

The Relationship between Mythology and Literature

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Abstract – *Myths are traditional myths produced in societies to provide explanations for phenomena. Myths initially began as stories told of religious origins in order to give people of a society logical explanations to describe natural or supernatural phenomena. Literature's interpretation of myth is of paramount importance. It can be viewed as a symbol, an allegory, or a theory. Myth is a mythical or conventional tale that is typically about an incident or a character, with or without the use of true or plausible explanations. They involve demigods and deities in general, and identify those rituals, activities, and natural phenomena. A theory typically includes historical events & supernatural beings. On other part, literature is more about persuading people and educating them. There are also other advantages of mythology that cannot be accomplished in fiction, such as there are no world limits, there is no such thing as 'true' and there is a low risk that anyone will question the theory.*

Keywords: *Myths, Literature, Background on Mythology, Characteristics of A Myth in Literature and Myth in Literature.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The connection between literature and myth is one of mutual dependence. Even though literature cannot be reduced to myth and myth cannot be reduced to literature, neither of the two can exist on its own: myth has always been “an integral element of literature”. Not only does it offer a repository of multifaceted stories for the fictional world-making of literature, which expands, modifies, or rewrites mythological elements in the process of creative reception. It also provides the narrative strategies which literature evolves from as it is indicated in Aristotle's *Poetics*, where *mythos* refers to plot, to a unified construct of required and probable actions. [1]

Furthermore, as suggested by the etymology of *mythos* (“word”), myth epitomizes the very origin of literature, which is rooted in oral tradition and the performance of literary texts. Rather than referring to *mythos* in the Aristotelian sense of the term, which has been treated by Northrop Frye, for instance, who conceives myth as “a structural organizing principle of literary form”, myth, in this paper, will be used to denote an invented, traditional story, “which embodies and provides an explanation, aetiology, or justification for something such as the early history of a society, or a natural phenomenon”. The following analysis therefore will concentrate on the origins of mythological narratives in classical antiquity and focus on stories as they have been transmitted and received by Greek and Latin literature and which

have henceforth served as a foundation for modern myth-making, providing the mythological archive for characters and themes in literature and art. For the purpose of this paper and the investigation of a possible connection of literature and myth, “literature” will be understood as the corpus of texts that have entered into writing or printing, which allows for a first differentiation between literature and myth, which has emerged from story-telling. While being rooted in oral tradition, myth is contingent on its translation into other media, primarily art and literature to preserve and perpetuate its imagery as well as its “knowledge”, which becomes retrievable in different cultural, geographical, and temporal space.

Considering the fact that the understanding of mythological elements that appear in art ultimately requires their re-embedding into a literary dimension where they become “readable” and decipherable, literature emerges as the supreme instrument for the transportation of mythical stories. Thus, literature is not only constituted by, but also constitutive for the communication of myth. [2]

II. THE “KNOWLEDGE” OF LITERATURE AND MYTH

The idea that literature might harbour its own mode of knowledge reaches back into antiquity where the knowledge of literature was not always seen as being desirable or particularly beneficial as it is

famously expressed by Plato's expulsion of poets from the city in his *Republic*. But what kind of knowledge is it that literature affords? In contrast to "opinion" or "belief", "knowledge" constitutes information that is ultimately defensible. The classification of information into the categories of "knowledge" and "belief", however, poses an epistemological problem since it is ultimately bound to the individual's sense of certainty rather than deriving from any kind of objective "knowledge". [3]

While knowledge can be defined as founded and thus justifiable understanding or reproducible modes of thinking and acting, it is never static but always in process: progressing over time, its scope develops to integrate the latest findings in the studies of culture, history, philosophy, and the sciences. As well as engaging in fictional world-making, literature absorbs knowledge that is generated outside the literary realm and appropriates this knowledge in a dynamic process of negotiation and exchange. The knowledge transmitted by literature's complex semiotic system can be classified into three different categories:

- 1) *specific or sectoral knowledge*, which is bound to a particular field of knowledge and comprises expert knowledge, which can be declarative or procedural.
- 2) *strategic knowledge*, which serves as an heuristic tool focussing on processes that are not restricted to a specific area of knowledge and which reveal strategies of how to close a specific gap in one's own system of knowledge as well as ways to infer, structure, and add new knowledge to one's intellectual reservoir, and finally.
- 3) *meta-cognitive knowledge*, which serves to critically reflect upon both the sources of knowledge and man's capability of epistemological reasoning. As Michael Wood remarks, however, following Roland Barthes' claim that literature comes into being wherever words have savour and expanding the etymological connection between knowledge (*savoir*) and savour (*saveur*), literature can only give us "a taste of knowledge a sample, rather than an elaborate or plentiful meal. We are going to have to go elsewhere for the continuous main course".

The *sapere aude* of literature resonates especially in the gaps of knowledge that are integrated into literary narratives to promote, in a maieutic manner, the interaction of text and recipient by activating the reader's collective and private knowledge reservoir. Within the indeterminable space of literature's archive, cultural knowledge,⁸ which is informed by science, religion, aesthetics, literature, and myth, is not only stored and made retrievable for future generations but it is restored, re-contextualised, and

revived either to affirm and contribute to existent systems of knowledge or to establish a subversive counter-discourse, which emphasizes the shifting relations and blind spots of powers in ongoing discourses of knowledge. [4]

III. INDIAN MYTHOLOGY IN LITERATURE

Ambreen Safder Kharbe's essay, "Mythological Exploration in *The Thousand Faces Of Night, Where Shall We Go This Summer* and *A Matter Of Time*" argues that mythological themes in Indian literature first bear its most influential and destiny defying traces in the two epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. The protagonist Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer* recalls the qualities of Lord Rama's wife Sita in the *Ramayana* and is given an emblematic stance, for patiently bearing and partaking all her suffering in life. *A Matter of Time* reflects myths from *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad* and *Katha Upanishad*. Deshpande in this novel rewrites myth. The three sections of the novel deal with three different Indian myths. The paper further explores the relationship of the protagonist with the great epics *The Mahabharata* and *The Ramayana* and the *Upanishads*, in the current context, by decoding myth. [5]

Lakshmi Muthukumar's essay, "Problematizing R.K.Narayan's Use of Myth in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*" seeks to show how Narayan uses a re-telling of the Bhasmasura myth in modern terms in order to scrutinize the social practice of gender, especially masculinity, in middle class upper caste Southern India. Narayan's location as an upper caste South Indian Brahmin is itself problematic and immediately makes him vulnerable to allegations of being classist and exclusionist as a novelist.

Muktaja Mathkari's essay, "Stereotypical Laxmanrekha and Rama Mehata's *Inside the Haveli*", explores the symbol of the Laxmanrekha, to indicate that it is a symbol of patriarchal control over female movement and how retribution must follow if there is transgression on the part of a woman. She shows how deep uprooted it is in the racial unconscious of the Indian Patriarchal society and how it is reflected not only in this novel but also in other Indian texts.

Shyaonti Talwar's, "Mythicising Women who Make a Choice: A Prerogative of the Indian Collective Unconscious to Demarcate Modesty and Right Conduct for Women" discusses the Indian woman's predicament. She argues that whenever she displays the power to make a human choice, she is either mythicized and turned into a supernatural being or glorified and put on a pedestal to be worshipped so that there is a sense of separateness or a distance between her and the multitudes she represents. These women include: Sati, Radha, Kunti, Draupadi, Shakuntala and

others. This sends a strong message forbidding the Indian woman to replicate their acts and through this inherent paradox and duplicity, the rules for a woman's conduct in Indian society are established.

Sushila Vijaykumar's , " Mythic Reworkings in Girish Karnad's *Yayati* and *The Fire and the Rain*" examines the Yayati myth in the *Adiparva* of the *Mahabharata* and deals with the father-son exchange of ages and the theme of responsibility. The second part returns to the Yavakri myth and the parallel Vritra myth in the *Vanaparva*, the third book of the *Mahabharata* to explore Brahmin power-struggles and fratricidal anxieties.

Titiksha Dhruv's essay, "Being Draupadi – Three Takes" focuses on Draupadi, the powerful female character of the epic *The Mahabharata* . She has shown how the Draupadi myth has been revived and explored by three contemporary women novelists, these include - Dr Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* and Kajal Oza Vaidya's *Draupadi*. In all these stories Draupadi remains a multifaceted personality who could be fiery and angry when the situation called for and also exhibit a compassionate nature. She becomes a role model and encourages people to face life with the same inner strength that she did.

Uddhav Ashturkar's essay, "Arun Kolatkar's 'Yeshwant Rao': A Stylistic View of the Mythical Text" examines one of the notable representative mythical poems. He uses the theory of linguistic criticism to establish that the text has got its own universe and the meaning lies in the same universe. Moreover the linguistic theory claims to be comprehensive because it offers a complete account of the structure of language at all levels, that is, phonology, lexis, graphology, syntax and semantics. Besides, the terminology of linguistics is systematic since language itself is a system of systems. [6]

IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF A MYTH IN LITERATURE

Myth usually features god-like reigning gods & heroes, but lower status than gods. Sometimes, a god's daughter or son is fully mortal, & these characters possess supernatural abilities and forces that raise them beyond average human beings. Myths are mostly very old and have ruled the world because, as they are now, science, philosophy, and technology were not very clear. People were therefore ignorant of some questions, such as why sky is green. Therefore, natural phenomena were explained by myths, and rituals and ceremonies were represented to people.

Here are some common features typically shared by myths:

1. Myths are often said to be real. Such stories were intended to provide reasonable explanations, so the audience assumed that these stories were true.
2. Myths have gods & goddesses and also have supernatural powers in these figures.
3. Myths include a description of how there came to be something in the universe. These myths have ancient origins; thus, for such phenomena as climate, they did not have the scientific explanations we are doing today. [7]

V. MYTHS AND LITERATURE

Today, more and more authors are developing fictional worlds of female heroes and magical tales affirming the universe. For example, in her myth / novel *Antelope Wife*, including *Paradise*, Toni Morrison has mystical tendencies. These plays also include elements of feminism. The picture of the bricoleur, feminist mythologist Marta Weigle, repeated by Lévi-Strauss, believes that perhaps the most important function of myth is its world-creating, world-affirming aspects. She differentiates male-centered myths that act as charters of male domination of society, from female-centered myths that usually confirm & create world itself. For her study of the world making, life affirming myth works, Weigle uses descriptions of spinning and weaving.

Marta Weigle states that myths are necessary in times of identity crisis: "In dreams and in various verbal & visual developments, cosmogonic myths & motifs herald and convey major psychological transition—whether an important decision, vital insight, artistic mission, schizophrenic break or change of consciousness". To order to resolve and make sense of social dilemmas, only obvious incompatibility requires theory.

Weigle also states in many of our traditional stories the lack of female gods, deities and heroines: "These female creator deities are rare". It is therefore very exciting to find so many powerful female hero figures and revised myths in contemporary female writers' work, particularly in female color writers. One such positive example is given by Erdrich's book. Although the Ojibwe's ancient, actual and fictional worlds may have been "cracked" or "cracked apart". Her novel contains clear fragments from her culture's mystical rituals, while providing examples of how to effectively mediate these desires, create or integrate a detailed and meaningful worldview, and flourish in today's world as Native Americans. Within the book, strong mystical trends lead the reader to understand it in terms of metaphysical scholarship. Theories of mythology typically apply to oral forms. The novel by Erdrich allows us to remember that

the fluidity of form noted in oral genres often applies to written genres. Her novel works as a myth: it offers images and symbols of the re-birth of culture that preserve traditions while suggesting how to live and think of being an indigenous person today.

The Antelope Wife symbolizes Ojibwe culture's revitalization. Erdrich's revolutionary myth is a tool for and a reflection of her culture, well serving a modern audience by providing time-appropriate characters and symbols, taken from her own experiences, inspiration and artistic tools, while retaining conventional images and messages. Therefore, she understands a folkloristic theory of dynamic integration between personally desired imagination and community resources. In view of a complex and fluid, folkloristic view of history, Erdrich's work can be considered a conventional tale or myth. [8]

VI. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MYTHS AND LITERATURE

The definition of mythology is derived from the word 'myth'. The word itself comes from the Greek word 'mythos', which means fable, legend or sagas. The word "myth" is a story that seeks to rationalize the universe and the world around us, passed down orally from generation to generation explaining religious origin, natural phenomena or supernatural event. Mythology is a collection of myths that concerns with cosmogony and cosmology, shared by a particular society at some particular time in human history. Literature is a body of written works of language, period or culture. Literature can be divided into fiction (e.g. fairy tale, gothic, saga etc) and non-fiction (e.g. essays, journal, science fiction etc). There are many distinctive natures of mythology and they seek to describe what a particular person or society believe during that period of time. Myths serve as a charter for their institutions, customs and beliefs. The typical mythology is the explanation of the universe and its ethology. Normally, the setting is set in a previous proto-world (similar to the current world but also different) and they often revolve around non-human or "extraordinary" people such as god, goddess, supernatural beings (e.g. Zeus, Adam and Eve, Prometheus etc). These stories explain why things are and how they became to be. It 'rationalises' our way of thinking, reconciles us to reality and establishes our pattern of life. Apart from the explanation of the creation of the universe, mythologies seek to explain everyday natural phenomena. Certain myths explain why the sun exists and why there is night and day. Some explain the existence of seasons: Spring, Winter, Summer and Autumn while others show of mother nature providing us with food and shelter. These myths suggest a way of understanding nature and organizing thoughts. For example, structuralism recognizes different contrasting aspects (light and dark, good/evil) as centres to myths which charters for social order or value within a society

(functionalism). Myths have been created by human beings for many reasons over thousands of years. They are an intellectual product of humanity and a rich resource for the ideas and belief of past generations. Their extraordinary and unbelievable aspect combined with the constant thought that there might be something 'out there' is what keeps mythology functioning and is what keeps literature moving. There are also many differences between literature and mythology. For instance, they were used for different purposes and existed in different times. Myths serve several purposes, including to socially/politically control society (e.g. to spread a myth about something to control people, to scare people when facts were not available). Literature on the other hand, is more about persuading and informing people. There are also other benefits to mythology that cannot be achieved in literature, such as there is no boundary to the world, there is no such thing as 'false' and there is low risk. [9]

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The arrival of the modern era would inevitably mean the death of mythology. The transformation from one to another was the belief that myth was useless, false and outmoded and that it did not 'work'. Science (regarded as a 'fictional literature') was the objective explanation of how the world around us work while the subjective myth was about faith and believing something 'unfounded'. Scientific rational thought was based on empirical knowledge, a priori (not falsifiable) and our way of thinking is based on facts. Myth is ultimately a different knowledge, an ideology, a set of 'belief'. Systems of myths have provided a cosmological and historical framework for societies that have lacked the more sophisticated knowledge provided by modern science. Myth is related to science, however it only provide basis for a theory, not knowledge. For example the myth of how the origin was created would have lacked modern day rational scientific belief because they would prefer a more 'true', superior and more authority theory, which is the big bang theory. Our modern rational paradigm thought is based on observation. Scientific rational thinking is based on logic to solve or explain how the world works and as it becomes a part of our everyday thinking, mythology will be inevitable cast aside.

Carl Jung invented modern scientific theory and for him, the world of dream, and myth represented the most fascinating and promising road to deeper

understanding. The significance of literature in mythology as said 'We need the stories of myth to make sense of the confusion of our society and our own psyches. Myth voices the truths of our unconscious selves, and the gods, goddesses, and heroes of myth embody aspects of creativity, cleverness, grief, joy, aggression, and ecstasy. Carl Jung believes that even the most sophisticated and important literature requires some mythological aspect. (E.g. the Lord of the Ring depends on mythical characteristic to drives the ideas; horror movies have a 'message' and some urban myth taps into child's fear of a 'bogyman under the bed') Northrop Frye criticises literature and states the importance of cultural myth underlying literature (E.g. Sea, land and sky, control, creation, decay, regeneration, our 'fear'). Mythology evokes our sub-conscious mind (e.g. dream) which is employed by reference to mythology in literature. Frye states that mythology provided themes for some of the world's greatest drama, and similar themes can be traced back to the Renaissance literature, through to Shakespeare (E.g. Hamlet, Midsummer Night's Dream) and finally to modern poetry and thus mythology plays a significance role with literature. One could even say that literature is based on mythology.

Karen Armstrong book "A Short History of Myth" is about how literature and mythology were shaped by the problems of the society people lived in. Armstrong states that the existence of Mythology from an early period: 'Human beings fall easily into despair, and from the very beginning we invented stories that enabled us to place our lives in a larger setting, that revealed an underlying pattern, and gave us a sense that, against all the depressing and chaotic evidence to the contrary, life had meaning and value.' With the coming of the 'great revolutions in human experience' science was used to explain 'facts' as opposed the theory of myth, which became 'useless, false and outmoded.' Literature, which could explain things that was never thought possible, was regarded as the next 'step' from mythology (from an uneducated society to a civilized society).

The relationship between literature and mythology is one of similarities as well as differences. They are both important creation by human beings and will continue to play an important role in the intellectual world. Literature will always include some aspect of myth which will continue to shape our modern world like it did in the past. [10]

VII. LITERATURE SURVEY

- Robert A. Segal [2019] The myth-literature relationship has taken on various forms. The most obvious method was the use of myth in literature works. Myth and literature' discusses the literature's supernatural roots. This talks about the

academics who theorized about the trends they delineated in hero myths. Myths are too diverse to share a plot generally, but certain plots have been proposed for specific types of myths, most often for hero myths. Certain myth types, such as creation myths, flood myths, paradise myths, and future myths, have been too diverse for all but the broadest commonalities. [11]

- Aparna Halpe [2010] Throughout twentieth-century Anglophone postcolonial literature, myth is utilized as framing tool containing and challenging historical events, thereby serving as form of alternative history. Given the proliferation of cross-cultural symbolic structures and radically hybrid narrative forms, the prevailing function of reading myth in post-colonial literary criticism remains based on theoretical models that construct myth as an original racial narrative. This particular approach promotes readings within culturally monolithic frames of contemporary secular myths of "country," "place" or "identity." I explore the connections between early structuralist myth readings and later post-structuralist myth deconstruction and propose a post-colonial myth reading as the politically coded middle space between religious and secular narrative. Focusing on four novels from Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Caribbean, I illustrate the myth's continuing impact and adaptability to narrate vastly different historical and socio-cultural contexts. [12]
- Hansen et.al. [2002] Within modern literature, I will discuss the role of myth as basis for a new impetus. In doing so, I would recognize the importance of orality in the growth of the literary canon, while discussing its decline in the midst of a growing secularization of literature since 19th century. Role of the voice, the bard, and the story's transmission as a public expression is essential to an older literature type. Subsequently, in the light of these findings, I will discuss how living myth among indigenous peoples can play a role in encouraging contemporary speech. [13]
- Hansen et.al. [2002] The world appear to be in chaos wherever one turns. Drug addiction tightens our population's foothold, youth suicide continues to rise, and people of all ages are disproportionately depressed. We seem unable to find common ground in our communities and universities, a basis on which to rediscover our individual and collective identity. People flock to church or therapy and try membership in groups to deal with depression. Some of these campaigns, like many women's movement, can be positive. Further poet Robert Bly has

led comparable movement in the quest for identity among men in his best-seller *Iron John* & in conferences around world. Nevertheless, what all these phenomena may indicate is what contemporary psychologist Rollo May calls "the scream for myth," myths in which people find their most important meanings. [14]

- Eller et.al [2000] The essays of the paper concentrate on discussing the different forms that myths take in literature. Under nine sections, the papers are commonly classified. These include: Greek Mythology in Literature, Indian Mythology in Literature, Native American Myth, Comparative Mythology, Christian Myth and Cult, Myth and Cult in Literary Criticism, Life and Literature Myth Psychodynamics, Life and Death Paradox, and Modern Myth Making Process. [15]

CONCLUSION

Myths frequently teach their audience morals. There is a lesson to be learned in many myths. Myths also play a major role in science, psychology, and philosophy in addition to literature. Frye's words show the link between myth and literature. Where he endorses the simpler sense of the Greek word 'myth,' saying, '... a myth is a tale, myth is narrative or poetic literature.' In literature too, two simple distinctions must be made. The first sort is literature deriving from and reinforcing the concept of the operant. Myths are literature as fables, they provide literature with concepts and patterns, and they also provide literature with story, character, themes and pictures. The relationship between myth and literature is The second is literature that is fictional by itself, literature that has been created as their mouthpiece by a community that starts as the agreed form of their own opinion and emotions. One of the similarities and differences is the relationship between literature and mythology. Both are important human development and will continue to play a vital role in intellectual world. Literature will always include few aspect of narrative that will keep influencing our modern world as it did in the past.

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