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FROM MYTH TO FOLKLORE

Mythology is a very ancient, but at the same time a very vital form of creative fantasy. It is a dominant feature in the spiritual culture of primitive societies, and to some extent of ancient societies; it is the principal means of giving an overall sense to the world. In a primitive culture, mythology gives body to an as yet weakly differentiated syncretic unity of unconscious creation, primitive religion and the embryonic forms of pre-scientific notions about the surrounding world. Mythology provides the soil and the raw material for early forms of religion and of poetry.

In recognising the syncretism of mythology as its specific characteristic, we are prevented both from identifying mythology with religion, thereby contrasting it with art (cf. for example the views of A. F. Anisimov, who attempts, in the context of the most primitive cultures, to draw a contrast between the "idealistic" religious myth and the "materialistic" artistic tale), and from identifying mythology with art, thereby contrasting it with religion (cf. for example, the views of R. Chase, in *The Quest for Myth*, Baton Rouge, 1949).

The development and the increase in complexity both of religious systems and of poetic genres is accompanied by a certain degree of differentiation of myths. For example, archaic

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myths about the first ancestors of the human race, the cultural heroes, point the way both to fairy-tales and to religious myths and legends about a creator-god. The very essence of myth is dual, in the sense that mythology comprises a particular assembly of notions about the world, and at the same time the totality of accounts of concrete figures of fantasy, the so-called gods and heroes. If we collect together all the numerous definitions of the myth, we can see that they fall clearly into two groups, according to whether the "notion of the world" or the "story" is taken as the essential feature. The point is that the myth—at least the primitive myth—is in its very essence a symbolic description of a model of the world expressed through an account of the happenings relating to various elements of the world order.

Certain features of mythology, as a type of thought, are expressed in the character of both the "world-view" and the "story." Mythology is characterized by a naive personification of surrounding nature, a "metaphorical" juxtaposition of natural and cultural objects, which has led to totemic classifications and to mythologic symbolism, as well as to the notion of the universe as a whole as a living being, and thus to the identification of the macrocosm and the microcosm. The diffuseness of primitive thinking shows itself in the vagueness of the distinction between subject and object, between the thing and the sign, between the thing and its attributes, between the part and the whole. Mythology does not construct generalizations on the basis of a logical hierarchy, from concrete to abstract or from cause to effect, but operates on a concrete and personal level; instead of a hierarchy of cause and effect, it has a hierarchy of powers and mythological beings—a hierarchy with semantic validity and significance.

Mythological classifications are not constructed on the basis of contrasting internal principles, but of secondary, sensual qualities, inseparable from the objects themselves and from the emotions aroused by them. Resemblances, and other such types of relationship, appear in mythology as identities; and instead of splitting things into their signs, the myth divides them into their parts. We therefore find in the myth not a scientific law, but concrete personages and individual events; not a process

of cause and effect, but a "beginning" in time (an event!) and a material metamorphosis.

Mythological logic is metaphorical and symbolic; in selecting its materials, it takes what it needs from what is available; one and the same element may appear first as material and then as instrument; and all the elements periodically undergo a "kaleidoscopic" rearrangement. Mythological logic operates widely using dualistic oppositions of sensory qualities. These contrasts become increasingly semanticized and ideologized, developing into different means of expressing fundamental opposition such as "life/death" and the like. A characteristic feature of myths is their illusory conquest of such antinomies through the successive discovery of mythological mediators (both heroes and objects), who symbolically unite the signs of the two poles.

For all the peculiarity of mythological thought, there is no doubt that it was a form of knowledge of the surrounding world; and for all its unwieldy and "fantastic" character, there is no doubt that it has served as an analytical instrument, without which even a material culture would have been unthinkable in the earliest stages of human development.

One must also bear in mind that the myth explains the existing social and cosmic order in such a way as to support it, by excluding inexplicable events and hopeless contradictions. This is part of the explanation for the elevation of myths into regularly repeated rituals, aimed at reconciling the individual to the social order and harmonizing the relationship between the social group and the natural world around it. By means of such rituals, the archaic model of "the earliest times" and the first creation (as contrasted with the empirically perceived passage of time in the present) is supplemented by a cyclical model of time, with a regular repetition of events. The narrative of myth is imbued with the pathos of order being established, of chaos being turned into cosmos.

The most mythological syncretism, and certain specific features of mythological thought, are to some extent inherited, exploited and adapted to their own ends, both by religious or even ancient religio-philosophical thought, and by art (especially on the level of folklore), whose remarkable poetic qualities have a somewhat elemental character.

The main form in which mythology exists is verbal, although myths may be illustrated by drawings or dances. There is no justification for equating folklore with mythology, but if myths are indeed not only expressions of a world-view but also stories, it follows that the myth must be accepted as the most ancient element of our verbal heritage of folklore. In the texts of the most genuine folklore, myths are present—both in the form of archaic views of the world and of man, and as essential elements of poetic language and style, and as a particular narrative style, a genetic precursor of other epic genres.

The theory of A. N. Vesselovsky, which puts forward a classical variant of a true historical poetics, lays the stress not on the syncretism of ideology or of content, but on that of the artistry of the various types of art and of poetry; the problem of the myth is glossed over. Vesselovsky's theory of primitive syncretism has performed good service as a working hypothesis for explaining the genesis of verbal art; but it requires some serious correction in the light of ethnographic material that has now accumulated. In particular, certain observations by the English academic Cecil M. Bowra should be noted. In his book *Primitive Song* he shows that the epic (whose ancient prototype is the myth) is not as closely bound up with primitive syncretism as are lyrical poetry and drama, which are hard to separate from music, pantomime and dance.

If we are to understand Vesselovsky's theory of primitive syncretism, we must understand quite clearly that he proposes, as the material vehicle of syncretism, "the games of popular ceremonies." In so doing, he to some extent anticipates Fraser's "Cambridge" school, which seeks in ritual not only the source of myths, but the chief root of all ancient culture. Following on the work of Jane Harrison and other Cambridge workers, all forms of folklore and epic were subsequently ascribed a ritual origin; including the magical fairy-tale and the heroic epic (cf. the works of P. Saint-Yves, Berta Philpotts, E. Mireaux, C. Autrand, G. R. Levy, Carpenter, Jan de Vries, Raglan; and cf. V. Propp's work tracing the magical fairy-tale back to initiation rituals).

Ritualism is a dominant theme in twentieth-century theories of myth and folklore; it has its merits, certainly, but it is

plainly one-sided, as can be seen, particularly, in the way that the subject of a myth or epic, the content of these artistic works, is wholly subordinated to the idea of ritual.

One cannot regard ritual as a totally dominant feature in the genesis of the heroic epic and of the myth as well. The problem of the temporal sequence of myth and ritual is the problem of the chicken and the egg—there are myths that originate in ritual, and rituals that are dramatic representations of myths; some myths have an equivalent in ritual, and others do not. If one adopts a somewhat schematic approach, myth and ritual can be treated as two different aspects—one in words, the other in actions—of one and the same phenomenon. In any case, in principle the inner unity of myth and ritual is not created by the formal means of the acts of a ritual, but by the identity of the semantic structure of the two—by those symbolic paradigms that are altogether indivisible from mythological "notions."

For instance, among the Aranda of Australia, the narration of a myth is not always accompanied by a ritual, within which dance and song are synchronised and indivisible. (Here Vesselovsky's theory requires correction). Dance, song and narration of the myth each appear in their own specific character—the dance being concerned with imitation of the movement of animals, in whose forms the totemic ancestors were used to appear; the song being a simple naming of these ancestors; while the narrative gives a ritual account of the path they take in their wanderings. (For more information on this, see my article "Primitive Sources of Verbal Art"[1]). But at the same time, all three are united by a single mythological theme, a single semantic content.

Stanner, in his brilliant book on the myth and ritual of northern Australia, with special reference to the Murinbata tribe,[2] shows that myth and ritual make use of the same symbolic language, whether or not the myth has a ritual equivalent or vice versa. This and other recent research leaves no doubt

[1] For further details, see my article "Pjervobytnye Istoki Slovesnovo Iskusstva" (Primitive Sources of Verbal Art) in *Rannie Formy Iskusstva* (*Early forms of art*), Moscow, 1972.

[2] Stanner, W.E.H., "On Aboriginal Religion." *Oceania*, vol. XXX-XXXIII, 1960-1963 (published separately in the Oceania Monographs series, No. 11, 1966).

that it is the myth (whether or not it accompanies a ritual) that gives the key to the content of primitive folklore.

Ancient Australian culture does not possess any non-mythological narrative; the very small number of Australian "tales" are nothing but exoteric myths, partially stripped of their secret and sacred elements. The Melanesians, on a somewhat higher cultural level, do possess some primitive "tales" as well as actual myths; paradoxically, however, even if such a tale originally arose in direct response to real events, by the time it is handed down it is already imbued with the same mythological notions as the myths themselves, and it is these that give it its form.

The foregoing observations are sufficient to show the sort of amendment that Vesselovsky's theory of primitive syncretism requires: formal syncretism (of types of poetry) is not strictly observed, and the epic is hard to fit into it, but ideological and semantic syncretism is obligatory in the early stages, and its focal point is the narrative of myth.

It should be added that the psychological parallelism and the repetition of subject-matter noted by Vesselovsky are both in essence closely bound up with the semantic content of myth. It must be concluded that for all his enormous achievements, Vesselovsky missed certain fundamental aspects of the role of myth in historical poetics. In this respect his older contemporary, the great philologist A.A. Potebnya of Kharkov, was more perspicacious; he perceived the importance of the semantics of myth in the development of poetic imagery in folklore and in language as a whole.

"The inner form of a word" (Potebnya's term) is the sensory sign of its semantic content; thus in the context of myth, image and meaning are indivisible in the word. Like the myth, the verbal image of folklore replaces what is complex and hard to grasp by something close and concrete; and so, at the same time, the concrete thing is everlastingly metaphorical and symbolic. In the last analysis, it is this that gives rise to poetic tropes. It is only gradually, as the quality becomes separated from the thing, the subject from the object, etc., that the mythological image is converted, in folklore, into an artistic metaphor. This explains why the poetic language of folklore is so richly supplied with symbols of every kind. The earliest word-formation was in many

ways subject to mythological logic; and in just the same way, mythological subjects, as well as epithets, comparisons and metaphors, are partly based on mythological identifications.

One may note that the nature folklore, passing as it does through many stages in succession, and the very technique of oral transmission, favor the development of poetic stereotypes, preserving repetitive "formulae" which in the final analysis amount to a mythology.

The semantic approach to historical poetics, based on Potebnya's approach, was carried on in a series of interesting works by Soviet philologists in the 1920's and 30's; particularly in the (still in part unpublished) works of O.M. Freudenberg. He showed, with a wealth of examples, that the very same semantic sediment is laid down in historically and formally diverse themes and genres, the basis for this process being one of mythological metaphor. The significance of the wide "pragmatic" variation in the mythology of mediaeval folklore and of the Renaissance is explained in M.M. Bakhtin's work on Rabelais and his sources.

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Myth was only the dominant element in the partially fragmented syncretism of genres that characterizes the state of narrative art in ancient societies. The true semantics of the tale can only be interpreted by reference to mythological sources. It is still the same mythological semantics, but now it is sometimes detached from tribal beliefs, and has taken on a degree of poetic convention, as well as undergoing a shift from the cosmic to the social and individual. For instance, the very important mythological opposition between "high" and "low" has social, not cosmic implications in the tale.

There is no doubt of the existence of a genetic link between the tale and the myth. The numerous totemic myths, and particularly mythological anecdotes, on the subject of tricksters, are widely reflected in tales about animals. A mythological origin is transparently obvious in the case of the ubiquitous type of fairy-tale about a marriage with a magic "totemic" being who has for a time cast off his or her animal form. The magic wife (in later variants the husband) gives her chosen partner the gift

of success in the hunt, etc., but later abandons him because he has transgressed against a marriage taboo; after this the hero seeks his wife and finds her in her own country, and must there pass through a series of traditional marriage tests (cf. No. 400, 425, and some others, in Aarne-Thompson's system[3]). This sort of theme is typical of certain late-surviving totemic myths of the origin of clans and tribes.

Stories about procuring (or stealing) rare objects, elixirs or magic articles (Nos. 550, 560, 563 and others, in the index) undoubtedly come from myths about cultural heroes. Stories about visits to "other worlds" to rescue girls held prisoner there (No. 301 and others) are reminiscent of myths and legends about the wanderings of shamans or wizards in search of the soul of a sick or dead person. The well-known story about the quest for a medicine for a sick father combines both these traditions. Popular tales about a group of children who fall into the hands of a man-eating ogre, and escape through the resourcefulness of one of them (No. 327 and the like), or about the killing of a mighty serpent—a chtonic demon (No. 300 and others)—re-enact specific themes of consecration rites. Similar themes are, to a certain degree, directly related to initiation ceremonies, in the folklore of Australia, of the North American Indians, and others.

Since every individual passes through initiations and other "transitional" rituals, these tales with their interest in the destiny of individuals make extensive use of mythological themes, related to consecration rituals. These themes become landmarks on the hero's journey and symbols of heroism itself. It is therefore not surprising that the fairy-tale owes many of its most important symbols, themes, subjects, and to some extent its general structure, to consecration rituals. This fact is expounded in V.Ya. Propp's book *The Historical Roots of the Fairy-Tale* (1946). Before Propp, similar observations had been made by Saint-Yves, and after him by Campbell, Stanner and Turner. This is the secret behind the paradox that the fairy-tale is perceived as being closer than the myth to initiation rituals. This does not, however, entitle one to draw any general conclusions about an essentially ritual origin of the fairy-tale.

[3] Stith Thompson, *Types of Folklore*, Helsinki, 1928.

The peculiar features of fairy-tale fantasy, and the very genre of the fairy-tale, are in many ways determined by the special nature of mythological thought, by primitive fetishistic, totemic, animistic and magical ideas and their mythological mediation. The essential steps in the transformation process are: the elimination of ritual and sacred elements, the weakening of strict belief in the truth of the mythological "happenings", the development of conscious invention, the loss of ethnographic concreteness, the substitution of ordinary people for mythical heroes, of indeterminate fairy-tale time for the age of myth, the weakening or loss of aetiologism, the shift of attention from collective destinies to individual ones and from cosmic destiny to social destiny. This process is accompanied by the appearance of a number of new themes and of some structural limitations.

It was emphasized above that the subject of a myth does not necessarily derive from ritual, and that the most ancient cultures possess "non-ritual" as well as "ritual" myths. However, those myths that have a basis in ceremonial, or that are closely bound up with rituals (being either an integral part of them or an essential commentary on them), can only be transformed into tales once their immediate link with the ritual life of the tribe is broken; this is an important precondition. The abolition of specific limitations on the telling of a myth, the admission of the "uninitiated" (women and children) to the audience, was followed willy-nilly by a change in the status of the teller, and by the development of the element of entertainment. Sacred information concerning the mythical routes followed by totemic ancestors is removed from totemic myths; instead, more attention is paid to the totemic ancestors' "family background," their quarrels and fights, to any sort of element of adventure; and considerable latitude for variation and therefore for invention is allowed here.

This removal of the sacred element inevitably weakens belief in the truth of the story. Of course, it does not immediately lead to conscious invention or to the regarding of the story as a piece of fiction; but strict authenticity is replaced by non-strict authenticity, and this in its turn allows freer use of permitted invention. This "freedom," however, is also quite limited by the limitations of the genre and by the semantic heritage of mythology.

Fairy-tale fantasy is no less concretely "ethnographic" in ancient

folklore than it is in myth; but in the classical European fairy-tale, fantasy is cut off from concrete "tribal" beliefs, and a rather conventional poetic "mythology" of the fairy-tale is created. For instance, the mythical personages of the Russian fairy-tale are different from those of the Russian *bylina*, a form that reflects the surviving superstitions of a particular social group. However, this poetic mythology of the Russian fairy-tale does itself ultimately derive from the most ancient myths.

A very important feature is the "de-mythologization" of the time of the action: the replacement of the time of the first creation and of a strict localization within a cosmic model, by an indeterminate "fairy-tale" time and place, as a setting for the action. This inevitably implies a "de-mythologization" of the results of the action, i.e., the abandonment of aetiologism, which relates specifically to acts of creation in the age of myth. Aetiologism is formalised as a particular mythical tail-piece. As the subject loses its ethnological sense, this tail-piece becomes transformed into an ornamental appendage, only gradually being supplanted by the "moral" of an animal tale, or in the case of a fairy-tale by a stylistic formula hinting at the fictitious nature of the story. It is typical that the traditional formulae of the fully-developed classical fairy-tale point to specific differences between fairy-tale and myth: the vagueness of time and place, the fictitious nature of the story, etc.

Mythical time and aetiologism are indivisible from the cosmic scale of the myth and its interest in the collective destiny of the tribe, subjectively identified with mankind as a whole ("real people"); these elements are all parts of the same whole. Promethean noble pathos is not obligatory for a myth, but the activities of a demiurge (even if they are reminiscent of the tricks of a mythical rascal) have collective and cosmic significance, defining the process of cosmogony, the first origin of light, fire, fresh water and the like. Cosmic "acquisitions" may appear in a negative light as well—as a diminution in the number of heavenly bodies, the ending of the deluge, etc.; but this changes nothing. The transition from myth to fairy-tale is marked by a shrinking of the "scale," a shift of interest towards the hero's personal destiny. In the fairy-tale, the objects that are acquired and the goals that are achieved are not elements of nature or culture, but food, women, magical

articles, etc., which bring about the hero's good fortune; instead of a first beginning of things, we find here a redistribution of certain goods which the hero acquires for himself or for his immediate circle. Where the mythical hero steals fire or fresh water from its primordial guardian—an old woman, a frog, a serpent, etc., thus establishing fresh water for the first time as an element of the cosmos—the hero of the fairy-tale steals living water in order to cure his sick father (e.g., in Hawaiian folklore, or European fairy-tales), or obtains fire for his own hearth with the animals' help (Dahomey), or the Hare, the hero of an animal tale, cunningly steals water for himself alone from a well dug by the other animals (in the folklore of the majority of African tribes). The altruism of the virtuous son in the Hawaiian tale and the egoism of the hare both stand in opposition to the collectivism and ethnologism of true myth. Fairy-tale heroes are thus no longer demigods, demiurges—though they may, as part of an idealizing approach to them, have divine parents, a "miraculous" origin, or keep residual totemic features: e.g., the son or son-in-law of the Sun in North American Indian tales, the descendant of a witch who has come down from the skies, the Polynesian hero Tafaki, the son of a bear who is found in the folklore of many races, etc. "Miraculous birth" is met with in European tales, but the hero's exalted origin more often takes a social form (the "king's son").

It would appear that the process of "de-mythologization" has been marked by an interaction between the tradition of true mythological narrative on the one hand, and on the other hand all kinds of little tales whose central figures have always been ordinary people, sometimes unknown and even un-named. The "de-mythologization" of the hero in the fairy-tale is often taken to the point where the hero of the tale is purposely made a socially deprived, persecuted and humiliated member of his family, tribe or village. His various characteristics (e.g., ignorance, unwashedness, passive madness, idiocy, etc.) are of deep significance on the ritual and mythological level, but on the conscious level it is precisely his social deprivation that is stressed. Thus we find numerous poor orphans in the folklore of Melanesia, of Burmese and Tibetan mountain tribes, the Eskimos, Palaeoasiatic tribes, North American Indians and others. They are ill-treated by their uncles' wives (Melanesia), their kinsmen and neighbors (North

America), while the spirits come to their help. A similar phenomenon is seen in the cinder-boy who is a younger son, or in the stepdaughter Cinderellas, found in European fairy-tales.

The fairy-tale hero does not possess those magic powers with which the mythical hero by his very nature is endowed. He has to acquire these powers through initiation, shamanistic ordeals, or the special protection of the spirits. At a later stage, these miraculous powers seem altogether to become detached from the hero, and largely operate in his stead. There thus develops an additional theme through which the magic fairy-tale can develop the semantic heritage of consecration rites. At the same time one must recognize that the ritual equivalent in the classical form of the fairy-tale is the wedding (a younger and more individualized ritual than initiation, with which it is to some extent genetically related); there is thus some truth in the statement that initiation is the ritual equivalent of the myth (and of archaic forms of the fairy-tale), while the wedding is the ritual equivalent of the more developed magical fairy-tale.

A large number of fairy-tale symbols and themes—Cinderella's slipper, the baking of a ring in a cake, dressing the bride in a pig's skin or in the skin of an old woman (the last is from a Japanese tale), the substitution of a "false bride," the flight of the bride or bridegroom, the employment of the bride or bridegroom as workers in the house of their partner's parents, the prohibition on pronouncing a young wife's family name, "dolls" that give advice, etc.—all find their explanation in the wedding customs and ceremonials of many peoples, and ultimately also derive from a quite ancient ritual and mythological semantics. The fairy-tale can also be related to the wedding ceremony as a whole, since marriage with the princess or prince is its ultimate goal.

The fairy-tale wedding, accompanied as it is by the elevation of the hero's social status, is itself a sort of "miraculous" way out for the hero as an individual from a situation of naked social conflict, which is presented in the form of internal family relations. Transgressions against the norms of family and marriage relationships (such as incest, or marriage to a too "distant" bride), or against mutual obligations with kinsfolk, are as we know the causes of serious conflicts in myth too, leading to divisions between

cosmic elements that had been united since time began. To reunite them requires mediation, and mediators. But in the fairy-tale, dealing as it does not with tribal happiness on a cosmic scale, but with personal happiness on a social scale, the "exchange" of marriage loses more and more of its communicative function (like the socialization of cosmic forces in the Palaeoasiatic myths about the marriage adventures of the Raven's children), and, as we have said, turns into an individual escape from social conflicts.

Such fossilized fundamental mythical oppositions as "life" and "death" are largely supplanted by social conflicts on a family level. To a certain extent, the fairy-tale family is a generalized version of the "great family"; i.e., a patriarchal unit almost equivalent to the clan. The maltreatment of the stepdaughter by her family, and the wrongs suffered by the younger son, have a concealed social significance—they are signs of the decay of the clan. The "younger son" theme appears to be an oblique reflection of the exclusion of minors in ancient times, and the development of inequality in the family.

The figure of the "stepmother" could only appear when the conditions of endogamy were broken, i.e., when brides were obtained from "too far away." It is no accident that the theme of the stepmother and her stepdaughter in the European fairy-tale has, in many long-lived stories, an alternative: that of the incestuous pursuit of the daughter by her father—an attempt at the ultimate transgression against endogamy.

Those same transgressions that appeared in myth are now turned to show their possible social, rather than cosmic, consequences. Family and social themes in the fairy-tale can be discounted as an innovation superimposed on the more ancient and truly mythological foundation. More archaic, truly mythological themes often form the nucleus of the composition of the classical European fairy-tale, while family (or social) additions of more recent date act as a sort of outer frame. For instance, the initial conflict situation between the stepmother and stepdaughter is developed in the nuclear part of the story, where the stepdaughter undergoes various ordeals at the hands of a wood-demon; the finale resolves the situation, or rather short-circuits it, with a happy marriage, which changes the stepdaughter's social status.

In the folklore of archaic societies, both myth and fairy-tale have the same mythological structure—a succession of losses and acquisitions of various cosmic or social benefits. In the fairy-tale, the intermediate links in the chain have specific significance—the tricks of zoomorphic rascals (in animal tales), or the trials of the hero, which can be compared to consecration ordeals or marriage trials. The archaic myth, or "mythological tale," appears as a sort of metastructure to the classical European magical fairy-tale, in which a rigid hierarchical structure of two or more usually three ordeals faces the hero. The first, preliminary ordeal is a test of behavior, of knowledge of the rules, and leads to the receiving of a magic aid, with whose help disaster and inadequacy in the face of the principal ordeal are averted. The third step is often an additional ordeal leading to identification—it becomes clear who carried out the deed, after which rivals and pretenders are put to shame. The obligatory happy ending as a rule comprises marriage to a princess and the gift of "half the kingdom."

On the stylistic level, as we have already noted, the magical fairy-tale, as related by the oral narrator, formalizes certain very important features of the genre, setting it up in opposition to the myth as a piece of artistic invention; at the same time, the direct speech used in fairy-tales preserves, in schematic form, certain elements of ritual and magic.

In the transition from myth to fairy-tale, the mythological cosmos is partly obscured by the "family"; in the transition from myth to heroic epic, it is the relations between usually genuine historical tribes and ancient states that come into the foreground. However, in ancient epics, created before states had become clearly consolidated, actual "historical" traditions are still only a secondary source for the development of the epic; they coexist with it, to a certain degree, but barely mix with it.

The main foundation for the formation of archaic epics is in the heroic song-tales (a genre that is well preserved in the folklore of the small tribes of the North: the Palaeoasiatic, Ugro-Samoyed and Tungus tribes), and particularly the myths and tales of the earliest ancestors, the cultural heroes—those central personages of primitive folklore. The archaic epic (even if the gods themselves are not its heroes, as for instance in the "mythological" songs or tales of the ancient Scandinavians)

generalizes the historical past through the language and concepts of primitive myth, largely following in the traditions of primitive narrative folklore mentioned above. The tribe's past is represented as the history of "real people" (since the boundaries of all humanity and of the tribe or group of related tribes subjectively coincide), and takes on the form of an account of the origin of man, the acquisition of the elements of culture and their defense against "monsters."

The epic time of these works is the mythical age of the first creation; the heroic poems of the Turco-Mongolian peoples of Siberia begin, as a rule, with an indication of the time when the earth, the sky and the water were created ("in the days when the earth was divided with a mixing-spoon, in the days when the water was divided with a scoop"), or when the earth was still the size of the bottom of a *tursuk,* the sky the size of a deer's ear, the ocean like a rivulet, the *izyubrikha* like a kid, etc.

Väinämöinen in his quarrel with Joukahainen, in Karelo-Finnish runes, suggests that he lived in the times when the world was created, and took part in the creation himself. The Nart Sosruko, in an Adyge epic tale, recollects the time when Beshtau was no bigger than a hummock, when little boys would step across the Idil', when the sky was still condensing and the earth had only just hardened, and he himself was already a grown man. In the ancient Sumerian poem of Gilgamesh and the tree Huluppu, the action is placed in the time immediately after the earth was moved apart from the sky, and the name of the human race was assigned to it. The place of the action in Yakut epic is the mythical "middle earth," i.e. the part inhabited by people. The description of a mythical world picture occupies a major part of the introduction to Yakut (and some Khakass) poems. The center of these descriptions is the tree of the world, in appearance an oak, larch or ash (cf. Yggdrasil in the "Edda" and Huluppu in the Sumerian epic).

The archaic epic generally presents a fairly mythological dual system of hostile tribes—one's own side, humans, and the enemy, the "demons," with a chthonic character. This opposition does not prevent the epic from introducing other, mythical worlds and tribes; but the foreground is occupied by these two tribes, who are in eternal enmity with one another.

This fact itself, moreover, does not rule out exogamous marriage relationships between the two, e.g., in Yakut or Karelo-Finnish epic. The conflict between them uses the language of inter-tribal hostility to give a concrete depiction of the defense of the cosmos against the forces of chaos. As we have said, the enemy is usually chthonic, i.e., related to the underworld, death, illness, etc., while one's own side is localized to "middle earth," and enjoys the protection of heavenly deities.

This is the nature of the opposition—fundamentally a purely mythological one—between the Yakut demonic heroes, the Abaasy, and the human heroes, the Ayii—or rather those who enjoy the protection of the Ayii, for the Ayii are the shining heavenly gods, while the Abaasy are the spirits of illness, chthonic demons. In Yakut heroic poems, this purely mythological opposition is superimposed on the opposition between the ancestors of the Yakuts—a group of pastoral Turkic tribes —and the surrounding Tungus-Manchurian tribes of forest hunters and fishermen. The Narts, in Osetin, Adyge and Abkhaz epic, are opposed by giants, as are the Bogamas, in the Scandinavian "Edda"; the Karelo-Finnish heroes (the "sons of Kaleva") are opposed by the Lady of the Northern land, who is endowed, by virtue of a purely mythological, "shamanistic" identification of the North, the mouth of a river and the kingdom of the dead, with a clearly chthonic nature.

The Altai Turks and Buryats do not have a clear division into two hostile tribes (among the Buryats, such a division survives in relation to heavenly spirits and gods), but the heroes fight with various Mangadkhai (monsters) in the Buryat *uligers*, or with monsters under the lordship of Erlik, lord of the underworld, in Altai tradition.

The conquerors of the two monsters, the celestial bull and the fearsome Huvava, are the Sumero-Akkadian heroes Gilgamesh and Enkidu; the Georgian hero Amirani (akin to the Greek Prometheus) vanquishes the dragons; other monsters are overcome by the well-known ancient Greek heroes Perseus, Theseus, Herakles, and ancient Scandinavian or Anglo-Saxon heroes (Beowulf).

A typical feature of archaic epic is the highly mythological figure of the mother or housekeeper of the demon heroes. Such

are the old shaman woman of the Abaasy in the Yakut poems, the old partridge-mother of the Altai monsters, the loathsome Mangadkhai woman of the Buryats, the "old swan-women" of the Khakass, Loukhi, Lady of the North, in Finnish and Karelian legends. On the one hand, these figures may be compared with others taken from the depths of mythology such as the Eskimo Sedna, the Ketish Khosedem, the Babylonian Tiāmat, etc.; on the other hand, they may be compared with figures from more developed epics—Queen Medb (Mab) in Irish sagas, Grendel's mother in Beowulf, the old woman Surkhayil in the Alpamysh, etc., (only the Nart epic possesses such a mother of heroes in its epic tribe, in the person of Satana). Giants and chthonic monsters often appear in ancient epics not only as enemies in war, stealing women and wreaking all kinds of mischief, but also as the guardians of fire, of heavenly luminaries, of plants for cultivation and of miraculous objects of which the hero takes possession.

"One's own" epic tribe, in archaic epic, does not have a historical name. The Narts or the sons of Kaleva (a full identification of the Finnish heroes with the sons of Kaleva is only found in the "Kalevala" of Lönnrot; cf. the Estonian Kalevi poeg and the Russian Kolyvanovichi) are merely a tribe of heroes who stand in opposition not only to the chthonic demons but in part to their own descendants too, now much diminished in stature. The age of the Narts is something like the Greek age of the heroes. It must be noted that in German and Scandinavian epic, the term "Goths" signifies not only the historical Goths, but a kind of heroic epic tribe, and the epithet "Gothic" is almost synonymous with "heroic" (just as the epithet "Nart" is). In developed epics, like the German, Greek or Indian, the Goths and Burgundians, the Achaeans and Trojans, the Pandavi and the Kauravi, all of whom had disappeared as independent tribes, and only appear as components of the "ethnic" vehicle of the epic tale, are essentially heroic tribes of a distant heroic age, a sort of heroic model for succeeding generations.

In some respects, the Narts and similar beings can be compared with the first ancestors of mankind who sometimes appear in ancient myths; especially as they invariably are presented as the national forebears and the bearers of epic traditions.

The time of their life and their noble deeds, similarly, can be compared with true mythical time (such as the Australian "time of dreams").

A vital point in this respect is that the figures of the heroes of the most ancient epic poems and legends clearly demonstrate residual features of the first ancestors or cultural heroes.

The oldest and most popular hero of the Yakut *olonkho* is Er-Sogotokn (literally "the solitary one"), who often appears under other names as well. He is a hero who lives alone, knowing no other people and having no parents; hence his nickname. He is the first ancestor of the human race. Er-Sogotokh seeks a wife in order to beget the human race. Tales about Er-Sogotokh also include rudiments of myth about the cultural hero, but this myth is more fully preserved in the corpus of traditions about the first ancestor of the Yakuts, Elle-Er-Sogotokh, who sails down the Lena from southern regions to the part now inhabited by the Yakuts. He is credited with the invention of the "dymokur,"[4] the breeding of cattle, the introduction of the spring rite and festival of Ysyakh and the offering of the first bloodless sacrifice of kumyss in honor of the gods, the Ayii. Other "solitary" heroes who do not know their ancestors are known to the Yakuts; for instance, Yuryun-Uolan. The first ancestor-hero of Buryat epic also resembles Er-Sogotokh. Residual elements of this type are also found in Altai poems, in which it is first stated that the hero does not know anything of his origins and has no parents, but then it turns out that he is the heir of a rich pastoral and patriarchal household. Narrators sometimes give a rational explanation of this "solitariness" as being the result of being an orphan. There is a hypothesis that derives the name of the Kalmuck hero Djangar from the word for "solitary one." Besides the "solitary" hero, the first ancestor, the Yakut epic possesses a second type (e.g. Nyurgun Boötur and others)—heroes sent to earth by the celestial gods with the special mission of purging the earth of Abaasy monsters: this is another variant of the cultural hero.

The epics of the Turco-Mongolian peoples of Siberia possess

[4] The use of smoke to disperse mosquitoes.

a mythological couple of racial ancestors, who establish life on "middle earth." In the Buryat *uligers* the sister weds her brother to a celestial goddess, in order to prolong the existence of the human race. The figures of the first racial ancestors also have an important place in Osetin legends about the Narts. They include Satana and Uryzmag, a brother and sister who marry; also the twin brothers Æhsar and Æhsartaeg (cf. the figures of Sanasar and Bogdasar, another pair of twins, founders of Sasun in ancient Armenian epic). The most ancient of Nart heroes, Sosruko, has manifest features of the cultural hero.

In the Adyge and Abkhaz versions, Sosruko obtains fire, cereal crops and fruit trees, which he takes from the giants and "returns" to the Narts. There is also a legend in which Sosruko steals the miraculous drink *sano* from a god and gives it to men. In the Osetin version Sosruko (Soslan) obtains from the giants not fire, but a warm land with lush pastures for the Nart cattle.

Traces of the theme of obtaining fire can be found in the oldest Georgian, Abkhaz and Armenian legends about heroes who were shackled to mountains in the Caucasus; these heroes may be more than typologically akin to the ancient Greek cultural hero Prometheus.

The features of the cultural hero and demiurge are even more evident in the Karelo-Finnish figure of Väinämöinen, and to some extent in his "double," the demiurge blacksmith Ilmarinen. Väinämöinen obtains fire from the belly of a fiery fish, builds the first boat and weaves a fishing-net, invents a musical instrument and is the first to play it; he is the first to discover a blood-staunching substance, and he makes a healing ointment; he also "obtains" the miraculous *sampo*—a mythical source of plenty, which the Lady of the North has hidden in a cliff. He performs deeds of a cosmogonic nature: he creates or "obtains" the heavenly bodies; the world is formed from an egg laid by a duck on this hero's knee. The figure of Väinämöinen has strong shamanistic features, which are particularly palpable in the story of his visit to the kingdom of the dead. The figure of the Scandinavian god Odin clearly demonstrates a layer of characteristics largely identical to Väinämöinen (the cultural hero is a shaman; his negative variant is the mischief-maker Loki). The connections between Odin, Thor, and Loki, and the traditions of cultural heroes have faci-

litated the transformation of these gods into heroes of ancient epic.

In ancient Akkadian epic, the figure of Enkidu contains traces of some notions about the first man, who was created by a goddess out of clay; while Gilgamesh himself has certain elements of the "first ancestor / cultural hero" complex (the founder of Uruk obtains a cedar-forest, or in the Sumerian version, some ritual objects).

The joint exploits of Gilgamesh and Enkidu against the monsters are very typical of a specifically heroic treatment of cultural heroes (cf. the similarly contrasted wandering fighters against the monsters, the "brother from the wigwam and the brother from the bush" in American Indian legend). Thus, the heroic figure in ancient epic often manifests himself in "cultural" activities, and is consequently endowed with a halo of magic; magic and cunning serve the hero together with his physical strength and bravery. Ancient epic has also preserved the mythological type of the rascal and trickster. Such mythological rascals certainly include Syrdon in Nart legends and the Scandinavian Loki.

An archaic (mythological) stratum is also easy to find in many classical epics. This is true, for instance, of the Indian Ramayana, in which Rama has the features of a cultural hero, who has been summoned to destroy the demons; he is reminiscent of Barnd and some other heroes of Dravidian myths. It is also true of the *Geseriad* (in which again there is a mission to fight the demon in all four countries of the earth, according to the ancient cosmological model, Geser even has some of the features of the trickster); and of "Beowulf," of certain features of the Alpamysh, Manas, of "David of Sasum," of the Russian Bylina, of the magician Vol'ga (cf. Scandinavian songs about Helgi), and other epics.

Not only epics that are known to be of ancient origin, but classical epics of the ancient world, clearly show an underlying stratum of mythology. Even if we cannot accept in full the ritualistic theory of the genesis of Greek epic, we must still grant that the epic poetry created by ancient agrarian civilisations makes wide use of the calendar myths, so typical of these agrarian civilisations, as "models" for the construction of subjects and of images. Grintzer has shown that Babylonian, Ugaritic, Greek and Indian epic contains a mythological complex that includes the at

first sight independent themes of the hero's miraculous origin (Gilgamesh, the Pandavi, Rama, Achilles, Keret and others), the hero's rejection of the love or favor of a goddess (Gilgamesh and Ishtar, Akkat and 'Anat, Rama and Surpanahta, Ardjuna and Urvashi, Odysseus and Calypso, etc.), the disappearance of the hero, by death, apparent death or expulsion (Akkat, Rama, the Pandavi, Keret, Achilles, Odysseus), the death of the ritual substitute (Enkidu, Patroclus, Odysseus's companions, the pseudo-Pandavi), the kidnapping or attempted kidnapping of the hero's wife (Sita, Dravapadi, Helen, Briseis, Keret's wife, Penelope), the quest for the hero or heroine, including a visit to the kingdom of the dead (Ramas, the Pandavi, Gilgamesh, Odysseus), and a fight with monsters (the Yakshas, the sea demons, Khumbaba etc.), and the reunion of the couple. Of course, not everything in this scheme can be interpreted exclusively in the light of calendar festivals. For instance, the kidnapping and returning of women is an essential theme of heroic tales and songs of the Siberian peoples, which bear no relation to agrarian calendar festivals; and battles with monsters are found in both calendar and initiation myths, and in myths about cultural heroes; and so forth. Nevertheless it is undeniable that it was precisely the agrarian calendar myths that were the principal models for the epics of classical antiquity.

It is noteworthy that Helen and Sita were both directly linked with agrarian mythology.

In this connection it is worth noting that many epic heroes, even those with historical prototypes, are related in a definite way with this or that deity and his functions, so that certain subjects or fragments of subjects reproduce traditional "mythologemes"; though this is far from proving that the epic composition derives *in toto* from myths and ritual texts.

According to Dumézil, the Indo-European tripartite system of mythological functions (magical and juridical power, strength in battle, fertility) and the corresponding hierarchical or antagonistic relationships between gods, are reproduced on the "heroic" level in the "Mahabharata", in Roman legend and even in the Osetin version of Nart legends. The Pandavi in the "Mahabharata" are in fact not the sons of the infertile Pandu, but of the gods (Dharma, Vayu, Indra and the Ashvini), and in their behavior they to a certain extent repeat the functional structure into which these

gods themselves fit. Some residues of such a structure can perhaps be found even in the *Iliad*, in which the shepherd-prince Paris, by choosing Aphrodite, sets Hera and Athena against him—representing as they do a different set of "mythological" functions; and so brings about a war. The story of the destructive war of the Pandavi and the Kauravi apparently represents a transition of an eschatological myth onto an epic level (cf. a similar process in Irish tradition).

A mythological underlay is thus preserved even in the classical forms of the epic. However, these classical forms developed at a time when the various nations were becoming clearly consolidated into national states, which became the bearers of their epic traditions; and these epics undoubtedly represent an important step forward in the process of "de-mythologisation". In contrast to archaic epics, they rely on historical tradition, and use the "language" of such tradition as their main means of relating the events of the distant past—a past that is not mythical but historical, or more precisely quasi-historical. The main difference from archaic epic is not in the degree of accuracy of the account, but precisely in the "language" of narrative, which uses ethnic rather than cosmic terms, gives geographical names, historical names of tribes and states, kings and leaders, wars and migrations. Epic time (Mycenae, the conflicts of the Kuru-Panchala with the Kauravi, the great migration of peoples, the empire of Charlemagne, Kievan Russia under St. Vladimir, the country of the four Oirats, etc.) is constructed on the model of mythical time, as a time when the ancestors were just *beginning* to be active and to set the pattern for succeeding ages; but the subject is now not the creation of the world, but the dawn of a national history, the setting up of the most ancient civic structures, etc.

The mythical fight for the cosmos and against chaos is transformed into the defense of a kindred group of tribes, of the state, or of the "faith", against "aggressors", "oppressors", "infidels", who are sometimes endowed with mythical or sorcerer-like attributes. But the "shamanistic" aura of the epic hero disappears entirely, leaving a purely warrior-like heroic ethic and aesthetic.

In contrast to the fairy-tale, the heroic epic is not perceived as fiction, and in this sense both myth and epic can be placed in almost equal contrast to the fairy-tale.