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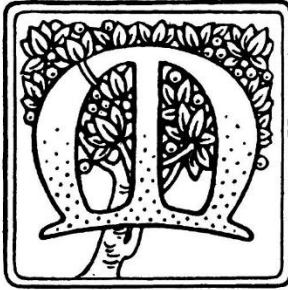
Mythos to Myth to Mythopoeia: A Cyclical Process

Abstract

The paper predicates the prospects of mythopoeia in the mythical tradition. An authorial construction of mythopoeia, when internalized into the collective consciousness can evolve into mythos. This mythopoeia turned mythos in the course of time and space may regress into myth. The fragments of the myth may then result in the making of another mythopoeia. Mythopoeia to mythos to myth is a cyclical process in mythical tradition. The paper establishes this argument with J. R. R. Tolkien's conception of mythopoeia. It explores similarities between mythopoeia and conlang. It contends that just as conlang can evolve as language, mythopoeia can also evolve into mythos. It further corroborates that if every mythos was mythopoeic in its conception, then every mythopoeia can advance into mythos.

Additional Keywords

mythopoeia, mythos, myth, Secondary World, Secondary Belief; Myth, nature of; Myth, theories of; Secondary Belief; Sub-creation; Tolkien, J.R.R. "On Fairy-stories"



μθος το Μυθ το Μυθοπoeia: A Cyclical Process

ASHNA MARY JACOB
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INTRODUCTION

Μυθοπoeia or *mythopoeia* in Greek means ‘myth making,’ *muthos* meaning ‘myth’ and *poiēin* meaning ‘make’ (*Merriam Webster Dictionary*). But the term mythopoeia is not as simple as its parts, because mythmaking is not as simple as it sounds. “Human beings have always been mythmakers” (Armstrong 1). We make myths to situate ourselves in a larger cosmic order. We make myths to reassure ourselves against the fear of infinite regress. We make myths to make meaning of our lives. Both “for society at large and for the individual, this story-generating function seems irreplaceable” (Cupitt 29). “Dogs, as far as we know, do not agonise about the canine condition, worry about the plight of dogs” elsewhere, or try to negotiate their position in the animal kingdom (Armstrong 2). Human beings on the other hand fall easily into despair. From the very beginning we invented stories to place our lives in a larger setting, which hinted at an underlying pattern and gave us a sense that, despite the depressing and chaotic evidence to the contrary, life had meaning and value. It is this human desideratum which forms the foundation of mythmaking.

Although this tendency of mythmaking is inherent and indispensable, ever since the 1950’s, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, there has come to be a definite category called mythopoeia in fiction, film and ludology. This category interprets, revises, and reproduces extinct pre-religious myths and extant incredible myths, in an attempt at redemption or restoration. But the question is—can such redeemed and restored mythopoeias serve the same function as myths and myth? How is mythopoeia relevant amidst primordial myths and fragmented myth? This paper is an enquiry into this contemporary category of mythopoeia in the mythical tradition.

Before we delve into mythopoeia, it is imperative that two keywords—mythos and myth—be defined at the outset so that the reader may pick their way through the annotative minefield of related terms. Mythos, in this study, refers to a story that a community believes in. It is what Sophia Heller calls a primordial story, “expressed in the form of narratives held to be sacred,” requiring a literal re-enactment through ceremony or worship (2). Myth, on the

other hand, especially in the western discourse, is the deteriorated version of mythos. It is a metaphoric and conceptual understanding of what was once an objective reality. Mythos and myth can be simplified as 'living' and 'dead' respectively. "'Living myths' are those narratives that are still linked with their associated rituals, such as the Catholic Communion or the Jewish Passover Seder. 'Dead myths' are those narratives that are no longer connected with their associated rituals, such as the myths of Ancient Greece" (Indick 21). With such a straight jacketing of both terms, we may now begin to broach mythopoeia.

Contemporary definitions of mythopoeia are tenuous. The *Collins English Dictionary* tells us that mythopoeia is the "making of myth/myths." But a myth is a myth because it lives and evolves in the collective psyche. Can myths be made? If yes, then can these man-made myths function as myths? *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* tells us that mythopoeia is "the making of myths, either collectively in folklore or religion [...], or individually by a writer." How can mythmaking be both individual and collective? Does this imply that myths made by an individual can become myths of the "collective unconscious" (Jung 138)? M. Alan Kazlev identifies mythopoeia as anything ranging from "[folk] creation stories to the epics of Homer or Vyasa to [...] fiction writing, cinema, and more recently even computer gaming [all of which portray] socio-cultural, anthropomorphic and materialistic representations of an actual cosmological reality" (14). The myths of Homer and Vyasa have indeed crossed over into the collective unconscious. Will similar endeavors in fiction, film and ludology share the same fate? Alan Dundes thinks not. He points out that "any novel cannot meet the cultural criteria of myth. [...] A work of art, or artifice, cannot be said to be the narrative of a culture's sacred tradition. [...] [It is] at most, artificial myth" (qtd. in Adcox). Does this artificiality imply that mythopoeia in fiction, film and ludology cannot be appropriated as myths of popular culture? Joseph Campbell would beg to differ. Campbell tells us that the world today has outlived much of the mythology of the past, and new myths must be created to fill the niche for mythology in the modern world ("Message of Myth"). Does this mean that mythopoeia is the next generation of the mythical tradition?

These are a few questions that inspired this paper on mythopoeia. Notwithstanding these varied attempts, none have quite defined the term conclusively. Mythopoeia in popular discourse is an amorphous term sometimes called mythopoesis, mythopoetic or mythopoeic. Mythopoeia and its inflections are used to describe any fiction, film and ludology which build fantastic worlds similar or different from our own, which invents or recycles mythical archetypes, or which creates stories of a primordial past. The family resemblance of mythos, myth and mythopoeia has also resulted in the latter being used as a zeugma for anything mythical. As a result, mythopoeia today is an often mentioned but seldom addressed term that is both elusive and vague.

This paper posits a definitive analysis to the polemical and artfully vague invocations of the term that have dominated both popular and critical discourse. These definitions and allusions, whether in conflating or collating the term, have served less to initiate critical analysis than to cast a spell. As scholars we cannot help but be intrigued by the popularity and magical power of this term; but we also look for precision and concrete examples. We do not see a monolithic definition of mythopoeia as “myth making” (*Merriam Webster Dictionary*) or the ambiguous definition “making of myths [...] collectively [...] or individually” (*Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*) or the un-critiqued definition of “myth-building” (Bunsen 450), “artificial mythology” (Adcox) or “new mythology” (“Hero’s Adventure”) convincing, for mythopoeia is and will likely remain, unless critiqued, a convoluted term. Still, convoluted implies specific, recurrent traits or qualities that even though combined flexibly and inconsistently in practice, can individually be subjected to careful analysis.

SITUATING MYTHOPOEIA

As the paper endeavors to first situate mythopoeia in the mythical tradition, let us begin with a discussion of some notable critiques that do so. Karen Armstrong traces the evolution of mythmaking from the primordial mythos to axial age religion to the incredible myth and finally to the contemporary mythical/religious vacuum that has produced a 21st century inflection which is without doubt mythopoeia. Although she does not use the term ‘mythopoeia’, she believes that “[i]t has been writers and artists, rather than religious leaders, who have stepped into the vacuum and attempted to reacquaint us with the mythological wisdom of the past” (Armstrong 138). Sophia Heller also situates mythopoeia in the mythical vacuum of contemporary times, although she too does not use the term. She perceives an absence of myth, a loss of a mythic mode of being which has led to myth being continually unearthed, redefined, recontextualized and intentionally conflated with thought and reflection in the attempt to cultivate a “mythic consciousness” to restore meaning to life and assuage the spiritual malaise of contemporary culture (Heller 42). She believes the contemporary resurgence in mythmaking is a reaction to this absence of myth. Matthew Sterenberg also places mythopoeia in the 21st century although he calls it “mythic thinking” and “myth-making.” Sterenberg believes “mythic thinking” to be the result of the inter-war period which turned towards myth to help redress the “psychological pressures that modernity brought to bear on the individual” (19). His study establishes that “myth-making” was a design to “show that ancient myths had revelatory power for modern life, and that modernity sometimes required creation of new mythic narratives” (3).

Michael Bell is one of the first critics to exclusively address the term mythopoeia. He believes mythopoeia to be the “outlook that creates myth; or, more precisely again, sees the world in mythic terms” (2). He posits that that mythopoeia is the counterbalance to the dilemma of the need for myth which the rhetoric of science has rendered incredible. The modern individual entertaining mythopoeia practices a “double consciousness” in which he understands his world view is relative and illusory. He is also aware that any worldview “cannot be transcendently grounded or privileged over other worldviews” (1) but is nevertheless a necessary “condition of life.” This intermediate position of mythopoeia, Scott Freer likens to “twilight.” Freer places mythopoeia in the twilight zone “between the doctrinal language of religion and the reductive materialism of secular dogma” (7). He urges us to disabuse ourselves of the popular notion that myth is false or that it represents an inferior mode of thought. He admits that we cannot cancel out the rational bias of our education and return to a pre-modern sensibility, but we can acquire a more educated attitude to mythology. He believes that mythopoeia is a trans figurative language, or a suitable art form, which can serve as the deliverance for the post-religious individual (Freer 7-15).

Mythopoeia thus perches precariously on the remains of a primordial mythos, an incredible myth and the resulting mythical vacuum. It is what Armstrong believes to be the solution to the problematic impasse between religion and science and their problematic relationship with each other. It is what Heller believes to be the respite for the mythically adrift man. It is what Bell calls a double consciousness. It is what Freer calls the “twilight of a secular myth” (7). If mythos is rudimentary and myth is defunct, mythopoeia would be what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar call “redefin[ing] and recover[ing] the lost Atlantis of [...] literary heritage” (99). Mythos and myth have become mythical due to a metaphoric disorientation. Mythopoeia is a “hermeneutic intervention” (Freer 88) which produces a new narrative as a part of myth’s reconstructive process. If myth is a distorted metaphor for the human condition, mythopoeia is a deliberate change in the signified of the signifier. This is the reason why Freer calls mythopoeia the result of hermeneutic confusion. Does mythopoeia provide for something that is beyond the limits of myth? We believe it does. Mythopoeia reaches beyond the limits of myth to achieve something akin to mythos. The following sections illustrate this contention.

TOLKIEN’S MYTHOPOEIA

Is mythopoeia a mere redemption of myth? The answer to this question is not that simple. Mythopoeia is neither a mere pastiche of myth nor a simulacrum of mythos. It takes off from the incredible myth. It moves towards a make-believe mythos. To better understand this, it is imperative we discuss an

account of how mythopoeia moves beyond myth, and who better than J.R.R. Tolkien and the rules of his board game, to understand how mythopoeia furthers the prospects of myth. This section discusses Tolkien's account of how mythopoeia moves beyond myth.

On September 19, 1931, the Inklings, a group of Oxford authors which included Tolkien, C.S. Lewis and Hugo Dyson, discussed at length about metaphor, mythology and mythmaking being the fundamentals of men. The night is regarded as the seminal moment which planted in the minds of Tolkien and Lewis the seeds of mythopoeia. Tolkien's idea of mythopoeia was different from Lewis's. According to him, Lewis's mythopoeia ended up being a fantastic world of Christian allegories, and mythopoeia is above allegory and fantasy. To reiterate his point, Tolkien composed the poem "Mythopoeia," which perhaps can be called Tolkien's manifesto for his mythopoeia-making, and wrote the essay "On Fairy-stories," which could be called a guide to his mythopoeia-making. The essay explicates what he considers to be a fairy story, but we are convinced that the essay is a blueprint to Tolkien's idea of mythopoeia. We believe it is this concept of a fairy story that developed into mythopoeia and on which he founded his works that would later make the tapestry of Middle-earth. J. Reilly also points out that *The Lord of the Rings* accords generally with the specifications that Tolkien laid down for "On Fairy-stories" (90). Lewis's review of the second and third volumes of the *The Lord of the Rings* devotes some space defending the work on a basis which is also evidently Tolkien's "On Fairy-stories." Therefore, we too read the essay as a guide to Tolkien's creation of mythopoeia from myth.

According to Tolkien, the process of making mythopoeia from myth is tricky. It involves "independent invention, inheritance, and diffusion," inheritance meaning "borrowing in time" from one or more centuries. It denotes an ancestral inventor who is a source or an inspiration to a story. Diffusion is "borrowing in space" ("On Fairy-stories" [OFS] 40-41). It refers to a preceding version of a story elsewhere. The inventor invents through inheritance from a predecessor and/or diffusion from another culture. To an inventor, inheritance and diffusion are mere tools that must in the end lead back to inventing.

Tolkien emphasizes that it is invention that is relevant, not inheritance and diffusion. But often, the limelight shifts from the invention that is mythopoeia to inheritance and diffusion which entails myth. This according to Tolkien is intolerable. It is "akin to losing sight of the forest for the trees [...] the stories need to be appreciated as they are as a whole, rather than in relation to their various parts" (Indick 18). Tolkien further argues that the process of making mythopoeia from myth is like making soup, where what is important is the soup and not its ingredients. "We must be satisfied with the soup that is set before us, and not desire to see the bones of the ox out of which it has been

boiled" (OFS 39). Often, according to Tolkien, mythopoeia is undermined as a reproduction of myth. Rather than looking to mythopoeia, source critics analyze myth, which according to Tolkien is disparaging. In 1966 Tolkien called the source critic "a man who having eaten anything, from a salad to a well-planned dinner, uses an emetic, and sends the results for chemical analysis" (qtd. in Fisher 30). Myth, Tolkien believes, does not determine the constructed mythopoeia. In "On Fairy-stories," he states that a story cannot be held in contempt because of an early congener. He believes that investigators who study recurring similarities between a source and a story are misled. According to his statements like

Beowulf 'is only a version of *Dat Erdmänneken*'; that '*The Black Bull of Norway is Beauty and the Beast*,' or 'is the same story as *Eros and Psyche*'; that the Norse *Mastermaid* (or the Gaelic *Battle of the Birds* and its many congeners and variants) is 'the same story as the Greek tale of Jason and Medea' (OFS 39)

may convey some element of truth; but "it is precisely the colouring, the atmosphere, the unclassifiable individual details of a story, and above all the general purport that informs with life the undissected bones of the plot, that really count" (OFS 39). Tolkien believed that mythopoeia is as important as myth. In fact, he was fain to add that mythopoeia is above myth.

In his poem "Mythopoeia," he remarks how myths of the "Primary World" have been recycled to such an extent that they have become "trite." According to him, mythopoeia is not yet another recycling of the myths of the "Primary World," its purpose is to redeem the "triteness" of myth.

I will not walk with your progressive apes,
erect and sapient. [...]
.....
I will not tread your dusty path and flat,
denoting this and that by this and that
.....
I bow not yet before the Iron Crown,
nor cast my own small golden sceptre down. ("Mythopoeia" 89)

These lines while snubbing the "triteness" of the primary world and its myths foretells his conviction in the liberating nature of the secondary world of his mythopoeia.

Tolkien's idea of mythopoeia as the Secondary World is what truly gives mythopoeia an edge over myth. Myth is a myth because it has lost its credibility. Mythopoeia is made out of myth in an attempt to redeem or restore

credibility, no matter how fantastic that credibility may be. In other words, mythopoeia is a make-believe world but a credible one. Tolkien believes that an author in constructing mythopoeia creates a 'Secondary World' into which the reader enters. When inside this Secondary World, the reader practices a Secondary Belief. Reilly in his book chapter "Tolkien and the Fairy Story" hypothesizes that behind Tolkien's notion of Secondary world and Secondary Belief is Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Secondary Imagination, "an echo of the Primary Imagination that creates and perceives the world of reality" (Reilly 97). This may very well be true. Mythopoeia is a product of the "esemplastic" (ibid.) imagination. But Tolkien's Secondary Belief moves beyond Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief" (208) for Secondary Belief is more than a kind of acceptance or tacit agreement. It is what Ajana Indu Priya calls self-referentiality of mythopoeia (2). Self-referentiality entails that mythopoeia should function on a mythopoeic reality and its own set of rules. It would be independent of any outside references. The reader who enters the system is required to accept its hyper-reality. Tolkien believes that if mythopoeia is truly successful the reader lets go of the Primary World and Primary Belief system and immerses himself in the Secondary World practicing Secondary Belief system. This process of making a world in which a green sun is credible requires labor, thought and special skill, "a kind of elvish craft" (OFS 61). He states that few writers attempt such a difficult task, but when attempted and accomplished we then have a rare achievement of Art. It is this rare achievement of Art that he calls mythopoeia. It is this ideal mythopoeia that surpasses myth.

The purpose of the ideal mythopoeia is fourfold. Tolkien elaborates them as Recovery, Escape, Consolation and Eucatastrophe. The first stipulation is Recovery. By Recovery, Tolkien means to remember what we had known but forgotten. It recovers the original intention of a story that has now become "trite" due to appropriation. According to Tolkien, Recovery is not "seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them." It involves "clean[ing] our windows; so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity" [OFS 67]. Recovery can be equated to defamiliarization. It "make[s] new" our old perception. The second parameter is Escape. Tolkien's notion of Escape is akin to the concept of escapist literature. But Tolkien sees it as a positive to divert oneself from the unchanging verities of human existence. Tolkien is aware of the scorn attached to "escapist" literature but believes that the fundamental reason why stories were invented was to escape from the trials and tribulations of real life. It is the oldest and deepest desire, to escape from the fear of infinite regress. Escape therefore is the fundamental aspect of mythopoeia. Following thereafter is the third parameter, Consolation, the reward for good and comeuppance for evil. This parameter, as is self-evident, is the "imaginative satisfaction of ancient desires" (OFS 75), good prevailing over

evil, a blessing in disguise, the reward of karma, or any such effects that provides man with hope. The final or the climactic fourth marker is Eucatastrophe. Eucatastrophe, Tolkien's opposite of catastrophe in Tragedy, is

the sudden joyous "turn" (for there is no true end to any fairy-tale) [...] [a] miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of *dyscatastrophe*, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is *evangelium*, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief. (OFS 75)

When the eagles swoop into battle in the final scenes of *The Hobbit*; when Aslan bounds into battle just as the White Witch seems to be gaining the upper hand in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, in that moment of eucatastrophe we discover that Joy Tolkien described as a "sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth" (OFS 77). Eucatastrophe is similar to the mechanism of *deus ex machina*, although it can also occur without it. C.S. Lewis believed that Eucatastrophe is a way to extend the narrative of hope into a hopeless world, a means to smuggle Joy past the "watchful dragons" (37), an image Lewis likened as a reference to those inhibitions that keep religion at arm's length.

Mythopoeia, the Secondary world with a Secondary Belief system which provides Recovery, Escape, Consolation and Eucatastrophe, helps compromise the "real world, so full of unanswerable questions and irresolvable problems" with the mythopoeic world "in which mysteries of creation are beheld, and the underlying forces of nature are revealed" (Indick 19), and true resolution is achieved. Mythopoeia redeems myth through Recovery. It provides Escape and Consolation like mythos. It promises Eucatastrophe like that of a mythos and elevates man to a higher level. It is such a mythopoeia that becomes ideal.

It is our contention that Tolkien's ideal mythopoeia functions like mythos. It is ideal because it provides "a totally coherent world-scape," "a structure that is so self-consistent and varied it will withstand any amount of probing" (qtd. in Walker 13). Roland Barthes discusses a similar concept in relation to Jules Verne's fiction. Barthes finds that Verne in his fiction built a self-sufficient cosmogony which has its own time, space and even an existential principle. This existential principle, according to him, is necessary for the man-child's seclusion of himself in his play world: "the man-child re-invents the world, fills it, closes it, shuts himself up in it, and crowns this encyclopedic effort with the bourgeois posture of appropriation" (Barthes 65). An ideal mythopoeia also encloses the man-child in his play world. In fact, the enthuse of the man-child, to reinvent the world and enclose himself in it, is an apt analogy that suits

the mythopoeic author. Unlike the open-ended reality we live in, a mythopoeic writer builds a closed world for himself, a Secondary World devoid of doubts that plague mankind. Tolkien describes this trait as follows: “Yes! ‘wish-fulfillment dreams’ we spin to cheat / our timid hearts and ugly Fact defeat!” (“Mythopoeia” 87). Mythopoeia thus becomes a wish-fulfillment Secondary World that the heart and mind can escape to leaving the Primary World behind. The encapsulation in a fictive time and space plugs our fear of infinite regress. A mythopoeic world succeeds in secluding and protecting man from the glitches of the real. According to Tolkien a writer may refuse to write about the world in which he/she lives, not out of cowardice, which is the usual accusation, but because to write about it is in a sense to accept it. And the very reason why the writer creates mythopoeia is to dwell in “one facet of a truth incalculably rich” (OFS 77). This immersion in a make-believe world is the major consolation that mythopoeia has to offer that no other literature can equal.

Mythopoeia is the scepter that allows man to escape from the fear of infinite regress that myth no longer provides insulation against. Myth is a myth because it has lost its credibility. Mythopoeia is made of myth fragments to redeem or restore credibility, no matter how fantastic that credibility may be. In other words, mythopoeia is a make-believe world but a credible one. It is these aspects that make **mythopoeia better than myth**. It is these markers that make **mythopoeia as appealing as mythos**. An ideal mythopoeia, ideal in the sense that it may achieve the status of mythos, can progress into mythos. The next section takes up this progression of mythopoeia. It argues that the natural progression of an ideal mythopoeia is mythos.

MYTHOPOEIA TO MYTHOS

Joseph Campbell believes that our society has outlived much of the mythology of the past. He claims that new myths must be created, and mythopoeia fills this niche for mythology in the modern world. In other words, he considers mythopoeia as a replacement for mythos. But can mythopoeia serve as mythos? We believe it can and it will.

When an author creates mythopoeia from myth, he does so because myths no longer serve their purpose. Once the mythopoeia is produced, the author and his readers can engage with it in a “willing suspension of disbelief” (Coleridge 208). If the audience or a community were to internalize the mythopoeia, the mythopoeia can transition into mythos. The extant or extinct myth may be replaced with mythopoeia or the mythopoeic version may become the accepted version. It is at this juncture that the **mythopoeia transitions into mythos**. If in the course of history this mythopoeia-turned-mythos is no longer appealing or credible, it may become myth yet again. This juncture may demand the construction of another mythopoeia. This process would recur repeatedly to

perform the same function. The attires of mythos, myth and mythopoeia may be different, but their function and dysfunction remain the same, tangents from the preceding other.

This potential transition of mythopoeia to mythos can be corroborated if we were to consider the conception of the first mythos. Armstrong contemplates that “[T]he Neanderthals who prepared their dead companion for a new life were, perhaps, engaged in the same game of spiritual make-believe that is common to all mythmakers: ‘What if this world were not all that there is?’ (9). The answer to this question may have become the mythos of the Neanderthals. The answer to the question may have been posited by some Neanderthal at some point. The answer may have been weaved like a story and internalized by the Neanderthal community. The first mythos thus had to have been made at some juncture. It had to be made by somebody, somewhere, sometime. In that inchoate state every mythos is mythopoeia. This mythopoeic mythos then evolved to such a degree that it no longer belonged to a particular source. If one were to go with this supposition and mythopoeia is placed at the head of mythos, then it would follow that mythopoeia is the inchoate form of mythmaking. Mythopoeia becomes mythos. Mythos regresses into myth. Myth fragments reform into mythopoeia. And this mythopoeia if internalized by a community may progress to mythos, making the tradition of myth making cyclical.

The cyclical nature of the mythical tradition can be substantiated with Sophia Heller’s and William Indick’s conjectures. Heller believes that when mythos becomes myth, there occurs a void in which the mythically adrift man may construct a “personal myth”: “*my* story, *my* myth, to satisfy if only for myself the need for a meaningful life in a meaningful world, irrespective of a world reality that may indicate otherwise” (65). Personal myth “perform[s] the functions of explaining, confirming, guiding, and sacralizing experience for the individual in a manner analogous to the way cultural myths once served those functions to an entire society” (66-67). Mythopoeia is nothing but one such personal myth constructed by an author.

Indick also discusses a similar concept. According to Indick an individual may construct an “individual myth” which is nothing but “an outflowing of preexisting images and ideas from the unconscious.” He posits that if this revelation of an individual is internalized by his culture it becomes a part of that culture’s myth and folklore. In other words, it becomes what he calls a “collective myth.” These dual parameters, according to Indick, are cyclical in nature. When the individual myth evolves with that culture, becoming a collective myth, it is “reborn in the dreams and imaginations of the next generation, and are transmitted from generation to generation and culture to culture in a never-ending cycle” (20). Mythopoeia is nothing but an “individual

myth" which if assimilated by a society becomes a "collective myth." Once internalized by a community it ceases to be mythopoeia. Once incorporated into a culture it becomes mythos.

Mythopoeia fulfills the function of mythos for both storyteller and his audience which is why it is invented, indulged in, and shared with. Mythopoeia arises as an authorial expression of what Indick calls "individual anxieties and psychological conflicts [that] reside in the phantasmagoric part of the psyche called the imagination." It is then expressed by the author through the gateway of imagination. This is the reason why "Jung believed [...] many artists and writers experience the art of creation as a form of catharsis rather than as a deliberate or conscious act of invention" (20). The artist does not produce mythopoeia from scratch; rather, he reproduces mythical motifs that emerge spontaneously from the recesses of his imagination. If this revelation of the individual, or mythopoeia, finds collective acceptance within that individual's culture, it becomes part of that culture's mythos. It is consumed by the children of that culture, molded by time and place, and are reborn in the dreams and imaginations of generation after generation.

Mythopoeia turned mythos in the course of time and space, may become myth. Mythos is the only blissful first half after the mythopoeic span. Mythopoeia initially being a construct of the author alone is debarred from outside interference. But once it is shared with an audience and assimilated into the real world, the boundaries of mythopoeia burgeon to include more and more partakers. Once it is appropriated into the collective psyche, it is incessantly bombarded, questioned, and refuted. It becomes a permeable system, prone to flux and open to interpretations. Just as mythos turns into myth, mythopoeia turned mythos can also regress into myth. The impasse repeats itself producing a need for a new mythopoeia once again. **This process of myth to mythopoeia to mythos and back again is a never-ending cycle.**

Every time an author dreams up new or more relevant means of expressing older ideas, mythopoeia perpetually changes yet remains essentially an extension of its precedent. Mythopoeia drives the "progression of our imagination into the future while simultaneously linking us to the distant past, retaining in [its] essence" the purpose of the "primordial human, who first journeyed into the depths of his own psyche and emerged from the abyss with the symbol of insight and wisdom that have been with us since the dawn of humankind, carried forward by his descendants in an unending chain of fantasy and imagination" (Indick 21)

This cyclical progression of mythopoeia to mythos can be further corroborated if conlang to language transition is considered. Mythos is to language what conlang is to mythopoeia. A conlang is a constructed language whose phonology, grammar and vocabulary have been consciously devised. It

is a product of singular authorial creation. It is built out of language fragments and may resemble its parent languages. It is first shared with a minute group who may partake in its creation and assimilation with limited proprietary. It may later become a communal engagement. Initially it is not susceptible to change. But once it is assimilated into the society, it evolves from being a conscious engagement to a subconscious one. It becomes subject to flux and dynamicity. In other words, it may progress into language. There are several extant conlangs today that were either produced for linguistic experimentation, for artistic creation, for language games or primarily due to necessity.

Klingon is a conlang that is widely popular. It was popularized in the *Star Trek* universe. The language was constructed in 1985 by Marc Okrent and published in the form of *The Klingon Dictionary*. The movie *Star Trek* marked the first time the language was heard on screen. Klingon was then subsequently developed by Okrent into a full-fledged language complete with grammar. The play *A Klingon Christmas Carol* was produced entirely in Klingon. Four Klingon translations of works of world literature have been published: *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *Hamlet*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Tao Te Ching*. A small number of people are capable of conversing in Klingon but according to linguist Arika Okrent, as its vocabulary is heavily centered on concepts such as spacecraft or warfare, it is cumbersome for everyday use (*In the Land of Invented Languages* 273). But some other conlangs have succeeded in transitioning as a language.

An example of a conlang turned language is Esperanto, a conlang created in the late 1870s and early 1880s by Ludwig Lazarus Zamenhof in Białystok, an earlier part of Russia. Esperanto was fashioned as a lingua franca between Russians, Poles, Germans, and Jews to facilitate communication. Today, it has an estimated two million speakers. Arika Okrent states in an interview: “But in terms of invented languages, it’s the most outlandishly successful invented language ever. It has thousands of speakers—even native speakers—and that’s a major accomplishment as compared to the 900 or so other languages that have no speakers.” Esperanto is evidence to the fact that conlangs may evolve through history and reach a point where it becomes language. This conlang-turned language in the course of appropriation, alteration and assimilation may also cease to be spoken. Its fragments may give rise to yet another conlang.

The birth, life, and death of a conlang is like that of mythopoeia. Both are authorial constructions. Both are consumed by a community. The consumers partake in this production initially with limited proprietary, but once assimilated into a culture it becomes a part of it. Conlang or mythopoeia is not at first but may later be subject to flux and dynamicity like language and mythos. They become susceptible to space and time and may become irrelevant and extinct. Its fragments may aid in another mythopoeia or conlang. Every

mythopoeia and conlang would thus have the potential to become mythos and language. This potential is ineludible like Aristotle's principle of 'entelechy' or 'actualization of potential,' the process by which an acorn insists on becoming a full-grown oak, or a child insists on becoming a mature adult.

Kenneth Burke claims that in making myths we trace the stages by which a new and perfect mythos can be generated and sustained. He believes that in making myths we mimic the first makers (Coupe 105). This will inevitably involve some hypothesis since few people can claim to have been present when the first mythos was independently invented. Nevertheless, for mythmakers, mythopoeia might offer, for the duration of the narrative, not just an effective narrative, but an approximation to the totality of mythos. It is this totality of mythos which an author attempts to achieve when making mythopoeia.

We arrive at this conjecture by understanding mythopoeia not in isolation but as a part of the larger mythical tradition. We arrive at this conjecture by not limiting our analysis to how myth determines or limits mythopoeia, but by following the natural and probable progression of mythopoeia. Often, as we saw in Armstrong, Heller, Sterenberg, Bell, Freer etc., mythopoeia does not receive its due credit amidst the larger discourses of myth. It is removed from the spotlight in favor of what Tolkien calls inheritance and diffusion. It is only when mythopoeia is perceived in the larger picture, that we can understand it as a part of the cyclical mythical tradition. Campbell's claim that that our society has outlived much of the mythology of the past and new myths must be created and mythopoeia fills this niche for mythology in the modern world ("Message of Myth"), may thus very well be true. Mythopoeia may indeed be the next generation of mythical tradition. It heralds new mythos planting new roots and perfecting old ones, the best part being that the contemporary time has the privilege of altering the mythical discourse. Mythopoeia in the mythical tradition reaffirms that man has come a full circle beginning at mythos, regressing to myth and now arriving at mythopoeia, standing yet again at the threshold of myth making.

CONCLUSION

Mythopoeia as discussed at the start is crucial to mankind. It is a game that transfigures our tragic, fragmented world, and helps us to entertain new possibilities by asking 'what if?' The ancient Egyptians who mummified their dead for the next life were, perhaps, engaged in the same game of spiritual make-believe that is common to all mythmakers:

What if this world were not all that there is? How would this affect our lives—psychologically, practically or socially? Would we become different? More complete? And, if we did find that we were so transformed, would that not show that our mythical belief was true in some way, that it was telling us something important about our humanity, even though we could not prove this rationally? (Armstrong 9)

Mythopoeia is an engaging answer to a question that serves its purpose in a particular time and space. It is like a board game that encapsulates the man-child in his make-believe world. It is one of the reasons why Johan Huizinga posits the nomenclature *Homo Ludens*, for us human beings who are unique in retaining the capacity for play (Huizinga i). Animals lose their sense of fun when they encounter the harsh realities of life in the wild. Humans, however, continue to enjoy playing with different possibilities, and, like children, go on creating imaginary worlds as a means of escape. "In art, liberated from the constraints of reason and logic, we conceive and combine new forms that enrich our lives, and which we believe tell us something important and profoundly 'true'" (Armstrong 9-10). In mythopoeia, we entertain a hypothesis, act upon it, contemplate its effect upon our lives, and discover that we have achieved new insight into the disturbing puzzle of our world.

Mythopoeia today, or mythopoeic tendencies today, can be traced in both popular and literary fiction, film and ludology. Heller states that "some of the clearest expressions of [mythopoeia] are 'found' in fantasy fiction and film, such as the recent *The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, *The Matrix*, and the comic book heroes of *X-Men*" (1). Popular fiction, film and ludology engage in mythopoeia or harbor mythopoeic tendencies at varying degrees. The concern here is not the presence of mythopoeia in artifacts of popular fiction, film and ludology. The concern here is whether popular mythopoeias can fulfill the purpose of mythos. Can a mythopoeic novel really replicate traditional myth, with its gods and goddesses? This paper established that mythopoeia has the potential to become mythos. The popular consumption of mythopoeia can serve as a feasible arena for such a possibility. But can mythopoeia in popular fiction, no matter how popular, really become mythos? Armstrong believes that such a possibility is likely. She remarks:

[M]yth could never be approached in a purely profane setting. It was only comprehensible in a liturgical context that set it apart from everyday life; it must be experienced as part of a process of personal transformation. None of this, surely, applies to the novel, which can be read anywhere at all without ritual trappings, and must, if it is any good, eschew the overtly didactic. Yet the experience of reading a novel has

certain qualities that remind us of the traditional apprehension of mythology. It can be seen as a form of meditation. Readers have to live with a novel for days or even weeks. It projects them into another world, parallel to but apart from their ordinary lives. They know perfectly well that this fictional realm is not 'real' and yet while they are reading it becomes compelling. A powerful novel becomes part of the backdrop of our lives, long after we have laid the book aside. It is an exercise of make-believe that, like yoga or a religious festival, breaks down barriers of space and time and extends our sympathies, so that we are able to empathize with other lives and sorrows. It teaches compassion, the ability to 'feel with' others. And, like mythology, an important novel is transformative. If we allow it to do so, it can change us forever. (147-8)

In other words, if it is written and read with serious attention, truly immersing oneself in what Tolkien calls a Secondary World with a Secondary Belief System, a mythopoeic novel, like a mythos, can become an initiation that helps us to make a rite of passage from one phase of life, one state of mind, to another. A mythopoeic novel, like a mythos, can teach us to see the world differently. It can show us how to look at our world from a perspective that goes beyond the familiar. This is precisely why Armstrong believes "[i]f professional religious leaders cannot instruct us in mythical lore, our artists and creative writers can perhaps step into this priestly role and bring fresh insight to our lost and damaged world" (149). Therefore mythopoeia, a potential mythos, is worthy of critical enquiry. The paper argues that the transitory nature of myth to mythopoeia to mythos makes it imperative that the genre of mythopoeia be scrutinized, and critiqued and mythopoeic fiction be examined with a yardstick of its own. This paper has been one such endeavor to identify and explore the implication of mythopoeia.

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