

Mythology in lewis and tolkien essay

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Introduction Present essay deals with the issue of mythology and mythic language in Clive Lewis's and John Tolkien's major writings. The primary research question this essay addresses is the extent to which Lewis and Tolkien works may be described as mythical. In the view of answering this questions, present essay studies mythical discourse, characters, their connection with existing European mythologies, the role mythical language plays within the entire writers' narrative and how does it organize it.

Based on these preliminary considerations, the present essay defends the thesis that Lewis and Tolkien's novels include the substantial number of mythical elements, which play important genre and narrative role. However, notwithstanding this fact, Tolkien's and Lewis's novels are inherently modern with the essential role of modernist narratives as well as Christian motives and the themes of liberation. The latter implies that mythology, being transposed to Tolkien's and Lewis' narratives, loses its intrinsically divine and eternal status and becomes the part of completely new world where myth exists as the part of constructed literary reality.

The Role of Mythology in Tolkien's writings Tolkien's writings, especially as far as Lord of Rings trilogy is concerned, embrace mythical symbols and elements, derived from many mythological traditions, including Northern, Irish, Celtic and Christian mythology. These elements are fused within Tolkien's narrative and function as secondary texts. There is no denying the importance of the fact, that introduction of myth in modernist novel is informed by the author's desire to revive the mythical consciousness, which is constantly repressed in modern industrial civilization. The first thing that marks the mythical nature of Tolkien's narrative in the Lord of the Rings is that historical time is removed

and the plot unravels in some eternal territory with stabilized and well-entrenched relations and traditions. The latter constitutes an essential part of mythical experience .

Such mythical eternity is represented in the Lord of the Rings in Bilbo's journey to Rivendell, where he settles to write and translate. The ahistorical atmosphere he finds here is expressed by him in the following way: " Time doesn't seem to pass here, it just is" (Tolkien, Fellowship 225). The atmosphere of mythical eternity and stasis is also obvious in Frodo's description of Lothlorien as a " high window that looked on a vanished world" where " ancient things still lived" (Tolkien, 2. 6. 340–41). However, such mythical atmosphere is not just for its own sake. Tolkien inserts mythical time in his text to make the break with quotidian experience and common sense and protect modernity and enlightenment. The latter is exemplified by the fact that such mythical space allows mortal characters to think historically.

For instance, that is evident in Bilbo's request to Frodo to complete his historical narration. Hence, it may be said that mythical atmosphere is not something autonomous in Tolkien's text – instead it functions in an inherently modernist context. Rivendell is a place, populated by mythical creatures named Elves. However, notwithstanding such mythical surroundings, it endows its members with strengths needed for the struggle with evil. Hence, Rivendell, in fact, represents the place where the forces of progress are united. Unlike Rivendell, which is the incarnation of modernist progress,

Lothlorien represents the stronghold of conservatism and darkness, which breaks causal historical ties of events and is focused only on the past.

The latter is evident in Frodo's chaotic and strange vision in the Galadriel's Mirror (Tolkien, 2. 7. 352-54). The same mythical timelessness and darkness may be seen in Mordor. The struggle between mythical forces in Tolkien's trilogy also bears on modernist connotations. Such mythical creatures as Sauron etc. represent dark forces, which want to halt the time pace in order to maintain their brutal power.

Therefore, it is evident that Tolkien's mythical narrative promotes the cause of history and liberation, which immediately links it to modernism. The use of mythical characters, names and locations in Tolkien's text is not sufficient to argue that it is totally mythical. Only myth can be identical to itself. As Hunter rightly suggests, any product of contemporary culture, including 19th century novels and today's fiction may be described as mythical, because it contains certain implicit or explicit references to ancient myths, however, such stance in fact distorts their genuine function in them.

Hence, the use of mythical material does not automatically imply that a given text is mythical in nature. In contrast, as the present analysis showed, the deal is how does myth function inside modern narrative and what implications for understanding of contemporary social, cultural and religious problems it has. Moreover, being inherently mythical means having certain structure of myth. Tolkien's trilogy has nothing to do with such a structure.

Notwithstanding its epic nature, Tolkien's narrative includes introspective and subjective discourses, which have no relation to mythical patterns, characterized by the dominance of objective and descriptive narration. Moreover, to be totally mythological, a narrative should not be tied to any historical, cultural and social context. In contrast, Tolkien's text is a product of a certain author, affected by cultural and historical conditions, which means that his text has nothing to do with mythology. Moreover, it should be said that mythical material used by Tolkien is continuously reinterpreted to reflect certain author's idea concerning English spirit and ethnic constitution of English nation.

As is it is evident, one of the basic Tolkien's intentions is to recover 'Englishness' by using mythical images of imaginary nations. In the Trilogy readers encounter with three distinct nations: Shire, Gondor and Rohan. Shire and Rohan represent direct reflection of 'English spirit', as it was perceived by Tolkien, while Gondor represents alien forces.

Shire and Rohan are presented as immature, romantic nations, which goes in line with Tolkien's sentimentality over Medieval England. To sum it up, Tolkien's narrative uses myths as the building blocks for conveying certain contemporary meanings and idea, while its structure is profoundly different from myth as it represents modernist novel tradition. Mythology in Clive Lewis' writings Lewis's literary heritage similarly to Tolkien's is also characterized by the significant influence of mythical themes and characters. However, it is not right to reduce them to Christian mythology as some may suggest. Chronicles of Narnia is the best example of how Lewis fuses

different mythological characters and themes in his narrative where they function as the secondary text.

As Ward suggests, Lewis "had translated the planets into plots, and the music of the spheres could be heard silently sounding... in each work." (Ward, 2008, 56) Such intertextuality allows Lewis to use ancient mythology as the literary symbols for promoting his religious ideas. The world of Narnia, hence, should not be described as homogenous and structured myth, because Lewis embeds very different characters such as fauns, nymphs, satyrs, Roman gods (Bacchus and Pomona) etc. He utilizes themes and characters from mythologies as different as Greek and Celtic and Roman.

Moreover, Lewis utilizes traditional British medieval fairy-tales and Christian divine texts (Downing, 45). The latter example proves the fact that similarly to Tolkien's texts, Lewis narrative does not function as the full-fledged myth – instead it just utilizes mythical material to create certain literary images and meanings. Such approach resonates with Lewis firm belief that the best classical myths reflect, "a real though unfocused gleam of divine truth falling on human imagination." (Downing, 108). In this way, myths are considered by Lewis to be the instruments for revealing the truth, rather than the end in themselves. This partly explains the fact, how such evidently distinct elements as biblical teachings and texts may find themselves in the same company with such folklore creature as giants, gnomes, dwarves, dragons etc.

Apart from literary aims, such approach also represents Lewis's idea that there is in fact no historical break between Classical and Christian as many historians contend. Moreover, Lewis use of different mythological characters and themes also originates from his idea that there exists continuity between two eras of Medieval Ages and Renaissance, which was refuted for the long time. The mythical themes are also evident in Lewis representing Narnia's society as a hierarchic cosmic order, which is based on 'timelessness' and 'eternal stability'. The most evil acts in the novel are the sins made against natural order. For instance, after the destruction of Jadis' home world, named Charn, she becomes the tyrant, oppressing people and ruling by force.

In another Lewis' writing named *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Edmund wants to rule his older brother, which contradicts social hierarchy in the family and results in mischievous events. In contrast, Edmund's older brother Peter as represented as the natural leader in the family. One of the major markers of mythical elements in Lewis' writings is the role of magic. Magic is reflected through the prism of action of traditional English mythical heroes such as Marylyn. The functioning of magic in Lewis's novels is usually embedded into the fight between good and evil forces.

ConclusionAs the present essay showed, both Lewis' and Tolkien's writings contain wide range of mythic characters, themes, places and events. They are usually borrowed from different mythological traditions, including Greek, Roman, Northern, Celtic, English, Christian etc. However, it is evident that notwithstanding the fact of the great role of mythology in Lewis and Tolkien's

writings, they function predominantly as the secondary texts within essentially modernist narratives. Tolkien's and Lewis's works do not have the structure, peculiar to classical myth, because they are the product of specific literary genre of a novel (developed in the 19-th century), certain historical, social and cultural contexts. Moreover, different mythical themes are fused in their writings so that their genuine meanings are lost in connotations. Myths, embedded in Lewis's and Tolkien's texts are endowed with new meanings serving concrete literary purposes.

Such approach is very similar to the literary tradition of 'magical realism', which also utilizes mythical themes and heroes to make the plot more intriguing and emotionally intensive. Apart from this, it is evident that myths used by Lewis and Tolkien often help them reveal and describe their own ideas about society, progress and human relations. In this way, it is obvious that Lewis and Tolkien's writings are mythical to the extent they utilize mythical material to create new literary meanings. However, unlike other writings, which also use mythical material, the genre created by Tolkien and Lewis is dependent on constant 'romance' with myths to maintain its organic and epic unity.

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