

Article

## Hyde's Deformity: The Literary Myth of the Fallen Protohuman

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**Abstract:** Drawing from a variety of examples in world literature, this paper expounds a pervasive, diachronic literary motif in which an early human—the mythic protohuman—exists superior to contemporary humans, whose greatness is reflected in physical stature and aesthetic form, and whose eventual spiritual “fall” is physically manifested in diminished stature and deformity. Indo-European creation myths, the biblical *Genesis*, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Stevenson's *Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde*, and Tolkien's *Middle Earth* legendaria are examined in support of the thesis that Western literature has recapitulated the mythological notion that the archetypal ancestor possessed a quality and grace that has been slowly lost in time and is represented by a corresponding physical decay. This notion, then, when read as anagogical symbol, serves to furnish society with insights into reiterated social constructs preoccupied with human degeneration and decay, as well as questions about its beliefs concerning humankind's origin, nature, and destiny.

**Keywords:** comparative mythology; archetypal literary criticism; comparative mythology; archetypal literary criticism; anagogical symbol; Stevenson; Swift

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Following the seminal work of Joseph Campbell in his *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, the field of mythological study in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has experienced revitalized interest in the characterization of a universal substratum of human mythology. In contrast to the *particularists*, who in their analysis choose to emphasize the differences between myths and the inherent inadequacy of a single theoretical schema ([1], p. 148), such *comparativists* lead an interdisciplinary effort that weds the disciplines of psychology, literature, anthropology, history, and religion to this end. More than six decades after the publication of Campbell's thesis, the fallout is a prodigious array of methodologies from which to invoke a lens for comparative mythological analysis: linguistic,

psychological, historicist, structural, and even biological. Because the scope of any paper attempting to contribute to this body of work is necessarily vast and interdisciplinary, I choose to restrict myself to the exposition of a single *literary* motif recapitulated by Western authors, to focus what might otherwise outrun the scope of a paper and evolve into a longer, book-length thesis. This endeavor is pursued in the spirit of Northrop Frye's reading of myth as literary anagogic symbol ([2], p. 58) a symbol that—in this particular case—furnishes society with an acknowledgement of reiterated preoccupations with “fall” and degeneration. The stakes of such a reading will be further revisited in the concluding reflection.

The purpose of this paper is to elucidate a common and pervasive motif in the Western literary tradition: an ancient human ancestor who exceeds the modern-day human in health, stature, and physical quality; a “mythic protohuman” now lost to time by some precipitous fall. Whether by moral decay or by similar mythic processes, this now-fallen protohuman devolves into the human of today, diminished in health and stature, if not entirely deformed, reflecting the loss of his once great cosmic status. By first examining the biblical narrative of early humanity and then considering the derived literature of Christian allegorists, I intend to firmly characterize a trend of diminishing physical prowess as a reflection of diminished spiritual merit in the Christian mythic history and in the literature of its students. Secondly, I intend to address several prominent examples of the literary myth in English-language fiction, using Mr. Edward Hyde—the eponymous villain of Stevenson's celebrated 19th century novella—as a model and symbol for the antithesis of the fallen protohuman. Finally diverging from the Western literary tradition, I intend to explore the incidence of the mythic protohuman in non-Western literary canons, demonstrating the universality of the myth despite its modern perpetuation by authors and consequent security in the cultural consciousness.

“So God created man in his own image.” (*KJV*; Gen. 1:27). Thus begins what is arguably the most famous account of ancient humanity's origins. Wrought from the dust (Gen. 2:7) and given “dominion...over all the earth” (Gen. 1:26); the first man of the Hebrew Bible is not merely one of God's creatures; but his agent. The Biblical Adam is a proxy for divine sovereignty made competent for the task of stewardship by virtue of his likeness to the divine; the implication being that man is godlike in his very appearance. Of course; this blessed state is not to endure.

Humankind's health—indeed, its immortality—is forfeited upon his first transgression from the law of God, prefacing a long history of gradual physical decay with decreasing spiritual merit. Man, the masterpiece of God's creation, once called “good”, is declared “dust, and unto dust [shall he] return” (Gen. 3:19). What follows in the Genesis account is a long line of antediluvian patriarchs who—with few exceptions—enjoy progressively shorter lifespans. Adam lives to be 929; Seth, 912; Enosh, 905; Methuselah and Noah buck the trend at 969 and 950, respectively, although both of their respective sons fail to reach two-thirds of their fathers' ages (Gen. 5). Following Noah, the average age from Shem to Abraham drops to only 317, with Abraham dying at a comparatively puerile 175 (Gen. 11). Moses dies at 120 (Deut. 34:7). Eventually, after countless generations, the reader arrives at the Book of Psalms, where the Psalmist measures the human lifespan at an utterly relatable “threescore and ten” (Psalm 90:10).

What have Christian commentators made of these numbers? Pre-modern thinkers like Luther quite literally believed that the soundness of these patriarchs' bodies can be attributed to the fact that sin,

only lately entered into the world, had less time to work its ill effects on the young creation ([3], p. 449). On the other hand, many contemporary commentators, including British theologian Kenneth Anderson Kitchen, chalk them down to nothing more than “pure myth” ([4], p. 40). While questions about the historicity or reality of such characters and their actual ages are irrelevant to the scope of this paper, more literary interpretations of these lifespans can prove useful in developing the myth of the ancient protohuman. Espousing a more symbolic view, theologians such as Claus Westermann claim that these seemingly fantastic ages serve to point the reader to a time in the “unimaginable distant past” ([5], p. 354). Donald V. Etz claims that the “larger than life” quality ascribed to the patriarchs by their ages paints them as better than their descendants ([6], p. 176). Interestingly, K. Luke of the Indian Pontifical Institute of Theology and Philosophy suggests that the declining lifespans of humankind across Genesis simply mirrors a corresponding “progressive deterioration of everything” ([7], p. 228). Perhaps a fresh, Eastern perspective such as this does the most to connect the myth of the fallen protohuman to the wider, universal sense that the world of the mythic past was bigger, better, and more magical than that of today.

Age is not the only manifestation of a superior, protohuman constitution. In Genesis, Chapter 6, before God decides to destroy humankind in a flood, the author recalls that “there were giants in the Earth in those days” (v. 4). While more is to be said of non-Western, non-Christian literary traditions, it is interesting to note the excitement generated by the appearance of early giant-men among the Native American mythologies, a presence whose similarities to the “giants” of scripture would not have been lost on the American frontiersman. Indeed, in the very autobiography of William “Buffalo Bill” Cody, Cody recalls an instance in which a Pawnee Indian tells stories of a race of giants who inhabited the area centuries ago, men who could outrun a buffalo and even pick one up with a single hand:

These giants denied the existence of a Great Spirit, so he caused a great rain storm to come, and the water kept rising higher and higher so that it drove these proud, and conceited giants from the low ground to the hills, and thence to the mountains, but at last even the mountain tops were submerged and then those mammoth men were all drowned. After the flood had subsided, the Great Spirit came to the conclusion that he had made man too large and powerful, and that he would therefore, correct the mistake by creating a race of men of smaller size and less strength. This is the reason, say the Indians, that modern men are small and not like the giants of old, and they claim that this story is a matter of Indian history, which has been handed down among them from time immemorial ([8], p. 593).

Cody goes on to claim that the thigh bone of one such giant is procured by the Indian for inspection by the camp surgeon. Immediately, the parallels become obvious: In a long-forgotten era, the human race is blessed with great strength and immense physical stature. Waxing proud and arrogant, these mythic protohumans deny their God, forfeiting their spiritual merit and experiencing a “fall” when the Deity destroys them in a diluvian downpour and decides to reform humankind to their contemporary specifications.

Needless to say, Cody does not encounter the Pawnee myth as a cultural *tabula rasa*. As an amateur commentator entrenched in his own European mythographical tradition, his nod to the perceived similarities between the Judeo-Christian narrative and that of the Pawnee might be more the product of projection than of faithful conveyance of the Native American myth. One second-hand interpretation—

by a member of a colonizing power, no less—is hardly sufficient evidence to convince the reader of the mythic protohuman’s universality.

That said, the body of Native American mythic and religious narratives is vast and heterogeneous, and will not be developed here, in the interest of brevity. Rather, the point to note from Cody’s autobiography is his readiness to include the narrative and, as is strongly implied, acknowledge the parallels between the Pawnee story and his own mythic tradition, one characterized by a recognition of mythic protohumans.

Few would downplay the prevalence of the Christian narrative in Western literature. The inclusion of Christian thought in works of literary fiction ranges from the clearly and deliberately allegorical (John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*) to the more subconscious troping of Western authors whose narratives mirror the common motif of “the death and resurrection of a savior figure” ([9], p. 131). For both categories, and everything in between, the vast body of affected literature even permits a uniquely religious lens for literary analysis, such as the “Religious Literary Theory” advocated by Boston College’s Dennis Taylor. Standing *sui generis* in this body of works is the immense, fictional legendarium of J. R. R. Tolkien. A devout Catholic, Tolkien acknowledged the conscious influence of his Christian theology on the fictional universe of Arda, which he crafted over a lifetime. However, unlike the brazen, often sententious allegorizing found in the fantastical realms created by his friend and colleague C. S. Lewis (*The Chronicles of Narnia*), Tolkien practices a unique form of literary expression which he calls “sub-creation” ([10], pp. 4–14). By creating his very own, artificial mythology, Tolkien engages in “sub-creation, rather than either representative or symbolic interpretation”, humbly submitting his work to the “fulfillment of [*the real*] Creation” ([10], p. 4). “In such fantasy”, he argues, “...new form is made. Man becomes a sub-creator...with the power of giving to ideal creations the inner consistency of reality.” ([10], pp. 4–5). Tolkien’s God becomes not only the Lord of Men but also the Lord of the Elves that populate his mythology. In his own words, “legend and history have met and fused” ([10], p. 15). The result is uncompromisingly both literary and religious. As Baylor University professor Ralph Wood states it, “Tolkien practiced the method of indirection, quietly imbuing his pre-Christian epic with concerns that are obliquely rather than overtly Christian.” ([11], p. 318). As for the myth of the physically-superior but fallen protohuman, consider the ancestral Dúnedain: “Kings among Men” who existed millennia before the events of the popular *Lord of the Rings* trilogy:

...they were mortal still, though their years were long, and they knew no sickness, ere the shadow fell upon them. Therefore they grew wise and glorious, and in all things more like to the Firstborn than any other of the kindreds of Men; and they were tall, taller than the tallest of the sons of Middle-earth; and the light of their eyes was like the bright stars. But their numbers increased only slowly in the land, for though daughters and sons were born to them, fairer than their fathers, yet their children were few ([12], pp. 236, 237).

In an event reminiscent of the Atlantis myth, the Dúnedains’ island continent of Númenór is cast into the sea. Those humans who manage to escape settle in the Eastern continent of Middle Earth, where they evolve, so to speak, into modern humanity. Like the antediluvian patriarchs, the transition from mythic protohuman to contemporary human is a gradual one, where age and prowess are slowly diminished over several generations, rather than being suddenly recreated as is the case of the ancient Pawnee giants. Caught in the throes of this transition, many centuries later, is Aragorn, one of

Tolkien's chief protagonists in *The Lord of the Rings*. He is introduced to the other characters at the elven city of Rivendell as "Chief of the Dúnedain in the North, and few are now left of that folk" ([13], p. 252). Tolkien regularly reminds the reader that that Aragorn consistently outperforms his other human counterparts as the last of a dying, unparalleled breed; the epic is fraught with commentary to that point. For example, after a particular grueling journey, it is remarked that "no other mortal Man could have endured it, none but the Dúnedain" ([13], p. 797). In his own act of mythic sub-creation, Tolkien exudes in his legendarium a strong pathos for the decay of the world, consistently mirrored by Aragorn's valiant attempts to validate the legacy of his ancestors. Whether Tolkien ordained the decay of human physical vigor in conscious imitation of the biblical narrative or whether he conceived of the notion as an intuitive, mythic motif, the experience of the Dúnedain in Tolkien's legendarium stands as a sterling, if artificially contrived, example of the theory of the mythic protohuman.

Physical decay as a consequence of sin or spiritual corruption is hardly a recent notion. If "the wages of sin is death" (*KJV*, Rom. 6:23), then they are also fragile health, diminished stature, and disfigurement. Having attempted to firmly characterize examples of the fallen, mythic protohuman in the literature of the Christian West and its conscious homages, I will now proceed to examine other Western literary works whose aims are less consciously rooted in the Christian mythic history. Before doing so, however, I invite the reader to consider the biblical commentary of a theologian from the latter half of the 20th-century. Perhaps the perceived link between physical health and stature linked to spiritual merit is no more clearly elicited than in the following:

The son born to him was like him not only in physical structure, but in his moral image as well. From Cain to the present all his descendants have inherited from him a nature depraved and prone to sin like his own...to the point that every part of his nature is affected. It is very much like a child who is first of all deprived of nourishments necessary to the building of strong bones. The result of his being deprived of these substances is that his skeletal structure becomes twisted and out of natural shape. Man is sufficiently far gone from righteousness as to be inclined to evil and that continually ([14], pp. 31, 32).

The literary myth of the fallen protohuman manifests itself in secular allegory and social satire, as well. Consider Jonathan Swift's classic *Gulliver's Travels*, in which the protagonist travels to many exotic and fanciful locales. One of such locales is the land of Brobdingnag, whose inhabitants grow to twelve times the narrator's size. When the protagonist is brought (in a box) to converse with their gentle but titanic king about the ways of his home country, the ruler of Brobdingnag exclaims that the history of England appears to be an amalgamation of "the very worst effects that avarice, faction, hypocrisy, perfidiousness, cruelty, rage, madness, hatred, envy, lust, malice, and ambition, [can] produce" ([15], p. 82). That the Brobdingnagians' many virtues and condescension to the ways of the English people already link an innate goodness to their corresponding physical size reinforces one aspect of this thesis. But the real surprise comes when the king remarks upon his own people's history. "Nature", argues the king, "is degenerated in these latter declining ages of the world, and [can] now produce only small abortive births in comparison of those of ancient times", and that furthermore—even from the perspective of the giant Brobdingnags—it would be very reasonable to think "not only that the species of men were originally much larger, but also that there must have been giants in former

ages” ([15], p. 86). The narrator is further surprised to find that even the strong and noble giants perceive themselves as “diminutive, contemptible, and helpless” in their natural state.

Could Swift be positing a universal awareness of the mythic protohuman? Certainly both aspects of this thesis—the spiritual decline and the ancient, mythic ancestry—are present in the king’s analysis of his own history. And while the author may not be able to evade the influence of his historical context, Swift, as a satirist, would have been conscious of the implications made by his characters in their juxtaposition against the main character and his readership; the Brobdingnagians possess a religious tradition completely isolated from the Christian West.

In the genre of modern novel, Swift’s *Travels* is an older work and one that has never been out of print since its first publication in 1726. Accordingly, the body of criticism surrounding it is prodigious. But in seeking out evidence to bolster this interpretation of Brobdingnag, we need look no further than the personal beliefs of its creator. In his tract entitled “Further Thoughts on Religion”, Swift himself claims that while “lions, bears, elephants, and some other animals, are strong or valiant, and their species never degenerates in their native soil [...] Men degenerate every day, merely by the folly, the perverseness, the avarice, the tyranny, the pride, the treachery, or inhumanity of their own kind.” ([16], p. 264). Indeed, Swift can almost be heard parroting his own character, cementing, for our purposes, his recognition of the protohuman narrative with his use of the word “degenerate”. As for his narrator’s service as a mouthpiece, Gulliver—a protagonist usually regarded as passive and naïve—offers uncharacteristic commentary that might lead the reader into agreement with the king when he references “that continual Degeneracy of human Nature, so justly complained of in all Ages” ([15], p. 210). In an independent recognition of this theme, Radner characterizes Gulliver as a utopian spectator “[seeing] the Western world as a panorama of decline” ([17], p. 51).

Lest we are tempted to accuse Swift of the same Christian projection that was previously ascribed to Bill Cody, it is worth mentioning that Gulliver’s encounter with utopian schemes is prescriptive for society *as a whole*, remaining silent on other Christian themes such as personal salvation. Morrissey notes that any allusions to religious worldview concerning utopia are far from obvious; Gulliver is silent and uncurious about things religious ([18], pp. 11–13). Barnett goes so far as to dub *Travels*’ secularity (and by implication, *universality*) as “the great absence that haunts the text” ([19], p. 237). This, coupled with the accommodating, if not specifically tailored delivery of his other works to a pluralistic array of listeners with differing beliefs ([20], p. 35), perhaps we can reconcile Swift’s ardent but speciously Christian belief in the degeneration of humankind to wider, diachronic mythic pattern.

Robert Lewis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* has been touted as the literary exemplar of dualistic philosophy [21], Victorian morality tale [22], and psychological case study ([23], pp. 58–67). But it is as the latter that Stevenson’s keen and intuitive understanding of compartmentalized human thought might recapitulate an additional, deeply-rooted archetype. Granted, the association between goodness and beauty—or evil and ugliness—is a trope that pervades both ancient and contemporary literature, reiterating itself time and time again in popular television. Physiognomy, or the reading of character by the face of physical appearance, is a practice that would have been known to the educated Victorian author, being a popular 18th century pseudoscience ([24], p. 495). But aside from the ineffable ugliness of the good Dr. Jekyll’s alter ego, is there any quality to bolster the state of Hyde as one fallen or descended from the mythic protohuman? What is the etiology of Hyde’s deformity?

At first, Stevenson goes to great lengths to describe his villain as curiously unattractive in appearance and behavior. To Jekyll's friend and attorney, Mr. Utterson:

Mr. Hyde was pale and dwarfish, he gave an impression of deformity without any nameable malformation, he had a displeasing smile, he had borne himself to the lawyer with a sort of murderous mixture of timidity and boldness, and he spoke with a husky, whispering and somewhat broken voice; all these were points against him, but not all of these together could explain the hitherto unknown disgust, loathing and fear with which Mr. Utterson regarded him. "There must be something else", said the perplexed gentleman. "There is something more, if I could find a name for it. God bless me, the man seems hardly human! Something troglodytic, shall we say? [...] or is it the mere radiance of a foul soul that thus transpires through, and transfigures, its clay continent? The last, I think; for, O my poor old Harry Jekyll, if ever I read Satan's signature upon a face, it is on that of your new friend." ([25], p. 40).

An ugly or unsettling *physiognomy* hardly succeeds in convicting Hyde of fallen mythic origins or predecessors, even with such devolved and bantam descriptors as "troglodytic". Still, later observations continue to link his physical stature with his strange but malicious *je ne sais quoi*. "Is this Mr. Hyde a person of small stature?" Utterson inquires. "Particularly small and particularly wicked-looking, is what the maid calls him", replies an officer ([25], p. 48). In this fashion, the villain's characterization gradually evolves until it transcends a simple evil-is-ugly metonymy. Finally, however, it is Jekyll's own summary of his case that places Hyde's deformity in a narrative of withering fortitude in time concurrent with spiritual decay. "Evil besides [...] had left on that body an imprint of deformity and decay." ([25], p. 84). Stevenson's diction is significant. Hyde's deformity is a physical manifestation of spiritual decay, decay being necessarily a process of deterioration *over time*. In touching upon these last four words, the author elicits the archetype shared by Swift, Genesis, Tolkein, and world mythologies: the literary myth of the fallen protohuman.

As alluded to before, literary accounts of the fallen protohuman are by no means restricted to the mythic history of the Judeo-Christian cosmogony. Mythological accounts describing a gradual decline in human civilization can be found in 8th-century Greece, B.C. Hesiod's "Works and Days"—essentially a poetic farmers' almanac—describes a striking account of the gradual decay of early humanity. In Book II, the poet describes how the gods created "a golden race of mortal men", who "lived like gods, ... their arms and legs never failing." ([26], lines 109–20). The second generation, however, is not so esteemed. "...Made of silver, and less noble by far", the second generation is like the golden men "*neither in body nor in spirit.*" (the italics are mine, added for emphasis). Linking physical quality to spiritual quality, Hesiod characterizes a concurrent physical and moral decay that begins to follow the traditional minting hierarchy of the Olympic medals. Nonetheless, these silver men enjoy a childhood of "an hundred years at [their] mother's side", mirroring the Hebrew trend of longer but continually decreasing lifespan ([26], lines 121–39). The Bronze Age, which follows as the third generation, is described as "a brazen race, sprung from ash trees.... Great was their strength", but being a warlike people, "they were destroyed by their own hand." ([26], lines 140–55). Here we see a vicious side of humankind emerge, indicating further, progressive spiritual decay. Interestingly, the eponymous "bronze" of the age refers not to the medium out of which the third generation is hewn, but rather the tools newly employed for the degenerate generation's violent purposes. The fourth age, "nobler and more righteous", briefly reverses the downward trend of human merit, but even it must

soon give way to the fifth generation, constituting “the men who are upon the bounteous earth.” ([26], line 169). Hesiod, in full appreciation of his fallen state, writes:

Would that I were not among the men of the fifth generation, but had died before...For now truly is a race of iron, and men never rest from labour and sorrow by day, and from perishing by night; and the gods shall lay sore trouble upon them ([26], line 170).

Even so, the poet’s state is not as pitiable as that of the men who are to come. In the fullness of time, “men will dishonor their parents, as they *grow quickly old* ... not knowing the fear of the gods”, and a vast array of wicked characteristics will come to characterize the poor generations to follow ([26], lines 171–201). The italics, mine, recapitulate the physical consequences of spiritual decay. With the promise of even shorter lifespans and correspondingly wicked generations, the myth of the fallen protohuman becomes to Hesiod a predictive trend; it is a myth in which we are still partaking, for indeed, the poet seems to suggest that future generations may come to envy our own comparatively blessed state.

Drawing on the Greek myths, Pre-Christian Rome also recognized the tragic path of human history, citing four ages of gradual decline, rather than Hesiod’s five. In Book I of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (ca. A.D. 8), humankind is born into a “Golden Age that, without coercion, without laws, spontaneously nurtured the good and the true.” ([27], line 89). Passing their lives in an Edenic state, early humans live without warfare or even agriculture; the very earth gives freely of her bounty ([27], lines 89–112). But, when the primordial god Saturn is overtaken by his son Jove and banished to Tartarus, “then came the people of the age of silver that is inferior to gold.” ([27], lines 113–23). Concurrent with humankind’s newly diminished state comes the decay of the wider world: specifically, the end of perpetual Spring. Jove introduces the seasons to the world, and men must learn to make shelters and tend the ground with the groaning of animals, “burdened under the yoke” ([27], line 124). Following the silver age—again, in keeping with the declension of Olympic medals—comes the bronze. “With fiercer natures, readier to indulge in savage warfare, but not yet vicious”, humanity continues its steady decline ([27], line 125). Finally, we arrive at “the harsh iron age”, where “every kind of wickedness erupted into this age of baser natures”. Astraea, the Goddess of Justice, sees what has become of humankind, and becomes the last of the immortals to abandon the fallen world ([27], lines 126–50). When man is reduced to the commonest and dullest of medals and his divine luster becomes lost to spiritual decay, divinity itself abandons him and leaves him to his wretched state.

Departing from the Western tradition altogether, we have already mentioned at least one parallel drawn between a colonizer’s understanding of the mythic protohuman and a Native American myth in the autobiography of William Cody. Other civilizations—including some that left behind larger bodies of recorded literature—offer *primary* sources illustrating a mighty, mythic protohuman. For example, one can encounter across many cultures stories of a “first man”, a noble and long-lived human who performs many great works. Some go so far as to ascribe this first man a cosmic importance in the formation of the very world. The Vedic Purusha, the Persian Kayumars, and the Chinese Pan Gu ([28], p. 383) are of note.

In the tenth Mandala of the Rig Veda, the *rishi* sings of Purusha, the Vedic *first man*. Although he is described in inhuman terms, possessing “a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, [and] a thousand feet” ([29], hymn 90, verse 1), it is significant that his Sanskrit name *puruṣa* can be literally translated



as simply “man”. In subsequent verses, Parusha is degraded by parts until his remnants become the classes of *Varna*, the four original castes. From his mouth, arms, thighs, and feet, come the *Brahmins* (priests), *Kshatriyas* (leaders), *Vaishyas* (artisans and merchants), and *Shudras* (laborers), respectively ([29], verse 12). In this way, all members of humankind, despite being clearly stratified by spiritual merit within the rigid system of Hindu *varna*, are nonetheless but fractions of their common, ancestral progenitor.

Compared to Purusha, the Zoroastrian Kayumars is unambiguously human, while nevertheless fulfilling the narrative role of “the first man” as well as the mythic protohuman. As the first created human and the first human worshipper of Zoroastrianism’s God, Ahura Mazda, Kayumars’s name takes its origin in the Avestan words *gaya* “life” and *marətan* “mortal”. And yet, despite his eponymous mortality, the medieval Persian epic *Shahnameh* ascribes to him the gift of *farr*, ([30], p. 1) an aura of divine radiance and kingly charisma not unlike the Christian “state of glory”. As philologist Alexander Lubotsky suggests, an etymological investigation of this concept and its evolution throughout the history of the Persian language suggests that Kayumars’s *farr* would manifest not only as visual halo of divine endorsement, but also in luck and ability ([31], p. 480). Unfortunately, such a blessed state was not to endure, and in a separate work, Ahura Mazda invokes the language of decay while relaying to Zoroaster that “for 30 centuries [he] kept the world from *corruption and decay*, when the 30th century came to an end the [devas] assaulted Kayumars.” ([32], pp. 345–47).

In Jungian theory, this “first man” archetype is better known as the “Cosmic Man”, the father not only of humankind, but also of the world itself, whereof he participates in creation ([33], pp. 200–04). Frequently, his body parts become the structural underpinnings of the universe, representing the oneness of human existence and an anthropomorphic concept of the universe itself. Before the present age can begin the Cosmic Man must be degraded; he is dismembered, with the various parts of his body becoming parts of the universe. This “gigantic, all-embracing figure that personifies and contains the entire universe is a common representation of the Self in myths and dreams” claims Jung ([33], p. 213); but as we have seen, this idealized self does not endure, instead succumbing to a degradative process which vacates him from a most-privileged spiritual rank. Like the Biblical Adam, the first human, mythic in stature and great in spirit, gives way to the humanity of today.

“To be a truth-seeking mythographer”, asserts William McNeill, “is a high and serious calling, for what a group of people knows and believes about the past channels expectations and affects the decisions on which their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor all depend.” ([34], p. 10). If McNeill’s assertion is true, what does the myth of the fallen protohuman say about humanity’s perception of itself? According to Ehrenpreis, Swift’s *Travels* became “a machine designed not to advance a set of doctrines, but rather to start readers on the way to reflection, self-doubt, and fresh thought” ([35], p. 454). If readers of myth in literature are similarly challenged toward a process of meaning-making, it should be conceded that health and vitality as predicated on divine favor (*i.e.*, spiritual merit) is hardly a novel observation: the link spans from the recognition of health deities in ancient pantheons to the present-day alternative medicines whose healing approaches are essentially spiritual [36]. What, then, does the literary myth of the fallen protohuman add to the discourse?

As anagoge, I argue that it furnishes contemporary society with a symbol that asserts a continued belief in humanity’s descent into immorality and decay. As a mythological comparatist, I *do* believe that such a literary motif draws on some universal substratum in human mythic thought, but equally

interesting is the implication for contemporary readers. As evidenced by its continued reiteration by modern and contemporary authors, the archetype has endured, and therefore is ignored at the risk of forgoing real insight to the collective human psyche. Ruminating too long on this point, the critic might be tempted to draw all sorts of parallels between social trends and a recognition of fallen humanity: are contemporary trends touting the merits of “natural” organic foods or the so-called “paleo” diet in part attempts to recapture a protohuman “state of grace” prior to a detachment from nature?

The flaws of humankind—war, murder, avarice, weakness, and death—are common and glaringly obvious, readily apparent to even the casual observer of any time and place. No literary archetype is needed to expose such warts. Therefore, I will conclude with a more optimistic interpretation of the mythic protohuman’s endurance: the very premise that humanity is decayed implies a former glory, a noble bloodline, and a high original calling. Perhaps the literary protohuman is not only a critical juxtaposition subconsciously evoked to expose human flaws, but also an innate yearning for human perfection and an optimism about the possibilities of human nature. Harkening back to a common mythic history, the literary endeavors of today continue to contextualize the human experience, making sense of evil in the present while acknowledging the inborn feeling that humanity, in spite of all that we see and hear and experience today, is of great and heroic stock. The recapitulation of Hyde’s Deformity may in fact be a manifestation of the author’s, the poet’s, and the playwright’s subliminal but shared belief in the primordial light that flickers today, fighting to stay lit in the midst of our decrepit, prevailing alter egos.

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### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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