

Posthuman Mysticism: From the Zero Point of Humanity to the Parallel Worlds in *The Gift*



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Göbeklitepe, located at Örencik village in Şanlıurfa, a city in southeastern Turkey, is the world's first and largest temple in history. It has recently been discovered as the zero point in time that shifts human history back to more than 12,000 years ago—7,000 years before the great Egyptian Pyramids and 6,000 years older than Stonehenge. Şanlıurfa is called the town of prophets and is mostly linked with the prophet Abraham, the ancestor of the whole of humanity in monotheistic religions, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Urfa is associated

with the town Ur from the Bible, and Edessa (modern Urfa) is also known as the first home of the Holy Mandylion-Christ icon on the Taurus Mountains. Göbeklitepe was built in the pre-pottery Neolithic period and is a significant point in the evolution of religions, as the root of monotheistic religions. With the temple's 14-tonne pillars, Göbeklitepe has been on the UNESCO World Heritage Site list since July 2018. Göbeklitepe, which translates to “Potbelly Hill,” was discovered in 1963 during joint research by Istanbul University and the University of Chicago, and it was unearthed by the 1995-2006 excavations led by the German archaeologist Klaus Schmidt. In the studies carried out in Göbeklitepe and its surroundings, it was revealed that religion, not agriculture, caused humans to shift to a sedentary lifestyle. So, Göbeklitepe has rewritten the history of the beginning of human civilization.



The 2019 Turkish Netflix series *The Gift* tells the (hi)story of (post)humanity by the archaeological discovery of a gate in Göbeklitepe that leads to parallel universes. Inspired by Şengül Boybaş's novel *The Awakening of the World*, the series is about the “mystical” story of a young and beautiful painter named Atiye (meaning gift) who opens the doors to the past and begins to question everything between the past and the future, between the real and the spiritual. The mysterious gate is tied to the extraordinary artifact buried for millennia and to



the (her)story of Atiye, who explores her post-Goddess power throughout the history of humankind by her mysterious journey to parallel worlds.¹ As an artist living in İstanbul, Atiye discovers that she has been drawing the same symbol since childhood when she meets the archaeologist Erhan. It was Erhan who found the symbol in Göbeklitepe, which then becomes the connection point between Atiye's different selves that exist in the parallel worlds. The series weaves the topics of awakening after death, rebirth within history, and her story of parallel worlds. The series has a plot that feeds primarily on mysticism, anthropology, and cosmology. I explore the strains of posthuman mystic reception of cosmology in Turkish SF film in the context of the myth of the mother goddess.

Metaphysical Space and Time in Myth

The Gift is an interesting representation of the posthuman condition, achieved by mixing together Turkish mythology and posthumanist ideology. There is a close relation between posthuman and mythological narratives that both live beyond time, place, and space of existence. According to Mircea Eliade, historian of religions, “the myth relates the events that date back to the origins, to the primordial and legendary time of beginnings. In doing so, it refers to realities that exist in the world, explaining the origins: cosmos, man, plants, animals, life” (6). Thus, we cannot decrease myth to a mere fantasy, fairy tale, or scientific fact. Myth “does not have a claim of realistic and historical reconstruction of the facts; it does not relate the history of the genesis and development of a reality: it says something profoundly real, that mere scientific explanation of the facts could not explain” (Valera and Tambone 354). The dimensions of space and time are sacred in the myth since, as Eliade claims, events in mythical time “make up a sacred history because the actors in the drama are not men but Supernatural Beings” (13). Thereby, the Netflix series *The Gift* is a symbolic expression of historical reality through the mythical expression of metaphysical nature that is not natural.



As Julien Ries explains, “[t]he myth is a symbolic expression through which the human being interprets the relationship between the current time and the origins” (6). Following Donna Haraway’s claim that “[b]y the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are all cyborgs” (150), Atiye is the cyborg goddess, a chimera hybrid of human and supernatural mythical organisms. The first scene of *The Gift* shows Atiye watching her own funeral from a distance, which symbolizes her

rebirth. The posthuman narrative in *The Gift* deconstructs the Western dichotomies of organic/inorganic, death/life, nature/culture, male/female, fact/fiction, human/environment, natural/supernatural, past/present, soul/matter, etc., so *The Gift* moves beyond Western real time and space and instead enacts its own time and space.



As a mythological heroine, Atiye gets rid of the past and the future by realizing her power over the moments she can control. This is what it takes to be eternal, and the hidden mythical element is the present, so Atiye finds her power when she stays in the present: “Eternity does not mean having endless time. It means timelessness. If you want to experience infinite enlightenment, you need to get the past, the

future out of your mind. And stay in the present” – Shams-i Tabrīzī (S1, E3). The show depicts the idea that as humans, we have always been posthumans in a divine/eternal plan and that we cannot change the past, but we can shape the future as it is also stated in the series: “Maybe time is not linear as we are told, my son, maybe the past and the future have melted into each other and we are in a dream and a delusion/illusion” (S1, E8). In this sense, as in Pepperell’s “Posthuman Manifesto,” “[t]he future never arrives” (5) because we live in the past, present, and future at the same non-dimensional time and space that depict the posthuman turn of integral metaphysical understanding. The series depicts the past, present, and future happening at the same time:

There is no such thing as time. Everything in the universe happens at once. We only perceive things sequentially because that’s what we were taught. Yet every choice we made leads to a new possibility. We affect everything in a timeless place even if we don’t realize it. (S3 E2)

The metaphysical time and space in *The Gift* explain how “[e]verything that exists anywhere is energy” (Pepperell 12); that there is no need for matter in the flow of energy. There is no ultimate time and space in the posthuman myth of the Göbeklitepe as the turning point of humanity. The fluidity of Atiye’s posthuman body without physical boundaries moves beyond the spatial limits in parallel worlds and becomes whole in the eternal time of past, present, and future in human history. We see the posthuman goddess coinciding with the whole Atiye in each multi-parallel universe.

Sun and Moon Myth

The most important mythical element in *The Gift* is the Sun and Moon iconography, which is also found on the actual pillars of Göbeklitepe. Archaeologist Schmidt believes the “H” sign motif located above the *Kün-ay* (sun-moon) motif is a reference to marriage (God-goddess) in spring, which is a kind of symbol of male and female togetherness. This type of *Kün-ay*/god-goddess reunion ceremony brings us to the origin of *hidrelez* festivals, which is how the spring equinox



is celebrated in Turkey, when nature awakens and the earth is reborn (Çığ 2014; Esin 2001). *Kün-ay* symbols are also seen in many ancient artworks, such as Sumerian and Akkadian cylinder seals and Proto-Turkish culture (from the Chu Turks, Hun Turks, to the Gökturks), as well as to the flag with the crescent and star used by modern Turks. The pillar also symbolizes the life-death-rebirth cycle and reminds us of the sacred marriage ceremony

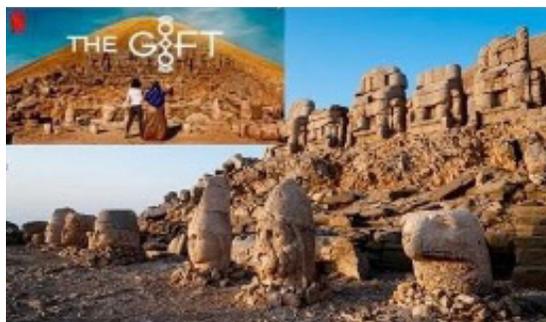
of Inanna, goddess of fertility and love, and shepherd Dumuzi (who is also called Tammuz)² in Sumerian civilization. Göbeklitepe is the first home for the fertility cults in the Anatolian and Mesopotamian civilizations.³ That is, Atiye and Erhan are depicted as “Adam and Eve, Jesus and Magdalene, Isis and Osiris, call them what you will” (S1, E8). Atiye represents the goddess Umay, Mother Earth (also called Ayasin or Ece); Umay is the symbol of birth and fertility, the protector of pregnant women, animals, nature, and non-humans in Turkish mythology. In Season 2, Atiye’s symbolic meaning is directly conveyed in an inscription written in the Göktürk alphabet in tunic letters:



You are the mother of the universe, nature itself, the sum of divine spirits from beyond time, the queen of souls, you are life and light, you are always the one who will always be Venus or Isis. You are the one that begins in every realm, you are the goddess with ten thousand names and you are the only one for me. (S2, E6)

The symbol of Göbeklitepe in Atiye’s art consists of the Moon, Sun, and Womb (referring to a baby in the uterus). The moon and sun are depicted on Atiye and Erhan’s foreheads and symbolize the awakening of nature and the rebirth of posthuman earth.⁴ The series shows that Göbeklitepe gives birth to human and superhuman beings which then attribute it a posthuman feature. Atiye, as the representative of the fertility goddess, is captured in the caves in Nemrut Mountain,⁵ and her emergence from the cave symbolizes her rebirth. Atiye realizes the dream of Antiochus I Theos, (considered a god in human form), who built a huge mortuary with enormous statues of

himself, other gods, and animals to be protected and live forever. Atiye achieves immortality as a posthuman goddess so she can protect all creatures in all universes. This rebirth scene portrays the notion that nothing dies and disappears, only time flows, so that the past might be our future, or the future may be lost in our past:



Don't worry, everything is as it should be, we are all parts of the divine plan, we are all a continuation of each other. You couldn't have stopped what happened, but creating what will happen is in your hands. A gift was given to you, Atiye. You really can do whatever you want. (S1, E8).

The Gift references collective consciousness and divine unity, which is also the cosmology of Sufism in Turkish culture; as Simurg explains, “[a]nd the real journey is the one where we realize we are all One” (S3, E5). Resurrection after death is explained in the series in the religious/spiritual/Sufi way as in the following quotes:



God removes the living from the dead, the dead from the living and revives the earth after his death. Thus, you shall also be removed.—Qur'an (S1, E6)

Birth begins with death. Our last day is the beginning of the first day. And when the time comes, a new age will begin with the first seed. She will come. She will open the door to real life. (S3, E3)

Death is not the end but an interlude. Really. They took me out of that interlude . . . beyond what we think we know. (S3, E4)

These lines illustrate how Atiye travels through time and places in order to complete her own inner spiritual journey. Atiye discovers her way by realizing her posthuman mythological power of resurrection in alternative universes. For example, when Atiye passes through the womb/gate of Göbeklitepe, she finds herself in a different universe where her dead sister Cansu continues her life as a different character, Elif, and does not recognize her. When Atiye, as a posthuman mythological heroine, understands her power can resurrect the dead, she brings her sister back to an alternative universe. As it is said in the series: “There is no time, no separation, everything is as it should be” (S1, E8).



Tree of Life

There is also a reference to the mythological Turkish tree of life—the great beech Ulu Kayı—in the second season, which takes place in a dystopian parallel world where women cannot get pregnant for an unknown reason. According to a belief in Turkish mythology, tying rags to trees, parks, and elsewhere to ask Mother Earth for children.⁶ This more-than-human nature, tree, is believed to have posthuman features as it holds the sky with its arms, one touching the sun and the other the moon, and its roots reach the deepest point underground. The tree is the symbol of posthuman rebirth in the series:

The door you are looking for is beneath that tree.
That tree which joins the heavens/skies and earth.
That has been here forever.
That tree has been entrusted to you for generations and
That will exist forever. (S2, E7)

The great beech, Ulu Kayın, was planted by Kayrahan, the son of Tengri, the Sky God, and from the tree nine human species descended from nine branches. This also demonstrates how posthuman species have always existed in Turkish mythology and *The Gift* is one of the good examples of Turkish posthuman culture.

Snake-Woman: Şahmaran

The ouroboros,—a snake biting its tail—represents the multiverse; in mythologies, it describes the cyclicity of time. Superheroes are the most well-known examples of posthuman figurations in narratives. In *The Gift*, we encounter them in the characters of Atiye, her grandmother Zühre and her daughters, Atiye's daughter Arden; Atiye in particular is a posthuman superheroine who tries to save the world from infertility. Atiye comes across her grandmother Zühre who suddenly appears and disappears and seems to come from another universe. Zühre represents the Şahmaran (Shahmaran), a posthuman mythological creature called the “Queen of Snakes” from a Middle Eastern mythological half-human half-snake being:

Everyone thinks that snakes are dangerous, that they're poison, the devil itself. But in reality, snakes are defined as knowledge and the mean rebirth. They are tasked with protecting what's sacred. Shahmaran was the beautiful and graceful queen of snakes. She reigned a secret garden of paradise



hidden underground. But then, one day . . . people came and found her and killed her, believing her dead body would create miracles. But don't worry, when Shamaran dies, her soul passes to her daughter and continues to live within her. (S1, E6)

The story of Şahmaran is important for the series, which depicts the posthuman mythological figures shaping the history of humankind. The miraculous abilities to heal and all the supernatural power that pass from mother to daughter in the series evoke the matriarchal system⁷ that posthuman mythological goddesses de- and reconstruct the history of time, space, and existence.

Conclusion

The most important message from this posthuman mythological SF is to accept what comes from the gift of life itself. I want to close my talk with Şems's sayings in *The Gift*: "Instead of resisting to changes, surrender. Let life be with you, not against you. If you think 'My life will be upside down' don't worry. How do you know down is not better than upside?" — Shams-i Tabrīzī (S1, E3).



Notes

1. *The Gift* focuses on parallel universes as in other series, such as *Finch*, *Dark*, and *The OA*.
2. Tammuz, in Turkish Temmuz, was also the name of the month July.
3. These symbols also have cosmic references that attribute Göbeklitepe to be built as an observatory place to observe planets and celestial objects.
4. The symbol of Sirius in the series is used as a sign of posthuman power.
5. Statues of gods and goddesses are located in Nemrut Mountain (southwestern Anatolia in Turkey), home for the Commagene Kingdom (163 BCE–72 CE).
6. Trees are also planted even in cemeteries in Turkish culture. Tying rags also dates back to the old Turkish belief shamanism, to the Turk-Mongolic native religious movement which is called Tengrism.

7. The villagers attack Zühre's house because they think her abilities are those of a wizard and devil. They also kill her husband and burn one of her daughters by throwing her in the fire. Zühre's daughters bear a star shaped birthmark and are healers who can travel through time and universes. Zühre and her dead daughter, with the star-shaped birthmark on her forehead, help Atiye get out of the cave of Nemrut.

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