

## Article

# Myth and One-Dimensionality

William Hansen

Department of Classical Studies, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405, USA; hansen@indiana.edu

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**Abstract:** A striking difference between the folk-narrative genres of legend and folktale is how the human characters respond to supernatural, otherworldly, or uncanny beings such as ghosts, gods, dwarves, giants, trolls, talking animals, witches, and fairies. In legend the human actors respond with fear and awe, whereas in folktale they treat such beings as if they were ordinary and unremarkable. Since folktale humans treat all characters as belonging to a single realm, folklorists have described the world of the folktale as one-dimensional, in contrast to the two-dimensionality of the legend. The present investigation examines dimensionality in the third major genre of folk narrative: myth. Using the Greek and Hebrew myths of primordial paradise as sample narratives, the present essay finds—surprisingly—that the humans in these stories respond to the otherworldly one-dimensionally, as folktale characters do, and suggests an explanation for their behavior that is peculiar to the world of myth.

**Keywords:** legend; folktale; myth; folk narrative; supernatural; ancient Greece; ancient Rome; Genesis; abstract style; one-dimensionality

## 1. The Otherworldly in Legend

An extraordinary event is reported to have taken place in the Greek city of Amphipolis during the fourth century BC.

In the house of a certain family a maidservant was passing by the door of the guestroom, which was partly open, and as she glanced in, she saw a young man and a young woman sitting next to each other. The youth was Machates, who was a guest staying in the house, and the young woman was Philinnion, daughter of the family. However, what the maid knew but the guest (as it turned out) did not, was that Philinnion had died six months earlier. The maidservant ran screaming to her master and mistress, Demonstratos and Charito, telling them to come immediately and see their daughter, who was alive and sitting with their guest in the guest room. Charito replied that the maidservant was mad. Since the woman persisted, Charito finally went to take a look. By then the occupants were asleep, and though Charito thought she made out her daughter's features and clothes, she could not be certain, and decided to wait until morning to investigate. But at dawn the girl left unnoticed, and when Charito came to the room she was distressed to have missed her. She asked her guest, Machates, to tell her everything that had happened, from the beginning. The youth explained that the girl's name was Philinnion, and that she visited him without her parents' knowledge, because of her desire for him. He showed Charito a gold ring that the girl had given him as a gift, and a breast-band she had left the night before. The sight of these tokens caused Charito to cry out, tear her clothes, and begin her grieving anew. Machates urged his hosts to calm themselves, promising to show them the girl if she showed up again.

Night came on, and then the hour at which Philinnion was accustomed to arrive. As the household kept watch, she came and sat on the bed. Machates ate and drank with her, unable to believe that the girl he was consorting with was not actually alive. He signaled secretly to Charito and Demonstratos that the girl had come. When they rushed to the room and saw their daughter, they were speechless at first, then cried aloud and embraced her. But Philinnion said to them, "Mother and father, how

unfairly you have grudged my being with your guest these past three days, since I have not caused anyone any pain. Because of your meddling, you shall grieve all over again. I came here by divine will but now shall return to the place appointed for me." Saying these words, she collapsed and was dead. The house was filled with confusion and wailing.

Word of the incredible event ran quickly through the city. A crowd gathered outside the house and was kept in check by a local official. At dawn the Amphipolitans filled the theater for an impromptu meeting. It was decided that they should proceed to the family tomb to see if the girl's body was still there. When they investigated, they found on Philinnion's bier only an iron ring and a wine cup, gifts that she had gotten from Machates on the evening of her first visit. Astonished and frightened, the people went on directly to Demostratos's house to see if the corpse was there, and indeed they found the dead girl in the guest-room. The people gathered again in the theater, where confusion reigned and no one was sure what to do. A man who was regarded as a fine seer and augur proposed that they burn the girl's corpse outside the boundaries of the city and perform apotropaic sacrifices to Hermes Chthonios and to the Eumenides, after which everyone should purify themselves, cleanse the temples, and perform certain other rites and sacrifices. Meanwhile, Machates became despondent and killed himself (Phlegon of Tralles *Mirabilia* 1).<sup>1</sup>

The events reported to have transpired at Amphipolis imply that in addition to the natural realm, there exists another realm, a supernatural world, or a realm of the otherworldly. This latter is a mysterious and elusive dimension of reality that we inhabitants of the natural world do not, and cannot, fully understand, for we get only glimpses of it. The two realms have an asymmetrical relationship: otherworldly beings, it appears, are able to intrude upon the natural world when it suits them, whereas the contrary is not true. So in the legend of Philinnion the supernatural or otherworldly suddenly visits the city of Amphipolis when a young woman returns to life, or quasi-life, less than a year after her death. Since the dead as a rule remain dead, we are entitled to wonder why Philinnion was an exception. We don't know. Moreover, why was she given a chance to return to life permanently? We don't know. Why was this opportunity somehow conditional upon her consorting with Machates for so many nights, and what divine or supernatural taboo did her parents inadvertently break by interrupting her third visit? Again, we don't know. While the other world comprehends ours, its own rules and conditions remain mysterious to us. What we do see are the effects of the otherworldly, here personalized as a revenant, on the household of Demostratos and on the community of Amphipolis: the family is in turmoil, the Amphipolitans take desperate measures to purify their city and propitiate the gods, and the girl's lover takes his own life.

Reports of the dead who unexpectedly return to the natural world for a time for their own reasons are not of course confined to classical antiquity. A memorable event of this sort was reported to have taken place in Saint Petersburg, Russia, in 1890, according to several local newspapers at the time. After celebrating mass a priest brought the holy sacraments to a certain apartment on Sergievskaya Street. The door was answered by a young man, to whom the priest explained that he had been asked to come there and administer the sacraments to a sick person. The inhabitant replied that the priest must have made a mistake, since he lived there alone. "No," the priest continued, "a lady came up to me today and gave me this very address and asked me to give the sacraments to the man who lives here." The young man was perplexed. Then the priest noticed a woman's portrait hanging on a wall of the apartment, and, pointing to it, said that that was the very woman who had asked him to come. The man said, "That is the portrait of my dead mother." Seized by awe, fear, and terror, the young man then took communion from the priest and died that evening (Edgerton 1968); on the larger legend tradition see (Brunvand 1981, pp. 24–46). So the young man's mother, knowing that her son would presently and unexpectedly die, had returned briefly from the dead to arrange for him to have communion.

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<sup>1</sup> On the story of Philinnion see further (Hansen 1996, pp. 65–85; Doroszevska 2016, pp. 24–67).

Dead supernaturals are not the only kind of otherworldly actors who cause ordinary human beings to be afraid. The epiphany of a live supernatural being has a similar effect. An early Greek narrative hymn recounts how the goddess Demeter, grieving for the loss of her daughter Persephone, left the company of the gods, assumed the form of an old woman, and sat down by a public fountain in the town of Eleusis. Daughters of the local ruler came upon her there when they went to fetch water, and brought her back home to serve as a nurse. When the supposed old woman stepped upon the threshold of the residence, her head reached the roof and the doorway filled with a divine light, so that the girls' mother, Queen Metaneira, was seized with awe and fear. Sometime later the woman revealed that she was the goddess Demeter. Resuming her true size and appearance, and radiating beauty, fragrance, and light, she exited the palace. At the sight of her, Metaneira's knees buckled, and she remained speechless for a long time (*Homeric Hymn to Demeter* vv. 90–293; on the hymn see further (Richardson 1974)). While the hymn's audience is privileged to know what lies behind Demeter's visit to Eleusis, the members of the royal household within the story are not. For them the sudden and unexplained appearance of a divine being in their house is jolting and fearful.

Human onlookers can experience fear even if they merely suppose that a deity is present. In his *Odyssey* Homer relates how Athena reversed Odysseus's disguise as an old beggar, transforming him back into a fine and more youthful man again. When Odysseus's son Telemachos first saw him, not knowing who he was, the youth averted his eyes, fearing that the stranger was a god. Telemachos asked the apparent deity to be gracious to them and spare them, and Odysseus had to explain that he was not one of the immortals (Homer *Odyssey* 16.172–89).

The moments at which Greek deities most often reveal themselves, if only partially, or at which human onlookers apprehend them, is at their arrival and/or departure. The reaction of witnesses to an epiphany is commonly amazement and terror (Richardson 1974, pp. 208–9). Even the toned-down epiphany of the disguised Demeter, when she merely enters the room in the guise of a mortal, causes Queen Metaneira to feel awe and fear, and when the goddess manifests her full divinity in preparation for departure, the human reaction is of course stronger.

Epiphanies of angels, as recounted in the New Testament, can call forth similar reactions. In scenes of angelic arrivals in Luke, the response of the humans who are present is fear. Thus an angel of the lord appeared to the priest Zacharias while he was burning incense in the temple, causing Zacharias to feel anxious and afraid. The angel told him not to be afraid (Luke 1:11–13). Later the angel Gabriel came to Mary in Nazareth, and addressed her. She too was anxious, but the angel told her not to be afraid (1:26–30). On a third occasion an angel came to shepherds in the field, and the lord's glory shone around them—a reference presumably to the angel's divine radiance. The shepherds were terrified, but the angel told them not to be afraid (2:8–10). Since angels regularly tell the mortals not to be afraid, they expect their appearance to provoke fear.

A lesser-known kind of supernatural manifestation reported from classical antiquity is a so-called “warning apparition,” in which a larger-than-life figure that is not natural appears on a particular occasion to a human being to issue a warning or other communication (Collison-Morley 1912, pp. 72–79; Felton 1991, pp. 30–34). An example is the experience that a certain Roman politician, Curtius Rufus, reported having. As he walked one day in the portico at the residence of the Roman governor of the province of Africa, a figure in the form of a beautiful woman, but larger than human, appeared to him. She explained that she was Africa, and foretold to him his future career and eventual death. The experience terrified him (Pliny the Younger *Letters* 7.27.2–3).

In general, then, the appearance of living supernatural beings such as gods, angels, and warning apparitions cause human actors to feel fear. In anticipation of this, the supernatural beings sometimes tone down their divinity by adopting human form, or reassure the humans by telling them not to be afraid.

In addition to dead supernaturals and live supernaturals, a third kind of otherworldly manifestation in traditional story is a low-level entity that behaves in some way like a human being, as when an animal suddenly speaks (Lüthi [1974] 1986, p. 7). For example, a German legend published in

the early twentieth-century recounts how one night a lad from Walporzheim went fishing. He had no luck and was going to go home, at which point he got a bite from a fine fish. He quickly landed it on the bank of the stream, put it into his sack, and cast his bait out again. Then he heard a voice, "One-Eye, where are you?", and from his sack there came an answer, "In Pete's sack!" Dropping his hook and bag, the terrified youth ran home.

The episode has an interesting continuation that illustrates how otherworldly phenomena sometimes not only frighten but also attract.

After his strange experience the fisherman returned to his fishing-spot again and again. He did not fish any more but sat on the bank and listened, and the old people relate that he understood the language of the fish and in the end was drawn down into the water by them. One morning people found his cap at the stream, but he himself had disappeared forever. Fishermen have seen him in the evenings as—naked, frisky, and adorned with reeds and water plants—he swam in the water in the company of hundreds of fish (Zaunert 1924, p. 273). What is eerie about the two fish is that their conversation implies the existence of a community of fish capable of speech whose very existence was not suspected by human beings.

In traditional story, then, otherworldly phenomena may intrude upon human space and do so suddenly and without warning and for reasons that remain mysterious to the humans who are affected. The instances that I have illustrated from a variety of ancient and modern sources fall individually into one of three categories: dead supernaturals (ghosts/revenants), live supernaturals (gods/angels/warning apparitions), and sub-human actors that exhibit human traits (talking animals). The human response to them is uniform: astonishment and fear.

## 2. The Otherworldly in Folktale

The stories that I have cited heretofore are, in terms of their oral-narrative genre, legends or legend-like narratives. Legends may come with credentials that serve to enhance the sense of their authenticity as reports of true events that took place: often the characters are named and the events set in a particular locale at a particular time in the past; in addition, the narrator may cite a supposedly reliable source in support of the story. Of course, the presence of these authenticating features does not mean that the legends are historically true or even that they are believed, only that, rhetorically speaking, they are presented in a way that is characteristic of reports of historical events.

If legends are traditional reports of allegedly true events, folktales are traditional fictions. Unlike legends, they make no serious claim to historicity and are not normally accorded credence. Supernatural or otherworldly characters—witches, giants, helpers with magic objects, talking animals, and so on—are also found in folktales, usually (as in legends) in a secondary role, but a peculiarity of folktales is that the human characters react to otherworldly phenomena as though such things were perfectly ordinary and unremarkable. The actors are not astonished at them and do not fear them. They are not even curious about them. They accept them and go on their way.

Take, for example, the familiar tale of Little Red Riding Hood. The story has been collected from oral narrators and is preserved in two classic collections of European folktales, that of Charles Perrault and that of the Brothers Grimm, which originally appeared in 1697 and 1812, respectively. In Perrault's narration the young heroine was dispatched by her mother to bring food to her grandmother, who lived in another village. As the girl was crossing the woods on her way to her grandmother's house, she met a wolf. He inquired where she was going, and she explained that she was bringing food to her grandmother. He asked her if the house was far away, and she explained that her grandmother's place was the first house in the next village. The two spoke a few more words and then went their separate ways. The tale ends with the wolf's devouring the insufficiently wary girl (Jones 2016, pp. 116–19; ATU (2004) 333 *Little Red Riding Hood*). What interests us is that the folktale heroine shows neither astonishment nor fear at encountering a wolf, let alone one that addresses her in human language. She may as well have come upon a fellow villager. She not only does not flee in terror, but

shows no particular interest in the wolf at all, proceeding on her way without giving the experience another thought.

Supernatural beings such as deities, which are common in ancient folktales, get the same response. An ancient Greek folktale, *Hermes and the Woodcutter*, recounts how once a man who was cutting wood beside a river dropped his ax into the water, and when the stream carried it away, sat on the bank and bewailed his loss. Pitying him, the god Hermes came and inquired from him the cause of his unhappiness. Presently the god descended into the water, brought up a golden ax, and asked if it was his. When the man said it was not, Hermes brought up a silver ax. After the man said this ax was not his either, the god brought up the man's original ax, which the woodcutter acknowledged as his own. Because of his honesty, Hermes gave him all three axes.

The woodcutter rejoined his companions and told them what had happened. One of them, wishing to have the same experience, picked up his ax, went to the same river, and deliberately dropped his ax into the stream. Then he sat down and wept. Hermes appeared and asked what had happened, and the man told him of the loss of his ax. When the god brought up the golden ax and asked if that was the one he had lost, the man, motivated by greed, said it was. But the god did not give it to him and did not even restore his own ax (Perry 1952, pp. 388–89, no. 173).<sup>2</sup>

Like Little Red Riding Hood who meets a talking wolf, the unnamed woodcutter shows not the slightest amazement or fear at an epiphany of the god Hermes, as though the deity were a fellow human being. Indeed, the woodcutter does not even show surprise at or curiosity about the golden and silver axes that Hermes brings up from the stream.

Many supernatural or otherworldly phenomena of different kinds make an appearance in the ancient folktale of Cupid and Psyche, recounted by the Roman novelist Apuleius in the second century AD. The tale is renowned as being the earliest attested fairytale in the Western world. In this tale a beautiful princess, Psyche, wed a supernatural being, the god Cupid. Her mysterious husband forbade her to look upon him, and when she was induced by her jealous sisters to violate this prohibition, he abruptly left her. Psyche undertook a long and arduous quest to find him, and eventually the two were happily reunited (Apuleius *Metamorphoses* 4.28–6.24).<sup>3</sup>

In the course of this long and complex tale Psyche encounters wonders of many sorts. When she is instructed to attire herself for her wedding and wait at the top of a cliff, she is lifted by the West Wind and deposited gently in a valley below. Is she amazed or fearful at this? No. Rather, the experience calms down her distressed mind, and she falls asleep on the grass. When she wakes up and finds her way to a nearby opulent palace, she is greeted by the voice of an invisible servant. Her response is not astonishment or wonder; instead, she senses divine providence and obeys the instructions of the servant. When presently she is the guest at a feast with unseen servants and music by unseen musicians, she shows no response. Later, the heroine is helped in wondrous ways to accomplish several seemingly impossible tasks; for example, when she is told sort a large pile of mixed seeds in a single day, a group of kindly ants comes and does the job. Psyche's response: none. Later, a green reed, growing alongside a stream, addresses her, advising her how to accomplish a particular task. Her response: she follows its advice. And subsequently a stream of water speaks to her, and then an eagle and a tower.

Psyche also comes face to face with a succession of gods. Setting out in quest of her husband, she encounters the god Pan, who offers her his advice. She pays him respectful homage and goes on her way. Soon she spies a temple and makes her way to it. It proves to belong to the goddess Ceres, who calls to her. Psyche prostrates herself in order to ask for her help, as any petitioner might to any official. When Psyche next comes to a shrine of Juno, she shows no particular reaction. The only deity whose aspect elicits a strong response from the heroine is her husband Cupid, on the occasion when, knife in

<sup>2</sup> See further ATU (2004) 729 *The Merman's Golden Axe*; (Hansen 2002, pp. 42–44).

<sup>3</sup> See further ATU (2004) 425B *Son of the Witch*; (Hansen 2002, pp. 100–14).



hand and expecting her heretofore unseen husband to be a snaky monster, she is shocked instead to discover that he is the stunningly beautiful god of love.

In sum, Psyche displays no surprise or curiosity about the marvelous wind that transports her, the invisible servants who wait upon her, and the animals, plants, and other non-human things that speak to her. She feels no awe at or fear of the deities she meets, other than the jolting scene in which she discovers that her spouse is not a monster but a god. Other deities she treats respectfully in the manner that people show deference to important or powerful persons. Like Little Red Riding Hood, she engages the wondrous without wonder, and like the Greek woodcutter she engages the supernatural without fear or awe.

In sum, folktale heroes and heroines treat the otherworldly things of the world without surprise or fear or curiosity.

### 3. One-Dimensional and Two-Dimensional Narratives

The first scholar to comment upon this basic difference between legends and folktales was the German folklorist Friedrich Panzer, in an essay first published in 1926. He observes that many “wondrous and otherworldly elements” appear both in both legends and folktales, stories alleged to be true and stories told to entertain. But in legends the otherworldly is perceived within the narrative as actually otherworldly, as being strange and frightening, as something that intrudes upon the human realm, whereas in folktales the otherworldly is treated within the narrative as belonging to the same reality as the this-worldly (Panzer [1926] 1973, p. 100). The most wondrous thing about the telling of folktales, Panzer remarks, is that its whole wondrous world with its strange beings and objects is treated internally as ordinary and unremarkable (Panzer [1926] 1973, p. 89).

The Swiss folklorist, Max Lüthi, developed Panzer’s brief observation.<sup>4</sup> Legends, he says, tell of the encounters of human beings with otherworldly creatures of various kinds such as ghosts, underworld beings, nature spirits, dwarves, and giants; and persons who come upon these beings feel fear, a sense of transgression, and curiosity. They are the Wholly Other. Lüthi associates them with Rudolf Otto’s notion of the holy, the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, the mystery that both frightens and attracts. In legends, he says, there seems to exist another world beside the world of everyday reality, an otherworld that appears not to be far away since at any moment it can affect the everyday world; indeed, its inhabitants often dwell among humankind. He calls it the *Jenseitswelt*, the world on the other side, or otherworld, in contrast to the *Deisseitswelt*, the world on this side, our world. Legends, acknowledging as they do both this world and the otherworld, can be properly described as “two-dimensional.”

Folktales, Lüthi goes on, also feature otherworldly creatures such as witches, fairies, giants, dwarves, trolls, and dragons; animals may speak, or an old woman or old man whom the hero has never met before may give him a magical gift or crucial advice, exactly what he will need to accomplish his task. And yet the hero deals with these otherworldly beings as though there were no difference between himself and them. He accepts their gifts with equanimity.

If a legend character encounters an otherworldly being or a magic object, he broods over the strangeness of it. But when a folktale character sees or experiences fantastic things, he does not bat an eye. He shows no astonishment or curiosity or interest. The numinous does not excite fear or curiosity, or if curiosity, then only of an everyday kind. If someone knocks at the door, he wonders who it may be, but if he encounters a magic object, he exhibits no special interest in it. Similarly, his fear is of an everyday kind. He fears dangers, but not the uncanny. Witches, dragons, and giants frighten him only as robbers would. All terror of the numinous is absent. While legend characters are horrified if an animal speaks, folktale characters show neither astonishment nor fear. In short, they have no sense

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<sup>4</sup> See (Lüthi [1961] 1975, pp. 25–28; 1981; Lüthi [1974] 1986, pp. 4–10).

of the extraordinary: everything belongs to the same dimension. Accordingly, the narrative world of folktales can be described as “one-dimensional.”

#### 4. The Otherworldly in Myth

Panzer and Lüthi focus upon folktales and legends in their discussions of the otherworldly in folk narrative, and do not mention myth. Folkloristics developed as a field of study in relatively recent times and mostly in Europe, where fieldworkers collected traditional narratives from oral narrators primarily in conservative, traditional communities. The genres of traditional story that these storytellers told were, broadly speaking, legends, or traditional reports of allegedly true events, and folktales, or traditional fictions. With few exceptions, myth was not a living oral genre in the European communities from which Panzer and Lüthi drew their data. For myth, peasants turned to their Bible or other holy writ. So although folklorists, like anthropologists, classify myth as a genre of folk narrative, they rarely encounter it in the field, and not many folklorists study it.

Let us pose the question that Panzer and Lüthi do not: how do human actors in myth react to otherworldly phenomena?

In contrast to folktales and legends, myths—at least European and Near Eastern myths—are set not in our familiar world but in a sort of pre-world and at a pre-time, before our cosmos becomes fully fixed in its nature. Everything is still subject to formation—the physical cosmos may not yet have its familiar form, things may not yet have names, toil may not yet be necessary for human sustenance, sickness and death may not yet be afflictions of human life, the relationship of humans and gods may not yet be determined, and, indeed, humans (or human females) may not yet exist. Although myths, like legends, are framed as reports of actual events, they are set in a time when the world is in flux.

It is not possible here to do a broad survey of myth, so that my analysis of a small sample of two mythic narratives can be offered only in the spirit of a preliminary inquiry. For this purpose I examine the ancient Greek and Hebrew myths of primordial paradise, since, for one thing, everyone will agree that these narratives are myths, and, for another, the two narratives feature humans as well as supernaturals, both of which are necessary in order to gauge the feature of dimensionality.

##### 4.1. *Humans and Yahweh in the Garden of Eden*

Our source for the Hebrew myth of primordial paradise is the so-called J-text, or Yahwist source (ca. 950 BCE), found in the second and third books of Genesis.

According to this narrative, Yahweh Elohim (henceforth simply Yahweh) formed an earthling from clay and blew the wind of life into his nostrils, whereupon he became a creature of flesh. Yahweh planted a garden in Eden. The garden had all the trees that were good to look at and good to eat. They included the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowing Good and Bad, which stood in the middle of the garden. Yahweh put the man in the Garden of Eden to tend it, giving him these instructions: he was free to eat from any of the trees there except for the Tree of Knowing Good and Bad; if he ate from that tree, he would die on that very day.

Presently Yahweh declared that it was not good for the man to be alone. So he made the man fall into a deep sleep, removed one of his bones, and shaped it into a woman. The man and the woman were naked, but since they were not aware of it, they felt no shame about it.

Of the wild animals that Yahweh had made, the snake was the most clever. It asked the woman whether god said they were not to eat of any tree. No, said the woman, they were only forbidden to eat from the tree in the middle of the garden; if they did so, they would die. No, said the snake, you won't die; rather, if you eat from it, your eyes will be opened like the gods, knowing good and bad. So the woman picked some of the fruit of the tree, and both she and the man ate, whereupon their eyes were opened and they perceived they were naked. They made coverings of fig leaves for themselves.

In the evening they heard Yahweh's voice as he walked in the garden, and they hid. When Yahweh asked where they were, the man answered that he was hiding because he was naked. Yahweh asked how he knew he was naked—did he eat fruit from the tree that Yahweh forbade them? The man

blamed the woman, and she in turn blamed the snake, whereupon Yahweh announced punishments, or at any rate sentences, for the snake (henceforth snakes would crawl on their bellies, and snakes and humans would be enemies), the woman (women would experience intense pain in childbearing, and they would be subject to their husbands), and the man (the soil would be cursed so that men would be required to earn their food by hard work).

Apparently addressing his fellow gods, Yahweh said that the earthling now had his eyes open like the gods, seeing good and bad, and there was the possibility that he would eat also from the Tree of Life and so live forever. So Yahweh drove the man and the woman from the Garden of Eden, stationing cherubim to guard access to the Tree of Life (Genesis 2:4b–3:24).<sup>5</sup>

The Hebrew narrative features two humans (the first man and the first woman), who encounter two otherworldly entities (or at least non-human beings) in the garden. The first is the god, Yahweh, creator of the garden. He tells the man which fruits are permitted and which are forbidden, and sometime later the three of them discuss the breaking of god's rule regarding permissible food. Nowhere does the Hebrew text say or imply that the sight of god causes awe or fear in the man or woman; rather, the humans respond to him with ordinary deference, the sort of deference that one would expect an inferior to display to a superior, as when Psyche interacts respectfully with Pan or Ceres.

The other being that can be called otherworldly, at least by the standards of the story's audience, is the snake, which can reason and speak. The fact that it can talk occasions no surprise or fear or curiosity in the humans, who converse with it exactly as they might with each other. Nor do they wonder why it knows so much.

In sum, the humans in the Hebrew myth do not react to god and to the human-like snake as astonishing or terrifying. Nothing in the garden is numinous or uncanny to them. Accordingly, the narrative world of the Hebrew paradise myth appears to be one-dimensional, exactly as in folktales.

#### 4.2. Humans and Gods at Mekone

The Greek myth of the first humans in primordial paradise is recounted by the early Greek poet Hesiod. The story must be pulled together from different parts of two poems, *Theogony* and *Works and Days* (ca. 700 BCE).

Hesiod begins his account in medias res, sometime after the first humans have come into being, but apparently not long afterwards, for we seem to be in mankind's early days. These first humans were all males. Hesiod does not relate how they came into existence, so that to that extent the myth as we have it is incomplete. The primordial humans lived in paradisiacal conditions, without hard work, sickness, or death.

The poet relates how the Olympian gods and human men once met at a place called Mekone in order to decide how meat was to be apportioned between them. Prometheus acted as a go-between. (He could do so because, although he was a god, he was descended from the Titans; hence, he was neither an Olympian god or nor a human being.) An ox was slaughtered, and Prometheus divided the meat, fat, and bones into two piles, inviting Zeus to choose the pile he preferred. Unfortunately for the Olympian gods, Prometheus had arranged the piles deceptively, and Zeus chose the one that looked better but in actuality was worse. Zeus's choice determined which portion of sacrificial animals would go to the gods, and which to humans, forever afterwards. Angered at the deception and the loss, Zeus withheld fire from men, but Prometheus stole some and made it available to the human community. Thereupon, Zeus instituted punishments for Prometheus (he had him bound to a column, where each day an eagle ate his liver, which grew back each night) as well as for the humans (he withdrew the *bios*, or life, from the soil, so that men would have to earn their food by hard work, and he introduced into

<sup>5</sup> For basic commentary on the Eden narrative see (Speiser 1964, pp. 14–33; Von Rad 1972, pp. 73–102; Davidson 1973, pp. 28–48; Zevit 2013).



the hitherto all-male community the first woman, Pandora, who in turn released the spirits of different miseries into the world) (Hesiod *Theogony* 521–616 and *Works and Days* 42–105).<sup>6</sup>

The Greek myth features a community of human males, who are in the company of the Olympian gods as well as the Titan Prometheus. The narrator attributes to the humans no awe at or fear at the presence of these supernatural beings. Since the state of mind of the humans is largely ignored, it is presumably unremarkable. True, both men and gods feel awe (*thauma*) at their first sight of Pandora, but she is a human, not a supernatural, and the fact that the human males are said to be awed at her but not otherwise merely underlines their lack of a strong emotional response to the presence of deities. In short, the meeting of gods and men at Mekone could as well be a gathering of representatives of neighboring Greek villages to decide some matter of regional policy. Accordingly, the world of the Greek paradise myth appears to be one-dimensional, like the Hebrew myth and like folktales generally.

## 5. Understanding the Dimensionality of the Paradise Narratives

Panzer's comments on the ways human characters respond to the otherworldly in different genres of folk narrative are brief and descriptive, and venture nothing by way of explanation. Lüthi's account is also predominantly descriptive but more elaborately worked out. I summarize his view as follows.

The genres of legend and folktale, by which Lüthi means primarily modern European legends and wonder tales, differ from each other in narrative style principally for the reason that the legend claims to be a truthful report of something that occurred, whereas the folktale represents itself as artful invention, as traditional fiction. In this sense, the legend's two-dimensional treatment of the otherworldly requires no explanation, for it is simply a realistic reflection of how human beings in real life respond, or imagine they would respond, to an encounter with the supernatural or uncanny. Like legend characters, they would experience strong feelings of fear and/or awe at the sudden advent of something wholly and mysteriously other.

The folktale is quite another matter. Its treatment of human characters' reaction to the otherworldly is not realistic. For Lüthi the one-dimensionality of the folktale is not an isolated phenomenon but is an aspect of the narrative style of the folktale as a form of folk art. Lüthi calls this style "abstract" (Lüthi [1974] 1986, pp. 24–36; 1977), a term he borrows from art historians, and for him it is the authentic style of the folktale as a traditional oral tale. He contrasts it with the realistic style of legend. The abstract style presents flat and isolated characters, who lack the depth and emotion of legend characters; the abstract style names rather than describes; it prefers sharp contrasts and extremes; and it favors formulaic and round numbers as well as precious metals. In the coordination of actions, "everything 'clicks'," as Lüthi's memorable phrase has it—if it is convenient for the progress of the folktale plot that a particular something happen then and there, it does. In short, the narrative style of the folktale is not realistic, and the phenomenon of one-dimensionality is part of its artificiality.

In Lüthi's view, then, the two-dimensionality of the legend requires no special explanation. Since legend makes a claim to be a report of an actual event, its human characters are made to respond to the otherworld the way real people do. If they encounter an otherworldly being, they are astonished and afraid, as one would expect live people to be. In contrast, the folktale is artful entertainment, and its characters are made to behave in accordance with the aesthetics of folk art, which in both its narrative and its material expression favors the abstract and unrealistic (Glassie 1989, pp. 128–29; Hansen 2004/2005, pp. 288–90). Isolated and lacking depth, folktale characters behave one-dimensionally.

Neither the realistic style of legend nor the abstract style of folktale seems to be an entirely good description of what we observe in myth, at least in the Hebrew and Greek paradise narratives. Myths are not presented as fictional narratives and are not characterized by the abstract style. While myth does, like legend, represent itself as an account of something that actually occurred, the human actors

<sup>6</sup> On the Hesiodic narratives see (West 1966, pp. 312–36), and (West 1978, pp. 153–72), and on the myth itself see (Hansen 2007; 2013).

in the Greek and Hebrew paradise narratives express no awe at the presence of the supernatural or uncanny, and so do not respond to the otherworldly in the way that legend characters do.

But should they? Consider the three categories of otherworldly being that we have examined in legend and folktale: (a) dead supernaturals, (b) live supernaturals, and (c) non-human entities exhibiting human traits.

Dead supernatural beings, or ghosts, whether embodied (revenants) or disembodied, are not found in the Greek and Hebrew myths, and cannot be, since death is not yet a feature of the cosmos in mythic times or has only just now become one. There are no dead persons to return to quasi-life to surprise and shock the living. Until people die and physically depart to a grave or death realm, they cannot burst unexpectedly back into the realm of the living. The paradise myths have no dead for the living to respond to.

Live supernatural beings, or gods, do appear in the paradise myths, but the reason why humans do not react to the presence of divine beings with fear and amazement in these narratives is that gods and human live familiarly with each other as neighbors, though not of course as equals. In the Hebrew story, Yahweh, the man, and the woman all dwell together in the Garden of Eden, where they converse with one another casually and where Yahweh can be seen enjoying a stroll in the evening. The situation in the Greek story, set in Mekone, is less clear, but humans and gods are portrayed as meeting together in order to decide a matter of shared interest, the allotment of meat, as though they were neighboring villagers. You cannot be astonished every time you see your neighbor. Only when gods and humans dwell separately, as is later the case after the gods have expelled humans from their divine home (Eden) or after the gods have withdrawn to their own home (Olympos)—only then can the presence of a god in a human space be an unforeseeable and truly frightening event, an intrusion from an unseen or inaccessible realm into the ordinary world.

The third category, a non-human entity with human traits, appears in the Hebrew myth in the figure of the talking snake. The human characters in Eden perceive nothing eerie about the snake. But the only standard the man and woman have by which to gauge what is normal or abnormal in a snake is their own experience; consequently, if they encounter a snake that speaks, that is for them the nature of snakes. Animals have only recently come into being, and in a world of becoming there are no long-established measures. In contrast, the young fisherman in the German legend, living in a stable world of well-established nature, has definite expectations about fish, according to which fish are creatures of low intelligence that are incapable of human speech; when he encounters knowledgeable fish (the fish he catches knows his name) that converse with each other, he has good reason to feel terrified. The human couple in Eden has no established standard with which to judge what properties properly belong or do not belong to snakes, other than what they themselves experience then and there. Nothing about the snake in the Garden of Eden implies that it is unusual in its own context, such as that it is a member of an unnoticed community of snakes with human speech. The snake with which the humans speak must be representative of the way all snakes were before god condemned them, changing their nature. This seems to have been the view of the ancient Jewish philosopher Philon (commonly known as Philo Judaeus), who in his commentary on Genesis asks why the snake speaks like a human, and replies that at the beginning of the world's creation very likely all animals enjoyed some faculty of speech, though humans excelled in it (Philo 1961, p. 19).

What dead supernatural beings, live supernatural beings, and nonhuman entities with human traits have in common in legend narratives is that they normally spend their time *hidden* from humans, the dead because they reside in graves or the death realm, the gods because they dwell someplace far away where they are inaccessible to non-gods, and the sub-humans because, in the instance of the talking fish, they belong to a community of animals with human speech that is unknown to and so, in effect, hidden from humans. What sets Eden and Mekone apart from the world of legend is that nothing is hidden; everything is up front—there are no dead beings, the gods live familiarly nearby, and talking snakes do, too. The snake that converses with the woman can speak because, one assumes, that was the original nature of snakes before god instituted his punishment for the species. Since there

is no hidden dimension where dead supernaturals, live supernaturals, and talking animals dwell and from which they can intrude suddenly into the world of ordinary reality, the world of the paradise myths is by its nature one-dimensional. The humans treat the mythic world one-dimensionally, not because they deny the two-dimensionality of the world as do folktale humans, but because it really is one-dimensional. To unnerve humans in realistic narrative it is not sufficient to be an objectively strange being; one must also be a mysterious being. Although the paradise myths are potentially two-dimensional so far as the realistic behavior of the human characters is concerned, their temporal setting and the physical environment—pre-death, the physical closeness of gods and humans, the unfixed nature of things—renders them functionally one-dimensional.

So myth, as represented by the ancient paradise narratives, constitutes a distinct case among the three principal genres of folk narrative. Like the folktale, but unlike the legend, it is one-dimensional. Like the legend, but unlike the folktale, its human actors behave realistically, however fantastic the world is that they inhabit, with its creator gods, jar of miseries, self-regenerating liver, trees with magical properties, etc. The mythic world is distinctive in being one in which everything is in the open. No fear of the otherworldly is found among the human characters because nothing is truly otherworldly.

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