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# The Collective Unconscious of Rome and India

## *Narrative Archetypes in the Abduction of Proserpina of Ovid's Metamorphoses and Sita of the Ramayan*

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### Abstract

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* has long served as a window into Greco-Roman culture and mythology. However, the ways in which the *Metamorphoses* may be shaped by, and in turn shape, the interactions between myths and cultures beyond the Greco-Roman world are underexplored. The *Ramayan*, a seminal South Asian mythological text, has received less attention in scholarship in the Global North, in part due to the overwhelming focus on the Greco-Roman canon. This article highlights stark narrative parallels between the abduction of Proserpina in the *Metamorphoses* and the abduction of Sita in the *Ramayan*. Given that these texts are genetically and geographically distinct, tracing the origin of these parallels remains challenging. Here, I leverage a Jungian analytical framework to propose that “narrative archetypes”—collections of images stored in the collective unconscious which manifest in myths across cultures—may explain why episodic details are conserved between the *Metamorphoses* and the *Ramayan*.

### Keywords

South Asia – mythology – intertextuality – ancient history – psychology

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## 1 Introduction: The Stories We Tell

Stories are embedded with instructions which guide us about the complexities of life. Stories enable us to understand the need for and the ways to raise a submerged archetype. [...] In each story fragment is the shape of the entire story.

ESTES, 1995: 16

The stories we tell reflect our cultures and our collectives. Scholars of folklore and storytelling have long regarded stories as “cultural artefacts” that are “pervaded by meaningful symbols” (Georges, 1969: 313). For those who study ancient civilisations, such stories may offer rare opportunities for insight into the beliefs and traditions of cultures that have long since disappeared. In *Metamorphoses*, Ovid embraces the ambitious challenge of weaving hundreds of myths, spanning many ages from the creation of the earth to Rome in antiquity, into a single overarching story, one that survives in its complete form to this day. This story (and its many notable episodes) has been repeatedly analysed by modern scholars to understand the ancient Greco-Roman civilisations, gleaning insights into aspects of daily life ranging from the Roman institution of marriage (Romano, 2009: 543) to the forms of astonishment in Greek myths (Buxton, 2009).

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* has thus often been treated as a window into the lost nuances of ancient Greco-Roman culture, but its value as a narrative that transcends cultural boundaries remains underexplored. Scholars continue to study the *Metamorphoses* to gain insights into issues of gender, sexuality, and morality in ancient Greece or Rome, but often fail to examine the ways in which this grand story might be shaped by, and in turn shape, the interactions between myths and cultures beyond the Greco-Roman world. Many such intersections exist between Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and other stories from antiquity, especially tales from ancient India (broadly defined as tales from cultures indigenous to the Indian subcontinent, which today subsumes most of South Asia). Individual episodes within the *Metamorphoses* and Indian mythology share key narrative features, a relationship that is epitomised by the similarities between the abduction of Sita in the *Ramayana* (Valmiki, 1965: 163–154) and Proserpina in the *Metamorphoses* (Ovid, 2005: v.552–655). For this discussion, I reference Charles Martin's 2005 translation of the *Metamorphoses* and C. Rajagopalachari's 1965 translation of the *Ramayana*.

## 2 Sita and Proserpina: Two Abduction Narratives

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Proserpina is introduced in Book v as "playfully picking white lilies and violets" from a deep pool within a grotto (Ovid, 2005: v.552–561). Consistent with the trends in other episodes of sexual assault in the *Metamorphoses*, Proserpina's presence in a grotto forewarns the reader of trouble ahead (Hinds and Stephen, 1987: 34). In this grotto, she is spotted by Dis (who had been struck by Cupid's arrow) and is carried away by him in his chariot (Ovid, 2005: v.562). As Dis rushes away in his chariot, he is confronted by the nymph Cyane, who attempts to prevent Dis from abducting Proserpina. Dis defeats the nymph and opens a path to the underworld using which he carries Proserpina off to his realm (Ovid, 2005: v.575–592). Meanwhile, Proserpina's mother Ceres searches fruitlessly for her daughter across realms, but finds no sign of her except her girdle that had fallen into Cyane's fountain (Ovid, 2005: v.636–641). Ceres then goes on to mourn the abduction of her daughter, until Jupiter splits the year into two seasons and allows Ceres to see Proserpina for half the year (Ovid, 2005: v.642–746).

While works like the *Metamorphoses* continue to be read and adapted into popular culture in the West, iconic works of non-Western myth such as the *Ramayana* remain less well-known. The *Ramayana* is an epic poem originally written in Sanskrit, and is believed to have been written in the 4th century BCE by the sage Valmiki (Bose, 2004: 355). Briefly summarised, the poem follows Ram, the son of King Dashratha and heir to the throne of Ayodhya (a kingdom in northern India), as he is exiled from his kingdom due to the machinations of one of his stepmothers. Ram moves to southern India for his 14-year exile and is accompanied by his brother, Lakshman, and his wife, Sita, who is herself a princess famed for her beauty and virtue. Much as Proserpina was born of a goddess associated with the earth and agriculture (Ceres), Sita was believed to have been born of Bhumi, the Hindu goddess of the earth.

During their exile, Ram and Lakshman insult (or, in alternative versions of the story, physically mutilate) the demoness Surpankha (Valmiki, 1965: 143). Her brother, the *rakshasa* (demon king) Ravan, then approaches Sita in their woodland abode to exact revenge while drawing Ram and Lakshman away from her using deception. Ravan is then struck by Sita's beauty and abducts her, forcing her on to his flying chariot (Valmiki, 1965: 153). As Ravan flies away with Sita, she loses her garland of flowers and her jewellery over the forest canopy, which are later discovered by Ram as a sign that Sita had been abducted (Valmiki, 1965: 164). Ravan makes for his kingdom of Lanka (modern day Sri Lanka) with Sita, but is confronted by Jataayu, an old vulture (alternatively, eagle) and a lord of birds, who refuses to let Ravan carry Sita away. Ravan and Jataayu battle in

the skies, but Jataayu is finally defeated and killed by the demon king (Valmiki, 1965: 154–155), who then makes his way from southern India to his kingdom of Lanka with Sita in his chariot.

### 3 Parallels between the *Metamorphoses* and the *Ramayan*

For any careful reader of both these stories, the striking narrative similarities between the abduction of Sita and Proserpina are hard to miss. Both Sita and Proserpina are rushed away on a chariot by an abductor, both lose the flowers they were wearing (which are later found by their pursuers) during this flight, and both are unsuccessfully defended by a mythical figure who challenges the abductor and is defeated. The similar features of these stories may, in part, stem from common literary tropes about abduction and gender-based violence, which can also be observed in other stories, such as the abduction of Helen of Troy (Edmunds, 2016). These tropes may in turn signify social and cultural anxieties around the act of abduction, with the abductor being a man from a foreign realm, the victim losing something representative of her femininity, and moral resistance against the abductor failing to protect the victim. Nevertheless, the shared features in these two episodes are more similar than can be entirely attributed to common literary tropes.

The cause of these distinctive parallels is difficult to pinpoint, given the spatial and temporal differences between the creation of these two texts: the *Ramayan* and the *Metamorphoses* are separated by about 6500 km and four hundred years. One possible explanation for this shared narrative could be the trade relationships between ancient Rome and ancient India, which may have led to an exchange of stories and myths, including the *Ramayan* making its way to Rome to influence Ovid's writing of the abduction of Proserpina. However, as will be seen, this explanation is highly unlikely since Ovid demonstrates very little specific knowledge of India in his writing and almost certainly would not have spoken or read Sanskrit. Another possible explanation is that both episodes emerged from a common Indo-European origin story, but this would only explain the broad thematic parallels, not the remarkable similarities in poetic description of these abduction episodes between the two texts.

An alternative explanation for the common themes that appear in these episodes of the *Ramayan* and the *Metamorphoses*, and arguably one that is much more abstract than migration theory, comes from the field of Jungian analytical psychology. Jungian analysts believe that, at their core, all (or most) human minds contain certain images and symbols that transcend personal experience and influence human perception and action (Roesler, 2012: 226).

These images, known as archetypes, were first conceptualised by C.G. Jung in the late 1960s (Jung, 1968) and are understood to be

... unconscious factors, affectively loaded so that, when we experience them, this often has a numinous quality. Archetypes are autonomous from consciousness and [...] universal, which means we will find the same set of archetypes in all human beings.

ROESLER, 2012: 226

Jungian analytical psychology has occasionally been used to examine the origins and shared themes among folklore and mythology in the last few decades. One such example is the Wild Woman archetype, through which Clarissa Pinkola Estes links together mythology from global regions as distinct as Mexico and Hungary (Estes, 1995). Other Jungian psychologists have attempted to link Proserpina/Persephone to the archetype of the *anima* or the feminine spirit. However, no attempts have been made to explore archetypal connections between Greco-Roman and Indian texts. This underexplored approach might well offer a possible explanation for the parallels between Ovid's text and Valmiki's.

There are striking narrative similarities between the episodes of the abduction of Proserpina in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and that of Sita in Valmiki's *Ramayan*, despite the spatial and temporal separation between the two stories. Trade of narratives alone cannot sufficiently explain these similarities (especially given Ovid's apparent lack of knowledge of Indian culture), and narrative archetypes drawing on a collective unconscious may offer a more robust framework for explaining the shared images in the two culturally distinct texts.

#### 4 Symbolic Archetypes: Theory and Evidence

Archetypes, particularly symbolic archetypes, may be defined as "universal images that most, if not all of us, seem to share" and which arguably form "the innate furnishings of our unconscious minds" (Richards, 2015: 79) and thus shape our responses to the world. The theory of archetypes emerged from Jung's study of inter-individually similar psychological complexes, such as negative mother complexes, that were shared by a majority of participants in his studies. Given this inter-individual homogeneity, Jung proposed that there must be a prototypical pattern from which these complexes arose and were shared by all (or most) human beings (Roesler, 2012: 226), and that these pat-

terms (archetypes) were stored in a “collective unconscious” from which they could be accessed.

In the years since Jung’s original studies, some empirical proof has been offered for the existence of archetypes by ethnological and psychological research. For instance, large-scale ethnological studies that examined fairy tales existing across the world found that all fairy tales could be reduced to a set of less than 100 distinct Aarne/Thompson types (Bode, 2006). Anthropologists were divided on explanations for the origins of these shared mythologies, with some arguing that migration theory could account for physical contact between cultures and be related to observed parallels in myths (Zeigo, 2019). However, there are at least a few cases in which anthropologists have found, with certainty, that there was no physical contact between two cultures, yet they still share similar mythological motifs (Lévi-Strauss and Layton, 2008). This paradox suggests that the theory of collective unconscious, not migration theory, might more fully explain the shared motifs in myths across cultures.

In addition to ethnological research, the field of analytical psychology offers some evidence that supports the existence of archetypes. Clinical studies with LSD and other psychedelics have corroborated this idea of “elemental thoughts” or archetypes that are shared by humans. Participants in these studies reported hallucinogenic experiences which including several shared themes (Grof, 2016) resembling mythological motifs (Masters and Houston, 2000). These hallucinations could thus represent archetypes that were explicitly accessed from the collective unconscious using psychedelics. More “conventional”—and much more recent—empirical research has also provided support for the existence of archetypes (Maloney, 1999). Participants were shown matched and mismatched pairs of symbols and words (e.g. the word *soul* and the image of a butterfly), then shown only the symbols again and asked to recall the words associated with each of them. Participants who were initially shown the correctly matched pairings (that is, pairs that seem to represent archetypal images and their corresponding symbols) displayed a significantly higher accuracy in recall of a word upon seeing the associated symbol than those who were shown mismatched pairings (Rosen et al., 1991). Taken together, these ethnological and psychological studies offer support for the theory of archetypes and the collective unconscious.

Archetypes seem to be difficult to consciously define, given their very nature as images stored within the unconscious mind. However, extensive research in analytical psychology has led to the development of tools such as the Archetypal Symbol Inventory (ASI) (Rosen et al., 1991: 226–227), which “is composed of forty symbols with occurrence in different cultures and their accepted mean-

ings, that is, the associated accepted meaning of the symbols across cultures” (Sotirova-Kohli et al., 2013: 549). The ASI concretely codifies archetypes with associated symbols such as *power* (symbol: bull), *ascent* (symbol: stairs), and *purify* (symbol: fire) and has been validated by follow-up studies conducted since its design in 1991. The validity of the ASI suggests that attempts to codify archetypes using cross-cultural paired associations among humans are at least somewhat successful. Jungian psychology may therefore offer a framework using which *narrative* archetypes (rather than symbolic ones) may also be codified from stories and myths.

## 5 Narrative Archetypes in Sita and Proserpina’s Abduction

While *symbolic archetypes* are singular images or symbols stored in the collective unconscious that determine our perceptions and actions in response to the world, I define *narrative archetypes* as a collection of images—constituting an episode—stored in the collective unconscious that manifest in myths and stories across cultures. The abduction of Sita in the *Ramayana* and that of Proserpina in the *Metamorphoses* share a collection of four such images: the flight of a chariot as a woman is abducted, the scattering of flowers during this flight, the abductor being challenged by a righteous being, and the battle and subsequent defeat of this being that follows. Each of these images correspond to symbolic archetypes of ascent or descent, beauty, protection, and wrath, respectively, but together form a cohesive set of symbols that constitute a narrative archetype.

The initial flight of the abductors in both texts represents the symbolic archetype of ascent or descent. In the *Metamorphoses*, Dis abducts Proserpina after he is struck by Cupid’s arrow and attempts to rush off to the Underworld with her. In the *Ramayana*, Ravan abducts Sita both to avenge his sister Sumpankha and because Sita’s beauty was unparalleled. He, too, captures Sita and attempts to rush off to his kingdom of Lanka. The images of Dis and Ravan flying (whether literally or figuratively) to their realms with the captive women are described vividly by both poets:

Her abductor rushed off in his chariot, urging his horses \\  
calling each one by its name and flicking the somber, \\  
rust-colored reins over their backs as they galloped \\  
through the deep lakes and the sulphurous pools  
of Palike ...

OVID, 2005: v.569–572



With one hand he caught hold of her hair and with the other lifted her up and carried her to the chariot which waited for him behind the trees, and forcing her into it, rose with her into the air.

VALMIKI, 1965: 153

[He] sped like an arrow across the sky towards Lanka. They went over many mountains and rivers ...

VALMIKI, 1965: 156

Although Dis is *descending* into the Underworld and Ravan is *ascending* through the air towards Lanka, both figures are depicted as “rushing off” in their chariots. Both Ovid and Valmiki also describe the landscape over which these figures travel with their captives, which serves to convey both the distance and speed at which the abductors are travelling. Even in translation, the parallels between Dis “[rushing] off in his chariot” (Ovid, 2005: v.569) and Ravan “[rising with Sita] into the air” in his chariot (Valmiki, 1965: 153) are striking. Both descriptions evoke a similar image of a chariot flying through the air: Dis descends in his chariot with Proserpina over deep lakes and sulphurous pools, while Ravan ascends in his chariot with Sita over mountains and rivers. These descriptions of chariots rushing away are similar enough that they may represent the shared symbolic archetype of ascent and descent.

Notably, the archetype of ascent/descent in Jungian psychology do not refer solely to physical movements, and similarly in these episodes, these archetypes likely symbolise the individual psyches of the central characters. A comprehensive exploration of the symbology of ascent/descent in mythological journeys to the Greco-Roman underworld (including the journey of Persephone) has been presented elsewhere by LaPrade (2019), demonstrating that these myths typify the notion of psychological transformation which is associated with the archetype of ascent/descent in depth psychology. In Sita’s case, the archetype of ascent may symbolise the psychic violence of her abduction, resulting in a psychological transformation as she is taken away from her husband and invoking cultural anxieties around the preservation of women’s chastity (Moodley, 2020). For Proserpina, the archetype of descent may foreshadow her melancholy, which is notable even when Proserpina becomes the queen of the underworld. Therefore, the physical ascent and descent of Sita and Proserpina as they are abducted may reflect psychological transformation for both characters, further suggesting that these descriptions may be linked to the symbolic archetype of ascent and descent.

The scattering of flowers by both Sita and Proserpina as they are being abducted seems similarly archetypal. As Proserpina is being taken on Dis’ char-

iot into the Underworld, she cries out because the white lilies and violets that she had been picking from a pool (Ovid, 2005: v.559) now “rained down from her negligent tunic” (Ovid, 2005: v.556). In a striking textual resemblance, as Sita is being carried away by Ravan through the air, “the petals fell down from the flowers she was wearing at that time and [...] were strewn along the path below” (Valmiki, 1965: 155). As was the case with the flight of the chariots, the narrative description of the flowers falling from the captive women during this flight is remarkably conserved between the two texts, even in translation. Both episodes depict the flowers falling from the women’s clothing to describe dishevelment through the loss of ornaments. This textual resemblance alone may suggest that these descriptions arose from an archetypal image, perhaps symbolising beauty. This argument is further supported by the fact that flowers have been repeatedly validated as symbols of beauty in empirical studies (Rosen et al., 1991: 222; Sotirova-Kohli et al., 2013: 553), and thus the *loss* of flowers may represent an archetypal depiction of the loss of beauty. Taken together, these textual similarities and the presence of flowers in these two narratives suggest that the falling of flowers from the abducted women also stems from a symbolic archetype of beauty.

As Ravan and Dis are carrying away the captive women, their flight is halted by mythical entities who try to prevent the abductions. The ways in which these entities attempt to hinder the abductors bear a resemblance across both texts. In the *Ramayan*, as Sita cries out while she is being carried away in Ravan’s chariot, she awakens old Jataayu, who was once a revered king of birds. He sees the chariot flying past and recognises Sita, and in that moment

Jataayu’s blood was fired by the sight of her piteous plight and he threw himself in the way of the aerial car [...] [his] fighting blood, the blood of generations of lordly ancestors who ruled the air and knew not fear, was on fire.

VALMIKI, 1965: 153–154

As he demands that Ravan let Sita go, Jataayu stops him by saying, “Hold, hold! What is all this?” (Valmiki, 1965: 153)

“O, you would fly away from me, would you? You shall not escape while I am alive! I care not for your chariot or your ten heads, or your glittering arms! Your heads shall roll on the ground that you have polluted with your presence.”

VALMIKI, 1965: 154

Jataayu thus physically blocks Ravan's path by throwing himself in front of Ravan's chariot when he recognises Sita, and is motivated by his righteousness to speak out against Ravan's actions. A remarkably similar series of events is also seen within the *Metamorphoses*. As Dis rushes off to the Underworld with Proserpina, the nymph Cyane recognises the goddess Proserpina (as Jataayu had recognised Sita) and commands Dis to "go no further!" (Ovid, 2005: v.581) Much as Jataayu throws himself in front of Ravan's chariot to block his path, Cyane emerges from her pool and "[stretches] her arms out in either direction, / [keeping Dis] from passing" (Ovid, 2005: v.587–588). There are striking parallels between the images of Jataayu rising through the air and spreading his wings before Ravan's chariot and Cyane rising from her pool and spreading her arms before Dis' chariot. In addition to the textual similarities, these descriptions of mythical entities blocking the paths of the abductors share an image of outstretched limbs, which are also previously validated symbols associated with the symbolic archetype of protection (Rosen et al., 1991: 223). Given these textual parallels and the presence of a shared symbol of outstretched limbs within these two sections, it is reasonable to suggest that the Jataayu's and Cyane's challenges to Ravan and Dis stem from the same symbolic archetype of protection.

In both the *Ramayana* and the *Metamorphoses*, the abductors prevail over their challengers, and Jataayu and Cyane are both defeated. These battles and subsequent defeat in the two texts also bear a significant resemblance to each other and thus seem to stem from a common symbolic archetype. As Ravan is challenged by Jataayu, he grows angry and "[attacks] Jataayu. It was like a clash between a mighty wind and a massive rain-cloud. The battle raged in the sky above the forest." (Valmiki, 1965: 154) Jataayu fights valiantly despite his old age and manages to wound Ravan and destroy his chariot, but eventually Ravan unsheathes his sword and uses it to

cut off the bird's wings and talons. The old bird was now helpless and fell on the ground unable to move.

VALMIKI, 1965: 155

In a similar turn of events, Dis grows angry when he is challenged by Cyane during his abduction of Proserpina, and

with his strong right arm, he hurled his scepter \\\ directly into the very base of the fountain.

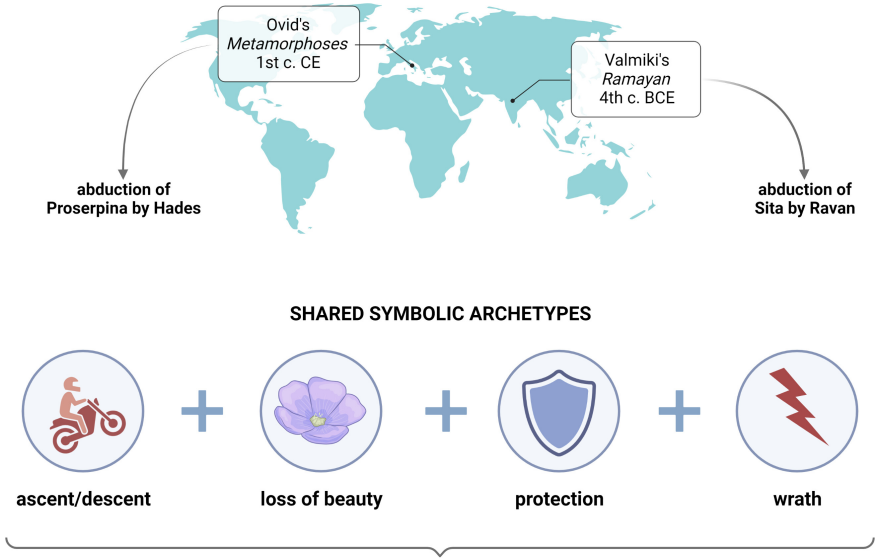
OVID, 2005: v.590–591

When she is struck by Dis' sceptre, Cyane begins disintegrating into her fountain and eventually becomes entirely fluid, until "nothing remains that you could have seized on" (Ovid, 2005: v.607). There are thus two major visual similarities between Jataayu's defeat and Cyane's: both are struck by a weapon by the enraged abductors, and both are then depicted as "falling" after they are defeated—Jataayu through the air, and Cyane as she dissolves into her pool. As before, the textual similarities between these episodes are striking enough to suggest that the images of the defeat of the two mythical entities stem from a common symbolic archetype. This is further corroborated by the fact that the symbolic archetype of wrath has been associated with the symbol of a lightning bolt (Rosen et al., 1991: 223), which may be roughly represented in the texts as the sceptre and sword that Dis and Ravan (respectively) use in their wrathful attacks against Cyane and Jataayu. Both these battles involve the image of these weapons being angrily hurled across the sky by the abductors to defeat their challengers, much as lightning would be hurled across the sky by a wrathful god. Thus, the textual similarities in the battles between the abductors and their mythical challengers, and their subsequent defeat through a weapon resembling a lightning bolt, suggests that these episodes represent the symbolic archetype of wrath. In recent qualitative research involving people experiencing first-episode psychosis, participants described their first experience of crisis in psychosis as a "lightning bolt hitting [their] world" (Bögle and Boden, 2019). The archetype of wrath, symbolised by the weapons hurled by abductors, may thus similarly represent the (first) experience of trauma for the central characters in these mythological episodes.

Therefore, four distinct images within the two abduction episodes in the *Ramayan* and the *Metamorphoses* seem to stem from shared symbolic archetypes (Figure 1). The flight of the Ravan's and Dis' chariots represents ascent or descent, the falling of flowers from the captive women suggests the loss of beauty, the challenge posed by Jataayu and Cyane to the abductors represents protection, and the subsequent defeat of the challengers is based in the archetype of wrath. Together, these four shared symbolic archetypes give rise to a cohesive set of symbols that create a narrative archetype shared by these two episodes.

## 6 Migration Theory vs. Collective Unconscious

Having established that the episodes of the abduction of Sita and Proserpina stem from a shared narrative archetype comprising four distinct symbolic archetypes, an investigation into the source of this shared narrative archetype



**NARRATIVE ARCHETYPES**

collections of images stored in the **collective unconscious** which manifest in myths across cultures

FIGURE 1 Schematic summary of symbolic archetypes in the narratives of Sita and Proserpina's abduction, which together may comprise a shared narrative archetype  
FIGURE CREATED WITH BIORENDER

is warranted. The *Ramayan* and the *Metamorphoses* may be classified as genetically and geographically distinct texts (Pietikainen, 1998), since the *Metamorphoses* did not emerge from a direct textual lineage stemming from the *Ramayan* (genetically distinct), nor were the two texts composed in the same region (geographically distinct). Since there are significant differences between the two texts' histories, the source of the shared narrative archetype in the abduction episodes is not easy to trace. Two divergent theories may explain the presence of this common narrative archetype in these two texts. The first, migration theory, would suggest that the narrative may have been shared between Rome and India at some point through trade and migration such that it eventually found its way into Ovid's writing. The second, the theory of the collective unconscious, would instead suggest that the shared archetype emerged from a common set of images which both ancient Romans such as Ovid and ancient Indians such as Valmiki could have unconsciously accessed.

Migration theory suggests that stories and mythology, much like humans, may migrate from one geographical region to another. The primary means of transportation for stories, according to this theory, is physical trade. As people from different civilisations trade goods with each other, they may also share

stories from their respective cultures, provided that they are able to communicate through a shared language or an interpreter. Migration theory may at least partially justify the presence of shared narrative archetypes in the *Metamorphoses* and the *Ramayan* despite the geographical distance between the two texts. Physical trade between India and Rome in antiquity is well documented in ancient (Fitzpatrick, 2011: 31–33) and contemporary (Chandra, 1977: 123–126) literature. This trade was facilitated by the presence of well-maintained naval routes from the Italian peninsula to the Indian peninsula via the Arabian Sea (Casson, 1992: 8–12).

Given these frequently-used trade routes, migration theory may suggest two possible ways by which the episode of Sita's abduction in the *Ramayan* may have migrated to Rome. First, this episode may have reached Rome through Indian traders who were trading in Rome sometime in or before the first century CE and then shared or passed down in Rome long enough for it to reach Ovid. Alternatively, Ovid may have travelled to India along one of these trade routes and come across the *Ramayan* in a written or oral retelling, which may have influenced his writing of the abduction of Proserpina.

There are a few significant issues with the theory that the narrative of the abduction of Sita in the *Ramayan* may have migrated to Rome in order to influence Ovid's writing of the *Metamorphoses*. Notably, there is almost no evidence to suggest that Ovid ever travelled to India or even significantly engaged with Indian culture. Several references in the *Metamorphoses* suggest that Ovid only possessed a cursory understanding of Indian culture and geography, no greater than that which may be provided by stereotypes of "the East" that were popular in the Greco-Roman civilisation. For instance, Ovid almost only mentions India in one of a few contexts: to establish that India had once been defeated and conquered by Bacchus (Ovid, 2005: IV.831) to reference the mystical "Ganges" (the river Ganga) (Ovid, 2005: VI.923–924), or to do both (Ovid, 2005: IV.34–35). None of these discussions of India offer any indication that Ovid possessed knowledge of India (especially not the ability to read a Sanskrit text), beyond hazy stereotypical images of the wilderness of India.

The only extended description of an Indian character in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is that of Athis, and this description is sorely lacking in consistency. Athis is described by Ovid in terms that certainly reflect Orientalist views of India (Smith, 2003), characterising Athis as an effeminate man with "perfumed locks" and a neck "ornamented" by golden necklaces (Ovid, 2005: V.77–80). Furthermore, the character of Athis/Attis as it appears in Ovid's other writings is fairly inconsistent, sometimes cast as a grandson of the river Ganga and other times as a son of the near-Eastern goddess Cybele (Konstan, 2002; Yonce, 1970). Given these vague descriptions of India and inconsistent characterisation of

the only significant Indian character in the *Metamorphoses*, it is reasonable to conclude that Ovid did not have any concrete knowledge or experience of Indian culture and geography, and that he almost certainly never visited India. It is then highly unlikely that Ovid acquired inspiration for his writing of the abduction of Proserpina from reading the *Ramayan* either in Rome or on a visit to India. Thus, the presence of a shared narrative archetype in the *Ramayan* and the *Metamorphoses* cannot be explained by migration of narratives.

The theory of the collective unconscious suggests that shared narrative archetypes between the *Ramayan* and the *Metamorphoses* may have emerged from the unconscious influence of symbolic archetypes on the authors of the two texts. Since symbolic archetypes are thought to be stored in a “collective unconscious” accessible to all humans across time and culture, these archetypes would presumably be accessible to both Valmiki and Ovid while they were crafting their respective stories. Sotirova-Kohli et al. (Sotirova-Kohli et al., 2013) and Rosen et al. (Rosen et al., 1991) demonstrated this phenomenon on a smaller scale, since they found that German and American individuals (respectively) matched symbols with words denoting symbolic archetypes in similar ways. Their results support the fact that individuals who have never interacted with each other and are separated by thousands of kilometres can still access similar symbolic archetypes. This trend may arguably be conserved across time, as well, so that people from different eras may still access the same collective unconscious and similar symbolic archetypes stored within it. This collective unconscious, thus, may explain the shared narrative archetypes that are present in the abduction episodes in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Valmiki’s *Ramayan* despite the geographical and temporal distance between the two authors and their texts.

There are several advantages to using the theory of the collective unconscious to explain the similarities between the abduction of Sita and that of Proserpina, especially over migration theory. Key among these is the ability of the theory of the collective unconscious to explain striking similarities in imagery across the two episodes despite the broader differences in the narratives of the two texts. The abductions of Sita and Proserpina are embedded within very different textual contexts in the *Ramayan* and the *Metamorphoses*; while Sita is abducted as part of a scheme orchestrated by Ravan that leads to a war, Proserpina’s abduction is only described because the Muses sing a song about her mother Ceres in a contest against the Pierides.

The characters in each myth behave consistently with their respective literary traditions and cultures. In keeping with the characterisation of women in some other ancient Indian texts, Sita is an ideal woman and wife, only showing emotion when she laments her abduction, and otherwise remaining silent

and unemotional. Her lamentation is also much more because of the dishonour it brings to her husband than because of the dangers she may be facing. Proserpina, on the other hand, is alternately playful and immature, and later grows angry because of her abduction and betrayal by Ascalaphus (Ovid, 2005: v.712), displaying all the rich *pathos* and range of emotions characteristic of a Greco-Roman epic character. Despite these significant thematic differences between the two episodes, the four images (chariot ascending or descending, flowers falling, mid-flight battle, and subsequent defeat) discussed previously are remarkable conserved across the narratives. These striking similarities that exist within otherwise distinct narratives suggest that the shared symbolic archetypes may have crept into Ovid's and Valmiki's stories unconsciously. Such an unconscious influence of symbols and images on the crafting of narratives may only best be explained by the theory of the collective unconscious.

Furthermore, the theory of the collective unconscious can also justify the presence of shared archetypes across narratives that are "geographically and genetically distinct" even when migration theory cannot do so. Based on the theory of the collective unconscious, it may be argued that Ovid and Valmiki were drawing on the same set of core images when telling their stories in the *Metamorphoses* and the *Ramayan*, respectively. As a result, even though they were separated by several hundred years and several thousands of kilometres, they may have inadvertently used the same symbolic archetypes to craft their abduction episodes. Migration theory would have required Ovid, who clearly did not have a concrete understanding of India, to have significantly engaged with Indian traders well-versed in Hindu texts or the Hindu texts themselves in order to write an episode that shared elements with a part of the *Ramayan*. The theory of the collective unconscious overcomes this contradiction as it does not require any physical contact between cultures to influence similarities between narratives. This theory would thus allow Valmiki and Ovid to independently incorporate a similar set of symbolic archetypes in their narratives, without needing their cultures to extensively interact. Therefore, the theory of the collective unconscious overcomes many of the problems posed by migration theory and better explains the presence of a shared narrative archetype in Valmiki's *Ramayan* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

Some caveats to this argument must be noted. First, the meanings of archetypal symbols are not identical or fixed, but can differ across cultures, environments, and even individuals. The idea of biological inheritance of universal archetypes has been challenged, and an alternative theory suggests that these archetypes may be transmitted more through culture and socialisation than as a biological phenomenon (Roesler, 2012). In addition, the exercise of codifying archetypes using fixed symbols has similarly been contested, since associations



between archetypes and symbols may not be consistent or universal. Consequently, the presence of shared narrative archetypes in these two episodes must be interpreted with caution, as social, cultural, and individual influences may lead to inconsistencies in the links between signs, symbols, and underlying archetypes. Nevertheless, replication of empirical evidence for recall advantage in matched archetype-symbol pairs in two culturally distinct populations offers promising evidence that there may be at least some value in codifying archetypal symbols (Rosen et al., 1991; Sotirova-Kohli et al., 2013). Therefore, using existing frameworks for indexing archetypal symbols may be a useful starting point to identify cross-cultural mythologies which may share narrative archetypes.

## 7 Conclusion: Embracing the Collective Unconscious

A close analysis of the abduction of Sita as depicted in the *Ramayan* and the abduction of Proserpina as described in the *Metamorphoses* reveals certain symbolic archetypes shared by both episodes. While it is relatively easy to identify the set of four common symbolic archetypes present in both episodes as a narrative archetype, tracing the origin of this shared archetype proves to be a more challenging task. The two texts and their histories are greatly separated, and the two abduction episodes seem to be independently crafted to fit with the literary contexts of their respective stories, rather than Ovid merely borrowing from Valmiki. This suggests that the two texts do not share a geographical or genetic link. However, several of the images incorporated into the episodes are so similar that both authors likely derived them from shared symbolic archetypes. Therefore, the textual similarities between the abduction of Sita and Proserpina in the *Ramayan* and the *Metamorphoses* may have stemmed from narrative archetypes accessed by the authors from the collective unconscious.

The collective unconscious is often dismissed as a “far-fetched” explanation for intertextual similarities or shared emotional experiences. Most scholars tend to prefer the more straightforward migration theory when attempting to explain the presence of shared elements in stories from different cultures and eras. However, for relationships such as the one between the *Metamorphoses* and the *Ramayan* where there is very little evidence that one author influenced (or even reached) another, migration theory fails to account for narrative similarities. In these instances especially, the theory of the collective unconscious must be embraced as a legitimate and reasonable explanation for the presence of shared narrative archetypes.

There is a growing body of anthropological and psychological literature that supports the existence of the collective unconscious and the symbolic archetypes housed within it, and it is imperative to begin to see these archetypes as potential explanations for shared narrative elements among geographically and genetically distinct texts. Individuals within animal species often share biological instincts (even as specific as global maps) without the need for those individuals to ever interact with each other. Why, then, is it so difficult for us to believe that humans may also be connected to each other, across the bounds of space and time, by the stories we tell?

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