

A Diversity of Myths, a Unity of Awakening

When you realize that nothing is lacking, the whole world belongs to you.

-Lao Ze

Introduction

In the dawn of our emergence as humans, the vastness of our world presented an overwhelming challenge for human consciousness. We couldn't take it all in, and had become aware of those frighteningly unknowable depths. This endless mystery exerted a force that caused a rupture within human consciousness. This disjunction expressed itself as mythology.

Animals create a territory by expressing sounds or smells. The territory of gods and dragons developed as we told the story of our instinctual dreamscape, our response to life's incalculable mystery. The world of myth is real, in that it is part of us. Myth has also brought us within its territory. Major religions and now modern materialism altered the human story, but diverse mythologies remain encoded into our cultural foundations, this talk will examine the universal experience of mythological territorialization.

I.

The rhythm of the Cosmos always pushes inward, forming disjunctions within the order of any given thing: Stars blow themselves apart through perfectly natural forces. These seemingly apocalyptic events are then able to yield higher levels of complexity. Crushing fusion within a star, for example, produces the 25 elements beyond hydrogen; exploding supernovae then produce all the elements heavier than Iron.

Another example can be found closer to home: in our planet's opening movement, the water and mineral milieu of Earth's crust, a motif composed to the cosmic rhythm, expressed itself as *life*. Abiogenesis, the emergence of the first life, was the compounding complexification of intense geologic forces; the result was earth's rupture into profound disjunction between the geologic order of crystals and solutions and life's new radical destratification and reterritorialization of matter. The cosmic milieu will intensify locally until it ruptures into greater complexity. There is a rhyme here with the theorized emergence of the universe from quantum fluctuations in the infinite void. As living beings, this pattern clues us in to the way that evolution *is the ongoing rupture*, the disjunction between the in-born coding of a species, and pressures of the surrounding world.

The rhythm of infinity has made a place for us out of nothing. Dancing chemicals assembled into animal forms. The ape became human, and as we tell the story the human becomes ape again, assembled in the infinite rhythm, aware that we are an *event* of Cosmic scale. Before Darwin gave the word, ape and human were separated into their own stories. Now the hyper-ape's mythology builds new conceptual territories; our inmost nature bounds beyond the edge of the cosmos.

We create and are created as the event of Apocalypse. In human expression, in our language and art, the veil of being animal is torn asunder. In the disjunction between the coding of the animal and the assemblage of humanity there is a space for a radical universality to emerge. Without thinking about it, our story returns us to the source.

In once sense, myths are a simulation within culture, a creation of one unified set of truths from out of the staggering diversity of facts surrounding us. Myth brings us into a

world where we can understand and interact with the undying powers confronting our mortal forms. In a postmodern light, myths are hyper-real, more real than real. They create a truth which consumes and digests other truths.

Ourobôrus, the encircling snake, swallows its tail. It was never meant as metaphor; from the ancient alchemical manuscript: *'One is All, and by it All, and for it All, and if it does not contain All, then All is Nothing'*. The word *dragon* carried me here on a mystic flight. Water King, Feathered Serpent, Mother of Chaos, most concrete of monsters whose terrible ambiguous meaning sets the bounds of reality. In the wyrm's coils the life of humankind unfolds its story.

II.

Birds command the sky, the water, the earth. On slender legs they dance, feathers shining among the branches, their calls ring out over the meadows. Fish and rats are ransomed from life by eye-feather-tallon assemblages. Insects are transmuted into birds. A world of seeds springs up beyond all bounds of territory.

The crow and the dove persist, enveloped in the cityscape. Our urban world overcodes for their abundance. These two birds were agents of the Ark; human memory has always had a place for them. The pigeon, or dove, signifies the peace of civilization, while the crow is as death: clever, inexorable, and ever present.

In the East, cranes are for luck, and wood ducks are lovers for life. In the West, the bluebird *is* happiness, and around the world, cuckoos call us to a deeper awakening in the gathering dusk.

Birdsong creates territory. The land lacks what the song creates. As earthlings we are kindred with our feathered cousins. Our singing sets the bounds of our space, with a tune we make a territory of a place in time, we whistle while we work. Layering rhythms, our stories set time apart from itself.

Locked in stone are fossil bones, gargantuan in size. Rhythms of life, written into rock, a deepening of time's mysteries. Terrible, magnificent reptiles whose songs once rent the world. In some enigmatic tragedy these creatures were dispossessed of their dominion. As ecosystems rebounded, the lack was nurtured by the richness of mousy mother's milk, and watched over, always, by birds.

Careful crows and hungry doves perched above our farms, we tilled the land, serenading our oxen. In the process of plowing, dinosaur fossils emerged. These immense bones were an expression of an ancient territory. Monsters called out across the dreamscape of the land's past. We had encroached into the limitless realm of dragons, beasts of earth and sky whose power stretches the bounds of our imagination.

The dragons are the quintessential symbol of East Asia, where they inhabited oceans, lakes, rivers, ponds, and wells. In their grace and wisdom they brought the rains. Cosmically the Dragon God encircles China, representing himself as a dragon king in each of the four cardinal seas, with a fifth Yellow Dragon representing the land at the center.

The civilization that emerged from out of the neolithic in China underwent a more stable development than any of the other agricultural centers, and dragons are still broadly expressed there. Many East Asian cultures have myths linking dragons with their oldest ancestors, believing in a mystical water-land-dragon-human assemblage. The expression

of their myth literally territorialized the people and land within the lifegiving water of the encompassing serpent.

Eastern dragons fixate on the flaming pearl. The pearl is a symbol of spiritual energy, enlightenment, and wisdom; it is a physical representation of infinite truth; it is the moon, as a reflection of the sun; it is the created universe, reflection of the infinite.

In juxtaposition, the Western dragon also fixates on its treasure, but in an inverse rhyme with the pearl and moon the dragon in his cave jealously guards the virgin. Dragons represent a masculine spirit: the *yang* essence, entwined with Imperial power in the East, and in the West symbolic of the most relatable human drive, lust. Throughout its many cultural formulations, the dragon is placed in contention with an opposing force:

Marduk, the thousand eyed, defeats *Tiamat*, primordial dragon goddess of the sea, darkness, and chaos. Each day Ra brings down fire to destroy Apep, the serpent of chaos. During Ragnarok, Thor will be fatally wounded while defeating Jörmungandr, the encircling World Serpent. Just as Persius slew the Kraken to save Andromeda, Saint George slays the dragon to save the virgin princess. The Archangel Michael casts down the dragon, Satan. Revelation also contrasts the dragon with the mother and divine child.

In complete contrast, the Zen tradition envisions the Buddha receiving the open blessing of the nine dragons, highest of spiritual realities. The nine dragons also adorned the cloak of the emperor. The Eastern phoenix meets the dragon in a dynamic dance, and in Taoism the tiger and the dragon create a complex balance of *yin* and *yang*.

What these various mythologies of the dragon all have in common is a rupture emerging from the interplay between archetypal forces. Just so the diversity of experiences in our world creates the rupture through which we awaken to a unity of being.

A story walks the boundary of a thing's unfathomability. Tales of dragons are elemental: coils of mystic serpents thrumming across the hills in rhythm with our hopes and fears. The living dream of dinosaur country evokes the monstrous reality of time. Arid bluffs are called the steaming jungles of eons past. Layers of land reveal a multiplicity of territories. Fossil analysis yields a rhythmic recapitulation of our mythology. Just as dragons emerged into myth, bounding our world with their incomprehensible presence, fossils of dinosaurs express the world's ongoing alteration across time, defining the presence of evolutionary forces. These expressions are understood through language: culture frames the interpretation of the territory in which we find ourselves.

Dinosaurs were the rage of Victorian society. The bones ennobled museum halls, bewildering forms from a lost world. But discovery is often curtailed by obstinate ego. Human theories vainly marked unassailable boundaries of their origins. Again and again fragile human geniuses were proven wrong, as layer upon layer were carefully chronicled, how science always seems to get the better of us. The cast of creatures grew more varied until the vast fossil fields of China revealed that small dinosaurs had developed feathers! The tiny dinosaur, *microraptor zhaoianus*, had wings upon all four limbs. Cataclysm for their enormous cousins had laid bare the planet for birds. What lessons of apocalyptic rupture awaken us now?