

## Gilgamesh and Prometheus: A Semiotic Exercise in *Mythotics*

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تروم هذه الدراسة الكشف عن البنية السيميائية للإسطورة الميثوبية والإغريقية الكلاسية. فالأساطير ليستبالسرديات التي يتم تداولها بقصد الإمتاع والمؤانسة، إنما هي أنماط فكرية مرمزة في منظومات من اللغة والثقافة. والدراسة تقوم على الفرضية القائلة إن البنى السيميائية قد أُسبِغَتْ على رؤى العالم الكلاسية فكانت الأساطير. الأساطير أشكال معنى، السيميائيات علم يستغور المعنى، والأساطير منتجات ثقافية ذات معنة كنهها الرموز العلاماتية. فالعلامات، كل العلامات، إنما هي اشكال للمعنى والتواصل إن هي دخلت مدخل الثقافات. ولما كانت العلامات الرمزية تعمل بفاعلية في فضاء ثقافة ما، فلا بد للثقافة من بطل يحمل منظوراتها الفكرية وقيمها، ويحمل لتلك المجموعة البشرية سبل الرخاء والإرتقاء، فيما يظل بطل الثقافة علامة رمز يتواشج والعلامات في البنية الإسطورية بغية إنتاج المعنى.

تتخذ الدراسة من (گلگامش) بطلا ثقافياً للأرومة الأسطورية الميثوبية ( السومرية)، فيما يمثل برومئثيوس) الثقافة الإغريقية، فمقصد الدراسة الكشف عن المبادئ البنائية التي تنتظم اساطير وادي الرافدين والأغريق بغية إدراك الإسطورة بوصفها كونية تحل في جميع الأمم واللغات والثقافات. ولغرض تحقيق هذه المقصدية، فالدراسة تتخذ من ( الإسطورية) *Mythotics* مقارنة جديدة في ادب السيميائيات تقوم على علاقات التواتر والتبادل والاستعارية والإشارية، ويتم تناول هذه العلاقات على ارضية مقارنة. تتألف الدراسة من مقدمة وفصلين يعنيان بالإطار النظري والتأويل السيميائي، فيما الخاتمة تلخص النتائج التي تمخض عنها التأويل.

## GILGAMESH AND PROMETHEUS: A SEMIOTIC EXERCISE IN *MYTHOTICS*

### Abstract

Semiotics is the quest for meaning in cultural products; it is the penetration of signs and symbols generated by the scenic nature and the universe of human mind. The study aims at investigating the sign symbols in the Mesopotamian culture, represented by *Gilgamesh*, and the Greek culture, represented by *Prometheus*. The worldwide symbols will be scrutinized in terms of the newly circulated term, *Mythotics*. The study hypothesizes that classical myths, though different in certain culture-specific constraints, are governed by certain structural principles . As semiotic data, the study will have recourse to *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, and Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*. This mythic pattern has come to be called *the myths of culture hero*. The study consists of mainly an introduction, two parts, and a concluding remarks elicited from the semiotic quest.

### Introduction

If semiotics is the science of interpreting signs and showing how meaning is generated and communicated by and through a shared cultural codes, these signs in antiquity are generated by myth. Myth is not merely a suspending-truth making story in mythology. Rather, it is the earliest symbolic form which unlocks the cognitive patterns of pre-historic man.

Semiotics is a theory about sign and symbol. So, there is a general consensus among contemporary semioticians that semiotics is the study of signs. So, the sign is widely realized as the cardinal concept of semiotics. Chandler (2007:260) defines a sign as a "meaningful unit which is interpreted as *standing for* something other than itself. Signs are found in the physical form of words, images, sounds, acts or objects. This physical form is sometimes known as the *sign vehicle*." Chandler concedes to say that "signs have no *intrinsic* meaning and become signs only when sign users invest them with meaning with reference to recognized codes" (ibid). Normally, signs in the universe do not exist individually solely. Rather, they are clustered into meaningful

systems. So, codes are "procedural systems of related conventions for correlating signifiers and signifieds in certain domains"(ibid: 245). Codes provide a framework with which signs make sense: they are interpretative devices which are used by interpretative communities"(ibid).

All human nations talk about myths: they have concepts about their origin, nature, and structure and so on. Still, myth is defined with a different degree of focus on one aspect or another. The term *myth* is defined as "a story or a complex of story elements taken as expressing, and therefore as implicitly symbolizing, certain deep-lying aspects of human and trans- human existence" (Preminger, 1975:538-541). This ostensive view stresses the symbolic function of myth as a cognitive carrier of human thought. On the same line is Dundes (1984:1-3) who defines myth as a "sacred narrative which explains how the world and humanity evolved into their present form, a story that serves to define the fundamental world view of a culture by explaining aspects of the natural world and delineating the psychological and social practices and ideals of a society."Such a view may stand in contrast to the conceptualization of myth primitiveness as widely spread in the nineteenth century intellectuality. Rosenberg (1997: 254 – 260) deals with myth as a sacred cultural event. So, myth "often refers to a sacred story told within a culture that defines it as factual. It represents ideas of cultural origins and philosophy." This is so because myths, as noted, are organically related to rituals of humans in different communities and become an omnipresent part of their cultures. The sense of divinity is correlated to the sense of might or heroism. Myths, in origin, are narratives about gods, titans and their heroic actions which surpass human powers. The main characters of these symbolic narratives are the gods, goddesses with their supernatural deeds, and whose heroic acts might be directed towards the prosperity of human condition, as in the mythic code of the culture hero.

Myth is a seminal component of human culture. This component or constituent is not without a semiotic organization or order. Modern scholars of myth come closer in their conceptualization to the linguistic structure of myth. Max Muller

(cited in Segal, 2004: 20) called myth a "disease of language." Muller speculates that "myth arose due to the lack of abstract nouns and neuter gender in ancient languages: anthropomorphic figures of speech, necessary in such languages, were eventually taken literally, leading to the idea that natural phenomena were conscious beings, gods." Claude Levi- Strauss, a French anthropologist thinker, stresses the structural aspect of myth. Levi-Strauss believes that myth "reflects patterns in the mind and interpreted those patterns more as fixed mental structures, specifically, pairs of opposites"(ibid: 113). The structure of myth seems to follow the movement of the human mind where the well-formed meaningful string starts from a point of departure unto a goal of discourse- a process that has come to be called *theme-rheme* in certain fields of linguistics. In some sense, the conceptualization and overall views about myth read as *mythology*. The term itself is given two senses, either the collective body of myths or the study of myth.

Myths, as mentioned, are stories handed over orally from one generation to another in the long, broad course of history. Entertainment is not the sole motif behind telling these sacred timeless stories. In some sense, myth is functional. Campbell (1988:519-521), elaborates on the metafunctions of myth, stressing the socio-cultural and psychological aspects of myth. He thinks that

**in the long view of the history of mankind, four essential functions of mythology can be discerned. The first and most distinctive- vitalizing all- is that of eliciting and supporting a sense of awe before the mystery of being. The second function of mythology is to render a cosmology, an image of the universe that will support and be supported by this sense of awe before the mystery of the presence and the presence of a mystery. A third function of mythology is to support the social current order, is integrated the individual organically with his group. The fourth function of mythology is to initiate the individual into the order of realities of his own psyche, guiding him toward his own spiritual enrichment and realization.**

Not away from Campbell's elucidation is that of Eliade. Eliade (1963:19) argues that one of the function of myth is "to establish models for behavior and that myths may

also provide a religious experience. By telling or reenacting myths, members of traditional societies detach themselves from the present and return to the mythical age, thereby bringing themselves closer to the divine." Mythic studies have stated various metafunctions to myth in human existence. In the light of the elucidation of *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* (1977), myths can describe the origin of the world, the end of the world, or a paradise-like state. So, the function, here, is descriptive. Myths might be invented to control the universe. The central mythology as a rule is primarily occupied with the creation that is presupposed in all other creations.

Myth as such has become a source of inspiration in human sciences, as in literature. This is because myth is one way of thinking to understand the globe around man and to satisfy his fears when encountered with disastrous phenomena. Greek communities, for instance, sacrificed animals for Zeus to fall rain. And they explained the drought phenomenon as a sign of the deity's anger. Being in a human context, myth is not the main concern of literature as an imaginative creation, but also anthropology, psychology, philosophy and linguistics. The canon of myths put man in accord with nature and the world around.

If semiotics seminally studies forms of meaning in life, then, myth is viewed as a *form of meaning*: a system of interrelated signs. Having a narrative structure, i.e., beginning, middle, and end, myth has also a systematically linguistic structure which comprises a combination of interlinked signs. So, it is no wonder to penetrate mythical gods and super humans as symbols within the semiotic structure of classical mythology. The classical myth, from a semiotic standpoint, is a sequence of signs standing in binary opposition. This linearity of signs in myths which appears in all human cultures is not without relevance to the assumption that the human mind is only part of the universe, and that there is some order in the universe and the universe is not a chaos (Le'vi-Strauss, 1978:12-13).

If a sign, in a general trend, is something representing something else, the symbol, then, includes a norm or rule which is conventional in nature. The

connection is conventional in the sense that it occurs in a certain socio-cultural context, without which there is no symbolic meaning. The mythical symbols with their binary oppositions can be viewed as meaningful units (methemes) that build up the semiotic universe of narrative myth.

On the semiotic level, myth may be related in the scientific mind to what is denoted is something false. In reality, myth is the only way of thinking that pre-scientific man had to unravel the inexpressible and mysterious phenomena of the world. Myth, in one opinion, is tied up to culture and metaphor. Lakoff and Johnson (1980:185-6) think that cultural myths, like metaphors, "help us to make sense of our experience within culture: they express and serve to organize shared ways of conceptualizing something within a culture." In this light, myth in contemporary studies is an expressive and cognitive power encapsulating the world view of the pre-scientific man which is put into practice by and through certain social rituals.

Not far away from the semiotic structure of myth is the domain of philosophy and philosophy of language. Eco (1984:14-15) defines semiotics as "a philosophy of language. "Eco makes distinction between two types of semiotics- the *general* and the *specific*. General semiotics, like philosophies of language, enables one to recognize experience into coherent form. Specific semiotics, on the other hand, is a science that attempts to provide the grammar of a particular sign system: traffic signals or the phonemic features of spoken language (ibid).

The relation between language and myth as a symbolic code could be fully detected in the work of the modern German philosopher, Ernest Cassirer. Cassirer has referred to his philosophical approach to myth as *the symbolic form*, and that the process of knowledge is symbolic. Since thinking is the property of human being, it is no wonder, for Cassirer, to refer to human being as *animal symbolicum* characterized by a unique ability of using symbolic form (cited in Bouissac, 1998:277). Now the question is: What are these symbolic forms? In Cassirer's words: " From this point of view, myth, art, language and science appear as symbols. . . in the sense of forces each of which produces and posits a world of its

own(ibid).These forms" function organically together in the constitution of spiritual reality, but that each of these organs has an individual assignment"(ibid).The symbolic forms "exist in the world as the evolving frames of human experience, and produce or posit worlds-for-man" (ibid).

Myths, though originated in human languages and cultures, are viewed as allegories of abstract supernatural powers like gods. That is to say, behind seemingly arbitrary absurd stories, at least to the modern scientific rationality, there is a philosophical sense. Armstrong (2005:2) wittingly symptomizes the metaphysics of myth. She says:

**All mythology speaks of another plane that exists alongside our own world that is in some sense supports it. Belief in this invisible but more powerful reality, sometimes called the world of gods, is a basic theme of mythology. It has been called the "perennial philosophy" because it informed the mythology, ritual, and social organization of all societies before the advent of our scientific modernity; and continues influence more traditional societies today. According to the perennial philosophy, everything that happens in this world, everything that we can hear and see here below has its counterpart in the divine realm, which is richer, stronger and more enduring than our own. And every earthly reality is only a pale shadow of its archetype, the original pattern, of which it is simply an imperfect copy. It is only by participating in this divine life that mortal, fragile human beings fulfill their potential. The myths gave explicit shape and form to a reality that people sensed intuitively.**

One point to be mentioned, here, concerns the difference between the philosophical study of myth and the semiotic one. The philosophical quest tends to discover meaning proper underlying the surface structure of myth, whatever type is. This stratum or level of meaning may encompass the essence of human nature or human morals which are a crucial part of that philosophical quest. Likewise, the semiotic quest tends to have insight into the meaning products but not for moral attainment. The quest; however, concentrates on the structural relations of the signs in the mythic code.

Given the fact that language is a social semiotic activity, language generates two forms of representation or (semiosis), literal and metaphorical. The literal is the meaning as it is, while the metaphorical is a meaning transfer. Metaphor, in a broad sense, is a covert comparison between two classes or entities. These entities are dissimilar in nature; yet, they have some characteristics in common. The principle of metaphor is based on analogy. In this rhetorical trope, words witness semantic transfer, and figurative language is often viewed as a sequence of meaning transfers.

Mythic meaning is a culture meaning which is generated mostly incongruently. So, the content of the figurative or metaphorical sign is the product of the structural relations which are generated in a given context of culture. Since meanings in the culture of myth are conventional (connotative), hence, these meanings and meaning products are symbolic. Metaphor, in this view, is symbolic, since it is used within the range of culture. In addition, metaphor in classical studies is the legacy of poetry, and even myth was survived by and through poetic structures.

Being symbolic in cultural context, metaphor is thought of as a verbal compact power used in certain expressive veins. Danesi (2004: 134) states that "conceptual metaphors and metonymys appear as *conceptual factors* in rituals, symbolism, and other components of the semiosphere." The Western "courtship rituals reflect the *love is a sweetness* metaphor ("She's my *sweetheart*," " I love you my *honey*, etc)"(ibid). Still, metaphor is used in non-verbal ways: for example, sweets are given to a loved one on Valentine's Day. Danesi (ibid) thinks that "animal metaphors are also common across cultures as a source of symbolism". In Greek and Arabic cultures, a hero might be compared to a lion or a woman to a gazelle in expressions like *He is a lion in the battlefield*, and *She is a gazelle*. An Arabic beloved is compared to a gazelle, attributing to the beloved the qualities of slimness, mildness, and width of eyes.

In modern semiotics, two terms are widely circulated, i.e., denotation and *connotation*. Denotation concerns the literal or the referential sense that a sign conveys. Connotation, on the other side, deals with the associative or the figurative

sense of the sign in context. Language, in reality, produces two levels of meaning: the meaning or the referential meaning which is denotative in scope, and the *meaning of meaning* or the metaphorical meaning which is connotative in nature. Metaphor, in this sense, is a sort of intersection between two contexts- the context of myth and the context of reality.

Denotation and connotation, hence, are two levels of semiosis. Given the fact that mythology is a body of conventional symbols and images, these symbols are basically based on meaning transfer, they are associative in meaning. Hence, the language of myth is a symbolic connotative language. Related to the concept of meaning transfer is the concept of allegory. Myth, according to one theory, begins as an allegory for natural phenomena. An allegory, according to Abrams (2009:7), is "a narrative, whether in prose or verse, in which the agents and actions, and sometimes setting as well, are contrived by the author to make coherent sense on the "literal", or primary level of signification, and at the same time to communicate a second correlated order of signification." For example, Apollo represents the sun, Aurora is the dawn, Poseidon is the water, etc. Chandler (1994) maintains that "metaphor can be regarded as new sign formed from the signifier of one Sign and the signified of another. If signification is the process of sign production, then, myth, being a semiotic system, produces a linearity or sequence of signs in which the signifier stands for a different signified." So, the referential signified is replaced by a new one. This new signification is a crucial part of the culture in which myth is articulated, comprehended and believed in.

Much concern in modern semiotic and cultural theory is paid to the relation of myth to culture. This may be because myth, culture, ritual, and religion form one whole universe by and through which humans encode their physical and spiritual experiences, visions, and attitudes towards the external world and the world of their innermost. Myth, in one vein, is a traditional narrative that sorts out the world view of a culture. A culture might be defined as that corpus of beliefs, behaviours, and patterns of thinking of a certain human group. The main characteristics of

symbolicity, communication, meaning, and community are fundamentally linked to the mythic code. Moreover, human creativity to produce mythic patterns, though they are cognitive, is bound to culture, in the general sense, since all human nations tend to encode their world views in myths.

Mythology is that corpus of myths narrated by a given cultural group which encode their visions, world views, and unravel the universe around them. The mythic conceptualization of the world is but the ceaseless philosophical adventure of the primitive mind to explain the world by and through a sequence of structural associative patterns in narrative poetic styles which have come to be referred to as *myths*. In addition, these stories "offer supernatural explanations for the creation of the world and humanity, as well as for death, judgment, and afterlife "(Murfin& Ray, 2003:284). This may explain the assumption that myth is given a systematic structure; it is a belief system that often concerns supernatural beings, powers, and provides a rationale for a culture's religion and practices, and reflects how people relate to each other in everyday life.

From an anthropologist angle, the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz stresses the correlation of culture to symbol and necessarily to myth. Geertz(1973:89) believes that " culture is a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life." In the mid-nineteenth century, the focus was on the anthropological aspects of myth, including beliefs and customs.

Myth, linguistically, is composed of a sequence of sentences; each sentence consists of a group of phrases and words that enter into systematically syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations, as we shall see. However, the mythic narrative encompasses a sequence of mythic actants or methemes performed by a hero, whose destiny is to bring a pleasant prosperous boon to mankind. This narrative hero has come to be called a *culture hero*. In *Mythology: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* (1980: 292), a culture hero or heroine is "a mythological being who first bestowed civilization on

human beings, giving them knowledge of arts and crafts, social institutions, laws and customs." Such elucidation shows that the culture hero is not responsible for the creation of the universe. Rather, he is the one whose heroic labours tend to bring development and prosperity to humanity. Around the hero and his heroic actions was created mythology which has come to be referred to as myths of culture heroes. Many oral traditions have myths about a culture hero, who, generally, is not responsible for creation but who completed the world and made it fit for human life, in short, he created culture. All these acts are performed in mythic code. The mythic code is inhabited by heroes or heroines who are found in a critical situation, usually involving conflict with other characters or super powers. That is to say, the hero or the protagonist is in binary opposition with anti-hero or antagonist. As in linguistic structure, binarism is the fundamental property of mythic structure. Around the mythic hero was created a set of myths. If myth, as Danesi (2004:340) has put it, is "a story of early cultures that aims to explain the origin of life or of the universe in terms of some metaphysical or deistic entity or entities," then, the myth of the culture hero is a "myth describing the actions and characters of beings who are responsible for the discovery of a particular cultural artifact or technological process" (ibid). Unlike the heroes of origin, creativity is the fundamental merit of the cultural hero. And because of that creative spirit, the hero has to undergo a sequence of sufferings and pains from the rival or the antagonist.

In linguistics a binary feature is "a property which can be used to classify linguistic units in terms of two exclusive possibilities" (Crystal, 1997: 52-3). This seminal feature can be detected in phonological, syntactic, and semantic levels or strata of language. In semantic analysis of lexical items, for instance, nouns have such properties as square [+common],[-common] (ibid). But binarism is not limited to the linguistic domain. In critical theory, a binary opposition (also binary system), as Smith (1996:383) has explained, is "a pair of related terms or concepts that are opposite in meaning. Binarism is the system by which, in language and thought, two theoretical opposites are strictly defined and set off against one another." The term

was first circulated in the literature of the structuralist school. The significance of the notion of the binary opposition comes from the assumption that a sign has a value in the binary code so far it is related to other sign(s) in a sort of reciprocal determination. The meaning of the sign is derived from the context in which it occurs, and the set of signs to which the sign is related to. So, the relation is that of complementarity rather than contradiction. Accordingly, the mythic structure follows a systematic organization in telling episodes. The beginning is where the episode starts. In the middle, the situation grows more complex and tension develops. In the end, the tension is somehow resolved. The main characters of classical myths are usually gods and supernatural heroes. Prometheus is not a myth, but a hero in Greek mythology, in the well-known stories that tell his labours in that culture. This mythic hero, almost tragic, is a sign representing a given culture in which this character is initiated, created and, in a degree, worshipped.

The study aims at investigating the sign symbols in the Mesopotamian culture, represented by *Gilgamesh*, and the Greek culture, represented by *Prometheus*. The worldwide symbols will be scrutinized in terms of the newly circulated term, *Mythotics*. The study hypothesizes that classical myths, though different in certain culture-specific constraints, are governed by certain structural principles. As semiotic data, the study will have recourse to *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, and Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*. The study consists of mainly an introduction, two parts, and a concluding remarks elicited from the semiotic quest.

### **Part One: *Mythotics* as a semiotic approach**

*Mythotics* is a set of structural principles that govern the underlying mythic patterns. It encompasses a set of principles that are the same in all human cultural myths. There are, however, certain differences between these worldwide myths. Put it another way, these mythic modes of meaning undergo certain culture-specific constraints. Morphologically, *Mythotics* is the product of a word-formation process,

where the derivational affix *tics* is combined to *mythos* (= Greek, meaning *story*). The term, in this study, focuses upon the mythical thinking which approaches the world through intuitive knowledge rather than empirical experiment as in scientific thinking. Now, the question is: What are these structural parameters that underlie the worldwide mythology?

From a semiotic stance, the term *structure* applies to "any repeatable, systematic, patterned, or predictable aspect of signs, codes, and texts" (Danesi, 2007:143). A language, for example, is a structure, in the sense that it is a network of interrelated signs, the meaning of the parts being specifiable only with reference to the whole. In this sense, the terms *structure* and *system* are often synonymous (Crystal, 1997: 439). These deep insights are of importance to study the semiotics of myth on the foundation of the structural principles. These principles are: *syntagmaticity*, *paradigmaticity*, *metaphoricity*, and *signification*.

The structure, in a general trend, is a set of syntagmatic relations holding among the elements of a sentence. In a linguistic structure every linguistic item enters into, basically, a linear relation with other items in the span. The relation itself is basically based on combination; it is a sequential relation as in, "The black cat chased the rat on the sofa." The characteristics of combination, linearity, sequence, and horizon are seminally attached to that axis of syntagmaticity. The definition of the syntagmatic relation with its key concepts *syntagm* in semiotics is close to that of linguistics, with more concentration of the philosophy of meaning. *Syntagm*, henceforth, designates "two or more lexical units linked consecutively to produce meaning. The combination of an adjective and a noun – such as "human life" or "beautiful day" – offers an example of a syntagm (Martin and Ringham 2000:129).

What is distinguishable about the signs of all types is that they have predictable or regular properties or structures. The semiotic theory views *syntagmaticity* as a *combinatory property* (Danesi and Sebeok 2000; Chandler 2007 and Danesi 2007). And this is true to all linguistic levels or strata. That is to say, meaning potential is the product of the proper combination of linguistic items in a given structure.

Linguists comprehend, for instance, the word *blue* as a well-formed structure because it consists of sounds (phonemes) that are linked to each other in an arrangement that is acceptable to the English speaker's competence. A combination as such exhibits structure since it holds a certain sort of meaning. Danesi (2007:45) generates a coherent conceptual network which shows the connectedness of the term *structure* to the terms *structuralism*, *linguistics* and *semiotics* as micro-disciplines, and their relation to the macro- structure, namely, the *world*. Danesi (ibid) thinks that

**the notion of structure is so central to semiotic theory and practice that the term *structuralism* is often used as a synonym for the discipline. The same term is used in linguistics and psychology, where it is also a crucial notion. The fact that certain forms, such as words and melodies, bear meaning by virtue of the fact that they have a specific type of structure suggests that they probably mirror internal sensory, emotional, and intellectual structures. To put it another way, humans seem to be programmed to produce and seek structure in the world on the basis of how they themselves are constituted.**

This argumentation leads to think that syntagmaticity involves that structural relation in which there is a systematic linearity of interacting signifiers which create a meaningful coherent whole within a text. It refers to co-existing signifiers that interact intertextually to each other in the text. Though the Saussurean legacy of syntagmaticity has been widely circulated in the linguistic domain, the term itself has been manipulated in the field of *anthropology*, more particularly in *structural anthropology* to spell out the structure of myth.

If syntagmaticity is based on sequence, combination, and horizon, *paradigmaticity*, on the other hand, is based on opposition, selection, and verticality. In other words, though germinated in the Saussurean linguistic paradigm, the two interrelated axes are different in certain aspects. However, they are crucial aspects of the semiotic system and are capable of producing meaning potential. Saussure (cited in Chandler,

2007: 83) speculates that " meaning arises from the differences between signifiers; these differences are of two kinds: *syntagmatic* (concerning positioning) and *paradigmatic* (concerning substitution).Chandler (ibid) thinks that such a distinction is of significance to structural semiotic analysis in which these two structural axes (horizontal as syntagmatic and vertical as paradigmatic) are seen as applicable to all sign system (ibid). *Paradigmaticity*, in Sebeok's words (2001; 155), is *a differentiation property of forms*. And paradigmaticity refers to "a structural relation between signs that keeps them distinct and therefore recognizable" (Danesi and Sebeok, 2000:141). Forms in the semiotic system are structurally meaning-carriers. This property of form is basically based on distinctive or binary opposition.

If we analyze the two signifiers, *cat* and *rat* in, *The black cat chased the rat on the sofa*," we realize that the two signifiers are recognizably distinct. It is, in part, the fact that the phonetic difference, which is referred to as *phonemic opposition*, between initial *c* (= /k/ and *r* (= /r/) is perceived as distinctive. This distinctiveness constitutes a *paradigmatic* feature of the two words (ibid). In addition, this relation is based on the concept of substitution. In our illustration, "*The tall hunter killed the tiger on the tree*," the words *black, cat, chased, rat, and sofa* in *The black cat chased the rat on the sofa*, for instance, can be substituted by *tall, hunter, killed, tiger, tree*, respectively, as shown in the following table 1:

**Table 1 Syntagmatic and Paradigmatic Structures**

Syntagmatic relation				
The black cat chased the rat on the sofa.	The black cat	chased	the rat	on the sofa
Paradigmatic relation				
The tall hunter killed the tiger on the tree.	The tall hunter	killed	the tiger	on the tree

The elucidation has shown that syntagmatic/paradigmatic contrast can be illuminated on the level of phonology and semantics, though the syntactic stratum remains unchanged. One way is the binary opposition: the sign meaning proper is the

product of the intersection of the syntagmatic (sequential) pole and the paradigmatic (substitutional) one in semiosis.

Paradigmatic relations stress the conceptualization of *association*. Saussure (cited in Chandler, 2007:84-5) called the paradigmatic relations *associative* relations. A paradigm, in Chandler's words (ibid), is a "set of associated signifiers or signifieds which are all members of some defining category, but in which each is significantly different." Applying this idea to our analytical diagram indicates that one member of the paradigm set, say (nouns), is structurally replaceable with another. So *cat* and *rat* are substituted by *hunter* and *tiger* respectively. The same process is with the adjectives in the given structure. In this light, "the use of one signifier (e.g. a particular word) rather than another from the same paradigm set (e.g. nouns) shapes the preferred meaning of a text. Paradigmatic relations can thus be seen as *contrastive*" (ibid). In reality, paradigmatic relations are *associative* relations, in the sense of *mental association* which includes perceived similarities in form (e.g. homophones) or meaning (e.g. synonym). This may lead us to decide that the concept of *substitution* is central to the paradigmatic pole, especially in imaginatively analogous forms of meaning as myth.

Most semioticians overdo the aspect of distinctive opposition in the paradigmatic process. Chandler (2007:88) speculates that paradigmatic analysis "involves comparing and contrasting each of the signifiers present in the text with absent signifiers which in similar circumstances might have been chosen, and considering the significance of the choices made." Chandler (ibid) concedes to say that paradigmatic analysis "can be applied at any semiotic level, from the choice of a particular word, image or sound to the level of the choice of style, genre or medium." The significance of paradigmaticity is to identify the value of the sign in a text. Paradigmatic relations, hence, are not restricted just to imaginatively verbal works of art; they can be detected in nearly all semiotic systems as fine arts, music, myths, etc. So the structure of any text or cultural practice has both syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes.

Though they seem to be two separable operations, syntagmaticity and paradigmaticity are but two aspects of the same phenomenon, i.e., the semiotic system, as mentioned. These aspects can be found in all human languages. They are, in a sense, universal. In addition; the syntagmatic pole goes alongside with the paradigmatic one. So, it is not altogether wrong to say that the syntagmatic/paradigmatic relations are cultural universals, meaning that they can be detected in all human patterns or forms of meaning. Moreover, most semioticians stress the aspect of distinctive opposition in the paradigmatic process. However, the concept of paradigmaticity with its relation to its counterpart (syntagmaticity) is not restricted to semiotic thinking. In syntax, the relational aspects of the sentence structure are widely discussed. Brown and Miller (1980:253) think that "paradigmatic relationships are those contracted between items that are mutually substitutable in some context." The substitution, in paradigmaticity, should occur between signs of the same category, as in proper nouns in mythology.

Having picked up the thread of association from the previous argumentation, we are in position to identify the most associative form of meaning, i.e., metaphor. This figurative device is an omnipresent feature that is widely discussed in literature, philosophy, anthropology and linguistics. Metaphor, in a broadest sense of the term, is a covert comparison between two entities or phenomena. There is a sort of similarity in this dissimilarity. In an expression like, "*Helen is a red rose*," *Helen*, the human phenomenon, is attributed with the characteristics of softness, rosiness, and glamour of the rose.

Danesi (2007:49-55) elucidates the metaphorical process by introducing the metaphorical sentence structure "The professor is a snake." The sentence is a sort of structure which is referred to as *associative structure*: a type of linkage made by inferring a commonality in meaning among seemingly disparate concepts. Danesi and Sebeok (2000:218) call this associative structure *metaform*- a concept ([thinking ] seeing ) that results from the linkage of an abstract notion ([thinking ] with a concrete source domain ([seeing ]). Metaphor is instantiation of a metaform."

Accordingly, the associative structure "The professor is a snake," encompasses two referents: (1) the *professor* referent, called "topic" (or *tenor*); and (2) the *snakereferent*, termed the "vehicle." The linkage of the two creates a type of meaning, called the *ground*, that is much more than the simple sum of the meanings of the two referents (ibid). Still, the process of association, more specifically the meaning of the vehicle, is not linked to the denotative sense, but the connotative (cultural) sense. Danesi has recourse to Lakoff and Johnson in analyzing the bygone example. He (ibid) says:

**"The professor is a snake" is really a token of an associative mental formula- human personality= animal behaviors- that links an abstract concept (human personality) to concrete traits we perceive in animals. Utterances of this type- "John is a gorilla," "Mary is a snail," etc. – are not, therefore, isolated examples of poetic fancy. Rather, they are specific instantiations, or *linguistic metaphors*, of the above mental formula- a formula that Lakoff and Johnson call a "*conceptual metaphor*".**

So, metaphor, according to Lakoff and Johnson's paradigm is not a prerogative of literature; it is organically rooted in the collective consciousness of human groups and their cultures. Primarily on the basis of linguistic evidence, Lakoff and Johnson (1980:4) maintain that "we have found that most of our ordinary conceptual system is metaphorical in nature." It is sufficient to point out that *metaphoricity* is the innate capacity to generate metaphors, and metaphors are the realizations of the process of metaphor generation. Metaphor, hence, is a meaning transference in which a signified operating as a signifier referring to a different signified. In this meaning process, certain features are transferred from one sign to another. The meaning captured, here, is connotative or symbolic.

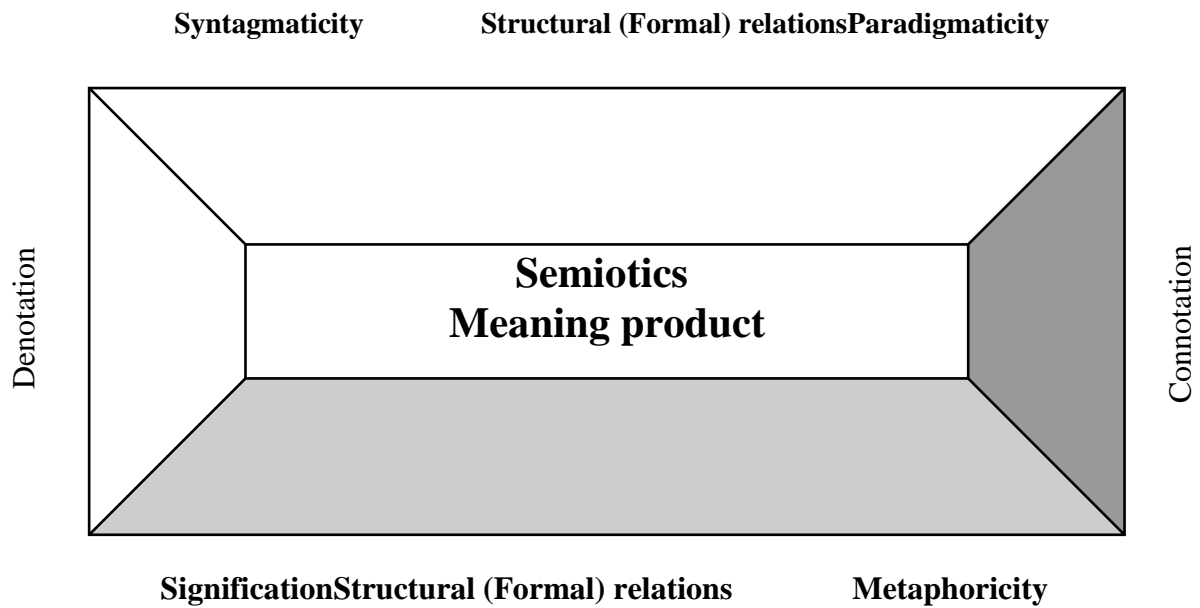
All semiotic structures, whether denotative (referential, literal) or connotative (associative, metaphorical) include the process of signification. As mentioned in 2.2, semiotics is a theory of signification. Signification is a "relation that holds between a form and its referent" (Danesi and Sebeok 2000:223). Put it this way, signification is

the "process of generating meaning through the use of signs" (Danesi, 2007: 143). The term itself was germinated in the Saussurean paradigm and was widely circulated in linguistic and semiotic theory. In order to fully comprehend signification as a process of generating meaning let us introduce Barthes's illustration. His example is a bunch of roses. He (ibid) says:

It can be used to *signify* passion. When it does so, the bunch of roses is the *signifier*, the passion the *signified*. The relation between the two (the "associate total") produces the *third* term, the bunch of roses as a *sign*. And, as a *sign*, it is important to understand that the bunch of roses is quite a different thing from the bunch of roses as a signifier: that is, as a horticultural entity. As a *signifier*, the bunch of roses is *empty*, as a *sign* it is *full*. What has filled it (with signification) is a combination of my intent and the nature of society's conventional modes and channels which offer me a range of vehicles for the purpose. The range is extensive, but conventionalized and so finite, and it offers a complex system of ways of signifying.

Signification, in the semiotic study, is the fourth axis of the structural (formal) relations. That is to say, whenever one engages into a semiotic process to investigate the big bulk of data, say worldwide myths; we have a process as such to discover the underlying principles that govern the structure of myth. One point to be stressed, here, is that *meaning* and *signification* are used synonymously in the literature of semiotics. This is so because the ultimate goal of semiotics is to explore the forms of meaning. So, signification is a mental process; it is "what happens in our mind when we use or interpret a sign" (Danesi, 2004:12).

The brief excursion may cover the semiotic theory in its structural relations, that is, syntagmaticity, paradigmaticity, metaphoricity, and signification. These axes of the semiotic theory can be plainly shown in figure 1:



The intersection of syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes may lead to meaning product, as exemplified in various types of texts. Meaning proper is the product of the signification process. The text itself is a unit of meaning, a unit of relations. It might be a referential (denotative, literal) (the left side) or associative (connotative, metaphorical) (the right side). The cornerstone of the whole process is the sign and the sign system in which meaning is organically produced. The diagram may not cover all the formal relations of the sign theory. Still, it gives a general idea of what a semiotic theory is and its function in meaning production.

These interrelated networks of poles or axes are the landmark of narrative texts. Myths, being narrative texts, are not exception. In contemporary semiotic theory, there is a general consensus among semioticians that there is a sort of "narrative instinct" in myth. Danesi and Perron (1996:248-9) think that this narrative trait is an integral part of human consciousness." Onemore structural trait of myth is that "the details of the stories change from culture to culture, but they all reflect the same *narrative structure*, i.e., the same kind of thematic units, plot lines, and character types" (ibid). This complex network of interrelated signs is organically rooted in culture; it is the intrigued cultural representation.

It is of interest for this study to verify the newness of *Myhtotics*. To verify the term, the researcher has received an e-mail from Prof. Crystal as a reply to a question whether the term has been used before. Crystal's e-mail reads: " As with any new term, the proof of the pudding, as it were, is in the using. If you believe in it, use it, and circulate it, and see what happens. There's no recorded use in the OED of it having been used before. But make sure you make it clear exactly how your term differs from the analytical terms already in use, such as mythogony, mythography, and mythonomy "(Appendix).

Following Crystal's precious remarks, we do apply the term to prove the universality of classical myth by unlocking the structural principles underlying the Mesopotamian and Greek mythic corpora. As for the terms mentioned by Crystal, i.e. mythogony, mythography, and mythonomy, we may say that our term has nothing to do with these terms. This point needs more exploration.

*Mythogony* means " the origination of myths, or the study of their origins"(Oxford dictionaries, 2016). The earliest use of the term was found in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in *Notes and Queries*, from *mytho* + *- gony*, after *theogony*(ibid). The divergence resides in the sense that *Myhtotics* is not a diachronic study of myth; it has nothing to do with the origin of worldwide mythology.

*Mythography* refers to " the representation of myths in art"(ibid.). *Mythotics*, on the other riverside, deals with mythic symbols, verbal and non-verbal. That is to say, it explores encoded and visual signs.

*Mythonomy* is " the deductive and predictive stage of mythology" (Fine Dictionar, 2016). *Mythotics*, fundamentally investigates the universal structural principles underlying the worldwide mythology; it never treads the path of prediction or deduction. The above brief argumentation has wittingly proved the authenticity of *Mythotics* in the literature of semiotics.

## Part Two: Gilgamesh and Prometheus

We are in position now to investigate the myths of culture hero as semiotic data. The culture hero in the history of ideas is the god or semi god who performed supernatural acts and did heroic labours for the prosperity of human beings. The culture hero, in the micro sense, is the one who holds the values and ideologies of a given human group in a given culture. In the macro sense, he is the hero who stands for universal human ideals and world views. To do so, the culture hero has to have a journey to an unknown imaginary land or space to fulfill his goals. The mythic journey, in the general mythic context, is not without perils which might threaten the life of the hero. Still, the function of the heroic journey, in addition to its humanitarian message, is that the hero witnesses dramatic development in spirit, not in body. For the purpose of semiotic investigation, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and *Prometheus Bound* are selected as models for the concept of culture hero. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* was translated by George (1999), whereas *Prometheus Bound* was translated by Roche (1962).

*The Epic of Gilgamesh* is one of the oldest revealing masterpieces of the ancient Mesopotamian literature. This is so, not because of the characteristic of narration, but also because of the characterization of the hero and the world views which explain the inexpressible problem of life/death and the human infinite search for immortality. Needless to say that the term *epic* refers to a long poem whose main theme is the heroic adventures performed by a supernatural figure.

In origin, the *Epic* was composed of five poems in the Sumerian language by anonymous poet(s). Though certain versions of the *Epic* were written in Akkadian, Hurrian and Hittite, the *Epic* was authentically a cuneiform text. Historically speaking, the Mesopotamian *Epic* was narrated before 4000 years. In this sense, it predated all the ancient records of mythic hero or mythic journey whether the Homeric epics or the Hebrew legends. The epic text witnessed several translations since the mid-nineteenth century and the twentieth century as that of George Smith in 1875 and 1876 and Samuel Noah Kramer in the 1930s and 1940s.

Two versions of the *Epic* were found: the Standard Akkadian version and the Old Babylonian version. Moreover, the number of the *Epic* tablets is different. Originally, the *Epic* consists of 11 tablets. A newly found tablet was added later. This makes the number of the lines of verse of the *Epic* uncertain. On the whole, the themes of the two versions are love/friendship, life/death, and wrath of the gods, the hero's journey and the quest for immortality.

Gilgamesh/gilgæmiš/ was thought of to be the King of Uruk, an ancient Sumerian city. He was the founder of Uruk with its high strong walls. As with all journey myths, the hero embarked on his journey for a certain cosmic motif. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* set the first prototypal narrative of the hero's journey searching for immortality.

Gilgamesh was endowed with supernatural physical and mental powers that made him a demigod (two-thirds god and one third human). His mother was the goddess Ninsun. In one version, he was the son of Lugulbanda, a shepherd god. Being a supernatural power, Gilgamesh behaved as godlike and exercised all sorts of cruelty against the Sumerians. The Sumerians were forced to build the high strong walls of Uruk. Of the humiliation acts exercised by the hero king was that Gilgamesh should sleep with every virgin in Uruk before her wedding night. In response to the Sumerians' complain of the King's cruelty, the Sumerian god of gods, *Anu*, created a brute creature, Enkidu, who lived in wilderness, as a counter power against the supremacy of the Uruk King (Hooker, 1966). The wild creature was brought from wilderness to civilization by Shamash, the temple harlot. The great combat between the two super-human heroes at the gates of the city led to a reciprocal friendship, which necessarily led to the great adventure of Gilgamesh and Enkidu in the Cedar Forest. As with most worldwide myths, the six-day journey was not without perils in its course. With the support of *Shamash*, the sun god, the two heroes first killed Humbaba, the guardian of the Cedar Forest, with the demon's prophecy of curse that Enkidu would meet his inevitable destiny.

Due to the course of the *Epic* episodes, Inanna/Ishtar, enchanted by Gilgamesh's heroic character, tried to seduce him, but he refuted her appeal with insult reminding her of her first slain lover, Dumuzi, in the first hint to the shepherd god in antiquity. Raged by the hero's refusal, Inanna asked her father, the Sun god, to send the Bull of Heaven to punish Gilgamesh for his insult to the goddess. Once more, the heroic pair defeated the bull and killed it. In response to the killing of the guardian of the Cedar Forest and the Bull of Heaven, Enkidu faced his determined destiny and died in the arms of his friend. The question of death was a heavy burden on Gilgamesh's thought. So, he started his mythic journey to the land of no return. The purpose was to see Utnapishtim, the only human survival so as to inform him of the secrets of eternal life. After passing by Mount Mash, which was guarded by two large scorpions, Gilgamesh met Siduri, the tavern maid; she informed the hero of the futility of his mythic journey. Insisting on seeing the last survival on the land, the tavern maid directed him to Urshnabi, the ferryman, who sailed him across the Waters of Death.

Meeting Utnapishtim, the old man told him that "death is a necessary fact because of the will of the gods; all human effort is only temporary, not permanent" (ibid). The human race was destined to death in the council of gods held in Shuruppak, a city on the banks of the Euphrates, even before the time of the Flood. The gods decided to destroy the human race by the Flood. The secret was never to be betrayed to the humans. However, *Ea*, one of the gods who created humanity, revealed the secret to the walls of Utnapishtim, violating the sacred oath. In response, and to save the human race, the last survival made a boat and took all the living things of the earth and launched the boat, in an episode similar to that of Noah in the *Divine Books*.

Having described the incident of the great Flood, Utnapishtim offered Gilgamesh the last chance for immortality by plucking the plant of the eternal life underneath the sea. Having plucked the plant, a snake devoured the plant while Gilgamesh fell asleep. The *Epic* ended with symbolic scenery where Gilgamesh stood before the

great gates of his city with a large precious stone engraved at the gate in which was the inscription of the Sumerian demigod's labours.

The narrative progression from the hero's hope of getting the secret of eternal life to the vanity of that hope is performed throughout a series of incidents performed by the mythic hero. The whole aspects of the mythic code, human and non-human, participated in the creation of the mythic text. But before the quest of immortality, which is in essence a philosophical inquiry; there is the combat between the two supernatural powers which eventually led to the reconciliation of the powers for the welfare of mankind. In order to kindle the semiotic patterns underlying the mythic narrative, the following extract is chosen for semiotic analysis. Lines of verse (103-240) are quoted from Tablet II (16-17), which show the godly combat and reconciliation of the heroes.

(Extract No.1)

**The land of Uruk was standing [around him,]**

**The land was gathered [about him.]**

**A crowd was *milling about* before [him,]**

**The menfolk were thronging [around him.]"**

**"Like a babe-in-arms they were [kissing his feet,]**

**already the fellow . . . . .**

**For the goddess of weddings was ready the bed,**

**for Gilgamesh, like a god, was set up a substitute.**

**Enkidu with his foot blocked the door of the wedding house,**

**not allowing Gilgamesh to enter".**

**"They seized each other at the door of the wedding house,**

**in the street they joined combat, in the Square of the Land.**

**The door-jambs shook, the wall did shudder,**

**[in the street Gilgamesh and Enkidu joined combat, in the Square of the Land.]**

Gilgamesh knelt, one foot on the ground.

his anger subsided, he broke off from the fight.

After he broke off from the fight,

said Enkidu to him, to Gilgamesh":

"As one unique your mother bore you,

The wild cow of the fold, the goddess Ninsun!

High over warriors you are exalted,

To be king of the people Enlil made it your destiny!"

They kissed each other and formed a friendship.

The event of the hero's wedding comes first; the celebration is abruptly stopped by the entrance of Enkidu who started the famous combat with the great builder of Uruk. The ending of the combat has led to that fraternity of the natural and nurtural powers. The actants, hence, follow a reasonable sequence in the progression of the story.

The *Epic* text is erected on two opposing supernatural powers, i.e., Gilgamesh and Enkidu. The significance of binarism comes from the assumption that a sign has a value in the binary code so far it is related to other sign(s) in a sort of mutual complementary process. The wedding celebration is not imaged without the presence of the goddess of wedding which adds a sacred sense to the incident. The godly blood of Gilgamesh is known by reference to the goddess Ninsun throughout the combat scenery. These powers are, in reality, symbolic. That is to say, the mythic powers stand for abstract notions. While the sign Gilgamesh represents civilization (nurture), Enkidu wilderness (nature). These powerful symbolic signs function mutually; there is a kind of reciprocal determination in the mythic atmosphere. Bringing Enkidu from the phase of savageness to the phase of urbanism may give the sense that the history of mankind itself is but the story of the progression from primitiveness to civilization. This cannot happen without that combat to which "the door-jambs shook, the walls did shudder." Enkidu, eventually,

confesses the supremacy of the new era of mankind, i.e., civilization. This determination is structured in the form of narration. In narration, signs do not exist individually solely; they are clustered into meaningful systems, and these systems are syntagmatic in structure.

Having a narrative structure, the *Epic* has a systematically linguistic structure which comprises a combination of interrelated signs. Moreover, the causality order is omnipresent: the creation of Enkidu as an opposing power is because of Gilgamesh's severity. Similarly, the great motif behind the knowing of the secret of the eternal life is because of Enkidu's death. The causality relation is organically rooted in the structural relations which fundamentally follow the order of sequence. So, all forms of meaning are the product of the relational system which is the remarkable brand of the *Epic*.

The personal pronouns *they, he/his*, function as substitutes for the dominant signs. So, while *they* in *They seized each other at the door of the wedding house*, refers to Gilgamesh and Enkidu, *his* and *he* in *his anger subsided, he broke off from the fight*, stand for Gilgamesh in and after the combat process. In location, *the Square of the Land* stands for *Uruk*, the city of Gilgamesh. The *wedding house* might represent the temple where the wedding celebration is performed. The *wild cow of the fold* represents the goddess *Ninsun*. These representations are the knowledge-making activity of the brain's capacity to produce and understand signs, that is to say, *semiosis*. The representation, here, is the use of signs to relate, depict, portray, or reproduce something perceived, sensed, imagined, or felt in some physical form, as indicated in 3.2.2. The combat between Gilgamesh and Enkidu, though symbolic in thought, is physical in reality. This physical fight may become the prototypal model of all sorts of combat in Greek and, later, Roman arena where the heroes fight each other to win victory.

Studying the substitutes *Square of the Land, wedding house, the wild cow of the fold* may reveal that these phrases are not extra beauty added to the style of the epic. Rather, they are, in the semiotic system, structural meaning-carriers. The

paradigmatic relation stresses the concept of association. So, when we say that the paradigmatic relations are associative relations, they are epistemically mental associations which include perceived similarities in form.

The mythic journey in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is symbolic; it is the symbolic search for the secret of eternity, the meaning of existence and nothingness. In addition, it is the ancient philosophical idea in a form of narration, and the exploration of the *Epic* from a semiotic stance may bring to one's mind the assumption that semiotics is but a philosophy of meaning.

The motif of the hero's journey is to gain wisdom and knowledge of the unknown. It is the evolution of the spirit in the mythic code. The story of heroism, here, serves not a moral motif but an epistemic one. Being the oldest narrative text, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* set the archetypal model of the hero's quest for meaning. In structure, the mythic journey consists of the departure-initiation-return tripartite model which the hero undergoes in the course of his/her journey. The analogy is moulded into a symmetrical form between vision and reality. This symmetrical order is mostly encoded into a set of metaphorical modes of expressions. These modes constitute not only metaphors, in the figurative sense, but all kinds of meaning transfer such as simile, metonymy, personification, etc. This is clearly shown in

- For Gilgamesh, like a god, was set up a substitute
- The wall did shudder.
- The wild cow of the fold, the goddess Ninsun!

The metaphorical modes of meaning function reciprocally to build up the symbolic world of the *Epic*. Not only the human powers in the *Epic*, like Gilgamesh and Enkidu, are signs functioning as symbols in the convention or the culture of Mesopotamia, but even other animate and inanimate creatures become a crucial part of the journey myth. Nonetheless, the Gilgamesh mythic journey occurs within the

cultural convention of Mesopotamia. These signs get their symbolicity from their organic relatedness to the given culture. If the iconic sign is seminally related to resemblance or similarity, and the indexical sign to the direct linkage or connection, the symbolic sign is wholly within the range of arbitrariness or conventionalism, in a word, within the domain of culture. Viewed as the second order of signification, metaphor is a distinctive feature of the language of myth. These signs in syntagmatic/paradigmatic intersection witness meaning transfer from their congruency or literal meanings to incongruency or associative meanings. And here lies the significance of metaphoricity as a structural relation of classical mythology. In spite of the fact that metaphor is the prerogative of human language, this figurative device operates as a forceful sign in larger texts like myth. Metaphor, in this sense, is the storage of meaning but in an indirect way. It is plausible to decide that all metaphorical modes are organically modes of meaning; these modes are mythically symbolic.

In myth, the signs are used in their symbolic conventional perspective. Being the oldest literary work, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* constitutes the elements of philosophy and metaphor interwoven in its mythic fabric. So, it is no wonder to find the signs standing for abstract concepts, or they represent the particles of reality. This is clearly shown in Table 2:

Table 1 Sign Symbols in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*

Sign	Cultural Symbol
Alu	( also Gudanna) the Bull of Heaven
Anu	the sky-god
Aurora	a creator goddess
Ea	also (Hea, Hoa) the god of sweat waves and one of the creators of human race
Dilmon	( meaning " paradise") the land of the sunrise and the land of living
Enkidu	( meaning " the land of good place") Gilgamesh rival and Friend molded of clay by Aurora
Enlil	( storm god) creator god; father of gods, the heaven and the earth god

Gilgamesh	demigod hero and the builder of Uruk
Ninsun	a goddess, mother of Gilgamesh
Humbaba	the fierce monster; the heavenly guardian of the Cedar Forest
Shamash	the sun god
Shamat	the temple harlot who brought Enkidu to the gate of Uruk
Suduri	the tavern maid
Shuruppark	the Sumerian city on the bank of Euphrates
Utnapishtim	the hero of great Flood and the oldest survivor on earth

These interrelated symbols operating in the mythic world stand as a symmetrical structure to the world of reality in its explicable and inexplicable phenomena. In other words, the world of the myth or epic is analogous to the world of nature whether verbal or non-verbal. In behaviour, the gods and goddesses behave as if they were human beings in love, hate, anger, and good or wicked schemes. This is true, not only to the Mesopotamian mythic plethora, but to Greek plethora as well.

One more characteristic of metaphoricality is that the signs are clad in new senses in the mythic code; the mythic code fundamentally deals with the connotative dimension of the narrative rather than the denotative one. Penetrating the quoted illustrations clearly reveal that the actants are described in an incongruent way, as in *the wall did shudder*. The language of myth generates the metaphorical form of representation or semiosis, which ultimately creates the symbolic atmosphere of the *Epic*. So, the strategy of metaphoricality in the mythic text is to produce the structure of meaning which is the core of semiotics; still, the content of the metaphorical sign ceases to be without that cardinal relationship between the signs themselves and the semiotic structure as one whole.

Signs, in the mythic code, function as mediators between the external world of objects and the internal world of ideas. In this light, signification is an inevitable process in any meaningful product. The names, proper or common, leave their referential senses to get new shades in the mythic code. The code, from a semiotic stance, is a system of signs. These signs are selected from the mythic domain to

construct the cognitive patterns or the worldviews of the pre- historic man toward the world he lives in. These selected signs; however, are governed by the syntagmatic/paradigmatic principles which are ultimately resulted in meaning production. The signs, however, are the products of the Mesopotamian practices, rituals and traditions. The fatal destiny of Enkidu, for instance, was because of the curse on the primitive hero for killing Humbaba, and, then, the Bull of Heaven with the support of Gilgamesh; the curse is inevitable for those who defy the laws of deities. As a response to Gilgamesh's insult of Inanna/Ishtar, the hero had to pay penalty, i.e., his bosom friend's death. A cosmic view as such is transmitted by and through that connected chain of signs in the sacred story. So, if semiosis is any form of activity, conduct, or process that involves signs, including the production of meaning, and myth is the actual meaningful product of this innate capacity, then, this production in mythology ceases to be without the culture space. In the production of meaning proper the worldwide myths follow the samemarrative structure. Being parallel to the movement of human mind, the plot of the narrative structure is planned as a series of actants or methemes that are configured in a systematic way so as to arouse suspense, and the progression of the incidents may lead to a certain climax, and then, come to an end. The Gilgamesh journey started as a heroic adventure that led to the killing of the heavenly creatures. By the death of Enkidu, the *Epic* reaches its climax; the episode of death led to the quest for immortality in drastic resent to the phenomenon of death. This quest ends in entire failure on the side of the hero. The configuration has become a prototypal to all journey myths afterwards, but with certain culture-specific limitations. This cultural specificity may lead us to penetrate Gilgamesh as a culture hero.

Being a generic term, myth encompasses major categories, of which are epics and legends. In these mythic categories, the hero is a semi- human noble figure who has come to be worshipped because of his ideals and heroic deeds; the term *hero*, might refer to any heroic principal figure, male or female. The culture hero is a sign symbol standing for the idealism of a given human culture. In addition to be the initiator of

heroic labours and motivations, the hero is the carrier of the ideals and values of the culture. And though s/he is the knowledge-giver, the hero is ultimately the product of a given culture. Taken Gilgamesh as an instance of the culture hero, the demigod, throughout the mythic journey, is not confined to his physical strength and heroic valor, but he had recourse to his mental and verbal creativity while having that conversational turn with Utnapishtim, since his motivation is an extraordinary one. George (1999: xiii-xiv) highlights the motifs and the spiritual evolution of Gilgamesh as a culture hero, so

as a story of one man's "path to wisdom", of how he is formed by his successes and failures, it offers many profound insights into the human condition, into life and death and the truths that touch us all . . . The eternal conflict of nurture and nature-articulated as the benefits of civilization over savagery- is also examined, as too are the rewards of friendship, the nobility of heroic enterprise and the immortality of fame. Artfully woven into Gilgamesh's own story are the traditional tale of the Deluge, the great flood by which early in human history the gods sought to destroy mankind, and a long description of the gloomy realm of the dead. From all this Gilgamesh emerges as a kind of cultural hero.

The elucidation has obviously shown that the *Epic* is a masterpiece of human spiritual experience formed in the mythic fabric. Though he is the holder of the social ideals and values, Gilgamesh is the product of a certain human culture, and the core of the semiotic analysis is to uncover these patterns of meaning in the mythic code. The spiritual development of the protagonist, Gilgamesh, from cruelty to wisdom, and the spiritual evolution of the antagonist, Enkidu, from savagery to civilization are imaged symbolically in the universe of the *Epic*.

One more semiotic characteristic of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is binarism in its epistemic sense. In semiotics, the binary opposition is erected on two contradictory signs, as that of Enkidu and Gilgamesh. In the Mesopotamian *Epic* we have what we intend to call a *cultural opposition*: the opposition is between *nature* and *nurture*, between primitiveness and civilization. The sign which stands for nature is Enkidu

with all his primitiveness in belief, behavior and way of thinking. On the other hand, the sign which represents civilization is Gilgamesh with all his dreamlike vision to build a new center of civilization, namely, Uruk. The clash or the combat between the opposing powers is, in reality, the clash between the two historical phases of mankind in its developmental procession, i.e., primitiveness or nature versus civilization or urbanity; it is the clash of wills or ideologies. This point needs more exploration.

Ideology, in a broadest sense of the word, is a system of thought that carries a specific pattern of meaning. Ideology, in this sense, is a conscious process, but humans may be unaware that their beliefs, behaviours and practical ways of thinking are mostly unconscious. The Sumerians deal with Gilgamesh, their priest, king and oppressor, like a *babe-in-arms*; they were *kissing his feet*, and this is because they think that the king is like a god on earth. So, his orders, like having sex to a maiden in her wedding-night, unconsciously shape their ideology for a while. This sort of social relationships was real; their beliefs govern their actual lives during the reign of Gilgamesh. However, this ideology which appeared in non-verbal practices was later on resented by the Sumerian human conscious because of its dehumanization. A cultural shock might happen in the Sumerian community that made the Sumerians appeal to the protection of gods from the king's inhuman severity. The culture shock happens when the identity or the community as one whole is experiencing a state of dehumanization from the upper power. It is, in a way, an epistemic and psychological response to the class and religious discrimination, and power abuse. To encounter Gilgamesh's power abuse, a new supernatural power is created, that is, Enkidu.

The final point to be related to the *Epic* is that Gilgamesh's quest for immortality is not confined to the Sumerian hero himself. Relevant to Gilgamesh's quest for immortality, the *Epic* speaks to us today in deeply moving human terms about our immortality. Here lies the cultural universal of the *Epic* as a piece of human experience. So, the concept of immortality is not a relic of the past, but a cultural

universal shared by all humans. The final scene, where Gilgamesh stands before the city gate on which were engraved the deeds of the mythic hero, shows that what is really immortal are the human ideals, values and deeds in history.

Having semiotically analyzed the culture hero *Gilgamesh* in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, we are now in position to penetrate its Greek counterpart, i.e., *Prometheus* in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*. What does *Prometheus* stand for? How far is the Promethean myth rooted into the Mesopotamian culture? What are the structural points of correspondence between the Mesopotamian and the Greek myths? Before embarking on the semiotic exploration of the Promethean model to answer these questions, it is of interest to outline the Greek myth.

In Greek mythology, Prometheus/pro:meəju: s/, meaning *forethought* was the titan god who created human race and protected it. For the progression of mortals, the titan god stole the secret of fire from Zeus for man. A valuable and different body of mythic texts encoded the Promethean story. Cavendish (1980:203-4) wittingly introduces a bird eye view of the myth by saying that

**after Zeus had conquered the Titans, Prometheus made human beings out of clay and life was breathed into by the goddess Athena. Zeus had no love for the race of men. He oppressed them and deprived them of fire. The wily Prometheus stole fire from heaven, carried it down to earth in the hollow stalk of a fennel plant and gave it to men. He also taught mankind the arts and sciences, but Zeus took his revenge. Prometheus he had fettered to a mountain peak (of Mount Elbrus in the Caucasus). Every day an eagle (or a vulture) came to peck and tear at the chained Titan's liver, and every night the liver grew again, so that there was no end to the torture. Prometheus remained fettered there for thousands of years until at last, in the usual story he was released by Hercules.**

Apparently, the brief introduction demonstrates, not only the outline of the story, but also the reasons that led mythologists and culturists to consider the titan god as the culture hero of Greek antiquity. In addition to be the human-race maker, Prometheus is human-race knowledge-giver. In addition to be the creator of mortals, Prometheus

was the inventor of the agricultural systems, the medical ways of cure, the metal working, navigation and writing as well. So, the Prometheus myth may reflect the hero's quest for human prosperity.

A myth, in one function, is narrated to explain the phenomena of nature. The problems of human creation were mythically solved by the presentation of Prometheus as the god of mortals on earth. This abstraction may coincide with the divine concept that the invisible God is the creator of man. Not only that, the fire-stealer was the great benefactor of human race. By comparison, the Sumerian deities, in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* , stripped mankind from the grace of immortality, so they will be immortal themselves. This may bring the Mesopotamian culture hero closer to the Greek hero in defying the orders of gods in searching for immortality to the human race. The oriental origin of Prometheus, the Sanskrit morphological derivation *Pramantha*, is a debatable matter among linguists and mythologists. What matters, here, is that the secret of fire was the divine grace that was given by the creator and protector of mankind.

To penetrate the syntagmatic relation in Prometheus' myth, the following extract is taken from Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, introduced and translated by Roche(1962:29-30).

(Extract 7)

Come, sweet celestial space  
and quick-winged airs,

Come, springing streams  
and deep-sea- dimpled seas  
in crinkled laugh;

Come, mother -of-all, great Earth,  
and round all-staring sun-  
I call on you to see my hurt:

a god's but done by gods.

Gaze upon my mangled wrestling,  
my millennium of pain to come.  
Disgrace and chains

The new Commander of the Blessed  
puts on me . . . .

O I cry, cry

For sorrows here and those to come.  
For where or when in destined ever  
a close to all these pains?

But what do I say?  
When every item of the future I foresee  
And nothing of my agony can as a surprise.  
No, I must bear my fate as best I may,  
Knowing that nothing resist the force of what must be.

To talk or not to talk about my state  
Is equally impossible;  
And after all my benisons to men  
Here I am caught beneath this yoke- compelled:  
I the one who snared within a fennel stalk  
The source of fire-  
Man's great teacher of the arts, his universal boon.  
This is the sin, for which I pay the price,  
Clamped beneath the naked skyand shackled here.

*[There is a stir in the air like*

*The distant sound of wings]*

Ah! What now?

A sound, a wafted scent-intangible-

Heavenly or human or between?

Does someone come to spy upon my struggles?

Here at this verge of all, this peak. . .

Or wanting what?

Come look upon this bitter god in fetters;

Enemy of Zeus, deserted by the lot

Of gods that go to Zeus's court;

And all because I was a friend too much of man( Roche,1964:29-30)

A story, any story, is a sequence of episodes arranged into a structure which reflects the movement of thought in its progression. Prometheus' mythic narration is no exception. The narration starts from Prometheus' cheating of Zeus and stealing of fire up to being chained on the top of the mountain. From a semiotic stance, the extract has shown the two dominant signs, i.e., the protagonist in his eternal agonies and his antagonist or rival in his temporal triumph and ecstasy. *Prometheus* is the oppressed sign which stands for liberty and free thought in dramatic contrast to *Zeus*, the oppressor who represents tyranny and pride.

What lies beneath is the clash of loyalties which are represented by the two main signs, namely, Prometheus and Zeus. The cosmic clash of wills is eternal between the opposing worldwide powers. Though Prometheus and Zeus are both gods and have similar semiotic features [+animate],[+male],[+god], they represent the liberty-tyranny cycle in the history of ideas.

Binarism, as with all bygone analyzed mythic texts, is the hall mark of classical mythology. It is the strategy that constitutes two contradictory phenomena, opposite in meaning proper. The two contradictory signs represent two contradictory patterns of thought which overwhelm the whole universe. Nearly the whole history of mankind is preoccupied with the tyranny/liberty antithesis. No other system but the semiotic system can constitute the concept of binarism in its epistemic trend.

In structuralism literature, the term *binarism* is extensively used to unravel human epistemic worldview, and how phenomena in the universe are constructed in a binary structure. The function of a mythic sign like *Prometheus* or *Zeus* is to operate as a universal symbol, not only in the semiotic structure, but also in the structure of knowledge. The mythic structure is binary simply because it is composed of only two opposing components. Still, these two mythic signs are operating within the mythic code, and within the code of culture.

Binarism in mythology cannot be fully comprehended without the combinatory and associative relations of the sign symbols. The themes, as the extract has shown, follow each other in linearity coping with the cause-effect relation. The agonies of the titan-culture hero are because "*I was a friend too much of man*," and because he is the "*enemy of Zeus, deserted by the lot of gods*," he becomes the *bitter god in fetters*. What is characteristic about the mythic code is that the spacial and temporal aspects are dramatically unspecified. The mythic context is timeless. The *when* and *where* may be unraveled from the context of the sequence of the episodes performed by the sign symbols in the mythic atmosphere. This may give the mythic code its universality, where the sign itself becomes out of history, and here lies the significance of the syntagmatic-paradigmatic relation in the mythic story.

In *Prometheus Bound* the selective axis is omnipresent, and this is obviously represented by the substitutes of the predominant sign symbols. So, Prometheus becomes *man's great teacher of the arts, this bitter god in fetters*, and *enemy of Zeus*. On the other riverside, Zeus becomes *the new Commander of the blessed*.

The mythic discourse commences with a sequence of summons to the supernatural elements of the universe. The pronoun *I*, in the mythic text, stands for Prometheus, while the addressees kept silent. This *I* might represent the voice of mankind through the dramatic character. So, the mythic hero cries:

-I call you to see my hurt.

-I cry , cry

-I the one who shared with a fennel stalk/the source of fire.

-And all because I was a friend too much of man.

The whole scenery is symbolic. The function of the deity's summoning is not to show the god's gift to man, but to uncover his pains and agonies because of that divine gift. That is why the pronoun *I* is transformed from its subjective case into its possessive form in the onset of the extract, though the speaker *I* continues scattering throughout the veins of the mythic discourse, as in, "Gaze upon my mangled wrestling/my millennium of pains to come."

While the tormented god is identified as *I* in the discursal episode, the oppressor is mentioned by his frank name. The signifiers in the vertical pole are seen to be in everlasting ideological struggle; and in spite of the fact that the idea of clash of wills does exist in the lyrical drama, the two sign symbols operate mutually, since they are structurally meaning-bearers. On the whole, the mythic space is filled with the images of the two basic sign symbols, the oppressor and the oppressed. Other signs or elements are summoned to behold the tragic pains of the titan-culture hero. So, the Earth is summoned as *mother-of-all, great Earth*. These forms are meaning-carriers. Giving these substituted expressions to the dominant sign (Prometheus) may uncover the depth of the torture that he undergoes because of his friendship and protection to man.

The metaphorical space is the span where the signs operate analogously or figuratively in the semiotic structure. The language of myth is metaphorical since it is based on the mechanism of analogy and meaning transfer. The associative or the figurative language is fundamentally manifested in the sequential episodes of myth. As noted previously, the whole narrative text in mythology is given an associative sense because of that analogy between the structure of cognition and the structure of the world. The progression of human history is explained in mythic terms. Put it in another phrase, the system of industry in the history of humanity was invented because of the titan hero's bringing fire to the human race.

Certain metaphorical expressions like *deep-sea-dimpled seas in crinkled laugh, the naked sky, this bitter god in fetters*, may add more details to the tragic situation of the titan god in his sufferings. These connotative expressions are fundamentally associated with the mythic location where the episodes occur and proceed in their syntagmatic-paradigmatic course. So, the development of the mythic discourse may occur along the metaphorical pole in which the standard language is aesthetically violated. This violation brings more energetic powers to the language of myth. The particular content of a metaphor may constitute an interpretation of reality in terms of a mental icon that allows us to see what is being talked about. Metaphor, in this sense, is pictorial. So, by and through metaphoricity with its manifestations we may comprehend the sufferings of the titan hero.

Reading the structural aspects of myth is of significance to semiotic analysis. This is so because the cognitive patterns of thinking in antiquity were channeled in the form of narration. The form of meaning is mythic, and the process of producing signs and sign symbols is existent in the domain of signification. Abstract in nature, formal systems are best exemplified by myth. What matters in myth is not the sign by itself, but sign in some relation. The sign in the language of myth has its function or role so far it is linked to neighbouring signs or to the semiotic system as one whole. In this light, Prometheus, being the dominant sign symbol, enters into a reciprocal relation, not only with the opposing sign (Zeus), but also with other human and non-human elements in the mythic space. Not only that, the spacio-temporal elements become a crucial part of that everlasting conflict between the contradictory signifiers. The frequent re-occurrence of the deices may stress the degree of torture and suffering Prometheus undergoes in his entangled loneliness:

- For sorrows here and those to come
- For where or when in destined ever
- Clamped beneath the naked sky and shackled here
- Here I am caught beneath this yoke - compelled.

The liberty- tyranny cycle, as has been noted, is exemplified by the eternal conflict between the two eternal sign symbols, i.e., Prometheus and Zeus, and if semiosis is the cognitive ability to produce signs, the signs in the mythic code constitute an entirely cohesive system which forcefully reflects the meaningful patterns of the pre-historic mind. Moreover, these signs, human or non-human, serve to be the basic interlinked components of the mythic construction.

The semiotic analysis may lead us to unmask the symmetrical structure detected in classical mythology in its selected data, i.e., Mesopotamian and Greek. The methemes in the Mesopotamian-Greco mythic forms follow each other in a sequential order to create the mental image of the world. The episode of Enkidu's death has led to the journey of the Mesopotamian hero for the plant of immortality. He killed the two huge scorpions, met Utnapishtim, found the plant underneath the sea, and finally, returned after the snake devoured the plant. Likewise, the episode of the fire stealing from the heaven has led to the endless torture of the Greek culture hero; but if the destination of the Mesopotamian journey is the underworld, the destination of the Greek is the upperworld. The two journeys are not without a set of perilous adventures and consequences. Still, the two signifiers in the *Epic* and the lyrical drama dominate the whole supernatural scene. The two contradictory symbolic powers, whether in the Mesopotamian Epic or the Greek myth, have revealed the contradictory aspects of reality. This is clearly shown in Figure 2:

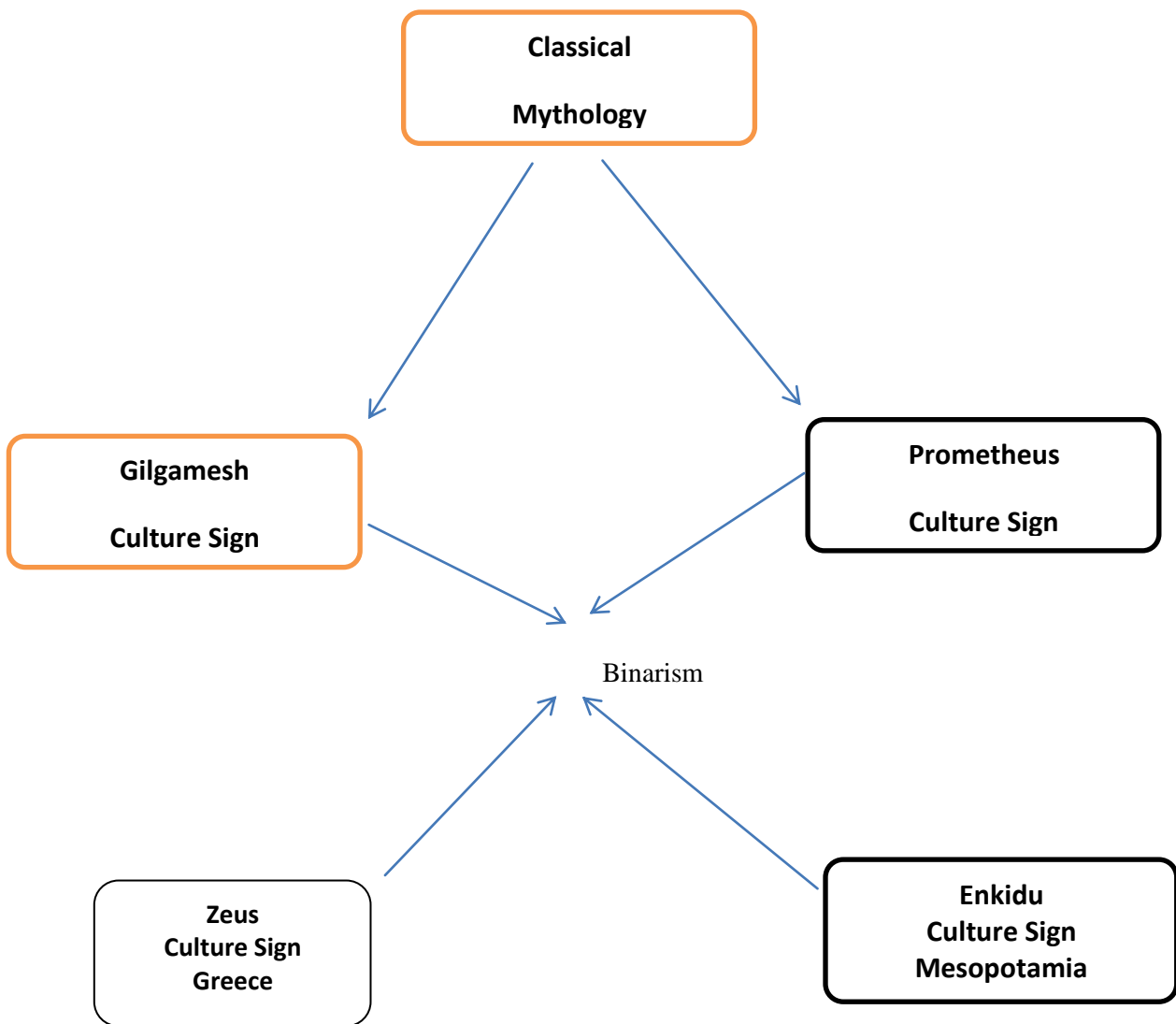


Fig..2The *Epic of Gilgamesh* and *Prometheus Bound*

The analogy in myth is between vision and reality, and between two differential aspects of the physical or abstract worlds. Metaphorcity, as a creative power, is fundamentally realized in a sum of metaphorical expressions, which charge the mythic texts with more expressive powers. Being the representation of the physical world, myth organically includes the principle of signification, where Gilgamesh, Enkidu, Prometheus, Zeus stand for abstract ideas. Such affinities cannot ignore the fact that these forms of myth also follow culture-specific constraints. The Gilgamesh mythic journey is a prototypical mode of moving from the world of light to the land of darkness. In Prometheus' mythology, there is a sort of ascending to the heaven rather than descending to the underworld. Prometheus steals the secret of fire from the heaven and then descends to mortals on earth. One more point is that Gilgamesh, being a sign, is accompanied by his rival and companion, i.e., Enkidu. That is to say, there is a kind of reconciliation between the heroic characters after that opposing struggle. In Prometheus, the sign hero is the one who has performed the episode of stealing the fire; the episode that eventually leads to the universal torture of the Greek hero on the peak of the mountain.

### Concluding Remarks

Semiotics is the structural theory which analyzes forms of meaning, of which is myth. The core of *Mythotics* is to disclose the structural or formal relations underlying the cognitive patterns or worldviews of pre-historic man. This complex network of interrelated signs is not without relevance to the cultural conventions in which it is germinated. So, the principles that underlie the structure of classical mythology are as follows.

1. Gilgamesh and Prometheus in semiotic analyses constitute syntagmatic relations. The signs in classical mythology follow a combinatory or a linear system in progression of the sacred story.
2. All Mesopotamian and Greek mythic corpora include paradigmatic relations, which are based on the mechanism of substitution. Signs in mythology are

substituted by other signs either to give more depth or to charge the mythic text with more powers of expression. In addition, binarism is an omnipresent semiotic feature of the classical mythic text. This may foster the notion that the semiotics of classical myth is universal, in the sense that all worldwide myths share the universal principle of binary opposition.

3. All Mesopotamian and Greek myths witness meaning transfer. The language of classical myth is metaphorical or associative. Metaphors, which are the product of metaphoricity, are functional. They unlock the structure of beliefs, behaviours, and ways of thinking in ancient communities. Because of the metaphorical coherence, myth becomes a sort of an extended metaphor, since metaphoricity is the innate process for the production of connotative semiosis in the mythic code. In addition, the semiotic structure of myth is erected on the mechanism of analogy. There is a sort of similarity between the structure of the mythic text and the structure of reality. So, myth is analogous to reality as in the resemblance between the life-death of Mesopotamian and Greek deities and the life-death recycling in nature.

4. All proper nouns in the mythic code function as signifiers either for abstractions or for factual particles. In mythology, unlike the norms of standard language, one signifier may stand for more than one signified. This is not without the cultural sphere in which the sign is produced and comprehended.

5. All classical mythologies, Mesopotamian and Greek, include a journey myth to a specific destination. What lies beneath the mythic journey is the spiritual development of the hero, and the pursuit of knowledge. The systematic phases of the extraordinary journey stand in analogy with the progression of human mind where the onset of the mythic metheme leads to a sequence of episodes following the causal relations in their fabric and correlation. The death of Enkidu in the Mesopotamian *Epic*, for instance, leads to the mythic journey of Gilgamesh.

6. The basic exponent of the Mesopotamian and Greek mythology is the culture hero who is fundamentally the sign symbol of a given human culture. The basic function of the culture hero is to bring prosperity and knowledge to human kind. The culture

hero is not only the figure who performs a set of heroic deeds, but also the one who holds the ideals and values of a given cultural group. Because the ideals s/he represents and holds are universal, the culture hero becomes a universal sign symbol.

7. In all human myths noun categories operate as representations for either factual or abstract concepts . All proper, common, and abstract nouns are given associative or connotative senses instead of their referential meanings. This is so because nouns, being signs in a conventional or cultural system, stand for something other than themselves.

The worldwide mythologies have structure and structural relations which make them meaningful forms,yet these classical narratives are different in certain respects. Mesopotamian and Greek myths are governed by a set of culture-specific constraints. In myths of culture hero, the Mesopotamian prominent signifier is a king, like Gilgamesh, behaving as a human being in the Sumerian commonality. In the Greek pantheon, the signifier is a god whose aim is to bring knowledge, as in the case of Prometheus. Though the motifs of the culture heroes in Mesopotamian and Greek mythologies are good, still, there are divergences in results. The snake (symbol of rebirth) has devoured the plant (symbol of eternal life). So, Gilgamesh has returned to read his earthly supreme labours on the Uruk gate. This may infer the immortality of human deeds rather than the divine boons. In Prometheus, however, the god's protector of mankind is rewarded with his everlasting agonies in everlasting chains.

The semiotic analyses have convincingly shown that the Mesopotamian and Greek myths, in spite of the marginal variations in the cultural constraints, have symmetrical semiotics in structure. They follow the same universal principles in narration.They are all meaning-bearers, and they all witness meaning transfer. In myths, as sign systems, the signs stand for something other than themselves. More importantly, the Mesopotamian and Greek myths are fundamentally based on binary opposition, which is a universal structural principle. So, these findings lead us to decide that the classical myth is a cultural universal. All human myths, from a

semiotic stance, follow the same universal principles in formal structure. The affinities, here above, stress the notion that classical myth in its semiotic structure and formal relations is a cultural universal shared by all human nations and languages.

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