

SUBJECT NAME: FOLK TALE AND MYTH

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UNIT V

- 1. M.H. Abrams** : **Introduction to Myth, Folklore**
- 2. A. Joseph Dorairaj** : **Theories of Myth: From Cassier to Frye**
- 3. B. Das** : **Myth Criticism and its Value**

Introduction to Myth, Folklore

- M.H. Abrams

Introduction

The word myth derives from the Greek mythos, which has a range of meanings from “word,” through “saying” and “story,” to “fiction”; the unquestioned validity of mythos can be contrasted with logos, the word whose validity or truth can be argued and demonstrated. Because myths narrate fantastic events with no attempt at proof, it is sometimes assumed that they are simply stories with no factual basis, and the word has become a synonym for falsehood or, at best, misconception. In the study of religion, however, it is important to distinguish between myths and stories that are merely untrue.

Definition of Myth

Myth, a symbolic narrative, usually of unknown origin and at least partly traditional, that ostensibly relates actual events and that is especially associated with religious belief. It is distinguished from symbolic behaviour (cult, ritual) and symbolic places or objects (temples, icons). Myths are specific accounts of gods or superhuman beings involved in extraordinary events or circumstances in a time that is unspecified but which is understood as existing apart from ordinary human experience. The term mythology denotes both the study of myth and the body of myths belonging to a particular religious tradition.

Myths are stories of the gods and of godlike heroes. They tell of the beginning of our earth and our creation, of life and death, and destruction. They explain the how and the why of life.

We use the word fable (from the Greek word muthos meaning myth.). A fable is a story given to recreate what mankind has always thought to be the creation of our world. The core of a fable is truth, as is the core of a myth

The Ancient Greek, Egyptians, Chinese and many more gave us such a colourful background and most of our present day belief systems date back to those Myths.

Each "tribe" keeping their secret stories, for disclosure would mean the end of the world. One person's myth is someone else's religious belief system. We must therefore honour all the stories handed down to us throughout history for much has been lost.

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The Nature, Functions, and Types Of Myth

Myth has existed in every society. Indeed, it would seem to be a basic constituent of human culture. Because the variety is so great, it is difficult to generalize about the nature of myths. But it is clear that in their general characteristics and in their details a people's myths reflect, express, and explore the people's self-image. The study of myth is thus of central importance in the study both of individual societies and of human culture as a whole.

In Western culture there are a number of literary or narrative genres that scholars have related in different ways to myths. Examples are fables, fairy tales, folktales, sagas, epics, legends, and etiologic tales (which refer to causes or explain why a thing is the way it is). Another form of tale, the parable, differs from myth in its purpose and character.

Fables

The word fable derives from the Latin word *fabula*, which originally meant about the same as the Greek *mythos*. Like *mythos*, it came to mean a fictitious or untrue story. Myths, in contrast, are not presented as fictitious or untrue.

Fables, like some myths, feature personified animals or natural objects as characters. Unlike myths, however, fables almost always end with an explicit moral message, and this highlights the characteristic feature of fables—namely, that they are instructive tales that teach morals about human social behaviour

Fairy tales

The term fairy tale, if taken literally, should refer only to stories about fairies, a class of supernatural and malevolent beings often believed to be of diminutive size. Like myths, fairy tales present extraordinary beings and events.

Folklore

Folklore is a compilation of the beliefs, customs, mores, and practices of distinct cultural groups. It reaches back in time to oral cultures: tales, creation myths, proverbs. It encompasses children's games and songs. It involves belief systems: rites and rituals surrounding coupling, childbirth, initiation into adulthood, and ideas about the afterlife. It encompasses styles of building, foods, and recipes, the use of medicinal plants. Folklore is not generally passed along in formal educational settings, but through group ceremony, individual tutoring, and children's play. Folklore represents a shared set of beliefs, and may, therefore, be a part of any kind of shared culture, not just one that has history or ethnicity or religion or language in common. In the modern world, computer programmers have common lore, as do stage actors and surfers.

Characteristics of myths, folklore, folktales, and fairy tales.

Myth

- Often explains how something connected with humans or nature came to be
- Reveals the consequences of both good and bad behavior
- Features gods or other beings who have supernatural powers as well as certain flaws

Folklore

- These include oral traditions such as tales, proverbs and jokes.
- They include **material** culture, ranging from traditional building styles to handmade toys common to the group.
- Folklore also includes customary lore, the forms and rituals of celebrations such as Christmas and weddings, folk dances and initiation rites.

Folk tales

- Folk tale is told with ordinary words. It is a prose, not a verse.
- Folk tales have been orally passed on for generations. With developed writing, folk tales may be written down based on the stories previously told by mouth.
- There is not indication of the original story teller. It is usually referred that the story has been told from their precedents who were important persons in the past

Fairy tales

- The defining characteristics of a fairy tale include a typical beginning and ending, magical elements, good and evil characters.
- Enchanted setting, occurrences in groups of three or seven, fantastical creatures and an explicit problem that eventually gets resolved.

Types of Myths

1. Aetiological Myths

Aetiological myths (sometimes spelled etiological) explain the reason why something is the way it is today.

2. Historical Myths

Historical myths are told about a historical event, and they help keep the memory of that event alive.

3. Psychological Myths

Psychological myths try to explain why we feel and act the way we do. A psychological myth is different from an aetiological myth because a psychological myth does not try to explain

one thing by way of something else (such as lightning and thunder can be explained by Zeus' anger).

Purpose of Myths

Myth — like religion and general story telling — has multiple purposes. Ancient mythology was used as a way of connecting human virtues and vices to divine counterparts. Like a lot of ancient civilizations, Greek, or even Norse mythology played a central function in setting ethical parameters in scenarios of complex decision-making. For the most part, ancient mythology utilized cultural symbols to signify a specifically unique way of acting, thinking, and living as a people from its respective territory.

In today's world, myth still plays a prominent role in our cultural experience. The philosopher and social theorist Roland Barthes writes a great piece about contemporary myth, titled "mythologies." In it he shows how even in our modern secular societies, myths are still created and disseminated in a manner that is highly conducive to provoking emotive reactions to context specific problems

All in all, myth is a pervasive and ubiquitous force that permeates story-telling at all levels of society. It's present in conversations with your friends, media stories, books, political parties, and even your family. There is no overarching purpose to myth because there is no unified consensus on which myths are best for society as a whole. Rather, it might be better to see myth as a powerful narrative that flows invisibly through much of your every day life.

The chapter opens with the discussion of the many meanings of myth and the obstacles faced in arriving at an exact definition of the term "myth." The similarities and divergences between "myth," "legends" and "folktales" have been discussed along with the characteristics of myth. The semiological structure of myth has been highlighted using the Barthesian framework. In the second part, as it were, the major theories and insights of Cassirer, Malinowski, Eliade, Levi-Strauss, Ricoeur, Jung, Campbell, Bodkin, Fiedler and Frye have been presented and critiqued. A strict chronological order has not been followed, for it is better to club myth scholars on the basis of their ideas rather than listing them in strict chronological fashion.

Towards a Definition of Myth: Unlike hard sciences where precise and exact definitions are demanded and arrived at as well, in humanities, especially in subjects like religion and mythology, precise definitions are hard to come by for these subjects, at least in part, deal with the transcendent and other superhuman beings who cannot be pigeon-holed by human categories which are finite and contingent. That is one of the reasons which compels scholars and researchers in these areas of inquiry to show a good deal of tolerance and put up with some ambiguity when it comes to definitions in these subjects.

Myth is one such term which eludes exact definitions and neat categorization. Ruthven opens his monograph *Myth* by conceding that it is difficult to define myth because it is "obscure in origin, protean in form and ambiguous in meaning" (1). Ruthven is not the lone voice expressing such apprehension. Righter puts us on guard by noting that myth is "one of the great cant words of our time" and, aligning himself with Ruthven, remarks that "'myth' has become a kind of intellectual shorthand which has gained acceptance as standing for an elusive, almost unanalysable, amalgam of beliefs, attitudes and feelings" (*Myth and Literature* 10- 11). Writing during the heyday of myth criticism, Chase notes that "these days the word 'myth' is thrown about cavalierly as is any word which the cultural climate envelops with glamour and charges with an emotional voltage.

There are as many as six thorny issues that beset any myth scholar when the question is trying to arrive at a precise definition.

Firstly, myths are tales/stories which took place in *illo tempore*. In other words, myths transcend the coordinates of time and space, for they belong to the primordial times. Being pre-historical phenomena, they pose difficulties to us who are in a way enslaved by time and space because of our contingent character. Day, in *The Many Meanings of Myth*, admits that "as outsiders to the archaic world of myth-fabrication we [moderns] can never speak [about myths] with certitude".

Secondly, most myths are sacred narratives characterized by *man a and treinandum et fascinans*, i.e. fear and awe (Rudolph Otto's phrase in *The Idea of the Holy*), and this

transcendent phenomenon cannot be adequately comprehended by human linguistic categories (God-Talk: An Examination of the Language and Louie of Theology 33).

Thirdly, we lack the "immediacy" of the "primitives". Therefore, an unmediated awareness of myths has been replaced by a mediated, critical approach to myths, which is characterized by reflection and subject-object dichotomy.' Fourthly, in the on-going confrontation between science and myths, science has emerged the aggressive victor, and, subsequently, we, rationalistic and empirical to a large extent, tend to dismiss myths brusquely as they do not square in with our scientific cosmology. Wheelwright points out that "science and myth are basically incommensurate ways of experiencing, and science 'can't' explain myth without explaining it away". Fifthly, myth is a multi-dimensional term whose reach traverses diverse areas such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, phenomenology of religion, literature and literary criticism.

Myths, Legends and Folktales: At the outset it has to be underlined that, though there are similarities between myths, legends and folktales, there are genuine differences as well, although the boundary markers are a little blurred and smudgy. These three terms have minor but definite semantic variations in different cultural contexts. Stith Thompson, the noted folklorist, drives home this point quite forcefully: "... European terms as myth . . . March en, or Sage, or the like [are used]... as points of reference and we must understand that they have only vague analogues in various countries of the world" ("Myths and Folktales" 175). It has to be conceded that a myth may 'degenerate' into a legend or a folktale and a legend or a folktale may be 'elevated' to the status of a myth. Similarly, a myth or a legend may sometimes pass off for a folktale with equal chances for transformation in the reverse direction as well. In his "The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives" William Bascom articulates this theory quite clearly.

Ernst Cassirer: Cassirer, the neo-Kantian philosopher, has articulated his conception of myth as a symbolic form in his three-volume *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* and in *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*. Highlighting Cassirer's Kantian roots, S. Korner in an encyclopedia article on Cassirer writes that "his philosophy is in many important respects a development and a modification of Kant's critical philosophy, idealistic in outlook and transcendental in method" (2: 44).

He argues that Cassirer's philosophy is, in a sense, an extension of Kant's philosophy especially his "Critique of Reason" and notes that Cassirer's avowed objective was "to extend Kant's static critique of reason . . . into a dynamic critique of culture, i.e. of the organizing principles of the human mind in all respects" (2:45). The three-volume *Philosophy of the Symbolic Forms* charts this development. "Symbolization" or "symbolic representation" forms the core of Cassirer's philosophical system. *Man is animal symbolicum* (symbolizing animal), asserts Cassirer, and adds that myth, language and science are the three symbolic systems. These three systems or forms of expression which articulate three types of reality are distinct yet overlapping in their task of producing culture. Donald Phillip Verene in an article entitled "Ernst Cassirer" states that, according to Cassirer, who thought of man as a

symbolizing animal, "all human activities are equally 'symbolic'. The symbol is the medium of man's cultural activity whether mythic-religious, linguistic, artistic, historic, or scientific" (3: 108).

Corresponding to the three symbolic forms are three modes or stages of what is essentially a single, condescent function of symbolization or symbolic representation. Myth, language and science are matched by expressive, intuitive and conceptual modes or functions respectively. "The first and the most primitive of these modes Cassirer calls the 'expressive function'. In the world it constitutes, the primitive world of myth, the sign and its significance merge into each other" (Korner 2: 45). In other words, in myth, which is characterized by immediacy, there is no cleavage between the sign and the signified. "Where empirical thought sees merely representation myth sees the real identity of image and thing. Word and name do not merely describe or portray but contain the object and its power," writes Hazard Adams in *Philosophy of the Literary Symbolic* (210).

What is Cassirer's conception of myth? Ivan Strenski in Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth Century History: Cassirer, Eliade, Levi-Strauss and Malinowski writes that "without saying so explicitly, Cassirer simply stipulates that 'myth' is a story 'held together' by the monistic principle of 'emotional unity'" (39). Strenski's statement has its basis in Cassirer's remark that "the real substratum of myth is not a substratum of thought, but of feeling" (An Essay on Man 81). Highlighting the point that mythical consciousness is the most primitive and the earliest in the development of consciousness and culture, Ruthven writes in Myth that Cassirer "treats myth as a primordial 'symbolic form' To him, myth is anon-discursive, densely imagistic 'language' . . . at once more archaic and vibrant [in contrast to conceptual language]" (74).

In the province of myth hermeneutics, Cassirer has made a significant contribution. He highlights the differences between an archaic conception of myth which was marked by immediacy and a modern critical understanding of myth which is always mediated, for there is a temporal and cultural chasm dividing the moderns from the ancients in their respective approaches to myth. In *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Adams observes, "he [Cassirer] goes to great trouble to argue that myth has to be understood on its own terms, from inside itself, at which point its own logic becomes clear" (215). A similar observation is made by Bidney, who writes that Cassirer "insists that myth is to be interpreted literally, and is opposed to the allegorical interpretation on the ground that the latter, . . . does not account for the unique and irreducible element in mythical expressions" (10).

Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms also highlights the relationship between myth and religion. He traces the historical development of religion to mythology and points out the breach and the inevitable breaking away of religion from mythology. According to him, "the break between religious consciousness and the mythical symbol occurs when consciousness begins to regard the images and signs of myth as pointing to meanings beyond immediate existence" (Verne 3: 108), In his "Summary and Conclusion" in *An Essay on Man*, Cassirer writes that "language, myth, art, religion, science are the elements and the constitutive conditions of this higher society," and adds that "they are the means by which the forms of social life that we find in organic nature develop into a new state, that of social consciousness" (223). To sum up, he considers mythical thought as a primitive but

necessary and integral stage in the development of human culture.

Mircea Eliade: Eliade, an eminent historian of religion, has written about religion and myths quite extensively. To Eliade, myth is basically a story or a tale. Although he categorizes myths into myths of cosmogony, theogony and anthropogeny, he assigns a pre-eminent place to cosmogonic myths for myths are stories of creation.

Claude Levi-Strauss: Before embarking on an exposition and critique of Levi-Strauss's structural study of myth, it would be better methodologically to throw light on the underpinnings of his theories, for once the underlying system is brought to light, his theory itself can be seen in a better perspective. It has to be underscored that Levi-Strauss's study of myth has its moorings in structural linguistics and anthropology, and he himself has labelled his study of myth as structural. Saussure, in *Course in General Linguistics* notes that in language there are no substantial but only relational or differential entities whose value and significance are not inherent but brought out in a system of relations and differences.

Secondly, Saussure sets off the social dimension of language from its personal side. According to him language consists of *langue*, the social but abstract dimension, which connotes the system, and the *parole*, the individual and personal dimension, which is a concrete manifestation of the system in the form of speech-acts. Saussure announces that "in separating language [*langue*] from speaking [*parole*], we are separating: (1) what is social from what is individual; and (2) what is essential from what is accessory and more or less accidental" (14). The marking off of *langue* from *parole* becomes an operational tool in the working out of myth typology as proposed by Levi-Strauss.

Thirdly, Saussure attaches great importance to the synchronic study of language as opposed to the diachronic study of it. While a diachronic study of language attempts to trace the historical growth and development of a language in a linear fashion, a synchronic study, on the other hand, delimits itself to the study of language at a particular moment or time and space in history. Culler clarifies in his monograph *Saussure* that the diachronic study of language would entail "study of its evolution in time" while its counterpart would zero in on "the study of a linguistic system in a particular state without reference to time" (35). Levi-Strauss's structural analysis of myth takes into account the synchronic dimension.

Fourthly, Saussure discusses the syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships that are at work in the language system. Language operates both at the horizontal level wherein contiguity is stressed and which is metonymic in character, and at the vertical level wherein similarity is underscored and which is metaphoric in character. Levi-Strauss's structural analysis of the Oedipus myth which takes into consideration its variants, is mapped out along the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes.

Fifthly, Saussure brings to the fore the relationship between the surface structure and the deep structure. The structuralists contend that sometimes identical or even variant surface structures may have the same deep structure, Saussure and his followers argue that the

underlying deep structure has to be sought out as the surface structure manifests only transformational variations of the deep structure.

Northrop Frye: Jung and Frye are the two outstanding archetypal critics notwithstanding the fact that Frye himself does not want to be bracketed with Jung, and staunchly denies any allegiance to his theory of myth and archetypes, which takes into account the collective unconscious. Given this kind of polemical background, it becomes imperative to spell out Frye's definition and theory of myth and archetypes, and the basis and orientation of his archetypal criticism.

In "Myth, Fiction, and Displacement," Frye makes it clear that he discusses the terms "myth" and "archetype" from the vantage point of literary criticism, and not from any psychological, anthropological or religious standpoint. He clarifies:

By myth ... I mean primarily a certain type of story. It is a story in which some of the chief characters are gods or other beings larger in power than humanity. Very seldom is it treated in history: its action takes place in a world above or prior to ordinary time . . . (360)

In another piece entitled "The Koine of Myth: Myth as Universally Intelligible Language," he states that "myth always means, first and primarily, mythos, story, plot, narrative" (3).

In "Literature as Context: Milton's 'Lycidas,'" Frye presents his definition of an archetype: "By an archetype, I mean a literary symbol, or cluster of symbols, which are used recurrently throughout literature, and thereby become conventional" (434). If we scrutinize Frye's definition of archetype and place it alongside Jung's definition, we notice that both Frye and Jung share a common plank. While Frye and Jung agree upon the universal and recurrent character of archetypes with different degrees of displacement, Frye, in sharp contrast to Jung, studiously avoids broaching the aetiology of myths and archetypes, and thus carefully avoids getting entangled in the theory of the collective unconscious which is, in his assessment, "an unnecessary hypothesis in literary criticism" (Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays 112)

Since Frye's definition and discussion of archetypes and archetypal criticism take into account the various causal factors at work in the forging of literature, it is better to discuss causality vis-a-vis literary production. Frye, in a seminal essay "The Archetypes of Literature," declares that the poet is only "its [poem's] efficient cause: it has form; and consequently a formal cause. The problem of the formal cause of the poem [is] a problem deeply involved with the question of genres." He points out that any inquiry into the genesis of the genre takes us "to the material cause of the work of art" which, in turn, "leads us into literary history" and ultimately to archetypes. In his peroration he places literature alongside anthropology and writes: "the search for archetypes is a kind of literary anthropology, concerned with the way that literature is informed by pre-literary categories such as ritual, myth, and folktale" (425-26).

In Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays, his tour de force, Frye comes up with a comprehensive and compendious vision of literature, which posits the coherence of literature with culture and civilization. Charting the basic tenets of his brand of archetypal criticism, he writes in Anatomy of Criticism:

An archetype [is] a symbol which connects one poem with another and thereby helps to unify and integrate our literary experience. And as the archetype is the communicable symbol, archetypal criticism is primarily concerned with literature as a social fact and as a mode of communication. By the study of convention and genres, it attempts to fit poems with the body of poetry as a whole. (99)

Plotting the perimeter of archetypal criticism, he states that he "studies the poem as part of poetry, and poetry as part of the total imitation of nature that we call civilization" (Anatomy of Criticism 105).

Central to Frye's enterprise is the quest myth which enables him to expound a holistic and synoptic vision of literature. In "Northrop Frye: Criticism as Myth," Wimsatt, furnishing an orientation to the discussion of Frye's monomyth, writes that "there is one basic and inclusive myth, which takes the shape of a divine quest, death, and rebirth, following the cycle of the four seasons" (76).

A. C. Hamilton, in Northrop Frye: Anatomy of His Criticism, maps out Frye's theory of the quest myth with an attempt to underscore the issue that, in Frye's conception, all literary genres are logically derived from the quest myth. Basing himself on Frye's theories as chalked out in Anatomy of Criticism, he lays bare the quintessence of the quest myth:

Frye posits three main stages of the quest-myth that give romance a literary form--the auon or conflict, the pathos or death-struggle, and the anagnorisis or recognition of the hero--in order to note parallels to the three-day rhythm of death, disappearance, and revival of the god in various myths. Later he adds a fourth--sparagmos, or the hero's dismemberment--in order to set up four aspects of the central quest-myth, a monomyth that relates the four mythoi in their order. (141)

Thus we perceive that Frye's archetypal criticism hinges on the rotatory or cyclical pattern in nature with its analogues in human life, and the dialectical tension that governs the whole universe: between light and darkness; between the forces of good and the forces of evil; between heaven or paradise and hell or the underworld. Disclosing the founding pillars of archetypal criticism, Frye himself has stated that "archetypal criticism ... rests on two organizing rhythms or patterns, one cyclical, the other dialectical" (Anatomy of Criticism 106). He has expressed the same idea in different words in "Romance as Masque" in Spiritus Mundi: Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society. According to him, the two crucial structural principles in literature are "the principle of cyclical movement, from life to death to rebirth, usually symbolized by the solar and seasonal cycles of nature and the principle of polarity

... " (155). Significantly, both these factors, viz. "the cyclical and the dialectical," are matched by their cognates in the world of art. In other words, literature would constitute the obverse of nature because both revolve around the same axis.

Ultimately the strength of Frye's theory consists in its synoptic vision, which calls for a comparative study of literature even to the point of comparing or placing

works of art alongside nature itself. And the end result is the total coherence of life and literature.

Elmer Borklund, resorting to a naturalist's taxonomic principles, sums up Frye's enterprise in Contemporary Literary Critics:

When we consider a given work we soon become aware that it bears some striking resemblance to other works; and like an experienced naturalist, Frye argues, we should therefore try to place our specimen in the broader context of related species, genera, and finally the entire range of organic life. The obvious similarities between works lead Frye to make a fundamental assumption that there is a 'total coherence' to be investigated and described. (231)

A critique of Frye's archetypal criticism will bring to light the reductionistic tendencies latent in the formulation of his monomyth. With reference to Frye's version of the quest myth, Righter, in Myth and Literature, comments that "the underlying monomyth is a fundamental form on which endless literary variations may be played, suggests a tidiness that is alien" (71). This remark can, of course, be levelled against other versions of monomyth such as Gluck's and Campbell's as well.

Secondly, the fuzziness surrounding the alleged Jungian elements in Frye's system need to be discussed. Frye himself has stated his position quite clearly. He declares in "Expanding Eyes" in Spiritus Mundi: "I am continually asked ... about my relation to Jung, and especially about the relation of the word 'archetype' to his. So far, I have tended to resist the association" (117).

But the issue is far from settled. Wimsatt, in a critique of Frye, underscores 'the Jungian elements in Frye's system, which form, as it were, the substratum of his theory, but which is underplayed by Frye. In a hard-hitting statement in "Northrop Frye: Criticism as Myth," he visualizes the imagined consequences if the Jungian props shoring up Frye's system are dismantled:

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3. Myth Criticism and its Value

- B. Das

TEXT

Das, B. "Myth Criticism and Its Value."

The advance of knowledge is an infinite progression towards a goal that for ever recedes. J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*.

Writing about the historiography of ideas in 1938 A.D. Lovejoy invited our attention to what might be called interdisciplinary studies. His reference to philosophy, science, folklore, linguistics, religious studies together with his assertion that "What I have in mind is not simply the parcelling out of the subdivisions of a large subject among specialists in those subdivisions; it is the convergence upon each of them of all the special knowledge from all of those subdivisions which is genuinely pertinent to it,"[^] has, in course of the last four to five decades, resulted in the emergence into prominence of what is now called myth criticism. The importance of this criticism was brought out in the Indiana University discussion published under the title *Myth: A Symposium* edited by Thomas A. Sebeok, besides in *Myth and Method* edited by J.E. Miller, *Myth and Symbol* edited by N. Frye et al and *Myth and Literature* edited by J.B. Vickery.

The development of myth criticism, as is seen from these books, is closely dependent on the insights which were revealed by anthropology, psychology, philosophy, religion and linguistics and it is seen at its best in the United States where the New Critics insisting upon the close study and explication of the text came up against problems of language and its behaviour which were explained in terms of the interaction of imagery, metaphor, myth and symbol. The mythical approach to literature, although not favoured in some quarters, e.g. in the writings of James Burnham and William Troy, has with the growth and development of the New Criticism, no doubt, enabled the reader to have a deeper understanding and appreciation of a literary work, which as a linguistic artifact, makes use of language in the non-representational mode: the implication, of this mode as discussed by philosophers like Cassirer and Susanne Langer and elaborated by critics like Richards, Pollock, Blackmur, Tate, Ransom, Brooks, Burke and Wheelwright is that the language of science is referential or steno-language and in it the relation between the image and idea or word and meaning is always clear and unambiguous whereas literary language is emotive, especially in poetry, and it has qualities that can be taken as pre-logical.

Once we assume the nature of poetic language to be such as has been discussed by Wheelwright and others in *The Language of Poetry*- we go back to the old distinction between Logos and Mythos — the truth of science vs. the truth of arts. The effort of the New Critics, like Burke, on the other hand, has been to take the cue from as many sources as possible to unravel the meaning of poetry or a literary work so that the modern sensibility which has been atrophied by the forces of science and technology or what F. R. Leavis calls a techno logico-Benthamite civilisation, might discover in the* verbal structure a significance that is coherent, integrated and which, once discovered, not only exposes the

disjuncted or disinherited mind of modern man but also his failure to respond to the ever expanding cluster of meanings in a literary work and these meanings are different from the meaning of science. Although the importance of New Criticism as a technique is diminishing its contribution to the interpretation of a literary work has been substantial. Interpretation since the time of Richards has been extending its scope and its connection with myth criticism can be well marked. This is so because the wider understanding of literature that we have gained through this approach has a relevance in our age in which extreme specialization has led to the analysis of a work often from a single point of view, e.g. psychological or sociological or biographical whereas from Coleridge onwards the attempt has been to accept the autonomous nature of a work of art and understand its wholeness. In myth criticism the extreme degree of specialization is avoided by a spatiotemporal gestalt in the wake of Kantian and the other schools of philosophy which are opposed to empiricism, realism, naturalism and positivism as can be seen in books like *American Humour* by Constance Rourke, *The American Adam* by R.W.B. Lewis, *Form and Fable in American Fiction* by D. Hoifman or *Myth and Modern American Drama* by Thomas E. Porter. The quest for myth, on the other hand, from the 1920's in books like *Poetry and Myth* by F.C. Prescott (1927) and *Myth and Ritual* by S.H. Hooke (1933) to *The Anatomy of Culture* (1957) by N. Frye and *The Orphic Voice* by E. Sewell (1960) has benefited critics immensely with the new concepts of myth — like “The Great Chain of Being” or “The Paradox of the Fortunate Fall” or “The Golden Age”, which have taken them into new areas of knowledge.

The impact and import of this, criticism can be felt by a reference to two statements, one by D.H. Lawrence and the other by T.S. Eliot : (a) Myth is an attempt to narrate a whole human experience of which the purpose is too deep, going too deep in the blood and soul, for mental explanation or description.

(b) In using myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.*

There are thus two approaches to myth, one internal and the other external. So far as the internal approach is concerned, it is made mainly through anthropology, psychology, linguistics and philosophy. With Taylor, Harrison and Cornford, Frazer, Boas, Benedict, Mead and Levi-Strauss — to name the important contributors to our understanding of the manner in which “the hero with a thousand faces” appears in the world amidst diverse cultural patterns — anthropology has cut across the time and space barriers and enabled us to see how literature is rooted in myth : this is not merely an integrating function but also a salvaging function. If Lawrence went to the primitive cultures it was to discover in them how the modern mind with its logical and rationalizing activities had lost what Koestler calls the “sense of wonder”. The classical stance of the New Critics, therefore, gets modified by myth criticism.

It will, perhaps, be relevant to refer to Malinowski here to see 'how myth becomes an instrument to give meaning to the writer's vision of ordinary life :

Myth is a statement of primeval reality which still lives in present-day life and, as a justification by precedent, supplies a retrospective pattern of moral values, sociological order and magical belief. It is, therefore, neither a mere narrative, nor a form of science, nor a branch of art, history, nor an explanatory tale. It fulfils a function sui generis closely connected with the nature of tradition and the continuity of culture, with the relation, between age and youth, and with the human attitude towards the past. The function of myth, briefly, is to strengthen tradition and endow it with a greater value and prestige by tracing it back to a higher, better, more supernatural reality of initial events.® Boas has a similar view. According to him the substance of myths and folktales is "almost exclusively events that reflect the occurrences of human life, particularly those that stir the emotions of the people."^ The anthropological view is also taken up by Cassirer who, investigating the function of language shows how the primitive mind forms concepts in which the word and image are fused without the intervention of "meddling intellect"; and this use of language is not differentiated from its mythic shape. Cassirer's approach which is philosophical throughout can be associated not only with Kant who speaks of the synthesis of apprehension of time and space in *The Critique of Pure Reason* but also with that of Herder, Schiller, Vico and even Fenolossa. In all these writers, .specially in Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, the relationship between logos and mythos transcends linguistic terminology. In the depths of man's consciousness the linguistic function becomes psycho- logical or archetypal and hence myth becomes a highly complex structure with multiple connotations combining the inner and the outer worlds. The inner psychic world which Freud and Jung discovered is related to the "form of things unknown" or as Cassirer holds : The mythical form of conception is not something super-added to certain definite elements of empirical existence; instead, the primary "experience" itself is steeped in the imagery of myth and saturated with its atmosphere. Man lives with objects only in so far as he lives with these forms; he reveals reality to himself, and himself to reality in that he lets himself and the environment enter into this plastic medium, in which the two do not merely make contact, but fuse with each other.'

To Cassirer, then, human language, myth, religion, science and art are symbolic forms by which man projects his reality and becomes aware of it. Reality, apart from these forms, therefore, has no relevance to our life. In his *Essay on Man* art is a symbolic form similar to religion or science which builds up a universe that enables man to organise and interpret his experience. It is thus a device to present an inner experience. This is evidently an internal struggle, a struggle that concerns Coleridge's primary and secondary imagination, the struggle against Newton's single vision and hence an attempt to relate the microcosm and the macrocosm in experience to reveal what Herbert Read calls the "true voice of feeling." Since the exploration of outer human life through the study of primitive societies is an exploration in depth on the spatiotemporal level, the myth-making capacity of man is a primitive aspect of the mind, an aspect that is also discovered by psychology— especially the psychology of religion and of unconscious. According to Jung the collective unconscious "has contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less everywhere and in

all individuals. It is, in other words, identical in all men and this constitutes a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us.”[®] The contents of the collective unconscious are distinguished from the personal unconscious and its contents are archetypes and myth is one of its expressions. It is an immediate datum of psychic experience and is not to be subjected to rational analysis. Thus according to Jung the psyche contains all the images from which myths have originated and so “Myths on this level are as a rule tribal history handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. Primitive mentality differs from the civilized in that the conscious mind is far less developed in scope and intensity.”[®] Thus by making an external study of a primitive society or studying the primitive element in a single individual’s unconscious, it is possible to have a better understanding of the nature of the poetic mind and the poetic language in which, as in myth, the element of make-believe or “as if”, is a problem of epistemology. In so far as modern man is concerned, by providing such an understanding, the myth critic has unlocked a new door to our comprehension of literature so that modern man who is said by Jung to be in search of a soul, or whose loss of self has resulted in a deep spiritual crisis — what Kierkegaard calls “sickness unto death” — can find in literature a new meaning that gives a sense of belonging, coherence and integration and respect for human life as a whole. It is thus a key to the unity and identity of “the human condition”, to use Hannah Arendt’s phrase. That is why Jung rightly holds that “myths . . . have a vital meaning. Not merely do they represent, they are the psychic life of the primitive tribe which immediately falls to pieces and decays when it loses its mythological heritage, like a man who has lost his soul. A tribe’s mythology is its living religion whose loss is always and everywhere, even among the civilized, a moral catastrophe.”^{^®} Thus a myth critic like Francis Fergusson in *Idea of a Theatre* or Herbert Weisinger in *Paradox of the Fortunate Fall* or Richard Chase in *The American Novel and Its Tradition* or R.W.B. Lewis in *The American Adam* has, by linking literature with myth, shown the manner in which the ancient and modern are united, so that the “dry brain in a dry month” struggling with words which “slip slide, perish/decay with imprecision,”^{^^} in a world in which “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold,”^{^^} finds a focal point, or a point of coalescence in myth. Modern man rediscovers a new meaning and pattern in life and in literature as its expression after experiencing the sundering of emotion and reason during the past three centuries. It is a departure from the unified and close-knit world that waned after the middle ages. Lovejoy’s *The Great Chain of Being* or Cyrus Hoyt’s *The Hyacinth Room* or Elizabeth Sewall’s *The Orphic Voice* not only make us aware of the loss that has occurred owing to the loss of the mythical vision in interpreting literature but also in interpreting life and that interpretation has been brought before us, amongst others, by Allen Tate in *The Man of Letters in the Modern World* in which Tate shows our proclivity for labels and jargon in describing a human being. It is Yeats’ vision too :

Locke sank into swoon

The garden died,

God took the spinning —jenny

Out of his side.^“

Modifying Jung's theory to an extent Philip Wheelwright says that archetypes equip our thought and imagination without which true reverence would become arid and lifeless. Arche- types like the Divine Father, the Earth Mother, the World Tree, the satyr or centaur or other man-animal monster, the descent into Hell, the Purgatorial Stair, the washing away of Sin, the castle of attainment, the culture hero like Prometheus or Odysseus, the sacrificial death of the god and his rebirth, the god in disguise or the Prince under an enchantment, the type of images that Maud Bodkin refers to, the vegetation and fertility myths that Frazer discovers — these are recurrent topics in many countries and among many races. Hence their universality and timelessness. Thus myth and archetype render a vision of life in which the vivacity and spontaneity of the imagination give an added intensity to the literary experience. As with Lawrence, it becomes a means of discovering a value system that neutralizes the forces of de-humanisation, atomisation or alienation that are so pervasive in our time.

The mythical imagination by eclipsing space and time not only helps in the renewal of the sense of wonder but also reunifies man with the circumambient universe in which the oppressiveness or the feeling of loss of identity is reduced. The amalgamation of the past and present, the recognition that all time is one time or that all experience is the same by the rooting of literature in the mythology of the earth as Yeats showed, create a sense of belonging and thus myth criticism helps us in discovering a new dimension in the meaning of literature. The myths that Frye, for example, analyses as constituting recurrent patterns, in his “Theory of Myths”, link the animal, human and divine worlds and exhibit their continuity. The corn god passes through growth, decline and death in harmony with the revolving year with its seasonal cycles which correspond to different literary modes and genres' and vindicate the God-nature-man sacred complex.

This idea is echoed by Berdyaev when he says ; “Myth is the story pre- served in popular memory of a past event and transcends the limits of the external objective world, revealing an ideal world, a subject-object world of facts. 'Richard Chase holds a similar view in spite of his reservations about the value of myths in ordering transcendent knowledge. He says ; “It is a way of sanctioning and giving significance to those crises of human experience which are cultural as well as personal : birth, initiation into life, ideal friendship, marriage, war against man or nature, death. Thus our deepest needs and aspirations are related to biological and psychic changes that occur in our individual lives and manifest themselves in cultural patterns that take artistic form. This is how myth can be thought of being “only art, in comparison with the historical vision that Vico unfolded. The disintegration of civilisation according to Vico is a historical phenomenon ; “Men first feel necessity, then look for utility, next attend to comfort. Still later amuse themselves with pleasure, thence grow dissolute in luxury and finally go mad and waste their substance.”^’ Hence Berdyaev believes that the mysteries of the divine as well as the human and worldly life with all their complexity of historical destiny admit of solution only through concrete mythology. ether concrete or not the mythical imagination is constantly at work in the world and it has affected life through the process of history or, as Toynbee would say, through the in

reaction of Yin and Yang ... or challenge and response. Feidelson, Jr., "the vindication of imagination in a world grown abstract and material myth for meaning through the application of

It can be seen in the interpretation of The Waste Land to be one given others, with the Spanish Tragedy Wheelwright's allusion to The conscious motive of Virgil, observes that "even while the of a father against his personal being the fated action 'till draw "otidyl realms beyond the time" archeaaitg Us analysis Wheelwright's Conti-y 'wielwngkt refers to other archetypes like the Vanishing Garden or the relation of early Christian symbology to the Fisher King of medieval romance and linking The Waste Land with Four Quarters, he shows how poetry becomes identical with myth making. The reading thus becomes an amalgamation of metaphor, emblem, archetype and myth and as such, it furnishes a new and deeper insight into Eliot's poetry. The rational modern mind, in contrast to the medieval mind, finds it difficult to perceive the unity of being that is at the core of myth. The emotional and intellectual complex in an instant of time, for example, that constitutes a metaphor, in Ezra Pound's view, can be compared with the simultaneity of response on literal, moral, allegorical and anagogical levels of the medieval man available to a poet like Dante or Langland. What happened thereafter is well seen in Donne's lament that "It is all in pieces, all coherence gone" and the subsequent attempt by poets like Blake and the romantics to revive that coherence and unity through myth. Schiller's words indicate the poet's quest :

The intelligible forms of ancient poets. The fair humanities of old religion ... all these have vanished. They live no longer in faith of reason ; But still the heart doth need a language, still Doth the old instinct bring back the old names.-

The quotation from "Ulysses, Order and Myth", given earlier exposes another aspect of the writer's quest and myth in this context is a search for form. From ancient times writers have, while using the narrative form, used myths and this includes legends, folk tales, fairy tales— for as even what Clive Bell calls a "significant form." The dichotomy between form and content did not loom large in the primitive mind; it is with the mimetic theory of art buttressed by theories of empirical truth that the truth of art was viewed separately. In the 18th century it was a problem of justifying for poetry the marvellous which did not exist in nature. With Coleridge, however, the "coadunating" imagination fuses mind and precept, life and nature. He based his view of poetry in the constitution and activity of the creative mind and thus stressed the "esemplastic" power of the imagination as Kant had done. In poetry the different parts are fitted in such a way as to produce a definite aim of pleasure.

The New Critics who have generally taken that line have indicated the problem of organic form in art and in metaphors like "The World's Body," "The Well-Wrought Urn," "The Burning Fountain," have shown their concern for the relationship between form and content. When Eliot discusses the problem of Joyce in Ulysses, who used the Homeric myth, he points to a vital problem of the modern writer, a problem that Colin Wilson examines in The Outsider in relation to the chaotic experience, of modern man as

illustrated in, say, *Steppenwolf* of Herman Hesse. It is an experience which in Donne's words mentioned above is "all in pieces, all coherence gone." With such experience to recount literature without the esemplastic power of imagination ceases to be or tends to degenerate into referential description as in the novels of C.P. Snow who fails to describe the reality of life. He describes it as a process merely. Herman Hesse, Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka, Rainer Maria Rilke, James Joyce, W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot and Kazantzakis are some of the major writers who have been concerned with expression when a whole generation has lost the power of understanding itself, when man grows up absurd lacking any sense of direction, not quite aware of his identity or destiny : hence a trans-valuation of all values becomes the order of the day. Yvor Winters's description of the "fallacy of imitative form" points to this problem of the modern writer.

The emphasis on the autonomous nature of a work of art which the New Critics stressed has to be understood in the context of the writer's concern to preserve the integrity of art and the intellect amidst the conditions of alienation, anxiety and disintegration brought about by the forces of science, technology and semantic positivism. It is a cultural crisis that the writer has to encounter in our age and from this point of view W.B. Yeats is perhaps the most explicit when he refers to his need of a living mythology in the absence of a traditional one destroyed by the science of Darwin, Spencer and Huxley. The poetry of Yeats finds a support in the vast design of his mythology, a design that is akin to Blake's. The different books of poetry that Yeats wrote by making use of the myth of *A Vision* are linked with one another and thus they achieve a unity that, as separate lyrics, they would have been deprived of. Eliot's dependence on *From Ritual to Romance*, similarly, helps him to have a conceptual framework and to be articulate on Margate sands where he can connect nothing with nothing. Thomas Mann in the *Joseph* novels links the past and the present and at the same time finds a frame of reference which establishes a structural unity for them. This problem of expression for the modern writer, therefore, becomes a problem of artistic form in relation to the nature of his experience. In *The Struggle of the Modern* Stephen Spender rightly stresses the role of the imagination in the face of the disjunct nature of modern experience and the problem of form : In a world of fragmented values the imagination cannot illustrate accepted doctrines, cannot refer to symbolic meanings already recognised by the reader, symbols of the faiths he believes in, and imbibed with his education. Everything has to be reinvented, as it were, from the beginning, and anew in each work. Every position has to be imagined in the poem.

The relationship of form and content and its explication through myth is, however, acutely explored and illustrated by Francis Fergusson in his discussion of *Hamlet* which, according to Eliot, lacks in artistic unity. But taking ritual as his starting point Fergusson shows how drama holds the mirror upto nature in all ages and how the "idea of a theatre can emerge from this. Commenting on the function of drama to imitate significant human life and action Fergusson writes : We doubt that our time has an eye, a body, a form or a pressure; we are more to think of it as a wilderness which is without form."

Ferguson's study of *Hamlet*, therefore, shows an approach that is indebted to the Cambridge School of Anthropologists like Cornford, Harrison, Murray, their demonstration

of Greek tragedy having its roots in ritual and myth and its cultural ramifications. It is this examination, of Hamlet as a complex pattern of cultural mores that enables Fergusson to refute Eliot's adverse criticism of its form as an artistic failure. Fergusson concludes that "If Shakespeare's Hamlet is realistic in the tradition represented by Sophocles and Dante, if he composes by analogy rather than qualitative progression" or "syllogistic progression", then the question of Hamlet as an artistic success appears in a different light. Fergusson's analogy of action by linking the past, present and future, exhibits how the experience has a universal significance or how as an expanded metaphor, it becomes a concrete universal.

Kenneth Burke, too, thinks that a ritualistic approach to drama might help us in seeing how action is related to meaning and form. As he says, "By starting from a concern with the various tactics and deployments involved in ritualistic acts of membership, purification and opposition, we can most accurately discover 'what is going on' in poetry. I contend that the 'dramatic perspective' is the unifying hub for this approach."²³ Thus whether dealing with meaning in depth or with the conception of form, myth criticism, when practised by able critics like Bodkin, Wheelwright, Fergusson, Chase, Lewis or Fiddler, enables us to see that myth is an expression of man's deepest concern about himself and his place in the scheme of the universe, his relationship with man, nature and god. Man's nature and destiny which are explored in literature, thus, form a structure of ideas, images, beliefs, hopes and fears, loves and hates and hence when practised soberly such criticism can be very helpful in having new insights into literature. But this conclusion is not always tenable since finally the judgement of a literary work cannot be based on the sense of myth alone. Richard Chase, therefore, truly observes "an exclusive interest in myth, as defined by myth critics, seems infallibly to lead to an exaggerated opinion on works which avoid this involvement and promise, the immanence of grace, of final harmony and reconciliation in a world whose contradiction it seems no longer possible to bear." To proceed on this line alone is to confuse literature or poetry as being a substitute for religion and to make this criticism reductive in nature. Religiosity and religion are not the same although myth does exhibit a "primitive phase of metaphysical thought. The epigraph from Frazer at the beginning of the essay,

With the change in sensibility that has been responsible for the diminishing interest in the verbal analysis of New Criticism, there has been, during the recent years, a reevaluation of myth criticism as well. Jung and Frazer do not have as much standing amongst recent scholars of mythology and comparative religion as they had two decades ago.

Anthropology and literary criticism, unless we think of the social implications of the former, as for example in the criticism of Christopher Caudwell, have a relationship that is different from the one discussed here. Edmund Leach has lately questioned and refuted many of the assumptions of Frazer. Levi-Strauss's writings open, on the other hand, new avenues along with the findings of modern structural linguists, for whom, myth is only a "contentless" system of signs. But however that may be one of the enduring values of this criticism is to remind us with Donne that "No man is an island."

