

LITERARY MYTHMAKING AND MYTH-CRITICAL APPROACH TO LITERATURE

New Criticism and "Myth-Ritual" Criticism, two distinctive trends in American literary scholarship, outlined the artistic methods of 20th century literature and suggested new principles for literary theory and analysis. The collapse of historicism, as a determinant of events and standard of values, brought about a change in the world-outlook, marked by remythologizing in art and literature. The linear view of history was replaced by cyclic reiterative concept, the latter being the absolute quality of mythological thinking. Anthropological looks at myth, in-depth psychology and modernism formed the theoretical background of the aesthetics and philosophy of myth as an integral part of culture. Mythmaking, however, is neither a reversal to ancient mythic consciousness, nor a flashback into a preceding history. It implies a mode of thinking that views current events through metaphysical bias and primordial paradigms. Present is relevant to past in archetypal terms, transforming mythic motifs and characters into psychological metaphors. "It has developed into an instrument of the structural analysis of the narrative, rid of social-historic and space-time aspects, focusing upon revealing the metaphorically eternal generalized contents" (E. Meletinsky). Drawing parallels between the present and old times writers interpret modern life in terms of archetypes and myth-models transforming the latter into psychological metaphors. Apart from carrying philosophical and psychological submeaning, myth-models also perform aesthetic and structural functions, stylizing and organizing the plot of a literary work.

The critical interest towards myth was stimulated by the myth theories of the 19th and 20th centuries, particularly the ritualistic concepts, Freud's existential psychology and Jung's psychology of the unconscious.

J. Frazer was the founder of ritualism and represented the Cambridge School of Classical Anthropology. He reasoned that myths and literature had developed out of ancient rites. He discovered the ritual complex of the dying-reviving god and put forward the cyclic model of time which turned to be very influential for 20th century fiction.

S. Freud identified myths and dreams assuming that they were symbols of suppressed desires driven into the subconsciousness by social and moral standards. The unconscious and myths were regarded as an expression of psychoanalytical processes based on individual experience.

C. Jung, contrary to the Austrian psychiatrist, promoted the idea that the unconscious had collective contents. He advanced the theory of "racial memory" according to which the remnants of prehistoric experience are located in "the collective unconscious". In his dreams modern man sees symbols that are analogous to "primeval images". Jung called these recurring patterns archetypes which are inborn and inherited like the instincts.

The aforementioned theories were the basic intellectual forces out of which came the controlling ideas of New Criticism and "Myth-Ritual" Criticism, which brought about a considerable change in the methodology of literary theory.

Landmarks in the history of New Criticism were the studies of T. S. Eliot, C. Brooks, A. Tate and J. Frank, who cardinally transformed the system of literary analysis. Declining the culture-historical descriptive method of the narrative and sociological interpretation of literature, they promoted aesthetic criteria for the analysis of a text, as a pure system of signs. Speaking of implicit mythopoeic faculty they viewed a piece of fiction as an esoteric verbal structure drawn out of historical-ethnic layers.

The structural period in the development of New Criticism was connected with Northrop Frye's "Anatomy of Criticism", published in 1957. Frye regarded myth not as a pre-form of literature, but a "structural organizing principle", since literature is a "displaced mythology" on the whole. Any piece of fiction is mythological in its "deepest layers", since mythopoeic faculty is inherent in human psyche and creative process. Current events and characters have metaphysical connotations being mere versions of ancient situations and masks. The myth critics, M. Bodkin, J. Campbell and R. Chase among them, ignored the social-historical contents of a literary work and held that the study of fiction and poetry should be extended to the investigation of structural categories, i. e. archetypes, genres and symbols, thus revealing pre-events, pre-situations. Frye called for constructing literary anthropology, seeking ethnographic models for types and characters. He gave crucial importance to the "dying-reviving" ritual complex and correlated the literary genres with the seasonal cycle of the year and phases of human life. Frye distinguished the following archetypes in literature.

1. The archetypes of romance and rhapsodic poetry. It was the dawn, spring and birth phases, which corresponded to the myths of the birth of the hero, his revival and resurrection and the defeat of the powers of darkness, winter and death.
2. The archetypes of comedy and idyll, corresponding to the zenith, summer and marriage or triumph phase. Here are the myths of sacred marriage and eternity.
3. The archetypes of tragedy and elegy form the third group, being associated with the sunset, autumn and death phases. Here are the myths of fall, of the dying god, of sacrifice and the isolation of the hero.
4. The archetype of satire, corresponding to the darkness and winter phase. Here are the myths of the triumph of dark powers, myths of flood, the return of the chaos and the defeat of the hero.

Frye regarded "the evolution of literature as a circular movement from myth to myth (from origin myth to modernistic myth)". Myth-ritual critical method provides an intellectual focus for literature and maintains to study it from a multidisciplinary perspective, including mythology, anthropology, psychology and structuralism. Myth-ritual critics dominantly focused upon mythological interpretations of the works of the 20-th century writers, such as Eliot, Joyce, Kafka, Proust, Faulkner, Th. Mann, Lawrence, Updike and others. In those interpretations history emerged as mythology, where nothing was real, but for the subconscious stream of irrational experience.

One of the main concerns of myth poetics is the problem of time, which is viewed as a juxtaposition of past and present. It is "... seen spatially, locked in a timeless unity which eliminates any feeling of historical sequence..." (J. Frank). History emerges as a continuum in which distinction between past and present are obliterated and the events of a particular time occur as metamorphoses of eternal prototypes.

Besides archetypes, other motivations for the use of mythology in 20-th century literature are metempsychosis, i.e. endless transmigration of souls, ritualistic cyclic reiteration and mythical imitation, i.e. psychological parallels between ancient figures and modern characters. E. g., mythical imitation emerged when Napoleon was said to have declared "I am Charlemagne" and not "I am like Charlemagne", which meant he had slipped into a Charlamagne pattern. Myth-models, metaphors and prefigurations were employed in Western writings mainly for genre formation, conveying aesthetic and philosophic submeaning to those artistic structures. Here are some broad types of

mythicizing: a) Th. Mann's Joseph Tetralogy is a complete renarration of the classical myth. It deals explicitly with the world of mythology. Joseph is the dying-reviving god himself symbolizing the rejuvenation of the old forms of spirit-life.

b) Another type of mythicizing appears when myth-images serve or concealed patterns transferred into psychological parallels. There is an archetypal relationship between mythological and modern characters.

In Joyce's "Ulysses" and Updike's "The Centaur" the events are set in the modern world with mythological motifs running through the novels. In "Ulysses" the mythical and real are juxtaposed and the titles of episodes are reminiscences of Homer's "The Odyssey".

c) In Faulkner's fiction mythopoeic faculty is hidden in the sublayers of the narrative. No bare myth models or motifs can be found here. It's a synthesis of artistic allegorization which combines different gnostic levels. It's an innate perception that comes from racial memory and as a stream of consciousness is related to real worldview. He has created the legend of man nature relationship, initiating the reader into the wilderness and beginning of things.

d) Lawrence was an antiintellectualist and myth for him was an escape to the sphere of "intuition" and healthy nature. In most of his novels and stories he had used anthropological models from James Frazer's "The Golden Bough". Lawrence's fiction is filled with ancient allusions and incarnational entities in the pattern of Frazer's dying - reviving god. His characters are modeled on mythical archetypes, with primordial paganism functioning as a basic instinct. Lawrence viewed death, marriage, fornication, initiation, dancing, sacrifice, arrival and departure as certain rituals of life phases. The symbolic imagery lying behind the contemporary setting underscore their deep mythopoeic orientation. The archetypes of stranger, sacred marriage, scapegoat, virgin, love and death shape his poetics.

e) Latin American "magical realism" is another type of mythmaking. It's an organic amalgamation of myth and reality. Myth is still a live tradition and is inseparable from everyday life, which is in "genetic relationship" with epic consciousness.

The myth-critical analysis considers a different methodological approach to a literary text and studies it from the perspectives of mythology, folklore, anthropology and psychology.