

The Role of Myth in Contemporary Storytelling

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the enduring relevance and adaptation of myth within contemporary storytelling across various media, including literature, film, and television. Myths, with their archetypal figures and universal themes, have historically served as tools to explain natural phenomena, shape moral values, and bind societies together. This study examines how contemporary storytellers incorporate mythic elements to create narratives that resonate with modern audiences by invoking the psychological and cultural power of archetypes such as the hero, the mentor, and the trickster. Additionally, the paper discusses how the globalization of media has transformed local myths into universal narratives, allowing for collective human experiences and emotions to be shared across cultures. By comparing mythic structures from ancient traditions to those in current popular culture, the research highlights how myths continue to serve as a means of psychological exploration, societal cohesion, and personal meaning-making in a rapidly evolving digital world.

Keywords: Mythology, Storytelling, Archetypes, Contemporary Culture, Popular Media, Hero's Journey.

INTRODUCTION

As cultural scholars explain, the myths of a culture serve to explain what societies often cannot, natural phenomena; the origins and development of societal customs and beliefs; and even the shared experiences of citizens in a community. Myths are by no means unique to one culture but are critical components of human cultures ranging from prehistoric oral traditions to classical story cycles. Although mythologies may address different aspects of the human experience some are more historical tales of a people, some are guides to morality, as well as a pantheon of gods, and still others, serve overlapping purposes—each culture has myths. Myths promote a sense of civic community and interpretation of physical surroundings and societal structure, which binds citizens together. Myths typically set the moral or ethical tone of a society. Further, in providing an explanation of place and identity in the world, myths shape the identity of citizens of a culture or ground their identity in a shared location or tradition [1, 2]. Although commonly believed to be tales of great antiquity, many myths are enacted at present. What characterizes myths is the narrative of extraordinary protagonists and their special relation to deities, exceptional achievements, as well as incredible deeds. These narratives offer a sense of comfort because they depict and provide a technique for overcoming violence, demonstrating right, elaborating an ethical life, and explaining human social and natural world behaviors and events. Myths also provide an effective way of looking at problems and offering solutions. Mythology is a human universal, a method of explanation and a guide to the practical world and to living a moral life by detailing the jarring experiences of others. It should also offer insights into understanding human narratives, such as the ways we tell stories, why we tell stories the way we do, and what our stories “say” to us in terms of both purpose and efforts. If we find there is a clear unifying principle to myths in their ability to explain some significant human experiences, then the issue is less how we use myths in storytelling today, but rather, why we are still drawn to and fascinated by myths. Having a more precise notion of what we seek to explain would help us understand why myths endure. Given this, the goal of myth is the articulation of human experience. Myth invites humanizing. Myth does not promise answers. Myth does not alleviate fear specifically. Myth explains being [3, 4].

Historical Evolution of Mythology and Its Adaptation in Modern Times

Myths were initially represented by ancient civilizations around 1750-1500 BCE, stemming from Indo-European and Semitic religious cultures, which are central to the origin of the Hebrews and Greeks. The myths created by humans were used to explain current events and supernatural phenomena, such as natural disasters and uncontrollable weather. They were motivated by the need to assign comprehensible explanations to unexplainable events for human survival. For instance, the Jewish, Islamic, and Christian God is believed to be powerful and inconceivable. The theme of love between a male and a female is frequently addressed in Greek mythology. A tale is retold of a man who wants to become a god by marrying a lady [5, 6, 7]. The conflicts, customs, and worries shared by ancient people throughout the various classical epochs were reflected in their experiences. Actual events and individuals in these areas have changed over time, as have the myths related to them. Mythological tales that spread throughout the many classical epochs of these particular regions show obvious parallels with modern stories. An example of this would be the Greek myth of Prometheus, a saga that tells of Zeus, the god of the cosmos, imprisoning a Titan named Prometheus for giving unlimited wisdom to humans, and Zeus leaving Prometheus bound in chains with a vulture tearing at his preordained liver as a consequence of his abhorrent theft. Over time, ancient myths have been transformed into contemporary structures by cultural exchanges with visiting civilizations or by new methods because of emerging technologies. Nevertheless, several myths from ancient Greece and Rome remain unsullied and continue to adapt to contemporary times [8, 9, 10].

Archetypal Characters and Themes in Contemporary Stories

While modern storytelling contains contemporary characters and stories, they are often constructed around archetypal characters and themes that have existed in stories for thousands of years. One example of an archetype found through numerous cultures and time periods is the hero. This individual, male or female, is often a reluctant or embarrassed chosen one who endures numerous trials and tribulations in order to save others. As the hero's guide, the mentor offers wisdom, guidance, and sometimes a call to adventure. Another example is the trickster, a character archetype who is fun-loving, rowdy, and possesses a casual disregard for typical social privileges and rules. This fictive figure can have negative attributes, one example of which is troubling deviance and talent for causing chaos [11, 12]. Some common themes that exist in mythology exist today as well. Conflict or the struggle against an external or internal enemy is central, as is a transformation in which a major change in a character's life coincides with an epiphany, new knowledge, or self-realization. Modern stories that meet these themes and archetypes have more emotional impact and can resonate on a deeper psychological and social level. As many of these archetypes and themes have been found in stories across numerous cultures for thousands of years, it is easier for modern storytellers to use them as a quick shorthand to appeal to a wide-ranging audience. By using these well-worn archetypes and their accompanying feel and characteristics, storytellers can plug their story directly into the human imagination and create connections between characters and events in the story and real-life people and scenarios. Additionally, many ongoing research efforts suggest that certain kinds of storytelling help people process their understandings and experiences of themselves and the wider world because these archetypes of the Western tradition resonate with people globally. Such figures help a modern audience in diverse cultures connect with the wider human understanding and with personal experiences. Revisioning how a certain archetype is employed in a particular film, novel, or television program can help bring audiences and common understanding of an individual in what is generally considered their external physical, societal, and imagined attributes into sharper focus [13, 14, 15].

Mythical Elements in Popular Culture: Film, Literature, And Television

In the 21st century, storytelling is largely concerned with the question of how classical myth can be made to function within the context of modern popular culture. Many of our most popular films, television shows, and literature are built around the use of myth as a means of servicing narrative depth and life-or-death stakes while also appealing to our emotions in a primal, mythic way. In media branding, for example, Apple is the sad Prometheus, experiencing the consequences of its arrogance. Contemporary adaptations of classical myth elements occurred in blockbuster films and began to appear on television and in literature. Both the Harry Potter series and The Hunger Games contain classical allusions. However, what these texts do is use such allusions as a means for the reader to access a world of high culture: they are, ultimately, snobbishly old-Hogwartsian, where if never-named Agamemnon tells you to do something, you do it [16, 17]. The thesis that our television culture has never been more mythic than it is today, where our most celebrated and valuable stories are built around immortal and larger-than-life

supernatural figures whose quests and powers to alter destinies are our own redundancies writ large, seems difficult to dispute. After eight years and 73 episodes, a television series built atop a sub-fictional and essentially anti-feminist reading of the chivalric romances of the late Middle Ages, managed to appeal to the faithless and the zealot alike, earning nearly 50 million dollars per episode. It is entirely likely that, in adapting the lives of Arthurian knights, this series can command the same breathless adoration in 2018 as a historical work commanded in 1460. Sir Lancelot, like Jon Snow, has reached the end of his lauded and lustful days and has been ushered into the bittersweet land of generations of collective remembrance [18, 19].

The Psychological and Societal Functions of Myths in Modern Society

Both in literature during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and in efforts to understand the psychology of the individual and the community, including the collective consciousness, the study of myth has remained relevant. The symbolic aspect of myths addresses basic human fears and aspirations. Among psychologists, myth is also seen as a way to reveal group psychology, to which individuals seek to conform. Beyond expressing archetypes and their struggle for integration, myths also establish a moral framework by reinforcing successful models or making examples of unsuccessful ones; myths work to indicate where limits can be placed [20, 21]. Including the modern mass, function shows a recuperation of the therapeutic aspect with stories and myths; one can better understand and develop through one's own story. For groups, these tales are also therapeutic means to reinforce unity, lift feelings of shame or despair, and re-establish identity. Digital media have allowed a globalization of the story/myth to be achieved. Globalization does not cancel out the local, and even essentialist, myths that require symbolic support from specific people and territories. Local myths foster the intergenerational aspect of the community and its survival. These myths remain pertinent as they legitimize power, foment patriotism, and define differences where there is opposition in identity. The globalized myth has a future as it is shaping our long-term evolution. The rational man is being replaced by the hyper-social 'connected', tied to his phone, social networks, and other interpersonal technical aids. Hyper-social man needs new myths and techno-scientific heroes to guide him amid the complexity of a world in which he no longer grasps the issues. Myth is also necessary to reinforce our cultural and historical continuity [22, 23].

CONCLUSION

The enduring appeal of myth in modern storytelling reveals its power to connect audiences with shared human experiences and to address fundamental questions of identity, morality, and existence. By repurposing archetypal themes and characters, contemporary narratives offer cultural continuity while adapting to current societal issues and technological advancements. Myths foster both personal reflection and community cohesion, transcending local boundaries to create globally resonant stories. As our world becomes increasingly interconnected, the role of myth in storytelling will likely continue to expand, offering new ways to process the complexities of human experience and the changing world around us. Through the lens of myth, contemporary storytellers provide audiences with enduring narratives that help define, understand, and navigate the collective human journey.

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