

The Casting and Recasting of Reality: From *Mythos* to *Historia* to History and Myth

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The thesis of this paper is simple: that the commonly held conviction, both popularly and in the academic world, that there is a conceptual distinction corresponding to the verbal distinction between “history” and “mythology” is off, and thus that a reader must be wary of historical writing that asserts its conclusions as absolutely accurate and fact-and-truth-bearing. History, as we understand it in the West, at least—as a series of events that not only progress in a given manner but are impelled by an identifiable series of causes and effects—is often a mistaken conviction; a misunderstanding of our human understanding of what happens around us. The implication of objectivity with regard to the causes and effects for a series of events dissipates before the reality of human subjectivity and of the limits of the human capacity to accurately and objectively observe events as they occur, much less in contexts where we have not been direct witnesses of those events. In short: my contention is that what we call “history” is often “historiography”: the writing down of history in accordance with the writer’s interpretation of events and their consequences. The process of shaping an interpretational actuality that accounts for how we label a series of events—words and actions—in the everyday, profane world as an objectifiably ascertainable progression is analogous to the process of exploring and explaining the sacred realm beyond the everyday, which by definition can only be understood to be subjective. Put otherwise: religion takes as its starting point revelation, that offers what the sacred realm is and wants of the profane realm through a series of sacerdotal individuals—prophets, priests and their conceptual siblings such as poets and artists—who articulate and interpret the revelation that is further interpreted over time, as the original group of prophets and priests disappears and successive generations of students of the revelation subject it to an ongoing series of interpretations. With this in mind, a similar problematic that, in common parlance, distinguishes religion from myth also distinguishes history from myth, albeit, perhaps, less obviously—and both pairs of distinctions reflect the failure to distinguish objective truth from subjective truth—or otherwise put, the misconstrual of subjective understanding as objectively truth-and-fact-laden. One can recognize the oversimplification of this pair of dichotomies—history and myth; religion and myth—in examining Western thought from its evolution among the ancient Greeks to our own time, when fact-bearing forms have proliferated to encompass journalism and media reportage.

From Hesiod to Thukydides

When Hesiod wrote his epic poem, *Theogony* (“*The Birth of the Gods*”) in ca 700-650 BCE, he and presumably his audience understood that he was offering an

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absolutely true account of creation, both because he invoked the divine muses for assistance—spending the first 114 verses of his poem doing so—and because, as a practical matter, the knowledge of these events could only have been in-spirited within him by divine sources. He obviously cannot have been present to witness the pre-time moments that he describes, and “imagination” was not an option that his audience would have considered as a source for his details—and it would have been dangerous to make up false things about divinities. Making things up about the gods can get a poet into a good deal of trouble. They therefore understood the *mythos* that he recounted—and its verbal sibling, *mythein*—to be a “gods’ truth account” for whom the gods themselves (or rather, their divine handmaidens, the muses) were the truth-bearing source.

Of course, many centuries later, when the Hebrew-Israelite-Judaean tradition has spread forward into what we call Judaism and Christianity (and, later, Islam), the practitioners of these traditions regard the *mythos* of the Hesiodic understanding of divinity as a plethora of gods residing on Olympus—who functionally mark the third generation of sacred beings whose existence precedes human existence, and who frequently end up arguing among themselves—as inherently fact-deficient. The supposition that Zeus, Apollo, Hera, Aphrodite, and the other Olympians, as well of the Muses, *exist* is viewed by them as false. For them the term “*mythos*” (which will later translate into English as *myth*) refers to a false understanding of divinity, in contrast to their own belief systems as *religion*, which is presumed to provide an objectively, factually true understanding of sacred reality.

As for the pagan Greeks themselves, by the time Socrates was discussing diverse issues—like immortality, justice, and love, as well as truth—ca 440-400 BCE, he distinguished *mythos*, as an account that was not factually verifiable, (albeit capable of offering important truths), from *logos*, a fully reasoned out account.¹ A generation later, Thukydides, in presenting his account of the Peloponnesian Wars (ca 385 BCE), argued that his incontrovertibly fact-based *historia* should be distinguished from prior accounts—he implies that he has Herodotos in mind in particular, who used the term, *historia*, to mean “inquiry” or “investigation,” and who was his teacher and also the one whom we call the “Father of History”—which failed to distinguish *historia* from fact-suspect *mythos*.² That Herodotos is his most specific object of criticism, as A.W. Gomme points out in his magisterial commentary, is most obvious when he notes that he didn’t get his information

1. We see him articulate this contrast, while using both forms of exploration/explanation, each with its own *raison d’être* with respect to the truth regarding whatever the subject at hand, in the *Republic*, *Gorgias*, and *Phaedo*, among others.

2. Herodotos added analyses of causes and effects to his accounts, whereas his Egyptian and Mesopotamian predecessors offered lists of rulers and events without discussion. I admit to a touch of snobbery with my transliterations: I prefer them to be closer to the Greek than to the Latinate versions we typically use, hence Thukydides and Herodotos and not Thucydides and Herodotus, etc.

“from the first person I chanced to meet”³ By contrast, he, Thukydides, promises us what constitutes *real history*, marked by absolute *akribeia* (precision) in what he will report. But his presentation to the reader of his method (in Bk I, Ch 1:22) makes it clear that the line between absolutely fact-reliable *historia* and fanciful, fact-deficient *mythos* is a thin, blurry one. He writes:

In this history I have made use of set speeches some of which were delivered just before and others during the war. *I have found it difficult to remember the precise words used in the speeches which I listened to myself* and my various informants have experienced the same difficulty; so my method has been, while keeping as closely as possible to the general sense of the words that were actually used, *to make the speakers say what, in my opinion, was called for by each situation* [emphasis added].

And with regard to my factual reporting of the events of the war, I have made it a principle not to write down the first story that came my way, and not even to be guided by my own general impressions; either I was present myself at the events that I have described or else *I heard of them from eye-witnesses whose reports I have checked with as much thoroughness as possible* [emphasis added]. Not that even so the truth was easy to discover: different eye-witnesses gave different accounts of the same events, speaking out of partiality for one side or the other or else from imperfect memories.⁴

It doesn't take much to see the problem here, where the boasts of *akribeia* and incontrovertible fact are concerned. He chose what actions to judge as *real*, since he did not and could not see them all—and it is probably fair to say that even if and when he was present, in the midst of battle, his ability to see everything everywhere precisely happening as it was happening would have been compromised by the inherently limited sight-lines of being a human in the midst of chaotic conditions and not a god calmly watching the action from above. And as for the magnificent speeches—most famously that very long speech of Perikles at the time when the Athenian dead were celebrated at the end of the first year of war with a state funeral (430 BCE)—while we might imagine the possibility of his having been there, Perikles' speaking style is remarkably Thukydidean, with characteristic features of Thukydidean writing style rampant throughout the oration.⁵ But he admits to a less than perfect memory and to having manufactured speeches as he thought appropriate, in any case. And who among those reading Thukydides' narrative had been present and/or would remember Perikles' words from half a century earlier to contradict the account of those words?

One wonders, therefore, whether the rendition of this speech is a case of relying on “reliable witnesses”—and what constitutes their “reliability”—or of his “placing in the speaker's mouth the words I know that he would have spoken

3. The phrase appears in Book I, chapter 1, section 22, line 2. Gomme's comment appears in his Commentary to Book 1, 141.

4. Thukydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, 24 (Book I, chapter 1, section 22).

5. His chiasmic sentence constructions, most obviously. Ibid, 116-23 (Book 2, chapter 4. sections 34-48).

under the circumstances.” One might add that Thukydides was removed from his position as a general and exiled for 20 years rather early in the war—after the defeat at Amphipolis (424 BCE) for which he was held responsible—so he sat out most of it from his study, writing about it without having participated on the field or in the discussions that comprised it: a war that he announces at the outset of his narrative as the most overwhelming ever to have transpired within the ambit of Hellas and its world. This last point, of course, means that his account is intended to be recognized by his readers as more important, even, than the *Iliad*, since the conflict about which he is writing is even greater than that known as the Trojan War. But—lest we forget our point—how much of his account is reliably *akribos*? How much of it is objectively factual *historia*?

It is notable for this discussion that as august a commentator on Thukydides as Gomme in his powerful analysis of so many aspects of this section of the *History of the Peloponnesian Wars*, who also discusses other commentators’ analyses, such as Grosskinsky and Pohlenz, does not allow his discussion to lead in the direction of this overriding issue. Even in the extended quote that he includes by Meyer, which Grosskinsky quotes, in which “the inevitable subjectivity of all historical writing” is front and center, Gomme does not use this observation to suggest the thin or blurred line, therefore, between *mythein* and *historiiein*; between *mythos* and *historia*.⁶ He references Thukydides’ own assertion that there is “an absence of *mythos* (to *may mythodes*)” in his narrative, as opposed to those of Herodotos—choosing to translate *mythodes* as “the story-telling element”—skirting on the edge of but never arriving at an assertion of the problem that I wish to suggest as so fundamental.⁷ Again, it is a simple and at once tiny and enormous problem: that the line is thin or blurry enough (or both) that we must be suspicious of the absolute accuracy and truth-quotient with the information that we encounter in what are claimed as historical accounts of human events.

The Shaping of Post-Thukydidean Western Historiography

On such foundations, in any case, the edifice of western history-writing has been built for more than 24 centuries. The discipline should indeed be called “historiography”—the “writing of history,” not “history”—since every historian so-called, (in a manner analogous to theologians who write about divinity and the revelations believed to emanate from God/the gods), interprets the data that are presumed to be factual as they offer accounts of events, their causes and consequences, that have been significant in the course of human experience. And there are variant shapes to this issue, of course, as one follows it across history. To offer one sort of example, we might easily and obviously ask what the historical

6. Gomme, 141-7. On 146 he offers the long quote from Meyer (2), II, 384-7.

7. Ibid, 149.

versus mythological realities underlying the 11th-12th- century French epic poem *Chanson de Roland* might be.

The most fundamental distinction between fact and imagination—history and myth—is in large part a function of the reality that three centuries separated what might have been the events of August 15, 778 that were gradually carried down through generations of oral poets (troubadours), from the oldest surviving somewhat complete written manuscript account of those events. Thus, most obviously, whatever it was that transpired at the pass of Roncevaux in the Pyrenees Mountains to Charlemagne's rear guard was almost certainly accomplished by the Gascons—aka the Basques—who refused to be subsumed into the expanding Carolingian empire, rather than by the Muslims (so-called Moors) depicted in the poem. But the latter, by the 11th-12th-centuries, had become the obsessive focus of Euro-Christian martial focus, from the surging *Reconquista* of ca 1031 through 1212 that would see Christians wrest so much of Iberia back from the Muslim control to which most of it had been subject between ca 750 and 1031, to the beginning of the Crusades at the other end of the Mediterranean, beginning in 1095.⁸ By the time a full written manuscript recorded the events the key antagonist had been transformed and its auditors or readers for the next many centuries understood those mythical antagonists to have been historic actors on that Carolingian stage.⁹

How much *akribeia* of perspective and details may we attain so many centuries after these events took place? But long distances in time between events and the writing about them doesn't necessarily disappear with chronological proximity (it didn't with Thukydides!). Of course, one might assume that, since it is a poem, the *Chanson* is not intended to be taken as a work of *historia*, but the misconstrual of the main antagonist, if we want to have any sense of the significance of the events that are narrated, is egregious.

That said, much closer to us and yet as or more pressing with respect to myth and history is the narrative of John F Kennedy's assassination in Dallas on November 22, 1963—with a substantial official report: 10,000 pages under the signature of the Chief Supreme Court Judge, Earl Warren, and thus with an

8. From the time when the Muslims, under Tariq, began to take control of much of the Iberian Peninsula, dispossessing the Visigothic Christians of political control, between 711 and 720, Christians beyond the Pyrenees hoped to reconquer it—hence, the “*Reconquista*.” The Umayyad dynasty, with its capital in Cordova, solidified control of most of the peninsula by about 750. When the dynasty finally collapsed, around 1030, the *Reconquista* began to achieve some success. By the end of the 11th century—shortly before the First Crusade began at the other side of the Mediterranean—Christians controlled about 65% of the peninsula; by 1212, after the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, Christian control rose to about 85%. The entire Peninsula succumbed to the Christians in January 1492, when King Ferdinand of Aragon conquered Granada. And so on.

9. This change from historical to mytho-literary antagonists of Roland is noted in the introductions to most translations and French editions of the *Chanson*. See. For example, the 2013 French edition edited by Gerard Brault.

emphatic US government imprimatur—that claims to offer the facts and the truth, but that would seem to include a large series of fact-and-truth deficiencies. To a careful and critical student of the event, the historical account asserted of the Warren Commission Report might suggest itself as myth.

Any number of written accounts—such as Josiah Thompson’s *Six Seconds in Dallas*, or with even more compelling mass of detail, Thompson’s *Last Second in Dallas*, as well as film footage of the key moment famously and almost accidentally shot by Alexander Zapruder—show rather emphatically how devoid of facts the Warren Report may well be.¹⁰ The alleged lone gun man, Lee Harvey Oswald, was a notoriously poor shot (he had served in the US army, which is when and where he demonstrated his singular lack of talent as a marksman) and yet, according to the report, managed to be extraordinarily accurate, shooting at a moving (albeit slow-moving) target 265 feet away and with his third, fatal shot, hitting Kennedy in the head—and in fact is supposed to have fired three shots (the first “missed” and the second hit the president in the back—with the old gun and its slow re-loading mechanism that was said to have been found up on the sixth floor of the Book Depository from where Oswald is said to have committed the assassination.¹¹ Of course, when, two days after Oswald had been captured—and strenuously denied having killed the President, insisting that he had been set up as a patsy—and he was being transferred to the county jail, it is astonishing that security was lax enough to allowed him to be killed by Jack Ruby at close range, so nobody in a court of law ever heard or cross-examined his account of what he did or didn’t do and under whose aegis if anyone’s. Ruby himself died, apparently of a pulmonary embolism, not too long thereafter—and, forensically speaking, what was left of JFK’s heavily damaged skull quickly disappeared, remarkably, from the Parkland Hospital to which the dying president had been rushed, so that should anyone capable of doing a forensic analysis, say, of bullet angles and the like, wanted to do

10. Dallas-based clothing manufacturer Abraham Zapruder was filming the Kennedy motorcade as it passed through Dealey Plaza, and thus happened to capture the assassination—from a relatively clear, slightly elevated position on the side from which the president’s fatal head wound is visible. In spite of its importance as a piece of eye-witness testimony that helped shape the Warren Commission Report, the footage of the third shot in particular has been viewed by a number of analysts as proving that Oswald was not the killer or at least not the lone shooter, since that third shot seemed to come in rapid succession from two different angles. Other details picked up by Zapruder’s camera added to that theory.

11. For more details—and there are quite a few—that reinforce the unlikelihood of the account presented in the Warren Commission Report, see *Six Seconds in Dallas*. Moreover, after nearly 50 years of further research, Thompson produced a second book, *Last Second in Dallas*, in which he again concluded, this time based on more recent technological possibilities for analyzing, among other things, the Zapruder footage, that—as Kennedy’s head could be seen knocked *backward* and then quickly again *forward*—he was shot from the front and then the back: meaning that there was a second shooter who hit him first from the “grassy mall.” In other words: two shooters, even assuming that Oswald was one of them.

so, that became and remains impossible.¹² We might wonder whether we have an accurate—*akribos*—historical account in the official report that is the basis for our understanding of the history of that event.

History and Myth from Hitler to Erdogan

One might sandwich the historiographic truths or facts regarding JFK's assassination between two very different events, the willful falsifying of the essential historical details of which served very specific political purposes. Adolph Hitler came to power as the German Chancellor in January 1933 with an ambition rather clearly articulated in the autobiographical tract, *Mein Kampf* (*My Battle*) that he had penned a decade earlier while in prison in the aftermath of his failed attempt to overthrow the democratic Weimar government in what is known as the Beer Hall Putsch. Barely a month in power, and in his National Socialist (aka Nazi) thugs set fire to the Reichstag on February 27, not long after he had proposed to the German President Hindenberg that its governing infrastructure be dismantled.

This act provided a key moment in facilitating Hitler's path of removing the last substantive alternative political party and thus the last political impediment to his rapid seizure of total power and his successful subversion of the republic. For in the aftermath of the fire—which he called “a sign from God” he was able to induce President Hindenberg to issue the “Reichstag Fire Decree,” which suspended civil liberties, and he shaped the lie that would galvanize so many Germans to support him unequivocally, convincing the public that the perpetrators of this crime were the Communists and their associates, the Jews. The version of events presented to the German people and the world as *historia* has been recognized often enough as *mythos*.¹³ The extra-legal mechanism for dealing with

12. Two further notes may be of interest: one: that the Warren Commission Report was not able to make any sort of determination regarding Oswald's motives for his alleged killing of JFK; and two: three of the Commission members—Hale Boggs, Sherman Cooper, and Richard Russell, Jr.—disagreed strenuously with the lone killer/single bullet theory advanced by the report. For a further discussion of these issues, see Jack Roth, *Killing Kennedy*.

13. A Dutch Communist, Marinus van der Lubbe, was arrested as the arsonist. He and four other Communists went on trial in September, 1933, and while the others were acquitted he was executed. While not everyone to this day agrees with the assessment that I am offering, it is noteworthy that Walter Gempp, head of the Berlin Fire Department at that time suggested that it was the Nazis who set the fire—for which assertion he was dismissed from his position. In 1937, he was arrested for “abuse of office”; he appealed his subsequent conviction but was put into prison—where he was strangled on May 2 1939. Regarding Gempp, see David H Pinkney, *A Festschrift for Frederick B. Arts*, 194 and also Harris M Lentz, *Assassinations and Executions: An Encyclopedia of Political Violence, 1865-1986*, 1974. Regarding the larger conversation regarding who was responsible for the fire, see Benjamin Carter Hett, *Burning*

these newly-pronounced enemies of the German state and the German people was to concentrate them in camps designed precisely for this unique purpose: incarcerating groups of people when prisons were neither sufficient nor appropriate because they could not simply all be found guilty of a given “crime.”

In the long run, the Communists would all but disappear from the German political map—although Hitler would, ironically enough, sign an important pact (that he would abrogate when it suited him to do so) with the premier Communist state, the USSR, and its totalitarian leader, Joseph Stalin. As for the Jews—residents of Germany since at least the year 321, but having found themselves first religiously emancipated in the early 19th century and then gradually re-marginalized based on new concepts of race, as “Semites,” one and two generations later—they found themselves swallowed by a perfect storm.¹⁴ They were racial outcasts who could never be “German” and also presumptive traitors through the nineteen-century-old Christian view of their association with Judas—to serve as the go-to scapegoat for anything and everything that went wrong in Germany, going back retroactively to the defeat in World War I.¹⁵

So the outcome of a false flag event—turning the mythologized moment of the Reichstag burning into a readily embraced historical datum—would offer a treble consequence (for starters): the transformation of the German democracy, the Weimar Republic, into a vicious dictatorship that prided itself on its successful use of the Big Lie to gain and maintain its power; the Holocaust that came gradually into focus—between the publishing of the first Nuremberg Laws in 1935 and the opening of the first Death Camps in 1941—as a campaign to exterminate all Jews and Judaism itself; and the unprecedented destruction of World War II, beginning with Germany’s invasion of Poland in September 1939.

The second event that flanks the JFK assassination, five decades *after* his murder in Dallas, echoes the Reichstag debacle—and seems in fact to have been modeled on it; as its perpetrator is an admirer of Hitler and an apparent student of *Mein Kampf*. I refer to the alleged coup attempt against the government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Türkiye in July 2016—to which event he referred, using Hitler’s own words, that it was “a gift from God” offering him the chance to complete his exterminationist war against the followers of Fethullah Gulen and against the

the Reichstag, 255-59 and Richard J. Evans, *The Hitler Conspiracies: The Third Reich and the Paranoid Imagination*, especially 59-78.

14. Regarding the establishment of the Jewish community in what is now Germany, in Cologne by 321, see Johanna Adrian, “Jewish Beginnings,” William D. Davies & Louis Frankenstein, *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, 1042; and Judith Lieu, et al, *The Jews Among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire*, 117. Regarding German Jewish history in the late eighteenth through late nineteenth centuries, see Soltes, *Shaping Modern Jewish Thought*, chapters two and three.

15. Regarding that long history of anti-Jewish sentiment associated with the demise of Jesus, See Soltes, *Jews on Trial*, particularly chapter two.

remaining institutions of the Turkish democracy that he had been gradually undermining or dismantling during the previous three years.

Everything about the “coup” smells of the Big Lie, coming in a country in which, prior to Erdogan’s rise, there was actually a coup practically every decade for the last third of the twentieth century: Turks seem to know how to do coups. They are done in the middle of the night, not during rush-hour; the key political figures one seeks to take down are the first to be rounded up; one doesn’t have the number one figure, Erdogan, free and out on the main bridge in Istanbul, broadcasting with his cell phone to call for support on social media—for starters. Not does the fact that Erdogan already had a list of over 100 “perpetrators” ready and in his hand before the event had even concluded offer much confidence in the fact-and-truth value of his anti-Gulen assertion.

Erdogan’s goal to finalize the removal from influence of the Hizmet Movement, inspired by the Imam, Fethullah Gulen, who had by then been living in Pennsylvania for 17 years, succeeded in removing the last potential obstacle to the finalizing of the demolition of the Turkish democracy and Erdogan’s assumption of complete control of the country—and significantly, the British, with listening access, could overhear him asserting that it was most important that Hizmet be blamed for the event.¹⁶ If the Hizmet Movement initially played the role for Erdogan that the Communists did for Hitler, they evolved to become his version of the Jews, the ever-reliable scapegoat for whatever is going wrong—and remain so to this day, even after Gulen’s death.¹⁷ And the *mythos* of the “failed coup” has been treated as *historia* but contemporary journalists who report in today’s media-rich world as Thukydides did 24 centuries ago. As ordinarily reputable an American publication as *New Yorker Magazine* and its prize-winning reporter, Dexter Filkins,¹⁸ recounted the event with complete lack of journalistic ethics, clearly doing little research beyond relying entirely on Erdogan’s sources to recount the so-called “failed coup” managed from afar by a nefarious Gulen and foiled by a heroic Erdogan—rather than the fake coup orchestrated by Erdogan that had transpired.¹⁹

16. For more detail regarding the matter of the “failed coup” as a fake coup, See Soltes, “Rising to Challenges in Difficult Times: The Bright Future of the Hizmet Movement,” in Soltes & Saraci, eds., *The Future of the Hizmet Movement*, chapter three.

17. Gulen passed away in October, 2024, but that has not caused Erdogan to desist from pursuing Hizmet participants both in and beyond Türkiye.

18. See Dexter Filkins, “The Thirty-Year Coup,” *The New Yorker*, October 17, 2016. The article more broadly paints an extremely tainted image of Fethullah Gulen and the Hizmet Movement that could hardly be more mythological. “Hizmet,” it might be noted, is the Turkish word for “service” and the Movement bearing that name exists to do just that, by way of interfaith and multi-cultural programs, social services, and building schools in places where they are most desperately needed. See Soltes, *Between Thought and Action*.

19. One of the ironies within the Erdogan-Gulen situation is that the latter never had any political ambitions. Ever. On the contrary, his vision of proper Islam is as a civil and

One might recognize how the media, beyond a single *New Yorker* article, have so successfully adopted and adapted the mental technology of *historia* and *mythos* to the needs of the state, particularly when the state is enthralled to one party or one individual. Part of Erdogan's path to dictatorship was to eliminate the most successful newspaper in Türkiye, *Zaman* (and its English-language sibling, *Today's Zaman*)—published by *Hizmet*—and assuring that anything provided to the Turkish and world public was produced and vetted by his own loyalists. The long-time Soviet Newspaper that provided Erdogan's model for this aspect of his rulership was called *Pravda*—meaning “Truth” in Russian. Established on May 5, 1912, *Pravda* began as an underground workers' daily in St. Petersburg. It was frequently suppressed by the Tsarist police, but eventually emerged as the major print-media mouthpiece for the regime under Lenin, Stalin, and their successors. The patent mythology of its historiography provoked an underground press, *samizdat*, for many decades in desperate response to its fictions-as-fact.

Coming to Today's America

Of course, the American democracy's media cannot be accused of always providing the truth, either, alas. The *New York Times* comes much closer to historical truth and its facts, perhaps, than *Pravda* does, for it prints “All the News That's Fit to Print,” but clearly not always facts or truth, and a bit too often news that *fits the print*—because it sells. Thus, alternative publications—our own version, perhaps, of *samizdat*?—assert their role in counter-reporting, particularly in the past decade, beginning late in 2016, when Donald Trump found himself in the White House for the first time.²⁰

Indeed, one might extend this question of myth as history versus history as history within the journalistic context forward to 2024, when an alleged assassination attempt against then would-be Republican Presidential candidate, Donald Trump, with its extraordinary irregularities in its reported narrative sequence, offers interesting possibilities for a rather recent confusion between historical fact and mythological fantasy.

The event to which I refer is the alleged attempt on Mr. Trump's life made by a shooter, 20-year-old Thomas Matthew Cooks, on July 13, 2024, at a campaign rally in Butler, PA. One might consider the following details to raise the question

civic not political idea—and see the previous footnote regarding *hizmet* as “service” in Turkish, which is the direction to which he has pointed his followers, in 170 countries, for decades. See Fevzi Sarac, “Cultural vs Institutional Solutions: Differences Between the Hizmet Movement and Political Islam,” in Soltes & Sarac, *Ibid*, chapter two.

20. Thus, for example, *Quora*, *Reader Supported News*, and *Truthout*—all of which are accessible on-line. Even mainstream sources, however, note the extraordinary plethora of lies offered by Trump almost daily to the American people.

as to whether the event might have been an extraordinarily fake assassination attempt. The most compelling evidence isn't that the presumed victim's ear healed so quickly (debates over whether it was a scrape or a graze or a bit of debris or whatever are all irrelevant distractions), or that the blood running from that alleged wound—and an awful lot of it, given that the wound was supposedly only to the ear—was flowing in the wrong direction, given the presumed position from which Trump's ear would have been hit.

It isn't that the secret service ignored several warnings about the man on the roof that it is difficult to imagine they did not see until no less than eight shots had been fired by the assailant—and then promptly gunned him down, shutting off the most obvious source of a possible counter-story to what was being spun. Or that they parted like the Red Sea for a perfect photo op, exposing Trump's head and chest, as, instead of being kept on the ground and covered with agents, he ducked but then rose to his feet and gestured defiantly—things that it would seem that no real secret service reaction would allow. Oh, and he managed to gesture fiercely in the precise direction of the shooter—650 feet away—in spite of what one can imagine as a chaotic, terror-filled moment when he should not have been able to discern what was coming from where. Or was the shooter dead by then?

It isn't that the man who got five draft deferments to stay out of armed combat decided to roar unarmed defiance into the face of a gunman (and then campaigned for the rest of the year on how we don't need gun control—from behind a protective sheet of bulletproof glass and a strict no-guns policy at his rallies; so I guess his newfound 'courage' didn't last long). What also didn't last long was, to repeat, the ear-wound, which disappeared so quickly, with not a scintilla of damage in evidence from that day to this.

Given Trump's personality and consistent behavioral pattern, the most compelling evidence is that Trump actually stopped talking about it so very quickly.

This man still has a beef with Obama from when the latter roasted him at a White House dinner years ago. This man still thinks the Central Park 5 should be executed, just in case. This man still hates Scotland and Panama because they wouldn't put up with his corrupt business practices. He holds grudges for decades and pours out venom about them again and again. But regarding the guy who supposedly actually tried to *kill* him? The guy whom he so heroically faced like Erdogan on the bridge in Istanbul—who managed to miss him with eight shots, unlike Lee Harvey Oswald, whose notoriously poor marksmanship failed to prevent his single-handed success at killing John F Kennedy? Nothing. Not a peep. No excoriating social media posts. Water under the bridge. Not even a mean nickname like "Shaky Tom."

Because he doesn't remember it—and why should he? Perhaps he wasn't in any real danger. It was just one of several dozen campaign stunts conducted around a man with a background in 'reality' television—the consummate contemporary medium of effacing the line between *historia* and *mythos*. His ear healed quickly because it wasn't hurt. The secret service let him stay upright and

pose because there was no real danger to him. And if one supposes that Trump isn't willing to kill—not just Crooks, but the bystander who died, allegedly from one of Crook's shots—for a half point jump in the polls, then one would be woefully unaware of Trump's personality past and present.²¹

Of course, I could also be wrong about this, couldn't I? I wasn't there—and even if I had been there, like Thukydides before he left the battlefield for his writing desk, what would I know about what actually transpired amidst the chaos and confusion? But if it *was* staged, then the more confusion and chaos the better to ensure that the theatrics would play through to their intended outcome: Trump as the hero who can lead the Party and who can lead the country. It will be interesting to see how this event is reconsidered over time. My intention is to just the possibility that there are enough questions regarding the official account not to embrace it as fact-and-truth-bearing simply because it is official.

New Media, *Mythos* and *Historia*

Certainty regarding so many events from the time and the world of Hesiod to our own time and world is nearly as elusive as certainty regarding the reality *beyond* our world. We believe in the actuality of certain events and the narrative that describes them, and so we refer to the narrative as *history*; narratives the facticity of which we reject we call *myths*. Analogously, we believe in a particular configuration of divinity, and we believe in a certain path of interpreting the revelation from divinity that reinforces how we understand it, and our belief system becomes what we call *religion*. A belief system that we consider false, with regard to both what divinity is and what revelations from it mean, we label *myth*—or *superstition* or *magic*.

But in both arenas, that which we consider true and fact-laden—in an *akribos* way—is typically unprovable by reason, however reasonable (or unreasonable). We weren't in the Bay of Syracuse in 413 BCE, the pass at Roncevaux in 778 CE, the field at Hastings in 1066, Berlin in 1933, Dallas in 1963, Istanbul in 2016, or Butler, PA in 2024. And it is difficult to assert that if we had been present at any of those times and places we would have walked away with a clear idea of what had transpired.

In fact, we live in an era when we are not limited to print media like *The New York Times* or *The New Yorker* or *Pravda* to offer us *akribos* information on events that, rather than swelling the pages of *mythos*, end up as told-again tales of *historia*—or counter-sources that reconfigure what we accept as history or reject as

21. There have already been any number of commentaries that see the event as different from what the official *historia* has already laid out. See, among others, Martha McHardy, "Half of Trump Voters and Many Democrats Don't Believe FBI on Matthew Cooks," *Newsweek*, August 4, 2024; and also Verity Bowman, "Trump Shooting: All Seven Conspiracy Theories Examined," *The London Telegraph*, July 15, 2024.

myth. Social Media—including Trump’s own cynically titled “Truth (*pravda*!) Social”—make up whatever news fits the news-perpetrator’s need. We live in a world where biopics and so-called reality TV constantly blur the boundary between fact and fiction—between historical fact and imaginative myth.

The rather prescient 1997 movie, *Wag the Dog*, codified what we can do with new kinds of media, by offering us, as a political satire, the account of a governmental decision to manufacture a war in Albania from scratch, in order to distract American voters from a sex scandal involving the president. The mechanism, in the hands of a Hollywood spin doctor producer, is that of creating fictional—fake—documentary footage. The outcome of the film includes the murder of the producer when the project has been completed and its goals achieved, lest his inclination for loose lips let the truth out.

A far cry from Thukydides’ problematic reference to *akribeia* or from Socrates’ obsession with *aletheia*—truth—being sought through discussions that interweave *logos* and *mythos*. The events and the reportage of events and the consequences of both, strung out between multiple pasts and the present might cause us to wonder, however, regarding today’s events and their consequences: what will be looked back at as myth and what as history tomorrow. That wondering—like the care with which we might approach historical and contemporary accounts, whether in poetry, or academic or journalistic prose, with regard to the reliability of its *akribeia* and *aletheia*—ought perhaps to be laced with concern and not just idle curiosity.

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