

TELLING MYTHOLOGIES: PASTS AND POSSIBLE FUTURES IN ACTIVIST LITERATURE  
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Our perceptions of the past help shape our expectations for the future, which in turn shape our present actions. In this dissertation, I have examined the mythological dimensions of activist literature in order to better understand the deep motivations that drive activists, and what possible futures those motivations might bring about. In particular, I have questioned what books inspire activists, and whether the assumptions and mythologies implicit in those books match the politics and stated goals of ‘the movement.’ On the principle that small samples of cultural material will reflect the larger patterns of a culture, I have focused on five books, which were selected from activists’ responses to an e-mail survey.

Over the course of several readings, in which I focused on tone as well as content, I identified three interlocking core mythologies which were recounted explicitly or implicitly in all the books:

- *Fall From Grace*: Hierarchical cultures have ‘fallen’ from an ideal indigenous state, with social, economic, and ecological conditions becoming steadily worse, eventually leading to an armageddon. The role of activists is to prevent armageddon by creating utopia.
- *Entrapment*: We are trapped in the oppressive ‘system’ of our culture, which constricts our choices and turns all circumstances to its own advantage. Activists must either destroy the system or escape it, leading others away with them.
- *The Great Battle*: Activists struggle against oppressors to determine the fate of the world. ‘The masses’ are unaware of this struggle, but they must be saved from the oppressors and ideally be won to the side of the activists.

These stories reflect familiar elements from ‘mainstream’ Western mythology, as well as elements found in non-Western mythologies. However, they can often be traced to fear and inaction, and thus do not fundamentally support the politics of liberation that most activists subscribe to. I have concluded that activist writers must be more aware of the mythological dimensions of their work, and more fearless and visionary in telling radical stories if they are to inspire activists to build the positive futures they desire.