

**A Humorous Reinterpretation of Ancient and Modern Myths in
Murdoch Mysteries Television Series**

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Abstract

Used for centuries as means of clarifying certain phenomena and occurrences or the causes for unexplained events, myths have adorned human reasoning with metaphors and allegories that kindle imagination and hope. Throughout historical eras, myths have been continuously adapted to the public, starting with ancient myths up to the modern ones that include urban myths, and they have served various purposes such as justifying the origin of words, rituals or even actions.

Most of the myths with which we are familiar incorporate surrealistic creatures, among which one can discover vampires or werewolves, whose existence proves difficult to demonstrate since they inhabit the deserted realms of the Americas or the isolated European communities. Even though there is little evidence that Krampus haunted the houses of misbehaving children or that a reminiscent dinosaur swam in the Loch Ness, these mythical occurrences were reinterpreted within amusing approaches to taboo topics that might elicit wonder or cynicism. Such comic interpretations of one of the latest modern myths, the extra-terrestrials abducting cattle for experiments and the famous marks left by their UFOs, or the so-called “crop circles”, together with other Ancient or Medieval myths, can be identified in some of the episodes belonging to *Murdoch Mysteries* television series.

Keywords: *myths, humour, reinterpretation, Murdoch Mysteries TV series.*

1. Introduction

Just like contemporary stories that are supposed to instruct the reader and display some heroes' tragic destinies, myths are complex narrative pieces, bearing sacred forms of human and celestial influences belonging to a prehistoric society. As the historical term of *myth* evolved, it was assigned multiple significations, either transparent or intricate, which varied according to the geographical positioning or the teller's personal perspective. The notion *myth* comprises meanings ranging from a work of fiction (or a figment of imagination) to the explanation of a collective memory that indicates how the world and humanity were created, and even prove the ancient construction of archetypes (Kernbach 1989: 346).

The most famous classic myths that people can recall are the Greek and the Roman ones that exploit topics connected to the genesis of earth, of constellations, of the Sun and the Moon, of poisonous and healing herbs, of beasts and earthly animals. Even though they might seem entertaining stories, ancient peoples conferred myths a religious purpose, every aspect of life being governed by at least one deity. Some of the topics approached by myths are heroic deeds, prodigious actions on the battlefield, passionate love stories, fantastic stories dealing with gods and monsters, tragic life stories about pride and downfall or about family schisms, stories regarding supernatural beast that confronted men and lovely stories that show how characters could shapeshift into animals and plants (Osborn and Burghess 2006: 21).

These myths illustrate regional particularities, according to the tribes or other forms of social organizations that live in a specific climate or follow a special calendar. For example, Norse mythology explains why wolves chase the Sun and the Moon, Hindu mythology depicts animals as reincarnation of Gods; Inuit mythology explains where caribous came from, Babylonian mythology states that Marduk was the first God that manipulated chaos and established a sense of order in the universe. (Osborn and Burghess 2006: 25).

2. General Considerations about Myths. Types of Myths

According to Eliade's *Traité d'histoire des religions* (1970), specialists cannot offer a general and exhaustive definition of myths that would be comprehended by amateurs, since it is impossible to provide a definition to encompass the whole typology of myths and all their functions in the traditional and archaic societies. Myths are extremely complex cultural realities that can be approached from multiple and complementary perspectives. As far as Claude Lévi-Strauss is concerned, myths are the product of ancient man's creative imagination, whose savage mind conceives logical patterns of understanding that allows the man to be environmentally assimilated. Thus, myths can be interpreted as: 1) revealing society's fundamental emotions; 2) attempting to explain mysterious phenomena (be they astrological, meteorological, etc.); 3) reflecting social structures and social relations; 4) exuding repressed emotions or primitive archetypes (Vulcănescu 1987: 26).

In his compendium entitled *Aspects du Mythe* (1963), Eliade synthesized a definition of myths that acknowledges the fact that they attest the history of supernatural beings' facts; they are considered to be utterly true (for they are connected with surrounding realities) and sacred (for they are the result of supernatural artistry). At the same time, they relate to a "creation" of some sort, or to a social common law, this being the reason why myths embody the paradigms of all significant human actions. By perceiving their nuances, myths can provide information of how things occurred and can be manipulated, being relived as a form of uplifting holy energy of remembered and repeated events (Kernbach 1989: 349).

Vico (1668-1744) considered that myths are stories that present the truth ideally so that the characters found in them, which have become famous for some reason, fulfil some expectations and are given the credit, even though they sometimes fail to fulfil their objectives. Vico formulated four distinct stages in the evolution of myths: 1) humanising and idolatrising nature; 2) symbolizing the conquest of nature and its transformation; 3) endowing gods with human and social values; 4)

humanising gods and removing any allegoric meaning (Kernbach 1989: 347).

The wind of change in readers' mentality blows in the 20th century, as new global movements of myth analysis emerge: psychoanalysis, structuralism, existentialism and some forms of historicism (Kernbach 1989: 348). In his *Natural History of Religions* (in Freud 1919), David Hume observed that humans tend to design gods as they reproduce human particularities that ancient people were familiar and comfortable with. Concurring with Hume's vision, Sigmund Freud scrutinised tribal beliefs in *taboo*, which were prohibited social practices that banned the members of a tribe to perform incest (caused by repressed sexual impulses) or any other forms of religious restrictions for the fear of death or other forms of collective neurosis (Freud 1919: 31-35).

In his *Dictionary of General Mythology* (*Dicționar de mitologie generală*), Kernbach comprised the psychoanalytical perspectives of myths debated both by Freud and Jung. According to Kernbach, Freud endeavoured, the same as Jung, to consider mythological archetypes a collective dream of humanity produced by the neurosis of not having reached sexual pleasure. On the other hand, Jung considered myths as an expression of collective unconscious, all their archetypes being identified psychoanalytically in the mythological literary works of every civilisation, as he followed the track of the transformations and symbols of what he called *libido* (Kernbach 1989: 348).

Myths have been divided into diverse categories: origin myths (such as cosmogonic myths), natural myths (those that explain the cause of natural phenomena) and historical myths (those that remind us of epic battles). Mellenthin and Shapiro introduce the novices interested in legends and heroes into the world of classical mythology via their online book *Mythology Unbound: An Online Textbook for Classical Mythology*. In the chapter *Three Types of Myths: Aetiological, Historical, and Psychological*, the two authors review only the types of myths mentioned in the title of the chapter for the sake of laying the foundations of interpreting myths. The first category of myths are aetiological/etiologal myths that

express the reason why something was created or explain why animals/plants/stars/humans act in a certain way. The second category of myths analysed by the authors are historical myths that keep the memory of a sacred moment alive, for instance epic journeys or the moment a nation is created. The last category mentioned in the chapter is psychological myths, in which feelings are not proven aetiologically, but seen as divine forces that influence a mortal's mind and feelings. For instance, Venus and Cupid, deities of love, were thought to be responsible for making people lose their mind and act irrationally (p. 246).

Modern mythology adopted character typologies and models of heroism inspired from antiquity into contemporary arts. The latter are part of the popular culture, such as comic books that compare modern heroes to ancient ones, or novels written in the 20th century that became main-stream and introduced modern monsters inherently born or created with human and supernatural features, such as vampires and werewolves (Wiesen 2013). As indicated on www.encyclopedia.com modern mythology "recycles" ancient mythology and adapts it to the consumerist public who expect certain expectations or personal theories to be confirmed.

3. A Humorous Work on Myths in *Murdoch Mysteries* Television Series

In the following paragraphs, humorous reinterpretations of myths will be presented as they developed in a Canadian television series *Murdoch Mysteries*, based on the series of novels eponymously named *Murdoch Mysteries*. The television series presents facts and events from Toronto in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, where a gifted police detective solves many of the cases he is assigned by using avant-garde methods of detection.

According to the typology of myths presented in the subchapter above, each humorous scene will be contextually presented and integrated in one of the three varieties of myths, then the original lines

will be rendered as they appear in the episodes, and afterwards the discourse/conversation will be pragma-stylistically analysed to illustrate the humorous reinterpretations of myths.

3.1. Martians

The first example demonstrates how a modern myth preserves the features of an aetiological myth. In season 1, episode 13, a French Canadian is found hanging by his scarf in a tall tree, in a middle of a field around which there are no footsteps, only some strange crop circles and some cows whose guts were suctioned by some narrow pipes. Detective Murdoch arrives at the scene of the crime and debates the possible way in which the dead body was lifted there. Constable Crabtree suspects that Martians may be involved, but Murdoch assures him there must be a terrestrial explanation. Murdoch shows the inspector a replica of the scene of the crime as he believes to be a two-man operation: one shoots a grappling hook from one top of a tree to the other, launches the dead body, then the first man, then the other man, they both rise the body and fake a hanging.

Brackenreid: You're crackers! Why not just roll the body in a ditch?

Murdoch: This is the only earthly means that I could device.

Brackenreid: Earthly?

Murdoch: Constable Crabtree believes Martians may be involved.

Brackenreid: Martians? You're both crackers! If it does turn out to be a Martian, I want him handcuffed, booked and sitting in that cell.

Murdoch: Them...

Brackenreid: I forgot, it's a two-Martian operation.

(*"Murdoch Mysteries" – The Annoying Red Planet, S01E13*)

Even if Inspector Brackenreid is familiarised with Murdoch's theories, he ironically criticises the killers' *modus operandi*. He uses the

informal British adjective *cracker* to point out the ridiculousness of the situations. He would resort to a pragmatic, down to earth method (he emphasizes his theory through the adverb *just* and adverbial phrase (*in a ditch*) and he contrasts the two variants that do not fulfil his expectations: either intricate manoeuvres to hang a body, or an unrecorded creature that starts killing for unknown reasons. The pronoun *both*, backed by the adjective *crackers*, reinforces the idea that the prodigy detective was corrupted by his protégé into overthinking impossible alternatives. The Inspector ironically mocks the so-called leads and comprises them in an absurd resolution, his lines referring to exactly the opposite intention: he wants the members of the two-Martian operation, as he calls it, handcuffed in his cells, without any fuss or dead-ends. Crabtree's amusing interpretation reminds the public how Ancient Astronaut Theories are used to explain the cause for out of the ordinary natural events, buildings and unusual animal deaths.

3.2. Vampires

The second example depicts how a sort of historically attested creature, reimagined in a modern manner, could have committed murder, which sounds impossible and absurd at the same time, and might induce laughter in those who do not take this approach personally, and do not fall for a Romantic vision of vampires, like our characters.

The recently published novel *Dracula* by Bram Stoker stirs the imagination of the inhabitants of Toronto, especially in a girls-only college where a body of a young, drowned girl was found, with fangs-like bites on her neck. It seems that most of the girls attending that college received mysterious letters from a Mr V. who allures them into a sort of tomb, kisses them to unconsciousness and drinks their blood. Constable Crabtree is a fan of metaphysics and drives his inspector crazy with his theories about aliens, ghosts and so on, as he considers himself an aficionado of supernatural occurrences, while the others

suspect something closer to the mundane life had to do with the poor girl's demise.

Crabtree: It's a vampire. Without a doubt.

Brackenreid: What the hell is a vampire?

Crabtree: It's a vile creature, sir. A human corpse that rises from its grave after the sun goes down; and to sustain its undead existence, it drinks the blood of the living.

Brackenreid: [Crabtree] is beginning to worry me.

Murdoch: Sir, a new novel entitled *Dracula* has been causing quite a stir. It's based, of course, on a vampire.

Crabtree: It's a chilling tale, although, I must say, I find Bram Stoker's prose long-winded.

Brackenreid: Bram Stoker? The manager of the Lyceum Theatre in London? So a bloke who spends his time ironing actors' trousers writes a book and so our victim got killed by a vampire. [...] Werewolves, Martians, ghosts, now vampires. What next, Crabtree? Abominable snowmen?

Crabtree: Sir, that is a fictitious creature most likely dreamed by someone who saw a sasquatch.

Brackenreid: Get out!

(*"Murdoch Mysteries" – Bloodlust, S04E11*)

Inspector Brackenreid is not up to date about supernatural beings, or about the latest literary compositions, so, coming across Crabtree's already extravagant theories, he shows reluctance and even concern about Crabtree's passion (emphasis on the premodifier *vile*) in exploring gruesome topics. Brackenreid makes use of consecutive verbs *beginning* (the first stage in a process, something that has not happened before) and *to worry* (his attempt to show sympathy towards someone he would usually bring back to its senses). Brackenreid decodes and summarises Crabtree's message: a manager that irons pants in London

decides all of a sudden to write a fiction book about a country in Eastern Europe that caused the death of a girl in Canada.

After ironically downgrading Stoker's importance (the indefinite article *a* and the noun *bloke*), whose job is not actually performing (*who spends his time ironing actor's trousers*), the Inspector expresses his preference for facts and motives, not abstract creatures. He rebukes Crabtree's waste of resources of time to identify what creature could have killed the poor girl. When Crabtree corrects the Inspector as he mentions *abominable snowmen*, that is the last straw and, as soon as Brackenreid hears the name of the local monster: *sasquatch* (a name probably derived from the Canadian province *Saskatchewan*), he throws Crabtree out of his office, employing as a supreme argument the imperative phrasal verb *get out*.

The vampire myth, which was one of the many mythical creatures that haunted the minds of Medieval peoples – specifically *ghosts, revenants, voodoo* and *Haitian zombies* – horrified humanity. For religious reasons, the myth served to remind the parishioners that Christian rituals performed in doubt may unfold tortured souls that will roam forever) and for social reasons, it was meant to keep the believers on a tight leash and exploit their fears before they err. Contrary to the public's expectations, this historical myth, which possessed modern and erotic interpretations in Stoker's novel, was approached rationally as the characters did not lose their temper and kept a level-headed perspective on the case.

3.3. Lake monster

This example demonstrates how a modern myth preserves the features of another historical myth that was debated in the 19th century: the lake monsters dwelling in the Canadian Great Lakes, but whose silhouette was barely photographed or witnessed. In season 7, episode 7, all the constables are summoned to come to the beach and look for evidence that reveals the location of a possible lake monster which is supposed to inhabit Lake Ontario. A young girl is found floating on

Lake Ontario with strange marks on her body, as if she had been bitten by a sea monster. Detective Murdoch and the Inspector return to Lake Ontario and have another look at the scene of the crime where they both see a monster swimming and swaying in the middle of the lake. Constable Crabtree considers that monsters would never show themselves in such a domestic environment.

Crabtree: A lake monster, sir?

Brackenreid: (*annoyed*) Yes, Crabtree, a lake monster. Go and bring me my suit. (*whispering*) If the missus telephones, don't mention the lake monster. I don't want her watering down my scotch again. [...] Crabtree, what do you know about this demon in the lake?

Crabtree: I'm not entirely convinced, sir.

Brackenreid: You don't believe in sea monsters?

Crabtree: Well, obviously there are monsters in the sea, sir. That's why they call them sea monsters. But I've never heard of any *lake* monster. I just can't imagine anything so dastardly living in fresh water.

Brackenreid: You're telling me that you believe in werewolves, vampires, Martians, Venusians, zombies, curses, voodoo, ghosts and sea monsters, but a creature in Lake Ontario, that both the Detective and I saw, is beyond the scope of your otherwise vivid imagination?

Crabtree: Sir, I can't attest to what you witnessed. I'm afraid I remain a sceptic.

(*"Murdoch Mysteries" - Loch Ness Murdoch, S07E07*)

Crabtree's logic is exasperating, as he does not completely accept the explanation and hopes that his superiors might come into their senses: he believes in every paranormal occurrence, event or ritual, but he will not accept that there could be a monster living in fresh water. The viewers should be impressed by his supposition and think over

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Crabtree's statement, who usually jumps to conclusions and thinks that mythological beasts are responsible for all sorts of crimes.

Inspector Brackenreid is known for his suspicions as far as monsters are concerned, and he slightly fears what Mrs Brackenreid might do. The Inspector eases the tension by the self-deprecating observation regarding how Mrs Brackenreid treats her husband's strange behaviour – Brackenreid uses the phrasal verb *water down* with the noun *scotch* (his favourite drink that some think he savours too much) and the adverb *again* as a common practice the Inspector is too familiar with. Crabtree shows his doubt about this particular monster (the modal verb *can't*), acknowledging that there are monsters in seas (the adverb *obviously*), but he uses an antithesis to prove how unnatural this monster is, consisting of the adjective *dastardly* and the adverbial *fresh water*.

Inspector Brackenreid, with his irritated tone, cannot accept that Crabtree backs out from investigating a monster, which, on a regular basis, he would enthusiastically do, showing no hesitation. Thus, the contrast between what a character would normally do and what he actually does creates a comic effect, just as the Inspector boosts it with his own confusion.

The preposition *beyond* and the noun *scope* are used ironically to ridicule Crabtree's complex concepts. The possessive adjective *your*, the adverb *otherwise* (that shows other circumstances), the adjective *vivid* and noun *imagination* summarize euphemistically all the Inspector's discontents regarding Crabtree's change of heart especially when two lucid superiors (the pronoun *both*), saw something in a real location (*Lake Ontario*), reinforcing Crabtree's disbelief. Despite all the arguments, Crabtree is still not convinced, but he replies to the Inspector diplomatically (the personal pronoun *I*, the modal *can* in a negative form and the verb legally used *attest*).

3.4. Werewolves and lycanthropy

The following episode brings to attention an example of a Native American psychological myth, which is largely examined by anthropologists and psychiatrists: the issues of totemism and lycanthropy. In season 2, episode 12, some members of the Canadian social elite are killed one by one by some wild animals. The latest victim and his dogs were attacked by a wolf, as an eye-witness testifies. Consequently, a tracker is brought to the scene to help the inquiry, but there are no paw prints to indicate where the wolf headed, only shoe prints. The witness reinforces the tracker's conclusion: he saw a wolf mauling those dogs, but he only saw a man leaving the scene of the crime, not a wolf.

Murdoch: I'm not entirely convinced we're looking for a wolf. When was the last time you heard of a wolf attack?

Brackenreid: I don't know, but I know they happen. They're what make the Brothers Grimm so bloody grim. [...]

Tramp: It was a wolf I saw in that building, but it was a man that came out!

Crabtree: I think we can all agree that the witness was describing a werewolf.

Brackenreid: Bloody hell, Crabtree. It wasn't a werewolf.

Crabtree: It was a full moon last night, sir.

Brackenreid: There was a man, and there was a wolf. And the man was using his wolf as a weapon.

Crabtree: But, sir, the witness only saw the one leave.

Brackenreid: He was three sheets to the wind in a gale. Who knows what he saw?

Tracker: Well, sir, uh, it's my understanding that the witness didn't say he saw a wolf exactly. Just a flash. It was the sounds that he heard - the snarling and the growling - that made him think it was a wolf.

Brackenreid: So what do you think it was?

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Tracker: A windigo, sir.

Brackenreid: A windigo?

Tracker: It's the name that we give to an evil spirit that lives up in the northern woods. It takes possession of the people and makes them hungry for human flesh.

Crabtree: Cannibals. Now, that's a chilling thought. You know, I've heard that in the islands near Borneo...

Brackenreid: Crabtree!

Murdoch: Actually, sir, there may be something to both of these arguments.

Brackenreid: "Oh, not you too, Murdoch."

Murdoch: I'm not suggesting anything supernatural, but there are people who believe themselves to be animals.

Brackenreid: So you're saying this is some kind of lunatic with a taste for human blood?

Murdoch: It would explain the feral nature of the attacks.

[...]

Murdoch: So, have you an opinion, Dr Roberts?

Dr Roberts: The condition you're describing is lycanthropy. The term is applied to individuals who, for psychological reasons, believe themselves to be an animal, most often a wolf. Hence, lycanthropy's traditional association with the werewolf myth.

Tracker: Actually, sir, I think he may be a shaman.

(*"Murdoch Mysteries" - Werewolves, S02E12*)

Inspector Brackenreid plays upon words about the Brothers *Grimm* and the *grim* folk tales and stories they write about, but as far as the inquest goes, he considers that the culprit manipulated the wolf as a murder weapon. Crabtree does not miss the chance to advance a theory about a supernatural creature: he uses the pronouns *we* and *all*, the modal *can* with an emphasizing meaning, the verb *agree*, and the infamous noun *werewolf*. Brackenreid disapproves with the witness's reliability, as he uses a British expression used in the navy: *to be three*

sheets to the wind in a gale, which would be used to refer to someone who drank too much. The tracker, who is a naturalised native Canadian, offers plausible explanations for those who lived in a similar culture: the nouns *windigo* and *shaman* have no direct translation, offering this episode a spot of originality and authenticity.

Dr. Roberts presents a psychological explanation: he uses the scientific term *lycanthropy*, pertaining to the scientific jargon, but his speech is clear enough for all the members of the group to understand. Dr. Roberts logically explains the connection between lycanthropy and the werewolf myth. As a cultural reaction to scientific proficiency, the tracker replies simply, even bluntly, that the culprit might in fact be one who shares the same pre-Christian background as him – a *shaman*. As a comic effect, Crabtree digresses as soon as he listens to the tracker's hypothesis, and his wheels start spinning all the way to the remote islands of Borneo, where he could find out-of-the-ordinary perpetrators (the noun *cannibals*).

3.5. Krampus

This example points out a case of an old, religious myth that is on the edge of becoming modern and psychological: the myth about Krampus, a devilish creature met in the German culture that accompanied Saint Nicholas, later Santa Claus, and devoured misbehaving children. In a special episode dedicated to Christmas holidays, Inspector Brackenreid resents Christmas ever since he was a child because he did not get the gifts he wanted and quarrelled with his father, which made Krampus haunt him regularly, starting that Christmas night. When a murder occurs in the park and some witness a monster-like creature with horns and giant hooves lurks around in the dark, he feels guilty that this monster travelled with him all the way to Canada, even though that was not the case. The constables in Station House Number 4, without suspecting what is troubling the Inspector, want to put up a Christmas tree as tall as the ceiling, but Brackenreid loathes the idea.

Brackenreid: Bloody Germans and their idiotic traditions! [...] This is a place of work, not a bloody herbarium! [...] I hate this bloody season. At least, at New Year's, all you have to do is get drunk and kiss the wife! Ha ha ha!

Crabtree: What about Easter, sir?

Brackenreid: Don't get me started on that bloody ghost-story.

(*"Murdoch Mysteries" - A Merry Murdoch Christmas*)

In almost every sentence that he utters, the Inspector uses the expletive attribute four times in five different sentences, proving how much he scorns religious holidays ostentatiously. He considers the German habit of adorning Christmas tree a nonsense (which, in fact, is a displaced conflict, he hates the German traditions for reminding him of the German demon Krampus), lowering its aesthetical significance (the noun *herbarium* with a pejorative meaning and the adjective *bloody*). The Inspector's favourite moment seems to be the New Year's Eve, a holiday that implies inebriation, the perfect moment to show tokens of affection to his wife. Crabtree attempts to change the Inspector's state of mind by bringing about another celebration, which is a also mixture of pagan and Christian elements, but he also touches on another sensitive topic that the Inspector dislikes.

The reason why Inspector Brackenreid thinks he is haunted by the creature is his guilty conscience due to the fact that he underestimated his father's efforts, which makes him believe what he would usually question: how could a Medieval creature migrate from the Old Continent to Canada just to frighten the inhabitants of Toronto? In any other circumstances, he would have dismissed this theory from the start, but his grumpiness connected and contrasted with the general joy of the celebrations offers this work on a semi-psychological-semi-historical myth a humorous interpretation.

3.6. Oedipus

In an episode dedicated to a highly contested science (psychoanalysis), the script explores an infamous psychological myth (the Oedipal myth), which is mistakenly taken as an ordinary, by-the-book diagnosis. It inflames the spirits in the constabulary and makes the public – who is familiar to this sort of psychic analysis – augh, or at least smile.

Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, together with Carl Jung (a fellow psychologist and a dear friend), and Sandor Ferenczi (a member of the Hungarian psychanalyst school), gathered with some American or Canadian doctors for a lecture in Toronto, but they provoke a row in a restaurant, and they all get arrested. The fight started because Dr Freud received a death-threat letter in German, the author of which is suspected to be one of his fellow doctors, including Dr Severn, who copies Dr Freud's image completely. A battle between the best methods of psychoanalysing the murderer commences: Dr Freud brings into play his techniques for analysing the psyche of the suspects, while Carl Jung uses word association to detect any possible deviations.

Jung: You think this is about my dreams?

Freud: One of these men wishes to kill me. What else am I to think?

Jung: You could start by stop making assumptions.

Murdoch: Henry, find out how this letter got to the restaurant.

Jung: Dr Freud doesn't need you to speak for him.

Severn: I will speak for Dr Freud...

Freud: This is about the subconscious expression of displaced Oedipal rage.

Brackenreid: (*infuriated*) Enough! Sit down and shut up! (*To Murdoch*) Can't we just spank this lot and send 'em home?

(*"Murdoch Mysteries" – Murdoch on the Couch, S16E13*)

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Freud is Jung's friend, but Jung considers Freud also a second father, which leads to the Oedipal rage that consists of usurping the father and keeping the mother for himself. Dr. Severn tries to imitate Freud in any possible way, from his dress code to his favourite cigars, this being the reason why he feels the urge to speak for Freud. The psychologists start an argument based on their own theories, but for those who are not familiar with their suppositions, the entire scene might look like a snobby dispute between scientists, where elements of psychological jargon overwhelm the bystanders. Dr. Freud makes the most of his favourite noun phrases (*subconscious expression of displaced Oedipal rage*), whereas Dr. Jung fights back when he is accused by Dr. Freud's oneiric interpretations on Dr. Jung revealed criminal intentions (Jung uses the preposition *about*, the possessive *my* and the plural noun *dreams*). Consequently, Dr. Severn, protects Dr. Freud from any of the accusations.

Inspector Brackenreid does not fall for this sort of discussions, so he starts giving orders imperatively (*Sit down, Shut up!*) and attempts ironically to dismiss the whole affair quickly. Thus, he uses the verb *spank*, as if these grown men are insufferable children, and the demonstrative adjective *this* preceding the noun *lot* trivializes the importance of this scientific group.

Dr. Julia Ogden met Dr Freud in Austria and agreed to take part in the so-called speech therapies, but during those sessions she spoke mostly about her husband, Detective Murdoch. When Dr. Freud, instead of answering the Detective's questions, starts scrutinizing his reactions and offers a verdict, the Detective becomes stiff.

Dr Freud: You're merely conforming to my expectations, Detective. You are a typical retentive.

Julia: Dr Freud believes that infantile development is defined by pleasure-seeking at distinct stages. If you can't derive sufficient satisfaction at any stage, one becomes fixated.

Murdoch: What stage would I be fixated at?

Freud: The anal.

Julia: It's a complex theory, William.

Freud: Retentives are rigid, socially inhibited, they resist new ideas. You have an expression in English, huh? A stick in the *ground*?

Julia and Murdoch: In the *mud*.

Freud: Well, it is, of course, complicated by an Oedipus conflict resulting in repression and unconscious feelings of inferiority.

Murdoch: Oedipus? You're talking about the man who killed his father in order to marry his own mother.

Brackenreid: What is this Oedipus conflict?

Julia: A boy's lust for his mother leads to conflict with his father that he fears he intends to castrate him and therefore wants to kill his fathers and claim the mother for himself.

Murdoch: You think it pertains to me?

Jung: It pertains to all men.

(*"Murdoch Mysteries"* – *Murdoch on the Couch*, S16E13)

According to Freud's theory, energy channels in life through five distinctive psychosexual development stages: the oral stage (from 0 to 1 year), the anal stage (1-3 years), the phallic stage (3-6), the latent stage (6-puberty) and the genital stage (from puberty to adulthood). In Freud's view the word "sexual" bears a general meaning related to energy which is oriented in a certain region and needs to get released in order for the individual to feel pleasure. The anal stage focuses on the pleasure of defecating and of self-control, such as potty training, in which restrictions about when and where to ease oneself are imposed to the child. If a child is potty trained too harsh, he forms an anal-retentive personality who is compulsively neat, punctual, stubborn and obedient to the laws. Fixations occur when the stage wasn't properly satisfied, thus the person suffers from frustration (McLeod 2023).

Murdoch misinterprets the meaning of the *anal stage*, thinking about homosexuality, but since he is a devout Catholic and considers

sodomy a sin, he is speechless with shock for a moment. Murdoch disagrees with Freud's analysis due to the legal aggravation of the subject (homosexuality was illegal in Canada until the middle of the 20th century, and everyone had the legal duty to report any homosexual activity, otherwise they would be charged with obstructing the course of justice and face jail for many years, just like the homosexuals in question). Dr. Julia Ogden reassures Murdoch that this theory is not what it seems when somebody first hears about it (she emphasises on the adjective *complex*, then on the noun *theory*). In the light of this theory Freud describes Murdoch laconically.

The anal phase is just the beginning of Dr. Freud's examination: the *coup de grâce* of the whole affair comes when Dr. Freud mentions the oedipal conflict that stirs Murdoch's frustrations (the nouns *repression* and noun phrases *unconscious feelings of inferiority* that pertain to the psychological jargon). Detective Murdoch summarizes the complexity of Sophocles' ancient myth in a sequence of insanely actions with the help of more or less brutal verbs, possessive adjectives and subordinate conjunctions. Dr. Jung's line do not make the theory easier to accept.

Dr. Freud's opinion intrigued the psychologists of his days and it still produces some reactions among those who think that these theories seem far-fetched. Almost nobody in the station house is familiar to psychology, except, of course, Dr. Ogden, so this is why the fragment might seem funny only for those who know what these theories refer to and who possess a particular set of knowledge. For a better understanding of the characters' reactions, the viewer should concentrate his attention on several episodes to observe how the plot thickens, how characters and jokes evolve throughout the series. In the following example, Inspector Brackenreid required Dr. Freud's assistance, but Freud soon gets on his nerves.

Brackenreid: Then I wonder if you could offer me some guidance. The missus, my wife Margaret, has been having some troubles of late. [...] She's been harping on about everything. I'm working too much, I'm eating too much, I'm drinking too much.

Freud: Are you drinking too much?

Brackenreid: Well, I don't think so. Same as ever. Uh, but here's where you come in, Doctor. I don't think it's me that she's worried about.

Freud: Ah! You think her true concern is displaced.

Brackenreid: Ah. Our son, Bobby, has had a spot of bother with the law. He killed a man. Well, two men. I see. And now he's on the run. If he comes back, they could hang him.

Freud: All sons are in conflict with their fathers. I was with my father, my sons are with me.

Brackenreid: But Bobby and I have never had any trouble.

Freud: Ah, you are the police. Any crime your son commits is an attack on you, a manifest expression of his subconscious hatred of you.

Brackenreid: Why would he hate me?

Freud: Well, a child is born and falls in love with his mother. When he becomes aware of his father's intimate role, he wishes to usurp him.

Brackenreid: You're saying my son wants to..... With his own mother? I was going to ask you for an autograph! Get out! Not another bloody word!

("Murdoch Mysteries" – Murdoch on the Couch, S16E13)

Dr. Freud flaunts his theory into Inspector Brackenreid's face, without a previous warning about the hidden messages and the metaphorical interpretation. Even though Bobby impulsively killed two men, just like Oedipus did in the myth, Bobby was not aware of any oracle that he would kill his father and mate with his mother,

which makes the theory sound a little unhinged. Oedipus' story does not actually fit to any interpretations Brackenreid would expect.

Freud's intentions are to cure, not to offend, but he seems to err on every occasion he opens his mouth. The humorous effect is that the characters, especially those with a short fuse, are not in contact with the latest psychoanalytic discoveries, they are not familiar with ancient mythology or medical deciphering of actions, so they interpret ad litteram every diagnosis. Dr. Freud is too full of himself to realise that his theories sound unusual for the untrained individuals, so he blunders with every opportunity he gets, making his observations sound problematic and slightly obsessive.

In the attempt of receiving a professional piece of advice, Brackenreid presents the tensions in his family and his son's problems (he uses the phrase *spot of bother*). Brackenreid seems to be ignorant to all the signals conveyed by his family. On the other hand, Freud uses his specialised terms to analyse Brackenreid's dilemma (the nouns *concern*, *conflict*, *hatred*; the adjective *displaced*, *subconscious*; the verb and verb phrases *usurp*, *fall in love*), but as the Inspector listens to Freud's diagnosis, he is appalled at the explanations provided by the famous specialist. The Inspector is so disgusted at the idea of his son soiling the matrimonial bed, that he cannot even mention the ghastly term, hence the suspension in his discourse. From that moment on, Freud is a persona non grata in his constabulary, Brackenreid loses his respect for him (he uses the phrasal verb *get out*) and reminds him the honourable intention he just missed (*I was going to ask you for an autograph.*)

Conclusions

Classical myths entertain older generations, instruct the youngsters, prevail symbolic histories involving the dynamics between humans and nature, between individuals and their peers or between individuals and society as a whole. Their religious function may have faded away, but these extraordinary stories strive to explain the unexplainable: the

genesis of the universe and of the religious rituals, the worldly and godly hierarchies, the kings' authority inherited from gods. These stories might make the readers feel better and more comfortable knowing that ancient heroes suffered tragic destinies.

Myths prevailed in maintaining order, encouraging a socially adequate behaviour by hindering crime or other forms of misconduct, even though people admitted that these stories were not flawless. The common denominator of myths is the authoritarian subtext, since nobody dared to question the verity of the facts or prove these teachings wrong.

Modern myths also aim to promote celebrities that lived in the last decades, who overcame difficulties and proved to become at least as famous as the classics, especially for generation Z, so connected to technology and contemporary personalities. Mass-media, as well as literature and sciences, capitalized ancient myths rooted in European culture (demons, revenants), Native American culture (the Algonquian legends) and contemporary myths such as aliens abducting men for the purpose of attracting young people's interest towards exciting historical issues.

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