

Myth Formation
in the Fiction of
Chinua Achebe
and Amitav Ghosh

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INTRODUCTION

Myths, as we often understand them, stand as cultural products that construct the idea of the supernatural. It is this notion that often forces us to believe that myths are removed from a cognitive understanding of everyday reality and are therefore to be studied in the context of removed from reality. Myth studies is not a new discipline because, from the very inception of human civilization, myths have linked the human desire to know the unknown and the attempt made to represent that unknown. However, myths have different degrees of understanding and representations in various cultures, and those understandings have changed with time. Myths have existed from the very inception of humankind. In the Palaeolithic Age, humans drew pictures on cave walls, depicting strange creatures and animals they imagined as representatives of natural objects and phenomena. These are myths, and so are the stories they used to narrate and share about things unknown and incomprehensible. Advanced civilizations in the ancient ages, like those in Maya, Egypt, Iran, Greece, Mesopotamia, and the Indus Valley, created numerous myths that sought to explain the supposedly supernatural happenings around them through stories of gods and other supernatural beings. Storytellers constructed stories to explain otherwise inexplicable happenings like death, famine, thunder and lightning, floods, diseases, and weather patterns. Invariably, figures more powerful than ordinary human beings would be drawn, and they were given supernatural powers to make these things happen. This urge to explain the inexplicable forms the basis of myth formation in ancient times. As a corollary to myths, rituals are also designed to give a more tangible representation to the myths. Myths are relegated more to aesthetic media – in paintings, sculptures, oral storytelling, poetry, songs, dance, and, later on, written literature. Rituals, on the other hand, are developed as sacred practices in order to maintain the sanctity of the myths and to give them a certain tangible representation in the domain of religion. Myths and rituals, then, form part of a continuum ranging from the aesthetic to the real. However, this is not to suggest that a neat binary exists between the aesthetic and the real as rituals can be aesthetic in the exercising medium and myths might exist in the domain of real experiences too. Hence, to treat myths and rituals as a part of a continuum seems more plausible.

With the march of human civilization, myths started to become more complex and political, with social hierarchies influencing the way myths got constructed. In an agrarian feudal society, myths are a means by which the power of the feudal lord is validated. This validation comes in the form of stories that depict the power of the gods and then equate them with the power of the local patriarch. As we move into the age of printed literature, myths still dominate narrative spaces as they are cultural and political representations of the immediate reality that the literature claims to represent. This book concentrates on the novels of Chinua Achebe and Amitav Ghosh and how they use myths to give shape to their literary politics. Achebe comes from the Igbo tribe of Nigeria, and since his upbringing was in the tribal hinterlands of Igbo Nigeria, he was exposed to Igbo myths and rituals from childhood. This shaped his literary taste, and when he set out to write novels, he could not ignore the immediate social and aesthetic reality with which he had grown up. On the other hand, Amitav Ghosh is more diasporic, and, in a specific manner, a more urbane writer. He shuttles between Kolkata and New York and has travelled to parts of China, Sri Lanka, and South-East Asia to research the subject matter of his novels. So, he does not have a specific geographical locale that he intends to represent in his novels, and that explains the difference between the two writers' approach to the use and formation of myths in their novels.

The book will open with a short introduction to the history of myth criticism. It is not possible to look into the whole gamut of myth criticism within the scope of one chapter; it demands perhaps a whole book. However, it is necessary to look briefly at the various schools and strands of thought associated with myth criticism because that will provide a necessary lead into the main debate of myth formation in the fiction of Chinua Achebe and Amitav Ghosh. Myths have existed from antiquity, but an institutionalized effort to construct a body of criticism surrounding myths started with Plato. Greek classical criticism was not always in favour of myths as an aesthetic medium; philosophers like Plato and Socrates considered myths detrimental to the project of rationality since the glorification of the mythical hero might lead to political unrest since the hero's stature might outshine that of the state. Aristotle, however, showed a more favourable opinion of myths as he talks about the kernel or the inner truth that every art production imitates. The chapter then proceeds to take a look at the German Romantic philosophers and their take on myths. The twentieth century showed a renewed vigour in myth criticism, especially post-James Frazer and his enthusiasm for anthropology and the evolution of totems. The chapter then looks at the justification behind the title of the book and ends with a

discussion on the myth-ritual interface and how the two vary in practice and conjoin in a continuum.

The book will attempt to look at the way myth criticism has evolved over the years, how myths and rituals can be looked at as part of a continuum, and then it will look at the individual works of both the authors in order to discern the way myths are reproduced in those works. A central question that arises is why we are looking at two authors who are culturally, and therefore spatially, so distant from each other under the same umbrella of myth formation. Other than the highly problematic and overarching term 'postcolonial', there seems to be no connecting factor between Achebe and Ghosh. The term postcolonial is problematic because there is a debate as to whether it can be used as a temporal quality of a text, as something that is produced *after* the colonial era is over, or whether it must have a more qualitative approach. However, with respect to the specific question of Chinua Achebe and Amitav Ghosh, what this book proposes to do is not go into a comparative study of their formations of myths but rather to look into their respective approaches to the given subject, given that their cultural moorings are quite different. However, the connecting factor lies in their politics of using myths in their texts. The politics is that of identity construction. Whereas identity construction may be a common factor in a large gamut of literature, identity construction through myth formation is the specific area that the book looks into with respect to the works of Chinua Achebe and Amitav Ghosh. It must be kept in mind that both writers are writing in a postcolonial context, though the context is not unproblematically the same since the Nigerian postcolonial and the Indian postcolonial cannot be said to have the same implicative connotations. However, the thread that binds them is the use of myths to represent the identity of the cultures they seek to represent, using the novel as the medium. And in that commonality lies the difference too, as the way they look at myths and their negotiation with culture is not the same.

Let us now look at an excerpt from an interview that Chinua Achebe gave to Jeffrey Brown on May 27, 2008.

CHINUA ACHEBE, Author, *Things Fall Apart*: I knew that something needed to be done.

JEFFREY BROWN: Something needed to be done?

CHINUA ACHEBE: Yes.

JEFFREY BROWN: And what was that?

CHINUA ACHEBE: That was my place in the world, my story, the story of myself, the story of my people. I was already familiar with the stories of different people.

JEFFREY BROWN: Because you grew up reading English literature...

CHINUA ACHEBE: Yes, and having an English education and encountering accounts of events of people. And, at some point, I began to miss my own. Think of it in terms of a gap in the bookshelf, you know, where a book has been taken out and the gap is there. (Achebe: 2008)

Achebe's politics become quite apparent in this interview as he stresses telling the story of "my people". It is a fact that English literature in the postcolonial period could not be Anglo-centric anymore as realities outside the domain of England and America existed and could be represented in the English language, though they called for new poetics. Achebe, and, for that matter, the Black African writers of his time, like Senghor, Fanon, Wa Thiong'o, and Soyinka, would consider writing an act of the empire writing back, constructing a new language of resistance and giving rise to a new world in literature that readers of English literature had not been exposed to before. Achebe uses myths as an important ingredient to expose the rest of the world to the African way of life – its social ideology and religious institutions. The word 'African', however, needs to be treated cautiously since Africa is not a monolithic whole. It is a vast continent with numerous cultures, languages and tribes, with different tribal, agrarian and urban conglomerations, possessing different cultural ingredients. Such a multi-cultural space cannot be clubbed under the term 'African', though that was precisely the colonial project - to stereotype the colonized as an entity. For intellectuals like Achebe, writing becomes an act of resistance and a way by which the different cultures of Africa are 'discovered' by the rest of the world, even though they have existed for centuries.

Achebe uses myth as an important component in his novels because the Igbo tribe that he represents has an institutionalized system of myths that govern the way the Igbo society is run. Myths form an important aspect of the Igbo cosmology, which is governed by *chi*, or destiny. To Achebe, myths are political in intent in his narrative strategy since they help construct the collective social identity of the Igbos. Achebe sort of de-territorializes English as a language as he puts English in the Igbo context and then constructs the poetics of his art through that language, which he appropriates for his politics. In 2012, Achebe wrote a book called *There was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*, which is an autobiographical narrative on the various incidents in his life. He includes a section on the compositional

history of *Things Fall Apart*. Let us devote some time to this book because that will give us a lead into the various aspects of myth formation discussed at length in the main chapters. Achebe, in the section on the compositional history of his first novel, writes

I have written elsewhere of how I fared when I entered a short story competition in the result, which was that nobody who entered the competition was good enough. I was more or less singled out as someone with some promise, but the story I submitted lacked “form”. Understandably, I wanted to find out more about what the professor meant by form. It seemed to me that there was some secret competence that I needed to be taught. But when I then applied some pressure on this professor to explain to me what form was, it was clear that she was not prepared – that she could not explain it to me. And it dawned on me that despite her excellent mind and background, she was not capable of teaching across cultures, from her English culture to mine. It was in these circumstances that I was moved to put down on paper the story that became *Things Fall Apart*. (Achebe, 2012: 34-35)

It is clear from his explanation what Achebe intends to do with his art. It is not an exclusivist approach that he has in mind when he says that the British professor could not explain to him what she actually meant by “form”. Achebe is aware that she is a product of her cultural background, and she knows fiction in the form that Europeans have deemed the form of a short story. But there can be other “forms” too which are not Eurocentric but can be appropriated into the English language and literary oeuvre through shifting the parameters of a “form”. Myths in his novels, therefore, perform the specific function of discerning the Igbo culture for the foreign audience, and he chooses to write in English so he can reach a wider audience. The cultural appropriation that Achebe exercises through his art is a dominant politics in the postcolonial authors as they want to reclaim their identity not through indigenous means but the colonial enterprise also. Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin in *Empire Writes Back* observes

The crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that postcolonial writing defines itself by seizing the language of the centre and replacing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place. There are two distinct processes by which it does this. The first, the abrogation or denial of the privilege of ‘English’ involves a rejection of the metropolitan power over the means of communication. The second, the appropriation and reconstruction of language of the centre, the process of capturing and remoulding the language to new usages, marks a separation from the site of colonial privilege. (Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin, 37)

This notion of appropriation of language is perhaps the point of view of the first generation of postcolonial critics, because, later, Homi Bhabha pointed out in *Location of Culture* that colonization leads to a hybridization of culture, where the colonial narrative constantly intrudes into the postcolonial narrative, giving rise to a hybrid identity in the narrative. To Ashcroft and Tiffin, the appropriation of the colonial language is almost unilinear, which leads to a discourse that defines the production of the postcolonial culture in terms of resisting the colonial centre of privilege. However, as far as Achebe is concerned, his appropriation of the colonial narrative is not a unilinear phenomenon because the interface between colonial history and the postcolonial present is a kind of mixture of cultures. “It is not the colonialist Self or the colonized Other, but the disturbing in-between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness – the white man’s artifice inscribed on the black man’s body”, states Homi Bhabha (Bhabha, 1994: 45). Achebe’s politics in his literary creations can be seen as a product of the in-between experience that was his childhood as he negotiated with the colonial culture in his school, and academia in religion.

In *There was a Country*, Achebe points to this tension between the colonial culture and the native ethos that he had to negotiate as a social person as well as an intellectual. He notes

I can say that my whole artistic career was probably sparked by this tension between the Christian religion of my parents, which we followed in our home, and the retreating, older religion of my ancestors, which fortunately for me was still active outside my home. (Achebe, 2012: 11)

The passage shows that Achebe grew up in a society where assimilation was perhaps the key factor that drove society towards a mingling of tradition and modernity. By modernity, we do not mean Christianity in particular, but the general influence of the colonial culture on the colonized. However, the word ‘modernity’ must not be interpreted in terms of a lateral growth of culture towards betterment but should be read in the context of a foreign influence in the local culture. As an artist who wants to portray the traditional Igbo way of life, Achebe chooses the point of inflection in history, that is, the arrival and consolidation of colonialism, in order to comment on the larger issues of cultural confluence. In novels like *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, Achebe does not unproblematically reflect on the tradition of Igbo culture that would have meant that Achebe was only interested in constructing a neat binary between the pre-colonial and the colonial times. At a time when cultures are intermingling and creating fissures in each other, Achebe discerns the inherent fault lines that run

through the centre of Igbo life. He shows how myths function as authoritarian agents at times as society is duty bound to follow them, and at other times he delineates how those very myths are twisted and strategically re-interpreted by people in power, like Okonkwo and Ezeulu, to galvanize their self-interest and strengthen their power. This makes Achebe a politically complex novelist to interpret. He is not a nationalist but a critic of cultures – both the colonial and postcolonial societies. The chapters that follow examine his texts and specifically focus on myth formation and how it contributes to the issue of identity construction. In the novel *No Longer at Ease*, myths prove to be detrimental to the hero Obi, who cannot marry the woman of his choice because she is an *osu*. In this case, Obi resists the traditional society governed by myths since he is a product of the postcolonial society who is also shaped by English education and does not consider tradition as a principle to take into account when making a decision.

Talking about the tension between tradition and modernity in Achebe's novels, Achebe mentions an incident in *There was a Country* that happened to his mother. Kola-nuts are considered sacred according to Igbo rituals and they are not supposed to be picked from the tree. One is allowed to collect them only when the fruit ripens and falls to the ground. However, Achebe's mother, being a Christian, picked a kola-nut from the tree and her Christian neighbour (who was also her relative) reported the matter to the local priest as an "insult to our culture". However, Achebe's mother did not give in to any pressure and said that she had every right to pick the fruit, especially when the tree was in her compound. Achebe concludes by saying "One can appreciate the fact that she had won a battle for Christianity, women's rights and freedom" (Achebe, 2012: 10). These autobiographical anecdotes are a glimpse into the kind of society Achebe fictionalizes in his novels. The strife between Igbo tradition and Christian modernity is centred around the debate of how the older belief systems are to be negotiated. Myths, therefore, form a central discourse in the debate, and it is the perspective on myths that contributes to the social tension surrounding the pre-colonial and postcolonial times.

The other author that the book proposes to look at in terms of myth formation is Amitav Ghosh. Ghosh's context is quite different from Achebe's, not only because Achebe is Nigerian and Ghosh is a diasporic Indian author but also because Ghosh follows a different politics in his novels. The postcoloniality of Ghosh is not the same as that of Achebe's. The novels *The Hungry Tide*, *Sea of Poppies*, *River of Smoke*, and *Flood of Fire* are not social critiques of a colonial condition but talk of characters

engaging with the colonial force to make their living. *The Hungry Tide*, however, should not be bracketed with the other three as they are part of the Ibis trilogy, set in 19th-century Bengal, Bombay and Canton, during the Opium Wars. *The Hungry Tide* is a depiction of the Bon Bibi myth that functions as a major ritualistic order in the Sunderban region. The chapter on this novel discusses the myth and its significance on the characters in detail. It must be kept in mind that Ghosh is a half-Diasporic and half-native author because he shuttles between Kolkata and the USA, and he even travels to various parts of the world to research the topics he intends to fictionalize. In an interview, Ghosh stated

I lived in a small village in the Sunderbans for a while, on an island called Satjelia. I travelled through the *khals* [canals] and creeks, got a boat and spent time with the fishermen, learnt how to catch crabs and heard their stories. Yes, it was a long process of research. (Ghosh, 2004: 6)

Amitav Ghosh is an avid researcher who not only depends on secondary sources for his research but conducts field research as well to get first-hand experience of the local cultures. Perhaps his training as an anthropologist helped him adopt this approach. The fact that Ghosh stayed in the Sunderbans to collect material for the novel shows in the way he fictionalizes the Bon Bibi myth in the novel because there is a tone of immediacy in the details of the myth. The Bon Bibi myth gives a hyper-localized temper to the text because the society governed by this myth is not a large one at all. The population of the Sunderban, though constantly increasing, does not have a large population, and even within it, only that part of the population that lives very close to the delta and the mangroves negotiates directly with the myths and rituals of Bon Bibi. Bon Bibi is the protective mother to all those who enter the forest as she is said to have the power to protect humankind from the attacks of the tiger. It is untenable to go into the details of the myth here as it is discussed at great length in the subsequent chapters, but what needs to be stressed here is Ghosh's aim to focus on the local in the novel. A debate might be raised as to whether the Bon Bibi narrative is a myth or more of a cult because the spatial influence of the narrative is not large. However, it is problematic enough to note that, based on the number of followers, a myth can be distinguished from a cult. Also, a myth might have many figures in it as divinities, but a cult is more directed towards an individual divine figure. However, in the case of Bon Bibi, there are other characters like Dakkhin Ray and Dukhe who are a part of the narrative and hence it will not be too deviant to say that Bon Bibi does lead up to a myth. A myth normally has a well-structured system of belief, which is manifested through rituals and, in the case of the Bon Bibi narrative, the

rituals form a coherent system of faith, as is evident in the rituals practised by characters like Malati and Fokir in the novel. The tension in *The Hungry Tide* is created by the reception of the myths and rituals by Piya – a diasporic Bengali who has settled in America and comes to Sunderban to research the Gangetic dolphins. Her ignorance about the local myths can be interpreted as the colonizer's ignorance of the local culture, but Piya is more receptive to gaining knowledge about the myths and rituals of the place that govern the lives of characters like Fokir. It is this fluidity in Piya that gives a different perspective on the myths because as an outsider who is not appropriated into the folds of the local culture, she is a different receptor to them. Fokir looks at myths with absolute faith; Nirmal dismisses them totally as he is a Communist and hence a non-believer in such narratives of faith. Piya, however, looks at mythology as a knowledge capital that produces a certain culture. The alternate gaze to the myth of Bon Bibi through the character of Piya is the objectivity that Ghosh attempts to bring in his narrative.

The other three novels that the book proposes to look at in terms of myth formation are *Sea of Poppies*, *River of Smoke* and *Flood of Fire*. These three novels are a part of the Ibis trilogy set in 19th-century Bengal, South-East Asia (briefly) and Canton during the Opium War. In these novels, myth formation takes place through the construction of various belief systems that were dominant in the 19th century in the various parts of Asia that Ghosh depicts. The three novels fictionalize various historical events that occurred during the Opium War, a war fought between Britain and China over the control of opium exports from the port of Canton. Ghosh inducts myths in his narrative as a statement of the social belief systems functioning during the time. Apart from this, the issue of class also pervades the myth formation in the texts. Deeti, who is a lower-class woman from Bihar, marginalized in terms of class and gender, negotiates with the myth of Sati and the related rituals. She is also, however, projected as the goddess when she proves to be the binding factor among the *girmitiyas* (coolies) aboard the ship to Mauritius, where they are being taken as plantation workers by the British. On the other hand, Babu Nob Kissin, who is a manager in Mr. Burnham's firm, experiences gender fluidity as he associates himself with the myth of *Rashleela* in which Lord Krishna engaged in playful romancing with the ladies of Vrindavana. Babu Nob Kissin imagines himself as one of the *sakhis*, or playmates, of the Lord. He feels that his male body is being appropriated by his spiritual guide and mother, Ma Taramony, and hence that he is becoming feminine, both ontologically and psychologically. In the case of Deeti, myth works as a repressive force because she is underprivileged in terms of her class and gender, and society finds in her a

suitable subject on whom to impose social narratives. On the other hand, for Babu Nob Kissin, myths serve as a liberating force that helps him come to terms with his body and gender. This emancipating aspect of the myth is made possible by Nob Kissin's affluent class affiliation. Deeti's resistance to social norms after she is taken away from the funeral pyre of her husband by Kalua is met with derision and social stigma. She and Kalua have to escape after marrying because society and her in-laws will not accept a woman who escapes being a Sati and then marries a man lower in class. Babu Nob Kissin, however, faces no such social stigma, at least not apparently. He does have to face some social derision from people like Mr. Burnham for being so "feminine" in a man's body, but he does not have to face social expulsion like Deeti because he is a manager in a British-owned firm, and also he is a man. When we look at the issue of myth formation in the text of Amitav Ghosh, this issue of class needs to be kept in mind especially because that determines how myths are received by the characters. In the *Ibis*, there is a conglomeration of classes, which by itself is an interrogation of the existing system of belief. In fact, the only identity that the characters possess on the ship is that they are all coolies. It does not matter that the coolies comprise of Deeti and Kalua from Bihar; Paulette, an British orphan who had been brought up by Indian foster parents and Mr and Mrs. Burnham; Neel, the deposed zamindar of Rashkhali, who is tricked into bankruptcy by Mr. Burnham; and Ah-Fatt, a half-Chinese, half-Indian led astray by opium abuse. These characters are socially distant, and before they come on board the *Ibis*, they didn't know each other. However, once on the *Ibis*, class becomes a secondary issue as everyone's identities are reoriented and they are assigned another –colonized subjects under the control of their British masters.

In the interview that we quoted above, Amitav Ghosh gave his reason for choosing the novel as a form to express his thoughts as an artist. He says

For me, the value of the novel as a form is that it is able to incorporate elements of every aspect of life – history, natural history, rhetoric, politics, beliefs, religion, family love, sexuality. As I see it, the novel lets you write anything you want to, as long as what you write remains pertinent to the bigger story. You create a world where you can include every part of you and the usual distinctions between historian, journalist, anthropologist dissolve. (Ghosh, 2004: 8)

This is why the researcher is tempted to call Ghosh a postmodern novelist. Ghosh seems to have an approach of generic synthesis in his novels, which is deemed to be an important feature of postmodernism. However, such tagging of authors is not unproblematic and the chapters on Ghosh will take

a close textual look to find whether Ghosh can be called postmodern with respect to myth formation or whether he slips away from any such terminological contouring.

A question that crops up during the book is how we can synthesize history with myth, and if that is tenable at all. In the poststructuralist tradition of Derrida, language is limited to all possible experiences and hence limited to transcendental subjectivity. So, history and myth are products of language that cannot construct a transcendental phenomenon and are hence tied to a continuum with facts at one end and fiction at the other. It is not quite correct to say that myth and history are completely different. In fact, to use Derrida's theory of *différance*, it might be argued that myth is understood in terms of negation of its meaning with history, and vice-versa. In such a scenario, myth and history spiral towards an endless chain of signifieds since both operate to discern their meaning through an infinite possibility of negation of signification. In the Ibis trilogy, apart from the myths and rituals, Ghosh uses history itself as a form of constructing the mythical narrative. This does not mean that history becomes myth, but rather it signifies that history becomes a possibility for mythical narratives to be constructed where mythology is not entirely dependent on stories of gods to discern its meaning but can operate to produce meaning at the scale of fact fusing with fiction and belief. In an interview, Amitav Ghosh was asked why he chooses to write historical novels and not history. And this was his answer.

Mahmood Kuria: What makes you comfortable to write historical novels and not academic history?

Amitav Ghosh: I do not really know how to answer that. To put it simply, I am just not interested in writing academic history, mainly because it is just a different set of questions that one asks. In the first instance, I am interested in characters, in people, in individual stories, and the history is a backdrop. But there is a huge difference between writing a historical novel and writing history. If I may put it like this: history is like a river, and the historian is writing about the ways the river flows and the currents and crosscurrents in the river. But, within this river, there are also fish, and the fish can swim in many different directions. So, I am looking at it from the fish's point of view and which direction the fish swims in. So, history is the water in which it swims, and it is important for me to know the flow of the water. But in the end, I am interested in the fish. The novelist's approach to the past, through the eyes of characters, is substantially different from the approach of the historian. For me, seeing the past through the prism of a character allows me to understand some aspects of the past that historians don't deal with. But I must admit that doing this would not be possible if historians had not laid the foundations. (Ghosh, 2013: 9)

The metaphor of the fish helps Amitav Ghosh declare that he does not consider history as a closed narrative that cannot be used for further dissemination of meaning. It is here that myth interjects within the historical narrative. Popular beliefs, cults and ritualistic practices intervene to construct a multifaceted narrative of history. It also contributes to the process of having multiple voices to a given narrative of history, and those voices need not always come from academically established discourses.

The book ends with a comparative look at the formation of myth in Chinua Achebe and Amitav Ghosh. The last chapter will delve into the methodological differences in myth formation between Chinua Achebe and Amitav Ghosh. It is stating the obvious to say that due to the temporal and cultural differences between the two authors, myth formation will be different because the very sources and content of the myths will be different. That is not something that we propose to look at. The focus will be on the politics of identity construction through myth and how that informs the difference in approach of the two authors. Achebe has more immediacy in postcolonial politics. Writing from his Black African identity, he needs to assert the cultural ties of his community to the white European and American world and rescue it from the severe racial stereotypification and violence that it has suffered for centuries from the colonizers. On the other hand, Amitav Ghosh is not compulsively postcolonial. His novels, though set at times in the colonial period, are not politicized by an immediate identity construction of the postcolonial. Ghosh does not have the compulsion to construct a narrative of resistance. However, his identity construction is more fluid in terms of community and race. His myths operate at various sections of the society, which comprise of Indians from various parts of the country, British colonizers, diasporic characters, expatriates, and even Chinese. Ghosh's politics of identity is more directed at the late twentieth century and early twenty-first-century globalized world where transnational travel and displacement, whether forced or self-willed, construct the notion of selfhood situated in various locations of the world. Displacement is a major theme in the *Ibis* trilogy and this, in turn, reorients myths as rooting factors for the culturally dislocated as well as the liberation of the self, as in the case of Babu Nob Kissin. The book will attempt to find the essential ruptures and differences that define the process of myth formation in the texts of the two authors under scrutiny.

CHAPTER ONE

A SHORT OVERVIEW OF MYTH AND MYTH CRITICISM

1.1 A Short History of Myth Criticism

The word ‘myth’ has received many critical and literary receptions across the generations in various cultures, and the receptions are as varied as they are fluid. Myth making is perhaps mankind's oldest form of cultural and aesthetic production. The cave paintings of the Neolithic age reflect people's desire to represent their world in terms of cognitive symbols, often taking the form of sequential art, leading to narratives through visual representations. As human reception of scientific and geographical phenomena has changed over the centuries, the representation of these aspects has also changed. It is difficult to ascertain why natural phenomena like thunder, lightning, fire, and death were given certain divine symbols – perhaps because of man's relative incompetency to understand the reason behind such phenomena in the early stages of civilisation. Myth studies as an academic or anthropological discipline is a relatively new area of study and it came into existence only after the Renaissance in Europe when there was a growing interest in studying man as a biological product. But myth as a form of representation has received critical attention from classical theorists, who have often denigrated myth as being anti-rational, that which goes beyond the scope of *logos*. This chapter will not focus so much on the history of myth making as on the theories that have cropped up to explain the various aspects of myth making. Therefore, an attempt is made to graph the various approaches to myth criticism, both from Europe and elsewhere. In classical Greece, the earliest critical thinking on myth was done perhaps by Hesiod, followed by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, as well as the Sophists. Hesiod identifies *logos* as the principle of reason and argument, and contrasts that with *mythos*. Bruce Lincoln, while identifying the term *logos* in Greek literary history, states

In the Homeric poems (hymns as well as epics), the term *logos* covers much the same semantic range that it does in Hesiod, although with a few different nuances and shades of meaning. Most striking, Homer's *logoi* are always set

in opposition to some situation or threat of violent struggle. In all instances, the term denotes acts of speech—often soothing, sometimes deceitful – that persuade men either to abandon the battlefield and renounce physical force or to find comfort and solace in moments of peace. The voices of official and conventional morality, however, tend to depict those who use and those who are influenced by such speech as irresponsible, womanly, or childish in nature. (Lincoln, 8)

Lincoln's theorization leads us to the point that Homer used logos as the principle of rational philosophy that constructs State and citizenship in terms of a certain mode of power hierarchy where violence becomes the right of the State, as common citizens are not allowed to take up arms, effectively meaning that they must not go against the State – one of the earliest examples where the state is represented as sacred. In contrast to logos is mythos, where Hesiod in *Theogony* tends to direct his argument towards speeches made during war, thereby engaging that speech with violence and a show of power. In texts like *Iliad* and *Odysseus*, according to Bruce Lincoln, myth making takes a major form in the epic narrative. However, the difference between logos and mythos lies in the fact that whereas the former intends to avoid violence, the latter is engaged with violence. Perhaps this is the reason why some Greek intellectuals prefer logos over mythos, because any ideology that moves towards violence is a threat to the establishment, especially if that violence is purported by a private individual. Myth making involves the mystification, self-glorification, exaggeration, and legitimization of the immense power of the mythical hero and hence there is a danger that his representation may outshine the State. However, there is a clear divide in the opinion of the ancients regarding mythos. Heraclitus and Plato denounce myth as the falsification of reality and an unnecessary story that encourages the practice of deception in both the individual and the political order. Plato in *Republic II* and *X* is critical of the role that the poets play in society, and therefore by extension he also denounces their myth making capabilities, especially that of Homer. Plato adds that since poetry is an act of mimesis that imitates the real, therefore mythos itself becomes an act of sub-standard imitation. In addition, since a poet claims to be divinely-inspired, where the Muse speaks through him, he loses all originality and becomes a kind of a cipher for divine dispensation.¹ These charges by Plato were refuted by Aristotle when he claimed in *Poetics* that mimesis is not an imitation of the real but of a kernel, the inner aesthetic spirit of a work.² Myth by extension also becomes an aesthetic simulation of that kernel and is not to be consigned to the stratum of the irrational or illogical. Heraclitus, Pindar and Xenophanes did not consider mythos enlightening enough, and even though poets like Pindar

told stories of gods and goddesses, they mostly preferred logos over mythos.³ However, what comes from a closer critical inspection is that all the ancients who did not prefer myth making in their creative or critical thinking were actually involved in myth making. The dialogues of Socrates in a book like *Phaedrus*, for example, are replete with myths and mythological constructions, as also devised later by Plato. The myths serve the function of establishing a certain code and hierarchy in the political/social order that must be convincing to the philosopher as well as the larger citizen public.

However, since the two authors in question, namely Chinua Achebe and Amitav Ghosh, are writers from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, it will be perhaps more relevant to look at the myth studies of the modern era. Before coming to the twentieth century, we need to look briefly at the German Romantic movement, which shaped the way anthropologists and the cultural historians of later ages looked at myth. We will glance at the work of Friedrich Schlegel, Schelling and Arthur Schopenhauer and attempt a critical analysis of their general trend of thought vis-à-vis myth criticism. Schlegel looks at mythology as a unifying principle of Western art and artistic consciousness that binds the different areas of thought and philosophy together, such as history, poetry and science. In “Talk of Mythology”, Schlegel observes

Our poetry, I maintain, lacks a focal point, such as mythology was for the ancients; and one could summarize all the essentials in which modern poetry is inferior to the ancient in these words: we have no mythology. But, I add, we are close to obtaining one or, rather, it is time that we earnestly work together to create one. (Schlegel, 309)

Mythology to Schlegel is therefore an aesthetic agent that binds knowledge capital in a singular strain of thought. Contemporary sensibility will categorize such a thought process as intellectual hegemony since mythology is constructed as a necessary parameter to inspect the quality of art production. He adds that “poetry and mythology are inseparable” (*ibid*, 310) and thus the two become qualities of antiquity. Schlegel is of the point of view that classical poetry is a perfect and indivisible form of art because it employed mythology in its construction. Schlegel belongs to a group of antiquarians, along with Schiller and Schopenhauer of his age and later artists like Eliot, Joyce and Pound, who felt the need to unify the sensibilities in art as practised by classical artists. Schlegel defines mythology as something that must be “forged from the deepest depths of the spirit” that will form the “eternal fountainhead of poetry” (*ibid*). Schlegel invokes Spinoza to link his conception of mythology with the sublime. He states

Mythology is such a work of art created by nature. In its texture the sublime is really formed; everything is relation and metamorphosis, conformed and transformed, and this conformation and transformation is its peculiar process, its inner life and method. (*ibid*, 312)

Mythology is related to the cult of the sublime, as theorized by Schlegel, which puts mythology on a platform of antiquarian idealism. Kant and Spinoza put sublime in the realm of absolute greatness,⁴ which means that sublimity cannot be imitated, it is beyond imitation. Mythology, if equated with sublimity, becomes an idealized state of aesthetic production that cannot be imitated. In other words, it is almost divine (philosophically, and not necessarily in religious terms) in nature and hence can exist outside the purview of imitation. As such a canon is constructed around the narrative and theories of mythology. The narrative quality of mythology is put on a platform of a higher synthesizing capacity where history, philosophy and poetry can coexist in a synthesized space. It is true that Schlegel's point of view is echoed in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* but Coleridge's focus is on the object of poetry whereas Schlegel has a wider interest in literary, aesthetic and philosophical debates. Schlegel, in *The Athenaeum*, observes that

Romantic poetry is a progressive universal poetry. Its mission is not merely to reunite all separate genres of poetry ... It will, and should, now mingle and now amalgamate poetry and prose, genius and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature... fill and saturate the forms of art with solid cultural material of every kind. (Schlegel, 314)

The moment some kind of art production becomes universal, the critic faces the charge of disbursing a kind of critical school that positions it as "the art". Schlegel's theory of mythology and Romantic art is a reaction to the empiricist philosophy of Locke and Hume, and his effort is to guide criticism to a space where the mystical can be justified under certain rational tenets like imitation and the qualitative approach to art in terms of that mythical dimension. Schlegel's argument is taken up by Schelling and Schopenhauer to construct mythology as a synthesizing agency between the ideal and the profane. The ideal, however, need not be taken as universally acceptable because the ideal in all cases is politically inclined in its narrative and hence not free from interrogation based on intellectual and philosophical debate.

Schelling's conception of mythology comes closer to what Nietzsche later theorized. Schelling's view of mythology is appropriated from the narrative of the polytheistic practice of the Greeks. He observes that "God" has

existed from the very inception of human culture/civilisation but in the pre-modern existence, God was monotheistic. Schelling identifies myth making as a rich cultural production only when monotheism gave way to polytheism; as Nietzsche would later say, it is the Dionysiac principle that propelled the making of the great classical tragedies. Schelling observes

Mythology is essentially a successive polytheism, which can arise only through an actual successive sequence of potencies, in which each power supposes and makes necessary what follows and is completed by what preceded, so that true unity is established again at last. (Schelling, 326)

Schelling's conception of an Aristotelian Unity of Action (Aristotle's theory that every succeeding action must be a logical result of a preceding action is imitated in Schelling's theory that myth narratives follow a sequential code) points to myth making as a linear process in culture where succeeding myths contribute to the generation of newer myths, and that in turn contributes to myth making in future. However, this linear progression in myths, according to Schelling, is possible only when there is a polytheistic structure of religion because without that myth narratives could not have the plurality that can generate multiple meanings. Schelling notes that mythology cannot exist outside consciousness; that is, man's conception of reality and hence polytheism reflects the multiplicity of human experience. Schelling belongs to the group of theorists who theorize mythology in terms of its approximation to social reality. Schelling is of the view that polytheism frees culture from the hegemony of the monotheistic appropriation of religious/ritualistic discourses. Schelling's originality in the larger Romantic conception of mythology lies in the fact that he tries to trace the development of mythology from the perspective of polytheistic discourses in Europe. Myth making involves a multiple approach to narrative construction, involving a plurality of voices, therefore it thrives in polytheistic religious cultures. Of course, this idea can be challenged in the context of monotheistic cultures but it is true that to a large extent polytheistic discourses open up the opportunity for myth making to become more complex, multi-voiced and plural in intent. This also opens up the debate about the origin of myths. The classical theorists of myth would like to believe that myths generated from one single source (also later argued by Max Mueller and Jung) but Schelling argues that myths have multiple sources which are culture-specific, and thus from a macro-narrative on myth, Schelling thrusts the arguments on myth criticism towards a micro-narrative reception. So, instead of focusing on one source to understand the etymological root of a myth, Schelling proposes that one needs to look at the various sources that might have contributed to the generation of that

myth and hence the focus shifts from a macro level enquiry to a micro level investigation on the narratives and sub-narratives that would have generated a given myth in the present form.

Schopenhauer's conception of myth is based on an esoteric notion that myth represents a kind of privileged knowledge that is hidden from the commonplace and is accessible only to the wise. Schopenhauer was interested in Indian religious scriptures, especially from the Aryan period, like the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*. He calls this the cult of Brahmanism and accepts it as an eternal truth. Schopenhauer's thoughts seem to stem from an acute sense of superiority of intellect and the hierarchization of the human mind according to its capability to retain intellectual discourses. He observes

This is the object of religious teachings, since these are all the mythical garments of the truth which is inaccessible to the crude human intellect. In this sense, that myth might be called in Kant's language a postulate of practical reason (Vernunft), but considered as such, it has the great advantage of containing absolutely no elements but those which lie before our eyes in the realm of reality, and thus of being able to support all its concepts with perceptions. (Schopenhauer, 362)

Kant's practical reason, found in one of his *Critiques*, is based on the assumption that the determination of will cannot become a law until that will presupposes the existence of another previous desire. What Schopenhauer intends to say here is that myth is not a universal law since myths presuppose that the receiving subject will act on the narrative of faith. Hence Schopenhauer shifts the focus from myth being the universal repository of human knowledge or consciousness. However, at the same time, he states that the Indian sources of myth like the *Upanishads* and the *Vedas* are esoteric in nature and are sources of the European intellectual mindscape since the Indian texts shaped and aligned the way European intellectual activities developed, especially post- eighteenth century. He also adds that myths function as a receptacle, a kind of vehicle that reveals esoteric truths to general humanity. Since the highest forms of knowledge are understood through revelations by intellectually superior people, myths are needed to pass that esoteric system of values to the intellectually inferior. Not only is Schopenhauer's theorization anthropologically classicist but also, to an extent, Modernist by supporting a culture of thought that accepts knowledge as privileged. The functionality of myth formation is pushed by Schopenhauer as a mere carrier in the chain of representation, and that also on an unequal scale. Myth then becomes a mere transporter of ideas from the intellectual to the non-intellectual, and hence as a narrative must adhere

to some kind of demotion in quality as the idea, which itself is of a higher order, must be presented to subjects in terms of easy representation. Myth fulfils that function.

In the twentieth century, there was a surge of anthropological studies by researchers like Franz Boas and Bronislaw Malinowski. Malinowski in particular contributed greatly to the development of myth studies as an academic discipline with the publication of *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays* (1948). Malinowski was not an academic theorist but was a field researcher in cultural/social anthropology and had conducted research in Australia and the Trobriand islands to observe the patterns of myth and ritual in tribal societies. For our purposes, we will look at one of the essays in this book, "Myth in Primitive Psychology". At the very beginning of the essay, Malinowski attacks the Society for the Comparative Study of Myth, which was founded in Berlin in 1906. He observes that this school of criticism, led by Ehrenreich, Siecke, Winckler, and Frobenius, chose to look at myth only from certain symbolic associations with objects of nature, like the sun and the moon, and then relate every myth narrative to some larger symbolic association of them. Malinowski came up with the idea that myth is not a symbolic codification of a natural or a historical event but rather a cultural or aesthetic production that exists by its autonomous right to be there. Therefore, Malinowski was one of the first critics in the modern era to link myth with aesthetic values and thereby construct it as a literary narrative having the values of an art form. He states

Studied alive, myth, as we shall see, is not symbolic, but a direct expression of its subject-matter; it is not an explanation in satisfaction of a scientific interest, but a narrative resurrection of a primeval reality, told in satisfaction of deep religious wants, moral cravings, social submissions, assertions, even practical requirements. Myth fulfils in primitive culture an indispensable function: it expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization; it is not an idle tale, but a hard-worked active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom. (Malinowski, 79)

If we choose to leave aside the clutter of Modernist grand narratives in relation to morality and primality, then it becomes tenable to see that Malinowski is actually concentrating on giving myths a certain ideological position. It seems that he is trying to construct a certain ideological strategic deployment in order to give myth a value in the world of academia instead of being merely fantastical tales of improbable events. Malinowski's

approach is therefore a sociological chartering of myths and their functionality in shaping the discourses of the artistic culture of a society. However, his approach is that of a field anthropologist's and therefore he backs his theoretical assumptions through field research and case studies. He mainly uses the myths of the Trobriand islanders to substantiate his points on myth criticism. Malinowski does not generalize his observations to all the cultures. He rather stresses on the micro-management of myth criticism, toning down each and every observation to the socio-cultural and political context of the society in which the myth was generated as a medium of communication. This is important to understand because critics like James Frazer and Jung (from the psycho-analytical perspective) had a too-general approach to myth criticism, imposing their readings on each cultural context, thereby proposing a grand narrative on the subject. Malinowski states that since the sociological approach is heavily dependent on field research, a micro-narrative theorizing the field studies should be in place, which will remain contextualized in the time-space continuum within which it is being studied. At the same time, Malinowski also makes the important observation that like any narrative, myth is not static. Myth narratives are "constantly regenerated" and are a "constant by-product of living faith" and sanctions a certain "moral rule" in society (*ibid*, 122). It is to be noted here that Malinowski seems to have a two-pronged observation of myths. On one hand he accepts that myths are subject to a certain fluidity in their narrative. In the primitive society that Malinowski refers to, myths generally take the form of oral performances or rituals, and so they are constantly shifting in content and form to suit the sociological context in the ever-changing time scale. On the other hand, Malinowski imposes a moral order on myths, making them a part of the sacred. If myths are treated as sacred, then they become teleological in intent and theosophical in purpose. It can be observed that Malinowski is differentiating between the aesthetic purpose of myths and their narratological evolution. He belongs to the strand of Modernist thinking where the moral purpose of any aesthetic production is of great significance and that is why he connects myth with the moral order of society. At the same time, he does not consider myth narratives as frozen in their meaning generation but they change in content and expression with the change of historical circumstances. Malinowski's contribution in the field of myth of criticism lies in the point that he historicizes myth and dislocates the grand narrative surrounding myths that they are some form of expression of human desire or divine order.

James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* was published in 1922 and is one of the most influential books on myth criticism in the Modernist era, influencing the works of Modernists like T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, D.H.

Lawrence and W.B. Yeats, among others. Frazer's work is an extension of the social anthropology that seemed to have captured the imagination of the critics working in the area of myth, ritual and magic of that era. Frazer, like Malinowski, worked as a field researcher in the domain of social anthropology and his methodology is the same; he theorizes on myth and ritual after citing social practices from his own field work. However, he also uses secondary sources to validate his points. One of the problems with Frazer's theorization lies in his construction of a binary between contemporary modernity and past savagery. The entire Modernist discourse was no doubt a culmination of the Enlightenment project of Europe, and in that project, there was a clear-cut demarcation in the intellectual capacities of modern age and pre-modern man. The problem with such a construction is that myths and rituals are immediately certified as the narrative of "savages", thereby constructing stereotypes. For example, while explaining the Diana Virbius myth from classical Roman antiquity, Frazer observes

No one will probably deny that such a custom savours of a barbarous age, and, surviving into imperial times, stands out in striking isolation from the polished Italian society of the day, like a primaeval rock rising from the smooth-shaven lawn. It is the very rudeness and the barbarity of the custom which allows us a hope of explaining it. (Frazer, 2)

The rude and barbarous custom that Frazer is referring to is that of the worship of Diana constituted by Orestes. He killed Thoas, the king of the Tauric Chersonese, and took the image of the Tauric Diana with him to Italy. It is said that anyone who lands on the shore where Diana's shrine is kept is sacrificed on her altar because of the violence that preceded the establishment of her shrine. Frazer calls this a "bloody ritual" (*ibid*, 3) when binarizing between modernity and the "savage" past; the undertone of Christian rebuke for pagan sentiments is clearly discernible. Another illustration from Frazer, this time from the Congo Basin in Africa, proposes an even greater intellectual trapping since cultural and social anthropologists from Europe of the nineteenth century imaged Africa as the cradle of primitivism and savagery, the dark and uncultured Other of Europe. Frazer points out a particular myth related to sin atonement and the associated ritual practised in the Congo Basin. Men and women have to bathe in two separate streams, spend two nights in the open street in the market, and then pass the house of the Kalamba (the head priest of the Bashinge tribe) completely naked. Then, as Frazer observes,

They return to the marketplace and dress, after which they undergo the pepper ordeal. Pepper is dropped into the eyes of each of them, and while this is being done the sufferer has to make a confession of all his sins, to

answer all questions that may be put to him, and to take certain vows.
(Frazer, 239)

There is undoubtedly violence in the ritual and the establishment of social hierarchy based on religious ranking. However, Frazer's analysis is more about denigrating the Other than an analytical critique of the rituals. The obvious pitfall of such an approach is that it marginalizes cultures by placing Europe in the centre, thereby exposing Frazer's colonial racial tendency. Frazer also goes back to the rituals of classical Greece, like that of Adonis, and connects the rituals with seasonal changes in nature. He notes that Adonis is said to have been born of a myrrh tree and after ten months of gestation, a wild boar ripped open the bark of the tree and the infant was born. Frazer is of the point of the view that Adonis "represented vegetation, especially the corn, which lies buried in the earth half the year and reappears above ground the other half" (Frazer, 406). Frazer's approach here is to link natural phenomena with mythical tales. He considers myths or rituals aesthetic manifestations of the natural cycle operating in the external environment, thereby falling in line with critics like Jung and Northrop Frye, who identified certain common patterns in the way myths operate in terms of portraying natural phenomena across cultures. Frazer attempts to study a large cross section of taboos, rituals, religious practices, and myths that operate at various levels in different cultures to arrive at a conclusion that myths define the archetypal human quest to define and concretely symbolize the natural happenings around him.

With Jung's arrival, the study of myth entered a new critical school, that of archetypal criticism. Freud had already worked on rituals from the perspective of psychoanalysis in a series of essays titled *Totem and Taboo*, published between 1912 and 1913. Consistent with his main theories on the id, he saw rituals as manifestations of repression and symbolic acts to express the primordial desires of the human unconscious. He observes

In the first place, then, it must be said that there is no sense in asking savages to tell us the real reason for their prohibitions – the origin of taboo. It follows from our postulates that they cannot answer, since their real reason must be 'unconscious'. We can, however, reconstruct the history of taboo as follows on the model of obsessional prohibitions. Taboos, we must suppose, are prohibitions of primeval antiquity which were at some time externally imposed upon a generation of primitive men; they must, that is to say, no doubt have been impressed on them violently by the previous generation. These prohibitions must have concerned activities towards which there was a strong inclination. They must then have persisted from generation to

generation, perhaps merely as a result of tradition transmitted through parental and social authority. (Freud, 36-37)

Freud's account is more on rituals than mythology proper and he considers rituals as symbolic expressions of suppressed desires. Freud stated in his earlier essays, as in "Creative Writers and Day Dreaming", that suppression often leads to violence, which may take the form of sexuality, aesthetic creativity or rituals. Jung of course deviated from Freud's ideology and began to publish his own ideas on the collective unconscious,⁵ which led to the construction of archetypes in the field of mythological studies. Jung identifies a series of archetypal images in myths and legends to interpret the collective unconscious of desire latent in human psyche from the pre-conscious stage. In the essay "Psychology and Literature", Jung says

The experience that furnishes the material for artistic expression is no longer familiar. It is a strange something that derives its existence from the hinterland of man's mind – that suggests the abyss of time separating us from pre-human ages or evokes a super-human world of contrasting light and darkness. It is a primordial experience which surpasses man's understanding... (1972: 178)

In this extract, the phrase "super-human world" refers to the construction of myth in accordance with Jung's conception of archetypes. The archetypes were constructed in the first place, according to Jung, as symbolic modes of representation to express the unconscious fears or desires through mythological constructions. So, myths are explainable in terms of archetypes like the superhero, the avenging hero, demons, seasonal movements, and so on. In another book, *Essays on a Science of Mythology* (first published in 1941) with C. Kerényi, Jung states

The hero's main feat is to overcome the monster of darkness: the long hoped for and expected triumph of consciousness over the unconscious. Day and light are synonymous for consciousness, night and dark for the unconscious. The coming of consciousness was probably the most tremendous experience of primeval times for with it a world came into being whose existence no one had suspected before. (1950: 118-19)

Jung's theory of the archetypes therefore sets some images as part of the "eternal" desires or inhibitions of man in terms of subconscious thought processes. One problem with this theory is its Euro-centricity. Jung mentions that the collective unconscious is knowable through the archetypal images but one cannot miss the underlying racist tone in associating light and day with the conscious and night and dark with the unconscious. A binary seems to be imposed in the representative space of the theory where

the non-white race is deemed to be associated with the Dionysiac cult of the unconscious. When this theory was applied to literature by writers like Conrad, there was inevitably a tendency to associate the Dionysiac and the atavistic with the non-European world. However, Jung does not explicitly binarize between European and non-European spaces, though throughout the essay there are tacit references to the lack that man suffers by failing to differentiate between a “transcendental subject of cognition” and “an empirical universe” that gives rise to the “hero-myth” (*ibid*, 125). It is the hero who can transcend to the cognitive and symbolic self of transcendence and can free man from the darker forces of the unconscious. Jung constructs a difference between an undifferentiated consciousness when primeval man mistook symbols for reality (and hence myths became ritualistic since they needed to be followed to remain a part of the larger cosmic order, which was undefinable to primeval man) and a differentiated consciousness when man began to understand the difference between symbols and reality. Here also, Jung can be critiqued for binarizing man’s chronological development of his rational self. Man’s rationale will develop in terms of chronology but a subjective binarization in terms of its quality may not be tenable. That is, to say that only modern man has the ability to distinguish between the false representations in myths and the empirical reality outside is to perhaps cast doubt on rationality in ancient times. It simplifies the whole debate on man’s progression in terms of knowledge capital and also puts the debate on mythology on a facile platform – whether to believe in the tales or not. That cannot be a founding proposition for mythology studies because the answer is obvious, but the answer does not capture the complexities in this field of research.

Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) is a study of how symbols began to have mythical significance in the general movement of aesthetic history and Frye develops on the Jungian archetypes in the four essays he writes for this book. For the purposes of our book we will concentrate only on the third essay, “Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths”, and a part of the second essay sub-titled “Mythical Phase: Symbol as Archetype”. To begin with the latter, Frye makes his position as critic clear; that is, his being part of the New Criticism movement started by Eliot in the 1920s with “The Sacred Wood”, which believes in the autonomy of the text and seeks to disconnect the text from its historical, political and social contexts. Frye refers to the word “poem” as associated with classical forms of art, mainly tragedy, comedy, epic, and narrative verse, and says that poems do not belong to the class of art or speech but rather represents its own class, a “*techne*” or artefact, and needs to be examined “without immediate reference to other things” (Frye, 95). This being Frye's subject position