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The Contextualization of Myth: Identification of Myth in the Propagation of Narrative Across Generational Boundaries

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THE CONTEXTUALIZATION OF MYTH: IDENTIFICATION OF MYTH IN THE PROPAGATION OF NARRATIVE ACROSS GENERATIONAL BOUNDARIES

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis demonstrates the unique correlation between myth and the propagation of narrative across generational boundaries. It argues that myth occurs in the intersection of belief, semiotics, and context, and further enables a way of re-encoding a narrative with a dual contextuality. This dual context preserves a narrative's literal context while endowing it with a new or modified myth context and affords the audience a selection of choices for how to receive a narrative experienced as myth. To demonstrate this correlation a Myth Context Reception Model is designed for the purpose of identifying ascendent, obscure or emergent myths evident in an audience's reception of narrative, as a result the paradoxical human beliefs and behaviors the audience imposes upon narratives appropriated as myth. Three over-arching narratives, classical myth, Santa Claus, and Batman are then evaluated as exemplars, using the procedures defined by the model, to demonstrate that myth can influence the propagation of a narrative across many generations and in ways we might not expect. And to show that myth is a powerful a rhetoric that is stealthily obscure, remarkably ubiquitous, and resilient. Even in the modern day.

Keywords: myth, context, mimesis, semiotics, generation, lifespan, belief, paradox, appropriation, imitation, obscure myth, emergent myth, ascendent myth, paradoxical belief, appropriative imitation, reverse-mimesis

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, and to everyone (most especially my stepmother), who were so kind and gave so much time and effort to try and fill some part of the void created by my mother's passing.

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To my children, thank you for your patience and support. Yes, even dads go back to school.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Whether a cave-dwelling society from a hundred-thousand years ago, the societies of ancient Egypt or Greece, or a society of the modern day, humans have sometimes sought to communicate in ways that transcend the limits of their time on Earth. Art on a cave wall, hieroglyphs in an Egyptian tomb, and electronic books written with the aid of a computer all tell similar stories. We lived, we experienced life, and these writings communicate to those who come after us what we want the world to know about us. But the human need for narrative, for story, is much broader than a simple need to record and archive histories. We use narrative to communicate, to entertain, to convey to others what we have learned from our experiences. But more importantly, we use narrative for the critical function of preserving and perpetuating, beyond our limited lifespans, the general essence of our characters, our consciousness, or our emotional responses to experiences. Yet, from the cave wall to the computer screen, a significant question to raise is: What is the probability that any of the narratives that we create will live on in the minds of generations that follow us? Is it a foregone conclusion that all that is necessary for a narrative to survive, is for it to be archived? Will any of it function as more than just a record? More than just a historical footnote? Is any of it "guaranteed" to become part of the consciousness of future generations? Will it be part of their living essence the same way it was for us? Or will it be nothing more than a simple record, without any of the life, excitement, or character that we experienced conveyed by it? For that matter, is it reasonable to even have an expectation that any of it will be experienced similarly to how we experienced it? While there may be support for the argument that the narratives we create today can never be fully

experienced in the distant future, especially exactly the same way we experience them today, it has always been, it is today, and will always be, a product of human nature to try. Which narratives become timeless and which will be lost to time? From a lifespan communication perspective, the processes of the transmission of narratives from one generation to the next and processes of narrative perpetuation within subsequent generations are highly relevant and significant questions that this MA thesis seeks to begin to address.

1.1 SOCIETY'S NEED FOR NARRATIVE

For as long as we have engaged in communication with each other, we have always told stories. Over the course of human history, the humble story, or narrative, has been used to capture the character of each generation from which it was woven. Time and again, narratives have been used to convey records of history, to entertain, to teach, and to persuade. And for purposes of this thesis, narratives have also been used to convey the very fabric of a generation or culture's essence to future generations. But why do some narratives, and the ideas they promote, live on for millennia, evolving and growing, while other narratives die a quiet but sudden death in the shadow of their own conception? Is there a mechanism or communicative process that is significantly influential upon any narrative's potential longevity and experiential quality? And within the time that literacy and orality have existed, is it reasonable to assume that the simple act of recording a narrative for posterity, duplication, or dissemination, is enough to ensure that a narrative will *live* on?

1.2 CONSTRAINTS UPON NARRATIVE PERPETUATION

Any narrative or text can be recorded for posterity and presumably exist in its recorded state for all eternity or, more realistically, can exist for at least as long as humans care to maintain the record of that narrative. After recording a narrative, as an artifact it can exist

silently, as in a secluded and dark tomb, or live vibrantly and in constant evolution within some (or many) humans minds. Or it can become a part of the code of human DNA for future communi-biological use (Hulse, 2017, p. 14). To the extent that any recorded narrative will live vibrantly in the collective or sub-collective human consciousness, passed exuberantly from one generation to the next, the narrative itself must, at the very least, somehow be interesting-enough and compelling-enough to persuade enough people to focus their attention upon the narrative. These successive generations of audience must then also desire to experience, repeatedly re-experience, and then repeatedly re-integrate the narrative into their collective consciousness, over and over and over. Further, each audience must then find ways to convince successive generations of audiences to do the same, and they must also hold out hope that this process can continue infinitely across many generations and great spans of time.

Indeed, we know this happens. Strauss and Howe (1991) argued clearly that "through our cross-generational relationships, we communicate across eras of mind-bending length" (p. 425). But what incentives are there for future generations to reach into our "tombs" and resurrect our narratives for themselves and future audiences to receive? Especially when this endeavor, the perpetuation of narrative, as a record of a prior generation's history, experiences, and imaginations, is often impeded by significant cultural or societal constraints typically caused by differential generational conditions. Differences in life experiences, opinions, beliefs, perceptions, cultural sensitivities, and affect, traits well known to significantly differentiate generational audiences separated by even the shortest distances of time, can impose significant barriers to acceptance, or understanding, of generational narratives. Another constraint that can occur is one of persuasion. Perpetuation of narrative must cope with the difficulty that only a handful of successive generations will have the benefits of the living presence of the prior

generation that conceived the narrative in question. These successive generations may be denied the opportunity to converse with the generations that forged the original narratives, and therefore may be denied the opportunity to be persuaded of the narrative's value as it was originally conceived, or intended, by the generation that authored the narrative. Further, preservation of that narrative may be adversely affected by that originating generation's own mortality and their resulting inability to continue as caretaker of their own narratives. The imperative, finally, is this. The problem is that a generation which conceives any narrative, if it desires the narrative to perpetuate or live on, must somehow endeavor to imbue the narrative with the very seeds of that narrative's potential for longevity and self-perpetuation. I will argue in this thesis that myth is a critical seed.

1.3 THE PROBLEM OF MYTH

Every generation will create a significant sum of narratives that have the potential to outlive that generation's time. However, the preservation of a narrative's literal form is a limited part of the narrative's persistence and stamina. Narrative can be preserved as a written record for many millennia. Its literal scope potentially unwavering and resilient. But will it remain fresh in the consciousness of each successive generation? Will any part of its original signification survive the generation that created it? And how might that signification change or evolve as it leaps from one generation to the next? More than what is written, or even what is told, it is our perception of the world around us, at the time the story is told, that molds our perception and conscious experience of these narratives (Strauss & Howe, 1991, pp. 9, 34). The historical time we live in functions as a lens through which we perceive any narrative, and there is no greater perception or experience that a narrative can produce than for the narrative to be received as myth. Since the time of Plato and Socrates, myth was believed to possess great power that could

be manipulated to shape societies (Murray, 2011, p. 183). Narratives that become myth speak profoundly for the generations that created them and the generations current and future that will enthusiastically appropriate them. But myth is so much more than a perception of narrative. Myth possesses the power to endow its form with great persistence and longevity across many generations (Brisson, 2004, p. 15), and myth possesses a sentient quality quite frequently recognized as nothing less than life embodied (Birenbaum, 1988, p. 235), or a "life form" (Von Hendy, 2002, p. 156). But what is myth? And how does one identify a narrative to be myth?

Becoming mythic involves a complex alteration of an existing narrative. Because it has a unique multi-contextual and contradictory nature, it often has a way of shrewdly redirecting or obfuscating our sense of what it really is. I suggest that we are typically conditioned to think of myth as being something exclusively of a classical or primitive origin that possesses a deep and historically complex cultural pedigree. For example, Joseph Campbell said that "When we think about mythology, we usually think either of the Greek mythology or of the biblical mythology." (Campbell & Moyers, 1991, p. 88), and that "One of our problems today is that we are not well acquainted with the literature of the spirit. We're interested in the news of the day and the problems of the hour." (Campbell & Moyers, 1991, p. 1). Further, I suggest we are prone to think of myth as being irrelevant. Doty (2000) implicated our modern dependence upon science as the cause of our tendency "to assume that we are above the 'primitive' need for myth, that science does away with the necessity for mythic expression or belief" (p. 92). This "tendency" is further reinforced by the observation that, for society today, myth is considered synonymous with the "cultural", while science synonymous with the "natural" (Doty, 2000, p. 89). I suggest, therefore, that we commonly perceive myth to be exclusively something for the conveyance of an ethereal sense of a distant age, antiquity, and culture that can only be experienced through myth. For

example, the unnatural half human-half animal creatures of distant Greek mythology, such as centaurs, sirens, or minotaurs, are argued to be easily recognizable and immediately apparent as myth (Woodford, 2011, p. 159). Or as Andrew Von Hendy (2002) put it, "myth and mythos redescribe a preexistent reality" (p. 312). In other words, we allow myth to function as a portal through space and time that permits us the unusual ability to experience antiquity through its instantly apparent mythical nature. So powerful is this ability that we often perceive the Greek legacy as the exclusive experience of myth. It should be no surprise then, with such temporally charged views of myth being so common, that myth should in some way be implicated in the process of cross-generational communication.

But there are other complications when it comes to myth. Such as, how do we define myth? Harvey Birenbaum (1988) argued that it is not possible to provide an "absolute definition of myth," asserting instead that myth can be defined from a subset of descriptive components dependent upon the discipline from which myth is being examined (p. xiv). The difficulty regarding the framing of myth is largely a result of whether it is framed relative to literature, theology, philosophy, rhetoric, science, psychology, anthropology, sociology, or history (Birenbaum, 1988, p. xi). Indeed, myth can appear to be as elusive a science as it is an elusive idea. Robert Alan Segal (2004) asserted that "There are no theories of myth itself, for there is no discipline of myth in itself…There is no study of myth as myth" (p. 2). Further, any attempts to explain myth by way of rule, form, or function, as opposed to lived and believed experience, was argued to occur at the cost of turning myth into an observational reduction (Liszka, 1989, p. 10), a consequence that often results in the loss of myth's meaning. As Birenbaum (1988) eloquently argued, myth exists primarily in the realm of human consciousness and experience (p. xii). This thesis is thus aware that any attempt to define a thoroughly complex theoretical framework that

comprehensively incorporates the larger bodies of the form, function, structure, reference, style, genre, and use of myth would require so significant an undertaking that this thesis has neither the time nor space to afford. But it does not accept the postulate that myth is, or can be, reducible to that simply of a literary genre, an oral mode of memory storage, or a teaching tool. Claude Lévi-Strauss (1981) asserted that "myths tell us nothing instructive about the order of the world, the nature of reality, or the origin and destiny of mankind", arguing instead that myth exposes the structural fabric of the culture that harbors the myth (pp. 66 – 67). In other words, it exposes the consciousness of the generation that created the narrative now perceived as myth.

And then there is the problem of how do we know when myth is present in the narrative? I suggest we are prone to think, albeit mistakenly, that myth should be always immediately obvious to us. The earlier citation on Woodford's (2011) views of what makes myth recognizable or apparent (p. 159), allude to this potential problem. But is myth only apparent in the obvious expression of the Greek legacy? Is it only a matter of antiquity? If that were the case, then it could have little or no function in the modern day. It would have no relevance as a means of perpetuating narrative for anyone but ancient Greek culture, and it is inconceivable that myth is only the province of a handful of Greek Gods.

Based on my review of the varied and extensive literature about myth, as well as my related studies in lifespan communication I postulate four necessary conceptual conditions for a narrative to function as a means of cross-generational communication: (1) it must in some way be relevant to at least two generations, that is, be relevant to their generational concerns and experiences; (2) it must somehow be present throughout both generations whether it is relevant to the simplest of narratives and/or the most sophisticated of narrative tragedies or epics; (3) it should be active within at least two generations' vernaculars during the historical time of that

generation; and (4) it should have the ability to produce effects upon the stories told of at least one subsequent generation's experiences. That is, it must somehow support a connection between "modern" urban myth and myth of "antiquity," or else why would myth of antiquity have managed to become the hallmark of hundreds of generations of cross-generational communication efforts?

1.4 RESEARCH STATEMENT

I argue in this thesis that myth is a powerful rhetorical communication process with a unique ability to overcome generational resistance and thus influence the perpetuation of its host narrative across generational boundaries. Specifically, I argue that myth, as a result of its unique 2nd order structure, permits a dual contextuality to occur within the reception of narratives appropriated from prior generations. And as myth, a narrative can be embodied with a powerful resilience with the ability to ignore paradoxical conditions within the reception of a narrative and thereby contribute to a narrative's ability to overcome its own potential mortality, as well as overcome any resistance a future generation may possess regarding the narrative.

To accomplish this, in Chapter 2, I provide a literature review establishing a core theoretical framework distilling the aforementioned postulates to frame a conceptual model that can be used to evaluate narrative for its potential reception as myth. It will define the constraints upon cross-generational perpetuation of narrative, define narrative relative its mimetic context, then it will contrast that to the semiotic context of myth using the work performed in Barthesian Semiotics to lay a groundwork for why myth is relevant. Finally, the thesis will establish the common relationship between belief and myth to show how myth in the modern day is compatible with the myth of antiquity, and to cross-generational communication. In Chapter 3, I construct a Myth Context Reception Model using the core theoretical framework built upon the

paradoxicality of myth. The model will attempt to discern the core attributes of myth, define a potential lifespan for myth, and will define the contextual, appropriative, paradoxical, and imitative qualities of myth reception that indicate myth's presence and highlight the conditions for a generation's willingness to acquire narratives outside the scope of content a generation might view as favorable. The purpose of this model is to address the core problem of how one determines when myth is present and active in relation to a given narrative. In Chapter 4, I offer a sample of existing narratives and analyze them using the model. I provide three examples of a cross-generational myth reception that is positively occurring, relative to the narrative, across multiple generations. In the first I will use an exemplar with a rich historical pedigree to demonstrate how a narrative both succeeds and fails at cross-generational propagation, and in the two that follow I will use exemplars that are more modern but also demonstrate successful cross-generational myth reception in variable ways. I conclude in Chapter 5 that myth permits a generation the unique ability to appropriate a legacy narrative for use as myth despite any literalness the generation might have normally resisted from the prior generation's source narrative.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Myth is ensnared in a dialectic that commonly promotes ‘classical myth’, a phenomenon where primitive cultures, including the traditional Greek legacy, leveraged the mythic for art or religion (Campbell, 1997, pp. 1-9), on one side, and ‘modern myth’, such as that promoted by Roland Barthes (2012), on the other. As illustrated by the contemporary essays in his seminal work *Mythologies,* Barthes (2012) demonstrated myth to be present in many modern “urban” narratives. Further, and quite ironically, myth in this broader modern context is understood to be less obvious, if not completely transparent (Barthes, 2012, pp. 240-242; Lévi-Strauss, 1995, p. 3). Such is the condition that myth finds itself a part of. At once the obvious expression and experience of the Greek legacy that is paradoxically a limited part of the greater, but less obvious, myth whole that Barthes is recognized to have significantly contributed to (Dowden & Livingstone, 2011, pp. 17-18). Barthes (2012) did argue that everything had the potential to be myth (pp. 217–218). While it might be difficult to fathom how all speech is, or could be, myth, it is further inconceivable to assume that myth only ever existed in antiquity or as the result of classical literature. This thesis takes the position that myth is alive, well, and thriving in the modern world, and can be found if we know where and what to look for and is a fundamental element of inter-generational communication. I will therefore attempt to create a theoretical framework for myth from as narrow a perspective possible while maintaining a core alignment with semiotics, maintaining relevancy to the thesis topic, and maintaining a connection with what is arguably myth’s most important qualities, the phenomenon of its appropriative, persuasive, and paradoxical natures. To that end, I will seek to build upon the work of Barthes to

demonstrate that myth can be fundamentally indiscriminate, spontaneous, and stealthy. In other words, within an audience or culture, sometimes myth just happens, and I argue that this spontaneity can occur as an unintended phenomenon, where a narrative never intended or expected to be myth, simply transforms, or as Barthes argued, distorts, into myth. Alternatively, a narrative fully intended to be myth may fail in that endeavor, but when the narrative is appropriated, and myth does emerge, regardless the narrative's intention, this distortion can be so stealthily silent that it can occur without the conscious awareness of the creator of the work, a large and significant segment of its audience and their culture or generation at large. Finally, once it is myth, obvious or not, it will exhibit the potential to grow, using any and all belief in the myth, by its audience, to overcome its paradoxical nature until it is ultimately imitated by its audience and ascends from speech into a 'living essence' capable of promoting its source narrative across significant generational boundaries.

2.1 THE GENERATIONAL CONSTRAINT

2.1.1 Common Limits to Narrative Perpetuation

There is an abundance of evidence in common history that will effectively attest to the potential difficulty of a narrative to overcoming cross generational boundaries. This can be seen most clearly in narratives that are susceptible to culture change or generational social change. Narratives regarding the British Crown in America were far different in the Revolutionary War era of the late 1770s than they were in the 50 to 100 years prior that time, or today. Narratives regarding NAZI Germany were far different following the end of the war, and with the subsequent discoveries of sites like Auschwitz and Buchenwald, than prior to Neville Chamberlain's signing of the Munich Agreement in 1938. We see this even today. The former dominant and positive narratives of "sacrifice," "family," "honor," and "remembrance,"

regarding the numerous Confederate war memorials found in southern American states, is today dominated by narratives depicting these memorials to be negative representations of racism, hate, and angst. Per the adage, times change. But is resistance to former narratives, previously perceived without controversy by most, strictly a matter of post-wartime reconciliation? Or is it just that these events are obvious to all? Is the need of the current generation to redefine these narratives, formerly perceived positively by some, into new narratives perceived negative by all, unique to just this generation? Or is there something much larger at work here regarding the willingness of one generation to accept or deny the narratives of a prior generation?

2.1.2 Generational Limits to Narrative Perpetuation

Strauss and Howe (1991) in defining their theory of generations, demonstrated the clear cyclical and repetitious nature of their model that is evident over more than 400 years of American history (pp. 80-97). Strauss and Howe (1991) proposed that any generation can be isolated or identified as a generational "cohort-group" with a temporal span of about 22 years (p. 34), and that any four consecutive 22-year generations comprise a generational constellation (p. 31). As a member of a "cohort-group," each person, that is a member of a generation, is generally born into their generational designation (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 44). Strauss and Howe (1991) argue that each generation possess a unique "peer personality" defined as "a set of collective behavioral traits and attitudes that later expresses itself throughout a generation's lifecycle trajectory" (p. 32), asserting that the "peer personality" of a single generation will always be unique from the peer personalities of other generations in the relative constellation (pp. 63, 73). Further, Strauss and Howe (1991) argue that these generational peer personalities recur in a persistent cyclical repetition of four personality types identified as "Idealist, Reactive, Civic, and Adaptive" (pp. 33-35), and that for each generation, their personality type is relational

and responsive to a recurring and alternating cycle of social moments, a crisis or an awakening, that typically occur in alternating repetition approximately 44 years apart (pp. 71-74). Most notable, Strauss and Howe (1991) assert that a generational response to a crisis social moment results in society's attempt at "reordering the outer world of institutions and public behavior," while a generational response to an awakening social moment results in society's attempt at "changing the inner world of values and private behavior" (p. 71). Lastly, in recognizing that each generation will seek to offer something unique of itself to the next generation, Strauss and Howe (1991) identify this act as a generational endowment (pp. 39, 369), and define the endowment effort of each generation to be intrinsically associative of that generation's peer personality for the purpose of promoting its own self-image and legacy (p. 369 – 370). Some examples of a transgenerational endowments provided by Strauss and Howe (1991) include poetry (p. 369), art (p. 369), spiritual capital (p. 369), and "the writing of great literature" (p. 39).

To summarize, every individual is a member of a generation defined by a specific temporal period into which the individual was born. Their generation will possess a unique collective character and collective identity called a peer personality. This peer personality may at times find itself to be driven to reorder or change the world created by itself or previous generations, their response will be dependent upon the larger nature of the social moments each generation will directly experience within their respective cycle, while also attempting to take ownership of any endowment for the sake of promoting their own generation's peer personality. In other words, every generation will, to some degree, seek to write their own narratives about themselves and the history of the generations that preceded them, and/or outright reject and dismantle the narratives of preceding generations if those narratives are not suitable to the sensitivities of the current generation's view of the world. With such conditions lying in wait for

the narratives a generation creates, what chance does a narrative have to resist and survive? Since this thesis relies heavily on the assertion that narrative is a dominant source of myth, it will now define narrative and its mimetic role in the myth making process.

2.2 MIMETIC NARRATIVE

2.2.1 Narrative

Cobley (2001) describes narrative as the "showing or the telling of these events [story and plot] and the mode selected for that to take place" (p. 5 – 6), adding further that it occurs as a "sequence which starts and moves inexorably to its end" (p. 9). Narrative occurs as a telling of a story that is situated in a time displaced from the time of the telling (Dowling, 2011, p. 10-11). This division of time within narrative can further be examined through the study of sequential (syntagmatic) relations in semiotics (Chandler, 2007, p. 114). Narrative, for the purpose of this thesis, has a direct and special relation to the concept of myth (Doty, 2000, p. 6; Hatab, 1990, p. 17; Segal, 2004, p. 4), and is assumed to be created by some generation, containing material that can be written about practically anything, but is assumed to commonly include a mimetic reproduction of something that interests that generation and is intended for reception by its own generation and/or generations that preceded it or follows it.

2.2.2 Mimesis

Narrative is commonly considered to be a "mimesis," or is in some way, mimetic in nature. In its simplest form, mimesis is understood as imitation (Lyons & Nichols, 1982, p. 1). From a literary perspective, mimesis is taken to be an imitation of life accomplished with a degree of verisimilitude (Hume, 1984, p. 20; Lamarque & Olsen, 1994, p. 72). As argued by Lyons and Nichols (1982), "Literature, like the other arts, is therefore an imitation of some reality outside itself" (p. 1). And further, it was the view of Plato that a mimetic reproduction

was a relation "between appearances and reality" (Boyd, 1968, pp. 8-9). A mimetic narrative is therefore an artistic imitation of some reality. In other words, a narrative is an artistic device with an "appearance" that can be similar to some "real thing" a narrative is written about, and what is being written about can be an event, an idea, or even a social concept.

In the form of literature, written narrative, or art, the imitation is considered to take the form of a *representational mimesis* (Schaeffer & Vultur, 2005), while imitation involving human re-enactment of the narrative is considered an *imitative mimesis* (Cobley, 2001, p. 62). However, mimesis is not considered to be exclusively a matter of representation or imitation. It is also recognized in the context of a social practice, evident in Aristotle's view that the practice of author or artist as imitator is synonymous with making (Boyd, 1968, p. 21). In other words, whether representational or imitative, mimesis is defined as an act of creating something. It is as much a social process as an object or product of imitative description. Further, Aristotle applies this view to the audience as well. For example, Boyd (1968) tells us that:

> Aristotle's view of literature as mimesis, or an imitation of human life, best stated the fundamental nature of the Classical literary achievement, and his view of its function for the audience as pleasurable contemplation most faithfully reflected the minimal demands of such literature. (p. 1)

In the larger context, mimesis involves not just the author but the reader or spectator of the artwork as well, because the mimesis is created for consumption by an audience. In other words, the distinction of narrative is highly relevant in regard to the audience that consumes it (Rabinowitz, 1987, pp. 20, 21, 95, 98). Further, mimesis is seen in the contemporary view of "art imitating life" (Dowling, 2011, p. 1), and is established with a clear and direct connection between narrative and audience. The directionality of the mimesis is generally expected to

proceed from life, as the example, to art, as the reproduction. With the author or artist acting as the agent that moves the mimesis, which can be significantly or minimally imitative, in the direction from life to art. The act of mimesis production therefor implicates a generation's social role in the process of producing narratives such that some of those narratives are fully anticipated to imitate or resemble in appearance, the life or consciousness of that generation, in some appreciable way.

Michael Riffaterre posited that a mimetic reading of a text is to understand the text in its literal sense, while a semiotic reading of the same text is to understand the text in its figurative sense (Scholes, 1982, p. 42). Barthes (2012) articulates much the same idea when he tells us that myth can be defined by its literal sense as well as its intention (p. 234), and in contrasting myth's literal form to its nebulous concept (p. 231). What the assertion by Riffaterre tells us is that first and foremost, many texts can be read either literally or figuratively, that second, a text can potentially be simultaneously mimetic and semiotic, and that third, because the figurative is often dependent upon the existence of the literal (Moran, 2017, p. 375), the semiotic and the mimetic possess a potentially codependent relationship. Mimetic context of narrative is therefore understood as the imitative nature of a literal narrative, fictional or otherwise, within an artistic social practice, where a narrative is fabricated for a spectator's consumption, and where this consumption is potentially open to figurative interpretation by the spectator. Or more simply put, susceptible to being received as myth.

2.3 SEMIOTIC MYTH

2.3.1 Semiotics

While myth is studied across many disciplines (Birenbaum, 1988, p. xi), it was Roland Barthes (2012) who declared the position that myth "in fact belongs to the province of a general

science, coextensive with linguistics, which is *semiology*" (p. 219). Semiotics is the discipline by which *semiosis* is studied (Danesi, 2010, p. 135). Semiosis is the structural process of sign production that enables a social process of communication intended to produce comprehension within an audience (Danesi, 2010, p. 135). This paper recognizes semiotics to be inclusive of the historical differences found in the 'Semiology' of Ferdinand de Saussure (Chandler, 2007, p. 3) and the 'Semeiotics' of Charles Sanders Peirce (Chandler, 2007, p. 3). It embraces the modern view that Semeiotics and Semiology have distinct similarities (Berger, 1984, p. 13), that Semiology is now considered a subset of Semiotics relative to extra-linguistics and that it is common practice to use the term Semiotics in place of Semiology (Hénault, 2010, pp. 103-104), and that Saussure's semiology was relational to a focus specific to the science of linguistics (Bouissac, 2010, p. 74). As asserted by Arthur Asa Berger (1984), contemporary semiotics can be applied to the study of "formulaic genres, advertising, sports, photography, fashion, television programs, cartoons, theatre, artifacts, videogames, fairy tales, films, and corporate symbols" (pp. ix–x). All topics that would be of great interest to any defined generation. Further, semiotic analysis of cinema, such as that done by Christian Metz (1982, 1991), is well established, and literature is recognized as a fundamental example of semiosis (Culler, 1981, p. 35). Therefor it can be extrapolated that semiotics, and by extension semiosis, is applicable to many forms of mimetic narrative including literature, illustration, fiction, fantasy, narrative, and performance.

2.3.2 Saussure

In the semiotics of Saussure, the *sign* is considered the primary constructive unit of communication (Bouissac, 2010, p. 90). Saussure (1959) cast the sign into a dyadic model where the *sound-image* component would be the *signifier* and the *concept* component would be the *signified* (p. 67). The sign is the composite of both signifier and signified, and the signifier is

incontrovertibly inseparable from the signified (Barthes, 1968, p. 47). While Saussure (1959) regarded the signifier to be a "psychological imprint" of a sound (p. 66), it is also referred to as the sign-vehicle (Eco, 1976, p. 14). In modern semiotics, signifier is generally regarded to be the sign's "physical form" (Chandler, 2007, p. 15). In contrast, the signified is typically defined as the mental or psychological concept we have about the sign (Chandler, 2007, p. 16). Barthes (1968) argued that a signified "is not 'a thing' but a mental representation of the 'thing'" (p. 42). In its simplest definition, the signified represents the sign's meaning (Eco, 1976, p. 14; Kress, 2001, p. 72).

2.3.3 Peirce

In contrast to Saussure's dyadic signifier/signified approach to sign division, Charles Sanders Peirce developed a complex triadic system of semiotics that permeated his view of the sign on multiple levels (Cobley, 2010, p. 7; Peirce, 1974b, §§ 2.233-2.234). At the core level, Peirce (1974b) divided the sign into three components - *representamen*, *interpretant*, and *object* (§§ 2.228). Peirce (1974b) argued that "A sign, or representamen, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity." (§§ 2.228), that the object is that which the sign stands for, or "represents" (Peirce, 1974b, §§ 2.230), and that the interpretant is a cognitive mental perception of that sign (Peirce, 1974b, §§ 2.242). Peirce frequently used the terms sign and representamen interchangeably (Chandler, 2007, p. 30), but Peirce (1974a) appears to distinguish between sign and representamen by arguing that a sign can always be interpreted by the human mind, while the representamen is a way of distinguishing something that has the potential to be a sign, but may not yet be understandable to the interpreter (§§ 1.540). This is supported by the general notion that the representamen is meant to describe the literal sign-vehicle (Chandler, 2007, pp. 29-30), and that the sign must be capable of producing an

interpretant in order to be a sign (Liszka, 1996, p. 24). Peirce's representamen and interpretant is considered to be similar in nature to Saussure's signifier and signified respectively (Chandler, 2007, pp. 30-31). This thesis will defer to the use of signifier and signified to describe these subcomponents of the sign.

2.3.4 Barthes

Roland Barthes (1968) expanded upon Saussure's idea of the sign to argue that a signifier's substance could be sounds, images, or objects as evident by his assertion that the "verbal sign, the graphic sign, the iconic sign, the gestural sign are all typical signs." (p. 47). Barthes thus redefined the signifier to be that part of the sign which takes any "literal" form (Moriarty, 1991, p. 23), an achievement that would eventually play a significant role in Barthes (2012) theories on deciphering myth (p. 238). With this bold step, one counter the Saussurean tradition, Barthes would promote the cause of Saussurean semiotics beyond that of just verbal or linguistic study (Cobley, 2010, pp. 8-9). It also bore some similarity to Peirce's approach to the sign, which permitted practically anything to be a sign (Houser, 2010, p. 91; Liszka, 1996, p. 20), included some level of objectivity (Merrell, 1997, pp. 25-26; Peirce, 1974b, §§ 2.228), permitted the sign to represent abstractions and fictions (Liszka, 1996, p. 22), and permitted the sign to originate and exist outside a constraint of human social interaction (Eco, 1976, p. 15).

2.3.5 Social Semiosis

Saussure's approach to sign was predominantly a social one that focused on, and required, human interaction (Hénault, 2010, pp. 104-105). For example, Saussure's semiological tradition is applicable to that of cinematic narratives (Metz, 1991, pp. 91-107), where human interaction is abundant. Eco (1976) argued that Saussure "did clearly stress the fact that the signified is something which has to do with the mental activity of anybody receiving a signifier"

(p. 14-15). Further, Peirce (1974c) also approached the sign as a matter of shared social relations (§§ 3.621). Though not exclusively a social mechanism, the sign is implied to be an intentional means of "social" communication between two people, one originating the sign and the other receiving it (Eco, 1976, p. 15). It is in this "reception," the signified half of the Saussurean dyadic sign that occurs as comprehension or meaning within the human mind, where myth is argued to ultimately reside (Birenbaum, 1988, pp. 4-5; Lévi-Strauss, 1969, p. 12).

2.3.6 Myth

Myth is a phenomena considered unique to the cultural forces that create it (Lévi-Strauss, 1981, pp. 66-67), and is argued to reside almost exclusively in the province of human experience (Birenbaum, 1988, p. xii). Barthes (2012) argued that myth is constructed from a second-order system where the sum of the signifier and signified of the first system, or linguistic sign, plays the role as myth's second-order signifier to myth's second-order signified (p.224). At the first-order level, Barthes (2012) referred to the linguistic sign as *meaning* (p. 226). At the second-order level, Barthes (2012) referred to myth's signifier as *form* (p. 226), and to myth's signified as *concept* (p. 226). Barthes (2012) argued that the binding of form and concept, or second-order signifier and signified, resulted not in sign, but in *signification* (p. 231), producing a condition where signification and myth are one and the same (p. 231). In defining the binding relationships of this signification, Barthes (2012) asserted that myth's form has an ambiguous and paradoxical relation with its literal meaning (pp. 226-227), and that myth's concept is overtly expansive in relation to its form, unambiguously nebulous, and ultimately susceptible to being appropriated by its audience (pp. 228-230).

2.3.7 Form

Barthes (2012) asserted that the first order sign, or *meaning*, and the second-order signifier, or *form*, are the same (p. 226). They are two sides of the same coin that are distinguished, and defined, by a specific viewpoint which is associative either the first-order linguistic system, or the second-order mythical system (Barthes, 2012, p. 226). Barthes (2012) tells us that *meaning* is defined from the viewpoint of the linguistic system (p.226), can be literate or visual (p. 224), and that it is a full entity, saying that it "postulates a kind of knowledge, a past, a memory, a comparative order of facts, ideas, decisions" (pp. 226-227). In contrast, Barthes (2012) tells us that *form* is defined from the viewpoint of the mythical system, and that there is a paradoxical relationship between *meaning* and *form* (pp. 226-227). In Barthes (2012) view, *form* develops into an empty, ambiguous, impoverished, recessive, and parasitical entity by putting *meaning* at a great distance from itself, leaving the *form's* starved but literal remnants free to influence a new and expansive mythical signified, or *concept* (pp. 226-228).

2.3.8 Concept

Barthes (2012) tells us that *concept* is the unambiguous signified of the second-order mythical system (p. 226), a place where *meaning* and *form* compete for dominance in a persistent and oscillatory dance such that the sum of this oscillation is the root of myth's ambiguity (p. 233). Or as Barthes (2012) put it, this oscillation is "a purely signifying and purely imagining consciousness…at once intellective and imaginary, arbitrary and natural" (p. 233). Barthes (2012) argued that *concept* [myth's signified] possesses a disproportionate volume in relation to its *form* [myth's signifier] such that *concept* is capable of spreading this signified "over a very large expanse of signifier" (p. 230), and that a new history, synonymous to a situational awareness derived from the *form's* distanced and depleted history, fills this expansiveness (p.

228-229). Barthes (2012) regarded this resulting expansive differential, between *meaning* and *concept*, as a *deformation* because "what the concept distorts is...the meaning" (p. 232). Barthes (2012) further tells us that the *concept* has an "open character…open to the whole of History" (p. 229), where the resulting situational awareness within the *concept*, or as Barthes (2012) put it, the "formless, unstable, nebulous condensation, whose unity and coherence are above all due to its function" (p. 229), is subject to *appropriation* (a key part of generational communication) by a discriminating reader for whom the myth appeals to (p. 229).

2.3.9 Signification

Barthes (2012) defined this distorted relation between *form* and *concept* to be *signification* and that this signification is explicitly synonymous with myth (p. 231). In Saussurean semiotics signification is defined as the "relationship between the signifier and the signified" (Chandler, 2007, p. 15). In repurposing the term signification to imply "second-order sign", Barthes (2012) tells us that the signification of myth is an interplay between the alternating viewpoints of an alienated but full first-order literal meaning and an empty second-order form that oscillate within a deformed and nebulous concept (pp. 232-233), and that the "relation which unites the concept of the myth to its meaning is essentially a relation of *deformation*" (p. 232). In other words, for a narrative to become a signification of myth, the narrative must distort or deform. But what phenomenon of human consciousness and behavior might have the raw catalytic power to enable a spectator or audience to deform a first-order literal narrative into a second-order signification of myth?

2.4 THE CATALYST OF BELIEF

2.4.1 The Case for Belief

As I developed this thesis, several critical questions would frequently resurface regarding the signification of myth. How does one differentiate, or place a value, on the many competing views or theories regarding myth? Which view of myth is the mainstream view? How does one narrow the subject of myth? How does one reconcile a myth, simultaneously argued to be anything from a form of memory-inducing mnemonics, a strict literary style, or a tool for societal control, to be one, or all, of these things? In the pursuit of answers to these questions, and keeping the focus on intergenerational communication, I determined that it was critical to find a common denominator among the variant qualities of myth. In examining the span of disciplines that study myth, as previously cited to Birenbaum (1988, p. xi), I sought to address the following questions. What are the qualities of myth that are noticeably common across most disciplines that study myth? Is that common quality of myth, if one exists, observable in both antiquity and the modern day? And can it be attributable to any level of audience? Individual or group? Regardless the discipline, or the approach, the one quality that appeared to dominate my evaluation, sometimes in ways so obvious, and so often presumed to be common knowledge by all, as to be frequently ignored or invisible within plain sight, was the phenomenon of belief associated with myth. The common phenomenon of deep personal convictions, or beliefs, held by the audience or spectator, about a narrative perceived as myth, could demonstrate a clear multi-disciplinary presence while also demonstrating a significant relationship to myth across the span of historical time.

2.4.2 Ubiquity of Belief Regarding Myth

Since the time of Greek Antiquity, philosophers and poets such as Plato and Socrates used fabricated narratives to persuade their societies to believe in myths, in the hope that these "noble lies" might promote desired societal behavior (Murray, 2011, p. 183). For Plato and Socrates, the purpose of myth is for the explicit inducement of desired societal beliefs (Murray, 2011, p. 183). The philosopher Ernst Cassirer (1956) argued that "In mythical imagination there is always implied an act of *belief*. Without the belief in the reality of its object, myth would lose its ground" (p. 75). Martin Heidegger (2010) spent considerable energy, within the context of the Greek understanding of myth (pp. 91-93), analyzing the contradiction of "true belief" in relation to Plato's deference for "false belief" (pp. 188-193). In the discipline of Classical History, Niall Livingstone (2011) has argued that myth "helps to crystallize belief and to fashion thought patterns" (p. 125). In Literature, it has been argued by Tudor Balinisteanu (2018) that "an enriched definition of myth would state that it is a literary style that engenders faith and belief experienced somatically" (p. 176). In contrast, Joseph Campbell (1997) argued that the human behavior of accepting something for what we experience it to be, and not for what it is logically, is "a primary datum, consequently, of the science of myth, which is concerned precisely with the phenomenon of self-induced belief" (pp. 20-21). In Sociology, Émile Durkheim attempted to draw a distinction between myth as belief and ritual as action (Pickering, 2014, pp. 363, 366-372). Durkheim's views were complex as he attempted to make further distinction between belief and religious dogma as they might pertain to myth, but the connection between myth and belief in Durkheim's work was evident and relevant, however ambiguous (Pickering, 2014, p. 367). In the discipline of Science it was the opinion of Tito Vignoli (1978) that myth and science are contradictory to one another while at the same time the two are also a symbiotic amalgam

(pp. 9-10), that they are "developed by the same methods" (p. 154), and that mythical theory is synonymous and integral with beliefs (pp. 39, 285). In Psychology, Richard H. Armstrong (2011) argues that myth functions as a belief system with the ability to encode deeply recessive childhood experiences into mythic narratives (pp. 475-476). In Psychiatry Celia Jaes Falicov (1988) asserts that family myth is the product of a family's systemic shared beliefs about each member's role and relationship within the family (p. 213). In Anthropology, Bronislaw Malinowski (1971) argued that myth "expresses, enhances, and codifies belief" (p. 19), and that it has the potential to be "believed to be true" (p. 25). Lévi-Strauss (1981) argued that myths clarify the "*raison d'être* of beliefs" within a society (p.66). In the discipline of Rhetoric, Michael Calvin McGee (1980) attempted to demonstrate a clear mutual inclusivity between ideology and myth (p. 3) by coining the term "ideograph" to describe common conceptual terms in the societal vernacular that can be leveraged for political persuasion and ultimately be used as "guides, warrants, reasons, or excuses for behavior and belief" (p. 6). And finally, within Semiotics, Barthes (2012) did clearly draw a connection between myth and ideology, or system of beliefs, though in Barthes' scholarship, this connection to belief to myth is acutely associated in relation to political ideology (pp. 249-274). However, the relationship of belief to both semiotics and myth is far more complex than it might seem at its obvious face value.

2.4.3 Belief and Semiotics

In arguing for the idea of signification of myth, Barthes situated myth not as a signified, but as a 2nd level deformation that can occur in the relationship between form (signifier) and concept (signified). The use of signification to identify this deformation inevitably goes a long way toward delineating the role society plays in the formation of myths and can further illuminate how belief also plays a role in the sustainability of myth. Eco (1976) asserted that

Semiology, as defined by Saussure, could otherwise be described as a "rigorous semiotics of signification" (p. 14), and that signification is implicated in the existence of *codes*, or sets of rules that govern the signification process (Eco, 1976, p. 8). Eco (1976) argued that a code "is a system of signification" (p. 8), and that all human acts of communication "presupposes a signification system as its necessary condition" (p. 9). The existence of code within a communication system presumes a condition where the code rules within the system are shared between two or more social agents (Chandler, 2007, p. 148). In other words, signification presumes that communication *code*, or subcodes, pre-exist as a result of commonly shared societal structures or peer groups. Further, Chandler (2007) expands on this by arguing that semioticians:

> treat as signs any objects or actions which have meaning to members of the cultural group, seeking to identify the rules or conventions of the codes which underlie the production of meanings within that culture. Understanding such codes, their relationships and the contexts in which they are appropriate, is part of what it means to be a member of a particular culture. (p. 148)

In short, sign production is dependent upon the cultural contexts in which those signs were generated. In the semiotics of Peirce (1974c), communication was predicated upon mutually shared knowledge gained through experiential relations (§§ 3.621). Liszka (1996) points out that this shared understanding in Peirce's model served as both the product of understanding by way of communication and as the common ground, or "*commens* of the sign agency" by which communication was interpreted (p. 81). Further, meaning could occur directly within the individual, be exchanged between different agents, or be imparted by non-agents through nature (Liszka, 1996, p. 81). In other words, what Peirce was arguing is that for understanding or

meaning to occur, some level of mutually understood prerequisite code, or common ground, must pre-exist and be shared amongst those agents communicating with each other and that physical things that pre-exist, without any involvement of agency or human interaction, still have the ability to function as sign vehicles, or alternatively as communication code. For example, a tree by any other species is still a tree. What this ultimately implies is that the code, or subcodes, that may influence signification reveal a cultural influence upon the process of signification. Code, while not necessarily exclusive to the group, thus lends itself toward a group activity, or communication between two or more people connected by way of associations and commonalities. In other words, peer groups with age commonalities such as a generation. One such code with relevance to this thesis is that of connotation.

In semiotics, *connotation* is recognized as a code that defines the way in which we personalize our interpretation of a sign through ideology or affect (Chandler, 2007, p. 138). Barthes (1968) argued that the signifiers of a connotation system, or connotators, were groups of denoted signs synonymous with that of rhetoric (pp. 91-92), and that the signifieds of the connotation system were synonymous with that of ideology (p. 92). Connotation's signifieds were, as Barthes (1968) put it, "at once general, global and diffuse" and that they "have a very close communication with culture, knowledge, history, and it is through them, so to speak, that the environmental world invades the system" (p. 91-92). The binding between rhetoric (signifier) and ideology (signified) is still signification (Barthes, 1968, p. 91), but connotation has a complex set of qualities as it is seen as an amalgam of many denotations, is synonymous in some ways with that of text, has an inexhaustive capacity, and can naturalize the denotations it is made from (Barthes, 1968, p. 91). In Barthes' description of it, connotation has a character that is virtually indistinguishable from his own descriptions of myth. Further, Barthes (1977) argued

that perception, cognition, and even ethics could impose themselves upon the connotative interpretation of a sign (p. 29). Connotation, therefore, reflects the process and product of persuasion within semiotics. It is a recognition that communication, by way of semiosis, involves more than just the communication of an idea, the defining of and conveyance of a term, but also: *What is it that I believe about this communication in relationship to my contextual position in space and time?* In relation to the culture I grew up in, the generation that raised me, the knowledge I have, and the culture, environment, and generation I now belong to, what are my convictions and beliefs regarding this communication that its connotative qualities seek to persuade of me? And what am I willing to accept? We could ask similarly: *What is the ideology, regarding a myth's rhetoric, that I choose to permit?*

2.4.4 Belief and Group

But is that permission to grant a narrative the status of myth, should I choose to grant it, isolated to just the individual? It is common knowledge that belief exists and occurs within the individual. But belief also occurs as a shared activity within groups of individuals that hold similar shared beliefs often producing the result of a shared cultural identity. Coupland and Jaworski (2001) argue that the acceptance of ideology "by the audience, especially mass media audiences, ensures the establishment of group rapport. As Fowler (1985, p. 66) puts it, through the emergence of a 'community of ideology, a shared system of beliefs about reality' creates group identity" (p.144). Coupland and Jaworski (2001) further argue the need to understand:

> the term ideology as a set of social (general and abstract) representations shared by members of a group and used by them to accomplish everyday social practices: acting and communicating (e.g. van Dijk 1998; Billig *et al*. 1988; Fowler 1985). These representations are organized into systems which are deployed by social classes and other

> groups ‘in order to make sense, figure out and render intelligible the way society works’ (Hall 1996, p. 26). (p. 144)

In other words, the cumulative of beliefs held by a group of individuals play a role in forming the beliefs of the group. These shared beliefs of the group then play an extended role in forming the beliefs of any one individual. Richard J.Watts (2012), in suggesting that we use narrative, as myth, to make our world intelligible, argued that:

> Beliefs about a phenomenon or a set of phenomena do not come from nowhere; they are socially constructed as frames, scripts, and schemata of knowledge in every individual’s cognition through the discursive repetition of those beliefs in institutionalized settings of social interaction (or social practice) such as the family, the school, the media, friendship networks, the work-group, and other communities of practice (Wenger 1998; Eckert 2000; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003). (p. 587)

The beliefs of the individual thus are influenced by those of the group. What someone believes about a narrative may differ from that of the group, but it might also be shared with another group. Belief can be a conviction of the individual, or it can be part of a shared ideology. And it should be no surprise that belief might also be recognized to play a significant role within the shared ideology of a generational cohort.

2.4.5 Belief and Generation

Strauss and Howe (1991) argue that the inner beliefs of the larger generational cohort tend to remain consistent over the span of a lifecycle, but that the beliefs of everyone in the cohort will not be uniformly demonstrated across the cohort (p. 66). In other words, the essence of the beliefs of a generational peer personality is the sum of the beliefs of everyone within that generation. However, individuals with nonconformant beliefs within their generation are

typically conscious of how their beliefs differ from the dominant beliefs within their generational cohort (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 66). If an individual can be acutely aware of how their beliefs differ from their generational peers, then they most certainly can be aware of how their beliefs, or even their generation's cumulative belief system, differs from the beliefs of a different generation. Strauss and Howe (1991) argued that "we can apply no reductive rules for comparing the beliefs and behavior of one cohort-group with those of its neighbors" (p. 67), and that any comparison "must be interpreted in the proper historical context" (p. 67).

In other words, even within a cohort belief system possessing rigid or dominant beliefs, it is not uncommon or unexpected that an individual, or subgroup of individuals, might desire to believe something different, counter, inconsistent, or even unconventional from their generational norm. Further, any interpretation of these beliefs must consider the culture and times in which the beliefs occurred. This oscillation between the belief identities of individual and group leaves open the potential for anyone in one generation to engage in or entertain beliefs inconsistently or illogically dispositioned (paradoxically) to the rest of the generation they currently belong to. Since narrative can be used to conveniently inherit, or appropriate, beliefs from a prior generation, even if those beliefs are illogical or inconsistent with the current generation, the dynamic creates a fertile environment where there is always an opportunity for myth to enable the appropriation of those narratives across generational boundaries, in spite of any generational constraints or differences that might exist to impose unpalatable opinion about those narratives.

2.5 SUMMARY

Belief thus takes center stage in the perpetuation of narrative across generational boundaries and time. Belief is implicated in the longevity of messages that people perceive as

memorable (Knapp et al., 1981, pp. 34, 40). Dallos and Vetere (1997) argue that family beliefs are often shared across time by way of narrative (p. 3), while further, Falicov (1988) tells us that "family myth" functions to "promote the continuity of family identity from one generation to another" (p. 218). Belief is relevant the audience of myth as individual, as group or generation, across countless avenues of research pertaining to narrative and myth and is further relevant myth across significant spans of time. But belief is only a catalytical character of myth's resilience. It accelerates and sustains the deformation of narrative into myth by permitting or encouraging appropriation. I argue that it is the strong conviction in the myth, by the audience, that acts as a catalyst to encourage those appropriations. Appropriation often perceived to occur against an illogical frame or set of conditions, and that frequently occur within contextual degrees of freedom that enable certain narratives to overcome social resistance to their content. In other words, myth provides the generational cohort with the necessary communication codes to use belief and imitation, under conditions that might otherwise be perceived as illogical or encounter a great degree of resistance, to endow certain narratives with resilience. But it's not just any belief, or just any imitation, that are found relational to myth. Signification of myth involves both a special kind of belief, and a special kind of imitation, paradoxical belief and reverse-mimesis, that provide a special kind of social code that ultimately permits audiences to distort narrative into myth.

What this implies is, there is a governing set of rules, or code, by which myth can be readily identified. That there are also subsets of rules governing interpretation of myth that can be highly relevant to cultural or group contexts. As Barthes (2012) argued, in the act of being a mythologist, myth can be identified (pp. 234, 238–239). In the case of this thesis, I will argue that myth can be shown to occur solely at the level of the individual operating within a single

mind, be highly relevant within the generational group, thus it can be hidden, stealthy, or obvious, occur as a result of the influence of a natural occurrence, and can scale to become a power within its own right. While both Barthes (2012, pp. 230, 234) and Lévi-Strauss (1981, p. 87) did argue for myth's ability to expand limitlessly, I will argue the distinction that it is in the moment that the signification of myth transitions from a private phenomenon to a shared process of group or culture that signification of myth is finally permitted the ability to expand to its true potential. Poised within that cultural context, narratives shared between multiple people, then between multiple cultures or groups, possess a significantly greater chance to survive beyond the mortal limits of the individual, or even the mortal limits of the generation, that conceive the myth. To that end, this thesis will now use the semiotic framework previously cited to propose a Myth Context Reception Model. A model whose purpose is to establish a clear relation between myth of antiquity and modern urban myth, that defines how myth can be stealthily hidden from view in plain sight, that defines how paradoxical belief and mimetic behavior can be used to identify myth reception within an audience, and that defines a lifespan for myth for the purpose of evaluating the state of a myth's scale, potential, strength, and resilience.

CHAPTER 3

MYTH CONTEXT RECEPTION MODEL

3.1 PURPOSE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE MODEL

3.1.1 Purpose

It is a fundamental argument of this thesis that myth occurs in both the individual and the group, and that myth is a force that enables a narrative to outlive the generation that spawned it by encouraging future generations to assimilate it as their own. Watts (2012) argued that myths "are also culturally constructed through a history of transference that has made them the 'cultural property' of a group" (p. 589). This thesis will demonstrate such transference by presenting narrative exemplars of myth in Chapter 4 that illustrate cross-generational longevity, and therefore resilience to their own potential mortality. But to put forward an exemplar requires the ability to identify the existence of myth in relation to a narrative. I argue that a model can be constructed, leveraged largely from semiotic scholarship and Barthesian theory of myth, to accomplish such identification adequately and reliably. This model is constructed for the purpose of identifying the existence of a myth reception in relation to a narrative. And while not all narratives produce myth, and others are not immediately obvious for their propagation of myth, this model is limited to the goal of providing guidance for identifying myth, for identifying where myth has the potential to exist, and for how to test for that potential.

3.1.2 Limitations

This model does not consider any application of the use of myth where it is applied as a derogatory term. The invocation of "that is a myth" is often used as a means of judgment by one party to suggest that another party, that holds a signification of myth for some narrative, is

somehow demonstrative of a position of ignorance regarding that signification by the other party. This constitutes the potential correlation of identification of myth with that of a derogation. This is a reduction based upon a personal value judgment of the first party against the second. This model is concerned only with the act of identifying the existence of a myth reception and does not place any judgement upon the value of such reception.

This model does not account for attempts to address style of narrative, theme of narrative, types of myth, genres, or other defining literary criteria related with myth. Its focus is on the receiver of myth, the reader or audience, and how that receiver responds to a narrative for the determination of whether the narrative is signified as myth by the receiver, and does that narrative propagate or perpetuate itself as a result of myth becoming involved in the narrative's reception. Conversely, it does not argue that styles, genres, themes, or types of myth are irrelevant or inconsequential to the existence of signification of myth. Further, it does accept the postulate that these characteristics of literary design may in fact enhance or promote the potential reception of myth, within an audience, with greater success or efficiency. While this thesis may not necessarily consider their effects, benefits, or relevance on the signification of myth, it also does not rule out any potential impact they may have on the larger discussion of myth.

This thesis observes that because myth requires a host narrative, such narrative is fundamentally "not myth" until it "becomes myth." In other words, there is no direct method of testing a narrative for "not myth" because the narrative is inherently always "not myth" until myth is observed. What this thesis will promote is a test for the potential existence of myth that has developed in an existing narrative as the alternative to a narrative having remained in a myth-less literal state since its origination. Further, because this literal state existed at origination, and always exists even after myth becomes present, a test for "not myth" is inefficient, impractical,

and potentially unresolvable. This model will therefore not test for the existence of “not myth”, but rather assumes that what is left, after all tests “for myth” are exhausted and have failed, is a narrative remaining in its original, literal, or “not myth” state. A narrative which has never developed a myth reception associable to it.

3.2 ANTECEDENTS TO MYTH CONTEXT

Since it is generally presumed that a default set of activities, conditions, and narrative inventory must exist before myth can occur as an experience, the antecedents of myth should be defined up front. This involves defining the prospective potential for myth, the source or inventory that myth can draw upon, the existence (or not) of any author intent for a myth’s eventuality and is that eventuality even guaranteed.

3.2.1 Prospective Myth

Barthes (2012) argued that everything could be appropriated to become myth (pp. 217 – 218). However, Barthes was not telling us that all things *are* myth. He was telling us that all things *can be* taken as myth. That all things have the *prospective potential* to be taken as myth (Flood, 2002, p. 161), at some point in the future, if we have cause for any of them to be appropriated, and then signified as myth, by us. Barthes (2012) further recognized that this potential was spontaneously indeterminate and at times volatile or potentially perishable (p. 218). Bruner (1959) points out that the viability of an “attempted myth”, or a narrative serving as a mold for myth, is always uncertain (p. 356). In other words, everything can potentially be a target, a victim of, or a host to the exploitative predator of myth. Everything is *Prospective Myth*. Not yet myth, but with the inherent potential to become myth, regardless that its origin is natural such as the moon, or man-made such as a fictional narrative.

3.2.2 The Myth Host

To become myth the object appropriated must become something it was not. Something different but also something more expansive. Barthes (2012) described myth to be an "expansive ambiguity" (p. 234). Indeed, even those things perceived to be natural, or naturally resistant to myth, are not excluded. For example, the moon precedes all of humankind, but is a natural source for countless myths in the course of history (Brunner, 2010, pp. 6, 25-36). But Barthes (2012) would effectively demonstrate that myth can remake any sign, and that all signs are Prospective Myth and ultimately powerless to resist being appropriated (p. 243). To demonstrate this, Barthes (2012) argued that myth could turn Einstein's venerable mass-energy equivalence formula, $E=mc^2$, into the "pure signifier of mathematicity" (p. 243). Any object natural or man-made, any invention, image, photo, animal, insect, human, event, or action is Prospective Myth. But Barthes (2012) also recognized that myth "is a type of speech" (p. 217), and that due to this qualification, "everything can be a myth, provided it is conveyed by a discourse" (p. 217). Therefore, while the object might merely be a literal thing, it is the discourse about that object or event, real or fabricated, that itself is Prospective Myth. It is the discourse—and the beliefs we hold, convey, or experience through that discourse—which have the power to turn a thing into a myth, and there is one discourse above all others that demonstrates the greatest prospective potential to become myth.

Barthes (2012) was clear in his position that myth was potentially relevant to any visual discourse (p. 219), but the most common host of myth is recognized to be that of story or narrative (Doty, 2000, p. 6; Hatab, 1990, p. 17; Segal, 2004, p. 4). An imaginative literary narrative, or fiction, is regarded as a mimesis, or literary product imitative of life (Hume, 1984, p. 20; Lamarque & Olsen, 1994, p. 72; Lyons & Nichols, 1982, p. 1). Both fiction and myth are

noted for their possession of imaginative quality (Barthes, 2012, p. 233; Lamarque & Olsen, 1994, p. 41). Fictional narrative is well known to be associated with myth. Lamarque and Olsen (1994) argued that the purposes of fiction included "mythic purpose" (p. 445). Hume (1984) asserted that "fantasy exists in the basic myths" (p. 33) and that fantasy provides a "mythological or metaphoric dimension to the mimetic level of the plot" (p. 86). While an association between fiction and myth can be clearly established, this thesis asserts that both are unique and distinct. Myth sets itself apart from fiction in a very special way. Schaeffer (2010) argued strenuously that there is a significant distinction between fiction and myth, where fiction as shared ludic feint, and myth defined as "beliefs held to be true", can simultaneously share the same space, and each is distinguished not by what a narrative literally is, but by how it is signified by a particular individual, society, or culture (p. 124-128). In other words, the variability of myth is contextually dependent upon a reception unique to a specific spectator or audience. Further, while these differences between fiction and myth seem to suggest a very short distance between the two, as well as a low resistance in one becoming the other, this thesis will show that the distance between the signified of each has the potential to be quite massive, regardless any motivated intent by an author for their fiction to become—or not become—myth.

3.2.3 Author Intent

Since narrative and storytelling is a uniquely human activity (Cobley, 2001, pp. 1-2), myth being a narrative, visual or otherwise, implies that narrative is something we can create with the intent for it to become myth. But myth can occur both where it is intended and where it is not intended. Any inanimate, sterile, or naturally occurring object can become myth. But since narrative is observed here to be uniquely endowed as Prospective Myth, what about those narratives never intended by an author to become myth? Barthes (2012) said that "myth can

reach everything, corrupt everything, and even the very act of refusing oneself to it" (p. 244), exposing even the most logical and immutable Einsteinian math to be vulnerable to myth. An author's intent, for something to become myth, might improve its chances of succeeding at that endeavor, but intent is not necessary for this to result. And where such intent is employed and myth accomplished, an author may soon lose complete control over the 'life' he has created (Gould, 1981, p. 182). Barthes (2012) suggested that myth could occur as "incidental myth" (p. 260-261), if its use was "not part of a strategy" (p. 261). And as noted by Scheub (2012), "In certain performances, narrative becomes myth; in other performances, the narrative remains narrative but not myth" (p. 18). Hagood (2008) wrote that, "although all myth is narrative, all narrative is not myth" (p. 204), and Brockway (1993) had argued that myth often occurs where it was not intended (pp. 71, 137), and that some narratives often far exceed the intentions of their creators (p. 120). These assertions are consistent with the argument by Eco (1979) that the interpretation of a narrative frequently uses codes not intended by the narrative's creator (§ 0.2.2). In other words, there is no guarantee that something unintended to be myth will remain narrative and no guarantee that something intended to be myth will become so.

Barthes (2012) clearly recognized that narrative could be created for the intended purpose of being received as myth, identifying the myth producer as a "journalist who starts with a concept and seeks a form for it" (p. 238). This excerpt provides two remarkable observations. The first is that myth can be produced with the direct intent by the author to become myth. The second is that myth resembles a circular reasoning argument. As argued by Walton (1991), circular reasoning can be recognized as a kind of argument observed to avoid a "burden of proof" requirement when used as an intentional tactical operation where the premise is dependent upon the conclusion and the goal is to coerce and deceive a respondent into accepting

"something as a legitimate premise that is really not, and to slur over the omission, to disguise the failure of any genuine proof" (p. 285). Myth, drawn in this light, can be viewed as a direct attempt to persuade by first defining the sum of a rhetorical logic equation and then second configuring the logical premise or premises in such a way that they might factor into a rhetorical message personalized to fit the special interests of the intended audience. In other words, the myth author not only creates an unprovable narrative with the intent to become myth, but with the express and clear intent for it to be believed regardless its lack of proof, and it is an act that has been known and practiced since the time of the ancient Greeks. In examining Aristotle's purposes for the invention known as myth, Richard Bodéüs (2000) wrote that "The myths are invented not *by* the many, but *for* the many, by individuals who wanted to persuade them", and argues further that myth's ultimate goal, in the time of Aristotle, was to guide conduct (p. 95). Both Socrates and Plato fabricated narratives for the desired purpose that these narratives might be believed by the audiences that they were intended for (Murray, 2011, p. 183). Still, the narrative must pre-exist in advance of the signification associated with it that might *become* myth, and it must eventually become the possession of someone else. Even if the thing being abducted is a planned eventuality, resembling a sacrificial offering by its creator for the express purpose of becoming myth, it must persuade someone to appropriate it despite its lack of guarantee for a myth outcome. Regardless the intent for a narrative to be received as myth, or the lack intent, nothing is safe from myth should the audience that desires it see fit to contextualize it into myth.

3.3 MYTH CONTEXT

It was the position of Bronislaw Malinowski (1971) that evaluation of the myth of antiquity, by text alone, and without the ability to survey or contextually frame the audiences of

those myths, was fatally flawed (p. 18). Murray (2011) asserted that the myths of Plato are "the product of his own artistic imagination" that were "designed for a specific context" (p.184), adding further that the meanings of Plato's myths were "dependent on context" (p. 189). I argue that the notion of context, derived from narrative or applied to narrative, and further constructed for and by the audience, is critical to a proper evaluation of myth's presence in relation to any narrative. Lévi-Strauss (1955) had asserted that "myth itself provides its own context." (p. 434). However, I would add that myth is not possessive of only a singular context, but fundamentally occurs within an overarching dual contextuality. Barthes (2012) referred to myth directly as a "double system" (p. 232), and I suggest that these two systems should be thought of as contextual systems where one context is static and relational to a narrative's 1st order literal system, while the other context is dynamic and relational to a narrative's 2nd order myth system. While it is common for any simple expression or utterance to potentially involve many multiple contexts, I argue that narrative transformed into myth is uniquely dual-contextual where it is always a composite of two governing contexts, a *Literal Context* and a *Myth Context*. This composite always a result of two messages existing simultaneously where (1) the Literal Context is mimetic, rigid, static, and independent and (2) the Myth Context is semiotic, scalable, dynamic, and co-dependent upon both the Literal Context and the audience for its existence. Even though at times the Myth Context might obscure itself from the very audience that will conceive or propagate it. Further, the audience can selectively choose, at will and at any time, which governing context it wants to directly engage with, or impose. And finally, the composited co-existence of these two contexts, in relation to a narrative, is fully supported by semiotics.

3.3.1 Peirce, Saussure, and Barthes

Context is generally viewed through the prism of linguistic pragmatics (Meibauer, 2012, p. 9). But context can also be shown to be an important element of semiotic theory. In Peircean semiotics, context can be demonstrated to be associative to Peirce's concept of object. Peirce's object is the fundamental component that permits the sign to possess external referents (Chandler, 2007, p. 63). Peirce (1974b) argued that a sign always "represents" something and defined that "something" as the object (§§ 2.230). A sign can refer back to a single object, to many objects, or to a single complex object comprised of an object set (Peirce, 1974b, §§ 2.230). Peirce (1974b) identified the referential condition, between object and sign, as *ground* (§§ 2.228). Ground being a concept typically described as an abstract quality, or character, of the sign's object (Liszka, 1996, p. 20; Peirce, 1974a, §§ 1.551). Thus, in Peirce's concept, the object can be real, an abstraction, or fictive (Chandler, 2007, p. 33). Further, since Peirce's object is not exclusively nor explicitly rooted in that of the physical "object", it is thus more a concept than a physical thing, whether it happens to be a physically real thing or not. For example, Floyd Merrell (2001) describes Peirce's object as a "semiotic object" as a way of distinguishing Peirce's object from that of the more common physical object (p. 28). Liszka (1996) used the words "resistance" and "constraint" to describe the purpose of Peirce's object (p. 21). Further, the object's role, as determinant of the sign, is argued by Liszka (1996) to play a direct role in determination of the interpretant (p. 23). In other words, the object serves as a condition that directly affects interpretation. It is a position supported by Merrell (1997) who argued that conditions that affect interpretation are synonymous with context (p. 38). Peirce (1974b) himself had suggested that context could be a factor in how the sign serves to represent its object (§§ 2.230). Peirce (1974b), in accounting for the different referential conditions that can occur

between sign and object, described some conditions as having the potential to be arbitrary (§§ 2.230). The result is to imply that the object, the object's character, and any parameters that govern the object's ground, play at least some role in establishing the context within which any signifier [representamen] is ultimately signified [interpreted]. Context was further supported by Jakobson, who asserted that Peirce's interpretant could be driven by both context and code (Chandler, 2007, p. 35), and that context is often used as the determinant for which codes are used at any given time (Bradford, 1994, p. 84). What's more, this allusion towards the idea of context, and to the arbitrary, is remarkably similar to the arbitrariness that Saussure (1959) described in the relationship between signifier and signified (p. 67).

Saussure (1959) had elaborated that the connection between signifier and signified should be understood to be arbitrary (p. 67). This "random" or "variable" behavior of the sign, as defined by Saussure, was evident by means of the multiple signifiers that a singular signified could possess within the context of different cultural base languages (Saussure, 1959, p. 68). For example, the English word *bat* is considered synonymous to the French word *chauve-souris*. Both are signified as the same thing, a small, winged, nocturnal mammal that can fly. In contrast, the French word *bat* is signified to be a type of cigarette. Bouissac (2010) directly identifies this contextual quality when he points out how this word *bat,* in English, can have multiple meanings in English as a result of separate simultaneous contexts derived from both zoology and sports (p. 98). What is evident here, in Saussure's notion of the arbitrary, is the contextual nature of the sign due to the signified's, and signifier's, potential to exist simultaneously within different linguistic conditions and histories. In other words, a sign's meaning is highly dependent upon context. Since the contextual parameters of language can change according to its relationship to a place or time, this kind of contextual constraint is possible within different environmental or

even generational settings. For Saussure, what could be described as the ultimate contextual binder between signifier and signified was largely predicated by his focus on different cultural base languages. But Saussure (1959) had also posited the idea that multiple signs could be placed into two particular relational configurations in order to produce meaning, or as he put it, a "class of values" (p. 123). Ultimately, context is implicated as a significant attribute of semiotics in Saussure's syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations (Chandler, 2007, p. 84).

Barthes (1968) would take Saussure's logic a step further, defining the process of *signification* as a binding of signifier and signified such that it produces sign (p. 48), with the sign deriving "its value also from its surroundings" (p. 48). The description is similar to the ground's ability to connect object and sign in the Peircean model and is a condition that could be interpreted as contextual. In regard to context and myth directly, Barthes (2012) did briefly connect context to "mythical schema" (p.238). In doing so, Barthes implied context in relation to myth by way of the imagination. To elaborate, schema is recognized as a procedural manifestation of the imagination by both Kant and Cassirer (Verene, 2016, pp. 101,103). Cassirer had implicated schema to the emotive qualities, or affect, that we impose upon symbol (Verene, 2016, p. 102), and symbol has been recognized as nothing less than myth but in iconic form (Pafford, 1962, p. 132). Further, Cassirer (1956) had asserted mythical imagination to be directly grounded through belief (p. 75). Barthes (2012) had depicted signification of myth as nothing less than "a purely signifying and a purely imagining consciousness" (p. 233). Barthes (2012) also suggested a more direct linkage between myth and context when arguing that myth's concept was "filled with a situation" (p. 228). Meibauer (2012, p. 11) implied that situation can be linked directly to extratextual context, defining this "*situational context"* as "the relation of a text to aspects of the situation in which the text has been produced or interpreted" (p. 11). In

other words, what is asserted here is that situation and schema are interchangeable examples of context and code. Further, where Barthes (2012) did not appear to directly address the examination of context relational to myth, he provided an overabundance of context's relation to myth, by way of example, in his anthology of myth dialogs titled *Mythologies.* Pete Bennett (2013), in critiquing the historical value of *Mythologies*, directly identifies this contextual nature of Barthes' dialogues on myth within *Mythologies* (pp. 148, 151, 154, 155, 164). But this recognition of context in relation to myth and Barthes is incomplete. Myth Context, as I propose it here, reveals that there is far more to signification of myth than an observation of environmental, temporal, or historical "situation" in relation to any narrative. Myth Context is context directly and intentionally manufactured by the audience which is both new and dynamic., and it is context that has the potential to be paradoxical, mimetic, resilient, and shared.

3.3.2 The Contextuality of Myth

Many of the poetic tragedies created in Plato's time are recognized to have been recycled myths, re-engineered and retold so that their contexts would be relevant to a new generation, and the efficacy of these tragedies was determined by an audience's ability, or willingness, to perceive the tragedy as myth (Brisson, 1998, pp. 54-55). The relationship of context to myth, the audience's role in receiving myth, and the intentional construction of context through perception, was as relevant to myth then as it is now. Context is commonly thought of in the terms of a constraint that frames communication content in direct relation to the environment in which the communication occurs (Fetzer, 2012, p. 107; O'Donnell, 1999, p. 63). However, context is far more complicated than it might seem. Context is much more than an environmental setting or constraint. More importantly, context is the act of interpreting something as a result of that constraint. Carmel Cloran (1999) argues that *Material Situational Setting*, or MSS, may "be

thought of as an actual physical space containing actual physical elements…considered to be a potential interactional frame" (p. 178). Cloran (1999) adds that context should be more appropriately viewed as "a theoretical construct abstracted for metalinguistic purposes from the MSS" where the elements within an MSS "may have a semiotic value which arises from conventional usage and which must be recognized when negotiating a context for interaction" (p. 178). Elements within the MSS may be human, spatial, non-human, circumstantial, or even temporal (Bowcher, 1999, p. 154; Cloran, 1999, p. 178). Since time can influence context production, it is thus relevant generationally, and context can be a dynamic product imposed by human behavior. For example, context can be construed as part of a negotiation process, by parties within a discourse, such that the parties accept or reject context that is potentially referred to, imported, or contributed in common through a discourse (Fetzer, 2012, p. 110; O'Donnell, 1999, pp. 92-93). O'Donnell (1999) argued that context is both constructible and negotiable through discourse, saying that "our behavior *projects* a situation" (pp. 92-93). And Fetzer (2012) argued that construed context can be differentiated between subjective context derived from the beliefs of the individual or community; and individual context derived from an individual's perception of the world (p.112). Fetzer (2012) asserts that subjective context is shared and negotiated through group participation and is a "social construct of context" (p. 112). In other words, subjective context relative a group can be inclusive of or the same as an individual context, while individual context has the potential to be exclusive of the group. Since context is something that can be uniquely group constructed, it can be relevant to a generational peer personality. From the individual perspective, Fetzer (2012) identifies another more localized form of context called cognitive context which includes "mental representations, propositions, contextual assumptions which may vary in strength, and factual assumptions" that are variably

dynamic and involve assumptions about the shared environment, or shared context, that the individual resides within, and likened it to a meta-representation (p. 119). In other words, cognitive context is a dynamic, constructible, and behavioral context that resembles belief, and is held by the individual but can be shared by a group. An individual could assume, accurately or erroneously, that the cognitive context they hold is also held mutually by others within the group. Further, as a meta-representation, cognitive context bears remarkable similarity to the way Barthes (1968, 2012) described myth when referring to second-order myth and second-order connotation systems as meta-languages (p. 90; p. 233), and it provides a foundational connection between context and myth, by way of belief and behavior, within the scope of significations produced by individual, group, or generation.

Myth Context is therefore more than a physical or environmental constraint upon the interpretation of a narrative. Myth Context is also relational to the context an audience, especially a peer group, brings with itself and attempts to impose upon the narrative privately or publicly. For example, what does the reader engaged in a Myth Context believe about the narrative and how do they attempt to personalize and promote that belief, and potentially the narrative itself, to align with the world view they and their peers hold. John M. Gómez (2017) argued that Barthes research emphasized "the ideological* context in myths, showing how meaning always reflects the interests of a particular social grouping" (p. 41). As an example, I can use an excerpt from Barthes' own *Mythologies* to illustrate. Each dialogue in *Mythologies* was an eloquent and artful exercise in defining the unique contextuality of the myth discussed in that dialogue. In an excerpt from one such dialogue, the "Jet-Man", Barthes (2012) writes:

> mythically the jet-man is defined less by his courage than by his weight, his diet, and his habits (temperance, frugality, continence). His racial identity can be read in his

> morphology: the anti-G inflatable nylon suit and the polished helmet encase the jet-man in a new skin in which "not even his mother would recognize him". This suggests a veritable racial conversion all the more plausible in that science fiction has already accredited this transferal of species: everything occurs as if there had been a sudden transmutation between the old creatures of propeller-humanity and the new ones of jet-humanity. (p. 104)

This particular dialogue provides some depth to Barthes' usage of the terms, situation and schema, or context and code, as noted previously. What Barthes provides here, in only the way Barthes could, is a description of Barthes' own self-constructed context for the narrative. "Jet-Man" exists within a situational setting, or environmental context, and derived from this context is a communicative code, or schema, that Barthes imposes upon the narrative as an alternative context to be shared with society that is built upon his own social understanding of the world, and what he believes it to really mean, *at the time he lived*. His own individual context situated within a subjective context. In other words, Barthes' is leveraging the environmental context or situation of the period (Bennett, 2013, p 156), that he and his generation experienced first-hand, or subjectively, to create a new Myth Context that is uniquely cognitive to Barthes. The emergence of the "Jet-Man", the construction of a signification of myth unique to his' and his generation's frame of mind, and his belief that the narrative is ideological, are intrinsically connected. While the constructed context is unique to Barthes' own eloquence, it has the potential to work within a group because it might also be shared or interpretable by others from his generation. The common thread is that his generation, because it shared a life experience and possessed a shared communicative code, was uniquely susceptible to the startling first impression that a pilot in a never-before-seen jet flight-suit might make.

Barthes' experience, predicated upon temporally influenced context, is a socially shared experience that has now been imposed upon the narrative, as a new context. The narrative of "jet-pilot" is in clear Literal Context, but the vision and belief of the "Jet-Man" as something more than human, if not completely and egregiously alien, is captured in a dynamic and expansive Myth Context filled in by Barthes. Situation, schema, and all. It is this clear and unequivocal construction of new context that is most significant. In describing the "Jet-Man" through a racial lens—"propeller-humanity" vs. "jet-humanity"—old vs. new—human vs. alien—Barthes' injects into a myth already steeped in paradoxical perceptions of super-humanity, a new and personal political dimension of anti-humanity. An expanded Myth Context unique to Barthes's own personal political view of the world. Where in the aftermath of World War II, the Holocaust, and the racial strife of that era, the narrative is now contextualized within his affective interpretation of his world and time. It is a self-constructed, and uniquely generational context in which the "Jet-Man" is appropriated for yet another myth and now viewed by Barthes through a prism of ideology or belief, and it is forged as a kind of persuasion and is thus rhetorical. A personal ideological interpretation acting as a metaphor for criticism of the racial politics common during his era, that is imposed upon the narrative by Barthes. But it is a context which is undeniably difficult to signify through the static Literal Context of "jet-pilot". For Barthes', his view of "Jet-Man" as racial difference, or even potentially racial disparity, demonstrates a quite significant paradoxical expansion of the narrative. It is a view, of which there is no doubt, that was important to him and that he held in high reverence because it promoted his own ideologies. It was important enough that he would intentionally appropriate this image to impose upon it a new Myth Context. An image which, on its appearance alone, could have little connection to French cultural criticism.

Myth Context therefore identifies much more than the observation or evaluation of a "myth reception". Myth and Myth Context occur as one and the same, where myth is the *event* and Myth Context is the structural and behavioral *facilities*, the context, that occurs internally and externally during the event. It is a cumulative interaction of input and output being received, occurring within, or being expressed by the reader of myth, that we impose upon the event. Barthes (2012) oscillatory turnstile analogy of myth is poignantly appropriate here (p. 233). Myth Context describes the dynamic attributes, indicators, and lifespan qualities that occur during human interaction with object or narrative to produce myth, and it is these attributes that can be used to identify the presence of myth in the reception of a narrative.

3.3.3 The Attributes of Myth Context

Myth Context is fundamentally a dependent context. That is, myth is always dependent upon a core communicative source for its eventual existence. Barthes (2012) described this dependence as myth's parasitical nature (pp. 226, 243), and asserted that "nothing can be safe from myth, myth can develop its second-order schema from any meaning and, as we saw, start from the very lack of meaning" (p. 242). In other words, myth is always dependent upon a symbiotic relationship with something that existed prior to itself. Myth can invade and repurpose any pre-existing, prospective, and unsuspecting host to support its ability to come into being and sustain itself. Regardless for why the thing did pre-exist or any intent, by the author, for the host. Another way to interpret this is to view myth's "parasitic dependence" as a metaphor for the very human behavior of appropriation. Barthes (2012) had argued clearly that the "fundamental character of the mythical concept is to be appropriated" (p. 229). Barthes (2012) further asserted that the literal narrative is always still present and does stop being narrative or stop being literal (p. 243). In any capacity that myth might function as an infectious parasite it does so at the

behest of the human mind. Myth possesses its character because we are intimately and behaviorally involved in the process of appropriating, repurposing, and re-signifying the narratives we consume. Barthes (2012) identified the general character of myth to be dynamic (pp. 234, 239), and that it's dynamic character was a result of how we paradoxically participate in myth's eventuality, arguing that we consume "myth according to the very ends built into its structure: the reader lives the myth as a story at once true and unreal" (p. 239). Myth's character is therefore a behavioral imposition resulting from tactical human interference in the strategic purpose of a narrative's stated first-order signification, or Literal Context. Attempts to define the attributes of myth are almost always metaphoric because what they frequently identify is not the character of myth itself, but rather, the behavior of myth's audience. For example, Barthes had eloquently described the dynamic character of myth, time and again, through the metaphor of myth as a living sentient being. The attributes of Myth Context must therefore be defined from the behavioral aspects of myth's reception and are thus metaphors for the behavioral dynamics of human interpretation of a narrative.

3.3.3.1 Obscurity

Myth Context can exist in obscurity. Myth can, and does, actively hide within both individual and culture. Positions arguing for myth's obscure nature are clear. Cassirer (1956) referred to myth as an unconscious fiction (p. 74). Joseph Campbell cited both Jung and Freud in arguing that "myth is grounded in the unconscious" (Campbell & Moyers, 1991, p. 71). Lévi-Strauss (1969) made the bold claim that it could be shown how "myths operate in men's minds without their being aware of the fact" (p. 12). Lévi-Strauss (1995) would further describe myth's nature, as a potentially unwitting human behavior, arguing that "myths get thought in man unbeknownst to him" (p. 3). Brisson (1998) asserted that "a myth is never a 'myth' for the

person who adheres to it. It only becomes a ‘myth’ for those who consider it from the outside and who question its validity” (p. 9). And finally, Barthes (2012) exposes society’s culpability, in myth’s inclination for obscurity, when he writes that, “‘normalized’ forms attract little attention” (p. 252). But Barthes (2012) also argued that everything had the potential to become myth (p. 217). We are thus told that myth, while it resides within us, can evade our conscious awareness of its existence and is potentially elusive to the cultural body at large. Yet it can occur anywhere. A condition that highlights its variable and scalable potential.

3.3.3.2 Variability, Potentiality, and Scalability

I assert that Myth Context is (1) a “*variable*” and (2) possesses the potential for great variability. This assertion is made with a uniquely contemporary interpretation in mind. I argue that Myth Context is itself a communicative *variable* in a sense quite similar to that of the logical variable of the modern digital computer programming paradigm. That is, Myth Context is a condition where we appropriate the Literal Context as a referent to a chosen value and that this value can be altered, replaced, or made as large and voluminous as we choose. A computer programming variable is a logical and commonly understood concept, is critical to the programming paradigm, and is conceivably present in every software language ever devised. While there are fundamental differences between a microprocessor’s handling of code and the human navigation of social communicative code, the attempt here is to provide a contemporary analogy, or metaphor, for myth’s dynamic character that is also a concept we generally assume uncontroversial, undeniably logical, and something taken for complete granted in modern digital communications. In this analogy, Myth Context’s expansive value can be irrelevant to, inconsistent with, or contradictory to the naming of the Literal Context while at the same time being one and the same. From a software programming perspective, one might declare myth as:

string $myReality = "my myth context";. As with myth, the *variable* is what my programming defines it to be, its value changes according to the rules my programming and algorithms dictate, and it doesn't matter what the variable's name says it is, my programming is going to fill it with whatever I want it to be, need it to be, or my algorithms say [believe] that it is. And further, I assert that this analogy, or metaphor, is grounded in semiotic theory.

Saussure (1959) observed the fundamental random, or variable, relationships that signifieds had with signifiers, within different languages and cultures, and referred to this as a sign's arbitrary nature (pp. 67-68) and that arbitrariness was dependent upon conventional rules, such as social context, to determine meaning (p. 68). Barthes (2012) declared that "Myth is a value" (p. 233), that when myth's form materializes "it empties itself…its newly acquired penury [poverty] calls for a signification to fill it" (p. 227), and that myth's concept is "filled with a situation" (p. 228). Gómez (2017) argued that what Barthes was advocating was that myth vacates a sign's original history and context to repackage itself with "different sets of meanings" than what the sign originally possessed (pp. 41-42), such that the sign, as myth, is endowed with "an entire history, perspective, and prejudice of its own" (p. 43). In other words, myth has the power to erase a sign's original context and fill the sign with a new and more potent context. So powerful is myth's ability to fill a sign with voluminous and seemingly arbitrary value, that Barthes (2012) declared myth's concept "open to the whole of History" (p. 229). But can something as simple as a single word be capable of filling itself with the equivalence of all history in the real world? There is evidence of exactly this kind of myth dynamic in the concept of the ideograph as posited in the work of Michael Calvin McGee. McGee (1980) argued that ideology and myth are connected (pp. 2-4), and that the truth or falsity of an ideology was rhetorical, a "product of persuasion" (p. 4). Interestingly, Barthes (2012) did casually refer to

myth as “a pure ideographic system” (p. 238). McGee (1980) argued that the symbiotic relationship between myth and ideology could be demonstrated quite effectively in ideographs, or terse words or terms that can be “easily mistaken for the technical terminology of political philosophy” (p. 5). McGee (1980) provides as examples terms such as “liberty,” “rule of law,” “equality” or “world peace” (pp. 7-8), arguing that while these terms are historically and politically charged they mean different things to different people in different cultures dependent upon their use in their localized social context, and are further temporally mediated and magnified (p. 8, 10-11). An ideograph is therefore a simple lexical sign, or *variable*, that can leverage the whole of human history for the express purpose of being filled with mythical meaning so that it may then serve as a vocabulary for a rhetorical political grammar (McGee, 1980, p. 14). A grammar that can be used as a guide for acceptable human behavior or alternatively to discourage unacceptable behavior (McGee, 1980, p. 15). McGee (1980) argued that ideographs were important because of the persuasive “*truth*” values these myths were perceived to possess, by the individuals who believed in them, and how these perceived truths managed to situate those individuals in relation to social groups (pp. 15-16). In other words, we use Myth Context, in the alternative form of simple rhetorical variables that we fill with expansive historical value, in order to situate ourselves socially and politically where we are most persuaded to belong, and we use the variable’s vast potential to persuade others to situate with us or against us.

Myth Context possesses significant potential. Much like the potential energy that millions of years of pressure have infused into a piece of coal, Myth Context possesses a similar reserve of potential “energy” that I shall refer to as its potentiality. Barthes (2012) indicated that myth’s growth potential was generally limitless, saying that in myth “there is no regular ratio between

the volume of the signified and that of the signifier" (p. 230). Potentiality recognizes a fundamental quality about myth that with myth there is always more to come. If it is not filled with potential at the time of its receipt, it at least can be filled with potential. This potential is quite like the growth potential for symbol as posited by C. S. Peirce. His view was that symbol is created in the human mind by means of thought and concept, and once experienced by the culture, its repeated use resulted in its evolution and subsequent growth (Peirce, 1974b, §§ 2.302). This "expansion by social construct" position of Peirce is also notable for its remarkable similarity to ideograph (McGee, 1980, p. 7). However, while ideograph is poised in a frame of political ideology, Peirce's notion of symbol was notably less exclusive to political relativity. However, as previously observed with ideograph, symbol also possesses expansive rhetorical potential. Interestingly, a commonly perceived difference between symbol and myth is purported to be the higher degree of elaboration that myth requires over symbol, and is a degree of elaboration that most often occurs in narrative form (Pafford, 1962, p. 132). Regardless the degree of elaboration, both are forged into existence in the realm of the signifier, and both receive their growth in the domain of the signified. A domain recognized by both Saussure and Peirce as the mental processes of the human mind. Therefore, the potentiality of Myth Context, occurs directly within us and exposes a myth's ability to scale.

Because Myth Context has inherent potential, Myth Context is therefore scalable. Lévi-Strauss (1981) argued that myth "slowly expands to its full extent" (p. 87). Lévi-Strauss was telling us that myth will not only emerge, but that it can alter its scale, seeking to consume as much space as possible after it emerges. It is a position quite similar to that of Barthes (2012) who eloquently described myth's push for "expansive ambiguity" (p.234). Barthes (2012) quite clearly articulated this notion of myth's scalability when he argued that myth's concept "can

spread over a very large expanse of the signifier" (p. 230), and when he asserted that there are "strong myths and weak myths" (p. 257). While it might seem, at first glance, redundant to differentiate myth's potentiality from myth's scalability, there is a difference. The former describes its hidden reserve potential, the latter the observable, experiential, and often measurable results that a myth's potential reserve might produce. In metaphorical terms, I argue that myth can grow such that a concept's *"perceptual mass"* can become far larger than the *"atomic mass"* of its form. Or to propose yet another metaphor, myth is a phenomenon that occurs when its "*signified mass"* expands to orders of magnitude greater than its "*literal mass"*. What this is intended to suggest is a further reinforcement of Myth Context's dynamic character and variability, where myth can be measured on a comparative scale. It alludes to a perceptible range where we can experience myth from less to more, from empty to full, from weak to strong, or from hidden to observable. Myth Context's scale as a "volume", "strength", or "visibility" can be measured independently or comparatively across a further scale of time and by the nature that myth propagates itself, its content, and its expansiveness across time (Brisson, 1998, pp. 22-23; 2004, pp. 74-75; Calame, 2011, pp. 519-520; McGee, 1980, pp. 10-11). In other words, it alludes to yet another perceptible experiential range of myth from young to old—or age. Myth's variable potential to be adapted, described in this thesis as "variability", recognizes it's high degree of resilience as a result of being an indispensable target of appropriators across culture, geography, and time. This potential to variably scale is also a potential for adaptability or malleability. For example, Raymond Firth (2011) referred to myth's adaptive nature as it's "plasticity" (p. 288). Calame (2011) also regarded myth to be endowed with "plasticity", associating this quality of resilience to the temporal adaptation of myth (p. 520). Calame's view of myth as being malleable is thus connected to both time and appropriation. Bignell (1997) argued that myths are

temporally moderated and gain power as a result of their contexts (p. 23). Bignell is thus suggesting that myth's potency is directly relational to its ability to adapt to variable interpretations over time and that this ability of myth to variably scale, from the state of impotent to potent, is directly dependent upon the myth's context. Context driven as much by situation as location. Bremmer (2011) argued that, since ancient times, myths would often propagate across "national, social, and cultural borders" (p. 540). Barthes (2012) had also noted myth's ability to adapt by way of history and geography (pp. 263-264). In other words, as myth scales within us it eventually scales beyond us. Beyond the scope of our socio-cultural identity, beyond the scope of the time we exist, and beyond our cultural borders. We project our myths, and the contexts that we endow them with, so that they might become visible to other cultures, ethnographies, and generations that might appropriate them. In other words, a myth's ability to cross generational boundaries is an evidentiary exhibit of myth's scalability. Which is ironic, in a way, since myth can deviously hide in plain sight for significant periods of time, and through multiple generational periods, despite any ambitiously expansive scale it might possess or seek.

Indeed, we note here myth's ability to be scalable. Is it possible for myth's scale to be small enough that we might not be able to observe it with the naked eye? Or do we potentially just ignore it? Do we know it's there, but fear it and intentionally evade it or deny its existence? It was Socrates himself, when narrating his description of the afterlife in the *Phaedo*, who noted the inherent risk involved in embracing myth, and the significant value in taking that risk (Murray, 2011, p. 187). How many of us actively embrace being associated with derogatory insinuations of ignorance imparted by an accusation of "*that's a myth!*" regarding some narrative? With myth there is often great risk at being subjected to its occasionally cruel ambivalence. We must risk the belief that what we cannot see, what we cannot prove, or what we

cannot logically explain or justify, has real or intrinsic value. With myth, we must at times take a leap of faith, to believe.

3.3.3.3 Reverentiality and Unfalsifiability

Myth Context occurs as a reverence for, or a belief about, the context itself. It is arguably the most controversial of attributes of Myth Context, but the reverence associated with it can be captured as belief, conviction, or ideology. At the opening of this thesis, a cohort of contrasting scholarly disciplines were documented to demonstrate where belief is commonly associable with myth. Since the time of Aristotle, it has been the goal of rhetoric, of persuasion, to convince the receiver to believe, or believe in, the message contained in the rhetoric presented (Dow, 2015, §§ 2.1-2.2). Belief is then directly implicated with all acts of rhetorical persuasion. Rhetoric, and the need to be convinced, is no stranger to appropriation (Barthes, 1977, p. 49), and conviction is no stranger to myth (Malinowski, 1971, pp. 19, 25, 88). Socrates was arrogantly confident in his ability to persuade society to believe in his fantastic narratives (Murray, 2011, p. 183). But Barthes does not appear to have explicitly or significantly addressed the notion of belief's direct influence upon myth. Rather, Barthes (2012) did imply a connection between ideology and the naturalization of myth using the myth of French national identity as a direct example (pp. 252-253). One could argue that Barthes was suggesting that a belief in myth, synonymous with a belief in a common national identity, was further synonymous with that identity being perceived as a naturalized state of myth. As myth, the abductive reception of a fantastic narrative in a significantly mutated state, yet perceived as something natural, therefor implies a deeply held conviction in the potentiality of the narrative. In other words, if you perceive the myth as normal or natural, especially if its state as myth is still in obscurity, you consequently hold a deep conviction for the myth.

Campbell (1997) argued that the experience of myth is fundamentally intertwined with that of belief (pp. 20-21). Ackerman (1972) reaffirmed the problematic of the study of myth, and clarified myth's central character, when he argued that myth was not exclusive to "archetypes, patterns, or stories" (p. 267), and asserted that the "overlapping functions of literature and myth lead finally to the problem of *belief*" (p. 267). Ackerman is thus reinforcing the premise, that myth is an experiential phenomenon central to the audience's impassioned conviction in that narrative. In making the argument that there is a fundamental and inherent differentiation of myth, in contrast to art—assumed here that art refers to mimetic narrative—Cassirer (1956) asserted that the grounding of myth was due to the "belief in the reality of its object" (p. 75). Cassirer was arguing that without an audience's belief in myth's object, it is then only a form of art. Myth's ground is directly related to the convictions held by the audience. Because art, or fictional narrative, is distinct from myth, the audience grounds the narrative with their convictions about it, endows the form with concept, abducting the narrative in the process, and finally brings myth forth. Segal (2004) argued that the condition that must be met for something to be myth is that "a story, which can of course express a conviction, be held tenaciously by adherents" (p. 6). Segal is attempting to define myth as a story, true or false, that takes it mythic meaning because of the strength and depth of one's belief in the narrative. In other words, something becomes myth if the concept, developed by the adherent, or advocate, of the story, is taken as a matter of faith in that concept, and the advocate demonstrates a tenacious refusal, or denial, to permit their belief or conviction in the concept's perceptual mass to be altered or modified in any way. Regardless how the myth, and the reverence for that myth, might be threatened by myth's inherent contradictory nature.

From a social perspective, Watts (2012) argued that myth promotes belief structure within social groups and enables identity performance in "emergent social practice" (p. 589). Subjective context, leveraged here by Myth Context, directly involves those shared beliefs constructed socially (Fetzer, 2012, p. 112). Because the second-order signification system of Connotation is synonymous with both ideology and rhetoric (Barthes, 1968, pp. 91-92), and because Connotation is socio-culturally context-dependent (Chandler, 2007, p. 138), the belief that something is different, bigger, or more exotic, than what a thing actually says about itself, can be used to transform a Literal Context into a Myth Context. Belief can then sustain Myth Context for as long as it is believed. Myth Context therefore involves a belief in, a belief for, or a belief about a myth. A belief held for a myth is a reverence for its corresponding narrative, the signification the concept conveys, and its raw importance to that individual, their culture, or their identities. Because I might not agree with a Myth Context someone else possesses, that does not make their Myth Context any less important to them or invalid. Above all, this thesis does not judge the veracity, prudence or morality of that context. The purpose of this thesis is to recognize where such expansive or dynamic personal reverence exists and how that reverence, for what is often perceived as or accused to be a false narrative, propagates itself across mortal boundaries. What is surprising though, is that myth brings with itself a congenital resilience or immunity to accusations of falsity.

Myth Context is unfalsifiable. A common misperception is that belief in myth is interpreted as an explicit belief that the myth is, or was, in fact real. In contrast, I argue that belief or reverence in relation to myth should alternatively be understood as a belief in myth's potentiality. The desire to believe that something of a fantastic but unproven nature is or was real, can be potentially indistinguishable from, the desire to believe that something of a fantastic

but unproven nature could be possible. In other words, belief in myth represents a range of belief between—a belief about myth and a belief in myth. As Brisson (1998) argues, it was Plato's view that myth is an *unfalsifiable* form of persuasion that, though it might appear to be plausible, evades logical or rational explanation (pp. 9-10). Indeed, Greek culture considered myth to be—not true, but also not false—or a *tertium quid* (Doty, 2000, p. 227). James Wood (2008), in examining the hypothetical plausibility promoted by Aristotle, asserted that the burden to convince is a matter of "mimetic *persuasion*: it is the artist's task to convince us that this could have happened" (p. 238). Just as when Barthes (1977) qualified *Italianicity* as "everything that could be Italian" (p. 48), myth is what could have been, or what still could be. Therefore, we believe in the myth's rhetorical potential, the ability of its story to persuade us to believe—in the potential for some possible alternate future that has not yet occurred, or in the potential for some possible past for which there is no evidence that it never did exist. The audience or spectator permits themselves to believe in myth's potentiality, and we do this especially when the Myth Context is in direct contradiction to Literal Context.

3.3.3.4 Paradoxicality

Myth Context is inherently paradoxical. *Paradox* is generally defined as the presence of contradiction (Birenbaum, 1988, p. 24), but more specifically, it refers to a contradictory condition that is potentially irreconcilable (Napier, 1986, p. 1). Paradox is supported logically in one regard, while simultaneously being supported illogically in another regard, such that the rational and the myth, the science and the conviction, the sign and the signification appear to occupy the same space paradoxically (Doty, 2000, p. 89). A. David Napier (1986) argues that recognizing the presence of a paradox requires "an acceptance that things may look like what they are not" (p. 1). In other words, before we can identify the existence of paradox, we must be

able to accept the possibility that a narrative, on appearance, can provide enough of an illusory appeal to attempt to deceive us, and we must accept the possibility that we are potentially susceptible to any illusion, or deception, by the narrative, if we are to acknowledge that a paradoxical condition exists.

Peirce (1974b) defined contradiction as a "reciprocal relation" where propositions "deny one another" (§§ 2.476-2.477). Semiotically, recognizing a contradiction is straightforward. The signifieds of two signs, or alternatively a sign and signification, are contrary to one another. By this definition, a contradiction can entail a contrary condition as simple as a disagreement. In contrast, however, a paradox is irreconcilable (Napier, 1986, p. 1). Paradox and myth are fundamentally related in structuralist semiotic theory. Lévi-Strauss (1981) argued that myth is permeated with paradox, describing paradox in myth as a "fundamental opposition" (p. 87), due in part to the "binary oppositions" (pp. 78, 85), or "binary distinctions" (pp. 84, 87), found in language and nature (pp. 84, 87). Harland (1993) leveraged Lévi-Strauss' theories on opposition (p. 197) to advance a similar theory, or binary-polarization technique, relational to myth (pp. 195-210), and posited that this technique could expose the very specific problem of "what is actually inherent in reality and what is merely cast over the top of it" (p. 200).

While these oppositions seem, at first sight, to be focused largely on paradox found specific to opposing objects (Lévi-Strauss, 1981, p. 87), or paradox within content, the approach is much more complex. Lévi-Strauss (1981) is arguing that myth is a mental activity that will compel "man…to accept…two self-evident and contradictory truths" (p. 87), and therefore results in an irreconcilable contradictory relationship between the "reality of being" (p. 87), and "the reality of not being" (p. 87). These oppositions are not intended to be received as entirely objective. They occur in the human mind. For example, Lévi-Strauss (1981) argued myth to be

directly and exclusively coexistent with human presence (p. 87), and he said further that "mythical thought always works from the awareness of oppositions towards their progressive mediation" (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, p. 440). Myth thus, is a result of oppositions occurring within human mental faculty, not exclusively oppositions of objective definitions. Myth is paradoxical as a result of the contradiction found between the collective construction of the narrative, and the way in which an individual experiences it (Lévi-Strauss, 1969, p. 18). From an experiential perspective, paradox is argued here to be relational to the dynamics of belief and reverence. From a constructive perspective, the mimetic or imitative nature of literary fiction is considered to be paradoxical because it projects an appearance of something contradictory as a matter of mimetic representation (Rabinowitz, 1987, p. 94). In other words, narrative, or Prospective Myth, is then inherently predisposed towards paradox.

Socrates recognized myth's paradoxical character to be a false discourse, while simultaneously possessive of some kind of inherent truth (Brisson, 1998, pp. 108-109; Murray, 2011, pp. 181-182). The Greek sense of myth as unfalsifiable (Brisson, 1998, pp. 9-10), or *tertium quid* (Doty, 2000, p. 227), placed it in a paradoxical state of being simultaneously a false discourse while also inherently unprovable. Niall Livingstone (2011) argued that what made myth invaluable to the ancient Greeks, as a means of instruction, was its "combination of reality and unreality" (p. 137). In establishing his *principle of non-contradiction*, Aristotle argued that "it is impossible for anything at the same time to be and not to be" (Hatab, 1990, p. 274). Aristotle further distinguished the separation between conceptual reasoning and myth (Hatab, 1990, p. 259), and it is this ancient moment, as Aristotle performs a significant role in establishing the foundations of the scientific method (Hatab, 1990, pp. 266-267), that the paradoxical nature of myth is positioned as a contrast against the logic of science.

Barthes (2012) recognized the significant relevance of paradox, in relation to myth, arguing that when the full first-order signified is converted to form, or second-order signifier, the distancing and emptying of the sign's literal meaning produces a, "paradoxical permutation in the reading operations" (p.227). It will become a permutation that, as form, will stand paradoxically to the prior literal meaning of the linguistic sign. Barthes (2012) exposed this paradoxical nature inherent to the mythic signifier, when he described sign, or meaning, as occupied, and form as vacant (p. 227). But Barthes (2012) would further expose the complex and obscure nature of paradox in myth when he observes that sign and form tend to exhibit a lack of contradiction during the experience of myth (p. 233), but regardless, will still possess contradiction in the examination of the myth (p. 234). Myth is something that happens in the mind of the reader, is experienced by the reader, but the reader who experiences the myth may be unaware, or may purposefully avoid any awareness, of the paradoxical condition experienced, and subsequently any recognition of the myth. In other words, a contradiction regarding a contradiction. The paradox exists, within the reader, but to the reader, it does not. Or as Lévi-Strauss (1995) argued, it exists "unbeknownst" to the reader (p. 3). The myth reader, Barthes (2012) argued, will "focus on the mythical signifier as on an inextricable whole made of meaning and form, I receive an ambiguous signification: I respond to the constituting mechanism of myth, to its own dynamics" (p. 239). In other words, the reader, by focusing exclusively on the form, may either intentionally, or incidentally, ignore any literal meaning. The reader imposes signification of myth, over the literal meaning, and this distorted relationship with the literal sign is believed by the reader to be something natural (Barthes, 2012, pp. 240,245), and is, consequently, not received as the paradox it is. Myth Context is therefore paradoxical because

the paradox occurs exclusively within us. A phenomenon with such fundamental influence that we may at times be inclined to imitate the paradox.

3.3.3.5 Mimeticality

Myth Context is mimetical. To be more specific, mimetical behavior on the part of the myth receiver is frequently present in Myth Context. The term mimetical implies that imitative phenomena can often be found present within an audience's reception of myth. As previously stated here, narrative is defined as a mimesis where it is assumed to be created by an author to be imitative of life in some way as a physical purpose of the narrative (Hume, 1984, p. 20; Lamarque & Olsen, 1994, p. 72). Most objects, facts, symbols, and images that become myth do so by way of narrative—written, verbal, or visual. Photographs and illustrations are imitative of the life events they capture. Icons and symbols imitative of the objects or events they represent. Facts and historical documents are expected to be as imitative of actual events as humanly possible in the scope of a literary endeavor. Even when producing fictions, the fictions are mimetic of the essence of human behavior if not at least imitative of an actual event. Mimesis plays an almost universal role in the production of Prospective Myth and is fundamentally behavioral since a human is assumed to create most mimetic representations that eventually become myth. But since formal mimesis is generally a means of constructing Prospective Myth, it is an antecedent to Myth Context. The mimetics we are concerned with at this juncture, however, are the internal and external mimetics that occur within us, the receivers of myth, because of Myth Context. I argue that this imitative behavior, observed to occur in a direction opposite artistic mimesis, occurs as an attribute of Myth Context demonstrable in the full range of indications of myth from appropriation to ritual.

The potential for myth to produce mimetical outcomes has been known since the time of ancient Greeks. In ancient Greece, myth was considered to be a form of magical incantation (Brisson, 1998, p. 10; Morgan, 2000, pp. 159, 199, 207). Plato recognized the potential for humans to exhibit behavior that reenacts myth, or project qualities of the experienced myth, in human behavior (Brisson, 1998, p. 74). It was perceived by Plato as a defect of myth (Brisson, 1998, p. 9), partly because there was always the potential for a mimesis of a reprehensible nature to find its way to being imitated by the audience (Schaeffer, 2010, pp. 16-17). As Brisson 1998 writes, "The imitation utilized by the transmitter affects the receiver, who tries genuinely to assimilate himself to the reality referred to by the discourse to which he is listening." (p. 74). What Plato understood is that myth has the unique power to "train" the recipient of the myth to imitate the myth (Brisson, 1998, p. 74; Schaeffer, 2010, p. 21). Myth thus is a valid means of persuasion assuming, as Plato does, that the mimesis being imitated is carefully restricted to one of high moral quality (Brisson, 1998, p. 116). Plato employed myth, as did Socrates, for the direct and intentional manipulation of societal behavior (Murray, 2011, p. 183). The use of myth by the ancient Greeks, to invoke imitation as a behavioral outcome, then was measurable and observable. But this imitative by-product of myth, and subsequently Myth Context, is not always directly observable.

As previously argued, myth can occur in complete obscurity. Myth can be present but hidden from direct observation by the culture in a socio-cultural setting. Imitative behavior, because of Myth Context, can occur as part of the cognitive or imaginative process internally within the individual, and might not be immediately observable. This could be thought of as an imaginative mimesis. As a function of Myth Context, this kind of imitative behavior is exclusive to an internal mental faculty and its existence can occur potentially obscured from societal view.

Barthes (2012) asserted myth to be experienced in a state of innocence, where the myth is taken inductively as "fact" (p. 242). It is a process where the artificiality of myth is naturalized into an equivalency perceived as factual (pp. 241-242, 255-256), because myth engages in a pretense (p. 245), where it "transforms history into nature" (p. 240). Barthes (2012) referred to this condition as *naturalization* (pp. 240-242). In other words, myth works because it is not really perceived as myth by the audience. It is not perceived as an imitation. It is therefore conceived as a natural thing, in a natural state of obscurity, because we believe it to be completely normal, natural, and without the paradoxical qualities that a deeper logical evaluation might reveal. But if this naturalization of the paradoxical narrative is a pretense, as Barthes asserted, then it is we, the receivers of myth, who are responsible for this pretense. It is we that perceive it to be, imagine it to be, or believe it to be something else than what it really is. We take it within Myth Context, by deception or by mistake, by intent or by accident, knowingly or unknowingly, to be an imitation of something it is not.

From a semiotic perspective, this kind of imitative behavior demonstrates a clear act of appropriation on the part of the audience. Barthes (2012) did connect the repurposing of the 'natural' to the act of appropriation (p. 260), characterizing this appropriative act as the taking of an existing history to distort its meaning (p. 243), and then described the use of this transformed replacement of the literal, as a "surreptitious faking" (p. 236-242). Further, Barthes (2012) disclosed the mimetic quality of myth when he declared that the concept's elements "are linked by associative relations" (p. 232). Associative relations, in the Saussurean tradition that Barthes was a part of, was typically indicative of similarity at either the level of form or the level of meaning (Chandler, 2007, p. 85), and a fake is generally regarded as a cheap imitation. An imperfect copy with a high degree of similarity to something else. A fake is also an appropriation

that is a blatant and egregious theft, by way of replication or duplication, meant to imitate something genuine. Barthes (2012) was clear in his view that myth occurred as the result something else generally being “stolen” (pp. 236, 242-244, 257). And Barthes (2012) revealed myth’s ability to promote, in the new history of the myth concept, an imitation of, a similarity to, or a likeness of a pre-existing history when he provided direct examples in his dialogs regarding the analogous or imitative natures of *Siniess* (p. 230), *Basquity* (p. 235), or *Romanity* (p. 19). In other words, myth is an illegitimate inheritance. Something we abduct to be used as a natural resemblance of something else. We perceive this ill-gotten and illegitimate contraband as an imitation of something we supposedly own. The mimeticality of Myth Context is therefore a process that occurs within us, the audience, knowingly or unknowingly, where the audience subsequently fakes ownership of an alien narrative in order to justify the variable remolding of that narrative into an imitation of yet another “something else”. Something potentially larger and grander that the author and/or audience might desire, in place of the original narrative. This mimetic behavior occurs first as thought—as a process which begins within us generally hidden from societal view—and has the potential to scale beyond us to evolve into imitation as action. Imitation that occurs as a result of which context of the narrative we selectively choose to engage and receive.

3.3.4 Myth Context and Selectivity

Because myth always offers us dual contexts, a Literal Context and a Myth Context, myth occurs in a condition of selectivity. Roman Jakobson (1971) had recognized that context and selection were arranged as the complimentary operations of sign interpretation (p.243). Jakobson (1971) argued (1) that context occurred as a result of combination where different signs could be arranged in relation to a sign to alter that superior sign’s meaning, and (2) because different

context combinations were possible, one combination could therefore be substituted by a different combination thereby presenting the opportunity for someone to select one combination or the other (p.243). Jakobson's argument was a semiotic argument pertaining to Saussurean structural linguistics. But it is highly relevant here since it positions both context and selection as two distinct and important sides of the interpretive equation within semiotics. For this thesis it reinforces that a choice exists between the Literal Context or Myth Context. We can select between these choices or, as in the case of myth because it is variable and scalable, further potential for choices of combination and selection will occur if we choose Myth Context. Myth therefore presents itself as though it were a mixed-case conditional statement. Myth permits us the ability to "select", as both primary and as a substitution for the opposite context, whichever context we desire when it is most meaningful or advantageous to us. Barthes (1977), in defining the twofold nature of the image, regarded the image as polysemous, arguing that it contained "a 'floating chain' of signifieds" (pp. 38-39), that the "reader was able to choose some and ignore others" (p.39), and that literal meaning and mythic form are always present, each with the ability to be called or dismissed at a moment's notice (Barthes, 2012, p. 227). Therefore, messages that contain multiple signifieds, as do those in 2nd level significations, clearly present a choice to the reader or spectator, and what is chosen depends on how the reader wants to use it (Gould, 1981, p. 119). Barthes (2012) also argued that "it is the reader of myths himself who must reveal their essential function" (p. 239). Positing further that myth was, by its essence, depoliticized speech (p. 255). Speech that is purified of its original socially derived history and replaced with a new value perceived innocently and blissfully natural in origin, capable of stating something as though it were fact, and to appear as though it lacked contradiction (Barthes, 2012, pp. 255-256). But Barthes (2012) qualified that this naturalization, by way of depoliticization, occurs as a

direct result of the "needs" and "situation" of people who "use" myth (p.257). In other words, Myth Context is dependent upon use selections driven by our needs and motives where the invocation and selection of Myth Context acts as a substitute for the alternative context.

3.3.5 The Indication of Myth Context

The attributes of Myth Context are therefore descriptive of the imposition of human behaviors upon any narrative and significantly representative of the human condition. Myth is *dependent* because we appropriate narratives. Myth is *variable* because we purposefully vacate a narrative's meaning and fill it with our new ideas. Myth has *potential* because we allow it to *scale* in our minds and take up expansive amounts of human mental real estate. Myth is *obscure* because at times we arrogantly assume, in the existence of a technologically superior age, that we are not capable of such "primitive" behavior. Myth is *reverential* because we believe in the raw power of its potential. Myth is *unfalsifiable* because we often choose to live in histories or futures of own desire that no one else can prove did not exist or hasn't yet. Myth is *paradoxical* because our reverence for it is often more important to us than the logic of its literalness, and myth is *mimetical* because we often choose to imitate it, at times publicly and at times completely unaware of our ritual reenactments, emulations, or mimicry. These attributes of Myth Context are therefore relational to their co-existence as the human behaviors that can occur during the contextualization of myth. Further, they are the building blocks of more complex human behaviors that can be observed, measured, and documented and therefore function as indicators of Myth Context that can ultimately be used to identify the presence of myth in an audience's reception of a narrative.

3.4 INDICATORS OF MYTH CONTEXT

Barthes would eloquently characterize myth as a “confidence and a complicity” (p. 234-235). The characterization was yet another metaphor. To Barthes, myth was a persuasive con artist. But as with any con game or hustle, there is always a “tell”. An indicator, multiple indicators, or an unintended divulgence that betrays the circumstance that is covertly transpiring. In defining the role of the mythologist, Barthes (2012) provided some guidance on how to determine the “tell”, or indicators of myth, describing it as a distortion in the mean relationship between the signified of the first-order sign and the concept of the second-order signification (pp. 238-239). Consequently, while this thesis does not presume to identify all possible indicators of mythic distortion, relative to all narratives, I do argue that there are at least three dominant indicators of myth, that are grounded in the attributes of Myth Context, and are human behaviors observable as a result of an audience’s reception of a narrative as myth.

The presence of any these indicators, in relation to a narrative, is not a judgement on the rationality of a narrative, the rationality of a narrative’s reception, or a judgement of the narrative’s audience. Rather, these are indicators of a reader’s willingness to engage with the Myth Context, to be complicit in the myth’s confidence game. These indicators are observable human behaviors. Each will rely on the indicators that precede it, and when present in combination, can assist in revealing a myth’s strength from weak to strong with Reverse-Mimesis indicating the strongest Myth Context response. However, because myth, and Myth Context, can potentially be hidden from audience and observer alike, an audience may be completely unaware they are exhibiting such indicators. Where and when obscure, any indicator may be difficult to observe without detailed and directed comparative examination of both the

narrative and its respective audience. These indicators are the acts of paradoxical belief, appropriative imitation, and reverse-mimesis.

3.4.1 Paradoxical Belief

The first indicator of Myth Context that this thesis identifies is that of Paradoxical Belief. The word paradox is an English translation of the Greek words *para* and *doxa*, or "against" and "belief" respectively (Adamson, 2014, p. 44). Paradox is therefore inherently and etymologically linked to the idea of reverentiality, or belief, as posited here. The term paradoxical belief, though potentially redundant from an etymological perspective, is used here to clarify that the paradox being discussed is not a paradox of content. Rather, while that is possible, what paradoxical belief seeks to describe is the way in which an audience's beliefs about a narrative are paradoxical to the stated literalness of the narrative. In other words, whenever Myth Context is present, the context of the reader's belief in, of, or about the myth should generally be paradoxical to the Literal Context.

The poetry of Wallace Stevens is frequently linked to both myth and faith (Ackerman, 1972, pp. 266-267). It was Wallace Stevens who penned the verse, "The final belief is to believe in a fiction, which you know to be a fiction, there being nothing else. The exquisite truth is to know that it is a fiction and that you believe it willingly" (Von Hendy, 2002, pp. 305-306). In this verse, Stevens imagines for us a phenomenon, experienced paradoxically, where something verifiably established as fiction, is willingly taken by the receiver as a matter of faith, to be enthusiastically and willingly embraced and believed as much more than the sum of its recognized and verifiable fictive limitations. Von Hendy (2002) cited this verse by Stevens and argued that it represents the "paradoxical quintessence of the constitutive conception of myth" (pp. 305-306). The significantly important observation to be made, in this critique of Stevens'

verse, is not necessarily a reinforcement of the power of belief to promote myth, but rather Von Hendy's conclusion that the constitution of myth, represented as a contrary belief enthusiastically held for a literal narrative, is 'quintessentially' a paradox.

Barthes (2012) did directly identify paradox to exist in the "reading operations" of myth (p.227), further telling us that myth "*hides nothing*: its function is to distort" (p. 231), that the "meaning is distorted by the concept" (p.232), and that "the concept literally, deforms, but does not abolish the meaning" (p.232). He asserted that the literal meaning and myth form, while occupying the same space, are observed in constant ambiguous alternation of one another as result of the concept's distortion (Barthes, 2012, p. 233). Barthes (2012) described this ambiguous alternation to be "at once intellective and imaginary, arbitrary and natural" (p. 233). Barthes' tendency was to speak of myth by way of metaphor. I argue that he was eloquently and consistently describing the persistence of paradox in myth, and that further, Barthes (2012) did implicitly connect the concept of belief, to this alternating ambiguity, when he argued that myth is a rhetoric seeking to persuade him of its contingent, yet ambiguous, forceful argument (p. 234). Since the point of rhetoric is to persuade someone to believe the argument, and Barthes (2012) presented myth as a "summons" addressed with great specificity to Barthes himself as the intended addressee (p. 234), the efficacy of any myth is dependent upon Barthes' willingness to believe its rhetoric. To believe paradoxically that the myth is natural and absolute when it is presented as contingent and ambiguous. Since the narrative's solicitation is a summons, an "ask" or "pitch", it presumes an "answer" forthcoming. A choice is presented to Barthes to accept the expansive ambiguity—or not. In other words, he is expected to select the Literal Context or the Myth Context as a result of the solicitation. If Barthes chooses to believe that the expansive ambiguity is a natural thing, then belief in the argument serves as justification to allow the

deformation of the literal into myth and thus enable its final appropriation. Belief therefore catalyzes the myth deformation and subsequently sustains it.

Barthes (2012) was very precise is saying that there was no contradiction, no paradox, between the literal meaning and the myth form (p.233). The paradox is not a contradiction of the first-level meaning and second-level signifier but rather a contradiction in the connotative binding of the second-level signification. The paradox exists not within content, but within the Myth Context. It is a contradiction of behavior. As a belief, it exists exclusively within us, the reader or audience, and is contextual to what we choose to paradoxically believe about the narrative and our willingness to believe. Gregor Sebba (1962) had eloquently argued that a myth "may be historically true, legendary, or invented; but for the believer, it is 'truer than truth' and therefore highly impervious to refutation by a show of facts to the contrary" (p. 145). While Sebba reinforces the idea that the source of myth can be factual or fictive, what is distinctive about this comment is that (1) Sebba recognizes that belief in myth is variable, not everyone believes, and that (2) myth's signified mass can be so scalable that it may become resistant to falsification regardless the scientific evidence, or literal contradiction, that is used to deny it veracity. It is this comparative difference, where beliefs are held paradoxically, that can potentially indicate when a Myth Context has been selected over a Literal Context.

3.4.2 Appropriative Imitation

The second indicator of Myth Context that this thesis identifies is that of *Appropriative Imitation.* Ricoeur (1981) defined appropriation as "to make what was alien become one's own" (p. 113), and argued that "interpretation 'brings together', 'equalises', renders 'contemporary and similar', thus genuinely making one's *own* what was initially *alien*" (p. 159). To be different, but also be equal and similar, as a process of interpretation, is to suggest an event of imitative

significance. In other words, *appropriation* is a form of imitative ownership predicated upon an acculturation or assimilation of something alien to the appropriator. Further, the link from imitative mimesis to appropriation can be found in the work of Rene Girard. Girard (1987) argued that "What is missing in Plato's account of imitation is any reference to kinds of behavior involved in appropriation…There is no reason to exclude appropriation from imitation" (p. 8). The argument is that one party, that imitates another party's behavior, is engaged in an "acquisitive mimesis", or an appropriation of the second party's behavior (Girard, 1987, pp. 8-9). Further, Girard's acquisitive mimesis provides a means to connect the appropriation associated with Barthes' view of myth with the imitation associated to Plato. In other words, imitation that occurs on the part of the audience, as an attribute of Myth Context, is inherently and unambiguously appropriative. It is an acquisition, or appropriation, by way of imitation. Or more concisely, it is an "appropriative imitation".

Barthes (2012) did explore the association between appropriation and possession in his essays (pp. 84, 87 – 88, 182, 265). What Barthes (2012) described as appropriation was characterized as a criminal acquisition, calling myth a "larceny" (p. 236), and a "robbery" (pp. 242-244, 257). But this appropriation is more complicated than it appears. As an acquisition, it is the taking of something to be used, and repurposed, to become something else, or something new, regardless its original intent. It is a phenomenon resembling a theft, where the thing stolen is ransomed in exchange for something of a different or greater value. Barthes (2012) referred to the targets of myth's appropriation as "prey" (p. 218), that myth is an "arrest" (p. 235), that myth "takes it away en bloc" (p. 243), carried "away bodily" (p. 243), and that what myth takes hold of is emptied (p. 226), to ultimately become "speech *stolen and restored*" (p. 236). Barthes (2012) tells us that what is abducted, or appropriated, when it is put back (p.236), it possesses a

concept with an ambiguous “new history” (pp. 228, 234), so distorted (pp. 231-232, 243), or transformed (pp. 242, 244), that it is expansively larger than (pp. 230, 234), or disproportionately voluminous in relation to (p. 230), that which was initially abducted. In other words, for myth to become an expansive new rhetoric, it is paradoxically and helplessly dependent upon the thing being appropriated for its future ability to imitate something else.

Barthes (1977) connected imitation with rhetoric by using a culinary advertising image characterized as having been presented in French, that visually included “some packets of pasta, a tin, a sachet, some tomatoes, onions, peppers, a mushroom, all emerging from a half-open string bag, in yellows and greens on a red background” (p. 33). Barthes (1977) defined the condition of this analogy, or likeness, as “*Italianicity*” (p. 32-33), such that “*Italianicity* is not Italy, it is the condensed essence of everything that could be Italian, from spaghetti to painting” (p. 48). Barthes (1977) equated the ideology of *Italianicity* to be synonymous with rhetoric, because of the commonalities the constitutive elements share (p. 49), or a rhetoric where the inherent syntagmatic relationships, of these elements, naturalize it into a “symbolic message” (p. 49-51). Harland (1993) recognized Barthes’ essay on “Italianicity” to be similar with Barthes’ dialogs on *Imperiality* or *Basquity* in relation to myth (pp. 204-205). In his dialog on Basquity, for example, Barthes (2012) describes the mythic appropriation at work in a French chalet imitatively modeled in the architectural style of a house commonly found in the Basque region of Spain (pp. 234-235). These likenesses, “Basquity” or “Italianicity”, are imitations that appropriate a historical character to elicit the myth of “everything Basque”, or “everything Italian”, respectively, and impose that essence upon these new things that are clearly not Basque, nor Italian. However, because this appropriative imitation is so perceived as something “naturalized” (Barthes, 1977, p. 51), it is potentially undetectable. It is potentially a deformation

perceived not to be deformed, or an unnatural history perceived to be a natural one. A further paradoxical condition of myth where there is no guarantee that an audience will even be aware of its own appropriative or imitative behavior while engaging with the myth. In other words, myth can remain obscure even as the result of a blatantly obvious appropriation.

Appropriative Imitation functions as an indicator of Myth Context because of the comparative differences it reveals in relation to myth. These appropriations and imitations, however discrete or obscure, are demonstrable of comparative observable differences in origin, appearance, location, relationship, intent, and ownership. They are further the result of human behaviors. Appropriated imitations with well-established historical character that, as a result of an artificial imposition of myth contextualization, a mimetic abduction of their character, they now possess the paradoxical distinction of having been displaced from their natural environment and repurposed for a detectable foreign duty. I am engaged in a paradoxical belief, that my appropriative imitation is sufficiently *Basque* or *Italian*, and that I, being of neither history, believe I am justified in owning or manipulating such "contraband". All of which indicate a clear engagement of a Myth Context.

3.4.3 Reverse-Mimesis

The third indicator of Myth Context that this thesis identifies is that of *Reverse-mimesis*. Reverse-mimesis is grounded within the larger mimetic process of narrative that this thesis has asserted myth to be a part of. Mimesis is typically described as a mode of imitation where *art imitates life* (Dowling, 2011, p. 1). In contrast, reverse-mimesis functions in the contrary to mimesis (Currie, 2013, p. 45), and describes a mode of imitation where *life imitates art* (Longxi, 1988, pp. 90-94). Reverse-mimesis, as employed here, describes an appropriative imitation inversely related to that of the mimetic narrative where someone in the audience, who consumes

a work of art [narrative] through reception, becomes an agent that appropriates that art as an example, or template, for enacted behavior that imitates the narrative.

This thesis asserts that reverse-mimesis is a distinct higher-order extension of appropriative imitation, that demonstrates the strongest and most observable paradoxical human behavior in relation to myth, and is therefore a clear indicator of Myth Context. Reverse-mimesis is an imitative human behavior meant to embody the myth. In other words, it is an attempt to homogenize reception by making human behavior similar with, congruent with, or imitative of the myth's narrative. While this imitation may appear, at first glance, to have the effect of removing any difference between narrative and audience behavior, reverse-mimesis is measurable both in its effectiveness at imitating the narrative and against perceived societal norms that may interpret the imitation as culturally controversial. Per Barthes' (2012) notion that any myth can be variable in strength (p.257), reverse-mimesis can assist in giving some indication of a Myth Context's strength because it indicates where and when a culture is willing to take great risks to imitate, despite controversy or societal taboo that might be associable with such imitation. As James S. Hans (1981) points out, mimetic appropriation—observed here as reverse-mimesis—is known to be associated with significant societal risk since the times of Plato (p. 64). Using Girard as his guide, Hans (1981) asserts that since ancient times we have generally attempted to ignore our innate and natural human inclination to imitate, because "to be possessed by the gods, as any poetic player is, is to be in an irrational state, and our desire has always been to turn away from possession, to keep our feet firmly planted in the ground of reason" (p. 64). In other words, reverse-mimesis indicates behavior which may be paradoxical to socially acceptable behavior.

Yet regardless any fear that might be associated with the risk of engaging in reverse-mimesis, it is a normal and ubiquitously common innate human response. Imitation of facial expressions has been scientifically observed in infants within hours of birth (Goldman, 2005, p. 81), and imitation is implicated as an agent in the bonding between imitator and imitated (Anisfeld, 2005, p. 108). It is further a fundamental tenet of parental guidance that children will imitate their parents and imitation is observed across the lifespan as a recognized means of passing social custom across generational boundaries (Meltzoff, 2005, p. 55). Hurley and Chater (2005) argue that "human imitation is flexible, ubiquitous, effortless, and intrinsically rewarding" (p. 20), and the effortlessness that humans engage in imitation is attributed to child and adult alike (Meltzoff, 2005, p. 55). With automatic and unconscious ease, humans imitate gesture, accent, facial expression, and vocal tone in order to assimilate into our social surroundings (Dijksterhuis, 2005, pp. 207-208), often completely unaware that we imitate social behavior (Dijksterhuis, 2005, p. 211). We further imitate the attitudes, goals, and emotions of others (Prinz, 2005, p. 276). Perhaps more controversial is that imitation is implicated as a broad performative tool in the art of human deception (Gambetta, 2005, p. 226). Imitation is further perceived as such a powerful force in the transmission of human cultural behavior that is has been implicated as one possible cause of the phenomena of suicidal contagion (Morin, 2015, p. 23). A claim that is no less disturbing than controversial, and one with such grave consequences as to make any fear of imitative behavior seem quite normal. Still, I suggest that reverse-mimesis relational to myth is paradoxically ubiquitous and common while are often blissfully unaware of its natural presence. Barthes (2012) had asserted that the controversies inherent with myths are generally naturalized, such that a myth can be perceived without controversy or contradiction (pp. 240-242, 255-256). And because imitation is a natural human response, it is understandable

that an audience or culture might be unaware of their own expressive reverse-mimetic behavior. This is a suggestion consistent with the general premise in Oscar Wilde's declaration that "life imitates art far more than art imitates life" (Gillespie & Zittoun, 2015, p. 135; Wilde, 1889, p. 47).

Plato and Socrates were well acquainted with myth's ability to train an audience to imitate desired moral or physical social behavior. (Brisson, 1998, pp. 10, 74; Murray, 2011, p. 183; Schaeffer, 2010, p. 21). So powerful and spectacular was myth's ability to induce imitation in its audience that Plato regarded it as a form of magic capable of exerting significant influence and modification upon the human soul of all ages (Brisson, 1998, pp. 10, 82, 138; Morgan, 2000, p. 159). It was perceived so powerful by Plato, that he feared it could be deployed unvirtuously (Munteanu, 2004, p. 156), and argued for the strict regulation of myth's moral content and distribution (Brisson, 1998, pp. 83, 116). Aristotle, always the rational scientist, held the alternative view that myth can produce positive effects on an audience simply because imitation is a natural human tendency that we enjoy because it initiates mental processes that directly affect learning (Munteanu, 2004, p. 97). Or as Jerome Bruner (1959) argues, "myth becomes the tutor, the shaper of identities; it is here that personality imitates myth in as deep a sense as myth is an externalization of the vicissitudes of personality." (p. 352).

It is arguable that there is no more profound an example of alternating shifts of personality than in the act of ritual. Ritual is a well-known associate to myth, and I argue further that ritual is the highest form of reverse-mimesis in relation to myth and Myth Context. Ritual is a phenomena that permits the ability to express and convey emotional understanding by way of imitation (Valeri, 2018b, p. 187). Burkert (1979) observed the timeless and inherently reverential, paradoxical, and irrational qualities of ritual when he writes that "'Ritual' is

something atavistic, compulsive, nonsensical, at best circumstantial and superfluous, but at the same time something sacred and mysterious" (p. 35). Ritual relational to myth, especially initiation ritual, was widely practiced in ancient Greece (Dowden, 2011b, p. 488). Ritual today is a common and ubiquitously shared human behavior, and as suggested by Valeri (2018a), can include "behaviors of courtesy, good manners, ceremonies of installation of political and religious authorities, the ceremonial of the court, weddings, baptisms, and so forth" (p. 15). Like myth, ritual has been perceived as a form of magic (Tudor, 1972, p. 29), and is directly implicated as a means of modifying human behavior (Scheub, 2012, p. 19). Further, ritual is also considered to be a context. For example, Allen (2011) suggests that ritual is synonymous with "contexts of transmission" (p. 342). However, there is no guarantee that myth will induce ritual. Myth and ritual have been regarded to not be explicitly codependent or mutually inclusive (Tudor, 1972, p. 29). Burkert (1979) suggests that while myth can persistently occur exclusive of any associated ritual (p. 56), the two can potentially "form an alliance for mutual benefit, indeed a symbiosis" (p. 57). But when they do occur together, myth gains a distinct strength advantage. For example, Malinowski had asserted that myth's power was a direct result of societal agents directly imitating other societal agents (Strenski, 1987, p. 52).

Myth and ritual therefore are cohorts, sometimes they work together, sometimes not, but the goal of both is to communicate by way of contextual experience. Ritual demonstrates a clear example of Myth Context's ability to scale until it eventually induces reverse-mimesis. It further demonstrates such a clear fundamental commitment to the appropriation of a myth, by the receiver, that any fear or inhibition to imitate is ignored in spite of cultural resistance. The inducement of such resolve showcases the ability of a myth's strength to variably scale. If we accept that we can be unaware of our imitative nature (Barthes, 1982, p. 406), then we can

reasonably argue that a reverse-mimesis has the potential to scale until it is no longer obscure. In other words, if the Myth Context possesses the potential to grow stronger, it will manifest itself first as a privately held and obscure paradoxical belief, then as an appropriative imitation, and may potentially and finally scale into the reverse-mimesis of an openly expressive public ritual. The clearest and most obvious indicator of a Myth Context. Along the way, each indicator highlights a myth's pattern of expansion, evolution, and growth as a result of measurable or observable human behavior. Behavior not only imitative but also communicative. Communicative to such a powerful degree that it is not limited to the transmission of message or even action, but also the transmission of mental state. As Radcliffe-Brown argued in the case of ritual, it can directly transmit the critical disposition of a society's emotional affect across generational boundaries (Valeri, 2018b, pp. 187-188). Just one further indication that this lifeform known as myth might also possess a lifespan.

3.5 LIFESPAN OF MYTH CONTEXT

The purpose for defining a Lifespan of Myth Context is that it can directly assist in the identification of a myth. I argue that it is critical for myth to be understood from both a lifespan perspective and from a perspective of myth itself having a lifespan. Ascertaining a myth's lifespan provides us with yet another template for observable patterns of its evolutionary scale of growth. In other words, a myth can scale not only in volume of signification but can also scale in temporal scope. When myth manages to overcome the mortal impasse that a generation's lifespan confronts it with, the myth's own lifespan dynamically expands. As a result of this inter-generational resilience, the myth itself becomes more resilient, and potentially less obscure.

Myth does not precede the advent of human consciousness. To the degree that myth transforms from a literal narrative into a "living thing", it does so in the vessel of human thought

and experience. Tito Vignoli (1978) adamantly stressed that myth was a "special faculty of the human mind" that "still exists in all men…whatever people and class they may belong" (p. 3). Von Hendy (2002) wrote that myth "objectifies a deeply felt subjective sense of the unity of all life, a sense that stands as the contrary of scientific analysis" (p. 156). Malinowski (1971) wrote that myth is an "indispensable ingredient of all culture" (p. 92). Further, myth is inherently dependent upon human consciousness and experience for its existence (Birenbaum, 1988, pp. 4-5; Lévi-Strauss, 1969, p. 12). In other words, myth is ubiquitous, flourishes still in modern times, is present in all cultures, and its ubiquity is predicated upon both its inherent paradoxicality, and the fact that it is exclusively dependent upon us for its very existence. Regardless how apparent that dependence might seem, with significant regularity we metaphorically characterize myth as if it were an independent and sentient living entity. Barthes (2012) did describe myth as a signifying "consciousness" (p. 233). Malinowski (1971) had argued that myth, as studied in primitive cultures, is not a fiction such as that found in literary fiction, but rather a "reality lived" (p. 18). Birenbaum (1988) captures this same feeling of myth as a living "lived thing", when he wrote in his notes that the myth form "suggests unlimited aspects of life to which it can refer by implication…myth is a projection -- a qualitative extension -- of the condition of life that it embodies" (p. 235). Jean-Marie Schaeffer (2010) metaphorically describes myth as a deceptive charlatan when saying that it is "explicitly conceived as an imposter that knows itself to be false but wants to be accepted as true" (p. 18), and Von Hendy (2002) asserted that myth is "also simultaneously 'a life form'" (p. 156). Time and again, myth is characterized as a "living" entity that occurs outside the normal semiotic process and possesses the ability to plead for its right be recognized, respected, and believed. This unusually common regard for myth, as though it were a living creature, is also timeless. Dowden (2011a) writes that even in ancient times "Mythology

was integral with the stages of life, its special moments, and its values. In a real sense, Greeks of the Archaic Age lived the mythology" (p. 53). Considering the degree to which we might perform a reverse-mimesis, or imitate our myths, such imitative behavior would reinforce any suggestion that we are inclined to attempt, consciously or unconsciously, to live out our myths. In that vein, to metaphorically suggest that myth might be a "living thing", does not seem all that unreasonable. And as with all living things, there is typically a span in which it is born, and lives for a while, before it passes on.

3.5.1 The Life, Propagation, and Death of Myth

Myths have what appear to be a lifespan. Myths can be born, evolve, and can die. Barthes (2012) had argued that myths can "come into being, alter, disintegrate, disappear completely" and that they can be suppressed by history (p. 230). German myth theorist Hans Blumenberg argued that myth had the potential to die (Nicholls, 2015, p. 176). Lévi-Strauss (1963, 1981) had argued similarly, that myths can die (p. 256; p. 77). He had observed the unique similarities in the lifespan of the human-myth relationship, known as mythology, with the lifespan of all earth-bound biological organisms—characterized by life's inclination to perish as a result of evolutionary diversification—and postulated that should man perish from the Earth so would any his creations, art and myth included (Lévi-Strauss, 1981, p. 87). The crucial distinction is that myth exists on this Earth because it exists exclusively within our human minds (Birenbaum, 1988, pp. xii, 4-5; Lévi-Strauss, 1969, p. 12; Vignoli, 1978, p. 3). The extrapolation is quite simple—myth lives because we live. Yet, we are human—and we are mortal. Therefore, by virtue of myth's dependence upon human mortality, myth must also be inherently mortal.

However mortal that myth might be, it does not always succumb to the same fatal reality that awaits all human minds that harbor it. Myth can grow incessantly, evolve, persist, and even

propagate its “species”. Barthes (2012) had observed myth’s prospective potential to evolve and propagate when he said that “some objects become the prey of mythical speech for a while, then they disappear, others take their place and attain the status of myth” (p. 218). Sanfeliu (2014), in the biographical study of Object Relations theorist Karl Abraham, writes that Abraham asserted “that a myth can disappear if society rejects is [sic] old beliefs and modifies its aspirations” (p. 140). Cruz and Frijhoff (2009) write similarly, identifying the death and rebirth of myths as a natural aspect of their generational progression (pp. 6-7). Lévi-Strauss (1963) had argued this exact point, that myths can die when confronted by critical socio-cultural boundaries (p. 256-268). Not only can and do some myths die, but they also have a unique power to perpetuate “offspring” by convincing succeeding generations, that they may have a need for a new version of it. Lévi-Strauss (1963) had observed that after multiple cross-cultural transformations, where a myth is retold in novel variation, a myth could simply disintegrate to be replaced by something new (p. 263). By virtue of its ability to produce offspring, it very much resembles the life that gives it life. Like life, and unlike the Literal Context—the rigid host that myth is dependent upon—myth can evolve. It is an evolution dependent upon myth’s ability to appeal to succeeding generations and persuade those generations to selectively re-appropriate it as their myth. Of course, just so long as those generations will also agree to bring myth’s literal host along for the ride.

3.5.2 Multi-dimensional Nature of Myth’s Lifespan

The span of a generation is associated with an aggregate computation relative the limited lifespan of the individuals born into it, who become its members. Therefore, each generation has a limited span. Strauss and Howe (1991) argue that the span of a generation is approximately twenty-two years (pp. 31 – 35). Myth, though it occurs in the individual human mind with a

corresponding limited human lifespan, further has the potential to outlive the individual and the generation the individual is a member of. But the lifespans of individual, generation, myth, and even culture or society, can all exist within different temporal scopes. The lifespan of myth, demonstrated especially in the case of the Greek legacy, can clearly last for millennia. So how does one define lifespan characteristics for any myth? To establish that requires an examination of the multi-dimensional quality of Myth Context.

An audience can ultimately appropriate anything it wants so that it might become myth, but an audience can be a unit of one or a collective of a great many. Any appropriation can be performed, as Barthes (2012) observed, by "reader" (pp. 239 – 240), "group" (p. 229), or "society" (p. 218). Barthes, in making these observations independent of each other, inadvertently distinguished that myth has a multi-dimensional quality when it comes to its appropriation. That any appropriation can occur within a context unique to the body making that appropriation at a particular time, and that the bodies themselves are subject further to the contexts of their own makeup. A reader can be an individual. A group can be any larger body of individuals that share a commonality, such as generation. A society can be a culture or even a nation state. Each can exist for varying degrees of time, from years to centuries or longer, and their interests and beliefs can be widely divergent or narrowly common. And while the spans of each might occur at different times, their spans may further intersect or be co-related. A group can be made of many readers. A society of many groups. This condition of multi-dimensional contexts that myth occurs therefore reinforces the Myth Context concept, and can enable the defining of lifespan parameters relevant to myth.

Context, relevant to linguistics, is recognized to occur in multiple dimensions. (Meibauer, 2012, pp. 9-11). In other words, the interpretation of any discourse may be impacted by multiple

levels of contexts that are simultaneously relevant the discourse. Meibauer (2012) says that this can include dimensions of context considering a word situated relational to other words in a sentence, the word situated relational to the entire body of a work, the relation of that text body to other bodies of text, or the environment the text was created within (p. 11). This multi-dimensional nature of linguistics is also present in the field of lexical semantics. Belica et al. (2010) argue that in lexical semantics "(i) meaning is construed, 'constructed' and 'co-dependent'; (ii) meaning is connotational rather than denotational, and (iii) meaning arises only in context." (p. 119). Belica et al. (2010) argue that lexical meaning can be influenced by two subtypes of context which they identify as "*local* or *collocational context*" and "*global* or *situational context*" (p. 120). Further, Belica et al. (2010) argue that, because contexts are never always exactly the same, to properly interpret contexts of local and global nature the interpreter must be able make conscious and unconscious connections regarding similarities (p. 121). Meibauer (2012) adds a time relation component to this argument, arguing that "localness or globalness" can be a matter of temporal protocol such that the relationship between things that occur first and things that occur later can affect meaning (p. 25), adding further that "time is a very important property of context" (p.26). In other words, lexical meaning—co-dependent and connotational—is construed from co-relational dimensions of context that are locally and/or globally situated and further influenced by conditions of time relationship and variable comparative conditions of likeness or similarity. This distinction holds significance because the concept of a generation is that of a peer social group defined by the similarities of its members as a result of temporal placement, and because the lifespan stages of a myth are greatly impacted by the local or global contexts of the environment that the myth might be born into.

3.5.3 The Lifespan Stages of Myth

The sequence of myth's lifespan stages will occur both locally and globally. That is, Myth Context can occur local to any individual reader's lifespan, yielding a local myth lifespan specific to only that reader. But Myth Context will alternatively also occur as a global myth lifespan which reflects the cumulative lifespan of a myth across multiple local myth lifespans unique to many different readers across time. This is a multidimensional character of the lifespan of any myth and it can have profound effect upon the variable scale of the myth. In other words, it recognizes that there are different contextual vantage points from which any myth can be viewed specific to reader, group, society, or generation. For example, it can be local to the reader relational to the reader's lifetime, local to the reader against the myth's global lifespan, or global to a group or society across the myth's global lifespan. From each vantage point a different multidimensional layering of contexts for the same myth can be present. And these different contexts, recognized to also occur in temporal location, relationship, and span contexts, expand this multidimensionality, and the myth's potential and variable scale, to new levels. Further, in recognizing that the global context of myth's lifespan is comprised of multiple successive local myth lifespan contexts, we are also recognizing that there are repetitive opportunities for a myth to perish associated with a reader or a group's inherent mortality, or end of generational span. These junctures, where one lifespan or one generation is survived by another, are therefore potentially fatal impasses for any myth. A fragile point in the life of a Myth Context where it might not succeed in crossing over from one local context to another successive local context, or may fail to become a globally received context because it did not cross enough successive local myth lifespans to sufficiently scale so that it may be shared by society and history.

In developing hypothetical lifespan stages for myth, we can draw inspiration from the human life cycle stages as theorized by Erik Erikson (Greene, 2012, pp. 199-202). Erikson had divided the human lifespan into 8 distinct life stages, divided according to time and social demand from infancy to old age, as depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Erik Erikson's Stages of The Life Cycle

Stage	Approximate Age
Infancy	Birth to 2 years
Early childhood	2–4 years
Play age	4–6 years
School age	6–12 years
Adolescence	12–22 years
Young adult	22–34 years
Adulthood	34–60 years
Old age	60 years–death

Note. Adapted from Erik Erikson's stages of the life cycle as presented on page 201 of Greene, R. R. (2012). Psychosocial theory. In C. N. Dulmus, K. M. Sowers, & B. A. Thyer (Eds.), *Human behavior in the social environment: Theories for social work practice* (pp. 193-223). [ProQuest Ebook Central]. Retrieved from http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/odu/detail.action?docID=980956.

Erikson's model was divided largely upon stages of social development with broad stages such as childhood and adulthood divided further into stages that correlate with distinct and well-defined social activities of focus such as play or school. Similarly, a model can be drawn for myth that correlates to distinct social behaviors that are responsible for the creation, development, distribution, and acceptance of myth. I suggest that these conceptual stages—(1) *Conception*, (2) *Obscurity*, (3) *Emergence*, and (4) *Ascendance*—can be distinguished as the Lifespan Stages of Myth, and they can be defined as follows.

3.5.3.1 Conception

The myth lifespan stage of *Conception* is a myth's "birth" stage. It refers to the moment of a reader's mental signification of myth concept. It should refer to the event when a narrative, regardless its origin or purpose, presents a choice to the reader to select between the Literal Context or Myth Context of a narrative, and the Myth Context is subsequently selected by the reader. At a minimum the Myth Context should be dependent upon the narrative's Literal Context, and should exhibit potential for the variability and scalability of its signification, and should involve some kind of paradoxical belief held by the reader, about the dependent narrative, that the reader is resistant to evaluate for potential falsification.

A Myth Context conception can be observed as local or global dependent upon its relationship to the current generation. From a local lifespan context, a local conception is the point a reader first conceives a myth or first encounters the narrative and is presented with the opportunity to appropriate it. In the context of a myth's global lifespan, conception refers to the point when the myth in question was first ever conceived relative to history. Its "birth" relative the global span of its entire existence in time. Alternatively, the local and global conception of a young myth, which has not yet had time to exceed the span of a single generation, would be one and the same. Whereas with an old and venerable myth, conceived in prior centuries, it would have a global conception of many centuries old. But may also have been reconceived with a new Myth Context by a younger generation at a later century.

It is this variable dynamic that exposes the general nature of myth's ability to cross generational boundaries, and while conception is synonymous with appropriation, it can also point to a re-appropriation. Per Barthes (2012), all objects can be open to being appropriated (pp. 217-218). Myth can also be appropriated from a pre-existing myth. Lévi-Strauss had argued that

an existing myth could be transformed into another different and unique myth (Liszka, 1989, p. 9). Barthes (2012) had argued that a "reconstituted myth" was the definition of a mythology (p. 247), and that myth's ability to recur was its "major power" (p. 246). Any appropriation of a standing myth is therefore a re-appropriation, and it is this ability for one generation to re-appropriate a prior generation's myth, that endows myth with great resilience and longevity.

Contextually, an appropriation would typically point to a myth's conception global to all history, while any reappropriation would typically point to a myth's conception or re-conception local and relative to a specific generation. Appropriations of narrative can expose the variable base potential of the myth. While reappropriations expose the inherent resilience of that myth's potentiality. Indeed, in ancient times Plato and other poets had reappropriated Homer (Dowden & Livingstone, 2011, p. 16; Murray, 2011, pp. 181-184, 190-191). It is a practice that continues to this day. Liz Gloyn (2019) writes that "The plasticity of myth allows popular culture to use it as an inspiration for revised and altered storytelling." (p. 125). Despite such ubiquity, any conception of a myth can occur without the knowledge of reader, group, or society, and can persist that way for an indefinite period.

3.5.3.2 Obscurity

The myth lifespan stage of *Obscurity* is a myth's "developmental" stage. It refers to the span of time when a myth, previously appropriated and conceived, begins to develop greater sophistication in the mental subconscious of the reader, while the reader and/or the culture are unaware of this development. Lévi-Strauss (1995) asserted "that myths get thought in man unbeknownst to him" (p. 3). During this developmental stage, the conceived Myth Context is permitted to incubate in the minds of individuals independently and/or collectively. However, regardless any collective experience of the Myth Context by large numbers of individuals within

the culture, during Obscurity the culture will generally remain unaware of the Myth Context that is present in themselves or others. As a result, any paradoxical beliefs or imitative behavior will generally be hidden, or go unobserved, even if present. Alternatively, while such behavior might be observed, these behavioral indicators may be considered so natural or normal that they will fail to stand out. For example, Barthes (2012) had observed that we are generally inattentive to myth's existence where its powers of naturalization can make the myth appear as something perceived normal (p. 252).

An obscure Myth Context can be observed as local or global dependent upon its relationship to the current generation. A period of obscurity in a local context refers to its obscurity status relative or local to the generation it was conceived in. A myth's obscurity can be further local to the reader, as well as being local to the generation. In the context of a myth's global lifespan, obscurity refers to the period that the myth has remained hidden, across multiple generations, since the time the myth was conceived in a global context. Alternatively, a myth might potentially remain obscure local to multiple successive generations but may have only been obscure for a short period of its cumulative global lifespan over a span of centuries.

Proximity to a Myth Context behavior, or lack of attention to it, can potentially isolate observation by some members of the group. Further, if young enough and weak enough, the Myth Context can potentially die during this stage. Especially if it is still obscure at a generational boundary, and/or if the myth is inadvertently subjected to repeated attempts to disqualify the paradoxical beliefs that are sustaining the myth's rhetoric. Barring such attempts at falsification, or any willingness by the audience to permit falsification, a Myth Context's obscurity will generally remain variable, relative the life stage context it occurs in, until the time that the myth emerges and asserts itself in the collective consciousness of the group or culture.

3.5.3.3 Emergence

The myth lifespan stage of *Emergence* is a myth's "young adult" stage. It refers to the period when a myth, previously appropriated and conceived, and still largely obscure, begins to emerge from the reader, or readers, to be spread across the group, culture, or society, and will begin to operate outside of obscurity. Joseph Campbell argued that because myth resides in the unconscious it "is something waiting to be brought forth in everyone" (Campbell & Moyers, 1991, p. 71). Barthes (2012) argued that "a myth ripens because it spreads" (p. 263), adding further that myth can reach "the entire community" (p. 272). Emergence is a social distribution stage where the audience, consciously or unconsciously, begins to engage with and disseminate the myth. It is a variable phenomenon that can take seconds or centuries to coalesce into a more unified socially shared signification with less and less deviation or difference. During this transition, a greater number of individuals become susceptible to selecting Myth Context over Literal Context. Any paradoxical beliefs, or imitative behavior will occur with increasing scale, promoting and disseminating the myth with greater ease, while also magnifying its potential and aiding in its eventual emergence from obscurity. As a result, any associated Myth Context indicators become progressively more observable, and therefore measurable with some degree of effort. The myth loses its anonymity while gaining notoriety.

An emergent Myth Context can be observed as local or global dependent upon its relationship to the current generation. Emergence in the local context refers to its emergence status local to a specific generation. A myth could potentially emerge and reemerge local to successive, or different discontinuous generations, in the event of multiple reappropriations during its global lifespan. In the context of a myth's global lifespan, emergence refers to that

time in history, regardless the generation, when the myth first becomes socially recognized beyond the confines of its obscurity.

In spite of its emergence, a Myth Context can still go undetected by some in the culture, remaining obscure for this limited minority, if its context is perceived as a natural or uneventful circumstance. Further, it can still perish at the generational boundary where members of that generation begin to expire. Especially if the myth has been subjected to forces with the ability to destroy or counter any paradoxical beliefs held, about the myth, by that group. However, barring such circumstances, a Myth Context might otherwise scale indefinitely with each new local reappropriation, and each subsequent global generational transmission. Until its emergence becomes visible, and remains so, to all of society and history. Toward this latter stage of emergence, fewer and fewer in the culture will remain unaware of the Myth Context as it ascends into an ethereal and diffuse signification of a discretely obvious nature.

3.5.3.4 Ascendance

The myth lifespan stage of *Ascendance* is a myth's "maturity" stage. It refers to the moment when a myth is considered, within a culture, group, or society, to be instantly and unarguably obvious. Dowden and Livingstone (2011) wrote that "We know a Greek myth when we see one and have need of no definitions, guidance, or codes of practice to identify it as such" (p.3). It should refer to the time when the average reader, and society at large, require no persuasion to be convinced of its myth status because it has the pedigree, in the form of a magnificent or difficult to comprehend history, to give its claim instant credibility. At a minimum, any indicators of Myth Context associated with the myth should be immediately or historically observable, and its Myth Context should exhibit an inexhaustible reserve of potential, scale, and variability. It is ascended because it has "risen" for all to see and understand it for

what it is. However, it should not be confused with transcendent, a term commonly used in association with myth. Further, ascendance is not as a relation of a myth to a political or social ascendancy, order, or class. Northrup Frye (2009) had used the term "ascendant" to describe myths associated or promoted by an ascendant social class (p. 32). Rather, as used here, it describes a myth's general ascendancy into a state of permanence in the culturally obvious. That is, the myth is no longer obscure and no longer emerging. Regardless the caveats of its rhetoric, its status as myth is undeniable.

An ascendant Myth Context can be observed as local or global dependent upon its relationship to the current generation. In the context of a myth's global lifespan, ascendance refers to the point when the myth is infinitely obvious as a Myth Context and typically requires significant spans of time and reappropriation for this to occur. Generally, most ascended myth is viewed as ascendant in a global context. Alternatively, from a local lifespan context, a myth can be conceived, emerge, and ascend in a matter of seconds. Though less common, an ascendance in local context typically occurs relative the generation it is local to or within the span of less than a generation. An instantaneous ascendance of local to global is typically relational to a monumental or super-historical event. For example, in the short span of a footstep NASA influenced the appropriation of newly and instantly ascendant myths such as '*NASA is the 'can-do' agency that can accomplish anything'* or '*the moon landing was faked',* while at the same time destroyed or weakened millennium old ascendant myths such as '*the moon is a god'*. These examples demonstrate that ascendent myths do not require significant analysis for identification. Though not all myths are yet ascendent and are therefore more difficult to identify.

3.6 IDENTIFICATION OF MYTH

Because myth can hide in the experiential consciousness of a single reader such that even that reader may be unaware of the myths they contextualize, detection of all myth should be considered a virtual impossibility. In contrast, at times identification of myth can be effortless. It is the position of this thesis that Ascendent myth is synonymous with myths that are instantly detectable and obvious. For example, ancient myth is generally observed as a matter that should be obvious (Dowden & Livingstone, 2011, p. 3; Woodford, 2011, p. 159). But not all myth has yet reached Ascendance, nor is all myth immediately obvious. Throughout the length of this thesis, I have attempted to stress the persistent way in which Myth Contexts manage to hide in plain sight. If we are to clearly understand myth's true power, we must be able to identify obscure myths. Jensen (2014) argued similarly, that there is a need for better methods of identifying myths that we are potentially unaware of (p. 433). Further, if we are to show that narratives passed down through generations may do so as a direct result of myth, then there is a direct need to demonstrate a clear myth context in relation to that narrative. The procedure proposed here seeks to address this need.

3.6.1 Definitions

The terms reception, interpretation, and response may possess ambiguity when used together, with the potential to be mistaken for one another. These terms will now be defined:

The term reception is used here to describe an all-encompassing social "result" of the consumption of a narrative. Jensen (1991) defined reception analysis in a broad contextual scope that included history, culture, and media in its composition (p. 139). This thesis regards the term reception similarly, as a broad category that represents a comprehensive social perspective considered from all potential sources, all potential contexts—literal, mythic, situational,

historical, social, or affective—and all potential interpretations. Reception therefore refers to an act of comprehensive meaning, understanding, and behavior by reader, group, or society.

The term interpretation is used to define how an individual interprets a narrative, both privately and socially, to produce personalized meaning or understanding about that narrative. Barthes (2012) regarded the act of a distortion, of first order meaning into second order signification or myth, to be an interpretation (p. 243). For this thesis, interpretation refers to an individual reader's unique construction of understanding regarding a narrative or idea. Interpretation can be literal or figurative, logical or affective, static or dynamic, or both. It can be taken as an equivalent to an act that produces first order meaning or second order signification that one might hold for a narrative.

The term response is observed as the ability of an individual to articulate their own unique interpretations of a narrative. Comparative reception analysis, as designed here, is used as a means of discovering which context, Literal Context or Myth Context, is active, dominant, or exclusive within the reception of a narrative, by seeking a response from audience members regarding their interpretations of the narrative.

3.6.2 Reception and Myth Identification

The Myth Identification Procedure employs a Comparative Reception Analysis, which leverages the general characteristics of the Myth Context Reception Model, to aid in the identification of Obscure or Emergent myth. However, Myth Context is significantly more than just a reception. The Myth Context Reception Model charges that human behaviors, as a result of reception, are fundamental to any contexts we associate with a myth. The model has sought to identify these unique behaviors, and charges further that they can be observed, discovered, or revealed in the audience through an ordered evaluation of the social act of reception. Calame

(2011) argues that the determination of myth's character is a matter of production and reception, saying that "everything depends on the author's intentions and on the associations which the narrative rouses at the point of its reception" (p. 516). Calame (2011) added further that if a narrative is to be effective as myth, it is due to "the strong relationship that narrative fiction and the world of text have with a world of cultural representations that corresponds to a universe of belief inscribed in space and time" (pp. 516-517). In other words, myth works because it is inherently dependent upon the context of an audience's beliefs about that narrative further contextually situated in relation to culture and history. Resilient beliefs that manifest themselves both paradoxically and mimetically.

The critical distinction of reception is that it is a variable phenomenon. Jensen (1991) argues that reception is "a social act that serves to negotiate the definition of social reality in the context of broad cultural and communicative practices" (p. 137), that is synonymous with audience (p. 138). However, the anticipated reception of any narrative should not be perceived as a predetermined conclusion. Jensen (1991) argued that multiple interpretations of meaning can occur (p. 137), and implied that there can exist in reception "an important theoretical distinction between potential and actualized meanings" (p. 137). In other words, while a narrative or text can exist in determinate literal form, because reception is a negotiated social act driven by context, a form possesses significant indeterminate potential to be variably interpreted. Variable interpretation that can occur within a single comprehensive audience, by reader, group, or society, can be further variable across time, and that can be evaluated for by way "audience-cum-content analysis" (Larsen, 1991, pp. 132-133), otherwise regarded to as "reception analysis" (Jensen, 2011a, p. 160). Jensen (1991) defines a reception analysis methodology as "a comparative textual analysis of media discourses and audience discourses, whose results are

interpreted with emphatic reference to context, both the historical as well as cultural setting and the "con-text" of other media contents." (p. 139). Jensen (2011a) further clarified reception analysis as the result of content analysis compared against audience response (p. 160). In other words, reception analysis involves a comparative analysis of a narrative's literal character on one side, against an analysis of the character of an audience's articulated affective interpretation of that narrative, or response, on the other. Because reception analysis of this kind is considered against historical or situational contexts, of potentially both textual context and audience context (Jensen, 1991, p. 140), this type of comparative analysis within context is regarded as a *frame* (Jensen, 2011a, pp. 164-165), and can be performed through a combination of both qualitative and/or quantitative evaluations (Jensen, 2011a, p. 165). The result of the comparison, framed in a close relationship between the narrative and its relevant audience, can be used to identify any unique qualities of reception regarding that narrative by the relevant audience (Jensen, 2011a, p. 165). The proposed design of this Comparative Reception Analysis will be tailored to use K. B. Jensen's reception methodology as a base template for the method, but with some modification.

3.6.3 Comparative Reception Analysis

The Comparative Reception Analysis is an optional multi-step analysis intended for the exclusive purpose of identifying Obscure or Emergent myths that are not obvious. The steps for this reception analysis will include (a) the performance of a *Content Analysis* that establishes the literalness of a narrative, (b) an *Audience Response Analysis* that gathers audience interpretations about the respective narrative content, and (c) a final *Comparative Analysis of Content and Response* that compares the content analysis findings against the audience response findings. In this final stage, if the audience response demonstrates evidence of reception that is paradoxical and/or imitative of the narrative, this will demonstrate a Myth Context to be present in the

reception of the narrative. Alternatively, if the audience response instead aligns with literalness of the narrative, this will demonstrate a Literal Context to be present in the reception.

Not all narratives will require a Comparative Reception Analysis because their status as myth may be obvious or any paradoxical or imitative phenomena produced by the audience may also be clearly obvious. In contrast, narratives where a myth context may be ambiguous, or not obvious, are the primary candidates this reception analysis is intended for. The presence of a Myth Context can only be quantitatively measured by this reception analysis against a current living audience that can be actively surveyed and/or interviewed. Further, this reception analysis is not a standardized uniform test. Use of this reception analysis to identify for myth, is a process that looks for a reception behavior unique to a specified narrative and its respective audience. Since no two myths are the same, nor do they produce identical audiences or identical audience receptions, there is no single list of queries that can be applied to all narratives to ascertain their relationship to myth in all circumstances. Each reception analysis is a "designer" evaluation that must be custom tailored to that narrative content and its unique audience.

3.6.3.1 Content Analysis

The Content Analysis is an analysis of a text's literalness and its findings will contribute to the final comparative analysis. Since the host narratives of many myths are in a text form, it would be reasonable to identify the analysis of a text's literalness as a Textual Analysis. However, not all myth hosts are textual narratives. Some host narratives are either so brief or so driven by visual or image that a physical text is unnecessary. Barthes' observation of $E=mc^2$ as myth and this thesis' previous observation of the moon as myth are just two such examples. In principle, this Content Analysis will adhere to the mechanics of a Textual Analysis as the template for its construction and operation. The Content Analysis is a qualitative logical

examination and should adhere as closely as possible to only what the narrative says while rejecting any perceptions, opinions, or biased interpretations on the part of the audience or examiner. It should follow a rigor as defined by Barthes (1968), where the text should only be examined relevant to an immanent understanding of its strict expression (pp. 95-96; Larsen, 1991, p. 124). In other words, analysis of the text must be focused only on the text and its strict literal character. The attempt should be to capture, as best as possible, the static and rigid character of the narrative's literalness. The guideline here is simple. If the narrative does not explicitly and literally express an idea, that idea is invalid from the strict vantage point of the content analysis. Where any extrapolation of the narrative might be required, such extrapolation should follow strict rules of progressive logic that evaluate only the first-order semiotic system of the narrative to arrive at a first order signification or meaning. All second order significations are to be excluded and ignored. The goal should be to ascertain "what the literal content logically articulates", and to exclude "what the audience rhetorically infers about the content".

3.6.3.2 Audience Response Analysis

The Audience Response Analysis is an analysis of an audience's interpretation of a narrative and its findings will contribute to the final comparative analysis. This response analysis can be a quantitative and/or qualitative evaluation. At a minimum, a quantitative survey should be used, but a mix of survey and qualitative interview is recommended. The purpose of this response analysis is to obtain an audience response regarding the perceptions, opinions, beliefs, attitudes, and interpretations that the audience members possess regarding the examined narrative. A survey should follow a rigor as described by Gunter (2011) where it should seek to acquire data "from respondents about their knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, values and behaviours on a post hoc basis" (p. 242). An interview should follow a rigor as described by Jensen (2011c)

where a respondent is asked to “put into discourse certain ideas and notions that otherwise may remain unarticulated” (p. 270). The attempt, regarding survey and interview, is to develop narrative relevant inquiries for the respondent, where such inquiries are tailored directly to the respective narrative, and its constitutive elements or characteristics, such that the inquiries can obtain personalized interpretations, such as beliefs or behaviors etc., that the respondent harbors for the narrative. The kind of questions inquired should always be uniquely tailored to the narrative, the narrative’s relevant and relative audience, and on any special insight that an examiner might have observed in the narrative/audience relationship. What the response analysis seeks to find is a composite data collection of multiple reader interpretations of the narrative in question that reflect an aggregated dataset of biased and personalized beliefs, perceptions, and affective interpretations that the audience has developed for the narrative. We are concerned only with the audience’s active interpretation of the narrative’s discourse, and not why it is interpreted that way. In other words, what does the audience think or feel about the narrative. Another goal of the response analysis is to discover whether that dataset yields a dominant subset of similar responses that are shared within the audience and to what degree those shared responses produce measurable patterns in the audience at large.

3.6.3.3 Comparative Analysis of Content and Response

The Comparative Analysis of Content and Response will compare the outcome of the content analysis data collection with the outcome of response analysis data collection. The purpose of this final comparative step is to evaluate for any differences between the content analysis and the response analysis, and further, to determine if these differences, should they exist, match any indicators of Myth Context. This comparative analysis should use a rigor such that it can meet the same objective for a comparative analysis as set forth by Jensen (2011b)

where a media discourse is compared to an audience discourse for the purpose of decoding an audience's interpretation of that media discourse (p. 178). When comparing the outcomes of the content analysis and response analysis, the comparison should yield a result in the range from no difference between content and response—to—significant difference between content and response. Where there is little or no difference between content and response a literal interpretation has occurred, and the reception of the narrative would reflect a reception in Literal Context. Where there is significant difference between content and response, further characterized by paradoxical and/or imitative behavior relevant the narrative, a myth interpretation has occurred, and the narrative would reflect a reception in Myth Context. Such a finding of difference, between content and response, should fall into one or more categories synonymous with the core Indicators of Myth Context as defined by this model—Paradoxical Belief, Appropriative Imitation, and Reverse-Mimesis.

A Paradoxical Belief indicates the presence of a Myth Context because it is a phenomenon where the reader or audience member possesses a belief about or for the narrative, that is paradoxical to a reception of the narrative in Literal Context. Paradoxical beliefs held about a narrative, and leading to Myth Context, can occur in one of several operations that demonstrate paradoxical difference between narrative content and reception response:

- **Reception eq Myth Context if ((!Literal == Response) || (⊥Literal ==Response))**
    - False Ground
        - Literal evidence, created with intent to be false, is Believed
- **Reception eq Myth Context if ((Literal) != (Response))**
    - Antithesis *or* Disbelief
        - Existing Literal evidence is 180 degrees counter the Belief

        - Existing Literal evidence is irrelevant to the Belief
        - Existing Literal evidence is incapable of altering the Belief
- **Reception eq Myth Context if ((Literal == Null) != (Response))**
    - Nonexistent Ground
        - There is no Literal evidence to counter or falsify the Belief
        - The Belief is foreign to the Literal
- **Reception eq Myth Context if ((Literal < Response) || (Literal > Response))**
    - Inconsistence
        - Existing Literal evidence is unable to adequately support the Belief
        - Existing Literal evidence lacks ground or veracity

An Appropriative Imitation indicates the presence of myth because it is a higher order example of a paradoxical reception where a narrative, or element of a narrative, is appropriated to become an imitation of something else which it paradoxically is not, and in imitating that thing, it is received as a genuine naturalized authority of or about the thing which it imitates. It functions to leverage paradoxical belief so that whatever the reader interprets the narrative to be while myth, this interpretation which is a belief that the narrative represents an authority on the subject matter, is believed to be its natural state. For example, if one were to believe or perceive that the popular culture fiction James Bond was an authoritative account of everything to do with spies and spy culture, then the image of James Bond is an appropriative imitation that represents a “Spy-icity”. In other words, it is an appropriative imitation, an element of narrative abducted to imitate something which it is not, and the imitation naturalized to be paradoxically “real”. A myth evidenced by a paradoxical belief that Bond is to be taken as the complete authoritative essence and character of everything related to “Spies” or “Spying”.

A Reverse-mimesis indicates the presence of myth because it is another high order form of imitation related to paradoxical reception. A reverse-mimesis is a condition where an individual, knowingly or unknowingly, will imitate the narrative through cognitive or physical action. That is, the audience member will treat a narrative, or narrative element, that is known to be a fiction or pretense, as a template for action to be imitated mentally or physically. For example, a fictional element of a narrative might promote a suggestion or instruction, as part of the fictional narrative, such that the suggestion is cognitively acted out in the receiver's mind, or in animated action. At the furthest extreme, a fictional element of the narrative may be ritualistically acted out as a ritual or celebrated behavior that mimics the narrative. That is, in an attempt to reconcile the paradoxical reception, to reconcile the difference, that which is different and paradoxical is acted out in an attempt to make it common and accepted, but it is also a pretense in action not just a pretense in thought. In the pursuit to naturalize the narrative by acting it out, the paradoxical reception is magnified because the ritual action, which is real, becomes ever more contradictory to a narrative which is fictional, and not real. An example of a reverse-mimesis experienced cognitively might include the paradoxical belief that a fictionalized biographical account, of an actual person who really lived, is believed to be *the* factual account even when parts of the work are known to be a fiction. Historical dramas about famous figures who lived in centuries past (e.g. Julius Caesar, Anthony and Cleopatra, Moses, etc.) where lost dialog is recreated and partially fictionalized, but believed to have occurred, would classify in this example. Further, an example of a reverse-mimesis experienced through physical action, might include ritual reenactment, costume use, or celebratory ritual where the receiver of the narrative acts out the narrative or encourages or teaches others to act out a fictional narrative through imitative immersion.

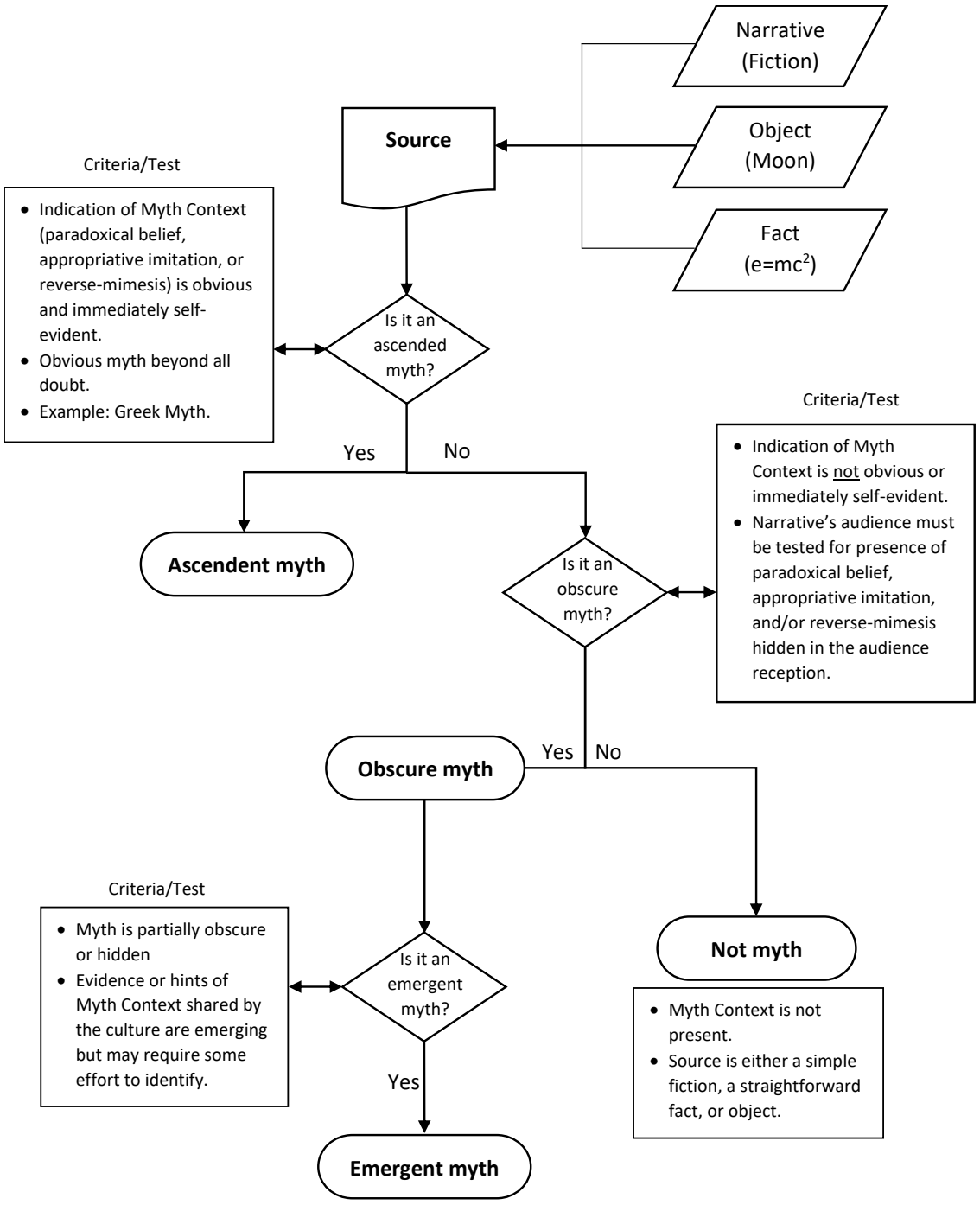
To arrive at a comparative finding between content and response, we should determine if the audience response to a narrative matches the progressively logical conclusion of the narrative's literalness such that the message of a narrative accomplishes the narrative's literal goal. That is, the response should logically match the content's "instructions". For example, a narrative about a mouse that ran up a clock might logically and literally be interpreted by a respondent that they believe the narrative to depict a small furry mammal clawing its way up a timepiece. In contrast, a narrative about a boy who traveled up a hill with a bucket and a female companion, and subsequently suffers injury on the journey, might be paradoxically interpreted by a respondent if they were to believe the narrative to depict the boy to chase the girl up a hill to make lewd sexual advances toward her, the boy's injury was due to the girl pushing him down the hill to avoid him, and finally as the coward ran for his life, the brave young heroine chased him down to finish the job and teach him a lesson about undesirable behavior. In this latter hypothetical example, if the narrative provides no literal evidence or guidance, that can literally or logically reach this conclusion, then the respondent would be exhibiting evidence of a Myth Context. In this case a human behavior, a paradoxical belief that the narrative surreptitiously says something that in literal form it clearly did not articulate. The premise for this myth identification procedure therefor relies on the observation of specific human behavior, defined by the attributes, indicators, and lifespan parameters of the Myth Context Reception Model, for the identification of myth.

3.6.4 Myth Identification Procedure

The Myth Identification Procedure is a procedural evaluation of a narrative against temporal, behavioral, and interpretive Myth Context factors that would demonstrate a narrative to be received as myth. A visual flowchart for this procedure is depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Myth Identification Procedure Flowchart



Note. Visual flowchart of the Myth Identification Procedure as designed by Joseph G. Ponthieux, 2021, for the Myth Context Reception Model.

This procedure works through a process of elimination that begins with an evaluation of the myth context lifespan seeking out obvious or Ascendent Myth first, subsequently prescribing a test for the presence of Myth Context where it may not be obvious such as Emergent or Obscure Myth, and works its way progressively toward an evaluation where no presence of a myth can be found. That is, at the final step, having failed all previous analysis, the narrative would be considered void of myth context or that its myth context is so weak and ineffective to be considered undetectable or nonexistent. During this procedure, at stages where the presence of myth is not obvious, vague, or uncertain, the previously defined *Comparative Reception Analysis* is employed to identify any indicators of Myth Context that might be present, but potentially hidden, in the audience's reception of the narrative. The value of this test is its specific design towards the identification of obscure myth.

3.6.4.1 Prerequisites

Prior to performing this procedure, one must be familiar with the general background and scope of the source narrative, symbol, or sign. This would typically involve three prima facie categories of information about the narrative to include (a) what its source content says and what it is about, (b) what its origin, history, and alterations over time are, and (c) what its observable reception and use appears to be. This does not need to be a deep analysis of literal content or a deep analysis of audience reception but rather should be a synopsis of evidence that is, at a minimum, easily obtainable and can establish that the source is an obvious Ascendent Myth.

3.6.4.2 Procedure

The general procedure for Myth Identification as prescribed by this Myth Context Reception Model is:

Determine if source is immediately obvious as myth:

- If OBVIOUS:
  A. Can you identify clear obvious indicators of Myth Context, for example, obvious paradoxical or imitative behavior, ritualistic culture, ancient myth, and so on?
     - If YES:
       i. Identify all obvious Myth Context indicators.
       ii. Source host is an Ascendant Myth. Procedure complete.
     - If NO:
       i. Determination made in error or inconclusive.
       ii. Research source's history and audience more thoroughly. Start over.
- If NOT OBVIOUS:
  A. Perform a Comparative Reception Analysis.
  B. If Reception Analysis yields any indicators of Myth Context:

     Are one or more of the following exceptional observations present:

     a. Were any Myth Context indicators, discovered through analysis, observable because of the analysis though not immediately obvious?
     b. Is there any kind of evidence, in the common public or published record, that might suggest, insinuate, or otherwise hint at a recognition of myth context, or myth, in relation to the source?
        - If YES:
          i. Identify all Myth Context indicators discovered by the analysis.
          ii. Identify the exceptional observations.
          iii. Myth Context is Emergent. Procedure complete.

- If NO:
    i. Identify all Myth Context indicators discovered by the analysis.
    ii. Myth Context is Obscure. Procedure complete

C. If Reception Analysis yields no indicators of Myth Context
    i. Myth Context may be weak, undetectable, or nonexistent.
    ii. Determination is inconclusive.

This outlined procedure will provide an avenue through which at least one exemplar of this thesis will be required to perform, in order to determine its status as myth.

CHAPTER 4

EXEMPLAR ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis will now present several narratives as exemplars analyzed using the Myth Context Reception Model. In accordance with the model, a background will be given for each narrative and an attempt will be made to pre-determine if that narrative is an obvious Ascendent myth. Where not obvious the narrative will be evaluated using a comparative reception analysis to determine if it is an Obscure myth, and if necessary, it will be examined further to determine if it is instead an Emergent myth, or alternatively whether a myth status is inconclusive. Evidence will then be submitted to support any indications of Myth Context that can be found associated to the narrative that may support a determination of myth. Finally, an evaluation of generational influence, in relation to the myth determination, will be performed. The exemplars to be evaluated will include Classical Myth, Santa Claus, and Batman. The selection of these exemplars is intended with the hope that their variable ranges of age can assist in realizing the broad potential of this model. All exemplars being put forward are fictions and are not being examined to determine their status as fictions. Rather, we are examining the narrative's abilities, obviously or obscurely, to produce a Myth Context response in their audiences, and to further determine if that response remains evident across multiple generations.

4.2 CLASSICAL MYTH

This thesis presents classical myth as its first exemplar. Because any singular classical myth narrative may exist in numerous re-appropriations, re-interpretations, and novel re-tellings across time and culture (Lewis, 2011, p. 447), and because Greek myths are often viewed by

some as an endless chain of inter-related serial narratives (Bremmer, 2014, p. 6), this exemplar is presented not as a specific narrative but rather as the class of narratives known as classical myth. Further, selecting just one classical myth sub-narrative to examine would significantly limit the role that the whole of classical myth still imposes upon modern culture. The intent is to place classical myth in its proper relation to the narrative exemplars that follow and to position this class of narratives not as one exemplar, but as two. As both an example of the extraordinary success that its Myth Context has had on its propagation, and as an example where such propagation can also be shown to have failed.

4.2.1 Narrative Background

For the purpose of this thesis, classical myth refers to the Greco-Roman tradition of storytelling that occurred predominantly in ancient Greece and Rome. Greek myth begins with the works of Hesiod and Homer in the 7th century BCE, continuing through the 1st century BCE with works such as those depicting the fall of Troy (Dowden, 2011a, pp. 47-48, 65), and ending as late as the 4th century CE (Bremmer, 2011, pp. 539). Many of the myths of ancient Rome are known to have concepts appropriated from Greek myths (Denova, 2019, p. 3), and the two are understood to be deeply connected with distinct parallels between them (Hays, 2017, p. 29). Classical myths told stories about the gods, their origins, and their relationships with humans (Denova, 2019, p. 4), and the tradition includes the influence of Plato's novel philosophical contributions to myth during the 4th century BCE (Dowden & Livingstone, 2011, p. 11; Hard, 2019, p. 13). Dowden and Livingstone (2011) regard this tradition as a form of rhetoric in the style of an "allusive poetic shorthand" that is "highly charged (with authority, glamour, beauty, and emotive force)" (p. 9), and that can be used as "virtual learning environments" (p. 11). Classical myths were conveyed and exchanged by oral recitation before living audiences across

many centuries and were repeatedly and significantly deformed by poetic privilege before being recorded in written form (Denova, 2019, p. 48; Dowden & Livingstone, 2011, pp. 3-4; Henrichs, 2014, p. 248; Lewis, 2011, p. 447). Mythography, or the recording of classical myth through literacy, is believed to have begun only as late as the 6th century BCE with very little that may have been written before that time to have survived (Denova, 2019, pp. 31-32; Fowler, 2017, p. 17). Much of the Greek mythology from this period, to have survived in writing, is available in a text known as the *Library* which is believed to have been created by Apollodoros in the first century CE (Dowden, 2011a, pp. 50, 66-72).

4.2.2 Myth Identification Analysis

4.2.2.1 Evaluation for Pre-determination of Myth

It is generally assumed that most of the classical narratives of the Greek tradition are received with special regard as myth. It can be asserted without reservation that classical myth is immediately obvious and Ascendent. For example, the fantastic and surreal qualities of Greek myth are known to have long contributed to its obvious nature (Woodford, 2011, p. 159), and in arguing for this obvious nature of Greek myth, Dowden and Livingstone (2011) adamantly insist that no standard of practice is required for its identification as such (p.3). As a class of Ascendent myths, these narratives can be shown to have exhibited obvious indicators of Myth Context, at a minimum within their audiences of origin, and also within the audiences of generations that have followed.

4.2.3 Evidence of Myth Context

4.2.3.1 Paradoxical Belief

Indications of paradoxical belief were culturally present and can be shown to have been obvious for the historical audiences of this narrative class and can subsequently be shown to still

be present in modern audiences. Given the significant breadth of this class of narrative, it could be argued that paradoxical belief of classical myths has occurred in every possible logical operation suggested within the Myth Context Reception model. However, it could also be argued that in ancient times classical myth presented itself most likely and most often as a paradoxical belief held for a nonexistent ground in the logical operation of "Reception eq Myth Context if ((Literal == Null) != (Response))", *e.g.* a belief in deities that could not be proven to not exist. For example, we know that ancient culture perceived their myths as being unfalsifiable (Brisson, 1998, pp. 9-10), and that many in the ancient world did believe in their myths (Denova, 2019, pp. 11-12; Dowden & Livingstone, 2011, p. 5; Griffiths, 2011, p. 196). Though such beliefs were often challenged (Griffiths, 2011, p. 197), as Fowler (2017) argues their "desire to believe in the myths remained strong, though, and is visible in the stratagems adopted to save them" (p. 21). Further, the relevance of the paradoxical beliefs that ancient society held for their myths can be seen in the great efforts they put forward in the architecture they created to celebrate and honor their myths. For example, Greek society would build extraordinary temples such as the Parthenon for the goddess Athena (Lambrinou, 2018, p. 126), and we know that they did worship their myths in such temples (Hard, 2019, p. 22). Temples that, as we will soon show, will play a role in this Myth Context being observable still in the modern day.

4.2.3.2 Appropriative Imitation

Indications of appropriative imitation were culturally present and obvious for many of these narratives. This Myth Context indicator occurred with great intensity in the ancient world and has continued with intensity into the modern day. We know that the ancient Greeks appropriated their myths as a direct source for imitations of narrative found in ancient art and pottery (Lewis, 2011, p. 448). But perhaps more profound is the way in which appropriative

imitation was built into the very construction of the Greek tradition of myth itself. Jean Alaux (2011) argues that the tragedies of ancient Greece, during the 5th century BC, were the result of common and blatant selective appropriations of pre-existing content (p. 141). Plato, Socrates, and others openly appropriated from ancient sources (Dowden & Livingstone, 2011, p. 16; Murray, 2011, pp. 181-184,190-191), and those who engaged in the telling of myth were significantly competitive (Calame, 2014, p. 155; Morgan, 2000, pp. 21; Parker, 2014, p. 189), with narratives often being altered with radical or novel deviation so that they might appeal to the audiences of the moment (Lewis, 2011, p. 447). As Sian Lewis (2011) asserts, regarding this variability within the narratives of the Greek tradition, there was "no single version of the story, nor a single meaning, but instead a series of meanings expressed at different times and in different ways." (p.447). As we shall soon see, this indication of Myth Context, in relation to these narratives, is still obvious and active in the modern day.

4.2.3.3 Reverse-Mimesis

Indications of reverse-mimesis were present and obvious for many of the narratives in this narrative class in the culture of its origination. This Myth Context indicator occurred as both ritual and performative reverse-mimetic social behavior in the ancient culture that worshipped these myths, and this indication of Myth Context occurred with such significant societal import that the behavior is regarded today as having been part of a daily religious social behavior for which its absence could not have been conceived by the ancient culture that was immersed in it (Denova, 2019, pp. 2-4). It is known that it was Plato's purpose for myth that it would induce an audience to imitate the myth (Brisson, 1998, p. 74; Murray, 2011, p. 183; Wohl, 2016, p. 483), We also know that the ancient Greeks did celebrate the gods of these myths in ritual activity (Hard, 2019, p. 202), such that they did behaviorally "act out" their myths. They are known to

have performed initiatory ceremonies that enabled transformations of social status for young adults. For example, as part of a wedding ceremony held in shrines to the goddess Artemis, a mock-death of the bride was often staged in a ritual imitating the myth *Arkteia* (Dowden, 2011b, pp. 489-492). Young boys transitioning into warriors acted out similar initiatory rituals conforming to myth narratives, such as the acting out of hunts (Dowden, 2011b, pp. 492-494), or the acting out of the conquest of a castle (Bremmer, 2014, p. 3). In both cases, myth was used as a conduit for one generation to celebrate a successive generation's transition in social status or rank.

4.2.4 Assessment of Generational Propagation

4.2.4.1 Propagational Success

Evidence for the generational influence upon the propagation of classical myth is significant. Classical myth has influenced appropriative cross-generational communication since ancient times (Brisson, 1998, p. 116). There are countless examples of how narratives from the classical tradition continued to impose Myth Context upon successive cultures and generations separated by time and geography. For example, Greek mythology was repurposed for use by the Romans (Fox, 2011, pp. 253,258; Griffiths, 2011, p. 198), and appropriated by the contemporary literature of late 1800s Japan (Amitrano, 2016, p. 91), and by the propaganda of Nazi Germany (Hall, 2016, p. 168). Today we can see similar kinds of re-appropriations in NASA's naming of their successful mission to the moon in the 1960s, and future mission to the moon in the 2020s, as Apollo and Artemis, respectively. But perhaps no more profound a case exists, for the lasting effects of paradoxical belief associated with Greek Myth, than that of the mythical city of Atlantis as told by Plato in the *Timaios* and the *Kritias* (Murray, 2011, pp. 179-180). It is a prime and obvious example of the propagation of a Myth Context where the persistent paradoxical

belief in Atlantis' existence has continued into the modern day complete with the reverse-mimetic behavioral enaction encompassed in the continual search for its existence across many generations. As Murray (2011) explains "literally thousands of books have been written on the whereabouts of Atlantis" (p. 180).

In holding with Barthes supposition that an image can be as susceptible to myth as a narrative, take for example the universal symbol of justice. It can be seen today in modern art depicted in architecture at the U. S. Supreme Court, such as the relief of a blindfolded woman bearing a sword and balanced scale (Justicia, 2021). Colloquially known as Lady Justice, it is a symbol, historically appropriated and imitated from the Roman goddess Justitia and Greek goddesses Themis and Dike (de Ville, 2011, p. 325), that has evolved into a modern icon complete with the clear visual influence of its myth origin. And finally, as with Barthes (2012) own example of the power of myth that he revealed in the imitated Basque chalet (pp. 234-235), we can also demonstrate the numerous times that ancient Greek architecture has been appropriated and imitated (Denova, 2019, p. 2). One specific example is the Parthenon, a temple constructed in the 5th century BCE (Lambrinou, 2018, p. 126), that has been commonly appropriated as a part of the Greek Revival architectural movement occurring across the world since the Renaissance (Lambrinou, 2018, pp. 126-150), and that began, as Lambrinou (2018) points out, when the "turn towards Greek antiquity was marked by the beginning of European familiarity with the works of Plato, Aristotle, and Homer" (p. 126). These examples provide but just a few disparate cases of the successful multi-generational propagations of Myth Context associated with classical myth. However, as apparent and obvious that such successes might seem, many have also failed.

4.2.4.2 Propagational Failure

Despite the wealth of classical myth that has survived, or all the power that it is commonly known to have wielded upon audiences throughout the millennia and across the world, for a variety of reasons a significant sum of classical myth has failed to propagate into the modern day (Dowden, 2011a, p. 66; Hard, 2019, p. 204). Because transmission of myth was performed through oral recitation, many ancient myths were never archived for posterity. Other works are partially lost to us as evident by existing narrative fragments and recorded testimonials (Hard, 2019, p. xxi), and through references to myths depicted in surviving wall paintings, sculpture, and pottery (Dowden & Livingstone, 2011, p. 12; Lewis, 2011, pp. 449, 551). For example, the goddess Eos depicted in the epic *Aithiopis* is considered a marginalized narrative barely known to modern culture because only fragments of the epic are available to us (Lewis, 2011, pp. 448-449). But while such losses might be considered matters of ancient technological deficits, even classical myth was susceptible to forces of cultural approval and popularity, and the popularity of a myth in ancient culture was often determined by situation or location. For example, temples to Poseidon were frequently situated near seashores (Denova, 2019, p. 97), or spirits such as nymphs might be more popular to only rural cultures (Hard, 2019, p. 190). Many of the classical myths were popular due to social context, such as the appeal of Artemis to young girls and women (Denova, 2019, p. 120), or Dionysos relation to banquets (Lewis, 2011, p. 448). Myth in ancient times could be at the mercy of an artist's willingness to include it on popular art or architecture (Denova, 2019, p. 48; Lewis, 2011, p. 448; Parker, 2014, p. 196), or a particular poet's willingness to recite it (Denova, 2019, p. 48). And though the improvisation of the ancient Greek poets was often considered to be divinely inspired, the success of their recitations was highly susceptible to popular reception and to what content the audience would accept or reject

(Bremmer, 2014, pp. 3-4). Further, the rejection of a poet's myths could come at great cost. The conviction and execution of Socrates, on the charge of disrespect of the gods, was the result of a generational dispute where the elders of Athens took egregious offense to the youths of Athens imitating Socrates behavior (Nails, 2006, p. 5). Some myths in classical times were more popular than others and their popularity could change over time. For example, Herakles was known to have been the most popular myth even in ancient times with a broad and variable appeal across many of the Mediterranean cultures (Burkert, 2014, p. 14), while as Albert Henrichs (2014) explains, marginalized myths such as those regarding Triptolemos, demonstrate a "local mythology which was once so popular in Eleusinian circles but which perished in later antiquity" (pp. 250-251). Finally, in the context where the belief in deities was an indispensable cultural norm in the ancient Greco-Roman world (Denova, 2019, p. 2), and understanding from the historical record how myth decreased in importance in the daily life of poet and myth consumer alike over the millennia (Bremmer, 2014, pp. 4-5), it is safe to assert that where the Myth Contexts of ancient cultures did not fail, those myths that survived are arguably less potent in their contextualization of myth in the modern today than they were in ancient times.

4.2.5 Summary

Classical myths demonstrate a significantly Ascendent Myth Context with a profound ability to propagate narrative across generational boundaries. Over the millennia classical myths have shown themselves to be obvious and ascendent, wildly unlimited in their significations, popular, and possess great variability and potential. Classical myths functioned as contextual frames in which variable meaning could occur (Johnston, 2017, p. 148). For example, Artemis could variably be a goddess of cruel relentless vengeance and death or a compassionate goddess of women, unborn children, and birth (Hard, 2019, pp. 150-152). A singular example of

experiential paradox that demonstrates the willingness of ancient culture to endow these narratives with significations of expansive scale, reverence, and potential. Classical myth is perceived to possess significant raw potential due to its ability to integrate the past with the present and produce many possible and variable interpretations within its fundamental context as a storytelling vehicle (Gaisser, 2017, p. 338; Tolliday, 2017, p. 244; Willis, 2017, p. 109). As Doherty (2017) explains, its "always been possible to make *reverent* allusions to classical myth" (P. 158). In other words, the ability of ancient narratives to propagate was dependent on the variable and potential scale of its Myth Context to reverently appeal to wider and more divergent audiences, across both geography and time, and in different ways. But the context of that reverence has changed over the millennia. Myths from the classical age could still be physically lost or disappear from the consciousness of an ancient society. We know for example that even Plato, in his time, exploited the existence of lost or fragmentary myths as a source for skillful reappropriations that he could transform into new myths (Murray, 2011, pp. 181-186). Yet, however weak or altered their significations have become in the modern day, the paradoxical beliefs in these narratives are still strong enough to persuade cultures across the world to dress their dwellings withs facades that imitate and allude toward a grand and expansive myth history once constructed to honor Greco-Roman gods. Even though modern society paradoxically does not worship the gods of ancient cultures in the same way it once did, or at all. Successive generations have clearly been selective in what Myth Contexts they have chosen to appropriate from the ancient classical tradition. Acts of selection that would overcome any resistance to a strict focus on deities and evolve into a whole new kind of myth.

4.3 SANTA CLAUS

This thesis presents the narrative of Santa Claus as its second exemplar. Santa Claus provides an example that is immensely popular and possesses a significant social pedigree from a generational perspective. Considered a mature and modern narrative, it also possesses a rich history and a deep connection to antiquity.

4.3.1 Narrative Background

From what is commonly known to us within modern popular culture, the Santa Claus narrative tells the story of an elderly and obese man with a flowing white beard that delivers toys to obedient children across the world every Christmas eve. This story tells us further that he dresses in a grand suit made of red furs, possesses magical powers, and is a resident of the North Pole where he is the proprietor of a great workshop that employs many elves to produce children's toys. On the eve of his annual journey, he travels the world in a flying sleigh pulled by eight airborne reindeer that can land Santa's sleigh on the rooftops of homes with precision accuracy. Then, by spiriting himself down a chimney, or using some other method of entrance, Santa enters the homes he visits and leaves gifts for well-behaved children on his approved recipient list that have anticipated his coming arrival throughout the year. With his rewards delivered, and the appointed visit complete, he and his agile reindeer will swiftly depart. In the span of a single Christmas eve, he will travel across the entire world to complete all his pre-scheduled arrivals that are anticipated, welcome, and carefully prepared for.

The Santa Claus narrative is considered to be a modern creation uniquely specific to American culture (Belk, 1993, p. 78; Siefker, 1997, p. 5). The origin of this American Santa Claus narrative is attributed to a combination of efforts that took place in the early 19th century. The Santa Claus narrative is attributed to a 1823 poem anonymously published in the Troy

Sentinel titled ‘A Visit from St. Nicholas’ (Siefker, 1997, pp. 3-4), reproduced in Figure 4, and is subsequently credited to Clement Moore as the author (Belk, 1993, p. 79; Siefker, 1997, p. 4). The modern visual appearance of the Santa Claus character is largely attributed to drawings produced by Thomas Nast, as seen in Plate 1, that were published in *Harper’s Weekly* from 1863 to 1886 (Belk, 1993, p. 79; Palo et al., 2020, p. 68; Siefker, 1997, pp. 34-37). While others, such as Washington Irving, have been recognized to contribute to the development of the American Santa Claus narrative (Curtis, 1995, p. 19), Moore and Nast are given the predominant share of credit as the source from which modern Santa Claus originated and is considered to be largely unchanged since the mid-19th century (Belk, 1987, p. 87). Belk (1993) argues that since the advent of the modern Santa Claus narrative, American popular culture—in the form of feature films, literature, and electronic media—has significantly contributed to the expanded backstory and ephemeral details of the modern narrative (pp. 79-81). In a similar way, Moore and Nast’s vision for Santa in the 19th century was itself an appropriation and modification of a much older and far more complex narrative that preceded their vision of Santa Claus.

Lévi-Strauss (2016) argued that Santa Claus was a “modern creation” (p.8) whose identity was the result of a “phenomenon of convergence” regarding several historical figures (pp. 7, 12). Belk (1993) suggests that the direct predecessor to Santa Claus is Saint Nicholas of Myra (p. 77), a Bishop from the 4th century known for destroying the temple of Artemis and for using his personal wealth for compassionate purposes (Curtis, 1995, pp. 17-18, 24). According to Belk (1993), among other predecessors to Santa Claus are the “British Father Christmas, the French Père Noël, the Dutch Sinter klaas, the Danish Jules-Missen, and the Romanian Moş Craicun” (p. 77).

Plate 1

Rendition of Santa Claus by Thomas Nast from the late 1800s.

Scanned from p. 37 of *Santa Claus, last of the wild men: The origins and evolution of Saint Nicholas, spanning 50,000 years.* by Siefker, P. (1997). Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

But there is evidence that the convergence responsible for producing our modern Santa Claus may have involved appropriation of factors that were less than virtuous or saintly. For example, Phyllis Siefker (1997) argues that the Santa Claus of Moore and Nast's imagination is also influenced by the ancient "Wild Man" rituals that gave birth to the German Pelznichol, a character also regarded as "Furry Nicholas" or Bellsnickle" (pp. 5, 17-19). Siefker (1997) suggests that the name "Claus" was a German name for both "Wild Man" and "Satan", the latter who was alternatively known as Old Nick (p. 69). Siefker (1997) offers further the suggestion that Santa's "Ho! Ho! Ho!" is derived from a salutation known as the "devils bluster" which was also attributed to Robin Goodfellow (pp. 69, 117). The suggestion is, much like the convergence that Lévi-Strauss proposed, that the Santa Claus we know today eventually crystalizes from a pool of many appropriated but disparate elements, each gleaned for their contribution in a new or alternative narrative. By 1821, just a few years before Moore's "A Visit from Saint Nicholas", a character named "Santeclaus" appears in the book *The Children's Friend* in a poem that depicts "Olde SANTECLAUS" to be transported "O'er chimney-tops" by reindeer so that he can deliver his "yearly gifts" (Siefker, 1997, pp. 30-31). By the mid-19th century Kriss Kringle, which is also German in origin, can be connected with Bellsnickle and it is known that Kringle was deliberately "impersonated" in the department store of Philadelphia merchant J.W. Parkinson in 1841 (Siefker, 1997, pp. 33-34). An imitative ritual commonly reenacted every Christmas in the modern era.

4.3.2 Myth Identification Analysis

4.3.2.1 Evaluation for Pre-determination of Myth

Santa Claus is fundamentally recognized as an obvious myth (Belk, 1987, p. 87; 1993, p. 77; Palo et al., 2020, p. 54; Sunday, 2011, p. 12). Given the clear, obvious, and culturally

ubiquitous nature of the modern Santa Claus narrative, it is easily pre-determined that Santa Claus is an obvious Ascendant Myth. As an Ascendent myth, the Santa Claus narrative exhibits clear and obvious indicators of Myth Context that can be easily found present within popular culture, public discourse, and observable common social behavior.

4.3.3 Evidence of Myth Context

4.3.3.1 Paradoxical Belief

Indications of paradoxical belief are culturally present and obvious in the audience of this narrative. For example, societal integration of the Santa Claus narrative is observed to be a practice of irrational thought (Lévi-Strauss, 2016, p. 9). This Myth Context indicator occurs in the logical operation of "Reception eq Myth Context if ((!Literal == Response) || (⊥Literal ==Response))" where the belief is paradoxical because it is held for a narrative with a known false ground. The belief is not only a matter of reception, but also as a part of the narrative 's fundamental "textual" design, where the narrative's content enthusiastically encourages belief in the fiction of Santa Claus in an open social context where such belief may also be viewed to be a belief in a questionable or false narrative. This social dynamic is poignantly captured in *The Polar Express*, a 2004 animated motion picture adaptation of a book by the same name authored by Chris Van Allsburg (1985), in which the core fictional narrative depicts a child's struggle to believe in Santa Clause set within the frame of a fantastical Christmas eve train ride to meet Santa at the North Pole where the credulousness of belief in Santa is then confronted (Zemeckis, 2004). From a broader perspective, the general premise of the Santa Claus narrative is a social dynamic where members of one generation, typically adults, actively encourage members of successive generations, such as children and grandchildren, to believe in a fictitious character (Lévi-Strauss, 2016, p. 9; Searle-Chatterjee, 1993, p. 183; Sunday, 2011, p. 12). This dynamic is

a premeditated act of encouraged paradoxical belief, of such intensity, that it occurs through significant deceptive practices (Lévi-Strauss, 2016, p. 9). Further, evidence of the paradoxical belief in Santa Claus is so complex and deeply structured, it includes supporting beliefs that Santa has a place to live, familial relations, and friendships (Belk, 1993, p. 78).

4.3.3.2 Appropriative Imitation

Indications of appropriative imitation are culturally present and obvious for this narrative. This Myth Context indicator occurs both as a raw source for appropriation and as an appropriation used to serve as a paradoxical authority for something that it literally is not. As a source of appropriation, the Santa Claus narrative and image has been openly appropriated to promote commercial products with great effect (Belk, 1987, pp. 93-95). Perhaps the most famous and successful of such appropriations was the advertising effort using Santa Claus to promote Coca-Cola in advertisements (Connelly, 1999, p. 207). This Santa Claus campaign for Coco-Cola, conceived by Sundblom in 1931, was so successful that it continued with variation for decades and was exported far beyond the confines of the American culture it was originally conceived in (Belk, 1993, p. 79; Connelly, 1999, p. 207).

As an appropriative imitation Santa Claus can be shown to function as a resolute authority on material consumerism (Curtis, 1995, p. 20), and as a surrogate repurposed to be an imitation of the very focal point of the holiday that the character was created to serve in a supporting role. Belk (1987) would argue that Santa Claus was the figurative “god of materialism” (p. 91). Adding that Santa functioned as “the god blessing Christmas materialism in early department stores” (Belk, 1993, p. 91), and that his presence in these stores further operated as the “spirit of spending with little concern for cost” (Belk, 1993, p. 91). In other words, in this context, Santa Claus was an appropriative imitation that served as a surrogate

authority for everything related to consumerism in relation to the Christmas holiday. Even though there is nothing directly literal in the narrative that demonstrates a direct promotion of commerce or capitalism, rather than an act of simple altruistic giving. But perhaps more controversial is the way in which the Santa Claus narrative is perceived to function as an appropriative imitation of Christ. For example, Belk (1993) argued further that "Santa is a secular version of Christ" (p. 83), and that Santa is a secular mythology where American materialism and excess, is to some degree, a poorly executed imitation of Christian spiritualism (pp. 82-85). In other words, as a Myth Context, in this alternative view Santa is perceived as the secular god of commercial Christmas, paradoxically becomes an appropriative imitation of the holiday's literal purpose, and has the potential, for those willing to contextualize it that way, to be a resolute symbol for "all things Christmas". Even though its literalness was only meant to function in a supporting role for the holiday.

4.3.3.3 Reverse-Mimesis

Indications of reverse-mimesis are present and obvious for this narrative. This Myth Context indicator occurs as both ritual and performative reverse-mimetic social behavior, with significant and reliable frequency, and is easily observed. For example, the annual presence of Santa is considered a ritual with equal stature to the Christmas rituals of gift wrapping and exchange (Belk, 1993, p. 91). Children are encouraged to actively participate, and routinely do, in the annual ritual of writing letters to Santa (Miller, 1993b, p. 135; Searle-Chatterjee, 1993, p. 176). Adults, in a variety of ways, actively engage in role-playing imitation where they dress in a Santa Claus costume to provide "evidence" of Santa's existence through imitative and performative pretense and charade. While both parents (Belk, 1993, p. 78), and departments stores (Lévi-Strauss, 2016, p. 4), are known to have engaged in this reverse-mimetic behavior of

imitative masquerade, the most common and obvious venue for this activity is arguably in the retail sphere. Some of the earliest records of store sponsored performances of Santa are traceable across significant time and distance. Kris Kringle was imitated at a Philadelphia retailer in 1841 (Siefker, 1997, pp. 33-34) while Santa's Grotto was known to have been imitated in the J.P. Robert department store in the Stratford suburb of East London as early as 1888 (Connelly, 1999, p. 192). The Grotto itself would evolve into detailed productions that might include Santa's reindeer, a replica of his winter wonderland, and any variety of supporting actors or Claus-like ambience (Connelly, 1999, pp. 192-193). These imitative "productions" highlight the significant and determined will to faithfully execute a complete imitation of the myth, and the imitation of both Santa and the Grotto occur to such a degree in the modern day that it is often an inescapable shopping mall experience during the Christmas season. This modern American Santa Claus narrative is recognized to have been imitated in many places. In post-World War II France (Lévi-Strauss, 2016, pp. 1, 4, 8), in Europe (Belk, 1993, p. 78), and across the world. The Santa myth has been assimilated by foreign cultures such as Japan (Belk, 1993, p. 82), where Santa Claus has even been imitated in costume by young Japanese women (Moeran & Skov, 1993, p. 116). The character has been assimilated by people of Jewish and Hindu faiths that have immigrated to the US (Belk, 1993, p. 81). The need to mimetically perform the Santa Claus myth has even included an attempt to produce a physical recreation of "Santa's home" in Lapland, Finland, to be staffed with performance actors for a month prior to Christmas, and the venue marketed as a tourism experience where one could travel to meet Santa in his personal residence (Palo et al., 2020, pp. 53, 58-59, 63-64). But perhaps one of the more evidentiary circumstances demonstrating the strength of this myth, to produce acts of reverse-mimesis within its audience, is the public admission made by Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy

and Infectious Diseases and advisor to the White House Coronavirus Task Force, during the worldwide Covid-19 Pandemic of 2020. Prior to the Christmas of 2020, Dr. Fauci publicly informed a group of school age children that he had personally vaccinated Santa Claus for the Coronavirus (Hines, 2020). In the depth of an ongoing and progressively worsening worldwide pandemic this senior medical expert, and administrator entrusted to advise the Federal government and the President of the United States on matters related to the pandemic, saw fit to publicly embrace the narrative as a Myth Context and imitate Santa's personal physician so that he might "immunize" Santa Claus and enable the gift-bearer to fulfill his annual commitment to the younger generation.

4.3.4 Assessment of Generational Propagation

The very fabric of the Santa Claus myth is predicated upon a direct inter-generational relationship. The myth's source narrative is purposefully invented by adults (Lévi-Strauss, 2016, p. 3), the actions of adults are directly implicated in the intentional transmission of the myth to the successive generations (Belk, 1987, p. 93), and adults actively, and with great sophistication and encouragement, attempt to convince the younger generation to believe in the invented narrative (Belk, 1987, p. 89; Lévi-Strauss, 2016, p. 9). Lévi-Strauss (2016) asserted that the myth exists for the practical purpose of attempting to directly influence desirable societal behavior in the successive generation such that Santa's "generosity" will be distributed as a matter of meritorious award (p. 10). Alternatively, in different cultures gifts may be awarded not on grounds of behavior, but as a result of status (Searle-Chatterjee, 1993, p. 184). A circumstance that still implies a condition where members of one generation are making selective award decisions about members of another generation. Lévi-Strauss (2016) stressed that to believe in Santa Claus was a "*transaction* between the two generations" (p. 10), and that revealing the

secret of Santa was synonymous with a rite of passage that enabled the younger generation to be assimilated into the older generation (p. 9). Further, while it is evident that inter-generational propagation of the Santa Claus myth is clear and well-established, this intergenerational cycle of propagation has repeated itself without interruption over a significant span of time. The modern American version of Santa Claus as conceived by Moore, and improved upon visually by Nast, has remained intact with minor alteration and improvement for nearly 200 years (Belk, 1987, p. 87). Using the schedule of generational boundaries outlined by Strauss and Howe (1991, p. 84) this would translate into 12 living generations or more that would have had an opportunity to engage with the contemporary vision of Santa Claus and subsequently usher the narrative forward to successive generations. While this only considers the more recent and documented American contribution to the myth, if the vestiges, elements, and other contributions—that preceded and influenced the modern convergence of Moore, Nast, and others—are also taken into consideration, then the myth has been propagated forward across dozens of generations. All that time doing what myths do, becoming appropriated, imitated, and transformed.

4.3.5 Summary

Santa Claus demonstrates a significantly Ascendent Myth Context with such intensity and effect that it has propagated itself across generational boundaries for two centuries or more. The Santa Claus narrative is constructed within a sub-context that is recognized as an intentional fiction with the purpose of encouraging an obvious and expansive paradoxical belief that the pretense of the narrative's sub-context, is not in fact a pretense. This sub-context of the narrative's social purpose and pretense, intentionally and cooperatively forged by society to ignore attempts to falsify the narrative, is thus integrated with the greater contextual whole of the social narrative and the variable social behavior it promotes. By engaging with the Santa Claus

narrative in the way that it does, the audience is clearly contextualizing the narrative as myth by openly promoting a reverent paradoxical belief in that narrative, by appropriating the narrative to imitate things that the narrative was arguably never intended to promote, and by committing reverse-mimetic behavior through the imitation or reenactment of the narrative in physical gesture, action, and ritual. The narrative provides clear evidence of an Ascendent Myth Context that is socially shared and encouraged across generational boundaries in the hope that successive generations will choose to continue contextualizing the narrative in the same way. Further, it demonstrates an impressive and expansive magnification to its second-order signification, such that the potential of its appeal is appropriated on a world-wide scale. For example, the narrative is recognized as an eagerly and enthusiastically experienced local context perceived to exist within and contribute to a much larger globally shared context (Miller, 1993a, p. 31). So powerful is the social fabric of paradoxical belief invested in the fiction of Santa Claus, that it possesses significant Myth Context attributes of unfalsifiability and raw future potential. For example, Searle-Chatterjee (1993) argues that Santa Claus endows one's childhood to be perceived as a magical period in their life (p. 183), and Sunday (2011) argues that to believe in Santa, is to be "grounded in the purity of possibility and a boundless supply of faith" (p. 40). Belief in Santa is therefore not exclusively a belief in his physical existence, but rather a belief in the potential of the spirit of the narrative's message. A belief in that potential, which is remarkably obvious in the Santa Claus narrative, but surprisingly obscure in others.

4.4 BATMAN

This thesis now presents the narrative of Batman as its third and final exemplar. This narrative is young and modern but possesses content that is well-established and immensely popular. Unlike the prior exemplars presented here, this narrative will be used to demonstrate the

efficacy of a comparative reception analysis as prescribed in the Myth Context Reception model, and to demonstrate how myth can exist obscurely and further produce an audience response of myth quite unexpected for a narrative of its caliber and age.

4.4.1 Narrative Background

The Batman narrative is a modern entertainment detective fiction. It depicts a story in which the lead character, Bruce Wayne, witnesses and survives the brutal and cold-blooded murder of his parents as a child (Bat-bio, n.d.; Rosenberg, 2013, p. 13). As a result of the tragedy, the young victim will swear vengeance upon the entire criminal world for his loss, devise a plan to become a vigilante crime fighter by preparing himself physically and mentally through years of training, and will disguise himself in the appearance of a large bat because he believes that this creature has the symbolic power to impose great fear and dread in the hearts of his adversaries (Bat-bio, n.d.; Rosenberg, 2013, p. 14). With no super-powers beyond his deductive intellect, physical skills, advanced technology, and wealth, the heir to the extravagant Wayne family fortune will venture out nightly disguised as Batman and engage in combat with all manner of criminals in Gotham City to impose his own special kind of vigilante justice upon them (Bat-bio, n.d.; Brooker, 2000, pp. 37-39; Langley, 2012, p. 5; Wainer, 2014, p. 44).

The Batman narrative is a popular culture media franchise owned by DC Comics (Bat-bio, n.d.; DC-copyright, n.d.). The Batman character was conceived as the result of a collaborative effort between Bob Kane and Bill Finger (Daniels & Kidd, 1999, pp. 17-25), and was first published in *Detective Comics* #27 in May 1939 (Brooker, 2000, p. 34). The character and narrative have been in continuous serial comic book publication for nearly 82 years, and is a commercial franchise that has been developed and distributed in various other media forms including motion picture serials, live and animated television serials, and feature films (Pub-

history, n.d). Since its conception, Batman has grown into one of the comic book industry's most prolific and popular narratives (Cronin, 2015; Dondero, 2013; Nine-best, n.d.; Top-100, n.d.) and has been experienced by billions of people all over the world (Langley, 2012, p. 5).

4.4.2 Myth Identification Analysis

Positions on whether the Batman character or narrative constitutes a myth is varied and complex. The notion of Batman as myth is largely rejected by some because it is perceived to complicate the narrative's general credibility. For example, David Seidman (2008) wrote that, "Batman isn't utterly a creature of myth and fable. His writers have worked like demons to make their star believable" (p. 210). Alex M.Wainer (2014) argued not that Batman is a myth, but rather that it is "mythic", or myth-like, arguing that Batman is a mythic figure that possesses qualities that resemble Greek myths (p. 10). In clarifying what mythic means, Wainer (2014) explains that Batman is "not a myth itself but drawing on mythical patterns" (p. 166). In his book *Batman Unmasked*, Will Brooker (2000) attempted to analyze the larger and comprehensive long-term cultural impact and audience response of the Batman narrative and franchise across a wide spectrum of media and cultural conditions including television, film, comics, and others. Brooker (2000) wrote bluntly that "Batman has now reached the point where he could live on in the cultural imagination, as myth, if that institution [DC Comics] decided to cut him free" (p. 11). Brooker's thesis was that all evidence of Batman's cultural appropriation demonstrates Batman's potential to eventually become a modern myth (Brooker, 2000, p. 17), but with the caveat that Batman, as myth, is realizable only within some future possibility, and that possibility comes into play if the Batman narrative is abandoned and released by its owner to become fully and completely appropriated by its audience (Brooker, 2000, pp. 329-333).

4.4.2.1 Evaluation for Pre-determination of Myth

Batman is a serial pulp whose original target audience was young children. It is a very young narrative when compared to the myths of the Greek legacy. It is easy to see why there might have been apprehension on the part of Wainer, Seidman, or Brooker to take such a leap of faith to argue that a comic book character is experienced in the same way as a classical Greek myth. However, a decade after *Batman Unmasked*, Brooker (2012) would then argue in his book *Hunting The Dark Knight* that "Batman is more than a character, more than a brand: he is a myth" (p. 217). Brooker (2012) asserted that he was using "Batman as a case study to explore broader issues of cultural meaning and cultural power" (p. xii), and that his examination was focused on the "policing, promotion, and pushing aside" of the Batman property (p. xii). I suggest that Brooker's evolution on the matter was well-founded and his conclusion correct. Ironically, however, it was Brooker's previous argument in 2000 for the appropriation of the narrative by its audience that might have satisfied, to some degree, at least one indicator of Myth Context. However, his new thesis was positioned in a study of political economy, and not a comprehensive examination of myth itself. Further, the direct competing arguments for and against Batman as a myth add to the complications in determining a status. A pre-determination of Myth Context is therefore inconclusive, and a comparative reception analysis will now be performed to determine whether there is in fact merit to any claim that Batman is a myth.

4.4.2.2 Comparative Reception Analysis

In performing a comparative reception analysis, as prescribed by this model, a comparison of content, and audience response associated with that content, will be made to determine if myth is associable with this narrative. The Batman narrative spans more than 80 years of continuous serial story development with thousands of storylines and story arcs over that

time. To perform a comprehensive comparative analysis on the entire Batman narrative would be a daunting task that this thesis neither has the time or space to accommodate. This analysis will be limited, as much as possible, to the serial episodes of the comic book titles *Detective Comics* and *Batman*, published by DC Comics Inc. and their predecessors, since the introduction of Batman in *Detective Comics* 27, in May of 1939. Within this constraint, analysis will be narrowed further to examine only aspects of the narrative that can be shown to be both foundational to the narrative and consistent over the span of the narrative's existence. For example, the origin and motives of the character are considered to be critical and foundational structural components of the narrative (Porter, 2008, p. 86). Will Brooker (2000) has described this structure as a "rigid and consistent template which specifies not just the character's appearance but his location, associates, motivation and attributes" (p. 39). Further, as Reynolds (1994) asserts, "every Batman story is to some extent an extension of the origin story, as Batman's motivation is wholly derived from the trauma of witnessing his parents shot in cold blood" (p. 67). Despite the many serial episodes, plot tangents, and creative licenses taken by the writers and artists since the narrative's conception, the origin and underlying structure of the character has remained largely unchanged (O'Neil, 2012, p. 2). Therefore, the focus of both content and response analyses will be narrowly limited to the perceived identity of the lead character of the narrative as defined by his origin and motivations.

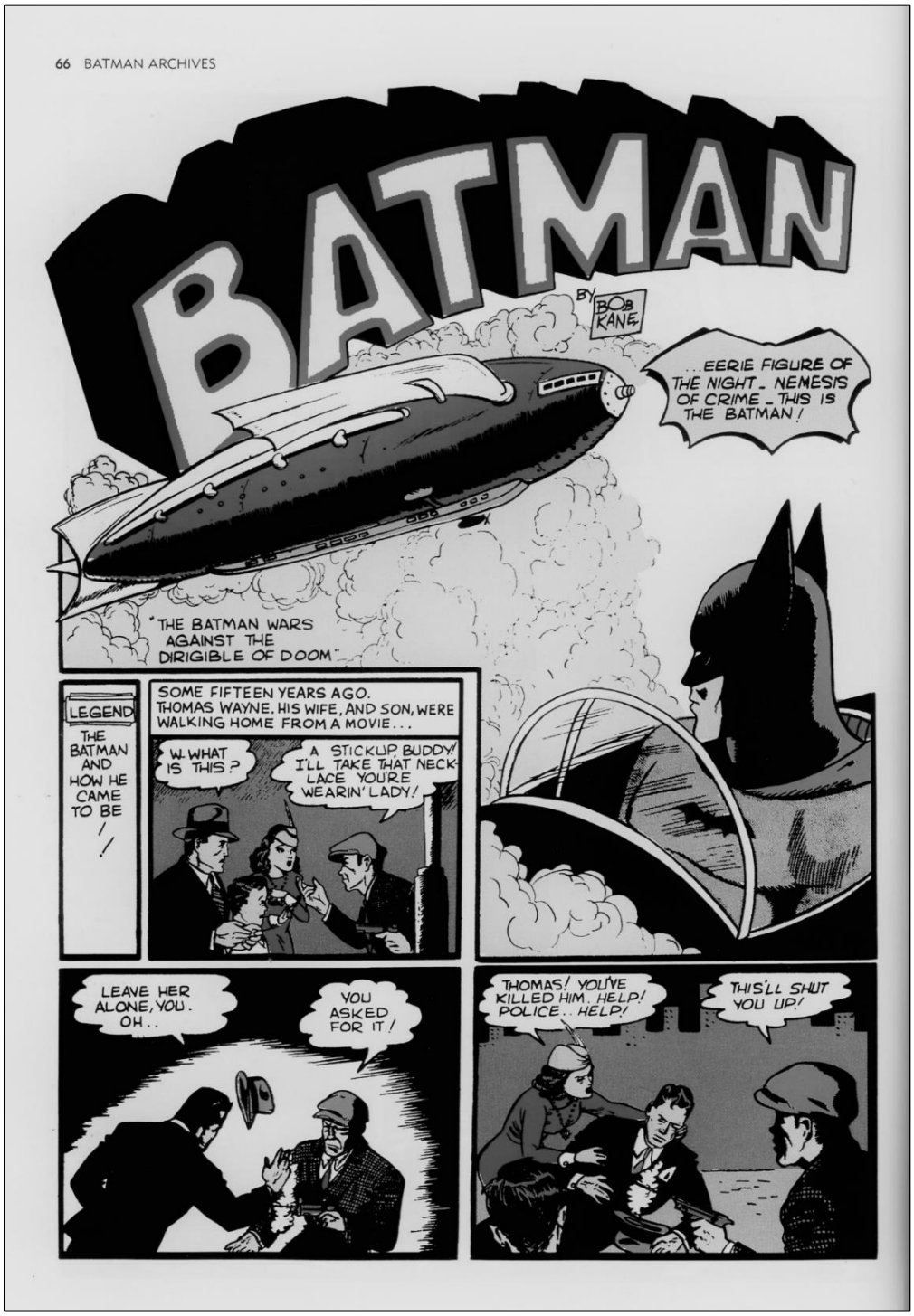
4.4.2.2.1 Content Analysis

The Batman origin was first told (Plates 2-3) in *Detective Comics* #33 in November 1939 with a more detailed account to follow in *Batman* #47 in June 1948. It was retold again (Plates 4-5) in *Batman* #404, May 1987, and in *Batman* Vol 2 #21-23, in 2013. While accommodating differences in artistic style and variance in the order in which events are revealed, in each

retelling a similar story is told with varying degrees of detail, backstory, and dialog. These versions depict a wealthy Bruce Wayne as a young adult making the decision to become a vigilante crime fighter in the guise of a large human-like bat, because of the Wayne family tragedy (Kane, 1988, 1990a; Miller & Mazzucchelli, 1987; Snyder & Capullo, 2013). The tragic circumstance that motivates Wayne is the senseless and brutal murder of his parents that he witnesses as a child as seen in Plates 2 & 4 (Kane, 1990a, p. 1; Miller & Mazzucchelli, 1987, p. 21). Wayne's reaction is to swear vengeance upon all criminals as seen in Plate 3 (Kane, 1990a, p. 2), and by committing to the task of vigilante justice as a career in adulthood (Miller & Mazzucchelli, 1987, pp. 1-19). The narrative also tells that Wayne will fail to accomplish his goal in his early endeavors and will place his life and family legacy at great risk in the course of his vigilante actions (Miller & Mazzucchelli, 1987, p. 20). Wayne comes to believe that to be successful he will need an unorthodox tool that can make criminals fearful of him and thus give him an advantage (Kane, 1990a, p. 2; Miller & Mazzucchelli, 1987, p. 20). As seen in Plate 3, Wayne reasons that "criminals are a superstitious cowardly lot, so my disguise must be able to strike terror into their hearts. I must be a creature of the night, black, terrible…" (Kane, 1990a, p. 2). As a bat flies into the window of his study as seen in Plates 3 & 5, Wayne will suddenly realize the significance of the creature's frightening imposition and exclaim "I shall become a bat" (Kane, 1990a, p. 2; Miller & Mazzucchelli, 1987, p. 21). This seminal event, that the adult Bruce Wayne characterizes as "an omen" (Kane, 1990a, p. 2), motivates Wayne to engage in a premeditated and intentional effort to fabricate a semiotic illusion, in the form of a novel signifier, that he can wear as a disguise to evoke fear in minds of Gotham's criminals. As seen in Plate 3, Wayne will use a fabricated cape and cowl to endow himself with a new persona that Wayne will call "the Batman" (Kane, 1990a, p. 2).

Plate 2

First telling of Batman origin story from 1939 – Exhibit A.



Note. Scanned from p. 1 of *Detective Comics* No. 33 by Kane, B. (1990) in J. Kahn (Ed.), *The Batman archives: Volume one* (pp. 65-77). New York, NY: DC Comics. (Originally published 1939). Copyright 1990, DC Comics.

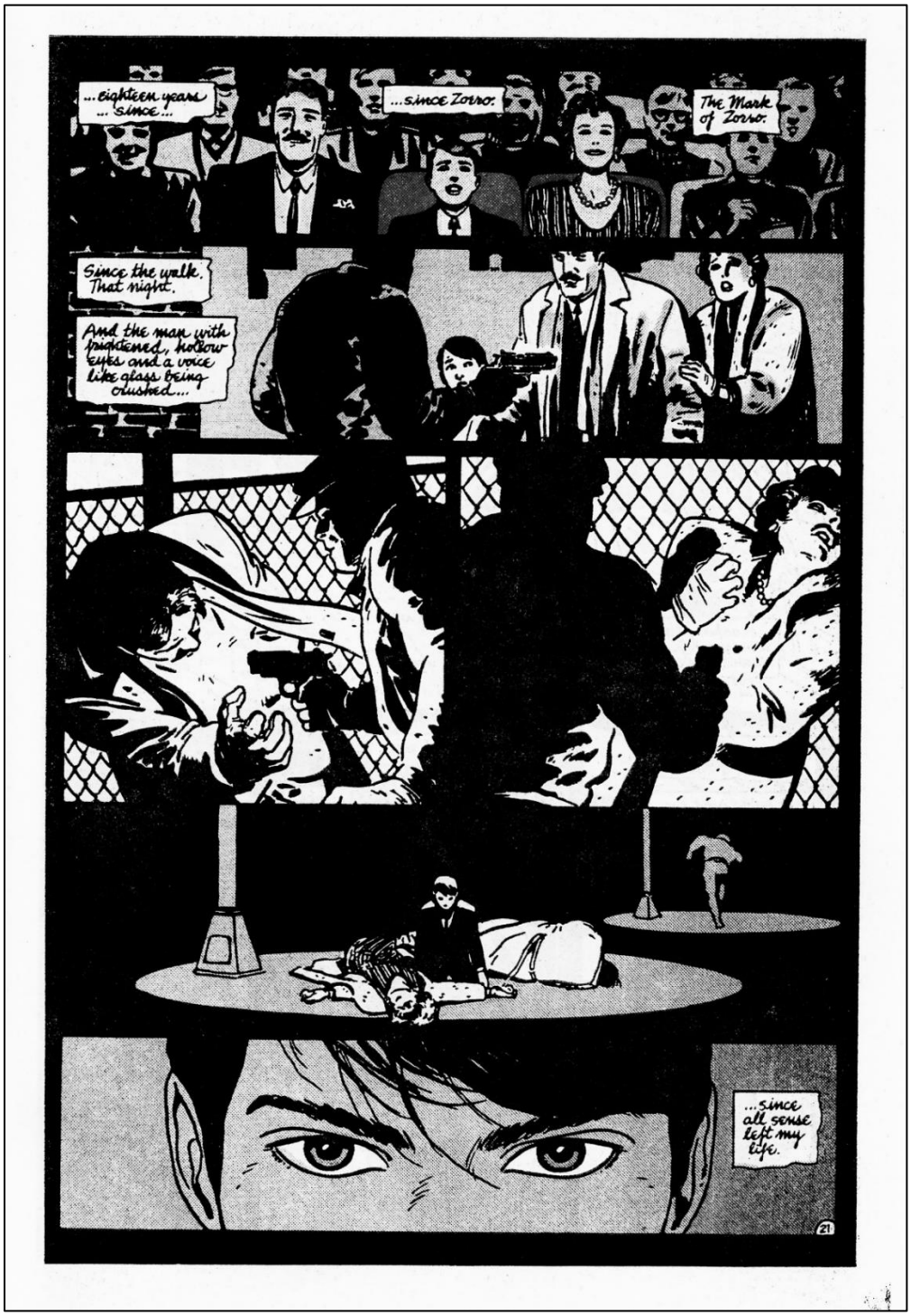
Plate 3

First telling of Batman origin story from 1939 – Exhibit B.

Note. Scanned from p. 2 of *Detective Comics* No. 33 by Kane, B. (1990) in J. Kahn (Ed.), *The Batman archives: Volume one* (pp. 65-77). New York, NY: DC Comics. (Originally published 1939). Copyright 1990, DC Comics.

Plate 4

Re-telling of the Batman origin from 1987 – Exhibit A.



Note. Scanned from p. 21 of "Batman year one - Who I am how I came to be". *Batman, 1*(404), by Miller, F., & Mazzucchelli, D. (1987). New York, Copyright 1987, DC Comics.

Plate 5

Re-telling of the Batman origin from 1987 – Exhibit B.

Note. Scanned from p. 22 of "Batman year one - Who I am how I came to be". *Batman, 1*(404), by Miller, F., & Mazzucchelli, D. (1987). New York, Copyright 1987, DC Comics.

This new persona will provide Wayne with both anonymity and a unique psychological edge over his adversaries. As seen in Plate 6 Wayne will use Batman's image to produce fear and dread in the criminal mind (Wolfman & Aparo, 1990, p. 5). But the persona that Wayne creates through the Batman signifier is more than just an illusion, it is also a performance. A premeditated and strategic act that Wayne performs with the direct intent to convince "Gotham" that the Batman is a "real creature" that possesses supernatural traits and powers. A strategy by Wayne that has been part of the narrative's essence since its conception. For example, as seen in Plate 7, *Detective Comics 1*(37) from 1940 depicted Wayne to use an advanced vision technology to deceptively convince his adversaries that Batman has extra-ordinary powers not possessed by normal humans (Kane, 1990b, p. 6). But Wayne's performance will also have effect on a wider audience to include all of "Gotham", not just its criminal element. For example, *Batman 2*(24) from 2013 depicts a dialog between a young and inexperienced Wayne and his butler and confidante Alfred Pennyworth (Snyder et al., 2013, pp. 47-48). In this exchange, as seen in Plates 8-9, Wayne voices his concern regarding the possibility that Gotham might learn Batman's true identity and Alfred responds to counsel Wayne that, in the case of the innocents of Gotham at least, this audience will not care who Batman is, but rather desire to be influenced by the direct passion of Wayne's performance, adding that:

> they want to believe in you up there, Bruce…they want to forget it's you by virtue of the passion of your performance. They want to be transported…to a world where bigger truths are at work, and anything - - anything - - can happen. A world where the impossible is possible. Batman can be something like that for them, Bruce." (Snyder et al., 2013, pp. 47-48).

Plate 6

Criminal cowering before Batman.

Note. Scanned from p. 5 of "The coming of Crimesmith". *Batman, 1*(443), by Wolfman, M., & Aparo, J. (1990). New York, Copyright 1990, DC Comics.

Plate 7

Batman's performance as a "supernatural" power.

Note. Scanned from p. 6 of *Detective Comics* No. 37 by Kane, B. (1940/1990) in J. Kahn (Ed.), *The Batman archives: Volume one* (pp. 115-127). New York, NY: DC Comics. (Originally published 1940). Copyright 1990, DC Comics.

Plate 8

The audience wants to believe in you – Exhibit A.

Note. Scanned from p. 47 of "Zero year - Secret city: Part three". *Batman, 2*(24), by Snyder, S., Tynion, J., Capullo, G., & Albuquerque, R. (2013, October). New York, Copyright 2013, DC Comics.

Plate 9

The audience wants to believe in you – Exhibit B.

Note. Scanned from p. 48 of "Zero year - Secret city: Part three". *Batman, 2*(24), by Snyder, S., Tynion, J., Capullo, G., & Albuquerque, R. (2013, October). New York, Copyright 2013, DC Comics.

Notable about this conversation between Wayne and Alfred is that (1) it transpires in the Batcave with Wayne sitting at a computer and wearing an incomplete Batman costume without the cape and cowl, (2) Alfred addresses the person before him not as Batman but as "Bruce", (3) it is a direct literal admission by the narrative that the image of Batman is in fact literally a performance by Wayne, (4) that the performance is a ruse that Wayne desperately does not want discovered, and (5) that the performance, originally intended for Wayne's narrow target audience of Gotham's criminals, has the added advantage of also being enthusiastically received by the audience of Gotham's innocents. In other words, while Wayne's performance is terrorizing, it is also far-reaching and inspirational, and Wayne will use both the signifier and the performance as a rhetoric to persuade Gotham to believe in the possibility that this artfully crafted deception is the actual identity of the mysterious creature Gotham thinks of as Batman.

The content analysis provided so far examines Wayne's motivation, intent, and methods for engaging in his unorthodox activities and fabricating the bizarre image and persona of the Batman. The narrative also provides us, through narration, clear evidence that it is Wayne who is the true focus of the narrative. For example, in the storyline "One Batman too many!" in *Batman 1*(403), Wayne must defeat a psychotic individual named Tommy Carma who is a former law officer whose wife and child were murdered and whose psychosis leads him to kill others while being a Batman imposter (Collins & Cowan, 1987). As seen in Plate 10, when Carma is defeated and the story concludes, Wayne will assume responsibility to get him treatment and the narration will tell us that "the avenger within the Batman co-exists with the compassionate man. Batman is indeed two men…and both are Bruce Wayne" (Collins & Cowan, 1987, p. 22).

Plate 10

And both are Bruce Wayne.

Note. Scanned from p. 22 of "One Batman too many!". *Batman, 1*(403), by Collins, M., & Cowan, D. B. (1987). New York, Copyright 1987, DC Comics.

The story appears both as an allegory for how Wayne's own path might have looked very different under alternative circumstances and as an affirmation that its Wayne's motives, compassion, and sacrifices that are the very reasons for Batman's existence.

We now provide evidence of how the narrative tells us Wayne perceives his own self. The "Bruce Wayne: Murderer", "Bruce Wayne: Fugitive", and "Aftermath" storylines, spanning 37 issues across multiple DC Comics titles in 2002 (BW-Fugitive, n.d), told the story that Bruce Wayne is framed for the murder of Vesper Fairchild, a woman that Wayne had been romantically involved (Brubaker & McDaniel, 2002d, pp. 3,17-19,37; Rucka & McDaniel, 2002, pp. 1-6). Throughout the storyline a despondent and angry Bruce Wayne struggles with yet another tragic murder of a person dearly close to him, and with the burden that an incarcerated (Brubaker & McDaniel, 2002a, pp. 13-20) and legally burdened Bruce Wayne has now become a liability to Batman's mission such that he will abandon his true identity by declaring that "there is no Bruce Wayne" (Brubaker & McDaniel, 2002b, p. 16), and further abandon those in his inner circle to focus solely on Batman's mission (Brubaker & McDaniel, 2002b, p. 31). Toward the end of the storyline Wayne is vindicated and the truth discovered (Brubaker & McDaniel, 2002d, p. 37). But as Batman he is faced with another situation where he must choose whether to protect the life of a killer by using his own body to shield the criminal from weapons fire (Brubaker & McDaniel, 2002c, pp. 15-17). The situation causes Wayne to take stock of his recent troubled perspective of his identity and, as illustrated by Plates 11 and 12, he realizes that his instinct could not permit even a killer to be murdered because his moral codes are those passed on to him by his father and he reasons finally that "I am Bruce Wayne. I always have been." (Brubaker & McDaniel, 2002c, pp. 22-23). The conclusion of this storyline provides a case where Wayne consciously reconciles with his past in a way that is clearly consistent with the greater narrative.

Plate 11

I am Bruce Wayne - Exhibit A.

Note. Scanned from p.22 of "Bruce Wayne: Murderer? – Reasons". *Batman, 1*(604), by Brubaker, E., & McDaniel, S. (2002). New York, Copyright 2002 DC Comics.

Plate 12

I am Bruce Wayne - Exhibit B.

Note. Scanned from p.23 of "Bruce Wayne: Murderer? – Reasons". *Batman, 1*(604), by Brubaker, E., & McDaniel, S. (2002). New York, Copyright 2002 DC Comics.

But perhaps one of the most unique and interesting examples for how the character truly perceives his self, from a subconscious perspective, occurs in the 2-part storyline “Whatever happened to the Caped Crusader?” as told in *Batman 1*(686) and *Detective Comics 1*(853). In this story, Wayne finds himself a subconscious witness to Batman’s funeral in some future setting (Gaiman & Kubert, 2009). As seen in Plates 13 and 14, the story comes to reveal that the event is an imagined near-death experience where Wayne’s deceased mother, Martha Wayne, is also present in the experience. In the vision Wayne is in full Batman attire, but his mother directly addresses him instead as “Bruce”. Yet the vision is Wayne’s, and the apparition of his mother would be more aptly discerned to be Wayne’s own subconscious dialoging with his unconscious self—that takes the appearance of Batman. It is an event where Wayne’s own subconscious is depicted by the narrative to reveal the complex internal dynamic between the way Wayne might desire for others to see him—as Batman—and how he sees his own self—as Bruce Wayne.

Plate 13

Bruce Wayne's near-death experience – Exhibit A.

Note. Scanned from p. 10 of *Detective Comics 1*(853), by Gaiman, N., & Kubert, A. (2009). New York, Copyright 2009, DC Comics.

Plate 14

Bruce Wayne's near-death experience – Exhibit B.

Note. Scanned from p. 11 of *Detective Comics 1*(853), by Gaiman, N., & Kubert, A. (2009). New York, Copyright 2009, DC Comics.

4.4.2.2.2 Audience Response Analysis

In a separate study, Ponthieux (2015) conducted an audience response analysis that gathered audiences' perceptions of the mental state and self-aware identity of the Batman character. This study gathered from attendees of the Comic-Con held in Baltimore Maryland on September 25-27, 2015, that included 243 respondents. I returned to reanalyze that data set for the purpose of ascertaining if it contained empirical evidence that might support or not support my model of intergenerational myth transmission. In particular, the value of this survey data is that it was drawn from a multi-generational audience purporting to be knowledgeable about a mythic narrative and shown to be invested in the subject matter by virtue of having chosen to pro-actively attend the comic-con. The original purpose of the survey, included here in Appendix C, focused upon a wider examination of audience members' perceptions regarding the Batman narrative, including perceptions of the character's mental state. However, it also contained a subset of response data that is directly relevant to the previously presented content analysis of the Batman narrative in this thesis. Therefore, a selected part of the data from this sample can be effectively used to perform a comparative analysis of content and response as defined by the Myth Context Reception Model. Only four data points from the original sample are relevant here and will be used. They include the respondents' age, a knowledge index composite corresponding to the respondent's familiarity with the narrative, and two questions specific to respondent perceptions of the Batman character.

The survey requested demographic information on the respondent's year of birth and limited survey participation to an adult age of 18 years or older per IRB restrictions. This information will be defined as the independent variable *Year*. The IV *Year* will be used to calculate a second variable for the respondents approximate age in years at the time the survey

was taken and will be defined as the independent variable *Age*. The survey requested information regarding the respondent's knowledge and familiarity of the narrative and the respondent's level of exposure to the narrative through reading or viewing of comic books, graphic novels, film, games, or other means. This information was used to create a composite knowledge index that will be defined as *BatFanIQ* on a composite range from 0 to 125. The sample demonstrated an average participatory age of 34.6 (std=10.575) where the respondents possessed an average *BatFanIQ* of 76.3539 (std=24.57099) as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Batman Audience Response Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
BatFanIQ	243	24.00	125.00	76.3539	24.57099
Age	243	18	63	34.60	10.575
Valid N (listwise)	243				

The two selected survey questions of interest from the survey are the seven-point Semantic-Differential like scales that captured respondent perceptions of the Batman character's "ego" identity and respondent perceptions of whom the character's decision-making skills can be attributed to. The questions are depicted in Figure 3 and their response results will be defined as the dependent variables *Ego2* and *Decisions* respectively.

Figure 3

Questions Taken From Survey

The dominant identity (ego identity or self-awareness) of the character is:

Batman 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Bruce Wayne

The identity making all of the decisions is:

Bruce Wayne 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Batman

Note. Audience response questions taken from survey by Ponthieux, J. G. (2015) *Audience Perceptions of the Batman Character*. The first question is represented by the DV *Ego2*. The second question is represented by the DV *Decisions*. Unpublished raw data.

The *Ego2* DV is a post-processed variable inversely rescaled from its original polarity to bring it into a common polarity with the *Decisions* DV such that scales of both variables are anchored to Bruce Wayne as 1 and to Batman as 7. Examination of these two DVs seeks to determine whether audience perceptions of the characters ego identity and audience perceptions of whom is responsible for making the character's decisions leans more toward Bruce Wayne or more toward Batman. The sample responses clearly demonstrate that the audience leans more towards Batman than Bruce Wayne in the case of both DVs. Regarding the question of self-aware ego identity, *Ego2* demonstrates a Mean of 5.32 (std=1.622) leaning in favor of Batman. Regarding the question of whom is making all the decisions for the character, *Decisions* demonstrates a Mean of 4.94 (std=1.722) leaning in favor of Batman. More remarkably, 75% of respondents reported *Ego2* as 7.00 and *Decisions* as 6.00 [or higher] as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Batman Audience Response Statistics

		Ego2	Decisions
N	Valid	243	243
	Missing	0	0
Mean		5.32	4.94
Median		6.00	5.00
Mode		7	6
Std. Deviation		1.622	1.720
Variance		2.632	2.959
Range		6	6
Minimum		1	1
Maximum		7	7
Sum		1293	1200
Percentiles	25	4.00	4.00
	50	6.00	5.00
	75	7.00	6.00

Finally, the *Year* DV was again post-processed to separate the data into subgroups according to the generational boundaries established for peer group inclusion, according to birth year, by Strauss and Howe (1991, p. 32). The postprocessing of the data found that each respondent, whose birth year had occurred at least eighteen years prior to the time the survey was taken, belonged to one of three distinct generations to include the Boomer, Thirteenth, and Millennial generations. A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was run to see if there was a mean difference, across the three generations of the dependent variables *Decisions* and *Ego2*, and the results were not significant (f= .718, p=.489; f=1.415, p=.245) as shown by Table 3.

Table 3

Batman Audience Response ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Decisions	Between Groups	4.257	2	2.129	.718	.489
	Within Groups	711.817	240	2.966		
	Total	716.074	242			
Ego2	Between Groups	7.425	2	3.712	1.415	.245
	Within Groups	629.538	240	2.623		
	Total	636.963	242			

Analysis of the responses captured by this survey clearly indicate that most of the audience leans in favor of the distinct belief that the narrative depicts Batman, and not Bruce Wayne, to be the self-aware identity with the direct responsibility for making all the decisions for the character's actions. Further, it is a finding of audience response with remarkable consistency across generational boundaries. This finding supports the argument of this thesis concerning the persistent intergenerational transmission power of myth, because it shows that belief in the Batman myth (versus the Bruce Wayne reality) continues to persist across these three generations.

4.4.2.2.3 Comparative Analysis of Content and Response

In comparing the content analysis against the response analysis, we find a significant difference between content and response. The content analysis tells us that the identity of the lead character of the Batman narrative is Bruce Wayne. That it is Bruce Wayne's tragic life experience that motivates his unorthodox actions. It is Wayne who expertly crafts a deceptive signifier in the form of a cape and cowl, that it is Wayne who makes full use of this deception to simultaneously mask his true identity and evoke fear and terror in the hearts of his adversaries. It is Wayne engaging in a premeditated and disguised performance, and it is Wayne that is the

dominant subconscious over the Batman persona that is making all decisions on Batman's behalf. In contrast, the response analysis tells us that most of the audience leans towards the belief that it is Batman, and not Wayne, that is the self-aware identity making all the decisions for the character within the narrative. This difference reveals a contradictory condition to exist between content and response that is directly relevant to a determination of myth for this narrative.

4.4.2.3 Analytic Determination of Myth

In following the procedure of this model, any evidence of exceptional recognition of Myth Context, that might be observable in the common record, can assist in distinguishing whether an Obscure Myth Context is completely Obscure or potentially Emergent. Will Brooker's (2012) assertion that the Batman narrative is a myth (p. 217), previously cited by this thesis, qualifies as an exceptional observation. It can therefore be determined from the Comparative Reception Analysis that such a significant difference between content and response exists in the reception of this narrative that the Batman narrative is, at a minimum, an Obscure Myth, but with the potential to also be an Emergent Myth. In either case, the analysis demonstrates evidence and indications of an obscure Myth Context to be vibrantly present and active in its audience. Indications that, while obscure, are still discoverable and measurable and which may also be slowly emerging into the shared culture to become obvious.

4.4.3 Evidence of Myth Context

4.4.3.1 Paradoxical Belief

Indications of obscure paradoxical beliefs are present in the audience of this narrative. This Myth Context indicator occurs in the logical operation of "Reception eq Myth Context if ((Literal) != (Response))" where the belief is paradoxical because it is held in direct contradiction to the clear literalness of the narrative. This obscure paradoxical belief, evident in

the comparative analysis of content and response in this thesis, takes the form of a dominant belief that the deception Wayne creates is the mimetic self-aware identity of the character, rather than Wayne. A position that is contradictory to the literal content and contradictory to what is generally understood about the literalness of the narrative. It is Wayne who precedes the advent Batman. Its Wayne's choice and decision to fight crime, and it is Wayne's decision to create the Batman image. For example, clinical psychologist Robin S. Rosenberg (2013) asserts that it is Bruce Wayne who "renounces a normal life" so that he can "dedicate himself to fighting crime", adding that for Wayne it is a "life encompassing career" (p.12-13). Grant Morrison (2012), a writer at DC Comics, wrote that "young Bruce…chose to fight crime on his own somewhat unconventional terms" (p.25). Those unconventional terms include a choice by Wayne to engage in an epic semiotic deception that as Uricchio and Pearson (2015) explain, is a costume in the form of a cultivated "non-human image" (p.228), that further enables him "to seize the psychological element of surprise from Gotham's criminal element" (p. 210). As Randall M. Jensen (2008) asserts, it is Bruce Wayne that "*makes himself into Batman*" (p. 86), and becoming Batman is recognized as being an explicit decision made by Wayne (Ananth & Dixon, 2008, p. 108; Langley, 2012, p. 54). Yet the cape and cowl, as conceived by Wayne, is paradoxically believed to be the identity capable of making all the decisions for the character, thus indicating a Myth Context to be actively functioning within the audience.

4.4.3.2 Appropriative Imitation

Indications of appropriative imitation, though obscure, are present in the audience of this narrative. The audience appropriates the image of Batman—the cape and cowl—to imitate something that the Batman image literally is not and can never be. The narrative tells us that it is Wayne who devises the plan to embody himself in the chimeric image of a bat so that the image

might ultimately be perceived by Gotham's criminals as a terrifying "creature of the night" so that this signification might give the criminals cause to fear him, thereby providing him a distinct advantage in his vigilante efforts (Kane, 1990a, p. 2; Miller & Mazzucchelli, 1987, p. 21; Wolfman & Aparo, 1990, p. 5). Thus, Wayne creates and wears the Batman costume as a uniform to signify a role that he has assumes in the line of duty (Rosenberg, 2012, p. 8). Rosenberg (2012) regards Batman's uniform to be similar to a policeman's uniform and asserts that the "uniform immediately conveys context to understand the wearer's behavior" (p. 8). In other words, as the audience we are supposed to understand that the wearer is Wayne, and that the cape and cowl Wayne is wearing is a second-order semiotic sign functioning as a metaphor for '*Bruce Wayne: Costumed Vigilante'*. However, the response analysis tells us that most of the audience ignores the metaphoric nature of the cape and cowl and paradoxically appropriates the Batman image and performance to function as an imitation of the mimetic consciousness and identity making all the decisions for Batman within the narrative. To this segment of the audience, Batman is no longer an image, or tool, or asset that serves Wayne's motivations and goals, but rather Batman is an appropriative imitation seen as *the* authoritative figure with the ability to make all the decisions for the character within the narrative.

4.4.3.3 Reverse-Mimesis

Indications of reverse-mimesis are present in the audience of this narrative. This Myth Context indicator occurs as an obscure performative reverse-mimetic social behavior, that is remarkably hidden within the audience's reception of this narrative. Wayne willingly chooses to wear the disguise of a bat not just to satisfy very specific strategies and goals, but also to hide his true identity (Rosenberg, 2012, pp. 7-8). From the onset of Wayne's conception of Batman, it is Wayne's goal to convince the criminals of Gotham that the image of Batman is all that Gotham

need know or concern itself with, by seeking to maintain his deception [Batman] as a secret from Gotham (Kane, 1990b, p. 6; Snyder et al., 2013, pp. 47-48; Wolfman & Aparo, 1990, p. 5). To reveal his involvement in the deception would reduce the efficacy of the image and would place Wayne and those close to him in great jeopardy. Wayne will therefore take advantage of Gotham's willingness to believe in Batman's existence (Snyder et al., 2013, pp. 47-48). Within the narrative, Gotham is expected to receive Batman as *the* identity. The audience response data tells us that many in the real audience *also* want to receive Batman as *the* identity. In other words, the real audience is demonstrating evidence of reverse-mimesis behavior where the paradoxical belief and appropriative imitation that it holds for the narrative is also a behavioral re-enactment of that same narrative. The *real* audience is receiving Batman as *the* identity in the same way that Wayne hoped that he might persuade *Gotham* to receive Batman as *the* identity.

4.4.4 Assessment of Generational Propagation

It can be shown that the Myth Context attributable to this narrative is generationally shared. This shared experience may also be due, at least in part, to the depicted origin and motivations of the lead character of the narrative. For example, in the book *Fan phenomena: Batman*, when asked by author Liam Burke why Batman fans are so devoted to the character, fan KC responds that:

> it translates from generation to generation, you know a guy who loses his parents when he's a kid and then grows up and decides 'I'm going to stand up and do something about it'. I think everyone wishes they were a little bit like that (Burke, 2013, p. 66).

KC's response reveals that the narrative's origin story arc, which was also the narrowed focus of the content analysis of this thesis, is a sub-narrative that persistently and rhetorically appeals to multiple generations, and the audience response data from this thesis gives credibility to KC's

opinion. In the span of the narrative's nearly 83 years of existence, at least 6-8 generations would have had the opportunity to experience it first-hand. At least three consecutive generations, from that lot, were evaluated in the audience response data sample. The analysis of that data found insignificant variation in the narrative's Myth Context reception across those three generations.

4.4.5 Summary

Batman demonstrates evidence of an Obscure, if not potentially Emergent, Myth Context that is dominantly shared across the generational boundaries of the narrative with uniform effect. The Literal Context of this narrative tells a tragic story about Bruce Wayne. His personal motivations and goals, his material participation in acts of vigilante justice, and the unique if not bizarre approach he uses to cope with his tragedy and succeed at his stated goals. His audience, by appropriating the image Wayne creates so that it can become an imitation of the mimetic consciousness, paradoxically believe this image to be capable of making life choices. A dynamic that reveals how passionately the real audience believes the image to be the identity despite the possibility that the real audience may be unaware that their obscure Myth Context is perceiving the image in exactly the way that the *fictional* Wayne wants everyone to imagine it. A passion that the audience holds for the semiotic signification, over the mimetic literal, in reverence of the very real power that the signification embodied in the image wields. Cory A. Friedman eloquently articulated the dichotomy of just that experience when he said:

> Which is the real identity—is it Bruce Wayne or is it Batman? The really cool answer, of course, is when we say 'Oh, its Batman,' but I think that misses the point. What defines the character is the essential humanity that the character possesses. (Langley, 2012, p. 64)

A quote that further illustrates how the hero of this narrative functions as a Myth Context variable. Within the narrative the Batman image can be as easily a symbol of inspiration as a

symbol of terror (Snyder et al., 2013, pp. 47-48; Wolfman & Aparo, 1990, p. 5). Within the audience, he can as easily be Wayne as he can be Batman. It is a condition indistinguishable from Michael Calvin McGee's (1980) sense of the ideograph, with Batman functioning as an example for how the audience can selectively choose the context it wishes to impose—Literal, or Myth, or some context that is a variation of one, the other, or both. It is further a variable context of reception equally divided among the writers and artists who create the narrative (Langley, 2012, pp. 64-65). As DC writer Scott Snyder asserts "It's not like Bruce is some phony thing he wears, but in the scale of the superhero identity, Bruce is deeply tilted towards Batman." (Langley, 2012, p. 64). Within this variability, the scale of potential for paradoxical belief in the narrative is profound. As Robin S. Rosenberg (2012) articulates, "part of what makes him [Batman] such a compelling character is thinking about what it would be like if he *did* exist, if he were real" (p. 3).

4.5 REVIEW

Dick Giordano (1988), a former Vice President and Executive Editor at DC Comics, recalling some of his earliest exposure to the Batman story, once editorialized that "I felt like an 'insider' when I saw Bruce acting silly at a party because *I* knew he was The Batman…No one in the story knew, but I knew!" (p. 9). What Giordano is articulating here is an understanding of the special relationship audiences have with the narratives they consume. The audience, because it exists external to the mimesis, has privileged access to all details within the narrative. This privilege is always present whether we are reading from Batman, Santa Claus, or Hercules, and it reminds us of the role the audiences play in a narrative's reception and potential longevity.

Though classical myth is aged and venerable, the overall effect it has had on its audience has changed. In some ways it has dramatically declined over the millennia (O'Flaherty, 1988, pp.

25-26). No longer worshipped or ritualized in the same way it once was, it has nonetheless continued ascending and expanding over the millennia to grow strong in one respect while becoming weak in another. The paradoxical beliefs it once fostered have arguably become less potent. Where it was once strong in ritual and worship, today it is an endless source of appropriative imitation. As it passed from generation to generation, and even though successive generations resisted the call to worship the deities of old, the narratives survived to become more ethereal and expansive. However, they would become more susceptible to the permutations imposed by each new re-appropriation. As with Triptolemos, the permutations caused some myths to weaken, be rejected, or become irrelevant and fail. At risk of being lost forever. In contrast, their ascendent expansion caused other classical myths to gain a novel kind of strength. The permutations, while permitting the myths to aggressively disseminate, would also produce an ethereal essence now appropriable by the entire world. They would develop an expansive potential for being contextually repurposed, and with that the ability to appeal to generation after generation. Much like the reputation of an aged and respected senior citizen, the voluminous and ethereal strength of classical myth comes by way of sheer stamina rather than brute literal force.

From the perspective of a narrative's stamina, Santa Claus also provides an excellent example where a narrative is transformed into myth through repeated generational re-appropriation and re-assimilation. While a relatively young narrative on the historical scale, it has undergone modification across both time and culture. A narrative now also perceived appropriable by many cultures across the world. This narrative highlights the way that the paradoxical beliefs about some narratives, though they occur, do not always occur as a direct contradiction to the literalness of a narrative. Rather, the paradoxical belief that its fictional Literal Context is true, is an intentional feigning or active pretense. With Santa the literal and

paradoxical belief are in sync—neither can be proven to be real. The paradox exists as a result of arguing that the false narrative, known empirically to be in fact false, is feigned to be believed not false. A condition no different than arguing that a true narrative, known to be in fact true, is believed to be false. Both conditions are paradoxical. Further, Santa Claus forms as a series of appropriations, modifications, and even rejections over time. Actions that altered the narrative through selective and reductive revisions. For example, as Siefker (1997) tells us, during St. Nicholas's gift-bearing rounds in Holland, he was often accompanied by a servant called Black Pete, disguised to appear as a grotesque ogre-like creature, who would distribute coal or sticks to the children who Nicholas judged unworthy (pp. 10-11). Over time this aspect of the Nicholas legend fell out of favor. However, rather than terminate the entire narrative, successive generations selectively appropriated those elements that appealed them or were acceptable in the frame of their generation's sensibilities. In the case of Santa Claus what we have today is an amalgam filtered through many selective re-appropriations by successive generations. By selecting elements of the Literal Context or the Myth Context, or both, something new was created. The context of the narrative was changed as elements were left behind, but the overarching essence of the narrative was preserved for another generation.

We can also see a passive rejection of a literal element within a narrative, by way of selective appropriation, in the rejection of Bruce Wayne as hero of the Batman narrative. While consistent with the mechanics of appropriation, it occurs here with an interesting perspective. Here we see a clear paradoxical tension between the Literal and Myth Contexts, where many in the audience, across multiple generations, desire the image within the narrative to assume a greater level of import than seems supportable by the narrative's Literal Context. This paradoxical belief for the image comes at the cost of rejecting a Literal Context that the audience

is intimately privileged to, and it is a tension magnified by a literalness that is dutifully controlled and maintained by the property owner (Pearson & Uricchio, 2015, pp. 25-26). With Batman, a constant state of persistence and resistance exists between creator and consumer, but it is a tension that is also obscure. There is little or no evidence to suggest that many in the real audience are even aware they are imitating mimetic behavior literally depicted within the narrative. Further, it is a signification on the part of the audience that is not easily observable, as evident by the effort put forth in this thesis to draw this distinction out. In other words, the narrative is strong in Myth Context at a local [individual] level but weak in Myth Context at a global [social] level. At the individual level Batman promotes a strong paradoxical belief, appropriative imitation, and reverse-mimesis. Still, at a social level these indications remain largely hidden. The context is shared and common among a large segment of the audience, though the shared paradoxical belief is deeply hidden within the social fabric. A dynamic of this narrative that directly supports the notion that myth often occurs as an unconscious behavior perceived completely normal that may also only be observable through external evaluation (Barthes, 2012, p. 252; Brisson, 1998, p. 9; Lévi-Strauss, 1995, p. 3). In other words, Batman shows how we are so often unaware of our complicity in the production of myth. Despite being provided the privilege of knowing Wayne's secrets, tragic history, motivations, and deceptive behavior—because they have direct access to all aspects of the narrative—many in the audience still selectively appropriate the Myth Context. A Myth Context with such intense potential that the paradoxical belief in the narrative ends up being an imitation of the narrative itself. A reception that, if I may be so bold to assert, would have been the envy of Plato.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

It was the objective of this thesis to demonstrate that myth is an effective means of influencing the propagation of narratives across generations. It argued that narratives transformed into myth become endowed with a unique dual-contextuality of Literal and Myth Contexts, and that these dual contexts offer future generations more choices for how a narrative might be appropriated and experienced. Choices that will permit future audiences to overcome resistance to a narrative or permit it to be transformed into something more appealing. However, this thesis also recognized the inherent difficulties in correlating the existence of myth with temporally transmitted narratives, the potential mortality of the audience sharing or receiving a narrative, and the conditions of social change and generational difference that can provide resistance to such propagation. Further, to determine a myth's influence upon the propagation of a narrative, one must be able to confirm that a narrative is in fact producing myth in its audience.

To address these constraints and fulfill the objective of this thesis, a Myth Context Reception Model was designed to reliable identify myth in the human behavioral responses of the audience of a narrative. The model—established in the theoretical frameworks of mimetics, semiotics, contextualism, and belief—defined the general premise of Myth Context. Myth Context described the behavioral contexts that an audience can be shown to impose upon a narrative when it is received as myth. The model defined the core attributes, indications, and lifespan stages of Myth Context, and outlined an optimized identification procedure that uses a process of elimination, regarding the lifespan stages of Myth Context, to more efficiently

evaluate for indication of myth. Indication of myth is confirmed when the presence of paradoxical beliefs, appropriative imitation, or reverse-mimesis behavior is evident in the narrative's audience. Where such indication is unobservable, an alternative method of comparative analysis of content and response was prescribed that could be used to identify behavioral indication of Myth Context when it might occur obscurely or be emerging.

With the model defined, three narrative exemplars were then put forth—classical myth, Santa Claus, and Batman. Each was procedurally evaluated using the guidelines prescribed by the model and evidence of Myth Context behavioral indications were presented for each. Finally, if the exemplar could be determined to be myth, an assessment of generational propagation was performed on the narrative and a summary provided of the exemplar's findings. All exemplars were determined to be myth. All exhibited observable or discoverable indications of Myth Context in their audiences, and all were determined to be successful at propagation across two or more generations. Notable differences in the findings included (1) an alternative assessment of propagational failure in some but not all classical myths, (2) the requirement to perform a Comparative Reception Analysis on the Batman narrative, and (3) the determination that the Batman narrative is a confirmed obscure myth with the potential to be also emergent.

5.2 DISCUSSION

5.2.1 Implications of the Exemplar Analysis

When we look at these exemplars, we tend to see entirely different things. Classical myths are often the gold standard from which we view the term myth. As Joseph Campbell asserted, we often exclusively position the Greek and biblical traditions above all else (Campbell & Moyers, 1991, p. 88). Santa Claus is a fun social exercise that we use to humor and excite our children or reminisce about our own childhood experiences with the narrative, as we celebrate

the Christmas holiday. Batman is a commercial entertainment science fiction about a billionaire whose tragic life experience encourages a career as a vigilante detective dressed as a bat. Both classical myth and Santa Claus are open narratives that today are vastly re-appropriated and variant. They are the result of voluminous spontaneous and cooperative authorship across generational and cultural divides. Due to their nature in the public domain, one can easily see how classical myth and Santa Claus might take on expansive scale and variability. Further, we know that ancient cultures intended their narratives to become myth. Santa Claus encourages rich paradoxical belief and reverse-mimesis participation in an annual ritualized form. This behavior could arguably be viewed as a modern analog for how some myths might have been socially and ritually practiced in ancient times. Batman, however, is a strictly controlled commercial property with many restrictions placed upon its literal depiction by its owner and is still actively published on a serial basis. Further, there is little or no evidence that its creators or owners ever intended Batman to be anything more than entertaining science fiction—much less a myth in the classical or Platonic sense. Regardless, we see that it is functioning as myth and that this response is virtually indistinguishable across the generations evaluated. The analysis demonstrates that Batman's reception is clearly susceptible to the will of the audience regardless how closed or controlled its literalness is. In other words, the Batman myth is still occurring even though its corporate owners appear to act as a persistent force attempting to prevent any undesired alterations to the narrative.

Batman, much like Santa Claus, may also provide valuable insight on how we might experience narratives as myth in the modern day, the way the ancients once did. For example, the reverse-mimetic behavior within the obvious myth reception of Santa Claus, and the obscure myth reception of the Batman, might today rival reception of ancient myths in the past, or even

exceed our reception of many classical myths in the present. It is further possible to see how the Batman reception—in the interrelationship that the appropriative imitation and reverse-mimesis behavior, so tightly bound to the paradoxical belief held for the Batman image—might provide a glimpse for how ancient classical myths may have once been experienced unbeknownst to the audiences of the ancient Greek poets and philosophers. An assertion of obscure myth experience that may be equally applicable to the experience of political myth in the present day.

5.2.2 Belief and Myth Context

This thesis sought to show how belief is more than just a symptom of myth. Belief is present in many of the disciplines that study myth and is the singular most import catalyzing and sustaining factor of a myth's existence. It is the paradoxical glue that binds the Literal Context and Myth Context together. For example, we must believe that their difference is rational, and we must believe that the logic of one will not cancel out the potential of the other. And, to rationalize the appropriation of something to become myth, that is not of our culture or time, we must believe that such a larceny—to use Barthes' (2012) vernacular (p. 236)—is warranted. We use semiotic transactions to offer up these new contexts, still imbued with our beliefs, in the hope that the contexts will be enthusiastically appropriated, received, and preserved. Knowing that, even if the value of any context is replaced with something different, a ghost of the original context always lingers. The Literal Context always wistfully gesturing towards any earlier or older Myth Context despite any new Myth Context, desperately pleading for our attention, that it might simultaneously harbor. A context that we, the audience, impose through paradoxical beliefs and behavior that can occur in a variety of ways.

5.2.3 The Variability of Paradoxical Belief

In designing the Comparative Reception Analysis procedure within the model, one of the more challenging problems was the need to resolve the logical operations used to identify paradoxical belief. When first wading into the subject of myth it quickly becomes apparent that the paradoxical conditions relative to myth, and/or belief, are varied and many. Few agree, and others focus on disparate areas such as fiction, gods, or deceit. Concepts such as credulousness, pretense, belief, faith, unfalsifiability, false belief, and noble lies quickly muddy the waters and make it appear that myth, as a discipline, is hopelessly inconsistent, when it is not. In designing this model, the idea was to find commonalities that integrated the belief conditions into a homogenous and observable process. The logical operations of paradoxical belief, as outlined in Chapter 3.6.3.3, solved this problem, and subsequently reinforced the notion that belief and myth are inseparable. When integrating these operations into the model an attempt was made to find and identify the minimum number of paradoxical operations necessary to accomplish this study, stabilize the model, and establish a reliable template for evaluation of paradoxical beliefs within a Myth Context. Four logical operations were included in the model and their inclusion was determined by their likelihood of frequent occurrence. That is not to say other logical conditions are not possible. They most certainly could be. Either as novel operations not included here, or as more granular sub-operations of the operations currently included.

What is notable is not how many operations there are, but rather that there are multiple different and satisfiable operations that successfully identify paradoxical belief in a Myth Context and permit the correlation of seeming disparate or disconnected aspects of myth. For example, if we compare a condition of disbelief in a ground provable to be true—to a condition of belief in a ground provable to be false—these two conditions operate in polar opposition to

one another, but both still generate paradoxical belief. More interesting however, is the condition of disbelief and the way in which disbelief can stealthily produce an obscure Myth Context. Someone who disbelieves a narrative may inadvertently or unwittingly be susceptible to myth simply and ironically by choosing not to engage with the narrative. For example, if someone is presented a story argued to be true yet disbelieves the story because they cannot be sure it is true, they may have unwittingly engaged in myth. The perceived "safe bet" is to not believe something you cannot personally verify, and we are prone to think that we "believe" in myths, not that we "disbelieve" in myths. It shows that variability of myth is not limited to different or expansive values but can be a variable with values perceived to be empty or null. A logical condition that confirms Barthes (2012) assertion that myth can "start from the very lack of meaning" (p. 242). It also demonstrates the importance of Peirce's notion of "ground" as it relates to the semiotic structure. Whether the ground is true, false, a known pretense, or unprovable can dramatically alter the logical relationship between it and belief or disbelief. Illustrating how a vast array of variable contexts can potentially occur with myth.

5.2.4 The Relevance of Context and Selection to Generation

While the core notion of myth's dual-contextuality in this model is defined as a distinction between a narrative's Literal Context and Myth Context, it should be noted that any narrative could also potentially possess many multiple Myth Contexts also associated with the Literal Context. Further, any of these Myth Contexts connected to the narrative are subject to being a socially negotiated procedure. That is, because they are behavioral contexts, further imposed upon the narrative by humans, they are subject to human negotiation. For example, context can be a selection when part of any social negotiation, especially one where context is constructed (Fetzer, 2012, p. 110; O'Donnell, 1999, pp. 92-93). To elaborate, using the Dynamic

Context model offered by O'Donnell (1999, p. 63), we can show that context is distinguished as being dynamic or static (p. 64), and provides for the notion of *Projected Context* where a discourse is capable of projecting alternatives of context throughout the discourse as a strategic maneuver aimed at encouraging a desired new or novel situation by way of projected offers or propositions (pp. 92-93). Projected context therefore resembles rhetoric, and since Barthes (2012) equated myth as a type of speech (pp. 217-219) and a discourse (pp. 245-247), this notion of projected context for the purpose of persuasion, engaged within a Dynamic Context model, harbors stunningly significant similarities to the rhetoric of myth as posited by Barthes. Further, O'Donnell (1999) argues that in the case of projected context, the actors or agents involved in a context negotiation are generally unconstrained, that is they can always "choose from the range of situation-types which their society, and personal history, provides them" (pp. 92-94). Adding that during this negotiation, any offered context can be accepted when desirable, ignored altogether, or one context can be outright rejected in favor of another when either is undesirable (O'Donnell, 1999, p. 92). In other words, context selection regarding Myth Context is driven by a process of selective negotiation affected by the beliefs or ideology of individual, group, or generation. This negotiation further propagates the narrative forward and imparts significant resilience upon the host narrative.

5.2.5 The Resilience of Myth

The resilience of a Myth Context can at times be identifiable in the lifespan stages of a Myth Context, such as Conception, Obscurity, Emergence, or Ascendence. In the same way some adults gain notoriety and respect in a community with age, so does a myth. The more "elderly" and "senior" a myth is, the more venerable and aged it is, the more ascendent and immediately obvious the myth will likely be. The classical myth exemplar can demonstrate such resilience.

For example, the gods of Greek antiquity resiliently survived the advent of Christianity and subsequent attempts to extricate such myths from the culture (Graf, 2007, p. 57). Some of these classical myths were so resilient at fending off such attempts, because they were so deeply integrated within ancient societies, that they were eventually appropriated to serve Christianity (p. 57). However, myth's resilience is not strictly a matter of popularity and is further connected to human resilience. For example, human resilience is suggested to be associable with myths that promote desirable outcomes (Kaplan, 1999, p. 30), especially myths regarding archetypal heroes in particular (p. 30), and human resilience is further noted as an attributable result of myth's ability to promote both identity and purpose (Newman et al., 2018, p. 89). In other words, humans are resilient because of myth's intervention in human lives and myth is resilient because of human intervention in myth's existence. Resilience, of human or myth, is the result of a negotiated, or co-dependent relationship, between human and myth.

5.2.6 The Co-dependence of Myth and Generation

Another implication observed by this research is that myth and generation are fundamentally co-dependent entities. The selective re-appropriation of a narrative, and any subsequent propagation of a myth associated with that appropriation, has been shown here to be a significantly "generational" activity based upon need. McGee (1980) had asserted that the value of an ideograph's meaning to one generation, is due in large part to its value to preceding generations (pp. 10-11) and argued that its usage was as an excuse for belief and behavior preferential to the generation invoking the ideograph's myth (p. 16). In other words, the opportunistic usage of an ideograph, is based upon a need for its corresponding historical influence by the appropriator. Barthes (2012) had made a similar case, arguing that "myth is depoliticized speech" (p. 255), and that people "depoliticize according to their needs" (pp. 257).

Hagood (2008) asserted that “a narrative becomes a myth when a given cultural force (which either is an imagined community and/or is part of an imagined community) appropriates it to articulate its desires or values” (p. 204), and Strauss and Howe (1991) described a generation as having “a sense of social community” (p. 65). In other words, a generation as a concept of community imagined, will appropriate a myth according to their need for it, its ability to reinforce their values, and promote their rhetoric. However, a myth’s mortality is directly tied to the unavoidable mortality of the generation that believes the myth. Where a myth can transmit from one generation to another it succeeds in avoiding its own mortality, and the generation benefits from the transmission of the myth, and the beliefs they contributed to it, being projected into the future. Since myth itself is incapable of contemplating its mortality, this dynamic should be understood in the context of a metaphor representing one generation in possession of myth and a successive generation void of myth. From this perspective, myth and generation therefore present as entities that mutually benefit from each other and are uniquely co-dependent.

5.3 CONCLUSION

5.3.1 The Propagation of Myth

This thesis concludes that myth directly influences the propagation of narratives across generational boundaries and can be shown to promote behavior in audiences that enables the selective appropriation of narratives from one generation to another. It further concludes that myth uniquely enables acceptance or rejection of generational and social differences, that might be present in source narratives, across generational divides. An action that permits the Literal Context to propagate as a result of transformations that produce the Myth Context associated with it. This is an assertion that is supported in Angus Nicholls’ research on Hans Blumenberg’s

theory of myth. Nicholls (2015) wrote that myth possessed a unique ability to perpetuate by way of temporal adaptation, saying that:

> A myth's capacity for survival and constancy is, however, dependent upon change—upon processes of cultural adaptation…The reception of myth arises from this dialectic between the familiarity and authority of the ancient stories on the one hand, and their acquiring contemporary relevance through variation on the other. That which seems relevant and 'significant' to an historically situated audience is seen as expressing a kind of ancient truth, while also being able to speak to their contemporary human needs. (p. 21)

Nicholls' passage implies several things of importance: (1) the relevance and significance of ancient origin is rendered contemporary by way of the modern being an appropriative imitation of the ancient, (2) the ancient is selected because of its immediate potential for variable adaptation, (3) Nicholls' interpretation of Blumenberg suggests that myth enables a process of cross-generational transmission of narrative that closely resembles the selective and contextual appropriation of narrative, as a result of contemporaneous need, as articulated in the Myth Context Reception Model, and (4) though the passage seems to assert myth to be situated within an exclusivity of ancient story, it also silently implies that myth still exists within a contemporary, or modern, social activity of reception, and is still active in the modern day.

5.3.2 The Ancient and Modern

This thesis can conclude that myth of the ancient and modern worlds, when viewed through the prism of the Myth Context Reception Model, operates in fundamentally similar ways. Despite Barthes intense focus on urban myths of French-culture, and an appearance that he might have largely avoided the integration of classical myth into his theories, Plato and Barthes

were of a stunningly similar mind regarding myth. They both viewed it as a powerful rhetoric with very special qualities. Plato enthusiastically employed his knowledge of myth in an attempt to mold a society (Murray, 2011, p. 183), while Barthes (2012) lamented this ideological exploitation of myth's powerful rhetorical character by the bourgeoisie (pp. 262-271). The myth that this thesis sought to embrace was the myth that both Plato and Barthes clearly recognized. A narrative that is expansive, paradoxically believed, enthusiastically appropriated despite any incongruence between its literalness and figurativeness, shared by many in the culture, and can influence human behavior and ultimately be imitated in thought and action. The results of this thesis further challenge the notion that myth is only evident in primitive societies or ancient history. In a practical sense, how does the annually enacted ritual of Santa Claus differ from any of the tribal rituals Malinowski studied? Lévi-Strauss (2016) made a similar observation regarding its similarity to the kachinas myth of Native Americans (p. 9). What has changed is not myth, but how we put myth into context. Where we might contextualize myth of the ancients to be conceived as a product of societies that lacked the education that might be required to invent antibiotics, automobiles, or computers, we alternatively attempt to re-contextualize myth today to conceive it not as myth but rather as simple play or pretense. Yet, as shown by the exemplars evaluated, both ancient and modern myths are all paradoxical believed, appropriated, and imitated by the audience. Behaviors that might be far more common than we are willing to admit.

5.3.3 The Obscurity and Ubiquity of Myth

This thesis can conclude that myth is both obscure and ubiquitous. A profound data point regarding the exemplar analysis performed in this thesis is the determination of Obscure Myth Context in the audience of the Batman narrative. The use of the Comparative Reception Analysis

procedure in this model, designed similarly to Barthes (2012) instructions for the deciphering of myth (pp. 238-239), proved to be a valuable tool in demonstrating an example of myth's obscurity within modern culture. In a condition where myth was presumed largely nonexistent, it was demonstrated to be strong and dominant within the audience of the immensely popular Batman narrative. It raises the question; how many other narratives or visuals evoke hidden Myth Contexts without our knowledge? In response to that question, I assert that myth is a persistent, inalienable, and ubiquitous human experience. Myth permits long vanquished gods an expansive license to influence our architecture, fiction, and geography. It permits an ancient, obese, and magical elf—with aeronautically endowed reindeer—the opportunity to sit at the table of the most beloved Christian celebration. It permits a fiction about a tragic victim of senseless crime to be a pop-culture symbol of justice in the form of a vengeful human-sized bat. But resilience and obscurity of myth, as articulated here, more aptly alludes to the frequency that myth might occur without our being aware of it. The assertion is that myth is everywhere, and it may further exist in places we think to be virtually incompatible with myth, such as science. For example, even the most rigidly logical scientist will put forth a hypothesis with nothing more than a deep personal belief that, with effort and a strict adherence to the scientific method, their hypothesis can be proven. The scientist perceives this pursuit as a simple matter of logical scientific evaluation. But to an outsider who is observing the scientist's actions, they will see an individual engaged in the paradoxical belief that a literal narrative with an unproven ground is in fact true. They will observe that the scientist appropriates data to use within an imitation of the hypothesis [a simulation] so that the hypothesis can be acted out, and that the scientist will use the imitation as an authoritative representation of something that, in a literal sense, it is not. With ritual thoroughness, the scientist will repeat the simulation, evaluating multiple simulated

contexts where the values of each context's variables are scaled or changed. All the while, the scientist continues to paradoxically believe in the potential of the hypothesis, despite all attempts by other scientists to prove the hypothesis is false. And finally, the observer will also note that the scientist will believe in the hope that, whether the hypothesis is proven or not, that the pursuit to prove it true will produce something, big or small, that some future scientist, or future generation of scientists, might find of value and seek to appropriate.

5.4 LIMITATIONS

5.4.1 The Difficulty in Testing for Obscure Myth

Though this model provides guidance for the discovery of obscure myths, and the Batman exemplar illustrates a good example of how to successfully perform such a discovery, it should be noted that the discovery of obscure myth requires significant preparation and background knowledge regarding both the narrative and its audience to properly prepare a comparative reception analysis. The relationship between audience and narrative is often special and unique, and some readers within an audience may have invested years, decades or even a lifetime contemplating the narrative. The process is generally easier if the mythologist begins from a thorough working knowledge of the literal narrative since that is typically a static parameter. Then carefully listen to what the audience has to say about the narrative to determine if anything they may articulate sounds paradoxical to the literal narrative. Significant effort and attention should then be focused upon the opinions and beliefs held within the audience. Many times, the audience may consider the beliefs they hold for a narrative to be irrelevant, unimportant, or just simply assumed common. Dependent on the age and depth of the narrative, and the complexity of the audience, this process can take time.

5.4.2 The Lost Context of Expired Generations

The most obvious limitation when evaluating the reception of a narrative propagated across generational boundaries, is that earlier generations may lack members available to provide qualitative or quantitative input. At worst, no members from that the generation will be available. This limits deep generational research inquiry to only those from past generations that are still living, or limits the inquiry to only historically available commentary. While we can ascertain from historical records that which was appropriated by one generation from another, the more critical questions as to why such appropriation may have been deemed necessary or permissible may often be harder to ascertain.

5.5 FUTURE RESEARCH

5.5.1 Alternative Applications of the Myth Context Reception Model

While the Myth Context Reception Model was designed to identify or discover the presence of a myth reception associable with a narrative in a generational context, the myth-centric methods of the model were constructed with the potential and intent that they might function independently. The Myth Identification Procedure and its sub-methods are separable, or at least modular enough to allow the Myth Context Reception Model to function without temporal constraint. In other words, the model is designed in such a way that with minimal adjustment it can be leveraged to research the spatial propagation of myth across geography or culture. Or it can alternatively be exercised exclusive of any temporal or spatial framing operations. In other words, it can be repurposed as a simple Myth Context evaluator for the determination of myth in a variety of genres where human behavior relational to myth can be measured. Examples might include urban, anthropological, or political myths, etc.

This thesis has taken an approach to myth that demonstrates the way that myth can, and most often does, eventuate into a shared experience. Even obscure myth can be shown to be a shared experience. Given the depth of Ernest Bormann's (1982) work in shared construction of meaning and behavior in communication, as well as his added focus upon fantasy themes, Bormann's work could provide a possible avenue for the expansion of this model. On a similar note, Walter Fisher's (1984) work on narrative paradigm incorporates a view of narrative that is simultaneously literal, rhetorical, and contextual (p. 2). Fisher's (1984) distinction of narrative fidelity (p. 8) implies a degree of faith, or belief, to be at work in the behavioral interaction between narrative and audience and could potentially provide application in support of this model.

Other areas where the Myth Context Reception Model might also be repurposed could include visual myth, linguistics, or even music. Consider for a moment a sports car analogy of visual myth where we might appropriate organic shapes and styles, natural signs such as sharks or stingrays, to persuade a viewer to paradoxically believe the design to be in motion even when the engine is off and the vehicle motionless. Or, from a linguistics perspective the model might be useful in testing metaphors for myth. For example, do we deploy metaphors such as "herculean effort" or "pandora's box" as miniature myths? Do they function as mini- narratives that we appropriate as imitations of a vast and historical myth past? In other words, are metaphors just weak or obscure myths that function in an ever so slightly altered context? And the model might also be useful to test for the presence of Myth Context in relation to music. For example, Lévi-Strauss (1995) famously sought to illustrate a connection between myth and music (p. 44). Even the poets who preceded Plato often delivered their myths in song, and there are music scores and lyrics that have survived generational passage for centuries. This model

could potentially be used to identify ways in which music, might produce paradoxical beliefs, appropriative imitations, or even reverse-mimesis behavior upon its audience. Consider for example the attempt to behaviorally imitate a “moonwalk” dance in response to the playing of Michael Jackson’s song “Billie Jean”. The “moonwalk” itself ironically a behavioral imitation of forward motion paradoxically moving in reverse. Or we could consider Christmas caroling of the song “Silent Night”, a behavioral ritual performed by Christians annually for centuries.

5.5.2 A Myth Context Theory

In developing the Myth Context Reception Model, every attempt was made to consider the broader realization of myth’s essence. This was not an effort to redefine myth. Rather, the intent was to find repeated commonalities—such as belief—and be willing to consider other possibilities—such as context. While this thesis has relied heavily on a theoretical framework of rhetoric that is more European than American, the whole of Semiotics, both Peircean and Saussurean was considered, as were the many disciplines that study myth that could also be ascertained to be relevant within the Semiotic paradigm. Not only were Semiotics and Contextualism found to be compatible, in the end they seem inseparable. However, since this was a study about narratives transmitted across time, by way of unique peer groups, it seemed prudent to invite the ancient poets, philosophers, and mythographers along for the journey. After all, what fun would research on myth be if we ignored the classical tradition? Further, if we argue that myth is an agent of transmission, shouldn’t it still be transmitting? Along the way, the similarities in Plato’s and Barthes’ thinking began to crystalize. Reduced to its essence it might be described as a resilient contradictory belief that influences and promotes acts of imitation in thought and behavior. In the process of developing this model, and upon considering the wide range of work that was drawn upon to determine if it could support the model, ultimately what is

included here is a shadow of what was left out. One remote observation not included here, however, did stand out. There are similarities in the patterns of semiotics and contextualism and it was noticed that those similarities further resembled patterns in the random quality of quantum computing theory. For example, the dual contextuality and variable value potential of a 2nd order signification quite closely resembles the dual-state potential of the quantum bit, or qubit, in quantum computing theory. The hallmark quality of the qubit is its quantum ability to paradoxically hold the values of binary 0 and binary 1 at the same time in a state called superposition (McMahon, 2008, p. 12). However, the similarities do not end there. Binary 0 and binary 1, in modern computing, are values of "false" and "true" respectively. It prompts the question, would such a superposition dual-state of quantum 0&1 equate to something like "maybe"? Or even "myth"? Those questions cannot be answered here, of course. But is such a connection between myth and technology a stretch? I think not. Computer technologies will only continue to proliferate and continue to influence our communication practices. The vast and exponentially growing store of e-communications means there will only be more and more sources of narrative available to be appropriated into myth. From a social standpoint modern computing will only advance and promote more transmission of myth, rather than temper it. Further, the similarity of the qubit to a 2nd order signification is quite stunning and its advent only strengthens the semiotic argument. It further suggests that one possible avenue of future research potential for the Myth Context Reception Model might be as a baseline toward a Myth Context Theory that explores the greater potential and variable intersection of contextualism and cascading 2nd order significations applicable to all human communications.

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APPENDIX A

FIGURES

Figure 4

A Visit from St. Nick by Clement C. Moore

A Visit from Saint Nicholas

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house

Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;

The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,

In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there;

The children were nestled all snug in their beds,

While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads;

And mamma in her ’kerchief, and I in my cap,

Had just settled our brains for a long winter’s nap,

When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,

I sprang from the bed to see what was the matter.

Away to the window I flew like a flash,

Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.

The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow

Gave the lustre of mid-day to objects below,

When, what to my wondering eyes should appear,

But a miniature sleigh, and eight tiny reindeer,

With a little old driver, so lively and quick,

I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick.

More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,

And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name;

"Now, Dasher! now, Dancer! now, Prancer and Vixen!

Figure 4 Continued

On, Comet! on, Cupid! on, Donder and Blitzen!

To the top of the porch! to the top of the wall!

Now dash away! dash away! dash away all!"

As dry leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,

When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky;

So up to the house-top the coursers they flew,

With the sleigh full of toys, and St. Nicholas too.

And then, in a twinkling, I heard on the roof

The prancing and pawing of each little hoof.

As I drew in my head, and was turning around,

Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound.

He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot,

And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot;

A bundle of toys he had flung on his back,

And he looked like a peddler just opening his pack.

His eyes — how they twinkled! his dimples how merry!

His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry!

His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow

And the beard of his chin was as white as the snow;

The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth,

And the smoke it encircled his head like a wreath;

He had a broad face and a little round belly,

That shook, when he laughed, like a bowlful of jelly.

He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf,

And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself;

A wink of his eye and a twist of his head,

Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread;

Figure 4 Continued

He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,

And filled all the stockings; then turned with a jerk,

And laying his finger aside of his nose,

And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose;

He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle,

And away they all flew like the down of a thistle,

But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight,

"Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good-night."

Retrieved from pp. 3-4 of *Santa Claus, last of the wild men: The origins and evolution of Saint Nicholas, spanning 50,000 years.* by Siefker, P. (1997). Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

APPENDIX B

SURVEY

Audience Perceptions of the Batman Character

This is a research survey being performed as a Lifespan Digital Communications graduate study at Old Dominion University. The study is seeking to measure audience perceptions of superheroes. Your participation in this study is strictly anonymous and any information provided will be held as confidential and will not be provided or sold to a third party. You may participate only if you are 18 years of age or older. This survey should take 3 minutes or less to complete. The study will be complete within several weeks' time following this data collection. If you have any questions regarding the study results after it is complete, contact Joey Ponthieux, Communication and Theatre Arts, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA, 23529. Email: odubatmail@gmail.com

Instructions: You must be **18 years of age or older** to participate in this survey. Read each statement carefully. Circle the number only, or mark the item, that best describes your response to the statement. Answer all statements or questions completely.

I am familiar with the fictional character Batman from one or more of the following media: comics, television, film, video games, graphic novels, audio, other:

Very Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Strongly Agree

I engage in the following Batman media: (check all that apply)

__Comic books __Television Films __Video games __Novels __Audio recordings __Other

I read or consume Batman comics or graphic novels:

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Daily

I view or consume Batman films or cartoons:

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Daily

Batman's secret identity is: (check only one)

__ Dick Grayson
__ Bruce Wayne
__ Jean-Paul Valley
__ none of the above

Batman's origin begins when: (check only one)

__ Alfred is murdered
__ Thomas Wayne is abandoned
__ Joe Chill finds Bruce alone
__ none of the above

...continued on other side

Batman/Bruce Wayne is psychotic (he has lost touch with reality):

Very Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Strongly Agree

Batman/Bruce Wayne suffers from Dissociative Identity Disorder (multiple personality disorder):

Very Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Strongly Disagree

Batman/Bruce Wayne is severely depressed, but not psychotic, and is still able to function as a superhero:

Very Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Strongly Agree

It is inconceivable or implausible that Batman/Bruce Wayne could ever be severely depressed:

Very Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Strongly Disagree

In your opinion, Batman's/Bruce Wayne's mental state is:

Very Stable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Unstable

The dominant identity (ego identity or self-awareness) of the character is:

Batman 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Bruce Wayne

The identity making all of the decisions is:

Bruce Wayne 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Batman

In the following questions, try to establish the difference between identity and role. For example, John Doe would see himself as the identity, but if John Doe was a fireman, then fireman would be a role.

In your opinion, the Batman persona is best described as:

Identity 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Role

In your opinion, the Bruce Wayne persona is best described as:

Identity 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Role

Please provide the year you were born _____

VITA

JOSEPH G. PONTHIEUX
Old Dominion University
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HONORS

- 2018: Awarded co-inventor on NASA Patent, USP #10,102,756: "Method and apparatus for providing in-flight pilot interface for trajectory optimization"
- 2018: Top Four Paper - SSCA, Communication Theory Division: "Visualization Metaphor and Diversity of Scale"
- 2017: Top Paper Award - SSCA, Popular Communication Division: "Star Trek, Metaphor, and Social Change: An Innovative Approach to Social Commentary in the 1960s and Beyond"
- 2017: Top Paper Award - SSCA, Language & Social Interaction Division: "The Inherent Visual Nature of Language"
- 1997: NATAS Emmy®: "Mid-South News Network"

EDUCATION

- 2021: M.A. Lifespan and Digital Communication, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA
- 1988: B.S. Radio-Television and Film, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS
- 1985: A.A.S. Commercial Design and Advertising, Hinds Community College, Raymond, MS

EMPLOYMENT

- 2019 – Present: 3D Animator, U. S. Department of Defense, Washington, DC
- 2015 – 2019: Concept Visualization Artist, Science Systems and Applications Inc., NASA Langley Research Center, Hampton, Virginia
- 2012 – 2015: Concept Visualization Artist, Mymic Technical Services, NASA Langley Research Center, Hampton, Virginia
- 2010 – 2012: Experiment Specialist, Science Systems and Applications Inc., NASA Langley Research Center, Hampton, Virginia
- 2001 – 2010: 3D Animator, NCI Information Systems Inc., ConITS Contract – Prime: Raytheon, NASA Langley Research Center, Hampton, Virginia
- 2001 – 2001: 3D Animator, Planners Collaborative Inc., NASA Langley Research Center, Hampton, Virginia
- 1996 – 2001: 3D Animator, Computer Sciences Corporation, NASA Langley Research Center, Hampton, Virginia
- 1994 – 1996: 3D Animator, WREG-TV/The New York Times, Memphis, TN
- 1990 – 1994: 3D Animator, WDAM-TV/Federal Broadcasting, Hattiesburg, MS