A Study of Adaptation of Myths and Narratives into Poems, both Lyrical and Dramatic

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy, 2019, of the Department of Comparative Literature, Faculty of Arts, Jadavpur University, Kolkata.

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Declaration

I, Nilufer Ali, hereby declare that the contents of this dissertation, ‘A Study of Adaptation of Myths and Narratives into Poems, both Lyrical and Dramatic’, has been written by me under the supervision of Professor Sucheta Bhattacharya. No part of this dissertation has been published anywhere or submitted for any other degree/diploma anywhere/elsewhere.

NILUFER ALI

Signature of the Candidate

Date: 22 - 05 - 2019

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Prof. Sucheta Bhattacharya, who helped me actualise my dissertation. Her suggestions, feedback, discussions, encouraged and inspired me to mould my dissertation accordingly.

I would like to express the deepest appreciation to my supervisor, Prof. Sucheta Bhattacharya, for she continually and convincingly conveyed a spirit of adventure in regard to research and scholarship, and an excitement in regard to teaching. Without her guidance and continuous help this dissertation would not have been possible.

In addition, a thank you to all the other Professors of, the Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University, for their continuous support towards the achievement of the degree.

I would further like to thank all the members of the library, in the Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University, for their useful suggestions and timely help.

Finally, I would like to thank all my family members for their continuous support.

Contents

Introduction

Adaptation is a part of nature and culture. Biology teaches us that organisms adapt – or do not: sociology claims that people adapt – or do not. We know that ideas can adapt; sometimes even institutions can adapt. Or not. It is no news to anyone that not only adaptations, but even 'original' art is bred of other art.

Literature, like painting, is usually thought of as what Nelson Goodman calls a one-stage art form: what we read, like what we see on the canvas, is what is put there by the originating artist. (Goodman, 1976) First, the implication is that the work is thus an original and new creation by that artist. However, even the most original of novelists – like Salman Rushdie – are the first to admit that stories get told and retold over and over. As he writes in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*: "no story comes from nowhere, new stories are born of old". (Rushdie, 1990)

When considering an adaptation of a literary work, there are other reasons why the literary source text might be privileged. Literature has historical priority as an art form, Stam claims, and so in some people's eyes will always be superior to other forms. (Stam, 2017) Like many other ages before our own, adaptation is rampant today.

Literary adaptations are their own things – inspired by, based on an adapted text but something different, something other. These works adapted from literature are now part of our readerly experience of that literature, and for that reason deserve the same attention, and not only the same attention, but also the same respect. Works of literature can have afterlives in their adaptations and translations, just as they have pre-lives, in terms of influences and models.

I am not alone in wanting to mount a defence of adaptations. Julie Sanders ends her book called, *Adaptation and Appropriation* with these words: "Adaptation and appropriation ….. are, endlessly and wonderfully, about seeing things come back to us in as many forms as possible". (Sanders, 2006) The storytelling imagination is an adaptive mechanism – whether manifesting itself in print or on stage or on screen. The study of the production of literature should, include those other forms taken by that storytelling drive.

Terry Pratchett puts it beautifully in his fantasy story, *Witches Abroad*: "Stories, great flapping ribbons of shaped space-time, have been blowing and uncoiling around the universe since the beginning of time. And they have evolved. The weakest have died and the strongest have survived and they have grown fat on the retelling". (Pratchett, 1991) In biology as in nature and culture, adaptations reign.

Classical mythology continues to fascinate us. It never seems to lose its relevance. So many poems make use of classical mythology, it's hard to choose examples. And, of course, the ancients themselves often wrote about their myths in poems. Myths often explore the relationship between the individual and the larger community. And, they are often modulated to better fit changing times.

The pivotal figures of modernism in English poetry have consistently expressed a profound fervor for the classical mythic world – a world that is deeply real and vivid to them. The appeal of the mythic world to these poets is profound and they have sought poetic inspiration from here. Naturally, the subject of myths is predominantly present in the poetry of the modernists.

Myths and fantasies are dearest to the poets, especially to the ones of the school of Modernism. W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden or some of the others are no exception to it. The modernists have, among other things, lost the sense of possession. They have lost all meaning in life. Futility, emptiness and nothingness can best describe their poetical world. They have been uprooted from their culture and tradition. But, life, if it is to be lived, can never rest on nothing. Really, culture and tradition make human life worth living and myth is one of the dominant manifestations of culture.

The Modernist Movement in literature saw western writers and artists working upon mythical material and tapping on the mythical dimensions of life. The use of myths has been a constant feature of literature in general but, in Modernist literature there is a new dynamics and a new urgency in the use and adaptation of myths.

Modernist authors found their literary pursuit a challenging task as the new century wore on, ravaging lives through two world conflagrations. In an attempt to make poetry possible in this new world, they often turned to mythical materials and created their own private myths. Rather than finding poetry in crisis because of the decline in religious faith and human values, we find a 'desire' for poetry uttered and transmuted by the works of poets such as W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot, as well as the other such poets. The manifestation of this desire in modernist poetry creates the condition of poetry both within the poem and for times looked forward to. Their poems do not display mythical structures but fluid and vivid frameworks that can be interacted with and reinvented by the future readers.

In this way, Modernist writers and poets were able to extend the applicability of myths beyond the orthodox associations in literature. In response to the crisis faced by art and faith alike in the post-World War 1 era, poetry found new use in myths and the mythical mode of narration.

Bearing in mind, the purpose of this research, Chapter One-*Literary Adaptation: Mythology and its Use in Literature with Special Reference to Poetry*; speaks of the definition and the creative process of adaptation, how adaptations can and have taken place from one genre to the others as well as into the same genres, for different purposes. It also reveals the world of mythology including mythologies from various cultures around the world. Further it mentions the adaptations made from various mythological cultures into the genre of poetry.

Chapter Two-*Myth and Poetry in Twentieth Century*; points out the different works created by the modernist and the postmodernist poets, what has led them to choose these ancients myths for retelling again and again, what kind of myths were selected for the creation of their masterpieces. It also includes appreciation and criticism of these works, by different analysts and critics.

Chapter Three-*An Analysis of Some Myth Inspired Poems by Modernist and Postmodernist Poets*; actually moves on to analyse five poems adapted from different mythological cultures, by the modernist and postmodernist poets. It also examines the relevance of these myths existing in our society, nature and culture till date, what has kept these stories alive and going through ages, and why do they exist even today.

Chapter – One

Literary Adaptation: Mythology and its use in Literature with Special Reference to Poetry

Read – Understand – Extract – Create; this process provides a new dimension to any kind of work in literature. This process can also be termed as adaptation. As one reads works from various genres, one tries to understand the writer's point of view. Further, reading of various literary texts helps us to develop new perspectives. Even old perspectives can be viewed from a different standpoint. These perspectives allow us to think and broaden our horizon of understanding. Then we try to extract it out, and often we rewrite it with the addition of our own perspectives using our creativity, which is controlled by our social, economic, political circumstances and the result leads to a new creation in the same or a different genre. This new creation is referred to an adapted version.

The term 'adaptation' owes its origin to early Latin – 'adaptare', late Latin – 'adaptationem' or 'adaptatio' and French – 'adaptation'; meaning "condition of being adapted, state of being fitted to circumstances or relations" is from 1670s. Sense of "modification of a thing to suit new conditions" is from 1790. Biological sense "variations in a living thing to suit changed conditions" first recorded 1859 in Darwin's writings.

In the biological term, adaptation refers to the state or process of changing to suit a new situation. Therefore literary adaptation is the adapting of a literary text, for instance; a novel, a short story or a poem – to another genre or medium, let us say; a film, a stage play or a video game. It can also include adapting the same genre or medium, basically for different purposes.

Narratives allow for the sharing of ideas and the teaching of ideals across cultures. Common themes can be communicated to a number of audiences through cultural traditions that both tell – through novels, books, radio, human values and show – through theatre, film, television. Many of these stories and lessons have been told and told again, yet they continue to find a place in our cultural landscape. This occurs through the unique process of adaptation.

Adaptation is not at all a new practice; authors, playwrights, directors, composers, choreographers, and designers have been adapting materials since the beginning of civilisations. But this does not mean considering this practice in our own and current culture would not reveal new information. Perhaps one of the biggest questions surrounding adaptations is how does an adaptation become topical in contemporary circumstances? Can there be literary sources which cannot be adapted and how can we decide this?

All media have an underlying commonality with respect to their role in the process of adaptation, and all genres reveal information about how adaptation functions. Adaptive expectations are met because each genre has a set of conventions that make it unique. Each genre therefore deals in different ways with artistic devices such as points of view, time and tense, ambiguity, irony, symbols and silence.

As a product, an adaptation cannot remain entirely faithful to its original, an adaptation differs enough from the original text while maintaining a recognisable link with the original text. Adaptations can be compared to language, just in the way translations can never be literal because they are taken out of the content of their original language and therefore the primary source is seen as having authority and authenticity. Adaptation as a process becomes an act of appropriating and salvaging while trying to give new meaning to a text. Therefore, new perspectives give adaptation its value. Adaptations are intertextual and become part of the public history of a story. As a result, all previous adaptations become part of our understanding of all later adaptations. (Sanders, 2006)

Another important area of concern would include who adapts, why they do so, and how audiences receive adaptations. The reasons behind why we create adaptations are diverse and can include economics, the building of culture, personal interests, homage, sheer entertainment and social commentary. Reasons for creating art are almost as important as art itself. The relative importance of the context of adaptation in terms of time, space, place, gender, politics, race and culture are equally important.

A text cannot only survive the shift from one form to another, but it can also thrive in ways not previously possible. Of course, just as countless biological organisms have failed to adapt to changes in their environment, a text can also fail to survive when attempts are made to adapt it to a new form. This is often the case when an adaptation does not live up to audience expectations regarding different reasons.

There is a long history of adaptation of texts into different forms. Historical events and spoken legends had been the inspiration for paintings and sculptures, plays, written tales, stained glass windows, poems, and later, stories in the form of novels. However, recent trends in adaptation theory have moved away from the dichotomy of film and literature and toward a focus on multidirectional flows across a trans media model, concentrating less on what has been lost by a text during the process of adaptation, and more on what the text has gained by taking on a new form or variation. Theories of intertextuality have also become a central element of adaptation theory, as the user compares the adapted text with not only the original, but other adaptations and similar texts in an ongoing dialogical process. (Oliete, 2015)

When a content undergoes adaptation, it is subject to a variety of forces and factors, which are dictated by the nature of the source text, the reason for adapting the text, medium, market, and culture into which it is adapted. Like biological organisms, some texts need to change their characteristics in order to survive in a new environment. Also just as organisms thrive in their new environment, successful adaptations change over time, adapting to new conditions, migrating to new areas, and ultimately, doing their best to perpetuate their existence.

One of the tools used in translation is adaptation. It is used in many cases, as cultural differences between different speakers can cause confusion that can sometimes be tricky to understand or can simply prevent us from understanding each other. Adaptation is not to be confused with localisation, however, which is used when the target audience speaks a different variant of the same language, such as in the case of Latin America. When adapting a message, we are not translating it literally. This does not mean, however, that when adapting a message or idea we are being unfaithful to the original message, or that we are not doing our job well. Simply there are situations in which it is required. British scholar Peter Newmark defines adaptation, taken from Vinay and Darbelnet, as, the use of a recognised equivalent between two situations. It is a process of cultural equivalence. (Newmark, 1981)

Adaptations also known as free translations are when the translator substitutes cultural realities or scenarios for which there is no reference in the target language. Adaptations are equivalents, and can be seen more clearly in the translations of television shows or movies, where conversations or cultural references must be adapted for foreign audiences.

When comparing translation and adaptation, we are comparing two ways of communicating a message. In many cases it is impossible to translate a text without making an adaptation, as a literal translation of the message would cause a loss of all or part of the meaning for the target

audience. It is important to know when to adapt a message when an expression might have a more appropriate equivalent for a given situation.

Translation is the process of converting words or text from one language into another; in other words, a translation is a process of using the exact equivalent word in another language. An adaptation is the action or process of adapting or being adapted. In other words, it is a change or the process of change by which element finds a way to suit to its target environment. Hence, adaptation proposes solutions to reinforce the essence while communicating in another language.

For instance, Shakespeare's famous play – *Romeo and Juliet* has been translated into various languages, such as French – *Romeo et Juliette*; in simplified Chinese or Spanish – *Romeo y Julieta*. The story, the characters and the setting are exactly the same in every language. However, the Shakespearean story has been adapted into various versions, such as the American movies *West Side Story* (1957) and *Titanic* (1997), where the essence of unconditional-love-despite-family-feud is kept but the cultural setting, characters and plots are varied to suit and emotionally touch the contemporary English American audience's.

Translation allows communication in other languages and takes account of the textual context by choosing the right word in case of homonymous words or ambiguous phrases. Adaptation preserves or even improves the quality of the text in the target language as it goes beyond the context of the text; it focuses on how the audience will read and what will the audience want to read. (Gentzler, 1993)

Translation aims at communicating and informing conveniently the audience in another language, whereas adaptation serves to communicate and inform strategically the audience by taking into account of their minding, behaviour and their preferences. An adapted text can be phrased differently from its original version, since each word is strategically thought through and researched in order to create an effect on the reader. (Gentzler, 1993)

If one's goal is to get the message out quickly and to inform without necessarily engaging the audience, translation is the efficient means of communication. However, if our purpose is to engage our audience, our message should be effective containing a strategy. Effectiveness is not only assessed on the ease of understanding the message, but also on the impact following reading the text.

Ancient stories are often deceptively simple, giving modern writers the option to interpret events, characters and themes every which way: symbolisation and metaphorisation being two of the most obvious routes that spring to the mind, and this in turn, leads to the adaptation of myths into modern literary writings. Like other retellings and reinterpretations, books that use Greek myths as their inspiration take an old and familiar story and change it into something new, something new, exciting, and never before conceptualised. In recreating a familiar tale we uncover unexpected details that can change the story entirely. What can be more exciting than reading *The Penelopiad* (2005) by Margaret Atwood which retells the myth of Penelope and Odysseus or *Oh My Gods* by Philip Freeman which is a modern retelling of Greek and Roman myths.

Mythology (from the Greek mythos for story-of-the-people, and logos for word or speech, so the spoken story of people) is the study and interpretation of often sacred tales or fables of a culture known as myths or the collection of such stories which deal with various aspects of the

human condition: good and evil; the meaning of suffering; human origins; the origin of place-manes, animals, cultural values, and traditions; the meaning of life and death; the afterlife; and the gods or a god. Myths express the beliefs and values about these subjects held by a certain culture.

Myths tell the stories of ancestors and the origin of humans and the world, the gods, supernatural beings (satyrs, nymphs, mermaids) and heroes with super-human, usually god-given powers; as in the case of Heracles or Perseus of the Greeks). Myths also describe origins or nuances of long-held customs or explain natural events such as the sunrise and sunset, the cycle of the moon and the seasons, or thunder and lightning storms.

Scholars such as Maria Leach and Jerome Fried define mythology along these lines:

A myth is a story, presented as having actually occurred in a previous age, explaining the cosmological and supernatural traditions of people, their gods, heroes, cultural traits, religious beliefs, and other such elements. (Leach and Fried, 1984) The purpose of myth is to explain, and, as Sir G.L. Gomme said, myths explain matters in "the science of a pre-scientific age". Thus myths tell of the creation of man, of animals, of landmarks; they tell why a certain animal has its characteristics, for example, why the bat is blind or flies only at night: why or how certain natural phenomena came to be, for example, why the rainbow appears or how the constellation Orion got into the sky; how and why rituals and ceremonies began and why they continue. (Gomme, 1908)

Myth as the source of artistic representations, emerge from ancient cultural practices, and can be understood as poetic modes of understanding and representation. A myth is a fiction with a simple, often non-linear, narrative that tells a story about human behaviour, the origins of the universe, natural phenomena, the relationship between culture and nature, the physical and the metaphysical. It makes use of symbols and archetypes, especially for characterisation; gods and humans often consort with each other, mingling their identities. Divine or semi-divine births support dynastic myths, such as the house of Atreus in Greek and Roman mythology. Seneca's Medea claims her birth right as granddaughter of the sun. Mythic histories make claim about lineage and establish national and ethnic identities by telling stories of war and conquest, or the founding of the city-state, as in for example Aeschylus's Oresteia.

Greek dramatists drew on myths for their subject matter, adding plot and characterisation. But myth and drama are also related closely in terms of religious ritual and public performance. The earliest Greek drama developed from religious festivals. The chorus performed a dithyrambic hymn in praise of Dionysius, the god presiding over revels and festivals, the lord of the dance. Dramatization occurs when the protagonist separates from the chorus, speaking as a single voice. In tragedy the protagonist's voice and presence indicates his estrangement from society and nature; the audience recognises the mythic patterns of destiny and suffering, and how these might be resolved. Sometimes dramatic conflict arises from equally justified moral imperatives as in Sophocles' *Antigone*, in which the protagonist refuses to privilege the demands of the state over duties to the gods of the underworld, thereby condemning herself knowingly and willingly to death. Greek fertility rights and satyr plays gave rise to comedy, while the ancient agrarian rites celebrated at Eleusis suggest another, occult source of mythic drama.

In the early middle ages, western drama developed out of liturgical practices. For example antiphonal tropes sung for holy week and Easter services. However, we might use the term 'mythic drama' for the popular mystery plays based on the Corpus Christi Cycle of the fourteenth to the sixteenth century. The plays' version of sacred history drew on Gospel narratives, Biblical creation myths and the liturgical calendar. English Cycles include the Wakefield, York, Coventry and N-Town Cycles. Characterisation tends to be realistic and representative of all social classes, such as the thieving Mak from the *Wakefield Second Shepherd's Play*, but characters such as Adam in the *Creation and Fall of the Angels* also point to symbolic archetypes.

Modern writers returned to mythic themes. Playwrights such as J.M.Synge and Sean O'Casey found in Irish myth and history a means of exploring and constructing national and ethnic identity, along with a powerful political critique and a protest against British hegemony. Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows,* for example, relocates the tragic myth of *The Exile of the Sons of Ulisliu* in contemporary Ulster. Jean Anouilh's daring adaptations of Sophoclean drama, *Antigone* and dramatisations of Greek myth, Eurydice, attacked French collaboration with Nazi Germany. More recently, Timberlake Wertenbaker has explored issues of gender and violence through mythic dramas like *The Love of the Nightingale*, based on the story of Philomene and king Tereus from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

Greek theatre is still one of the most important and long-lasting theatrical influences in the world, dating from around 700 BC and with some Greek plays still being performed to this day. Theatre became significant to general Greek culture when it became an integral part of a festival honouring the god Dionysus. The Greek empire was far reaching, and as a result, theatre was spread throughout much of the world, along with the mythological tales that many plays were based upon.

The three major genres of ancient Greek theatre were comedy, tragedy and satyr plays, and a large amount of the material contained within was based upon Greek myths, familiar tales to theatrical audiences. While comedies and tragedies continue to this day to be important not only in theatre but in culture as a whole, satyr plays, which were similar to burlesque shows with their sexual humour and playfulness, largely died out.

The origins of Greek tragedy began around 532 BC in Athens. During this time, a theatre festival called Dionysia was founded to bring unity among the Attican tribes. The event included a contest, and people competing to present the best performance included Thespis, Choerilus, Pratinas and Phrynichus, who each left a specific legacy in drama. For instance, Phrynichus was the first poet to use a historical figure as a subject of his work.

Comedy plays were typically used to mock the men in power, making fun of them for their foolish decisions or their vanity. This style of comedy has continued to this day remarkably similar to its original form. Aristophanes was the first great writer of comedic plays, including plays that are still studied to this day, such as, The Birds and The Clouds.

The three best writers of ancient Greek tragedy were undoubtedly Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. These three writers wrote about some of the great motifs of their time and ours, including pride, love, power, greed, and loss, all of which are prominent themes in the ancient Greek mythology upon which many of their plays were based. Some of the great tragedies ever written, in ancient Greece or otherwise, were written during this time and by these three writers,

including Aeschylus' trilogy The Oresteia, Sophocles' Oedipus the King, and Euripides' Electra.

According to Psychiatrist Carl Jung, myth is a necessary aspect of the human psyche which needs to find meaning and order in the world, which often presents itself as chaotic and meaningless. (Jung, 1957)

Mythology has played an integral part in every civilisation throughout the world. Pre-historic cave paintings, etchings in stone, tombs, and monuments, all suggest that, long before human beings set down their myths in words, they had already developed a belief structure corresponding to the definition of myth.

The infinite Jung references to the numinous quality of the mysterious, holy, and powerful which provides the underlying allure of mythological tales and themes because it gives a final meaning to human existence.

What one calls mythology in the present day, it should be remembered, was the religion of the ancient past. The stories which make up the corpus of ancient mythology served the same purpose for the people of the time as the stories from accepted scripture do for people today: they explained, comforted, and directed an audience and further provided a sense of unity, cohesion and protection to a community of like-minded believers.

There are many different types of myth but, essentially, they can be grouped into three:

Etiological myths explain why a certain thing is the way it is or how it came to be. For example, in Egyptian mythology the sycamore tree looks the way it does because it is home to the goddess Hathor, the lady of the Sycamore. Etiological myths can offer explanations for why the world is the way it is – as in the story from Greek mythology of Pandora's Box which explains how evil and suffering was released into the world.

Historical myths retell an event from the past but elevate it with greater meaning than the actual event. One example of this is the story of the battle of Kurukshetra as described in the Indian Epic *Mahabharata* in which the Pandava brothers symbolise different values and provide role models, even if they are occasionally flawed. Kurukshetra is then presented in microcosm in the Bhagavad Gita where one of the Pandavas, Arjuna, is visited on the battlefield by the god Krishna, avatar of Vishnu, to explain one's purpose of life. Whether the battle of Kurukshetra ever took place is immaterial to the power of these two stories on a mythological level. The same can be said for the Siege of Troy and its fall as described in Homer's *Iliad or Odysseus'* journey home in the Odyssey or Aeneas' adventures in the works of Virgil.

Psychological myths present one with a journey from the known to the unknown. Probably the best known myth of this type is that of Oedipus the prince who, seeking to avoid the prediction that he would grow up to kill his father, leaves his life behind to travel to another region where he unknowingly winds up killing the man who was his actual father who had abandoned him at birth in an attempt to circumvent that same prediction.

To the ancients the meaning of the story was most important, not the literal truth of the details of a certain version of a tale. One of the best known etiological myths comes from Greece in the form of the tale of Demeter, goddess of grain and the harvest, and her daughter Persephone who became queen of the dead. In this story, Persephone is kidnapped by Hades, god of the underworld, and brought down to his dark realm. Demeter searches desperately everywhere for

the maiden but cannot find her. During this time of Demeter's sorrow, the crops fail and people starve and the gods are not given their due. Zeus, king of the gods, orders Hades to restore Persephone to her mother and Hades obliges but, because Persephone has eaten a certain number of pomegranate seeds while in the underworld, she has to spend half the year below the earth but could enjoy the other half with her mother in the world above.

This story explained the changes of the seasons in Greece. When it was warm and the fields were bountiful, Persephone was with her mother and Demeter was happy and causes the world to bloom; in the cold and rainy season, when Persephone was below the earth with Hades as his queen, Demeter mourned and the land was barren. Since, in the course of the tale, Demeter teaches the people of Eleusis the secrets of agriculture, the myth would also serve to explain how people first learned to cultivate the earth and, further, as she also teaches them the correct way of recognising and worshipping her, proper veneration of the gods.

The most famous historical myth in the west is Homer's epic 8th century BCE tale of the *Iliad* which tells the story of the siege and fall of the city of Troy. Helen, the wife of the Achaean king Menelaus, runs off with the Trojan prince Paris and Menelaus, swearing to bring her back home, enlists the aid of his brother Agamemnon who then calls on the kings and princes of the various city-states for aid and they sail off to attack Troy. The great Achaean hero, Achilles, who is invincible in battle, feels insulted by Agamemnon and refuses to fight any longer resulting in the death of his beloved Patroclus and many others of the Achaean host. Although there are many different stories told in the *Iliad*, this central theme of the dangers of pride is emphasized as a cultural value. A certain amount of pride in one's self was considered a virtue but too much brought disaster.

There are actually many different types of myth. In fact, there are several entire theories of myth. The theoretical study of myth is very complex. Aetiological myths explain the reason why something is the way it is today. They are explanations that have meaning for us as human beings. A natural aetiological myth explains an aspect of nature. An etymological aetiological myth explains the origin of a word. A religious aetiological myth explains the origin of a religious ritual.

Historical myths are told about a historical event, and they help keep the memory of that event alive. Ironically, in historical myths, the accuracy is lost but meaning is gained. The myths about the Trojan War, including the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, could be classified as historical myths. Psychological myths try to explain why we feel and act the way we do. In psychological myth, the emotion itself is seen as a divine force, coming from the outside that can directly influence a person's emotions.

We also have myths belonging to different cultures like – Egyptian Mythology, Greek Mythology, Irish Mythology, Japanese Mythology, Chinese, Mayan, Mesopotamian, Indian Mythology, Norse Mythology, Roman and Scottish Mythology, to name some of them. Every culture has their own stories, handed over through generations, orally or in some form of writing.

Although there are different kinds of mythology belonging to various cultures; keeping in mind the purpose of this research, we will look into the Historical Myths and the Psychological Myths, borrowed from the cultures of Greece, India, Ireland, Canada; and how they have been adapted from myths and narratives into poems, both lyrical and dramatic kinds.

“Myth has two main functions,” The poet and scholar Robert Graves wrote in 1955. “The first is to answer the sort of awkward questions that children ask, such as ‘Who made the world? How will it end? Who was the first man? Where do souls go after death?’ ….. The second function of myth is to justify an existing social system and account for traditional rites and customs.” (Enotes, DOA 23 / 03 / 2019)

People still read myths and legends today because they often convey timeless and universal themes, which are relevant both in the art of storytelling and in portraying the human experience. Myths and legends also give insight into the values and perspectives of long gone cultures. Their stories offer clues to how these people lived and what kind of societies they inhabited. For this reason, myths and legends can also show what was different about human life when these stories originated and what has stayed the same.

In China, this theme was explored in another way through the tale of Fuxi, the god of fire. As a god, Fuxi had many responsibilities but when his friend, the goddess Nuwa, asked for his help, he did not refuse. Nuwa had created human beings but found they did not know how to do anything and she did not have the patience to teach them. Fuxi brought humans fire, taught them to control it, and how to use it to cook food and warm themselves. He then taught them how to weave fishing nets and draw food from the sea and, afterwards, gave them the arts of divination, music, and writing. Fuxi is thought to be based on an actual historical king who possibly provided the order necessary for the rise of the Xia Dynasty, the first historical dynasty in China. In this story, Fuxi sets aside his pride as a god and humbles himself to the service of his friend Nuwa and humanity as well.

The oldest myth in the world is, not surprisingly, a psychological myth relating to the inevitability of death and individual’s attempt to find meaning in life. The Epic of Gilgamesh developed in Mesopotamia from Sumerian poems relating to the historical Gilgamesh, king of Uruk, who was later elevated to the status of a demi-god. In the story, Gilgamesh is a proud king who is so haughty that the gods feel he needs a lesson in humility. They groom the wild man Enkidu as a worthy opponent to the king and the two fight but, when neither can get the best of the other, they become best friends. Enkidu is later killed by the gods for affronting them and Gilgamesh, grief-stricken, embarks on a quest for the meaning of life embodied in the concept of immortality. Although he fails to win eternal life, his journey enriched him and he returns to his kingdom as a wiser and better man and king.

Scholars often describe the philosopher Mircea Eliade as the most influential historian of religion and the world’s foremost interpreter of symbols and myths, and the claim has been borne out even today. As a historian of religion, Eliade believed that any historical study implies certain familiarity with universal history. He pointed out that historical study of religions illustrates the continuous emergences, changes and modification of the ideas of the sacred and how the sacred objects, myths and rituals grow up. Eliade believed that myths are very important religious phenomenon and they represent some kind of human behaviour. The historical study of the developments of myths of different periods or societies gives us knowledge about the culture, tradition and religious life of that period or society.

According to Eliade, myths narrate a sacred history – they are the expressions of the sacred in words in the form of narratives. Eliade insisted that a new theoretical approach, new hermeneutics is necessary to interpret the meaning of myths and other religious phenomenon. He claimed that by using an empirical approach for analysing myths, it’s possible to recognise

the historical nature of the mythic data. He criticised the reductionist approach to myths and gave his alternative methodological view of anti-reductionism in terms of the irreducibility of the sacred. Thus, his history of religion as a methodology has an anti-reductionist orientation to interpret and analyse the significance of myths in socio-religious culture.

Eliade maintained that homo religious represents the total man. Therefore the science of religion must become a total discipline in the sense that it must use, integrate and articulate the results of various methods of approaching religious phenomenon. Eliade believed that to understand and grasp the meaning of any religious phenomenon is necessary to study their history. The history not only unravels its changes and modifications but also helps to elucidate the contributions of the religious phenomenon to the entire culture where it exists. Eliade claimed to have adopted a non-reductionist or anti-reductionist method for the interpretation of myths. Thus, in spite of appreciating and even supporting many of the traditional mythic worldviews, he claimed that his anti-reductionist approach to analyse myths to be more advanced than that of earlier interpretations. He advised to avoid the methodological pitfalls of the past theories and in the process offered a new and more adequate interpretation of the meaning of myths.

Eliade's anti-reductionist method for the interpretation of myths can be considered valuable to understand Indian mythology, which is one of the richest elements of Indian culture, which enriches it further and makes it a unique one in the world. Through generations, different stories in Indian mythology have been passed from generation to generation either by word of mouth or through carefully stored scriptures. These stories, which form the backbone of Indian mythology, are great medium for people especially parents to inculcate interest in Indian culture in the younger generation and to impart values of Indian culture to them. The interesting aspect of these stories is that, they are usually meant to convey subtle facts, rules and maxims to guide our daily lives. Naturally story-telling is the best medium for conveying even powerful messages. (Eliade, 1956)

The Hindu religion is the oldest religion whose origin can be traced back to the prehistoric times. So much of the interesting myths, beliefs and mythologies surrounding the religion are as old. Many of these mythologies might have gone through a number of retelling at different ages. The Hindu mythology has rich history, enigmatic characters, resounding stories and a surprisingly innate association with modern science.

The Hindu mythology clearly states four different epochs or 'Yugas'. The Satya Yuga is said to be the golden age of truth and enlightenment, everyone led an honest life and completely adhered to truth. Then by the advent of the Treta Yuga, the presence of goodness in human nature had slowly started to diminish. Next Dwapar Yuga or the Bronze Age, represents an age where the goodness and evil in human nature are neck in neck. The man had already lost control over his innermost body and knowledge. The current time period falls under Kali Yuga or the Iron Age, which witnesses' hypocrisy and instability like never before. Human nature is significantly corrupted by the temptations of sin and only a fickle of conscience remains.

There were many instances where some unique curses worth mentioning have been given in Hindu mythology. In the epic of the *Mahabharata*, the Pandavas were hit by immense sorrow on realising Karna was their half-brother all along. They had only just killed him in the battle. An enraged Yudhisthara could not believe their mother Kunti would keep such personal

information from them. So, he cursed that no woman then on, shall be able to keep any secrets from others.

The Hindu epics were written to create moral and upright ideals for followers to look up to. These epics were written in Sanskrit and in their essence described the power of Hindu gods in poetic verses. The most popular among these poetic epics are the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The *Ramayana* is a magnificent narration of the story of Rama. It chronicles the life of Rama from his birth in the kingdom of Ayodhya to his decisive victory over the evil nemesis Ravana. The epic speaks volumes on the virtue of true brotherhood, love and the essence of sacrifices one has to make to defeat the ultimate evil.

The *Mahabharata* is the longest epic ever written and gives an in-depth insight on the rise of Hinduism. In fact its entire narration is seven times the length of the *Iliad* and the *Odessey* combined. Apart from its glorious narration of tussle between the Kauravas and Pandavas, it also details the scripts of Bhagawat Gita. It is a recital from origin to end of a great battle that pits brothers against brothers. In time, the Bhagawat Gita went on to become the epitome of Hinduism's sacred scripture.

Hinduism follows a polytheistic tradition. The Hindus worship multiple deities, and these gods and goddesses usually belong to a certain pantheon of divinities. Each of these gods and goddesses symbolise a certain aspect of life, for example, Goddess Saraswati is the source of all knowledge and wisdom. The divine trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva is seen as a base of entire Hindu mythology.

Indian mythology also contains a vast and ancient array of tales, which are stimulating, entertaining and have a moral lesson behind them. We have all read about Eklavya who could not become the best archer in the world because he gave his right thumb as gurudakshina to Dronacharya without a second thought. From his act we learn about hard work, respect and dedication, especially for our teachers and instructors. From the story of Surdas, one of the greatest devotees of Lord Krishna, we learn how to love unconditionally and exhibit devotion towards those things that we care about. Abhimanyu was one of the greatest warriors in the Kurukshetra war. His sacrifice will teach you about loyalty to family, bravery, dignity and love. Durga shows little boys and girls that women too possess great courage, strength and righteousness. The story of Sita explains, even in the face of such adversity, women can still be strong, brave and independent. Shravana is the embodiment of kindness and loyalty. He teaches us the virtues of compassion and taking care of our parents.

Indian mythological stories are an intricate tapestry with interwoven threads of politics, morality, philosophy, parenting, love, war and religion.

Celtic scholars, when they talk of the mythological roots, refer to the earlier pantheon of gods and goddesses that many of the characters are derived from. But we can expand on this meaning by also adding that a myth is a way of communicating that implies a particular ideology or ethos. In that sense the term myth can be used to describe much more than just traditional tales about gods or human origins. We find myths in modern books like *The Lord of The Rings*, in films like *Star Wars* and *Batman*; we find them in modern art, television advertisements and magazines, in literature as usual. In fact anything within a culture – story, poem, film, object or person, can become the vehicle of myth.

As Roland Barthes said, myth is, in its most basic form, a special type of speech. What he meant was that a myth isn't just a genre of stories, it's a way of saying something. According to Barthes, the special trick of myth is to present an ethos, ideology or set of values as if it were a natural condition of the world, when in fact it is no more than another limited, man-made perspective. A myth doesn't describe the natural state of the world, but expresses the intentions of its teller, be that a storyteller, a poet, priest, artist, journalist, filmmaker, designer or politician. (Barthes, 1972)

We shouldn't forget that like any word in a language, the definition of myth evolves. Whereas we often relegate myth to the same category as children's stories, Barthes argued that myth, or the mythological way of communicating, permeates much of what we could consider to be culture, mass media, advertising and entertainment. What this modern definition has in common with the old definition is that both place belief at the heart of what myth is. But whereas the old definition of myth generally referred to gods or tales of human origins as the focus of belief, the new definition includes any cultural activity that implies an ethos or ideology as the focus of belief, be that secular or religious. If a myth is to be effective it must be believed in by its audience.

This also means that the same myth can be expressed through many different mediums. For example Jesus' life, death and resurrection is a narrative that dominated European culture for a long time. Implied in that narrative is the myth of the saviour and those he saves as well as the idea of good and evil that's tied up in that relationship. For Christians this myth is believed to be the natural condition of the world, something they take for granted in their everyday lives. Over the millennia, this myth has been expressed through many different mediums: rituals, ceremonies, paintings, poems, drama, and oral texts such as prayers and music such as hymns, symphonies and folk songs. The basic myth of the saviour is expressed in all of these many derived practices and works of art. It has become the centre around which all of these unique expressions are positioned.

A related example is how early Christian leaders explored another aspect of the myth of sin and redemption through a different narrative, that of Adam and Eve. For early Christians such as St. Augustine, the story of Adam and Eve explained how humanity became sinful and why it needed a redeemer such as Jesus. For many Christians the doctrine of original sin is a natural condition of the world humans are part of, an ethos that's presented mythologically in many related works of art such as medieval paintings of Adam and Eve, or the Poem Paradise Lost by John Milton. (Britannica, DOA 27 / 04 / 2019)

As we can see, a myth can sit at the heart of a culture for very long periods of time, becoming a reference point for morality, philosophy, spirituality and art. Another example of this is the Taliesin myth that almost certainly began as a legend about the historic Taliesin who lived in the 6th century. For over 1500 years now the Welsh bards and poets have considered him one of the most famous founders of the Welsh tradition. As part of their public performances and rituals, medieval Welsh bards would adopt the dramatic persona of the perfected bard, an echo of the mythical Taliesin. Perhaps as early as the 12th century his tale was being adapted through many lineages of the oral tradition, with variations of it migrating throughout Wales. His fame and popularity gradually grew until by the 16th century Taliesin had evolved into a central symbol of Welsh mythology. (Britannica, DOA 27 / 04 / 2019)

Different tellers of a myth, be they renowned bards, musical poets, literate monks, advertising agencies, modern druids or academics, will use popular figure such as Taliesin to further their own particular ideology or ethos. The same myth can be told or evoked in many different ways, but almost always for the same reason, to promote the myth-maker's own position. All these are ways of indirectly implying a set of values that are to be taken for granted and are therefore mythological ways of communicating.

Differing from the Saussurean view that the connection between the signifier and signified is arbitrary, Barthes argued that this connection, which is an act of signification, is the result of collective contract, and over a period of time, the connection becomes naturalised. As stated in his book, *Mythologies* (1957), Barthes considers myth as a mode of signification, a language that takes over reality. The structure of myth repeats the tridimensional pattern, in that myth is a second order signifying system with the sign of the first order signifying system as its signifier.

Myth is a type of speech defined more by its intention than its literal sense. Myth also has the character of making itself look neutral and innocent – it naturalises the concept and transforms history into nature. It deforms and dehistoricises the original connection between the signifier and the signified. The function of myth is to empty reality, to establish a world without depth and to naturalise history.

Sigmund Freud on the other hand, viewed primitive religious figures as the manifestation of human's hidden desires, seeing all religions as a mass delusion or a paranoid wish-fulfilment. He sought to discover the universal truths of human nature that were enshrined in the figures themselves. One mythological character dominated this thought above all others-Oedipus. According to ancient Greek legend, Oedipus dared to answer the riddle of the Sphinx, half-woman and half-lion that terrorised the city of Thebes. From a young age, Freud imagined himself as bold Oedipus skillfully solving the riddles of the human mind.

But Oedipus later suffered at the hands of fate. He had inadvertently killed his own father and married his own mother, who he did not recognise. While writing The Interpretation of Dreams, Freud started putting together the rudiments of what one day would be called the Oedipus complex. The theory would become a cornerstone of his thinking, critical to the formation of character and personality in everyone. Hidden with the myth of Oedipus, was the universal truth of human desire. Freud drew inspiration from the totems of human desire that crowded in around him. He methodically sought to liberate humanity from the trappings of religion personified in these objects.

In his *The Structural Study of Myth*, anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss argues that myth is like language. One might suppose that myth is a subdivision of language, but according to Levi-Strauss myth has its own characteristics which distinguish it from its language and which make myth a language in itself. This special attribute of myth is revealed according to Levi-Strauss in the attempt to translate a mythical narrative from one language to another. Unlike other form of language, and especially poetry, which lose a lot in translation, myth retains its capacities even when poorly translated. (Levi-Strauss, 1955)

According to Levi-Strauss, this is due to the nature of the structural components which make up a myth which are irreducible and recurrent across myths. These structural components of myths, which Levi-Strauss terms "mythemes" are not important in themselves and have no

intrinsic value but rather, much like the nature of the sign according to de-Saussure, depend on their structural alignment in order to gain meaning. Every mytheme receives its meaning from its position in the myth and its relations with other mythemes. (Levi-Strauss, 1955)

In *The Structural Study of Myth*, Levi-Strauss is curious how different mythemes group together and reproduced as an underlying structure of myth. The method Levi-Strauss suggests for the study of myth is supposed to address exactly this concern. According to Levi-Strauss, a myth should be analysed into its mythemes which are subsequently classified and visually sorted in columns. The horizontal axis of the mythemes chart represents diachronical development in the myth. The vertical column represents variations on the same subject. Thus a map of relations between mythemes is received which enables the anthropologist to see both temporal and thematic relations. Only is reading the myth with both these aspects taken together into account can the meaning of the myth be deciphered. (Levi-Strauss, 1955)

Storyteller and mythology expert Devdutt Pattanaik explains why children and adults need to understand their local mythology to understand their life course better. According to him, mythology tells people how they should see the world. For example, Islamic mythology speaks of how one God created the world and laid down rules of good conduct while Jain mythology speaks of how the world has no creator and that it goes through cycles of degeneration and regeneration. There is no one mythology for the world today or for the future. Different people will have their own mythology, reframing old ones or creating new ones.

Further he explains that, understanding mythology has nothing to do with age. It is part of human beings. Unlike plants and animals, humans seek meaning, purpose and value in life. This comes to us only from stories. Science cannot do that. Logic cannot do that. We need to feel we matter. Concepts like nation, patriotism, divinity, liberation, salvation, achievement, heaven, hell, right, wrong, are essentially established through stories. The idea ‘we have to make the world a better place’ is a human myth; animals have no such urge. We need the myth to feel good about ourselves. Every culture creates these myths and transmits it through stories, symbols and rituals. In the last hundred years nations were established based on these myths. (Pattanaik, DOA 31 / 10 / 2018)

Devdutt Pattanaik also states that, myths have nothing to do with history. History is time bound. Myth is timeless. History tells us how people lived in the past. Myth tells us how heroes and gods live all the time. Moreover myths can be interpreted in different ways by different people. Islamic and Christian mythology is comfortable with multiple interpretations, Buddhist mythology splits into different schools as multiple ideas evolved. Hindu mythology thrives on multiple readings. The notion of origin and true nature are all myths, with different mythologies offering different explanations. Islam believed in God creating man. Jains do not think that is so. Buddhists don’t believe in an essential soul, Christians do. So what is true for one tribe or community, is not so for others. (Pattanaik, 1996)

Every mythology brings different kinds of value to the community. Abrahamic mythologies seek singularity, hence collective efficiency. Indian mythologies seek plurality, hence diverse effectiveness. Western mythology is far more glamorous as it establishes villains and victims and calls for heroes to act. This model is also a part of the Indian mythology, but Indian mythology is not just that. It expands the scope and speaks in terms of infinity that is more wisdom driven and less glamorous.

Elaborating the relationship between science and myth, he adds, Science is about measurement and experimentation and evidence. Myth is about faith. They are two very different worlds. Science is best when dealing with matter. Myth is best when dealing with mind, especially emotions and imagination.

According to Kavita Kane, mythologies are evergreen because of their rich, literary narrative possessing deeper, symbolic and highly philosophical levels of interpretations. She comments that the epics are not stories of gods and goddesses but of Man and his follies and fallacies and flaws and his struggle with the outside and the inside, the people, his society, his family and his inner self. For this reason they are relevant even today. Myth is the story of Man's conflict and contest with the world he lives in: of love and loyalty, of hate and anger, rage and revenge, shame and humiliation, fear and jealousy, insecurity and greed, pride and honour, rivalry and war, peace and forgiveness.

Kane said, "All these emotions and experiences remain constant, felt through thousands of years later, making them immediately relatable and identifiable to us today." (Kane, DOA 03 / 09 / 2018)

Kane believes that contemporary reinterpretations and re-visioning of the old stories in mythology incorporate attitudes and thoughts of current culture. Mythologies enable the writer as well as the reader to interrogate the layered identities within the stories and investigate human nature and its profound reality.

A myth constitutes a cultural truth, a religious truth, a nation's truth, one that binds a community together by giving them a common worldview to function within. Science can tell us how the world functions, but only myth can tell us why it functions the way it does. The idea of God, for example, is a cultural truth: it is not part of Buddhism, Jainism or secularism. Likewise, the idea of prophets makes no sense in the Hindu worldview. The idea of hero, villain and victim is a Greek mythic idea, which was imposed by modern storytellers on mythologies around the world, leading to distortion of cultural ideas.

Equality is not a rational concept. It is a subjective truth, a belief that comes to us from Abrahamic mythology. Likewise the idea of justice comes from Greek mythology.

Chapter - Two

Myth and Poetry in Twentieth Century

“Here we have our present age ….. Bent on the on the extermination of myth. Man today, stripped of myth, stands famished among all his pasts and must dig frantically for roots”. (Nietzsche, 2016)

We live at a time where science and technology have diminished our physical suffering to a remarkable degree, but we are unable to deal with our psychological suffering. For a while our life spans have been prolonged, and many diseases eradicated, this has not changed our existential predicament. Just like every other man or woman to have walked this earth, we are born, we will die, everything and everyone we know will turn to dust, and unless we are one of the exceptional few, our legacy will live on for at most a generation. Dwelling on these facts does not bring us joy. But if we dwell on these facts and at the same time feel that our life lacks meaning then we will suffer from acute psychological pain.

But while science and technology have much to offer, there is no application, device, equation, or pharmaceutical drug that can imbue one’s life with meaning. Rather this role has traditionally been played by myth. The West however, finds itself in a difficult position in this regard. For according to Friedrich Nietzsche and Carl Jung, the decline of Christianity ushered the West into a period of mythlessness in which it remains to this day. And this lack of myth, irrespective of all the advances in science and technology, has made it harder for one to face up to our existential predicament and has increased our propensity for psychological suffering.

“Among the so – called neurotics of our day there are a good many who in other ages would not have been neurotic – that is, divided against themselves. If they had lived in a period ….. in which man was still linked by myth with the world of the ancestors ….. they would have been spared this division within themselves.” (Jung, 1963)

Myths help us to shoulder our existential burdens and alleviate our psychological suffering. Myths are not merely primitive attempts to explain the workings of the natural world or fictional stories which glorify the origins of a culture. According to Nietzsche and Jung, we have not moved beyond our need for myth with the rise of science. For science and myth address different questions. The scientific method deals with cause and effect and helps us understand the workings of the natural world. Myths, on the other hand, are narratives which transmit modes of behaviour, patterns of action, and ways of experiencing the world, that promote a healthy psychological development and a meaningful life. The myth, in other words, embodies wisdom of generations past, offering solutions to our shared existential dilemma and helping unite a culture under a shared vision.

For millennia, the myths of ancient Greece and Rome have been objects of fascination and tools for exploring humanity’s most abiding concerns: self, society, birth, death and the afterlife, the cosmos, and the divine. In the 20th and 21st centuries, the power and beauty of these archaic narratives have inspired scores of poets, including such well – known figures as Hughes, Yeats, Heaney, Eliot, Pound, Plath, Rilke, Auden, and Seferis, to name a few. We will delve into this rich poetic heritage, savouring the full range of modern responses, while paying attention to the many meanings of the old stories that they echo or challenge.

In the twentieth century authors and poets took up myths as themes, symbols and approaches to understand modern life. Ted Hughes in modern times has used mythology to think and write about vitality and death. In doing so, Hughes drew not only on ancient myths but also on the works of previous writers influenced by mythology, such as Robert Graves, W.B. Yeats, and

Carl Jung. An understanding of Ted Hughes's preoccupation with myth is crucial for any sympathetic reading of his poetry and prose. By his own admission, Hughes was attracted to myths from an early age.

In an article to introduce his first book of poems, *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957), Hughes said: "What excites my imagination is the war between vitality and death and my poems may be said to celebrate the exploits of the warriors of either side." (Hughes, 2016) For Hughes, vitality and death were the divine forces in nature that early man had attempted to control and make sense of through myth and ritual. In *The White Goddess*, which Hughes described as 'the chief holy book of my poetic consciousness,' (Hughes, 2016) Robert Graves argued that the original function of the poet was to write hymns for the archaic matriarchal 'Triple Goddess' of Northern Europe and the Mediterranean archaeologists have found around 30,000 goddess figurines that, in dating as far back as 20,000 BC, represents some of the earliest relics of human art and culture throughout Eastern Europe, Turkey, Palestine, Egypt, Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley. (Graves, 1999)

According to Hughes, the philosophical and intellectual ideals of Western civilisation over the last 300 years had alienated man from his inner life. The distrust and denial of the 'subjective' inner life of instinct and feeling had led to the sickness that psychoanalysis had discovered at the turn of the 20th century. By rejecting as untrustworthy the subjective element of our experience and relying solely on our objective principles to define our truths, Hughes believed we are denying the most important part of our experience. He complained that the 'human spirit' was not 'a mechanical business of nuts and bolts' and could not evolve into such 'just because a political or intellectual ideology requires it to.'

Like Graves, he believed that since the Bronze Age, poetry had become intellectualised and had gone into decline and decay until the Romantic revivals which attempted to re-establish the connection between man and nature. Hughes was influenced by the works of Carl Jung, Robert Graves, W.B. Yeats, Mircea Eliade and Paul Radin, and he employed anthropological and psychological registers interchangeably to describe the creative process. He believed all forms of art were a natural healing process that employed the psychic equivalent of the immune system. At times he described the creative process as a form of Jungian 'individuation', through which the contents of the individual's personal and collective unconscious are made conscious, through the experience of archetypes, providing the psyche with a sense of wholeness, meaning and purpose. At others, he compared the role of the poet to that of the shamanic healer of primitive tribes who descended into the underworld to recover a sick man's soul, or to perform some task to resolve a crisis afflicting his tribe. Essentially, he understood the poet as performing a quasi-religious function in providing a healing image that reconnected man with his inner self and nature.

Hughes saw myths as enduring visionary narratives which through their archetypal images and drama brought order and balance to the incoherent opposing forces of the inner and the outer worlds: 'A story that engages, say, earth and the underworld ….. contains not merely the space and in some form or other, the contents of these two places; it reconciles their contradictions in a workable fashion and holds open the way between them.' (Hughes, 2016)

In his prose criticism of Keats, Coleridge, Yeats, Plath and Shakespeare, Hughes identified a myth in each poet's writings; each myth, he believed, contained the poet's 'fate' in that it provided an archetypal pattern that magnetised the poet's psychic life in a particular inevitable

direction, and in doing so, helped the poet to resolve a personal spiritual crisis. In healing themselves, these visionaries wrote poetry that also had a healing effect upon their readers.

Tales from Ovid is made up of twenty-four passages from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and from here grew out Ted Hughes's translation of four tales for After Ovid, *New Metamorphosis*. It was also adapted for the stage. Acclaimed in its own right Tales from Ovid also illustrates Hughes's late preoccupation with myth during the writing of his final book of poems, *Birthday Letters*. His lifelong interest in myth is well documented and is evident to anyone familiar with his writings and translations. Hughes was well acquainted with the fact that myth explained the mystery of origin, birth and death, and offered coherent explanations for the objects and mechanisms in the objective world. It provided a dramatic form for the intangible inner-world of instinct, desire and emotion, and offered a stage upon which traditional values could be celebrated or challenged.

These days the term myth is most commonly understood as a synonym for falsehood, a widely-held false belief, a fiction, a delusion. But for Homer and the early Greek poets, mythos meant literally words and signified a pleasing arrangement of words in a literary sense. Plato considered mythos to be an art of language alongside, and including, poetry; it was a persuasive type of discourse that contained its own particular kind of intuitive truth. Plato's pupil Aristotle, in his *Poetics,* offered another useful definition of mythos. Aristotle believed that the poet's role was to unveil the higher, universal truths of experience that objective historical accounts could not provide.

Hughes considered myths as our ancestors' earliest attempts to civilise the archaic powers of instinct and feeling. He saw myths in a Jungian sense, as an expression of a collective dream; the drama, images, and symbols in myth drawing attention to the neglected parts of the tribes' psyche and restoring the balance in its psychic life. Myths were to Hughes, a record of great visionary experiences, they told the story of the poet's journey into the underworld of the unconscious to gather its healing energies to heal himself and his tribe. He saw myths as a record of the relationship between the subjective and the objective worlds and believed that each variant and adaptation of a particular story as a record of the imaginative life of the author, and of his era.

In his essay Myth and Education, Hughes argued that myths are a particular kind of story that contain cathartic psychic properties – an image, or a symbol, or drama – that reunites our inner world's subjective chaotic energies with our conscious life. The meanings derived from myths have, over history, been called divine, religious, mystical or, as Hughes commonly called them, visionary. And for Hughes this visionary quality is what all great art, and poetry in particular, aspires to. (Gifford, 2015)

The selection, arrangement, and adaptation of Ovid's myths in *Tales from Ovid* suggests that, in the process of translating these tales, Hughes found the way to provide a healing shape to the most tragic events in his own life. In Hughes's late works, myth and translation become an increasingly important poetic through which he contends with the significance and subjectivity of original stories and myths, creates new and original readings, and challenges the roles of the protagonists, giving these often well-known stories a new life. (Hughes, 1997)

In assessing William Butler Yeats's poetry, one requires an understanding of such basic sources as Irish cultural nationalism, the poet's personal muse, and poetic myths. The poet uses myth

consistently throughout his poems. As Harold Bloom observes, “Yeats was always writing mythologies”. While Yeats’s Dublin and Maud Gonne subjectify important themes and various subjects in his poetry, his golden bird and Ledaean girl objectify the central ideas and diverse subjects theoretically. Because of the connotative power of the imagination, Yeats highly poeticises myths which make his poetry unite reality with imagination, nature with human beings, life with art, locale with universe, logic with mystery, humanity with divinity, and history with literature. In this capacity the poet explores the philosophical and even religious possibilities of poetry through the poetic revitalisation of myth in the contemporary world. In this sense Yeats culminates his poetry by the use of mythic vision. Therefore, the myth plays a crucial role in Yeats’s poetry as it does in the world of most complex poets. (Richard, 1958)

The language and patterns of myths from the Irish cultural mind are present in Yeats’s poetic account. In myth powerful means of organic integration are used at the levels of collective unconsciousness, religion, art, and literature. In Yeats’s poetry, this myth is part of a grand design which unites such antithetical conflicts as the real with the ideal, the credible with the incredible, and life with art, from Crossways through Last Poems. Furthermore Van Harvey, sees that myth is a legitimate expression of the human mind and, therefore, opens the door to irrationalism. Hence this conception of myth includes primitive intuition without falling into literalistic error. Yeats conceptualises this sense of myth throughout his poetry. (Richard, 1958)

Yeats uses myth to create total organic unity in that myth has the self-autonomy of the imagination. As Roland Barthes explains, myth includes the tri-dimensional pattern: the signifier, the signified, and the sigh which imply the associative total of a concept and an image. Therefore, Gerald Graff concludes that experience is always superior to ideas about experience. In this sense, Yeats says that man can experience truth but he cannot know it.

Yeats conceptualises myth by including mythopoeia, mythology, and the post-mythological experience to explain a full truth. In *Among School Children*, Yeats uses various myths to unify the literal with the figurative, like dancer with dance. Hence, most of his poems use dramatic elements. As Frye mentions, “The basic form of the mythic process is a cyclical movement which signifies completeness and totality.” Meanwhile Yeats applies this concept of myth in a general context of all his poems rather than in individual poems, in that the myth unites microcosmic parts of each poem with the macrocosmic totality of all poetry. Therefore, both his theory and his practice point to the need to read an individual poem by Yeats in the context of the rest of his poetry and of his life.

Yeats’s use of the myth in some of its more traditional roles manifests his deep respect for the poetic tradition, and at the same time his use of myth in some of its more progressive roles indicates his insightful vision of poetic progress. Yeats uses history to create contemporary mythological literature in *The Second Coming.* When this poem was published in 1919, Ireland was engaged in a violent civil war, Europe had experienced World War 1, and Russia was experiencing civil war right after its 1917 Revolution. All these historical conflicts signify for Yeats the coming end of the Christian era, the historical cycle begun almost two thousand years from the birth of Christ. In Yeats mythological-historical theory, the change from one historical period to another is always marked by a turning point of war and confusion.

In his ‘Essays and Introductions’, Yeats views mythology as “the unquestioned belief”, and “the deeper my thought the more credible.” In this sense, as David Lynch concludes, the mythology provides Yeats with ‘creative energy’ in making his poetry. Especially Yeats

utilizes symbolic mythologies to invoke supernatural realities. After all, the mythological thought becomes identical with credible reality through the tool of poetic imagination. Therefore, in his final years, Yeats devotes his life to reconcile reality with imagination through the poetic truth of the interactive myth. On the whole the Yeatsian interactive myth integrates organic unity in diverse themes and subjects, and suggest philosophical and religious possibilities of his poetry in contemporary civilisation. (Yeats, 1961)

Myths have an important sociological function, helping us to understand ourselves as part of a wider human story, and where we fit within it. They shape our aspirations and give us meanings. When a society loses its myth, the members of that society do not lose their need to author stories about their life. Rather this need is so integral to our well-being that it's something we do with, or without, the help of a myth. We emphasise certain past events, deny others, and even fabricate certain elements of our life story and we do this to make sense of who we are and where we are going. But when a society's "horizons are ringed about with myth" the process of constructing a meaningful life story, and one that promotes our psychological development, is greatly facilitated.

Myth and archetype are new additions to the various literary devices in use such as metaphor, imagery and symbol. Myth is very distinct. Besides working as a literary device, it also works as a tool to bring order, as T.S. Eliot says, "to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history." It does so by being ubiquitous in time and place, by connecting the past, present and future in a chain and by being universal because of its attachment to the complex psychic predispositions inherited by human beings. It is a part of the unconscious psyche of man which projects itself into the conscious by means of, what Jung calls, "motifs", "primordial images", or "archetypes". In his poem *The Waste Land*, Eliot has used them profusely in order to bring order in man's life, order in the theme and content of the poem and also in its style. (Eliot, 1923)

T.S. Eliot's poem came in 1922 almost simultaneously with the publication of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. It was in his critical appreciation of this novel that Eliot commended the new technique called the mythical method as the only way of imposing order upon the modern chaos. Eliot has always been concerned with order-order in man's life, order in the theme and content of the poem and also in its style. When the poet id dealing with the contemporary anarchy, he should make the theme itself look controlled and ordered by; giving it a meaning, a significance and ordering the style of the poem so that the poem looks organic. As poetry is to express the complex sensibility of the modern society, where order has broken down and contradictions abound in every sphere of life, it is necessary to re-mould the language by all possible means conducive to its flexibility and suggestive enrichment. The principle aim is to organise diverse experiences and disparate objects into an artistic whole. To him, the best way to achieve this order is the use of myth and mythical method. This new technique suited the modern temper. (Eliot, 1923)

Eliot has mentioned Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and Miss Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, especially the latter, as the source of the mythical framework in the poem. The myth in the background, is a Grail legend which describes how the hero of virgin purity, during his pursuit of the Holy Grail reaches the kingdom of the Fisher King, who has become impotent under the curse arising from the wanton violation of the sanctity of sex and surrender to lust. The impotency of the ruler is reflected in the sterility of his drought-laden kingdom, which has

become a universe of death. But there is a hope for rebirth in the belief that someday the kingdom would be visited by a knight of immaculate purity who would visit the Grail temple in it, known as the Chapel Perilous, will answer the questions and then perform the ritual washing of the king's person to restore it to health and vitality which will be signalised by the refreshing shower of rain, herald of the new dry land.

This mythical wasteland is the analogue for the modern world of spiritual barrenness. But Eliot has widened its scope by combining with it the classical waste land of King Oedipus and the barren land of the Christian Bible. The classical association is symbolised by Tiresias, the blind prophet of Thebes, who is introduced as the protagonist of the poem. He stands for the human consciousness, connecting the present with the past and his vision, which is the substance of the poem, is a series of flashes, backward and forward, like those in a film.

This poem is a fine illustration of the basic technique of the mythical method which makes us surpass both time and space by making us swing in time and space so that we can cover the immense vastness of human consciousness and realise the grim intensity of the human feeling of pain and hope, and also feel, in ourselves, the universal and timeless tragic situation of man and his life. Through this method Eliot makes us think not only of the pastness of the past but also of its presence. It means that this spiritual barrenness or death is at once temporal and timeless and the scene is London or any capital in Europe or any place, anywhere, in ant period of history.

The keynote of the mythical technique is parallelism and contrast, the likeness and unlikeness of the past and the present. Thus, the modern sterility, like spiritual sterility in all ages, is the result of the denial of God.

Myths provide the clues to the unity of existence that is inherent in what a poet experiences. Ezra Pound records the particularity of myth in *The Spirit of Romance*, when he affirms: "I believe in a sort of permanent basis in humanity, that is to say, I believe the Greek myth arose when someone having passed through the delightful psychic experience tries to communicate it to others and found it necessary to screen himself from persecution." (Pound, 1910) Pound saw that the attempt to express a vital, human desire resulted in the formulation of something which could be interpreted in as many ways as possible. Pound fully realised that each psychic experience destroys all systematic order that is in society. It is the order within the psyche which is found to be absolute, and thus the substantiation of this natural order, "the cosmos inside a human being ….. the order harmony universe which we call our individual or personal experiences", may cause a person to be ostracised. Thus, Pound also saw myth as having been brought on by fear of rejection by a society whose boundaries are set. It is a fear, engendered by the actual process of living the experience, of finding the truth.

Myths are a fundamental actuality of life for they themselves are "cheques against knowledge". To this extent, Pound employs myths as images qualifying his actual experience. Myths act as touchstones for the transformation of seemingly particular and subjective data into universal, living designs. Whatever significance is drawn from the designs is dependent upon the presentation of the myths to be sure, but it also depends upon the receptivity of an audience to the myths. It is because of the latter condition that myths, as Pound experienced them, in The Cantos, are tied to a search for order. The order is felt to exist in times of extraordinary perception and these times are real. In some fundamental way, whatever tension there may be

between the presentation of the myths and the receptivity of the audience to them is resolved in the form of *The Cantos,* the actual images which present the myths.

Pound recognised that things are seen ultimately in process. They are a continuum. What to the ears and eyes is separate is, in reality, a relationship between two things, a relationship that never resolves itself completely, but is demonstrable in and through poetry. Thus Pound's attitude towards the material presented in *The Cantos,* is built upon the same type of awareness of relationships that Frobenius linked himself to in order to discover a people's origin. It is this same relationship that fashions the treatment of myth in *The Cantos*. The relationship is a symbiotic, organic one in which Pound and myth are not separate entities, but in a continual process of interchange. One cannot separate Pound from the myth with which he deals.

As Margaret Atwood mentions in *Lady Oracle*, "every myth is a version of truth", meaning that every narrative takes the narrator's point of view and thus becomes her/his truth, even when it comes to ancient stories such as classical mythology. About rewriting myths, she explains, in the *Notes in The Penelopiad,* that she is not simply retelling *The Odyssey*, but also regarding other sources, for there is not only one version of ancient Greek myths: "a myth would be told one way in one place and quite differently in another". To support the matter on history-as well as myth-being one viewpoint of truth, Carol Ann Howells states: "We live in a period in which memory of all kinds, including the sort of large memory we call history, is being called into question". (Wilson, 2008)

The process of understanding and clarification to which Barthes contributed so brilliantly can give rise to newly told stories, can sew and weave and knit different patterns into the social fabric and that this is a continuous enterprise for everyone to take part in.

Sharon Wilson, who holds relevant works on Margaret Atwood's intertextuality, has been investigating Atwood's extensive use of myth and fairy tales. In her essay *Mythological Intertexts in Margaret Atwood's Works*, Wilson states that Atwood uses mythology and its symbols "not only to provide a mythic resonance and polyphonic melody, but to parody or undercut narrative authority in a postmodern way". (Wilson, 2008)

Sharon Wilson raises an interesting hypothesis about Atwood's use of mythological intertexts, dividing the purposes into five categories: As can be seen in Atwood's use of fairy tales and other folklore, myth intertexts generally serve at least five connected purposes throughout Atwood's works. One, they indicate the quality and nature of characters' cultural contexts; two, they signify characters' and readers' entrapment in pre-existing patterns; and three, they comment self-consciously on these patterns-including the embedded myths, fairy tales, and related popular traditional stories-often by deconstructing constricting literary, folkloric, and cultural plots with transgressive language, thus filling in the gaps of female narrative. Four, myth and other intertexts comment self-consciously on the frame story, on themselves, and on their intertexts. When used in metafiction, intertexts call attention to themselves as intertexts, highlighting their shortcomings or celebrating the power of language and story. Finally, five, and the most important, mythic intertexts structure the characters' imaginative or magical release from externally imposed patterns, offering the possibility of transformation for the characters, for the country they partly represent, and for all human beings. (Wilson, 2008)

Howells observes in five ways of looking at *The Penelopiad*, that, in Atwood's poems and short fictions there are many women who speak out of ancient myths and legends, given a voice

for the first time through her literary imagination to dissent from the cultural myths imposed upon them: Circe and the Sirens in *You Are Happy*, Eurydice in *Interlunar*, Athena-Daphne and *Helen of Troy* – who goes counter dancing in *Morning in the Burned House*. All of these women's voices are sceptical, irreverent, and assertive as they refocus the grand narratives of ancient myth. (Wilson, 2008)

In the case of Margaret Atwood's poems, *Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing* and *Sekhmet Lion-Headed Goddess of War*, allusions are used to empower and change the way we view the female speaker. This is especially obvious in *Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing*. The poem is about a stripper, which is considered to be quite a degrading job in today's society. Normally such a protagonist would be looked down upon and pitied by the readers, and yet through allusions to Helen of Troy, the speaker comes off as superior to women with respectable jobs, and also to the men who watch her, when you would think it would be the other way round.

In using lines such as – I don't let on to everyone, / but lean close and I'll whisper: / My mother was raped by a holy swan – Atwood references Helen of Troy's links to the gods of Greek mythology, and makes her speaker seem otherworldly and goddess-like in doing so. Instead of feeling ashamed of herself for her employment, the speaker feels superior in that she can make so many men swoon, much like Helen of Troy, and also in the knowledge that they cannot lay a finger on her. Touch me and you'll burn – Atwood uses these allusions to aid in the acceptance of the feminist view on such a controversial subject as stripping or prostitution.

In *Sekhmet, Lion-Headed Goddess of War*, Atwood references the Egyptian goddess of war and destruction, Sekhmet, daughter of the god Ra, and various other Ancient Egyptian deities, most notably Osiris. The speaker in this poem seems to be Sekhmet herself, or at least a statue of her, much like in Siren's Song, where the sirens are the speakers. In mythology, Sekhmet is the daughter of the sun god Ra, who unleashes her upon the world to bring vengeance upon those who have rebelled against him. She goes crazy with blood-lust and begins to kill everyone resulting in her being tricked into drinking red dyed beer by the men of the day in order to stop her killing rampage. With a bit of cleaver emphasis, and a feminist viewpoint, Atwood turns Sekhmet into a proud and fearsome warrior queen, who is not content to sit in a museum with the god Osiris, and who would like to go back to the days when she was worshipped, not just shown to children learning about cultural diversity.

Both these poems utilise strong female characters in their allusions, most probably because Atwood tends to write from a feminist viewpoint and likes her woman to have power over the men, as opposed to in the majority of society, where the view is quite patriarchal, and the men tend to hold power over the women. Helen of Troy, the femme fatale who caused one of the greatest conflicts of the ancient world, and Sekhmet one of the most revered, and certainly the most feared warrior of the Egyptian empire, are strong, untouchable and confident in themselves, just the sort of woman that Atwood believes all women should strive to be like. (Wilson, 2008)

Because of these references, we do not see a degraded stripper who is taunted and looked down upon, or a lonely and forgotten goddess sitting in a museum gathering dust. Instead we see an unattainable woman of unsurpassable beauty, above the people who sneer at her, confident in her own skin, and a proud, fierce warrior goddess who remembers her glory days but still knows that she will never be forgotten.

Margaret Atwood uses allusions to mythological figures to the highest degree, giving protagonists that would normally be seen as weak or pitiful characteristics of such influential women; she empowers her speakers with these allusions, using them to show us a different, stronger side to cliché characters that we thought we already knew.

Sylvia Plath, a true embodiment of American myth, is a controversial poet and novelist of mid-20th century America. The mythological analysis of her characters appears to be fitting in the context of her major works. If we focus our glance at *The Bell Jar*, we will find a clear picture of the protagonist, being enclosed and then being liberated from an enclosure by maddened or suicidal or an airy and ugly avatar of the self. Plath apparently developed her own mythology to explain her depression and euphoria. This mythology is brilliantly explored in Judith Kroll's book *Chapters in a Mythology*: *The Poetry of Sylvia Plath*. Judith Kroll speculates that Sylvia's genius lay in her ability to explore the dark corners of her psyche. Apparently Ted Hughes also thought so, for he curiously remarked that Sylvia possessed the qualities of a sage.

On reading the works of Frazer, Graves and Rank, and comparing the imagery present in these studies to the imagery in Plath's poetry, there should be little or no doubt as to the validity of Kroll's claim, namely, that a vital source of Plath's inspiration was located in myth, and not solely in her own mind. Plath personalised the mythical and mythologised the personal. (Debata, 2013)

Seamus Heaney belongs to Ireland and people in Ireland have been a minority under the British control. In this way he cannot remain unconcerned with the political, social and cultural disorder in his country. Thus it was necessary for him to find a middle way and that middle way he finds by creating a myth. The myth is that strife and violence are a pattern of life. They are inevitable. Nobody can stop them, but through the message of love, arid peace, the poet can provide some consolation, some redress.

Heaney's poems clearly show how Heaney reconciles between poetry and politics with the help of creating a myth. The poem, *The Tollund Man*, is the best example of Heaney's myth making in his poetry. He takes the title of his poem from Glob's book *The Bog Men*, which was about the archaeological excavations in Jutland, a marshy land in Denmark. The researchers found a large number of dead bodies in Jutland. These dead bodies were called Bog Men. They belonged to the Iron Age or perhaps the Stone Age. The researchers concluded and Glob agrees that those dead bodies were of the people who were sacrificed in some sacred ritual. One head which was found separated from the body, had been kept in a museum, and called Aarhus. And the sacrificed man was given the name of Tollund Man.

It was thought that the Tollund Man was sacrificed to the goddess of land, so that her fertility may insure the fertility of the land in the next winter. This is a version of the myth of Adonis, relating to Classical Mythology. Adonis was the god of fertility and he was supposed to die in autumn and again come to life in the spring every year. Heaney sees this sacrifice in the archetypal pattern which he applies to Ireland. He thinks that the same myth is working in Ireland also. The people of Ireland are sacrificing their live for their motherland. In the Tollund Man, he sees the fate of his fellow countrymen worst hit by the Irish war.

Wedding Day, is also an example of the myth making technique of Heaney. It is a much more political poem, but in a disguised way because of the application of myth in the poem. The title of the poem is symbolic, meaning the day of sacrifice, the death of death. Heaney concludes

that every day is a wedding day in Ireland. The Toome Road has also an echo of the suppressed minds of the people of Ireland but the poet, as usually, doesn't discuss it as an attempt to instigate or rouse the people to protest against it. He discusses the poem in his personal unique style. He talks about the threat of state terrorism. The poem shows a sense of state of war. The army has occupied the country and the citizens are living in a state of scariness and fear. Human freedom has been blocked and the individual feels oppressed.

Heaney, in fact, wants to redress the people through his art without becoming a heckler. He finds a middle way between the two extremes, between the idealist and the escapist. He uses the myth for bringing politics into poetry. (Neoenglish, DOA 25 / 01 / 2019)

Myths and legends are important to us today for a number of reasons. They have value as literature, offering timeless and universal themes; they give us insight into other times and places; and they help us to see how much humankind had and has in common. The themes of myths and legends are the same as those that are present in all great literature, just a few of which are man versus man, man versus nature, man versus the Gods, man on a quest, family conflict, and coming of age. Most myths and legends include at least one of these themes and often several. These are in the earliest "stories", the ancestors of all literature that we read today. Even aside from the beauty and creativity of these stories, which alone make them worthy of study, it enriches our study of literature today to see its earliest roots.

Every culture has its own mythology and legends and these reflect the geography of the culture, the values of the culture, and the history of the culture. Japanese creation myths, for example, reflect the fact that Japan is an island nation, and the sea and its creatures play an important part in these myths. Myths can also tell us what a culture considers ethical, significant, and central to its ideologies, giving us insight into another culture. Each myth we read has something to tell us about another culture.

Chapter - Three

An Analysis of Some Myth Inspired Poems by Modernist and Postmodernist Poets

Adaptation is by all means, a creative process. To adapt means to transpose from one medium to another, or into the same. It is the ability to make fit or suitable by changing, or adjusting. Modifying something to create a change in structure, function, and form, which produces a better adjustment. It may seem strange to translate one art form to another, but it is an age old custom. The trick of adaptation is to find what still works and find a way to update what no longer does.

Poetry is defined as writing that formulates a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience in language chosen and arranged to create a specific emotional response through meaning, sound and rhythm. The meaning comes from the literal meaning of the words and what those words suggest by imagery and symbolism. The impact of language in poetry occurs through the rhythmic arrangement of the words.

Myth, a symbolic narrative, usually of unknown origin and at least partly traditional, that ostensibly relates actual events and that is especially associate with religious belief. 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. (Britannica, DOA 27 / 04 / 2019)

As with all religious symbolism, there is no attempt to justify mythic narratives or even to render them plausible. Every myth presents itself as an authoritative, factual account, no matter how much the narrated events are at variance with natural law or ordinary experience. By extension from this primary religious meaning, the word myth may also be used more loosely to refer to an ideological belief when that belief is the object of a quasi-religious faith; an example would be the Marxist eschatological myth of the withering away of the state. (Britannica, DOA 27 / 04 / 2019)

While the outline of myths from a past period or from a society other than one's own can usually be seen quite clearly, to recognise the myths that are dominant in one's own time and society is always difficult. This is hardly surprising, because a myth has its authority not by proving itself but by presenting itself. (Britannica, DOA 27 / 04 / 2019)

The process of adaptation, how it has been undertaken through generations, the theories which go behind the process, have all been discussed in the first chapter. Apart from this, it also highlights the various myths and legends that have been adapted into poems through different ages, what has actually fascinated the poets to adapt these stories into their poems, what relevance do these stories still hold in our present day society, why are these myths and legends so important even today; these things have been clearly mentioned in the first section.

The second chapter speaks about the various poets who have been fascinated by these myths and legends and how they have all used them in their poems, how a certain myth has been used by different poets in their own ways to explain or mean things relevant to the society of their times.

The third chapter will try to attempt to analyse a few of the poems whose origin lie in myths-legends-epics. I have chosen five poems from the early and late twentieth century for study.

The first poem I will look at is-*Karna Kunti Sambad* by Rabindranath Tagore. This dramatic poem based on an episode in the *Mahabharata*, is from Tagore's collection *Kahini* (1900). Stories from the *Mahabharata* or from *Buddhist Folklore* were reworked with a view to re-interpreting them so that they resonate with new meanings. These were artistic tasks that Tagore took very seriously in his poetry and drama, opines Dyson. The poem is based on two personal conversations – one between, Krishna and Karna; the other between Karna and Kunti. (Dyson, 2000)

Tagore retains the basic situation as it is in the original, but reworks it according to his poetic imagination. Kunti introduces herself to her long-forgotten and disowned son Karna and tells him the extraordinary story of his birth. It is a very significant episode where Kunti reveals to him that he is her eldest son and was conceived when she was an unmarried virgin. The all-powerful Sun God is his father. She begs him to unite with his brothers, the Pandavas, and fight on their side in the Great War and claim his rightful share of majesty and kingdom. But Karna turns down his pleading mother and gives his own arguments for not doing so.

Tagore's lyrical drama in Bengali is a transcreation of the classical text. Translations and transcreations of these classical texts had been prevalent. Madhusudan Dutt, too, keeping with the demands of his time, had transcreated the Meghnad episode of the *Ramayana*.

Roman Jakobson has rightly said that poetry by definition is untranslatable. So what goes in the name of translation is nothing but transposition. Transposition may be either intralingual, that is, from one poetic shape to another, or interlingual, that is, from one language to another, or, again, intersemoitic, that is, from one system of signs to another, e.g., from verbal art into music, dance, cinema or painting. Tagore's *Karna Kunti Sangbad*, which is his own creative episode of the event in the *Mahabharata* falls in the first model of Jakobson, the intralingual, that is, from one poetic shape into another.

In the *Mahabharata*, we find a third voice, the voice of Karna's father, the Sun God, who Karna to obey the advice of his mother. But Karna remains adamant. Tagore's work does not have a third character. He has focused exclusively on the mother-son dialogues. Probably a third voice would have loosened the tautness of the whole drama. An exclusively mother-son discourse makes the whole thing more effective. Now if we compare the dialogues of the two Karnas we will see how Tagore's own inclusions have totally changed the character of his Karna from the original Karna of the *Mahabharata*. The same has happened with Kunti as well.

The Karna of the *Mahabharata* is more ruthless and fierce in his condemnation of his mother. He uses direct hard – hitting words. He does not want to pass for a coward. He directly tells Kunti:

Born a Kshatriya,

I was deprived of Kshatriya rites

Because you treated me as you did.

What enemy could have done worse?

When I needed help,

You gave me none.

You deprived me of my samskaras.

Now you need me

And so you come to me. (Lal, 1980)

Then when Kunti tells him to join the Pandavas, he says:

Who does not fear

The alliance of Arjuna and Krishna?

If I defect to the Pandavas,

Will they not say I did so out of fear? (Lal, 1980)

Moreover, he explicitly expresses his wish for a duel with Arjuna. He promises Kunti that he will not kill her four other sons. But he would surely kill Arjuna, or Arjuna would kill him, and this is one of his most important reasons for declining Kunti's offer.

Tagore's Karna is much mellower and his softness makes him a solitary and a desolate figure, foregrounding an otherness from the original in the *Mahabharata*. Indeed, Tagore has omitted all the above attributes found in the original. On his mother's revelation about his being her son, he says:

I do not understand: but your eyes melt my

Heart as the kiss of the morning son melts

The snow on a mountain-top, and your voice

Rouses a blind sadness within me of which the

Cause may well lie beyond the reach of my

Earliest memory. (Tagore, 1994)

We also find in Tagore's Karna an element of temporary submission whereby he wants to go away with his mother without asking any questions: "the struggle for victory and fame and the rage of hatred suddenly becomes untrue to him". It is not that he does not hold his mother responsible for making him homeless and a subaltern. But he does so in a softened manner and when the mother entreats the son to accept her forgiveness, he says "Mother, accept my tears".

Ketaki Dyson in the translator's note says:

Tagore takes details from two contiguous sections of the 'Udyogaparva' of the *Mahabharata*, a dialogue between Krishna and Karna and a dialogue between Karna and Kunti, to make a new composite story of an encounter between a fostered son and a long lost natural mother ….. Tagore's treatment is more psychological: Karna is humanised to suit the tastes of Tagore's own time. (Dyson, 2000)

In the *Mahabharata* Kunti goes to meet her son in the morning. Tagore gives a much softer setting. Here Kunti meets her son in the evening. Moreover Tagore has made his Kunti much shyer. She is embarrassed to tell Karna, how he was conceived out of wedlock. But in the *Mahabharata*, according to the mores of the time, Kunti tells Karna of his birth in a matter-of-

fact manner. Moreover, in the earlier episode Krishna had already told Karna of his birth and the information from Kunti is only a confirmation.

Another important aspect that should be examined on reading *Karna-Kunti Sambad* is Tagore's representation of Karna and Kunti. Nirad C. Chaudhuri says that Rabindranath's portrayal of Karna places him in the Eurocentric tradition. He has introduced an element of self-conflict in his Karna, unlike the Karna of the *Mahabharata*. He at one time almost wants to resign to his mother's entreaties and follow her to the camp of the Pandavas:

Yes, I will come and never ask question, never doubt.

My soul responds to your call; and the struggle for victory and fame and the rage of hatred

Have suddenly become untrue to me, as the delirious dream of a night in

The serenity of the dawn.

Tell me wither you mean to lead? (Tagore, 1994)

Karna of the *Mahabharata* was sterner, outspoken and unambiguous in his condemnation of his mother. Probably what Tagore was trying to project through the character of Karna, values like devotion, respect, love and modesty. Karna is so modest that he says:

By what right?

Would I enter the sanctum? Tell me how

From those already cheated of empire

I could possibly take a portion of that wealth.

A mother's love, which is fully theirs. (Tagore, 1994)

Probably Tagore is trying to project a relationship which is very unique, probably what he saw was essentially Indian, where brothers fight on the battlefield yet retain the love and respect they have for each other and where promise and devotion is more important than anything else.

Tagore being a political figure was probably taking part in the nationalist project which at that point of time was very consciously defining its culture, with women playing a vital role as being the seat of culture. Tagore makes Kunti as aristocratic as any Victorian matron by endowing her with the correct behaviour. His representation of Indian women in the figure of Kunti is further corroborated in his later works like *The Home and The World*, where even though the world invades the home and women enter the public sphere and become modern, yet home, the spiritual and cultural sphere, remains inviolable. (Dyson, 2000)

Tagore's Karna is made more of a tragic character, rather than the typical epic character that the *Mahabharata* projects him as. His Karna is self-reflecting when compared to the Karna of *Mahabharata*, who projects hyper masculinity through his character. Moreover, Tagore has adapted something which is the part and parcel of the living Hindu tradition. The *Mahabharata* is a sacred text for the Hindus and a very important aspect of their religion as well. The Epics and religion are the same for the Indians, in contrast to the Greeks; their epics are not sacred, to the contemporary generation.

After Rabindranath Tagore's Karna Kunti Sambad, we will look into, W.B. Yeats's-*Leda and the Swan*, which was first published in the Dial in 1924, which is an example of Irish poetry drawing on Classical Greek and Latin texts to create a commentary on the political atmosphere in Ireland. The poem is based on the story of Leda, who was raped by Zeus in the form of a swan and later gave birth to Helen of Troy. In Yeats's poem, Leda arguably represents Ireland, violated by a foreign power – Great Britain.

In *Leda and the Swan*, Yeats employs the fourteen lines of sonnet form but in a new style. He depicts a range of wonderful but odd images of a physical event. By the help of language and structure, Yeats draws a well –known sexual picture without directly presenting the meaning of the poem. *Leda and the Swan* is a sexually violent poem with clear diction, rhythmic tone, and allusion to Greek myth about the world, the relation of human and divine, and history. It is also a poem about the approach through which one event can be understood as a part of a bigger scheme; the consequence of Zeus's invasion to Leda is the birth of Helen of Troy, and the outset of the modern time.

Leda was the daughter of Thestios, the King of Pleuron. When of age, Leda was married to King Tyndareus of Sparta. Leda was a beautiful woman, and her beauty attracted the attention of Zeus, who spied her from his throne on Mount Olympus. The beauty of Leda roused Zeus to action, and the God transformed himself into a magnificent swan. Then Zeus lay down next to Leda, and impregnated her. On the same day, Leda would also sleep with her husband.

Leda would subsequently produce two eggs, from which four offspring were born; the children being Helen, Clytemnestra, Castor and Pollux. The fame of the four children would far outstrip that of their mother.

In adulthood, Helen was known as being the most beautiful of all mortals, a fact which would see her abducted by Paris whilst married to Menelaus. This abduction would see the Greeks and Trojans go to war, and ultimately resulting in the Fall of Troy. Castor and Pollux were twins who were considered inseparable, and the pair were highly regarded heroes in Greek Mythology. Clytemnestra, whilst less known, would also play an important role during and after the Trojan War. Clytemnestra was married to King Agamemnon of Mycenae, the most powerful king of the day. Before the Trojan War started Agamemnon would sacrifice their daughter Iphigenia, to the gods, to allow the fleet to sail from Aulis; and during the war, Clytemnestra would start an affair with Aegisthus. These two points would lead to Clytemnestra killing Agamemnon on his return from Troy; whilst she herself would subsequently be killed by Orestes, her son, because of the murder.

The poem is regarded as a masterpiece by many reviewers. Camille Paglia, sees the text as, "the greatest poem of the twentieth century". He argues, "all human beings, like Leda, are caught up moment by moment in the 'white rush' of experience. For Yeats, the only salvation is the shapeliness and stillness of art". (Graves, 2001)

Janet Neigh observes the political aspects in the poem, as she says, "when I take Yeats's sonnet personally, and pursue my identifications with the text, which as Cixous suggests one cannot help but do when reading, I identify with Leda and her experience of victimisation". Neigh considers the political aspect of the poem as "ambivalent" because of its "open-ended conclusion". She sees Leda as the symbolic rape of Ireland by the British Colonizers. (Graves, 2001)

The fourteen lines of this sonnet are divisible into three quatrains and a couplet.

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still

Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed

By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,

He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

The above first four quatrain narrate dramatically, vividly and with almost a Dante-like concentration, the story of mating a common girl and a god.

How can those terrified vague fingers push

The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?

And how can body, laid in that white rush,

But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?

The second quatrain shows the helplessness of the delicate and beautiful maiden Leda being subjected to sexual exploitation by the swan.

A shudder in the loins engenders there

The broken wall, the burning roof and tower

And Agamemnon dead.

Being so caught up,

So mastered by the brute blood of the air.

The third quatrain shows that, a god mated with a mortal and the event proved a fateful one as it set in motion a whole chain of events.

Did she put on his knowledge with his power

Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

The couplet, the last two lines of the sonnet conclude the poem with a rhetorical question.

In *Leda and the Swan*, Yeats retells more than a Greek myth. Remarkable symbolism can be found in the poem which retells the history consisting of a series of events in which everything influences everything else. Anything appears in isolation and everything new is produced by putting together of opposite forces. At the era when, Yeats published *Leda and the Swan*, a new Ireland was made out of the previous chaos, and Yeats, as a member of the Irish Senate, participated in the process of building a new Ireland. The opinion that violence has the capacity to produce knowledge can be seen in *Leda and the Swan*, in which the swan by his violence attempt to have control over Leda who later gains knowledge through his violence. The poem convinces the reader to consider Leda and her trouble. While Leda is the symbol of Ireland, the swan is England, and invader who attacks defenceless Ireland.

Elizabeth Cullingford notes that, “according to Yeats, the poem was inspired by a meditation on the Irish situation in relation to world politics. The first version was finished ….. in the

atmosphere of political instability resulting from the Civil War". The poet wanted his poem to attack England's violence. In Yeats's words, "nothing is now possible but some movement from above preceded by some violent annunciation". Yeats used "Leda and the Swan" as a metaphor to represent the 'violent annunciation'. Obviously, the poem represents a political statement about the violent relation between Ireland and England. Indeed, the poem shows a social injustice by a higher power that is England. (Graves, 2001)

Cullingford describes why Ireland was regarded as a quite conservative country in the 1920s and why obsession with sexuality resulted in the foundation of a Committee on Evil Literature in 1926. Cullingford emphasises on rape as the key theme of the poem. She sees rape as a significant motif for both feminists and gender critics since it considers sexuality as well as gender relations. (Graves, 2001)

In a verse, the poet tells us that the human being is the one who can decide about her or his future, and can even decide to forget the gods. The poem is a hymn to human beings and its superiority to the being of gods. This superiority is evident even in in the structure of the poem. Because of the existence of this myth, the other myths have been created also.

Yeats took the central theme of the story – the seduction, the rape – and turned it into a metaphor for the British involvement in Ireland, which lasted centuries, eventually coming to a conclusion in 1922. Others see it as a disguised narrative of the progress of western civilisation. A single violent event sets off a cycle of barbarism and deceit, initiating the modern era and despite the pessimism and outrage, positive and beautiful things can emerge.

Another Greek myth we will analyse, is that of the *Odyssey*. The title of Dorothy Parker's poem *Penelope* alludes to the famously virtuous and loyal wife of Odysseus, the great hero of Homer's ancient epic poem *The Odyssey*. Odysseus is away from his home, his wife, and his son for twenty years. He spends the first ten of those years trying, along with other Greeks, to attack and destroy the city of Troy. Finally the Greeks invent the Trojan horse and use it to trick the Trojans into allowing the Greeks to smuggle soldiers into the city. Troy is then decimated.

Attempting to sail home, Odysseus and his men encounter numerous delays and undergo many adventures. Finally, they make it back to Ithaca, where, with his son Telemachus, Odysseus slays the numerous suitors who have been pestering Penelope to marry one of them. While Odysseus was away, Penelope had spent much of her time weaving a burial shroud for her father-in-law. She tells the suitors that when she finishes weaving the shroud, she will choose one of them. However, each night she undoes her weaving, thus stalling for time.

In the pathway of the sun,

In the footsteps of the breeze,

Where the world and the sky are one,

He shall ride the silver seas,

He shall cut the glittering wave.

I shall sit at home, and rock;

Rise, to heed a neighbour's knock;

Brew my tea, and snip my thread;

Breach the linen for my bed.

They will call him brave.

Parker's poem presents Penelope's reflections on the situations in which she and Odysseus find themselves. She imagines him out on the sunny, breezy ocean, surrounded by beautiful seas and horizons. Penelope, in other words, feels confined, both physically and socially. She performs mundane social deeds, such as, brewing her tea, and, above all, doing and undoing her weaving of the shroud.

The final line of the poem is sardonic: People will call Odysseus "brave", whereas she seems to assume that her own sacrifices will largely be forgotten. To some degree she is correct: Homer's poem, after all, is called *The Odyssey*, not *The Penelopiad*. Men wrote the rules and did the writing: men determined what was celebrated and what was simply taken for granted. Parker's poem is a small protest against the fact that Odysseus is famous whereas Penelope is comparatively unknown. In fact, by naming her poem *Penelope*, Parker seeks to provide a bit more balance, if only slightly.

The poem *Penelope* is one that reflects upon the subjugation and domination over the great deeds of women. If a woman does not fight over on the battlefield, it doesn't necessarily mean that she is unable or weak. In fact, she does all the work as a homemaker. Keeps the house safe and keeps the suitors away. Thus, this poem is a pathetic sight of the wife that only Odysseus is portrayed as a nobleman and his bravery is personified – but her efforts are ignored. (Weebly, DOA 03 / 05 / 2019)

The central theme of the poem deals with the pathos of a woman, the wife Penelope, that her deeds are neglected. It is seen that from the earlier era, women are subjugated. Even now, we see that the deeds of men are magnified where as women are dominated over. The theme deals with the pain that a woman faces on the subjugation of her deeds. She does all the household work while her husband is away, remains faithful by keeping her suitors away, brews her coffee, threads and performs all her duties. Yet, the society keeps her away and praises only her husband. This is the grievance that she portrays. (Weebly, DOA 03 / 05 / 2019)

The tone is one of anger and sarcasm. First, the woman praises her husband for all her deeds. Indeed, Odysseus was a person who won over the world with his wit, intelligence, and bravery. However, the wife Penelope has also remained faithful and loyal to her husband. She did the tedious work of weaving a shroud and keeping her suitors away. Yet, she is not praised. This has brought a sense of unhappiness and thus, she repents that the world calls her husband brave. The poet creates something new with the last line, "He will be called brave". This interrupts the description of Penelope's daily life, perhaps to suggest that we should think of Penelope as the brave one instead. (Weebly, DOA 03 / 05 / 2019)

In Indian mythology too, there are numerous characters who have been portrayed in different works of literature, in mesmerising ways. One of these works include *Kamayani* by Jaishankar Prasad, which is a Hindi classical poem, and is one of the best literary works present in modern times in Hindi Literature. The poem belongs to the 'Chhayavaadi' school of Hindi poetry. It was first published in 1937 and became quite popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

This poem by Jaishankar Prasad is one of the most ambitious epic. It is based on 'Manu' the only man who survived from the deluge and was completely emotionless. However he later started to get involved in emotions, thoughts and actions. The emotions that Manu poured on characters are Shraddha, Ida, Kilaat, and many others. The poem is trying to depict the thoughts, emotions and actions of humans by taking the reference of mythological characters.

The first sight itself abandons the heart on the drifting current of love, bringing memories from the uncharted regions of soul-life:

The immaculate sweet crescent smiled

When first I saw thee. And anon I felt

I knew thy face since long, since the birth of time.

There is a plea for mercy:

Of cheerless storm and strife. Reign, o, reign,

Pity supreme! And bring tranquil mirth

To those that wear in life's battling train.

It is the mental attitude that determines one's happiness:

Joy and sorrow play

And eye and heart contend.

Tennyson too, could have no complaint against the law of nature:

I curse not nature, no, nor death;

For nothing in that errs from law.

Like the Victorian, Prasad was convinced that no man can solve the problem of life by enduring faith alone.

In the yonder shade of the tree of love,

Rest awhile! weary traveller of the world.

Cool-comforted in trembling flower-dust,

Tear-swept and strewn along the banks of Faith!

Explaining his metaphorical presentation of Vedic characters, the poet said:

"Ida was the sister of the Gods, giving consciousness to entire mankind. For this there is an Ida Karma in the Yagnas. This erudition of Ida created a rift between Shraddha and Manu. Then with the progressive intelligence searching for unbridled pleasures, the impasse was inevitable. The story is so very ancient that metaphor has wonderfully mingled with history. Therefore, Manu, Shraddha and Ida while maintaining their historical importance may also express the symbolic import. Manu represents the mind with its faculties of the head and heart and these are again symbolised as Faith (Shraddha) and intelligence (Ida) respectively. On this data is based the story of Kamayani". (Epustakalay, DOA 03 / 05 / 2019)

Kamayani is Prasad's 'magnum opus'. In the medium of the romantic epic he found the adventurous thrills of abundance and variety. The story had the essential heat of conflict which could be richly exploited by his dramatic talent. The intensity of a thronging life inundated by joy could not find a happier expression than in the exuberance of romanticism. The characters were as old as time and the Upanishads; and the Puranas gave him enough material for allegory. The march of the 'evolutionary appetite' of his art towards a greater perfection found its fulfilment in his *Kamayani*.

Milton had a similar experience. He wished to make a drama out of the Fall of Man; but his artistic urge, elemental and instinctive as it was, swept him on, as it were, to the epic form. Yet, his *Paradise Lost* has enough of drama in it. *Kamayani* is as universal in its subject-matter as *Paradise Lost, Prometheus Unbound,* and *Faust*. These works have brought cosmic sublimities within the ambit of common life by proclaiming Eternity as an event. They try to answer the same questions as confront mankind in every country and, perhaps, in every age. They try to solve the riddle of life, the mystery of the universe, in terms of experience and contemplation. They depict man as torn between conflicting desires and temptations and tempestuous passions, struggling for the golden mean of life from where he can view the extremes with equanimity and detachment.

Kamayani is a table of torment and in it the heart of Man is made to sojourn in the primal wonders and the recurring mysteries of life. But like other long poems of the world it never leaves us in the midst of the torment. It is also the story of Man's final victory, of his return to harmony with Nature. The story is as simple as it is old. In the Satapatha-Brahmana and the Bhagavata we find the episode of the deluge or the Jalapralaya. *Kamayani* takes up the narrative at this point. Manu is incessantly haunted in his isolation by bleak prospects over immense distances in the future. He despises the lust of the angels and exposes their indifference to suffering and their lack of conscience. One is reminded of Prometheus and Satan in their role of upbraiding the old heavens and the gods.

Shraddha, who is also called Kamayani, being the daughter of Kama, the God of Love, answers him that she has come from the country of the Gandharvas in quest of a greater presence in whom she could merge her own identity in order to achieve a new integrity. Manu accepts her as his companion. She stands a little away like a flower waiting for a sun-beam. Sweeping in strenuous outlines to the heaven of his mind a glorious vision rises up, in which he sees Kamayani as his partner since ages.

In taking such a story going back to the very tap-root of our culture for his artistic treatment, Prasad struck gold, for he could bring back a symbolic vision of the race mind and of the primeval twilight in which mankind lived. And the story is full of romantic possibilities and purposeful allegory.

Then comes Ida. Ida represents power and glory, passion and pride, youthfulness and strength. In contrast, Shraddha represents detachment and devotion, piety and faith, mellowness and spiritual beauty. Ida attempts to tempt Manu and she succeeds. He is drawn towards her irresistible charm. With her he rules over the new country, and, under his able administration, a new flush of life enters the land. Manu is intoxicated with success. His 'ahamkara' knows no bounds. Ida tries to persuade him to the right path but fails.

In reference to Carlyle's words:

“He feels that he is with others, but not one of them. Pride and an entire uncompromising, though secret, love of self are the main springs of his conduct. Knowledge is with him precious only because it is power; even virtue he would love chiefly as a finer sort of sensuality, and because it was his virtue. Go where he may, he will find himself in a conditional world; widen his spheres as he pleases, he will find it again encircled by the empire of Necessity; the gay island of Existence is again but a fraction of the ancient realm of Night”. (Epustakalay, DOA 03 / 05 / 2019)

Ida is disgusted with the obstinate attitude of Manu and seeks to abandon him. The sense of possession has entered into his mind. He tries to own and dominate Ida. No sooner does he lay hand over her dissolving form than do the doors of the Fort fall down and a discontented populace, outraged by the incident, rushes into the palace in a rebellious mood and puts him to flight. Kamayani suffers estrangement and wanes away in the diurnal wheel of hope and despair. Manu never returns to her. Her only light in the cottage is her son.

The poet then becomes pure mystic and the scene in which Shraddha leads her husband, showing him a higher destiny and a more blissful world, reminds us of the *Divine Comedy* where Beatrice takes her lover; Dante, round the seven circles of heaven. The poet turns once again to Nature, light and shade, plants and herbs, flowers and honey and butterflies, and evokes an idyllic atmosphere lulling us slowly into a bewildering world of dreams.

Nowhere is his ideal better achieved than in *Kamayani. Kamayani* is the most splendid poem of the modern era in Indian literature. It has shown that there is a hope for real poetry in our country. Nay, it has shown a hope for the survival of the human race itself. If mankind achieves that equanimity and detachment stressed in this mighty poem, the hope would not be a forlorn one.

The achievement of Prasad has been summarised by Dr. Indra Nath Madan:

“Prasad symbolises the protest against the gross materialism of the age. He stresses the beauties of Nature for those who have no leisure to enjoy the reddening of the rose, the charm of spring, the buzzing of bees and the flowing of the breeze. He felt, as early as 1913 that the head was becoming empty. He pleads in almost all his poems for a return to the objects of Nature. According to him life is not a mass of contradictions, conflicts, abstractions and logical concepts; it is a flowing stream of bliss and consciousness. He has embodied this mystic experience of life in *Kamayani*, a landmark in the history of mystic poetry. (Epustakalay, DOA 03 / 05 / 2019)

Prasad has taken the great myth of deluge as the source of his literary theme and story. In Indian mythology deluge does not stand exclusively for a mere physical and universal inundation but also bears a deep philosophical and metaphysical significance. It marks the end of the urge to live and stands for complete inaction; inertia and annihilation.

Kamayani presents a psychological interpretation of human history-not racial, not material but the basic conflict of ‘man’ – his littleness and limitedness, follies and faults of his life and the continuous struggle, he is involved in. The base of *Kamayani* is historical, sociological, anthropological and above all psychological in its structure. *Kamayani* is an allegory. Its characters are symbolic and allegorical. *Kamayani* is refreshingly new and is traditionally and mythologically old.

Poetry can be one of the most unique ways of utilising the written word to tell a story. Skilled poets are capable of making the written word say far more than its own meaning by adapting the poem's structure, grammar, and theme to be a part of the story as well. Margaret Atwood's *Siren Song* is an excellent example of such a poem, one that briefly tells a story that compliments its own meaning, and is enhanced for it greatly. Like a siren itself does, the poem draws the reader in with its content and style both, in what is best described as a fun and well-written story in poetry.

Siren Song, was written in 1974, and can be found in Atwood's collection entitled *You Are Happy*. The poem itself describes the sirens, who have origins in Greek Mythology, particularly from Homer's *Odyssey*. They are described as being combinations of women, fish, and bird, and had divine origins, though they could be perceived by mortals. In the tales from Ancient Greece, the sirens are noted as being extremely dangerous. They could be found on Sirenum Scopuli, a collection of three small islands marked by dangerous ridges and sharp rocks, the kind that a ship would only go through if it was asking to be destroyed.

What was so dangerous about the sirens was that they were indescribably beautiful, and everything about them followed that, including their voices. In the *Odyssey*, they were known for luring sailors to their deaths, because when men heard their singing and saw their figure, they were consumed by a desire to be with them, so much so that it overrode their reason or even survival instinct, and drove them to their deaths when they attempted to reach the sirens.

Odysseus, the central character of the poem, wished to hear their song, and so took his ship to Sirenum Scopuli – but not before blocking the ears of his entire crew with beeswax and ordering himself tied to the mast, not to be let down under any circumstances. His crew obeyed, and while he begged and pleaded and threatened after the sirens began to sing, he was not let down by his deaf crew until they were well away from the island. The sirens continue to hold an image in popular culture as a fascinating element from this mythology.

In a strange way, Atwood makes each reader of the poem a victim of her siren. By breaking up the verses to be short and quick, she forces the reader to move through the poem quickly. It is a clever way to build suspense, and starting by stating that the mystery of the siren's song will be revealed does build up suspense – like any story, the reader wants to know the ending. It turns out there is no ending; the song has always been obvious, and the unfortunate recipient of the serenade is just like everyone else who's passed that way by. In this way, the reader is duped as well, which makes this an interesting poem that is both fun and well – written, a strong testament to Atwood's ability to convey powerful emotion when she wants to, and also to write story pieces that entertain and amuse otherwise. (Paperap, DOA 01 / 05 / 2019)

Siren Song is a unique poem because it uses a classical Greek myth to convey Atwood's ideas about the nature of relationships between men and women in her society. Giving the myth a refreshing twist and making the narrator one of the Sirens, Atwood manages to say a lot about the role of power, control and vulnerability in relationships between men and women. According to the legend, none of the men who heard the Sirens singing were able to control themselves and were thus forced off their ships. Atwood uses this story as a parallel to real relationships to illustrate how men feel inherently drawn to women who are vulnerable because it gives them a sense of power, and how women often like to play the role of the victim because it gives them some control over men. (Paperap, DOA 01 / 05 / 2019)

This is the one song everyone

Would like to learn: the song

That is irresistible:

The song that forces men

To leap overboard in squadrons

Even though they see the beached skulls.

The song nobody knows

Because everyone who has heard it

Is dead, and the others can't remember. (Stanzas 1 – 3, Owlcation, DOA 17 / 05 / 2019)

The first three stanzas help set the scene. The speaker tells of the special song, with no mention of the personal, as if she is on the island surveying the most recent and oldest victims. Helplessness is the common theme. The helplessness of men that is, they jump into the sea once they hear the song, eager to meet with the creatures who perform on the island of certain doom.

In the poem Atwood calls this call for help "irresistible". It is a song that can never fail because it plays with men's innermost desires for power, something that they cannot change about themselves. It is important to realise that despite the control that the narrator has over men, she sounds weary and bored. Here is where Atwood's own opinions about relationships come in. Atwood probably finds it dull and disheartening to know that a relationship can be narrowed down to a struggle for power. Eventually, this quest for control will become completely meaningless, just as the Siren in the poem views her own life.

Atwood furthers her point by playing with her own readers. Throughout the poem, Atwood keeps secrets to grasp the reader's attention, making us feel that we have access to some sort of secret information, giving us some power. Nevertheless, at the end of the poem we realise that we were fooled by the song ourselves, because we too were lured by the prospect of having the upper hand in something. With this play on her readers Atwood illustrates how men and women play with each other. (Owlcation, DOA 17 / 05 / 2019)

Despite Atwood's views on relationships being pessimistic, it is important to take them into account because often, loving and caring relationships turn into nothing more than a battle for control. This is what Atwood saw in her life, living in a society where more and more marriages fail every year as people become more individualistic and divorce rates soar.

She is assigned by gods to stay on a secluded island along with two other Sirens, with nothing to do but obey her duty of enchanting sailors over and over again. Deprived of liberty to break free from this restraining position, the siren expresses her exasperation and frustration, and requests help from the reader. However, as the poem unfolds, her cry for help turns out to be a trick to lure unassuming men to her rescue. At the end of the day, she is unable to leave her designated role.

Through the depiction of a desperate Siren, the writer is hinting at the difficulties faced by women in real life as well. Women are constrained by plenty of societal expectations and roles

imposed upon them, just like the Sirens. It can be difficult and frustrating to break free from these expectations. The poem is about the distress a woman experiences about being stuck in a designated role and trying to break free. This distress is caused by the reluctance of having to give up the mental comfort provided by following her role, the fear of betraying her group, and the lack of ability and means to break free from her designated role.

On the one hand, she yearns to rebel against societal expectations in pursuit of individuality and freedom. It shows the speaker is irritated that people perceive her as just a typical character from a myth, instead of a real person with real emotions and desires. She also feels that her struggle is dismissed and invalidated by others as if it is fictitious and unreal. It shows she is determined and willing to actively seek help from others in order to break free.

Margaret Atwood's petulantly patronising tone towards men and her blatantly vivacious tone towards women shows that she holds women in a higher respect than Homer. By changing the point of view in her revision of the *Siren Song*, Atwood examines a side of the story that has never been explored before. Atwood, throughout the song, shows men in a negative light. The Siren is explaining how the men can never resist her song though the sight of death is present as there are skulls and human remains on the islands where the Sirens are located. This implies that men are not smart, and that they fade in comparison to the woman's mind. She is trying to say that all men think is that women take from them as women are inferior to them. Atwood successfully causes the reader to feel pathos and being rueful towards women. Here, Atwood characterises the Sirens as mendacious. (Paperap, DOA 01 / 05 / 2019)

However at the same time, in *Siren Song* by Margaret Atwood, the obvious bias in characterisation is put on women now. Basically, the point that has been successfully proven is that Atwood broke down socially constructed gender roles by changing the tone and perspective of the *Siren Song*.

Conclusion

The most striking thing in twentieth-century English Literature is the revolution in poetic taste and practice. Various movements and changes had a greater influence upon modern poetry. Though poets are often influenced by each other and sometimes, share a common outlook, their style and the ways of writing differ from each other. So modern poetry is essentially a private art form and it contains very much a story of individual poets.

Stories have been told and retold again and again, yet they do not run out of their inner potential for generating new meanings. This occurs through the process of adaptation. Adaptation is not a new practice; authors, poets, playwrights, directors, composers have been adapting material since civilisations arose. But this does not mean considering this practice in our own current culture would not reveal new information.

As we have analysed poets like Rabindranath Tagore, W.B. Yeats, Dorothy Parker, Jaishankar Prasad and Margaret Atwood have all looked back to these age old stories, adapted and moulded them into something new and different, and they have all given us a new outlook towards these ancient myths and narratives.

Therefore, modernists use mythologies because artists are cited as responsible for fixing the problems which the modernist techniques like subjectivity as well as fragmentation bring about. Since postmodernism is an extension of modernism, myths are equally used by postmodernists to give form and order as well. In addition, postmodernists draw upon myths because they like to borrow from the past, thus downplaying the idea of originality in the parody and pastiche they practice. Importantly, modernists and postmodernists employ popular myths to negotiate certain ideologies and further certain ideas. In this sense, such renderings and retellings of those myths differ according to their take on the myth or the position they are expected to communicate.

Myths and legends are important to us today for a number of reasons. They have value as literature, offering timeless and universal themes; they give us insight into other times and places; and they help us to see how much humankind had and has in common. The themes of myths and legends are the same as those that are present in all great literature, just a few of which are man versus man, man versus nature, man versus the Gods, man on a quest, family conflict, and coming of age. Most myths and legends include at least one of these themes and often several. These are in the earliest “stories”, the ancestors of all literature that we read today. Even aside from the beauty and creativity of these stories, which alone make them worthy of study, it enriches our study of literature today to see its earliest roots.

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