a story independent of History, but rather expresses History in colourful accounts that illustrate the major trends of an era. [...] History as expressed in myth is more closely related to female, matrilineal traditions." See also Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*, trans. Alison Martin (New York: Routledge, [1990] 1993), 24. "Johann Jacob Bachofen's work on myths as historical expressions is interesting given the evidence he provides of the existence of gynocratic structures during particular eras." For a critique of Irigaray's use of myth as a historical source, see Joy Morny, *Divine Love: Luce Irigaray, Women, Gender and Religion* (Manchester University Press, 2007), 28–32.

[160] Plato, *Republic. Books 6-10*, 514a, p. 107.

where mere shadows, projected onto the cave's wall. In other words, this myth explains the origin of philosophy in terms of a journey that leads away from the darkness and false images of the cave toward a life in the sun, above ground. However, since Plato's cave is reminiscent of a womb (*hystera*) and the sun is associated with God, Irigaray argues that this myth also constitutes an attack on the mother, which helps render maternal origins insignificant by presenting the birth of truth as an entirely male affair. Summarizing the myth's implicit message as she understands it, Irigaray writes: "The cave gives birth only to phantoms, fakes or, at best, images. One must leave its circle in order to realize the factitious character of such a birth. Engendering the real is the father's task, engendering the fictive is the task of the mother – that 'receptacle' for turning out more or less good copies of reality."[161] Irigaray herself refers to this as a "reading" of the cave myth. Others have, nonetheless, called it a rewrite. For example, philosopher Sasha L. Biro asserts: "It is a rewriting that borrows from myth in order to create a new myth […] Irigaray reinvents and re-mythologizes this myth of origins, thereby demonstrating how myth is transformative and can itself be transformed."[162]

To summarize, feminist engagement with "myth" in the 1970s invites us to reflect on the question of how radical social change becomes possible. Does it require a definitive break with the past, made possible by a critical use of history? Or, on the contrary, that (parts of) the past is remembered (turned into monuments), reinvented in the form of mythic fictions, or rewritten in a revisionist manner? These are issues of continuing relevance, which can be explored on the basis of Daly's writings on myths.

To give but one more concrete example of how Daly's writings on myth can be linked to contemporary debates about the preconditions of social change, I want to end this section by looking at philosopher Fanny Söderbäck's *Revolutionary Time* (2020). In this work, Söderbäck aims to uncover a temporal structure that makes change possible: one that she describes as "a temporal movement of return, from the present of our here-and-now, to a past that by and large has been silenced and repressed, into a future that might be otherwise."[163] Söderbäck presents this model of time, which she calls "revolutionary time", as an alternative to the temporal paradigm now

[161] Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, [1974] 1985), 300.

[162] Sasha L. Biro, "Disrupting Symmetry: Jean-Luc Nancy and Luce Irigaray on Myth and the Violence of Representation", *Eidos. A Journal for Philosophy of Culture* 3, no. 2 (8) (2019): 69.

[163] Fanny Söderbäck, *Revolutionary Time,* 5.

dominant in the West: linear time. Officially, the latter privileges forward movement and progress. Yet, Söderbäck claims that it gives rise to "*repetition*", as its one-sided focus on the future fosters a "*forgetfulness*" of history and our material/maternal beginnings, without regard to which a different future cannot be realized. Consequently, Söderbäck argues that real change presupposes "a work of recovery, of anamnesis, of unearthing a forgotten history and silenced stories".[164] At the same time, revolutionary time is not to be confused with "cyclical time" as this model is usually understood – that is, with the denial of historical change or a privileging of return and repetition at the expense of renewal.

Söderbäck finds antecedents to the revolutionary temporal structure she herself seeks to articulate in the works of Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, both of whom have realized that a different future requires what she terms a "perpetual and active return to and tarrying with the past".[165] In this part study, I aim to illustrate that similar insights can be discerned in Daly's writings on myths. Admittedly, Daly often adopts the very positions that Söderbäck criticizes. While Daly's first book can be said to reproduce the linear model, her later ones tend to idealize the past in ways that impede the struggle for a radically different future. The latter tendency in particular is often highlighted by her critics. Daly, claims Mongale, "urges a return to a putative prepatriarchal world, to a primal matriarchy", which implies that she privileges return at the expense of renewal.[166] Historian of religion Cyntia Eller levels a similar accusation against all spiritual feminists. There is, she writes, "a persistent undercurrent of antihistorical intent in the feminist spirituality movement."[167]

And yet, Daly's work is more complex, if not necessarily more compelling, than histories of 1970s feminism usually manage to make visible. First of all, she rejects the linear model of time on which the very division between return and renewal rests. "I think our foresisters are here now. I don't believe in linear time", she states in a late interview.[168] In other words, Daly views the past as always present, in a multi-temporal now. Likewise, in accordance with the Christian notion of "already and not yet", according to which God's kingdom

[164] Ibid., 11, italics in original.

[165] Ibid., 9

[166] Monagle, "Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology*, 340.

[167] Cynthia Eller, "Relativizing the Patriarchy: The Sacred History of the Feminist Spirituality Movement", *History of Religions* 30, no. 3 (1991): 292.

[168] Daly and Madsen, "The Thin Thread of Conversation", 348. Cf. Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 43. Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 1, 33.

is both a present reality and future blessing, she sometimes conceptualizes the future as an already present not yet fully realized potentiality or promise.[169] Daly also emphasizes that the remembrance she advocates is always, ultimately, in the service of the future. Commenting on the "pre-patriarchal origin stories" promoted by Daly, Lorde and Gloria Anzaldúa, AnaLouise Keating asserts that these "do not indicate a nostalgic desire to return to some prehistorical, utopian, gynecentric community of women. By going 'back' to previously erased conventions, they go forward [...] These 'returns' are performative, not descriptive".[170] Hence, when Daly urges women to recall forcibly repressed memories and gynocentric myths, or – in line with Irigaray – criticizes "patriarchal myth-makers" for displacing the mother's role in engendering the new, her aim remains a revolution.

Of course, there are other aspects of her writings that clash with and jeopardize this aim. My point is that the study of Daly's writings on myths can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of her conception of time, making visible the presence of something radical in the midst of the ostensibly conservative, or perhaps something disturbingly conservative about the seemingly radical.

Previous research

There is relatively little previous research about Daly, at least compared to the enormous number of studies dedicated to Beauvoir.[171] The only book-length studies dedicated to her work are *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Daly* (2000) and *Two Reformers: Martin Luther and Mary Daly as Political Theologians* (2007).[172] Studies on her writings on myth are thus scarce. Yet there are a few significant exceptions, which I will discuss below.

Generally speaking, the present study differs from these previous studies in four important respects. First, my primary aim is not to evaluate Daly's

[169] On the notion of "already and not yet", see Christiaan Mostert, "The Kingdom Anticipated: The Church and Eschatology", *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 13, no. 1 (2011); J. Scholtz Jacob, "A Critique of Ladd's 'Already but Not yet' View of the Kingdom", *Koers: Bulletin for Christian Scholarship* 87 (2022).

[170] AnaLouise Keating, *Transformation Now! Toward a Post-Oppositional Politics of Change* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 144.

[171] For a useful overview of the available literature on Daly, see Jennifer Rycenga and Linda Barufaldi, "Secondary Sources on Mary Daly", in *The Mary Daly Reader* ed. Jennifer Rycenga and Linda Barufaldi (New York: New York University Press, 2017).

[172] Hoagland and Frye, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Daly*; Riswold, *Two Reformers*.

writings on myths, but to analyze them from a historical perspective. Second, I do not privilege a particular definition or understanding of myth. Instead, I chart the ways in which Daly herself uses this word. This helps make visible the many different argumentative and analytical functions that specific concepts of myth serve in her work. Third, because I study three works and allow the word "myth" to guide my gaze, I am able to identify several discontinuities and tensions in Daly's writings on myth, overlooked or ignored by other scholars. Fourth and finally, mine is the first study to make visible the many ways in which Daly engages in dialogue with other mythologists, whose writings on myth I demonstrate that she both appropriates and challenges. In this regard, I construct a broader context for Daly's writings on myth than previous research has done.

A key contribution to the research on Daly's writings on myth is Pamela Sue Anderson's chapter "Myth and Feminist Philosophy" from 2002. As mentioned earlier, Anderson conceptualizes myth as an extra-discursive and ahistorical phenomenon that feminist theorists "approach" in different ways. Daly is thus said to adopt a "radical-essentialist" feminist approach to myth, which means that she, like "conservative-essentialist feminists", claims that "timeless truth about women can be represented in myth", yet "insists upon the need to reproduce radically new versions of old myths".[173] In support of this interpretation, Anderson cites a passage from *Gyn/Ecology* (the only work by Daly that she mentions), wherein Daly presents "patriarchal myths" as "distortions" of older myths from a "gynocentric civilization", through which women can come to learn important truths about themselves. Anderson does not discuss the function of this claim, but proceeds to highlight a series of "problems" with the essentialist feminist approach to myth.[174] Most importantly, because its representatives postulate the existence of "a universal female identity as discoverable in myth", Anderson argues that it risks rendering invisible (sexual, racial, ethnic, cultural and class) differences between women, while simultaneously exaggerating the differences between women and men.[175]

A second scholar who has studied Daly's writings on myth is the aforementioned Keating, who addresses this topic in a chapter titled "'There

[173] Anderson, "Myth and Feminist Philosophy", 103.

[174] Ibid., 105.

[175] Ibid., 106. Targeting Daly in particular, Andersson asks: "Is it possible to avoid exclusion of differences in essentialized accounts of becoming woman? Aren't univocal myths of identity precisely what have shaped racism and imperialism?" Ibid., 107.

is No Arcane Place for Return': Revisionist Mythmaking with a Difference", published in her book *Transformation Now!* from 2012. From a historiographical point of view, this study is amenable to the same objection as Anderson's, meaning that Keating too speaks of myth as an extra-discursive and ahistorical *thing*, the nature of which can be defined in advance. Instead of approaching her material on its own terms, Keating thus begins her text by establishing what myth is and is not, stating that "the conflation of 'mythic stories' with 'lies,' is too simplistic and overlooks the crucial roles mythology plays in shaping our material realities and other dimensions of our lives".[176] In fact, Keating does not give any example of how the authors she studies use the word "myth", which means that "myth" in this text only functions as an analytical concept.

Keating presents Daly as a "radical feminist" who practices "revisionist mythmaking" and promotes "prepatriarchal origin stories" – that is, stories that postulate the existence of an ancient matriarchy whose members worshipped female deities and other mythic figures, which can be revived to produce new revisionist myths.[177] As opponents of this position, she names Judith Butler, Teresa de Lauretis and Donna Haraway, all of whom she calls "post-structuralist" feminists.[178] Keating states that she herself resents pre-patriarchal origin stories that ignore differences between women and vilify men, yet does not believe that feminists should "reject *all* origin myths", nor all references to goddesses and the feminine.[179] To find a middle ground between the position represented by Daly and that of post-structuralists like Butler, Haraway and de Lauretis, Keating explains that she will "adopt a relational perspective" that sets Daly in "dialogue" with Lorde and Anzaldúa, whose approach to myth she claims to prefer.[180] This dialog enables Keating to identify wherein the main difficulty with Daly's origin stories lies, according to her. For it is not, Keating explains, that they are centered around mythic figures rooted in European traditions, but that Daly herself does not acknowledge this fact: that she treats decidedly European mythic figures as "unmarked" categories capable of unifying all women under a supposedly universal heading, effectively obscuring the many differences that exist

[176] Keating, *Transformation Now!*, 112.
[177] Ibid., 113–114.
[178] Ibid., 114–116.
[179] Ibid., 116, italics in original.
[180] Ibid., 117.

between women.[181] By disregarding the "cultural specificity" of her mythic images, Daly "inadvertently normalizes the generic ('white') norm and thus erases other types of cultural specificities."[182] By contrast, Keating argues that Lorde and Anzaldúa openly acknowledge that the mythic figures at the center of their revisionist myths are ethnically marked.[183]

A third scholar who has studied Daly's writings on myth is theologian Sue Waslin, author of a thesis titled *The Theoretical Contexts of Mary Daly's Thought* (1998). This study is particularly useful because Waslin discusses how Daly herself uses the term "myth". According to Waslin, the author of *Gyn/Ecology* defines myths as "paradigmatic models or patternings of male domination-female subordination that are continuously reactualised through performance throughout culture."[184] But in the end, Waslin too adopts a normative rather than historical perspective on Daly's writings on myth, which she compares to those of Beauvoir. Asserting that both fall "prey to the same or similar objections", Waslin writes:

> Both use the term "myth" in a broad sense to denote any perceivable patterning of ideas and attitudes towards women on the part of a man or group of men. […] Daly comes to the study of myth with certain philosophical and political assumptions which colour her perspective in a particular way. […] Daly uses myths, as de Beauvoir, to illustrate a certain view of man rather than to analyse "myth" in its own right.[185]

My reading allows for other conclusions. First, I argue that Daly's, as well as Beauvoir's, (various) concepts of myth are less imprecise than Waslin claims: that they all have a basis in already established mythological traditions. Second, I do not see it as a problem that Daly does not, as Waslin writes, analyze myth in its own right. In fact, this is one of this study's main points: that different concepts of myth, both in the context of feminist theory and more generally, often function as tools or weapons in struggles that revolve around other issues. Third, the present study makes visible that *all* mythologists, not just feminist theorists like Beauvoir and Daly, approach "myth" with certain philosophical and political preconceptions, which inform

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[181] Ibid., 134–135.

[182] Ibid., 135.

[183] Ibid., 139–141.

[184] Sue Waslin, *The Theoretical Contexts of Mary Daly's Thought* (Doctoral thesis: The University of St. Andrews, 1998), 62.

[185] Ibid., 63.

how they conceptualize the nature and function of the various phenomena thus named.

A fourth and final text that deserves mention is theologian Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki's "The Idea of God in Feminist Philosophy" (1994), which contains a short but important discussion of what Suchocki calls Daly's "mythological method". According to Suchocki, this method is most fully developed in one of Daly's later books, *Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language* (1987), designed as a dictionary in which Daly both introduces new words and provides alternative definitions of existing ones.[186] Suchocki states that Daly in earlier works, such as *Beyond God the Father*, provides a "feminist reinterpretation" of the "Christian mythos" (for example, we have seen that she describes the women's revolution as the Antichrist).[187] In contrast, the author of *Wickedary* "reconstructs the Christian mythos, not through reinterpretation of basic concepts […], but in a recasting of the Christian eschatological story" – that is, by telling a story of salvation in which Daly herself takes on the role of Christ. Suchocki explains: "By working directly with the mythos, rather than interpreting it in rationalistic categories, Daly is attempting to refashion the fundamental sensitivity from which we live. She reconfigures the lines etched so deeply into our psyches."[188] In what follows, I demonstrate that Daly can be said to make use of this "mythological model" in earlier works as well.

Disposition

Whereas Beauvoir only devotes much attention to what she terms myth in one work, Daly does so in three. Since she makes use of different concepts of myth in each one, I have chosen to discuss these books separately, in chronological order. Thus, this part-study consists of three chapters, centered around *The Church and the Second Sex* (chapter 8), *Beyond God the Father* (chapter 9) and *Gyn/Ecology* (chapter 10).

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[186] Mary Daly and Jane Caputi, *Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).

[187] Suchoki, "The Idea of God in Feminist Philosophy", 59.

[188] Ibid., 62.

8. Exorcising demonic myth

Aggiornamento is an Italian word that translates into "updating" or "bringing up to date". It was made famous by Pope John XXIII (1881–1963), who used it to characterize the objective of the Second Vatican Council, the latest ecumenical council of the Catholic Church, which took place between 1962 and 1965.[189] That even the Catholic Church, warden of the supposedly eternal, felt the need for renewal is indicative of the general spirit of the 1960s, which has been called *a decade of change.* One of the sixteen documents enacted by the council fathers in 1965 bore the title "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World". In its introductory statement, one reads: "Today, the human race is involved in a new stage of history. Profound and rapid changes are spreading by degrees around the whole world." Together, these changes are said to entail "a true cultural and social transformation, one which has repercussions on man's religious life as well."[190] Thus, the Church needed to change too. But the change aspired to by the council fathers was of a particular kind. The concept of *aggiornamento* suggests that one has fallen behind, and is stuck in the past. This, in turn, presupposes that the one's future, so to speak, is already present, in a now that one currently does not inhabit – or, in other words: that there is a temporal frontier, the distance to which must be reduced. In this particular context, the frontier was assumed to be embodied by the "modern world", to which the Church had to be brought closer, through reform.[191]

This temporal logic informs the writings on myth in Daly's first book, *The Church and the Second Sex,* a work that she herself describes as influenced by the

[189] Ormond Rush, "Conciliar Hermeneutics", in *The Cambridge Companion to Vatican II*, ed. Richard R. Gaillardetz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 98; Gerard Mannion, "The Pilgrim Church: An Ongoing Journey of Ecclesial Renewal and Reform", in *The Cambridge Companion to Vatican II*, ed. Richard R. Gaillardetz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 115, 121; Stephen Bevans, "The Church in Mission", in *The Cambridge Companion to Vatican II*, ed. Richard R. Gaillardetz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 138, 143.

[190] Paul VI with the Father of the Sacred Council, "The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World", in *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (Washinton: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1965), 4.

[191] Although this is clearly what was sought, the word "reform" is absent from most Vatican II documents. John W. O'Malley, "Reform, Historical Consciousness, and Vatican II's *Aggiornamento*", *Theological Studies* 32, no. 4 (1971): 587.

Second Vatican Council.[192] Daly, however, focuses on an issue that did not receive much attention during the council, which originally did not allow women to participate, even as auditors.[193] "Christianity", writes Daly, "[…] has not yet faced its responsibility to exorcise the devil of sexual prejudice. In fact, it has lagged behind the rest of the world on this issue." This, then, is where an update is most urgently needed. If the Church fails to improve the situation of women, Daly concludes, "there will be no answer to the mounting suspicion in the minds of many that Christianity […] is the inevitable enemy of human progress."[194]

According to Mary J. Henold, *The Church and the Second Sex* constitutes the first significant scholarly critique of sexism within the Catholic Church. Together with a few earlier articles published in Catholic journals, it "made Daly a national figure as the country's most prominent Catholic feminist."[195] In the chapter at hand, I examine how Daly uses the concept of myth to articulate the argument and analysis at this work's center. As we will see, "myth" helps her to pinpoint where the problem lies and how severe it is, without having to abandon her hope that the Catholic Church can be reformed. To accomplish this, she draws on the work of Simone de Beauvoir. She also appropriates a concept of myth rooted in Christian theology and the work of Harvey Cox (1929–), one of the most influential American theologians of the 1960s.

To help make visible where Daly is speaking from, I begin with a brief account of the context in which *The Church and the Second Sex* was written.

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[192] Mary Daly, "Autobiographical Preface", in *The Church and the Second Sex* (Boston: Beacon, 1999), 9.

[193] Peter De Mey, "The Role of Non-Voting Participants in the Preparation and Conduct of the Council", in *The Cambridge Companion to Vatican II*, ed. Richard R. Gaillardetz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 89. It was not until the third session, held in 1964, that 23 women were invited as auditors. Yet no women were admitted as voting participants. See also Regina Heyder, "Women and the Council: Catholic Women's Organizations and Women Theologians Prior to and During Vatican II", in *The Oxford Handbook of Vatican II*, ed. Catherine E. Clifford and Massimo Faggioli (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 21; Henold, *Catholic and Feminist*.

[194] Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 219.

[195] Henold, *Catholic and Feminist*, 39. Still today, writes Jessica Coblentz and Brianne A. B. Jacobs, *The Church and the Second Sex* "endures as a historical milestone in the emergence of feminist theology." Coblentz and A. B. Jacobs, "Mary Daly's *The Church and the Second Sex*", 544. See also Sîan Melwill Hawthorne, "Entangled Subjects: Feminism, Religion and the Obligation to Alterity", in *The Sage Handbook of Feminist Theory*, ed. Mary Evans (London: SAGE Publications, 2014), 122.

In the "Autobiographical Preface" to the 1975 edition of *The Church and the Second Sex*, Daly describes the history of this work. In 1954, she had earned a doctorate in theology from Saint Mary's College, the first American doctoral program in theology to admit women.[196] Daly then went on to pursue the highest degree in Catholic theology: a doctorate in sacred theology from a pontifical university (i.e., an ecclesiastical university established or approved by the Holy See).[197] Because the only American university that offered such a program did not accept female students, Daly applied to the University of Fribourg in Switzerland, where the theological faculty was state-controlled and thus had no legal right to exclude women.[198] There she earned not one but two additional doctorates, one in sacred theology and one in philosophy.[199] It was also in Fribourg that Daly began work on *The Church and the Second Sex*, initiated in 1965.[200]

This work, Daly writes, "might never have happened if there had not been one great carnival of an event", the Second Vatican Council, which she visited during its final year. There, the Catholic Church "came bursting into open confrontation with the twentieth century". It seemed, Daly continues, that "the greatest breakthrough of nearly two thousand years was happening."[201] The significance of this event is clear from the third chapter of *The Church and the Second Sex*, entitled "Winds of Change". In this chapter, Daly writes that with Pope John XXIII "came opened windows and an on-rushing *aggiornamento*", from which there was no return. Citing excerpts from the documents enacted by the council fathers, she concludes that "it is evident […] that an evolution has taken place in the official ideology."[202] In other words, the council helped sow the hope that the Church could indeed be updated, brought into harmony with modern society. In the introduction to *The Church and the Second Sex*, Daly states: "However slowly, surely the Church learns somewhat from 'the world', and eventually progressive thinking does have

[196] Daly, *Outercourse*, 50, 53.

[197] Ibid., 55–56; Daly, "Autobiographical Preface", 7–8.

[198] Daly, "Autobiographical Preface", 8.

[199] Daly's two dissertations from Fribourg have been published as Mary Daly, *The Problem of Speculative Theology* (Washington: Thomist Press, 1965); Mary Daly, *Natural Knowledge of God in the Philosophy of Jacques Maritain* (Rome: Officium Libri Catholici, Catholic Book Agency, 1966).

[200] Daly, "Autobiographical Preface", 5.

[201] Ibid., 9

[202] Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 118.

some influence upon the upper regions of its ponderous organism. If pessimism on this score was plausible before the Vatican II, it is no longer a completely realistic attitude."[203]

Yet, the council was not *The Church and the Second Sex's* only catalyst. Equally important, Daly writes, was an article by Catholic philosopher Rosemary Lauer, published in the progressive Catholic journal *Commonweal*. This piece, entitled "Women and the Church" (1963), represents the first explicitly feminist article to appear in the North American Catholic press.[204] Though it was only moderately critical, Daly argues that it spoke to her in a way that the works of non-Catholic feminists did not: "That article functioned in a special way that the more radical works of Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan, which I greatly admired, could not function at that point in time: it legitimated the possibility of my own creative feminist writing."[205] This supports the thesis of Henold, who argues the story of Catholic feminism cannot be reduced to one about how non-Catholic feminism was picked up by Catholic women and applied to the sphere of religion. On the contrary, Henold claims, the evidence suggests that Catholic feminism to some extent originated in, was justified through and motivated by religious traditions.[206] This helps explain why early Catholic feminists so often made use of religious and theological concepts, such as "myth", even when they criticized religious teachings and practices.

Having read Lauer's article, Daly wrote a letter to the editor of *Commonweal*, expressing her sympathies. In this letter from 1963, which constitutes her first feminist text about religion, Daly states that Lauer's letter made her feel ashamed that she herself had not written anything on this subject. Seeking to understand why neither she nor anyone else had done so, Daly points out that Catholic women are taught that their "semi-human" status in the Church is willed by God, who has "revealed" that this is how it must be. "True", she continues, "some of us managed to reach the point at which we understood that it is highly questionable that God has revealed any such thing. *But it is difficult to shake off the inhibiting effects of myth.*" Here, then, the influence of myth is invoked to explain why Catholic women have not protested their situation in writing. A few lines further down, Daly goes on to write: "But let's not make excuses. There are some of us who did *break through the myth*, who have thought

[203] Ibid., 55.

[204]Rosemary Lauer, "Women and the Church", *Commonweal* 79, no. 19 (1963); Henold, *Catholic and Feminist*, 35–36.

[205] Daly, "Autobiographical Preface", 10–11.

[206] Henold, *Catholic and Feminist*, 6.

and said many of the things that Professor Lauer has written. Why didn't we write it then?"[207]

In this short letter, Daly provides no detailed answer to the aforementioned question. She does, nevertheless, return to it in *The Church and the Second Sex*. Having observed that the Church promotes "the myth of equality already attained", which paralyzes many women's will to strive for change, Daly states: "Of course, some do see through the myths. A few women writers strive to expose the problem and in so doing, renders a great service."[208] However, she then quotes Beauvoir, who asserts that woman usually "exhausts her courage dissipating mirages and she stops in terror at the threshold of reality."[209] "That is", Daly adds, "even gifted women who have broken through the myths are handicapped; their capacity for objectivity and creativity is partially worn out in the struggle to break the webs of delusion."[210] Put differently, Daly turns to Beauvoir to argue that the very act of breaking through the myths wears women down, leaving them with no energy left to proclaim the truth they find *behind* the myths.

From the conceptual horizon she herself establishes, Daly's decision to take up the pen and write *The Church and the Second Sex* must thus be understood as a conscious attack on the myths that have hitherto prevented her and other Christian women from expressing themselves in writing. Daly took a first step towards writing this book in 1965, when she followed up her 1963 letter with a longer article, also published in *Commonweal.* In this piece, titled "A Built-in-Bias", Daly again makes use of "myth" to articulate her argument. This time, the word is assigned a more precise meaning, reminiscent of that which it carries in Beauvoir's work:

> The static myth of the eternal feminine – which is the last resort of the "traditional" Catholics who wish to retain the idea and practice of the subjection of women in the Church – rejects *a priori* the facts of personal experience in favor of a collective, immutable image of "Woman".[211]

Apart from the fact that she uses the same expression as does Beauvoir (the "myth of the eternal feminine"), we recognize the claim that this is a "static" myth, which overrides "experience" in favor of an "immutable image" of

[207] Mary Daly, "Letter to the Editor", *Commonweal* 79, no. 20 (1963): 604, italics added.
[208] Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 60–61.
[209] Ibid.; Beauvoir, *TSS*, 841.
[210] Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 61.
[211] Daly, "A Built-in Bias", 510.

"Woman" with a capital W. What function this concept serves in Daly's work will become clear in a moment, as we go on to study *The Church and the Second Sex*. But already here, we may note that she speaks of the myth of the eternal feminine as a "last resort", which suggests that Daly like Beauvoir sees this myth as one of the few remaining strongholds of patriarchal oppression.

Just a few weeks after the publication of "A Built-In-Bias", Daly received a letter from a British publisher asking if she wanted to develop her ideas into a book. "The letter was like a summons", she writes.[212] She began work in Fribourg and completed it in Boston, where she was hired by Boston College in 1966.

Patriarchal anachronisms, part II

To demonstrate what function "myth" serves in *The Church and the Second Sex*, I must first clarify how Daly frames the larger problem, which this work is meant to address: the Church's complicity in patriarchal oppression. In the following, I argue that she, as did Beauvoir when she discussed patriarchal oppression in general, conceptualizes this problem in temporal terms, as stemming from a conflict between the past and the present.[213]

In agreement with Beauvoir, Daly emphasizes the importance of material factors in the development of women's general condition. "It was not Catholic ideology but the industrial revolution which led to feminine emancipation", she writes.[214] But according to Daly, men and women are now facing another turning point, which could be even more disruptive than the industrial revolution. Historically, women and other oppressed groups have been forced to adhere to predetermined "roles", preventing them from becoming whole persons and realizing their full, human potential. "In our time, however, we appear to be at the threshold of liberation from this ancient servitude", Daly asserts.[215] This is mainly due to scientific and technological advances.[216] In a passage that well summarizes the temporal logic that characterizes her book, Daly concludes:

> Indeed, it appears that we are entering upon *a new stage in human evolution*, and it may be that many social structures which are still with us and many accepted

[212] Daly, "Autobiographical Preface", 11.
[213] See "Patriarchal anachronisms", this thesis, 163–165.
[214] Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 107.
[215] Ibid., 194.
[216] Ibid., 194–195.

> patterns of behavior are really *dead remnants of an earlier stage*. Characteristic of our age is the breakdown of class distinctions which have persisted for thousands of years – indeed, *since the human race moved from its infancy, the state of primitive society, into its adolescence*. These class distinctions have been expressed in hierarchical patterns of society. […] Today these structures remain, but *modern man* is experiencing them more and more as *suffocating anachronisms*.[217]

We recognize here several distinctive features of a worldview partly popularized by evolutionary anthropology (also reproduced by Beauvoir), such as the notion that human culture is subject to an evolutionary process; that this process leads from a primitive to a modern stage where the former represents humanity's childhood; and that primitive elements can survive and create problems at later stages. A few pages later, Daly suggests that institutions such as slavery and patriarchy may have constituted "necessarily survival techniques […] during one phase of the evolutionary process", but that humanity has now left that phase behind.[218] "The slaves have been freed […], the women are beginning to become conscious of their latent potentialities. The archaic heritage is being shaken off."[219]

Daly's point, however, is that this evolutionary process has yet to be completed. Remnants of past stages still linger. One important factor contributing to this temporal lag is the Catholic Church, about which she writes that it "appears to many as the last stronghold of anachronism and prejudice, refusing to adapt its structures to the condition of modern

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[217] Ibid., 206, italics added. Cf. Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Becoming of Women in Church and Society", *Cross Currents* 17, no. 4 (1967): 422. "We are today at a new threshold of human evolution."

[218] Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 220. See also ibid., 194, where Daly speaks of "processes which may have been necessary for the development of civilization", but which have now outlived their usefulness.

[219] Ibid., 220. The expression "archaic heritage", which we will see is also employed by Harvey Cox, was popularized by Sigmund Freud, who used it to denote a biological, rather than cultural, inherence (resembling that which Carl Gustav Jung called "the collective unconscious"). In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud states that "what may be operative in an individual's psychic life may include not only what he has experienced himself but also things that were innately present in him at his birth […] – an *archaic heritage*." Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism* [1939], in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXIII (1937-1939): Moses and Monotheism, an Outline of Psycho-Analysis and Other Works*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1968), 98, italics in original. This heritage, Freud continues, includes not only certain "dispositions", but also "memory-traces of the experiences of former generations." Ibid., 99.

women".[220] This institution, states Daly, has "prolonged a traditional view of woman" and continues to "combat the legitimate aspirations of women, justifying this by archaic ideology".[221] Thus, it is understandable if those fighting for equality see the Church as an "enemy"; a relic that must be surpassed once and for all, if the evolution of human culture is to reach its next stage.[222] At the "transitional stage" at which humanity now stands, it is unsurprising that people who long for change have lost all patience with "organization and ideologues that appear to hold back the evolutionary process." To such individuals, a "total rejection of the old appears to be a normal and necessary part of maturation."[223] This, writes Daly, was Beauvoir's position. "Beauvoir rejects Christianity as burdensome baggage inherited from the past."[224] Still, in keeping with the spirit of Vatican II, Daly herself argues that the Catholic Church can be reformed, brought in synchronization with "the world" outside. There is, she writes, an alternative to rejection.[225] But to achieve this, the Church must be freed from whatever binds it to the past. "It is time […] to challenge anachronistic patterns, which may have been necessary at an earlier stage of human development, but whose survival constitutes an obstacle to human progress."[226]

Accomplishing this objective requires a capacity to identify what in Catholic doctrine and practice is obsolete and what remains relevant. Elements of continued value "must be distinguished from the oppressive, life-destroying ideas with which they have been confused, and by which they are in danger of being choked off."[227] So, whereas Beauvoir characterized Christianity itself as a patriarchal anachronism, Daly establishes an *internal* distinction between anachronistic and non-anachronistic aspects of Christianity. Or perhaps one should say that she establishes a distinction between the Church's historically contingent materialization and its transhistorical, true potentiality. At least, Daly states that "the seeds of […] the liberating, humanizing Church of the future, are already present, however submerged and neutralized they may be", while she also argues that Christianity's "prophetic voice", declaring the dignity of the human person,

[220] Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 54.
[221] Ibid., 53, 55.
[222] Ibid., 53.
[223] Ibid., 220–221.
[224] Ibid., 222
[225] Ibid., 221.
[226] Ibid., 173
[227] Ibid., 73.

"has always called out from the depths, however muffled that voice may been by alienating notion spawned by an alienated society."[228] In either case, she constructs a boundary between the outdated and the still relevant.

Conceptualizing the problem in these (temporal) terms has two advantages, in view of what Daly, as a reformist Catholic feminist, wants to achieve. On the one hand, it allows her to frame the feminist struggle against patriarchal tendencies within the Catholic Church as part of a much broader quest for progress, the goal of which is to eliminate anything that inhibits the supposedly natural evolution of human culture. On the other hand, it saves her from having to dismiss the Church itself as, per definition, oppressive. Indeed, the assumption that oppressive institutions may have functioned as "necessary survivals techniques [...] during one phase of the evolutionary process" invites the conclusion that even the most destructive aspects of Christianity once served an important purpose.[229] This means that Church cannot be criticized for what it once was, but only for its inability to adapt when the circumstances change. It also means that feminists can remain within the Church, provided they manage to identify and eliminate those anachronistic aspects that have played out their role.

According to my reading, Daly turns to "myth" to name one particularly important aspect of the "archaic heritage" from which the Church must be liberated. This too is something that she has in common with Beauvoir, who we have seen conceptualized myth as a remnant that helped keep the patriarchal past alive.

Because Beauvoir presented the myth of woman as an anachronism that belonged to the past yet continued to "haunt" people in the present, I argued that she depicted this myth as a ghost: an immaterial and therefore elusive enemy, the spectral presence of which her own conceptual invention nevertheless helped make visible. In the next section, I demonstrate that something similar can be said about Daly. But while in Beauvoir's case this link (between myth and ghost) was only implied, Daly makes it explicit by speaking of myths as "demons" to be exorcised. In this respect, Daly can be read as employing a concept of myth appropriated from Cox.

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[228] Ibid., 221, 222.

[229] Elsewhere, Daly states that it, in the future, will perhaps "be understood that our sickness was only the growing pains of a species on its way to maturity." Ibid., 194.

The chapter in which Daly uses the word "myth" most frequently is the book's fifth, titled "The Demon of Sexual Prejudice: An Exercise in Exorcism". It begins with a quote from Cox, which reads: "Exorcism is that process by which the stubborn deposits of town and tribal pasts are scraped from the social consciousness of man and he is freed to face his world matter-of-factly."[230] To better understand Daly's writings on myth, we must begin by taking a closer look at the work from which these lines are taken: *The Secular City* from 1965, a book that turned Cox from a little-known minister to one of the world's most famous theologians.[231]

The theme of Cox's book is "secularization", defined as "the loosing of the world from religious and quasi-religious understandings of itself, the dispelling of all closed world-views, the breaking of all supernatural myths and sacred symbols."[232] According to its author, secularization is both an inevitable consequence of modernity and a fundamentally positive thing. It entails "man's coming of age"; a liberation from traditions and superstitions that, finally, enables "man" to become "his" own master.[233] Cox links this process to that of "urbanization", which does not only denote a population shift from rural to urban areas, but the emergence of a new way of life, characterized by increased rationalization, technologization, bureaucratization and pluralism – or, in one word: modernization.[234]

The combined outcome of secularization and urbanization is "the secular city", which Cox frames as the last stage in a three-part development scheme, the earlier stages of which are associated with "the tribe" and "the town" respectively. The first of these stage, also termed "tribal society", constitutes "a stage in human social development" that others, as Cox notes, have termed "primitive" or "savage"; labels that he describes as pejorative, yet continues to employ.[235] In line with evolutionary anthropologists such as James George Frazer, to whom he himself refers, Cox claims that life at this stage is governed

[230] Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 166; Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, [1965] 2013), 183.

[231] Anton Jansson, "The City, the Church, and the 1960s: On Secularisation Theory and the Swedish Translation of Harvey Cox's *The Secular City*", in *Histories of Knowledge in Postwar Scandinavia: Actors, Arenas, and Aspirations*, ed. Johan Östling, Niklas Olsen and David Larsson Heidenblad (New York: Routledge, 2020), 176.

[232] Cox, *The Secular City*, 2.

[233] Ibid., 5.

[234] Ibid., 4–16, esp. 15.

[235] Ibid., 8.

by a belief in myth, magic, ghosts and demons.[236] I write "is" here, because Cox, as did Frazer and other evolutionary anthropologists, maintains that some people remain at this early stage. "Even today we can find people in Africa and the South Pacific who still live a tribal existence", Cox asserts.[237]

In contrast, "we" modern people of the secular city – having taken the necessary detour via the bourgeois town-stage, during which myth was replaced by religion and law – have left all tribal structures behind. Or at least we *should* have. But the truth, Cox claims, is that we have yet to fully free ourselves from our tribal past. "Even in the emerging secular city, massive residues of magical and superstitious world-views remain."[238] For example, our secular society is still permeated by what Cox terms myths. "One would not", he writes, "have to look very far in a modern metropolis [...] for myths seeping into the present from an archaic heritage."[239] This is because we ourselves were once savages. Reproducing "the-savage-within" trope analyzed by Henrika Kuklick, Cox states: "Contemporary man carries with him, like his appendix and his fingernails, vestiges of his tribal and pagan past."[240] "Within the breast of urban-secular man, a toe-to-toe struggle still rages between his savage and his bourgeois forebears."[241]

To speak of the myths and other tribal relics that continue to haunt the secular city, Cox uses the word "demons". This reinforces the impression that one is dealing here with a set of essentially primitive phenomena (as just mentioned, Cox argues that the belief in ghosts and demons is a characteristic of that tribal society). But this word also carries other connotations. Demons in the context of Christian demonology are entities that "possess" people. And that is exactly how myths work, according to Cox. To illustrate this, he points out that even the oppressed tend to "internalize" and then "enact" stereotypes invented by the oppressors.[242] Cox consequently speaks of the fight against myth as a form of "exorcism", aimed at dispelling the ghosts/myths that haunt us and expel the demons that we have internalized. In pursuing this objective, he believes that the Church can continue to play an important role, even in secular societies:

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[236] Ibid. 9–10.
[237] Ibid., 7.
[238] Ibid., 178.
[239] Ibid., 184.
[240] Ibid., 229; Kuklick, *The Savage Within.*
[241] Cox, *The Secular City*, 227.
[242] Ibid., 180.

> The ministry of exorcism in the secular city requires a community of persons who, individually and collectively, are not burdened by the constriction of an archaic heritage. It requires a community which, if not fully liberated, is in the process of liberation from compulsive patterns of behavior based on mistaken images of the world. In performing its function the church should be such a community […]. The church should be ready to expose the fallaciousness of the social myths by which the injustice of a society are [sic] perpetuated and to suggest ways of action which demonstrate the wrongness of such fantasies.[243]

According to Cox, there is one area where the need for exorcism is especially great, namely that of sex and sexuality. "No aspect of human life seethes with so many unexorcised demons as does sex. No human activity is so hexed by superstition, so haunted by residual tribal lore, and so harassed by socially induced fear."[244] As an example, Cox mentions "The Girl", which he describes as an ideal or model around which a new "cult" has formed. The embodiment of this ideal, which men worship and women seek to emulate, is miss America: a young and beautiful female, who is "openly sexual" but "officially" a virgin: an "anti-Madonna" who challenges traditional Christian values such as poverty, humility and sacrifice but celebrates the aspiration of modern consumer society.[245] This may of course seem like a distinctly modern phenomenon. And yet, Cox sees it as a "residuum" of something essentially pre-modern: namely, the pre-Christian cults of fertility goddesses. "Everything from the elaborate sexual taboos surrounding her person to the symbolic gifts at her coronation hints at her ancient ancestry."[246] Hence, an analysis of how young American girls try to imitate The Girl cannot but reveal "certain striking parallels" to "savage" (quotation marks in original) practices, such as that of "African tribesmen" who, according to Cox, makes incisions on their arm to resemble their totem.[247]

To summarize, we may conclude that Cox describes myth as a primitive or savage phenomenon that haunts modern societies; that he likens myths to demons because both are understood as primitive and as entities that possess people; and that he, finally, claims that myths must be exorcised to free the secular city of tribal residues, be it racism or goddess-worship. This is the concept of myth that Daly, according to my reading, appropriates.

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[243] Ibid., 184.
[244] Ibid., 227.
[245] Ibid., 229–232.
[246] Ibid., 230.
[247] Ibid., 231–232.

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Daly calls Cox's book a "stimulating" work, which has "described with logic and power the need for the Church to fulfill its role as a cultural exorcist."[248] This means that the Church has a duty to exorcise "demons", a word that Daly in line with Cox uses to denote "projections" that have been internalized.[249] Daly differs from Cox, however, in what "demonic distortions" she discusses. Whereas Cox focuses on "The Girl", Daly instead emphasizes what she refers to as "the Eternal Woman". This is not the secular ideal represented by Miss America, but the traditional Christian ideal of womanhood, according to which women should strive to be self-sacrificing, modest and motherly.[250] As he does not mention the Eternal Woman, Daly states that Cox, as a Protestant theologian, perhaps believes that this ideal has vanished, which she nevertheless denies. "In the Catholic world, the Eternal Woman is yet not dead."[251] There, it remains the dominant ideal, imposed on all women. In fact, the Catholic Church has never succumbed to the "cult" of The Girl but continues to view her as a "deadly enemy" that must be actively resisted. "For conservative Catholic theologians and journalists, the 'good girl', who is the Eternal Woman, is the only answer to the challenge of the 'bad girl', who is The Girl", Daly explains.[252]

An influential thinker who helped maintain the Eternal Woman ideal is, Daly notes, the Catholic historian and philosopher Gertrud von Le Fort (1876–1971), author of *The Eternal Woman: The Timeless Meaning of the Feminine* (1934). In this work, Le Fort claims to uncover the "significance of woman" by studying what woman has symbolized historically.[253] Among other things, this analysis leads to the conclusion that motherhood, in Le Fort's words, "can never become for woman the special assignment of a certain time; it is her task, simply and utterly."[254] According to Daly, Le Fort reaches this erroneous conclusion because she fails to understand that symbols are products of historically conditioned experiences and therefore incapable of expressing

[248] Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 169.
[249] Ibid., 168–169.
[250] Ibid., 149.
[251] Ibid., 171.
[252] Ibid., 170.
[253] Gertrud von le Fort, *The Eternal Woman*: *The Timeless Meaning of the Feminine* trans. Marie Cecilia Buehrle (Milwaukee: The Vruce Publishing company, [1934] 1954), xiii.
[254] Ibid., 67

eternal truths. It is simply impossible, Daly explains, to determine what woman ought to be today, by referring to what she symbolized in the past.[255]

I will return to the Eternal Woman in the next section. What is important to note here is that Daly speaks of both this ideal and The Girl as myths. "The Church does", she writes, "[…] have the duty of exorcising the Eternal Woman as well as The Girl, for both myths are destructive."[256] Thus, we see how she appropriates Cox's concept of myth, according to which myths are demons that must be exorcized in order to break the past's stranglehold on the present. According to my reading, this concept allows Daly to accomplish two things. First, it offers her a way of conceptualizing both the cause of and solution to the issue at hand (i.e., the Church's complicity in patriarchal oppression) that is fully consistent with the reformist logic discussed in the previous section. That is, by appropriating Cox's concept of myths as spectral remnants of an earlier stage of human history, she can articulate an analysis that locates the cause within the Church yet does not require feminists to dismiss the Church as such. Instead, the Church appears as a haunted house, which can be reoccupied once the evil spirits have been driven out. Second, by appropriating Cox's concept of myths as demons, but applying it to what she terms sexual prejudices, Daly can portray the feminist struggle against patriarchal tendencies as fully compatible with – indeed, as a natural extension of – both the intra-theological endeavor to demythologize Christianity and the much older struggle against demons, of which the bible presents Jesus himself as a proponent.[257]

In this respect, Daly can be said to appropriate Cox's concept of myth to advance an argument of great importance to Catholic feminism. However, this also means that early Catholic feminism, through Daly, inherits some of the colonialist thought structures that characterizes Cox's reasoning. In Cox's work, the primitive is not only a place in time (i.e., the beginning of human history), but a time in space. For example, he concludes that "remnants of tribal structure" still linger among "primitive peoples" such as the African pygmies, Austrian bushmen and American Indians.[258] This is a clear expression of what Johannes Fabian, as mentioned in the previous part-study, calls the "denial of coevalness": the idea that some peoples are stuck in the past

[255] Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 148.

[256] Ibid., 170.

[257] "Jesus", writes Cox, "was viewed by his own age as a great exorcist. His power to cast out demons was central to his ministry." Cox, *The Secular City*, 177.

[258] Ibid., 8.

and therefore doomed to adapt or perish. To be sure, Daly, unlike Beauvoir, avoids all explicit reference to so-called contemporary primitives. But even in her text, the historically-primitive is presented as a problem: the thing Catholics must get away from. In a passage reminiscent of Donna Haraway's critique of Western origin stories, Daly states:

> The healing which we seek must not be understood as a return to a state of health presumed to have existed in the past. This would be nothing but an abortive quest for the state of dreaming innocence, for primitive unconsciousness, or for the paradise lost by the Fall. Rather, we must strive for that forward leap into the future of human history which is now demanded of us.[259]

Again, the expression "primitive unconsciousness" need not be understood as referring to a state characteristic of now living people. But since Daly invokes Cox's notion of exorcism as the "process by which the stubborn deposits of town and tribal pasts are scraped form the social consciousness of man" without problematizing his explicitly colonialist logic, she nevertheless helps to legitimize it. The reason I emphasize this is not to expose the shortcomings of *The Church and the Second Sex* but to reiterate the ambiguous nature of appropriation: how the concepts we use to communicate also speak through us and sometimes say more than we intend. It may be that this becomes particularly evident when one studies the concept of myth, the history of which so clearly intersects with that of, for example, "savage", "primitive", "civilized" and "modern".

Battling myths through myth

As we have seen, both Cox and Daly speak of myths in negative terms, to denote a remnant of the past that modern people should leave behind. It is therefore worth emphasizing that both authors, when they speak of myths as "demons" to be "exorcised", themselves utilize a language that Christian theologians have described as informed by a distinctively mythical worldview. To give but one example, Rudolf Bultmann identifies references to "daemons" and "daemonic forces" as clear signs that the cosmology of the New Testament

[259] Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 194. Cf. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 175. "Cyborg writing must not be about the Fall, the imagination of a once-upon-a-time wholeness before language, before writing, before Man."

is mythical in character.[260] Of course, Cox and Daly are not alone among theologians in continuing to use the demon as a metaphor, even after the belief in demonic forces has been dismissed as mythical. Another well-known theologian who does so is Paul Tillich, to whom both refer.[261] Yet the case of Cox and Daly is particularly interesting, as they use this metaphor to articulate a critique of myth. For if this metaphor is rhetorically effective – if it, for example, helps them engage their readers on an emotional level – it could be argued that their critique of myth exploits the historically derived charge that the word "demon" has acquired through literary myths, which by extension means that they appropriate a concept rooted not in mythology but in mythology's object of study. Indeed, by conceptualizing the struggle against myths as a struggle against demons, Cox and Daly can be said to mythologize the process of demythologization, or to battle myths through myth.

This generates a tension between two temporalities in Daly's debut book. On the whole, *The Church and the Second Sex* is structured by a linear temporality and what I with Friedrich Nietzsche have called a "critical" approach to history and myth. Yet, when Daly appropriates an image commonly understood as derived from the world of literary myth to critique myth, it is possible to decern a different logic. At that point, she returns to the past, not to dismiss it, but to make use of it: to transform it into a resource.

The demonic myth of the eternal feminine: Daly and Beauvoir

Daly challenges Cox's analysis by emphasizing that the Eternal Woman myth persists, alongside the myth of The Girl. In fact, as she states that these two myths are "two sides of the same mirage", Daly's argument suggests that they can be considered variants of the same, broader myth (recall that Beauvoir sometimes used "mirage" as a synonym for "myth").[262] This broader myth would then be that which she speaks of as "the 'eternal feminine' myth", or

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[260] Bultmann, "The New Testament and Mythology", 1, 2.

[261] Paul Tillich, "The Demonic", in *The Interpretation of History*, trans. N.A. Rasetzki and Elsa L. Talmey (New York: Charler Scribner's sons, 1936); Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 15–16. For a feminist critique of Tillich's writings on the demonic, see Tracy Fessenden, "'Woman' and the 'Primitive' in Paul Tillich's Life and Thought: Some Implications for the Study of Religion", *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 14, no. 2 (1998).

[262] Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 170. Note that Daly, in this text, does not use the exact same *expressions* as Beauvoir. While the latter speaks of about "the myth of the eternal feminine" (*le mythe de l'éternel féminin*), Daly employs the expression "the 'eternal feminine' myth". But as we shall see, these are still related *concepts*.

"the demonic myth of the eternal feminine", a concept that she, according to my reading, appropriates from Beauvoir.[263] However, to demonstrate what function this concept serves, I must first say something more general about Beauvoir's role in Daly's first book.

It is not only Daly's writings on myths that make visible Beauvoir's importance. As its very title suggests, *The Second Sex* provides a starting point for *The Church and the Second Sex* in its entirety. Daly's work begins with a quote from Beauvoir, which reads: "Christian ideology has contributed no little to the oppression of woman."[264] A few pages in, Daly declares: "So pre-eminent is Beauvoir's analysis that no one today who is seriously concerned about the problem can afford to ignore it."[265] Daly thus goes on to summarize Beauvoir's case against Christianity. She emphasizes that she will only focus on those parts of *The Second Sex* that are directly relevant to her own study. But as Daly still takes pains to specify on what philosophical premises Beauvoir's case rests, this summary develops into one of the first extended, academic discussions of *The Second Sex* written by a U.S. feminist.

It is in this context that we find Daly's most detailed discussion of what she herself refers to as essentialism. According to Beauvoir, writes Daly, "there are no fixed essences." Hence, "one is not born man or woman; one becomes thus."[266] This is not to say that there are no l differences between men and women whatsoever. Seeking to clarify Beauvoir's point, as she understands it, Daly states:

> What it means is that the characteristic attitude of men and women are acquired; they are cultural, the results of conditioning. Thus, "masculinity" and "femininity" are the effects of historical processes. What is called "femininity" is really only a situation of fact in a given culture. It is not definitely grounded in either biology or in a mysterious feminine essence.[267]

As pointed out by Sue Waslin, Daly does not accept Beauvoir's position out of hand. Instead, she evaluates its soundness, often with reference to scientific

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[263] Ibid., 147, 177, 193.

[264] Ibid., 53. In her "Postchristian Introduction" to the 1975 edition of *The Church and the Second Sex*, written in third-person, Daly writes of her younger self that the first chapter and the book's title "revels how strongly Daly was influenced by the French feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir." Mary Daly, "Feminist Postchristian Introduction", in *The Church and the Second Sex*, (Boston: Beacon, 1999), 16.

[265] Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 56.

[266] Ibid., 70.

[267] Ibid.

research.[268] Even so, her conclusion is that all available empirical evidence indicates that Beauvoir is right:

> As to whether one is born or becomes man or woman, dogmatic assertions about an unchanging feminine essence do not find anything like general acceptance among those who follow developments in modern philosophy and in the social sciences and psychology. In fact, our awareness of the profound and subtle effects of conditioning upon the human personality is continually increasing. There is an impressive stock of evidence in support of de Beauvoir on this point […].[269]

Towards the end of her book, Daly also claims that one "misconstrues the problematic of sexuality" if one "assumes that one sex can be understood as if it were a complete essence existing in isolation." "In fact", she writes, "the sexual differentiation has to be understood within the category of relation. Men and women as they are, are the product of complex social relations which are constantly in flux. That is to say, they have a continuing history."[270] In other words, Daly can be said to follow Beauvoir in adopting an explicitly anti-essentialist position.

It is to defend this anti-essentialist position on sexual difference that Daly appropriates Beauvoir's concept "the 'eternal feminine' myth." This expression is never properly defined. Yet it is clear that it does not signify what Tae Yeoun Keum calls a literary myth. In line with Beauvoir, Daly instead seems to use it to denote a (false) *idea*, shared by those who view or conceptualize femininity as a static essence or nature, separate from and inferior to masculinity (she also speaks of "the myth of fixed natures").[271] This concept is first introduced in chapter four, "The Pedestal Peddlers", which follows "Winds of Change" and is aimed at explaining why the Church continues to function oppressively. In the introduction to this chapter, Daly states: "Despite the steady progress toward recognition of women's personal rights and autonomy, stereotypes concerning their supposed 'nature' have continued to reappear in modern and contemporary thought."[272] In

[268] Waslin, *The Theoretical Contexts of Mary Daly's Thought*, 68–70.

[269] Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 71–72.

[270] Ibid., 189.

[271] Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 193. See also ibid., 183, where Daly discusses "the myth of 'immutable feminine nature and masculine nature', which is in reality a pattern of images derived in large measure from social conditioning".

[272] Ibid., 147.

accordance with Beauvoir, Daly argues that this "tendency towards stereotypes" constitutes an extremely widespread phenomenon, reflected in a wide variety of discourses, apart from religious and theological texts.[273]

As mentioned, Daly's analysis suggests that the Eternal Woman myth and the myth of The Girl are both variants of the eternal feminine myth. With reference to the ideals or "stereotypes" around which these two sub-myths are centred, she writes: "Both the Eternal Woman and The Girl are, in the ultimate analysis, passive, abject, relative and irrelevant beings. […] Both are abysmally, hopelessly, non-human."[274] Indeed, these "demons" are but "the opposed faces of the same illusion", in the sense that The Girl is the Eternal Woman "face-lifted and rejuvenated", yet equally reductive.[275] This argument echoes that advanced by Beauvoir in *Brigitte Bardot and the Lolita Syndrome* (1959), originally published in English. In this piece, Beauvoir states that the actor Brigitte Bardot's public persona, as a mysterious "child-woman", is the creation of film director Roger Vadim, who is said to have "tried to rejuvenate" a "very old myth". "He invented a resolutely modern version of 'the eternal female' and thereby launched a new type of eroticism", Beauvoir asserts.[276] Hence, although presented as a representative of the "new woman", the official image of Bardot often "does not depart from the traditional myth of femininity."[277]

According to Daly, the eternal feminine myth, whether centred on the Eternal Woman or the Girl, helps sustain patriarchal oppression, within and outside the Church, in at least two ways. First, it breeds an insensitivity to injustice. In the eyes of men who believe in or invoke the eternal feminine myth, women are not beings like themselves, whose well-being they need to take into account. Actualizing the same comparison and philosophical terminology as Beauvoir, Daly writes: "The images of the 'greedy Jew' and the

[273] Ibid. See also ibid., 156–157.

[274] Ibid., 170–171.

[275] Ibid., 171.

[276] Simone de Beauvoir, "Brigitte Bardot and the Lolita Syndrome" [1960], in *Simone de Beauvoir Feminist Writings*, ed. Margaret A. Simons, Marybeth Timmermann and Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 115.

[277] Ibid., 117. Importantly, Beauvoir nevertheless maintains that Bardot has successfully challenged two aspects of the myth of the eternal feminine: namely, the myth that women is but an object for man's sexual desires, as well as the myth that the sexual woman is unnatural, dangerous and/or evil. And this does matter, according to Beauvoir, who writes: "As soon as a single myth is touched, all myths are in danger." Ibid., 124. For a critique of this reasoning, see Denise Warren, "Beauvoir on Bardot: The Ambiguity Syndrome", *Dalhousie French Studies* 13 (1987): 48.

'lazy Negro' have the same effect. In each case, the victim is seen as a completely 'other', not as a person with whom one can identify or enter into a relationship of friendship and respect."[278] Secondly, because women internalize those images of themselves – as, for example, passive and relational beings – that the eternal feminine myth reproduces, this myth prevents them from becoming active subjects and changing their situation. "Members of the oppressed or minority group have no other images with which to identity than those forced upon them by the dominant class. Slowly these persons learn to live of what is expected of them", Daly writes.[279] Eventually, these mythical images thereby become self-perpetuating. In addition, Daly – again in agreement with Beauvoir – points out that the eternal feminine myth damages the relationship between individual men and women. As it prevents her from becoming an independent person, "the woman who is victimized by this myth is damaged in her potential to love as well as to think."[280] This "mutilated creature" is unable to enter into an "authentic union" and can therefore never become a satisfactory partner. "The harmfulness of the myth, then, is contagious; it affects men, too."[281] Daly accordingly concludes that there is a "need for exorcism on the level of theory, particularly though the explosion of the demonic myth of the eternal feminine from theology."[282]

One can of course argue that Daly, despite the many similarities noted above, does not remain entirely faithful to Beauvoir's analysis. But this is a natural aspect of appropriation, as this practice is understood within the framework of the present study. When I claim that Daly appropriates the concept "the 'eternal feminine' myth" from Beauvoir, I am not saying that she employs it in the exact same way, but that she exploits at least some aspect of the idiosyncratic meaning this concept carries as a result of Beauvoir's usage. In this respect, Beauvoir's concept serves as a discursive tool, which helps Daly articulate her own analysis.

To be more precise, I argue that Beauvoir's concept assists Daly in at least two different ways. First, it helps establish the very horizon from which Daly addresses the situation of women in the Church. Beauvoir's concept suggests that the general situation of woman is, in part, the product of a long-lived notion of femininity as a static essence. This analysis – which we have seen

[278] Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 166.
[279] Ibid., 169.
[280] Ibid., 173–174.
[281] Ibid., 174.
[282] Ibid., 193.

that Daly embraces as early as 1963 – structures how she approaches her object of study: it guides her gaze and helps her identify a particularly important problem. Additionally, "the 'eternal feminine' myth" offers Daly a way to conceptualize this problem for her readers. By appropriating this concept, she can subsume the patriarchal tendencies she identifies within the Christian discourse under an already established category. It allows her to say that the Eternal Woman stereotype promoted by conservative Catholics is but one aspect of a more general problem, already identified by Beauvoir.

This reading supports the claim advanced in the previous case study: that the merit of Beauvoir's writings on myth is not of an altogether negative kind. They are positive or productive, in the sense that Beauvoir helped transform "myth" into a feminist *means of critique.* If myth is a ghostlike phenomenon and Beauvoir's concept of myth a tool that makes the ghost visible, this tool also helps Daly deal with her demons.

How to exorcize myth

How can the demonic myth of the eternal feminine be exorcized from the realm of theology? Daly places great faith in science. The "final solution" to this myth requires taking into account "information" drawn from "the world of experience", including "relevant data from any of the sciences", Daly writes.[283] "It is important", she states elsewhere, "that the specialists in such disciplines as biology, psychology, sociology, anthropology and philosophy bring the fruits of their labors to bear upon our understanding of the problem".[284] Here she differs from Beauvoir, who to a greater extent emphasized the complicity of science and philosophy in patriarchal oppression. According to Daly, science is objective. When it is not, it ceases to be science and instead becomes "pseudo-science".[285] And yet, Daly maintains that rational objections built on facts produced by science cannot defeat the myth on their own:

> Efforts should be made, certainly, to improve the quality of Catholic writing and publishing, which still harbors strong inclinations toward serving up archaic myth to support traditional teachings and antiquated canon law. However, since the roots of sexual prejudice are deep – in fact, since this represents the

[283] Ibid., 171

[284] Ibid., 214. See also ibid., 176. As mentioned, Daly also turns science to validate Beauvoir's anti-essentialist stance. Ibid., 71–73.

[285] Ibid., 155.

> neurosis of a whole culture, it cannot be expected that logical arguments will convince the official exponents of the "eternal feminine" myth.[286]

This quote is interesting because it illustrates that *logos* (whether one takes it to mean God's word or the scientists), according to Daly, ultimately remains incapable of vanquishing the myth of the eternal feminine, as the latter is both too deeply rooted and too widely spread. In this respect, the demonic myth of the eternal feminine can be understood as a deep myth, which Keum describes as "especially impervious to facts and arguments."[287] The question then becomes how deep myths can be overturned? "It will be necessary", Daly writes, "[…] to look for a way of exorcism which strikes at the roots of the problem."[288] But what does this mean, more specifically?

Daly argues that critical practices must be combined with creative ones. It is not enough to challenge the established myth; women must also produce alternative, non-mythical images of womanhood. Interestingly, she argues that this answer was originally proposed by Beauvoir – who, as we have seen, wrote that women writers often assume that it is enough to "pull the veils of illusions and lies", but objected that such negative practices must be paired with positive ones.[289] More specifically, Daly argues that women who have seen through the myth must act as role models, proving to others that there are many ways to be a woman. Thus, women have "the responsibility of changing the image of woman by raising up their own image". "The point is not", Daly continues, "to set up another stereotype, such as that of the stateswoman, to replace the old, but to manifest the unreliability of all stereotypes by showing the immense variety in the potential of woman."[290] At the same time, Daly acknowledges the diabolical dialectic inherent in the fact that emancipation requires role models, but role models require emancipation. "Despite the fact that the answer lies in the 'raising up' of new images, it is doubtful that women will rise to the task in sufficient numbers until favorable conditions are not only

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[286] Ibid., 177.

[287] Keum, *Plato and the Mythic Tradition in Political Thought*, 6.

[288] Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 177.

[289] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 841. As we have already seen, Daly quotes part of this passage at *The Church and the Second Sex*, 61.

[290] Ibid., 177. This solution has much in common with that proposed by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), to which Daly also refer. Ibid., 134, 176. Friedan writes: "American women no longer know who they are. They are sorely in need of a new image to help them find their identity." Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell publishing, [1963] 1964), 64–65.

allowed but also encouraged."[291] Both women and men must therefore work to foster an environment, inside and outside the Church, that enables women to realize themselves as full persons. For example, Daly argues that Christians must do away with the image of God as male, as this image harms both women's self-confidence and men's confidence in women.[292] In addition, she stresses that the problems caused by what Keum calls literary myths need to be addressed.

Daly refers to two stories from the Bible as myths: the story of how Eve was created from Adam's rib and the story relating to the Fall.[293] In line with Beauvoir, she argues that these stories have served an ideological function, in the sense that they have helped maintain an oppressive social system by justifying it. For example, Daly claims that "the androcentric myth of Eve's creation" – which early theologians read as suggesting that woman was fashioned out of man and therefore destined to remain inferior to him – "served as guarantee of divine approval" for treating women differently than men.[294] As this meant that women were denied education and other paths to autonomy, Daly states that this treatment helped *make* women inferior. The myth thereby became self-fulling. As Daly writes,

> experience apparently supported the rib story, just as the myth itself helped "explain" the common experience of woman as incomplete and lesser humans. The vicious circle persisted, for the very emancipation which would prove that women were not "naturally" defective was denied them in the name of that defectiveness which was claimed to be natural and divinely ordained.[295]

Likewise, the story that Daly calls "the mythical account of the Fall" has helped legitimize patriarchal oppression by presenting woman as the main culprit for humanity's loss of innocence and expulsion from paradise.[296] Together, these two myths have been assumed to prove "beyond doubt woman's immutable inferiority", Daly writes.[297]

To explain these literary myths, Daly uses two strategies. On the one hand, she argues that they, like the eternal feminine myth, are projections, meaning

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[291] Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 178.
[292] Ibid., 180–181.
[293] Ibid., 79, 86–87.
[294] Ibid., 86.
[295] Ibid., 87.
[296] Ibid., 79, 87–88. See also ibid., 76, 185-186.
[297] Ibid., 76.

that they are created by men who projected certain qualities onto women (in this respect, "the creation story speaks the truth in declaring that Eve came from Adam").[298] On the other, she describes these literary myths as products of historically specific situation. "The authors of both the Old and the New Testament were men of their times", she explains.[299] We recognize this argument from the myth-critical theological tradition, discussed in the introduction to this part-study. Unlike eighteenth-century theologians like Johann Gottfried Eichhorn and Johann Philipp Gabler, Daly does not follow Christian Gottlob Heyne in presenting myths as products of particular state of thought. But she does state that these myths reflect historical "prejudices", which science has since disproved.[300]

Finally, it is important to note that Daly does not claim that the problem lies with these stories themselves, or with literary myth as a genre, but rather with how such myths have been interpreted and used. Consequently, there is nothing in *The Church and the Second Sex* that suggests that literary myths must serve a repressive function. In fact, Daly refers to contemporary readings which argue that the Genesis account, if understood correctly, teaches that man and woman share the same nature and dignity.[301] With reference to Paul Tillich, she nevertheless objects to "literal belief" in myths.[302]

Eschatological hope

As previously discussed, Daly argues that the Church needs to be updated to catch up with "the world", which it has lagged behind. This suggests that the world represents a temporal frontier that the Church must approximate. But toward the end of her book, Daly still claims that Christians can help reform the world, in order to realize a different future. "The people of God, as the Church in diaspora, have a mission […] to bring about in society what the Church as an institution has failed to do within its own doctrine and structures."[303] As mentioned, Daly also speaks of "the liberating, humanizing Church of the future" as a potentiality, the seeds of which are already present.

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[298] Ibid., 193.
[299] Ibid., 74.
[300] Ibid., 74–75, 77.
[301] Ibid., 78.
[302] Ibid., 185. For Tillich's critique of literal readings of myth, see this thesis, 280–281.
[303] Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 214.

This, the liberating Church of the future, is in turn described as an "eschatological community".[304]

According to theologian Christians Mostert, Christians who understand the Church as an eschatological community see it as "the anticipatory sign of the eschatological reign of God", meaning that they view it as a phenomenon that *participates in* this reign and thus renders it already present, but does not *coincide with* the reign in question, which therefore remains a not-yet.[305] Hence, when Daly describes the eschatological community as a something yet to come, identical with the Church "of the future", she can be said to represent the reign of God as twice removed from the present: if the Church as an eschatological community is an "already and not yet", she suggests that this "already and not yet" is *itself* not yet (for now, it is "already" only like a seed or unrealized potentiality). At the same time, Daly does give voice to an eschatological hope – that is, a hope that the last days, when the Church (for the first time) will come to fulfil the role of an eschatological community, may not be too distant.

Daly never develops this idea in any great detail. However, in the next chapter, I argue that she, in *Beyond God the Father*, transfers this eschatological hope to the women's movement.

[304] Ibid., 221.

[305] Mostert, "The Kingdom Anticipated", 36. See also ibid., 34.

9. The remythologization of religion

In the previous chapter, we saw that Daly, in *The Church and The Second Sex*, often spoke of myth in negative terms, to denote a phenomenon that must be overcome because it constitutes an obstacle to the evolution of human culture. In her second book, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* from 1973, "myth" serves a different function. Although she still conceptualizes myth as a problem (indeed, as a much bigger problem than before), Daly now suggests that the phenomenon thus named may also serve a progressive function. To make sense of this shift, we should note that Daly in her second book enters into dialogue with a different set of mythologists. In *The Church and the Second Sex*, she engaged with Harvey Cox and Simone de Beauvoir, both of whom spoke of myths in negative terms, to name a remnant of the past. In *Beyond God the Father*, Daly instead refers to theorists such as Mircea Eliade, Paul Tillich and Herbert Richardson (1932–), all of whom represent more myth-affirmative traditions.

We should also note that Daly in her second book seeks to answer different questions than she did in her first; a fact that helps explain *why* she engages with other mythologists. In "After the Death of God the Father" from 1971, Daly states that the women's movement must now leave its first, "critical" and backward-looking phase behind, to embark instead on a more "creative" and forward-looking path. The main task of the first phase, Daly explains, was "exposition and criticism of our male-centered heritage." Its aim was to reveal the oppressive character of existing traditional and institution, be it philosophy or Catholic theology. That phase is said to have reached it "crescendo" with Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics,* first published in 1970. And although much work remains to be done to communicate the insights gained during this phase of "critical research", the time has come to take the next step. "The skeletons in our cultural closet have been hauled out for inspection", Daly writes. It follows that feminist theorists much shift their focus from the past to the future, from what has been to what will be. "We now have to ask how the women's revolution can and should change our whole vision of reality."[306] This is the question around which *Beyond God the Father* revolves.

So what does Daly believe that the future holds in store? The fact that she here and elsewhere speaks of a "revolution" provides us with an important clue. In her first book, Daly sought to assist in "updating" or reforming the

[306] Daly, "After the Death of God the Father", 7.

Catholic Church, portrayed as stuck in the past, by bringing it nearer the present, represented by secular society. In contrast, she now foresees and hopes for a radical transformation of secular society itself, meant to bring it *beyond* the present, into a different future. Importantly, she argues that this development might also have spiritual consequences. In chapter one of *Beyond God the Father*, Daly proclaims:

> As the women's movement begins to have its effect upon the fabric of society, transforming it from patriarchy into something that never existed before […] it can become the greatest single challenge to the major religions of the world, Western and Eastern. Beliefs and values that have held sway for thousands of years will be questioned as never before. This revolution may well be also the greatest single hope for survival of spiritual consciousness on this planet.[307]

One particularly significant thing that the women's revolution might bring about is a "remythologizing of religion" – that is, the emergence of new religious myths.[308] I argue that Daly offers the remythologization of religion initiated by women as an alternative to the "demythologization" called for by Rudolf Bultmann. Thereby, she can be read as entering an ongoing debate on the role of religious myths in modern societies, a question that occupies most mythologists with whom she engages, though none of them answer it in the same way.

As we remember, Bultmann argued that the New Testament must be demythologized, lest it lose all credibility in modern societies where no one still believes in myths. This position received some support from Tillich, who nevertheless maintained that myth constitutes an integral element of all religions. The latter claim was echoed by both Eliade and Richardson. However, whereas Eliade favored the anti-historical myths said to characterize archaic or primitive societies, on which he claimed that both Jews, Christians and nonreligious moderners had turned their back, Richardson argued that modern people needed *new* myths, different both from the cyclical myths favored by Eliade and the linear-progressive myths that he, as did Eliade, associated with Christianity.

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[307] Ibid., 13–14. Daly sometimes seems to postulate a reversed causality, which is to say that she implies that the women's revolution will change secular society by challenging established religions. See for example ibid., 133. "It is the evolution of social reality that undercuts the credibility of sexist religion to the degree that it undermines sexism itself."

[308] Ibid., 71.

In this chapter, I demonstrate that Daly appropriates aspects of all these theories to build her own analysis, while she also challenges them from a distinctively feminist perspective. My four main points are as follows. First, that Daly follows Richardson in arguing that modern people need new myths, but stresses that these myths must serve the interests of both men and women. Secondly, that she echoes Eliade's claim that certain myths help perpetuate an anti-historical existence, yet questions the assumption that Judeo-Christianity entailed a break from the "mythical behavior" Eliade says characterizes primitive societies; a break that she, on the contrary, states is only taking place now, thanks to the women's revolution. Thirdly, that Daly extends but also complicates Bultmann's and Tillich's critique of Christian myths by arguing that this critique obscures both the gendered dimension of such tales and their continued influence over modern societies. Fourth and finally, that Daly models her own account of the impending women's revolution on these canonized mythologists' descriptions of myths, wherefore she can be said to mythologize the present moment.

The chapter at hand also shows how Daly makes use of the very tales that she describes as myths. In particular, I examine how she reinterprets the story of the Fall so that it comes to serve a new, feminist function. The latter strategy is interesting, as it suggests that the aspired revolution, according to Daly, still presupposes some form of return: a reworking of older myths, through which these myths are utilized rather than dismissed.

To facilitate a better understanding of this work, I will start by saying something about context in which *Beyond God the Father* was written, as well as a few words about its central tenets.

Post-Christian radical feminism

In the years that lie between Daly's first and second books, she abandons her Catholic faith in favor of what she herself terms a "postchristian" and "radical feminist" stance. This shift has highly tangible effects. In retrospect, Daly even claims that *The Church and The Second Sex* has so little in common with her other books that she does not consider herself its author. In the "Feminist Postchristian Introduction" to the 1975 edition, she speaks of her younger self in third person, as an early predecessor or a "half-forgotten foremother" whose work she, as "a competent Dalyan scholar", struggles to understand in its historical context, likened to a different planet, many lightyears away.[309]

[309] Daly, "Feminist Postchristian Introduction", 6, 20.

> It hardly seems appropriate for me to pass judgments upon an author who was not an astronaut before it was possible to become one. Rather, I am thankful for her labors. Speaking personally – and I hope this will not appear tasteless in a review of this nature – I must admit that if it were not for Daly's early work, I myself probably would never have tried on a feminist spacesuit.[310]

We should not let Daly dictate how we read her. There are significant continuities between her first and second book, continuities that this self-presentation, if taken at face value, risks obscuring. At the same time, Daly's perspective does seem to shift during the period in question. To understand why, we must look at what happened both in her own life and in society at large.

Although the critique Daly offered in *The Church and the Second Sex* may appear relatively mild by today's standards, the book provoked considerable debate within the Catholic community. Most importantly, it prompted her employer, the Jesuit-run Boston College, where Daly had started work in 1966, to refuse renewal of her contract. Following large student protests, she was eventually rehired anyway.[311] Yet, this event and its aftermath left a definitive mark. Because her case attracted media attention, it brought Daly into contact with other women with similar experiences, who helped her see that women who spoke out were subjected to the same hostile treatment at non-Catholic universities and outside academia as well. Daly herself explains: "It was the universalist quality of this personal 'revelation' that was important. I began to understand more of the implications of the feminist insight that 'the personal is political.' […] I understood more clearly the nature of the beast and the name of the demon: patriarchy."[312] Put differently, Daly argues that the aftermath of her first book gave rise to the realization that her seemingly personal problems were actually the result of an oppressive social order, the effects of which were more far-reaching than she had previously understood. Biographical and historical factors converge here. Undoubtedly, Boston College's unsympathetic response to *The Church and the Second Sex* seems to have served as a wake-up call. But this episode would likely have had very different consequences just a decade earlier, when the so-called second wave of U.S. feminism was still in its infancy. By the late 1960s, however, a relatively well-

[310] Ibid., 21.

[311] Daly, "Autobiographical Preface", 11–13.

[312] Ibid., 13

established feminist community had emerged, offering Daly new and compelling theories to make sense of her recent experiences.

Daly claims that she felt particularly drawn to the world view afforded by radical feminism. In her book *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975,* Alice Echols traces the origins of this movement back to 1967.[313] At that time, the U.S. women's movement was still predominantly liberal in its orientation, meaning that a majority of its members deemed it both possible and desirable for women to achieve equality with men within the existing social order. By contrast, women who sought an alternative to this order were more likely to join the New Left, the leaders of which followed Friedrich Engels in subordinating the struggle for equality to the battle against capitalism. Radical feminism, which Echols says reached its peak in the early 1970s, was born out of a resistance to both these tendencies.[314] Where their liberal predecessors had pushed for social and legal reform, radical feminist called for a revolution.[315] Meanwhile, they differed from most members of the New Left in that they argued that such an upheaval would require a renewed focus on gendered relations. Indeed, one defining feature of radical feminism was the assumption that patriarchy constituted the most fundamental of *all* systems of oppression, which was taken to mean that the fight against male supremacy should take precedence over that against all other injustices.[316] This movement was, furthermore, characterized by the creed that women, through the practice termed "consciousness-raising", must learn to identify and ultimately eliminate all imposed "roles" and internalized definitions of femininity, to eventually develop both "class conscious" and more "authentic", less alienated

[313] Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 3. The history of radical feminism has also been chronicled by Sara M. Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980); Judith Grant, *Fundamental Feminism: Radical Feminist History for the Future* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

[314] Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 3–4.

[315] "Radical feminism is called 'radical' because it is struggling to bring about really fundamental changes in our society. We, in this segment of the movement, do not believe that the oppression of women will be ended by giving them a bigger piece of the pie, as Betty Friedan would have it. We believe that the pie itself is rotten. Bonnie Kreps, "Radical Feminism 1" [1972], in *Radical Feminism*, ed. Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine and Anita Rapone (New York: Quadrangle, 1973), 239.

[316] In the "Redstockings Manifesto" one reads: "Male supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination. All other forms of exploitation and oppression (racism, capitalism, imperialism, etc.) are extensions of male supremacy: men dominate women, a few men dominate the rest." "Redstockings Manifesto" [1969], in *Sisterhood Is Powerful : An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*, ed. Robin Morgan (New York: Random House, 1970), 534.

identities or selves.[317] The ultimate goal was sometimes presented as "androgyny", meaning that women should be able to develop both "feminine" and "masculine" characteristics, so to become whole persons.[318]

In her autobiography, Daly states that her Boston apartment by 1970 had become "a center for Radical Feminist activism and intellectual life."[319] Around the same time, she begun to distance herself from the Catholic Church. This disassociation was made manifest when, in November 1971, Daly gave a talk at the Harvard Memorial Church, which was followed by a collective walkout, meant to symbolize her and other women's "exodus" from the Christian community. In this sermon-like speech, later published as "The Women's Movement: An Exodus Community" (1972), Daly asserts that Christianity, contrary to what she claimed in her first book, is too marked by its patriarchal past to ever be reformed. Daly thus turns to her "sisters", proclaiming:

> We have to go out from the land of our fathers into an unknown place. […] The women's movement is an exodus community. Its basis is not merely in the promise given to our fathers thousands of years ago. Rather its source is in the unfulfilled promise of our mothers' lives, whose history was never recorded. […] We can affirm *now* our promise and our exodus as we walk into a future that will be our *own* future. […] Our time has come. We will take our own place in the sun. We will leave behind the centuries of silence and darkness. Let us affirm our faith in ourselves and our will to transcendence by rising and walking out together.[320]

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[317] See for instance Radicalesbians, "The Woman-Identified Woman" [1970], in *Feminist Manifestos: A Global Documentary Reader*, ed. Penny A. Weiss and Megan Brueske (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 224–226; Kathie Sarachild, "A Program for Feminist Consciousness-Raising" [1968], in *Feminist Revolution an Abridged Edition with Additional Writings*, ed. Kathie Sarachild (Random House: New York, 1975).

[318] Joreen Freeman, "The Bitch Manifesto" [1970], in *Radical Feminism*, ed. Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine and Anita Rapone (New York: Quadrangle, 1973), 52; Nancy Topping Bazin and Alma Freeman, "The Androgynous Vision", *Women's Studies* 2, no. 2 (1974); Janice Raymond, "Beyond Male Morality", in *Women and Religion*, ed. Judith Plaskow and Joan Arnold (Missoula: Scholars press, 1974), 117–124. On androgyny in radical and cultural feminism, see also Tong and Botts, *Feminist Thought*, 40–46.

[319] Daly, *Outercourse*, 104. As this activism is described as partly linked to NOW, it is uncertain whether other radical feminists would have perceived it as typical of the movement.

[320] Mary Daly, "The Women's Movement: An Exodus Community" [1972], in *The Mary Daly Reader*, ed. Jennifer Rycenga and Linda Barufaldi (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 45–46, italics in original.

The women's departure from the Church is here described in terms that bring to mind Plato's cave myth, which also tells of a journey from darkness and into the sun. But whereas Plato, according to Luce Irigaray, established a link between the cave and the womb, Daly presents the cave as "the land of the fathers" and the world outside as unknown territory. Similarly, where Plato portrayed the journey towards the sun as facilitated by a male midwife dragging the prisoner upwards, Daly describes the "source" of the women's exodus as an unfulfilled, maternal promise.

This exodus did not mean that Daly abandoned or began to downplay the value of religion or even Christianity as such. The prefix "post" in "postchristian" must not be confused with "anti", which signals a direct negation. Rather, it would appear that Daly speaks of her new position as "postchristian" to signal that it succeeds and exceeds but also preserves some aspects of her former Christian position. That this is the case becomes apparent if we consider the analysis that structures *Beyond God the Father.*

One premise of Daly's second book is that patriarchy constitutes a "planetary sexual caste system", which has produced a "worldwide phenomenon of sexual caste, basically the same whether one lives in Saudi Arabia or in Sweden." This oppressive system is perpetuated with the help of "sex role socialization", a process that starts at birth and to which all social institutions contribute.[321] Through this process, men are persuaded that they are rational, objective, aggressive, controlling and autonomous, while women are taught that they are emotional, passive and self-abnegating. Daly states that this has prevented both women and men from realizing their full human potential and thus from becoming "whole" persons. Hence, one objective of the women's revolution is to eliminate all sex roles, so that women and men are free to become "androgynous" humans.[322] Daly speaks of this – the quest to overcome internalized sex roles to become instead whole, androgynous beings – as a struggle for "self-transcendence".[323]

So far, there is little to distinguish Daly's position from that of other self-proclaimed radical feminists. This changes when she introduces God into the equation. In the book's first chapter, Daly notes that some might argue that feminists should just go about their business "without worrying about God."[324]

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[321] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 2.

[322] Ibid., 15.

[323] Ibid., 24, 28–29.

[324] Ibid., 28.

Yet, she maintains that this would be a grave mistake, which could undermine the movements radical potential:

> It is reasonable to take the position that sustained effort toward self-transcendence requires keeping alive in one's consciousness the question of ultimate transcendence, that is, of God. It implies recognition of the fact that we have no power *over* the ultimately real, and that whatever authentic power we have is derived from *participation* in ultimate reality. This awareness, always hard to sustain, makes it possible to be free of idolatry even in regard to one's own cause, since it tells us that all presently envisages goals, lifestyles, symbols, and societal structures may be transitory.[325]

Daly here speaks of God both as "the ultimate real" and as "ultimate transcendence", which suggests that God is the foundation of reality as a whole, yet fully beyond the limits of human comprehension. Historically, the existence of a divine or "ultimate" reality has often been invoked to support the claim that there are absolute and knowable truths, which God has either revealed or, in the case of philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650), stands as a guarantor of.[326] But as we can see, Daly argues that the notion of God can also lend support to the opposite conclusion. For if God is indeed ultimate transcendence, then God is neither accessible nor fully knowable, which means that the ultimately real will always elude us, an assumption that Daly believes encourages the continued pursuit of self-transcendence.

Daly goes on to state that God must not be understood as a static entity, but something that unfolds in and through history, a process in which she argues that humankind itself participates. In other words, God is not a noun but a verb.[327] As she herself points out, this theory of "a developing God" has something in common with those advanced by philosophers Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) and Charles Hartshorne (1897–2000), whose names are usually associated with "process theism", a strand of theological thought that rests on the notion of God as partially amenable to the effects of temporal processes.[328] Daly's unique contribution to this school of thought is the claim that the women' revolution – because it enables women, hitherto reduced to

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[325] Ibid., 28–29, italics in original.

[326] René Descartes, *Meditations on First* Philosophy [1641], in *Meditations on First Philosophy with Selections from the Objections and Replies*, trans. Mike Moriarty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 50.

[327] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 33.

[328] Ibid., 36–37. See also ibid., 188.

"nonbeing", to participate in both "being" and history – represents a new and decisive step in God's development.[329] "The unfolding of God […] is an event in which women participate, as we participate in our own revolution", Daly writes.[330] That is why the women's revolution "may not only be the doorway to deliverance which secular humanism has passionately fought for – but also a doorway *to* something, that is, a new phase in the human spirit's quest for God."[331]

Here, we can observe how the eschatological hope Daly expressed towards the end of her last book is transferred to the women's movement. Not only does she present this movement as operating in the last days of the old order and as the agent through which a new reign might be realized. One can also argue that she conceptualizes it as an "anticipatory sign" of this reign, through which it is both already present and not-yet.[332] A few pages later, Daly proclaims:

> Instead of settling for being a warped half of a person, which is equivalent to a self-destructive non-person, the emerging woman is casting off role definitions and moving toward androgynous being. […] It is […] something like God speaking forth God-self in the new identity of women.[333]

This passage combines the radical feminist notion of feminism as a struggle for a fundamentally different society beyond all sex roles, with Daly's understanding of the women's revolution as the beginning a "spiritual" revolution.[334] In addition, it can be seen as an example of how Daly strives to give her own narrative a mythical framing, by identifying the women's revolution with a step in becoming of God. I develop this argument in the following two sections, where I also highlight other ways in which Daly

[329] Ibid., 23.

[330] Ibid., 40. Cf. ibid., 36. "The unfolding of the women-consciousness is an intimation of the endless unfolding of God."

[331] Ibid., 23, italics in original.

[332] Self-affirming women, writes Daly, "are in a situation to experience *presence*. This is not the presence of a super-reified Something, but of a power of being which both is, and is not yet." Ibid., 36, italics in original.

[333] Ibid., 41. Cf. ibid., 73. At the latter location, Daly states that the women's revolution can be envisioned as having the potential "to bring about a manifestation of God which would be the second appearance of God incarnate, fulfilling the latent promise in the original revelation that male and female are made to the image of God."

[334] Ibid., 6.

appropriates concepts from mythology to articulate her idiosyncratic, post-Christian form of radical feminism.

Old and new myths: Daly and Richardson

There are many different concepts of myth at play in *Beyond God the Father.* One of these appears to have been appropriated from Herbert Richardson, of whose writings on myth Daly presents a largely appreciative analysis early in her book. This is indicative of the more general shift that separates *Beyond God the Father* from *The Church and the Second Sex*, as Richardson is an outspoken critic of Harvey Cox's writings on myth, from which we have seen that Daly drew in her debut book. Cox, writes Richardson,

> seems at least to argue that an open, changing society cannot be integrated by myths, since myths integrate societies by closing them from change. Myths create "static, tribal societies." But such an argument is incorrect. It does not follow from the fact that static, tribal societies are integrated by myths that changing open societies cannot also be integrated by myths.[335]

According to Richardson, myth is a "symbol", "image" or "story-image" that symbolizes "the All-Encompassing Whole."[336] He holds that such images are integral to all religions. But he also maintains that different groups, under different circumstances, create different myths, which suggests that all myths are conditioned by contingent circumstances. Furthermore, he claims that there may be *new* myths. In a text called "Three Myths of Transcendence" (1967), Richardson presents three types of myths about transcendence and identity, which he organizes into a developmental scheme, ranging from the primitive to the modern. This is the text with which Daly enters into dialogue with in *Beyond God the Father*. I will therefore begin by summarizing Richardson's main points.

Richardson states that "the primordial human myth" is centered around the theme of separation and return. Myths on this theme are said to reiterate a universal human experience: the sense of loss experienced by the child when it was separated from its mother.[337] Richardson presents such myths as reflecting and validating the child's fantasy of returning to what Sigmund

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[335] Herbert W. Richardson, *Toward an American Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 53.
[336] Herbert W. Richardson, "Three Myths of Transcendence", in *Transcendence*, ed. Donald R. Cutler and Herbert W. Richardson (Boston: 1969), 101–102, 105.
[337] Ibid., 107.

Freud termed the state of pre-Oedipal symbiosis, a longing that Freud claimed lived on in many adults. These are the myths that structure religious life in primitive societies, according to Richardson. He argues that primitive people, like children, feel helpless and dependent on forces beyond their control. Therefore, all their myths are about returning to an origin: a metaphorical mother, who is seen as the only source of their existence and identity. "The primitive's or child's sense that he is nothing in himself and hence can exist only in total dependence on or by participation in the mother (or originating principle) is […] an experience of transcendence rooted in man's sense of his own utter deficiency".[338]

As the separation-and-return myths have their roots in "primitive helplessness and total dependency", Richardson reasons that they are destined to lose their appeal when people, as he states has happened in the West, evolve into more independent individuals. These tales are then replaced by myths of "conflict of vindication" – that is, myths centered on individuals or groups whose initial dependence derives from some kind of outer force, the limiting influence of which is eventually overcome through a struggle. Such myths are linear-progressive rather than cyclical and reflect/reproduce the belief of Western "man" that he can achieve transcendence and identity by actively opposing the forces that limit him. According to Richardson, the shift from separation-and return myths to myths about conflict and vindication first occurred with the birth of biblical religions.[339] "So, for example, archetypical Western stories are the bondage and exodus of Israel, the testing and triumph of David, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, the martyrdom and glorification of the saints."[340] Such myths do not present the "Whole" that is God as a mother to whom one must return, but as father that urges one to go on, forward.

Today, we are in desperate need of new myths, Richardson argues. For although conflict-and-vindication myths are better than those about separation and return, they are far from perfect. Conflict-and-vindication myths, which present transcendence and identity as the outcome of a struggle against an external force, are problematic because societies built around such tales will never be free of conflicts.[341] To replace the myths centered on conflict and vindication, Richardson hopes for myths on the theme of "integration and

[338] Ibid., 108
[339] Ibid., 108–109.
[340] Ibid., 109.
[341] Ibid., 110

transformation." Such myths would neither portray transcendence and identity as something achieved by returning to a mother/origin nor by struggling against an external force, but by being true to one's inner, authentic self. "The kind of transcendence correlated with the myth of integration and transformation is that of self-transcendence", Richardson explains. "In our integrity we can experience transcendence as our own potentiality to become more, as the demand for self-transformation." Here, the "Whole" that is God is something one realizes within oneself, which means that the goal is self-divinization.[342]

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Returning now to Daly, we see that she both challenges and appropriates aspects of Richardson's reasoning, which again means that she unwillingly helps legitimize the colonialist view of primitive people as childlike and dependent, stuck in the of circle of eternal return.

"The drive toward transcendence can be envisaged mythically in different but interrelated ways", Daly writes. "This point has been made in an original way by Herbert Richardson, whose typology I am relating to sex role socialization in the following analysis."[343] Since she accepts the basic assumptions on which Richardson's reasoning rests, it seems reasonable to assume that she also uses the word "myth", which she never defines, in a similar way – that is, to denote a symbol, image or story-image that symbolizes the Whole. Another thing that Daly has in common with Richardson is the assumption that myths are a conditioned by historically changing circumstances, which means that the symbols of which they consist of are relative rather than absolute. "Religious symbols fade and die when the cultural situation that gave rise to them and supported them ceases to give them plausibility." It is therefore necessary to "accept the relativity of all symbols" and admit that "clinging to these as fixed and ultimate is self-destructive and idolatrous."[344]

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[342] Ibid., 112.

[343] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 24.

[344] Ibid., 15. This concept of symbol has much in common with that of Sam Keen, whose Nietzschean plead for a Dionysian theology Daly refers to at ibid., 103. In an article called "Manifesto for a Dionysian Theology" (1969), Keen writes: "The God from whom human life is a gift can never be adequately named, hence we are responsible at a minimum to be flexible in our adherence to symbols for the ultimate, lest our allegiance turn in to idolatry and we give

Daly begins by discussing myths of separation and return, which she too presents as cyclical and permeated with "parental" images. But where Richardson argues that the advent of Christianity challenged the hegemony of such myths, Daly maintains that many Christians still tend to privilege return over progress. "Popular Christianity envisions human life in these terms, looking forward to a return to the Father in heaven.[345] Moving on, Daly follows Richardson in arguing that the myth of conflict and vindication – which she associated with the project of so-called "black liberation theologians" like James Cone (1938–2018) – remains less adequate than the myth of integrity and transformation.[346] At the same time, she criticizes Richardson for not making it clear that true self-transcendence involves the becoming of androgynous human beings, which in turn presupposes the elimination of patriarchal oppression.[347]

This argument makes it evident that Daly now attributes a potentially progressive function to the thing she terms myth. She no longer presents myth as a primarily demonic or primitive phenomenon but follows Richardson in arguing that new and better myths can arise. The question then becomes how this can be achieved? Daly seems to suggest that the emergence of a new and better myth (centered around integrity and transformation rather than separation and return or conflict and vindication), is already on its way, thanks to the women's revolution.[348] Reasoning that this revolution enables both self-transcendence and the surpassing of oppressive social structures, she states: "I am suggesting that the vision of human becoming as a process of integration and transformation, *as this vision is emerging in the women's revolution*, potentially includes *both* the individualistic ontological dimension of depth and revolutionary participation in history."[349]

One could also argue that Daly herself seeks to create a new myth, by modeling her narrative about the women's revolution on Richardson's description of myths. After all, she does not just claim that the women's

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our loyalty to symbols which have become repressive." Sam Keen, "Manifesto for a Dionysian Theology", *Cross Currents* 19, no. 1 (1969): 51.

[345] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 24.

[346] Ibid., 25.

[347] Ibid., 26.

[348] Richardson also suggests that this new myth may be emerging. He illustrates this by comparing Homer's *Odyssey,* which ends with Odysseus returning back home, with Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which ends in with a "spiritual rebirth" unassisted by a mother. Richardson, "Three Myths of Transcendence", 111.

[349] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 26–27, italics in original.

revolution contributes to a "vision" of human becoming as a process of integration and transformation, but that it contributes to integration and transformation as concrete processes. This is to say that Daly constructs a narrative in which "women" are presented as the subject through whose revolution integration and transformation, in the sense of "psychic unity" (i.e. androgyny) and "self-transformation", become a reality.[350]

Daly also weaves the two other mythical motifs discussed by Richardson into her own narrative about what the women's revolution is about to accomplish. Asserting that women who rise against patriarchal oppression exhibit both courage and hope, she concludes:

> This synthesis of hope and courage, potentially in the dynamics of the feminist revolution, includes separation and return since by breaking form the past and consciously creating our own history, we [women] change that past, that is, change and expand our understanding of it. […] The synthesis also includes conflict and vindication […] in the sense of breaking down the masculine/feminine models thrust upon us by the powers and principalities that shrink the human potential of women and men.[351]

This quote is interesting for several reasons. To begin with, it makes it clear that Daly does not assume that a revolution implies a definitive break from the past, but can involve a return and reworking of history, which both re-actualizes and changes it. I will discuss this aspect of her argument in greater detail towards the end of this chapter. For now, it is enough to reiterate that Daly here appropriates Richardson's terminology but also models her own narrative about the women's revolution on his description of myth. I thus read this narrative adaptation as a deliberate attempt to facilitate the revolution by giving it a mythic framing. This demonstrates that Daly makes use of what Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki calls her "mythological method" already in *Beyond God the Father*. We will find a further example of this in the next section, which revolves around Daly and Eliade.

The myth of the eternal return: Daly and Eliade

To my knowledge, Daly is the first theorist to articulate an explicitly feminist critique of Eliade's enormously influential mythological writings. I discuss this critique below. At the same time, I aim to demonstrate how Daly makes use

[350] Ibid.
[351] Ibid., 27.

of Eliade to explain the persistence of patriarchal oppression, in the sense that she appropriates his notion of myth as a phenomenon that sometimes generates repetition and return at the expense of renewal. In addition, I show that Daly offers the women's revolution as a solution to a problem discussed by Eliade, while she also models her narrative about this revolution on his description of myth. To facilitate this reading, I must first summarize some key features of Eliade's theory of myth.

Eliade is among those who oppose the tendency to equate "myth" with falsehood or illusion.[352] To understand what myths really are and do, he argues that they should be studied in societies where they are perceived as true stories – that is, those societies that he terms "pre-modern", "traditional", "archaic" or "primitive".[353] Attempting to identify what function myths serve in such societies, Eliade states that myths narrate "sacred history", which is to say that they "describe the various and sometimes dramatic breakthroughs of the sacred (or the 'supernatural') into the World"[354] – what he also speaks of as *hierophanies*.[355] He goes on to state that primitive myths always present these breakthroughs as having taken place at the very beginning of time. "In other words, myth tells how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence […]. Myth, then, is always an account of a 'creation'; it relates how something was produced, began to *be*."[356]

Such stories do not only exist in primitive societies. But one thing that, according to Eliade, characterizes the behavior of primitive man, is that he, in everything he does, seeks to "imitate" or "repeat" the deeds narrated in myths. Why? Because primitive man believes that he, by replicating the acts told in

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[352] Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 1–2.

[353] "The premodern or 'traditional' societies include both the world usually known as 'primitive' and the ancient cultures of Asia, Europe, and America." Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. R. Williard Trask (New York: Harber & Brothers, [1949] 1959), 3. Eliade sometimes puts the word primitive in quotation marks, but far from always. Hence, he speaks of "primitives", "primitive man", "primitive societies" and "primitive cultures", without using quotation marks. Ibid., 22, 33, 36, 51. On the epistemological status of myth in such societies, see for example Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 8.

[354] Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 6.

[355] Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 11.

[356] Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 5–6, italics in original. Here and elsewhere, Eliade seems to imply *all* myths are always about creations and beginnings. But he also uses the word "myth" for stories that concern, for example, the end of time (i.e., "eschatological myths"). See for example Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 206. Thus, when he claims that myths are "always" about creations and beginnings, he appears to mean that this is how myths are experienced in primitive societies. Cf. Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 18.

myths, is transported back to the "Great Time" when those acts first occurred, which also brings him closer to the "Supernaturals" that performed them. Acting in accordance with the "exemplary models", "paradigms" or "archetypes" provided by myths thus allows primitive man to escape profane "history", which Eliade claims inhabitants of primitive societies find very difficult to tolerate, because in their eyes it lacks all meaning and reality.[357] "By virtue of the continual repetition of a paradigmatic act, something shows itself to be *fixed* and *enduring* in the universal flux."[358] Summarizing his theory, Eliade states that

> the imitation of a transhuman model, the repetition of an exemplary scenario and the breakaway from profane time through a moment which opens out into the Great Time, are the essential marks of "mythical behavior" – that is, the behavior of the man of the archaic societies, who finds the very source of his existence in the myth.[359]

The antithesis of primitive man's "mythical behavior" is, Eliade argues, the "historical" or "historicist" attitude of "modern" man. The latter attitude rests on the assumptions that everything is open to change, which suggests that all things (including oneself) are the way they are, not because that is how they were created by supernatural beings, but because of what has happened to them throughout history, be it the history of the world or that of these things' individual existence.[360] This means that the beginning loses the privileged position attributed to it in primitive societies. Modern or "historical" man assumes that he is free, but also obliged, to create himself without the guidance of transhistorical models or eternal values.[361]

According to Eliade, an important turning point in the transition from the primitive-mythical to the modern-historical worldview occurred with the advent of Judaism and Christianity. This is not to say that these religions are entirely free from the influence of mythical thought. Both refer to events believed to have taken place at the beginning of time to explain why the world

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[357] Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, xi, 34–37. On the meaning of terms such as "exemplary models", "paradigms" and "archetypes", see ibid., viii–ix.
[358] Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 140.
[359] Ibid., 169.
[360] Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 12–13.
[361] Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 203.

is the way it is.[362] Likewise, both religions present figures from the past as exemplary models whose actions should be imitated.[363] Yet, because both Jews and Christians view God's plan as realized in and through history, the triumph of these religions helped popularize the decidedly non-mythical notion of time as linear and irreversible.[364] "It is only through the discovery of History – more precisely by the awakening of the historical consciousness in Judaeo-Christianity […]", Eliade writes, "[…] that myth could be left behind."[365] The definitive break with myth nevertheless occurred much later. According to Eliade, it only became possible following the birth of the fully "nonreligious" or "profane" man, a being that he describes as unique to "desacralized" modern society.[366]

Though some religions, such as Judaism and Christianity, are less mythical – that is, more historical – than others, Eliade claims that no religion is entirely without a mythical dimension: ultimately, all religions ascribe a particular importance to "beginnings" and models.[367] This is why the nonreligious man of modern society is the first human being who can be said to reject myth per se. Importantly, this does not mean that modernity as such is completely devoid of myth. Art and politics still offer "camouflaged myths": narratives that share the same structure and/or content as sacred histories, hidden in profane contexts.[368] Even so, Eliade maintains that these narratives do not serve the same *function* as real myths, because modern man does not seek to imitate the deeds of which they tell. In the end, "modern man's 'private

[362] "For Judaeo-Christianity the 'essential' is the drama of Paradise, which instituted the present human condition." Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 93.

[363] Ibid., 169, italics in original.

[364] "For Judaism, time has a beginning and will have an end. The idea of cyclic time is left behind." Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 110. "Christianity, as faithful heir of Judaism, accepts the linear Time of History: the World was created only once and will have only one end; the Incarnation took place only once, in historical Time, and there will be only one Judgment." Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 169.

[365] Ibid., 113.

[366] Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 202–203.

[367] Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 168–169. Cf. Bryan S. Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade: Making Sense of Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 219.

[368] "A whole volume could well be written on the myths of modern man, on the mythologies camouflaged in the plays that he enjoys, in the books that he reads." Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 205. On Eliade's notion of "the camouflaged sacred", see Moshe Idel, "The Camouflaged Sacred in Mircea Eliade's Self-Perception, Literature, and Scholarship", in *Hermeneutics, Politics, and the History of Religions: The Contested Legacies of Joachim Wach and Mircea Eliade*, ed. Christian Wedemeyer and Wendy Doniger (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

mythologies' […] never rise to the ontological status of myths, precisely because they are not experienced by the *whole man* and therefore do not transform a particular situation into a situation that is paradigmatic."[369] Hence, the modern nonreligious man is left to his own devices, with no mythical models to guide him.[370]

Eliade's narrative, which can be said to represent Western societies as having developed from *mythos* to *logos,* while primitive non-Western societies remain arrested at an earlier mythical stage, obviously has much in common with that of evolutionary anthropologists like James George Frazer. But there is an essential difference. For Eliade does not present modern societies as superior to primitive ones. On the contrary, he depicts modern man's loss of myth as a tragedy. With the words of literary theorist Radu Vancu, Eliade is a "counter-modern" thinker, whose opposition to modernity is based on what he sees as its most distinctive feature: namely, its desacralized and disenchanted nature.[371] Consequently, where the evolutionary anthropologists sought to hasten the evolution away from primitive myth and religion, Eliade would rather see this progression reversed.

Interestingly, Eliade's hope that this – the re-sacralization and re-enchantment of modernity, remains possible – rests on what he himself would term a typically historicist and thus non-mythical premise, meaning that he assumes that we humans are the way we are because of our history. Having stated that "profane man cannot help preserving some vestiges of the behavior of religious man", Eliade concludes: "Do what he will, he is an inheritor. He cannot utterly abolish his past, since he is himself the product of his past. He forms himself by a series of denials and refusals, but he continues to be haunted by the realities that he has refused and denied." [372] A few pages later, Eliade continues:

> In short, the majority of men "without religion" still hold to pseudo religions and degenerated mythologies. There is nothing surprising in this, for […] profane man is the descendant of *homo religiosus* and he cannot wipe out his own history – that is, the behavior of his religious ancestors which has made him what he is today.[373]

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[369] Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 211, italics in original.

[370] Ibid., 203.

[371] Radu Vancu, "The Counter-Modern Eliade. 'Wiederverzauberung der Welt' in the Life and Work of Mircea Eliade", *World Literature Studies* VII (2015): 25.

[372] Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 204.

[373] Ibid., 209.

Again, on a structural level this argument has much in common with one popularized by evolutionary anthropology. For example, we recognize the assumption that modern man continues to engage in mythical behavior because he is "haunted" by his past; that he, so to speak, harbors a "savage within", who is there because he was once a savage himself. The difference, however, is that Eliade does not present this spectral presence as a problem, but as a promise. It is *because* religion and myth have survived, albeit in a "camouflaged" or "degenerate" form, that there is still hope of finding a way back from the profane to the sacred.[374] "From one point of view", Eliade writes, "it could almost be said that in the case of those moderns who proclaim that they are nonreligious, religion and mythology are 'eclipsed' in the darkness of their unconscious – which means too that in such men the possibility of reintegrating a religious vision of life lies at a great depth."[375] Yet, there is still hope that the repressed will one day return.

Vancu argues that this, the return of the repressed mythical and religious mode of being in the world, was something that Eliade not only hoped for passively, but worked actively to achieve. He cites a letter addressed to the poet and art historian Barbu Brezianu (1909–2008), where Eliade states that one must seek to "*resacralize in a creative manner* the historical moment, in other words to transfigure it, by assigning to it a transcendental dimension." This seems to imply that one, according to Eliade, must strive to transform profane history into "sacred history" – that is, myth.[376] To give but one example of how Eliade attempts to accomplish this, we can note that he argues that modern man's loss of myth and religion, from "the Christian point of view", can be understood as "equivalent to a new 'fall' of man", whereby Eliade can be said to mythologize the very process of demythification.[377] Turning now to Daly, we will see that she makes use of a very similar strategy.

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[374] Cf. Von Hendy, *The Modern Construction of Myth*, 185–186.

[375] Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 213.

[376] Vancu, "The Counter-Modern Eliade", 27, italics in original.

[377] Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 213. On the concept of fallenness in Eliade's work, see Carl Olson, "Theology of Nostalgia: Reflections on the Theological Aspects of Eliade's Work", *Numen* 36, no. 1 (1989): 99–101.

In chapter six of *Beyond God the Father*, Daly cites a passage from Eliade's *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (the first English translation of which was titled *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Archetypes and Repetition*), in which Eliade states: "Christian thought tended to transcend, once and for all, the old themes of eternal repetition, just as it had undertaken to transcend all other archaic viewpoints by revealing the importance of the religious experience of faith and that of the value of the human personality."[378] Daly disputes this description, arguing that Eliade arrives at an erroneous conclusion because his perspective is androcentric in the sense that it ignores the experience of women. "Eliade sees the situation through male lenses."[379] Had he adopted a female or feminist lens, Eliade would have realized that Christianity did not put an end to the cyclical existence that he says characterizes primitive societies.

Eliade, writes Daly, believes that Christianity is the religion of the "fallen" man, who has been forced out of the "paradise of archetypes and repetition" and tumbled into history. But this is not true. "The experience of feminists reveal that women feel very much trapped in this 'Eden' of endless circles and that Christianity is keeping it this way."[380] This is to say that women, as already Beauvoir argued, have remained trapped in the sphere of reproduction and repetition, while men alone have been allowed to participate in history.[381] In fact, Daly argues that men could not have participated in history to the extent they have, had not women been forced to take full responsibility for the necessarily repetitive aspects of human existence. As a result, male "renewal" has taken place at "female expense", which means that "progress" (quotation marks in original) constitutes a "delusion", experienced as positive only by those who it has benefited.[382] That is to say, no real change has taken place. For women, the triumph of Christianity just meant more of the same. In her discussion on Richardson's text, Daly states:

> Taken on the imaginative level the myth of separation and return reflects quite well the limited sort of transcendence that has been the only possibility for most women in the course of history – separation from the home of parent only to return to paternalistic domination in the home of a husband. The eternal circle

[378] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 160. Note that Daly italicizes block quotes, but that I have chosen to quote the paragraph as it appears in the original. Cf. Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 137.
[379] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 160.
[380] Ibid.
[381] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 98–99.
[382] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 160.

> of separation from and return to infantile dependence has been the story of the feminine mode of existence.[383]

Daly accordingly concludes that Christianity did not entail a break with the mythical attitude that Eliade says characterizes primitive societies. On the contrary, the advent of Christianity only meant that one set of myths was replaced by another, equally ahistorical. Daly can be read as demonstrating this by invoking "the myth" of the Garden of Eden. "The fact that the myth cultivated a backward-looking consciousness and […] constituted an obstacle to progress, was noted by Teilhard de Chardin as early as 1933 […]. The story conveys to the popular imagination the idea that the best has already been; paradise seems to be located in the past", writes Daly.[384] As we have seen, this idea is not alien to Eliade, who himself presents the Eden-story as a Christian myth.[385] But what distinguishes Daly's argument from Eliade's is that she emphasizes how this and related Christian myths affect women. In particular, she highlights that the Garden of Eden myth, because it blames Eve for humankind's expulsion from paradise, has reinforced misogynistic ideas and practices that have hindered renewal by helping keep patriarchy alive. Daly therefore states that Teilhard failed to acknowledge the "*specific* nature of the backward-looking vision" promoted by this myth: namely, its "fixation upon a one-sided and distorted image of half the human species […] which prevents the becoming of psychically whole human beings."[386]

As we recall, Eliade claims that the first human being without any myths whatsoever was the nonreligious man of modern society. In contrast, Daly argues that not even the advent of secular modernity leads to a definitive break from the cyclical existence upheld by myth, at least not for women. This is partly because Christian myths, as even Eliade seems to acknowledge, continue to influence nonreligious people. The image of woman perpetuated by "the myth of the Fall" still "retains its hold over the modern psyche […] in a disguised and residual manner", Daly states.[387] But the continued power of the cyclical myth is also linked to modern societal mechanisms. For example, Daly follows Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno in arguing that the alienation and commodification associated with modern capitalism helps

[383] Ibid., 24–25.
[384] Ibid., 46.
[385] Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 93.
[386] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 46, italics in original.
[387] Ibid., 45.

prevent true renewal. "This is a translation into the realm of economics of the myth of the eternal return. It means living out the endless circle of meaningless desires, never fulfilled, pouring human being into the insatiable chasm of nonbeing."[388]

So, unlike Eliade, Daly maintains that modern people have not actually left the primitive world of myth behind and stepped out into history. Nevertheless, the point of her argument is that the women's revolution can *now* bring about what Eliade wrongly claimed that Christianity had made possible long ago.[389] "The circle of eternal return [...] can be broken if women break the chain of nonbeing by be-ing."[390] This development, writes Daly, is also "an invitation to others to leave the patriarchal space of alienative identity – the sacred circle of eternal return – and enter new space."[391] In other words, by freeing themselves, women will also help free men.

When one enters this new space, located "on the boundary" of patriarchal institutions, one will also enter a new time.[392] "To stay in patriarchal space", Daly writes, "is to remain in time past."[393] Whereas primitive man, according to Eliade, always stives to abrogate history and return to the beginning, Daly explains that women participating in their revolution "are vividly aware of living in time present/future."[394]

In this new space-time, life will not be governed by models or ritual repetitions of paradigmatic events, as Eliade claims that it is in primitive societies. In chapter three, titled "Beyond Christolatry: A World Without

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[388] Ibid., 177. Daly herself does not mention Horkheimer and Adorno's work. But she does refer to Herbert Marcuse, another thinker often associated with the Frankfurt school, at several locations. See ibid., 98–99, 123–124, 143–144, 171, 175–177, 179. On Daly's use of Marcuse see also Marsha Aileen Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion: A Feminist Analysis* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 113–145.

[389] "The moving center of women's new space is on the boundary of the dead circle of archetypes of repetition. Historians of religion, such as Eliade, have made such claims for Christianity." Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 159.

[390] Ibid., 189.

[391] Ibid., 168.

[392] Ibid., 40, 42. Daly appropriates the expression "on the boundary" from Tillich, who (among other things) uses it as the title of his autobiography: Paul Tillich, *On the Boundary: An Autobiographical Sketch* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, [1936] 1966). On the boundary metaphor in Tillich's work, see Matthew Lon Weaver, "Beyond the Boundary: Tillich and the Ambiguous Path to Self and Community", *Les ambiguïtés de la vie selon Paul Tillich: Travaux issus du XXIE Colloque international de l'Association Paul Tillich d'expression française* 9 (2017): 176–178.

[393] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 43.

[394] Ibid., 42.

Models", Daly asserts that "no adequate models can be taken from the past."[395] She consequently rejects the view of those who claim that "past history […] has some sort of prior claim over present experience, as if resource to the past were necessary to legitimate experience now."[396] In fact, Daly asserts that the very meaning of the term "model" must be changed, if it is to remain significant in a post-patriarchal space-time. "The same term may be retained, materially speaking, but what we are about is *breaking models* in the old sense of the term. It seems to have been part of the patriarchal mind-set to imitate slavishly a master of father-figure with an almost blind devotion and then reject this figure in order to be oneself."[397]

Daly here adds something to Eliade's description of the past, in that she maintains that the (male) inhabitants of patriarchal societies have not only *imitated* exemplary models but eventually tried to become such models themselves. However, in stating that patriarchal societies are governed by both myths and models, I argue that Daly appropriates Eliade's terminology to establish a parallel between primitive societies and patriarchal ones.[398] In this respect, Daly has something in common with Beauvoir, who we saw established a similar parallel. But unlike the Beauvoir, Daly presents *women* as the historical subject, through whose revolution a break with the mythical-primitive past is finally about to take place.

To summarize, Daly's argument suggests that the "fall" from primitive myth into history, which according to Eliade began with the advent of Christianity and reached its peak in modernity, never actually occurred, but that it *is* happening now, thanks to the women's revolution. From the perspective that Eliade adopts, this development still represents a tragedy, as a fall is a fall, regardless of when or because of whom it transpires. Daly obviously disagrees. Again, she explains that this erroneous conclusion stems from Eliade's androcentric bias – that is, from his inability to consider what effects this fall might have for women. Citing a passage from Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane*, already referenced above, Daly writes:

> Mircea Eliade […] suggests that in the modern mind religion and mythology have been "eclipsed" in the darkness of the unconscious: "Or, from the Christian point of view, it could be said that nonreligion is equivalent to a new

[395] Ibid., 71

[396] Ibid., 73–74.

[397] Ibid., 74–75, italics added.

[398] One goal of the women's revolution is, Daly states, to move beyond "archaic God-projections", which she describes as products of "earlier stages of consciousness". Ibid., 29.

> 'fall' of man." I am proposing a different interpretation of the contemporary situation, arising from the new women's experience of liberation. That is, if the symbols and myths of patriarchal religion are dying, this is hardly a total tragedy, since they have perpetuated oppression. To the extent that they have done this, they have represented a pseudo-sense of the sacred.[399]

We can see here that Daly both appropriates and challenges Eliade's argument. She appropriates it by conceding that a "fall" from myth into history is indeed taking place (thanks to the women's revolution), but she challenges it by adopting a feminist perspective on this development, which reveals that it can be valued differently, effectively achieving a "revaluation" of this event.

Importantly, Daly does acknowledge that the desacralization and disenchantment that Eliade associates with modernity is not entirely beneficial. But she presents the women's revolution as a solution to this problem as well. Borrowing the same biblical-mythical metaphor as Eliade, she states that the women's revolution will entail a movement "beyond patriarchy's good and evil", which can be "seen mythically as 'the Fall' – the dreaded Fall which is now finally beginning to occur, in which women are bringing ourselves to and then the other half of the species to eat of the forbidden fruit – the knowledge refused by patriarchal society."[400] This is an example of how Daly, like Eliade, mythologizes the process of demythification. I will discuss this strategy in greater detail below. For now, I want to focus on the fact that Daly asserts that this Fall "has the potential to bring us away not only from the false paradise of the pseudo-sacred *but also from the banal nonreligious consciousness that Eliade deplores*."[401]

How can the Fall initiated by the women's revolution help resacralize and reenchant modernity? The answer to this question was alluded to in the introduction to the present chapter. As stated, Daly argues that the women's revolution may well constitute "the greatest single hope for survival of spiritual consciousness on this planet."[402] The assumption on which this claim rests is that there is a transcendent reality that can only be approached through symbols, but that all inherited symbol systems (religious and otherwise) remain inadequate, because they have been created by men alone and thus only reflect

[399] Ibid., 67–68. Cf. Ibid. 15.
[400] Ibid., 67.
[401] Ibid., 68, italics added.
[402] Ibid., 14.

half of humanity's experience.[403] Employing another biblical-mythical metaphor, Daly writes: "It is necessary to grasp the fundamental fact that women have had the power of *naming* stolen from us. We have not been free to use our own power to name ourselves, the world, or God."[404] This means that things have been given "false names", which is to say that the images and image-narratives presently used to symbolize transcendence are but sexist "idols", misrepresenting the sacred. The women's revolution challenges this order. It is a "spiritual revolution", which will take humanity "beyond the idolatries of sexist society" and bring forth more appropriate symbols for transcendence.[405]

This is what is meant by a "remythologizing" of religion.[406] Here it is significant to recall that Daly, unlike Eliade, does not equate myths with stories of beginnings and creations, but follows Richardson in using the word "myths" to refer to image-narratives that symbolize the sacred or transcendent. Hence, she can argue that some (primitive-patriarchal) myths contribute to a cyclical state yet hold on to the hope that the women's revolution will yield *new* myths, fully compatible with a historical existence. Discussing the use of Jesus as a symbol of divine incarnation, Daly states: "As a uniquely masculine image and language for divinity loses credibility, so also the idea of a single divine incarnation in a human being of the male sex may give way in the religious consciousness to an increased awareness of the power of Being in all persons."[407] This argument has much in common with the idea David Friedrich Strauss advanced when he questioned "the myth" of Jesus and claimed that the unity of human and divine natures was not achieved through one single individual, but through humanity as such. On the other hand, where Strauss sought to replace myth with philosophy, Daly maintains that the women's revolution will give rise to new and better myths. "In a real sense", she writes, "the symbols of patriarchal religion deserved to 'die.' What women's becoming can mean is something beyond their death and beyond their rebirth. It is not mere cyclic return or resurrection […]. Rather, women's becoming is something more like a new creation."[408] In this way, Daly both uses and challenges the central tenets of Eliade's writings on myth.

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[403] "In a sexist world, symbol systems and conceptual apparatuses have been male creations." Ibid., 7.

[404] Ibid., 8, italics in original.

[405] Ibid., 6.

[406] Ibid., 71.

[407] Ibid.

[408] Ibid., 68.

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So far, I have shown how Daly's argument suggests that the women's revolution represents a break with the repetitive mythic order that Eliade claims characterizes primitive societies. I have also shown that this revolution, according to Daly, may generate a remythologization of religion, with the potential to resacralize and reenchant modernity. In both respects, Daly presents herself as a spectator, commenting on a development that she portrays as more or less inevitable. But as mentioned above, Daly can also be read as constructing a myth of her own, in the sense that she models her narrative about the women's revolution on Richardson's description of myths of transcendence. Before moving on, I want to demonstrate that this narrative also incorporates aspects of Eliade's description of myth.

As we recall, Eliade states that myths narrate "breakthroughs of the sacred", or what he calls *hierophanies*. Daly models her account of the women's revolution on this description of myth when she writes: "I am proposing that the emergence of communal vocational self-awareness of women is a *creative political ontophany*. It is a manifestation of the sacred (*hierophany*) precisely because it is an experience of participation in being, and therefore a manifestation of being (*ontophany*)."[409] The point of this passage – which is followed by a reference to Eliade's *Patterns in Comparative Religion*[410] – is that the women's revolution has led to "a manifestation of the sacred (*hierophany*)", because it, as Daly states elsewhere, has made it possible for women to participate in being and thus in the unfolding of God.[411] To me, this presentation represents a clear attempt on the part of Daly to (with Eliade's words) "*resacralize in a creative manner* the historical moment […] by assigning to it a transcendental dimension" – that is, to frame the women's revolution as

[409] Ibid., 34–35, italics in original.

[410] "A historian of religion such as Eliade insists that there was a sort of qualitative leap made by the biblical religion in the realm of hierophany. Whether or not this is historically true is not my concern at this point. What I do suggest is that the potential for *ontological* hierophany that is already beginning to be realized in the participatory vocational self-consciousness of women does involve a leap, bridging the apparent gap between being and history." Ibid., 35, italics in original. In a footnote, Daly also references an article by Jay J. Kim that discusses Eliade's concept of hierophany. Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 204 n37; Jay J. Kim, "Hierophany and History", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 40, no. 3 (1972).

[411] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 40.

part of a sacred history, thereby creating what Eliade would have called a myth.

Against demythologization: Daly, Bultmann and Tillich

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, I argue that Daly presents remythologization as an alternative to demythologization. But what is the difference between re- and demythologization, as she understands these practices? This query stands at the center of the present section. I will demonstrate that Daly, by engaging with Bultmann's, Tillich's and Millet's writings on myth, provides both a feminist critique of the premises of the demythologization debate and offers a partial explanation for the persistence of patriarchal oppression.

Daly's discussion on demythologization begins with the myth of the Fall. It would seem, she states, that this tale is "not given serious weight in the modern consciousness"; though it is still referenced in popular culture, "many, perhaps most, people would insist that they do not take it seriously."[412] But is this true? Has this myth really lost its power over modern people, or does it continue to influence "us" in ways we do not realize? This is one of the questions that Daly seeks to answer. Early on, she states:

> Among some theologians there is a tendency to "demythologize" the biblical story, that is, to remove the "shell" of myth while retaining some alleged content (Bultmann and some of his followers). Others have attempted to "break the myth", that is, to retain it while recognizing it as *myth* and not taking it literally (Tillich).[413]

For reasons to which I shall return shortly, Daly opposes these ambitions. But to clarify what she rejects and what she appropriates in Bultmann's and Tillich's arguments, I will begin with a very brief summary of these two theorists' writings on myth.

As mentioned earlier, the so-called demythologization debate took off in the 1940s, after Bultmann published his *New Testament and Mythology*, often referred to as one of the most influential theological works of the twentieth century. This famous text begins: "The cosmology of the New Testament is essentially mythical in character."[414] In support of this claim, Bultmann notes

[412] Ibid., 44, italics in original.

[413] Ibid.

[414] Bultmann, "The New Testament and Mythology", 1.

that that the New Testament speaks of a heaven and a hell, of both God and Satan as agents who intervene in history and in the life of individual humans, of miracles and evil spirits, of an impending end and a final judgment, of death as a consequence of the Fall and of sin as something inherited. "All this is the language of mythology", Bultmann concludes.[415] Taken together, these descriptions form the basis of what he terms an essentially "*mythical view of the world*."[416] In accordance with many mythologists before him, Bultmann describes this mythical worldview as inherited from a primitive past. "It is simply the cosmology of a pre-scientific age."[417]

Bultmann goes on to ask: "Can Christian preaching expect modern *man to accept the mythical view of the world as true?*"[418] His answer is no. The worldview of modern man is far too influenced by science for a pre-scientific, mythical view of the world to seem credible. In line with the representatives of evolutionary anthropology, Bultmann does claim that aspects of a primitive-mythical past continue to haunt modernity. Consequently, he concludes that "there are people alive to-day […] who are primitive enough to qualify for an age of mythical thought."[419] In another text, Bultmann asserts: "Of course, there are today some survivals and revivals of primitive thinking and superstition."[420] But by and large, he maintains that the mythical worldview has been superseded by a scientific one.

Does this mean that the New Testament must be rejected in its entirety, as it is completely devoid of relevance to modern people? Bultmann explains that the answer to this question depends on whether the New Testament consists solely of mythology, or if there is something else behind the myths that deserves to be preserved. In *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (1958) he writes: "We must ask whether the eschatological preaching and the mythological sayings as a whole contain a still deeper meaning which is concealed under the cover of

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[415] Ibid., 3. In a much-debated footnote, Bultmann states: "Mythology is the use of imagery to express the other worldly in terms of this world and the divine in terms of human life, the other side in terms of this side. For instance, divine transcendence is expressed as spatial distance." Ibid., 10 n2. One reason why this footnote is contested is that Bultmann does not seem to adhere to his own definition. Roger A. Johnson, *The Origins of Demythologizing: Philosophy and Historiography in the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 7–10.

[416] Bultmann, "The New Testament and Mythology", 2, italics in original.

[417] Ibid., 3.

[418] Ibid., italics in original.

[419] Ibid., 5 n1.

[420] Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1958), 36.

mythology."[421] This question is of course rhetorical. In the end, Bultmann remains convinced that the New Testament contains an eternal truth of continued value. This is why it must be demythologized. "The only honest way of reciting the creeds is to strip the mythological framework from the truth they enshrine."[422]

What, then, does demythologization entail? Although Bultmann repeatedly speaks of "eliminating" myths, demythologizing does not amount to rewriting the New Testament in order to remove all mythical elements. Instead, it involves a kind of *translation*, which should take place in the context of interpreting and communicating the text.[423] Again, this reasoning rests on the postulation of an eternal truth, hidden behind the myths, but possible to convert into a non-mythical language. Referring to earlier, "liberal" theologians like Strauss, Bultmann writes: "Perhaps we may put it schematically like this: whereas the older liberals used criticism to eliminate the mythology of the New Testament, our task today is to use criticism to interpret it."[424]

Bultmann's call to demythologize the New Testament sparked a fierce debate among theologians; in 1942, an assembly of German pastors even denounced his original essay as heretical.[425] In accordance with a discourse on myth rooted in Romanticism, many detractors objected that myth was indispensable to religion, as there was no other medium available to express the transcendent. This was the position adopted by Tillich, who held that there was "no way of speaking about God except in mythological terms."[426] And yet

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[421] Ibid., 18.

[422] Bultmann, "The New Testament and Mythology", 4.

[423] David Fergusson, "Demythologization", in *Religion Past and Present Online: Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion* (Brill, 2011). See also Ulrich H. J. Körtner, "Die Macht des Mythos: Mythos und Entmythologisierung: Paul Tillich und Rudolf Bultmann, in *Das Mythosverständnis Paul Tillichs im Kontext*, ed. Christian Danz and Werner Schüßler (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 146.

[424] Bultmann, "The New Testament and Mythology", 12.

[425] Fergusson, "Demythologization".

[426] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology I* [1951], in *Systematic Theology: Three Volumes in One* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 223. This is where Tillich differs from Bultmann. "Although Bultmann does not want to eliminate myth from biblical texts, he does not share Tillich's view that religion and faith depend on the language of myth as a means of expression even under the conditions of modernity." Körtner, "Die Macht des Mythos", 161, translation mine. [*Zwar will auch Bultmann den Mythos in den biblischen Texten nicht eliminieren, doch teilt er nicht die Ansicht Tillichs, dass Religion und Glaube auch unter den Bedingungen der Moderne auf die Sprache des Mythos als Ausdrucksmittel angewiesen sind.*] See also Christian Danz and Werner Schüßler, "Einleitung", in *Die Macht des Mythos: Das Mythosverständnis Paul Tillichs Im Kontext*, ed. Christian Danz and Werner Schüßler (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 7.

Tillich did not outright reject Bultmann's proposals.[427] Instead, he tried to redefine the meaning of demythologization.

Tillich first addressed the question of myth and religion in the early 1920s, long before Bultmann published his famous text.[428] But his most accessible discussion on the theme is found in *Dynamics of Faith* (1954). There, Tillich defines myths as "symbols of faith combined in stories about divine-human encounters."[429] Such stories, Tillich continues, must be demythologized. However, it is of utmost importance to define "demythologization" correctly. Seeking to distinguish his use of the term from that of Bultmann, Tillich asserts that the call to demythologize the Bible "must be accepted and supported if it points to the necessity of recognizing a symbol as a symbol and a myth as a myth", but it "must be attacked and rejected if it means the removal of symbols and myths altogether." The latter project, Tillich explains, will never succeed, "because symbol and myth are forms of the human consciousness which are always present."[430] In other words, to demythologize the Bible means to make sure that its mythical elements are understood symbolically rather than literally. But it does not require removing its myths or even replacing these with other myths. "All mythological elements in the Bible […] should be recognized as mythological, but they should be maintained in their symbolic form […]. For there is no substitute for the use of symbols and myths: they are the language of faith."[431] Myths that have been demythologized – that is, de-literalized, but not "removed or replaced" – are those that Tillich calls "broken" myths.[432]

To see how Tillich himself proceeds to "break" Christian myths, one may study his writings on the myth of the Fall. In the third volume of *Systematic Theology* (1963), Tillich historicizes this myth by stating that it "is derived from

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[427] In 1955, Tillich wrote: "Absurd is every myth understood literally, and with this I place myself entirely on the side of the demythologization program of my colleague and friend Bultmann, which has become famous." Quoted from, Körtner, "Die Macht des Mythos", 143, translation mine. [*Absurd ist jeder wörtlich verstandene Mythos, und damit stelle ich mich ganz auf die Seite des berühmt gewordenen Entmythologisierungs-Programms meines Kollegen und Freundes Bultmann.*]

[428] See for example Paul Tillich, "Mythos und Metaphysik" [1924], in *Gesammelte Werke. Ergänzungs- und Nachlaßbände. Band 10 Teil 1* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999). In this early text, Tillich defines myth as part of a primitive world view. Ibid., 357.

[429] Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 49. See also Paul Tillich, "Mythos und Mythologie" [1930], in *Gesammelte Werke Band 5: Die Frage Nach dem Unbedingten*, ed. Albrecht Renate (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 1987), 187.

[430] Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 50.

[431] Ibid., 51.

[432] Ibid., 50.

the daily experiences of people under special cultural and social conditions."[433] Yet, he still maintains that it is universally valid. To grasp wherein this validity lies, it is necessary to approach the myth as a myth – that is, to break it. Consequently, he argues against "literalistic" interpretation, stating that theologians must present the Fall as "a symbol for the human situation universally", rather than an event that took place "once upon a time" (quotations marks in original).[434] To be more precise, Tillich reads this myth as symbolizing the fact that humans are "estranged" from their own "essence", not because of Eve's original transgression, but because humans – since they are born free and therefore forced to make choices – can never realize every aspect of their "nature", meaning their full potential.[435] In conclusion, Tillich presents the Fall as a symbol of the human condition as understood from an existentialist perspective.[436]

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To summarize, Bultmann equates demythologization with a translation or interpretation meant to make visible the truth that mythical language distorts, while Tillich argues that demythologizing means "breaking" the myths by de-literalizing them. Yet, neither one wants to remove the biblical myths altogether. Nor are they interested in inventing new religious myths. This is why Daly rejects the position of both. Although she agrees with Tillich and Richardson that myth is integral to religion, she argues that all Christian myths must be discarded. Daly thus advocates remythologizing over demythologizing. But why must the myths of Christianity be discarded, according to Daly? There are two answers to this question. First, we have already seen that she argues that all myths are made up of symbols that are relative, the products of historically contingent circumstances, which means

[433] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology III* [1963], in *Systematic Theology: Three Volumes in One* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 37.

[434] Ibid., 29.

[435] Tillich, *Systematic Theology III*, 38.

[436] Tillich claims that his reading of the myth of the Fall only achieves a "half-way demythologization" (quotation marks in original). This is because he relies here on Bultmann's definition of myth as a narrative in which the transcendent is conceptualized in immanent terms (cf. this thesis, 278 n415). To be more precise, Tillich points out that his translation of this myth into a story about the transition from essence to existence still makes use of a temporal term (i.e., "transition"). "And if we speak in temporal terms about the divine, we still speak in mythical terms, even if such abstract concepts as 'essence' and 'existence' replace mythological states and figures." Ibid., 29.

that it is idolatrous to cling to old myths when the world changes. Second, she claims that Christian myths are particularly problematic because they reflect and reinforce patriarchal relations.

To better understand the second argument, it is necessary to return to the myth of the Fall, which explains both death and the existence of sin with reference to Eve's transgression in the Garden of Eden. In accordance with both Bultmann and Tillich, Daly argues that this tale constitutes an attempt to answer existential questions about the human situation.[437] These questions are perhaps eternal. But the answers, Daly explains, are conditioned by historically specific circumstances. In this respect, she historicizes the biblical myth, which is to say that she argues that it is a product of historically contingent factors. As we have seen, theologians have been historicizing myth since the late eighteenth century. But where her predecessors often presented biblical myths as conditioned by a particular, primitive mode of thought, Daly puts more focus on political circumstances. Consequently, states that the myth of the Fall, "as an exclusively male effort in a male-dominated society […] succeeded primarily in reflecting the defective social arrangements of the time."[438]

Yet the myth of the Fall did not only *reflect* this "defective", patriarchal order. Daly argues that it also helped to reproduce it. "The myth was both symptom and instrument of further contagion. Its great achievement was to reinforce the problem of sexual oppression in society, so that women's inferior place in the universe became doubly justified. Not only did she have her origin in man; she was also the cause of his downfall and his miseries."[439] The fact that this myth refers to God makes it a particularly effective weapon in the patriarchy's arsenal. As we recall, Daly argues that women have had the right to "name" the world stolen from them, meaning that all symbols and symbol systems are male creations, which reflect and reinforce male experiences and interests at the expense of female ones. Expanding on this line of reasoning, Daly writes: "The myth of the Fall can be seen as a prototypic case of false naming." In this case, "the male's viewpoint is metamorphosed into Gods viewpoint. It amounts to a cosmic false naming."[440]

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[437] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 45.

[438] Ibid., 45–46. Cf. Ibid., 48. "The attitude of negativity on the part of male is directed against woman. This, clearly, was the prevailing psychological climate which engendered the myth [of the Fall] and sustained its credibility."

[439] Ibid. 46.

[440] Ibid., 47.

Importantly, Daly maintains that the myth of the Fall *still* helps perpetuate patriarchal oppression. According to her, both Bultmann and Tillich overlook the fact that "in the myth of the Fall the medium is the message."[441] Daly appropriates this way of speaking about myth from Richardson, who in turn appropriates the expression in question from communication theorist Marshall McLuhan (1911–1980).[442] However, her point is not that myth as a medium is problematic, but that the myth of the Fall can be understood as a specific medium, which will continue to convey the same message, even if it demythologized – namely, the message that women are to blame for the predicament of humankind. How is this possible? As pointed out by Sue Waslin, Daly argues that myth operates on two levels: a conscious-conceptual and an unconscious-imaginative one.[443] At the conscious-conceptual level it is possible to "break" the myth – that is, to de-literalize it and extract an alternative, symbolic meaning. But at the unconscious-imaginative level the myth's literal meaning remains unaltered. As Daly notes in reference to the biblical myths that portray God as a masculine, heavenly father:

> Sophisticated thinkers, of course, have never intellectually identified God with a Superfather in heaven. Nevertheless it is important to recognize that even when very abstract conceptualizations of God are formulated in the mind, images survive in the imagination in such a way that a person can function on two different and even apparently contradictory levels at the same time. Thus one can speak of God as spirit and at the same time imagine "him" as belonging to the male sex.[444]

Similarly, one can conceptualize the Fall as a symbol of the human condition yet continue to harbor an unconscious image of woman as especially fallen, reinforced through the myth one believes to read symbolically. In line with Beauvoir, Daly therefore presents patriarchal oppression as sustained in part by images that, because they operate on an unconscious level, can be said to possess a spectral quality.

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[441] Ibid. See also Daly, "Autobiographical Preface", 21–22.

[442] Richardson, *Toward an American Theology*, 69; Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (New York: Gingko Press, [1964] 2013), 12.

[443] Waslin, *The Theoretical Contexts of Mary Daly's Thought*, 161-162.

[444] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 17–18. Daly makes a similar point in her first book. "Of course, no theologian or biblical scholar believes that God literally belongs to the male sex. However, these are bits of evidence that the absurd idea that God is male lingers on in the minds of theologians, preachers and simple believers, on a level which is not entirely explicit or conscious." Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 180.

In accordance with Beauvoir, Daly also argues that the myth of the Fall reflects and reproduces another kind of myth, which she speaks of as "the myth of feminine evil".[445] Unlike the myth of the Fall, this is not a literary myth. Rather, this expression seems to denote what Tae-Yeoun Keum calls a deep myth: a widely and uncritically held belief, embodied both in literary myths and other discourses. This myth is particularly problematic, because it governs not only how men experience women, but how women experience themselves. For this reason, it constitutes an important instrument in the patriarchal toolbox. "As long as the myth of feminine evil is allowed to dominate human consciousness and social arrangements, it provides the setting for women's victimization, by both men and women", Daly writes.[446] Like "the myth of woman", used by Beauvoir, the expression "the myth of feminine evil" might thus be considered a conceptual tool, which Daly makes use of to explain how the myth of the Fall and other literary myths help perpetuate patriarchal oppression.

In conclusion, the myth of the Fall is not a thing of the past. Because its images survive on an unconscious level and helps keep alive the myth of feminine evil, it is very much present here and now. Daly accordingly asserts that this myth has "projected a malignant image of the male-female relationship and of the 'nature' of women that *is still deeply imbedded in the modern psyche*."[447] This argument seems at least partly inspired by Millet, whose book *Sexual Politics* we have seen that Daly ascribes great value.[448] Having stated that the myth of the Fall constitutes a "highly finished version" of the ancient Pandora myth, Millet concludes:

> As the central myth of the Judea-Christian imagination and therefore of our immediate cultural heritage, it is well that we appraise and acknowledge the enormous power it still holds over us even in a rationalist era which has long ago given up literal belief in it while maintaining its emotional assent intact. This mythic version of the female as the cause of human suffering, knowledge,

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[445] This expression appears in Millet's *Sexual Politics.* Millet, in turn, refers to Hoffman R. Hay's book *The Dangerous Sex,* a work that pays particular attention to primitive myths. Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, [1969] 2000), 46, n54; Hays R. Hoffman, *The Dangerous Sex: The Myth of Feminine Evil* (New York: Routledge, 1964).

[446] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 48. The myth of feminine evil has also led women to de-prioritize their own struggles in favor of those of others. Ibid., 54.

[447] Ibid., 45, italics added.

[448] See this thesis, 251.

> and sin is still the foundation of sexual attitudes, for it represents the most crucial argument of the patriarchal tradition in the West.[449]

In a footnote, Millet adds: "It is impossible to assess how deeply embedded in our consciousness is the Eden legend and how utterly its patterns are planted in our habits of thought."[450] As we can see, both Millet and Daly argue that the myth of the Fall is "embedded" in the modern consciousness/psyche, which is why it continues to affect the behaviors of men and women, even if no one takes it to be literally true. And that is why this myth, according to Daly, must be eliminated and replaced by another myth, rather than merely demythologized:

> In view of the fact that the destructive image of women that was reflected in and perpetuated by the myth of the Fall retains its hold over the modern psyche – even though in a disguised and residual manner – it is not adequate for theologians simply to intellectualize and generalize the alleged content of the myth […]. Indeed this approach is intellectually bankrupt and demonic. It amounts merely to abandoning the use of explicitly sexist theological imagery while failing to acknowledge its still persistent impact upon society. Such silence about the destructiveness of the myth's specific content is oppressive because it conveys the message – indeed *becomes* the message – that sexual oppression is a nonproblem.[451]

Daly advances a similar argument in an article called "The Courage to See" (1971), where she focuses on Tillich's above-mentioned reading of the myth of the Fall. There, she explains that Tillich, when he seeks to "break" this myth, "fails to take specifically into account the malignant view of the man-woman relationship which the androcentric myth itself inadvertently 'reveals' and perpetuates." She continues: "Since the residue of this specific content of the myth still deeply affects Western culture in its attitudes, customs and laws […] I would suggest that it is not adequate to talk abstractly of estrangement while religion perpetuates the concrete manifestations of estrangement."[452]

In both these texts, Daly advances a feminist critique not only of Bultmann and/or Tillich, but the demythologization debate as such. To be more precise, she makes visible that both defenders and detractors of Bultmann's original

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[449] Millett, *Sexual Politics*, 52.

[450] Ibid., 52 n67.

[451] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 45, italics in original.

[452] Mary Daly, "The Courage to See", *The Christian Century* 88 (1971): 1100.

appeal help naturalize patriarchal oppression by overlooking or deliberately ignoring the gendered dimension of biblical myth; a point that is almost never mentioned when this influential debate is summarized. At the same time, Daly achieves something more than a critique. By intervening in this debate from a feminist perspective, partly influenced by Millet's writings on myth, she is able to articulate an explanation for the persistence of patriarchal oppression that places biblical myths at its center.

In the next section I will demonstrate how Daly develops this explanation further by engaging in a dialog with theologian and sociologist Peter L. Berger (1929–2017) and Émile Durkheim.

Myths, rituals and the art of forgetting

In chapter five of *Beyond God the Father*, titled "The Bond of Freedom: Sisterhood as Antichurch", Daly cites a passage from Berger's *The Sacred Canopy* (1967), in which the latter explains that social reality is constructed and sustained through three processes, termed "externalization", "objectivation" and "internalization".[453] According to Berger, the first of these terms refers to the "outpouring of human being into the world", in the form of physical or mental activities. The second term denotes the process through which the "products" of these actives attain a certain amount of "facticity" and thus come to confront its original producers as part of objective reality (think, for instance, of a phenomenon such as marriage, which is the product of human activities, but also constitutes a legally established institution that exists independently of us as individuals). Internalization, finally, refers to the "reappropriation" of this very same reality by those who produced it, transforming it "once again from structures of the objective world into structures of the subjective consciousness" (that is, the process through which one comes to experience and relate to, for example, the institution of marriage as something natural, or identify with one's own marital status).[454]

Daly agrees with Berger that this is how social reality is created. But she objects that he has missed something essential. Berger argues that all people partake in the process of externalization and objectivation, which means that "reality" can be seen as our joint creation. But this is not true, according to Daly, who claims that in patriarchy men "do the externalizing", while women

[453] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 135.

[454] Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1969), 4.

have been "conditioned to be the internalizers *per excellence*, a point which the noted sociologist passes over."[455] That is, she argues that women are stopped from participating in the creation of social constructs, but forced to internalize those constructs created by men. "We have been foreigners not only to the fortresses of political power but also to those citadels in which thought processes have been spun out, creating a net of meaning to capture reality", Daly explains.[456] For this reason, she describes women as a "cognitive minority" at "war" with the prevailing sense of reality.[457] To win this battle, women must first of all make sure to "expel what has been internalized", which Daly again likens to a form av exorcism aimed at banishing ghosts and demons.[458] But she also points out that the power of religious myths makes this particularly difficult.

Daly cites Berger, who writes: "Religion legitimates so effectively because it relates the precarious reality construct of empirical societies with ultimate reality."[459] To continue with the same example as above, this means that religion, according to Berger, helps to legitimize social constructions such as marriage by presenting this cultural and legal institution as a holy sacrament instituted by God. "The institutions are thus given a semblance of inevitability, firmness and durability", Berger explains.[460] Importantly, this does not only apply to formal institutions like marriage, but also informal institutions like social roles. For example, Berger states that the role of fatherhood, thanks to the legitimacy bestowed upon it through religion, "confronts the individual as a divinely given facticity, ultimately untouchable". "The point needs hardly be belabored", he continues, "that legitimation of this kind carries with it extremely powerful and built-in sanctions against individual deviance from the prescribed role performances."[461] Although Daly does not quote this passage, the same logic permeates her argument about the importance of religion in maintaining patriarchal sex roles.[462] Daly nevertheless adds that myths serve a particularly important function in this context. Acknowledging that her decision to conceptualize the women's revolution as an "Antichurch" might appear to trivialize this phenomenon by reducing it to an attack on a single

[455] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 135–136.
[456] Ibid., 6–7.
[457] Ibid., 138.
[458] Ibid., 136. See also ibid., 50.
[459] Ibid., 132. Cf. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 32.
[460] Ibid., 36.
[461] Ibid., 38
[462] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 13, 31, 48–49, 139.

cultural institution (the Church, or religion in general), she states: "However, this is to forget the power that religion has over the human psyche, linking the unsteady reality of social construct (objectivations) to ultimate reality through myth."[463] Here, she combines the argument studied above, according to which myths are symbolic narratives embedded in the human psyche, with a feminist appropriation of Berger's social constructivist theory, to explain the persistence of patriarchal oppression.

Daly then goes on to explain that myth sustains sexist rituals. In this context she cites Durkheim, who writes that "the rite" very frequently is "nothing but the myth put into action", which means that a religion without myths would also be one without rites.[464] But what, then, is the function of rituals? In a passage from *The Sacred Canopy* that Daly quotes in part, Berger notes that religious rituals are meant to prevent "forgetfulness" by "reminding" us of past events.[465] Daly also cites Nietzsche, who states: "Whenever man has thought it necessary to create a memory for himself, his effort has been attended with torture, blood, sacrifice."[466] This is how Daly argues that patriarchal myths and rituals have worked: they have never allowed woman to forget that she is inferior to man (who was created in the image of God the Father) and evil, guilty of the Fall.[467] But the truth, according to Daly, is that this fact constitutes a *false* memory. "Sexist ritual is false memory, placing present experience in the context of a history that is in fact a deadly fiction, a pernicious lie."[468] The women's revolution as Antichrist and Antichurch reveals the falseness of this memory and can thus be said to empower women to forget:

> Seen in the positive perspective in which I have presented it, as a spiritual uprising that can bring us beyond the sexist myths, the Antichrist has a natural correlative in the coming of the Antichurch […].[469]

> The women's revolution as Antichurch […] rejects not only the myths of patriarchy but their externalization in ritual. This makes it more threatening than an abstract "intellectual" discussion about "myth and all that."[470]

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[463] Ibid., 138.
[464] Ibid., 140–141; Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 79.
[465] Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 40; Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 142.
[466] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 142; Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 38.
[467] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 46–48, 139–140.
[468] Ibid., 142.
[469] Ibid. 140.
[470] Ibid., 142.

But is forgetfulness the only remedy that Daly can read as recommending in the face of patriarchal myths? What about remembrance and revision? The final section of this chapter aims to answer this question.

Revisionist mythmaking and the importance of memory

In many ways, *Beyond God the Father* is structured by a progressive temporal paradigm, according to which forward movement and transcendence constitute self-obvious objectives. As we have seen, Daly values the women's revolution because she believes that it is liberating women from a repetitive existence governed by patriarchal myths ("the sacred circle of eternal return") and allowing them to step into history. In this respect, her ambition aligns with that of existentialist feminists like Beauvoir, who Julia Kristeva states "aspired to gain a place in linear time as the time of project and history."[471] But it is important to recognize that Daly's second book also accommodates other temporal logics.

To begin with, Daly argues that women who have entered the new space and time "on the boundary" of patriarchy – and who, in this respect, already live in the future – have overcome some of the inherent limitations of linear time. "What it is, in fact, is women's *own* time. It is our *life-time.* It *is* whenever we are living out of our own sense of reality, refusing to be possessed, conquered, and alienated by linear, measured-out, quantitive time of the patriarchal system."[472] Furthermore, we have seen that Daly argues that the women's revolution includes an element of "separation and return", which for example happens when women "establish the significance of events that historians have disregarded, such as the achievements of great women and major landmarks in the history of the oppression of woman."[473] Along similar lines, she states that it is important to break "the *silence* about women's history", by acknowledging the evidence that suggests that patriarchy was preceded by a "universal matriarchy", which Daly describes as an egalitarian society whose religion was centered around "the Great Goddess" (the dim memory of which is preserved in the symbol of Mary).[474]

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[471] Kristeva, "Women's Time", 18.

[472] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 43, italics in original.

[473] Ibid., 27.

[474] Ibid., 93-94, italics in original. Cf. ibid., 96.

I will discuss the original matriarchy thesis in greater detail in the next chapter, as it plays a much bigger role in *Gyn/Ecology*. But it is interesting to note here that Daly, although she argues that women both "remember and look forward to the Golden Age", does not equate the women's revolution with a return to a pre-patriarchal era.[475] "Far from being a 'return' to the past, it implies a qualitative leap toward psychic androgyny."[476] If the women's revolution does include an element of "separation and return", it is, primarily, one that aims to recover repressed *knowledge about the past*, not to recreate the past itself. Such knowledge is valuable, as it – according to Daly – suggests that women were once free and therefore can become so again. Hence, she states that the "Second Coming", needs not be understood as referring to the "return of Christ", but can be used to denote "a new arrival of female presence, once strong and powerful, but enchained since the dawn of patriarchy."[477] This also leads Daly to conclude that the Great Goddess, as a symbol, contains a "prophetic dimension", testifying to what will come, rather than what has been.[478]

Apart from such occasional references to the Great Goddess, *Beyond God the Father* does not spend much time seeking to recall forgotten, pre-patriarchal myths. Daly does, however, re-write biblical ones. This creates certain tensions in her text, about which I will say something below.

Although Daly emphasizes the possibility, indeed the *necessity*, of remythologization, she also stresses that isolated individuals and groups do not exercise any direct power over myth. In an interview from 1971, she explains: "I am assuming that social infrastructures produce ideologies and myths." Invoking Berger, Daly continues: "The death of old symbols and birth of new symbols and myths is, as Peter Berger says, a consequence of social change."[479] It follows that the patriarchal myths will not die as long as patriarchy itself lives; for the myths to change, society must change first. Daly makes a similar point in *Beyond God the Father*, where she notes: "The becoming of new symbols is not a matter that can be decided arbitrarily around a conference table. Rather, symbols grow out of a changing communal situation and experience."[480] This seems to suggest that it is rather pointless for individual

[475] Ibid., 150.
[476] Ibid., 97.
[477] Ibid., 96
[478] Ibid.
[479] Mary Daly and L. I. Stell, "The Ch Purch and Women: An Interview with Mary Daly", *Theology Today* 28, no. 3 (1971): 349.
[480] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 15.

feminists to engage in revisionist myth-making; that they should rather concentrate on bringing about social change, so to help establish the very situation from which new myths will arise. This might explain why Daly – although I have argued that she gives her own narrative about the feminist revolution *a mythical framing*, modelled on other mythologists' descriptions of myth – does not seek to produce entirely new myths, but instead reinterprets existing ones.

With the words of Suchocki, it can be argued that Daly in *Beyond God the Father* offers a "feminist reinterpretation" of large parts of the "Christian mythos" simply by appropriating concepts from the Bible to discuss the women's revolution. But she also rewrites what she herself speaks of as a biblical myth, namely the myth of the Fall. As mentioned earlier, Daly claims that the women's revolution constitutes a "movement beyond patriarchy's good and evil", which is to say that this revolution poses a challenge to patriarchal ideas about good and evil. To illustrate how she then proceeds, allow me to cite a larger portion of a passage already quoted above:

> This movement beyond patriarchy's good and evil can be seen mythically as "the Fall" – the dreaded Fall which is now finally beginning to occur, in which women are bringing ourselves and then the other half of the species to eat the forbidden fruit – the knowledge refused by patriarchal society. This will be a Fall from a false innocence into a new kind of adulthood […] In writing this way, I am tearing the image of "the Fall" from its context in patriarchal religion. […] I am now suggesting that there were intimations in the original myth – not consciously intended – of a dreaded future. That is, one could see the myth as prophetic of the real Fall that was yet on its way, dimly glimpsed. In that dreaded event, women reach for knowledge and, finding it, share it with men, so that together we can leave the delusory paradise of false consciousness and alienation. In ripping the image of the Fall from its old context we are also transvaluating it. That is, its meaning is divested of its negativity and becomes positive and healing.[481]

The first thing we should note about this quote is that Daly here displaces the "original" myth's temporality. A tale that, according to her reading, has been used to explain and thereby justify something in the present (the subordinate status of women) by invoking an event said to have taken place in the past (Eve's transgression), is now transformed into a prophetic story about a future that is yet to come. In this respect, Daly can be said to convert the myth of the

[481] Ibid., 67–68.

Fall from an origin myth to an eschatological myth, which implicitly frames the women's movement as an eschatological community.

As the passage just quoted contains not one but two references to the work of Nietzsche ("beyond patriarchy's good and evil" and "transvaluating it"), it also seems reasonable to read this re-written myth in the context of the anti-Christian but myth-affirmative tradition associated with the latter. Such a reading helps us see two things. First, that Daly's revisionist myth-making aims to undermine the very guilt-ridden, life-denying morality that Nietzsche accuses Christianity of having established. Second, that it can be understood as accomplishing this by fusing what Nietzsche calls the "feminine" origin myth of Christianity with the "masculine" myth of the Greeks. As we recall, Nietzsche claims that the Prometheus myth is superior to the myth of the Fall, as the former implies that humankind acquired what they most desired through an active, courageous act whose negative consequences were stoically accepted, while the latter myth suggests the evil entered the world because of a supposedly "feminine" mendaciousness and openness to seduction. In contrast, Daly's re-written version of the myth of the Fall proclaims that women, like Prometheus, deliberately steal the source of knowledge from self-appointed gods and share it with all humans. This paraphrase does not only challenge the patriarchal conception of women (who Daly presents as active instead of deceived, saviors instead of sinners), but also the biblical notion of beginnings. For whereas the Christian myth revolves around the loss of original innocence, Daly speaks of a new beginning, which takes place in the present rather than the past and entails a coming of age instead of a loss.

And yet, by engaging in revisionist myth-making, Daly does not break all ties with the past. On the contrary, by re-actualizing biblical concepts and myths, she remains dependent on what she criticizes, which her strategy does not allow one to forget. In this sense, her approach still has something in common with that of Bultmann and other theologians of demythologization. Of course, Daly differs from Bultmann in that she does not claim to extract an existential truth always implicit in the myth but hidden behind its mythical language. Instead, she openly states that she offers a radical reinterpretation, which reads the myth of the Fall as a message that was never consciously intended. In addition, Daly does not merely reinterpret the "original" myth. She also rewrites it, by telling another version of it, in which the "real Fall" is said to be happening right now.[482] However, if it is true that mythical images,

[482] Note, however, that Daly still maintains that there "were intimations" of this "real Fall" in the "original" myth, which seems to suggest that the latter retains a value that is independent of

as she herself claims, can survive unaltered in the unconscious, even after having been rejected or reinterpreted on the conscious-conceptual level, one must ask whether Daly, by speaking of a Fall and of forbidden fruits, does not risk reactivating and thus reinforcing the very "destructive image of women" that she seeks to eradicate? This question raises a larger one, around which my entire study can be said to revolve. *To what extent is it possible to convey one's own message when one is forced to speak through or appropriate the words of others?*

Here, it may suffice to repeat that there is a tension in Daly's text, linked to the fact that she rejects the past in favor of a radically different future, yet constantly returns to and reuses biblical concepts and myths with particularly long and fraught histories. Her way of dealing with the myth of the Fall is but one example of this. This tension can of course be construed as a flaw. At the very least, Suchocki is correct to state that it demonstrates that Daly is much more "engrained" within the Christian tradition than she herself acknowledges.[483] Still, the tension in question also points towards the intricacies of myth itself, as this phenomenon is defined by Daly. For if myths function as she claims that they do, it seems as if they *must* generate a contradictory response. That is, if patriarchal oppression is sustained by age-old myths "embedded" in the unconscious, feminists must of course try to reduce the continued influence of these narratives. And yet, it is perhaps *because* they remain influential that Daly is reluctant to abandon them to her opponents, but instead tries to work through them, to utilize their historically acquired charge. In this respect, the stories that Daly calls "myths" can be said have something in common with the *concepts of myth* derived from the scholarly field called mythology, which is at the center of this thesis.

her new version. Daly develops a similar argument when she states that the image of Mary may be "a foretelling image, pointing to the future becoming of women". Ibid., 84.

[483] Suchoki, "The Idea of God in Feminist Philosophy", 59.

10. Myths of origin

In Daly's third and most famous work, *Gyn/Ecology* from 1978, the importance ascribed to myth is even more prominent than in her previous two books. Alongside language, myth is now presented as the very foundation of patriarchal oppression. In chapter one, titled "Deadly Deception: Mystification Through Myth", Daly notes that the word "myth" is often used to name widespread falsehoods, dismissed as *mere* myths.[484] But this, she objects, is a "cliché" that "belittles the power of myth." For myth is no common misconception, but an extremely potent social force. "Patriarchy", writes Daly, "perpetuates its deception through myth."[485] Consequently, she argues that feminists must seek to free society from patriarchal myths: to challenge the "male myth-masters" and "transmute the base metals of man-made myth" by practicing what she terms "myth-breaking".[486] And yet, Daly does not reject myth altogether. On the contrary, she insists that feminists need myth. In support of this claim, she develops a comprehensive and relatively coherent, distinctively feminist theory of myth.[487]

The premise of this feminist theory of myth is that all patriarchal myths constitute "reversals" of much older "gynocentric" myths, stemming from a pre-historic matriarchy whose members worshiped female deities.[488] Daly explains that the memory of this ancient civilization, overthrown by men at the dawn of written history, has since been repressed, along with that of what she terms women's "original" integrity. To recover the memory of this repressed past and help women re-member their "dismembered" integrity constitutes one of *Gyn/Ecology*'s primary aims. If *The Church and The Second Sex* was a book about *reform* and *Beyond God the Father* rotated around *revolution*, Daly's third work thus places much more emphasis on *remembrance*. This does not mean that she has given up her hope of a different future. But whereas Daly in her earlier work – often though not always – argued that the realization of this goal required forward movement, she now accentuates the importance of return. This shift is linked to the fact that Daly in *Gyn/Ecology*

[484] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 43.
[485] Ibid., 44.
[486] Ibid., 3, 34, 50.
[487] I use the epithet "feminist" here to signal that the focus of this theory of myth is on gendered inequalities, conceptualized as a problem that must be addressed. Cf. this thesis, 33 n83.
[488] Ibid., 47.

attributes more weight than before to the original matriarchy thesis, first advanced by Jakob Johann Bachofen.

The matriarchy thesis has sometimes been referred to as a feminist "origin myth", which (much like its Christian counterpart, the myth of the Garden of Eden) both tells of a paradise lost and explains why that paradise perished; the difference being that this myth shifts the blame from Eve and woman to patriarchy and man.[489] The merits of such myths constitute a highly contested issue, both among feminist theorists and other scholars. To give but one example, we may note that Paul Tillich, with whom Daly often enters into conversation with, argued that myths of origin constitute a serious obstacle to emancipatory political aspirations.

According to Tillich, origin myths are always attempts to answer the question of where one comes from, which they usually do by reference to a particular place (the soil), race (the origin of blood) or social group.[490] As the question of "Whence" arises from the human situation itself (that is, from the fact that we humans do not create ourselves, but are "thrown" into existence), Tillich denies that we can ever abolish all myths of origin.[491] Even so, origin myths become a problem when the question of Whence is prioritized over that of "Whither" – that is, when less weight is given to what "ought to be" than what has been or is. For to prioritize the former question over the latter is to deny that we humans are free and that this freedom "demands" of us that we seek to transcend the given toward a not-yet.[492] Tillich consequently concludes that emancipatory movements must strive to "break" myths of origins.

Tillich wrote this in 1933, when the National Socialists' morbid obsession with origins was beginning to have tangible effects. But the notion of origin myths as inherently problematic has endured to this day, partly because the political developments of the twentieth century seemed to confirm the worst fears of Tillich and other critics. This is evident if one considers the feminist critique of the matriarchal thesis. For example, in *The Myth of Matriarchy: Why*

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[489] Keating AnaLouise, *Transformation Now!*, 116, 142; Cynthia Eller, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Won't Give Women a Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 5, 180–188.

[490] Paul Tillich, *The Socialist Decision*, trans. Franklin Sherman (Washinton: University Press of America, Inc, [1933] 1977), 13–15. On the concept of myth in this work, see also A. James Reimer, "Nation and the Myth of Origin in Paul Tillich's Radical Social Thought", *Consensus* 14, no. 2 (1988): 43–47; Raymond F. Bulman, "'Myth of Origin,' Civil Religion and Presidential Politics", *Journal of Church and State* 33, no. 3 (1991): 526–527.

[491] Tillich, *The Socialist Decision*, 3.

[492] Ibid., 4–5.

an Invented Past Won't Give Women a Future (2000), Cynthia Eller concludes that "origin stories tend to reduce historically specific facts and values to timeless archetypes", which means that "the solutions provided by origin thinking are not tailored to specific cultural environments".[493] In addition, she notes that "origin thinking" is often characterized by a nostalgia for "a lost past", as well as for something precultural and "natural", commonly associated with woman as such.[494]

In many ways, Daly's third book seems to confirm both Tillich's and Eller's misgivings about the emancipatory potential of origin myths. As Rosi Braidotti points out, Daly's ideal future, as it is presented in *Gyn/Ecology*, remains hierarchical, albeit with women on top instead of men.[495] It also appears to exclude trans women (conceptualized as man-made "substitutes") and women perceived as "male-identified" or unenlightened ("female tokens" or "painted birds"), which points to the survival of a highly restrictive concept of womanhood.[496] This suggests that Daly is unable to envision a future radically different from the past and present.

But are myths of origins, as defined by the scholars discussed here, inherently problematic from a feminist perspective? As will become apparent from my analysis of Donna Haraway's "cyborg myth", presented in the next part-study, not all stories centered around origins are nostalgic, or prioritize the question of Whence over that of Whither. This insight prompts us to ask if there might be an additional reason as to why Daly appears incapable of envisioning a radically different future, apart from her preoccupation with remembrance and origins? Towards the end of this chapter, I suggest that we should also consider Daly's tendency to approach certain myths as absolute truths.

More generally, this chapter demonstrates how Daly conceptualizes the nature and function of myth in *Gyn/Ecology*, as well as how this work relates to

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[493] Eller, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory,* 183.

[494] Ibid., 183–184. See also ibid., 65–66.

[495] Rosi Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance: A Study of Women in Contemporary Philosophy* (Oxford: Polity, 1991) 207. In a later book, Braidotti speaks of Daly in more positive terms, comparing the "force of affirmation and quality of intensity" in Gyn/Ecology with that found in the works by Irigaray. Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 130.

[496] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 57, 71, 333–336. For a more detailed critique of Daly's dismissive attitude towards "painted birds" and "Other women", see Ann J. Morey-Gaines, "Metaphor and Radical Feminism: Some Cautionary Comments on Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology*", *Soundings* 65, no. 3 (1982): 347–348; Morris, *The Pirate's Fiancée*, 42–44.

other texts in the mythological network. To accomplish this, I analyze the (mythic) structure of *Gyn/Ecology* and the feminist theory of myth Daly therein presents. I also read Daly's writings on myth in the context of the larger intra-feminist debate about the matriarchal thesis, which I argue is both *about* and *facilitated by* (different concept of) myth.

As in previous chapters, I begin by addressing the context in which the work I study was written.

From androgyny to difference

In the preface to *Gyn/Ecology*, Daly explains that this book "voyages beyond *Beyond God the Father*."[497] That there is something distinctive about the work in question is evident from the first page, where one encounters a much more lyrical language, characterized by an abundance of erratic capitalization, neologisms and wordplay. Yet this is not the most important change. *Gyn/Ecology* is also marked by a greater emphasis on alleged differences between women and men, where men and masculinity are consistently described in negative terms, while (cis) women and "femaleness" are discussed in positive terms.[498] For example, Daly states that "female energy is essentially biophilic" (meaning life-loving), while maleness is linked to "necrophilic" tendencies.[499] She also associates women with nature and men with "technology", presented as a weapon that threatens the survival of nature as well as women.[500] "Women and our kind – the earth, the sea, the sky – are the real but unacknowledged objects of attack", Daly states.[501] This constitutes a clear departure from the logic that structures her previous works.

As we recall, *Beyond God the Father* envisioned an androgynous society as the women's revolution's ultimate goal, where both women and men would be

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[497] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, xlv.

[498] Daly distinguishes between "femininity" and "femaleness". See ibid., 68.

[499] Ibid., 11, 21, 61, 355. Daly might have borrowed the notion of a specific, female energy (or "gynergy") from her friend Emily Culpepper, who advances this idea in Emily Culpepper, "Female History/Myth Making", *The Second Wave* 4, no. 1 (1975): 14, italics in original. Cf. Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 12–13.

[500] Cf. J Halberstam, "Automating Gender: Postmodern Feminism in the Age of the Intelligent Machine", *Feminist Studies* 17, no. 3 (1991): 450–451, 454; Catriona Sandilands, *The Good-Natured Feminist: Ecofeminism and the Quest for Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 9.

[501] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 28. Note that this particular statement is not about technology, but patriarchal oppression as such. For passages in which Daly associates women with nature and/or men with technology, see ibid., xlv, 28, 53, 57, 61–63, 70–71.

free to develop ostensibly feminine and masculine traits, thereby becoming "whole" persons. By contrast, the author of *Gyn/Ecology* explicitly rejects the very word "androgyny", stating that it conveys something like "John Travolta and Farrah Fawcett-Majors scotch-taped together".[502] In this work, the goal of feminism is thus conceptualized very differently: as assisting women in overcoming an imposed femininity, to instead realize what is sometimes framed as an inner, authentic femaleness.

This increased emphasis on sexual differences can be identified already in the post-Christian reintroduction to the 1975 edition of *The Church and the Second Sex*. Toward the end of this text, Daly notes that her younger self, with Beauvoir, had hoped that both women and men would learn to "set their pride beyond sexual differentiation".[503] Commenting on this hope, Daly now states: "The time had not yet arrived when women would learn to set pride not only beyond but *in* the sexual differentiation – not in the differentiation as defined by the patriarchs ('the eternal feminine'), but as defined by *us*."[504] Apparently, that time *had* come by 1975. It is therefore interesting to ask what happened in Daly's life and in society at large during this period?

To understand why many U.S. feminists, including Daly, in the second half of the 1970s began to emphasize sexual differences, it is crucial to consider the mounting influence of the women's spirituality movement, especially groups advocating the original matriarchy thesis.[505] Naturally, this movement was far

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[502] Ibid., xlv. Around 1975, several feminists who had previously embraced this concept began to question the value of "androgyny". See for example, Mary Daly, "The Qualitative Leap Beyond Patriarchal Religion", *Quest: A Feminist Quarterly* 1(4) (1975): 45–48; Janice G. Raymond, "The Illusion of Androgyny", *Quest: A Feminist Quarterly* 2 (1975); Adrienne Rich, "Natural Resources" [1976], in *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems* 1974-1977 (New York: Norton, 1978). Cameron Partridge argues that Daly's and Raymond's "anti-androgyny arguments extended their anti-trans critique, functioning as a barely veiled form of transmisogyny." Partridge, "'Scotch-taped Together'", 69.

[503] Daly, "Feminist Postchristian Introduction", 47.

[504] Ibid., italics in original.

[505] In 1974, the feminist-lesbian journal *WomanSpirit Magazine* was founded, which was the first American journal dedicated to feminism and spirituality. The first conference on this theme, titled "Through the Looking Glass: A Gynenergetic Experience", was organized two years later, in 1976. It took place in Boston and attracted around 1500-2000 attendants – one of whom was Daly, who was among the keynote speakers. Dijk Denise, "The Goddess Movement in the U. S. A.: A Religion for Women Only", *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 18 (1988): 259–260; Betty Roszak, "The Spirit of the Goddess", in *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, ed. Theodore Roszak, Mary E. Gomes, and Allen D. Kanner (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995), 291. Note that Dijk wrongly states that the conference took place in 1975. Information about the conferences from one of its organizers, Gloria Greenfield, along with a program that

from homogeneous. Still, one thing many of its members did have in common was a strong interest in what they saw as typically female. This is particularly true of feminist matriarchalists.[506] In the first instance, their focus was on women's allegedly unique history and religion.[507] But whether it was born out of or fueled by it, this focus often coincided with a belief in the existence of distinctively female values and a female nature.

One work that was instrumental in popularizing the matriarchy thesis among U.S. feminists was *The First Sex* (1974), by librarian Elizabeth Gould Davis, to whom Daly refers multiple times.[508] The premise on which this work rests is that the patriarchy was preceded by a now forgotten matriarchy, the memory of which has been preserved in literary myth. This thesis was first advanced by Bachofen in the mid-nineteenth century. But whereas Bachofen depicted the shift from matriarchy to patriarchy as a favorable development, through which superior masculine values triumphed over inferior feminine ones, Davis describes the matriarchal era as a golden age and the patriarchal "revolution" that ended it as a fall into perdition.

In support of the claim that the matriarchal era was far superior to what followed it, Davis invokes the different biology of women and men. According to her, "man is but an imperfect female."[509] Davis moreover claims that the entire human race originally consisted solely of females, who reproduced through parthenogenesis.[510] The emergence of males, defined as individuals with one or two Y chromosomes, is thus described as the result of an unfavorable "mutation", which severely damaged the race's chances of prosperity. "Maleness remains a recessive genetic trait", Davis asserts.[511] In retrospect, Daly confirms that she was so swayed by this line of reasoning that she in the 1970s "commonly" referred to men as "*mutes*", meaning mutants. "I

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lists Daly as one of the speakers is available on the Jewish Women's Archive's website, accessible via this link: https://jwa.org/feminism/greenfield-gloria-1

[506] On the origins of feminist matriarchalism, see Eller, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine: A Western Religious History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 274–297.

[507] Eller, "Relativizing the Patriarchy", 281.

[508] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 92, 94; Daly, "Feminist Postchristian Introduction", 32 n5; Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 348.

[509] Elizabeth Gould Davis, *The First Sex* (New York: Putnam, 1971), 34.

[510] Ibid., 34–35. This idea was promoted by Bertha Eckstein-Diener (also known as Helen Diner) in her *Mothers and Amazons: The First Feminine History of Culture*, trans. John Philip Lundin (New York: Julian press, [1932] 1965), 3–4.

[511] Davis, *The First Sex*, 35.

do think", she explains in the same interview from 2002, "that there's something wrong with that life form, to be honest."[512]

Daly's increased reliance on ideas associated with the women's spirituality movement and feminist matriarchalism, as represented by Davis and similar theorists, helps explain why she in *Gyn/Ecology* places greater emphasis on the differences between men and women compared to her earlier works. But why did such ideas grow more popular with Daly and U.S. feminists in general around the mid-1970s?

The increased popularity of feminist spiritually and matriarchalism around this time can be linked to the rise of what is commonly referred to as cultural feminism.[513] The term "cultural feminism" differs from "radical feminism" in that few women have self-identified as cultural feminists. Rather, this term has been used as a pejorative, to denote feminists said to espouse essentialist ideas and prioritize the establishment of a separatist female counterculture over the material political struggle. As a historiographical concept, it is thus fraught with certain difficulties. But it remains a fact that more and more women, in the early 1970s, began to emphasize the value of developing a distinctively female culture.[514] It follows that the pursuit of specifically feminist and/or female spirituality can be of viewed as one aspect of this larger trend. Since the matriarchy thesis rests on the assumption that a thoroughly female religion and culture had already existed and should therefore be possible to recreate, it is also easy to understand why this particular belief was embraced by many so-called cultural feminists.

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[512] Daly and Madsen, "The Thin Thread of Conversation, 346, italics in original.

[513] Eller, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*, 16. The link between cultural feminism and feminist matriarchalism was highlighted as early as 1975, in Brooke Williams, "The Retreat to Cultural Feminism", in *Feminist Revolution: An Abridged Edition with Additional Writings*, ed. Sarachild Kathie (New York: Random House New York, 1975), 81.

[514] See the many examples cited by Echols in *Daring to Be Bad*, esp. 243–272. Echols argues that this development was partly due to deepening divisions within the feminist movement itself, in the sense that many cultural feminists hoped that a female culture, built around what women had in common and what separated them from men, could help unify a movement that becoming increasingly fractional. Ibid., 244. In addition, these women often saw the creation of a female culture as a necessary step towards realizing the women's revolution. In 1973, author and feminist activist Rita Mae Brown (1944–) even argued that feminists, in this regard, had something to learn from the Nazis. These, she wrote "organized an alternative culture within the German culture and they took over in ten years. It's shocking. Nazism was an alternative culture built on certain emotional things that already existed. This is a negative event, but the process worked." Quoted from ibid., 271–272.

Both feminist matriarchalism and the emergence of cultural feminism may, in turn, be understood against the background of a more general pattern, common to many radical movements of that time. As philosopher Amber L. Katherine points out, one can identity a parallel between what transpired among feminists in the 1970s and a development that took place within the civil rights movement a decade earlier. To challenge the long-standing hegemony of biological racism in the U.S., civil rights activists had initially stressed the fundamental sameness and abstract equality of white and black Americans. This began to change around the mid-1960s, largely as a result of the Black Power movement. For example, Stokely Carmichael (1941–1998), one of this movement's key figures, argued that black Americans, in order to end institutional racism, had to develop a positive collective identity and race consciousness, which could facilitate more radical politics, capable of fundamentally transforming society.[515] To produce such an identity and consciousness, black Americans had to recognize and embrace what they, *as* black American, had in common and could feel proud about. This, in turn, meant that they must learn their own history and recover their own culture, which their white oppressors, according to Carmichael, had sought to suppress. In *Black Power: Politics of Liberation in America* (1967), Carmichael and political scientist Charles V. Hamilton (1923–2023) observed:

> It is absolutely essential that black people know this history, that they know their roots, that they develop an awareness of their cultural heritage. Too long have they been kept in submission by being told that they had no culture, no manifest heritage, before they landed on the slave auction blocks in this country.[516]

Such arguments helped shift the focus of many black activists, from sameness and abstract equality to racial differences.[517]

In effect, it is possible to detect an analogy between how representatives of the Black Power movement argued in the late 1960s and how some feminists, including Daly, began reasoning nearly a decade later. According to

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[515] Ambler L. Katherine, "'A Too Early Morning': Audre Lorde's 'An Open Letter to Mary Daly' and Daly's Decision Not to Respond in Kind", in *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Daly*, ed. Sarah Lucia Hoagland and Marilyn Frye (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2000), 277–278.

[516] Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967), 38.

[517] Katherine, "'A Too Early Morning'", 279.

Katherine, this parallel is partly due to the fact that radical movements active in the 1960s and 1970s shared a common "pattern of thinking and organizing", built on the assumption that there is one primary system of oppression (race supremacy or patriarchy) and that "resistance to assimilation within this system is achieved through identification with a difference (race or gender) that challenges and departs from the dominant order."[518] In addition, it is worth noting that feminists like Davis were directly influenced by the Black Power movement. That is why she herself establishes a link between her project and that of the latter, stating: "In order to restore women to their ancient dignity and pride, they must be taught their own history, as the American blacks are being taught theirs."[519]

Finally, there are biographical circumstances, specific to Daly, that may help to explain why she, during the latter half of the 1970s, began to afford more weight to ideas promoted by Davis and likeminded feminist matriarchalists. In her memoirs, Daly explains that 1975 marked a decisive turning point in her life and career. Employing the idiosyncratic language that has defined her work ever since the publication of *Gyn/Ecology* , she proclaims: "It was a startling Time, characterized by a convergence of many events which Moved me into utterly New dimensions of thinking, living, loving, writing, being."[520]

In February of that year, Daly applied for promotion to the rank of full professor, a request that Boston College denied, citing her lack of academic merit.[521] This caused widespread protests, both among her students and other feminist scholars around the country. A rally was organized in one of Boston College's gymnasiums, attended by around 800 women. Daly claims that this protest, combined with Boston College's unwillingness to recognize the value of her achievement "fomented enormous explosions" in her psyche.[522] For one thing, it caused her to rethink her approach to scholarly work. As neither her two monographs nor her many articles published in scientific journals were acknowledged as sufficiently scholarly, she felt "liberated" from the demand to conform to established academic norms.[523] More generally, it led her to distance herself from the world of academia in favor of extra-academic

[518] Ibid., 284.

[519] Davis, *The First Sex*, 18. Cf. Joanne H. Wright, *Origin Stories in Political Thought: Discourses on Gender, Power, and Citizenship* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 142.

[520] Daly, *Outercourse*, 200.

[521] Ibid., 206.

[522] Ibid., 207.

[523] Ibid., 207–208.

contexts.[524] In fact, *Gyn/Ecology* was written during an unpaid leave of absence from Boston College, partly financed by a "substantial" grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, which was awarded in March of 1976.[525]

Admittedly, Daly cites Davis and invokes the notion of an original matriarchy already in *Beyond God the Father*.[526] But this thesis is assigned much more weight in *Gyn/Ecology*.[527] And where it, in the former work, was presented as a plausible possibility, it is now framed as an absolute truth, despite the fact that it received very little support from empirically oriented academics. I argue that this development can be understood as related to her withdrawing from the world of academia and distancing herself from its standards of scientificity. Already in her second book, Daly warned women against becoming "*super*-cautious and hesitant" when evaluating the evidence presented in support of the ancient matriarchy. "It is essential to be aware", she wrote, "that we have been conditioned to fear proposing any theory that supports feminism."[528] But in her later works, which Daly states "can rightly be called anti-academic", this stance gives way to a more thorough rejection of academic norms.[529] "The acceptable/unexceptional circular reasonings of academics are caricatures of motion", Daly writes. "The 'products' are more often than not a set of distorted mirrors, made to seem plausible through the mechanisms of male bonding."[530] Later, she concludes: "While it may be hard to unlearn the lessons of academia – especially hard for those of us who earned 'honors' for learning them – it is honorable to unlearn them."[531] These statements can be compared to Daly's argument in *The Church and the Second Sex*, where she invoked "science" in in support of her evolutionary, explicitly anti-essentialist history and anthropology, but portrayed "pseudo-science" as feminism's enemy.

The argument here is not that Daly strays from the "truth" just because she abandons the mainstream of academia, or that she was necessarily closer to it

[524] Ibid., 208. "I knew fully, then, that my scholarship and originality would never be adequately rewarded within the 'system,' and that my Rewards would be utterly other, chiefly in the work itself and in what this communicated to other women."

[525] Ibid., 212.

[526] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 192–195.

[527] This does not mean that Davis herself is devoted more space. On the contrary, Daly only mentions *The First Sex* in passing, along with several other feminist classics. But the ideas Davis helped popularize permeate *Gyn/Ecology* in a more tangible way.

[528] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 94, italics in original.

[529] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, xlvii.

[530] Ibid., 23.

[531] Ibid., 49.

in her earlier works, where she presented her own position as being in accordance with the latest scientific findings. If historians of science have proven anything, it is that adherence to academic disciplinary norms does not necessarily produce true statements, while it, as Michel Foucault notes, "is always possible for the truth to be told in the wilderness beyond the discipline."[532] But if one wants to understand why Daly, during the latter half of the 1970s, came to embrace arguments that in some respects seem diametrically opposed to those advanced in her earlier work, these biographical facts are certainly not unimportant. The weakly supported historical claims and often biologically deterministic view of human nature promoted by parts of the women's spirituality movement can and have been espoused by individuals inside as well as outside academia. Yet, it seems reasonable to assume that Daly, who initially promoted conflicting ideas, came to accord more weight to these theories in part because her sense of being oppressed by academia aroused a massive distrust of the scientific community with which she previously identified.

The mythical journey

Daly explains that *Gyn/Ecology* charts an "Otherworld Journey", which will help women to discover and create a "world other than patriarchy."[533] This metaphor structures the entire work, which is divided into three parts, each of which represents a "Passage" guarded by "demons", "ghosts" and "evil spirits" that the reader/journeyer must "name" to vanquish.[534] The first part/passage consists of two chapters and deals with "the barriers of obsolete myths which block vision", including ancient, Christian and post-Christian myths.[535] In the second part/passage, Daly analyzes the "reenactment" of these myths in violent "rituals", through which women have been drawn into "emotional complicity" with their oppressors.[536] This part consists of five chapters, each addressing one such ritual: the Indian practice of Suttee (widow burning), the Chinese custom of foot binding, African genital mutilation, European witch burnings and American gynecology (the latter of which Daly calls a male science designed to control women, and contrasts with the female tradition of

[532] Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse" [1971], in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young, trans. Ian McLeod (Boston: Routledge, 1981), 61.
[533] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 1.
[534] Ibid., 1–2, 29–30, 229.
[535] Ibid., 32.
[536] Ibid., 109.

midwifery).[537] Finally, in the third part/passage, which consists of three chapters, the reader/journeyer "moves deeper into the Otherworld", which means that "she", according to Daly, develops a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of patriarchal oppression and the preconditions for resistance.[538]

On the most general level, Daly describes this metaphorical journey as one from the "father's foreground" to the "Background". The first of these terms refers to the "surface consciousness" implanted by patriarchy.[539] Put differently, the "father's foreground" denotes an internalized, false world-view and self-image, fabricated by men and foisted on women, in order to conceal and legitimize patriarchal oppression. Paraphrasing one of Plato's myths, Daly likens this (psychic) place to a "cave", which she also describes as filled with "holographs", meaning "flat" images of women and other phenomena that actually possess great depth.[540] "Thus the monitors of the foreground, the male myth-masters, fashion prominent and eminently forgettable images of women in their art, literature, and mass media – images intended to mold women for male purposes."[541]

By contrast, the "Background" is likened to a place in the "sun" where women have access to the truth, about the world and themselves.[542] But this too is primarily a psychic place, one that women reach by reclaiming something already present within them.[543] The "deep Background", writes Daly, "is the divine depth of the Self"; each woman's "homeland" and the journey's ultimate goal.[544] "The feminist journey into the wildly sacred Background", she states elsewhere, "is movement into wholeness/integrity."[545] The concept of "integrity" used here is borrowed from Jay Raymond, who employs this term to denote "an original unity from which no part may be taken".[546] Along similar lines, Daly speaks of an "original integrity" that women recover when they "re-member" their Selves – that is, when they free

[537] Ibid., 111, 224–229.
[538] Ibid., 32.
[539] Ibid., 26.
[540] Ibid., 8, 50.
[541] Ibid., 3.
[542] Ibid., 3, 8.
[543] Cf. Marjorie Suchocki, "The Challenge of Mary Daly", *Encounter* 41, no. 4 (1980): 314–315. "This means that the background [according to Daly] is the depth of women's inner Self, and that the journey is an inward journey".
[544] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 2, 26.
[545] Ibid., 48.
[546] Raymond, "The Illusion of Androgyny", 64; Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 21.

themselves form the alienating or "dis-membering" false self that patriarchy has forced them to internalize. In this respect, the journey towards the Background entails a return, not to a particular time, but to a lost state: an unalienated, female identity, that is both personal and collective.

The fact that Daly speaks of the Background as the "divine" depth of the Self is important, as this makes visible an important shift in her understanding of what divinity is. Whereas in *Beyond God the Father*, she discussed the divine in terms of a transcendent God, Daly now conceptualizes it as an immanent Goddess, which exists within each individual woman. In other words, the divine is no longer understood as something outside women and men, the "unfolding" of which all participate in, but a potentiality inside women, which they realize by becoming their authentic female Selves.[547] Thus, the journey towards the Background is also a journey towards the divine, symbolized by the Goddess.[548]

How, then, can women reach the Background and become their authentic or real, divine Selves? Daly argues that the false consciousness that constitutes the foreground is established and sustained by means of myth and language; two phenomena sometimes merge into one. Citing philosopher Henri Bergson (1859–1941), she declares:

> "The way back to reality is to destroy our perceptions of it", said Bergson. Yes, but these deceptive perceptions were/are implanted through language – the all-pervasive language of myth, conveyed overtly and subliminally through religion, "great art", literature, the dogmas of professionalism, the media, grammar.[549]

A bit further down, Daly adds that women "can find our way back to reality by destroying the false perceptions of it inflicted upon us by the language and myths of Babel", where "Babel" refers to the "babble" of men.[550] Stated otherwise, she argues that women, to leave the foreground and reach the Background, must do away with patriarchal myths. As in her previous works, this is likened to an "exorcism" through which women expel the false images (or "holographs") that they have internalized and therefore are "possessed"

[547] Suchoki, "The Idea of God in Feminist Philosophy", 60–61.
[548] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 4.
[549] Ibid., 3.
[550] Ibid., 4.

by.[551] "Holographs […] typify the contents of patriarchal myth. Thus myth-breaking is breaking the projector of these illusions", Daly writes.[552] But again, Daly does not want to eliminate all myths. For behind the false myths of the foreground, there are other, true ones. Ultimately, her work is "concerned with the Background, most specifically of language and myth, which is disguised by the fathers' foreground fixations."[553]

In sum, myths are both what the journey leads away from and what it leads to. The reader/journeyer is moving away from the myths of the foreground, towards those of the Background. Women who journey are accordingly described as "Myth-living/loving", while the wholeness they achieve is termed a "mythic wholeness/holiness".[554] At the same time, myths are conceptualized as one of the means by which the journey itself becomes possible. Because myths are said to preserve the memory of a pre-patriarchal past when women were not yet dismembered, Daly argues that they can assist women seeking to re-member their original integrity or female identity by helping them remember it.[555] In line with early Romantics and Friedrich Nietzsche, Daly thereby establishes a link between myth and identity, according to which (authentic) myths both reflect and reinforce – by reminding one of – what individuals who belong to a particular group have in common.

Still, myths are not *just* something to be remembered, according to Daly. Citing author and feminist philosopher Monique Wittig's (1935–2003) novel *Les Guérillères* (1969), she proclaims: "Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent."[556] Besides "myth-breaking", Daly thus encourages women to practice what she terms "feminist myth-making".[557] Indeed, my reading

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[551] Ibid., 1–3, 30–31, 213, 342. See also ibid., 381. "It is axiomatic for Amazons that all external/internalized influences, such as myths, names, ideologies, social structures, which cut of the flow of the Self's original movement should be pared away."

[552] Ibid., 50. Citing Emily Culpepper, Daly also explains that "seeing through the controlling (male) myths is the beginning of living." Ibid., 56.

[553] Ibid., 11.

[554] Ibid., 50.

[555] A similar argument is advanced by Raymond in the above-mentioned text, referenced by Daly. Seeking to define what she terms an "intuition of integrity", the former explains: "It is an […] original state that does not reside in a static historical past […], but which resides rather in the intuitive wanderings of a mytho-historical past which has the potentiality of generating for all of us a future vision of becoming, beyond a gender-defined society." Raymond, "The Illusion of Androgyny", 64; Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 21.

[556] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 47; Monique Wittig, *Les Guérillères*, trans. David Le Vay (Boston: Beacon Press, [1969] 1985), 89.

[557] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 47, asterisk.

suggests that she understands herself as engaged in this activity. At the very least, we must note that Daly's argument about (foreground and Background) myths is itself *embedded in a mythical narrative*, meaning a narrative that borrows its form from what she presents as an already well-established mythological motif – that is, the Otherworld Journey.

At several points, Daly refers to *The Seven Deadly Sins* (1952) by medievalist Morton W. Bloomfield, who states: "The Otherworld Journey is a motif […] which has been found in many mythologies".[558] Further down, Bloomfield adds that this motif "is spread all over the world and is part of the cultural heritage of mankind."[559] Hence, when Daly chooses to structure her entire book on the basis of this motif, she can be said to engage again in a form of revisionist myth-making, through which she also mythologizes her own feminist message and analysis. In fact, there is hardly a single claim in *Gyn/Ecology* that is not dressed up in mythological garb. To give but one additional example among countless others, Daly calls women who participate in the Otherworld Journey "Amazons", "Crones" and "Hags", adding:

> Significantly, Hags are commonly identified with Harpies and Furies. Harpies are mythic monsters represented as having the head of a woman and the body and claws of a vulture […] The Furies were believed by the Greeks and the Romans to be avenging deities. As Harpies and Furies, Feminists are agents for the Goddess Nemesis.[560]

One scholar who has addressed the mythical structure of *Gyn/Ecology* is Sue Waslin. According to her, the journey Daly describes can be read as a mythical metaphor for "consciousness-raising", a practice popularized by self-proclaimed radical feminists around the end of the 1960s. The aim of this practice, which involved sharing and reflecting on personal experiences (so to make visible that the *personal is political*), was to dismantle the false consciousness installed by patriarchy and develop a female "class" consciousness.[561] By the

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[558] Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature* (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1952), 12–13.

[559] Ibid., 15.

[560] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 40.

[561] Sarachild, "A Program for Feminist Consciousness-Raising"; Kathie Sarachild, "Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon", in *Feminist Revolution: An Abridged Edition with Additional Writings*, ed. Kathie Sarachild (New York: Random House, 1975); Anne Forer, "Thoughts on Consciousness-Raising", in *Feminist Revolution: An Abridged Edition with Additional Writings*, ed. Kathie Sarachild (New York: Random House, 1975).

end of the 1970s, this was a tried and tested method, discussed by several feminist theorists. The novelty of Daly's approach, notes Waslin, "consists in the attempts to 'mythologise' the process, thereby elevating a political strategy to spiritual, ontological status."[562] This is valuable, she argues, because women "have seldom had their experiences lifted to mythic levels, except where it is filtered through the male perspective."[563] Against critics like philosopher Jean Grimshaw, who claims that Daly's "myth of female salvation" offers but a "retreat" from real-world struggles, Waslin thus objects that this myth may serve a distinctly political function.[564] "Notably, the mythologisation of consciousness-raising can politicise women by awakening them to the reality of their subjugation and inspire them to revolt."[565] In this respect, Waslin can be said to describe Daly's feminist version of The Otherworld Journey as similar to a Sorelian myth, the purpose of which is to motivate women to act.[566]

Waslin's analysis is valuable. But if one only reads Daly as seeking to mythologize the process of consciousness-raising, as this practice has been defined by radical feminists, one will overlook what she has in common with the representatives of another mythological tradition, far removed from the Sorelian one. For the journey Daly describes is not just one towards a collective class consciousness, but the "center" of one's "authentic" Self. It is, she writes, a "Self-centering" journey, through which women "name our Selves, become our Selves, more adequately."[567] In this respect, the journey does not merely aim to clarify what all women, as women, have in common, but what makes each woman unique. It is not (only) a myth about class consciousness, but about becoming conscious of oneself.

In the last-mentioned sense, the mythical journey Daly describes has much in common with that of Ulysses, as interpreted by Mircea Eliade. "His journey was a journey toward the center, searching for Ithaka – which is to say, searching for himself." "I think", Eliade continues, "the myth of Ulysses is very

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[562] Waslin, *The Theoretical Contexts of Mary Daly's Thought*, 25.

[563] Ibid., 27.

[564] Ibid. Note that Waslin incorrectly states that these quotes ("myth of female salvation" and "retreat") are taken from Grimshaw, *Feminist Philosophers: Women's Perspectives on Philosophical Traditions*. In fact, they appear in a review of Daly's later book *Pure Lust*: Jean Grimshaw, "'Pure Lust': The Elemental Feminist Philosophy of Mary Daly", *Radical Philosophy: A Journal of Socialist and Feminist Philosophy* 49 (1988): 29.

[565] Waslin, *The Theoretical Contexts of Mary Daly's Thought*, 27.

[566] On the link between myth and revolutionary action in Sorel, see Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 28. See also this thesis, 81–82.

[567] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 31.

important for us all. We shall all of us turn out to be a little like Ulysses, seeking for ourselves, hoping to reach […] our home and homeland once again, […] discovering ourselves."[568] Now, as Daly dismisses the value of man-made myths, she would not agree that the myth of Ulysses – in which females and the feminine are often presented as obstacles for the protagonist to overcome (Circe, Calypso, the Sirens) or a reward for his efforts (Penelope) – is important to "all" people. I maintain, however, that her myth is meant to serve a similar function as the myth of Ulysses does according to Eliade, which is to say that it should inspire women to embark on a journey inward, towards their own "center" (a center that both she and Eliade speaks of as the "homeland").

The notion of myths as guides to inward journeys was also promoted by Carl Gustav Jung. In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* – which is one of five works by Jung to which Daly refers – Jung states that he understands his own life "as a story of the self-realization of the unconscious", which "can only be expressed by way of myth."[569] Jung moreover suggests that the quest for "self-realization" can be *assisted* by myth.[570] In *Psychology and Religion* (1938) – also referenced by Daly – Jung explains that some myths have a "psychotherapeutic" value, linked to the fact that they encompass symbols that represent and thereby inspires one to strive for "wholeness".[571] Importantly, since Jung claims that physic wholeness is symbolized by "God images", he concludes that "self-realization […] amounts to God's incarnation" – that is, the realization of the divine within oneself.[572] This means that myths, according to Jung, may function as guides toward self-divinization. I argue

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[568] Mircea Eliade and Claude Henri Rocquet, *Ordeal by Labyrinth: Conversations with Claude-Henri Rocquet: With the Essay "Brancusi and Mythology"*, trans. Derek Coltman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1978] 1982), 95. Cf. Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1958), 382. "The journey to the 'centre' is fraught with obstacles, and yet every city, every temple, every house is at the centre of the universe. […] The sufferings and trials undergone by Ulysses were fabulous, and yet any man's return home has the value of Ulysses' return to Ithaca." Daly refers to the latter work in *Beyond God the Father*, 204 n37.

[569] Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 3.

[570] C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion: West and East* [1938], in *The Collected Works of C.G Jung, Volume 11*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1958), 157; Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 395. See also Curtis D. Smith, *Jung's Quest for Wholeness: A Religious and Historical Perspective* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 3.

[571] Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, 194, 188.

[572] Ibid., 157. Cf. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 334–335, italics in original. "The mandala [also described as a God-image] is an archetypal image whose occurrence is attested throughout the ages. It signifies the *wholeness of the self*. This circular image represents the wholeness of the psychic ground or, to put it in mythic terms, the divinity incarnate in man."

that it is a myth of this kind that Daly seeks to create. However, to symbolize psychic wholeness, Daly does not use "God images", but what she terms "Goddess images", such as the image of the Triple Goddess.[573]

This distinguishes Daly's myth from a typical Sorelian myth, meant to inspire collective political action. Yet, it would be a mistake to conclude that she seeks to construct an apolitical myth. One must instead recognize that Daly's understanding of the relationship between myth and politics differs from that of George Sorel and Sorelian mythologists, in part because it is derived from a different, neo-Romantic mythological tradition. This tradition is represented by Eliade and Jung, as well as Joseph Campbell. It is thus productive to read *Gyn/Ecology* alongside Campbell's famous *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (1949), to which Daly herself refers.[574] In the introduction to this work, Campbell claims that myths about the "hero's journey" (including the myth of Ulysses), can help guide one "from the external to the internal world […], from the desperations of the waste land to the peace of the everlasting realm that is within."[575] He then adds that this mythical journey inwards, towards the "unconscious", where one's as of yet unrealized potential lies hidden, may also enable societal change:

> If only a portion of that lost totality could be dredged up into the light of day, we should experience a marvelous expansion of our powers, a vivid renewal of life. We should tower in stature. Moreover, if we could dredge up something forgotten not only by ourselves but by our whole generation or our entire civilization, we should become indeed the boon-bringer, the culture hero of the day – a personage of not only local but world historical moment.[576]

This is how Daly, in my reading, envisions that her myth, by helping women remember and thereby re-member their fractioned authentic selves, can facilitate both self-realization and a social revolution.

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[573] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, xlvi.

[574] Ibid., 464 n9, 465 n24.

[575] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, [1949] 2004), 16.

[576] Ibid.

Daly begins the first part of *Gyn/Ecology* by engaging a number of well-known mythologists. Citing works by Eliade, Tillich and Karl Jaspers (1883–1969), she asserts:

> On a level that passes as "sophisticated", scholars from various fields generally agree on certain components of what they perceive to be myth. Myths are said to be stories that express intuitive insights and relate the activities of gods. The mythical figures are symbols. These, it is said, open up depths of reality otherwise closed to "us". It is not usually suggested that they close off depths of reality which would otherwise be open to us.[577]

The way in which Daly here situates her own work in relation to established theories of myth demonstrates not only that she is well versed in that field, but that she also regards her own writings on myths as a contribution to – or rather, a reckoning with – the field in question. But this does not mean that she develops a feminist theory that is completely independent of pre-existing mythological traditions. On the contrary, although she is highly dismissive of all male mythologists, much of *Gyn/Ecology's* general argument is built around concepts of myth appropriated from traditions that these mythologists have helped found. To prove the existence of the original matriarchy and justify her own revision and invention of myths, Daly must, for example, invoke and defend the notion of myth as a source of both historical insights and absolute truths. At the same time, it is necessary for her to disprove most insights and truths that male mythologists claim to have extracted from myth. This prompts her to execute a series of intricate discursive maneuvers.

"Since a radical feminist analysis reaches the point of recognizing patriarchal myths as lies in the deepest sense, as distortions of our depths, one could easily conclude that traditional definitions should be dismissed", Daly observes. Yet, she herself argues against doing so. For the male mythologists are both right and wrong. "When a philosopher such as Jaspers asserts that myths express 'intuitive insights', and when a theologian such as Tillich asserts that these 'open up depths of reality and of the self otherwise closed to us', they deceive us with statements that are both true and untrue at the same time." According to Daly, these statements are true in that myths can accomplish just that, but they are untrue because the myths that Jasper and Tillich have in mind are "patriarchal myths", rather than "gynocentric" ones. Admittedly,

[577] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 44.

Daly states that even patriarchal myths can provide insights and open up new depths of reality, albeit of a different kind than the "myth-makers and uniformed myth perpetrators" assume. By studying such "lies" feminists can, for example, learn to understand how patriarchal oppression operates.[578] Furthermore, because patriarchal myths are "reversals" of older, gynocentric myths, it remains possible to recover the latter through the former. But for this to become possible, one must recognize that patriarchal myths are indeed false. "In order to reverse the reversals completely we must deal with the fact that patriarchal myths contain *stolen* mythic power", Daly explains.[579] "They are something like distorting lenses through which we can see into the Background."[580] In other words, Daly appropriates the concept of myth as a source of historical insights and absolute truths, but adapts it to serve her argument by claiming that only gynocentric myths count as *real* myths – which, in turn, means that patriarchal myths are *false* myths, from which one cannot extract any insights or truths unless one first admits that they are actually lies or distortions.[581] On this premise, Daly builds her entire theory, which I analyze below. Notably, this theory is both a feminist theory of myth and an attempt to theorize basic mechanisms of patriarchal oppression, as well as the conditions of emancipation.

Daly holds that the original gynocentric myths were centered around female divinities, such as the Triple Goddess, which symbolized the divine in each individual woman. As these myths both reflected and reinforced the gynocentric order, men – having rebelled and replaced matriarchy with patriarchy – made sure to rewrite them, so that they would serve their interest. To begin with, male deities were introduced into mythologies that had previously only contained female ones:

> The fact is that the ancient world knew no gods. […] As patriarchy became the dominant societal structure, a common means of legitimation of this transition from gynocentric society was forcible marriage of the Triple Goddess, in her different forms, to a trinity of gods. Thus Hera was taken by Zeus, Demeter by Poseidon, Kore by Hades.[582]

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[578] Ibid., 46.

[579] Ibid., 47.

[580] Ibid., italics in original.

[581] "[I]t is necessary to break their codes in order to use them as viewers; that is, we must see their lie in order to see their truth". Ibid.

[582] Ibid., 76.

Some male "myth-makers (re-makers)" went one step further and simply had male mortals or gods murder the goddesses.[583] For instance, Daly cites the Babylonian creation myth, *Enūma Eliš,* which tells of how the male god Marduk trapped, murdered and dismembered the goddess Tiamat, from whose parts he created the cosmos.[584] To legitimize the subordination of women and erase the memory of their immanent divinity, to which the gynocentric myths testified, men also introduced the motif of gods raping goddesses. "The rape of the Goddess in all of her aspects is an almost universal theme in patriarchal myth", Daly writes.[585] This is particularly evident in the Greek myths, which are among the oldest patriarchal myths that she discusses. "Zeus […] was a habitual rapist."[586] Furthermore, the male myth-makers/re-makers reversed the natural order, so that male deities, rather than female ones, were portrayed as the source of life. To that end, Greek mythology asserts that Athena was born from the forehead of Zeus, while Dionysus was "reborn" from Zeus' thigh.[587] The mythic memory of maternal origins was thereby effectively erased.

Daly goes on to discuss Christian myths, which she describes as "purified" versions of pagan myths, meaning that the latter's overt misogyny has been slightly toned down, making them more palatable, but also harder to defend oneself against. "Just as refined sugar sweetly damages the body, purified myth seductively deceives the mind."[588] Daly accordingly notes that Christian myths include fewer explicit rapes than the pagan ones, but that this motif is still there. "The rape of the rarified remains of the Goddess in the christian myth is mind/spirit rape."[589] As an example, she cites the myth of the Annunciation, which relates how the Archangel Gabriel announced to Mary that God was going to impregnate her, to which she is said to have replied: "Let it be done unto me according to thy Word." Commenting on this story, Daly concludes: "Physical rape is not necessary when the mind/will/spirit has already been invaded."[590]

In their effort to erase all memory of woman's divinity and importance, the Christian myth-masters went even further than their pagan predecessors, Daly

[583] Ibid., 40, 110–111.
[584] Ibid., 110.
[585] Ibid., 84–85
[586] Ibid., 85.
[587] Ibid., 46, 65–66.
[588] Ibid., 74.
[589] Here and elsewhere, Daly deliberately spells "christian" with a lowercase c.
[590] Ibid., 85.

says. Whereas pagans still allotted some space in myths to powerful goddesses, the Christians turned the Triple Goddess into a thoroughly male Trinity, made up of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Admittedly, one can still sense a dim echo of the Goddess in the figure of Mary, venerated by many Catholics.[591] But in the end, Daly states that Mary too remains an empty shell, who the Holy Spirit – a "mythic male mother, the spiritual single parent"[592] – impregnates to birth the Father in the form of Christ.[593] Likewise, the resurrection, through which Christ is "re-born", requires no involvement of women whatsoever.[594] In effect, every instance of "female mythic presence" is denied.[595] In its place we are left with "myths of Processions", according to which everything and everyone "proceed" from and return to the Father.[596]

Daly describes the elimination of female mythic presence as a crucial step on the road to what she calls "gynocide", meaning the murder of women and nature. By erasing the memory of women's inherent divinity, Christian re-makers of myth have helped enable a mass murder, the ultimate end of which is the complete eradication of the authentically female. "This christian demolition of the Goddess and mythic establishment of male divinity", writes Daly, "has paved the way for the technological elimination of women through the application of modern medicine, transsexualism, cloning and other forms of genetic engineering."[597]

It is necessary to pause here to reflect on how Daly's feminist theory of myth reproduces and reinforces her dismissive attitude toward transgender people. In the introduction to this thesis, I referred to Elizabeth Baeten, who argues "our theories *about* myth have come to play the roles of myth", in that they "perform the function of indicating what belongs to human being [sic] properly understood and what does not."[598] This is evident in the case of Daly. For when she writes that "transsexualism" represents a step toward the "technological elimination of women", Daly promotes a dehumanizing view

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[591] Ibid.

[592] Ibid., 229.

[593] Ibid., 83–85.

[594] Ibid., 87. With the birth of Protestantism, even Mariology is rejected as idolatrous. "Just as catholicism was an important stage in the refinement of phallocentric myth, protestantism represents a more advanced stage of 'purification'. Having eliminated Mary, the ghost of the Goddess, it sets up a unisex model, whose sex is male. Ibid., 88.

[595] Ibid., 38.

[596] Ibid., 37–38.

[597] Ibid., 88.

[598] Elizabeth M. Baeten, *The Magic Mirror,* 19, 38, italics in original.

of trans women, according to which these individuals constitute technologically produced substitutes. To borrow her own language, one must recognize that this "myth" contributes to the "elimination" of trans women, both on a symbolic and material plane, meaning that it both constitutes a form of taxonomic violence and helps legitimize the psychical, sometimes fatal violence directed towards many transgender people.[599]

Returning to the myths of Christianity, we should note that these, according to Daly, still influence life in contemporary Western societies, although few realize this.[600] Their "gynocidal messages" are now also conveyed by post-Christian myths, which can be seen as further purified extensions of the former. For example, Daly states that children's books provide "chilling evidence of mind-control through dismembering myth."[601] To demonstrate this, she refers to *The Giving Tree* (1964), by Sheldon Allan Silverstein. This is the story of a boy and a tree, in which the tree – persistently referred to as a "she" – "gives" of herself to make the boy happy: first her shade and her fruits, later her branches and her trunk, from which the boy, having become a grown man, builds a boat and a house, until nothing remains of her but a stump.[602] According to Daly, this "chilling children's tale" is actually an "extension of christian myth", where the Goddess, whose gynocentric myth is sometimes represented as "the Tree of Life", is again raped and dismembered, conveying the message that it is appropriate to treat all women in this way. "It thus brings its parental purchasers and readers into unwitting compliance with primary programming for gynocide."[603]

In order to understand why these Christian and post-Christian myths are so influential, Daly explains that one must consider the relationship between myth and ritual.[604] Myths are not just oft-repeated stories, she states. They also guide reoccurring *practices*, through which the mythical narratives are acted out and thus materialized. As mentioned, Daly focuses on five such practices, described as "barbarous rituals, ancient and modern": suttee, footbinding,

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[599] Cf. Strassfeld, "Transing Religious Studies", 45–49.

[600] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 89.

[601] Ibid., 90

[602] Shel Silverstein, *The Giving Tree* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).

[603] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 90.

[604] On Daly's understanding of the relation between myth and ritual, see also Sheilagh A. Mogford, "The Murder of the Goddess in Everywoman: Mary Daly's Sado-Ritual Syndrome and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*", in *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Daly*, ed. Sarah Lucia Hoagland and Marilyn Frye (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2000), 136–139.

female genital mutilation, witchburning and gynecology, each of which she ties to a specific continent.[605] Her claim is that these practices must be understood as "reenactments" of the rapes and murders of female divinities and mortal women depicted in patriarchal myths from antiquity till today. Hence, they help turn false myths into reality:

> The Myth Masters are able to penetrate their victims' minds/imaginations only by seeing to it that their deceptive myths are acted out over and over again in performances that draw the participants into emotional complicity. Such reenactment trains both victims and victimizers to perform uncritically their preordained roles. Thus the psyches of the performers are conditioned so that they become carriers and perpetrators of patriarchal myth. In giving the myth reality by acting it out, the participants become re-producers and "living proof" of the deceptive myths.[606]

Daly here appropriates an already well-established concept of myth. This concept of myth, as a narrative embedded in "rituals", understood as "reenactments" of myths, can be traced back to James George Frazer, who is often presented as the founder of the Myth and Ritual-school. It was further popularized by the so-called Cambridge Ritualists, represented by scholars such as Jane Ellen Harrison, Gilbert Murray (1866–1957), Arthur Bernard Cook (1868–1952), F. M. Cornford (1874–1943), as well as by French sociologists like Émile Durkheim.[607]

The notion of myth as closely linked to ritual was also embraced by Eliade, who argued that rituals are a reenactments of those "primordial" acts around which all myths revolve.[608] The objective of rituals, Eliade explains, is to ensure that this primordial mythical event is never forgotten. As an example, he cites the rituals of primitive or "palaeo-agricultural peoples", whose origin myths are said to relate the murder and dismemberment of a (typically female) divinity. According to these myths, "man became what he is today […] in consequence of a primordial murder; in *illo tempore* a divine being, quite often a woman or a maiden, sometimes a child or a man, allowed himself [sic] to be

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[605] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 107–292.

[606] Ibid., 109.

[607] Ackerman, *The Myth and Ritual School*, 89–117. In *Gyn/Ecology* Daly refers to Durkheim's theory of myth and ritual at *Gyn/Ecology*, 88.

[608] Eliade nevertheless adds that "among primitives, not only do rituals have their mythical model but any human act whatever acquires effectiveness to the extent to which it exactly repeats an act performed at the beginning of time by a god, a hero, or an ancestor." Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 22.

immolated in order that tubers or fruit trees should grow from his body."[609] In a passage from which Daly herself quotes, Eliade continues:

> For all these palaeo-agricultural peoples, what is essential is periodically to evoke the primordial event that established the present condition of humanity. Their whole religious life is a commemoration, a remembering. The memory reactualized by the rites (hence by reiterating the primordial murder) plays a decisive role; what happened in *illo tempore* must never be forgotten. The true sin is forgetting.[610]

As in her previous book, Daly appropriates Eliade's concept of myth but adapts it to explain the workings of patriarchal oppression. "Eliade", she writes, "unwittingly elucidates the oppressive function of the rituals which re-create and re-enforce this primordial act."[611] In her view, it is not only primitive myths that revolve around a primordial murder. On the contrary, this applies to all patriarchal myths, ancient as well as modern. This murder, reenacted in patriarchal rituals, represents the original act through which the patriarchal order was first established and continues to be reconstituted: "the murder/dismemberment of the Goddess – that is, the Self-affirming be-ing of women."[612] Again, this demonstrates that Daly does not simply reject the canonized male mythologists with whom she enters into dialogue, but makes use of their theories to develop her own. However, she also challenges them. Most importantly, whereas Eliade claims that rituals enable remembrance, she objects that (patriarchal) rituals aim to generate oblivion. Inverting the statement of Eliade, Daly asserts that "the 'true sin' against patriarchal rule/ritual" is not "forgetting", but remembering:

> [T]hat is, remembering that as long as we are alive the Goddess still lives. The radical "sin" is re-membering the Goddess in the full sense, that is, recognizing that the attempt to murder her – mythically and existentially – is radically wrong, and demonstrating through our own be-ing that this deed is not final/irrevocable.[613]

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[609] Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 101.
[610] Ibid; Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 110–111.
[611] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 110.
[612] Ibid., 111.
[613] Ibid.

To sin, meaning breaching the patriarchal ban on remembrance, thus constitutes a decisive step in the journey away from the patriarchal foreground, towards the Background. "Continual complicity in the crime of Goddess-killing is mandatory in the Man's world", Daly writes. "Our refusal to collaborate in this killing and dismembering of our own Selves is the beginning of re-membering the Goddess – the deep Source of creative integrity in women."[614] But to achieve this, it is necessary to confront the patriarchal myths that help perpetuate women's amnesia.

Seeking to summarize the mythical attitude of primitive people, Eliade states that only those actions that imitate a mythical model are perceived as sacred and thus fully real.[615] "Such lines", writes Daly, "contain the essence of the patriarchal view of myth." In contrast, she argues that patriarchal myths stage a *false* reality and lure women *away* from the sacred and from their own Selves. Hence, when women unknowingly "repeat mythical models", they do not get closer to reality, but further away. To reach the Background, where the memory of the Goddess lives, women must therefore do exactly what "myth-masters" like Eliade despise: disobey all mythic paradigms and act on their own initiative.[616] From the perspective of Eliade and other male mythologists, such acts are seen as "profane", Daly observes.[617] Yet, she objects that they are in fact "mythic", as women who act on their own initiative are actualizing what gynocentric myths reflect: their own female divinity, the existence of which false, patriarchal myths deny.[618]

Daly explains that when she uses the term "mythic" in the aforementioned manner, she does so "to speak of dimensions hidden by the all-pervasive 'holographs' which are the distorted reflections of true depth" – that is, the Background.[619] This tells us that Daly does not only employ this term to characterize a particular kind of narrative (myths); she also uses it to describe a hidden psychic space, the content of which such narratives are said to reflect.[620] Acknowledging this helps us understand what it, according to Daly,

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[614] Ibid.

[615] Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 96. This passage is cited by Daly in *Gyn/Ecology*, 44.

[616] Ibid., 45.

[617] Ibid., 47–48.

[618] "For what women who have the courage to name our Selves can do is precisely to act on our own initiative, and this is *profoundly* mythic." Ibid., 47, italics in original.

[619] Ibid., 50.

[620] Along similar lines, Daly writes: "When I use the term *mythic* to describe the depths of metapatriarchal Self-centering/be-ing, I mean to convey that the Dreadful Selves of women

means to "invent" gynocentric myths. Daly explains that women who have made some progress on their journey (i.e., "Crones"), can "see through the distortions into the Background", which means that they do not have to approach this realm via patriarchal myths, seeking to reverse the reversals. Instead, they can create entirely new myths, which reflect the Background in a more immediate way.[621]

My reading suggests that this is how Daly presents her own project. That is, I argue that she portrays *herself* as someone who, like Dante in *The Divine Comedy*, can describe the Otherworldly Journey because she has already undertaken it, which also means that she can engage both in myth-breaking and feminist myth-making: reversing the reversals *and* inventing new gynocentric myths, like the Otherworld Journey itself.

Matriarchal myths or the myth of matriarchy?

An important fact that the analysis carried out above, due to its synthesizing nature, failed to clarify – but which I intend to demonstrate in this section – is that *Gyn/Ecology* encompasses at least four different concepts of myth.[622] To clarify what these concepts are and what functions they serve, I read *Gyn/Ecology* against the backdrop of the broader feminist debate on the matriarchy thesis; a debate that I will demonstrate is underpinned by the same four concepts. This will enable a deeper understanding of Daly's work. But is will also illuminate the larger context of which it is part.

(1) Daly makes use of an "ideological" concept of myth when she employs "myth" to denote narratives that she describes as both untrue and malicious. This only applies to "patriarchal" myths, which we have seen that she rejects as being "lies in the deepest sense".[623] On most occasions, Daly employs the term "patriarchal myths" to name a set of literary myths.[624] This concept of myth, according to which myths are false and harmful stories centred around

who choose the Wild Journey participate in the source of what the pale patriarchal myths reflect distortedly." Ibid., 49, italics in original.

[621] Ibid., 47.

[622] Admittedly, these concepts often overlap, which is why it must be remembered that the unambiguous distinctions that structure my presentation do not appear in the material, but are superimposed by me to serve an analytical purpose: to make visible how Daly draws from several mythological traditions to articulate her feminist arguments and analyses.

[623] Ibid., 46. Patriarchal myths are also referred to as "male" and "phallocratic" myths.

[624] The category "patriarchal myths" also encompasses that of "postchristian male myths", which in turn includes both "fairy tales" and certain political narratives, described as "extensions" of Christians myths. Ibid., 89–112.

false gods or idols, has its historical roots in the Christian denouncement of pagan religions. Daly nevertheless employs it as a tool to criticize both Greek paganism and Christianity.

The argument that pagan and Christian myths have helped maintain and continue to perpetuate patriarchal oppression was first advanced by Beauvoir.[625] A similar argument can be discerned in Campbell's *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology,* published in 1959. Campbell generally describes literary myths as paths to transhistorical truths. And yet, in analyzing the myth of Adam and Eve, he cannot help but ask whether there might also be "consciously contrived, counterfeit mythologies". "It may well be", writes Campbell, "that a good deal of what has been advertised as representing the will of 'Old Man' actually is but the heritage of a lot of old men, and that the main idea has been not so much to honor God as to simplify life by keeping woman in the kitchen."[626]

This concept of patriarchal literary myths as not only false, but *deliberate falsifications*, was later adopted by several influential proponents of the matriarchy thesis. It is echoed by Davis, who writes that the "Adam and Eve myth has been completely reversed from its original meaning; Eve is not born from Adam's rib, but Adam from Eve's."[627] Likewise, in *When God Was Woman* (1976), artist and author Merlin Stone (1931–2011) states that the myth of Adam and Eve was probably "intentionally written and included in the creation story of the Bible as yet another assault upon the Goddess religion."[628] In line with Beauvoir and Kate Millet, both Davis and Stone maintain that this myth has retained its power over modern minds. This concept of myth thus helps feminist theorists such as Beauvoir, Millet, Davis, Stone and Daly to explain the persistence of patriarchal oppression.

However, the notion of patriarchal myths as reversals of older, more authentic gynocentric versions also points towards another way in which literary myths might be used by feminist theorists: namely, as a source of historical knowledge. This is the second concept of myth at play both in Daly's text and in the larger feminist debate about the matriarchy thesis. It is a version of the "folkloristic" concept of myth, according to which myths are sacred

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[625] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 31, 114.

[626] Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* (New York: The Viking Press, 1959), 323.

[627] Ibid., 142.

[628] Merlin Stone, *When God Was a Woman* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, [1976] 1978), 197.

stories about gods, goddesses and other superhuman beings, often associated with temporally and/or spatially removed cultures.

(2) As we have seen, Daly states that patriarchal myths constitute "reversals and […] pale derivatives of more ancient, more translucent myth from gynocentric civilization [sic]", which means that women can approach the former as "distorting lenses" that allow them to see into the Background.[629] This suggests that patriarchal myths might also preserve a repressed memory of the original matriarchy. We should note that Daly does not explicitly invoke literary myths in support of the matriarchal thesis. Indeed, she offers no evidence whatsoever in its favor but proceeds as if the existence of a pre-historic gynocentric civilization represents an indisputable truth. Yet this very fact implies that she assumes that myth constitutes a source of historical knowledge, since all the authorities on which she implicitly relies, from Bachofen to Davis and Stone, appeal to myths to defend the matriarchy thesis.[630]

Citing Bachofen, Davis states that "myths are the memory of real events experienced by the human race".[631] For this reason, she concludes that "myths represent not fiction but historical realities".[632] "Myths", writes psychologist Phyllis Chesler in 1972, "are themselves a very important kind of proof. Myths preserve the history of human thought […] as well as the history of human deeds."[633] Daly's friend Robin Morgan even coined a name for the practice of extracting historical insights from myths: mytho-history. "A mytho-historical approach requires of us at one and the same time a suspension of disbelief *and* a dedication to truth", Morgan explained in 1978.[634] That is, women must dare to seek the truth amidst what others reject as falsehoods, yet not forget that it is precisely the truth they seek. "What was yesterday's magic is today's

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[629] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 47.

[630] In fact, Eller points out that literary myths, alongside archaeological artifacts, constitute the primary material invoked by feminists who advocate the thesis in question. Eller, "Relativizing the Patriarchy", 283.

[631] Davis, *The First Sex*, 29. See also ibid., 42.

[632] Ibid., 76. Cf. Wright, *Origin Stories in Political Thought*, 137. "If goddesses existed in myth, that alone was evidence for Davis that a gynocratic age once existed." Daly's belief in the original matriarchy thesis seems to rest on the same premises.

[633] Phyllies Chesler, "The Amazon Legacy: An Interpretive Essay", in *Wonder Woman* (New York: Holt, Reinehart and Winston, 1972), unnumbered page.

[634] Robin Morgan, *Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist* (New York: Random House, 1977), 233, italics in original.

science. It seems as likely that what was seen through a glass darkly yesterday as myth forms the basis for what tomorrow will be understood as history."[635]

This concept of myth, according to which literary myths constitute a source of historical knowledge, was appropriated already by Beauvoir. But in the hand of later feminist theorists, it serves a very different purpose. As we recall, Beauvoir argued that all myths, even those centered around female deities, had been invented by men. In her view, women as a group had never exercised any real influence over the symbolic order. "They have no past, no history, no religion of their own."[636] This assumption is vehemently rejected by the feminist matriarchalists, who describe it as indicative of the imposed amnesia orchestrated by patriarchy.[637] Whereas Beauvoir dismissed Bachofen's theory of an original matriarchy as being "only a myth", the feminist matriarchalists therefore invoke literary myths to prove that he was actually correct. In doing so, they appropriate Bachofen's concept of myth to offer women the very thing Beauvoir claimed that women lacked, but other oppressed groups possessed: a common heritage that makes it easier to generate a political subject. In addition, the argument advanced by feminist matriarchalists suggests that women, contrary to Beauvoir's claim, have not always been subordinate to men, which in turn implies that they need not remain so (as Beauvoir herself wrote: a "situation created over time can come undone at another time").[638]

Of course, many scholars have questioned whether literary myths really constitute a credible historiographical resource. In a master thesis in anthropology from 1976, Lynne Bean observes that most feminist advocates of the matriarchy thesis "tend to be general, even vague, in their discussion of the merits of myth."[639] According to Bean, these feminists often embrace the claim that myths prove the existence of an original matriarchy in an uncritical manner, which she links to their lack of expertise in areas such as mythology, anthropology and history. At the same time, Bean highlights how myths in this respect fulfill another function, beyond the purely historiographical one. "The feminists' purpose would appear to fall within the realm of *myth as propaganda* […] They are not interested in critical acceptance by assorted academicians. There is nothing subtle about their bias, their belief is obvious to all, their

[635] Ibid.

[636] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 28.

[637] Daly advances an explicit critique of Beauvoir's writings on history in Mary Daly, *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 136–138.

[638] Beauvoir, *TSS*, 28.

[639] Lynne Bean, *Children of the Goddess: A Critical Examination of Feminist Writings on the Matriarchy* (Master thesis: California State University, 1976), 43.

premise is clearly asserted – the matriarchy did exist!"[640] Importantly, Bean notes that the feminist matriarchalists are far from alone in using myths in this (propagandistic) way. Referring to Bronislaw Malinowski's concept of "myth as charter", she concludes that the "use of myth as a justification for a particular set of beliefs or a rationale for certain behaviors" represents a tendency common to both feminists and non-feminists.[641]

A similar, albeit more dismissive, reading was advanced in 1979, by archaeologist Sally Binford. In an article titled "Myths and Matriarchies" (1979), she proclaimed: "One of the basic objections to the mythic matriarchal past – apart from the lack of evidence to support it and the consistent body of data that argues against it – is the use of myth as history by the propagators of the faith. […] Myths are not appropriate primary data for reconstructing the past."[642] According to Binford, the over-reliance on myths as a historical source had generated a myth of its own, in the sense of a false but widespread belief, impervious to rational critique: "The myths of Eve's apple, Pandora's box, and Freud's penis envy have been replaced by the myth of Former Matriarchal Greatness and the Overthrow of Mother Goddess."[643] Citing anthropologist Joan Bamberger, who argues that all matriarchal myths imply that women were unable to handle political power, Binford goes on to write: "The myth of matriarchy is but the tool used to keep woman bound to her place. To free her, we need to destroy the myth."[644] In a later article on the same theme, she states: "The function of myth is the same in all societies: to rationalize the *status quo.* [...] The powerless dream of and long for a mythic past and waste precious time attempting to document its reality."[645]

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[640] Ibid., 44, italics added.

[641] Ibid., 5–6, 61.

[642] Sally Binford, "Myths and Matriarchies" [1979], in *The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power within the Feminist Movement*, ed. Charlene Spretnak (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1981), 544.

[643] Ibid., 542.

[644] Ibid., 548

[645] Sally Binford, "Counter-Response", in *The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power within the Feminist Movement*, ed. Charlene Spretnak (Garden city: Anchor Books, 1981), 559. A similar argument was advanced by Brooke Williams in 1975. Linking the matriarchy thesis to cultural feminism, she writes that this thesis "removes the idea of women's liberation from actual possibility to a mythic utopia, thus negating it. It draws from an unknown past instead of defining a real future. […] The matriarchy trend is very helpful to the forces of fascism, who promote the Big Rock Candy Mountain of some golden age (whether in the past or after death) for people to get hooked on, while they consolidate their power here and now." Williams, "The Retreat to Cultural Feminism", 81–82.

Here, we see that the feminist debate on the matriarchy thesis is *both about* literary myths and fought *with* different myth concepts. Whereas some feminists invoke the concept of literary myth as a historiographical resource to substantiate this thesis, Binford invokes the concept of myth as a false and harmful belief to name and discredits it.[646]

How did feminist matriachalists respond to this critique? Some dismissed it as illustrating the patriarchal bias of mainstream science. We have already seen that Daly warned women against taking too seriously scholars who opposed the original matriarch thesis. A similar argument was advanced in an article titled "Female History/Myth Making" (1975) by theologian Emile Culpepper, who was one of Daly's close friends. When it comes to "origins of history", Culpepper argues that even the most commonly invoked theories offered by "traditional scholarship" are as inconclusive as Davis's controversial *The First Sex*. Male academics, she explains, take each other seriously, but "castigate the speculations of women outside their game as mad or feeble." Whether knowingly or unknowingly, these scholars thus end up ignoring, distorting and destroying the history of woman, writes Culpepper.[647] Other feminist matriarchalists tried to modify their arguments to accommodate at least certain objections. For example, author and journalist Margot Adler admitted that literary myths need to be handled more carefully than some early advocates of the matriarchy thesis had done. "It's fairly easy to argue that one cannot always take the myths literally, as Davis often does", Adler writes in 1979.[648]

However, what makes Adler's text "Meanings of Matriarchy" particular interesting is that it also encompasses a third way of responding to the critique in question. For Adler argues that what matters is not what historical insights myths offer, but what they accomplish, on a social or existential plane. Citing Wittig, also referenced by Daly, Adler writes: "There was a time when you were not a slave, remember that. [...] You say you have lost all recollection of

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[646] See also Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* (New York: Pantheon books, [1979] 1988), 5. "If women allow themselves to be consoled […] by the invocation of hypothetical great goddesses, they are simply flattering themselves into submission (a technique often used on them by men). All the mythic versions of women […] are consolatory nonsenses; and consolatory nonsense seems to me a fair definition of myth, anyway."

[647] Culpepper, "Female History/Myth Making", 14.

[648] Margot Adler, "Meanings of Matriarchy" [1979], in *The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power within the Feminist Movement*, ed. Charlene Spretnak (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1981), 128.

it, remember. [...] Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent."[649] This, writes Adler, is how many feminist proponents of the original matriarchy thesis reason. "These women are *creating* their own mythologies and their own realities."[650] Here, then, we are dealing with a third concept of myth, according to which myths are purposeful fictions. This is the "constitutive" concept of myth.

(3) Daly can be read as employing a constitutive concept of myth when she states that women are free to "invent" their own gynocentric myths. Feminists should not, she explains, feel forced to "prove" (quotation marks in original) that "each phallic myth and symbol had a precedent in gynocentric myth, which chronologically antedated it." Such historical studies are valuable, but not necessary. For the Background is "always present" within women, which means that there are two paths to gynocentric myths: backwards and inwards.[651] This is reminiscent of Nietzsche's reasoning, according to which the German myth could be reborn thanks to the "inwardly healthy, ancient strength" of Germans.

At this point, we must note that *to invent*, according to Daly, who here consults Merriam-Webster's dictionary, can mean both to "find" and "discover", as well as to "think up" and "create".[652] Consequently, she writes that women both "*discover and create* our myths in the process of a-mazing [i.e., disenchanting] tales that are phallic"; a statement that also suggests that myth-breaking constitutes a precondition for, or even an integral part of, myth-making.[653] The fact remains, however, that Daly presents myths as something women may manufacture, here and now. At the same time, she explains that these new myths may well be *about* the past: "When I speak of gynocentric myth and feminist myth-making I do not refer to tales of reified gods and/or goddesses but to stories arising from the experiences of Crones – stories which convey primary and archetypical messages about our own Prehistory and about Female-identified power."[654] This can be read as a defence of the effort to invent women's "Prehistory" – that is, to create myths, in the sense of

[649] Ibid., 131; Wittig, *Les Guérillères*, 89.

[650] Adler, "Meanings of Matriarchy", 128, italics added.

[651] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 47.

[652] Ibid.

[653] Ibid., 47, italics added.

[654] Ibid., asterix. The fact that Daly here rejects "tales of reified gods and/or goddesses" suggests that her notion "gynocentric" myths does not comprise any narratives that belong to the current cultural repertoire of literary myths, although it would seem to include successful "reversed" versions of these myths.

purposeful fictions, that incorporate the notion of an original matriarchy. That is not to say that the original matriarchy, according to Daly, never existed. As stated, she treats its historical reality as an indisputable fact. But the claim that feminists do not necessarily need to engage in historical studies aimed at remembering, but can just as well invent the past, suggests that the mythical *function* of the matriarchy thesis is as important as its historical accuracy. This generates a tension in Daly's work, between the notion of matriarchy as a reality whose existence can be verified by way of literary myths, and the idea of the original matriarchy as a myth in itself.

This same tension also characterizes the larger feminist debate on the matriarchy thesis. To begin with, we may note that several contemporary scholars have described the matriarchy thesis as a myth.[655] This is true of Eller, who in *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory* states that "myths are stories that impart profoundly value-laden messages in dense, image-rich language", wherefore she concludes: "And by this definition […] the myth of matriarchal prehistory is a myth. It is a narrative designed to grasp hold of an audience's consciousness and thereby fulfill certain social and psychological functions: in this case feminist functions."[656] Historian Juliette Wood similarly claims that the idea about an original matriarchy, whose members indulged in Goddess-worship, can be seen as an "exercise in creative history" that helps produce a shared, "feminine" cultural identity. "A kind of metaphorical myth is created in which the sense of female alienation within a male dominated culture is reversed. […] Because the feminine was central before, it possesses the ability to be central again."[657]

Eller and Wood both situate themselves outside the phenomenon they discuss, as critical or neutral observers. Even women who support the matriarchal thesis have, however, often conceptualized this thesis as a myth. For example, we have seen that Rich, in a eulogy titled "The Origins of Feminist Myth-making" (1974), calls Davis "the first contemporary feminist

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[655] Apart from those scholars mentioned below, see Stella Georgoudi, "Creating a Myth of Matriarchy", in *A History of Women in the West. 1 Fom Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints*, ed. Georges Duby et al. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 463. "The error was to [...] mistake myth for history. In so doing, [Bachofen and his followers] unwittingly created a myth of their own, itself a worthy object of study: the myth of matriarchy." See also Harvey Greisman, "Matriachate as Utopia, Myth, and Social Theory", *Sociology* 15, no. 3 (1981): 332; Wright, *Origin Stories in Political Thought*, 129.

[656] Eller, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*, 14.

[657] Juliette Wood, "The Concept of the Goddess", in *The Concept of the Goddess*, ed. Sandra Billington and Miranda J. Aldhouse-Green (New York: Routledge, 1996), 16.

myth-maker", stating that her book is "inaccurate, biased, unprofessional", yet immensely valuable, precisely because it functions as a myth. Davis, writes Rich,

> was the first contemporary feminist myth-maker. […] She assumed the role of the tribal story-teller of a conquered people, reciting legends of their past […]. Out of a blend of fact and guesswork, fragments of rumor, memory and desire, she tried to do in prose what the poet of earlier times did in epic or ballad – to call up before women a different condition than the one we have known […].[658]

The fact that Davis uses footnotes has, Rich states, led to the assumption that her book can and should be read as if it was a doctoral thesis. But this is a mistake. Instead, it should be approached as a "catalyst of memory and imagination", as well as a "continuation of that tradition by which the human mind attempts to link past and future, dreaming up freedom while in exile". With reference to Jane Ellen Harrison, Rich writes that "a myth […] expresses a need, a longing, a desire."[659]

A similar argument was advanced by poet and art historian Anne Carson in 1986. Noting that many feminists view the matriarchy thesis as a "myth", she concludes: "Let it be myth then […] Whether the Golden Age of Matriarchy ever existed in history is not important: what is important is that the myth exists *now*, that there is a story being passed from woman to woman, from mother to daughter, of a time in which we were strong and free and could see ourselves in the Divine".[660] Here the epithet "myth" is used to protect the matriarchal thesis against rationalist objections. By presenting this thesis as a myth, Rich and Carson can concede that it might not stand up to academic scrutiny, without having to reject it.

Finally, some feminist matriarchalists argued that the "myth of matriarchy" is a myth in the sense that it fulfills a mythical function, yet claimed that myths can be both true and fictitious. Outlining her own position in an interview from 1982, Carol P. Christ explains that she views the matriarchy thesis as a true myth:

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[658] Rich, "The Origins of Feminist Myth-Making", 15.

[659] Ibid. The same idea is echoed by Rhoda Lerman, who in her eulogy writes describes *The First Sex* as the feminist movement "own myth". Quoted from Wright, *Origin Stories in Political Thought*, 137.

[660] Anne Carson, *Feminist Spirituality and the Feminine Divine: An Annotated Bibliography* (Trumansburg: Crossing Press, 1986), 6, italics in original.

> I think that the myth of matriarchy is that […] we were not slaves in the past and that there was a time when we ruled or at least were equal. This is used as a justification, it sures us up psychologically in the present. If it were shown that it was not true, we could still use the myth to give us psychological sustenance. I would not find it very satisfying, if I knew it was not true in any way. […] I would rather be working with the truth and if it is true that there never has been any form of female power in the past, we need to form myths about doing what's never been done before. Being the first and only ones, going against all of history and all of nature, which is a lot; I'd rather not have to do that."[661]

This quote brings to light one of the difficult questions that inform the feminist debate on the matriarchy thesis, as well as the discussion on origin myths in general. As we can see, Christ both suggests that "the myth of matriarchy" *is* true and that it could remain useful even if it was false, yet concludes that she herself might not use it, if the latter turned out to the case. Even so, she *hopes* that it is true, not because it is impossible to construct alternative, true myths, but because she believes that only an origin myth of this type, which promises that the world was once very different, can help feminists accomplish their ultimate aim. In other words, should the myth of matriarchy prove false, women who accepted the premises on which Christ's argument rests would be forced to choose between inventing a past or giving up their hope for a different future.

(4) So far, I have identified three concepts of myth at work in *Gyn/Ecology* and in the larger debate about the matriarchy thesis. But there is also a fourth one, which plays a particularly important part in Daly's work This fourth concept of myth has much in common with the neo-Romantic concept, whose representatives speak of "myths" to denote narratives believed to encompass transhistorical, metaphysical or psychological truths conveyed through symbols. I argue that Daly makes use of "myth" in this way when she claims that myths offer insights about and serves as guides to the Background, meaning women's authentic Selves.

As mentioned earlier, the idea that literary myths can encompass truths about the psyche or about the self was popularized by Jung, who we have seen argued that myths could function as guides toward wholeness. It was developed by Campbell, who himself emphasized the importance of Jung.[662] Discussing the images that he believes stem from the unconscious and are embodied in myths, Campbell declares that these "carry keys that open the

[661] Quoted from Dijk, "The Goddess Movement in the U. S. A.", 261, ellipses in original.
[662] Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 4.

whole realm of the desired and feared adventure of the discovery of the self." He continues: "It has always been the prime function of mythology and rite to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward, in counteraction to those constant human fantasies that tend to tie it back."[663] This suggests that myths do not only make possible self-knowledge, but self-realization. Myths can guide us through the "labyrinth", to "the center of our own existence."[664] But without access to the archetypical images that myths convey, Campbell holds that one's "energies" will "remain locked in a banal, long-outmoded toy-room, at the bottom of the sea."[665] I read Daly as claiming that this is exactly what has happened to women, because the myths that could help them release their (gynocentric) energy have been re-written, reversed and repressed. Hence, she states that men have robbed women of everything: "our myths, our energy, our divinity, our Selves."[666]

So, when Daly conceptualizes gynocentric myths (including her own "Otherworld Journey") as guides to wholeness, integrity and the authentic Self, she appropriates a concept of myth derived from the neo-Romantic mythological tradition, as represented by Jung and Campbell. Meanwhile, her argument also challenges one of the premises on which this tradition rests: namely, the assumption that *all* mythical images – because they stem from the collective unconscious and therefore constitute humanity's common creation – possess a universal relevance. As I have shown, this claim was disputed already by Beauvoir, who objected that all literary myths were created by men and therefore only reflected and reinforced men's interests and experiences. Daly's argument points to the same conclusion, with the important difference that she maintains that there are gynocentric myths, created by women. Whereas Campbell argues that mythology is "everywhere the same, beneath its varieties of costume", Daly emphatically establishes a sharp distinction between gynocentric and patriarchal myths.[667]

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To summarize, the above analysis has shown that "myth" serves a variety of functions in the larger feminist debate about the original matriarchy thesis. Of

[663] Ibid., 10.
[664] Ibid., 23.
[665] Ibid., 11.
[666] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 5
[667] Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 3.

particular interest is the fact that some feminists invoke literary myths in support of this thesis, while others speak of the thesis itself as a myth. As I have demonstrated, this tension also informs Daly's work. This does not mean that Daly rejects the matriarchy thesis as false, but that she presents the original matriarchy both as a *source* of older myths and as a *subject* for newly invented ones. It follows that the historical reality of the original matriarchy is both important and unimportant for Daly. It is significant in the sense that her entire argument presupposes that the matriarchy thesis is indeed correct. Should this thesis prove to be wrong, this would suggest that Daly is mistaken about many of the things she claims, such as that all literary myths are reversals of more original gynocentric myths, or that the political power once lay in the hands of women. Yet, the work of Daly and other feminist matriarchalists demonstrates that myths *about* the original matriarchy can become highly influential despite their lack of support from scientific specialists. In her above-mentioned article from 1979, Binford identifies this as a serious problem, stating:

> In many discussions I have had with partisans of this myth over the past several years, I am persuaded that logic, reason, and arguments based on knowledge of the data cut no ice at all. The only experience I have had as an anthropologist that is analogous in its lack of susceptibility to reason is trying to argue the evidence of biological evolution with hardcore fundamentalists, whose faith also renders them impervious to information.[668]

We should note, however, that other mythologists have emphasized that the resistance of myth to objections built on logic, reason and fact is one of its great advantages. Sorel, for example, argues that one important difference between myths and utopias is that a utopia, as "an intellectual product", can be challenged with reference to empirical observation, while a "myth cannot be refuted since it is, at bottom, identical to the convictions of a group".[669] That is why Sorel, in his discussion on to the socialist myth of the general strike, cheerfully exclaims that people who live "in this world of myths are secure from all refutation".[670]

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[668] Binford, "Myths and Matriarchies", 542–543.

[669] Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 28, 29.

[670] Ibid., 30. This, Sorel continues, "has led many to assert that socialism is a kind of religion", an assertion that he nevertheless rejects, as not all beliefs "unaffected by criticism" are necessarily religious." Ibid.

These divergent assessments bring us, finally, to the question of the advantages and disadvantages of mythic thinking.

The power and perils of mythic thinking

If we, following Beauvoir, use "mythic thinking" to denote a mode of thought characterized by a unreflexive approach to the products of one's own consciousness, several passages in *Beyond God the Father* can be read as presenting a critique of this thinking. For example, Daly stresses the importance of achieving "a sense of distance and relativity in relation to the symbols prevailing in one's culture." "Without it", she continues, "the mind tends to perceive these as literally 'true' or at least as permanently adequate for all cultural situations, which means that the human mind becomes paralyzed by its own products."[671]

Indeed, to the extent that Daly's conceptualization of God as an "ultimate transcendence" – over which humans have no power, but in the becoming of which women participate – is to be understood as a form of revisionist myth-making (intended to provide her own radical feminist narrative with a mythical framing), she can be said to construct a *myth meant to safeguard against mythic thinking*. At the very least, we have seen that she herself argues that the notion of God as ultimate transcendence "makes it possible to be free of idolatry even in regard to one's own cause, since it tells us that all presently envisioned goals, lifestyles, symbols, and societal structures may be transitory."[672] The fact that Daly here emphasizes the value of freeing oneself from idolatry "even in regard to one's own cause" is important, as it suggests that *all* concepts and values, even those she herself invokes, should be viewed as historically contingent.

In sharp contrast, the author of *Gyn/Ecology* seems to assume that the categories that structure her reasoning mirror an absolute reality. This is perhaps most evident in her use of the word "woman", which she assumes can only be correctly defined in a way that, among other things, excludes trans women. There are of course many possible explanations for this shift. But I want to highlight a factor so far never considered: that Daly in *Gyn/Ecology* operates on the basis of a different concept of myth than in *Beyond God the Father*.

We can recall that Daly, in an interview from 1971, claims that myths are the product of "social infrastructures", which means that the death and birth

[671] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 28.
[672] Ibid., 29.

of myths must be understood as a consequence of social change.[673] A similar reasoning structures *Beyond God the Father*, where Daly with Richardson speaks of myths as story-images that symbolize the Whole, but emphasizes that all symbols are relative. In fact, since she maintains that God must be understood as something that unfolds, a verb rather than a noun, her argument indicates that both myth and that which myths symbolize is subject to change. In effect, *Beyond God the Father* seems to suggest that it is pointless to look for anything eternal or absolute in myths.

At the center of *Gyn/Ecology* we encounter a very different concept of myth. There, (gynocentric) myths are not described as a product of historically changing social conditions, but as emanating from the Background, which Daly in turn presents as a "sacred realm" inside women, hidden behind but ultimately unaffected by the false consciousness imposed on them by patriarchy.[674] In this respect, she can be said to appropriate a concept of myth rooted in a neo-Romantic discourse represented by mythologists who speak of myths as vehicles of transhistorical truths. This understanding of myth informs Daly's own myth-making. Nowhere in *Gyn/Ecology* does she indicate that the symbols she employs to articulate her mythic narrative are relative. Instead, she presents the entity at the center of her myth – woman – as a being that is both absolute and knowable.

It is quite possible that Daly's immense popularity was partly due to this fact. In *Gyn/Ecology*, she takes on the role of the prophet. She provides a myth with no gray areas, devoid of ambivalence, one that establishes a decisive divide between "us" and "them", good and evil; a myth that explains the past and identifies a definitive path forward, towards salvation. Thus, her myth accomplishes exactly what Sorel claims that a myth should accomplish: it does not nuance, but simplifies, while it also suggests that the matter *is* actually just that simple. It is easy to see why many women found this myth extremely appealing. At the same time, it is these reifying simplifications that render invisible the experience of non-white women, and that lead Daly and her followers to dismiss trans women as non-women. It is because she takes the category of woman to be absolute, even sacred, that Daly is compelled to condemn any tendency to expand or relativize it. Contrary to the message of *Beyond God the Father*, she thereby turns the woman into an idol, a fetish – the cult-like worship of which she both directs and participates in. In this respect,

[673] Daly and Stell, "The Church and Women", 349.
[674] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 48.

Daly can be said to enchant herself, succumb to her own extraordinary myth-making ability.

Daly's third book can thus be said to illustrate both the power and the perils of mythic thinking. In the next part-study, centered on Haraway, I discuss the benefits but also the difficulties of *ironic* myths, meant to render mythic thinking impossible.

Summary

"Religion is truly a great challenge to feminist thinking", notes historian of religion Lisbeth Mikaelsson. "Because religion regularly is involved in legislation and practices organizing gender inequality, the history of feminist religion critique goes back centuries."[675] One of the most influential feminist critics of religion in the twentieth century is Mary Daly. Simultaneously, she has been instrumental in promoting the idea that feminists need religion and that religion needs feminism. In fact, it can be argued that Daly – who asserts that "the women's revolution, insofar it is true to its own essential dynamics, is an ontological, spiritual revolution" – is among those who, for better or worse, have helped turn feminism itself into a religion, at least for some. In this study, I have explored the ways in which Daly uses myth-talk to achieve these different ends. I have also shown how she challenges long-held ideas about the role of myth in Christianity, as well as in secular society at large.

Myth and religion

In her first book, *The Church and The Second Sex*, Daly appropriates a concept of myth used by Harvey Cox, who describes myths as primitive demons that haunt modern societies. I have argued that Daly makes use of this concept to articulate an analysis that frames the feminist struggle against patriarchal tendencies within the Catholic Church as fully compatible with – indeed, as a natural extension of – both the intra-theological endeavor to demythologize Christianity and the much older battle against demons, which the Bible presents Jesus as waging. Conceptualizing the Church as haunted spectral remnants of a primitive stage also allows Daly to criticize the Church without having to dismiss Christianity as such. By framing the problem in temporal terms, she can argue that an updating (*aggiornamento*) of the Church constitutes a sufficient solution. In the same work, Daly moreover appropriates a concept of myth developed by Simone de Beauvoir ("the 'eternal feminine' myth"), which serves her argument in that it both makes problematic tendencies visible and allows her to categorize these as part of an already identified problem.

In her second book, *Beyond God the Father,* Daly appropriates a concept of myth used by Mircea Eliade, who claims that myth in primitive societies generate repetition. Daly agrees with this conclusion, but objects that

[675] Mikaelsson, "Religion", 762.

Christianity did not, as Eliade maintains, entail a break from this mythic-cyclical temporal order. Instead, she states that the "fall" from myth into history is only occurring in her own time, as a result of the women's revolution. Furthermore, I have shown that Daly in this work appropriates a concept of myth used by Kate Millet, to argue that Christian myths help perpetuate patriarchal oppression even after people cease to perceive them as literally true, because they continue to operate at an unconscious level. At the same time, we have seen that Daly argues that the women's revolution can help accomplish a remythologization of religion, and draws on Eliades description of myth to mythologize this revolution.

Finally, this study has demonstrated that Daly in her third book, *Gyn/Ecology*, draws on mythologists like Eliade and Émile Durkheim to develop a coherent feminist theory of myth, which both identifies myth as the very fundament on which patriarchy rests, and as a path to liberation.

A multidimensional mythologist

Daly has not so much been excluded from the history of feminist theory as she has been relegated to it: classified as belonging to a part of this tradition's past with no relevance to its present. Thus, much previous research tends either to dismiss her completely or – in order to rehabilitate her – disregard all aspects of her writings that make them controversial. In contrast, this study attests to the value of continued critical engagement with Daly's work.

Daly is usually described as an essentialist feminist who advocates backwards looking, pre-patriarchal origin myths. But this study has shown that she is a far more versatile theorist than previous scholarship generally suggests. Not only does Daly adopt a variety of positions throughout her career (one of which rests on an explicitly anti-essentialist ontology), she also employs many different concepts of myth to articulate and defend these positions. In addition to those termed "ideological" and "folkloristic", Daly's work contains what Andrew Von Hendy calls a "constitutive" and "romantic" conception of myth, which is to say that she sometimes uses "myth" to denote a necessary fiction (constitutive), while she at other times suggests that myth is a vehicle of transhistorical truths (romantic). Likewise, we have seen that Daly's work harbors conflicting temporal logics, manifested in different forms of myth-talk. At times, she does speak of myth as part of a repressed, pre-patriarchal past that women must seek to remember, or as part of a past that they can recollect *through* myth. But she also conceptualizes myth as a matter to be forgotten or

rewritten in order to enable a different future, just as she sometimes advocates the invention of new myths.

The often-overlooked complexity of Daly's work is also evident in how she relates to the different phenomena she herself refers to as myths. In her first book, she employs concepts of myth appropriated from Cox and Beauvoir to criticize myth. Even so, I have shown that she, in this and later works, can be said to mythologize the process of demythification, in the sense that she, for example, conceptualizes the fight against patriarchal myths as an exorcism of demons. Likewise, in her second book, Daly argues that biblical myths, such as the myth of the Fall, must be abolished rather than demythologized, yet she herself engages in a form of revisionist myth-making that transforms this story from a myth of origin to an eschatological myth with Nietzschean overtones. Finally, this study has shown that Daly can be read as a writer modeling the stories she tells about the feminist struggle on influential mythologists' descriptions of myth. This is particularly evident in her third book, where she argues that women fighting for emancipation must engage in a "Otherworld Journey", with Daly herself as their Virgil and Beatrice. But according to my reading, she also mythologizes the present moment in her second book, where she describes the women's revolution as a "manifestation of the sacred" that enables integration and transformation – which is how Eliade and Herbert Richardson define the (ideal) nature of myth.

The fact that Daly is more a complex feminist theorist and mythologist than previous research has generally acknowledged does not render the critique directed at her invalid. For example, this study has revealed how Daly's feminist theory of myth reproduces and reinforces a dehumanizing view of trans women. But it has also highlighted a hitherto unrecognized factor that may help us make sense of Daly's dramatic shift, as a consequence of which she goes from promoting an anti-essentialist ontology to conceptualizing "male" and "female" as transhistorical absolutes. Namely, her increased reliance on the Romantic concept of myth, promoted by neo-Romantic mythologists like Carl Gustav Jung and Joseph Campbell. To be more precise, I have argued that Daly, under the influence of this concept, begins to look for eternal truths in older myths and advance new myths that purport to contain such truths – which, among other things, leads her to indulge in a form of mythic thinking that obscures the contingent meaning of categories such as male and female.

Daly is the one of the three feminist theorists at the center of this study who challenges canonized mythologists in the most explicit way. She engages in a direct dialog with esteemed historians of religion and theologians such as Eliade, Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich, all of whom she criticizes for adopting an androcentric perspective on myth. To the best of my knowledge, she is among the first mythologists – perhaps *the* first – to do so.

Daly claims that Eliade can only conclude that Christianity put an end to the mythical-cyclical existence that, according to him, characterizes life in primitive societies because he "sees the situation through male lenses"; otherwise, he would realize that women are still trapped by the myth of the eternal return. Daly also asserts that Eliade would not have mourned the death of pagan and Christian myths had he taken into account their devastating effect on women's lives. Likewise, she advances a feminist critique of Bultmann and Tillich, who maintain that Christian myths should be demythologized or broken, but not removed or replaced with new myths. Again, she argues that this position betrays a clear androcentric bias, which blinds or makes these famous theologians indifferent to the fact that Christian myths, such as the myth of the Fall, were created to justify male supremacy and *still* serve this function in today's society, which means that it is not enough to simply reinterpret them.

PART IV.
DONNA
HARAWAY

Introduction

In a strict sense, science is our myth.

Donna Haraway, 1978

What good is science to the oppressed? In the 1970s and 1980s, this question gained significant traction among U.S. scholars and activists. Following the Second World War, government investment in scientific research and education surged dramatically, from $50 million in 1939 to $15 billion by 1970.[1] This development helped generate further scientific and technological advances, which in turn increased confidence in the continued growth of scientific progress. In the post-war period, public trust in the beneficial effects of science thus rose to an all-time high.[2] Yet, the scientification and technologization of society also raised serious concerns, especially among the left.

Historically, the left had placed much faith in the emancipatory potential of science and technology. Indeed, many socialists had gone to great lengths to prove that Marxism was itself scientific.[3] But amid the horrors of the war

[1] Kelly Moore, *Disrupting Science: Social Movements, American Scientists, and the Politics of the Military, 1945-1975* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 4. On this development, see also Olof Hallonsten, *Big Science Transformed: Science, Politics and Organization in Europe and the United States (*London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 43–50.

[2] Moore, *Disrupting Science*, 22. See also Robert Young, "The Anthropology of Science", *New Humanist* 88, no. 3 (1972): 102.

[3] Friedrich Engels used the term "scientific Socialism" to define Karl Marx's theory. Friedrich Engels, "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific" [1880], in *Marx and Engels Collected Works. Volume 24. Marx and Engels 1874–83*, ed. Jack Cohen et al., trans. Lawrence & Wishhart (London: Lawrence & Wishhart, 1970), 325. In 1889, Vladimir Lenin proclaimed: "Marxism was the first to transform socialism from a utopia into a science, to lay a firm foundation for this science". Vladimir Lenin, "Our Programme" [1889], in *Collected Works 4. 1898–April 1901*, ed. Victor Jerome, trans. Joe Fineberg and George Hanna (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 210. Much later, Louis Althusser defended the scientific objectivity of Marxism against those who argued that it was "a myth in the Sorelian sense" – that is, "a subjective ('class') theory, having no claim to scientific universality and objectivity". Louis Althusser, "On Marxism" [1953], in *The Spectre of Hegel: Early Writings*, ed. François Matheron, trans. G.M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 1997), 246. See also Louis Althusser, "Theory, Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation: Ideology and Ideological Struggle" [1965], in *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists & Other Essays*, ed. Gregory Elliott, trans. Ben Brewste (London: Verso, 1990), 3–22.

and the atrocities of the Holocaust, a more critical discourse emerged, represented by theorist who did not describe science as a tool of liberation, but as an instrument of domination. Writing in 1944, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno observed that "not only the operations but the purpose of science have become dubious."[4] This discourse gained ground among U.S. left-wing scholars and activist in the early 1960s. These individuals initially focused on the scientific community's close ties to the military-industrial complex, intensified and made visible by the nuclear arms race and the war in Vietnam.[5] But under the influence of the New Left, which drew much inspiration from the Frankfurt School philosopher Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979), the focus widened to eventually include the role of science in society at large.[6] Seeking to sum up the situation as he saw it in 1972, historian of science Robert Young (1935–2019) wrote:

> The question is not merely that of the specific uses and abuses of science and technology. The debate is much wider. On one side it is being argued that we have entered a new age – the cybernetic one – in which advanced industrial countries can, for the first time, implement the dreams of abundance and egalitarian democracy which science has always promised […]. On the other side, many of the members of the New Left and the counter-culture of young people argue that science and technology have robbed people of their dignity and have created a society devoted to the acquisition of goods and gadgets in place of human relationships.[7]

Donna Haraway is among the first and most influential scholars to approach the questions around which this debate revolves from a feminist perspective. Consequently, she is generally considered one of the pioneers and leading figures of feminist science studies and feminist philosophy of science, the representatives of which have helped produce profound shifts in how science is understood, both within academia and among the general public.[8] Her work

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[4] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* xiv.

[5] Moore, *Disrupting Science*, 3–4, 133.

[6] Ibid., 7, 48. For Marcuse's influential critique of the scientification of the technologization of society see Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, trans. Douglas Kellner (New York: Routledge, [1964] 2002).

[7] Young, "The Anthropology of Science", 102.

[8] On the history and effects of feminist science studies and feminist philosophy of science, see Banu Subramaniam, "Moored Metamorphoses: A Retrospective Essay on Feminist Science Studies", *Signs* 34, no. 4 (2009); Sarah S. Richardson, "Feminist Philosophy of Science: History, Contributions, and Challenges", *Synthese* 177, no. 3 (2010); Susan M. Squier and Melissa M.

has also had great impact beyond these fields. According to sociologist Patricia Ticineto Clough and Joseph Schneider, no other cultural critic has been more successful than her in exposing the complicity of science in oppression.[9] To avoid the common misconception that this constitutes Haraway's only focus, one must immediately note that she devotes just as much attention to science's emancipatory potential. Her faith in science does, however, rest on different premises than that of her socialist predecessors, just as her critique thereof differs from that of the Frankfurt School and the New Left.

Focusing on articles published between 1978 and 1984, this part-study explores how Haraway uses myth-talk to articulate and argue in favor of this innovative, distinctly feminist approach to science, the nature of which will be specified in the analysis. The study at hand also examines Haraway's own myth – what she refers to as "my cyborg myth" – presented in her famous "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1985), a text that I return to later on.[10]

Science as "our" myth

In addition to Haraway, there are a few other scholars active in the 1970s who use "myth" to discuss science from a feminist perspective. In "Gender and Science" (1978), physicists Evelyn Fox Keller argues that there exists a "historically pervasive" link between science and masculinity, which the nonfeminist academy refuses to address. In her eyes, this suggests that the association in question has "the status of a myth which either cannot or should not be examined seriously."[11] Keller continues:

> The survival of mythlike beliefs in our thinking about science, the very archetype of antimyth, ought, it would seem, to invite our curiosity and demand investigation. Unexamined myths, wherever they survive, have a subterranean

Littlefield, "Feminist Science Studies", in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Science*, ed. Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (New York: Routledge, 2011). A partially overlapping field of which Haraway can also be considered one of the founders is called *feminist cultural studies of science and technology*. Maureen McNeil, *Feminist Cultural Studies of Science and Technology* (New York: Routledge, 2007), esp. 12–24.

[9] Patricia Ticineto Clough and Joseph Schneider, "Donna J. Haraway", in *Profiles in Contemporary Social Theory*, ed. Anthony Elliott and Bryan Turner (London: SAGE Publication Ltd, 2001), 344.

[10] For the publication history of this text, see this thesis, 18 n29.

[11] Evelyn Fox Keller, "Gender and Science" [1978], in *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science* ed. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka (New York: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004), 187.

> potency; they affect our thinking in ways we are not aware of, and to the extent that we lack awareness, our capacity to resist their influence is undermined. The presence of the mythical in science seems particularly inappropriate.[12]

We recognize this concept of myth, according to which myth constitutes the antithesis of science and a "survival" operating at a "subterranean" level, from the evolutionary anthropology discourse on myth, which was also appropriated by Simone de Beauvoir.

A similar concept of myth figures in biologists Ruth Hubbard's "Have Only Men Evolved?" first published in *Women Look at Biology Looking at Women* (1979). Having concluded that there are many "male myths" in science, Hubbard asks how women should approach these myths. She begins by asserting that women should not use science to build myths of their own. "Of course, there is a place for myth-making and I dream of a long poem that sings women's origins and tells how we felt and what we did; but I do not think that carefully constructed 'scientific' mirror images do much to counter the male myths." Instead, women should opt for one of two alternative strategies. "Women can sift carefully the few available facts by paring away the mythology and getting as close to the raw data as possible." Or, women may concentrate "as a beginning, on exposing and analyzing the male myths that hide our overwhelming ignorance".[13]

In brief, both Keller and Hubbard pit science and myth against each other. While they acknowledge the presence of myth *in* science, they maintain that this is a problematic or "inappropriate" presence that should be eliminated, in order to liberate science form myth. In stark contrast, Haraway's *equates* science with myth, collapsing the very demarcation between the two. Where others have argued that myth haunts science, she claims that science *is* myth. Already in one of her first academic articles, a text with the heavy-footed title "Animal Sociology and a Natural Economy of the Body Politic, Part II. The Past Is the Contested Zone: Human Nature and Theories of Production and Reproduction in Primate Behavior Studies" (1978) – quoted in the epigraph above – Haraway proclaims: "In a strict sense, science is our myth."[14] In a

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[12] Ibid., 187–188.

[13] Ruth Hubbard, "Have Only Men Evolved" [1979], in *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science* ed. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka (New York: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004), 66.

[14] Donna Haraway, "The Past Is the Contested Zone: Human Nature and Theories of Production and Reproduction in Primate Behaviour Studies", in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Natur* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 42. Henceforth, "The Past Is the Contested

later piece, "The Contest for Primate Nature: Daughters of Man-the-Hunter in the Field, 1960-80" (1983), she again asserts: "Science is our myth."[15] I argue that this repeated claim should not be construed as a mere provocation or empty rhetorical gesture, but considered as an attempt to articulate a particular understanding of science, which permeates everything Haraway writes regarding the topic. As we will see, Haraway does not only *speak* of science as "our" myth; she also *approaches* it as such.

What, then, does it mean to approach science as "our" myth? To answer this question, it is necessary to read Haraway's writings on myth and science alongside other works in the mythological network, which comment on the same theme. In particular, I will focus on texts by influential representatives of what I call *the anthropological turn in science studies*, all om whom argue that science should be approached as "our" myth. These scholars will, in turn, be shown to appropriate, but also challenge, a concept of myth associated with Claude Lévi-Strauss, who helped popularize the notion of primitive myth as "their" science. The primary purpose of this recontextualization is to facilitate a deeper understanding of Haraway's writings. But it will also make visible her often overlooked contribution to the *anthropology of science*, an influential academic field whose history remains to be written.

An enemy of science?

Haraway's writings on science have been the subject of much controversy.[16] During the so-called science wars of the 1990s, biologist Paul R. Gross and mathematician Norman Levitt, authors of *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science* (1994), labelled Haraway a member of the "the feminist-critique-of-science mafia", whose writings they claimed helped

Zone". Originally published as Donna Haraway, "Animal Sociology and a Natural Economy of the Body Politic, Part II: The Past Is the Contested Zone: Human Nature and Theories of Production and Reproduction in Primate Behavior Studies", *Signs* 4, no. 1 (1978).

[15] Donna Haraway, "The Contest for Primate Nature: Daughters of Man-the-Hunter in the Field, 1960-80", in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, (New York: Routledge, 1991), 81. Originally published as Donna Haraway, "The Contest for Primate Nature: Daughters of Man-the-Hunter in the Field, 1960-80", in *The Future of American Democracy: Views from the Left*, ed. Mark Kann (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983).

[16] In addition to the texts mentioned below, see Susan Cachel, "Partisan Primatology", *American Journal of Primatology* 22, no. 2 (1990); Matt Cartmill, "Primate Visions", *International Journal of Primatology: The Official Journal of the International Primatological Society* 12, no. 1 (1991); Larry Arnhart, "Feminism, Primatology, and Ethical Naturalism", *Politics and the Life Sciences* 11, no. 2 (1992).

undermine the authority of all scientific knowledge.[17] Interestingly, even Levitt and Gross use "myth" to discuss science, but assert that it is the supposedly anti-scientific academic left that spread myths *about* science.[18] This view was also propagated by contributors to an anthology with the telling title *A House Built on Sand: Exposing Postmodern Myths About Science* (1998), in which physicist Alan Sokal denounces postmodernists for claiming that science is "just another social practice, which produces 'narrations' and 'myths' that are no more valid than those produced by other social practices".[19] In this work, Haraway is again cited as an enemy of science. For example, historian of science Meera Nanda argues that Haraway and kindred theorists' decision to approach Western science as but one "ethnoscience" among many (that is, as *our* ethnoscience or myth), effectively nullifies the notion of truth as a useful criterion for evaluating contradicting statements.[20]

Lately, the idea of feminist theorists as enemies of science has resurfaced in debates about who is to blame for the alleged decline of public faith in facts, said to characterize our current "post-truth" climate. In an article from 2020, cultural theorists Eva Haifa Giraud and Sarah-Nicole Aghassi-Isfahani even speak of a "rearticulation" of the 1990s science wars, in which "theoretical perspectives concerned with gender and racial inequality have been seen as contributing to a relativization of facts and expert knowledge."[21] More generally, the threat is often spelled (poststructuralist or postmodernist) "critique", a phenomenon said to foster epistemological relativism. But

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[17] Paul R. Gross and Norman Levitt, *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 100.

[18] Ibid., 8. "In the current climate, […] sane and indispensable scrutiny threatens to be displaced by myth-making of the most fanciful sort. The key function of these myths is to gratify the resentment and self-righteousness of those who propose them".

[19] Alan D Sokal, "What the *Social Text* Affair Does and Does Not Prove", in *A House Built on Sand Exposing Postmodernist Myths About Science* ed. Noretta Koertge (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 10. See also Paul A. Boghossian, "What the Sokal Hoax Ought to Teach Us", in *A House Built on Sand: Exposing Postmodernist Myths About Science*, ed. Noretta Koertge (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 27. Postmodernism, writes Boghossian, is "seeking to demote science from the privileged epistemic position it has come to occupy, and thereby to blur the distinction between it and 'other ways of knowing' – myth, and superstition, for example".

[20] Meera Nanda, "The Epistemic Charity of the Social Constructivist Critics of Science and Why the Third World Should Refuse the Offer", in *A House Built on Sand: Exposing Postmodernist Myths About Science*, ed. Noretta Koertge (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 286, 299–300.

[21] Eva Haifa Giraud and Sarah-Nicole Aghassi-Isfahani, "Post-Truths, Common Worlds, and Critical Politics: Critiquing Bruno Latour's Renewed Critique of Critique", *Cultural Politics* 16, no. 1 (2020): 2.

according to Giraud and Aghassi-Isfahani, feminist and postcolonial theorists are usually held especially guilty of having developed a strand of critique that paves the way for post-truth.[22]

However, one should note that Haraway's writings on science have also been criticized by other feminists, some of which highlight her equation of science and myth as particularly upsetting. In an article titled "Baboons with Briefcases" (1991), primatologist Susan Sperling argues that Haraway represents a postmodernist "school", which has conceptualized the work of primatologists as "a series of myths, one replacing another".[23] Sperling describes this position as highly problematic. "Postmodernism", she writes, "leaves untouched the question of the relative worth of epistemologies in evolutionary science, because postmodernists tend to view all epistemologies as equally mythic social constructions."[24] Likewise, in "Why Pragmatists Should Not Be Cyborgs" (2014) philosopher Mary Magada-Ward claims that "it is irresponsible to blur the boundaries between myth and science", because one thereby undermines the authority of scientific knowledge.[25] In effect, Haraway's argument runs the risk of "playing into the hands of those who willfully ignore instances of scientific consensus."[26] And as political strategy, the value of this blurring is "negligible", as it hinders the realization of the "liberatory ideals" championed by progressive science studies scholars.[27]

In short, both feminists and critics of feminist science studies have portrayed Haraway as an enemy of science, whose equation of science with myth is especially troublesome. If one studies what Haraway actually writes, it is nonetheless clear that she sees herself as trying to *defend* the value of science; in particular, the value of science to women and other marginalized groups. Admittedly, she does highlight the complicity of science in oppression. In particular, Haraway notes that science has helped naturalize and thereby

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[22] Ibid., 7.

[23] Susan Sperling, "Baboons with Briefcases: Feminism, Functionalism, and Sociobiology in the Evolution of Primate Gender", *Signs* 17, no. 1 (1991): 25.

[24] Ibid., 26. See also Micaela di Leonardo, "Introduction: Gender, Culture, and Political Economy Feminist Anthropology in Historical Perspective", in *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge*, ed. Micaela di Leonardo (University of California Press, 1991), 24. Although she does not present Haraway as representing this position, Leonardo states that "poststructuralism" is "antiscience", because it "it levels our distinctions among truth and falsehood, science and myth."

[25] Mary Magada-Ward, "Why Pragmatists Should Not Be Cyborgs", *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 28, no. 4 (2014): 472.

[26] Ibid., 480.

[27] Ibid., 472.

justify "domination", whether it is women being dominated by men, animals being dominated by humans, or "nature" being dominated in the name of science or culture. Furthermore, her claim is not just that science has been *used* (or abused) in this way, but that "the principle of domination" permeates its very content.[28] In this respect, Haraway ascribes a similar function to science as did Mary Daly to religion. However, just as Daly also stressed religion's liberating potential, Haraway maintains that science can serve an emancipatory function; indeed, that emancipation is impossible without science.

Haraway argues that feminist who reject science as inherently oppressive grant it "the role of a fetish, an object human beings make only to forget their role in creating".[29] In contrast, she asserts that "we have the science we make historically" and that feminists must strive to reappropriate and remake science.[30] Summarizing her understanding of what science is and may become, she states that "we may reinforce our vision of the natural and cultural necessity of domination", but just as well learn to practice science in a way that makes possible greater degrees of freedom.[31] Most importantly, Haraway argues that feminists must engage with science because science makes it possible change or *reinvent* (human) nature itself.[32] In the present study, I demonstrate that her decision to approach science as "our" myth helps her articulate a coherent argument in favor of this position. To denote this approach – which does not constitute a scientific study of myth (a *mythology*), but a mythological study of science – I speak of Haraway's *logomythology*.

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[28] Donna Haraway, "Animal Sociology and a Natural Economy of the Body Politic: A Political Physiology of Dominance", in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (Routledge: New York, 1991), 22. Henceforth "Animal Sociology". Originally published as Donna Haraway, "Animal Sociology and a Natural Economy of the Body Politic, Part I: A Political Physiology of Dominance", *Signs* 4, no. 1 (1978).

[29] Haraway, "Animal Sociology", 23. The word "fetish" has something important in common with "myth", in that both words have been used to denote supposedly primitive phenomena and to articulate arguments suggesting that "we" resemble the primitive Other in a problematic way. See James Lorand Matory, *The Fetish Revisited: Marx, Freud, and the Gods Black People Make* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

[30] Haraway, "The Biological Enterprise: Sex, Mind, and Profit from Human Engineering to Sociobiology", in in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (Routledge: New York, 1991), 45. Originally published as Donna Haraway, "The Biological Enterprise: Sex, Mind, and Profit from Human Engineering to Sociobiology", *Radical History Review* (1979).

[31] Haraway, "The Past Is the Contested Zone", 21.

[32] See the subtitle of Haraway second monography: *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature.*

As mentioned above, Haraway does not only study science as myth, she also strives to create a myth of her own, meant to serve the emancipatory aims of feminism. The very first sentence of "A Cyborg Manifesto" reads: "This chapter is an effort to build an ironic political myth faithful to feminism, socialism, and materialism."[33] Later in the same text, Haraway proclaims that her "cyborg myth" is a myth about "transgressed boundaries" that "progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work."[34] This tells us that Haraway sees herself as myth-maker and the cyborg myth "political" myth.

Haraway's manifesto has received immense attention and sparked considerable debate.[35] Most commentators mention that it revolves around a phenomenon referred to as a myth. However, few scholars devote much attention to this fact. And those who do typically prioritize normative questions, which pertain to the advantages and disadvantages of this particular myth.[36] In contrast, I explore what "A Cyborg Manifesto" can teach us about how Haraway, more generally, understands the nature and function of myth and myth-making. On what premises does Haraway faith in myth-making as political strategy rest? Why should feminists privilege "ironic" political myths? What myths must feminist reject and why? In what sense does myth-making constitute a form of coding? How does Haraway's manifesto relate to other texts in the mythological network? These are some of the questions that my study seeks to answer. In doing so, it will not only reveal how Haraway uses myth-talk to articulate feminist arguments and analysis. It will also enable a deeper understanding of the manifesto itself.

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[33] Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 149.

[34] Ibid., 154.

[35] Zoë Sofoulis, "Cyberquake: Haraway's Manifesto", in *Prefiguring Cyberculture: An Intellectual History*, ed. Darren Tofts et al. (MIT Press, 2002); Joseph Schneider, "Haraway's Viral Cyborg", *Women's Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 1/2 (2012).

[36] For scholars who have celebrated or criticized Haraway's use of cyborg imagery to build her political myth, see Marsha A. Hewitt, "Cyborgs, Drag Queens, and Goddesses: Emancipatory-Regressive Paths in Feminist Theory", *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 5, no. 2 (1993): 138–140; J Halberstam, "Automating Gender: Postmodern Feminism in the Age of the Intelligent Machine", *Feminist Studies* 17, no. 3 (1991); Malini Johar Schueller, "Analogy and (White) Feminist Theory: Thinking Race and the Color of the Cyborg Body", *Signs* 31, no. 1 (2005); J. R. DeCook, "A [White] Cyborg's Manifesto: The Overwhelmingly Western Ideology Driving Technofeminist Theory", *Media, Culture and Society* 43, no. 6 (2021); Kerry McInerney, "From Cyborg Irony to Oriental Fantasy: The Racial Limits of Cyborg Feminisms in *Ex Machina* and *Ghost in the Shell*", *SIGNS* 50, no. 2 (2025).

Haraway's claim that science is "our" myth challenges one of the most influential dichotomies in the history of Western thought. And yet, she cannot be said to break with the tradition from which this dichotomy derives.

The dichotomy between myth and science can be traced back to Plato and the division he establishes between the narrative-figurative *mythos* of poets and the rational-conceptual *logos* of philosophers.[37] But it was not until the nineteenth century that myth was contrasted with science in an unambiguous way. This demarcation was popularized by evolutionary anthropologists such as Edward Burnett Tylor and James George Frazer, who helped establish mythology as a scientific endeavor. To be more precise, these mythologists characterized what they termed myth as a primitive *predecessor* of science (a similar reasoning can be found in the work of Bernard Fontenelle, who we have seen described fable as a "crude philosophy").[38] This concept of myth is based on the assumption that myth seeks to accomplish the same thing as science, namely to explain and thereby control physical phenomena, but that myth fails where science succeeds.[39] Hence, one could say that a contingent concept of science (as aimed at and able to achieve control) enabled the construction of the anthropological concept of myth (as aimed at but unable to achieve the same result). But the latter, in turn, helped naturalize the former, by endowing science with an Other, in comparison with which both its history and merits could be specified.

Both concepts were thereby made dependent upon each other, generating a gridlock that even Haraway fails to fully escape. As we will see, she does challenge the notion of myth and science as aimed at control. But she does not break from the tradition that requires or invites one to (re-)define science in relation to myth and vice versa. In the following sections, I discuss some particularly important aspects of this tradition.

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The concept of myth as primitive *pre-science*, popularized by nineteenth-century mythologists, was eventually appropriated by influential philosophers of science, who used it to articulate and argue in favor of their view of science's

[37] Morgan, *Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato*, 3.

[38] Robert A. Segal, "Myth and Science: Their Varying Relationships", in *Myth Analyzed* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 138, 141–149; Fontenelle, "Of the Origin of Fables", 12.

[39] Segal, "Myth and Science", 138, 144.

origin and nature. In *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy* (1951), the philosopher and proponent of logical positivism Hans Reichenbach (1891–1953) explains that human beings began to ask questions about the makeup of the world long before they developed methods that could provide accurate answers, which gave rise to "*pseudo explanations*" of physical phenomena.[40] To exemplify this thesis, Reichenbach notes that "the mythologies of all peoples include primitive versions of the origin of the universe", the explanations of which are "of the naive type that satisfies a primitive mind, or a childlike mind", but which does not constitute proper scientific explanation.[41] Likewise, in "Aspects of Scientific Explanation" (1965), philosopher and logical empiricist Carl Gustav Hempel (1905–1997) states that one basic motive of "man's scientific quest" is a profound longing to understand the world. Hempel continues: "So strong, indeed, is this urge that in the absence of more reliable knowledge, myths are often invoked to fill the gap. But in time, many such myths give way to scientific conceptions of the what and the why of empirical phenomena."[42]

Finally, philosopher Karl Popper (1902–1994), a vocal critic of logical positivism, describes myth as a primitive pre-science, but differs from Reichenbach and Hempel in that he simultaneously characterizes science as a form of myth. In his *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (1962), Popper first notes that myths reflect a "pseudo-scientific attitude" that is "prescientific" in the sense that it is both "more primitive" and "prior" to the scientific attitude.[43] Even so, he goes on to state: "My thesis is that what we call 'science' is differentiated from the older myths not by being something distinct from a myth, but by being accompanied by a second-order tradition – that of critically discussing the myth."[44] Popper accordingly concludes that "science is myth-making", but a form of myth-making that generates much better accounts of the world than primitive myths do.[45] Consequently, Popper

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[40] Hans Reichenbach, *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1951), 8, italics in original.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Carl Gustav Hempel, "Aspects of Scientific Explanation", in *Aspects of Scientific Explanation and Other Essays in the Philosophy of Science* (New York: Free Press, 1965), 333. See also Carl G. Hempel, "Explanation in Science and in History", in *Frontiers of Science and Philosophy*, ed. Robert G. Colodny (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962), 9.

[43] Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (New York: Basic Books, 1962), 50.

[44] Ibid., 127. A similar argument is advanced in Willard Van Orman Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism", in *Can Theories Be Refuted?: Essays on the Duhem-Quine Thesis*, ed. Sandra G. Harding (Dordrecht: R. Reidel Publishing Company, [1953] 1976), 61.

[45] Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 127.

can be read as arguing that science is "our" myth. Still, he does not hold that "their" myth is scientific. This is because primitive myths, unlike scientific theories, are not "falsifiable", which in Popper's view is what distinguishes scientific theories from pseudo-scientific ones.[46] In this respect, the evolutionary concept of myth as primitive pre-science still helps him enforce a normative distinction between science and non-science, which also serves to accentuate the superiority of modern science over other forms of knowledge. For example, Popper asserts that psychoanalysis and Marxism, because these theories cannot be falsified, appears to have "more in common with primitive myths than with science".[47]

I will show that Haraway too establishes a distinction between scientific and non-scientific theories. But because her logomythological approach rests on other premises, she draws this line very differently. To articulate and argue in favor of this approach, she also uses a different concept of myth.

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Reichenbach, Hempel and Popper all invoke the evolutionary anthropological concept of myth as pre-science to clarify the difference between primitive myth and modern science. Ultimately, their aim is to defend the value of the science. But the same concept of myth has also been used by philosophers who highlight the similarities between primitive myth and science in order to expose the shortcomings of the latter.

Appropriating the concept of myth as a primitive precursor to science, aimed at the same thing, Horkheimer and Adorno write: "The scientific calculation of events annuls the account of them which thought had once given in myth. Myth sought to report, to name, to tell of origins – but therefore also to narrate, record, explain."[48] Like the evolutionary anthropologists, Horkheimer and Adorno argue that myth fails to accomplish this, in part because it is based on a flawed understanding of nature. "False clarity", they state, "is only another name for myth."[49] Nevertheless, their point is not that this makes myth inferior to science, in its current form. On the contrary, the fact that the science of "civilized man" has succeeded where the myth of

[46] "One can sum up all this by saying that the criterion of the scientific status of a theory is its falsifiability, or refutability, or testability." Ibid., 37.
[47] Ibid., 33.
[48] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 5.
[49] Ibid., xvii.

"primitive people" failed has had dire consequences.[50] To comprehend and control everything, the "scientific temper" had to reject as being mythical not only the notion of deities and demons, but everything (including concepts and values) that cannot be understood from a quantitative-mathematical framework.[51] As is well-known, Horkheimer and Adorno argue that this development caused enlightenment to "relapse" into mythology. By this, they mean that the worldview informed by modern science became as restricted and fatalistic as that which was dominated by myth. "Enlightenment […] regresses to the mythology it has never been able to escape", they declare.[52]

The distinction between myth and science, primitive and civilized, is here destabilized. But it is important to recall that the analogies Horkheimer and Adorno establish constitute acts of accusation.[53] When they liken the scientific temper to the attitude of the primitive magician, who does not dare to step out of the circle he himself has drawn, this is meant as a critique of the former.[54] Likewise, when they state that enlightenment regresses or relapses into mythology, or that humanity has been "forced back to more primitive anthropological stages", they reproduce the normative, linear temporality of evolutionary anthropology, according to which science *should* replace myth.[55]

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The notion of myth as a primitive pre-science faced increased opposition in the twentieth century. Contributing to this development were functionalist anthropologists like Bronislaw Malinowski. In an essay titled "The Role of Myth in Life", published in *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (1926), Malinowski asserts: "Studied alive, myth […] is not an explanation in satisfaction of a scientific interest, but a narrative resurrection of a primeval reality, told in satisfaction of deep religious wants, moral cravings, social submissions, assertions, even practical requirements."[56] This is not to say that primitive people, according to Malinowski, lack an early equivalent of "our" science. In

[50] Horkheimer and Adorno use the terms "civilized man", "primitive man", "the primitive", "primitives" and "primitive people" at ibid., 6, 7, 10, 11, 14, 27.
[51] Ibid., 2–3, 7, 18–19.
[52] Ibid., 20. See also ibid., 8.
[53] Cf., this thesis, 62.
[54] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 20.
[55] Ibid., 28.
[56] Bronislaw Malinowski, "The Role of Myth in Life", in *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1926), 23.

"Magic, Science, and Religion" (1925), he declares that "even the lowest savage communities have the beginnings of science, however rudimentary."[57] But this rudimentary science is something quite different from myth. Whereas the aim of science is to provide explanations of physical phenomena, Malinowski argues that myth serves a social purpose.[58] In order to understand myth one must therefore consider what *function* it performs within a given social system. If one does, one will often find that seemingly irrational mythical beliefs fulfil an indispensable role in the maintenance of this system, which in turn explains why these mythical beliefs persist.

The functionalist concept of myth made it easier to imagine the existence of *modern* myths, coexisting with science. For if science and myth serve different functions, then there is nothing to say that modern science, by definition, will replace myth.[59] This possibility was highlighted by philosopher John Passmore (1914–2004). In *Science and Its Critics* (1978), Passmore writes: "It has been widely supposed […] that mythology is simply pre-science, an attempt to explain the natural world without the benefit of scientific method. […] A myth, on this view, is simply a false theory; science replaces it by a true theory – an obvious and unmitigated gain."[60] But citing Malinowski, Passmore objects that myth and science serve different functions, which is why he has no problem accepting the notion of distinctly modern myths, such as the "myth" of the proletariat or the classless society.[61]

At the same time, Passmore's argument illustrates that the functionalist concept of myth may still be combined with the normative idea that science ought to replace myth, championed by evolutionary anthropologists. "The scientific ideal", Passmore asserts, "[…] is a world without myths, in which men will see for themselves, without feeling the need for any mythical justification […]. It is a splendid ideal, one that I do not wish for moment to deny."[62] Put differently, it is possible to argue that myth and science serve different functions, while maintaining that science is superior to and should

[57] Bronislaw Malinowski, "Magic, Science and Religio", in *Magic, Science and Religion: And Other Essay*, ed. Robert Redfield (Boston: Beacon Press, [1925] 1948), 17.
[58] Malinowski, "The Role of Myth in Life", 23.
[59] Segal, "Myth and Science", 138.
[60] John Passmore, *Science and Its Critics* (London: Duckworth, 1978), 18.
[61] Ibid., 18–19.
[62] Ibid., 19.

supersede myth. This is one of the basic assumptions challenged by anti-evolutionary anthropologists like Lévi-Strauss.[63]

Myth as "their" science

Lévi-Strauss rejects the assumption, popularized by functionalist anthropologists like Malinowski, that myth only performs a social function and in no way satifies a scientific interest. In accordance with evolutionary anthropologists such as Tylor and Frazer, Lévi-Strauss maintains that myth does respond to a desire for knowledge. But unlike Tylor and Frazer, he does not speak of myth as a primitive pre-science that fails where Western science succeeds. Instead, he argues that myth forms part of "their" science.[64]

In *The Savage Mind* (1962), Lévi-Strauss explains that there are two forms scientific thought: what he terms "the science of the concrete" and one that is more abstract. Modern science is abstract, in the sense that it has removed itself from the world of perception. In contrast, the science of savages is concrete, because it relies on sensory experience. Myth is a result of the latter. It therefore differs from the products of modern science.[65] Still, it is no less valid. "Myths […] are far from being, as has often been held, the product of man's 'myth-making faculty', turning its back on reality", Lévi-Strauss asserts. "This science of the concrete was necessarily restricted by its essence to results other than those destined to be achieved by the exact natural sciences, but it was no less scientific and its results no less genuine."[66]

Lévi-Strauss hereby destabilizes the dichotomy between science and myth. But he maintains that there is an important difference between the savage

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[63] I characterize Lévi-Strauss as an *anti-evolutionary* anthropologist because he explicitly criticizes the evolutionist tendency to think of myth and science, the savage and the civilized, as stages in a developmental scheme (cf. next page). Yet, this does not mean that Lévi-Strauss avoids all tendencies associated with evolutionary anthropology. See Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 4–8.

[64] Throughout this part of the study, I place "our" and "their", "us" and "them" in quotation marks, to mark a distance from the logic that characterizes the arguments I analyze. Hence, these quotation marks do not indicate that the actors themselves use the words in question (except for Haraway, who explicitly states that science as "our" myth).

[65] In a later work, *The Raw and the Cooked* (1964) Lévi-Strauss does suggest that "our" science, or at least the science of myth (mythology), constitutes a myth, in the sense that it functions like a "code" that makes possible a specific reading of myths. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked: Introduction to a Science of Mythology I*, trans. John Wieightman and Doreen Weightman (New York: Harper & Row, [1964] 1969), 12. Cf. this thesis, 436.

[66] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind,* translated by George Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd. (London: University of Chicago Press, [1962] 1973), 16.

myth-maker and the modern scientist. The former, writes Lévi-Strauss, can be likened to a "bricoleur", while the modern scientist has more in common with an engineer. The first of these terms refers to an individual who creates new objects by making use of "whatever is at hand" (quotation marks in original), piecing together a heterogeneous set of items that previously served other functions.[67] In this respect, the bricoleur differs from the engineer, who is free to adapt his materials and tools to the given project, selecting those most suitable for the task. "It might be said that the engineer questions the universe, while the 'bricoleur' addresses himself to a collection of oddments left over from human endeavors, that is, only a sub-set of the culture."[68] Lévi-Strauss explains that myth is a form of "intellectual" bricolage. This is to say that the myth-maker also works with a collection of odds and ends left over from human endeavors. Namely, a disparate but finite set of signs inherited from the tradition that forms the basis of "his" local culture; signs that can be combined in many different ways, but nevertheless remains "pre-constrained" by their history.[69] In contrast, the modern scientist is portrayed as resembling the engineer in that "he" is much freer in relation to his immediate environment, which also makes it easier for him to transcend it.

Having established this, Lévi-Strauss nevertheless moves on to question his own distinction. In reality, the engineer "is no more able than the 'bricoleur' to do whatever he wishes when he is presented with a given task. He too must begin by making a catalogue of a previously determined set consisting of theoretical and practical knowledge, of technical means, which restrict the possible solutions." In other words, the difference between myth-makers and modern scientists is not as absolute as it first appeared. Lévi-Strauss nonetheless states that it remains "a real one", in the sense that the engineer is "always trying to make his way out of and go beyond the constraints imposed by a particular state of civilization while the 'bricoleur' by inclination or necessity always remains within them."[70] That is, while the myth-maker is content or forced to remain "within" the confines of his own culture, generating new myths from the restricted set of pre-used building blocks it provides, the modern scientist always strives to go "beyond" the given.[71]

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[67] Ibid., 17.

[68] Ibid., 19.

[69] Ibid., 16–21.

[70] Ibid., 19.

[71] This analysis reproduces the old link between the primitive-mythical and cyclical or statical. But it is important to note that Lévi-Strauss does not portray the linear-progressive temporality of modern science as unambiguously favorable to the more static temporality of myth. In a

The bricoleur as an appropriator

In a famous commentary on Lévi-Strauss' work, Jacques Derrida argues that every discourse must be understood as a bricolage, in the sense that all discourses are produced by piecing together items already "at hand" – that is, by "borrowing" concepts from other discourses.[72] This means that Lévi-Strauss' discourse on the difference between the bricoleur and engineer *itself* constitutes a bricolage, which by extension suggests that Lévi-Strauss can be understood as a myth-maker ("the odds are", writes Derrida, "that the engineer is a myth produced by the bricoleur").[73] The way in which Derrida employs the concept of bricolage thus helps to further destabilize the boundary between myth and science. I will demonstrate that representatives of the anthropological turn in science studies accomplish something similar.

According to Derrida, Lévi-Strauss can be said to proceed as a bricoleur not only in the general sense that every discourse is a bricolage, but in that he is "conserving" concepts derived from the ethnocentric heritage of Western philosophy and anthropology, "exposing here and their limits", while he also treats them "as tools which can still be of use."[74] This reading helps make visible a similarity between the Lévi-Strauss' concept of bricolage and the concept of appropriation at the center of this study. For if bricolage, in the words of Derrida, is understood to denote the process of employing concepts already at hand to "destroy the old machinery to which they belong and of

series of radio interviews from 1961, transcribed and published as *Conversations with Lévi-Strauss* (1969), Lévi-Strauss states: "We criticize the scientist for pursuing research which may lead to destructive ends. We criticize him for having succeeded in making pure research coincide with the potential destruction of humanity. In short, for having ensured the advancement of physics through the creation of the atom bomb." Claude Lévi-Strauss and G. Charbonnier, *Conversations with Claude Lévi-Strauss* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), 10. According to Christopher Johnson, Lévi-Strauss' characterization of the modern scientist in *The Savage Mind* ought to be read in the light of this critique of modern science's potentially disastrous consequences. That is, when Lévi-Strauss claims that the modern scientist always strives to go beyond the given, this must be understood as a warning aimed to clarify what makes modern science so dangerous. By extension, it suggests that the approach of the myth-maker or bricoleur is, in some respects, preferable to that of the modern scientist. Christopher Johnson, "Bricoleur and Bricolage: From Metaphor to Universal Concept", *Paragraph* 35, no. 3 (2012): 363–369.

[72] Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" [1967], in *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, ed. and trans. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 255.

[73] Ibid., 256.

[74] Ibid., 254. Cf. M. C. McGrady, "The Bricolage of a Myth: Re-Reading Derrida Reading Lévi-Strauss Fifty Years After", *Word and Text, A Journal of Literary Studies and Linguistics* VII (2017): 237–238.

which they themselves are pieces", then the feminist appropriators that I study must also be understood as bricoleurs.[75]

The fact that Haraway proceeds as a bricoleur, as this term is defined by Lévi-Strauss and Derrida, will become particularly evident in chapter fourteen, where I establish that Haraway builds her own myth by appropriating the central concepts of cybernetics.

Political myths

In that she describes her "cyborg myth" as a "political myth", Haraway joins a long list of mythologists who have conceptualized myth as a useful political tool. But what is a political myth?

One of the most influential theorists on the subject, who helped popularize the very expression "political myth", is Ernst Cassirer. In *The Myth of the State,* he argues that political myths differ from traditional ones, which he describes as the product of "an unconscious activity", in that they are "artificial things" fabricated by "skillful and cunning" individuals to serve a particular political purpose. According to him, myths of this sort first appeared in the twentieth century. Now, writes Cassirer, "myths can be manufactured in the same sense and according to the same methods as any other modern weapon – as machine guns and airplanes."[76] In his view, this represents a fundamental shift, which has catastrophic consequences. For it was such myths, centered around the leader and the race, that made possible the rise of National Socialism. Towards the end of *The Myth of the State*, Cassirer consequently issues a dire warning:

> When we first heard of the political myths we found them so absurd and incongruous, so fantastic and ludicrous that we would hardly be prevailed upon to take them seriously. By now it has become clear to all of us that this was a great mistake. We should not commit the same error a second time.[77]

Today, in the twenty-first century, there are many commentators who suggest that we are on the verge of repeating this very error, or that we already have.[78]

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[75] Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", 254. If one adheres to Derrida's logic, this also means that Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway are myth-makers, who produce myths by appropriating concepts of myth.

[76] Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, 282.

[77] Ibid., 296.

[78] See this thesis, chapter 16.

But it is also possible to discern a strong determination to challenge Cassirer's negative concept of political myth, in favor of more neutral definitions. One scholar who has been particular influential in this regard is Chiara Bottici, whose *A Philosophy of Political Myth* (2007) has done much to revitalize academic discourse on the topic. Other frequently referenced books on the same theme are political theorist Henry Tudor's *Political Myth* (1972), linguist Christopher Floods' *Political Myth* (1996) and theologian Roland Boer's *Political Myth* (2009).

Though these works differ in several respects, they have a few important things in common (apart from their identical titles). To begin with, Tudor, Flood, Bottici and Boer all start from or aim to produce a specific definition of political myth.[79] In other words, these authors adopt a normative-philosophical, rather than historical, approach. Certainly, all four discuss works by historical actors, but only in order to establish who was right and who was wrong about political myth. Furthermore, all of them maintain that political myths may serve both regressive and progressive functions (hence, all contend that Cassirer was mistaken). For example, Flood asserts: "The aim of this book has been to demythologize the theory of political myth by showing that mythmaking is an everyday practice […]. There is nothing strange about mythmaking. There is nothing wrong about it."[80] Yet, none of them claim that all political myths are equally beneficial. Bottici, in particular, emphasizes the importance of establishing criteria for distinguishing harmful from and productive political myths.[81]

My study differs from those mentioned above, in that it does not aim to *evaluate* Haraway's writings on political myth, but to analyze these writings from a historical point of view. Nevertheless, this reading can contribute to contemporary discussions on criteria for progressive myths by drawing attention to questions that the aforementioned critics overlooked – perhaps because all focus exclusively on canonized, male mythologists, none of whom adopt a feminist perspective. Most importantly, I show that Haraway invites us to reflect on the nature and function of non-nostalgic myths of origins and "ironic" political myths. To clarify how her stance differs from that of

[79] Tudor, *Political Myth*, 137–140; Flood, *Political Myth*, 41–44; Bottici, *A Philosophy of Political Myth*, 14; Boer, *Political Myth*, 9.

[80] Flood, *Political Myth*, 275.

[81] Bottici, *A Philosophy of Political Myth*, 260. On the need to distinguish between harmful and harmless (political) myths, see also Tae-Yeoun Keum, *Plato and the Mythic Tradition in Political Thought*, 237–238; Karolina Enquist Källgren, "Guiding Examples: Democratic Myth-Making in the Work of María Zambrano", *Constellations* (2025), 1.

canonized mythologists focused on political myths, I read Haraway in conjunction with, among others, George Sorel.

Previous research

As philosopher Helen Merrick and Margret Grebowicz point out in *Beyond the Cyborg: Adventures with Donna Haraway* (2013), there is a "surprising lack" of book-length studies of Haraway work.[82] This is probably because she is still an active researcher whose work is ongoing and therefore difficult to summarize. To date, only two monographs on Haraway have been published, excluding one book-length interview.[83] These are Grebowicz and Merrick aforementioned work, and *Donna Haraway: Live theory* (2005) by philosopher Joseph Schneider.[84] Both monographs are commemorative in the sense that they do not aim to criticize or historicize Haraway's work, but to establish and illustrate its merits. Neither discuss her writings on myth, other than in passing.[85] There are, however, a few important articles and chapters that deal with this topic in a more extensive manner. The majority of these focuses on "A Cyborg Manifesto", but do not indicate that Haraway in her earlier texts claims that science is our myth.[86]

Once again, it is Pamela Sue Anderson who provides the most detailed reading. As we recall, she argues that Haraway, together with Luce Irigaray, represents a "progressive-poststructuralist" approach to myth. Here, the term "progressive" is meant to signal that Haraway and Irigaray differ from supposedly "essentialist" feminist like Daly, who are said to adopt a more backwards-looking stance. At the same time, Anderson seems to suggest that Haraway is more forward-looking than Irigaray. For example, she states that "while Irigaray disruptively mimes ancient myths, Haraway simply rejects the structure of the Western self as ordered by the Adam and Eve myth with its portrayal of an original unity and innocence."[87] However, in accordance with classicist Genevieve Liveley, who argues that Haraway can be said to "re-

[82] Margret Grebowicz and Helen Merrick, *Beyond the Cyborg: Adventures with Donna Haraway* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 1. See also ibid., 16.

[83] The interview in question is Donna Haraway and Thyrza Nichols Goodeve, *How Like a Leaf: An Interview with Thyrza Nichols Goodeve* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

[84] Joseph Schneider, *Donna Haraway: Live Theory* (London: Continuum, 2005).

[85] See for example Grebowicz and Merrick, *Beyond the Cyborg,* 121–124.

[86] One scholar even suggest that Haraway is an *opponent* of myth-making. Keating, "*Transformation Now!,* 115.

[87] Anderson, "Myth and Feminist Philosophy", 111.

member classical myths", I will show that Anderson's reading exaggerates the difference between Haraway and Irigaray, as well as that between these two and Daly, in the sense all three can be said to "mime", rather than dismiss, older myths.[88]

Anderson also discusses potential problems with Haraway's cyborg myth, highlighting the ties between cyborgism and technology, militarism and capitalism.[89] These may well be reasonable concerns (which we will see that Haraway actually addresses, although this is not acknowledged by Anderson). Nevertheless, what my study demonstrates is that Haraway's choice to remain within and to build her own myth by using concepts borrowed from the dominant (techno-optimistic, partly militaristic and capitalist) discourse can be understood as fully consistent with the understanding of myth-making as a form of bricolage. This does not invalidate Anderson's objections, which have also been raised by many others.[90] It does, however, help clarify the logic behind Haraway's strategy.

Another scholar who criticizes the role Haraway's cyborg myth attributes to technology is theologian Robert A. Campbell. In an article titled "Cyborg Salvation History: Donna Haraway and the Future of Religion" (2001), he states that the cyborg myth offers "further legitimation for the technological myth" in which technology replaces Christ as humanity's savior.[91] As stated, this is but one version of an oft-repeated complaint. But what sets Campbell's study apart when compared to similar, dismissive readings is the fact that he asks what the word "myth" means when it appears in Cyborg Manifesto. Sometimes, he writes, Haraway uses "myth" to mean story or fiction. Yet, there is also "evidence" that suggests that this word denotes what Peter L. Berger speaks of as a "legitimating myth" or "plausibility structure", which is to say that myth provides "not just an ethos to live by in the realm of daily

[88] Genevieve Liveley, "Science Fictions and Cyber Myths: Or, Do Cyborgs Dream of Dolly the Sheep?", in *Laughing with Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought*, ed. Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 283.

[89] Anderson, "Myth and Feminist Philosophy", 112.

[90] For similar objections to the Cyborg Manifesto, see Peter Galison, "The Ontology of the Enemy: Norbert Wiener and the Cybernetic Vision", *Critical Inquiry* 21, no. 1 (1994): 260; Jhan Hochman, "Donna J. Haraway and Technology", *Democracy & Nature: The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy* 4, no. 1 (1998); Robert A. Campbell, "Cyborg Salvation History: Donna Haraway and the Future of Religion", *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 26, no. 1/2 (2001); Ariel Salleh, "The Dystopia of Technoscience: An Ecofeminist Critique of Postmodern Reason", *Futures* 41 (2009); DeCook, "A [White] Cyborg's Manifesto."

[91] Campbell, "Cyborg Salvation History", 154.

experience, but a worldview that somehow transcends the here and now."[92] This reading is not without merit, at least not if one understands "legitimating myth" to denote a narrative meant to legitimate a particular political project or political subject. Yet, Campbell's decision to invoke Berger, mentioned in the previous part-study, ends up obscuring more than it clarifies. In the work to which Campbell refers – where the term "legitimating myth" does not appear – Berger states that each socially constructed world "requires a social 'base' for its continuing existence as a world that is real to actual human beings. This 'base' may be called its plausibility structure."[93] As examples of such structures, Berger mentions whole communities, made up of a series of interrelated social institutions, like the "pre-Colombian Inca society" in its totality.[94] In Haraway's text, the word "myth" carries a completely different meaning.

Finally, it is worth returning to Magada-Ward's aforementioned article from 2014, as she too attempts to unravel what concept of myth is at play in Haraway's writings. Magada-Ward differs from the scholars already discussed, in that she does not only focus on the Cyborg Manifesto, but also studies Haraway's earlier texts. Citing these, Magada-Ward argues that Haraway, in stating that science is our myth, is "claiming that it is now primarily popularized versions of science that inform our understanding of ourselves and others."[95] I agree that this is *one* of the things Haraway wants to make visible when she equates science with myth. Yet, my analysis will show that the concept of myth Haraway makes use of is much more complex.

Disposition

This part-study consists of four chapters. The first two (chapter 11–12) focus on what I have called Haraway's logomythology, based on articles published between 1978 and 1984. In the latter two (chapter 13–14), I discuss Haraway's own myth, concentrating on "A Cyborg Manifesto" from 1985.

[92] Ibid., 157.
[93] Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 45.
[94] Ibid., 46.
[95] Magada-Ward, "Why Pragmatists Should Not Be Cyborgs", 473.

11. Science as myth, part I.
The anthropology of science

This and the ensuing chapter form a unit, the primary purpose of which is to specify what it entails, in Haraway's case, to approach science as "our" myth. In the next chapter, I concentrate on Haraway's own work, while the chapter at hand focuses on other texts within the mythological network. In particular, I explore what I term *the anthropological turn in studies of science,* an expression used to denote an increase in studies of Western science informed by anthropology, especially the anthropological study of non-Western societies, discernible from the 1970s onwards.[96]

This contextualization will demonstrate that Haraway is but one of several science studies scholars active in the 1970s who argue that science should be approached as "our" myth. Other scholars who advance similar claims are Bruno Latour, Steve Woolgar, Robert M. Young, Barry Barnes and Karl M. Figlio. This allows us to see that Haraway's equation of science and myth does not constitute an isolated provocation, but forms part of a wider epistemological shift.

Since these other scholars are more explicit than Haraway about *why* science should be approached as myth, this contextualization also helps to illuminate the premises on which her logomythology rests. This is not to suggest that Haraway's logomythology is directly influenced by Latour, Wooglar, Young, Barnes or Figlio.[97] But as all these scholars, around the same time, claim that science should be approached as myth, it seems reasonable to

[96] Although I use it in a particular way, I have not coined the expression "the anthropological turn". For example, Wolf Lepenies speaks of "the 'anthropological turn' in the sociology of science" to name a development that he, if one is to judge this by what works he cites as examples, believes begun in the 1970s. Wolf Lepenies, "Anthropological Perspectives in the Sociology of Science", in *Sciences and Cultures : Anthropological and Historical Studies of the Sciences*, ed. Everett Mendelsohn and Yehuda Elkana (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1981), 245–246, 253. On the other hand, Alan Goodman suggest that science should have but not yet taken "an anthropological turn". Peter Peregrine et al., "What Is Science in Anthropology?", *American Anthropologist* 114, no. 4 (2012): 594, 595.

[97] Haraway thanks both Young and Figlio in Donna Haraway, "Acknowledgements", in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women : The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), ix. Young in turn emphasizes Haraway's importance in Robert M. Young, "Science, Ideology and Donna Haraway", *Science as Culture* 3, no. 2 (1992), 179–201.

assume that their work may rest on similar assumptions; assumptions made more explicit in some than others.

However, the anthropological turn does not merely serve as a background against which I read Haraway's writings on myth. I also aim to demonstrate that these writings form part of this turn and thus constitute an important contribution to the early anthropology of science.

To make sense of the anthropological turn, which here serves as a synchronic context for Haraway's logomythology, I will begin by outlining an even broader diachronic context, which stretches back to the end of the nineteenth century.

How science became myth-like

As present-day anthropologist Matei Candea notes, anthropology has for much of its history been understood as a science of "non-scientific or not-quite scientific ways of thinking and being" believed to dominate life in so-called primitive societies.[98] The anthropological turn in the 1970s meant that anthropological methods and concepts, including anthropological concepts of myth, began to be used to discuss and study Western science. How is one to make sense of this shift? As earlier noted, anthropologists like Claude Lévi-Strauss can be said to have helped destabilize the distinction between myth and Western science from *within* anthropology, by arguing that primitive myth formed part of a science of the concrete. But although Lévi-Strauss in this respect suggests that myth constitutes "their" science, he does not claim that science should be approached as "our" myth. That decisive step was instead taken by scholars who were active *outside* the traditional domains of anthropology.[99] As historian of science Everett Mendelsohn points out, this step became possible only after the breakdown of the historically influential belief in scientific knowledge as a set of objective truths. "As long as science was considered something of an epiphenomenon and its knowledge not amenable to sociological analysis, as long as science was seen as possessing universal status, an anthropological approach would have been difficult to

[98] Matei Candea, "Science", in *The Open Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, ed. Felix Stein (2016), 1.

[99] That is, by scholars who were not themselves trained anthropologists, but who found the methods and concepts of anthropology, previously reserved for primitive societies, appropriate for the study of modern science. Cf. ibid, 2–3.

understand or appreciate", Mendelsohn explains.[100] How, then, did science lose this elevated status?

According to literary theorists Michel Bell, the development that eventually led to Western science being equated with myth began towards the end of the nineteenth century, when the post-Baconian belief that observations and measurements enabled scientists to discover the laws of nature faced new serious challenges. To make sense of micro and macro processes like electricity and astronomy, scientists were forced to draw speculative conclusions about processes that could not be "observed" in the traditional sense of the word. Moreover, with the birth of quantum mechanics in the early twentieth century, physicists realized that observations *influenced* the observed object, as when the same entity behaved either as a particle or a wave, depending on what experiment one set up. "Fundamental knowledge of the universe thus came to be a matter of speculative interpretation yielding possibly competing accounts with no direct observation by which to decide between them", Bell notes.[101]

Already in his popular *A Grammar of Science* (1892), mathematician Karl Pearson (1857–1936) argues that science can describe past events and predict future ones, yet not offer any "explanations" as to why these events occur, because the laws assumed to govern nature constitute "products of the human mind", whose existence is impossible to confirm through observation.[102] Consequently, the answers that science provides to why-question are ultimately as baseless as those offered by myth.[103] Again and again, Pearson – a eugenicist who invoked science to support the war against "inferior" race"[104] – pits "civilized man" and the "normal human being" against the "savage", whom he compares to a child.[105] Even so, when it comes to explaining why physical phenomena behave in a certain way he concludes that "we" modern

[100] Everett Mendelsohn, "Introduction", in *Sciences and Cultures: Anthropological and Historical Studies of the Sciences*, ed. Everett Mendelsohn and Yehuda Elkana (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1981), viii.

[101] Michael Bell, *Literature, Modernism and Myth: Belief and Responsibility in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 15. See also Hannah Arendt, "Man's Conquest of Space", *The American Scholar* 32, no. 4 (1963): 528.

[102] Karl Pearson, *The Grammar of Science* (London: Adam and Charles Black, [1892] 1911), 36.

[103] Ibid., 114, 119–121.

[104] Karl Pearson, *National Life from the Standpoint of Science* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1901), 44.

[105] See for example Pearson, *The Grammar of Science*, 36.

people are not "one whit further advanced than Aristotle, nay, than the primitive savage."[106]

Pearson is still very far from equating science with myth. On the contrary, he often contrasts myth with science.[107] But what both he and many other scholars who stress the limits of observation imply is that any scientific theory that ventures beyond the descriptive level constitute a speculation, more akin to artistic inventions than to objective representations of external reality.[108] And this is one of the assumptions that later led later theorists to argue that science should indeed be approached as myth.[109] For example, we have already observed that Karl Popper claims that "science is myth-making", in part because scientific theories can neither be deduced from nor verified by observation (although they, unlike "primitive myths", can be falsified).[110]

However, this equation could not have been made, had anthropologists and other mythologists not already established that primitive myth aims but ultimately fails to explain natural phenomena. Bell thus states:

> The anthropological study of "primitive" myths in the nineteenth century eventually produced a cultural reflector by which Europeans could recognise their own world view as having an ultimately similar status. As science sought to understand myth, it increasingly found itself understood *as* myth.[111]

Since he focuses on modernist writers, Bell does not provide any examples of scientists or science studies scholars who argue that science should be understood as myth. Later, I will try to remedy this lack of concreteness. But first, it is necessary to highlight another important circumstance that likely contributed to the anthropological turn: the publication of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) by historian of science Thomas Kuhn (1922–1996).[112] This work helped promote the understanding of scientific knowledge

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[106] Ibid., 591.

[107] Ibid., 25, 413, 591.

[108] Ibid., 36.

[109] Bell, *Literature, Modernism and Myth*, 16.

[110] Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 34, 127–128.

[111] Bell, *Literature, Modernism and Myth*, 12, italics in original.

[112] On Kuhn's importance to the anthropology of science, see also Michael M. J. Fischer, "Four Genealogies for a Recombinant Anthropology of Science and Technology", *Cultural Anthropology* 22, no. 4 (2007): 552–553; Candea, "Science", 4. On the "shared historical genealogy" between Kuhn's theory and American anthropology, see John Tresch, "On Going Native: Thomas Kuhn and Anthropological Method", *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 31, no. 3 (2001): esp., 308–309.

as radically contingent, effectively undermining the epistemological primacy frequently ascribed to science in relation to other forms of knowledge.[113]

The term most people associate with Kuhn's name is probably "paradigm", one which he did not invent, but helped popularize and assign new meanings. It is therefore interesting to note that one oft-cited commentator, to whom Haraway refers, states that Kuhn equates paradigm with myth.[114] This is philosopher Margaret Masterman, famous for having argued that Kuhn makes use of the term "paradigm" in no less than twenty-one different ways.[115] In support of the claim that Kuhn uses paradigm to mean myth, Masterman cites a passage from *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.* Having observed that "out-of-date beliefs", such as Aristotelian dynamics, are no less scientific than "current" ones, Kuhn writes:

> If these out-of-date beliefs are to be called myths, then myths can be produced by the same sorts of methods and held for the same sorts of reasons that now lead to scientific knowledge. If, on the other hand, they are to be called science, then science has included bodies of belief quite incompatible with the ones we hold today.[116]

But although Kuhn employs the word "myth", I argue that Masterman misunderstands him, when she states that he equates myths with scientific paradigms. In fact, Kuhn's point is that one should *refrain* from calling out-of-

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[113] Kuhn's groundbreaking work had its own conditions of possibility, related to the altered status of science in the United States following the Second World War. As mentioned earlier, the war led to a surge in government funding, which helped integrate science within a larger institutional framework. According to historian of science Steve Shapin, this development reduced the previously strongly felt need among scholars and intellectuals to "defend" science, understood as a "precious" and "fragile" institution threatened by outside forces. Shapin argues that this, in turn, paved the way for more descriptive (or "naturalistic") approaches to science, such as Kuhn's. Steve Shapin, "Kuhn's Structure: A Moment in Modern Naturalism", in *Kuhn's Structure of Scientific Revolutions: 50 Years On*, ed. William J. Devlin and Alisa Bokulich (Cham: Springer, 2015), 14–15. On this development, see also Daniel S. Greenberg, *The Politics of Pure Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

[114] Donna Haraway, *Crystals, Fabrics, and Fields: Metaphors That Shape Embryos* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2004), 188. Originally published as Donna Haraway, *Crystals, Fabrics, and Fields: Metaphors of Organicism in Twentieth-Century Developmental Biology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).

[115] Margaret Masterman, "The Nature of a Paradigm", in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge. Proceedings of the International Colloquium in the Philosophy of Science.*, ed. Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

[116] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, [1962] 1970), 2; Masterman, "The Nature of a Paradigm", 64.

date beliefs of the type here discussed myths, as they are indeed scientific. The passage that Mastermann quotes continues: "Given these alternatives [e.g., categorizing out-of-date beliefs under myth or science], the historian must choose the latter. Out-of-date theories are not in principle unscientific because they have been discarded."[117] In other words, Kuhn argues that that scientific beliefs should *not* be called myths, even if they are out-of-date.

But if a paradigm is not a myth, then what is it? In a "Post-script" from 1969. Kuhn identifies two main meanings of this term. One the one hand, it denotes "the entire constellation" of values, standards, techniques, beliefs and similar elements shared by all members of a given scientific community. On the other hand, it refers to one specific element that is part of all such constellations, namely scientific achievements raised as "models" or "examples" of how scientific problems should be solved.[118] To put this differently, the paradigm can be said to provide both the problems (or "puzzles") that scientists within a particular community are expected to solve and the "rules" according to which this ought to be done.[119] According to Kuhn, the existence of such paradigms constitutes a precondition for productive scientific work.[120]

One of Kuhn's most consequential claims is that scientific research always takes place within one paradigm or another, which means that there is no neutral, extra-paradigmatic position from which the relative epistemic value of two competing paradigms can be determined.[121] This conclusion undermines thoroughly "internalist" explanations of scientific change, according to which scientific revolutions are the result of purely scientific-rational procedures. If there is no extra-paradigmatic position from which two paradigms can be compared, then the advantages of an emerging paradigm are only recognizable to scientists who have already accepted the premises upon which it rests. But what convinced these scientists to accept said premises to begin with? "Individual scientists", answers Kuhn, "embrace a new paradigm for all sorts of reasons and usually for several at once. Some of these

[117] Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2–3.

[118] Ibid., 175.

[119] Ibid., 11, 36–38. The idea of science as rule-governed is discussed in more detail in the following chapter, 385–394.

[120] Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2–3.13, 15

[121] "Once a first paradigm through which to view nature has been found, there is no such thing as research in the absence of any paradigm." Ibid., 79.

reasons […] lie outside the apparent sphere of science altogether."[122] The absence of a neutral, extra-paradigmatic position also implies that it is impossible to say what paradigm allows for the more truthful image of the world, which challenges the understanding of scientific progress as a continuous accumulation of truths.[123] Commenting on Kuhn's work, Candea thus concludes:

> This view of science exploded the idea of a single project with a continuous, progressive history. Instead, historians and sociologists were offered a new object of study: the rich tapestry of multiple scientific paradigms, each carried by a human community with its own internal rules, forms of transmission and structure – much like the "cultures" or "societies" which anthropologists had been investigating.[124]

In this sense, Kuhn helped enable the anthropological turn, which I will discuss next.

The anthropological turn

Two influential representatives of the anthropological turn are Latour and Woolgar, who themselves describe their seminal *Laboratory Life: The Social Construction of Scientific Facts* (1979) as an endeavor aimed at an "anthropology of science".[125] This work is based on two years of field studies, carried out at the neuroscientist Roger Guillemin's molecular biology laboratory. It is primarily, although not exclusively, this – the fact that it is based on *in situ* observations of a specific group within a particular context – that renders *Laboratory Life* an anthropological study, according to its authors.[126] With Latour and Woolgar's own words:

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[122] Ibid., 152–153. See also ibid., 94. "Like the choice between competing political institutions, that between competing paradigms proves to be a choice between incompatible modes of community life. Because it has that character, the choice is not and cannot be determined merely by the evaluative procedures characteristic of normal science, for these depend in part upon a particular paradigm, and that paradigm is at issue."

[123] Kuhn consequently asserts that one might have to "relinquish the notion […] that changes of paradigm carry scientists and those who learn from them closer and closer to the truth. Ibid., 170.

[124] Candea, "Science", 4.

[125] Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Social Construction of Scientific Facts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, [1979] 1986), 27.

[126] In addition, Latour and Woolgar argue that their investigation is anthropological in the sense that they have sought to bracket their familiarity with the object they study. Ibid., 29.

> We envisaged a research procedure analogous with that of an intrepid explorer of the Ivory Coast, who, having studied the belief system or material production of "savage minds" by living with tribesmen, sharing their hardships and almost becoming one of them, eventually returns with a body of observations which he can present as a preliminary research report.[127]

As we can see, it is above all the anthropological study of non-Western, so-called primitive cultures or "savage minds" that constitutes Latour and Woolgar's point of reference. This is even more evident in the book's introduction, where the authors explicitly establish a parallel between studying modern science and "the myths" of non-Western "exotic tribes", here framed as the traditional study object of anthropologists:

> Since the turn of the century, scores of men and women have penetrated deep forests, lived in hostile climates, and weathered hostility, boredom, and disease in order to gather the remnants of so-called primitive societies. By contrast to the frequency of these anthropological excursions, relatively few attempts have been made to penetrate the intimacy of life among tribes which are much nearer at hand. This is perhaps surprising in view of the reception and importance attached to their product in modern civilised societies: we refer, of course, to tribes of scientists and to their production of science. Whereas we now have fairly detailed knowledge of the myths and circumcision rituals of exotic tribes, we remain relatively ignorant of the details of equivalent activity among tribes of scientists, whose work is commonly heralded as having startling or, at least, extremely significant effects on our civilisation.[128]

Obviously, this is in part a conscious play on genre conventions, aimed to amuse. But it is not *only* that. The juxtaposition of myth and science here reflects and reinforces a concrete, historical shift in the understanding of what science is and how it ought to be studied. It is because modern science is assumed to have something in common with primitive myth that it now seems reasonable – to Latour and Woolgar as well as many of their contemporaries – to approach these phenomena in the same way, using the same anthropological method. How this common ground between myth and science is conceptualized differs, depending on who you read. But the basic assumption that such common ground exists unites several representatives of the anthropological turn in science studies.

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[127] Ibid., 28.
[128] Ibid., 17.

In stating that they aim to approach scientists and scientific theories in a way analogous to how anthropologists have studied "the myths […] of exotic tribes", Latour and Woolgar appropriate a concept of myth derived from anthropology.[129] But this concept is not that of nineteenth century evolutionary anthropology, according to which myth constitutes a primitive pre-science. Instead, these authors follow later anti-evolutionary anthropologists like Lévi-Strauss – whose *The Savage Mind* is included in their reference list[130] – in approaching their object of study as a collective, context-bound and therefore contingent form of knowledge, which is nevertheless fully legitimate. At the same time, they go further than Lévi-Strauss. For whereas Lévi-Strauss stopped at the assumption that primitive myth is "their" science, the way in which Latour and Woolgar frame their study suggests that modern science should be approached as "our" myth.

This claim remains implicit in *Laboratory Life*, but is made more explicit in a later work by Latour, titled "Postmodern? No, Simply Amodern! Steps Toward an Anthropology of Science" (1990). In this text, Latour argues against the "asymmetric treatment of Us and They", which is why he criticizes Lévi-Strauss for having established too sharp a line between the primitive myth-maker and modern scientist. "In order to save the savages from the accusation of being intellectually inferior, Lévi-Strauss finds no other solution but to transform the savage mind into an alter ego of the scientific one", Latour notes. And yet, he claims that Lévi-Strauss "falls back on the most classic dichotomy", according to which savages "remain bricoleurs" and live in static (or "cold" societies), while we moderners reside in ever-changing (or "warm") societies and behave like engineers.[131] By contrast, Latour celebrates philosopher Michel Serres (1930–2019), who he characterizes as an anthropologist of science and "a sort of symmetric Lévi-Strauss who would add to the diversity of primitive myths all of the scientific ones."[132]

Almost 20 years earlier, a similar critique, also directed at Lévi-Strauss' distinction been primitive myth and modern science, was voiced by Young. In an article aptly titled "The Anthropology of Science" (1972), Young notes that

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[129] There is also another concept of myth (or rather, of mythology) at play in their work. This concept is appropriated from Roland Barthes, whose *Mythologies* the authors themselves cite Ibid., 54.

[130] Ibid., 268.

[131] Bruno Latour, "Postmodern? No Simply Amodern! Steps Towards an Anthropology of Science", *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science* 21, no. 1 (1990): 145–146. See also Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 97–98.

[132] Latour, "Postmodern?", 161.

recent developments in the history of science have helped undermine the belief in the absolute objectivity of scientific knowledge. "The closer historians of science look at the great achievements of science, the more difficulty they find in distinguishing science from pseudoscience and from the political, economic and ideological contexts."[133] "Historians of science are, therefore", Young states, "[…] finding that their investigations have much in common with those of anthropologists."[134] In another text, titled "Evolutionary Biology and Ideology" (1971), Young asserts: "If we take the single step of replacing the sharp distinction between primitive and scientific thought with a continuum, we can adapt the approach of anthropology to the study of our own culture, including science."[135] It might, Young continues, "prove a useful exaggeration" to approach "our" scientific theories about nature as a "systems of rituals and myth" of the same sort that deal with natural phenomena in "primitive societies" (quotation marks in original). And this brings us back to Lévi-Strauss, about whom Young writes that he has already taken "a small step in this direction", by comparing "primitive science" to our own. Yet this is not enough. "Levi-Strauss seems only to be asking that we see 'primitive' ideas about nature as a distinct mode of scientific thought, operating at a different level from our own." For the anthropological approach to become useful, one would have "to go much further and study the social role of the religion of science, the utterances of its high priests and its ritual incantations about the realities behind appearances."[136] Phrased differently, Young argues that it is insufficient to, as Lévi-Strauss does, simply highlight the scientific nature of "their" myths. One must also examine the mythical, religious and ritualistic dimensions of "our" science.

A similar reasoning structures the works of Barnes. In a chapter called "The Comparison of Belief-Systems", published in *Modes of Thought: Essays on Thinking in Western and non-Western Societies* (1973), Barnes argues against all *a priori* attempts to distinguish between what he terms "pre-literate belief systems" and modern science. Instead, he maintains that "all belief-systems, scientific and preliteratre […] are most profitable compared and understood

[133] Young, "The Anthropology of Science", 103.

[134] Ibid., 104.

[135] Robert Young, "Evolutionary Biology and Ideology", *Science Studies* 1, no. 2 (1971): 197 note i.

[136] Ibid., 198 note i.

within a single framework."[137] In support of this claim, Barnes presents two arguments, both of which he depicts as supported by the work of Kuhn. First, he states that all science is "essentially presuppositionalist", in that scientists are always already committed to some understanding of reality, which influences what they see and what they perceive as facts.[138] Second, he argues that science is not inductive, deductive or logical, but "analogical" or "metaphorical", in that scientific theories establish analogies between familiar and unfamiliar phenomena, as when electricity is studied as fluids or light is studied as waves.[139] Barnes concludes:

> From the present viewpoint it does indeed become difficult to identify systematic formal differences between scientific and preliterate belief-systems. Contrasts based on claims that scientific concepts are abstract, relational or culture-free […] are unacceptable because they ignore the central role of models and analogies in science; Lévi-Strauss's description of the "bricoleur" is not inappropriate to the natural scientist.[140]

This argument is further developed in Barnes's seminal *Scientific Knowledge and Sociological Theory* (1974). With reference to Lévi-Strauss, Barnes states:

> As the "bricoleur" constructs devices for a wondrous range of purposes from a limited set of bits and pieces […] so the primitive intellect constructs myth out of bits and pieces of culture. This delightful image of the myth maker as a kind of plumber, who works with culture rather than piping, is entirely appropriate to the scientist. He, too, redeploys pieces of culture in new ways to perform new tasks.[141]

As we recall, Lévi-Strauss holds that the scientist is not a bricoleur, because science is not bound to culture in the same way that myth is. Barnes does not agree. It is, he writes, "a pity" that Lévi-Strauss "tries to use his account of the myth maker as bricoleur as a source of contrasts between myth and science." "The scientist", Barnes asserts, "must select from his repertoire of available

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[137] Barry Barnes, "The Comparison of Belief-Systems", in *Modes of Thought: Essays on Thinking in Western and Non-Western Societies*, ed. Robin Horton and Ruth Finnegan (London: Faber & Faber, 1973), 183.

[138] Ibid., 184.

[139] Ibid., 183. See also ibid, 186.

[140] Ibid., 187.

[141] Barry Barnes, *Scientific Knowledge and Sociological Theory* (New York: Routledge, [1974] 2009), 58.

cultural resources, just as *le primitif* selects bits and pieces of his culture to create myth."[142]

A final proponent of the anthropological turn whose work must be mentioned here is Figlio. In a text titled "The Metaphor of Organization" (1976), Figlio notes that a "briocolage" constitutes "a construction of any sort made out of available pieces."[143] He also observes that Lévi-Strauss employs this term to describe myth. But according to Figlio, "briocolage" can just as well be used to characterize science. Although the vocabulary used by scientist allows them to articulate new theories, it is also "laden with accreted meanings as a result partly of historical contingency, partly of the design and use of elements of that language for ideological ends."[144] In other words, Figlio argues that science theories resemble myths, as described by Lévi-Strauss, in that both are composed of "available pieces" that have already been used for other purposes.

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The analysis carried out above has revealed a previously unheeded trend: how a number of influential science studies scholars in the 1970s came to argue that Western science should be approached as "our" myth. It has also identified a few additional similarities between these scholars and their writings on myth and science. Most importantly, we have seen that all are familiar with Lévi-Strauss' anti-evolutionary anthropological concept of myth, which I argue that they both appropriate and challenge. Although only two of these scholars (Barnes and Figlio) explicitly state that modern scientists are bricoleurs, all seem to assume that science constitutes "our" myth in the sense that it – in accordance with how Lévi-Strauss conceptualizes the nature of primitive myth – represents a context-bound, historically contingent yet fully legitimate form of knowledge. This raises the question of whether Haraway's logomythology might also be influenced by Lévi-Strauss' anthropology. I hold that the answer is yes.

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[142] Ibid.

[143] Karl M. Figlio, "The Metaphor of Organization: An Historiographical Perspective on the Bio-Medical Sciences of the Early Nineteenth Century", *History of Science* 14 (1976): 31. Haraway refers to this article in Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 384 n2, 429 n13. It is also included in the "exceptionally useful bibliography of radical critique" she refers to in Haraway, "Animal Sociology and a Natural Economy of the Body Politic, Part I", 22 n3.

[144] Figlio, "The Metaphor of Organizatio", 31–32.

Unlike Latour, Woolgar, Young, Barnes and Figlio, Haraway does not establish an explicit link between her concept of myth and that of Lévi-Strauss.[145] But there is no doubt that she is well versed in anthropology and the anthropological study of myth. In an interview from 2007, Haraway herself notes: "I've always had a deep tie to anthropology […]. I feel like I have a green card in anthropology, a sort of permanent resident alien."[146] This deep tie is clearly visible in her work. In the latter half of the 1970s, when Haraway began researching the history of primatology, anthropology became part of her object of study. The primary reason for this is that many primatologists, especially female ones, were anthropologists, who turned to apes and monkeys, instead of primitives, to answer questions of human origins.[147] Haraway's articles about primatology are thus replete with references to anthropology and famous anthropologists like Bronislaw Malinowski.[148]

However, Haraway's involvement with anthropology actually goes back even further in time. Already in the early 1970s, when Haraway worked as a teacher at the University of Hawaii, she put together and taught a university course partly centered around the works of Lévi-Strauss. This course was called "Case Histories in Science" and revolved around three "modern, western, adult, male scientists who share a common philosophical perspective seeking to understand human groups markedly different from themselves", namely Lévi-Strauss, Joseph Needham (1900–1995) and Jean Piaget (1896–1980).[149] The reading list for this course contains no less than eight of Lévi-

[145] Haraway only occasionally refers to Lévi-Strauss' work. See for example, Haraway, *Crystals, Fabrics, and Fields*, 16, 137 n29; Donna Haraway, "'Gender' for a Marxist Dictionary", in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 137, 146; Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 247 n26.

[146] Donna Haraway and Irene Reti, "Edges and Ecotones: Donna Haraway's Worlds at UCSC" (2007): 69.

[147] Haraway herself notes that "many more women primatologists originally came from anthropology than from the biological disciplines". Donna Haraway, "Primatology Is Politics by Other Means", *PSA: Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association* 1984 (1984): 494. See also Sperling, "Baboons with Briefcases", 2.

[148] See for example Haraway, "Animal Sociology", 15; Haraway, "The Past Is the Contested Zone", 26, 27, 30, 32.

[149] Donna Haraway, "Course Announcement. Case Histories in Science", Box 21, folder 347, G. Evelyn Hutchinson Papers, Yale University Library. Haraway states that all three scientists "focus on the 'other': primitive man, the child, another civilization." Ibid.

Strauss' most prominent work, including *The Savage Mind*.[150] A look at the schedule furthermore reveals that Haraway gave several lectures both on structuralism and the history of anthropology, while students had to present on *The Savage Mind*.[151]

Against this background, it seems reasonable to assume that Haraway's writings on myth and science, like those of Latour, Woolgar, Young, Barnes and Figlio, are in part informed by anthropology. Indeed, her debt to the anthropological study of myth is already evident from the fact that she speaks of science as "our" myth. Notably, the "our" in this sentence is pregnant with meaning. It implies the presence of a "them", with "their" myth: a myth with which "our" has something in common, but from which it can also be distinguished. In this respect, Haraway still operates within that timeworn Western tradition popularized by evolutionary anthropologists, which invites "us" to define "our" science in relation to "their" myth.[152]

When Haraway argues that "we" are like "them" in the sense that we have a myth of our own, she challenges one of the premises upon which evolutionary anthropology rests. But again, as "our" science is likened to "their" myth – the nature of which Haraway never discusses, which implies that this concept has been sufficiently defined elsewhere – her logomythology remains productively dependent on an already established concept of myth.

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[150] Donna Haraway, "Handout for Sci 420", Box 21, folder 347, G. Evelyn Hutchinson Papers, Yale University Library, 1.

[151] Ibid, 3.

[152] That the "them" against which Haraway sets her "we" are the non-Western societies that anthropologists have always associated with myth becomes particularly clear when, in a text from 1981, she writes: "The lived dominations of race, sex, and class are built into biological science as a systematic discourse on hierarchical control of growing, expanding, fruitful systems. Without ceasing to be scientific, biological discourse generates both mythology and technology. Like other peoples studied by anthropologists, we carve our meaning onto our bodies". Donna Haraway, "The High Cost of Information in Post-World War II Evolutionary Biology: Ergonomics, Semiotics, and the Sociobioloy of Communication Systems", *Philosophical Forum* 13, no. 2/3 (1981): 248. We see here how an image of non-Western peoples derived from anthropology serves as a reference point, through which Haraway articulates her own logomythological approach to science. The same tendency can be discerned when she, in reference to scientific research on the three-million-year-old skeleton known as Lucy, writes: "In other times and places, people might have cast Lucy's bones in the rituals of necromancy for purposes western observers called 'magical'. But western people cast her bones into 'scientific' patterns for insight into a human future". Haraway, "Primatology Is Politics by Other Means", 515. This comparison maintains a distinction between "our" science and "their" magic. But it also suggests that the difference might be smaller, or at least of another sort, than what some "western observers" have claimed.

The question then becomes what concept of myth is at play in her writings on myth and science? Obviously, it is not the concept of evolutionary anthropology, according to which myth is primitive pre-science. However, like that of those other scholars discussed in this chapter, Haraway's concept of myth does seem to have something in common with that of Lévi-Strauss. Most importantly, I argue that Haraway can be read as conceptualizing the scientist as a bricoleur.

As we recall, Lévi-Strauss argues that the myth-maker behaves like a bricoleur in the sense that he always operates "within" the confines of his local culture, manufacturing myths out of "a collection of oddments left over from human endeavors", all of which are "pre-constrained" by their history. Haraway often suggests that the Western scientist is forced to proceed in a similar manner. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate that historical and social circumstances, according to her, set definitive limits to what "stories" scientists can produce, for instance in the sense that the activity of female animals could only become an integral element of stories told by primatologists after the women's movement of the 1970s. Here it suffices to note that Haraway also claims that scientists have no choice but to use concepts provided by their culture, previously used to discuss other phenomena than those they themselves study. In "The Contest for Primate Nature" – the second of the two articles in which Haraway asserts that science is "our" myth – one reads:

> It is impossible not to suspect that multi-levelled stories are at the core of things when, without ever necessarily speaking about human primates, contemporary primatologists must speak seriously about harems, dual-career mothering, social signalling [sic] as a cybernetic communication control system, troop takeovers and infanticide, rapid social change, time-energy budgets, reproductive strategies and genetic investments conflicts of interest and cost-benefit analyses, nature and frequency of orgasm in non-human animal females, female sexual choice, male overlords and leadership, social roles, and division of labour.[153]

All these examples of concepts that primatologists "must" use ("harems", "dual-career mothering" etcetera) are borrowed from published work in the field. Haraway's analysis thus suggests that science is "our" myth in the sense that Western scientists – just like savage myth-makers according to Lévi-Strauss – are bricoleurs, who can redeploy pieces of culture pre-constrained by their history to tell stories of many different kinds, yet never escape the

[153] Haraway, "The Contest for Primate Nature", 83.

confines of their own cultural context. In this respect, Haraway's writings on myth and science have something in common with those of Latour, Wooglar, Young, Barnes and Figlio, who all appropriate Lévi-Strauss' concept of myth in a more explicit manner. This observation makes it easier to understand the premises on which Haraway's logomythology is based.

Nevertheless, one should not exaggerate the similarities between Haraway and the other scholars discussed in this chapter. In the next chapter, I demonstrate that Haraway's logomythology also rests on other legs. Furthermore, we will see that Haraway, unlike Latour, Wooglar, Young, Barnes and Figlio, invokes the parallel between science and myth to articulate a distinctively feminist argument and analysis, which aims to clarify both how and why women must engage with science.

The history of the anthropology of science

Before concluding this chapter, I would like to highlight how my analysis can shed new light on the history of the anthropology of science. This history remains to be written. But a few sketches have been attempted.[154] In an article from 2019, historian of science Francesca Rochberg states it was Latour who "set terms" for an anthropology of science in his previously mentioned article "Postmodern? No, Simply Amodern!" from 1990.[155] In this text, Latour explains that anthropology, since the time of Lucien Levy-Bruhl, has been "interested in science, but in the sciences of the Others", while "*our* science" has only recently been subjected to the anthropological gaze.[156] One of the "few people" who used anthropological methods to study modern science is, Latour writes, himself. In fact, he states that it was he who, in *Laboratory Life* from 1979, "clumsily" coined the very phrase "anthropology of science" (a claim that we know to be incorrect, as it was used by Young as early as 1972).[157] And yet, Latour also argues that he and Woolgar utilized an "outdated" version of anthropology, which means that even their study does not constitute

[154] In addition to the works discussed below, see also Jonathan Marks, "Anthropology and Science", in *The Routledge Companion to Contemporary Anthropology*, ed. Simon Coleman, Susan Brin Hyatt, and Ann E. Kingsolver (New York: Routledge, 2017), 310–312. Marks mentions Haraway's *Primate Vision*, but only in passing, as one of several works that have "contributed additional complementary perspectives." Ibid., 311.

[155] Francesca Rochberg, "Anthropology of Science: The Cuneiform World", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 78, no. 2 (2019): 253.

[156] Latour, "Postmodern?", 145, italics in original.

[157] Ibid. This erroneous claim is repeated by Rochberg in "Anthropology of Science", 253.

a proper anthropology of science.[158] Instead he claims that "the real start of an anthropology of science" came in 1985, with the publication of historians of science Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer's *Leviathan and the Air-Pump* (1985).[159] In addition, Latour discusses *Statues* (1987) by Serres and *Beam Times and Life Times* (1988) by anthropologist Sharon Traweek, the latter of which he nevertheless dismisses.[160] Haraway's name does not appear in this influential historical sketch.

The history of the anthropology of science is also discussed in the 9th volume of *Knowledge and Society*, titled *Anthropology of Science and Technology* (1992). Here one reads that this field can be understood both as old and vast or new and small, depending on one's perspective. On the one hand, anthropologists have long studied non-Western technologies and knowledge systems; on the other, anthropology is a "relative latecomer" to the study of Western science and technology.[161] In the last decade, an "anthropological focus" on "our" science and technology is nonetheless said to have emerged.[162] As representatives of this focus, the editors name Emily Martin and the aforementioned Traweek.[163] They also devote some space to Latour and Woolgar.[164] But apart from that, little is said about the extra-anthropological roots of the anthropology of science. Haraway is mentioned in passing, but only as one of several feminist science and technology scholars who represent a "post-Mertonian" critical approach to science.[165] In *Science and Cultures:*

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158 Latour, "Postmodern?", 146.

159 Ibid., 147. For a more detailed discussion of what anthropology of science entails according to Latour, see *We Have Never Been Modern*, 7–8, 15, 21. See also S. Woolgar, "What Is 'Anthropological' About the Anthropology of Science?", *Current anthropology* 32 (1991).

160 Latour, "Postmodern?", 167–169.

161 David J. Hess and Linda L. Layne, "Preface", in *Knowledge and Society: Studies in the Sociology of Science, Past and Present. Vol. 9 the Anthropology of Science and Technology*, ed. David J. Hess and Linda L. Layne (Greenwich: JAI Press, 1992), ix.

162 Ibid., x.

163 Ibid.; David J. Hess, "Introduction: The New Ethnography and the Anthropology of Science and Technology", in *Knowledge and Society: Studies in the Sociology of Science, Past and Present. Vol. 9 the Anthropology of Science and Technology*, ed. David J. Hess and Linda L. Layne (Greenwich: JAI Press, 1992), 4.

164 Hess, "Introduction", 4, 14.

165 "STS also has its own post-Mertonian critical approaches, including the work of [...] feminists such as Haraway (1990), Harding (1986), and Keller (1985)." Ibid., 11. This is the only reference to Haraway in the entire work.

Anthropological and Historical Studies of the Sciences (1981), Haraway is not mentioned at all.[166]

Other texts that deal with the history of the anthropology of science usually do mention Haraway, though they rarely devote much space to her work. Candea explains that both anthropologists and other social scientists have "learnt" much from Haraway, who she describes as an influential exponent of the idea that science is a "process of active world-making" and thus thoroughly political.[167] Likewise, the aforementioned Martin presents Haraway as a source of inspiration, who has traced the "discontinuous, fractured and nonlinear relationships between science and the rest of culture".[168] But what both Candea and Martin have in common is that they only refer to a one work by Haraway: *Primate Vision* from 1989. This implies Haraway did not contribute much to the *early* history of the anthropology of science, at least compared to Latour and Woolgar, whose *Laboratory Life* from 1979 is often ascribed particular importance. The same applies to anthropologist Michael M.J. Fischer. One the one hand, Fischer states that the first anthropologically informed "ethnographies of science and technology" was authored by Martin, Traweek and Haraway, who might therefore be considered "*moral pioneers* in the anthropology of science and technology." On the other hand, the works to which he refers are Martin's *The Woman in the Body* from 1987, Traweek's *Beam Times and Life Times* from 1988 and Haraway's *Primate Vision*.[169]

The only scholar I have found who emphasizes Haraway's contribution to the *early* history of the anthropology of science is anthropologist Sara Franklin. In an article titled "Science as Culture, Cultures of Science" (1994), she describes the science of anthropology as a newcomer to the study of science, arguing that it had its "coming of age" (quotation marks in original) in 1992, when the American Anthropological Association organized a series of panels on "cyborg anthropology" and Haraway's work, which attracted a large audience.[170] But Franklin also discusses the extra-anthropological roots of the field in question. In this context, she observes that Haraway constitutes "a

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[166] Everett Mendelsohn and Yehuda Elkana, *Sciences and Cultures: Anthropological and Historical Studies of the Sciences* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1981).

[167] Candea, "Science", 9.

[168] Emily Martin, "Anthropology and the Cultural Study of Science", *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 23, no. 1 (1998): 31 Note that Martin asks what the anthropology of science "might" look like, rather than what it is or has been. Ibid., 25.

[169] Fischer, "Four Genealogies", 541, italics in original.

[170] Sarah Franklin, "Science as Culture, Cultures of Science", *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 168 n5.

major force in shaping the anthropology of science as well as science studies generally." Most importantly, Franklin argues that to study science anthropologically is to study it as culture and that science to Haraway "is culture in an unprecedented sense."[171] Exactly how Haraway helped shape the anthropology of science nevertheless remains somewhat vague even in Franklin's study, wherein Haraway is devoted no more than three paragraphs.

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Haraway's name is not the only one often omitted from accounts of the early history of science anthropology. As we have observed, Latour and Wooglar are mentioned quite frequently. But Young, Barnes and Figlio are almost never included. This is where my analysis offers a new, valuable insight. It suggests that *all* of these scholars belong to the early history of the anthropology of science, in the sense that they, as part of the anthropological turn of the 1970s, invoke anthropological methods or concepts to study or conceptualize the nature of science – as evidenced by the fact that all argue that science should be approached as "our" myth.

At the same time, Haraway deserves special attention. As we shall see in the next chapter, she has been particularly consistent in adopting a logomythological approach. Ever since 1978 – a year before Latour and Woolgar's *Laboratory Life* and seven years before Latour states that "the real start" of the anthropology of science occurred – Haraway has persistently studied science as "our" myth. In this chapter, we have seen one example of this. In the next one, I will highlight several others.

[171] Ibid., 172. The idea that to study science anthropologically is to study it as culture is also echoed by other scholars. See for example Rochberg, "Anthropology of Science", 253–254; Martin, "Anthropology and the Cultural Study of Science", 26; Candea, "Science", 4.

12. Science as myth, part II.
Haraway's logomythology

At the center Donna Haraway's article "The Contest for Primate Nature" from 1983 stands the work of four female primatologists researching the lives of langurs, a leaf-eating monkey found in Asia. In its introduction, Haraway proclaims that "scientific debate is a contest for the language to announce what will count as public knowledge. Scientific debate about […] primates, is a social process of producing stories, important stories that constitute public meanings. *Science is our myth.*"[172] A few pages later, she announces one of her study's key conclusions: that "the langur story" told by the female primatologists whose work she examines are neither "a mechanical reflection of ideology", nor "the product of diligent objective science ever improving its own methods of finally seeing nothing but Ur-monkeys." "The natural sciences", Haraway continues, "are neither so tame nor so mystifying. Both these points of view caricature the production of *science as myth,* that is, as meaning-laden public knowledge."[173] These short quotes tell us two things of great importance. First, that Haraway uses the word "myth" to denote a form of "meaning-laden public knowledge", which is produced through and embedded in stories. Second, that to approach science as myth is to refrain from approaching science as mere ideology or a set of objective truths.

The chapter at hand aims to further elucidate what Haraway's logomythological approach entails. At its center stands three articles published between 1978–1984, all of which deal with the relation between science and myth: "The Past Is the Contested Zone" (1978), "The Contest for Primate Nature" (1983) and "Primatology is Politics by Other Means (1984). In order to clarify what Haraway's logomythology constitutes an alternative to, I first discuss what it, in the 1970s, meant to approach science as ideology. I then specify an important premise on which Haraway's logomythology rests by focusing on the fact that she describes science as a story-telling practice governed by historically contingent rules. Having accomplished this, I move on to discuss Haraway's logomythology in greater detail.

[172] Haraway, "The Contest for Primate Nature", 81, italics added.
[173] Ibid., 92, italics added.

To approach science as myth is to refrain from approaching it as ideology.[174] But what does it mean to approach science as ideology, according to Haraway? To answer this question, it is instructive to examine the debate about the alleged ideological nature of sociobiology, in which Haraway herself intervenes. This debate took off in the wake of biologist E.O Wilson's influential but equally controversial *Sociobiology: The New Syntheses* (1975). The basic assumption structuring this work is that social behavior, in both animals and humans, is best explained in evolutionary-biological terms, through principles of natural selection. This assumption particularly provoked left-wing and feminist researchers, who argued that it helped promote biological determinism.[175]

Many of sociobiology's most vocal critics were members of the organization Science for the People (SftP), which Haraway cites as an important source of inspiration.[176] This organization published a popular, bi-monthly magazine of the same name, which regularly featured articles on sociobiology. In these articles, sociology was primarily approached as a form of ideology in the Marxist sense of the term – that is, a set of ideas aimed at maintaining the prevailing order. In a review of Wilson's book, titled "Sociobiology: The Skewed Synthesis" (1975), members of the Boston Chapter of SftP argue that sociobiology and similar theories lack all scientific support, which means that the only possible explanation for their popularity is that they "consistently purport to provide a scientific justification of the *status quo* and of existing privileges for certain groups according to class, race or sex."[177] Likewise, in "Sociobiology: A Sexist Synthesis" (1977), sociologist Barbara Chasin

[174] This distinguishes Haraway's concept of myth form that of mythologists who equate it with ideology. See for example Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), 138.

[175] Eric Holtzman, "The Sociobiology Controversy", *International Journal of Health Services* 7, no. 3 (1977).

[176] In an interview from 2020, actually published in *Science for the People magazine* – which was re-established in 2019, after having been cancelled in 1989 – Haraway explains: "Science for the People was important to me when I was a biology graduate student at Yale. That's when the organization first entered my world. […] I taught from the magazine in my classes early on. I was never a key activist in Science for the People but I was a member and a fellow traveler and it was part of the world that made sense to me." In the same interview, she refers to the work done by the SftP-lead Sociobiology Study Group (SSG) as part of her "infancy". Donna Haraway, Katherine Bryant and Erik Wallenberg, "Beyond Critique: An Interview with Donna Haraway. Part 2: A Biology for the People", *Science for the people magazine* 23, no. 3 (2020).

[177] Genetics and Society Project Group, "Sociobiology: The Skewed Synthesis", *Science for the People* 7 no. 6 (1975): 28.

contends that sociology "is not science", but "propaganda, touted by the media not for its scientific merits but for its political functions."[178] Finally, in an article titled "Sociobiology: The Controversy Continues" (1979), physicist Freda Salzman writes that "sociobiology, as presently formulated and promoted, is without any real scientific merit, but is political ideology for the *status quo* masquerading as pure, objective, value-free science."[179] To summarize, all these critics conceptualize sociobiology as ideology *rather* than science. As we move on to study Haraway's writings on sociobiology, we will see that she adopts a very different approach.

Haraway agrees that there is a clear political dimension to sociobiology. The very language employed by sociobiologists reflects and reproduces the political logic that structures capitalist and patriarchal societies. For example, Haraway demonstrates that sociobiologists like Wilson make use of metaphors rooted in militarist implementations of cybernetics. More specifically, she notes that Wilson conceptualizes the ant population he studies as an "artillery system in cybernetic terms", which is to say that he highlights the similarities between how these ants localize food (or their "target") with the way anti-aircraft systems are designed in order to amplify their hits.[180] The presence of such metaphors suggests that biological objects of knowledge through sociobiology have been "militarized", which Haraway relates to the fact that this discipline was developed in a capitalist and patriarchal society marked by the experience of war.[181] In this respect, sociobiologists can be said to proceed like bricoleurs, who use concepts pre-constrained by their history to tell new stories, which nevertheless reflect and reproduce the context from which they stem. By conceptualizing natural objects in terms of cybernetic command-control systems, sociobiology helps promote the notion of nature as a series of machines, designed to maintain the status quo and maximize control.[182] The principle of domination is thereby naturalized and effectively justified. And yet, Haraway refuses to equate the biology of sociobiologists with ideology.

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[178] Barbara Chasin, "Sociobiology: A Sexist Synthesis", *Science for the People* 9, no. 3 (1977): 30. Further down, Chasin concludes: "Theories of biological determinism are yet another kind of weapon used to preserve inequalities." Ibid., 31.

[179] Freda Salzman, "Sociobiology: The Controversy Continues", *Science for the People* 11, no. 2 (1979): 26.

[180] Haraway, "The High Cost of Information", 260, 258.

[181] Ibid., 260. See also ibid., 271–272. "The historical contingences of capitalist patriarchy have meant, most starkly, that biology can be a war baby and like to play with guns. Knowledge can be a militarized zone."

[182] Ibid. 271.

"There was nothing mysterious or conspiratorial or propagandistic about the constitution of this biology", Haraway writes. "At most this biology could be called ideological in the sense of Clifford Geertz's notion of ideology as a cultural map", a notion that he speaks of as an alternative to the "evaluative" Marxist concept of ideology. [183] The objects of knowledge that Wilson and other sociobiologists construct through the use of cybernetic metaphors are not the fruits "of bad science or ideological abuse", Haraway argues.[184] Toward the end of the article, she concludes: "Again, 'science as ideology' is not the argument of this paper."[185] Importantly, Haraway does not claim that sociobiology is non-ideological, but that it is not *only* ideology. In other words, what she objects to seems to be the dismissive attitude towards sociobiology that characterizes, for example, the articles published in *Science for the People* – that is, the tendency to denounce sociobiology as non-scientific, "science" (within quotation marks), propaganda or mere politics.

I argue that Haraway uses myth-talk to develop an alternative to the position she here calls science as ideology. But on what premises does her logomythology rest? And why is it so important not to equate science with ideology? These questions will be answered in the following.

Science as rule-governed

Haraway began her doctoral studies in biology at Yale University in 1967 and completed her dissertation in 1972. In 1974, she was hired to teach the History of Science at John Hopkins University where she remained until 1980, when she was employed as a professor in the History of Consciousness Program at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Looking back on her time at Yale, Haraway notes that it was then that she became interested in the relation between science and politics.[186] A question to which Haraway has often

[183] Ibid., 247. See Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System", in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (Basic Books, 1973), 196, 201.

[184] Haraway, "The High Cost of Information", 256.

[185] Ibid., 270. See also ibid., 271. "I think that sociobiology is particularly a discourse about command-control systems. That does not mean sociobiology is necessarily poor science. […] It would be absurd to label all cybernetic-related science and technology 'bad science' or ideology."

[186] Haraway and Reti, "Edges and Ecotones", 57. For a more detailed account of Haraway's biography, see Janet Wirth-Cauchon, "Donna Haraway", in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Major Social Theorists. Volume II: Contemporary Social Theorists*, ed. George Ritzer and Jeffrey Stepnisky (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

returned to since completing her doctorate is whether, and if so how, science can serve the emancipatory aspirations of feminism.

To answer this question, Haraway has focused primarily on the science of animal groups, or what she sometimes terms "animal sociology". In particular, she has considered research on apes and monkeys, the prime object of study for primatologists. In the 1970s and 1980s, this was a contentious discipline, at the center of both popular and academic debates. Contributing to these controversies were highly influential works such as zoologist Desmond Morris' *The Naked Ape* (1967) and Wilson's *Sociobiology*, both of which invoked the science of apes and monkeys to explain human behavior from the perspective of evolutionary biology.[187]

In one of Haraway's first academic articles, she gives several reasons why the science of animal groups constitutes a relevant object of study for a feminist historian of science. Most importantly, she notes that animal sociology, through its contributions to theories about evolutionary origins, has helped naturalize oppressive, patriarchal structures. "Thus", writes Haraway, "this area of the natural sciences is one we need to understand thoroughly and transform completely to produce a science that express the social relations of liberation without committing the vulgar Marxist mistake of deriving directly the substance of knowledge from material conditions."[188]

How, then, can feminists transform this and other sciences? As we have already seen, Haraway claims that all scientists produce "stories" (what this claim actually entails will be discussed below). In an article with the fitting title "In the Beginning Was the Word: The Genesis of Biological Theory" (1981), Haraway appropriates the same biblical-mythical metaphor as does Mary Daly, stating that such stories "name" and thereby "give birth" to the world.[189] Consequently, Haraway argues that feminists who wish to transform the sciences must tell different stories than those already told. But she also maintains that science is a "rule-governed" story-telling practice, which means that feminists pursuing new stories must either play by the rules or try to

[187] Desmond Morris, *The Naked Ape: A Zoologist's Study of the Human Animal* (New York: Dell, 1967); Edward O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975).

[188] Haraway, "Animal Sociology", 12.

[189] Haraway, "In the Beginning Was the Word: The Genesis of Biological Theory", in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Natur* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 72. Originally published as Donna Haraway, "In the Beginning Was the Word: The Genesis of Biological Theory", *Signs* 6, no. 3 (1981).

change the rules themselves.[190] For example, Haraway explains that primatologists

> have developed and progressively enforced on each other quite explicit criteria for collecting data worthy of respect: number of hours in the field, physical position of observer, ability to recognize animals, inter-observer similarity in naming and counting "units" of behaviour, form of data sheets and storage of data, sampling procedures to counter observer preferences to watch what is already interesting, and so on.[191]

This means that not all stories about apes and monkeys will count as scientific stories in the eyes of other primatologists, but only those told in accordance with these and other rules.[192] Later on, I will clarify the difference between playing by the rules and trying to change them. But first, we must examine more carefully what function the notion of science as rule-governed serves in Haraway's work.

Haraway was not alone in the 1970s to employ the rule metaphor. It had long been used by anthropologists seeking to uncover the hidden logic behind apparently irrational human activities in non-Western societies.[193] But in the 1960s and 70s, several influential thinkers argued that the science of Western societies was also governed by rules.[194] One of them was Michel Foucault.[195]

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[190] Haraway, "The Past Is the Contested Zone", 39. See also Haraway, *Primate Visions*, 4.

[191] Haraway, "The Contest for Primate Nature", 92.

[192] Cf. Haraway, "Primatology Is Politics by Other Means", 499. "[S]truggles for a feminist science cannot proceed only by writing the tales one wants to be true […]. It is important not to trivialize the very real difficulty of good scientific story telling."

[193] See for example the texts collected in Mary Douglas, *Rules and Meanings: The Anthropology of Everyday Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, [1973] 2003).

[194] Much earlier, the notion of science as governed by historically contingent rules had been advanced by Ludwik Fleck, whose work went more or less unnoticed until it was popularized by Thomas Kuhn. See Ludwik Fleck, *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*, trans. Fred Bradley and Thaddeus J. Trenn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 44, 99, 111.

[195] In the foreword to the English edition of *The Order of Things,* Foucault explains that he in this work sought to examine whether "the subjects responsible for scientific discourse" are somehow "determined" by conditions beyond their control. "In short, I tried to explore scientific discourse not from the point of view of the individuals who are speaking, nor from the point of view of the formal structures of what they are saying, but from the point of view of *the rules that come into play in the very existence of such discourse*". Michel Foucault, "Foreword to the English Edition" [1989], in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences,* (New York: Routledge, 2002), xiv, italics added. See also Michel Foucault and Colin Gordon, "Truth and Power", in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 132. An article that touches on the important but

Another was Thomas Kuhn, mentioned in the previous chapter. Kuhn is particularly important in this context, as his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* forms the theoretical basis of Haraway's first book from 1976.[196]

I have already discussed Kuhn's work in some detail. Here it suffices to emphasize two additional aspects thereof, which structure Haraway's writings as well. First, Kuhn describes "rules" as an essential aspect of scientific "paradigms", which both constrain and enable scientific work (or rather, enable *by* constraining).[197] Second, he holds that the rules governing a particular paradigm, like all intra-paradigmatic elements, are subject to non-cumulative historical changes (i.e., "scientific revolution"), which means that they are temporal and thus contingent. These two assumptions together form part of the premises on which Haraway's logomythology rests.

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Haraway actualizes the notion of science as rule-governed to refute the claim that science should be studied as a mechanical reflection of ideology; the first approach to which "science as myth" is meant to provide an alternative. To demonstrate this, I will consider the argument advanced in "The Past is the Contested Zone" and "The Contest for Primate Nature", the two texts in which Haraway claims that science is "our" myth.

In the first of these articles, Haraway examines attempts to map the early evolutionary history of humankind – of which "human nature" is understood as a product – by studying monkeys and apes. One of the theories she discusses is the so-called Man the Hunter thesis, according to which hunting constitutes the key factor in the evolution of human behavior. Proponents of this thesis

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different roles both Fleck, Kuhn and Foucault attribute to what they speak of as "rules" is Luca Sciortino, "The Emergence of Objectivity: Fleck, Foucault, Kuhn and Hacking", *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 88 (2021): esp. 130, 132, 133.

196 In an interview from 2000, Haraway states that her first book, *Crystals, Fabrics, and Fields,* based on her dissertation *The Search for Organizing Relations,* was "written under the spell of Thomas Kuhn", whose work she first read and was captivated by in 1968. Haraway and Goodeve, *How Like a Leaf*, 19. In the first-mentioned work, Haraway sets out to study scientific change by analyzing developments in embryology during the first half of the twentieth century. To do so, she claims that it is "instructive to explore the notion of a paradigm as applied to biology", which means that Kuhn's book is of "central importance". Haraway, *Crystals, Fabrics, and Fields*, 2.

197 "Men whose research is based on shared paradigms are committed to the same rules and standards for scientific practice." Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 11. See also ibid., 38–39.

argue that hunting, usually portrayed as a predominantly male pursuit, drove the development of language and culture, because the hunting "way of life", adopted by our ancestors, generated a "selection pressure" for abilities associated with communication, cooperation and the use of tools.[198] One theorist who helped establish this theory was the physical anthropologist and evolutionary functionalist Sherwood Washburn (1911–2000), author of texts such as "The Evolution of Hunting" (1968). About the latter, Haraway writes that he "has produced a fundamental theory with tremendous implications for the practice of many sciences and for *the rules* of speculative evolutionary reconstruction. In Kuhnian terms, Washburn seems to have something basic to do with scientific paradigms."[199]

Almost immediately, the Man the Hunter thesis met resistance from female and feminist anthropologists. Haraway examines a counterargument advanced by anthropologists Nancy Tanner (1933–) and Adrienne Zihlman (1940–), who utilize concepts and methods borrowed from sociobiology to develop an alternative theory (according to Haraway, Tanner and Zihlman thus "appropriate sociobiology for feminist ends").[200] In an article titled "Women in Evolution. Part I. Innovation and Selection in Human Origins" (1976), Tanner and Zihlman state that the Man the Hunter thesis is problematic because it focuses exclusively on male behavior, "with females having little or no part in the evolutionary saga except to bear the next generation of hunters."[201] Conversely, Tanner and Zihlman's explanatory model highlights the previously overlooked importance of gathering, which they present as an activity often carried out by females. In support of this thesis, they refer to studies of chimpanzees. More specifically, Tanner and Zihlman look at *female* chimpanzees, the behavior of which had received much less attention than male ones.[202]

How, then, does Haraway frame this debate between Washburn and his feminist critics? Early on, she states: "The debate has been bounded by *the rules of ordinary scientific discourse*. This highly regulated space makes room for technical papers; grant applications; informal networks of students, teachers, and laboratories; official symposia to promote methods and interpretations;

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[198] Sherwood L. Washburn and C. S. Lancaster, "The Evolution of Hunting", in *Man the Hunter* ed. Richard B. Lee and Irven DeVore (New York: Aldine, 1987), 293.

[199] Haraway, "The Past Is the Contested Zone", 37, italics added.

[200] Ibid., 39.

[201] Nancy Tanner and Adrienne Zihlman, "Women in Evolution. Part I: Innovation and Selection in Human Origins", *Signs* 1, no. 3 (1976): 585.

[202] Ibid., 594–595, 598–603.

and finally, textbooks to socialize new scientists."[203] Instead of dismissing Washburn, Haraway thus stresses the legitimacy of his approach. The former, she writes, is "a careful, experimental scientist", who is also "unusually consistent and unified in his methods, theories and practices."[204] Furthermore, she explains: "Washburn is not an ideologue; he is a scientist and educator." But the same is true for his feminist critics. Although their "practice of science is controversial […] for political reasons", Haraway states that Tanner and Zihlman "no more make themselves ideologues than Washburn". "Telling stories of the human past is a rule-governed activity", she writes. "Washburn's science changed the rules of the game to require argument from the conditions of production." Tanner and Zihlman, Haraway continues, "play by the new rules but tell of a different human nature, of different universals."[205]

Washburn and Zihlman are once again discussed in Haraway's "The Contest for Primate Nature", where both are presented as having helped forge new rules for scientific story-telling. In this article, Haraway states that Washburn accomplished a break from the racist heritage of physical anthropology, "primarily by crafting rules for telling evolutionary stories that did not easily yield racist meanings."[206] Likewise, feminist primatologists like Zihlman are said to have challenged the patriarchal heritage of primatology. They have, writes Haraway, "collectively changed the rules for explicit and implicit logics of stories. It is no longer acceptably scientific to argue about animal models for a human way of life without considering female and infant activity as well as male."[207] As we will see shortly, Haraway argues that these new rules could not have been established were it not for certain political events, which made possible the telling of stories that both reflect and help reinforce the rules in question. Yet she also maintains that all the stories she studies are indeed scientific. These stories are, Haraway writes "important scientific products of ordinary good scientific practice judged by standards applicable at publication."[208] In other words, all were produced in accordance with the rules of the game, albeit they also helped to change them.

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[203] Haraway, "The Past Is the Contested Zone", 22, italics added.

[204] Ibid., 37.

[205] Ibid., 39.

[206] Haraway, "The Contest for Primate Nature", 87.

[207] Ibid., 106. Referring to Zihlman's story about the importance of gathering, Haraway writes: "I like that new story; I also suggest that it changed the rules of what can count in scientific debate about oestrus. Ibid., 107.

[208] Ibid., 108.

Although she does not use the word "rule" there, Haraway presents a similar argument in the article on sociobiology discussed above. In this text, she states the work of sociologist like Wilson "cannot be explained away as 'mere' ideology or 'bad' science' without in the process explaining away large sections of what practicing behavioral biologists accept as basic to their disciplines."[209] Again, this suggests that sociobiology cannot be dismissed as mere ideology because Wilson and his colleagues play by accepted rules.

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So far, we have seen that Haraway invokes the notion of science as rule-governed by arguing that there is a difference between scientific stories and mere ideology. But she also claims that the rules governing sciences (such as primatology) are subject to change, whereby she introduces an element of contingency. Thus, the notion of science as rule-governed also supports the claim that science should not be studied as a set of objective truths – that is, the second approach to which Haraway's logomythology is meant to serve as an alternative.

Why do the rules that govern science change? According to Kuhn, "normal science" will inevitably generate "anomalies", or results that cannot be explained without breaking the rules of the current paradigm.[210] When the number of anomalies reach a certain point, a "crisis" erupts, followed by a "revolution", which results in a "paradigm shift" and the establishment of new rules. Put differently, Kuhn claims that the rules change when the paradigm does, as a result of intra-paradigmatic work. By contrast, Haraway emphasizes the importance of extra-paradigmatic political events. Consequently, she states that Washburn was able to contest the rules that help generate racist stories, yet not those that produced sexist ones, because his work was informed by the civil rights movements and the wave of decolonization, but not by the women's movement:

> Washburn actively contested to move physical anthropology away from part of this heritage, primarily by crafting rules for telling evolutionary stories that did not easily yield racist meanings. He did not see or challenge similar scientific

[209] Haraway, "The High Cost of Information", 246.

[210] Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 5–6. "Sometimes a normal problem, one that ought to be solvable by known rules and procedures, resists the reiterated onslaught of the ablest members of the group within whose competence it falls […] In these and other ways besides, normal science repeatedly goes astray."

> frameworks for knowing and for producing hierarchically ordered gender – not because of personal ill-will, but because world struggles challenging racism were ending colonialism and making visible many of its rules for generating public knowledge, including the life sciences. The women's movement of the 1970s made different scientific constructions of gender possible, not the insight of genius in the heads of either men or women.[211]

The point here is not that, for example, the women's movement of itself led to the emergence of new scientific rules. As we recall, Haraway argues that one must refrain from "committing the vulgar Marxist mistake of deriving directly the substance of knowledge from material conditions."[212] To establish the rule that primatologists telling stories about apes and monkeys must take the behavior of female animals into account required a great deal of effort and (material) labor from scientists "possessing the authority to author and working by the rules of scientific discourse", as Haraway writes about Zihlman.[213] However, she still holds that the women's movement helped open up the space in which Zihlman and other feminist primatologists operate.

The fact that the rules governing science are conditioned by political events means that all societies are prone to produce stories of a particular kind, while there are always many stories that cannot be told.[214] This suggests that scientific knowledge should not be approached as a collection of objective truths. Toward the end of "The Contest for Primate Nature", Haraway writes:

> [N]o class of these stories can be seen as innocent, free of determination by historically specific social relations and daily practice in producing and reproducing daily life. Surely scientific stories are not innocent in that sense. It is equally true that no class of tales can be free of rules for narrating a proper story within a particular genre, in this case the discourse of life science. Demystifying those rules seems important to me. Nature is constructed, constituted historically, not discovered naked in a fossil bed or a tropical forest.[215]

Here, the notion of science as rule-governed is invoked in support of the claim that scientists construct rather than discovers nature – one of Haraway's most

[211] Haraway, "The Contest for Primate Nature", 87.
[212] Haraway, "Animal Sociology", 12.
[213] Haraway, "The Past Is the Contested Zone", 108.
[214] "[P]rimatologists tell stories remarkably appropriate to their times, places, genders, races, classes – as well as to their animals." Haraway, "The Contest for Primate Nature", 84.
[215] Ibid., 106.

important and controversial arguments. Obviously, this is not to say that no natural phenomena existed before the birth of science. For example, there were apes and monkeys long before primatologists began studying them. And these animals do affect the theories primatologists put forward (at least, it is against the rules of scientific discourse to ignore them), which is why we are not dealing here with pure inventions. But according to Haraway, primatologists have no unmediated access to apes and monkeys. As she notes in her famous, somewhat later article, "Situated Knowledges' (1988), all knowledge is "situated", in the sense that it is produced by embodied subjects operating in a particular time, in a particular place, within a particular discipline, governed by historically contingent rules.[216] Thus, it is impossible to achieve a one-to-one correlation between what the apes and monkeys are and what they are *for us*, as scientists (or as laymen, whose understanding of apes and monkeys is partly produced by science) – which means that, as scientific objects of knowledge, even apes and monkeys are partly constructed.

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To summarize, the notion of science as governed by historically contingent rules serves as a premise for Haraway's logomythology in that it helps her to argue that science is neither mere ideology nor fully objective. This is an important step in her work to clarify the need for feminist science. If science could be reduced to ideology in the Marxist sense of the term (i.e., the ideas of the ruling class) female feminists would not be able to influence science from within, simply because they do not belong to the ruling class. Similarly, if one could dismiss all science partly motivated or influenced by politics as ideological and thus non-scientific, feminist science would by definition end up on the wrong side of the divide. On the other hand, if science was objective, there would be no need for feminist science, as even non-feminist scientists would eventually arrive at the one and only truth. By contrast, the notion of science as rule-governed helps Haraway articulate what she terms an "avowedly interested approach to science", which "promises to take seriously

[216] Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective", in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Natur* (New York: Routledge, 1991). Originally published as Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective", *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988).

the rules of scientific discourse without worshipping the fetish of scientific objectivity."[217]

This brings us back to the question of how feminists can transform science. As we have already seen, Haraway argues that one way to accomplish this is to play by the rules of the game to produce new stories, which might eventually help modify the rules themselves. Examples of feminists who have done this include Zihlman and Tanner, who played by the rules of sociobiology and primatology to stress the importance of females in the evolutionary origins of human nature. As they both helped challenge the Man the Hunter thesis and establish a new rule – according to which stories that ignore the behavior of female animals do not constitute good science – Zihlman and Tanner must be understood as successful. Their work proves that feminists can partake in debates about human nature from *within* the sciences. And yet, Haraway states that one must "be acutely aware of the dangers of using old rules to tell new tales." For although Zihlman and Tanners do present a new story, there are respects in which it might not be new enough. Citing the stories of Washburn, Zihlman, Tanner and other animal sociologists active around the same time, Haraway writes: "It has been against the rules to argue from a position of biological reductionism. But the goal of each tale has been a picture of human universals, of human nature as the foundation for culture."[218] According to Haraway, such tales are problematic because the notion of a universal human nature as the foundation of culture ultimately implies – or is often invoked to assert – that the possibility of transforming culture, of creating greater freedom, is severely restricted.

What, then, is one to do, if one wants to tell a completely different story, one that does not reproduce the notion of a universal human nature? If one does not want to use the "old rules", yet cannot establish completely new ones? Haraway does not provide a definitive answer to that question. But her own work suggests one possible solution. Namely, that one plays a different game, as I will demonstrate that she herself does, when she utilizes the rules of cybernetics to author a "non-naturalist" cyborg myth.

Myth as metalanguage: Haraway, Barthes and Figlio

In the previous section, I discussed one of the premises on which Haraway's logomythology rests. It is now time to further specify what this approach

[217] Haraway, "The Past Is the Contested Zone", 23.
[218] Ibid., 42.

entails. To do so, I will begin by examining the paragraph from "The Past Is the Contested Zone" in which Haraway for the first time equates science with myth. This paragraph begins with the claim, quoted above, that one must be aware of the risks involved in using old rules to tell new stories. Haraway then writes:

> This is compatible with a larger refusal to pretend that science is either only discovery, which erects a fetish of objectivity, or only invention, which rests on crass idealism. We both learn about and create nature and ourselves. […] They [the sciences of function] show both the given and the possible in a dialectic between the past and the future. Often, the future is given by the possibility of a past. Sciences also act as legitimating metalanguages that produce homologies between social and symbolic systems. That is acutely true for the sciences of the body and the body politics. *In a strict sense, science is our myth*. That claim does not in any way vitiate the discipline scientific practitioners impose on each other to study the world. We can both know that our bodies, other animals, fossils, and what have you are proper objects for scientific investigation, and remember how historically determined is our part in the construction of the object.[219]

This is a dense passage, which can be interpreted in several different, though not necessarily incompatible ways. First, Haraway seems to establish a relatively clear link between approaching science as myth and approaching scientific knowledge as historically contingent. Thus, we see that the statement "science is our myth" is followed by the assertion that this claim "does not in any way vitiate the discipline scientific practitioners impose on each other", because one can view, for instance, animals as the "proper" object of science, even as one remembers how "historically determined" our part in the "construction" of this objects is. Second, the passage analyzed here suggests that the mythical quality of science is linked to the power it holds over how we understand our past and future. I will expand on both these interpretations later on. In what follows, I would like to focus instead on a third, complementary interpretation that this passage lends itself to: namely, that science is "our" myth in the sense that it constitutes a metalanguage.

When Haraway suggests that to approach science as myth is to approach sciences as a "legitimating metalanguage", she can be read as appropriating a concept of myth introduced by Roland Barthes, who was the first to describe

[219] Ibid.

myth as a metalanguage.[220] In his seminal *Mythologies* (1957), Barthes states that myth, which he defines as a type of speech, is a metalanguage in that it turns the signs of one semiological system into the signifier of a greater, second order system.[221] Somewhat simplified, this is to say that myths operate by making texts, images and other instances of speech say something more, which lies beyond their explicit meaning. Barthes himself provides a now famous example:

> I am at the barber's, and a copy of *Paris-Match* is offered to me. On the cover, a young Negro in uniform is saluting, with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolour. All this is the *meaning* of the picture. But, whether naïvely or not, I see very well what it signifies to me: that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any color discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors.[222]

According to Barthes, one is dealing here with the myth of "French imperiality"; a myth that helps legitimize colonialism.[223] But how does it achieve this, more specifically? Barthes argues that myth legitimizes by naturalizing what is actually historical. "We reach here the very principle of myth: it transforms history into nature."[224] The young black man in the photo would not be saluting the French flag if it were not for centuries of military violence and colonial oppression. But myth conceals this history. The situation thus appears natural and inevitable: part of an eternal order rather than the

[220] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Richard Howard and Anette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, [1957] 2013), 114. The relationship between Barthes and Haraway has not been subject to much research. It is clear, however, that Haraway must have read and been impressed with Barthes at some point. In an article from 1991 she discusses the presence of "mythic" elements in an advertisement for scientific lab products, after which she writes, in a footnote: "Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* […] is my guide here and elsewhere. Donna Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/D Others", in *A Reader in Feminist Theory, Cyborgs and Cyberspace*, ed. Jenny Wolmark (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 334 n22. Given that Haraway discusses myths and mythic elements on several occasions in this article, it is difficult to know whether "elsewhere" here refers to elsewhere in this particular text, or elsewhere in her oeuvre.

[221] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 224.

[222] Ibid., 225, italics in original.

[223] Ibid., 228.

[224] Ibid., 240.

result of contingent circumstances. Myth thereby impedes change. Indeed, "the very end of myths is to immobilize the world", Barthes states.[225]

Returning to Haraway, one could say that she makes visible how scientific theories function in similar ways. For example, she demonstrates the Man the Hunter thesis operates like a mythical metalanguage in that it, on the explicit level, speaks of apes, monkeys and human physiology to argue that hunting constitutes the key factor in the evolution of human societies, yet implicitly helps naturalize a patriarchal ideology according to which man is the driving force behind all development.

But it is also possible to identify an important difference between Barthes and Haraway. The former speaks of myths only in negative terms, as an ideological weapon in the hands of the ruling class. He claims that myth generates a "false Nature" which must exposed.[226] Doing so is the job of the "mythologist", a disruptive (male) figure – with whom Barthes obviously identifies – whose mission is entirely negative, in the sense that he must seek to abolish myth but renounce all utopian aspirations. "It is forbidden for him to imagine what the rest of the world will concretely be like when the immediate object of his criticism has disappeared. […] All the values of his undertaking appear to him as acts of destruction".[227] In contrast, Haraway argues that myth-making can serve a progressive function. This is in part because she and Barthes use the word "myth" differently, to denote different phenomena. But their reasonings also rest on different premises. Talk of a "false Nature" suggests that a nature devised by myths is always problematic: a pseudo-nature that should be exposed. In contrast, Haraway argues that we have no access to nature beyond myth, which is why it is just as important to engage in myth-making as it is to demythify.

Haraway shares this more neutral understanding of myth with Karl M. Figlio, discussed in the previous chapter, As mentioned earlier, the Figlio appropriates Claude Lévi-Strauss' concept of myth-making as bricolage. But in "The Metaphor of Organization", Figlio also turns to Barthes. Figlio begins this article by stating that science is a "human activity" that cannot be isolated from its intellectual and social milieu. He explains that science has a "double nature", in that it is "made up of (1) abstract, theoretical, observational elements, and (2) covertly communicated but persuasive impressions which

[225] Ibid., 270.
[226] Ibid, 271.
[227] Ibid., 272–273.

convey an ideology".[228] We recognize this, the notion of an implicit meaning, communicated through the explicit one, from Barthes' characterization of myth, a similarity that Figlio himself confirms. Having summed up Barthes' understanding of myth as a metalanguage, Figlio asserts:

> Applied to science […] this notion of myth is consistent with the 'double nature' I mentioned. Science as myth is a metalanguage comprising elements in a structured relationship and a covertly communicated ideology. It is a naturalized carrier of its 'context'. The historian of science must search for the concrete forms in which this double function occurs, knowing that it *does* occur.[229]

In other words, Figlio holds that science is a myth, in the sense of a metalanguage, in that scientific theories always reflect and help naturalize ideas specific to a particular time and place. Importantly, this is not meant as a denunciation. As a human activity, Figlio argues that science cannot possibly function in any other way. I suggest that Haraway shares this assumption, which is one reason why she follows Figlio in stating that science constitutes a myth in the sense of a metalanguage. But what else does it mean to approach science as myth?

Two concepts of myth

To answer the question posed above, we must acknowledge that there seems to be a tension in Haraway's writings on myth and science. One the one hand, we have already seen that she, on more than one occasion, speaks of science as (our) myth. One the other hand, Haraway claims that myth and science should not be confused. In "Primatology is Politics by Other Means", she states that

> the scientific and mythic characters of primate discourses are not quite in phase; they evoke each other, echo each other, annoy each other, but are not identical to each other. Science and myth do not exclude or replace each other; they are versions of each other. In the twentieth century in the United States, they structure each other. Reducing science to myth or vice versa would obscure

[228] Figlio, "The Metaphor of Organization", 19. Here, the term "ideology" is used in "its broadest sense as a shorthand for the power of ideas – philosophical, theological, political, etc". Ibid., 18.
[229] Ibid., 19, italics in original.

> precisely the field of gender politics – and much else – which I regard as real and interesting.[230]

This article was published just a year after "The Contest for Primate Nature", where Haraway for the second time asserts that science is "our" myth.[231] It is of course possible that she changed her mind in the year that separates these two publications. However, even in the latter text, she continues to conceptualize scientific practices in terms of myth-making. For example, she speaks of primatology as one of several "major systems of myth […] in western story-telling traditions".[232] She also argues that feminists may help transform primatology by "telling another version of a crucial myth".[233] How, then, are we to understand this tension? It can be resolved if we acknowledge there are at least two different concepts of myth at work in Haraway's texts: one narrow (which excludes science) and one broad (which includes both science and the narrow concept of myth).

Haraway employs a narrow concept of myth when she uses this word to denote what Tae-Yeoun Keum calls literary myth – that is, fantastical tales about gods, goddesses and other superhuman beings that are generally assumed to belong to a particular genre, traditionally associated with temporally or spatially removed societies. Haraway distinguishes between such tales and scientific theories. Yet, she also argues that they have much in common. Hence, she emphasizes the "fruitfulness of paying close attention […] to the common structures of myths and scientific stories".[234] Likewise, in the introduction to *Primate Vision* (1989), she contends that primatology has been "about the origin and development of many persistent mythic themes" and that this science makes "repeated use of the narrative resources of Judeo-Christian myth systems."[235] In this respect, literary myth and science may indeed be understood as "versions" of each other. And yet, Haraway still insists that one must not reduce science to myth. The question then becomes wherein the difference between literary myth and science lies?

To address this question, we must recall that Haraway describes science as a "rule-governed" and thus "constrained" story-telling practice.[236] As stated,

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[230] Haraway, "Primatology Is Politics by Other Means", 494.
[231] Haraway, "The Contest for Primate Nature", 81.
[232] Haraway, "Primatology Is Politics by Other Means", 493.
[233] Ibid., 491.
[234] Haraway, "The Contest for Primate Nature", 82.
[235] Haraway, *Primate Visions*, 10.
[236] Ibid., 4.

she claims that "no class of tales can be free of rules for narrating a proper story within a particular genre", which implies that both scientific theories and literary myths are subject to certain rules. But although Haraway argues that the rules governing the production of scientific theories remain open to change, it is quite clear that they, for the time being, differ from those that govern the making of literary myths.[237] This helps explain why Haraway states that there exists a tension between "asserting the mythic […] nature of the sciences of monkeys and apes" and pointing out that primatology "is subject to the epistemic structuring of the life and human sciences."[238]

The fact that Haraway differentiates between science and literary myth is already evident when she writes that science is "our" myth. As mentioned in the last chapter, this suggests that there exists a "them", with "their" myth, from which "our" myth can be distinguished. Unlike many earlier mythologists, Haraway does not locate this other myth in the past. Consequently, she refrains from temporalizing the difference between "their" and "our" myth. Instead, she maintains that literary myth and science coexist, but that this does not constitute a problem. Still, to argue that science is similar to and can co-exist with literary myth, is not the equivalent of arguing that science *is* (our) myth.

So, what is the second, broad concept of myth at play in Haraway's texts, which allows her to assert that science is, in itself, mythical? Here we must return to where we began. For as we saw already in the introduction to this chapter, Haraway defines myth as a form of "meaning-laden public knowledge", produced through and embedded in stories. According to my reading, this is her broad concept of myth, which encompasses both literary myth and science. Phrased otherwise, Haraway's writings suggests that although literary myth and science are governed by different rules, both are mythical in the sense that they constitute *narrative forms of knowledge* that are "public" and "meaning-laden" in that they exhort great influence on how certain collectives understand themselves and their world.

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[237] For example, we have observed that primatologists, according to Haraway, "have developed and progressively enforced on each other quite explicit criteria for collecting data worthy of respect", including "number of hours in the field, […] inter-observer similarity in naming and counting 'units' of behaviour, form of data sheets and storage of data", etc. Haraway, "The Contest for Primate Nature", 92. Obviously, these are not the same rules that govern the production of literary myths.

[238] Haraway, "Primatology Is Politics by Other Means", 494.

Haraway is by no means the first theorists to argue that myth constitutes a form of narrative knowledge. But she *is* among the first to claim that this also applies to science. It instructive here to compare Haraway's writings on myth with that of philosopher Jean-François Lyotard (1924–1988). In his famous *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), Lyotard states that "narrative knowledge", including myth, has often been differentiated from and presented as inferior to scientific knowledge, especially by scientists themselves, who typically classify the former as belonging to "a different mentality", conceptualized as "savage", "primitive" or "underdeveloped", as well as feminine and childish. "Narratives are fables, myths, legends, fit only for women and children. At best, attempts are made to throw some rays of light into this obscurantism, to civilize, educate, develop", Lyotard writes.[239] By contrast, he suggests that myth contains a form of knowledge that is as legitime as science. Because narrative knowledge and science, according to him, are governed by different "rules", which determines what "moves" are "good", Lyotard asserts that it is "impossible to judge the existence or validity of narrative knowledge on the basis of scientific knowledge and vice versa: the relevant criteria are different."[240]

Thus, we can see that Lyotard and Haraway have much in common. Both present myth as a form of narrative knowledge. Both suggest that myth and science are rule-governed activities, yet both maintain that each practice is governed by a different set of rules. But it is also possible to identify a clear difference, the acknowledgement of which helps clarify what is new about Haraway's reasoning. Namely the fact that Lyotard continues to conceptualize scientific knowledge as non-narrative. Admittedly, he notes that even science has been dependent on a "metanarrative" for its *legitimization*. And although he argues that postmodernity is characterized by an "incredulity" toward such narratives, he states that the "return of the narrative in the non-narrative […] should not be thought of as having been superseded once and for all."[241] But

[239] Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1979] 1984), 27.

[240] Ibid., 26.

[241] Ibid., 27. "A crude proof of this: what do scientists do when they appear on television or are interviewed in the newspapers after making a 'discovery'? They recount an epic of knowledge that is in fact wholly unepic. They play by the rules of the narrative game; its influence remains considerable not only on the users of the media, but also on the scientist's sentiments." Ibid., 27–28

as the latter quote indicates, Lyotard still maintains that science, in its essence, is non-narrative, which also sets it apart from (literary) myth. This is one of the time-honored assumptions that Haraway's logomythology challenges. Whereas both Lévi-Strauss and Lyotard suggest that myth has something in common with science, in that it contains a form of knowledge, Haraway argues that science has something in common with myth, in that both consist of narratives. "Stories", she writes, "are a core aspect of the constitution of an object of scientific knowledge."[242]

As literary critic Danial Punday notes, Haraway is but one of that several contemporary theorists who have turned toward "the language of narrative and storytelling" to describe the construction of knowledge.[243] Citing philosopher Christopher Norris, Punday argues that this tendency – which can be seen as the hallmark of a more general "narrative turn" in recent intellectual discourse – often "goes along with a marked reaction against the kinds of wholesale explanatory theory which would seek to transcend their own special context or localized conditions of cultural production."[244] In other words, to conceptualize scientific theories as stories is to challenge their claim to objectivity: it is to argue that a scientific theory does not simply reflect the world *as it really is*, but uses language to present an account thereof that remains but one of several possible, conditioned by the storyteller's historically specific situation. As we have seen, Haraway does question the objectivity of science by stating that all scientific knowledge is conditioned by historically contingent circumstances. Therefore, it can be argued that she, like other representatives of the narrative turn, conceptualizes science as a story-telling practice to suggest that scientific theories do not constitute a set of absolute truths.[245]

Even so, the claim that scientific theories constitute stories can also be understood in a much more literal sense, meaning that they, according to Haraway, are narratives that relate events taking place in time.[246] According to Plato, the fact that narratives deal with temporal phenomena is one of the

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[242] Haraway, "The Contest for Primate Nature", 82.

[243] Daniel Punday, *Narrative after Deconstruction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 1.

[244] Ibid., 2.

[245] In the introduction to *Primate Vision*, Haraway writes: "Scientific practice is above all a story-telling practice in the sense of *historically specific* practices of interpretation and testimony. Haraway, *Primate Visions*, 4, italics added.

[246] The term "narrative" can be defined as an "account of a series of events, facts, etc., given in order and with the establishing of connections between them." *Oxford English Dictionary*, "Narrative, n., Sense 2.A" (Oxford University Press, 2024).

things that separates *mythos* from *logos*. While poets use images to produce *mythos* about acts and events (e.g., just acts), the conceptual *logos* of philosophers revolves around eternal and unchanging Forms (e.g., the *eidos* of justice).[247] This notion is echoed by Lyotard when he describes scientific knowledge as essentially non-narrative. By contrast, Haraway argues that even scientists tell stories, with a beginning, a middle and an end. Indeed, she claims that they often tell stories that resemble literary myths.

As mentioned, Haraway stresses the "fruitfulness of paying close attention […] to the common structures of myths and scientific stories". In particular, she emphasizes the similarities between primatological theories and Judeo-Christian origin myths. "For a person formed by a Judaeo-Christian mythological inheritance, the extraordinary persistence of the Genesis story in scientific reconstructions of human evolution demands attention", Haraway notes.[248] In another work, she writes: "Primatology is […] a period in salvation history, deeply immersed in not-so-secular versions of the Garden and the Fall."[249] More specifically, what many primatological theories have in common with the Genesis myth is that they seek to make sense of the present by looking backwards, towards a imagined origin. In the Bible, the time of origins is represented by the Garden of Eden; in primatology, by the savannah or the jungle, which Haraway therefore refers to a "material/mythic" space.[250] In the origin stories produced by primatologists, Adam and Eve have been replaced by apes and monkeys.[251] But in each case, it is often assumed that our present predicament, as well as our future possibilities, are in part determined by the fateful acts of distant forefathers and foremothers.

To give but one example, let us return one last time to the Man the Hunter thesis. This thesis rests on the assumption that hunting represents the key factor in the evolution of human behavior, because this activity's adaptive value generated a selection pressure that privileged the evolution of traits believed to be typical to *homo sapiens*. According to Washburn, these traits include the ability to develop complex forms of communication, cooperation and tool use, but also a readiness for aggression, violence and killing, at least among males.[252] This does not mean that Washburn presents violence as an

[247] Plato, *Republic. Books 1-5*, 392d, p. 249, 479e–480a, p. 567.

[248] Haraway, "The Contest for Primate Nature", 82.

[249] Haraway, "Primatology Is Politics by Other Means", 593.

[250] Ibid., 500.

[251] Ibid., 490.

[252] "The extent to which the biological bases for killing have been incorporated into human psychology may be measured by the ease with which boys can be interested in hunting, fishing,

inevitable aspect of human culture (as Haraway notes, it was "against rules to argue from a position of biological reductionism").[253] However, this origin story does allow Washburn to explain the constant occurrence of "large-scale human destruction" – including the Holocaust and the war in Vietnam – as well as to argue in favor of a particular remedy to human violence. Man, writes Washburn, "is aggressive because of his evolutionary past, because of his biological nature". But aggression can perhaps be "controlled", if the "prescientific customs" that govern human behavior is transformed, adapted to the "technical world that is dominated by a fantastic acceleration of scientific knowledge."[254] In this respect, Washburn's origin story helps legitimize both the principle of domination and the practice of social engineering.

Washburn's origin story is challenged by his feminist critics, whose narrative of human evolution prioritizes the importance of gathering over hunting. "Tanner and Zihlman", writes Haraway, "[…] avoid telling a tale of obsolescence of the human body caught in a hunting past." In doing so, they do not only rewrite the past, they also make it possible to theorize the future differently – that is, to question the need for social control. "The open future", Haraway asserts, "rests on a new past."[255] But again, because scientific story-telling about the human past remains a rule-governed activity, primatologists like Tanner and Zihlman can only produce new stories by returning to the savanna or the jungle. In this respect, they proceed like feminist theologians who reinterpret rather than reject the Genesis myth as a means to clarify what limits our origins *really* impose.

The construction of nature

Science can be considered "our" myth both in the sense that scientists produce stories that often resemble literary myths and in that these stories exert great influence on our understanding of what it means to be human. "In our time, natural science defines the human being's place in nature and history", writes

fighting, and games of war." Washburn and Lancaster, "The Evolution of Hunting", 300. See also Sherwood L. Washburn, "Aggressive Behavior in Old World Monkeys and Apes", in *Primate Patterns*, ed. Phyllis Dolhinoe (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), 294. "Throughout most of human history [...] males were expected to hunt and to fight, and to find these activities pleasurable."

[253] Haraway, "The Past Is the Contested Zone", 42.

[254] Washburn, "Aggressive Behavior in Old World Monkeys and Apes", 295.

[255] Ibid., 41

Haraway.[256] However, her logomythological approach suggests that "our" myth also has something else in common with literary myth. Namely, that both these storytelling practices construct, rather than discover, nature. We have already seen that Haraway, in "The Contest for Primate Nature", states that nature "is constructed, constituted historically, not discovered naked in a fossil bed or a tropical forest."[257] Above, we considered one of the premises upon which this claim rests: the fact that science is governed by historically contingent rules. It is now time to examine the implications of this claim.

That literary myths such as the myth of the Garden and the Fall, according to which Eve was created from Adam's rib, reflects and reproduces a historically contingent construction, rather than a discovery, of female nature, has long been the subject of great consensus among Western mythologists, feminist and non-feminist alike.[258] That the same can be said of scientific theories is much more controversial. Of course, one could argue that Daly voiced a kindred idea. At the very least, the argument she develops in *Gyn/Ecology* suggests that all man-made science is conditioned by made-up Christian myths about woman. However, Daly's reasoning also implies that feminists should reject science in its current form, as both it and Christian myths *distort* female nature; that they should instead privilege gynocentric myths, wherein their true nature or essence can be discerned. In contrast, Haraway invokes the claim that both science and literary myth construct nature to support the argument that feminists must engage with science.

Haraway writes that women "have challenged our traditional assignment to the status of natural objects by becoming anti-natural in our ideology in a way which leaves the life sciences untouched by feminist needs."[259] That is, because the concept of (human and female) nature has often been used to naturalize patriarchal oppression, women have dismissed all talk of nature, as well as the very sciences for which nature constitutes an object of study. While understandable, Haraway argues that this move is problematic, even counterproductive. For as long as notions of nature and the natural continue to influence women's lives, feminists must partake in the struggle to define what these concepts mean. Science is not the only arena in which negotiation of this kind takes place. Another such space is that of literature (in particular,

[256] Haraway, "The Biological Enterprise", 43.
[257] Haraway, "The Contest for Primate Nature", 106.
[258] See this thesis, 231.
[259] Haraway, "Animal Sociology", 8.

Haraway highlights the importance of science fiction).[260] But science is "our" myth precisely in the sense that scientific stories exert a particularly strong influence over how we experience nature and what we perceive as natural. "By constructing the category nature, natural science imposes limits on history and self-formation. So science is part of the struggle over the nature of our lives."[261]

Had scientists simply discovered nature, the ultimate aim of feminist scientists might have been identical to the (explicit) goal of non-feminists: to uncover nature as it really is. Naturally, it could be argued that the former would have been more likely to succeed where the latter failed because their gaze was not clouded by ideological interests that led them to overlook or misinterpret important data. But if we assume, with Haraway, that scientific theories, like literary myths, construct rather than discover nature, it follows that the potential impact of feminist scientists is infinitely greater. Their task, then, is not merely to correct masculine biases, but to invent nature anew.

Towards the end of "The Contest for Primate Nature", Haraway proclaims:

> To ignore, to fail to engage in the social process of making science, and to attend only to use and abuse of the results of scientific work is irresponsible. I believe it is even less responsible in present historical conditions to pursue anti-scientific tales about nature that idealize women, nurturing, or some other entity argued to be free of male war-tainted pollution. *Scientific stories have too much power as public myth to effect meanings in our lives*.[262]

This passage can be read as a critique of the stance adopted by Daly in her later works. It also demonstrates that Haraway's logomythology aims to convince women and other marginalized groups that they must engage with science. It is *because* science is "our" myth that feminists cannot afford to ignore it. But again, this is not Haraway's only point. By conceptualizing science as myth, she is also articulating a specific view of what science can achieve, according to which science can be used to transform (human) nature itself.

[260] Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 174–178.
[261] Haraway, "The Biological Enterprise", 43.
[262] Haraway, "The Contest for Primate Nature", 107, italics added.

Science as myth summarized

In this and the previous chapter, I have argued that Haraway does not simply *speak* of science as "our" myth, but develops a *logomythological approach* to science. This is to say that she *studies* science as myth, both in the sense that she approaches it as a historical contingent form of narrative knowledge that constructs rather than discovers that around which it revolves (part II) and in that she, implicitly if not explicitly, presents the scientist as a bricoleur, who manufactures stories out of redeployed pieces of culture (part I).

This analysis has, furthermore, demonstrated that Haraway employs myth-talk to elucidate both the *why* and *how* feminists should engage with science. On the one hand, her logomythological approach suggests that feminists must engage with science because it shapes our self-understanding and worldview as profoundly as literary myth shapes that of others. On the other hand, it indicates that feminists ought not to be satisfied with merely exposing or correcting male myths. Rather, they must become myth-makers themselves, reinventing (human) nature by creating myths of their own.

13. An ironic political myth

Having examined how Donna Haraway uses myth-talk to articulate and argue in favor of a feminist approach to science, it is now time to explore her own myth, advanced in her most influential work: "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" from 1985. Unlike much previous research, my aim is not to evaluate this myth, but to analyze how Haraway describes it, in order to further specify how she conceptualizes the nature and function of myth. This will clarify how myth and myth-making, according to Haraway, can serve the emancipatory aspirations of feminism, as well as what kind of myths she believes that feminists should prioritize. By examining the myth to which Haraway presents her cyborg myth as an alternative, this chapter also demonstrates how she employs myth-talk to theorize the persistence of patriarchal oppression.

To facilitate the analysis that follows, I begin by outlining one of the main arguments advanced by Haraway in her manifesto.

The Cyborg Manifesto

Haraway's manifesto was written at a time when the question of what, if anything, women had in common preoccupied many feminists, especially in the United States. One circumstance that had brought this issue to the fore was the tendency of self-proclaimed radical feminists to emphasize the alleged sameness of women as an oppressed class within a global system of repression, as well as so-called cultural feminist's oft-repeated claim that all women shared certain innate and desirable traits, like maternal instincts or close ties to nature. Towards the end of the 1970s, such beliefs began to meet increasing resistance from within the feminist movement. In particular, opposition came from non-white feminists, who emphasized the problem of homogenizing theories that did not take racial differences into account.[263]

Commenting on this development, Haraway speaks of a painful "fragmentation", which has destabilized the meaning of the concept of woman. To resolve this problem, feminist have begun searching for a new "essential" unity.[264] But this is the wrong way to go, according to Haraway. The search for something that all women share inevitably breeds exclusion

[263] See for example Audre Lorde's critique of Mary Daly, this thesis, 194–195. Cf. Michelle Bastian, "Haraway's Lost Cyborg and the Possibilities of Transversalism", *Signs* 31, no. 4 (2006): 1028–1029; Wirth-Cauchon, "Donna Haraway", 502.

[264] Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 155.

and "totalizing" theories that privilege some women's experience and self-perception at the expense of others. Feminists are therefore better off embracing what Haraway terms a "postmodernist, non-naturalist" outlook.[265] Seeking to define the implications of this attitude, she writes: "There is nothing about being 'female' that naturally binds women. There is not even such a state as 'being' female, itself a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses and other social practices."[266] Instead of continuing the futile search for a new essential unity, Haraway argues that women should privilege temporary coalitions based not on "identity" but "affinity" – that is, common values and political aims.[267]

To promote affinity politics over identity politics, Haraway suggests that women think of themselves as "cyborgs", defined as hybrids of organism and machine; products of both biology and technology.[268] This metaphor implies that women possess no innate, uniform nature; that they, on the contrary, are "chimeras", whose very existence by extension challenges several other influential dichotomies, like that between nature and culture, natural and artificial, body and mind, male and female.[269] As cyborgs, women would have no choice but to abandon the search for natural identities, allies and adversaries, in favor of "partial identities" and strategic alliances based on affinity. "Cyborg unities are monstrous and illegitimate; in our present political circumstances, we could hardly hope for more potent myths for resistance and recoupling", Haraway asserts.[270]

Haraway does not merely speak of the cyborg as a useful metaphor, however. She also argues that all humans *are* cyborgs, in a non-metaphorical sense.[271] In support of this claim, she invokes recent scientific and technological developments, which have helped destabilize the boundary between organism and machine in a variety of ways. Haraway acknowledges that this development is not without its downsides and risks.[272] But unlike many feminist theorists before her, she maintains that it must not be viewed as inherently

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[265] Ibid., 150.
[266] Ibid., 155.
[267] Ibid.
[268] Ibid., 150.
[269] Ibid., 150, 152, 154, 163, 177.
[270] Ibid., 154.
[271] On the tension between metaphorical and literal cyborgs in the manifesto, see Kate Soper, "Of Oncomice and Female/Men: Donna Haraway on Cyborg Ontology", *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 10, no. 3 (1999): 74.
[272] Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", e.g., 154, 166 172.

harmful. Most importantly, she states that one is dealing here with "powers with serious potential for changing the rules of the game."[273] Given what we observed in chapter twelve, where we saw that Haraway stressed "the dangers of using old rules to tell new tales", this suggests that recent scientific and technological developments are valuable because they, by destabilizing time-honored dichotomies, make possible the telling of new stories – of which the cyborg myth can be considered one.

The cyborg myth as a counter-myth

Before examining the cyborg myth in greater detail, I want to discuss the myth to which Haraway presents the former as an alternative. Here, it is vital to note that she does not only speak of myth as a feminist tool, but as part of the problem to which feminist politics constitutes a solution.[274] Haraway states that "cyborg writing" is about "seizing the tools" previously used to mark one as other. She continues:

> The tools are often stories, retold stories, versions that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalized identities. In retelling origin stories, cyborg authors subvert the central myths of origin of Western culture. We have all been colonized by those origin myths, with their longing for fulfilment in apocalypse.[275]

The authors that Haraway here refers to as "cyborg authors" are primarily "women of color", which she in turn defines as a "postmodernist" collective identity, inhabited by non-white women who choose to unite under this umbrella.[276] But as she names her own story a "cyborg myth", this argument

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[273] Ibid., 173.

[274] The idea that myths can be combated with (counter) myths is one that Haraway embraced early on in her academic career. It can be identified already in an unpublished "position paper" from 1970, preserved in her former supervisor's archive. In this text, which Haraway authored together with her first husband Jaye Miller and their mutual friend Richard Stith, she states that American society is one "based on the myth of individual and conquest." Later, she proclaims "radicals" must embrace a new kind of reason, one that does not "attempt to reduce the life world to hard, atomistic facts", but appreciates the "whole which is us." Haraway then continues: "It [this reason] would be founded on a myth of service and gratitude, which would replace our present American myths of individual success and conquest." Donna Haraway, Jaye Miller and Richard Stith, "Common Position Statement", 1970, Box 21, folder 347, G. Evelyn Hutchinson Papers, Yale University Library.

[275] Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 175.

[276] Ibid., 155.

implies that the category of cyborg authors also includes herself. This tells us two interesting things. First, that Haraway understands herself as engaged in a "retelling" of "origin stories", a fact that I will return to below. Second, that her cyborg myth is meant to subvert "the central myths of origin of Western culture", which means tht the cyborg myth can be understood as *counter-myth*.[277]

What, then, are these malicious myths of origin that we have "all" been colonized by? Haraway pays particular attention to "the myth of original unity, fullness, bliss and terror" (henceforth referred to as "the myth of original unity"). Early on in her manifesto, she proclaims:

> In a sense, the cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense […]. An origin story in the "Western", humanist sense depends on the myth of original unity, fullness, bliss and terror, represented by the phallic mother from whom all humans must separate, the task of individual development and of history, the twin potent myths inscribed most powerfully for us in psychoanalysis and Marxism.[278]

According to my reading, "the myth of original unity" does not refer to a specific literary myth, but to a phenomenon that has something in common with what Tae-Yeoun Keum calls deep myths – that is, tacit and deeply entrenched imaginative frames, which many different stories, including countless literary myths and scientific theories, reflect and help reproduce.[279] In support of this claim, note that Western origin stories, according to Haraway, "depends" on the myth of original unity, which implies that this deep myth structures Western origin stories but cannot itself be defined as one.[280]

At the most fundamental level, the myth of original unity involves the notion of a (lost) unity with nature, alternatively a (lost) natural unity with other people. As the passage cited above makes clear, Haraway claims that this myth permeates both Marxism and psychoanalysis. This arguments rests on the assumption that Marxism postulates an original unity between human beings and (a feminized) nature, while psychoanalysis hypothesizes an original pre-oedipal symbiosis between the child and the mother. According to Haraway,

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[277] In an interview from 2000, Haraway states that she in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Woman* – wherein the Cyborg Manifesto was republished – foregrounds "the rhetorical strategies of counter-myth building". Haraway and Goodeve, *How Like a Leaf*, 65.

[278] Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 150–151.

[279] Keum, *Plato and the Mythic Tradition in Political Thought*, 9.

[280] Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 151.

neither Marxism nor psychoanalysis present these unisons in a favorable light. She refers to philosopher Hilary Manette Klein, who argues that Marx celebrates the fact that humanity as a collective has liberated itself from and learned to dominate nature, while Freud believes that each child must free itself from the mother to eventually become an independent subject.[281] Yet, the Cyborg Manifesto suggests that the myth of original unity also generates stories of the opposite kind, in which the lost unity appears as something that must be restored. In particular, the presence of this myth can be identified in stories that postulate the existence of an essential unity between women, hidden behind supposedly man-made divisions such as class and race. The struggle to escape from the original unity and the desire to re-establish it are thus dialectically linked; they are two sides of the same mythical coin.

Another story that reflects and reproduces the myth of original unity, as defined by Haraway, is the Judeo-Christian myth about the Garden and the Fall. As she explains in "Primatology is Politics by Other Means", this story begins with a seemingly indivisible unit: Adam, who lived in complete harmony with nature. The (false) "memory" that it, according to Haraway, helps preserve is therefore one of "lost oneness, sameness." If it charts a way forward, it is one where the threat associated with the Other is neutralized through "dominance" (illustrated by Adam's relation to Eve, who he is given as a helper to rule) and then, ultimately, eliminated by a "final transcendence of difference", represented by the apocalypse. Consequently, what this story – said to "tell white western people about the origins and foundations of sociality" – teaches, is that difference constitutes a transitory problem that must be overcome, or otherwise managed through the establishment of hierarchies.[282] In her manifesto, Haraway adds that the myth of the Garden and the Fall presents our origins are "innocent", in the sense that the original unity is indivisible but also without guilt, in no way responsible for wrongs of the world – as Adam was before Eve, who introduced both difference as sin.[283]

At this point, it is possible to identify an interesting similarity between Haraway and Mary Daly. Although the latter focuses on what she terms "the myth of feminine evil" and the former focuses on "the myth of original unity", both argue that beliefs or deep myths promoted by the Judeo-Christian origin myth continue to inform social life in contemporary, supposedly secular

[281] Ibid; Hilary Manette Klein, "Marxism, Psychoanalysis, and Mother Nature", *Feminist Studies* 15, no. 2 (1989).
[282] Haraway, "Primatology Is Politics by Other Means", 489.
[283] Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 157, 175, 180.

societies, where these beliefs help perpetuate an oppressive order. An important difference is that Haraway's reasoning suggests that Daly herself continues to propagate the logic inherent in the Judeo-Christian origin myth, at least in *Gyn/Ecology*, as this work clearly reproduces what Haraway terms the myth of original unity. At the same time, both Haraway and Daly present feminist myth-making as a solution to the problem they identify. In fact, both can be said to offer counter-myths specifically designed to challenge the deep myths fostered by the Judeo-Christian myth of origin. "Cyborg writing", Haraway asserts, "must not be about the Fall, the imagination of a once-upon-a-time wholeness".[284] "A cyborg body", she states elsewhere, "is not innocent; it was not born in a garden; it does not seek unitary identity and so generate antagonistic dualisms without end (or until the world ends)".[285]

To recapitulate, I have argued that the cyborg myth ought to be understood as a counter-myth, meant to challenge the myth of original unity, reproduced by the myth of the Garden and the Fall. The preceding analysis has also shown how Haraway uses myth-talk to theorize the persistence of oppression. On the one hand, she underlines the continued power of the Judeo-Christian myth of origin. Just as Daly argued that this still-active, literary myth helped keep alive the myth of feminine evil, Haraway suggests that it propagates the myth of original unity, in light of which difference can only be understood as a problem to be eradicated or managed through hierarchies. On the other hand, like Beauvoir, Haraway uses the word "myth" to create a new philosophical concept ("the myth of original unity"), which makes it possible to see, discuss and criticize transhistorical patterns that were previously more elusive.

How, then, can the cyborg myth challenge the order that the myth of the original unity helps to preserve? Is it just a matter of replacing one myth with another? Haraway rejects this notion, arguing that social change requires concrete, political work. But political work still requires political subjectivity. And this is where the myth of the cyborg enters the picture. As a political myth, it is meant to enable the formation of a political subject that can challenge the prevailing order, sustained by the myth of original unity. This brings us to the relationship between myth and identity.

[284] Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 175.
[285] Ibid., 180.

According to philosophers Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, myth has been tied to the question of identity since the time of Plato.[286] But as Chiara Bottici points out, the relation between identity and myth has often been conceptualized in two different ways. Simply put, some mythologists have conceptualized myth as a product of identity, while others have conceptualized identity as a product of myth. As a representative of the former position, Bottici names jurist and political theorist Carl Schmitt (1888–1985), who is said to present national myths as a "symptom" of a national identity that pre-dates the myths, but which the myths reflect. The latter position is, in turn, described as represented by George Sorel, who frames the myth of the general strike as a means for creating a proletarian identity (or "class consciousness") that would not otherwise exist.[287]

The interpretation of Sorel as a mythologist who conceptualizes myth as a tool for creating identity has also been advanced by political theorists Chantel Mouffe and Ernst Laclau. According to their reading, Sorel turned to myth because he realized that Karl Marx was wrong. That is, because Sorel understood that the proletarian class consciousness did not constitute a "historical necessity", but had to be sustained through discursive means that could "reconstitute" the working class as a "unified subject", which the myth of the general strike accomplished by accentuating the line of conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.[288] Put differently, Mouffe and Laclau read Sorel as claiming that the mythically constituted collective subject constitutes an alternative to the essentialist one.

As far as the relationship between myth and identity is concerned, I argue that Haraway, although she employs a different concept of myth, adopts a position similar to Sorel's. This is to say that Haraway, in line with Sorel, conceptualizes political myth as what Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy speaks of as a "*identificatory mechanism*".[289] This claim may seem odd, given what we learned above. Did we not find that Haraway presents her cyborg myth as a

[286] Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Nazi Myth", *Critical Inquiry* 16, no. 2 (1990): 296–298.

[287] Bottici, *A Philosophy of Political Myth*, 230–231.

[288] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 2001), 38–42. Cf. Jeffrey Shantz, "A Post-Sorelian Theory of Social Movement Unity: Social Myth Reconfigured in the Work of Laclau and Mouffe", *Dialectical Anthropology* 25, no. 1 (2000): 98–100.

[289] Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, "The Nazi Myth", 296, italics in original.

device for countering identity politics? The answer is yes, but only if by identity politics one understands a form of politics centered around supposedly unitary, *natural* identities.

Haraway claims that the need for "political unity" has never been greater than at the present moment.[290] Consequently, she does not argue that feminists should dismiss all identities, as they would then "risk lapsing into boundless difference and giving up on the confusing task of making partial, real connection."[291] Her point is simply that the identities feminists invoke or construct must allow for "partial, contradictory, permanently unclosed constructions of personal and collective selves" – which the "cyborg identities" promoted by her own myth do, according to her.[292] The last section of Haraway's manifesto is thus titled: "Cyborgs: A Myth of Political Identity", which supports the claim that she, like Sorel, presents myth as an identificatory mechanism.[293] In fact, Haraway and Sorel can be said to favor myth for the same reason. It is because neither workers nor women constitute an essential subject with a natural identity that the revolutionary subject of socialism/feminism needs to be constituted mythically.

The question then becomes *how* the cyborg myth, according to Haraway, can found a political identity? Literary theorist Dan Edelstein asserts that Sorel's myth constitutes a "modern" political myth, because it enlists the future rather than the past.[294] Where "classical" myths produce identity by invoking or inventing a shared heritage, the myth of the general strike – defined as a mental image of a future triumph – welds the proletariat together by turning their gaze forward. Borrowing this terminology, I hold that Haraway's cyborg myth has more in common with classical than modern political myths; indeed, that it constitutes a myth of origins, which seeks to produce identity by looking backwards.

The cyborg myth as a myth of origin

In the previous chapter, we saw that many scientific theories, according to Haraway, resemble literary myths in the sense that they purport to explain the present and foretell the future by looking backwards, towards an imagined

[290] Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 157.
[291] Ibid., 161.
[292] Ibid., 157, 170.
[293] Ibid., 173.
[294] Dan Edelstein, "The Modernization of Myth: From Balzac to Sorel", *Yale French Studies*, no. 111 (2007): 32–33.

origin. In particular, we observed that Haraway often highlights the similarity between the stories primatologists tell and the Judeo-Christian origin myth.[295] We must now delve deeper into the question of how feminists, according to Haraway, can take responsibility for such origin stories – which requires that we momentarily shift our focus away from her manifesto.

To answer the question posed above, Haraway invokes literary theorists Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's seminal *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979). The premise of this study is that women writers have inherited a patriarchal literary tradition made from works "fathered" by male authors and full of mythical images of the (eternally) feminine.[296] Their focus is on the different ways in which women have dealt with or challenged this tradition. For example, Gilbert and Gubar study the works of women writers who engage with John Milton's (1608–1674) famous *Paradise Lost* (1667), an epic poem based on the Judeo-Christian tale about the Garden of Eden and the Fall, which they refer to as a "myth of origins" that summarizes a long misogynic tradition.[297] Gilbert and Gubar argue that these women, who they refer to as "Milton's daughters", often adopt one of two strategies. The more "ardently submissive" daughters seek to "*rewrite it so as to clarify its meaning*", which is to say that they assume that the myth contains a truth about women that can be made visible through clarifications. The second strategy, by contrast, entails "*rewriting Paradise Lost so as to make it a more accurate mirror of female experience*", a strategy that rests on the assumption that the original myth is misleading and therefore must be replaced by a revised or completely novel story.[298]

Commenting on this analysis, Haraway writes: "In deep similarity, feminists taking responsibility for modern origin stories […] may try to get the story right, to clean up shoddy science about evolution and brains and hormones […]. Or feminists may more boldly announce a completely new birth."[299] As we have seen, Haraway often examines the work of women scientists who utilize the first strategy. For example, she studies primatologists

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[295] See this thesis, 399.

[296] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, [1979] 2000), 4. See also ibid., 16–17.

[297] Ibid., 188.

[298] Ibid., 220, italics in original.

[299] Haraway, "In the Beginning Was the Word", 72. This particular paragraph is not about primatology but biology. But Haraway also uses the expression "Milton's daughters" to denote primatologists like Zihlman, who re-tell and revise the story about Man the Hunter. Haraway, "Primatology Is Politics by Other Means", 510–511.

who return to the jungle and play by the rules in order to get the story of human evolutionary origins right the second time around, by taking the behavior of female apes and monkeys into greater consideration. In her view, this is a far from pointless endeavor, which is why she asserts that "women's place is in the jungle, arguing the nature of beginnings and ends."[300] But we have also observed that these new (or revised) stories, according to Haraway, may not be new enough.[301] My reading suggests that this is why Haraway herself, in her Cyborg Manifesto, makes use of the latter strategy, which so to say that she strikes out to "boldly announce a completely new birth", by declaring that we humans, just recently, became cyborgs.[302] And yet, the cyborg myth still seeks to explain the present and chart a way forward by looking backwards, towards this (new) beginning: the moment when the cyborg was born. By her own definition, it thus remains an origin story.

The claim that the cyborg myth constitutes an origin story – or a myth of origin – contradicts much previous research on Haraway's manifesto. Art historian Jennifer Gonzáles asserts that "Haraway contends that cyborgs have no natural history, no origin story".[303] Along similar lines, anthropogeographer David Bell asserts that origin stories, according to Haraway, constitute a "resolutely un-cyborgian" phenomenon.[304] But as we have seen, Haraway never states that the cyborg lacks an origin story. Her claim is simply that it – in "a sense" – has "no origin story in the Western sense", meaning that its origin story does not depend on the myth of original unity. In fact, Haraway is quite clear about the origins of the cyborg. It is, she explains, "the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism." Admittedly, she also proclaims that illegitimate offspring tend to be "unfaithful to their origins", as she obviously hopes that the cyborg will be.[305] But this only confirms that the cyborg does indeed have an origin, which it –

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[300] Ibid., 490.

[301] Haraway, "The Past Is the Contested Zone", 42.

[302] On whether it is correct to say that the cyborg was "born" or not, see Haraway and Goodeve, *How Like a Leaf*, 129. Having first proclaimed that the cyborg was not "born" (quotation marks in original), Haraway corrects herself, stating: "It wasn't born in a garden, but it certainly was born in a history."

[303] Jennifer Gonzáles, "Envisioning Cyborg Bodies: Notes from Current Research", in *The Gendered Cyborg: A Reader*, ed. Gill Kirkup et al. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 63. Gonzáles nevertheless argues that this does not mean that the cyborg is without origins. "The cyborg [...] is not without origins, though it is without origin myths." Ibid.

[304] David Bell, *Cyberculture Theorists: Manuel Castells and Donna Haraway* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 95.

[305] Ibid., 151. Cf. Liveley, "Science Fictions and Cyber Myths", 289.

much like Eve, when she defied her creator's only command – might be able to betray. Just as Daly, Haraway can thus be said to appropriate and adapt the Judeo-Christian origin myth, giving it a Nietzschean touch.[306] In this respect, she proceeds like other cyborg authors, who retell origin stories to subvert the central myths of origin of Western culture.

However, the most important point is this: if the cyborg has an origin story, then this story – or rather, the version thereof told by Haraway – also constitutes *our* myth of origins, detailing how we became cyborgs. One must note here that we humans, according to Haraway's myth, did not "originally choose" to be cyborgs.[307] Instead, this becoming has happened to us, as a result of recent technological and scientific developments. In an interview with radio host Ayana Young, Haraway explicitly rejects the claim that we have "always been cyborgs", asserting that "we have become cyborgs in a particular historical conjuncture", adding that it is important to know the "origins" of this thing that we now are.[308] Phrased differently, she presents our cyborg-becoming as an event, with a before and an after.[309] Exactly when this event took place is impossible to say. Yet the manifesto provides a clue, as it is there revealed that the cyborg "appears in myth precisely where the boundary between human and animal is transgressed", which is said to have occurred in the late twentieth century – a period that Haraway speaks of as "our time, a mythic time".[310] This suggests that we are dealing here with a rather recent event (one that, to paraphrase Friedrich Nietzsche, may still be "on its way").[311] But this event still constitutes a new beginning.

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[306] Cf. this thesis, 292.

[307] Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 176. Cf., Anne Kull, "The Cyborg as an Interpretation of Culture-Nature", *Zygon: Journal of Religion & Science* 36, no. 1 (2001): 51.

[308] Donna Haraway and Ayana Young, "Donna Haraway on Staying with the Trouble", *For the Wild*, 2019.

[309] This fact has mainly attracted the attention of critics who argue that this undermines Haraway's anti-dualistic stance. For example, Vicki Kirby argues that Haraway "forgets that it is against the the [sic] unity of 'the before,' the purity of identity prior its corruption, that the cyborg's unique and complex hybridity is defined." She continues: "Haraway's 'disassembled and reassembled' recipe for cyborg graftings is utterly dependent upon the calculus of one plus one, the logic wherein pre-existent identities are *then* conjoined and melded. The cyborg's chimerical complications are therefore never so promiscuous that its parts cannot be separated, even if only retrospectively." Vicki Kirby, *Telling Flesh: The Substance of the Corporeal* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 147, italics in original. See also Dianne Currier, "Feminist Technological Futures: Deleuze and Body/Technology Assemblages", *Feminist theory* 4, no. 3 (2003): 323–324.

[310] Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 152, 150.

[311] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*,120.

To summarize, Haraway's cyborg myth constitutes a story, which quite literary announces a new birth and explains how something (the cyborg) came into being. What makes this story an origin myth is the fact that it, like those other tales that she characterizes as such, invokes the past to explain the present and chart a way forward. In effect, it endows our cyborg origins with an explanatory as well as normative quality. We are cyborgs, not because we choose to be, but because of something that happened in the past. And now we have no choice but to abide by these conditions. "The cyborg", writes Haraway, "is our ontology; it gives us our politics."[312] It is because we are – or rather, have become – cyborgs that we must abandon identity politics in favor of affinity politics and coalitions, at least if we wish to stay true to our (new) nature as hybrid beings devoid of a natural identity.

As a result, it is possible to discern a tension in the Cyborg Manifesto. On the one hand, we have seen that Haraway rejects totalizing theories and homogenizing identities; on the other, the story she tells suggests that we are all cyborgs, whether we like it or not.[313] It could be argued that this tension stems from her ambition to both adopt an anti-naturalistic outlook and to build a "myth", as myths are often said to universalize and naturalize. But it is important to note that Haraway also counters her own myth's universalizing and naturalizing tendencies. To begin with, Haraway's cyborg myth is a myth that constantly reiterates its own fictional-mythical nature; it is a myth that tells the recipient that it is a myth, rather than an objective truth. In this respect, Haraway can be said to employ a "constitutive" concept of myth, which means that she presents her cyborg myth as a necessary fiction or vital lie.[314] In the next section, I analyze this as an expression of the "ironic" nature of her political myth.

Another way in which Haraway can be said to thwart the universalizing and naturalizing tendency of her myth is by having the myth itself question

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[312] Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 150. "Ontology", writes Paul Tillich, "is the final and most abstract version of the myth of origin." Tillich, *The Socialist Decision*, 18.

[313] Cf. Susan Bordo, "Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender-Scepticism", in *Feminism/ Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990), 155 n9. According to Bordo, one can detect a tension between Haraway's notion of "the Cyborg as a liberatory 'political myth' and a lingering 'epistemologism' which presents the Cyborg as a model of 'correct' perspective on reality." See also Michelle Renée Matisons, "The New Feminist Philosophy of the Body: Haraway, Butler and Brennan", *The European Journal of Women's Studies* 5, no. 1 (1998): 13. Haraway herself problematizes the claim that we are all cyborgs in Donna Haraway, , Constance Penley and Andrew Ross, "Cyborgs at Large: Interview with Donna Haraway", *Social Text*, no. 25/26 (1990): 17.

[314] Von Hendy, *The Modern Construction of Myth*, xii–xiii, 74, 304–305.

the decisive force of origins. For although Haraway claims that we cannot escape our origins, in the sense that we are cyborgs whether we like it or not, the cyborg myth still suggests that we may influence what being cyborgs entails. "Knowing something's origins does not determine what happens next", Haraway explains in the aforementioned interview.[315] "Who cyborgs will be is a radical question", she writes in the manifesto.[316] In other words, her origin myth postulates a relatively open future. Indeed, it implies that the future is open *because* we have become cyborgs, as the birth of the cyborg undermines the very premises of biological determinism.

This makes visible another important difference between Haraway's political myth and that of Sorel. Granted, Sorel agrees that it is impossible to foresee the future. "There is no process", he writes, "by which the future can be predicted scientifically, nor even one which enables us to discuss whether one hypothesis about it is better than another."[317] But according to Sorel, the value of myth is precisely that it conceals this uncertainty. By presenting the future triumph as guaranteed, myth motivates people to act in the present. Haraway instead seeks to build a political myth that underlines that the future remains uncertain, indeterminate. In this respect, her writings on political myth also challenges received ideas about what origin myths are and do.

As mentioned in the last part-study, it has often been argued that origin myths breed nostalgic (perhaps even fascist) attitudes, incompatible with emancipatory political projects. Daly's third book seemed to confirm this suspicion. But if we accept Haraway's claim that cyborg authors, including herself, are indeed "retelling origin stories", we are obliged to reassess this time-honored assumption. For although the cyborg myth turns to the (recent) past to explain the present and chart a way forward, it is by no means nostalgic or anti-historical. On the contrary, it suggests that there is nothing to be nostalgic about: no Eden, no innocence, no lost wholeness. In the words of Paul Tillich, the cyborg thus constitutes a myth of origin that, paradoxically, privileges the question of Whence over that of Whither.[318]

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[315] Haraway and Young, "Donna Haraway on Staying with the Trouble".
[316] Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 153.
[317] Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 14–115.
[318] Cf. this thesis, 295.

As just stated, I argue that Haraway counters her own myth's universalizing and naturalizing tendencies through the use of irony. To substantiate this argument, it is necessary to specify in what respect the cyborg myth constitutes an ironic political myth. Early in the manifesto, Haraway asserts:

> Irony is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true. Irony is about humour and serious play. It is also a rhetorical strategy and a political method, one I would like to see more honoured within socialist-feminism.[319]

This passage demonstrates that Haraway does not use "irony" to denote the type of speech termed ironic in everyday life: that is, an utterance whose implicit meaning is the opposite of its explicit one ("nice weather", uttered on a particularly rain-soaked day).[320] Nor is her irony that of Socrates, at least not if by "Socratic irony" one understands a philosophical method that involves feigned ignorance.[321] Rather, her concept of irony seems to be related to the Romantic one.

The exact nature of "Romantic irony" is a matter of debate. But it is possible to identify a few features that scholars tend to describe as characteristic of this phenomenon. My guide here will be the literary scholar Katarina Båth, whose analysis of Romantic irony is based on the work of Friedrich Schlegel. "As a literary device", Båth explains, "Romantic irony is usually described as the poet's self-reflexive way of playfully breaking the illusion in their work, suggesting that it is all just made-up fantasy".[322] Haraway can be said to employ this form of irony in the that she, throughout her manifesto, insists that her myth is a myth, rather than an objective description of the way things are.

But Romantic irony is much more than this literary device. According to Båth, it involves a particular view of the self and the world, structured by the conviction that it is impossible to arrive at a complete understanding or

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[319] Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 149.

[320] Katarina Båth, *Ironins skiftningar – jagets förvandlingar: Om romantisk ironi och Subjektets paradox i texter av P. D. A. Atterbom* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2017), 38.

[321] Ibid., 39.

[322] Ibid., 11, translation mine. [*Som litterärt grepp brukar den romantiska ironin beskrivas som diktarens självreflexiva sätt att lekfullt bryta illusionen i sitt verk, och antyda att alltsammans bara är påhittad fantasi* …]

everlasting truth.[323] Båth invokes Schlegel, who speaks of "irony as an awareness of eternal contingency and infinite chaos of all things."[324] This ironic epistemology (or "epistemological irony") imposes certain demands on the poet, which romantic-ironic works of literature reflect.[325] To be more precise, it demands that the poet practices constant self-critique and reflexivity, questions established dichotomies, accepts indeterminacies, uncertainties and paradoxes (the logic of "both/and" rather than "either/or") and seeks to dissolve rather than enforce the boundary between reality and fiction.[326] According to my reading, Haraway's cyborg myth is ironic in the sense that it both reflects and reinforces the same ironic epistemology – based on a similar, typically anti-foundationalist premise, according to which neither the self nor the world can be subject to all-encompassing, fully coherent and permanently valid descriptions.[327]

Of course, anti-foundationalism need not give rise to ironic myths. If lack of certainty is perceived as a (existential or political) problem, anti-foundationalists may just as well prefer myths that conceal or compensate for this absence. This is how Sorel believes that political myths must work. Seeking to defend the myth of the general strike, he underlines that this myth shows "the groups that are struggling against each other […] to be as separate as possible", leaves no room for "the reconciliation of opposites" and only makes "one interpretation of socialism possible."[328] The fact that this myth is "so well adapted to the working-class soul that there is the possibility of it dominating the latter in the most absolute manner" is presented as another one of its strengths.[329] As we have seen, Sorel also stress that a myth "cannot be refuted",

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[323] Ibid., 45–51.

[324] Ibid., 48, translation mine. […*ironin som medvetenhet om alltings eviga föränderlighet och oändliga kaos*.]

[325] On the concept of "epistemological irony", see Herman Paul, "An Ironic Battle against Irony: Epistemological and Ideological Irony in Hayden White's Philosophy of History", in *Tropes for the Past: Hayden White and the History/Literature Debate*, ed. Kuisma Korhonen (Amsterdam: Rudopi, 2006), 37.

[326] Båth, *Ironins skiftningar*, 47–51.

[327] Cf. Zoë Sofoulis, "The Cyborg, Its Manifesto and Their Relevance Today: Some Reflections", *PLATFORM: Journal of Media & Communication* 6, no. 2 (2015): 9. On the link between Romantic irony and anti-foundationalism, see Frederick C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 128–130.

[328] Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 112-113.

[329] Ibid., 120.

which means that those who live in the "world of myths" will never abandon the belief in their predestined triumph.[330]

Sorel can thus be said to value what he calls myths because they are decidedly unironic. Unlike romantic-ironic works such as Haraways cyborg myth, the myths Sorel celebrates foster blind devotion, absolute certainty, sharp delineations and the logic of either/or. To put the same point differently, Sorel can be said to favor myths that promote what I with Simone de Beauvoir have termed mythic thinking: a mode of thought characterized by an inability or unwillingness to adapt a reflexive attitude towards the products of one's consciousness. In contrast, I argue that Haraway tries to build a myth that will prevent its recipients from succumbing to this unreflexive mode of thought.

The remaining question concerns the advantages and disadvantages of Haraway's ironic myth. As stated, I do not aim to settle queries of this type. Yet, a look at how others have approached it can help make visible what kind of conversations that Haraway's writings on myth make possible.

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The ironic nature of the cyborg myth is one of the features celebrated by many commentators.[331] But it has also become a source of critique. Robert A. Campbell states that much of what Haraway writes sounds familiar, but that "the trouble begins" with her irony.[332] More specifically, Campbell argues that irony is dangerous because ironists "have no way of knowing in advance whether their intended meaning will come across" (for example, whether the recipient will understand that the statement "nice weather" uttered on rain-soaked day is actually meant to communicate the opposite message). Indeed, ironists do not even know if their irony will reach its "intended" target, which means that ironic statements may confuse, or even mislead, a large number of people. "So, not only does the use of irony run the risk of misinterpretation, it also runs the risk of doing harm to unintended victims", Campbell writes.[333] Yet, this critique reveals that he has misunderstood what Haraway means by

[330] Ibid., 19.

[331] Bartsch Ingrid, Carolyn DiPalma and Laura Sells, "Witnessing the Postmodern Jeremiad: (Mis)Understanding Donna Haraway's Method of Inquiry", *Configurations: A Journal of Literature, Science, and Technology* 9, no. 1 (2001): 135; Donna Haraway and Cary Wolfe, "Companions in Conversation", in *Manifestly Haraway* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 208; Sofoulis, "The Cyborg, Its Manifesto and Their Relevance Today", 9–10.

[332] Campbell, "Cyborg Salvation History", 158.

[333] Ibid.

irony. Where she makes use of a Romantic concept of irony, Campbell assumes that she is defending irony in the everyday sense of saying the opposite of what one means.

The historian of ideas Karolina Enquist Källgren offers a more sophisticated critique. In an attempt to differentiate between "fascist" and "populist" political myths, she argues that fascist myths promote "religious and embodied emotional effects", while populist myths encourage people to adopt an "ironic" attitude, characterized by "detachment from the contents of statements, but commitment to the fact that these statements are ambiguous and interchangeable." According to Enquist Källgren, populists benefit from all statements being perceived as interchangeable. It frees them from the requirement to be coherent, allowing them to change their views whenever it serves their interests, while it also enables voters to place their trust in them without having to embrace all (or any) of their explicit remarks. Thus, "populist myth-making explicitly aims to maintain the interchangeability of its contents", which is "achieved by asserting that every individual has their own truths and that the only general truth is that everybody lies."[334] This is obviously not the epistemological premise on which Haraway's defense of irony rests. Even so, Enquist Källgren argues that Haraway's embrace of ambiguity and contradictions risks playing into the hands of populists. "In the contemporary political landscape", she writes, "myths have performative effects when and because we expose them as myths or lies." It is by perpetuating patently false myths that populists reinforce the belief that there is no general truth. "Based on this analysis", Enquist Källgren concludes, "Haraway's proposal to actualize irony for the sake of democratic values borders on wishful thinking."[335]

This is an incisive analysis, which offers a new perspective on ironic political myths. However, there are also commentators who argue that the problem with populists is that they lack, rather than encourage, irony. For example, in an article titled "Irony in the Age of Trump" (2019), philosopher Samuel Loncar proclaims that present-day populists are disturbingly unironical, in the sense that they may lie, but never question the worldview that, in their eyes, justifies those lies.[336] Similarly, studies have shown that Donald Trump's followers often perceive his lies as warranted, as they believe that these lies serve or convey a "deeper truth", which these individuals do not subject to

[334] Enquist Källgren, "Guiding Examples", 4.

[335] Ibid., 5.

[336] Samuel Loncar, "Irony in the Age of Trump", *Marginalia*, November 1, 2019.

critical scrutiny.[337] From this perspective, the Romantic irony that Haraway advocates – which we have seen demands that one also practices self-critique – can just as well be understood as a potential antidote to the self-righteous logic that populist political myths, according to Enquist Källgren, reflect and reinforce.

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I read Haraway as a self-proclaimed myth-maker seeking to craft myths meant to prevent mythic thinking. If such myths function as envisioned, they will enable the formation of political subjects without stifling the ability or willingness of those who partake to adopt a reflexive attitude towards the categories and concept that guide their own political projects. This is the main advantage of ironic political myths, as their nature and function are conceptualized by Haraway. Of course, one could object that such myths will not work as intended. Yet, an equally interesting question is whether they would be of any use, even if they did. As noted, Sorel values what he terms myth precisely because this phenomenon fosters blind devotion and firm conviction: mythic thinking instead of reflexivity. In his view, this is necessary in order to bring about far-reaching social change. So, if Sorel is correct, the reflexivity enabled by ironic political myths might be bought at the expense of efficiency.

That the cyborg myth has sparked no revolution remains a fact. But does this mean that myth-makers who want to change society at its core must forgo the use of irony? Answering this question lies beyond the scope of the study at hand. However, by reading Haraway as a mythologist in the context of the mythological network, this chapter has shed light on an often-overlooked argument in favor of ironic political myth, which deserves more attention from scholars and activist interested in this issue.

[337] Minjae Kim et al., "When Truth Trumps Facts: Studies on Partisan Moral Flexibility in American Politics", *American Journal of Sociology* 130, no. 1 (2024): 199 n3.

14. Myth-making as coding

This chapter's point of departure is the rarely observed link that Donna Haraway, in "The Cyborg Manifesto", establishes between myth and code.[338] Exploring how Haraway presents this link will help further clarify how she conceptualizes the nature and function of myth. It will also make visible a hitherto unnoticed affinity between Haraway's writings on myth and that of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes, both of whom discuss myth in relation to code. However, whereas Lévi-Strauss and Barthes often invoke concepts of myth and code to argue that human freedom is curtailed, I demonstrate that Haraway conceptualizes myth-making as a means to *code a new self and recode communication,* so to thereby promote the emancipatory aim of feminism. This is another way in which Haraway uses myth-talk to articulate a feminist analysis.

How Haraway learned to code

Levi-Strauss, Barthes and Haraway are just three of several theorists who began to speak of code in the second half of the last century. Already by the late 1950s, this term had been picked up and put to work by representatives of many different scientific disciplines. The cause and consequence of this development have been chronicled by historian of science Bernard Geoghegan in his book *Code: From Information Theory to French Theory* (2023). Most importantly, Geoghegan emphasizes the impact of cybernetics, under whose influence he claims that a large number of intellectuals *learned to code* – that is, "to cast cultural objects in terms of codes".[339]

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[338] Few scholars have taken note of the importance Haraway attributes to code. A significant exception is Jonathan Crewe, who observes that Haraway's "heroines are neither female divinities nor biological mothers (neither Goddess nor Woman) but skilled code manipulators thriving at the interfaces and exploiting code differentials." Jonathan Crewe, "Transcoding the World: Haraway's Postmodernism", *Signs* 22, no. 4 (1997): 900. Crewe does not, however, acknowledge the link Haraway establishes between code and myth. Nor does he place Haraway's discourse on code in same context (the "code boom"), as I do. Another scholar who points out, but above all critiques, Haraway's focus on code is Teresa L. Ebert, who argues that Haraway equates "code" with "discourse" – a claim that my study refutes. Teresa L. Ebert, *Ludic Feminism and After: Postmodernism, Desire, and Labor in Late Capitalism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 107.

[339] Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan, *Code: From Information Theory to French Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2023), 152.

An early work that helped popularize the concept of code was *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (1949), by mathematicians Claude Shannon (1916–2001) and Warren Weaver (1894–1978).[340] In this book, often described as having help found information theory, the term "code" is used to denote the instructions in accordance with which the "transmitter" of a mechanical device, such as a telegrapher or a computer, converts or *encodes* one sets of signs (e.g., the words of a written text) into another set (e.g., the dashes and dots of the "Morse Code", or binary digits) that can be transmitted to another mechanical device, the "receiver" of which *decodes* it.[341] In this context, scientists sought "the most efficient kind of coding", so to streamline communication and minimize the influence of "noise", defined as that which distorts the transmitted message along the way.[342] Soon, however, meaning of "code" widened. As mentioned, this was partly due to the tremendous influence of cybernetics, the representatives of which successfully argued that *all* forms of communication (mechanical and organic) could be studied as transmissions of encoded information.

What, then, is cybernetics? The term comes from the Greek *kybernḗtēs* (meaning "steersman") and was coined by mathematician Norbert Wiener (1894–1964).[343] On the basis of his work, we may conclude that three ideas are particularly central to the cybernetic worldview. First, that *machines and organisms are similar* in several respects; indeed, they often function as interlinked systems.[344] Second, that one way in which organisms and machines are alike is

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[340] Claude E. Shannon and Warren Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1949). This work consists of two texts: one by Shannon, originally published as "A Mathematical Theory of Communication" (1948) and a popularizing overview by Weaver, entitled "Recent Contributions to the Mathematical Theory of Communication". Commenting on the influences of her manifesto, Haraway states: "Shannon and Weaver are in there big time." Donna Haraway and Nicholas Gane, "When We Have Never Been Human, What Is to Be Done? Interview with Donna Haraway", *Theory of culture and science* 23, no. 7/8 (2006): 139.

[341] Shannon and Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication,* 17, 33–34.

[342] Ibid., 18, 19.

[343] Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (New York: M.I.T. Press, [1948] 1961), 11.

[344] "One place where we can and do use such mixed systems is in the design of prostheses […]. A wooden leg is a mechanical replacement for a lost leg of flesh and blood, and a man with a wooden leg represents a system composed both of mechanical and human parts." Norbert Wiener, *God and Golem, Inc. A Comment on Certain Points Where Cybernetics Impinges on Religion* (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, [1964] 1990), 73–74. Wiener first conceived of this idea during the Second World War, when he sought to design a more effective anti-aircraft artillery for the British. To devise a weapon that could neutralize the enemy, Wiener hypothesized that both

that both aim to *control* their environment, meaning that they strive to exert some form of influence over it.[345] Third and finally, that control involves *communication*, in the sense that control is made possible by collecting information (input) and exorcised by imparting it (output).[346] Wiener thus concludes that "the theory of control in engineering, whether human or animal or mechanical, is a chapter in the theory of messages."[347]

If both organisms and machines seek to achieve control through communication, this means that all organisms and machines (as well as all systems composed of both) can be understood as governed by some type of code enabling them to send, receive and process information. Variants of this idea were echoed in many places during the second half of the twentieth century. The linguist Roman Jacobson (1896–1982) maintained that language itself – or, more precisely: the formalized, "synchronic" aspects of language that Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) had termed *langue* – constituted a code, through which "messages" (*parole* in Saussure's parlance) were transmitted between an "encoder" (speaker) and a "decoder" (listener).[348] Inspired by Jacobson and cybernetics in general, this concept was also appropriated by Lévi-Strauss, who argued that "totemic" systems "are codes suitable for conveying messages which can be transposed into other codes, and for expressing messages received by means of different codes in terms of their own system."[349] Another group of scientists who picked up the concept of code

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enemy pilots and allied antiaircraft personnel must be understood as merged with the machinery they operate, which ultimately helped blur the boundary between organism and machine. Galison, "The Ontology of the Enemy", 233.

[345] Thomas Rid, *Rise of the Machines: A Cybernetic History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016), 47–48. Summing up the cybernetic concept control as he understands it, Rid states: "The very purpose of machines and living beings is to control their environment – not merely to observe it, but to master it." On the cybernetic concept of control, see also Andrew Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain: Sketches of Another Future* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 31–32. Unlike Rid, Pickering stresses that *to control*, in this context, does not mean *to dominate*, but *to get along* by adapting to unforeseeable events. One should note, however, that Wiener himself seems to equate control with having one's "order" obeyed. Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* (New York: Da Capo, [1950] 1988), 16.

[346] Ibid., 17, 23.

[347] Ibid., 16–17.

[348] Roman Jakobson, "Patterns in Lingustics" [1953], in *Selected Writings. Volume II: Word and Language* (Paris: Mouton & Co., 1971), 224, 233; Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, [1956] 2002), 15, 22, 28. See also Panagiotis Sakellariou, *The Semiotic Concept of Code: A Study in Concept Formation* (Postdoctorial dissertation, Corfu: Ionian University, 2019), 132–142.

[349] Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 75–76.

early on were biologists, who still today speak of the "genetic code" to denote the means by which DNA and RNA carry encoded, genetic information.[350]

Borrowing this expression from Geoghegan, I propose that Haraway learned to code in the late 1970s and early 1980s. During this period, she published several articles that deal with cybernetics, a subject that she was introduced to by her dissertation adviser, the ecologists Evelyn Hutchinson ("a lot of people came out of Evelyn's lab deeply interested in various aspects of cybernetics, including me").[351] In these texts, Haraway investigates the influence of cybernetics on biology – here described as having been "transformed from a physiological into technological, cybernetic discourse" – with a particular focus on sociobiology, the representatives of which are said to theorize the social "strictly in terms of the exchange of information" and approach their object of study (i.e., "the organism") as "a complex cybernetic device characterized by its communications functions."[352] More specifically, Haraway argues that sociobiology is a scientific and political discourse that understands all natural-technical objects – be it an ant population or monkey tribe – as cybernetic control-command systems, which is to say that it conceptualizes living entities as machines, programmed to execute certain instructions. "Within these frameworks", Haraway writes, "the dichotomy between animal and human is not very important. The boundaries and connections of living and non-living similarly shift fundamentally."[353] "Coding and copying, communication and replication are the key concepts."[354]

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[350] Brigitte Nerlich, "Encounters between Life and Language: Codes, Books, Machines and Cybernetics", 59 (2020). See also Matthew Cobb, *Life's Greatest Secret: The Race to Crack the Genetic Code* (London: Profile Books Ltd, 2015).

[351] Haraway and Gane, "When We Have Never Been Human", 137. The four articles that devote the most space to cybernetics are Haraway, "The Biological Enterprise: Sex, Mind, and Profit from Human Engineering to Sociobiology", esp. 44–45, 57–66; Haraway, "The High Cost of Information"; Donna Haraway, "Signs of Dominance: From a Physiology to a Cybernetics of Primate Society, C.R. Carpenter, 1930-1970", in *Studies in History of Biology*, ed. William Coleman and B Camille Limoges (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), esp. 175–195; Donna Haraway, "Class, Race, Sex, Scientific Objects of Knowledge: A Socialist- Feminist Perspective on the Social Construction of Productive Knowledge and Some Political Consequences", in *Women in Scientific and Engineering Professions*, ed. Violet B. Haas and Carolyn Cummings Perrucci (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984), esp., 221–224.

[352] Haraway, "The High Cost of Information", 247, 252, 249.

[353] Ibid., 252.

[354] Ibid., 245. See also Haraway, "Primatology Is Politics by Other Means", 495. "By the late twentieth century both sex and mind have been recast from organismic molds into technological-cybernetic ones: they have become coding/control problems for systems that are still nostalgically called organisms."

Haraway is not uncritical of the developments she describes in these texts. As we observed in chapter eleven, she objects to dismissing sociobiology as mere ideology. Yet she maintains that the cybernetically informed discourse of sociology has had negative consequences. In particular, by conceptualizing animals and humans as command-control systems, which both seek and are subject to control, it has helped naturalize the principle of domination.[355] However, as we turn to the Cyborg Manifesto, we will see that Haraway herself appropriates aspects of the cybernetic description of reality.

In an early, unpublished version of her manifesto, called "Cyborg: Natural Child of Jupiter Space" (1984), Haraway writes: "Post War biology is a science of coded texts […] Biology is no longer the science of organisms, but of cybernetic technological devices, hybrids of information machines and biotic components.[356] This argument is reiterated and elaborated in the published version of "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" from 1985, where Haraway asserts:

> [C]ommunications sciences and modern biologies are constructed by a common move – *the translation of the world into a problem of coding*, a search for a common language in which all resistance to instrumental control disappears […]. In communications sciences, the translation of the world into a problem in coding can be illustrated by looking at cybernetic (feedback-controlled) systems theories applied to telephone technology, computer design, weapons deployment, or database construction and maintenance. […] In modern biologies, the translation of the world into a problem in coding can be illustrated by molecular genetics, ecology, sociobiological evolutionary theory, and immunobiology. The organism has been translated into problems of genetic coding and readout. Biotechnology, a writing technology, informs research broadly. In a sense, organisms have ceased to exist as objects of knowledge, giving way to biotic components, i.e., special kinds of information-processing devices. […] Immunobiology and associated medical practices are rich exemplars of the privilege of coding and recognition systems as objects of knowledge, as constructions of bodily reality for us. Biology here is a kind of cryptography.[357]

This passage tells us that Haraway by no means affirms all aspects of the cybernetic worldview. As in her previous texts, she takes issue with the tendency to reduce all objects to machine-like entities that can and perhaps

[355] Haraway, "The High Cost of Information", 247, 271.
[356] Donna Haraway, "Cyborg: Natural Child of Jupiter Space", 1984, Box 21, folder 347, G. Evelyn Hutchinson Papers, Yale University Library, 5.
[357] Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 164, italics in original.

must be subject to instrumental control. But she does not reject cybernetic discourse in its totality. Most obviously, Haraway – who describes the cyborg at the center of her myth as a "cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism" – appropriates the cybernetically informed idea that no absolute boundary needs to or can be established between human and animal, living and non-living. But as I will demonstrate, Haraway can also be read as appropriating the more general notion of *the world as a problem of coding*, claiming that feminists must become coders – which, in turns, involves becoming myth-makers.

Already in the unpublished 1984 version of her manifesto, Haraway presents the cyborg as an answer to the question of how "an oppositional politics" can "begin *to code its own messages* and thereby articulate its own body".[358] The fact that Haraway appropriates the notion of the world as a problem of coding is even more evident in the 1985 version, where she moreover establishes a link between code and myth. Speaking of the cyborg, which she also describes as a product of myth, she writes: "The cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self. *This is the self feminists must code*."[359] This suggests that the cyborg myth constitutes a code, through which this new self is made possible. Haraway's aforementioned claim that cyborg authors retell "origin stories" to "subvert the central myths of origin of Western culture" is also followed by this remark: "The phallogocentric origin stories most crucial for feminist cyborgs are built into the literal technologies […] that have recently textualized our bodies as code problems […]. *Feminist cyborg stories have the task of recoding communication and intelligence to subvert command and control*."[360] As her own myth constitutes a cyborgian origin story, this implies that Haraway sees herself someone who codes.

More generally, the preceding analysis suggests that Haraway presents myth-making as a form of coding that feminists must engage with. This conclusion aligns with that of previous chapters, insofar as I have already stressed that Haraway holds that feminist should become myth-makers. However, the fact that she here equates myth with code tells us something new about how she conceptualizes the nature and function of myth. In fact, it allows for a deeper understanding of Haraway's entire ontology. But to see

[358] Haraway, "Cyborg: Natural Child of Jupiter Space": 3, italics added.
[359] Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 163, italics added.
[360] Ibid., 175, italics added.

this, we must clarify what it, according to her, means to approach the world as a problem in coding – as well as what it does not mean.

To speak of the world as a problem in coding is to conceptualize everything that exists either as information or information-processing apparatuses, whether it is a body or a written text, a human brain or a computer. This move collapses the machine-organism dichotomy, a collapse that Haraway herself affirms. But it also implies that it might be possible to construct a single, all-encompassing (scientific or political) code, with the help of which one can explain and by extension control everything, simply by optimizing information flows and minimizing the occurrence of noise (i.e., "a common language in which all resistance to instrumental control disappears"). Haraway strongly opposes this ambition. She therefore argues that "cyborg politics" must be a struggle "against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism." Instead, cyborg feminists must "insist on noise and advocate pollution".[361]

Thus, when Haraway appropriates the cybernetic notion of the world as a problem in coding, her point is not that there is or can be a complete, universally valid code, capable of resolving all (merely apparent) tensions and contradictions. Her point is, rather, the opposite. Namely, that there is an infinite number of codes that can be used to read and write (literal texts, as well as ourselves and the world at large), but none that does not involve the loss or distortion of some information. At the same time, there is no way to determine which is the optimal code, as this depends on what one wants to achieve. For example, there are signs that we have recently become cyborgs. The cyborg myth provides a code that enables this reading of one's personal and collective body. But again, it is an ironic myth, which points out that the individual and collective self could be coded differently. This, then, is how myths function according to Haraway: they are codes that permit partial readings.

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Having reached this point, we should stop to ask why Haraway chooses to appropriate a cybernetic vocabulary? The question is pertinent, especially as she herself, as we have seen, highlights that the cybernetic discourse is far from unproblematic. There are of course several possible answers to this question. To begin with, we must note that Haraway argues that conceptualizing the

[361] Ibid., 176.

world as information or "coded texts" can have negative consequences, in that it may invite the conclusion that everything – including our own bodies – is reducible to information produced and processed by technologies that we ourselves do not control. Yet this is not the only possible conclusion. "Technological determination is only one ideological space opened up by the reconceptions of machine and organism as coded texts through which we engage in the play of writing and reading the world."[362] Another space opened up by the same move is one from within which all technologies – including the technology of writing, which Haraway describes as "pre-eminently the technology of cyborgs" – may be viewed as tools that we ourselves can utilize to re-write or recode both our bodies and the world.[363] In an interesting passage, Haraway proclaims:

> Communications technologies and biotechnologies are the crucial tools recrafting our bodies. […] Technologies and scientific discourses can be partially understood as formalizations […] of the fluid social interactions constituting them, but they should also be viewed as instruments for enforcing meanings. The boundary is permeable between tool and myth […]. Indeed, myth and tool mutually constitute each other.[364]

On the one hand, this passage suggests that analog as well as digital communication technologies make it possible to build myths, such as the cyborg myth (the first text Haraway wrote on a computer).[365] On the other hand, it implies that biotechnologies are myths in themselves, in the sense that they, like stories, constitute tools that we can use to recraft our bodies (recall that Haraway argues that "we", just like "other peoples studied by anthropologists […] carve our meaning onto our bodies").[366] In either case, the bottom line remains the same: if the world constitutes a problem in coding, then it can be re-coded with the help of technology.

In sum, Haraway's choice to appropriate the cybernetic notion of the world as a problem of coding can be understood in light of what function this claim serves in her text – that is, what kind of analyses and arguments it enables her to articulate. Yet, this is not the only possible explanation. We must also ask what was at stake when Haraway and her contemporaries turned to the

[362] Ibid., 152.
[363] Ibid., 176. See also ibid., 175.
[364] Ibid., 164.
[365] Bell, *Cyberculture Theorists*, 97.
[366] Haraway, "The High Cost of Information", 248.

concept of code. To answer this question, it is necessary to recontextualize Haraway's manifesto. To be more precise, I argue that it should be read in the context of what philosopher Umberto Eco (1932–2016) has termed the "code boom" of the twentieth century.

The code boom

By the "code boom", Eco seems to refer to roughly the same development as that examined by Geoghegan. But what makes Eco's interpretation of this phenomenon particularly interesting is his claims that one can identify a "unifying obsession" that preoccupied many intellectuals drawn to the concept of code:

> [T]he acknowledgement of codes (or of the Code) meant that we are not gods and that we are moved by rules. What was at stake, however, was the question as to whether we are not gods because we are determined by rules socially produced in the course of human history or because God is the Rule which stands behind us and our social history.[367]

Put differently, Eco argues that to speak of code was to speak of rules – or more pointedly, to enter a debate about the extent to which rules circumscribe human freedom.

The association between code and rule can be traced far back in time. The term "code" comes from the Latin *codex*, which originally meant manuscript or book (e.g., *Codex Gigas*), but which was often employed to name manuscripts or books that collected laws or statues (e.g., *Codex Justinianus* or *Codex Gregorianus*).[368] This helps explain why law collections have been called "codes" (e.g., *the Napoleonic code*), as well as why the same term, since the sixteenth century, has been used in an extended sense to denote systems of unwritten rules and conventions (e.g., *the fashion code*).[369] Biologists use the word in a different way. But the link between code and rule remains intact. Thus, the "genetic code" is sometimes conceptualized as a "set of rules", governing the

[367] Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 188.

[368] Sakellariou, *The Semiotic Concept of Code,* 23, 27. *Codex* stems from *caudex*, which was used as a synonym for *polyptych,* the Latin word employed to denote texts written in wooden boards with many leaves. Ibid., 23.

[369] *Oxford English Dictionary*, "Code, n" (Oxford University Press, 2024).

activities of genes.[370] When social scientists and humanists, from the 1950s onwards, began to appropriate the concept of code to discuss human culture, it often served a similar function, meaning that it was used to argue that cultural activities were rule-governed. "Speaking of codes meant for many to identify 'scripts' where, previously, only random, blind impulses, unspeakable creativity, dialectic contradictions were recognized", Eco explains.[371] This becomes particularly evident if one examines the anthropology of Lévi-Strauss, with which the French structuralist side of the code boom, according to Eco, can be said to have started.[372]

Early on in *The Raw and the Cooked* (1964), the first of his four-volume work *Mythologiques*, Lévi-Strauss states his goal, as a structuralist, has always remained the same: to "attain a level at which a kind of necessity becomes apparent, underlying the illusions of liberty."[373] To accomplish this, he has searched for cultural patterns that can be traced back to universal, mental structures or laws, presumed to govern all aspects of cultural life. Yet, he notes that his previous studies have all remained open to the objection that the regularities he has identified were not actually the product of mental laws, but of institutional and thus contingent circumstances. This is why he now turns to mythology. "Mythology", writes Lévi-Strauss, "has no obvious practical function"; it does not deal with an objective reality, but must be considered the outcome of a mind "left to commune with itself", imitating itself as an object. "And so, if it were possible to prove in this instance, too, that the apparent arbitrariness of the mind, is supposedly spontaneous flow of inspiration […] imply the existence of laws operating at a deeper level", then one would be forced to treat these laws as real. In fact, "if the human mind appears determined even in the realm of mythology, *a fortiori* it must also be determined in all its spheres of activity."[374] In other words, Lévi-Strauss turns to mythology to prove that freedom is an "illusion", since the workings of the human mind is indeed "determined" in this realm as well. It is in this context that he invokes the concept of code:

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[370] See for example Carl Zimmer, "Creating Life as We Don't Know It: Scientists are Changing the Rules for How DNA Works", cited in Nerlich, "Encounters between Life and Language: Codes, Books, Machines and Cybernetics", 315. "To translate the gorilla's genes into the corresponding proteins that build and do almost everything in the gorilla's body, its cells use a set of rules: the genetic code."

[371] Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, 168.

[372] Ibid., 167

[373] Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 10.

[374] Ibid.

> I am concerned to clarify […] the system of axioms and postulates defining the best possible code, capable of conferring a common significance on unconscious formulation which are the work of minds, societies and civilizations chosen from among those most remote from each other. As the myths themselves are based on secondary codes (the primary codes being those that provide the substance of language), the present work is put forward as a tentative draft of a tertiary code, which is intended to ensure the reciprocal translatability of several myths. This is why it would not be wrong to consider this book itself a myth: it is, as it where, the myth of mythology. […] However, this code, like the others, has neither been invented or brought in form without. It is inherent in mythology itself, where we simply discover its presence.[375]

Lévi-Strauss distinguishes here between three different kinds of code. The "primary" ones are those that "provide the substance of the language" – that is, the signs and grammatic rules that make it possible to articulate myths and other messages. The "secondary" codes govern how language and grammar are used to produce the specific messages that we recognize as myths. The "tertiary" code, finally, is the code that Lévi-Strauss himself seeks to provide: a set of rules with the help of which it is possible to identify the "common significance" of myths taken from a wide variety of different context. This third code is, in turn, likened to a myth ("the myth of mythology"), which suggest that myths, according to him, are codes that make possible specific readings. Lévi-Strauss nevertheless denies that this latter code was "invented" by him. Instead, he describes it as "inherited in mythology itself", where we "discover" it. This is to say that if all myths can be deciphered using the same rules, it is because the production thereof is itself rule-governed.[376] Not in the sense that the myth-makers follow a set of formal rules of which they are themselves aware. No, the laws governing the production of myths are embedded in the human mind. In this respect, we humans are like pre-programmed computers, coded to perform certain tasks.[377] To once again cite Eco, Lévi-Strauss'

[375] Ibid., 12.

[376] Cf. Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, 167. Summarizing the position of Lévi-Strauss and his use of "code" as well as what it articulates, Eco writes: "Culture, art, language, manufactured objects are phenomena of collective interactions governed by the same laws. Cultural life is not a spontaneous spiritual creation but, rather, is rule-governed."

[377] "With Lévi-Strauss, the whole humanist tradition goes down the drain. Instead of a free spirit, responsible for its decision, we have a man responding to programmed circuits called structures." Sance de Gramont, "There Are No Superior Societies", in *Claude Lévi-Strauss: The Anthropologist as Hero*, ed. Nelson E Hayes and Tanya Hayes (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1970), 7. This anthology is on the reading list for Haraway's course, discussed in chapter eleven. Haraway, "Handout for Sci 420": 1.

analysis thus suggests that "the code" is not a thing that we humans "*posit*", but something that we "as thinking cultural subjects […] *are posited by*".[378]

A similar conclusion follows from the writings on myth and code by Barthes.[379] According to Geoghegan, Barthes can be characterized as a champion of "crypto-structuralism", the representatives of which differ from orthodox structuralist like Lévi-Strauss in that they employ more "antagonistic" concepts of code, invoked to explain the mechanisms of oppression.[380] In particular, the crypto-structuralists utilized the concept of code to contest "the neutrality of communication", while they also "read communicative codes into all manner of phenomena."[381] This becomes evident if one considers *Mythologies*, in which Barthes also establishes a link between code and myth.

Under the heading "African Grammar", Barthes examines the "official vocabulary" used by the French government to discuss events in its African colonies. This vocabulary, he writes, "has no value as communication, but only as intimidation." It does not facilitate a dialogue or debate, but dictates how the situation is to be viewed, while it also helps naturalize the speaker's viewpoint by presenting it as objective. Thus, it hides or obscures what actually takes place. "In a general way *it is a language which functions essentially as a code*, i.e., the words have no relation to their content, or else a contrary one. It is a writing we might call cosmetic, because it aims at covering the facts with the noise of language" (*d'un bruit de langage*).[382] Barthes gives the example of "band"

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[378] Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, 188, italics in original. Interestingly, even critics of structuralism, such as the so-called poststructuralists, invoked the concept of code to argue that human liberty was, in some respects, illusory. For example, in the foreword to the English edition of *The Order of Things*, Foucault – who also speaks of knowledge production as a rule-governed activity – explains that this work was guided by the hypotheses that the empirical knowledge of particular time and place always possessed a "well-defined regularity", that its makeup was "not at the mercy of chance" and that "the practice of old beliefs, including not only genuine discoveries, but also the most naïve notions, obeyed […] *the laws of a certain code of knowledge*". Foucault, "Foreword to the Engish Edition", x, italics added. The difference between Foucault and Lévi-Strauss is, of course, that the former locates the code outside the subject, in the discourse – of which the subject itself is presented as a result – while Lévi-Strauss, ultimately, locates it inside the subject, in the human mind.

[379] Eco describes Barthes as partly "responsible" for the code boom. Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, 186.

[380] Geoghegan, *Code*, 153, 157.

[381] Ibid., 153.

[382] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 153, tanslation modified, italics added; Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* [French original] (Paris: Édition du Seuil, 1957), 128. Note that Barthes here presents "noise"

(*bande*), the term used by the government to denote those fighting for independence from colonial rule. This, he explains, is typical case of "axiomatic language" that seeks to dictate how the world is to be understood, while it both conceals the fact that France is at war and denies that the resistance is legitimate by defining the rebels as outlaws.[383]

Further down, Barthes notes that the vocabulary he studies primarily consists of nouns (such as "mission", "division" and "destiny"), which are assigned a fixed and inflated, moral meaning. It is at this point that he links code to myth, stating:

> Here moral inflation bears in on neither objects nor action, but always ideas, "notions", whose assemblage obeys less a communication purpose than the necessity of a petrified code. Codification of the official language and its substantivation thus go hand in hand, for the myth is fundamentally nominal, insofar a nomination is the first procedure of distraction.[384]

Put differently, the codification of language means that language is transformed from a communicative tool into an instrument of control, used to impose a particular, distorted view of the world. This is achieved by reducing multifaceted phenomena and processes to unambiguous nouns ("substantivation"). Codification thus goes hand in hand with the creation of myths, since myth-making begins with attributing a specific, but false or reductive, meaning to some aspect of reality.

"The Photographic Message" (1961), where Barthes focuses on press photographs, is another text in which he links code to myth. The term "code" is here used to denote the conventions that guide how photographs are made and interpreted. As he himself points out, it is usually assumed that press photographs are unconditioned by codes: that such photographs, unlike texts or painted pictures – which *represent* reality through a multitude of signs, be it written words or drawn lines – are objective, in that they simply *record* or *reflect* reality, as it really is. In other words, a press photograph is generally believed to "denote" but lack connoted or "coded" messages (it is, Barthes writes, seen as "*a message without a code*").[385] However, it is precisely this assumption that

(*bruit*) as something undesirable, which distorts, not the message communicated by the code, but the "facts" themselves.

[383] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 153.

[384] Ibid., 157–158.

[385] Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message" [1961], in *A Barthes Reader*, ed. Susan Sontag, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 196, italics in original.

Barthes challenges. A photograph that appears in the paper, he states, "has been worked on, chosen, composed, constructed, treated according to professional, aesthetic, or ideological norms".[386] Thus, it has been manufactured in accordance with a code. Likewise, because a press photograph is not only "perceived" or "received" but "*read*" (i.e., interpretated), its meaning remains context or code dependent.[387] "Thanks to its code of connotation the reading of the photograph is […] always historical; it depends on the reader's 'knowledge' just as though it were a matter of a real language, intelligible only if one has learned the signs."[388] Consequently, even press photography is not a neutral form of communication. Barthes gives an example, which also links the concept of code to that of myth:

> A son has just been born to the Shah of Iran and in a photograph we have: royalty (cot worshipped by a crowd of servants gathering round), wealth (several nursemaids), hygiene (white coats, cot covered in Plexiglas), the nevertheless human condition of kings (the baby is crying): all the elements, that is, of the myth of princely birth as it is consumed today.[389]

Here we have a press photograph that, on the one hand, simply denotes: it records an event. But it also carries a coded message, generated both by the photographer's choices and the reader's culturally mediated interpretive framework. Without reflecting, one decodes this photograph as connotating royalty, wealth, hygiene and humanity. Thus, it functions as a myth that helps naturalize a particular understanding of the "princely birth", according to which the prince is both a human among others and an exalted being whose birth constitutes a special (perhaps even sacred) event, which deserves to be celebrated.

To summarize, both Lévi-Strauss and Barthes speak of "code" to denote phenomena that they claim restrict human freedom. But it is also possible to identify important differences between them. Lévi-Strauss claims that he can provide a code that makes it possible to interpret mythology, because myth-making, like all cultural practices, is a rule-governed activity. In contrast, Barthes – whom Geoghegan refers to as a *code breaker*[390] – represents a more critical endeavor, the aim of which is to decipher codes and debunk myths.

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[386] Ibid., 198.
[387] Ibid, italics in original.
[388] Ibid., 206–207.
[389] Ibid., 208–209.
[390] Geoghegan, *Code*, 158.

More importantly, whereas Lévi-Strauss claims to localize the laws that renders freedom illusory in the human mind, Barthes focuses on historically contingent codes, the restrictive effect of which he relates to the dominant political order.[391] As a consequence, Barthes' position is more difficult than that of Lévi-Strauss to reconcile with the idea of a universally valid code.

In one of his later works, Barthes openly rejects the notion of a universal code. This is done in *S/Z* (1970), wherein Barthes presents a reading of Honoré de Balzac's novella *Sarrasine* (1830). Above all, this analysis seeks to challenge the idea that literary texts carry an "original meaning", accessible through the correct interpretation.[392] In contrast, Barthes insists that texts are "plural", in that they have many possible meanings.[393] Not only do authors make use of numerous different codes; meaning is primarily produced through *readings*, the agents of which may choose between several codes (of which Barthes in this work focuses on five). Barthes' analysis consequently constitutes an attack on the quest for "*idyllic*" communication, understood as one where the optimal code allows for a message to be transmitted between sender and receiver without the interference of "noise" ("in the cybernetic sense of the word").[394] Such communication may be possible within the sphere of the formalized sciences, Barthes writes. But literature "is the writing of noise, of impure communication", where noise does not distort but becomes the message.[395]

In *S/Z*, the concept of code thus serves a different function than in Barthes' earlier texts. It is no longer invoked to discuss that which constrains us – that which again and again generates the same message or myth – but a phenomenon that makes it possible to extract new meaning.[396] And yet, Eco

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[391] In the words of Eco, it could therefore be said that Barthes contends that humans "are not gods because we are determined by rules socially produced in the course of human history", while Lévi-Strauss analysis suggests that "God is the Rule which stands behind us and our social history".

[392] Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, [1973] 1990), 7.

[393] Ibid., 6–7.

[394] Ibid., 131, italics in original.

[395] Ibid., 132.

[396] The concept of code is used in a similar way in Julia Kristeva, "The System and the Speaking Subject", in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, [1973] 1986). According to Kristeva, semiotics is based on linguistics, which has managed to establish itself as scientific only "in as much as it focuses on language as a social *code*", which means that it has "no way of apprehending anything in language which belongs not with social contract but with play, pleasure or desire". Ibid., 26, italics in original. However, Kristeva wants to take semiology elsewhere, by focusing on the body, emphasizing the fact that "biological operation

argues that the way in which the Barthes in *S/Z* speaks of codes still suggests that one is dealing with a set of rules. But in this text, code "is not only a rule which *closes* but also a rule which *opens*. It not only says 'you must' but says also 'you may' or 'it would also be possible to do that'. If it is a matrix, it is a matrix allowing for infinite occurrences, some of them still unpredictable, the source of a game."[397] My argument is that Haraway invokes the concept of code to advance a similar point.

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The preceding analysis has shown that both "myth" and "code", during the so-called code boom, figured in discussions on (the limits of) human liberty. In that Haraway appropriates concepts of myth and code partially influenced by prominent representatives of this context, her manifesto can be read as a contribution to the same debate. Yet the ways in which she employs these concepts points to different conclusions than those advocated by Lévi-Strauss and Barthes.

Haraway differs from Lévi-Strauss in that she does not conceptualize "myth" – whether this term is taken to denote "our" myth (i.e., science) or "their" (i.e., literary myth) – as conditioned by of immutable laws or mental structures, but by historically contingent rules. This means that we humans are much freer than Lévi-Strauss' analysis implies. The codes can always be re-written, which is what Haraway herself seeks to accomplish through her cyborg myth.

In that she speaks of codes as constructed rather than discovered, Haraway's use of this concept is obviously closer to that of Barthes than Lévi-Strauss. If we read the Cyborg Manifesto together with *S/Z*, we find even more similarities. Most importantly, both argue that the same text can be approached through different codes, which enable different readings, none of which constitutes the "true" one. Hence, both dismiss the dream of idyllic communication facilitated by a common language or the optimal code, favoring instead a perspective that promotes plurality and sees "noise" as something both unavoidable and desirable. The main difference is of course that Barthes, in this particular work, focuses on a literal (literary) text, whereas

[…] though invariably subject to the signifying and/or social codes […] infringe the code in the direction of allowing the subject to get pleasure from it, renew it, even endanger it". Ibid., 30.

[397] Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, 187, italics in original.

Haraway expands the concept of text, so that it also includes human bodies and the world at large.

If we instead read Haraway's manifesto together with Barthes' earlier work – in which he, like her, establishes a link between code and myth – we can identify other differences as well. For while Barthes in these works adopts the role of a code-breaker and "mythologist", who seeks to decipher codes and debunk myths, Haraway studies codes and myths to demonstrate how they can be used: how feminists, including herself, can play by the rules to code their own message and create new myths. Already in chapter eleven, we observed that Haraway, unlike Barthes, speaks of myth in positive terms. This is in part because they use the word "myth" to mean different things. But as stated, it is also possible to relate Haraway's more myth-affirmative rhetoric to the fact that she champions an alternative concept of nature. While Barthes argues that myth generates a pseudo-nature, Haraway maintains that the natural is always a construct, which feminists must partake in constructing. Hence, it is not enough to denaturalize through demythologizing; one must also, or so Haraway's argument suggests, participate in the *reinvention of nature* – by engaging in myth-making. This affects how Haraway utilizes the concept of code. As noted, Barthes links the formation and enforcement of naturalizing myths to what he terms the "codification of language", by which he means the invention of a state-imposed code that aims to determine how words are used and what they mean. In this respect, Barthes conceptualizes code as supporting oppressive myths. By contrast, Haraway argues that myths, like her cyborg myth, can serve as a means to recode communication. Through this tale, Haraway seeks to introduce a *new* code, meant to facilitate a different understanding of nature.

Haraway as a bricoleur

So far, I have shown that Haraway, to articulate her cyborg myth, appropriates a cybernetic vocabulary, which includes both the concepts of cyborg and code. Because of this, she has been criticized by those who hold that cybernetic vocabulary is too burdened by its history to serve a progressive function. As mentioned earlier, Haraway herself emphasizes that cyborgs are "the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism." But she also states that this might not be a problem,

as "illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins."[398] Not everyone shares this optimism, however.

In an article titled "The Ontology of the Enemy" (1991) historian of science Peter Galison asks: "Can the cybernetic vision be so easily detached from its military historical origins and present location?" Answering his own question, he continues: "I would argue that the associations of cybernetics (and the cyborg) with weapons […] do not so simply melt away."[399] This objection is not without merit. Yet, what I want to emphasize is that Haraway's choice to appropriate cybernetic vocabulary can be read as consistent with her understanding of myth.

As we have seen, Lévi-Strauss holds that the savage myth-maker can be compared to a bricoleur because he makes myths using what is "at hand": a set of signs inherited from his culture, which can be combined in new ways but nerveless remain "pre-constrained" by their history. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that Haraway's logomythology implies that scientists must proceeded in a similar manner: that they too are forced to make use of concepts marked by the culture in which they live – which today means that it is impossible to tell scientific stories untainted by, for example, militarism, capitalism and patriarchy. When she herself appropriates the vocabulary of cybernetics to build her cyborg myth, Haraway can be said to embrace the implications of her own logomythology. In addition, she can be read as challenging Lévi-Strauss' distinction between the savage and the civilized, "us" and "them", not only discursively but performatively.

But are there no other vocabularies, with a less burdened history, also "at hand", which Haraway could have appropriated instead? Perhaps, but this brings us back to the already discussed question of what function the cybernetic vocabulary serves in her manifesto. I will not repeat here what I have stated above but instead add something of equal importance. When she appropriates the vocabulary of cybernetics to articulate her feminist myth, Haraway appropriates an influential *scientific* vocabulary. In this respect, she plays by the rules of the game to tell a new story – just as we have seen that feminist scientists should do, according to her. Certainly, the cyborg myth would not be accepted as a scientific story by, for example, primatologists. But that is not the game Haraway intends to play (indeed, as she emphasizes herself: she lacks the authority required to participate).[400] Haraway does not

[398] Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 151.
[399] Galison, "The Ontology of the Enemy", 260.
[400] Haraway, "The Contest for Primate Nature", 105.

want to return to the "material/mythic" space of the jungle (or the Garden), which is why she instead embraces the rules of a different game, which allows her to speak of communication and coding rather than, for example, hunting and gathering.

The coding trickster

Before concluding this chapter, it is necessary to say something brief about the concept of code in one of Haraway's later texts, which is not part of my primary source material. In "Situated Knowledge" from 1988, she writes: "The world neither speaks itself nor disappears in favour of a master decoder. The codes of the world are not still, waiting only to be read."[401] "Perhaps", she adds a few pages later, "our hopes for accountability, for politics, for ecofeminism, turn on revisioning the world as coding trickster with whom we must learn to converse."[402] As philosopher Jasmin Trächtler explains, Haraway's goal here is to articulate an intermediate position between realism (according to which scientific results are to be understood as *discoveries* of an extra-discursive nature) and radical social constructivism (whose proponents hold that scientists in one sense *invent* nature).[403] As we have seen, Haraway's point of departure is nearer to that called constructivism, especially in her early writings. But we have also observed that Haraway rejects idealism, which is why she asserts that science is not "only" invention.[404] According to her, there is something beyond the scientific discourse, which this discourse mediates (or constructs), but which it does not create out of nothing. In terms of code, this means that nature (or "the world") influences – but does not determine – which readings of it are possible: it produces its own codes.

What makes this claim particularly interesting in the context of the present study is that Haraway, as we just saw, borrows (what she herself describes as) a mythological figure to articulate it: the Trickster or Coyote, primarily associated with Southwest Native American myths.[405] In a later interview,

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401 Haraway, "Situated Knowledges", 198.

402 Ibid., 201.

403 Jasmin Traechtler, "The World as Witty Agent-Donna Haraway on the Object of Knowledge", *Frontiers in Psychology* 15 (2024): 3

404 Haraway, "The Past Is the Contested Zone", 42.

405 Haraway, "Situated Knowledges", 199. For mythological studies devoted to this particular figure, see for example the introduction to and essays in J. Hynes William and G. Doty William, *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993).

Haraway notes that her use of this figure is "marked by the middle-class, white feminist appropriation of Native American symbols, about which one must be very suspicious."[406] A similar insight has been voiced by philosopher Shane Phelan, who states that some Native American feminists might find that the appropriation of Trickster myths by white feminists such as herself "distorts the stories and cannibalizes their cultures."[407] But in light of what we discussed in the previous part-study, it is possible to identify a logic behind Haraway's choice of mythical figure, which does not only concern what function it serves in her text. As we recall, Audre Lorde criticized Mary Daly for only using figures derived from European myths. "Where was", Lorde asked, "Afrekete, Yemanje, Oyo, and Mawulisa?"[408] I argue that Haraway's choice of a mythical figure can be read as an attempt to, belatedly, approximate the position represented by Lorde, especially since the latter – in her "biomythography" from 1982 – describes Afrekete as a "*trickster*" who "*we must all become*."[409]

In stating that scientists should conceptualize nature as a trickster, Haraway also takes another step towards collapsing the time-honored science/myth dichotomy. Indeed, one could argue that Haraway, towards the end of the 1980s, has moved from advocating that scientists should approach science as (our) myth, to actively attempt to mythologize the scientific worldview itself.

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[406] Donna Haraway et al., "Cyborgs, Coyotes, and Dogs: A Kinship of Feminist Figurations and There Are Always More Things Going on Than You Thought! Methodologies as Thinking Technologies. An Interview with Donna Haraway Conducted in Two Party", in *The Haraway Reader*, ed. Donna Haraway (New York: Routledge, 2003), 327.

[407] Shane Phelan, "Coyote Politics: Trickster Tales and Feminist Futures", *Hypatia* 11, no. 3 (1996): 132. Shane still follows Haraway in appropriating this figure.

[408] Lorde, "An Open Letter to Mary Daly", 67.

[409] Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name: A Biomythography* (New York: QualitypPaperback Book Club, [1982] 1993), 255, italics in original. See also Kara Provost, "Becoming Afrekete: The Trickster in the Work of Audre Lorde", *MELUS* 20, no. 4 (1995).

Summary

Donna Haraway is among the first and most influential theorists to advance a distinctly feminist approach to science, which aims to clarify both why and how feminists should engage with science. This study has shown how she utilizes myth-talk to articulate and argue in favor of this novel approach. It has also demonstrated that Haraway, in her famous Cyborg Manifesto, invokes the power of myths both to explain the mechanisms of patriarchal oppression and to point out a way forward, toward liberation. Thereby, it has enabled further insights into how myth-talk has facilitated arguments and analyses of great importance to the historical development of feminist theory.

Myth and science

Haraway proclaims that science is "our" myth. Admittedly, she also states that one must refrain from reducing science to myth or vice versa, which points to the presence in her work of two different concepts of myths: one narrow (that only encompasses what Tae-Yeoun Keum calls literary myths) and one wide (that encompasses both literary myths and science). Haraway's argument suggests that one can distinguish between literary myths and scientific myths because the making thereof is governed by different rules. Yet they still share enough features to be subsumed under the same (wide) concept.

This study has revealed that Haraway's equation of science and reflects and enables the articulation of a particular, *logomythological* approach – that is, a mythological study of science as myth, which she carries out in a consistent manner. Some scholars assert that Haraway and other postmodernists believe that scientific theories are "mere" myths: stories among stories, devoid of any legitimate claims to validity. Others read her as arguing that science performs the same *function* as (literary) myths do elsewhere. The study at hand has made visible the shortcomings of both interpretations.

I have argued that Haraway appropriates Roland Barthes' concept of myth as a "metalanguage" that transforms history into nature. However, whereas Barthes claims that myth produces as "false Nature" that must be demythologized, Haraway argues that there is no nature beyond myth, which means that scientists must engage in myth-making, at least if they which to transform science into a emancipatory force. Haraway's analysis also suggests that the similarities between "our" myth (science) and "their" myth (literary myth) are several. Both consist of narratives. Both convey "public" knowledge.

Both construct, rather than discover, the phenomena around which they revolve, including (human) nature. Both tend to explain the present and point out a way forward by looking backwards to an imagined origin. Lastly, both scientists and myth-makers are bricoleurs, in the sense that they manufacture stories by redeploying pieces of culture "pre-constrained" by their history. Phrased differently, Haraway's point is not simply that science serves the same function as myth: her equation of myth and science is more radical. But since her argument also implies that scientific myth-making is governed by different rules than the production of literary myths, it still allows one to differentiate between these.

One of the ways in which equating science with myth supports Haraway's claim that feminists must engage with science is by highlighting the immense influence of science on how "we" understand ourselves and our world. "To ignore, to fail to engage in the social process of making science […] is irresponsible. […] Scientific stories have too much power as public myth to effect meanings in our lives", Haraway writes. But this study has shown that her logomythological notion of "science as myth" also encourages engagement by offering an alternative to science as objective truth and science as ideology. If science constitutes a set of objective truths, then feminist scientists can, at most, serve a corrective function. By adopting a more objective position, they can help dispel masculine biases to reach the one truth *behind the myths*. On the other hand, if all science is dismissed as ideology, it becomes difficult to justify the value of a feminist science: then feminist scientists would only continue to produce *mere myths*. However, if science is understood as a rule-governed, legitimate form of narrative knowledge that constructs nature using pre-constrained bits of culture – that is, if science is understood as "our" myth – then feminist scientists who play by the rules can change not only science fundamentally, but (human) nature itself.

Haraway is not the first mythologist to destabilize the boundary between myth and science. Claude-Lévi-Strauss has been particularly influential in this regard. But whereas Lévi-Strauss conceptualizes literary myths as part of "their" science, Haraway goes a step further, in that she argues that science is "our" myth. This claim calls into question both time-honored and more recent conceptualizations of the myth-science relation, including that of other postmodern thinkers like Jean-François Lyotard – who maintains that science, unlike myth, constitutes a "non-narrative" form of knowledge. And yet, this study has revealed that Haraway is but one of several influential science studies scholars active in the 1970s who argue that "our" science should be studied as "their" myth. Others who advance similar claims are Bruno Latour, Steve

Woolgar, Robert M. Young, Berry Barnes and Karl M. Figlio. By reading Haraway as part of this hitherto overlooked portion of the mythological network, the present study has established her important contribution to the early history of the anthropology of science, a field whose history remains to be studied in greater detail. It has also shown that Haraway is the only one of these scholars who invokes the notion of science as "our" myth to argue that feminist must engage in science – that is, become myth-makers.

The Cyborg Myth

This study has shown that Haraway, in her Cyborg Manifesto, speaks of the "the myth of original unity" to denote the belief in a (lost) unity with nature or other people – a myth that, according to her, permeates most Western origin stories, religious as well as secular (including scientific ones). As this myth reproduces the idea that difference constitutes a transitional problem to be either obliterated or otherwise dealt with through the establishment (or maintenance) of hierarchies, Haraway's argument suggests that it helps perpetuate oppression. I have argued that she presents her "cyborg myth" as a counter-myth, meant to challenge origin myths based on the myth of original unity.

Acknowledging that Haraway speaks of the cyborg myth as a "political" myth, I have read her manifesto side by side with George Sorel's *The Reflections of Violence*, one of the most famous texts about myth and politics in the mythological network. I have shown that the cyborg myth has something in common with Sorel's myth of the general strike, in the sense that both Haraway and Sorel make use of a constitutive concept of myth – according to which myths are necessary fictions – and conceptualize political myths as identificatory mechanisms. But we have also seen that Haraway's myth differs from the myth favored by Sorel in at least two important respects. First, contrary to much previous research, I have argued that the cyborg myth constitutes a *myth of origin*, which endows our (cyborg) origins with an explanatory as well as normative quality. Second, this study has shown that Haraway's myth, unlike that of Sorel, is an "ironic" political myth, meant to foster reflexivity rather than mythic thinking.

I have refrained from evaluating Haraway's myth. But I have argued that her *writings on myths* are valuable, as they enable a less simplistic discussion of myths. As we have seen, Haraway suggests that origin myths can privilege the question of Whither over that of Whence, while political myths can be ironic. This promotes a discussion that does not reduce myth to a single thing that we

must take a stand for or against. Instead, it implies that there are different kinds of origin/political myths, which must be evaluated separately.

Finally, this study has drawn attention to the rarely acknowledged link Haraway, in her manifesto, establishes between myth and code, arguing that she appropriates the cybernetic notion of the world as "a problem in coding" and conceptualizes myth-making as a means to code a new self and recode communication. Building on this insight, I have constructed a new context for the Cyborg Manifesto: the so-called "code boom" of the twentieth century. I have shown that other representatives of this context, namely Lévi-Strauss and Barthes, use the terms "myth" and "code" to discuss invisible phenomena that restrict the limits of human freedom, but that Haraway makes use of these terms to argue that we humans might be freer than we think. In this respect, Haraway herself can be said to operate like a bricoleur, who creates new myths with the help of concepts pre-constrained by their history.

PART V.
CONCLUSION

15. Myth and feminist theory

a book of myths
in which
our names do not appear.

Thus ends Adrienne Rich's celebrated "Diving into the Wreck" (1972), which has been read both as a reckoning with myth and an attempt at revisionist myth-making.[1] At a more general level, the poem raises the question of how to address omissions and exclusions. If one, like Rich's protagonist, is searching for "the wreck and not the story of the wreck / the thing itself and not the myth", the type of book referenced in these lines should perhaps be left behind, simply because it constitutes a book of myths.[2] But what if this book remains far removed from "the thing itself", not because it deals with myths, but because of what myths it neglects: the many names it does not mention? Then one may have no choice but to continue writing, adding new pages and new myths, instead of rejecting the book in its entirety. Rich's interest in the original matriarchy thesis and repressed Goddess myths, discussed in this thesis' second part-study, suggests that she herself championed the latter strategy.

Metamythological books do not deal with myths, but with studies of myth. Yet, given all that they omit, most might very well be termed "books of myths", in which the absence of all names but those of canonized male mythologists obscures "the thing itself", or at least all too much of mythology's heterogeneous past. Of course, it is not only metamythologists who have produced books centered almost exclusively on men. Historically, this has been the rule across most academic fields. But whereas, for example, philosophers and historians have begun to push back against this age-old pattern, the androcentric bias of metamythology has remained largely intact.

The present thesis challenges this bias. It has examined the works of three well-known feminist theorists whose names almost never appear in books

[1] Adrienne Rich, "Diving into the Wreck", in *Diving into the Wreck: Poems 1971-1972* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1973), 24; Ostriker, "The Thieves of Language, 71–72; Rachel Blau Duplessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 131–133.

[2] Rich, "Diving into the Wreck", 23.

about mythology. In doing so, it has shined new light on the history of this field and made visible a hitherto unheeded resource that mythologists might explore in the future. It has also facilitated a better understanding of these three theorists' respective works, and – more generally – established the importance of mythology for the historical development of feminist theory. In the following, I discuss my most significant findings in greater detail. Results that only concern one of the three theorists at the center of this thesis have already been summarized at the end of each part-study. This chapter therefore focuses on overarching insights made possible by studying Simone de Beauvoir, Mary Daly and Donna Haraway together.

Overlooked continuities

As stated in the introduction to this thesis, Clare Hemmings argues that the stories feminists usually tell about the history of feminist theory tend to oversimplify the past by representing different feminisms (like "existential", "radical", "cultural" or "postmodern" feminism) as episodes in grand narratives of progress or decline. The study at hand has made visible overlooked continuities between Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway that make possible what Hemmings calls a "different vision" of the feminist past.

This study has shown that all three theorists use myth-talk to explain the persistence of patriarchal oppression and theorize the preconditions of emancipation. But it has also identified more specific affinities. To begin with, it has found that Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway all foreground the continued sway of Judeo-Christian narratives, such as "the myth" of the Garden of Eden and of the Fall. In this respect, all stress the continued influence of religious ideas over supposedly secular societies. By emphasizing the power of myth, they also provide an explanation as to how such ideas have remained influential. In myth, these three theorists claim to have identified a particularly stubborn aspect of the patriarchal Judeo-Christian heritage, which remains pervasive even when other religious institutions lose their former standing. According to Daly and Haraway, even contemporary stories that make no reference to divine beings – be it a children's tale about a self-sacrificing tree or a scientific theory about apes and monkeys – often reflect the logic of Judeo-Christian myths.

When they use "myth" to denote biblical narratives such as "the myth" of the Garden and of the Fall, Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway employ a well-established "folkloristic" concept of myth, according to which myths are sacred stories usually associated with temporally or spatially removed societies.

These are the stories that I with Tae-Yeoun Keum have called literary myths. But all three theorists also make use of "myth" to designate other phenomena, like "the myth of woman" (Beauvoir), "the myth of feminine evil" (Daly) and "the myth of original unity" (Haraway). These myths are described in ways that call to mind what Keum calls deep myths: mental rather than discursive phenomena, which permeate both literary myths and other stories, including scientific ones. The more precise nature and function of these deep myths are conceptualized quite differently. Yet, this study has shown that "myth", in all three instances, is used to name a supposedly transhistorical and immensely influential – but highly elusive – set of images or ideas. Furthermore, it has argued that these images and ideas become possible to address only after having been named. Through myth-talk, Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway thus clothe something spectral with words, whereupon it becomes visible, less ghostly.

This study has, furthermore, shown that Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway all, at some point in their careers, present what I with Beauvoir have called mythic thinking as a serious problem. According to Beauvoir, men succumb to this mode of thought – characterized by an inability or unwillingness to adopt a reflexive approach to the products of one's own consciousness – when they treat "the Eternal Feminine" as more real than women of flesh-and-blood. I have argued that Daly in *Gyn/Ecology* can be said to exploit the engaging potential of this thinking, while she herself falls victim to it. But if one instead considers Daly's second book, it is possible to discern a clear similarity between Daly and Beauvoir. For even though Daly speaks of myths in positive terms in *Beyond God the Father*, she also emphasizes the importance of maintaining a reflexive attitude toward the symbols of which myths are composed. One must, she writes, recognize that all symbols are "relative" and avoid situations in which "the human mind becomes paralyzed by its own products." Indeed, I have argued that Daly – who stress that her concept of God as "ultimate transcendence" implies that all "symbols and societal structures may be transitory" – provides a myth meant to counter mythical thinking. In this sense, Daly's religious myth has something in common with the "cyborg myth" advanced by Haraway, which I read as a myth meant to make mythical thinking impossible – not by invoking God, but by promoting an "ironic" epistemology.

Another overlooked continuity has to do with how Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway relate to the various phenomena they term myth, as well as what type of myth they themselves favor. First of all, this study has revealed that

Beauvoir need not be understood as a direct adversary of the myth-affirmative feminist tradition to which Daly and Haraway more obviously belong. In fact, it has shown that she can be read as having helped establish the very foundation on which this tradition rests. In support of this claim, I have argued that Beauvoir's analysis suggests that the predicament of women is, in part, linked to the fact that they have no myths of their own, while she also argues that it is possible to re-write old myths so that they can serve new functions. Thus, her reasoning helps make visible the value of what later feminists have come to call revisionist myth-making. This conclusion challenges the received idea that the history of feminist theory has moved from *logos* to *mythos* – that is, from a rationalist opposition to all myths towards an appreciation of myth's value.

It is well established that both Daly and Haraway, at times, speak of myths in positive terms. But previous research usually concludes that they prescribe diametrically opposed myths. There is, of course, some truth to this. Even so, this study has reasoned that Haraway – who highlights the value of "retelling origin stories" as a means to "subvert the central myths of origin of Western culture" – resembles Daly in the respect that Haraway's cyborg myth constitutes a myth of origin, which seeks to explain the present and chart a way forward by looking backwards, towards a (new) beginning. Moreover, it has shown that Haraway's myth, like those of Daly, includes elements appropriated from the Judeo-Christian mythology, like the image of a creation that rebels against its creator. Yet another thing that Daly and Haraway have in common is that both provide the historical development of feminism with a mythical framework. Daly does so when she, in line with Mircea Eliade's definition of a myth, conceptualizes what she terms "the women's revolution" as a manifestation of the sacred (a *hierophany*). Haraway accomplishes something similar when she bestows the collective subject of postmodernist feminism – the cyborg – with its own myth of origin.

Finally, this study has revealed that Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway all relate myth to identity. Beauvoir primarily describes the phenomenon she terms myth as an obstacle to the subject-becoming of individual women. But she also establishes a link between the fact that women, according to her, do not have any myths of their own and their inability to say "we" about themselves. I have argued that both Daly and Haraway can be read as attempting to remedy this absence of myth, first highlighted by Beauvoir. Again, Daly and Haraway recommend very different myths. While Daly conceptualizes myth as a *symptom* of a pre-existing (but dismembered) *natural* feminine identity (re-

membered through myth), Haraway conceptualizes myth as a means to *produce* a *political* feminist identity. Nevertheless, both may still be said to present myth as an identificatory mechanism.

Mythology and the history of feminist theory

Modern feminist theory did not spring from nowhere, as the proponents of "spontaneous generation" once thought life itself could. Although it encompasses much that is new, its conditions of possibility, like those of all other intellectual currents or fields, must in part be sought among that which proceeded it. By examining the works of Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway in the context of the mythological network, this study has established the importance of a previously unnoticed resource, which feminist theorists have made use of to articulate particularly influential arguments and analyses.

The claim that feminist theorists have *made use* of mythology should not be understood to mean that mythology is something external to feminist theory. On the contrary, this study's point of departure was that the work of Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway form part of the mythological network simply by virtue of dealing with phenomena called myth. In addition, it has revealed that these and other theorists make use of writings on myth written *by* feminists, from a feminist point of view. For example, I have shown that Daly cites writings on myth by Beauvoir, as well as by Kate Millet, Elizabeth Gould Davis and Merlin Stone. Likewise, we have seen that even Drucilla Cornell, a vocal critic of Beauvoir, appropriates the latter's idiosyncratic concept of myth, when she describes "the myths of the feminine" as a set of man-made, transhistorical images and ideas that help perpetuate patriarchal oppression. This illustrates that the histories of feminist theory and mythology are entangled, in some respects inseparable.

Because the history of feminist theory is intertwined with that of mythology, the ethnocentric legacy of the latter constitutes part of the former's past as well. Many prominent mythologists have conceptualized myth as an essentially primitive phenomenon that haunts modernity. Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway all challenge this belief. Yet, none of them achieve an absolute break with the tradition from which this idea derives. Thus, the study at hand suggests that modern feminist theory, from its inception is itself haunted not by a primitive phenomenon, but instead by an idea – or a myth – *of* the primitive.

This is particularly evident in Beauvoir's case. In accordance with evolutionary anthropological discourse, she constructs a dichotomy between primitive and civilized people. Admittedly, she also destabilizes this time-

honored dichotomy by highlighting the presence of supposedly primitive phenomena and behaviors in civilized societies. But just like Jean-Paul Sartre, Ernst Cassirer, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno – all whom establish a parallel between certain modern people (such as anti-Semites) and primitives – Beauvoir primarily invokes this presence to *criticize* some of her (un)civilized contemporaries, who she suggests can and should adopt a less primitive attitude. A related, but much less obvious, tendency can be discerned in Daly's work. Daly does not use the primitive-civilized dichotomy herself. But her writings on myth often rely on mythologists who do, like Harvey Cox and Herbert Richardson. And since Daly never questions these thinkers' pejorative descriptions of so-called primitives, she ends up legitimizing the colonial notions on which these texts rest.

By contrast, Haraway explicitly rejects the primitive-civilized dichotomy, as well as all talk of primitives. Yet, because she, like many other science studies scholars active in the 1970s, seeks to enable a new approach to "our" science by highlighting what it has in common with "their" myth, her reasoning still presupposes the existence of an Other, whose myth has been defined by "our" mythologists.

Feminist theory and the history of mythology

Modern societies have frequently been described as devoid of myth; indeed, as being modern precisely by having freed themselves from myth, which has been coded as intrinsically anti-modern. By contrast, Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway speak of myth to name a force still at work, with a profound impact on all our lives. This is one of the more general ways in which all three theorists challenge the very premises on which much modern mythology rests.

Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway are not the first to use the word "myth" in this way. As we have seen, the Second World War marked something of a turning point in the history of mythology, when it became more common to talk of myth as a phenomenon present not only in primitive societies, but in modern ones as well. However, because Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway, as feminist theorists, focus on aspects of modern society usually ignored by non-feminists, they are able to identify signs that, as they interpret them, suggest that the presence of myth is much more widespread than other mythologists generally assume. Whereas, for example, Cassirer argued that the continued impact of myth was noticeable only in moments of crisis, when "the rational forces" that usually kept myth at bay temporarily lost the upper hand (i.e., when modern societies regressed and relapsed into pre-modern savagery),

Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway speak of myth as an integral part of modernity, the enduring power of which is apparent not only in exceptional cases, but also in the most mundane of situations – such as everyday encounters with someone of another sex.

In fact, Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway all point to the presence of something mythical amid what has traditionally been conceptualized as the anti-thesis of myth: philosophy and science. In this respect, they have something in common with Horkheimer and Adorno, who also placed myth at the heart of modernity. Nevertheless, it is still possible to identify a significant difference between how the former three and latter two speak of myth. Like many other mythologists inspired by evolutionary anthropology, Horkheimer and Adorno conceptualized myth as a problem whose power over modern societies should be minimized. As mentioned, Beauvoir sometimes argues in a similar way. But in the end, all three theorists at the center of this study suggest that the different phenomena they speak of as myth may also serve progressive political functions.

The fact that Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway – as well as many other feminist theorists – hint at or stress the progressive potential of myth is one reason why mythologists could benefit from studying their work today. In the introduction to a recent special issue of *History of European Ideas*, titled "Political Myth in the Twentieth Century" (2023), Tae-Yeoun Keum and Carmen Dege note that fascism's use of myth during the 1930s and 40s helped establish a strong association between political myths and totalitarian politics. Consequently, a "rationalist consensus" emerged, "according to which myth is a purely pathological presence within a society, to be excised as it grows more rational and more free." "This consensus", Keum and Dege continue, "remains dominant today, in political theory as well as in broader public discourse." As this unnuanced understanding hinders the advancement of more constructive theories on the relationship between myth and politics, Keum and Dege argue that it is crucial to demonstrate that "alternative approaches to political myth are not only possible, but that they have in fact been much more widespread in twentieth-century political and philosophical discourse than scholars tend to realize."[3] The present study has helped to reveal precisely this.

In that Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway sometimes speak of myth in positive terms, it is also possible to identify a resemblance between them and influential neo-Romantic mythologists like Carl Gustav Jung, Joseph Campbell and Eliade, all of whom made use of a myth-affirmative rhetoric. Nevertheless,

[3] Dege and Keum, "Editors' Introduction",1199.

while proponents of the neo-Romantic discourse on myth tend to conceptualize the pagan and Judeo-Christian narratives that they call myths as vehicles of timeless and universal truths, Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway suggest that all such stories are conditioned by specific historical circumstances and therefore tend to reflect and reinforce patriarchal beliefs.

This last claim also deserves attention from mythologists today, as neo-Romantic ideas have recently gained renewed sway over the public discourse on myth. Among those responsible for this development is Jung-influenced psychologist Jordan B. Peterson (1962–), who regularly makes use of myth-talk to articulate his analyses and arguments.[4] Above all, Peterson – whose *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (2018) has sold more than 1.1 million copies – invokes classical and biblical myths to argue that his message rests on an ancient foundation: that he merely reiterates truths that humans have known for thousands of years, but which have been lost, or rather actively repressed, in modern societies. One such truth is that masculine qualities constitute a precondition for "order", a truth that humanity must have known for a long time, as all myths represent "chaos" as feminine – the very thing Peterson's book seeks to serve as an "antidote" to.[5] In an interview from 2018, Peterson proclaims:

> You know you can say, "Well isn't it unfortunate that chaos is represented by the feminine" — well, it might be unfortunate, but it doesn't matter because that is how it's represented. It's been represented like that forever. *And there are reasons for it.* You can't change it. It's not possible. This is underneath everything.[6]

Here, myths are once again invoked to defend the notion of an immutable fact beyond the contingencies of history, as well as the idea of the feminine as a dangerous element, which must be controlled by masculine forces. The Peterson quote thus serves as an important reminder that mythology constitutes a battlefield, on which battles are waged that concern much more than the correct definition of a particular word. At stake is still the boundary

[4] For Jung's influence on Peterson's thinking, see Jordan B. Peterson, *Maps to Meaning: The Architecture of Belief* (New York: Routledge, 1999), xvii, xix–xx; Jordan B. Peterson, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (Toronto, Ontario: Random House Canada, 2018), 59–60, 323. In addition to Jung, Peterson often refers to Eliade and Campbell.

[5] Peterson, *12 Rules for Life*, xxviii, 323–326. See also Peterson, *Maps to Meaning,* xxi, 20.

[6] Nellie Bowles, "Jordan Peterson, Custodian of the Patriarchy", *The New York Times*, May 18, 2018, italics added.

between "us" and the Other, be it women, primitives or – as the next and final chapter suggests – populists and postmodernists.

The present study has not weaponized "myth" to intervene in such battles. However, it has helped clarify what mythologists risk overlooking if they ignore the kind of questions that a feminist perspective raise. These questions concern the ways in which myth – as well as the academic field called mythology – contributes to the maintenance of, yet also makes it possible to challenge, patriarchal structures. Perhaps it is not the work of Beauvoir, Daly and Haraway that will be of most use to future mythologists. But it is by reading these theorists as mythologists that this study has managed to illustrate the immense difference that a feminist perspective on myth makes possible.

16. Myth today

On the 6th of January 2021, supporters of Donald Trump stormed the United States Capitol Building. Their objective was to prevent the formalization of Joe Biden's victory in the recent presidential election, which Trump claimed that the Democrats had "stolen" by rigging the vote. In an attempt to chart the developments that led up to this event – the largest incident of domestic political violence in the United States since the Civil War – historian Timothy Snyder emphasizes Trump's use of lies, among which the stolen election claim is but one. More generally, he argues that Trump, by exploiting lies as a political tool, has helped facilitate the advent of a "post-truth" society, in which objective facts has lost much of its former influence over politics. According to Snyder, this has also paved the way for myth. "Post-truth", he explains, "wears away the rule of law and invites a regime of myth."[7]

Snyder is not alone today in asserting that truth is in decline while myth is gathering momentum, nor in blaming Trump for this development.[8] But there are also commentators who describe the alleged rise of harmful myths as a much broader trend, linked to the global growth of populist and authoritarian movements.[9]

In this contemporary context, "myth" is sometimes used as a synonym for "misinformation"; a phenomenon held to have devastating social consequences, the spread which may, nevertheless, be mitigated by using scientific methods. A clear example of this is *The Debunking Handbook* (2020), the joint product of 22 researchers, said to represent the "scientific consensus"

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[7] Timothy Snyder, "The American Abyss", *The New York Times Magazine*, January 9, 2021.

[8] On Trump and myth, see Chiara Bottici, "The Mass Psychology of Trumpism: Old and New Myths", *Public Seminar*, November 17, 2016; Tony Stigliano, "Donald Trump's Political Mythology", *Telos*, October 29, 2020; Paul Blumenthal, "Trump's 'Make America Great Again' Myth Reaches Its Catastrophic Conclusion", *Huffpost*, January 10, 2021; Richard Slotkin, "Trumpism's New 'Lost Cause' National Myth and the Struggle for America", *Illiberalism Studies Program*, April 3, 2024; Charles M. Bloom, "The Potency of Trump's 'Lost Cause' Mythmaking", *The New York Times*, March 20, 2024; Jason Garshfield, "Donald Trump and the Perils of Myth-Making", *Quilette*, July 17, 2024.

[9] Cf. Enquist Källgren, "Guiding Examples",1. Apart from the texts discussed below, see also Camil Ungureanu and Alexandra Popartan, "Populism as Narrative, Myth Making, and the 'Logic' of Political Emotions", *Journal of the British Academy* 8, no. S1 (2020); Anders Hellström and Katarina Petterson, "The Use of National Myths in the Rhetoric of Populist Radical-Right Parties in the Nordic Countries", in *The Nordic Populist Radical Right: Voters, Ideology, and Political Interactions*, ed. Ann-Cathrine Jungar (New York: Routledge, 2025).

on how misinformation can be combated.[10] In this work, "myths" – such as the "common climate myth" that modern climate change is natural – are presented as instances of misinformation that must be "preempted" or "debunked", ultimately replaced with fact.[11]

But not everyone agrees with this definition of myth. Having observed that the word "myth" is now used to characterize a wide variety of phenomena, including deceptive appeals to "a single unified nation" and the "nostalgic rhetoric" used to romanticize the past, Tae-Yeoun Keum notes that the fear of myth, in our time, goes "beyond a concern about misinformation", although misinformation is often understood as a "symptom" of the more profound problem. "At stake instead", Keum writes, "is the existential threat posed by the growing influence of cultural forces that appear immune to correction altogether" – that is, beliefs or narratives that seem impossible to debunk, no matter what method one employs.[12]

This "existential threat" has been conceptualized using other terms as well. But the fact that many commentators turn to "myth" to voice their concerns is hardly surprising, given this concept's historically acquired charge, extensively discussed in the study at hand. There are, after all, many received definitions on the basis of which it does seem reasonable to speak of ours as an age beset by myth. Yet, it is important to recall that there is no general agreement on what role myth plays, or should play, in today's society – nor on what role it has played historically.

Those who wish to minimize the power of myth over politics tend to characterize it as belonging to a bygone age. Snyder's image of Trump as "our post-truth president", who has circumvented the rule of law and inaugurated the reign of myth, suggests that the United States, before Trump's presidency, was law-bound and free from myths.[13] But since the very distinction between law and myth connotes that between civilized and primitive, Snyder's reasoning also implies that the advent of post-truth constitutes a *regression*: a relapse into a state of pre-truth.[14] This tendency is even more evident in other works. In *Post-Truth: The New War on Truth and How to Fight Back* (2017),

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[10] "The Debunking Handbook 2020: Downloads and Translations", *SkepticalScience.com*, October 14, 2020.

[11] Stephan Lewandowsky et al., *The Debunking Handbook 2020* (2020), 15, 4, 10. See also Norbert Schwarz, Eryn Newman and William Leach, "Making the Truth Stick & the Myths Fade: Lessons from Cognitive Psychology", *Behavioral Science & Policy* 2, no. 1 (2016).

[12] Keum, *Plato and the Mythic Tradition in Political Thought*, 233.

[13] Snyder, "The American Abyss".

[14] See this thesis, 159–160.

journalist Matthew d'Ancona asserts that emotionally charged "mythologies" and "tribal stories" have exerted a greater influence than objective facts throughout most of human history. This only changed with the Enlightenment, after which such "collective narratives" have had to compete with rationality and truth. What distinguishes our time, d'Ancona explains, is that "emotion is *reclaiming* its primacy and truth is in retreat."[15] Once again, this implies that the advent of post-truth entails a *return* of myth: a relapse into "tribal" pre-truth.

To explain this development, d'Ancona turns to philosopher Maurizio Ferraris, who traces the disdain for truth said to characterize our own age back to the early Romantic's call for a "new mythology", meant to correct the excessive rationalism of the Enlightenment. "Concretely, the colorful, noisy, and especially fake world around us is the heir to the Romantic dream of a revival of the myth", Ferraris asserts.[16] Still, the main villains in Ferraris' historical drama are not the Romantics but postmodernist philosophers, who he portrays as present-day successors to the former. Admittedly, the postmodernists were well intentioned. According to Ferraris, they sought to free humans from myth by means of reason. But in their efforts to question all preconceptions, they went too far. "After using the *logos* to criticize myth […] the deconstructive forces of reason turn against the *logos* and knowledge themselves", he explains. This "dialectic of postmodernism" fostered a suspicion of reason as such, which paved the way for populism and encouraged the belief that real emancipation could only be achieved through the opposite of *logos* – that is, myth.[17]

Conceptualizing myth as part of a recently revived past helps discredit both this phenomenon and its alleged proponents, be it populists or postmodernists. The aim is, of course, to defend truth. At the same time, this narrative suggests that the dominance of *logos* over *mythos* constituted a historical exception: a temporary state of affairs, the demise of which began only a few decades after it was first achieved. The period separating pre-truth from post-truth thus appears so limited that one is tempted to ask whether truth ever stood a chance against myth.

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[15] Matthew D'Ancona, *Post-Truth: The New War on Truth and How to Fight Back* (London: Ebury Press, 2017), 31, italics added.

[16] Maurizio Ferraris, *Manifesto of New Realism*, trans. Sarah De Sanctis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), 74.

[17] Ibid., 75

Not all contemporary mythologists speak of myth as an anachronistic threat that has recently returned, however. The "rational consensus" discussed by Keum and Carmen Dege remains strong.[18] Still, there is evidence of growing dissatisfaction with this consensus. In his immensely popular book *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (2014), historian Yuval Noah Harari conceptualizes myth as the very source of humanity's evolution beyond mere bestiality. It is, he argues, thanks to common myths that Sapiens can work together. "Any large-scale human cooperation – whether a modern state, a medieval church, an ancient city or an archaic tribe – is rooted in common myths that exist only in people's collective imagination."[19] The fact that only Sapiens have such myths is why our species, with Harari's words, rule the world.[20] In his latest book, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century* (2018), Harari invokes the same line of reasoning to dismiss all talk of myth and post-truth as a recent threat. "In fact", he writes, "humans have always lived in the age of post-truth. *Homo sapiens* is a post-truth species, whose power depends on creating and believing fictions. Ever since the Stone Age, self-reinforcing myths have served to unite human collectives."[21] Harari concludes: "Therefore, if you dream of a society in which truth reigns supreme and myths are ignored, you have little to expect from *Homo sapiens*. Better try your luck with chimps."[22] Here, myth is neither a thing of the past nor a recent return, but a transhistorical constant: the very engine that generates history.

Other commentators acknowledge that the destructive impact of myth does seem to be increasing and that this development presents a serious problem, but still decline to dismiss all myths as inherently harmful, as myths might also serve progressive functions. In an article from 2019, philosopher Paulina Sosnowska proclaims that "political myths are potentially dangerous" and that it would seem that "during the first two decades of the twenty-first century they are regaining their power".[23] Yet, she adds that it might be that "a myth can be countered only by another myth", which would mean that the champions of democracy must seek to develop "a powerful mythological weapon of their own", if they are to stand a chance in the struggle against

[18] Dege and Keum, "Editors' Introduction".
[19] Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (London: Harvill Secker, 2014), 27.
[20] Ibid., 25.
[21] Yuval N. Harari, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2018), 233.
[22] Ibid., 242
[23] Paulina Sosnowska, "The Reinforcement of Political Myth? Hans Blumenberg, Hannah Arendt and the History of the Twentieth Century", *Eidos. A Journal for Philosophy of Culture* 3 (2019), 52.

populism.[24] Likewise, Karolina Enquist Källgren – whose critique of Haraway I discussed in the last part-study – agrees that ours is "a time where myths are being weaponized for authoritarian politics", but concludes that democratic societies, rather than reject all myths, "need to harness democratic myths that are capable of organizing and strengthening a democratic emotional core."[25]

A similar argument is advanced by media theorist Yves Citton in his recent *Mythocracy: How Stories Shape Our Worlds* (2025), on the back cover of which one reads that the "time has come for the left to reclaim the power of myth from reactionary populism."[26] The success of populists *is* linked to their use of myths, Citton notes.[27] But he adds that "myth" must be distinguished from "mystification", so as not to throw out the baby with the bathwater.[28] In the end, all forms of politics presuppose myths. "We can only choose our (better: more egalitarian, more solidary, more sustainable) myths to fight against other (worse: more exclusory, more oppressive, more ecocidal) myths."[29]

Finally, there are those who argue that the major problems of contemporary societies are linked to an absence, rather than an abundance, of myths. In *The Myth Gap* (2018) political adviser Alex Evans asserts that the great challenges of our time – "mass migration, inequality, resource scarcity and climate change" – can only be solved if we manage to build enormous mass movements, which in turn presuppose "powerful resonant stories" that "unite rather than divide us." "Not so long ago", writes Evans, "our society was rich in these kinds of stories, and we called them myths. Today, though, we have a myth gap."[30]

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[24] Ibid., 60.

[25] Enquist Källgren, "Guiding Examples", 1.

[26] Yves Citton, *Mythocracy: How Stories Shape Our Worlds*, trans. David Broder (London: Verso, 2025), back cover.

[27] Ibid., 203

[28] Ibid., 204

[29] Ibid., 213. See also Timothy Stacey, "Beyond Populist Politics: Why Conventional Politics Needs to Conjure Myths of Its Own and Why It Struggles to Do So", *Global discourse* 8, no. 4 (2018); Stephen K. White, "A Democratic Mythic? Why Imagination Matters in Politics", *The Hedgehog Review* 24, no. 1 (2022).

[30] Alex Evans, *The Myth Gap: What Happens When Evidence and Arguments Aren't Enough?* (London: Eden Project Books, 2017), xx. See also Eric Foner, "In Need of a New Myth. Review of A Great Disorder: National Myth and the Battle for America", London Review of Books, July, 2024. (

Who among the above-mentioned scholars are right? Has myth returned, vanished or always exerted the same influence? Does myth constitute a serious threat, our only rescue, or both? These questions are not only of theoretical interest. The way in which one responds to them has highly practical implications, in that it determines what political strategies one can endorse and engage in, at least if one strives to be consistent. And yet, this thesis will not offer an answer. To do so would require privileging one definition of myth over another, undermining – at the very last moment – the theoretical and methodological premise of the entire study.

This does not mean that the present study is without relevance to those how grapple with questions of this nature. In fact, this work springs from my own preoccupation with such issues. But whereas most studies that deal with the societal function of myth either start from or aim to produce an unambiguous definition of the phenomena thus named, the one at hand represents a different approach: one that is thoroughly historical, rather than purely philosophical-normative. Thus, it has not sought to determine what myth is or does, but instead pursued to make visible how other theorists have answered this question, paying particular attention to the historically specific circumstances, assumptions and objectives that structure their reasoning on the topic. It has not tried to decide which of the theorists at its center comes closest to capturing the truth about myth. On the contrary, I have shown that such queries tend to become nonsensical, as different mythologists often use the word "myth" to denote different phenomena. However, this insight does not represent the absence of a result, but a result in its own right, relevant to contemporary discussions on myth and politics.

I am far from the first to point out that the word "myth" has been used in many different ways. But those who partake in contemporary discussions on myth rarely display any awareness of this fact. Instead, these discussions seem permeated by a desire to suppress the inherent polyphony of language: to fix the meaning of the word "myth" and thereby curb its historically acquired ambiguity. In one sense, this is unsurprising. If definitions and re-definitions of myth – as I argued in the introduction to this thesis – have always served as weapons in larger battles, it appears inevitable, perhaps even necessary, that they continue to be deployed in this way. But the desire to establish or enforce a final definition of myth is not without its drawbacks.

To begin with, this desire tends to produce circular arguments, the proponents of which conclude that myth, for example, can or cannot serve a progressive political function, because they define myth in a way that

inevitably yields this conclusion. More importantly, because it usually obscures the fact that all concepts of myth are constructs, the desire discussed here risks reifying both myth and the more general boundaries – between, for instance, "us" and "them" – that definitions of this word always reflect and reproduce. In this respect, the desire to establish or enforce a final, unambiguous definition of myth might generate what I with Beauvoir have called mythic thinking: an inability or unwillingness to establish a reflexive approach to the products of one's own consciousness (i.e., one's own concept of myth). Ultimately, this desire therefore risks reinforcing the very thing many commentators involved in contemporary discussions on myth seek to counteract.

The claim here is not that the effort to define myth is inherently problematic. Paradoxically, this study has shown that all definitions of myth are contingent *and* that Simone de Beauvoir, Mary Daly and Donna Haraway have accomplished something of great importance by (re-)defining myth. I believe that these two insights can be combined through a *dual gesture*. That is, we may continue attempting to define myth, while keeping in mind that no definition is final. This allows us to evaluate each definition with reference to its function, focusing on what it, for example, enables us to see or say, rather than whether it captures the ahistorical essence of the myth. It would also encourage a constant reassessment of received definitions, to the benefit of both new and older ones, including definitions previously overlooked – like those examined in this thesis. Emphasizing the value of this dual gesture is my final contribution to the discussions on myth today.

Swedish summary

I centrum för denna avhandlingen står tre av det förra århundradets mest inflytelserika feministiska teoretiker: Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986), Mary Daly (1928–2010) och Donna Haraway (f. 1944). Översiktsverk ägnade feminismens historia beskriver dem ofta som representanter för vitt skilda, kanske oförenliga, former av feminism. De har likväl en sak gemensamt: samtliga tillskriver vad de själva kallar för "myter" (eng. *myths*, fr. *mythes*) en enorm makt över allas våra liv.

Framför allt diskuterar Beauvoir, Daly och Haraway myternas inverkan på kvinnors situation. Att studera myter kan, enligt dem, förklara varför förtrycket av kvinnor fortlever när så mycket annat förändras. Samtidigt antyder alla tre att myter kan främja feminismens sak och bidra till kvinnors frigörelse. I båda dessa avseenden utmanar de etablerade antaganden om vad myter är och gör. Där många mytologer före dem framställt myter som ett "primitivt" fenomen, hävdar de att myter – på gott och ont – fortfarande utövar ett oerhört inflytande över moderna samhällen. Beauvoir, Daly och Haraway komplicerar därigenom den populära berättelse som förkunnar att västerlandets historia inneburit en utveckling från *mythos* (myt) till *logos* (förnuft, filosofi och vetenskap).

Trots detta har tidigare forskning ägnat mycket lite utrymme åt vad Beauvoir, Daly och Haraway skriver om myter. De stora vetenskapliga förlagen har publicerat en ofantlig mängd böcker och artiklar om mytologins historia (i detta sammanhang åsyftar ordet "mytologi" inte *en uppsättning myter*, utan *studiet av myter*). Men i dessa omnämns nästan aldrig några feministiska teoretiker. Vanligtvis innefattar de faktiskt få kvinnor överhuvudtaget. En överväldigande majoritet kretsar istället kring samma kanoniserade manliga mytologer, varav ingen studerat myter utifrån ett feministiskt perspektiv.

Om de forskare som studerar mytologins historia försummat feministerna, kan forskare inriktade på feminismens historia i sin tur sägas ha försummat mytologin. De senare har bara undantagsvis intresserat sig för vad feministiska teoretiker som Beauvoir, Daly och Haraway haft att säga om just myter. När så väl skett, har de oftast läst dessa teoretiker var för sig eller enbart tillsammans med andra feminister, förbiseseendes det faktum att Beauvoir, Daly och Haraway befinner sig i dialog med en mängd icke-feministiska mytologer.

Föreliggande studie är således unik i sitt slag. Den undersöker inte bara Beauvoirs, Dalys och Haraways ofta negligerade utsagor om myter, utan

upprättar en, i förhållande till tidigare forskning, ny kontext åt dessa utsagor; en kontext som innefattar stora delar av mytologins långa historia. Detta möjliggör en fördjupad förståelse för de tongivande feministiska argument och analyser som Beauvoir, Daly och Haraway artikulerar genom att åberopa vad de själva talar om som myter. Därigenom bidrar avhandlingen med ny kunskap om dessa tre teoretikers mest inflytelserika verk och övergripande feministiska tänkande.

Avhandlingen har därutöver en vidare målsättning: att med utgångspunkt i Beauvoirs, Dalys och Haraways arbeten generera nya insikter om såväl feminismens som mytologins historia, genom att visa att dessa historier är sammanflätande. Denna undersökning synliggör, närmare bestämt, att mytologin utgjort en resurs som feministiska teoretiker utnyttjat för att artikulera argument och analyser av stor betydelse för den feministiska teoribildningens utveckling. Men också att samma argument och analyser går att läsa som en – hitintills obeaktad – del av mytologins förflutna, av fortsatt värde för dess framtid.

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Avhandlingen tar inte avstamp i en särskild definition av "myt" och syftar inte till att utvinna en sådan. Istället undersöker jag hur Beauvoir, Daly och Haraway använder ordet "myt" och vilka funktioner detta ord fyller i deras texter. Jag frågar inte vad myter är och gör, utan studerar hur andra aktörer, historiskt sett, besvarat den frågan. Detta är alltså inte en studie om myter (en mytologi), utan *en studie om studier om myter* (en metamytologi), centrerad kring tre teoretiker som dessförinnan aldrig lästs som mytologer.

Är det då rimligt att närma sig Beauvoir, Daly och Haraway som mytologer? Det beror förstås på vad man menar med mytologi. Termen brukar som sagt användas för att beteckna studiet av myter. Men vad är egentligen en myt? Om detta har mytologerna aldrig enats. Vissa har likställt myter med lögner, medan andra hävdat att myter förmedlar heliga sanningar. Myter har ofta sagts innefatta gudar och gudinnor, men idag talar många mytologer om ”politiska”, ”sociala” och ”nationella” myter, centrerade kring sekulära företeelser. Somliga har påstått att myter alltid handlar om det förflutna, samtidigt som andra jämställt myter med ”bilder” av framtiden. Det existerar med andra ord en oöverskådlig mängd inkompatibla definitioner. Snarare än studiet av en särskild *sak* (till exempel en viss typ av berättelser) går

mytologin därför att betrakta som ett slagfält, varpå en mängd aktörer kämpar för att just deras definition ska vinna gehör.

För att fånga detta förhållande har jag valt att tala om mytologin som ett "nätverk", där alla lärda texter som behandlar (olika) företeelser omtalade i termer av myter ingår: *det mytologiska nätverket*. Nätverksmetaforen ska tydliggöra att texterna ifråga är sammanlänkade, i det avseende att de innefattar explicita hänvisningar till, eller idémässiga element utvunna ur, andra texter i nätverket. Samtidigt är inte alla texter förbundna på samma vis. Vissa texter åberopas ständigt. Dessa kan sägas utgöra *mytologins kanon*. Men i nätverket ingår även texter som få eller inga andra mytologer uppmärksammat. Beauvoirs, Dalys och Haraways arbeten hör till den senare kategorin.

Denna undersökning utgår emellertid ifrån att metamytologiska studier återverkar på det mytologiska nätverket. Eftersom sådana studier ofta kretsar kring redan kanoniserade verk tenderar de flesta att befästa nätverkets befintliga sammansättning. Men så måste det förstås inte vara. Genom att synliggöra vad ett feministiskt perspektiv på myter möjliggör vill jag bidra till att fler mytologer får upp ögonen för Beauvoirs, Dalys, Haraways och andra feministiska teoretikers utsagor om myter – vilket, i förlängningen, skulle förändra det mytologiska nätverkets sammansättning.

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Avhandlingens första delstudie kretsar kring filosofen och författaren Simone de Beauvoirs *Det andra könet* (*Le Deuxième Sexe*) från 1949; det första verk av en feministisk teoretiker där ordet ”myt” intar en framträdande plats.

Jag visar att Beauvoir gör bruk av ordet ”myt” på tre olika sätt. Ett fåtal gånger likställer hon myt med lögn. Betydligt oftare använder hon ”myt” för att beteckna berättelser om gudar, gudinnor och andra övernaturliga varelser. Mytologer brukar räkna sådana berättelser till en särskild litterär genre, varför den politiska teoretikern Tae-Yeoun Keum kallar dem för ”litterära” myter. Men den myt som Beauvoir tillskriver störst betydelse, ”myten om kvinnan” (*le mythe de la femme*), är vare sig en lögn eller litterär myt.

Myten om kvinnan är inte en specifik berättelse, utan en uppsättning bilder och idéer som existerar i människors medvetanden men som *kommer till uttryck* i, bland annat, berättelser av olika slag. Dessa bilder och idéer genomsyrar litterära myter, men präglar även moderna romaner och filmer, liksom

religiösa, filosofiska och vetenskapliga texter. De är, menar Beauvoir, allestädes närvarande.

Den som tror på myten om kvinnan gör gällande att kvinnan är mannens Andre, samt att det existerarar en oföränderlig kvinnlig natur (”det Evigt Feminina”), som för alltid beseglat kvinnans öde. Detta är förvisso inte sant, varför man skulle kunna kalla föreställningen för lögnaktig. Men myten om kvinnan är även mytisk i andra bemärkelser. Till skillnad från vanliga lögner härrör den, till exempel, ur ett ”mytiskt tänkande” (*pensée mythique*), kännetecknat av en oförmåga eller ovilja att inta ett reflexivt förhållningsätt till det egna medvetandets produkter (män kan följaktligen sägas hemfalla åt ett mytiskt tänkande då de vägrar erkänna att det Evigt Feminina inte existerar i verkligheten, utan enbart i deras huvuden).

I det sistnämnda hänseendet påminner myten om kvinnan om de myter som, enligt det sena 1800-talets evolutionära antropologer, dominerade tillvaron i utomeuropiska, så kallade ”primitiva” kulturer. Dessa kulturer sades representera ett tidigt utvecklingsstadium i de mänskliga samhällenas evolution; ett som ”civiliserade” folk lämnat bakom sig flera tusen år tidigare. Myter, menade antropologerna, var en produkt av det outvecklade tänkande som härskade på detta stadium, vars medlemmar – ofta kallade ”vildar” – ännu inte lärt sig att skilja mellan fakta och fiktion, det objektiva och subjektiva.

Min undersökning tydliggör att Beauvoir läst och tagit intryck av de evolutionära antropologerna. I linje med dem skiljer hon på oförnuftiga primitiva kulturer (styrda av mytiska och magiska föreställningar) och rationella civiliserade samhällen (vägledda av vetenskap). Samtidigt slår hon fast att myten om kvinnan är ”djupt förankrad hos alla män”, vilket destabiliserar denna gränsdragning. Om ”alla” män tyr sig till myten om kvinnan, betyder det att alla män, i detta avseende, beter sig som vildar.

Även de evolutionära antropologerna påstod att civiliserade samhällen hemsöktes av primitiva kvarlevor. På 1940-talet plockades denna hypotes upp för att förklara hur fascisternas och nazisternas (politiska) myter – om nationen, rasen och den stora ledaren – kunnat vinna så stort inflytande över ”oss” påstått förnuftiga västlänningar. Enligt filosofen Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945) berodde detta förödande faktum på att civiliserade människor i stunder av kris regredierar: hemfaller åt ett primitivt tankesätt, som gör att irrationella myter återigen kan få fäste. ”Ty myten har aldrig definitivt besegrats eller kuvats”, skriver Cassirer i *Myten om staten* från 1944. ”Den finns där alltid, den lurar i mörkret och bidar sin tid.”

Beauvoirs analys av det patriarkala förtrycket pekar mot en liknande slutsats. Men där Cassirer påstår att civiliserade människor enbart faller offer för mytiskt tänkande i krissituationer – då de ”rationella krafterna”, som vanligtvis reglerar tillvaron i moderna samhällen, tillfälligt förlorar sitt övertag – vidmakthåller Beauvoir att myten om kvinnan utgör en integrerad, ständigt närvarande aspekt av tillvaron i alla (patriarkala) samhällen, äldre såväl som samtida.

För att förklara närvaron av primitiva företeelser i civiliserade samhällen skyllde den evolutionära antropologins representanter på de obildade ”lägre” klasserna, som sades likna vildar i det hänseende att de ännu inte tillägnat sig ett fullt rationellt förhållningsätt till världen, något som även antogs gälla kvinnor och barn. Beauvoirs resonemang utmanar detta inflytelserika påstående. Även om ”alla” män tyr sig till myten om kvinnan är det, menar hon, män ur de påstått rationella, övre klasserna som skapat myten. Faktum är att dessa män, enligt Beauvoir, använt sitt förnuft för att försvara mytiska föreställningar, som när de nyttjat vetenskapliga metoder i syfte att bevisa det Evigt Femininas existens. Beauvoirs analys antyder därmed att *mythos* och *logos* inte utgör motsatser, utan två företeelser som ibland samverkar.

Tidigare forskning har skildrat Beauvoir som mytens svurne fiende: en ”mytoklast” vars främsta bedrift består i att ha avslöjat myten om kvinnan. I skarp kontrast framhåller jag att hon använder sig av myt.

Till att börja med visar jag att Beauvoir använder litterära myter på tre olika sätt. För det första hävdar hon att sådana berättelser bidragit till att upprätthålla patriarkala strukturer, vilket innebär att hon tillskriver dem ett *förklaringsvärde.* För det andra gör hon bruk av litterära myter som en *historiografisk resurs*, som hon utnyttjar för att kartlägga det patriarkala förtryckets historia. För det tredje närmar hon sig berättelser av detta slag som ett *fenomenologiskt redskap,* med vars hjälp hon försöker identifiera hur kvinnan ”framträder” i männens ögon.

Vidare använder Beauvoir, enligt min läsning, själva ordet ”myt” för att skapa ett nytt ”filosofiskt begrepp”, varigenom hon synliggör någonting dessförinnan osynligt, spöklikt. Beauvoirforskare har ofta framställt myten om kvinnan som en fördiskursiv företeelse: en *sak* som alltid existerat, men som Beauvoir upptäckt. Istället framhåller jag att (det filosofiska begreppet) ”myten om kvinnan” utgör en uppfinning. Detta betyder inte att Beauvoir hittat på själva de fenomen hon diskuterar under rubriken ifråga. Men genom att sammanföra just dessa fenomen under just denna rubrik möjliggör hon en ny

förståelse av dem och sättet varpå de hänger samman. I detta avseende utgör ”myten om kvinnan” ett begreppsligt verktyg som Beauvoir konstruerat.

Min undersökning visar att detta verktyg hjälper Beauvoir att artikulera en nydanande analys av det patriarkala förtrycket, som utmanar både liberala och marxistiska förklaringsmodeller. Å ena sidan hävdar Beauvoir att myten om kvinnan påverkar kvinnors situation i lika stor utsträckning som det patriarkala samhällets lagar, men att denna myt, till skillnad från de lagar som männen instiftat, inte går att avlägsna med hjälp av juridiska reformer. Därmed ifrågasätter hon det för samtida liberala feminister centrala antagandet att politiska beslut – ämnade att utöka kvinnors formella fri- och rättigheter – på egen hand kan eliminera det patriarkala förtrycket. Å andra sidan vidmakthåller Beauvoir att myter speglar både historiskt specifika ekonomiska intressen *och* transhistoriska ”ontologiska ambitioner”, vilket innebär att myten om kvinnan inte utgör en ”överbyggnad”, dömd att försvinna om den materiella ”basen” förändras. Detta skiljer Beauvoirs mytbegrepp från det marxistiska ideologibegreppet. Resonemanget antyder vidare att en socialistisk revolution inte per automatik skulle befria kvinnan, som samtida marxister påstod.

Om tidigare forskning har rätt i att Beauvoir bidrog till att grundlägga den moderna feministiska teoribildningen genom att erbjuda ett systematiskt alternativ till både liberala och marxistiska teorier om patriarkalt förtryck, visar min undersökning således att denna teoretiska tradition springer ur hennes utsagor om myter. I begynnelsen var mytologin.

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Avhandlingens andra delstudie kretsar kring teologen och filosofen Mary Dalys tre första verk: *The church and the second sex* (1968), *Beyond god the father* (1973) och *Gyn/ecology* (1978). Till skillnad från Simone de Beauvoir och Donna Haraway står Daly inte högt i kurs bland dagens feminister, som ofta anklagar henne för att ha hjälpt till att popularisera en essentialistisk och transexkluderande feminism. Min undersökning bekräftar att det finns fog för denna kritik. Samtidigt visar jag att Daly åberopar myter för att artikulera analyser och argument av flera olika slag, inklusive sådana som går att använda för att *ifrågasätta* essentialism.

Daly går i dialog med andra mytologer än Beauvoir: teologer och religionshistoriker verksamma på 1900-talet, snarare än det sena 1800-talets evolutionära antropologer. Likt antropologerna gör dessa teologer och

religionshistoriker ibland gällande att myter utgör en oförnuftig primitiv företeelse, från vars makt moderna samhällen behöver befrias. Men bland de senare finns också flera som talar om myter i positiva termer. Ja, i linje med det sena 1700-talets tyska romantiker hävdar åtskilliga teologer och religionshistoriker att det existerar sanningar som människan enbart kan närma sig med hjälp av myter. Detta antagande förenar även 1900-talets ”neo-romantiska” mytologer, från vilka Daly också lånar vissa resonemang.

The church and the second sex är en reformistisk feministisk kritik av den katolska kyrkan, delvis inspirerad av *Det andra könet.* I detta verk intar Daly en anti-essentialistisk position som vilar på antagandet att ”manligt” och ”kvinnligt” utgör historiskt föränderliga kategorier, snarare än statiska essenser. När hon talar om myter är det för att kritisera den katolska kyrkans essentialistiska kvinnosyn. Daly påstår nämligen att kyrkans hållning reflekterar och reproducerar vad hon, i linje med Beauvoir, kallar för “myten om det ’evigt feminina’” (*the ”eternal feminine” myth*). Detta begrepp åsyftar inte en särskild litterär myt – det vill säga, en berättelse om gudar, gudinnor och andra övernaturliga varelser – utan en falsk men vida spridd föreställning, enligt vilken alla kvinnor delar en oföränderlig feminin natur, underlägsen den maskulina.

För att formulera en kritik approprierar Daly teologen Harvey Coxs (f. 1929) mytbegrepp. Han talar om myter som en ”demonisk” kvarleva från ett primitivt förflutet som kyrkan måste exorcisera. Daly lånar detta resonemang, men hävdar att Cox förbiser en myt som det är särskilt viktigt att fördriva: ”den demoniska myten om det evigt feminina” (*the demonic myth of the eternal feminine*). I detta hänseende begreppsliggör Daly den feministiska kamp hon själv företräder som en naturlig förlängning av andra teologers försök att avmytologisera kristendomen, samt den äldre strid mot demoner som Jesus själv, enligt bibeln, var inblandad i. Men då själva föreställningen om demoner, enligt många samtida teologer, var att förstå som mytologisk kan Daly samtidigt sägas kritisera och bekämpa myter med ett retoriskt verktyg lånat från mytens värld.

När Daly författar sin andra bok, *Beyond god the father,* har hon övergett den katolska kyrkan till fördel för en radikalfeministisk ”postkristen” position. Hon fortsätter emellertid att försvara föreställningen om Gud som en reell, absolut transcendens (det vill säga, föreställningen om Gud som verklig, men helt och hållet bortom människans fattningsförmåga).

I detta verk går Daly i dialog med teologerna Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) och Paul Tillich (1886–1965), som båda menar att bibeln måste

”avmytologiseras”. Detta är inte detsamma som att hävda att de bibliska myterna – om, till exempel, Adam och Eva – bör elimineras. Poängen är snarare att sådana myter, enligt Bultmann och Tillich, måste tolkas, eftersom en bokstavlig läsning förvanskar den sanning som bibeln rymmer. Daly radikaliserar denna inflytelserika kritik av de bibliska myterna. Hon slår fast att dessa berättelser skapades för att rättfärdiga förtrycket av kvinnan, samt att de fortfarande fyller samma funktion. Myten om Adam och Eva – som gör gällande att syndafallet var Evas fel – håller, till exempel, liv i ”myten om den feminina ondskan” (*the myth of feminine evil*); en djupt rotad idé som hjälper till att legitimera männens envälde. I linje med den feministiska teoretikern Kate Millet (1934–2017) hävdar Daly dessutom att de kristna myterna bibehåller sitt grepp om människors omedvetna och fortsätter påverka hur vi erfar världen, långt efter att vi avfärdat dem som påhittade. Därför är det inte tillräckligt att tolka eller omtolka de kristna myterna. De måste istället förgöras.

I linje med Tillich och teologen Herbert Richardson (f. 1932) vidmakthåller Daly emellertid att vi människor behöver någon form av myter för att kunna tala om det transcendenta. Detta vare sig ”transcendens” avser Gud eller den ”självtranscendens” varigenom vi människor överskrider innevarande begränsningar i syfte att realisera vår fulla potential. Istället för att avmytologisera bibeln vill hon följaktligen *remytologisera* religionen: skapa nya myter som ska ersätta de äldre, kristna. Eftersom myter, enligt henne, speglar den samhälleliga infrastrukturen, kan den feministiska rörelsen åstadkomma en sådan remytologisering genom att förändra samhället i stort. Men min undersökning visar att Daly samtidigt försöker skapa nya myter på egen hand. Å ena sidan beskriver hon ”den kvinnliga revolutionen” som en ”manifestation av det heliga” (en *hierofani*) och ett nytt stadium i Guds utveckling (enligt Daly är gud inte ett substantiv, utan ett verb: någonting föränderligt, som blir till). Å andra sidan skriver hon fram en revisionistisk version av myten om syndafallet, som tillkännager att samtida feminister äter av kunskapens förbjudna frukt i syfte att leda både kvinnor och män ut ur patriarkatets falska paradis.

I *Beyond god the father* lånar Daly därutöver från religionshistorikern Mircea Eliade (1907–1986), som fokuserar på myternas roll i primitiva samhällen. Eliade hävdar att primitiva människor alltid försöker imitera de gärningar som gudarna, enligt deras myter, utförde i tidernas begynnelse. Därför är deras tillvaro ahistorisk och repetitiv, styrd av mytiska ”modeller” som förhindrar förnyelse. I kontrast hävdar Eliade att moderna människor lämnat detta ”mytiska beteende” bakom sig, till fördel för en helt igenom historisk existens.

Daly tar fasta på Eliades påstående att (vissa) myter kan motverka förändring, men invänder att vare sig kristna eller sekulära samhällen övergett ”den eviga återkomstens cirkel”. Detta skulle Eliade, enligt Daly ha insett, om han studerat kvinnors situation. Ty kvinnors tillvaro är fortfarande styrd av (kristna) myter, som stoppar dem från att ta plats i historien. Först nu, tack vare den kvinnliga revolutionen, är de repetitiva myternas makt äntligen på väg att brytas, hävdar Daly.

I sin tredje bok, *Gyn/ecology,* utvecklar Daly en mer systematisk feministisk teori om myter. Det grundantagande varpå denna teori vilar är att antika, kristna och sekulära myter utgör förvanskningar av äldre ”gynocentriska” myter; ett antagande som, i sin tur, bygger på rättshistorikern Johann Jakob Bachofens (1815–1887) idéer om ett förhistoriskt matriarkat. Daly påstår att de gynocentriska myterna var centrerade kring Gudinnan, som enligt henne symboliserade det gudomliga inom varje kvinna. När männen störtade den ursprungliga matriarkala ordningen författade de nya myter centrerade kring manliga gudar, vars syfte var att rättfärdiga den nya patriarkala ordningen och utradera alla tecken på kvinnors gudomliga värdighet.

Daly menar att kvinnor måste återerövra ”minnet” av sin inre gudomlighet, som ”manliga mytmakare/omtolkare” (*male myth-makers/re-makers*) försökt förtränga. I detta sammanhang har myter två funktioner att fylla. Eftersom de patriarkala myterna utgör förvanskade, spegelvända versioner (*reversals*) av de gynocentriska, kan kvinnor studera dessa och försöka vända dem rätt (*reverse the reversals*), för att på så sätt få syn på sanningen de döljer. Samtidigt hävdar Daly att alla kvinnor bär med sig den bortglömda sanningen om dem själva djupt inom sig. De kvinnor som förmår erinra sig denna sanning kan således skapa *nya* feministiska myter, där denna sanning kommer till uttryck. Jag visar att Daly framställer hela *Gyn/ecology* som en myt av det senare slaget. I detta avseende påminner hennes resonemang om neo-romantikerna Carl Gustav Jungs (1875–1961) och Joseph Campbells (1904–1987), som både göra gällande att myter kan förmedla sanningar om jaget.

I *Gyn/ecology* antyder Daly att kvinnor och män är födda med väsensskilda och oföränderliga naturer. Hon förefaller därmed ha övergett sin tidigare anti-essentialistiska position. För att förstå detta skifte betonar jag att Daly i *Gyn/ecology* gör bruk av ett annat mytbegrepp än i sina äldre verk. I *Beyond god the father* hävdar Daly att alla myter är relativa, eftersom de speglar historiskt föränderliga förhållandena. Där kan hon till och med sägas förorda en myt ämnad att påminna om detta. För en poäng med föreställningen (eller myten) om Gud som en absolut transcendens – verklig, men bortom människans

fattningsförmåga – är, enligt Daly, att den indikerar att inga mänskliga försanthållanden eller symboler är eviga. Men i *Gyn/ecology* intar Daly en romantisk position, vilket vill säga att hon nu gör gällande att vissa myter innefattar universella sanningar. Detta föranleder henne, enligt min läsning, att söka efter sådana sanningar i litterära myter, samt till att formulera egna myter som gör anspråk på att innefatta sanningar av detta slag.

Daly skriver följaktligen fram en myt helt utan gråzoner, som etablerar en entydig gräns mellan kvinnor och män, liksom mellan mellan gott och ont. Enligt denna myt är ”kvinna” någonting absolut: inte ett historiskt föränderligt begrepp som härrör ur mänskliga medvetanden, utan en objektiv realitet. I detta avseende formulerar Daly en myt som både speglar och främjar vad Beauvoir kallar för mytiskt tänkande: en ovilja eller oförmåga att inta ett reflexivt förhållningsätt till det egna medvetandets produkter. I den mån kvinnor fann denna myt tilltalande – vilket väldigt många verkar ha gjort – kan Daly därmed sägas demonstrera det mytiska tänkandets potential att engagera. Samtidigt framstår denna ”mytiska” tendens att likställa människoskapade begrepp (såsom ”kvinna”) med ahistoriska essenser som en tänkbar förklaring till varför Daly och hennes anhängare så kategoriskt avfärdar transkvinnor som inkräktande icke-kvinnor (ett avfärdande som fått ödesdigra konsekvenser för denna grupp). I detta avseende tydliggör Dalys tredje bok att det mytiska tänkandet kan vara både effektivt och farligt.

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I centrum för avhandlingens tredje och siste delstudie står vetenskapshistorikern Donna Haraway. Hennes mest kända text är ”A cyborg manifesto” (1985), som enligt henne syftar till att skapa en ”ironisk politisk myt” (*ironic politial myth*). Men detta är inte den första text vari Haraway diskuterar myter. Redan i artikeln “Animal Sociology and a Natural Economy of the Body Politic, Part II” (1978), förkunnar hon att “vetenskapen är vår myt” (*science is our myth*), en utsaga som hon upprepar i ”The Contest for Primate Nature” (1983). Detta påstående utmanar en av det västerländska tänkandets mest inflytelserika gränsdragningar: den mellan myt och vetenskap.

Det sena 1800-talets evolutionära antropologerna påstod att myter syftade till samma sak som vetenskap: att förklara för att därigenom behärska naturen. Men de hävdade samtidigt att myterna misslyckades där vetenskapen lyckades, vilket berodde på att myterna var primitiva; sprungna ut ett

outvecklat och oförnuftigt tänkande. Myter var således att förstå som en form av ovetenskaplig förvetenskap (*pre-science*), dömd att gå under när de primitiva samhällena civiliserades. Haraway förkastar denna slutsats. Men jag menar att hon ändå inte åstadkommer ett definitivt brott med den tradition varur slutsatsen härrör: en tradition som fortsätter uppmuntra västerländska mytologer att definiera och omdefiniera ”vår” vetenskap i relation till ”deras” – de primitivas – myter.

Haraway är inte den första som ifrågasätter föreställningen om myter som vetenskapens oförnuftiga och ovetenskapliga antites. Redan 1962 invänder antropologen Claude Lévi-Strauss att vildarnas myter utgör en legitim form av vetenskap, som dessutom producerat användbara resultat. Men han påstår ändå inte att modern vetenskap utgör ”vår” myt. Tvärtom vidmakthåller Lévi-Strauss att det existerar en viktig skillnad mellan dessa två företeelser. Till skillnad från moderna vetenskapsmän är nämligen primitiva mytmakare, enligt honom, oförmögna eller ovilliga att överskrida de begränsningar som lokala, kulturella och samhälleliga omständigheter ställer i deras väg. Symbolerna de använder för att skapa sina myter har vildarna ärvt från den lokala kulturen, som redan laddat dem med en viss innebörd. Detta innebär att myter, till skillnad från moderna vetenskapliga teorier, alltid reflekterar och reproducerar den givna kulturella och samhälleliga kontexten.

På 1970-talet utmanar flera inflytelserika vetenskapsteoretiker – som Bruno Latour, Steve Woolgar, Robert M. Young, Barry Barnes och Karl M. Figlio – denna distinktion. Ty de menar att även modern vetenskap utgör en i högsta grad kontextbunden aktivitet, påverkad av historiskt föränderliga faktorer. I detta avseende har ”vår” vetenskap någonting gemensamt med ”deras” myter. Haraway delar denna förståelse av vetenskapen som kontextbunden. Det är, förklarar hon, ingen slump att biologer verksamma i en patriarkal kultur främst studerar handjur; eller att de – delvis till följd av detta begränsade urval – producerar teorier som antyder att män bidragit till den evolutionära utvecklingen i högre grad än kvinnor. Detta, det faktum att vetenskapliga teorier, enligt Haraway, speglar det samhälle som de är en produkt utav – varför de inte kan sägas utgöra en uppsättning objektiva sanningar – hjälper oss att förstå varför hon hävdar att vetenskapen är ”vår” myt.

Men vetenskapen är även att förstå som ”vår” myt i andra bemärkelser. Till att börja med hävdar Haraway att vetenskapsmän producerar ”berättelser” (*stories*) som ofta liknar litterära ursprungsmyter i det avseende att de försöker förklara nuet och peka ut en väg framåt genom att vända blicken bakåt, mot ett avlägset ursprung (av, exempelvis, evolutionärt slag). Likt många

antropologer hävdat att litterära myter gör i primitiva samhällen påverkar dessa vetenskapliga berättelser dessutom hur människor erfar naturen och definierar det naturliga, vilket innebär att de, enligt Haraway, utövar ett stort inflytande över hur ”vi” förstår oss själva och vår värld.

Men även om ”vår” vetenskap liknar ”deras” myter i alla ovannämnda hänseenden existerar är det väl så att myter speglar subjektiva – oftast felaktiga – föreställningar om naturen och det naturliga, medan vetenskapen skildrar naturen som den faktiskt är? Haraway ifrågasätter också denna distinktion. Hon hävdar nämligen att vetenskapen ”uppfinner”, snarare än ”upptäcker”, naturen och det naturliga. Vetenskapliga berättelser är inte, menar Haraway, neutrala avbildningar, utan tolkningar, betingade av, bland annat, samhälleliga strukturer. Och eftersom samhället fortsätter att förändras kommer vetenskapen aldrig nå fram till en slutgiltig tolkning eller fullständigt objektiv beskrivning.

Genom att karaktärisera vetenskapen som ”vår” myt försöker Haraway, enligt min läsning, klargöra både varför och hur feminister bör närma sig denna institution. Om vetenskapen har lika stor makt över ”vår” världsbild och självförståelse som myter har över ”deras”, måste feminister förstås engagera sig i vetenskapens utformning. Men om vetenskapen är ”vår” myt i det att den uppfinner, snarare än upptäcker, naturen och det naturliga ställer detta särskilda krav på feministiska vetenskapare. Då bör de inte nöja sig med att försöka korrigera icke-feministiska vetenskapliga teorier i syfte att eliminera maskulina myter, i bemärkelsen fördomar eller falska föreställningar. Istället bör de betrakta sig själva som mytmakare med uppgift att omdefiniera – eller, som Haraway själv skriver, *återuppfinna* – naturen och det naturliga.

Som jag redan nämnt tar Haraway själv på sig rollen som mytmakare i “A cyborg manifesto”, vari hon säger sig försöka skapa en ironisk politisk myt. Jag uppfattar detta som en mot-myt som ska utmana det Haraway i samma text talar om som ”myten om ursprunglig enhet” (*the myth of original unity*). Detta är inte en litterär myt om gudar och gudinnor, utan en djupt rotad föreställning som präglar både litterära myter och berättelser av andra slag, inklusive vetenskapliga teorier. Haraway menar, till exempel, att feminister reproducerar myten om ursprunglig enhet då de påstår att det existerar en för alla kvinnor gemensam, ursprunglig essens. För att utmana detta antagande gör Haraway gällande att kvinnor – ja, egentligen alla människor – är ”cyborger”: hybridvarelser som saknar en given natur eftersom att de är en produkt av både biologi och teknologi (i detta sammanhang innefattar begreppet teknologi ”verktyg” av en mängd slag, från bioteknik till det skrivna

ordet). I egenskap av cyborger har kvinnor alltså inget annat val än att ge upp jakten på en ursprunglig enhet.

Samtidigt poängterar Haraway att myter – inklusive hennes egen cyborgmyt – inte utgör objektiva beskrivningar av verkligheten. Istället likställer hon myter med ”koder” som gör det möjligt att ”läsa” världen. Cyborgmyten hjälper feminister att ”omkoda” – eller omtolka – verkligheten: att förstå den och sig själva annorlunda. Men den är bara en kod bland andra. Alla koder medför dessutom någon form av informationsbortfall eller ”brus” (*noice*), vilket vill säga att koder tillhandahåller ofullständiga perspektiv, som inte förmår fånga alla aspekter av verkligheten.

Det faktum att cyborgmyten öppet kungör att den utgör en myt i ovannämnda bemärkelse är en av de saker som gör den till en ”ironisk” politisk myt. Jag menar, närmare bestämt, att Haraway gör bruk av en ”romantisk” ironi (en form av ironi uppkallad efter de tyska romantikerna). Litteraturvetare brukar jämställa romantisk ironi med den form av illusionsbrott som författare åstadkommer när de, i skönlitterära verk, själva betonar att det är fiktion som läsaren sysselsätter sig med. Haraway använder sig av detta litterära grepp då hon i sitt manifest framhåller att hennes myt inte utgör en objektiv beskrivning av verkligheten, utan en av flera möjliga ”koder” eller tolkningar. Den romantiska ironin innefattar därutöver en särskild världsåskådning, sprungen ur övertygelsen att det är omöjligt att nå fram till en absolut sanning om jaget eller världen. Denna övertygelse kräver att ironiska författare ifrågasätter gränsen mellan verklighet och fiktion, praktiserar självkritik, utmanar etablerade dikotomier, samt skapar utrymme för tvetydigheter och paradoxer – vilket Haraway, som tidigare forskning ofta påtalat, gör i sitt manifest.

Med hjälp av den romantiska ironin försöker Haraway, enligt min läsning, skapa en myt som inte generar det icke-reflexiva förhållningsätt som Simone de Beauvoir kallar för mytiskt tänkande. I det att cyborgmyten proklamerar att den inte representerar en absolut sanning – ja, att det inte ens existerar några sådana sanningar – uppmuntrar den mottagaren att ifrågasätta försanthållanden (inklusive de försanthållanden som Haraway själv reproducerar), idka självkritik och acceptera tvetydigheter av olika slag.

Frågan är bara om en ironisk myt – som motverkar mytiskt tänkande och främjar reflexivitet – också kan bli en *effektiv* myt? I sin bok *Tankar om våld* (1908), slår filosofen George Sorel (1847–1922) fast att myter utgör effektiva politiska redskap just därför att de föder ett okritiskt, hängivet förhållningsätt. En myt som fostrar en ironisk distans är således ingen myt, enligt Sorel.

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I avhandlingens avslutande del diskuterar jag mytens roll i dagens samhällen. Här går åsikterna isär.

En första grupp tänkare menar att myternas makt tilltagit på senare tid, på bekostnad av fakta, förnuftiga argument och sanningen själv (vi lever, menar dessa personer, i ”post-sanningens” tidevarv). Som ansvariga för denna utveckling lyfter man ofta fram ”populister” som Donald Trump – men också ”postmoderna” filosofer, som sägs ha underminerat tilltron till sanning genom att premiera *mythos* på bekostnad av *logos*. En annan grupp hävdar emellertid att myter alltid varit viktigare för oss människor än sanningen; ja, att myter – i bemärkelsen gemensamma, fiktiva berättelser – möjliggjort all samhällelig utveckling. En tredje grupp erkänner att (de populistiska) myternas makt förefaller ha ökat på senare tid och att detta utgör ett problem, men vidmakthåller att myter inte går att bekämpa med fakta och sanna påståenden allena, varför demokratins försvarare måste skaffa egna myter. Avslutningsvis finns det en fjärde grupp tänkare som påstår att samtidens största problem – klimatkrisen, till exempel – sammanhänger med att vi *saknar* myter, i stånd att förena och motivera människor.

I förhållande till diskussioner av detta slag bidrar min undersökning med två viktiga insikter. För det första tydliggör den vad samtida och framtida mytologer riskerar att förbise, om de inte inkorporerar ett feministiskt perspektiv. Jag vill, mer precist, hävda att produktiva diskussioner om mytens roll i dagens samhällen behöver ta hänsyn till det faktum att många myter, enligt Beauvoir, Daly, Haraway och flera andra feministiska teoretiker, speglar, legitimerar och upprätthåller – men också gör det möjligt att utmana – patriarkala strukturer.

För det andra tydliggör min undersökning varför det är missvisande att, som många mytologer gör idag, närma sig myter som en särskild *sak*, vars vara och värde går att definiera en gång för alla. Ty jag visar att ordet ”myt” är ett redskap som olika aktörer – inklusive Beauvoir, Daly och Haraway – använder på olika sätt, för att åstadkomma olika saker. Ambitionen att tillhandahålla en slutgiltig definition riskerar följaktligen att fostra mytiskt tänkande: en oförmåga eller ovilja att inta att reflexivt förhållningsätt till det egna medvetandets produkter (vilket i detta fall avser till den specifika definition man själv uppfunnit).

Därmed inte sagt att vi bör avstå varje definitionsförsök. Paradoxalt nog synliggör min undersökning både att alla definitioner av ordet ”myt” är

situationsbundna *och* att Beauvoir, Daly och Haraway åstadkommer något av vikt, just genom att tillhandahålla nya definitioner. Men jag menar att dessa två insikter går att kombinera. Vi kan fortsätta försöka definiera ”myt”, samtidigt som vi har i åtanke att ingen definition är slutgiltig. Istället för att fråga huruvida en viss definition fångar mytens ahistoriska essens (det vill säga, vad myter *egentligen* är och gör) bör vi då fråga vilka argument och analyser den möjliggör, liksom vad den osynliggör. Det är just så jag i denna studie har närmat mig de ofta förbisedda definitioner som Beauvoir, Daly och Haraway skriver fram.

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As the first study of its kind, this work uncovers the intertwined histories of feminism and mythology (the study of myth). Through the writings of Simone de Beauvoir, Mary Daly and Donna Haraway, it reveals that mythology has served as a resource from which feminists have drawn to articulate arguments of great importance for the historical development of feminist theory. Simultaneously, it demonstrates that these same feminist arguments challenge the very premises on which much modern mythology rests. Thereby, this study also offers novel perspectives on contemporary issues such as the role of myth in today's world.

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Myth and Feminist Theory: Beauvoir, Daly & Haraway is his doctoral dissertation.