

Play a Trick and Get a Queen: “Divine Tricksters” in Ancient Korea (and Beyond)

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Abstract: The issue of trickster in old Korean literature has yet to be discussed in a broadly comparative way in a scientific context. Using a structuralist approach, this article addresses the anthropological theme of the “divine trickster” in some stories from ancient Korea and the ancient West. In particular, by examining three famous episodes from Korean folklore alongside three cases from Western fantastic literature, this article investigates the strategies aimed at acquiring the feminine element as represented by high-ranking foreign women. Starting with the hunting mentality of prehistoric society, where man tries to prevail with intelligence over his prey, the article reviews literary episodes from different anthropological contexts (Indo-European societies, Semitic societies of the Near East, and ancient Korean society), underlining their similarities and differences, but always highlighting and emphasizing the presence of a divine trickster. Ultimately, together with the common denominator of the progressive masculinization of the various societies, we note a more passive role of women in the Korean stories, which appear to be of more recent codification than their Western counterparts, and therefore seem more inspired by cultural patterns of patriarchal orientation.

Keywords: divine trickster, cultural anthropology, structuralism, Korean mythology, Korea and the “others”

The figure of the “gentleman thief” is well attested in the literature of many cultures, and even episodes present in religious texts do not avoid presenting the good side, if in evidence, of thieves, cheats, and evildoers (just think of the case of Disma Δυσμάς in the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus).¹ After all, salvific religions such as Christianity and Buddhism have always contraposed the idea of sin to the concept of shame present in other societies (first of all the Confucian one); sin, unlike shame, is surmountable and forgivable, following a sincere repentance.²

Nevertheless, there are thieves and other outlaws who act for a righteous purpose, as reparation for the errors produced by an unfair and corrupt society, and such characters, who have become almost revolutionaries, are also found in Confucian societies. The rebels of Liangshanpo 梁山泊 in China³ and characters such as Hong Kiltong 洪吉童 or Chŏn Uch'i 田禹治 (also called Chŏn Unch'i 全雲致)⁴ in Korea need no particular introduction.

“Outlaws and gentlemen” are yet another set of characters (often inspired by actual historical figures) in tales, both ancient and less ancient, from the West and

the East—ranging from Robin Hood to Arsène Lupin and from Aladdin to Rocambole. Such figures are sometimes leaders of sects and guilds (think of Hong Kiltong's Hwalbindang 活貧黨, “Society for the Redemption of the Poor”), and in general they are ordinary subjects, often poor and discriminated against by the wider society. But what happens when the thieves and tricksters are gods, saints, or kings?

This article examines from a structuralist approach three famous cases found in ancient Korean literature that present fraud and deception perpetrated by illustrious and eminent characters who go unpunished. Starting from the common denominator of the human mind as a divine gift, Korean stories will be inserted in an anthropological model present across many cultures, with the end result emerging as an important piece in the varied cultural and transnational kaleidoscope—the *tòpos* of the “divine/illustrious trickster.” For this reason, I compare the three Korean cases with three cases from different Western cultures. The article moves on two different levels. The first level examines, structurally, the dynamics of the concept of the trickster as it came to be formed in various human societies over the millennia. The second level deals with the anthropological aspects typical of certain cultures, which lie hidden behind the episodes described. It follows that the approach in the first part is typically structuralist, while in the second part it is historical-cultural.

Cogito, Ergo (Homo) Sum

Odysseus is not a god, and yet he is often described as “strong and divine,”⁵ within a range of epithets, especially in Homer's poems, aimed to make easier the recitation and the composition of metrical schemes. Indeed, the adjective “divine” (δῖος) occurs frequently whenever the poet writes about heroes; heroes are not ordinary people, but something halfway between man and god. In particular, Odysseus is well known for his astuteness, and it is no coincidence that his protector divinity is Athena, the goddess of knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge belongs to man, and only man is able to transmit his cognitive experience to descendants, forming what is called “culture,” a prerogative typical to humans which is very different from the “nature” possessed by every living being. Adam and Eve realize they are naked (the awareness of nudity, in fact, is a cultural element) only after eating the fruit of knowledge, which also gives them the faculty to distinguish Good from Evil, which belongs to humans alone. But there is a price to pay: from that time hence, Paradise will no longer be a right, but something that must be conquered, by doing Good and refraining from Evil. If there were a Paradise for animals, all animals would go to Paradise, since they only follow their “nature,” or their natural instinct.

The creation of man in the image and likeness of God concerns above all the mind, since God has no form. The mind is what separates man from animals and brings him closer to the dimension of the ineffable—to Heaven or God. In other words, mind is a gift from Heaven, as believed in many cultural contexts. The mind, therefore, represents the faculty and the capacity of thinking and acting as a consequence of thinking, both for good and for evil. And it is no coincidence that in the linguistic field the idea of man is inextricably united with the concepts of

thought and memory (only man, in fact, remembers experience and transmits it to posterity, creating in this way culture as opposed to brutal nature). I will only give a few examples here.

The root *M-N, linked to the concept of “man,” “to think,” or “memory” (also in a negative sense), is easily found in Eurasia within what should have been the protolanguage conventionally called Proto-Boreal. This root is at the basis of English words such as *mind* (Middle English: *mynde*) and *man*, German *Mann*, Italian *mente* (mind), but it is also traceable in Sanskrit *manas* मनस् (mind) and *Manu* मनु (the first man), in old Greek μνησκειν (to remember) and Μνημοσύνη (goddess of memory and mother of the nine Muses, because the arts are the offspring of memory and human experience), in Hungarian *monda* (legend, tale), in Nenets *manz* (to think, to ponder), in Russian запомнить (to remember), and so forth.

But the mind can also be obtuse or used for illicit purposes. So here we find terms like the Turkic *mundus/munduz* (fool), the Italian *menzogna* (lie) and *mentire* (to lie), the Spanish *mentida* (lie), the Khanty *münærkholta* (to faint, to lose consciousness), and the Korean *maengch'u* and *möngch'öngi* (both meaning “stupid,” “idiot”) and *mongtchach'ida* (to deceive, to simulate).

A high-minded person is a “genius.” But *genius* is a Latin word indicating a tutelary deity, and in turn is connected with the idea of “to generate,” “to produce,” “to create” (see Latin *gignere* [to beget] and old Greek γίγνομαι [to be born] and γένος [descent, family]). Hence the modern term *engineering*. Creation is first of all a product of mind, but creation is also a divine or supernatural act: in this regard it cannot be excluded that *genius* is also connected with the Arabic *jinn* جِن (a term that refers to various kinds of supernatural beings). In this way, therefore, the mind also becomes an instrument of strength and power. Gods thus prevail over humans, and humans prevail over animals. However, since mind is not dispensed in equal measure, it follows that humans come to prevail over other humans, thus also receiving, in many cases, the approval of the society in which they live. In the Islamic context, therefore, card games are stigmatized as they are usually linked to the whim of luck, but chess is well tolerated or even encouraged, because the results of the matches are the result of the human mind, which is the reflected image of God.⁶ In ancient Sparta, what was dishonorable was not so much stealing as being discovered during the theft.⁷ In the Sumerian *Poem of Enmerkar and Ensuhriranna*, a strange war without armies is waged between the cities of Uruk and Aratta.⁸ The fighters are in fact two champions of sorcery, each designated by a city, who in turn demonstrate their abilities, and eventually Uruk is the winner.

The awareness of the dual nature (beneficial and evil) of the human mind is manifested in all probability already in prehistoric times, when the hunter-man ends up ritualizing and exorcising his own activity as a consequence of the fact that he “steals” the life of animals by virtue of his cognitive superiority. By hunting, however, one learns the characteristics and behaviors of the various animals. In this way, some animals such as buffalo or bear become symbols of strength for man, while others, like wolves (whose success in hunting does not depend on the individual but, as in the case of man, on coordinated actions among different indi-

viduals), fascinate the first hunters and end up becoming totemic progenitors of man himself.

Nevertheless, it will not have taken long for men of the past to find that the most “cunning” animals are not always the strongest. A sort of list of particularly smart animals has thus been created which has become fixed in the collective imagination of many peoples, even if at times it has been denied by modern ethology.⁹ This is how animals such as the fox and corvids (crows, ravens, magpies, etc.) have become proverbial: foxes and jackals do not need any introduction, while the name of “thief” has been given to cats (see for example the proverbial *toduk koyangi* of Korea) and corvids (the magpie in Italy is still called “gazza ladra” or “thieving magpie”).¹⁰ Animals such as the fox and the squirrel (the latter considered to be smart because he stocks up on food) share the same linguistic root within the concept of “hair,” “fur,” or “furry animal.” Thus, from the root **W-L(a)* we have terms such as the Sanskrit *vṛka* वृक (wolf, but also fox),¹¹ the Avestan Persian *varənā* (fur), the Latin *vulpis* (fox), the ancient Greek (ν) *alopex* (ἡ) ἄλωπιξ (fox), the Gothic *wulfs*, the English *wolf* and *wool*, the Russian *volosy* волосы (hair), the Italian *volpe* (fox), *vello* (fur), and *ululare* (to howl: the crying of wolves and dogs), the Finnish *villa* (fur), the Evenki *ulā* (wolf) and *uliki* (squirrel), and so forth. But we also have terms, derived from the same root, connected with the idea of “to lie” and “to cheat.” Such is the case with Finnish *valhe* (lie), Gaelic (Middle Irish) *fell* (cheat: < *WLxn-), English *felony*, Latin *furare* (to steal, to deceive), old Italian *fellone* (criminal/traitor), and so forth (Paliga 2007: 121).

This deductive process carried out by humans proves decisive in creating all the minor supernatural entities capable of making, just for fun, jokes and other deceptions more or less harmful to man. Figures such as gnomes and elves reveal the caricature and parody of the gods in their physical appearance, and this is also revealed by their names: the Germanic term *kobold* as well as the English *goblin*, for example, have the same root as the old Greek *kobalos* κόβαλος, “dwarf” or “thieving/trickster sprite/dwarf.” The κόβαλοι were followers of Dionysus and, according to mythological tradition, robbed even Heracles when he was sleeping. Dionysus is a god linked to the ancient Mediterranean religion prior to the arrival of the Indo-Europeans, and it is known that he remained a transgressive divinity in the pantheon of the classical world. The social chaos represented by him and his followers (Silenus, the satyrs, and, precisely, the κόβαλοι) could be the consequence of the ancient conflict between Indo-European and Mediterranean cultural models (see Riotto 2017b). In this way, ridiculed deities who play tricks on the humans of the new social and moral order would have been created following a religious revolution, remaining as vestiges of the past (at once feared, respected, and depreciated) to be exorcised.

But if corvids and elves, in terms of absolute strength, are the poor relatives of eagles and gods, having to make up for their physical deficiencies with their intelligence, why could humans, as bad copies of the gods, not try to put themselves at least on the level of the gnomes to take advantage of some situation with tricks and deceptions? Before going into the topic, however, we should first spend a few words on elves, gnomes, and other similar creatures.

The Professional Tricksters of Collective Imagination

Over time, an intermediate category of minor supernatural being is formed between humans and the gods, who, incapable of great creative endeavors, are nevertheless capable of interfering heavily in the daily life of humans. These entities remain in the supernatural sphere of human perception, but they belong not so much to religion as to religiosity, the latter being a personal religious attitude and feeling, strongly imbued with cultural elements of its own tradition, which is not necessarily linked to a particular historical religion and its dogmas.

We find these in almost all the places of the world, and their names change according to the cultures by which they were created and to which they belong. Thus, there are, for example, *dwarves*, *goblins*, *kobolds*, *gnomes*, *elves*, *gremlins*, *leprechauns*, *kallikantzaroi/καλλικάντζαροι*, *folletti*, *jólásveinar*, *nisser*, *duendes* (*dwendes* in the Philippines), *laftraches*, *ngannamenta*, *domovoj/домовой*, Korean *tokkaebi*,¹² and Japanese *tsukumogami* 付喪神. They are different from ghosts or spirits, being considered as divinities or as mortals of a human or animal nature/aspect. Sometimes, as in the cases of *tokkaebi* and *tsukumogami*, they represent the transformation of used and discarded objects. They may act in a more or less good or evil way, but all of them are adept at playing tricks, such that humans have to use all their intelligence and experience in order to avoid or frustrate their attacks.

The systematic study of divine tricksters as an important theme of folklore and collective imagination starts in the first half of the twentieth century, thanks to two well-known ethnologists, Paul Radin (1883–1959) and Károly Kerényi (1897–1973). The starting point for Radin's studies was the figure of the *Wakdjunkaga* (the one who plays tricks), a main character of the collective imagination of Native Americans of the Hochunk ethnic group, better known as the Winnebago.¹³ The expression “divine trickster,” however, was first used by Kerényi (Radin 1956: 9–11).

What emerges from the studies of such scholars is that the trickster belongs to a conception of the world no less religious than that of the Church, thus constituting an element of religiosity alternative to the official faith, of which we have spoken above. In this way, the folklore trickster becomes a “divine trickster,” that is to say, a deceptive deity representing the “paradoxical category of sacred amorality” (Hyde 2010: 10). Differently than the major gods, the divine trickster does not “create” but transforms (similarly to wizards) what has already been created, destroying the old established order and building a new one. We must pay close attention to this detail, because the deceptions perpetrated by kings and presented in this study are often modifiers of a political status quo, by heavily altering the dynasties or forming new alliances (and therefore new destinies) for their kingdoms. This transformative capacity is well suited to the figure of the kings of the past, who concentrated in themselves the functions of rulers, priests, and magicians, thus becoming absolutely sacred figures: we must not forget, in this regard, that many kings and heroes of classical mythology descend from divinities.

The sacredness with which the divine tricksters are invested favors their emulation by humans, who thus become aware of the fact that a certain moral and civil reality can be changed, with intelligence if possible, or with violence if necessary.

We begin to glimpse, therefore, the connection between the divine trickster and the figure of the “good brigand,” and not only this: we can also see the positive side of the trick and deception if this can help avoid a war or any other type of armed conflict.

This is all the truer for sovereigns, whose sacredness brings them closer to the divine tricksters than others, while at the same time they must obey that sense of responsibility aimed at avoiding the outbreak of a conflict until the very end. In other words, differently than *tokkaebi* and the like, tricks played by kings generally have a precise scope and purpose. In this way, getting a woman (and even more so, a queen) by deception becomes a preferable option to a forced marriage following a war of conquest. This is the instinct and first priority of the hunter, be it man or animal: to obtain his prey by running the least possible danger. Leaving episodes like the “Kidnapping of the Sabine Women” as *extrema ratio*, therefore, a king (as leader of a complex society) will try to get a queen with cunning; if he has not yet become a king, he will try to become one by inventing some stratagem to marry a princess.

Classical antiquity (among other traditions) tells us that a certain type of crime, understood as a transformative action external to the codified (or fossilized?) morality of a society, can find supporters even among the Olympian gods. This is the case of Hermes, god of shrewdness and intelligence but also of thieves, traders, and, not by chance, alchemists and experts in transformations.¹⁴ He transforms himself, takes on feral features, plays tricks, makes people fall asleep and awakens them;¹⁵ in sum, he is a true divine trickster able to propose an existence out of the constraints of written laws and lived in the name of fantasy. In this way, the Hermetic man alchemically renews his soul with brilliant ideas, tricks, and stratagems capable of overturning what could be called destiny. *Mutatis mutandis*, such is the lifestyle that will triumph later in Spanish picaresque literature, in literary masterpieces such as *Lazarillo de Tormes* and *Guzmán de Alfarache*.

All that we have said leads to the conclusion that deception is not always an execrable thing; on the contrary, it can represent a peaceful solution to a political or religious issue. This is of particular value when deceivers are VIPs like kings or saints. As representatives or vicars of a god or of Heaven, in fact, they enjoy (at least theoretically) more than others of that intelligence which, a priori, has long been considered a super-infused virtue donated by Heaven. In this way, they themselves become divine tricksters.

No Simpleton, No Trickster (1): Three Cases from Korean Folklore

We have seen how characters invested with sacredness such as sovereigns and saints can be considered divine tricksters if they resort to deceptions aimed at obtaining a profit for the kingdom or changing (for better or for worse) a certain context and a certain situation.

In order for the deception to take place, however, there must also be a counterpart who is deceived: according to a Sicilian proverb, in fact, “Senza minchiuna nenti marpiuna” (No simpleton, no trickster). In our case, we will see that, at least as regards the episodes reported here, the deceived will be (directly or indirectly) three sovereigns (two mortal kings and even the heavenly king), but the ultimate

goal of the deception will always be possession (or rescue) of a “noble” woman or, in any case, of a noble female being.

These episodes will be compared with other similar stories present in the folklore of other cultures, where we will see that women will be the ones deceived. What socio-anthropological implications all such tales may have will be the topic of the final reflections. In the first episode, the protagonist is T’arhae 脫解, the fourth king of Silla 新羅,¹⁶ as reported in *Sui chōn* 殊異傳.¹⁷

It happened to the queen consort of the kingdom of Yongsōng 龍城¹⁸ that she laid an egg. Considering the supernatural fact, she took that egg and, after placing it in a small casket, handed it, along with other treasures and a written text, to seven slaves, so that they could take it by ship around the sea. The ship finally arrived in Ajinp’o 阿珍浦¹⁹ and here Ajin 阿珍, the chief of the local village, took the egg out of its container. At that moment, a magpie suddenly arrived, which pecked the egg and broke its shell. Thus, a child came out who said his name was T’arhae, and who was entrusted to an old woman of the village who from then on was considered his mother. Growing up, T’arhae learned letters and history, and he also became an expert in geography, while his appearance became increasingly that of a heroic great man.

One day, T’arhae climbed Mount T’oham 吐含,²⁰ from where one could see the whole capital, and realized that in the Sinwōlsōng 新月城²¹ area, topographically truly worthy of being occupied, a certain Hogong 瓠公²² was already living, a practically unknown character about whom it was known only that he had arrived by crossing the sea on a pumpkin.

T’arhae then decided to devise a stratagem in order to obtain Hogong’s home. At night, he thus entered the home garden and there buried tools to melt metal. Afterwards he went to the Royal Palace and said to the competent authorities: “I am a blacksmith with a strong family tradition in this profession. I had gone to a nearby village, but during my absence Hogong entered my home. So please check what I said.”²³

The investigators thus dug into the garden of Hogong and found there the hidden objects. At that point the king, despite being aware of the fact that T’arhae was not from Silla, considered this prodigious fact and, after praising the stranger, granted him the house and his own eldest daughter.

The kingdom of Yongsōng was located north-east of the country of Wae 倭, two thousand li 里 away.²⁴

We notice immediately in the episode that the deceived characters are not one but two—namely, Hogong and the king of Silla himself. The figure of T’arhae seems to belong more to legend than to history, and yet it poses key questions about Korea’s distant past and about Silla in particular. The sources agree in saying that he was a foreigner who arrived in Korea in a more or less improbable way, capable of winning the attention of the local sovereign thanks to actions that are anything but fair and orthodox. The story narrated in the *Sui chōn* offers a meager and synthetic profile of the character, but the first book of the *Samguk yusa* is much more lavish in its details. We can thus know, among other things, that T’arhae’s mother was a princess of the kingdom of Chōngnyō 積女, a place name that is sometimes associated with fabulous “women’s countries” (whose existence, how-

ever, is certainly not limited to Korean folklore; see, for example, Jay 1996) called Yögun 女國 or Yöin'guk 女人國. T'arhae, however, declares that he comes from Yongsöng.²⁵ We also learn that the infant T'arhae, along with his servants, had been locked in a chest on a boat apparently set adrift, but actually driven by a superior will. After a first stop in Kaya, the boat, despite the attempts of the locals to keep it, had moved to Silla and there had been hauled ashore by Ajinüisön 阿珍義先, a talented fisherwoman and the mother of Hyökköse, the founder of the nation.

Whatever the case, T'arhae and his entourage are graciously welcomed and the prodigious child tells all the events that had brought him there. Subsequently, the episode of the deception against Hogong is also narrated, more or less as we read it in *Sui chön*, and also the episode of the marriage with the (eldest) daughter of King Namhae 南解, whom we learn here was called Ani 阿尼.²⁶ Other minor episodes follow, and finally the death and funeral of T'arhae, who has now become ruler of Silla. The *Samguk yusa* also gives hypotheses on the meaning of the surname Sök²⁷ and dwells on the improbable dimensions of his body, which reached a height of about ten feet, while the circumference of his skull exceeded three feet.

In its second book, however, the *Samguk yusa* tells us the story of T'arhae according to the *Karakuk ki* 駕洛國記 (Chronicles of the Kingdom of Kaya), a lost work attributed to a certain Munin 文人,²⁸ governor of Kümngwan 金官 (corresponding, roughly, to the area of modern-day Kimhae 金海) at the time of King Munjong 文宗 (r. 1075–85) of Koryö. Here the tale of T'arhae's deeds is an entirely different matter. The protagonist not only is an authentic dwarf, being only three feet tall, but he certainly does not prove to be a champion of diplomacy when, presenting himself before the king of Kaya, he tells him without much preamble that he has come to oust him.²⁹ Upon rejection of the legitimate ruler, T'arhae then challenges him to a competition in the magic arts, in which he is defeated. He then escapes from Kaya, by sea, chased by five hundred vessels, and it is on precisely that occasion that he manages to take refuge in Silla.

The episode of T'arhae conceals many interpretations within itself. What is sure, however, is that T'arhae is a character suspended between the human and the divine spheres. His aspect is supernatural, as that of a fantastic being of folk beliefs, and he is capable in sorcery too. His relationship with magpies, from which he may even have taken his surname, indicates intelligence, cunning, and even good omen. Moreover, by introducing himself as a blacksmith, he makes the king believe that he possesses divine techniques. In ancient societies, in fact, the blacksmith is a special person, a sort of magician capable of bending an elusive and dangerous element such as fire to his will. Like a shaman, the blacksmith is respected and feared and leads an existence as a *homo sacer*, meaning isolation from the rest of the community, being blessed and cursed at the same time. Among today's Tuareg, artisans and blacksmiths are commonly called "inadan," a term that can be translated, more or less, as "separated." The blacksmith is the one who forges work tools, but above all he is also the one who forges weapons, and the weapons belong to the divinity. The blacksmith himself thus becomes a divine being, like the Ἡφαιστος of Greek mythology and the Tvaṣṭṛ वृष of Indian mythology: the first anneals lightning bolts for Zeus, the second forges the *vajra* वज्र for Indra

इन्द्र. As reported by Eliade ([1951] 2005: chap. 13), in various Asian cultures the blacksmith's profession comes immediately after that of the shaman. "Blacksmiths and shamans are of the same nest," says a Yakut proverb. "A shaman's woman is respectable, a blacksmith's woman is venerable," is another of these proverbs. Blacksmiths have the power to heal and even predict the future. According to the Dolgans, shamans cannot "devour" the soul of blacksmiths, because they keep it in the fire; on the other hand, it is possible for the blacksmith to take the soul of a shaman and make it burn in the fire. The blacksmiths, in turn, are perpetually threatened by evil spirits. They find themselves condemned to work continuously, to handle fire, to make an incessant noise to ward off hostile spirits.

T'arhae, therefore, presents himself as a skilled craftsman (and shaman?) capable of teaching new techniques in an era in which Silla must have been a technologically very backward kingdom. The symbology is all here: even before the divine birth and despite its foreign origin, T'arhae pretends to carry the art of iron, which is also that of weaponry, royalty, and divinity. More likely, however, T'arhae is an unscrupulous adventurer, as evidenced by the slander against Hogong, who is portrayed in other sources as a trusted royal adviser. His ascension to the throne of Silla, combined with his failure in Kaya, authorizes us to think of military events (pirate raids) subjected to the whims of fortune. After all, T'arhae comes from the sea and conquers power by deception: it is certainly the portrait of a pirate (I will reiterate this later), perhaps a sort of Chang Pogo 張保臯 (?–846) *ante litteram*. It is thus possible that one of his expeditions was rejected in Kaya and had more success in Silla, but we cannot know this for sure.

The next episode is very famous and is particularly loved for its romantic aspect, despite the fact that its historicity is far from proven. The protagonist is King Mu 武 (r. 600–641) of Paekche 百濟, who, wanting to marry (probably also for political reasons) Sōnhwa 善花, royal princess of Silla, spreads a false rumor according to which the princess herself, in outrage to every female decorum, leaves the royal palace at night in order to "embrace" him. But let us leave the word to Iryōn:

Sōdong 薯童³⁰ had learned that Princess Sōnhwa 善花 (or perhaps 善化), the third daughter of King Chinp'yōng 眞平 of Silla, was of extraordinary beauty. Then, having cut his hair, he went to the capital of Silla, offering his roots to other boys in order to make them his friends. When he was sure of the trust of his new friends, he wrote a doggerel and begged the other children to spread it as widely as possible. The doggerel went like this:

Sōnhwa, the princess,
Has a secret love,
And she goes by night
To meet Sōdong.

The childish song soon spread throughout the city until it reached the Royal Palace. At that point, the dignitaries of the court vigorously protested against the sovereign, asking him to exile the princess to a remote place in order to silence the scandal.³¹

What happened next is easy to imagine: Södong rushed to console the princess during her journey into exile and it was love at first sight.

The story is confusing, because it almost seems that Södong married Sönhwa before becoming king, but the fact remains that Södong has divine powers (and therefore is an authentic divine trickster) as evidenced by the enormous amount of gold he had amassed by digging roots. Later, with the help of the Buddhist Master Chimyöng 知命, he will send that gold to king Chinp'yöng, in order to repay him for the loss of his daughter and forge an important strategic alliance with him. Nor should it be forgotten that the *Samguk yusa* presents King Mu as a possible son of a dragon, as part of a process of idealization of the sovereign. In any case, in the aforementioned episode, King Mu is undoubtedly a trickster, even if a much more gallant and elegant one than Tarhae. We also begin to notice, moreover, how in the Korean stories the queen is conquered not by direct action but through a cunning used to the detriment of others. This will be one of the elements that will distinguish Korean stories from many Western stories, where cunning will be used directly against the woman.

The next trickster does not marry a princess, but in any case he conquers (and defends) an important female being, because the dragoness of the Eastern Sea can only be related to the dragon-king of the abyss. Most likely, the dragoness herself is a sea princess. However, the “simpleton” of the episode is truly sensational: the one deceived, in fact, is the King of Heaven. Here is the passage, from *Haedong kosüng chön* 海東高僧傳:

A female dragon from the West Sea used to come and listen to the Master's sermons. Once, when a severe drought was raging in the country, the Master asked her to make it rain in order to alleviate the suffering of the population, but the dragoness shielded herself, saying: “The Lord of the sky would not allow it. If I were to agree to your request, I would have to face the punishment of Heaven, and I would have nowhere to hide to avoid it.”

But the Master replied: “Do not worry. My skills are such that I can avoid any possible trouble.”

So, a morning rainbow soon appeared on the southern mountain and, even before lunchtime, it began to rain heavily. Immediately thereafter, however, a formidable thunder was heard, confirming that the punishment of the dragoness was proceeding. She, for her part, rushed to inform the Master of the imminent danger, and then Wön'gwang 圓光 hid her under the pulpit, continuing his explanation of the Scriptures as if nothing had happened. When he introduced himself, the Avenging Angel who was to punish the culprit said: “I am here by order of the ruler of Heaven, and I understand that you are helping the guilty in some way. What would happen if I didn't carry out my mission?”

Pointing to a pear tree that was in the garden, the Master replied: “The one you are looking for has changed and has taken on the appearance of that pear tree. Execute the sentence on that tree, then!”

The Angel then hit the tree and left. The dragoness then came out and, after thanking the Master, began to caress the tree that had been executed in her stead and thus brought it back to life.³²

Wŏn'gwang is a saint, and since a saint is God's favorite, for this reason he is divine. Therefore, Wŏn'gwang may be considered a divine trickster too. What is surprising, however, is that the deception is perpetrated against the Sovereign of Heaven, whereas deceptions against demons and other supernatural entities (i.e., mortals' revenge against *tokkaebi*, goblins, etc.) are common in many cultures. In the Christian oral tradition, there is even a narrative scheme focused on deceptions perpetrated against the devil.³³ There is, inherent in these stories, the satisfaction at having been able to exploit the power of the devil while avoiding becoming his servant. Deception, otherwise considered a reprehensible act, in this case is considered a legitimate weapon because the demon is not recognized as just any adversary: he is the enemy par excellence, considered the representation of absolute evil, and for this reason every means, lawful or unlawful, fair or unfair, becomes a potential resource for a battle that is characterized by its eschatological references. The deception has other functions too: it allows ridicule of the figure of the devil, thus exorcising his fearful role and giving greater prominence to its creator. These stories are probably aimed at reassuring believers about eternal salvation and the defeat of the forces of evil and therefore have an undoubted didactic value.

The episode of Wŏn'gwang, therefore, must be explained from the perspective of Buddhist propaganda, according to which the ruler of Heaven himself is subject to the Buddha. The Buddha himself, however, did not hesitate to resort to deception if this was done for a good purpose: the case of Hārītī हारीती, in this regard, is significant.³⁴

This kind of challenge to the sovereign of Heaven is not isolated in Korean fantasy literature, but the protagonists are often different. A similar episode is encountered in the *Samguk yusa*, book 4, in the chapter known as “Poyang and the Pear Tree” (Poyang imok 寶壤梨木), where we find Poyang instead of Wŏn'gwang and the dragoness is substituted by the dragon Imok 璃目,³⁵ a son of the dragon king of the sea, whose name, by an interesting (and perhaps not accidental) homophony, if written with different characters, means exactly “pear tree.” Moreover, in the classic novel *Ch'oe Koun chŏn* 崔孤雲傳 we find again Imok, whereas Wŏn'gwang is substituted by Ch'oe Ch'iwŏn 崔致遠 (Chŏng 2001: 99–114). The female presence reported by the *Haedong kosŭng chŏn*, thus, acquires particular value, and brings the episode closer to the model of the struggle for the possession of a noble woman.

No Simpleton, No Trickster (2): Three Cases from Western Mythology

Kebra nagast ክብረ ነገሥት (The Glory of the Kings) is one of the most important religious texts of Ethiopian Christianity. By an unknown author, its nucleus dates back to about the fifth century CE, and its first version was probably written in Coptic. Subsequently, the original nucleus was enriched with other elements, also passing through translations into Arabic and Ge'ez, until it was established in a definitive form in the fourteenth century. This text reports a particular version of the episode of the meeting between King Solomon and the queen of Sheba, a

mysterious character already described in the Bible (1 Kings 10:1–13; 2 Chronicles 9:1–12), in the Gospels (Matthew 12:42; Luke 11:31), and in the Qur'an (27:22–44), as well as in various other Jewish, Islamic, and Christian sources.

The kingdom of Sheba has not been precisely identified, although it is often located roughly in the area of modern Yemen. As for its famous queen, she appears in the sources with various names, such as Makeda, Nikaule (Νικαύλη) (Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities* 8.158), or—especially in the Arab sources—Bilqīs³⁶ بلقيس. The core of the story is as follows: having heard of King Solomon's great wisdom, the queen of Sheba goes to see him in order to ascertain if this is true. Having received full satisfaction, she then returns to her own kingdom. The various versions add different details from time to time, but the one that interests us most is found in the *Kebrā nagast*. Here King Solomon, wanting to unite carnally with the queen of Sheba, devises an ingenious trick in order to possess her. Here are the main passages of the story from the translation of E. A. Wallis Budge (1922: 33–35):

And with wise intent Solomon sent to her meats which would make her thirsty, and drinks that were mingled with vinegar, and fish and dishes made with pepper. And this he did and he gave them to the Queen to eat. . . .

And the King rose up and he went to the Queen, and he said unto her (now they were alone together): "Take thou thine ease here for love's sake until daybreak." And she said unto him, "Swear to me by thy God, the God of Israel, that thou wilt not take me by force. For if I, who according to the law of men am a maiden, be seduced, I should travel on my journey [back] in sorrow, and affliction, and tribulation." And Solomon answered and said unto her, "I swear unto thee that I will not take thee by force, but thou must swear unto me that thou wilt not take by force anything that is in my house. . . ."

And she said unto him: "Swear to me that thou wilt not take me by force, and I on my part will swear not to take by force thy possessions," and he swore to her and made her swear. And the King went up on his bed on the one side [of the chamber], and the servants made ready for her a bed on the other side. And Solomon said unto a young manservant, "Wash out the bowl and set in it a vessel of water whilst the Queen is looking on, and shut the doors and go and sleep." And Solomon spoke to the servant in another tongue which the Queen did not understand, and he did as the King commanded, and went and slept. And the King had not as yet fallen asleep, but he only pretended to be asleep, and he was watching the Queen intently. Now the house of Solomon the King was illumined as by day, for in his wisdom he had made shining pearls which were like unto the sun, and moon, and stars [and had set them] in the roof of his house. And the Queen slept a little. And when she woke up her mouth was dry with thirst, for the food which Solomon had given her in his wisdom had made her thirsty, and she was very thirsty indeed, and her mouth was dry; and she moved her lips and sucked with her mouth and found no moisture. And she determined to drink the water which she had seen, and she looked at King Solomon and watched him carefully, and she thought that he was sleeping a sound sleep. But he was not asleep, and he was waiting until she should rise up to steal the water to [quench] her thirst. And she rose up and, making no sound with her feet, she went to the water in the bowl and lifted up the jar to drink the water. And Solomon seized her

hand before she could drink the water, and said unto her: "Why hast thou broken the oath that thou hast sworn that thou wouldst not take by force anything that is in my house?"

Thus, thanks to King Solomon's trick, the queen of Sheba breaks her oath and is forced to have sexual intercourse with him. From this union Menelik/Menilek ምኒልክ, progenitor of all the kings of Ethiopia, was born. The deception, however, did not remain without consequences: the testimony of *Kebrā nagast* reports how, subsequently, Menelik stole (or received from Solomon) the Ark of the Covenant, which was brought from Jerusalem to Ethiopia, where, according to a tradition, it is still hidden today.³⁷

The next episode is taken from Greek mythology. Princess Atalanta is the daughter of King Iasus of Arcadia. According to a very common theme in cultures around the globe, she is exposed at birth, because the king would have wanted a boy. The little girl, however, manages to survive and becomes a skilled hunter, until her father recognizes her as his own daughter. The king then wants to give the princess a husband, but she refuses, because an oracle had predicted that, once married, she would lose her abilities. However, she promises her father that she will only marry the one who can beat her in a running race. Any suitor who did not come out victorious would be killed by her. In this way, Atalanta systematically kills all those who come to challenge her.

Prince Melanion (also called Hippomenes) is madly in love with her, but fears being killed like the previous suitors, and so tries to win with a trick, asking for help from Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Aphrodite then gives him three golden apples from the Garden of the Hesperides, advising him to drop one at a time during the race:

Iasus and Clymene, daughter of Minyas, had a daughter named Atalanta. The child was exposed by her father, because he wanted a son, but she was nursed by a she-bear until she was found and adopted by a community of hunters, among which she grew up. Once she became an adult, she kept her virginity, always remaining in arms by hunting in wild places, and when the centaurs Hylaeus and Rhoecus attempted to rape her, she shot and killed them. . . .

After many (suitors) had already been killed, Melanion fell in love with her and wanted to do the running race. Having brought with him the golden apples given to him by Aphrodite, chased by the girl he dropped them and she, stopping each time to pick those fallen fruits, lost the race. Thus, Melanion managed to marry her.³⁸

The next example, the *Nibelungenlied* (The Song of Nibelungs), is certainly the best-known German epic. Written by an unknown author in Middle/High German at the beginning of the thirteenth century, it deals with events that took place in the fifth century, involving historical figures such as Kings Attila and Theodoric in the plot. The whole story revolves around two marriages: Gunther, king of the Burgundians, wants to marry Brunhild, the queen of Iceland. Brunhild, even if fascinating, is an authentic virago whose suitors are challenged to various

contests but inevitably lose and are killed by her. Thus, King Gunther asks for the help of the hero Siegfried (who, besides having extraordinary strength and valor, is also capable of making himself invisible) to win the terrible queen; Siegfried agrees on condition that the king then gives him as wife his sister Kriemhild:

“Noble Siegfried,” said (Gunther), “will you help me
so that the lovely girl becomes mine?
If you agree and she will be my bride
I will give you what you ask for.”

Siegfried, son of Siegmund, answered:
“If you will give me Queen Kriemhild, your beautiful sister,
I will satisfy you, and in the difficult undertaking
I will not ask for any other compensation.”

Then said Gunther: “O Siegfried I swear in your hands
That if the beautiful Brunhild will come to this land
I will give you my sister as a bride
So that you may live your love happily.”³⁹

Gunther thus challenges the queen with the invisible Siegfried to help him by his side. He is thus able to overcome the duel with weapons unscathed, but then comes the crucial test: throwing a huge boulder as far as possible and then overcoming it with a leap. Gunther is worried, but here is what happens:

So angry the noble girl quickly went towards the stone,
And having lifted it high, with a strong hand she threw it away.
Soon after having thus launched, she made a prodigious leap,
And such was the strength of that gesture, that it made her armor resound.

The stone had fallen twelve fathoms away,
But the beautiful girl crossed the distance well.
Then it was Siegfried who went to the stone,
And he threw it after Gunther had taken it.

Siegfried was brave, tall and strong,
And not only did he throw the boulder further,
But he overtook (Brunhild) even in the jump,
Taking Gunther with him, thanks to his magic.

The competition was over and the stone was laying on the ground,
And only Gunther was visible to everyone.
Beautiful Brunhild was red with rage,
Siegfried had saved Gunther from death.

When she saw that (Gunther) was unharmed in the field,
(Brunhild) called all his subjects in a loud voice:
“All of you come here immediately:
From now on Gunther will be your king.”⁴⁰

The trick was successful. How the story ended up, however, we will see later.

Cultural/Anthropological Implications and Final Considerations

All the aforementioned stories present strategies aimed at the possession of a woman (in the case of the master Wōngwang, the possession is spiritual rather than physical) as part of a hunt for a partner, which must have had, over the millennia, more or less dramatic implications within various cultures. The stories must therefore be framed and seen in the more complex context of the man-woman relationship in antiquity and, although united by the theme of the trickster, they must be analyzed separately on the basis of the cultures that these stories have produced. And if it is true that all the women conquered in the aforementioned episodes are foreigners, it is also true that the ways in which the women are acquired are strongly affected by the cultural stratifications that over time had come to distinguish some societies from others.

I will start with the two stories that flourished in the context of Indo-European societies (Greek and Germanic), characterized by a strong exogamy, patriarchy, and initially pastoral, if not nomadic, life patterns. We notice immediately that in the two stories the women are, to use a typical police expression, “armed and dangerous,” and this should not come as a surprise even in the context of a patriarchal society such as the Indo-European one. The exogamous cultural pattern, in fact, inevitably led to frequent episodes of kidnappings or even to armed conflicts between tribes that broke out over the possession of women.⁴¹ The aforementioned case of the “Kidnapping of the Sabine Women” (Latins and Sabines/Samnites were Indo-European peoples who arrived in Italy with the so-called second migration, which took place around 1200 BCE) is a wonderful example of how the ancient Indo-European tribes must often have acted apropos of “weddings.” We should not forget, moreover, that the Trojan War also broke out over a woman. Indeed, echoes of warrior women (Amazons, Saurōmatae) have reached us through the ancient texts of history and literature (starting from Homer),⁴² and many sources agree in saying that these peoples, real or imaginary, lived in Scythia (and more precisely the steppe zone of modern-day southern Russia between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea), which is thought by various scholars to be the main area of origin of the Indo-Europeans.⁴³

Thus, the stories of Atalanta and Brunhild are struggles for life or death, even before they are love stories. Those who failed to overcome the two women would be killed, and those who won would possess them. The fact that the two women are defeated by deception, then, leads to prehistoric hunting models, whereby animals, especially potentially deadly ones, could only be conquered and captured with the help of others (Gunther and Siegfried) or by means of bait (Melanion).

Over millennia and with the creation of more complex legal systems, deception begins to be condemned, but not only this: the effects of “cultural contamination” (often due to migrations and violent conquests) are able to reverse the results of the actions perpetrated by means of tricks. This is why the stories of Brunhild and Atalanta do not have a happy ending. The epilogue of the *Nibelungenlied* is even terrible, becoming almost an icon of the aesthetic titanism of Germanic cultures, capable of exalting and idealizing even the greatness of tragedies. After the weddings between Gunther and Brunhild and between Siegfried and Kriemhild, everything seems to be going well until, one day, Kriemhild, during a quarrel with her sister-in-law, reveals to Brunhild the deception of which she was the victim. Brunhild then takes revenge by having Siegfried killed by the vassal Hagen (actually with the consent of Gunther), and then Kriemhild even marries Attila, king of the Huns, thinking already of revenge. In this way, as queen of his new people, she invites Gunther and his Burgundians to her court, where they will all end up massacred. Kriemhild herself kills her brother Gunther and Hagen with her own hands, and is eventually killed by an indignant Hildebrand, a vassal of the Gothic king Theodoric, who was also there as Attila’s guest. The epic poem ends with a scenario of total death and destruction.

Indo-European tribalism emerges forcefully along with the concept of “feud” (not by chance a Germanic term): by marrying Attila, king of a Turkic/Mongolian people, in respect of exogamy, Kriemhild changes nationality and therefore does not have any qualms about exterminating even the people of her former tribe, including family members.

In the case of Atalanta, on the other hand, the memory of the dramatic clash of civilizations that took place between the Indo-European cultural patterns and the ancient Mediterranean civilization lingers. The Mediterranean civilization, in fact, was mainly linked to agricultural subsistence models, primarily female divinities, and endogamy. In the race against Atalanta (an Indo-European warrior woman), Melanion is helped by Aphrodite, an ancient Mediterranean goddess of love and fertility, who, like other deities (for example, Dionysus), also survived in the Indo-European pantheon. However, after marrying Atalanta, Melanion will forget the favor of the goddess and engage in absolutely indecent religious behavior, and thus the two spouses are transformed into lions, animals that, according to the beliefs of the time, did not mate with each other.

Here the cultural clash (the offense against the old Mediterranean cults and deities) is evident: according to some sources, in fact, Melanion and Atalanta were punished for having had sexual intercourse inside the temple of Cybele, another Mediterranean goddess. The conflict between the two cultures will remain latent for a long time (but in some cases is still visible today in the Mediterranean area) and will also play a major role in the birth of Greek tragedy (Untersteiner 1942).

With the episode of King Solomon and the queen of Sheba we enter a completely different context. The historical path followed by the episode raises interesting questions about the development and transformations of ancient Middle Eastern societies. In the Bible, it is the woman who goes to look for the man, in an episode that, albeit remotely, takes us back to the journey of Queen Hō Hwangok

許黃玉 in Korean folklore.⁴⁴ The biblical episode depicts the queen of Sheba as anything but subordinate to the Jewish king; on the contrary, the queen is placed on a level of absolute equality with Solomon. She is the queen of a rich kingdom who, out of her own cultural curiosity, goes personally to ascertain the wonderful wisdom of a distant sovereign. She is satisfied, and after having given rich gifts to the king (receiving as many in return), she simply returns to whence she came, without converting to Judaism.

The later mythography, however, shows a completely different picture. The queen is now almost a demonic being: she is hairy and even has a donkey's (or goose's) foot. The relationship with King Solomon is no longer one of equality but of subordination, both political and religious. This must certainly be connected to the male chauvinist turn that took place within the so-called revealed religions in the early centuries of the Common Era. This is certainly not the place to explore an extremely complex phenomenon like this; I will only remember the degradation (if not the disappearance) of the feminine element that the philosophy of the time (Gnosticism, above all) had exalted. The Supreme Wisdom, called *Sophia* Σοφία in Greek and *Ruah* רוח in Hebrew, loses ground, and what was originally the Mother of the Christian Trinity becomes an ambiguous Holy Spirit (πνεῦμα ἅγιον). The female element seen as essential to reach Heaven resurfaces in the late Middle Ages, thanks to the reinterpretation and reworking of the old Greek texts by Arabo-Persianate culture. This phenomenon reaches Europe, where it sees (at least in literature) the woman as a spiritual guide, materializing, for example, in Dante's Beatrice and in Shākh-e Nabāt شاخه نبات, the muse of Hāfez حفظ.

Kebra nagast's queen of Sheba could be the result of this revaluation. Thus, the queen yields to King Solomon only by deception and, in any case, she becomes the progenitor of the Ethiopian royal dynasty that will be able to place itself on a level of superiority over the Israelites by obtaining the Ark of the Covenant.

In Korean stories, by contrast, women play a much more passive role, becoming above all (unlike what happens in the Western episodes mentioned above) a political/diplomatic instrument. This implies a more evolved context within an already masculinized society and, therefore, a possibly later codification of the stories, in opposition to other episodes such as, for example, that of Ondal 溫達 (?–590),⁴⁵ where the woman has a predominant role.⁴⁶ It is also for this reason that, as has already been said, the deception is not perpetrated directly toward women but toward those around them. The episode of T'arhae certainly lends itself to many interpretations, but a cross-analysis of the chronicles of Silla and Kaya reveals further evidence of how eventful the protohistoric period may have been in the area between northeastern China and the Japanese archipelago. Sea voyages in both directions (Korea–Japan, Korea–Northeast Asia, and vice versa) must have been frequent, in the context of a culture that presented very similar aspects (e.g., jar burials and southern-type dolmens) in the south of the Korean peninsula and on the island of Kyūshū. Thus, there must have been local migrations of people in search of fortunes to be obtained by more or less legitimate means. Episodes like that of Yōno 延鳥⁴⁷ and Seo 細鳥 of Hogong and, of course, of T'arhae must certainly be framed in this context.

But T'arhae's place of provenience remains unknown. Very interesting, in this regard, is Yi Hyöngu's intuition that the migration of T'arhae could be connected in some way to the migration of Chumong (Yi H. 1994: esp. 20–22).⁴⁸ I feel I can support a similar hypothesis because, in this way, T'arhae and his entourage would come from the continent, where the iron civilization had already evolved, and therefore they could certainly have used their technological experiences as a calling card to gain hospitality in Silla. Another possible scenario could be that T'arhae was originally a Kaya man, expelled for some reason from his own country.

T'arhae directly challenges King Suro in a magic contest that suggests the role of king-shaman that the tribe chieftains of the time must have had. More likely, his must have been a full-scale military attack, thwarted by the ruler of Kaya, who has him chased by five hundred ships, whereupon, defeated, he abandons the enterprise and flees by sea. Five hundred ships are never used (even if the number is clearly hyperbolic) to pursue a single person, and this confirms that T'arhae's must have been a pirate raid. It is also possible that this story was invented in the context of the nobility of old Kaya, which came to light especially after the end of the *sönggol* 聖骨 aristocracy: however, if we remove the inevitable exaggerations, it does not seem completely absurd.

After failing in Kaya, T'arhae tries again in Silla, this time with deception, and succeeds, to the detriment of Hogong, who had also come by sea. T'arhae is probably content to keep a low profile for the moment, waiting diplomatically for a better time to gain the throne, and in the meantime gets rid of Hogong, who may have been a dangerous competitor.⁴⁹ T'arhae is aware that he can wait because he evidently knows that in Silla a son-in-law, instead of a daughter, can become king. As for Hogong (whom we later find as T'arhae's own officer), he too may have been a former adventurer in the service of the king of Silla.

What is certain is that, thanks to deception, T'arhae becomes a precursor, in Korea, of the theme of “son-in-law who becomes king,” which is widespread in Western mythology and probably has the same origin, which is that of matriarchy and/or matrilineage replaced by the patriarchy.⁵⁰ In this regard, the protohistoric era must have been decisive in Korea, and typical patterns of matriarchy/matrilineage such as endogamy must have survived for a long time, if it is true that Kim Yusin 金庾信 (595–673) gets to marry his own niece.

The King Mu episode certainly happens in the historical period, but this has not served to dispel many doubts about its authenticity. The document found in the Mirüksa 彌勒寺 pagoda, in 2009, does not mention Sönhwa as queen but as Sat'aek 沙宅 (that is, a lady from the Sa clan), but this does not exclude that King Mu may have had more than one queen.⁵¹ Furthermore, we do not know how much a Silla queen could be loved in Paekche, and therefore many inscriptions may have been voluntarily reticent.⁵²

King Mu's trick is usually explained by the fact that at that time the relations between Paekche and Silla were already very strained. This may be true, but if so then King Mu would have no reason to enrich an enemy king with his gold (although this is probably a fantastic detail), unless his was a risky political move aimed at improving relations between the two states. In addition, placing the

daughter of an enemy king in his own home could have meant, for Mu, both holding a hostage and keeping a spy, and we don't know if the king of Paekche wanted to take such a risk.

It is therefore possible that the episode has something to do with the customs of the peoples of that time. As part of the endogamy of the ruling aristocracy of Silla, marrying a princess of that country should not have been easy; besides, at the beginning of the seventh century, the *sōnggol* were already starting to run out. This must have been a common opinion in other states as well, meaning that Mu's deception could have served to circumvent the social taboo with the greatest joy of its population. It cannot even be ruled out that, by flaunting a queen of Silla, King Mu intended to make a good impression on China, which, at the time of the episode, had yet to be ruled by the Sui 隨 (581–618) and was on a full collision course with Koguryō.

From the point of view of fairytale narrative, King Mu's trick suggests that the "predestination" of his own kingship⁵³ (if there was one) does not also include the acquisition of a queen of Silla. On the contrary, to have Sōnhwa (and a possible alliance with Silla) the king must use all his wits, personally and on his own initiative.

In short, behind the fictional love of Mu and Sōnhwa (assuming that there really was a marriage), as eternalized in the *Sōdong-yo* 薯童謠, the presence of a political motive is always the most probable. The ingenious trick remains but, as they say, anything goes in love and war, and for Paekche, love and war were never so closely connected as in that moment.

Finally, the episode of Master Wōngwang. Technically it is very similar to that of the queen of Sheba: a woman of high lineage learns of a man's wisdom and visits him. But the similarity does not end there. Like the story of Solomon, the female character first takes on fantastic connotations (dragoness) and then even disappears from the scene. It is obvious that Buddhist masters must have had women among believers, and in a period when literacy was very rare, the only women capable of fully understanding a sermon had to be the most educated and therefore, at least theoretically, the most aristocratic ones. As a matter of fact, women (and not only in the East)⁵⁴ have always been particularly receptive to salvific religions, and the case of Korean Buddhism is no exception. The popularization of Buddhism through the use of a simple and theatrical language, maximized by Wōnhyo 元曉 (617–86), was precisely aimed at attracting believers from the lower classes, and women represented the majority, not least because they led a more sedentary life. Wōngwang's dragoness, therefore, must have been a woman in all respects, whom we find already demonized in *Haedong kosūng chōn* and even replaced by Imok in subsequent literature, in the context of an increasingly militant patriarchy and moralism.⁵⁵ In any case, saving the woman/dragon, Wōngwang definitely conquers an important believer and proclaims the universality of Buddhism and its superiority (which also legitimizes the Royal House of Silla) over local cults and beliefs, starting with the ruler of Heaven, who is ignominiously duped.

In conclusion, the trickster motif belongs to what structuralist philosophers call mankind's "reptile brain" or "deep brain structure," meaning that it can be found in human nature even before culture (Laborit 1971). For this reason, it exists in every

part of the world. To this innate motif, the cultural stratifications of each civilization add a series of different aspects and nuances to the form, the practice, and the purpose of the trick itself. By overcoming the scientific limits of pure phenomenology, which often stops at the mere observation of the similarity of phenomena, structuralism aims to demonstrate that, when faced with the same situation, all human beings tend to react in the same way (the “nature” of the reptilian brain), but in different aesthetic forms (the “culture” of the structured brain) according to the various cultural contexts. In this way, structuralism overcomes phenomenology and at the same time leads us to the kind of historical-cultural investigation which is also associated with the phenomenological method, pointing out from time to time those variants of the same phenomenon that are the result of cultural stratification.⁵⁶ What we have seen in this article have been variations on the theme of “conquering” a woman, but it is obvious that the theme of the trickster can be extended almost indefinitely. What was important to demonstrate is that all human beings live “under the same sky,” in the sense that, beyond linguistic, religious, and political differences, there remains in the world a universal language, understandable to everyone, which, if correctly applied, can still help mankind to travel a long way.

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NOTES

This work was supported by a Humanities Korea Plus Project through the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2019S1A6A3A03058791).

1. *Gospel of Nicodemus*, chapter 10.2. In the Coptic version of the same Gospel the episode is reported at chapter 7, 3–4. The name of the good thief is not revealed in the Canonical Four Gospels but is reported as “Titus” in the *Arabian-Syriac Infancy Gospel* (chapter 23, 1–2). The Russian orthodox tradition reports the name as Rach (Pax). On the Apocryphal Gospels, see Craveri 1969 and Moraldi 1994. For the Coptic version of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, see Vandoni and Orlandi 1966.

2. On the whole question, see Santangelo 1991.

3. I.e., the heroes of the Chinese classical novel *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 (The Water Margin), one of the “Four Great Classical Novels” of China (*Sidamingzhu* 四大名著). Articulated in one hundred books (the number of books changes according to the various versions), its authorship is debated, but is often attributed to Shi Nai’an 施耐庵 (ca. 1296–1372) with a possible contribution by Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中 (ca. 1280–1360). The date of its completion is generally indicated as the fourteenth century.

4. Among the most popular editions of *Hong Kiltong chŏn* 洪吉童傳, see Hō 1991. For *Chŏn Uch'i chŏn* 田禹治傳, see the edition of 1996, where *Hong Kiltong chŏn* is also reported. The

thirty-seven-sheet version of *Ch'ŏn Unch'i ch'ŏn* 全雲致傳 preserved at the Academy of Korean Studies is translated into Italian in Riotta 2017a: 135–201.

5. See, for example, *Odyssey* 13.250: πολύτλας δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς.

6. The skill of Muslims in chess is already attested in medieval times. It is known that in Florence, on January 18, 1266, a Muslim known as Buzzeca (or Buzzecca) played three games simultaneously (two without seeing the chessboard) and scored two wins and a draw. The episode is recorded by Giovanni Villani (*Cronica*, book 7.12) and, in verses, by Antonio Pucci (*Centiloquio*, book 15, 63–65): “In questo tempo arrivò in Fiorenza / Un Saracin ch'ebbe nome Buzzeca / Che degli scacchi seppe ogni scienza” (At this time arrived in Florence / A Saracen named Buzzeca / Who everything knew about chess). The Islamic chess champion is probably to be identified with Abu Bakr ibn Zubair, from Seville. See Villani 2007 and Pucci 1772.

7. Plutarch, *Instituta Laconica* (Ἀποθέγματα Λακωνικά) in *Moralia*, vol. 3 (1961: 423–49): Κλέπτουσι δέ οἱ νέοι καὶ τῶν σιτίων ὀ τι ἂν δύνωνται, μαθηθάνοντες εὐφυῶς ἐπιτίθεσθαι οἷσιν καθευδουσιν ἢ ραθύμως φυλάσσουσιν τῶ δέ ἀλόντι ζημία πληγαὶ καὶ τό πεινῆν (The boys steal as much food as possible after learning to attack those who sleep or are negligent on guard. In the event that they are caught, they are flogged or forced to fast as punishment).

8. The poem is part of an epic cycle that shows the often-difficult relationships between the well-known Uruk and Aratta, a city that has not yet been identified (it has been speculated that it was somewhere in the area of present-day Armenia/Azerbaijan or in the Elamite region in the southeast of present-day Iran). See Rubio 2009: 46–48, and Anonymous 2006.

9. See, for example, the well-known book by Konrad Lorenz, *King Solomon's Ring* ([1949] 1992).

10. It is worth mentioning, in this regard, that an *opera semiseria* by Gioacchino Rossini (1792–1868), composed in 1817, is titled precisely “La gazza ladra.” The intelligence of corvids (crows, ravens, magpies, jackdaws, jays, etc.) is today unanimously recognized by ethologists. In the imagination of many cultures, the crow is an authentic alchemical symbol that represents various types of metamorphosis: the passage from ignorance to knowledge, from life to death, from evil to good, from night to day. To cite just a few cases, among the populations of the Russian Far East (Chukchi, Itelmens, Koryaks) the crow is an authentic divinity capable of acting also as a shaman and trickster. The Korean *Samjogo* 三足鳥 and the Japanese *Yatagarasu* 八咫鳥 do not need any particular introduction, nor should it be forgotten how two ravens, Huginn (The Thought) and Muninn (The Memory), are the messengers of Odin. I take this opportunity to point out that what in Korean is called *kkamagwi* (or *songjang kkamagwi*) in English is called “carrion crow” (*Corvus corone*) and not “common raven” (*Corvus corax*) or “rook” (*Corvus frugilegus*). On the behavior and intelligence of ravens, see, among others, Heinrich (1999) 2019.

11. The term is applied to a subgroup of animals called *prasaha* प्रसह, those animals who take their food by preying.

12. Also termed *tokkakkwi* 獨脚鬼, *mangnyang* 魍魎, *höju* 虛主, etc.

13. Radin 1956. Also see Radin 1990: 7–9. The term *Hochunk* is used by the Winnebago to refer to themselves, while the term *Winnebago* is of uncertain origin and was used mainly by the Potawatomi to indicate the Hochunk. It is possible, however, that *Winnebago* means “people of bad waters,” where by “bad waters” we must intend “brackish waters,” perhaps with reference to the place of origin of the Winnebago, near the sea. See Perrot 1911: 288n199.

14. On the role of Hermes as protector of thieves, see, among others, Grossato 2006: 15–18.

15. Homer, *Odyssey* 5.47–48: εἴλετο δὲ ῥάβδον, τῆ τ' ἀνδρῶν ὄμματα θέλγει / ὧν ἐθέλει, τοὺς δ' αὖτε καὶ ὑπνῶντας ἐγείρει (Then he [Hermes] took the wand, with which the eyes of men enchants / of those he wants, and he also awakens those who sleep).

16. According to tradition, he belonged to the Sök 昔 family and reigned from the year 57 to the year 80. The *Samguk yusa* (book 1) states that he was the son of King Hamdalp'a 含達婆 of the kingdom of Yongsöng.

17. Also called *Silla Sui chön* 新羅殊異傳 (Unusual Stories of Silla). Attributed to Ch'oe Ch'iwön 崔致遠 (857-?) or to Pak Illyang 朴寅亮 (?-1096), only some fragments of this work survive; they are reported in later books as *Samguk yusa* 三國遺事, *Haedong kosüng chön* 海東高僧傳, etc.

18. This kingdom is reported in Korean sources with various names, such as Chöng-myöng-guk 正明國, Wanha-guk 琺夏國, Hwaha-guk 花夏國, Tap'ana-guk 多婆那國, etc. Never identified, there is a timid hypothesis according to which, based on the assonance of the two names, "Tap'ana" could be "T'amna 耽羅," i.e., the island of Cheju 濟州. On the other hand, Yongsöng has also been considered a synonym of Yonggung 龍宮 (Yun 1936). A greater affinity between Yongsöng and Japan is seen by Kim S. (2011: esp. 105).

19. On the coast, east of the capital Kyöngju 慶州.

20. Very close to Kyöngju, it is 745 meters high.

21. Here too we are close to the capital.

22. The *Samguk sagi* 三國史記 (book 1) gives us some information on this still legendary character. It would have been in fact an inhabitant of the Japanese islands who arrived in Silla aboard a pumpkin [sic]. He would have received a title from Pak Hyökköse 朴赫居世, the founder of the kingdom, on behalf of whom he would also have carried out a diplomatic mission to Mahan 馬韓 or Paekche 百濟. Much later, he would have given his residence to King T'arhae before his retirement near Sinwölsöng. Behind the legend, however, there may be a historical truth according to which, given that the sinograph *ho* 瓠 is that for "pumpkin" (a vegetable that will later be associated with Pak Hyökköse and the very surname "Pak"), Hogong himself may have been a cadet of the royal family of Silla. What is certain is that we also find him in the episode of the birth of Kim Alchi.

23. 龍城國王妃生大卵怪之置卵小櫃以奴婢七寶文貼載船泛海來至阿珍浦村長阿珍等開櫃出卵忽有鵲來啄卵開有童男自稱脫解託村嫗爲母學書史兼通地理體貌雄偉登吐含山相京師地勢新月城墟可居而有瓠公浮瓠渡海來居不知何人也脫解謀欲取之夜入基家園埋鍛金器告於朝日予世業鍛金暫適鄰鄉瓠公取居吾家請驗之掘之果有鍛金器王知脫解實非鷄林人也特善基非凡以基家賜之遂降長公主龍城國在倭國東北二千里. *Sui chön*, in *Samguksa chöryo* (book 2).

24. A thousand *li*, according to the *Samguk yusa*. At this point some calculations can be made, assuming that "Wae" indicates Japan; certainly not, however, in its current geographical aspect. In all likelihood, in fact, the term *Wae* indicated the Japanese closest to Korea, like those who lived in the western area of Kyüshü 九州. One *li* corresponds, in modern Korea, to just under 400 meters, but the measurements have varied considerably over the centuries: in Tang China, contemporary with Silla, a *li* was equivalent to almost 560 meters and in China of the later Han 漢, contemporary with T'arhae, to almost 415 meters. Accepting the distance proposed by the *Sui chön*, therefore, the kingdom of Yongsöng would have been located a thousand kilometers northeast of the country of Wae, while this measure is halved in other sources like the *Samguk yusa*. Now, if the Wae were really in the south of present-day Japan, the kingdom in question could have been found on the great island of Honshü 本州 or, more implausibly, on Hokkaido 北海道. However, there is no lack of identification with southern China or areas of southeastern Asia on the basis of a possible Buddhist origin of T'arhae's father, Hamdalp'a 含達婆.

25. 我本龍城國人 [亦云正明國 或云琺夏國 琺夏或作花廈國 龍城在倭東北一千里], *Samguk yusa* (book 1): "I come from the country of Yongsöng (also called Chöngmyöng, Hwaha or Wanha. It is located 1000 *li* northeast of Wae)."

26. Her surname was Pak. In various sources she is also mentioned as Ahyo 阿孝 and Aro 阿老. The eldest daughter of King Namhae and Queen Unje 雲帝, she would later become the adoptive mother of Kim Alchi 金闕智, the ancestor of the Silla royal family with the surname Kim.

27. The *Samguk yusa* (book 1) explains that the character of the surname Sök is none other than the character *chak* 鶻 of “magpie” deprived of the radical *cho* 鳥 (bird). In addition, Iryön also hypothesizes a derivation from the single character “sök 昔,” which means “ancient,” since in ancient times he had taken possession of another’s house. The name “Tarhae,” on the other hand, as it can be summarily translated as “making oneself free,” would allude to the fact that the character in question had freed himself from the captivity of the egg (or the coffer).

28. Or “Mun In”? The term *munin*, however, might even be a common noun, for *munin* means “literatus.”

29. *Karakkuk ki*, in *Samguk yusa*, book 2: 身長三尺 頭圓一尺 悅焉詣闕 語於王云 我欲奪王之位 (His height was three feet, and his head was about one foot in circumference. Once he arrived, he definitely went to the royal palace and said to the king: “I have come to take your place”).

30. Södong was the familiar name of King Mu. As a child he earned his living by gathering and selling roots, and for this reason people had renamed him Södong, or “root boy.” But what kind of root? The character *sō* 薯 in modern Chinese is often translated as “potato” or “sweet potato,” but potatoes could not be found in ancient Asia. Probably the reference is to what in pure Korean is called *ma*, a plant of Solanaceae, endemic to the Far East, whose roots are called *sanyak* 山藥 (literally: “mountain medicine”) and are used as a tonic.

31. 聞新羅眞平王第三公主善花 (一作善化) 美艷無雙 剃髮來京師 以薯蕷餽閭里羣童 羣童親附之 乃作謠 誘群童而唱之云 善化公主 隱他密 只嫁良置 占薯蕷房 乙夜矣 卯乙抱遣去 如童謠滿京 達於宮禁 百官極諫 竄流公主於遠方. *Samguk yusa*, book 2.

32. 西海龍女常隨聽講 適有大旱 師曰汝幸雨境內 對曰上帝不許 我若謾雨 必獲罪於天 無所禱也 師曰 吾力能免矣 俄而南山朝濟 崇朝而雨 時天雷震即欲罰之 龍告急 師匿龍於講床下 講經 天使來告曰 予受上帝命 師為逋逃者 主萃不得成命 奈何 師指庭中梨木曰 彼變為此樹 汝當擊之 遂震梨而去 龍乃出謝禮 以其木代已受罰 引手撫之 其樹即蘇. *Haedong kosŭng chŏn*, book 2.

33. Typical is the case in which the devil is told to build a bridge in exchange for the soul of the one who will cross it first. After the construction of the bridge, an animal is made to pass in place of a person and thus the devil is deceived.

34. Hārītī was a demoness (*rākṣasa* राक्षस, K. *nach'al* 羅刹) who loved her children but ate those of others; the Buddha, in order to convert her, stole one of her children and hid him under a rice bowl. Desperate, the demoness began to look for him everywhere, asking for help even from the Buddha, who said to her: “Even though you have five hundred children, you are now desperate for having lost one: can you now imagine the agony felt by those mothers when you ate their children?” The demoness converted, becoming the protector of all children, and from that moment on she replaced her usual prey with pomegranate grains. Hārītī will manage to arrive in Japan where she will be revered as Kishimojin 鬼子母神 or Kariteimo 訶梨帝母 (transliteration of “Hārītī-mo”). Kishimojin is so often considered a manifestation of Avalokiteśvara/Kwannon अवलोकितेश्वर/觀音, especially in the context of Shingon 真言 Buddhism. Hārītī is also highly revered in Nepal, where she is considered the bride of the demon Pañcika पाञ्चिक (Ch. Bandujia 般闍迦, K. Pandoga). Together they would have produced five hundred children. Hārītī is quoted in *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra* सद्धर्मपुण्डरीकसूत्र, chapter 26, and the story is narrated in detail in the section *Samyukta Vastu* संयुक्त वस्तु (Miscellanea), which is found in chapter 31 of *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* मूलसर्वास्तिवाद विनय (Ch. *Genben shuo yiqieyou bu* 根本說一切有部), in *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* (hereafter referred to as T.) 24: 1451.

35. Imok is the one who is also called *imugi* in the varied fantastic zoology of Korea. Imagined now as a fish, now as a snake, the *imugi* is an aquatic being (sometimes the son of the dragon god of the abyss) who is only waiting to transform into a dragon, and for this reason is sometimes identified with the carp, which, long-lived as it is, when dying in reality does not die but turns into a dragon and rises to heaven. The sinograph that represents it is 蟒 (K. *mang*) not to be confused with 虯 (K. *i*), which also indicates a dragon, but a terrestrial one of *yin* 陰 nature and of small size, which usually stands in the shade of trees or rocks feeding on insects and other small animals. On the *imugi* in relation to Buddhism in Korean folklore, see Ch'ŏn 2017.

36. In this regard, see, among others, Canova 2000.

37. For an analysis of the queen of Sheba across the ages and sources, see Lassner 1993.

38. Ἰάσου δὲ καὶ Κλυμένης τῆς Μινύου Ἀταλάντη ἐγένετο. ταύτης ὁ πατὴρ ἀρρένων παίδων ἐπιθυμῶν ἐξέθηκεν αὐτήν, ἄρκτος δὲ φοιτῶσα πολλὰ κίς θηλὴν ἐδίδου, μέχρις οὗ εὐρόντες κунηγοὶ παρ' ἑαυτοῖς ἀνέτρεφον. τελεία δὲ Ἀταλάντη γενομένη παρθένον ἑαυτὴν ἐφύλαττε, καὶ θηρεύουσα ἐν ἐρημίᾳ καθωπλισμένη διετέλει. βιάζεσθαι δὲ αὐτὴν ἐπιχειροῦντες Κένταυροὶ Ροϊκός τε καὶ Ὑλαῖος κατατοξευθέντες ὑπ' αὐτῆς ἀπέθανον. . . ἤδη δὲ πολλῶν ἀπολομένων Μελανίων αὐτῆς ἐρασθεὶς ἦκεν ἐπὶ τὸν δρόμον, χρύσεια μῆλα κομίζων παρ' Ἀφροδίτης, καὶ διωκόμενος ταῦτα ἔρριπτεν. ἡ δὲ ἀναρουμένη τὰ ριπτόμενα τὸν δρόμον ἐνίκηθη. ἔγημεν οὖν αὐτὴν Μελανίων. Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, book 3, 9.2. The myth of Atalanta (with more or fewer variants) is reported in various classic authors such as Hyginus (*Fabulae* 185), Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 10.560–680), etc.

39. Er sprach wil dv mir helfen edel Sivrit

Werbn die minnechlichen tvostv des ich dich bit

Vn- wirt mir ceime trvotv <daz> minnechliche wip

Ich wil dvrch dinen willen wagen ere vn- lip.

< es> antwrte Sivrit der Sigmvndes svn

Gistv mir dine swester so wil ich ez tv^n

Di scoenen Chrimhilde ein kvneginne her

So ger ich deheines lones nach minen arbeiten mer.

Daz lob ich sprach do Gvnther Sivrit an dine hant

Vn-chvmt div scoene Prvenhilt her in dizze lant

So wil ich dir ce wibe mine swester gebn

So mahtv mit der scoenen immer vroeliche lebn.

Nibelungenlied (Handschrift B), Adventure 6, 330–32.

40. Do gie si hin vil balde vil zornech was ir mvt

Den stein hvop vil hohe div edel magt gvt

Si swanch in crepftchliche vil verre von der hant

Do spranch <si> nach dem wrffe ia er clanch ir allez ir gewant.

Der stein der was gevallen wol zwelf clafter dan

Den wrf den brach mit sprvnge div maget wol getan

Dar gie der herre Sifrit da der stein gelach

Gvnther in do wegte der helt in werffene pfalch.

Sifrit der <was> chvne vil crepftech vnt vil lanch
 Den stein den warf er verrer dar zv er witer spranch
 Von sinen schonen listen er hete crapft genvch
 Daz er mit dem sprvnge den chvnich Gvnthere <doh> trvch.

Der sprvnch der was ergangen der stein der was gelegen
 Do sach man ander Niemen wan Gvnther den degen
 Prvnnhilt div schone div wart in zorne rot
 Sifrit hæte geverret des kvnich Gvntheres tot.

Zv zir ingesinde einteil si lvte sprach
 Do si Gvntheren cent des ringes wol gesvnden sach
 Vil balde chvmt her naher ir mage vnt mine man
 Ir svlt dem chvnige Gvnther alle wesen undertan.
Nibelungenlied (Handschrift B), Adventure 7, 460–64.

41. See Dumézil 1979, where the original Indo-European marriage is hypothesized to have been an act of force or violence by men as consequence of purchasing or even kidnapping women, within a strongly exogamic society.

42. Homer, *Iliad* 3.189. For Saurōmatae, see, among others, Pseudo-Hippocrates, *De aeribus, aquis, locis*, book 17: ἐν δὲ τῇ Εὐρώπῃ ἐστὶν ἔθνος Σκυθικόν, ὃ περὶ τὴν λίμνην οἰκεῖ τὴν Μαίωτιν, διαφέροντων ἔθνέων τῶν ἄλλων, Σαυρομάται καλεῦνται. τουτέων αἰ γυναῖκες ἰπάζονται τε καὶ τοξεύουσι, καὶ ἀκοντίζουσιν ἀπὸ τῶν ἵππων, καὶ μάχονται τοῖσι πολεμίοισιν, ἕως ἂν παρθένοι ἔωσιν. οὐκ ἀποπαρθενεύονται δὲ μέχρις ἂν τῶν πολεμίων τρεῖς ἀποκτείνωσι, καὶ οὐ πρότερον ζυνοικέουσιν ἢ περὶ τὰ ἱερὰ θύουσαι τὰ ἐν νόμῳ. ἢ δ' ἂν ἄνδρα ἐωυτῇ ἄρῃται, πάντα ἰπαζομένη, ἕως ἂν μὴ ἀνάγκη καταλάβῃ παγκοίνου στρατείας. (In Europe there is a Scythian race, called Saurōmatae, which inhabits the confines of the Palus Maeotis, and is different from all other races. Their women mount on horseback, use the bow, and throw the javelin from their horses, and fight with their enemies as long as they are virgins; and they do not lay aside their virginity until they kill three of their enemies, nor have any connection with men until they perform the sacrifices according to law. Whoever takes to herself a husband, gives up riding on horseback unless the necessity of a general expedition obliges her.) It is worth saying, in this regard, that similar statements have found some evidence in the excavations of tombs attributed to the Sauromatian culture. The *kurgan* (burial mounds), in fact, have shown the presence of single burials (more than in pairs), where at least 20 percent of women have weapons among their grave goods, together with typically feminine objects such as mirrors. See David 1976: esp. 214–22. It should not be forgotten that according to Herodotus (1.205–6), the leader of the Massagetae Scythians, capable of defeating and killing Cyrus the Great in battle, was Queen Tomyris.

43. According to Herodotus (4.100.1), the “Scythians” lived in an area between the Maeotian marshes (sea of Azov) and the river Tanais (Don), and they were divided into four “families” (Auchatai, Catiaroi, Trasprians, and Paralatai), descended from three brothers.

44. Reported in *Karakuk ki*, in *Samguk yusa*, book 2, the story reports that Princess Hō Hwangok, daughter of the king of Ayut'a 阿踰那, takes a sea voyage by divine decree in order to find a husband worthy of her. Guided by heavenly will, the ship with the princess aboard finally arrives in Kaya, where she becomes the queen consort of King Suro. Ayut'a has never been identified but is sometimes linked to modern-day Ayodhyā अयोध्या, which however begins to be called so only from the fourth to fifth centuries CE (before it was called Sāketa साकेत). On

the other hand, there is no evidence that present-day Ayodhyā is the mythical city of the same name mentioned in ancient Indian epics. The historicity of the episode is also challenged by the fact that it would have happened in too ancient an era, when there were hardly any centralized states on the southern part of the Korean peninsula.

45. There is no reason not to consider Ondal a historical figure; more likely, he is a historical character subsequently mythologized, according to a very common cliché in ancient epic and fantastic literature.

46. *Samguk sagi*, book 45.

47. “Yōngo 迎烏” in *Sui chōn*, in *P’ilwōn chapki*, book 2.

48. The continental origin of the myth is also supported by Na (1995: esp. 136–45), who compares the figure of T’arhae to that of the no less legendary Sōōn 徐偃, author of great deeds in China in remote antiquity.

49. The episode of deception in Hogong is often minimized (if not justified) by Korean scholarship, forgetting that, even before Hogong, it is the sovereign who is deceived. See, for example, Pak 2005a: esp. 150, 152. Here, as well as in Pak 2005b, the embarrassing episode narrated in *Karakkukki* is almost ignored. The harsh reality remains that T’arhae takes the throne by deception.

50. The *tōpos* of the son-in-law who becomes king is attested in various cultures and perhaps presupposes the idea of the “sacrifice” of daughters. In ancient China, Emperor Shun rises to the throne after marrying Emperor Yao’s 堯 daughters. In Greek mythology, this kind of power transmission is frequently attested. Menelaus becomes king of Sparta after marrying Helena, Tyndarus’s daughter. Bellerophon ascends to the throne of Lycia after marrying the daughter of the local king; Melampus marries the daughter of King Praetus and becomes the monarch of Argo. The diffusion of such a custom reveals an incipient transformation of social rules, now oriented toward the masculinization of power. On this question, see Riotto 2017b: 126.

51. On this question, see, among others, Kim C. 2009.

52. Among the most recent publications, a decisive denier of the historicity of the episode is Kang 2019.

53. On the predestination of King Mu’s kingship, see Yi S. 2018.

54. In the West, women were in fact the protagonists of many cults linked to the ancient Mediterranean religion, which provided for personal salvation, unlike the Olympic cults, of Indo-European extraction, whose divinities were prayed to for the salvation of the community. In ancient Greece, a typical festival open only to women was that of the Thesmophoria Θεσμοφόρια, in honor of Demeter, a typical Mediterranean deity.

55. Strangely, this aspect has never been sufficiently noticed, not even in those very few publications (e.g., Kwak 2015) that speak of the figure of Wōn’gwang in the *Haedong kosūng chōn*.

56. In this regard, Lévi-Strauss (1949) 2002 is a pioneering work.

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