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Myth and Literature

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The word myth has been taken from Greek word mythos; myth means story or word. Mythology is the study of myth. It means a fairy tale, "something false" or "imagination" or "Unbelievable". The English term myth derived from the Greek mythos, means "word" or speech "the thing spoken", "the tale told" perhaps any information transmitted verbally including both "truth and false". As stories, myths articulate how character undergo or exact an ordered sequence of events. The term myth has come to refer to a certain genre of stories that share characteristics that make this genre distinctly different from other genres of oral narratives, such as legends and folktales many definitions of myth repeat similarly general aspects of the genre and may be summarized thus ; myths are symbolic tales of the distant past that concern cosmogony and cosmology (the origin and nature of the universe), may be connected to belief systems or rituals, and may serve to direct social actions' and values. There are many concepts regarding myths. Myths are cosmogony narratives, connected with the foundation or origin of the universe, though often specifically in terms of a particular culture or region. Myths are narratives of a sacred nature, often connected with some ritual. Myths are often foundational or key narratives associated with religions. Myth narratives often invoice heroic character that mediate inherent troubling dualities reconcile us to our realities, or establish the patterns for life as we know it. There have been many other functions and implications attributed to myth. They are often highly valued or disputed stories that still intrigue us even though many of us do not. Recognize them as a living genre in our culture. Mc Dowell says myths are often involve extraordinary characters or episodes that seem impossible in our world but the extraordinary feats and traits of mythic protagonists are possible only because they attach to a primary and formative period in the growth and development of civilization. Thus their various aspects or dimensions are best considered as "organically intertwined". Myths also seem in opposition to science because they are not testable, which is the case because of their primordial setting-If events described are from a different earlier world, then of course they would not be repeatable or logical in our world.

In the beginning, myths were handed down from one generation to another orally; later the ancient myths became literature incarnation divine creatures. Mark Scorer says "Myth is fundamental the dramatic

representation of our deepest instinctual life, of a primary awareness of man in the universe, capable of many configurations, upon which all particular opinions and attitudes depend." A product of the deepest urges of man, myth is the manifestation of his efforts made in solving the problem of physical needs, and religious wants, facilitating his survival and adjustment with the hostile milieu. Thus the external needs and social, cosmological and philosophical considerations also govern the creating of myth which projects itself in various forms. Myth is a vital ingredient of human civilization, creating codes of belief, faith in ritual and tenets of morality. Myths are imbued with a sense of dynamics. Myths represent the cyclic movement of seasons, rise and fall, birth and death and the transcendental reality. Myths are the elements of culture, but they are also the projections of the subliminal urges and archetypes, as suggested by Northrop Frye.

Myth is a narrative of the ritual a story, "Aristotle's meaning there by plot or narrative, closer to his Lexes, though integral element of literature, permeating many areas of contemporary thought; anthropology, psychology, comparative religion, sociology and several others". Myth as a story belongs to the world of art. The world of myth is created by the creative artist. It imitates nature and relates nature to human life and it is the god which brings together the human form and nature.

Both science and myths offer explanations of the cosmos. A key difference is that information about the universe presented in myths is not testable, whereas science is designed to be tested reputedly.. Science also depends on cumulative, frequently updated knowledge, whereas myth is based on passed down stories and belief. Myths may change over time, particularly after contact with other cultures but they do not change and adapt to new periods and technological developments in the same way science does. Myths may be exacted through rituals and believed in absolutely but they usually do not have physical effects in real world, as in leading new technology for building cars or providing medical treatment.

Myth is a type of story in which the central characters are gods and spirits wielding enormous power over nature, who have been created in human likeness

and materialize “the vision of and omnipotent personal community beyond and indifferent nature” the hero enters this community of apotheosis and the world of myth is above this mundane world. The characters are capable of doing what the story writer would like them to do it. Myths differ from the folk. Tales because they are believed to have really happened. They also explain certain aspects of life, such as ritual. The famous Myths are creation myths, fall and flood myths metamorphosis and dying –dog myths, divine-marriage and hero- ancestry myths, etiological myths, apocalyptic myths”. Myths are seldom historical do provide a kind of tradition.

In Frye’s opinion, Myths is the archetype, and in archetypal criticism there is an identity between the individual and the universal forming images which are found in comedy and tragedy. Frye refers to the archetypal images pertaining to the human animal, vegetable mineral and the unformed world portrays in comedy and tragedy.

The archetypal image representing the animal world in the comic view is a “community of domesticated animals, usually a flock of sheep, of a lamb, or one of the gentler birds usually a dove”. On the contrary, in the tragic vision the animal world is seen in terms of wolves, vipers, serpents or dragons. Frye examines the apocalyptic and demonic images. In addition to these two types of images, there is a reference to three intermediate stages of imagery corresponding to the romantic high, Mimetic and low mimetic modes. These three constitute the atmosphere. The mode of romance is concerned with the idealization of the world. Its imagery presents the human counter part of the apocalyptic world. This type of imagery represents analogy of innocence.

A myth in literature refers to story with a purpose or lesson. It tries to explain why things are the way they are or why things happen. For instance there are several myths trying to explain the origin of earth or what causes storms and lightning and many other things. According to Wikipedia, a myth is a sacred narrative explaining how the world and humankind assumed their present form, although, in a very broad sense the word can refer to any traditional story. Bruce Lincoln defines myth as “ideology in narrative form”. Myths may arise as either truthful depictions or overelaborated accounts of historical events, as allegory of personification natural phenomena, or idealized experience, to establish behavioral models and to teach. We can see clearly that views on using myth in literature are changing constantly from many centuries. The wars called the crusades look many Europeans to Jerusalem and other parts of the Middle East. A surge of interest arose in ancient Greek and Roman culture. This was called the renaissance or rebirth. The invention of the printing press in the mid-15th centuries made classical literature more accessible to the reading public.

In the 17th century in England, George Chapman’s translations of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* made Homer’s epics even more widely accessible. Because most literature people were so familiar with traditional myths and their characters, poets often allowed to mythological figures in their works, even if the ancient story was not the main theme. In the late 18th century, classical mythology again came into favor in Europe, a good example of this trend is the popularity of a type of poem called the “pastoral”. In it, Greek shepherds and shepherdesses inhabit and idealized and tranquil landscape which in its simplicity seemed an antidote to the increasingly industrialized world of the readers. Later, archaeologists were returning to Europe carrying statuary and huge pieces of ancient monuments.

From the mid-18th and throughout the 19th century, the English, Germans and other Europeans were getting to actualize remnants of the cultures of classical mythology even without traveling to the Middle East. The personages and events depicted on these again excited the interest of the public as well as the academic communities. Northrop Frye is conscious of the deficiencies of this procedure and these evaluations though original are not free from fault. W.K. Wimsatt in his article “criticism as myth” does not commend Frye’s twenty four overlapping divisions of the seasonal cycle of myths, or his permutations of high, middle and low styles, complicated by the ideas of hieratic and of verse, prose and associative rhythms at primary, secondary and tertiary levels”. He feels that his archetypal patterns are “touristic, simplistic and uninteresting”.

Levi Strauss has also his opinion about myths, he explicates “myth as communication system”. The dialectical method can be applied to the study of myth and it is essential to break the elements of myth into pairs of contraries and their resolutions” the elements are words. Levi Strauss away influences by Marx, he favors the analysis of myth through the dialectical method. He says there is no antithesis between sociology and psychology. Sociology has no place in his works and there is no reference to his concept of myth, being associated with the existing view of the term in his views psychology does not represent the motivations of a single individual but it attempts to systematize human relationships and inter-relationships”. Undoubtedly myth has no existence ratified human consciousness, but even though mythological process consists solely in determination of consciousness. Schelling said “God himself becomes by creating himself step by step true god”. The human consciousness is such as to include God within it. In the mythological process, things are not so important, as the power engendered by the consciousness automatically holds a grip in its grip. In myth, the represented objects are potencies, creating consciousness and also creating nature “the mythological process deals not only with natural objects but with the pure creative potencies whose original product is consciousness itself”. Schelling regards language as a faded mythology. The mythic

symbol represents values and is charged with intense feeling juxtaposing complex ideas. There is a fundamental difference between the mythic and scientific apprehensions. The scientific explication proceeding logically and analytically. The mythical imagination concordats on the present and the immediate present acquires a of religious significances and the whole world is life out. The ego contemplates over the single object, lives in it and loses itself. There is tension between the subject and its object.

The mythical consciousness deferent forms the empirical and scientific causality does not distinguish between dream and the empirical reality is blurred the distinction between dream and reality, between the symbolic representation and the realistic perception. In myth, the dividing line between dream and the empirical reality is blurred, the distinction between life and death is obliterated and the two become homogenous aspects of the same thing. Two realities in myth need not be governed by the empirical and scientific laws and need not have empirical existence of it exercises power to move the perception mind. Myth reveals an idea behind the image. The image does not signify anything, it replaces the actual. The mythical rites do not represent a belief, they become real. The world of the mythical creations is concatenate and is concerned with significations and things which are merged. Myth is born like an art, in immediate separating from the concrete reality, indication that it has gone beyond one step of what is given, its cretins assume the form of the real. In myth, there is inherent a force which freeing the soul from the bondage of things, forges more powerful bonds to enslave the soul do is stronger than the earlier bond. Myth is connected with language, and both mutually affect each other and are inseparable. Words and name are significant in magic.

The human sound or the language holds power enabling the primitive person to subjugate evil forces and exercise spirits. Sir James Frazer says "Myths proper are concerned with the origin of the world and the man the motions of the stars, the vicissitudes of vegetation, weather eclipses, storm, the discovery of fire, the invention of the useful arts, the mystery of death Folk tales are purely imaginary, having no other aim than the entertainment of the hearer and making no real claim of his credibility.

Magic is available to myth and art both and it is an athletic activity involving compulsive techniques. Myth is also an aesthetic activity which reaffirms magic. The essence myth is magical, though magic does not favor gods or spirits. Magic gives power to men and curbs the forces of gods and imposes a limitation upon their activities. There is an affinity between myth and poetry because the conceptual elements in both are analogy and identify. The simile and metaphor of poetry are based on these elements and it is because of this attribute that poets have been drawn to myth.

This attribute that poets have been drawn to myth. Besides this myth articulates religious beliefs, historical traditions, cosmological speculations, the greats of literature like Homer, Spenser, Milton, Shelly, and Keats created immortal works with the use of myths. Dante and Milton with their faith in Christianity created epics out of myth, but poets who have no faith in the classical and Christian mythology, have adapted it, it make their works suggestive and symbolical. The poet in epic or drama imitates actions in words and depicts universality. Imitation of ritual is myth. Poetic Imagery has been built upon certain archetypal patterns, cyclic movement of seasons, life and death, permanence and change. Grand epic conceptions and sublime poetic creation have been inspired by myths and legend. Like poetry, drama criticism and fiction also have been suffused with myth. Drama has originated from rituals and religious myth and drama are records of man's existence. Man in his primitive circumstances was in a world of terror. He depended on the fertile grasslands, productive fields and the family to tribe. The environment was wakeful, and through creating of his myth, the acquired an imaginative control over external forces. Myth has vitalized literature and has a great affinity with it. Myth and literature both are the aesthetic expressing of man. Myth and literature are also manifestations of deep unconsciousness urges as well as the archetypes and primordial images.

In short we can say that ever since its earliest beginnings in the poems of honor and the tragedies of classical Athens, imaginative literature has been inspired by stories much older still: the myths of gods and heroes inherited from oral tradition. Myth is a worldwide phenomenon, studied by anthropologists in the fields, as well as by those who seek the origins of literature as we understand it today.

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