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## Epic Triads. A Phylogenetically Rooted Gestalt of Narration

One of the central problems in an evolutionary-biologically interpretation of cultural phenomena is the differentiation between biological basic configurations (›universals‹) and cultural modification. The psychological concept of gestalt does not provide a decision for this problem, since it includes innate as well as acquired patterns of reality construction. Still, it can provide a frame inside of which such differentiation can be discussed.

The schematic sequence of original unity, separation, and reunion serves as an example. Conceptions of the world that follow this sequence are apparently tied to experiences of lack and project a condition without lack both into the past and into the future. Walter Burkert has set up the most explicit bridge between literature and biology. In many works of world literature, Burkert identifies the formula of an ›adventurous quest‹ extended to a pattern of departure and return, which Vladimir Propp has also found in Russian fairy tales. According to Burkert, this pattern is rooted in the practical necessity to find food. But this argument glosses over a layer of human universals and indicates a modality of all animal life: the basic activities connected with searching for food can be found in the amoeba as well.

Psychoanalysis puts the layer of universals a little closer to the homo sapiens. In psychoanalytical interpretation, the cause is found in a fundamental experience of separation, when a child is cast out of the symbiotic relation with the mother at birth, and again when the third agent appears, which psychoanalysis labels ›father‹. This experience is said to lead to regressive fantasies of paradise in later stages of life. In contrast to this psychoanalytic default explanation that conceives of attachment only as a pathological reaction, John Bowlby posits that attachment is a genuine drive, and that separation must therefore always be experienced as painful, even without assuming the construction of a regression. Bowlby, however, only acknowledges the attachment drive, which leads to a necessary view of separation as pathogenic. Norbert Bischoff in addition postulates a genuine separation drive in the growing individual. The installation of both of these equally important drives, of both a need for security and a wish for excitement, is the sole foundation of the ›original conflict of intimacy and autonomy‹. It is therefore a universal that

can be regarded as fundamental to the pattern of separation and reunion and its variations. The term ›original conflict‹ (»Urkonflikt« ), however, indicates that this tension is located in an ultimately pre-human area.

Ernst Bloch interprets the gestalt of separation and reunion politically from a Marxist point of view. Bloch also encounters the layer of universals. In contrast to the psychoanalytical emphasis on libido, however, he posits hunger, or self-sustenance in general. Bloch succeeds in connecting this universal drive to history (and Marxist theory) by expanding self-sustenance to self-development, and therefore a will to achieve conditions which allow for self-development. Thus, the »principle of hope« (»Prinzip Hoffnung« ) has become a universal formula and can nonetheless be applied to the specifics of concrete historical-cultural situations. But again, this principle of hope is not specific to humans only, but is also at work in animals' struggle to survive.

The modification specific to humans will not be found in an additional evolutionary category, but rather in an additional scope of flexibility of the basic gestalt. It is grounded in man's ability to segment behavioral programs and to redefine them by conceptualizing intermediate worlds. The search for a universal gestalt therefore points towards a universal gestalt disposition, which can take different gestalts in different individual and historical-social conditions. In this context, language gains a superior importance as it allows for a fixation of variations in between worlds. And here lies one of the evolutionary advantages of narration. It can equip versatile, ›imprecise‹ adaptations (›open programs‹) with a scale of possible fixations and imprint them on memory by repetition. Stories of departure and return, of separation and reunion, of losing and finding, of falling ill and healing, of sin and salvation, hold in store the complete scale of applications of the gestalt disposition.

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