BETWEEN MYTH AND MEANING: THE FUNCTION OF MYTH IN FOUR POSTCOLONIAL NOVELS

by

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Abstract

In Anglophone postcolonial fiction of the twentieth century, myth is used as a framing device that contains and interrogates historical event, thereby functioning as a form of alternative history. Despite the prevalence of cross-cultural symbolic systems and radically hybrid forms of narration, the dominant method of reading myth in postcolonial literary criticism remains dependent on conceptual models that construct myth as originary racial narrative. This particular approach fosters readings of contemporary secular myths of “nation”, “land” or “identity” within culturally monolithic frames. I scrutinize the intersections between early structuralist approaches to myth, and later post-structuralist deconstruction of myth and suggest a postcolonial reading of myth as the ideological coded middle space between sacred and secular narrative. Focusing on four novels from Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Caribbean, I demonstrate the continued influence and adaptability of myth to narrate vastly different historical and socio-cultural contexts. Taking into account several major shifts in the conceptualization of twentieth-century myth criticism, I develop a critical vocabulary for comparative readings of myth.
which interrogates existing discourses on the categories of “archetype”, “ideology” and “symbol”. My approach is comparativist, and foregrounds the importance of locating myth within literary and socio-cultural context.

The introduction to this study defines the field of myth criticism in relation to postcolonial fiction. I provide outlines of the theoretical positions drawn from Carl Gustav Jung, Roland Barthes, Northrop Frye and Bruce Lincoln and demonstrate the relevance of each in relation to reading myth in the four novels under survey. The first chapter looks at the way Alfred Yuson exposes mythic constructions of Filipino identity in *The Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café* (1987). The second chapter provides a comparative study of Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992) and Allan Sealy's *The Everest Hotel A Calender* (1998). This chapter analyzes Ondaatje and Sealy's employment of the Fisher King myth as a device for narrating radically different visions of postcolonial community. The third chapter analyzes the function of archetype as a vehicle for ideology in Wilson Harris's *Jonestown* (1996). The conclusion of this study suggests the way this method of analysis can provoke further critical inquiry in the field of postcolonial myth criticism.
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I Introduction

1. Myth as Resistance and Recuperation

This study analyzes the function of myth in four twentieth century postcolonial novels. In Alfred Krip Yuson's *The Great Philippine Jungle Energy Cafe* (1987), Wilson Harris's *Jonestown* (1996), Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992) and I. Allan Sealy's *The Everest Hotel A Calender* (1998), myth is a framing device that interrogates particular socio-cultural and historical moments. While each adaptation of myth is unique to an author's specific construction of story, these novels also demonstrate seemingly shared concerns over the relationship of man/woman to land, constructions of nationhood, and the narrativization of the “self” through language. These issues are characteristic of late twentieth century narratives from different regions and historical moments that demonstrate a preoccupation with the “mythemes” of resistance and cultural recuperation. Narrating myth is a key component in the perceived recuperation of the colonized imaginary in contemporary postcolonial literatures. However, comparative, inter-regional readings of myth in postcolonial literature are hard to come by. Myth, in postcolonial literature, is read almost exclusively in region-specific terms. This study aims to demonstrate that a cross-cultural, inter-regional reading of myth has much to offer due to the multiple intersections between seemingly discrete regional narrative traditions and the evolution of postcolonial fiction in a more globalized literary milieu. However, the capacity of myth to narrate forms of resistance and recuperation also makes
us ask, “Whose myth? Whose resistance? Whose recuperation?” A careful analysis of these four novels provokes varied and sometimes problematic responses to these questions that force us to interrogate the way myths become alternative histories.

My reading suggests a significant shift in the conceptualization of myth criticism in relation to contemporary postcolonial fiction. A large body of critical material identifies the presence of myth in postcolonial literary texts and addresses its relation to issues of modernity. These issues include (but are not confined to) narratives of emancipation from colonial rule, nation building, and identity formation in relation to emergent notions of nationhood. Several postcolonial authors of the twentieth century who use myth demonstrate a marked preoccupation with notions of a cross-cultural imaginary when they fix these issues in narrative. However, because postcolonial myth criticism remains a largely region-specific discipline, a nuanced comparative approach to reading myth in postcolonial literature is notably absent. In part, this is due to the fact that such a critical analysis could potentially invoke notions of universal symbolism that erase the socio-cultural specificities of “regional” approaches to narrating myth. Likewise, postcolonial myth criticism remains largely dependent on early twentieth century conceptual frames which are only partially helpful in an analysis of the function of myth in contemporary postcolonial literature.¹ This tendency to read myth in structuralist and regional terms

¹ The temptation to read myth via the structuralist models of early twentieth century comparative mythography often leads to overtly general statements about the function of myth as racial narrative as in Meenakshi Mukherjee's reading of myth in Indo-Anglian fiction. Mukherjee, Meenakshi. “Myth as Technique”, The Twice Born Fiction. 136. However, recent explorations on the function of myth in postcolonial literature demonstrate a more contemporary engagement with myth as disruptive and discursive narrative strategy. An example of this shift in configuring myth is apparent in Erik Uskalis's “Contextualizing Myth in Postcolonial Novels: Figures of Dissent and Disruption”.

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does not encourage a productive discussion of the presence of seemingly universal story and symbol patterns in postcolonial literature. Using these four novels as a point of departure, my aim is to construct a critical frame for reading myth in postcolonial fiction that takes a middle ground between early twentieth century structuralist approaches to myth and later post-structuralist deconstruction of the category of myth as sign.

2. Defining Myth
It is notoriously difficult to arrive at any single definition of myth. For example, myths can be stories about ancient events that define and sustain notions of community. However, a “myth” can also be a fabrication or act of false speech that is, nevertheless, ideologically persuasive. In Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology and Scholarship, (1999) Bruce Lincoln provides a thorough genealogical study of both these aspects of myth. As Lincoln demonstrates, the idea that myth is an ideologically weighted narrative about figures or events from a remote past which shape contemporary ideologies comes down to us from about the seventh century BC, through Homer and Hesiod (3). Myths are, by nature, both untrue and true. What separates a myth from any other kind of narrative is a peculiar affective quality or narrative potency that carries its ideological matter in disguise. This “affect” elevates myth above ordinary speech and aligns it with the rhetoric and matter of sacred narrative. As such, mythical narrative requires a collective investment from its author and audience that elevates speech and story to the status of a myth.
The notion that myths were false speech emerges in the fourth century BC through the work of the Sophists, and later, Plato. Lincoln identifies the following lines in the Republic as characteristic articulations of the discourse on myth that emerged during this period: *Mythoi* are categorized as a form of speech that is “false on the whole, but still having some truth in it” (39). Lincoln goes on to suggest that this shift in the conceptualization of myth occurs in conjunction with the shift from orature to literature. Thus, when a myth is written, the immediacy of its affect diminishes as it becomes susceptible to analysis and interpretation at the intellectual level. The idea of myth as false speech is often set in counterpoint to the notion of myth as elevated, sacred narrative by postcolonial authors. The postcolonial reader is caught in the tension between the construction of myth as oracle or riddle, and the accompanying suggestion that mythical pronouncements are also nothing more than fiction. For example, in Yuson's *Café*, the central myth of the heroic revolutionary, Leon Kilat, is deflated through mock-epic narrative techniques that expose the internal ideological potency at work in contemporary literary constructions of the Cebu revolution. Yuson's narration of the Kilat story invokes the potency of myth while maintaining a subtle ironic distance from its subject. This double-speaking understanding of myth alerts us to the way postcolonial authors can invoke the power inherent in mythical narratives while providing strategic checks and balances that interrogate the ideological assumptions of myth. Reading myth in postcolonial fiction thus calls for subtle critical recalibrations that negotiate and expose ideological foundations while remaining conscious of the function of myth as a vehicle for collective and individual belief systems.

I use the term “recalibration” following Lincoln. See Lincoln, 158.
3. **Archetype and Archetypal Image**

A critical frame for reading archetype in myth is essential to this study because it unmasks the ideological imperatives of a fictional work. Of the many approaches, Jung's theory of archetype and archetypal image remains the most helpful theoretical exploration of the relation between archetypal narratives and the figurative expression of individual and collective impulses. Jung's theories are doubly relevant to this project because he is cited as an influence (and sometimes a source of parody) by all the authors under survey. For example, Yuson provides direct parodic references to Jung in *Café* (97). Ondaatje and Sealy do not directly refer to Jung in *The English Patient* or *Everest Hotel*. However, Ondaatje's use of a quotation on Jung by Leonora Carrington in *Anil's Ghost* (2000) is pivotal to his understanding and construction of myth in the text: “Jung was absolutely right about one thing. We are occupied by gods. The mistake is to identify with the god occupying you” (*Anil's Ghost*, 230). Sealy uses Jung as a source in his doctoral thesis *Wilson Harris and the Experimental Novel* (1982). Sealy correctly cites Jung as an interesting, if problematic, myth theorist (65). Recognizing the pitfalls of over determination in Jungian symbolism, Sealy's approach to the question of archetype in his own fiction is different from Harris's and tinged with irony and ambivalence. In the *Everest Hotel*, for example, he works directly to dismantle the power of certain critical archetypes within his novel, while, on the other hand, mobilizing others. Jung's theories on archetype and archetypal image are most helpful in reading the fiction of Wilson Harris. Writing on the genesis of *Jonestown*, Harris states that “the archetypes of the past
become unfathomable and are woven into 'unknowns' arriving from the future”.

The idea of archetype as unfathomable and unknown (a theory drawn from Jung) leads to difficult, if interesting, ambivalences in the fiction of Wilson Harris. These ambivalences can be productively analyzed through a Jungian approach that distinguishes between archetype and the subjective content of an archetypal image.

For Jung, the human psyche attaches a sign to an archetype in order to contain and “form” its meaning. In *The Undiscovered Self* (1959), Jung suggests that an archetype, “when represented to the mind, appears as an image which expresses the nature of the instinctive impulse visually and concretely, like a picture” (81). An archetype, which is a purely unconscious process, is fundamentally unknowable. However, the archetypal image, as symbol, is knowable and subject to the various processes of analytical exploration. Jung goes on to suggest that myths are made up of strings of archetypal images – recognizable groups of archetypal images that are ordered in relatively similar patterns of relation. These larger patterns may be collective, but negotiation of a myth always involves a subjective component which depends on the “affect” of the myth on individual life history and story. Jung described myth as a “textbook of archetypes” in which archetypal images function as resonant points of entry into narratives that are already embedded in the psyche. Jung maintained that the recognition of archetypal impulse through archetypal image fostered the necessary link between a subjective and objective imagination. However, he also stressed the necessity for negotiation and differentiation of individual psychic content from the universalizing images of archetype.

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3 Harris, “From Jonestown (Imagination Dead Imagine)” 5.
While the interpretation of archetype in the text of a dream always requires a conscious and rational negotiation of symbolic content, Jung also warns against “too much clarity” and suggests a method of interpretation that preserves the affect of numinous, supra-objective articulation in archetypal images through a process of “inoffensive empathy”. Myths function by invoking this kind of articulation which is akin to sacred, oracular speech, but which must be uttered in a “local” tongue. As vehicles of collective communal narratives, myths represent the culturally formed narratives on archetypal processes. As such, they are always already ideologically coded and invoke the power of archetype in service of collective socio-cultural practice and belief systems.

As Stephen Walker points out in his study on the function of myth in Analytical Psychology, the act of reading myth within a Jungian frame is primarily subjective: “The subjective factor is important in two different ways. First of all, a myth must have a numinous and emotional impact on the individual's psyche in order to be experienced and understood as a genuine myth: the individual is moved by the myth. Second, even in the course of analyzing a myth as the object of a purely academic investigation along Jungian lines, the researcher must respond emotionally to the myth” (95). Walker goes on to describe Jung's theories on the process of “integration” by which archetypal content is related back to the individual psyche. In Walker's terms, “Integration is the process of relating the ego carefully and cautiously to the archetypal material put forward” (33). The process of integration and differentiation (which I discuss at greater length in my chapter on Wilson Harris's Jonestown) provides a middle space from which the individual is able

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4 See Jung, “Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon”, 199.
to form a conscious relation to the metanarratives of myth. However, because Jung’s theories of myth place the onus of interpretation squarely on a process of affective re-experiencing of mythical narrative, as literary critics, it is necessary to guard against the tendency to read the vastly hybrid sources of myth via universalizing discourses that masquerade as representative visions of people and place.⁵

The process of “intuitive” reading proves most controversial in Jung's analysis of myth since it appears to subsume the particularities of cultural production involved in the narrative process of any myth. In the field of literary myth criticism, this is all the more important since the cultural content of a myth can be different for author, reader, and for the indigenous communities from which certain myths are appropriated. Jung's own analytical tools of “differentiation” and “integration” serve as helpful functions when applied to literary myth criticism, because they foreground the need for constant, subtle re-evaluations of the power relations between mythical subject and object. Unlike Sigmund Freud's work on myth, Jung provides us with a discursive frame in which to theorize the function of both sacred and secular myth as having meaning not merely as symptom. Furthermore, as a key influence on the work of Northrop Frye, Jung's theories provide a key counterpoint to Frye's reading of archetype. While Frye draws primarily on Jung's “Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious” (1928) as a source for Anatomy of Criticism (1957), he diverges significantly from Jung's position. Taking Jung's notion of a collective unconscious, Frye reads archetypal content in a text centripetally,

⁵ In “Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon” Jung outlines the function of affect in the following passage: “The protean mythologem... express the processes of the psyche far more trenchantly and, in the end, far more clearly than the clearest concept; for the symbol not only conveys a visualization of the process but – and this is perhaps just as important – it also brings a re-experiencing if it” (25).
foregrounding a schematic approach to literature based on “form”. On the other hand, Frye does not seem critically concerned with Jung's own theoretical approach to reading archetype in the analytical situation. As a result, Frye overlooks key features of Jung's analytical process that ensure the differentiated reading of individual content in an archetypal image. While Jung stresses the eventual return of all myths to a point within the psyche, his way of reading myth allows for a middle ground in which myth is neither reduced to any sign with ideological potency nor inflated into a purely collective narrative. While it may contain these characteristics, myth is always mediated and adapted to individual specificities.⁶

For the reasons outlined, this study will draw on the critical frames of Jung, Frye and Lincoln. Frye's theory of genres demonstrates that the form of a text determines its internal rhetoric and relates its ideological bias. Frye's understanding of archetype as set forth in Anatomy, and in The Great Code, suggests a narrative pattern which, in turn, demands a pattern of reception. While Frye holds to a centripetal reading of a text where archetype achieves the drive to formal consistency, Jung suggests that archetypes are fundamentally unknowable and their symbolic forms, or archetypal images, are creative reconstructions of internalized collective narratives. The taxonomic differences between Frye and Jung's definitions of archetype provide a point of entry into the relation between ideology and structuring principles in myth. While the theories of Frye and Jung prove helpful when analyzing the function of archetype in myth and its relation to the subjective and objective components of narrative, Lincoln provides us with a method of relating

ideology in myth to contemporaneous socio-cultural power relations. Lincoln suggests that when used to construct social taxonomies, myth can function as “…ideology in narrative form” (147). This reading alerts us to a particular characteristic in mythical speech that conflates secular constructions of socio-cultural hierarchies with notions of a divine order. Together, these theoretical and critical frames provide us with a method of reading myth that foregrounds the importance of context and form, and negotiates the relation between the structure of a myth and its ideological proclivities.

4. Myth as Ideology
The idea that myths are both true and false provides postcolonial authors with an ideal foundation on which to construct narratives that interrogate the ideological impact of particular historical moments. By drawing on an ancient myth, an author can invoke a prefabricated frame of meaning which the reader will recognize. However, by making “myth” the point of entry into a historical moment, the author also suggests a particular reading of history that is, to a large extent, determined by the reader's emotional response to the “truth” of the myth. This emotional response always holds the key to the ideological core of the myth, and by extension, it also demonstrates the author's own manipulation of ideology in response to history. Using myth to narrate history supposes a sense of myth as alternative history. The central issue however, is how the author invokes the ideological impulse of the myth to narrate history. For example, when Allan Sealy constructs his protagonist via the image of a mythic Mother Earth and the equally mythic but more contemporary Mother India, he suggests a particular link between a primordial
mythic narrative about land as the source of human nourishment and a more recent use of land as a metaphor for social and cultural unity along nationalist lines. Both aspects of the mytheme carry powerful ideological significance when Sealy links them to a narrative of disenfranchisement of indigenous populations through environmental degradation and the pursuit of growth according to economic models that ape the “West”. When Sealy introduces a third mytheme with the story of the Grail and the waste land, he brings another series of associations that further complement and interrogate the myth of the Mother. At this level, the mytheme becomes a commentary on the failure of India to nourish its own people due to the persistence of festering neo-colonial attitudes in relation to social hierarchies of race, class and caste.

In order to fully comprehend the complex use of myth in Sealy's Everest Hotel, we need a method of reading that takes into account the power of an archetypal mytheme like the Mother, but can also pick up the subtleties of the ideological interrogation that Sealy offers in the text. From among the many differing conceptual approaches to myth, those of Carl Gustav Jung, Northrop Frye and Bruce Lincoln are beneficial for this particular project. To some extent, the theories of Jung and Frye are complementary in that they both develop a critical basis for talking about archetype. Lincoln focuses more on the the ideological implications of myth and suggests that myths are instrumental in defining and

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While there are several schools and scholars of myth criticism, Jung and Frye's focus on myth as narrative is particularly helpful for this project. Furthermore, any study of myth that constructs a critical discourse on archetypal imagery must contend with the influence Jung and Frye wielded on twentieth century conceptions of archetype. In contrast to Jung and Frye, Lincoln's approach foregrounds the importance of context, intellectual histories and the taxonomies of power at work in constructions of myth. His approach provides an important balance to the structuralist method of reading myth drawn from Jung and Frye.
sustaining the cultural codes of a society. Such codes are largely prescriptive and provide
symbolic significance in narrative form to the power dynamics that determine social
stratification. Lincoln situates himself between early structuralist models of classification
provided by Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, and the post structuralist readings of
myth as a sign by Roland Barthes. By drawing judiciously from the key schools of myth
scholarship, Lincoln arrives at a reading that takes into account the potency of myth
narration while acknowledging its function as a supreme vehicle for ideology. His
method of reading is highly adaptable to a study of the function of myth in postcolonial
literature because it addresses the issue of ideological power through a more nuanced
comprehension of the sacred and secular aspects of mythical narrative.

Lincoln draws most productively on Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss's suggestion that
“Every mythology is fundamentally a classification, but one which borrows its principles
from religious beliefs not scientific ideas”. Lincoln argues that Durkheim and Mauss's
system of classification inscribes a religious significance to socio-cultural divisions based
on race and caste. The question of classification formed on religious belief points to the
nature of myth as a form of elevated speech that has greater symbolic weight and
resonance than secular speech precisely because its origin is located in creed. It is this
sense of symbolic weight that enables us to read an archetypal image like Sealy's Mother
Earth/Inda in its full significance. However, focusing only on the symbolic weight of an

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archetypal image robs us of the capacity to probe its ideological premises. When Lincoln places Durkheim and Mauss's statement against later twentieth century revisions of myth that conflate the notion of sacred speech with narratives of ideological significance, he suggests that ideology, in myth, functions in a manner similar to a religious imperative. This reading guards against a naïve, inflated reading of the persuasive power of archetype in myth. It also reminds us that we must negotiate the sacred impact of a mythical narrative in the full extent of its potency.

Lincoln refers to Barthes's reading of myth in *Mythologies* (1957) which foregrounds the post-structuralist response to myth as a sign with ideological significance. Barthes, drawing on the theories of Ferdinand de Saussure, asserts that myth is a “second order semiological system” (114). In his reading, any sign that is weighted with a predetermined ideological significance is a myth and can thus be mobilized to produce affect on the collective and the individual. Because Barthes analyzes the notion of myth in its smallest possible unit, his theory suggests that it is impossible to differentiate myth from narrative: “everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by discourse” (109). Barthes points out that in a seemingly secular world, signs which appear neutral may in fact be potent vehicles for ideologies and thus function in a “mythical” manner. Barthes's theory is significant for any reading of myth in postcolonial literature because it takes into account the shift from configuring myth in purely religious terms, to an approach that analyzes the function of ideology in secular myth. Thus, though he never in fact uses the word “myth”, Benedict Anderson's study on the construction of “nation” in *Imagined*
Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism (1983) suggests that an idea such as “nation” (which is primarily secular in nature) functions with the imaginative potency of a myth by eliciting a particular kind of collective investment from all who partake of the narrative. The problem with Barthes's theory is that it fails to take into account the continued presence of a spiritual or religious imperative in twentieth century constructions of myth. This is particularly the case in mythical narratives in postcolonial literature where secular myths may be framed as sacred myths and vice versa. To assume that the collective investment in a myth (sacred or secular) is simply a question of ideology is to miss the capacity of myth to function as a narrative that also invokes a sense of transcendental meaning in relation to key mythemes.

Lincoln's approach to myth achieves the fine balance in reading the relation between ideology and religious impulse. Arriving at a middle ground that scrutinizes the intersections between the sacred and its relation, via ideology, to the legitimation of social heirarchies, Lincoln maintains that “...when a taxonomy is encoded in mythic form, the narrative packages a specific, contingent system of discrimination in a particularly attractive and memorable form. What is more, it naturalizes and legitimizes it. Myth, then, is not just a taxonomy, but ideology in narrative form” (147). While Lincoln primarily studies ancient Indo-European mythical systems, his argument holds true for the function of myth in contemporary contexts, including literature. If, following Lincoln, we direct the critical lens on the function of myth and the plot it seeks to reinforce, we discover that the myth always voices a certain code of belief. Besides the
definition and construction of social hierarchies, the mythical structure of a literary text outlines a hierarchy of images, of symbolism. These hierarchies are intimately shaped by the socio-cultural and literary “pretexts” of the author and the critical reader.

In the postcolonial context, the narration of myth is often linked to the author's desire for recuperation not merely of cultural practice, but of subterranean dimensions of the spirit that have survived and evolved through the many faces of colonialism.\footnote{This is especially true of narratives that “write back” to the perceived center of colonial privilege. However, even in the contemporary literatures of non-indigenous communities from Australia or South Africa, for example, the issue of recuperation surfaces in complex negotiations of the relation of settler to land and inheritance. The idea of recuperation itself functions as a mytheme that can be adapted to the vastly different aspects of postcolonial experience.} It is, therefore, necessary to develop a critical method of reading that can identify the presence of ideological structures in their full complexity – without reducing them to overly narrow socio-political frames. A critical reading that primarily depends on a process of de-mystification (as in the case of Barthes) can lead to an unfortunate myopic mis-reading of the belief system that is narrated through the myth. Such a method of reading would be detrimental to the processes of both recuperation and resistance.

While there are many ways to negotiate the relation between ideology and notions of the sacred, I argue that archetypes and archetypal images prove extremely productive in this capacity. The task of narrating community via myth often involves the employment of archetypal images and plot structures. In postcolonial literature which fictionalizes myth, the notion of archetype demands scrutiny precisely because it is a device used to bridge a gap between differing cultural traditions and narratives. For the postcolonial author, the
notion of archetype as an originary and universal symbol can function as a metaphoric frame for negotiations of hybridity and submerged racial/communal narratives. Reading with an awareness of the function of archetype demands an analytical participation in the power of myth. In order to fully comprehend the ideological significance of a myth, we must first experience it, in the act of reading, as truthful fiction. In the postcolonial context, when myths are used as framing devices to narrate historical events, our reading experience of these moments will be propelled by a particular force which is determined by the myth, not the event. Analyzing the rhetoric of persuasion or the affective power of myth leads us to the ideological core of a narrative. However, the very invocation of “archetype” can also problematically suggest the dissolution of the specific socio-cultural context of a symbol. Read in this light, archetypes are no more than symbols of “universal” significance and can provoke naïvely cross-cultural readings of myth.

5. Archetypal Criticism
In the field of literary myth criticism, Northrop Frye provides the most coherent (and at the same time most radical) use of a structuralist model that utilizes archetype. In his several critical works, Frye proposes a reading of literary genres that outlines the relation of myth to the form of a literary piece. Drawing primarily on the theories of Giambattista Vico and Ernst Cassirer (and peripherally on Oswald Spengler and Jung) Frye developed what was later termed “archetypal criticism”, a method of critical reading that focuses on the function of mythical structures in literature. In *The Bush Garden: Essays in the Canadian Imagination* (1971), Frye argues that myth is the structuring principle of
narrative (ix). This idea of a structuring principle derives from an understanding of archetype as a drive to formal consistency in any narrative. Frye's reading is helpful because it demands that we read myth within a critical understanding of literary convention (a complex task in the case of a novel like Yuson's Café which can read like an exercise in deconstructing genre boundaries). Frye's analysis of mythical function also explores the relation between myth and the notion of “magical” speech, which he links to figurative narrative acts and to metaphor. In The Great Code (1982) Frye demonstrates the relation between forms of metaphorical speech and the process of symbolic translation. Writing on the function of metaphor in the epics of Classical, pre-Biblical literatures and the Old Testament, Frye maintains that in the employment of metaphor “there is relatively little emphasis on a clear separation of subject and object: the emphasis falls rather on the feeling that subject and object are linked by a common energy or power” (6). Frye's reading suggests that a sense of persuasive “power” is linked to magical notions of associative translation: “... articulating of words may bring this common power into being... Words in such contexts are words of power or dynamic forces” (6). This “common power” of figurative speech also constructs and sustains the ideological codes that are endemic to the societies and cultures which share the same symbolic language.

Frye goes on to argue that metaphorical speech is no longer aligned with the magical although it may still exercise the function of symbolic translation built on chains of associative figurative links. In this reading, the function of metaphor in literature is
emancipated from notions of ritual transubstantiation which invoke the ideological codes of sacred speech:

Poetry, then, keeps alive the metaphorical use of language and its habits of thinking in the identity relations suggested by the “this and that” structure of metaphor. In this process the original sense of magic, of the possible forces released by words of power, disappears. The poet's approach to language in itself is hypothetical: in free societies he is allowed to assume anything he likes, but what he says remains detached from faith, power or truth, as we ordinarily understand those words, even when it expresses them... Magic demands prescribed formulas that cannot be varied by a syllable, whereas novelty and uniqueness are essential to poetry. Poetry does not really lose its magical power thereby, but merely transfers it from an action on nature to an action on the reader or hearer. (Frye 25)

In this reading of “magic”, Frye inherently demonstrates the circulation of power involved in reading the relation between the subject and object of metaphor. Metaphor, in poetry, allows for the hypothetical negotiation of the distance between subject and object by the reader. Magic blurs this distance, and magical speech cannot vary the tenor or mode of the relation between subject and object. Myth, as a form of narrative that is both poetic and magical, binds the reader within the “common power” of a symbolic system while provoking a recognition of the distance between subject and object characteristic of poetry. For example, when an “English” patient “reclines on his bed like a Fisher King”,¹¹ the reader participates in the range of symbolic meaning invoked by the Grail myth.

¹¹ Fledderus, 19.
However, in the novel, this figure also outlines the failure of nation to contain the radical hybridity of the transnational subject. The archetypal weight of the Grail myth provokes an enhanced affective response to the character while the plot of the novel destabilizes the power of the symbol through situational irony. The invocation of the Grail myth thus provides an example of a literary gesture that “remains detached from faith, power or truth” (Frye 25) while it expresses them.

The troubled relation between sacred and secular speech in myth also becomes the location of the authors' individual exploration of issues of cultural recuperation in a post-independence world. If we read postcolonial literature purely as artifice “detached from faith, power or truth” (25) we would be tempted to ignore the vital discourses on cultural erasure and appropriation that are at the fore in many articulations of myth in the postcolonial context. However, Frye's revision of the reader's active participation (via metaphor) in the construction and sustenance of myth, brings us back to the issue of the ideological function of mythical narrative. Frye suggests that the “action” of poetry (which is also its ideological vehicle) shapes the circulation of power in a text. This power constitutes the “magic” of a text – its affective powers of persuasion. In contemporary postcolonial literature, the construction of meaning via mythical narrative strategies requires just such an understanding of the presence of ideological codes in acts of symbolic translation. As metaphor replaces miracle in the mythical or magical realist strategies of these novels, reading with an awareness of the “awe-some” capacity for

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12 Ondaatje is an author who has been consistently taken to task for his apparent commitment to artifice at the expense of historical representation. This is an example where reading with an awareness of the function of myth teases out the double-sided nature of mythical truth that Frye speaks of.
persuasion in myth alerts us to the ideological issues of power and location that continue to thrive in the postcolonial novel, if in altered form.

The function of myth in the postcolonial novel also depends on an understanding of the role genre plays in framing historical moments in fiction. For Frye, genres are important because they are the “differentiating factors in literary experience”. Because Frye's theory of myth looks at the entire work via the notion of mythoi and dianoia (which we may roughly translate as “plot” and “theme”) genres become the vehicles of myth. Frye's reading helps to scrutinize the relation between genre and the narration of historical event via myth. The awareness of persuasive “mythic” frames in genre foregrounds the relation between an author's ideological bias and the construction of figurative reality as representative of historical moment. The present study engages the question of literary convention by exploring the implications of using genres as frames that shape an author's ideological reading of historical event. Genres shape the reader's response to the myth of a text through the action of the plot. Thus, the fact that Ondaatje's English Patient brings both tragic and comedic conventions to romance influences the way we respond to the central premise of the text. If the novel is read primarily in tragic terms, via the death of the “hero” Almàsy, it provokes a commentary on the failure of identity politics in an increasingly fragmented geo-political world. On the other hand, if we read the novel's concluding gesture between the young nurse and the sapper as a comedic resolution to the Almàsy's story, we encounter a more complex negotiation of the issue of identity that is only resolved through an understanding of artifice. Adapted to the critical paradigm of

13 Frye, Spiritus Mundi 123.
postcolonial studies, Frye's theory provides a challenge for scholars who deal with hybrid traditions in the novel. To locate the generic conventions of a text within its time thus requires a radical engagement with the question of tradition in the postcolonial literary work. As I hope to demonstrate, such an engagement can never be apolitical.

Archetypal criticism has been largely overlooked in critical analyses of postcolonial literature because Frye's structural readings of genre and plot seem at odds with issues of narrative fracture, dislocation and palimpsest that abound in the postcolonial novel. Postcolonial myth criticism that uses Frye tends to focus on Frye's schematic readings of genre as pre-fabricated categories. This method of reading Frye's archetypal analysis, which is naïve, forestalls the capacity to develop socio-politically nuanced readings of mythical function in postcolonial literature. Frye's theories on genre can be applied in the postcolonial context, if tempered with an understanding of the complex relation between archetype and ideology. Following Frye's schema, we see that the four novels in this study represent three genres (with the absence of comedy). The English Patient and The Everest Hotel are romances, Jonestown is a tragedy and The Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café is a satiric mock epic. In each case, depending on the genre, the treatment of embedded myth varies. Furthermore, since these novels narrate specific historical events in mythical terms, an author's choice of genre invokes a particular socio-cultural reading

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14 In *Northrop Frye and the Theoretical Imagination* (1994), Jonathan Locke Hart demonstrates the difficulty of reconciling Frye's structural theories and their possible pre-occupation with metanarratives with issues of deconstruction and power relations in textual production that are central concerns in both postmodern and postcolonial criticism. See Hart 150-151.

of history. History is constructed as romance, tragedy or satire with differing levels of ideological persuasion characteristic of each. In romance and tragedy, the ideological impetus of myth is established via a persuasive rhetoric of identification. In mock-epic, the authorial voice punctures the conflation between subject and object of the mythical narrative. As a result, the ideological codes of the myth are exposed and demystified. However, this process of demystification, in turn, demonstrates the urge to construct newer myths that revise the ideological hierarchies of the text. In each case, reading with an awareness of the function of genre recalibrates our understanding of the socio-political genesis of a text and provides a helpful subtext from which to scrutinize an author's response to issues of ideology.

6. Myth and Magic(al) Realism
Due to the preponderance of twentieth century novels that draw attention to their use of myth through magical realist narrative strategies, reading myth via discourses on magical realism has become common critical practice. However, scant distinction is maintained between notions of “magic” and “myth” in the critical material that surrounds this body of work. Magical realism is often used as a catch-all phrase that encompasses a gamut of narrative strategies from sophisticated modernist experimentalism to the presence of indigenous folklore or myth in a text. Each of the novels in this study would be categorized as magical realist fiction due to particular narrative characteristics that we have come to associate with magical realism. Each novel draws on a recognizable mythical system (often constructed through hybrid narrative frames). Likewise, the form
of each novel (as tragedy, romance or satire) fosters particular “affective” responses to the central thematics of each text. In each case, myth serves a radical purpose and is used in a revisionist, subversive manner that provides alternative narratives to the historical moments that the novels explore. However, precisely because myth is used to narrate revisionist alternative histories, the differing magical realist approaches to myth can signal the various ideological preoccupations of a text. The relation of myth to magical realist narrative strategies is a complex issue that has been largely under-theorized because of the extremely slippery nature of notions of “magic” and “myth”. Criticism that deals with magical realist narrative strategies has, in the main, conflated the two categories of mythical and magical narrative in such a way that the two terms are virtually interchangeable. This study attempts to maintain a critical differentiation between the two terms for the purpose of demonstrating that the central issue at hand (the function of ideology in mythical narrative) requires a conscious reading practice that locates myth within its socio-cultural context and remains aware of the power of mythical narrative when employed as artifice.

Magical realist narrative strategies afford a rich experimentalism which can contain and interrogate myth, if read primarily as narrative strategies rather than representations of a “mythified” local. The sense of the gaps and absences that are invoked in the hesitation between categories of the real and the fantastic provide a sense of willing disbelief that is distinct from an unmediated narration of myth. This hesitancy is helpful when negotiating some of the more difficult ideological pitfalls of a mythic consciousness in contemporary
fiction. The magical realist narrative strategy does not assume a shared mythical space between author and reader. While it is critically fallacious to suggest that magical realism is a single definitive narrative act, there is a key characteristic that is shared by all magical realist texts – the understanding that the magical real is a figurative device, albeit a device with varying levels of rhetorical potency. Likewise, in the magical realist text, the reader encounters myth primarily as a form of figurative speech even in situations where an author can claim a “representative” vision of a mythical narrative. The magical realist narrative strategy may attempt persuasion with the mythic as part of its aesthetic, but it allows the reader to decide if the fantastical events of the narrative are “true” -- it invokes hesitation and negotiation. For example, Yuson constructs the character of Leon as a Christ figure. However, he dismantles any sense of sanctity in this allusion by framing the significant mythemes of the Christ story in bawdy humor. Therefore, Leon does not go to a willing sacrificial death because he wishes to save all humanity but because he wants to bed another beautiful woman – his motives are anything but sacred (198). Yuson's use of comic irony affords the reader the ability to participate dialogically with the narrative because it dismantles the rhetoric of persuasion that one experiences in myth.

On the other hand, Harris's *Jonestown* employs a mythic consciousness that does not, simultaneously, invoke an ironic distance to the mythical subject. While Harris avoids describing his approach as magical realist, his discomfort with formal genre systems and

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16 Garcia Márquez famously claimed that he was inspired by the way his grandmother told stories, but he never claims that the stories are true except in an aesthetic dimension. See García Márquez, “The Paris Review Interviews” 188.
the tenor of what he calls the “novel of persuasion” leads to the kind of experimentalism that is characteristic of magical realism. Furthermore, Harris's dense, self-reflexive use of mythical narrative also suggests a revisionist position in relation to myth that is characteristic of magical realist writing. For example, in *Jonestown*, the central character, Bone, is a figure drawn out of two complimentary biblical stories – that of Christ and his follower Lazarus. The “moral” imperative of the novel rests on the reader's ability to participate in both myths with a full awareness of their numinous complexity. We are also required to “see” Harris's juxtaposition of the two myths through a complementary, self-regulating form of interrogation. The result is a highly complex vision of the salvation myth as a narrative of postcolonial resistance. However, in my chapter on *Jonestown*, I argue that our participation in Bone's narrative leads to rather problematic constructions of “otherness” in relation to the local and indigenous belief systems narrated by Harris. Because Harris's construction of myth leaves no space for hesitation, we must accept his vision of particular indigenous myths at face value. In this example, the category of “truth” precludes the reader's capacity to remain impartial to the ideological contents of the myth. Scrutinizing the function of myth in *Jonestown* enables us to negotiate ideological boundaries that draw on notions of a postcolonial transnational and local imaginary. These boundaries are intimately tied to projected notions of audience and the reader's ability to respond (or not) to the myth of a text. An understanding of the difference between mythic realism and magical realism would, in this instance, provide a stronger basis for analyzing Harris's approach to narrating myth.

17 This is why Barbara Webb reads him beside other key Latin American magical realist writers like Alejo Carpentier. For a sustained reading of Wilson Harris as representative of Caribbean magical realist writing see Webb.
7. Myth in the Postcolonial Literary Context

In the field of postcolonial studies, the study of myth is intimately tied to the process of writing and imagining back to the center. However, the employment of indigenous myths or legends in postcolonial novels also brings up questions about authority and representation that are difficult to ignore. We have to contend with issues of appropriation and adaptation that arise when certain mythical systems are privileged over others. Furthermore, reading with a consciousness of the location of a text and authorial bias in relation to indigenous myth is particularly important in situations where myth narrates a history of the disenfranchised. The problem of cultural erasure and appropriation alerts us to the difficulties inherent in reading myth in a postcolonial context. As discussed, my approach to reading myth lies between structuralist notions of myth as archetypal racial narrative and a Barthesian reading of myth as ideological vehicle. A middle ground is necessary between two such polarized readings of myth because it is present in postcolonial fiction of the late twentieth century. Thus, while Yuson uses myth to comment on the ideologies behind the construction of identity politics in the Philippine context, Harris negotiates syncretic visions of the self/other binary as imaginative recuperation through myth. Yuson's novel is an exploration of myth as artifice, while Jonestown (employing artifice) provides more of a negotiation of the archetypal potencies of myth. However, Sealy and Ondaatje demonstrate an uneasiness in their narration of myth that fits neither reading. Such strategic manipulations of myth require a new critical negotiation of the problem of ideology in myth which explores the relation of
The markedly hybrid approach we encounter in these novels depends, in some degree, on the narration of myth. Quite often, narrative complexity and the author's experimental style of narration are developed through an intertextual dialog between embedded myths and the thematics of the novel. Such myths are drawn from indigenous traditions as well as from the larger body of classical mythology from the “West”. For example, Sealy invokes the Nepali folktales of the Yeti as trickster and savior while Ondaatje draws on the Grail myth. An analysis of myth in these postcolonial texts necessarily involves an engagement with the question of inherited narrative traditions that are both indigenous and other. However, postcolonial criticism about myth focuses almost exclusively on an archival approach that identifies indigenous myths and legends in texts and scrutinizes their relevance within the thematics of the texts.\(^\text{18}\) Often, myths are employed to narrate difficult histories, thereby suggesting that myths provide alternative histories. An approach that focuses primarily on identifying indigenous myth in contemporary form fails to address the more syncretic components of myth. For the postcolonial author, a hybrid imaginary gives birth to mythical narratives from differing cultural traditions and social modalities that compete within the same textual space, often highlighting the tensions and ambiguities that frame the author's negotiation of issues such as identity, selfhood and nationhood. In these four novels, the idea of myth as ancient story with collective significance is placed beside newer secular narratives which are also

\(^{18}\) My discussion of Chitra Sankaran's *Myth Connection* (1993) will demonstrate this aspect of myth criticism.
constructed as myths. By demonstrating the collective ideological potency of such emergent myths, we can trace, with added depth, the ideological preoccupations of certain postcolonial “fictions”. While this study contends that the function of myth is always contextually specific and coded with the author's particular response to socio-cultural inheritance, it also analyzes the emergence of shared concerns about categories such as “nation”, “community” and “land” which are addressed in mythical terms.

Critical studies on the function of myth tend to read myth as a form of artifice that draws on archetypal/archival pre-colonial racial narrative. In fiction, the process of narrating myth as racial or communal narrative encourages a critical reception that foregrounds region-specific readings of myth. Myth becomes a means by which to redress the erasure of indigenous narrative practices and is reconstructed in relation to particular notions of cultural identity. Such constructions reflect current preoccupations with issues of socio-cultural and racial representation, identity politics and nation building. Wole Soyinka's *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1990) is an early example of such a critical and creative response to the role myth plays in the postcolonial novel. Soyinka relocates and adapts region-specific notions of myth to the project of writing community in post-independence Nigeria. Soyinka's rhetoric is in itself an exercise in “mythic” narrative that foregrounds a ritualistic sense of language: “...let it always be recalled that myths arise from man's attempt to externalize and communicate his inner intuitions” (3). Soyinka's myth criticism lends itself to the process of literary myth-making and reflects his

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19 The preoccupation of writers such as Soyinka and Achebe with a revival of myth in largely patriarchal terms is itself a “centering” project.
particular concerns about the relation between myth and the narration of an African imaginary. He articulates the role myth plays in the process of cultural recuperation of an “African” past. However, Soyinka also invokes the notion of archetype, thereby linking notions of an African mythic consciousness to a universal symbolism. By doing so, Soyinka simultaneously employs a strategy of recuperation that conflates the specificities of his Africanist mythic vision with symbols of universal significance. Such a position is necessarily hybrid, but it also speaks to the gaps and anxieties that attend any project of cultural recuperation in a postcolonial present.

Soyinka's conflation of regional myth with notions of archetype, and the subsequent inflation of symbolic categories that happens as a result of expanding myth in universal terms, is what I wish to avoid in my analysis of myth. The present study stresses the importance of reading myth in postcolonial fiction within its socio-cultural contexts. However, it also aims to address a dearth of literary myth criticism that is informed by a comparative approach. Drawing on critical concerns framed through postcolonial discourse, I argue that a study of myth must necessarily foreground issues of cultural appropriation while remaining sympathetic to the process of recuperation. Likewise, identifying common concerns in mythical narratives across regional divides brings richness to our readings of resistance, reclamation and nation-building in the postcolonial context. Because myth provokes a desire for archetypal or universal significance (a desire, in turn, fostered by the twentieth century postcolonial author's anxiety about racial and cultural antinomies), we must read it through strategies that preserve the sense of
archetype. By contextualizing our reading of archetype, we locate its complicity in the construction and sustenance of ideological power structures within the text. If we were to read the four novels under survey in purely archetypal terms, we would go no further than identifying a savior myth that follows the rise, zenith and fall of a central, prodigious character. We could demonstrate how, in each case, various indigenous myths follow this fundamental narrative structure, thereby subsuming the specificities of these narratives within the larger archetypal narrative of the savior myth. Such a reading would lead to an approach similar to Joseph Campbell, where myth is no more than metanarrative. Instead, locating the savior myth in each novel involves a differentiated engagement with an author's narration of a specific page of regional history. These separate narrations of savior myths demonstrates highly individual concerns, which, despite certain shared thematics, speak to very different narrative traditions.

Postcolonial literary criticism does not refer exclusively to myth as racial or communal narrative. In “Anthropologists and Other Frauds”, Graham Huggan outlines a very different strategic approach to myth in postcolonial fiction which falls back on the notion of myth as satiric artifice – myth as false speech. When Huggan, drawing on Susan Sontag, refers to the “myth of the anthropologist” he refers to a peculiar set of false significations that surround the notion of the anthropologist as objective scholar of the indigenous subject (117). Huggan's analysis of the anthropologist as metaphor in Alejo Carpentier's *Los Pasos Perdidos* (1954), Yambo Ouologuem's *Le Devoir de Violence* (1968) and Albert Wendt's *Flying Fox in a Freedom Tree* (1974), is a brief but important
case study in the way certain postcolonial authors deconstruct a contemporary secular myth and expose its complicity in the colonial project. Huggan demonstrates that in this approach to myth, authors revoke the ideological authority of myth through a process of demystification and expose particular mythical narratives as colonial fraud. The issue at hand, however, is whether we read Huggan's “anthropologist” as a myth in the same way we attach potent transformative symbolism to a figure like the Fisher King. The fact is that we do not. We see therefore, that in postcolonial critical practice we have come to think of myth almost exclusively in terms of indigenous, pre-colonial racial narratives. This approach precludes our capacity, as readers, to disentangle the multiple strands of ideological persuasion that might be at work in an invocation of a mythical figure or story, a problem that would not arise in narratives where authors set out to expose and dismantle mythical constructions.

Reading with an awareness of the ideological undercurrents of mythical narrative also requires an awareness of the issues of location and context of both author and critic. As Franco Moretti's study of García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1968) in *Modern Epic* (1996) demonstrates, there is a particular predisposition in the novel's “Western” audience to read myth as a form of resistance to the onslaught of imperialism and the epic of progress that forms the plot of the novel. It is in this sense that Moretti suggests that “myth...is the sign and instrument of symbolic resistance to Western penetration” (247-248). While Moretti does not claim to speak for the novel's reception in Latin America, he points out that the unprecedented success of Marquez's novel points to
a very interesting characteristic in the reception of “magical realism” in the so-called West. For Moretti, the critical reception of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* demonstrates the neo-colonial desire for consumption of the indigenous other via categories of the imaginary. In his evaluation, the reception of magical realism in the “West” is built on desire:

... the desire of contemporary societies for 'meaning', imagination, re-enchantment. A wish that, in Europe, comes up against centuries of Weberian coldness, and is therefore hard to fulfill; but which can quite well find an outlet in stories belonging to another culture. Especially if that culture is a perfect compromise formation: sufficiently European ('Latin') to be comprehensible – and sufficiently exotic ('American') to elude critical control. We are ready to believe almost anything about what is far away from us: it was true for the cronicas of the Conquista, and has been true again for magical realism. (249)

The notion of the indigenous myth as “sign and instrument” of resistance is tempered by the awareness that critical reception of the magical realist novel is largely a transnational cosmopolitan phenomenon. While we are dazzled by the notion that Márquez's narrative is magical because it recuperates a lost mode of narration, Moretti suggests that we lose sight of the fact that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is a novel about the occultism of progress in a postcolonial contemporary. As Moretti points out, it is the future of Macondo, after its transmutation through colonial and imperial process, that is magical. For Moretti, “...the true magic of this novel is not magic: it is technology” (249). The
importance of Moretti’s argument is that it insists that we read the mundane secular world of the compass, ice, or the cinema via the same lens as an infant with a pig’s tail or a levitating beauty (249). In Moretti’s reading, the compass or the telephone are symbolic categories to which we attach ideological significance because they belong to a recognizable narrative on the history of the Americas. Moretti’s argument would suggest that the act of narrating the so-called fantastic requires a similar engagement with ideological codes of representation. The issue of recuperation and resistance via the narration of myth is thus extremely complex as we are forced to encounter, over and again, the difficulty of locating myth, and producing a “located” reading of myth, in a postcolonial context.

8. Four Choices: Reading Myth Across the Postcolonial Divide
The presence of novels from South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Caribbean suggests an inter-regional reading of myth. My concern lies with examining the ideological implications of employing a cross-cultural vocabulary in the narration of myth. To this end, my textual choices are purposefully eccentric and foreground distinct authorial approaches to narrating myth. The four novels in this study would not normally be read as complementary, their differences far outnumber their similarities. For example, the issue of location in authorial orientation (Harris and Ondaatje are “differently” diasporic writers) makes for very different constructions of the mytheme of “land” in all four texts. Likewise, because the location of a text (in terms of publication) affects its reception, the response to the narration of indigenous myths and belief systems in these texts can vary
significantly. Furthermore, each author in this study would normally be read within critical frames that are not conducive to a comparative reading. For example, we are not encouraged to read an Anglophone Philippine writer like Yuson beside an Anglophone Indian writer like Sealy because conventional methods of separating postcolonial literature according to the “Commonwealth” divide preclude such comparisons. Likewise, although Ondaatje and Harris are well established writers of the same literary milieu whose works depend quite heavily on myth, it is highly unusual to suggest a comparative reading of their work, or to place them beside lesser known artists like Yuson and Sealy.

Despite the significant dissimilarities outlined, I suggest that these novels share a particular literary inheritance that is postcolonial in every sense. This literary inheritance is intimately tied to the function of myth in each novel and calls for a method of analysis that is comparative without suggesting a singular or monolithic reading of myth. If we continue to paint in broad strokes, we see that both Harris and Yuson use a Christ myth as a frame for their hero myths (which are, in turn, punctuated by other versions of indigenous hero myths). Both Sealy and Ondaatje draw on the Grail myth (which is, after all, an adaptation of the Christ myth) in their novels. Therefore, we see that authors from around the postcolonial world, who are both local and diasporic, draw on similar myth sources for their particular narrations of historical moments. While it is possible to conceive of an archetypal pattern that lends itself to telling particular stories, or a shared psychic consciousness, I would rather suggest that the presence of this mytheme points to
a shared symbolic consciousness born of the strangely similar intellectual and philosophical foundations of the educated middle class postcolonial writer.20

The act of narrating history as myth superimposes a particular prefabricated symbolic meaning onto historical events. In all four novels, hybrid hero myths constructed out of indigenous and European Christian traditions are used to narrate particular socio-cultural and political movements of the twentieth century. With the exception of The English Patient, which is transnational in content and context, these novels foreground local struggles in hybrid mythical terms which lend both a particular and a universal significance to their matter. As such, we see that hero myths can, in a broader sense, provoke similar narratives of resistance across widely different regions. The notion that the postcolonial everyman/woman can rise up against corrupt authoritarian social structures has particular potency in regions struggling with the aftermath of colonialism and its influence on neo-colonial patterns in “Third World” politics. The struggle of a hero to find agency and articulation is the essential mytheme in the four novels we encounter in this study. In each novel, this struggle is also intimately tied to particular socio-cultural relationships between the hero and the land which provoke commentaries on the issue of human agency and the specific geo-political controversies of nation-building.

20 Harris, Yuson, Sealy and Ondaatje benefited from primary and secondary education from elite institutions within their regions and abroad. Wilson Harris was educated at Queen's College, Georgetown, Guyana. Alfred Yuson attended Ateneo de Manila, Manila, Philippines. Allan Sealy attended St. Stephen's College Delhi, India. Michael Ondaatje's early education in England included a stint at Dulwich College.
While the narration and significance of myth differs across regional and cultural divides, this study does not attempt to suggest that there is an “Indian”, “Canadian-Sri Lankan”, “Filipino” or “Guyanese-British” way of speaking myth. While regional divides provoke cultural and racial boundaries in the narration of myth, I do not follow a line of questioning that demonstrates essential “nationalized” characteristics in the narration of myth. Rather, I focus on the reception of myth through various hybrid narrative inheritances which demonstrate that for the postcolonial author, myth is inherited from Yeats and Eliot, and from the Bible, as it is from Maya chronicles or Cebuano folk stories. My reading takes into account the function of myth as racial and communal narrative. However, I also scrutinize the multiple issues that arise when the “originary” sources of myth are complex, diverse and fragmented. My aim is as much to revise the tendency to read myth in purely racialized and regional terms, as it is to focus on the details that link a myth to its particular socio-cultural genesis.

The four novels in this study are significant literary works while not being representative pieces of regional literatures. The reason I choose novels that are not representative is because they afford interesting examples of particular authorial approaches that foreground the sense of myth as a literary device. While the function of myth in these texts is primarily literary, I also explore tendencies in the treatment of myth that encourage certain ideological positions over others. Each author in this study approaches the problem of ideological persuasion differently.\(^\text{21}\)

\(^{21}\) The absence of women writers in this study is intentional. I have chosen four male writers whose works speak to certain shared anxieties which are complementary when read together. Central to the novels by Harris, Ondaatje and Sealy is the sense of the violated feminine as a figurative representation of the land. While this is not a central issue in the *Caffè*, Yuson's mock-epic construction of the revolutionary
about the validity of narrating myth as an antidote to colonized and colonizing notions of history within the postcolonial text, narrative strategies that employ myth are multifarious and range in tenor from straightforward mythical allusions to deeply ironic inversions that undo the mystical masks of myth. I argue that novels drawn from complex hybrid mythical traditions are often mis-read because of a critical response that attempts to fix them within particular readings of indigenous or racialized myths.

The impetus to read myth in racial terms is curiously consistent across regional divides. For example, in her analysis of Mulk Raj Anand's work, Meenakshi Mukherjee argues that the trappings of modern ideologies cannot provide an adequate substitute for the “myth of a race”. Likewise, in his study of the Filipino novel, Resil Mojares claims that writing the Filipino experience involves a process of freeing the soul from the seduction of colonization: “the fullness of our literature can be judged by how well we weave and fuse within us the winds that blow from the many sites of what we must claim, in the nation's making, as our shared life”. While Mojares doesn't use the word myth, the process of storying that he seeks in Filipino literature is inescapably tied to emergent notions of national identity. Both Mukherjee and Mojares, writing in entirely different literary and cultural contexts, demonstrate a very similar anxiety over the function of

Kilat contains a subtext that alludes to his consuming desire of the feminine. The novel simultaneously pokes fun at this desire while making it the catalyst for Kilat's eventual demise. The concerns of novels such as Isabel Allende's *House of Spirits* (1982), Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), Sorayya Khan's *Noor* (2000) or Nalo Hopkinson's *The Salt Roads* (2003) are quite distinct from the issues scrutinized in this study. While we may encounter a similar preoccupation with the relation between land and woman, the approaches to narrating myth are somewhat different from those we encounter in the four writers that make up this study.

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22 See Mukherjee, *The Twice Born Fiction* 230.
23 Mojares, “The Haunting of the Filipino” 309.
myth in literature. In their readings, “myth” is a racial narrative intimately tied to the
definition and sustenance of community, race and nation. The tendency to read myth
purely within racialized and communalized terms leads to a sense of anxiety over
mythical narratives that do not appear to foster notions of community. Such an
approach ignores the evolution of secular, global narratives into contemporary myths that
require more hybrid methods of analysis.

The issue of hybridity in myth poses a slew of problems for the postcolonial critic
because it often points to a symbiotic relation between symbolic representations of “self”
and “other” in mythical narratives. The hybrid literary inheritances of the four authors in
this study lead to particular responses to myth. In these four novels, genre interrogates
myth just as much as myth frames and shapes particular responses to genre. In each case
the relation between these two aspects shapes the reader's response to the particular
historical event that is narrated. In order for us to fully understand the complexity of the
postcolonial engagement with myth, we have to come to terms with a critical bifurcation
in the definition of myth that arises out of the recognition of the ideological power of
myth and the author's critical exploration of this affective power within narrative. Each
author in this study has a distinct approach to narrative that consciously grapples with the
affective capacity of myth. Ondaatje uses the dramatic immediacy of myth to interrogate
the failure of the nation state and explore alternative visions of community based on
transnational biases. Sealy revises Ondaatje's narration using classical European and

24 For example, Anand's myth-like constructions of Socialism fall into this category and provoke
Mukherjee's troubled response.
Sanskrit myths to negotiate the failure of the contemporary nation state to address the concerns of the local. Yuson writes a novel that is a commentary on the way Cebuano legends and myths were used to rejuvenate notions of nationalist identity by mid-twentieth century scholarly discourse. Harris uses Biblical and Mayan myth to narrate the symbiosis of colonized self and colonial other in the horror of the Jonestown massacre in Guyana.

When Ondaatje alludes to the Fisher King through imagistic reconstruction of the Grail myth, he also problematizes the notion of the “Grail-like” quest for identity that arises in the chaos of war. Likewise, when Sealy seemingly reconstructs his own vision of the Grail myth in the northern states of India, he foregrounds the theme of the waste land as a figure for economic, political and environmental collapse on the intensely local scale. Both Ondaatje and Sealy appear to be telling a similar story – an extended allegory on the anxieties of identity construction in relation to nationhood. However, the shifts and nuances in their separate narrations of the same myth provide radically different visions of the relationship of man to his environment, both political and spiritual. *The English Patient* foregrounds issues of transnational identity politics on a global scale, while *The Everest Hotel* highlights the tensions of class and race politics in a frontier township in India. However, both novels ultimately explore the state of the postcolonial subject in relation to projects of nation-building.

If we look at Harris's *Jonestown*, we see another hero myth set in motion – the narrative
of salvation through love that is the central myth of Christianity. However, Harris's
treatment of the myth employs a writerly exploration of the vicissitudes of “love”,
providing complex negotiations of the relation between religious devotion and the sway
of ideological persuasion. Rather than constructing a narrative about a saving hero, Harris
provides us with a meditation on the theme of salvation in the climate of late twentieth-
century global geopolitics that caused the tragedy of Jonestown. Once again, Harris's
central concern is the relation between an ideology of “self” and the re-emergence of
colonial and imperial forms of indigenous consumption. While he does not directly touch
on the vicissitudes of nation-building, he draws a clear parallel between the “magical”
boundaries of empire and the ideological limits of the Jonestown commune. Yuson's Café
deals most explicitly with the issue of nation-building. Using a fairly recent legend of a
Cebuano revolutionary, Yuson employs myth, legend and folk beliefs of the Philippine
peoples to construct a burlesque allegory on the failure of revolutions, political and
otherwise. His concern, once again, is the relation of the individual to the project of
nation-building.

We see, therefore, that all four novels, despite their separate regional concerns, narrate a
shared anxiety about the capacity for individuated national and communal consciousness.
The fates of the protagonists in these novels are linked to historical events that define the
boundaries of a postcolonial vision of “self”. In each case, this boundary is porous and
shifts according to the constructed mythical imaginaries and literary forms these authors
employ in their separate narrations of history. We see, therefore, that the relation of the
embedded mythical narratives to the plot and thematics of these novels describe specific authorial responses to contemporary issues which, due to their particular sociocultural genesis, are also postcolonial in nature. These issues reflect a preoccupation with cyclic visions that link ideologies of a postcolonial contemporary to a colonial and precolonial past.

9. A Possible Method
As discussed, my task lies in locating and situating myth within specific literary traditions. A novel's relation to historical event also necessitates a reading of the sociocultural influences on embedded mythical narratives. However, I propose such readings only in consequence to the way myth is employed in relation to plot, theme and the form of a text. Each chapter begins with a brief introduction to the central themes of the text and outline the recognizable mythical narratives that are present. I then identify key characteristics in the critical discourse on myth from a regional perspective, thereby tracing possible concerns that might influence the construction and reception of myth in a text. This approach enables me to study the evolution of particular authorial strategies in relation to myth and helps me locate an author within his literary milieu. Focusing on structuring principles, I argue that an understanding of a novel's form provides a mythical “frame of reference” which shapes the specific myths in each text. The construction of a myth through satire, tragedy or romance provokes a complementary “generic” response to the historical moment that the myth frames. Such moments help us identify an author's specific ideological preoccupation in relation to each narrative act. In turn, the
recognition of the affective strategies that shape our response to myth also alerts us to the ideologically persuasive nature that the employment of myth fosters. This approach to reading myth in contemporary fiction foregrounds its vast adaptability and relevance to postcolonial narratives on identity, nation-building and the relationship between land and human agency.

My first chapter will focus on Yuson's Café. Yuson's novel is situated within the body of Philippine fiction in English that uses magical realist strategies to explore and narrate issues in Filipino identity politics and twentieth-century nationalism. Yuson follows in the tradition of Nick Joaquin and Gregorio Brillantes who already made the use of myth as political allegory relevant. The Café alternates between the infamous martial law period under Ferdinand Marcos and the period before the Cebu uprising that was to propel the Filipino resistance against Spanish Colonial rule. The novel's doubled narratives are meant to function as palimpsests that intersect and interrogate each other and comment on the ambiguity of heroism within Filipino history. However, I will also argue that Yuson's novel sets up a commentary on the way twentieth century scholarly discourse, both from within the Philippines and through the North American academy, uses indigenous myths as a means to construct narratives about Filipino identity in primarily mythic-heroic terms. As a burlesque mock-epic, Yuson's novel deconstructs such visions through postmodern pastiche and mock-heroic language and sets up a playful negotiation of the question of myth-making in the Philippine context.
My second chapter will offer the only comparative analysis of two texts in this study. I argue that Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* and Allan Sealy's *The Everest Hotel A Calendar* are novels that benefit from a comparative reading because of their particularly complementary use of myth. While Sealy's novel was written six years after *The English Patient*, several thematic and structural similarities between the two novels prompt us to read the latter as a response to the first. Both novels rework the myth of the Fisher King as a means to negotiate the problem of narrating nation. In Ondaatje and Sealy we see the emergence of a consciousness that interrogates the ideological potency of newer secular myths such as “nation” through the frames of older myths such as the myth of the Fisher King. Ondaatje's novel brings together a seemingly motley crew of characters from around the world whose stories negotiate the tragic mis-identifications of “national” identity in the chaos of a “world” war. Ondaatje seems to suggest that in the chaos of war nations fail their subjects. He points, rather, to a notion of a global community as a post-national answer to the divisions of the twentieth century identity politics. Sealy's novel shifts focus from global issues to the place of the local. His characters build a sense of the Indian subject as local and marginal. *The Everest Hotel* outlines the collapse of local communities due to the systematic degradation of the environment and the inability of both centralized governments and localized political action to reverse the cycles of deprivation. Sealy's answer to the failure of nationhood lies in suggesting a return to pre-nationalistic, pre-communal custodianship which he places, significantly, in the hands of the local female subject. While both Ondaatje and Sealy make use of the Fisher King myth as a framing device, their revisions of the myth involve a negotiation and
demystification of the notion of “nation”. While both novels mobilize critical archetypal images of relationship and custodianship, they also problematize these images through the use of dramatic irony. Both Ondaatje and Sealy do not seek to demystify myth, rather, they demonstrate the ideological potency of myth while keeping its affective nature intact.

My third chapter will be on Wilson Harris, whose use of myth is the most experimental of all the texts in this study. Harris has written extensively on his understanding of myth and this chapter will explore some of the consequences of his theoretical explorations on the nature of myth and allegory. Harris identifies allegory as a central method by which colonial discourse frames the colonized. His task of writing back to the center involves a process of destabilizing the roots and foundations of allegory from within the imaginary. In Harris's words, “my assertion is that one can come to allegory from that side, from the victimized side and renovate it, rediscover implications in it which make it genuine and true, so that allegory is not a museum piece”.25 This idea of renovation is at the heart of the doubled characters that people Harris's novel Jonestown. Harris uses a polymorphous sense of identity where oppressor and oppressed are part of a continuum. The uncertainty caused by this method of narration destabilizes the power dynamics in his novels. At any given moment, protagonist and antagonist are two faces of the same principle. In his words, “concepts of invariant identity... function in the modern world as a block imperative at the heart of cultural politics. The oppressor makes this his or her banner.

The oppressed follow suit. Such is the tautology of power”.26 Thus, Bone, the fictional survivor of the Jonestown massacre who is the narrator of the novel, is doubled with Rev. Jonah Jones, the man responsible for the tragedy. Both characters are framed within the biblical narratives of Jesus and Lazarus. While Harris's imaginative project is the single most radical exploration of the capacity of the postcolonial writer to rework the fabric of history, it is not without a somewhat problematic conflation of categories of meaning. Jung's theory of archetype provides a theoretical frame in which to analyze Harris's project of the arts of imagination. I will argue that while Harris uses the sense of the numinous in archetype as a critical decentering mechanism, he does not provide the equally important process of differentiation that was key to Jung's analysis of archetypal images. This chapter will analyze the consequences of dismantling the “real” as a tautological category and question the syncretic archetypes Harris erects in its place.

26 Harris in Rutherford, From Commonwealth to post-colonial: Critical Essays (xii).
II Excavating the Local: Alfred 'Krip' Yuson's *The Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café*

1. **Introduction**

This chapter will analyze the way Alfred 'Krip' Yuson interrogates the myth of Philippine national identity in *Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café*. Yuson's novel emerges from a tradition of experimental storytelling in late twentieth century Philippine Anglophone fiction that uses myth, folk narrative and inter-textual references to other works of art and literature as narrative strategies that rework the conventions of the realist novel. Written during the political foment of the 1980s in Manila, Yuson's novel frames conventional narratives of Filipino heroism through a form of self-conscious mythification that interrogates the ideological foundations of these narratives. While the novel resists any simple generic definition, it is best read as a burlesque epic that outlines the mundane appetites and desires of a Cebuano revolutionary in his magical ascension towards victory and martyrdom. Foregrounding low, bodily humor, Yuson provides a tricksterish reading of the Filipino hero that is customarily written out of epics of revolution. The sustained allusions to the protagonist's physical excesses gesture to the Philippine folk hero Juan Tamad and point to narrative strategies of resistance that invert the colonial stereotype of the lazy *Indio*. Juan Tamad's unlikely heroism provokes laughter through incongruity and functions as a trickster myth where humor is a tool for disruption and resistance. However, Yuson's revision of the very category of laughter is characterized by a double-sided ambivalence that punctures any “heroic” reading of the protagonist's anti-colonial and anti-imperial victories. As such, this novel provides an exceptionally unique essay on

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27 Hereafter referred to as *The Café*. 46
the process of myth-making and its relation to constructions of Filipino identity (via narratives of heroism) in the post-Marcos era.

Written during the politically volatile period of Martial Law in the Philippines, Yuson's novel is a retelling of historical events set approximately a hundred years apart. Running in parallel story-lines, Yuson's novel outlines the Philippine struggle for emancipation from Spanish colonial powers and the uprisings against Ferdinand Marcos's neocolonial governance in the late 1980s. The first story-line traces the adventures of Leon Kilat, a minor hero of the 1897-8 Cebu revolution. The second, weaves through the wanderings of Kilat's narrator-double, Robert Aguinaldo, whose fictional life is caught up in the events of the elections of 1984, EDSA\textsuperscript{28} and the massacres at Mendiola Bridge.\textsuperscript{29} Set as palimpsests, these historical events are inter-referential and give rise to a vision of revolution as integral part of Philippine identity.

\textsuperscript{28} EDSA stands for Epifanio De Los Santos Avenue, the central artery of downtown Manila where the historic demonstration commemorating the first anniversary of the assassination of President Benigno Aquino took place on Feb 22-25 1987. Approximately a million people were present (some estimate twice the figure) and this show of public support for the Aquinos led to the notion of a "People's Power". Overwhelmed by the sheer numbers, Ferdinand Marcos was forced to step down and Corazon Aquino, wife of the late Benigno 'Ninoy' Aquino, was sworn in as President on 25\textsuperscript{th} Feb 1987. She would later be known as the "People's President".

\textsuperscript{29} Mendiola Bridge is a tragic site that was doubly marked by violent governmental suppression of demonstrations by the Filipino people. The first occurred in January 1970 when a group of students stormed the bridge in a demonstration against the Marcos regime. Six students were killed and many others wounded in the ensuing confrontation with armed forces. Yuson's novel, written in 1987, refers primarily to this incident. However, history was to repeat itself in 1987 when, under the Aquino government, armed forces opened fire on an unruly demonstration by a radical group demanding agrarian reform (the Farmers' Movement of the Philippines, K.M.P). This incident marred Corazon Aquino's human rights record. Of further significance is the fact that Gen. Fidel Ramos was head of the Armed forces under Aquino and directly responsible for the attack. He would later succeed Aquino to become the President of the Philippines in 1992. For the Philippine readership, the historical reference to Mendiola Bridge in The Café would resonate in multiple ways. See Desmond,"The Philippines Death in Manila."
Yuson frames his central character, the Cebuano revolutionary, Leon Kilat, in the Juan Tamad-esque myth of the laughing hero. The interplay between history and myth serves as a foundation from which to negotiate more contemporary constructions of Philippine identity. Yuson writes what is primarily a historical novel that is couched within a mythical framework. However, he deconstructs myth through narrative strategies that foreground a sense of play within the process of narration and interpretation. While Yuson constructs notions of Filipino community in the process of narrating Leon's story, these communal ties are defined by literary continuities rather than shared racial, cultural or geopolitical relationships. Foregrounding a sense of textual hybridity, “myth” does not refer to inherited racial narratives but becomes a strategy for gesturing towards an eclectic referential canon that includes scholarly articles on the historical material, literary works, pulp fiction and populist forms of cultural expression such as Philippine and American film and rock music. These “prior texts” act as “native informants” in his project of writing a mock epic of the past hundred years of Philippine history. Focusing on the textuality of myth, The Café stands as an intervention in the project of excavating the local that interrogates several key socio-cultural frames of contemporary Philippine identity.

_The Café_ signals a radical departure from prior expositions of myth in Anglophone Philippine fiction. In the Anglophone novel of the mid and late twentieth century, “myth” is primarily used as a frame for discussing the relation of modernity to constructions of Filipino identity. By situating Yuson's novel within its literary context, I discuss Yuson's
attempt to create a fiction which is radically different in mode, rather than matter, from novels of revolution within the existing canon of Philippine fiction in English. Writing in a self-consciously magical realist style, Yuson develops a sense of form that is radically experimental. His exploration of various categories of myth ultimately becomes the fertile ground from which he launches what he terms a “para-genre”, a form of narrative that encompasses all possible narrative modes (115). Structurally, Yuson's novel is a *Künstlerroman* in which we find an embedded *Bildungsroman*. At first glance, the romance mode in this novel of revolution appears to frame a conventional quest myth in which the Philippine hero conquers the forces of colonialism and neocolonialism. However, Yuson draws on the folk Filipino trickster figure in a way that inflects the novel with an ambiguous laughter that is directed as much at the “self” as at the “other”. The Filipino trickster myth is enhanced by burlesque humor and the novel abounds with moments of low farce that create riotous interruptions within the overall structure of the romance mode. Significantly, the novel's conclusion is just such an interruption, suggesting the capacity for laughter to strategically dismantle the teleological framework of the romance.

In *The Café*, “myth” is self-consciously drawn from scholarly excavations of folklore and overtly refers to the process by which certain myths can construct and narrate identity politics. Likewise, the overall structure of *The Café* plays out the mythical journey of a hero that parallels the creative genesis of the story via the artist narrator. The two journeys are symbiotically linked and act as framing devices that interrogate key
assumptions about the historical moments in which the stories are set. The Café is shaped by our expectations of the characteristic movement and progression of the romance genre that are, in turn, deconstructed via satire and self-reflexive irony. Genre and form shape our readerly expectations and play with the sense of shared and inherited narrative traditions. The relation between myth and form centers on the issue of narrative tradition and requires the reader to negotiate the complex intersections between the novel, the multifarious narratives of popular culture such as film, journalistic accounts, komiks and the Filipino and American scholarly discourse on myth. By invoking a sense of playful fracture, Yuson problematizes the key categories of the myth he uses. This process of disruption paradoxically dislodges and decenters the frames that the myths invoke. Yuson's use of myth thus creates a troubled, disjunctured sense of communal story in which the sociocultural and economic flux of the post-occupation nation makes for partial, fragmented narrative strategies. Yuson's myth does not “end” in the manner we expect and his interrogation of historical moment (via myth) is revised and recalibrated according to a sense of radical inconclusiveness. Yuson's treatment of the process of myth-making provokes a conscious engagement with the many ideological functions of myth through a superbly nuanced reading of the relation between myth and constructions of identity in the Philippine context.

2. Literary Inheritances: Myth in Anglophone Philippine Novels

Anglophone fiction in the Philippines demonstrates a constant relation to mythical writing that is impossible to ignore.³⁰ This writing follows two distinct trajectories. The

³⁰ Resil Mojares demonstrates that indigenous narrative traditions create a foundation for mythical writing
first, includes the large body of realist fiction that uses indigenous myth to explore issues of resistance and recuperation from colonial rule. The second, includes the more experimental magical realist and mythical realist projects by writers who assume a more hybrid approach to the function of myth. Anglophone fiction of the mid and late twentieth century primarily used realist modes to narrate emergent notions of nationhood.

Following the great revolutionary romance, Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* (1887), the struggle for emancipation from colonial or imperial rule became a central trope in constructions of Filipino identity. The collective struggle against oppression (encapsulated in the notion of a “people's power” and the emergence of a unified “Filipino” identity) is narrated via epic stratagems that construct indigenous activism within heroic quest narratives. This is a pattern that we can trace in the detailed realism of Maximo Kalaw's *The Filipino Rebel* (1930), N.V.M. Gonzalez's *A Season of Grace* (1954), Frankie Sionil José's *Po-on* (1984) and the pithy naturalism of Alfredo Navarro Salanga's *The Birthing of Hannibal Valdez* (1984). Each of these novels deals with the central myth of the twentieth century Filipino consciousness – the emergence of Filipino nationhood.

Any careful reading of the function of myth in Gonzalez's *A Season of Grace* or José's *Po-on* suggests that the Anglophone writing of the twentieth century was deeply involved in the process of myth-making. Gonzalez's writing serves as a landmark in the twentieth century realist novel and influenced subsequent writers like José. Characterized by a

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31 Translated in English as *The Lost Eden*.
32 Written in English and originally published as *Dusk*.
dense attention to detail, Gonzalez's stories construct a vision of the Philippines and the Filipino through ethnographic descriptions of cultural practice in addition to thematics and plot. His depictions of rural Philippine life are narrated through a hyper-realism that invokes the affective quality of myth. The symbiotic relationship between “land” and “peasant” is constructed in mythic terms that invoke a contemporary creation myth.

Richard Guzman points out that this particular attention to detail invokes a sense of cosmic pattern that is similar to the framing functions of myth:

More than any other Philippine writer, Gonzalez concerns himself with names, with the building of houses, the catching of fish, the harvesting of rice, the sharpening of knives used in that harvest. Then in the midst of detail will often come a kind of time warp making us realize that certain facts, certain rhymes of action, somehow rise from some ancient memory, some cosmic pattern, and more important, have the potential of connecting us to those things from which they arise. (106)

The sense of a “time warp” arises from the awareness of detail, itself a reference to a notion of internal communal truth which Guzman here terms “ancient memory”. The “time warp” of Gonzalez's fiction provokes a reading of the Filipino's relationship to the land as both contemporary and eternal. In such a reading the sense of an “organic” right of land and governance is the pre-ordained context from which Gonzalez constructs his particular vision of nationalism. Guzman's analysis suggests that Gonzalez's use of realism involves a process of myth-making that defines a vision of community that provokes consonance between an archetypal notion of the “peasant” and the emergent
construction of the Filipino.

Gonzalez's *A Season of Grace* follows the journey of two families through a harvest cycle: the Rudas, privileged landlords, and the Agnas, peasants who work their land. The novel outlines the relations of power between the two families as a commentary on social inequality in feudal Mindoro. Guzman points out that Gonzalez constructs an elaborate allegory in which central themes of internal migration and agro-social cultural ties (which are characteristics of the peoples of Mindoro and its surrounding islands) are reworked into a communal myth. In Gonzalez's reading, the tasks of every day life are elevated to the level of myth through a particularly rich textural use of language. For example, as Doro, the young peasant, finds a sprouting coconut on the shore, he questions its arrival and its ability to grow although soaked through with salt brine. His questions are answered by his wife Sabel, who rises out of the sand and water in a doubled vision of peasant and visionary, and divine mother/muse: “Her patadiong wet against her breast and hips and legs, Sabel stepped out of the water saying: 'Yes, I remember. The one you picked up last time – why, it has sprouts already, I believe. And Doro,' she assured him, 'we planted it at once and it grew’” (218). The brief passage demonstrates the manner in which Gonzalez reworks a seemingly mundane moment, a peasant pausing in the midst of toil, into a metaphor of identity. Guzman provides a sustained analysis of the coconut as a metaphor for fruitful migration among the Philippine islands: “one realizes that the coconut is a metaphor for the Philippine peasant's survival and growth – but not only that. It is a sign meant to revision history by joining together certain qualities of a people with
certain other historical facts about that people's creation” (111). Guzman suggests that Gonzalez constructs an elaborate myth of origin that is couched in the realist mode of the twentieth century novel. We see that Gonzalez's mythical vision intimately involves the project of cultural recuperation that was characteristic of the early Anglophone Philippine novel. This concern, and this particular recourse to myth, is, in turn, developed in the fictions of José.

The plot and thematics of José's Po-on, the first of five novels that make up the “Rosales Saga” (1984-1993), defines the peasant uprisings against a corrupt feudal system that eventually lead to the anti-colonial revolution. A young peasant, Istak, flees his home after confrontation with the Spanish clergyman and arrives in Rosales, Pangasinan, where he becomes a tenant of a benevolent landlord. Recognizing himself through his relation to the land, Istak grows aware of the social injustices in the feudal system which find their root in the Spanish colonial administration. Determined to fight the Spanish, Istak leaves his wife and child to deliver a message to the great General Emilio Aguinaldo. Istak's mission ends in death as he is shot by American forces who have recently arrived in the islands. His journey to Pangasinan involves a quest motif from which José explores an emergent “Filipino” identity. This process involves the recognition of colonial stereotype in Spanish constructions of Filipino subjectivity and the process of redefining the Filipino “self” in opposition to colonial frames.

Throughout the novel, José develops this process of self-recognition through Istak's love
of the land. At the significant battle of Tirad Pass in which Istak eventually dies, his day begins with the revelation of the earth as symbiotic double of the self: “It was such a beautiful Saturday morning, the sky was pale blue and clouds white as cotton laced the far horizon... his flesh, his blood – would blend inexhorably [sic] with this land. Rain on parched earth, benediction” (196). In this moment, Istak arrives at the complete vision of self, and, significantly, José uses sacramental language to describe the relation between man and land. The notion of autochthonous benediction is significant because it answers Istak's inward questioning of the socio-cultural hierarchy represented by the corrupt Spanish Catholic clergy. Istak's desire for union with God without the mediation of colonized belief systems is realized in this moment. The relation between Istak and the land thus figuratively describes a particular reading of Filipino emancipation where the shackles of a colonial belief system fall away and the indigenous hero communes directly with “God” through his recognition of the sanctity of the land. In José's vision, the notion of “Filipino” (itself a colonial construction) finally recognizes an essential core of belief that reinforces particular kinship ties between the indigenous subject and the land. The spirit of revolution attains a sacramental significance that further reinforces the mythic quality of Istak's brand of Filipino heroism. José's use of myth is not structurally different from Gonzalez's and demonstrates one aspect of the way myth is used in Anglophone Philippine literature.

While the tendency to narrate emergent notions of Filipino nationhood via realist modes was the norm, it was by no means the rule. Writers such as Nick Joaquin, Gregorio
Brillantes, Gemino Abad and Alfred Yuson evolved their own particular forms of magical realist, mythical realist and postmodernist writing. Drawing on hybrid notions of form and narration, these fictions demonstrate complex visions of communal consciousness that resist singular readings of categories like the “Filipino”. The narration of myth, through allusion and complex intertextual reference, becomes a way to foreground the partialities and ambivalences of emergent notions of identity and nationhood. Foremost among the Anglophone experimental writers is Joaquin, whose fictions outline a uniquely Philippine postmodernist aesthetic as early as the 1950s. Foregrounding cycles of erasure and adaptation in the construction of myth, Joaquin points to the collective cultural amnesia surrounding the Spanish colonial heritage in the Philippines and its influence on contemporary notions of subjectivity. Joaquin uses myth as a palimpsest that layers narratives drawn from Spanish traditions and pre-colonial indigenous rituals and folk narratives from the many distinct regions of the Philippines. This leads to a complex vision of identity and nationhood that speaks against the more monolithic notion of national consciousness. Following in this tradition, Yuson belongs to what might be called the second generation of Anglophone postmodernists who choose to write in experimental forms that incorporated myth, folk narrative and ritual. While Yuson's style might mimic the exuberance of twentieth century Latin American magical realist writers such as Gabriel Gárcia Marquez or Mario Vargas Llosa, his literary influences lie primarily with Joaquin and Brillantes both in terms of structural experimentalism and an aesthetic that foregrounds fractured visions of the Filipino contemporary. Drawing on the burlesque, and on Philippine folk traditions that deploy humor as subversion, Yuson sets
up a mode of narration that is other than tragic and realist. In doing so, he moves, quite decisively, away from the literary tradition of the great novels of revolution from Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* and the Philippine realist novels of the twentieth century.

Unlike Gonzalez or José, Joaquin and Brillantes wrote in experimental styles that use narrative strategies borrowed from Gothic, Science Fiction and Fantasy genres. In their short fiction, both Brillantes and Joaquin often use myths to foreground issues of individual, social and cultural alienation. In his novels, Joaquin strives to capture the richness of Philippine reality through a romance mode that fictionalizes the ambivalent imaginary underbelly of the “Filipino”. His visions of the post-occupation urban Filipino (as with Brillantes' characterization of the middle class) function in contradistinction to the redemptive nationalistic fictions where “myth” provokes a reclaimed reading of the Filipino in primarily heroic terms. On the other hand, Joaquin and Brillantes's use of myth is often ambiguous and ambivalent. It is also extremely hybrid and can draw from indigenous, Spanish colonial, Chinese and American sources. Joaquin and Brillantes are both literary forefathers of Yuson, and their characteristic black humor and pithy wit are very much a part of a literary tradition from which Yuson happily borrows. However, neither Brillantes nor Joaquin use burlesque modes of narration. Their writing, even when comic, foregrounds a sense of cultural collapse that outlines fractured, dislocated visions of the nation. Following in their footsteps, Yuson moves away from a sense of Filipino fiction as a vehicle through which to voice a heady nationalism. He turns, instead, to irony and the burlesque as modes of narration in which contemporary Filipino identity is
both constructed and deconstructed.

Brillantes's approach to myth involves complex intertextual allusions to recognizable mythical stories. These can involve biblical myths such as the story of Lazarus of Bethany, or contemporary myths such as time travel. In “Faith, Love, Time and Dr. Lazaro” (1980) Brillantes outlines the story of a middle class urban doctor who must face mortality when brought to heal a child of a peasant family. The Doctor (aptly named Lazaro) is unable to save the child. A pronounced atheist, Lazaro mocks his Catholic son's attempt to baptize the child before imminent death. Lazaro ridicules his son's religious belief but finds his paternal relationship reinforced by the humanity of the young man's action. The story concludes with the atheist Lazaro attempting an uneasy relationship with his Christian son. Brillantes's characterization of Lazaro's relationship to “faith” and “love” is developed in a manner that demonstrates the failure of inherited belief systems to provoke a transcendental sense of either category in the protagonist. The short story is a complex revision of the Lazarus myth that explores the issues of faith, mortality and an immortal soul. However, it is also a narrative that explores the distance between the middle class Filipino's experience of the inner Christian myth and the potent secularist ideologies of the educated, modern subject. The story invokes a doubled reading in which the reader is simultaneously aware of the distinction between the construction of the key “mythemes” and the protagonist's individual exploration of these categories. The latter is bound to time and context and becomes a mirror which reflects

Lazarus is, after all, narrated within the frame of a beloved follower. His sisters Martha and Mary call for Christ's presence at his deathbed with the words, “He whom thou lovest”, signifying Lazarus's devotion to Christ. John 11:1.
the psychological and spiritual paralysis of mid-twentieth century urban life and the failure of colonized modes of belief to provide sustenance in the postcolonial Filipino's psychological space.

Brillantes's "The Distance To Andromeda" (1980) deals with a very different kind of myth – that of American “ideological” occupation of the Filipino psyche through film and pulp fiction. The short story outlines a visit to a movie theater where two young boys watch a science fiction film about human colonization of “the final frontier” in the aftermath of nuclear apocalypse. For the adolescent protagonist, Ben, the story articulates a deep and as yet indistinct desire for otherness. As he walks home with his friend Pepe, Ben's voice outlines the seductive magic of the movie's promise that demonstrates the adolescent desire to conquer the unknown. As Ben “wanders” through his reveries we grow aware that he identifies himself with the American heroes of the film:

“I wonder if there are people on Mars – like in the comics.”

“If there are any they'd look like Mr. Cruz.”

“Just because he flunked you in Algebra.”

“Do you think people will ever get to the moon?”

“Ahh, nobody's going to land on the moon,” says Tito, “there's no air up there.”

“They'll bring their oxygen in the rocketship.”

“Moon, rocketship, Mars – what kind of crazy talk is that?” (97-98)

Even as Ben voices the desire for the unknown exotic “space”, his friend punctures the
romance of Ben's inner quest through humorous references to the familiar. While Ben's voice outlines the myth in all its power, Pepe's voice dismantles the affect of the myth through references to the “real” world of Tarlac. Pepe's use of irony and bathos expose the fragility of young Ben's desires. We are made aware that for Ben, the myth of human conquest of space has also to do with constructions of power. His desiring voice outlines the great conquest of space that will set America as a beacon among the stars. Although Ben never consciously demonstrates the link between his dreams and American occupation of the Philippines, the entire cultural code of this short story demonstrates the seduction of the young Filipino by the “American” dream. As the story concludes, Ben stands alone in the familiar Tarlac night, surrounded by the recognition of the inescapable “alien-ness” that encompasses every aspect of his young Filipino world view.

The two short stories discussed demonstrate Brillantes's complex use of myth. While critics such as Leonard Casper take Brillantes to task for an overarching vision or impulse in a story, we might say that this is precisely what makes Brillantes a writer who understands and mobilizes the affective power of myth. L.M. Grow suggests that all Brillantes's fiction follows the form of a post-lapsarian parable. While Grow's analysis is accurate and reflects the general critical response to Brillantes' work, I would extend his analysis further and suggest that Brillantes's reading of the post-lapsarian moment is intimately related to a particular socio-cultural vision of twentieth century middle class Filipino life. For Brillantes, the life of the middle class “everyman”, who is neither

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34 Cecilia Locsin-Navaz quotes a lecture by Casper where he criticizes Brillantes's for the stylistic quirk in that “his stories have a deus ex machina, whose presence involves the reader in a theological view of man”. See Locsin 93.

35 See Grow 491.

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revolutionary nor peasant, provokes narratives of internal “magical” dislocation that reflects the Filipino's response to cycles of colonial and imperial desire. As the two examples demonstrate, Brillantes writes ambivalence into his narratives and provides it with the power of mythical affect. The allusions to thematically recognizable “myths” provoke a sense of double-vision in relation to characterization and plot that functions through irony. In these stories, irony is neither comic nor burlesque for Brillantes is not laughing at or with his characters. Rather, his writing outlines the manner in which cultural myths (from all sorts of hybrid originary sources) provoke and punctuate varying forms of social, cultural and individual alienation in his characters. His reading of myth is profoundly ironic and gestures to the discourses of power inherent in processes of mythification. This approach to myth is echoed in Yuson, who develops this double-sided reading of myth as a means to explore (and explode) contemporary constructions of Filipino identity and nationhood.

As Epifanio San Juan Jr. suggests in Subversions of Desire: Prolegomena to Nick Joaquin (1988), there is a decentering quality to Joaquin's use of myth that layers notions of time and history. San Juan Jr.'s text attempts to “locate” Joaquin's mythic vision in relation to a perceived historical materialist reading, thereby providing a glimpse of some of the pertinent ideological frames that Joaquin mobilizes. In San Juan Jr.'s words:

One can hazard the proposition that, faced with the now stereotyped crisis of representation, whereby realist ego-centered conventions no longer seem adequate to express history defined as “process without subject,”
Joaquin is forced to adjust his metaphysical idealist Weltanschauung with empirical notations (McLuhan), or explode the presumed unity of the transcendental ego, the post-Cartesian rational psyche, with the enigmas of the body, the “polymorphous perverse” drives once invested in archaic rituals and myth-laden memory. (196)

San Juan Jr.'s Freudian analysis of myth and ritual leads to an unfortunately reductive reading of the relation between myth and Joaquin's construction of history via layered temporalities. However, his engagement with the decentering process of Joaquin's “bodily” narratives provides an important foundation from which to scrutinize the function of myth as subversive, alternative history in Joaquin's fictions. In The Woman Who Had Two Navels (1961) it is precisely because Joaquin does not provide an “authorial” translation for the uncanny polymorphism of Connie Escobar's projected myth of self (her assertion that she has two navels) that the symbol multiplies, exerting a perverse affective power over all who come into contact with her story. We cannot reduce the image of the beautiful young Filipina with two navels to political allegory, although this is certainly part and parcel of Joaquin's construction of Connie as figurehead and anima figure of the troubled world of the contemporary “Ilustrados”. However, neither has Joaquin produced a simple regression into San Juan Jr.'s reading of the “polymorphous perverse”. His construction of contemporary myth is clearly specific to the socio-cultural milieu of mid-twentieth century Filipino diasporas coping with internal alienation and fragmentation through the comfort of a dark, possessing nostalgia.
Joaquin's exploration of the Gothic and grotesque is also a palpable influence on Yuson. While Joaquin never attempts the bodily humor of Yuson's burlesque narrative, his early collections of stories, *Tropical Gothic* (1972), *Pop Stories for Groovy Kinds* (1979) and *Joaquinesquerie: Myth a la Mod* (1983), demonstrate the double-sided treatment of myth that becomes a defining characteristic in *The Café*. For Joaquin, Filipino laughter involves the recognition of absurd hybridity in a postcolonial world, and his collection *Joaquinesquerie* depends on the reader inhabiting a space in which s/he recognizes him or herself through multiple, hybrid narrative traditions. As José Nilo G. Binongo points out in his article on Joaquin's use of humor, it is the marriage of “western” tales with a primarily Filipino aesthetic that causes a laughter of incongruity to arise: “A characteristic of Joaquinesquerie (some people call it a deficiency in originality) is that its author, by reshaping Western folktales, accommodates the inclusion of Filipino cultural practices, norms and clichés. Thus, despite their foreign origins, he makes his stories exude a distinct Filipino flavor. Filipino folktales are not spared either, from the same conscious intent to refashion traditional tales” (115). Binongo goes on to demonstrate that humor, in Joaquinesquerie, involves the recognition of characteristics of Filipino-ness in narratives that are patently not Filipino. What Joaquin accomplishes with this cultural double-speak is a revised understanding of myth as racial narrative. In Joaquin's humorous constructions of myth, various, hybrid mythical and narrative traditions become foundations from which to construct prismatic revisions of Filipino cultural essentialisms. The recognition of “self” in these stories invokes a complex, ironic reading of Filipino identity that is a precursor to Yuson's burlesque depictions of Buhawi,
Melechio or Leon in *The Café*.

*The Café* is a novel in which laughter, elements of farce and verbal play become tools for subversion. Foregrounding the fictive, *The Café* demands that the narrator, protagonist and reader enter a constructed world in which historical past and present are primarily versions of Philippine story. The fluidity of form (*The Café* is a novel, journal article, poem and screenplay) and Yuson's narrative experiments create the illusion of a narrative where “story” is polymorphous and uncanny. *The Café* arrives at a moment in Philippine literary history where the convergence of multiple narrative traditions gives birth to fiction that is distinctly experimental. While Yuson gestures to his literary predecessors within the novel, his grasp of the burlesque appears to be drawn as much from extant literary traditions as it is from popular culture. Soledad Reyes's comprehensive work on the tradition of Philippine “Komiks” argues that Philippine pop culture and literature demonstrated “...the 'crazy mixture' of serious devotion and farce, sublimity and earthiness, traditional and modern, earnestness and frenzy, vulgarity and loftiness, high and low, all of it punctuated by 'boisterous laughter'”.³⁶ It is this sense of the carnivalesque in populist narrative that best describes Yuson's project. *The Café* translates the exuberance of the *Komiks* and the romance of cinematic frames into fiction.³⁷

Yuson's genius lies in the way he adapts the “boisterous laughter” of populist narratives to myth and history. This mode of narration sets *The Café* apart from previous

³⁶ See Reyes, * Tellers of Tales, singers of songs: selected critical essays* 179.
³⁷ Curiously, the emergence of the Anglophone graphic novel was heralded by popular comics creator Arnold Arre. Arre's *Mythology Class* (2005) is a text which demonstrates the resurgence of myth in contemporary populist domains.
explorations of myth, and is also distinct from Yuson's contemporaries. Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo points out that Yuson's project complements fictions by Erwin Castillo, Vicente Garcia Groyon and Charlson Ong that narrate particular historical moments from Gothic, Fabulist or magical realist perspectives. However, none of these authors utilize burlesque modes of narration. Yuson's experimental narrative techniques shape and influence later work by writers like Dean Alfar and Angelo “Serge” Lacuesta whose Speculative Fictions provide nuanced “magical” revisions of contemporary Filipino politics and culture. We may thus trace the evolution of Anglophone experimental fiction from Joaquin and Brillantes, through Yuson, to the vastly productive genre of Philippine Speculative Fiction. The growing popularity of Philippine Speculative Fiction demonstrates the emerging presence of an entire body of experimental literature that uses myth (among other framing strategies) to narrate the nation. The Café remains a definitive text within this tradition, outlining a complex and agnostic approach to myth-making that we do not witness before or after its emergence.

3. Critical Readings of the Text
While there is a significant amount of critical material on The Café, from varied perspectives, none provides a sustained study of the function of myth, legend or folklore in the novel. In this section I will outline the positions of key critical works on The Café and demonstrate how reading with an awareness of myth in this novel can enrich and

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38 Charlson Ong straddles a middle ground between the Gothic and the grotesque, but his fiction does not attempt the boisterous bodily humor of The Café.
39 See Alfar's Salamanca (2006) and Lacuesta's collection Life Before X and other stories (2000). Both texts won significant literary awards in their years of publication.
subvert existing critical perspectives. *The Café* has been alternately called a “post modern mock epic” and a “post postmodern” novel.\(^{40}\) It was hailed as a “novel as poem” by the late Nick Joaquin.\(^{41}\) Taking into account the use of folklore and legend, Cristina Pantoja-Hidalgo provides a helpful reading of the novel as a “mock-epic”. Pantoja-Hidalgo draws a genealogical trajectory between Philippine *Komiks*, literature and film, and Yuson's multiple narrative techniques. Stephen Lim, writing on Yuson's experimentation with form and narrative strategy, describes the novel as simultaneously deconstructionist and encyclopedic (37-39). Focusing on issues of gender and agency, Maria Teresa Martinez-Sicat provides a feminist revisionist reading of *The Café* that analyzes certain problematic tendencies in Yuson's characterization and choice of form. Martinez-Sicat demonstrates key ambivalences in the social and cultural representation in his depictions of revolution. These critical perspectives demonstrate vastly plural, polyphonic methods of reading *The Café* that cannot be confined to specific literary taxonomies – the novel can be a “poem” for Joaquin\(^{42}\) while it is a “mock-epic” for Pantoja-Hidalgo and a “historical novel” for Martinez-Sicat. Yuson's critics admit this sense of literary shape-shifting. For example, in “Fabulists and Chroniclers” (2008) Pantoja-Hidalgo suggests that: “…trying to fix the text within a box and attaching a label to it is an exercise in futility. The text will simply turn around and leap out again” (8). I will focus on the studies by Pantoja-Hidalgo and Martinez-Sicat who argue that *The Café* is a historical novel, albeit narrated in persuasively anti-historical modes. These studies define the key approaches to Yuson's

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40 Gemino Abad and Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo use the term mock epic in their teaching aid on *The Café*. See *Our People's Story: Philippine Literature in English* 311; Leonard Casper seeks to push beyond the contemporary by playfully calling the work “post postmodern” in “Naming the Unknown Soldier: The Novels of Salanga and Yuson” 162-167.


42 Joaquin, “The Novel as Poem” qtd. in *The Café* (vii).
text and, due to their engagement with history and modes of narration, are ideal points of
departure for my proposed reading of myth in the text.

Pantoja-Hidalgo locates *The Café* within its contemporary literary milieu. She points out
that the novel is a historical novel, but that history itself is read differently in Yuson's
novelistic practice: “... history here is not setting. It enters into the motivation of the
characters; it propels the plot... The personal conflicts of the protagonists and the
development of the plot are inextricable from the historical forces obtaining in the
fictional world of the novel. And this fictional world is understood to be based on an
actual historical period, for all that the rendering of it might be in the fantasy mode” (7).
In such a reading, notions of history are subject to revision and invention based on
authorial strategy. Pantoja-Hidalgo goes on to suggest that such moments provide
examples of what Linda Hutcheon terms “historiographic metafiction” (7). The
alternative history of *The Café* thus dismantles a singular or monolithic reading of history
and foregrounds the multiple constructions of story within historical record. Pantoja-
Hidalgo's argument establishes the fact that Yuson's text should be read as alternative
history. However, although Pantoja-Hidalgo draws attention to the fabulist or fantastical
tenor in which this particular form of historical fiction is couched, her reading of the
fantastic does not trace the possible ideological significances of constructing history as
myth.

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43 Pantoja-Hidalgo's gesture to Hutcheon's *Poetics of Postmodernism* is, unfortunately, not developed
further. However, it provides a helpful intertextual and “inter-theoretical” frame to the argument she
proposes. Pantoja-Hidalgo's reading of *The Café* as alternative history draws on Hutcheon's theoretical
base while situating the novel within a primarily “local” theoretical discourse on historiographic
metafiction drawn from critics such as Ruth Jordana Pison or Resil Mojares.
Citing Resil B. Mojares's *Origins and Rise of the Filipino Novel* (1983), Pantoja-Hidalgo points out that the evolution of the Philippine novel in English follows a trajectory that demonstrates the early influences of genres that drew heavily on myth, folklore and fantasy. Pantoja-Hidalgo argues that the thematic, structural and conceptual frames of the folk tales, epics, *pasyon,*44 *awit* and *corrido,*45 lives of saints, manuals of conduct and early Tagalog romances produced an early engagement with extended artifice, allegory and the fantastic that is a significant influence on Yuson's *The Café*. While Pantoja-Hidalgo avoids providing a formal analysis based on the intertextual allusion to myth and popular narrative forms such as the Komiks, she makes the important observation that there is a hybrid sense of aesthetic that defines the contemporary Anglophone novel:

> ... formal elements such as mode, structure and style; and such textual strategies as narrative frames, language registers, scenic effects, atmosphere, imagery etc. which I think we might better appreciate if we understood their functional values; and if we saw them as governed by a different sort of aesthetic than that which governs conventional realist fiction, and which aesthetic seems to me drawn, not principally from foreign sources, but from our native literary traditions. (4)

While Yuson's “aesthetic” may be different from the formal realism of his predecessors or contemporaries such as José or Salanga, Pantoja-Hidalgo suggests that his experimentalism is born out of an engagement with local narrative traditions, and must be

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44 *Pasyon* are verse narratives on the life of Christ that are typically sung during lent. (Mojares 50).

45 *Awit* and *corrido* are forms of metrical romance (Mojares 60-61).
Pantoga-Hidalgo's analysis of Yuson's novelistic devices demonstrates the preponderance of strategies that parody epic literature: She states, “I have called this novel a 'mock-epic', and point to the many passages that mime the rhetoric of epic narratives, with epithets, repetitions, incantations, litanies; all parodic, since they are interlaced with doggerel, phrases in pig-Latin, in genuine Latin, in Spanish, recipes, the jargon of literary criticism, and God knows what else” (8). Her analysis goes on to outline how Yuson's parodic vision of Philippine history opens out a particular reflexive reading of the Filipino “self”. In Pantoja-Hidalgo's reading, ironic laughter exposes the inward complicities of the individual and collective within colonial and neo-colonial projects. As Yuson encourages his audience to laugh at and with several key players in these historical events, he suggests that formal realism does not admit the internal ambivalences that are potentially alive within polysemous readings of history. The events of 1897 and 1987 are not read as great revolutions where colonial and neo-colonial forces are overthrown by the force of the people. Rather, the fallible desires of “the people” are brought to the fore and provide important resonances to the monological visions of Philippine revolutionary heroism.

While Pantoja-Hidalgo's reading demonstrates the decentering vision of history invoked by laughter in The Café, her analysis does not really take up the gauntlet that Yuson throws down. Foregrounding the sense of “play” in Yuson's use of laughter, she does not touch on the radical potential of his burlesquerie to expose the darker underbelly of his
construction of Filipino laughter:

...irreverent laughter is at the core of every member of this novel's dramatis personae, and at the core of their relationships with each other... This laughter permeates the novel – it is the life force triumphing over sorrow and adversity, triumphing even over death. To this day, this quality – the Pinoy's irrepressible humour both exasperates and heartens. It might prevent the Filipino from taking his life seriously enough to get his act together and catch up with his Asian neighbours. On the other hand, it might prevent him from losing heart, from giving up, from disbelieving that somehow, he will manage, *awa ng Diyos* [with God's help]. (10)

While the capacity of humor to function as a powerful hermeneutic in the novel can't be disputed, we must question whether Yuson simply wishes to invoke a seemingly a-political vision of the laughing Filipino hero. There is ample textual evidence to suggest that Leon's (or any other character's) laughter is *not* triumphant. It points rather to the recognition of lost agency in Yuson's reading of cycles of Filipino action and inaction. Furthermore, the novel's conclusion does little to reinforce a sense of “hopeful” laughter as the central character disappears into a daze of laughter which is neither funny nor profound.

Pantoja-Hidalgo's reading, while critically nuanced, suffers from a reluctance to deal with the ideological content of the novel's laughter. Furthermore, she constructs a curiously sentimentalist vision that invokes somewhat problematically essentialist notions of
Filipino humor, while overstating the “innocence” of Yuson's novelistic laughter. I argue that reading with a complex awareness of the function of myth could provide alternative interpretative frames where the difficulty of internal ambivalence and ideology in a text can be explored through the “double-speak” of mythical language – the assumption that at a certain level, myth is both true, and untrue. In such a reading, we would have to account for the darkness and inward petrification that are a definitive part of Yuson's central heroes, while drawing on the relief that their farcical antics provide.

While Pantoja-Hidalgo's analysis largely avoids the ideological function of laughter in The Café, Martinez-Sicat's analysis of the novel rests entirely on this issue. In “The Impotent Charm of Alfred A. Yuson's Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café” Martinez-Sicat's Marxist feminist reading analyzes key passages from the novel in relation to their historical events and provides particular readings of Yuson's seemingly apolitical view of the Filipino revolutionary (106). Martinez-Sicat's evaluation of the novel is set beside the work of Maximo Kalaw, F. Sionil José and Linda Ty Casper, novelists who are characterized by their adherence to formal realism. Martinez-Sicat's choice of authors suggests the evident polarity between realist accounts of revolution and Yuson's more experimental undertaking. Martinez-Sicat's concern over the representation of grassroots Filipino nationalism invokes a particular ideological frame which she imposes on the novel. The work of Kalaw, José and Ty Casper provide particular “sympathetic” readings of revolution that do not necessarily foreground potential ambivalences within revolutionary projects. Furthermore, the realist mode of narration in these novels
reinforces the ideological premises of the authorial visions, leaving little room for ambiguity or porousness. However, Yuson's self-reflexive, scathing irony and his open-ended approach to story invokes an entirely different mode of narration. It is precisely because *The Café* resists offering conclusive portraits or plots that its ideological premises are open to interpretation. Martinez-Sicat uses *The Café* as a figurehead for an argument on literary aesthetics where experimental narrative comes off poorly because of this capacity for double-vision.46

Yuson's fault seems to lie primarily in his irreverent characterization of Filipino heroism. Martinez-Sicat suggests that Yuson's experimental form and ribald narration of key historical events suggests an ideological betrayal of the tremendous struggle for emancipation by the Filipino people. Given that Martinez-Sicat fosters a particular reading of the Filipino “peasant”, it is precisely Yuson's burlesque depictions of the peasantry (which include all the main characters in the plot) that provokes censure:

There is a gap in the text about the leadership which reneges on the promises of the revolution and which has caused the peasants – those labeled as counter-revolutionaries – to take up their arms again.

Philippine history is replete with figures who have demonstrated their disregard of the collective good in favor of their own selfish interests:

Emilio Aguinaldo and his Cavitismo, the Paterno-Buencamino clique, the

46 While Martinez-Sicat limits her analysis to Yuson, her method of analysis suggests that one could include any form of writing that explores the internal inconsistencies inherent in any construction of the local or national subject through non-realist modes of narration. By such a measure, Joaquin, Brillantes or Ong, or the writers and poets of the younger generation such as Sarge Lacuesta would all be charged with misrepresenting the nation.
Marcos family and cronies, *ad nauseam*. The characters who made a travesty of the nation deserve to be lampooned in the best modernist tradition. Instead, it is the peasants who bear the brunt of the mockery in *Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café*. (104)

Martinez-Sicat's argument presupposes a class divide where burlesque humor is concerned – a fact that is at odds with any critical reading of the burlesque. Furthermore, in asserting that Yuson lets the corrupt leadership off the figurative hook, she seems to misread the fact that Yuson's characters are constantly “blinded” by elite power and demonstrate a naïve and somewhat tragic acceptance of privilege even in the face of their own destitution.

Martinez-Sicat uses Yuson's depictions of two Generals of the Cebu revolution as an example of the manner in which he privileges Gen. Aguinaldo, the *ilustrado*, over Gen. Bonifacio, the leader of “the masses” (103). Suggesting that Yuson paints a more favorable view of Aguinaldo, Martinez-Sicat completely ignores the boisterous irony the character Señor B&B applies to both in the following passage:

> ...who shall tell us if we stay in this gay city or hurry off to the hills of Montalban to join our Supremo [Bonifacio] in his vainglorious bolo forays or take a boat to Cavite to join our brilliant Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo in a real and successful war of Revolution, yes! How sweet the wine... how ripe we are for a revolution led by the *ilustrados*, our educated lights, who play on pianos from Germany and gaze daily in their living room parlors at
paintings from France and Spain and mirrors from England and porcelain vases from China. *(The Café* 174)

If Señor B&B is Yuson's voice, his portraits of both revolutionaries are framed within a humorous ambivalence that deconstructs the revolutionary project from both sides of the fence. Yuson suggests that the project of revolution requires scrutiny, and that heroic desire, whether of the masses or the elite, needs to be read outside naïve or nostalgic historical reconstruction. We notice that although the tone is sharply ironic, there is also Señor B&B's palpable desire for a “successful war of Revolution”. This double-sidedness in the passage hints at the manner in which Señor B&B, one of Leon's many “local” guides, is drawn to the signifiers of revolution through its symbolic, ideological trimmings. Yuson offers the burlesque as a means by which to interrogate naïve historical reading, thereby suggesting an alternative vision that allows irony to coexist with enthusiasm in the local subject's vision of the revolutionary project. It is the distance between both visions, the internal “double-speak” of this passage, that brings about the sobering recognition of the seductive persuasion of revolutionary ideology.

Martinez-Sicat misses the sophistication of Yuson's characterization because she is determined to read the novel within a specific ideological frame. While she acknowledges that the magical realist mode of the novel invites polysemous interpretative frames, she does not extend the scope of her analysis to include them. Martinez-Sicat's reading of the fantastic via magical realist modes depends on a particular critical relation to myth: “Magic realism is the celebration of the supernatural and the miraculous; therefore, it is
most apt in the project of recuperating the mythological powers of epic and romance, narrative forebears which have been destroyed by irony and burlesque” (112). The “project of recuperation” that Martinez-Sicat envisions in this case is palpably at odds with a historical vision tempered by “irony and burlesque”. The assumption is that myth cannot be read ironically, neither can it be narrated via the burlesque. Martinez-Sicat's assertion brings out some of the problems involved in narrating myth. When she suggests that myth cannot be narrated via the burlesque, she evidently shows no recognition of trickster narratives and their function in *The Café*. This points to a particular reading of myth as racial narrative that has the ideological power of sacred text. However, it ignores the fact that many trickster narratives invoke the burlesque as examples of sacred excess.

While Yuson may not self-consciously attempt this rendition of tricksterism in his text, it is one possible reading and has already been explored by critics Joaquin and Frank Arcellana in their early reviews of *The Café*.48

Martinez-Sicat's secondary concern over Yuson's ironic revisions of myth demonstrates a particular anxiety over the novel's representation of the indigenous subject. Her argument maintains that literature “... can seduce its readers towards an authentic culture untainted by the foreign” (113). Such a reading of “authenticity” *vis a vis* her pronouncements on myth lead to the conclusion that “the primitive is an effective metaphor for cultural

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47 Lewis Hyde spends an entire chapter demonstrating the relation between tricksterism and appetite. See “The Trap of Appetite.” *Trickster Makes This World.*

48 Joaquin claims that the novel is a poem “A poem should not mean but be” (*The Café* xii). Likewise, Arcellana asserts, “This novel is comic in a sad disconsolate way, it has a kind of grandeur, a grandeur all its own; it is, in its own inimitable way, charged with grandeur, the grandeur of music, the grandeur of magic, the grandeur of poetry – the grandeur of God? death and transfiguration and resurrection! the grandeur of the living God? ” (*The Café* x).
authenticity” and that it is precisely this project of “authentic” cultural recuperation that has been lost in *The Café* (113). If we take into account the fact that *The Café* concludes with a grand “celestial” party peopled by the most eclectic gathering of figures including artists such as Joaquin, literary critics like Paul Sharrad and the deceased Hollywood star James Dean, we can hardly expect that Yuson wishes to read Filipino experience within narrow definitions of the local. Furthermore, given the novel's hybrid approach to storytelling that draws on narrative techniques borrowed from epic, folk legend, picaresque and other formal strategies of Filipino, Latin American, European and American origin, it is incongruous to suggest that Yuson seeks a mode of narration that is “untainted by the foreign” (113).

At root, the “problem” with narrating myth via irony is that it dismantles the archetypal affective quality of myth. In such readings, the reader/listener remains outside the myth and is not bound to the primary ideological frames of the narrative act. Rather, we are encouraged to dissect and deconstruct the ideological premises of these acts and remain agnostic in the face of their persuasive internal rhetoric. We might say, therefore, that while Yuson writes a historical novel, his disavowal of realist modes of narration encourages alternative visions of history. Likewise, while *The Café* is a novel that employs myth, Yuson's reading of myth is complex and agnostic. More often than not, the function of burlesque bodily humor decenters our reading of heroic figures and exposes them as mere mortals. Martinez-Sicat claims that these humorous readings of revolution are at best frivolous and at worst inaccurate: “Because Leon Kilat was in fact a
revolutionary commander who led the attack on the capital city and whose forces controlled the province of Cebu, a derisively inaccurate biography is unjust. The plenitude of meanings produced by literature could instead have embellished an ambiguous life without reducing the hero to absurdity” (117). By systematically projecting a particular desired vision of history as myth, Martinez-Sicat ignores the implications of Yuson's narration of myth as alternative history and refuses to engage either formally, or thematically, with his reading of the relation between myth, history and ideology.

The two critical approaches I have analyzed struggle with the relation of myth to history. Both stumble on the issue of ideological persuasion. While Pantoja-Hidalgo might suggest an apolitical reading of The Café that regresses into sentimentalist constructions of notions like the “Filipino psyche”, Martinez-Sicat's overly political reading suffers from sustained misreading of characterization and form. In both examples, myth is read as racial narrative that serves the purpose of cultural recuperation. However, Yuson's approach to myth is consistently ambivalent on the very issue of cultural recuperation, and his use of the Filipino laughing hero is colored by absurdist readings of potency that underscore the novel's failed revolutions. We note that historically, both the Cebu revolution and the events of EDSA produced victories for the people – they appear in Philippine history as mythic upheavals that reinforced the collective “People's Power”. When Yuson punctures these “historical” myths via the burlesque, he demonstrates a conscious decision to dismantle the projected “archetypal” potency of these moments.
Contrary to Martinez-Sicat's assertion that Yuson's elitist poetics do not have the power to transform the collective, a nuanced reading of the function of myth and history in this novel exposes the deep ambivalences in his reading of Filipino heroism. As a tricky, double-sided tale, *The Café* is ultimately a conscious, if troubled, parable of Filipino nationalism.\(^{49}\)

### 4. Constructing Myth: Sourcing Leon and Buhawi

The legends of Pantaleon Villegas (Leon Kilat) and Ponciano Elopre (Buhawi) are sources for Yuson's pan-Philippine revolutionary mock-epic. *The Café* opens with the allusion to epic heroism that is cinematic in tenor. The exuberant magical realist fantasy of the opening chapters magnifies the burlesque and mock-epic tone of the Kilat story. This tone shifts in the fifth chapter, when we are introduced to the “narrator”, Robert Aguinaldo. Although Yuson appears to use the device of a first person narrator in Aguinaldo, *The Café* is narrated by an omniscient narrator who is Aguinaldo's silent double. The novel appears to be Aguinaldo's story and screenplay, but he remains a character within his own play. The device of Aguinaldo as a narrator and character enables the omniscient narrator to detail the process by which Aguinaldo constructs his story on Kilat. By revealing Aguinaldo's method, the narrator elaborates on the relation between historical narrative and the genesis of living myth. Aguinaldo's fictional construction of the Buhawi and Kilat relationship is, in fact, a pseudo-scholarly exploration of the permeable boundaries between history and fiction. In each case, Aguinaldo quotes copiously from scholarly sources that document events in Kilat and

\(^{49}\) I use the sense of parable as a doubled story that hides as it reveals meaning.
Buhawi's life (the former by Resil B. Mojares and the latter by Donn Hart) only to outline an extant narrative tradition that he intends to subvert. Aguinaldo's work depends on reworking the existing corpus of scholarly narrative on both Kilat and Buhawi.

In the fifth chapter, “Buhawi, The Old Farting Waterspout Himself”, the mock-epic tone of the novel shifts. We are introduced to Aguinaldo's twentieth-century Manila and encouraged to re-read the previous chapter through the scholarly material he sets before us. The narrative style of the mock-epic changes to realism, and Aguinaldo “exposes” his project by revealing his sources without mediation. Through the omniscient narrator, Yuson provides a parodic reading of the process Aguinaldo must work through in order for his creative genius to emerge. Following Aguinaldo's multiple entries into the Kilat and Buhawi story, we participate in the seemingly non-fictional genesis of the text:

Sometime in 1975, a writer-researcher named Robert Aguinaldo, of Manila, purchased a book from a popular bookstore called Alemar's. He paid twenty pesos for a copy of “Studies in Philippine Anthropology (In Honor of H. Otley Beyer)” edited by Mario D. Zamora and with a message by Gen. Carlos P. Romulo. On pages 366 to 396 was a research paper written by Donn V. Hart of Syracuse University. (45)

The pseudo-academic citation of Aguinaldo's source sets the tone for parody and adds to the sense of representational authority that the narrator is about to dismantle. Throughout Aguinaldo's “reading” of Hart's article, the narrator manages to elicit the sense of wonder that arises through the story itself, while treating Hart's scholarly discourse with
humorous irony.

Aguinaldo quotes at length from Hart's text, interspersing the large citations with commentary on his efforts at rigorously cataloging Hart's material:

Robert Aguinaldo read the paper and underscored large parts of the text. He felt that these would be of considerable use to him at a later date.

Here are his underscored excerpts from that paper, the research for which was made possible, according to a footnote, by Fulbright Research Fellowships in 1950-1951, 1955-1956 and 1964-1965.

We start with part of author Hart's introduction, which Robert Aguinaldo saw fit to include in his tremendous task of underscoring. (45)

The humor of this section lies in the omniscient narrator's compulsive detailing of Aguinaldo's writing process. The repetition of Aguinaldo's name, the detailed dates for the Fulbright Fellowships, the grand project of “underscoring” invoke humor through a recognition of the familiar. The narrator is at pains to demonstrate how Aguinaldo works meticulously to get the story right, ensuring authority by providing copious references to academic material by a Fulbright scholar from Syracuse University. However, the narrator also suggests that Aguinaldo's choice of American scholarly constructions of Filipiniana demonstrates the process by which Filipino cultural practice is “othered” within certain forms of scholarly discourse.\footnote{Hart's identity as an American scholar brings up several interesting issues: Hart's curiosity as an ethnographer, in this context, brings back the curiosity of the Orientalist documenting the exotic other. Yuson dwells at greater length on such exegetic traditions in his later novel \textit{Voyeurs and Savages} (1998). In this passage however, Hart's position of privilege immediately brings up the issue of power in discourse. The ambivalent relationship (with all its intricate interdependencies) between America and the Philippines is brought to the fore. It is a subtle authorial maneuver which demonstrates that

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trickster, however, Aguinaldo eventually re-appropriates this discourse and transforms it into story.

Aguinaldo's source for historical material on Buhawi is an article by Donn Hart on Buhawi's role in Bisayan revitalization movements. It is significant that Aguinaldo chooses an anthropologist's account of the Buhawi story that foregrounds the genesis of living mythical narratives from historical events. The article focuses on Buhawi's emergence as a cult figure and deals only minimally with Buhawi's relationship to Leon. Hart's work provides a contextual frame for Aguinaldo's subsequent construction of Leon as a heroic brigand within the tradition of the Babaylanes. Following research by Vic Hurley, Hart suggests that the Babaylanes were local rebels who fostered particular ritual practices around self-appointed heroes that mimicked Christian and indigenous ritual: “...these movements had a tone of religious ritual with crusading 'Popes' self-appointed 'Messiahs,' distinctive costumes, bottles of holy oil, prayer books, and various amulets to protect from harm” (370). Hart's article (which uses 30 informants for the construction of the Buhawi story) focuses less on the actual historical events of Buhawi's life than on the process by which the Buhawi story becomes a living myth in the imaginations of his informants:

As the original research hypothesis was modified, a new interest in Elopre developed: the ethnohistory of legend making. Although Elopre died only seven decades ago, the real man is now a superman. A nascent cult in

American scholarly interest in the Philippines goes hand in hand with a history of occupation and cultural imperialism.
Negros Oriental province centered around his extraordinary powers, founded and led by one of his female kin, appears to be developing. Elopre's life has greater significance than its obvious value as a fascinating fragment of Filipiniana. (46)

Hart's analysis of legend making involves a study of a process by which a historical figure inhabits a living mythical space in the collective narratives of the Bisayan people. Set against this is the notion that the Buhawi story is a “fragment of Filipiniana” that details the life of a historical character whose “place” is among the written documents of the Bisayan revolution in the annals of Philippine history. Hart suggests that Elopre's life has more value as an example of living narrative than as historical narrative. Hart thus sets up a tension between the oral storytelling traditions and popular beliefs of the Bisayan people, and the literature of Filipiniana (itself a troubled, anachronistic category). The notion of popular belief is set against the metanarratives of history. Hart's article thus brings us straight to the question of the sanctity in narrative, a sanctity which he invests with collective “value” because it falls within the province of indigenous belief systems.

Sanctity functions on multiple levels in this extract, but it is also destabilized by Aguinaldo's inbuilt use of irony. Aguinaldo refers to Hart's text because of its stature as a scholarly monograph; the academic text bears the ideological weight of canonical

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51 I use the word sanctity here, as opposed to authority, because it best captures the sense of a sacred narrative, which Hart refers to in his description of the deification of Buhawi by the Bisayan people. In his words, “the real man is now a superman” (46). The movement from sacred text to authoritative text also emerges in this passage as Hart's study legitimizes an otherwise populist discourse, locating it (by the use of the term “revitalization”) within a social, cultural and political moment, rather than dwelling on its significance as ritual.
authority. However, Aguinaldo also invokes the issue of the sanctity in living narrative (implicit in Hart's text) and its place in the collective imagination. In such a reading, sanctity is invested in narrative through the collective beliefs of the people. Though Hart's article bears the weight and stature of academic discourse, the story of Buhawi cannot be read as factual narrative because it draws on a series of fantastical events that fall outside the epistemic quality of historical narrative. The depiction of Buhawi's supernatural strength and wisdom do not take on the qualities of realism because Hart's premise suggests that the Buhawi stories are collective mythical constructions of the Bisayan community. For example, the following passage details the feat of making rain that became Buhawi's supernatural trademark. The story is legendary, and, through its allusion to Christ, it builds on the syncretic vision of Buhawi as a latter day messiah:

*Buhawi's nickname (waterspout) describes his ability to make rain at will.*

*When Buhawi and his followers were pursued by Spanish and Filipino soldiers, “he would shout to the elements. Lightning appeared, even when the sky was blue. Dark clouds gathered. Soon heavy rain fell”. The rains flooded the rivers, forcing soldiers to abandon their chase. “This happened many times”. Once Buhawi climbed a coconut tree and prayed for rain; torrents fell shortly thereafter. Such floods, however, posed no obstacles to Buhawi for, befitting a Living God, he could walk on water “even swollen rivers”.* *(The Café, 50)*

The account documents an oral retelling of the legend of Buhawi. The issue is not whether Buhawi really walked on water or not, but that Hart's “native informants”
produce an authoritative narrative that proclaims the “miracle”.

Through the artist-narrator Aguinaldo, Yuson transforms the epistemic quality of Hart's article into magical realist literary devices that detail Buhawi's fantastical exploits in the more “fantastical” mock-epic sections of the novel. Since the novel opens within the magical realist frame, and only shifts to a realist mode in the sections on contemporary Manila, Yuson's inclusion of the scholarly material on Buhawi demonstrates the “literariness” of Aguinaldo's magical and mythical imagination. Aguinaldo does not “inherit” the myth of Buhawi through indigenous memory or story – he “plagiarizes” it from the American who did the field research on the subject. Aguinaldo's oblique use of legend and myth, which is drawn from such an eclectic multitude of sources, reflects a syncretism which draws simultaneously on Philippine mythology, folklore and twentieth century pop culture. Aguinaldo's narrator also creates humorous interludes where he plays with the syncretic rituals of the Babaylanes by integrating sources that are distinctly not Filipino. In the following example Buhawi's benediction is a parodic revision of the syncretic rituals that were characteristic of the Babaylanes:

“Sacra ng draco.”

“Sacra ng draco.”

“Torre de illuminati.”

“Torre de illuminati.”

“Vox pace.”

“Vox pace.”
“Verde yo te quiero verde.”
“A las tres de la tarde.”
“Hostia magica.”
“Maja blanca.”
“Salsa verde.”
“Huevo de rojo.”
“Zamboanga hermosa.”
“Anak bulan.”
“Pokinina.”
“Dias del sangre.”
“Quid pro quo.”
The narrator provides no translations for the Spanish, Malay and Latin that he uses in this passage. As Buhawi refers with equal ease to fast food, such as “Salsa verde” and familiar dishes such as “Huevo de Rojo” or “Maja blanca”; popular songs such as “Zamboanga hermosa”; or arcane phraseology such as “Sacra ng draco”; we are simultaneously mystified and yet maintain an ironic detachment of humor that such incongruous pairings provide. The narrator thus dismantles the “sanctity” of the ritual through humorous allusion. Given that this is Buhawi’s final benediction to the Katipunan revolutionaries, the narrator seems to suggest that all such efforts at epic heroism should only be read within the ridiculous.

If the section on Buhawi was largely constructed via the ethnographic work of Donn Hart, the narrator describes Aguinaldo's entry into Leon Kilat's life through the historical fictions of the Philippine literary historian and critic, Resil B. Mojares. Once again, the narrator uses the canonical authority that Mojares's work carries to provide a meditation on authority and the interstices between history and fiction. In “Life in Cebu in 1896 (And 1968)” the narrator outlines Aguinaldo's encounter with Resil Mojares. We discover that like Aguinaldo, Mojares is a writer who takes part in the famous Silliman University Writers Workshop (113). Grounded in contemporary detail, this chapter begins in the realist mode before it shifts to the more mythical and magical construction of Kilat's life in “The Song Not The Singer” (118). Foregrounding his relationship to the living Cebuano writer, Aguinaldo proceeds to demonstrate how Mojares's influence affects the trajectory of Leon's story. As in the section on Hart, the narrator humorously depicts the
manner in which Aguinaldo “borrows” from Mojares's work by providing copious quotations of Mojares's history of colonial Cebu, *Casa Gorordo in Cebu* (1983). However, before setting up Mojares as an authority on Cebuano life (and Kilat), the narrator also shows us how narrative traditions in the Philippines are shaped by particular internal socio-cultural contingencies. For example, although Aguinaldo has met and discussed Kilat as an historical and fictional subject with Mojares, he is unable to read Mojares's Cebuano play on Kilat in its original language: “...Resil himself had used Kilat for a play on the obscure hero's last hours in Carcar. Robert never read the play; he couldn't, since it was in Cebuano” (115). Yuson thus touches on the problem of narrative transmission within the multilingual Philippines, intimating that legend is a cultural construct that is subject to the socio-cultural specificities of time, place, and, most particularly, language.

Although Aguinaldo acknowledges the debt he owes Mojares, he also “claims” his own imaginative authority over the piece by maintaining the primacy of genre over story: “Resil sent him more material on Kilat, some of which Robert felt he couldn't use at all for his burgeoning novel, these being inapplicable, downright irrelevant or useless, or worse, it got in the fucking way of what he was beginning to call a para-genre” (115). Aguinaldo's disavowal of Mojares's material on Kilat is based on his desire to tell a particular kind of story. His preoccupation is less with Kilat as a subject and more with the shape that the story affords – the para-genre. Aguinaldo's narrator has thus brought us to the author's central concern – that story traces the genesis of myth, not the history of a
The Café requires a method of reading that negotiates the complex transformation of historical material into myth. Yuson systematically dismantles the notion that stories of resistance and local heroism are the “province of the people”. His narrator-artist is a happy plagiarist who constructs his great Philippine mock-epic from a multitude of borrowed narratives, both Filipino and American. Yuson reworks local myth and exposes the ideological foundations from which mythical narratives emerge as socio-cultural responses to historical moments. The novel demonstrates the way myth becomes a frame for historical material, a structuring principle that attaches elevated significance to certain kinds of narrative. Yuson's narrator persistently exposes the sources of his myths, thereby also outlining the internal ideological projects at work in the myths. Rather than focus on the archetypal nature of myth, Yuson's narrator exposes its mundane genesis and evolution into a discourse on power that is charged with socio-cultural and political potency.

5. **Juan Tamad: The Hybrid Genesis of Myth**

While scholarly monographs on the historical figures of Kilat and Buhawi provide Robert Aguinaldo with the “raw material” from which he constructs his “para-genre”, he also uses several references to folk stories and beliefs in his treatment of the “magical” throughout the novel. The most sustained folk narrative motif appears to be drawn from Juan Tamad stories about a lazy, wily Indio who outwits his colonial overlords. Yuson
never specifically claims to draw from the Juan Tamad folk stories, but the parallels between Yusan's Leon Kilat and the folk trickster-hero Juan Tamad are too transparent to ignore. Yusan's treatment of the Leon Kilat legend interrogates the assumption that within the Philippine context, laughter can assume heroic proportions. The "laughing hero" is a mytheme we encounter in many folk narrative traditions, but in the Philippine context, it is drawn primarily from the folktales of the character Juan Tamad (or Juan Pusong in the Bisayan tradition). Juan Tamad is usually the strategically naïve Indio who gets himself out of scrapes by his "native" cunning. Leon is, in every sense, an unlikely and unworthy hero who depends primarily on luck and a certain kind of charm (both magical and personal) to win his battles, rather than any grand act of heroism. Leon reflects the idea of a tricksterish simpleton similar to the folklore character Juan, a fact which becomes part and parcel of the method in which Yusan uses varied Filipino narrative traditions in his construction of Leon Kilat.

Herminia Meñez's *Explorations in Philippine Folklore* (1996) demonstrates that the Juan Tamad or Juan Pusong stories originate from the Spanish Juan Bobo tales. These stories have an element of play and irreverence built into their structure. The tales are trickster myths in which a naïve Indio boy subverts indigenous and colonial authoritarian systems through accidental cunning. Meñez suggests that the Juan Tamad tales were most probably borrowed from a pan-Hispanic model for "numbskull" tales, such as the Juan Bobo/Tonto tales of Spanish America (40). The tale is thus an example of the

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52 As a Bisayan folk character, Juan Tamad's stories are doubly ripe for adaptation to the story of Leon Kilat as he becomes a prime mover in the Bisayan revolution.

53 Yusan is not the first to invoke the Tamad character. Joaquin revises the story in his *Pop Stories for Groovy Kids* (1979).
hybridization of storytelling within the Philippine folk tradition which absorbed and adapted the narratives of their colonial masters for their own purposes. Furthermore, Meñez demonstrates that the Philippine versions of the Juan tales are not confined to the “numbskull” variety, but frequently develop into “märchen” which include fantastic magical situations and interventions. In this sense, the Philippine versions of the Juan tales differ from their original Spanish Juan Bobo prototypes in their shift from tragicomic to comic and heroic conclusions (43). Meñez points out that this happy conclusion is brought about by a magical intervention which secures wealth and happiness for the unlikely hero, Juan (45).

If we pay attention to the dynamics in the Juan tales we discover that bodily humor and cunning are subversive strategies by which narrators demonstrate the inherent power imbalances in colonial subjectivity. Frequently, the humor in the tales hinges on acts of cultural and linguistic mistranslation that encode the distance between colonizer and colonized. It is Juan's inability to comprehend and translate his own subjectivity within emerging colonial power structures that leads to his so called “stupidity”. However, as the tales themselves suggest, Juan's stupidity is, in fact, his saving grace. The following passage from Meñez's text demonstrates an example of Juan's perverse subjectivity:

Like most numskulls [sic], Juan Tamad has occasional inspirations of logic and displays a kind of wit which helps him get away with his stupidity and laziness. For instance, when the capitán gives a command to the townspeople to sprinkle the dusty streets with water, Juan first uses a
coconut shell full of water, and when reprimanded, he pours buckets of water on the streets, later excusing himself by pointing out the ambiguity of the command. (42)

By demonstrating the Indio's ambivalence in the colonial enterprise, the Juan tales create a framework of narration which foregrounded principles of subversion and resistance. In the Juan Tamad tales, humor lies in the transgression of the socio-cultural and linguistic boundaries between Spanish overlords and the Filipino subject. In Meñez's example, we see that Juan's subversions do not really come about through a sense of wit or cunning; rather, they seem to arise out of acts of mistranslation. Juan “misunderstands” the command that is given, thereby foregrounding the gap between the Captain's projection of Juan as a “dumb” participant within the colonial project and Juan's own comprehension (and construction) of his subjectivity through logical action. Juan's resistance is made up of subversive action rather than speech; his wily clumsiness rises uncannily out of the conscious recognition of the abjectness of his own body.

The Juan Tamad tales depend on an ambivalent sense of regional humor as their vehicle for subversion. Yuson is not the first to adapt this particular folk narrative as a frame for the socio-cultural discontinuities of the twentieth century Philippines. Chief among the writers who use this model is Carlos Bulosan in *The Laughter of my Father* (1944). Writing in exile, Bulosan uses the Juan figure in his short fiction as a way to discuss questions of agency and loss of identity.54 Bulosan himself demonstrates that his vision

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54 See Grow's concise essay on Bulosan's use of laughter “The Laughter of my Father: A survival kit” N. pag.
of laughter is subversive and focuses on exposing the internal ambivalences that are encoded in the Filipino's negotiation of subjectivity in a Post-American era. Such negotiations foreground notions of inherited colonial subjectivity that Bulosan treats with satiric humor. In *Power of the People* (1983), Bulosan outlines this theory of laughter in the following manner: “laughter is double-edged, cutting both ways, eliciting tears of sorrow and happiness at the same time. It is a weapon for those who know how to use it” (329). We could argue that when read as resistance, this particular mode of narrating Filipino humor is charged with ambivalence and the consciousness of robbed agency.

E. San Juan Jr., writing on Bulosan's *The Laughter of my Father*, discusses the question of resistance and ambivalence as follows: “The archetypal figure of Juan Tamad has fixed the proverbial native indolence without diminishing its ambivalent potentialities for caricature, parody or satiric extrapolations...indolence can be a ruse to sabotage authority...The Indio's cunning naivete in times of emergency or disaster affords him insights into alternatives and options accessible only in a comic or detached context” (qtd. in Grow 38). In *On Becoming Filipino: selected writings of Carlos Bulosan* (1995), San Juan develops this idea further as he suggests that Bulosan's humor has to do with “misconstructions” on the nature of being Filipino. In San Juan's words, “by mobilizing folk/plebian memory and the carnivalesque resources of his heritage, Bulosan devised a strategy of cultural resistance that would subvert the Eurocentric representation of Filipino 'Otherness'” (7). San Juan's reading of Bulosan is set within the frame of exilic
writing. However, it demonstrates that in this particular mode of narration, humor is defined by magnifying the opposition between margin and center.

While Yuson is not an expatriate writer and does not seek to narrate the fractures of diasporic Filipino experience, his construction of Leon Kilat within the Juan Tamad frame invokes the similar distance between margin and center. In Bulosan's revisions of the Juan figure, humor is created out of absurd or witty situations or word play. Bulosan's laughter is humorous, not uncanny, and functions according to the rules of satire. However, Yuson differs from Bulosan in that his use of the Juan Tamad frame in *The Café* veers more towards the folk tradition that utilized the fantastical rather than the satirical. Yuson's Kilat appears to draw more from the folk revisions of the tale that introduce an aspect of magic or the supernatural to complement Juan's “natural” alterity. Yuson's “magical” humor creates as much ambivalence as the social satire of Bulosan. However, because Yuson does not hold up an “othered” object of ridicule, we are not sure what we are laughing at. Our laughter is tinged with the uneasy lack of comprehension; the laughter is ambivalent and uncannily resembles possession.

If we analyze any instance of Leon's laughter, we realize that the object of his laughter is himself. The laughter arises spontaneously, outside the bounds of humor, and invokes a sense of distance in which Leon views himself from the outside. Leon laughs at his subjectivity within the colonial drama. For a revolutionary, Leon curiously voices no patriotic sentiments through the course of the novel. His only source of power is his
subversive laughter, over which he has no real control. If we follow the notion that Leon laughs (without control or consciousness) at himself, we must also contend with the notion that his laughter is uncannily abject. Figuratively, Leon's laughter is another form of possession. It is not so much a weapon of revolution as the final face of disavowed subjectivity that asserts, over and again, its continuing, playful alterity through the cycles of history.

Yuson's treatment of Leon's laughter is built from bottom up, through a sense of grotesque participation in a process that is somehow seen as organic to Leon and his environment. The “organic” relationship between Leon and his environment is often the source for Leon's laughter. Seen in this light, Leon's perception of colonized “self” within the colonial context is the butt of the joke. In the following passage, we encounter one of the first actions that Leon commits. The passage rings with a humor that is bawdy and yet suffused with a peculiar type of resistance as all participants are implicated in a moment that signals the death of one world order and the birth of another:

At sunrise the church would face another onslaught – from the morning rays creeping up over the hills of Siquijor Island across the strait, fine golden antennae of an eternal insect clawing its way up over the island's hump and then shooting out with the speed of sorcery against those walls, suffusing everything with a pagan glow...The morning sun, needless to say, was no match for Old World memories. NADA PODER. Not across the strait, not even from Siquijor.
Leon stops, takes a whiff of sea air. The insect sun gives him a playful sting in the face. This tickles Leon, he begins to come. Laughing, he comes. He rubs his hand against his crotch, rubbing the come to bigger and better areas inside his pants. He doesn't care much about the pants anyway. As long as it doesn't soil his fresh mountains, Leon would never spoil a come.

“Hey, I see you doing something perverse out there, hey, in the churchyard even!”

The yell comes from the belfry. Paquito the dwarf points an accusing dwarfish finger at Leon below him... At times Paquito the dwarf is Leon's best friend. This time the dwarf doubts that. He doesn't like seeing strange perversities happening at daybreak. … Leon grins up at Paquito. I can't explain this to you now, my friend, the day is colored sepia and the sun stings me to such playfulness. (3)

Leon's characterization as the lazy Indio youth whose opening act is simultaneously physical and transgressive is immediately reminiscent of the Juan stories. Like Juan, Leon appears to be linked to his environment in a magical symbiosis that prefigures his later development into the invincible laughing hero. Drawing on the lower order of bodily humor, this passage sets the novel resolutely within the burlesque mode. However, the ribaldry also masks a sustained figurative depiction of the struggle between “New World” and “Old World” values. Leon's masturbation is the opening act of subversion which complements the personification of resistance through environmental metaphors. The sun
is the first actor in the process of revolution. Described as an insect, drawing on the sense of the minute, the sun claws its way across the land to “sting” the hero into action. The narrator admits the sun is no match for “Old World” memory, suggesting that colonization is a process that depends on a peculiar kind of nostalgia that inspires the dreamer to inscribe the lost “Old World” on the new. The “radical” sun stings the hero into action but proves no match for colonial memory.

Given that the narrator's description of the sun has already alerted us to the inadequacy of resistance in the face of colonial memory, Leon's masturbation becomes a way of facing the void of colonization; it is the only resistance he chooses to offer. It is also significant that the dwarf Paquito does not comprehend the action and regards it as a “strange perversion”. Paquito, who eventually joins Leon's revolution, is, in this moment, the voice of the colonized. He is uncomfortable with Leon's masturbation because he does not understand it, and because it takes place in the churchyard – the place in which the Castillian priest's memories have not as yet lost their “charm”. Paquito's yell (itself a bodily response) exposes the “otherness” of Leon's action. It suggests that the action, and the laughter it provokes, is strange and perverse because it is “organic” and has grown unfamiliar to the colonized, and in this case, Christianized, mind. It exposes the ideological limits of the “Old World” and “New World” boundary and, at the same time, creates the bodily opening from which the liminal (and magical) crossovers of the burlesque happen.

Note that the narrator admits that the sun is no match for “Old World Memory” (3) referring to a previous passage in which the Castillian priest who built the church is possessed by memories of the matronas of Mexico – a metaphor that demonstrates the easy shift between Mexico and Sequijor in the Priest's perverse colonial desire.
6. Theorizing Laughter
In *The Café*, laughter is always strategic and frames the key movements in the plot, it is mythical and reworks the idea that the laughing hero is an archetypal symbol of resistance for the contemporary Filipino. Laughter provokes the “marvelous” and, at the same time, destabilizes the established categories of myth in the text. Writing a burlesque novel in the tradition of Sterne, Fielding and Rabelais, Yuson frequently draws our attention to the lower order of humor that emanates from the body and bodily functions. Likewise, Yuson's allusion to the Juan Tamad stories reinforces the relation between the transgressive body and subversive laughter. Yuson's draws on a sophisticated reading of laughter as an opening through which prodigious or marvelous realities can arise. Rather than define and reinforce social and cultural hierarchies through irony, Yuson's laughter arises in a middle space that crosses the boundaries between discrete notions of national identity. Laughter is porous and provokes a doubled reading of identity which profits from the tension between self and other. What sets Yuson's characterization of Leon Kilat apart from any other historical or fictional narrative is the framing device of the laughing hero. In *The Café*, Leon's heroism is secondary to his magical laughter. Furthermore, this sense of laughter does not depend on humor or wily tricksterism but arises of itself from a particular reading of the body as open and transgressive.

In his study on the function of laughter in myth in *The Raw and the Cooked* (1964), Levi-Strauss suggests that laughter often indicates the location of proscribed action or thought;
its function indicates the crossing over of a boundary between self and other. In his words: “Laughter is an opening; it can cause opening; or the opening itself is presented as a combinative variant of laughter” (125). We realize that Leon's laughter often provokes this kind of opening. It is a textual space where the act of laughing, as a bodily function of the indigenous subject, arises of itself (magically) and transforms a particular historical moment. Seen from this perspective, laughter takes on an ambivalent “tricky” purpose that dismantles the predetermined “mythemes” in the narrative. While the function of the laughing hero is to disrupt hierarchies of power, in *The Café*, laughter also signifies a textual space that defies meaning. Because Leon's laughter is magical and not attached to humor, it disrupts the categories of subject and object. We do not know why Leon laughs and must hesitate before we construct meaning around this uncanny laughter. Ultimately, Yuson writes a novel about the evolution of history into myth that deconstructs the myth of the laughing hero through a particularly self-conscious, uncanny laughter. This subverts a traditional reading of the Juan Tamad tricksterism in Leon's story. Rather, Leon's laughter turns our attention to the mechanics of resistance in the Juan Tamad stories and exposes them as another form of “self-defining” ideology.

Yuson punctuates all significant moments in the text with the sound or image of laughter. It is laughter that prompts Leon's early acts of resistance against the Guardia Civil (8), and it is the movement caused by his laughter that provokes the banana charm from which Leon gains magical invincibility (17). Likewise, Leon's death is heralded by tragic laughter (200), while a haunting, uncanny laughter signals his rebirth (202). Leon's final
journey to the Jungle Energy Café marks the culmination of his story where his quest ends in a chaotic inebriated uproar of laughter (214). In each of these moments it is not humor so much as the invocation of the physical act of laughter that brings about the mystical/magical transformation. Leon's laughter neither involves the willful mis-translation of colonial power dynamics that we encounter in the Juan Tamad stories, nor is it the consciously absurd reaction to absence of agency as in the case of Bulosan's “father”. Throughout the story, Leon's laughter appears to be cut off from his action. It appears to have a separate will and function, and thus takes on characteristics of a divine (if absurd) gift. By separating the act of laughing from human relation and reaction, Yuson elevates laughter to the level of a transcendental absurd. Laughter is mythic, and functions as the magical gift that opens a space between the realm of human thought and action, and a primordial, magical unknown. As such, Yuson's laughter acquires the status of myth in a manner entirely different from the Juan characterizations. Yuson's revision of the Juan stories invokes an “organic” response that slips past constructions of colonial and postcolonial binaries of self and other. Leon does not laugh at the colonial joke or stereotype – his laughter is “always already” outside it. This depiction of laughter serves the purpose of alerting us to the binaries of self and other, but does not propose a redefined boundary between the two (as is conventional in the carnivalesque). Yuson thus exposes and punctures the ideological construction of national identity via the trope of laughter, but he does not offer a recalibrated vision of identity in its place.

The act of laughter sets up a textual space where the reader must broker an uneasy
meaning with bodily metaphor. Set entirely within the realm of bodily function, Leon's laughter inhabits a space that is both burlesque and grotesque. As the work of Bakhtin has demonstrated, the function of grotesque laughter in the novel involves a process of fruitful degradation:

The people's laughter which characterized all the forms of the grotesque realism from immemorial times was linked with the bodily lower stratum. Laughter degrades and materializes...Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one. To degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of nonexistence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down into the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place. (20-21)

Bakhtin's argument links laughter to death through the metaphor of degradation. The process of degradation signals the end of material, bodily function. Likewise, resistance to death is constructed within absurd terms. However, Bakhtin argues that the conscious recognition of absurdity gives birth to more enlightened material reality. The function of the grotesque thus contains a fruitful reproductive capacity from which the carnivalesque aspects of literature perform a transformative social function. However, Yuson's trope of laughter provides the fruitful ground of degradation without the emergent new birth. While Leon is reborn or resurrected in the Jungle Energy café, the linguistic babble of its clientele suggests further chaos rather than reconstruction.
The relation between laughter, myth, and postcolonial issues of resistance and recuperation bears further scrutiny. As Susan Reichl and Mark Stein have pointed out, theorizing laughter in the postcolonial is a project that few have undertaken. Reichl and Stein argue that a fundamental unease with the question of humor lies at the heart of this looming silence: “Why is humor such an uneasy bedfellow, why laughter – apparently – an abomination to postcolonial studies? The problem seems to lie with a basic misconceptualization of the nature of laughter, which is often seen as either slighting a serious subject matter or simply indicating lighthearted entertainment” (2). While I would not go so far as to assert that laughter is an abomination to postcolonial studies, Reichl and Stein’s suggestion that most studies on the question of humor in the body of postcolonial studies depend on demonstrating “interventionist stances” and thus fall victim to “methodological and conceptual gaps” (3) alerts us to the uneasy balance that we must achieve when negotiating the “subject” of humor. As Reichl and Stein point out, the fundamental issue at the heart of theorizing laughter is teleological: “laughter and humor are essentially subjective and whether we find something humorous, funny, comic, whether we laugh at it heartily or don’t even manage a smile, depends on a variety of factors, among them our cultural background and identity, our politics and aesthetics, and our location and current state of mind” (5).

*The Café* opens with Leon's laughter, and as the novel progresses, we realize that for Leon, laughter is a primary method of resistance. As discussed, at all significant moments in the text, the protagonist's and narrator's lives are punctuated with the sound or image of
laughter, but this laughter is mythic rather than funny. Laughter signals a point of
negotiation between subject and object that is uncanny and magical. Reichl and Stein
refer to Manfred Pfister's formulation on the function of laughter as the expression of a
fundamental incongruity between margin and center:

...laughter is always caught up in the kinds of distinctions between center
and margins every society employs to establish and stabilize its identity: in
one society, the predominant form of laughter can be that which aims from
the site of the ideological or power center at what is to be marginalized or
excluded altogether; in another, the most significant form of laughter can
arise from the margins, challenging and subverting the established
orthodoxies, authorities and hierarchies. (Pfister vi-vii; qtd. in Reichl and
Stein 9).

Pfister demonstrates that laughter serves a primarily sociological purpose, which has to
do with constructing “stable” identities. On one level, in *The Café*, laughter is a trope that
explores the power relations inherent in the struggle between the individual and colonial,
and subsequently, nationalist authorities. However, Leon's uncanny laughter is also a self-
regulating tool that prevents him from grasping the “power” he grasps from his victories.

Addressing the question of laughter in the postcolonial, in her article “Laughter and
Aggression”, Virginia Richter demonstrates the fact that laughter is also intimately based
on the recognition of stereotype: “At the core of the joke is the stereotype. In fact, this is
the basis of the 'coalition' established by the joke: persons A and C distance themselves
from B who fully personifies the stereotype” (64). Richter goes on to draw on Homi Bhabha's theory on the colonial stereotype\(^{56}\) to outline her argument on the relation between humor and the construction of otherness:

The otherness expressed in the colonial stereotype is an object of both desire and derision, thus constituting the productive ambivalence of the object of colonial discourse. The colonial stereotype is always already known, but has to be constantly reiterated; it is structured by a simultaneous recognition and disavowal of racial, cultural, and historical difference – colonial discourse produces the colonized as other and, at the same time, as fully knowable. (64)

Yuson's Juan Tamad-like Leon has the characteristics of an internalized colonial stereotype, and, at the same time, is framed within the burlesque. This double-sided nature of Leon lends to a complex reading of the function of laughter. Laughter is not simply a mode of resistance to colonial power structures, but also a strategy that reveals the tension prevalent in the colonized subject's perceived loss of agency.

As Richter goes on to demonstrate, Bhabha's critique, while helpful in its definition of a productive sense of ambivalence, is problematic in its assumptions on agency and states of liminality:

\(^{56}\) Bhabha, Homi K. “The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism” *The Location of Culture*, 96. It is also worthwhile to read Bhabha's construction of the “Other” against Sander Gilman's thesis of the “Other” in *Inscribing the Other* (1991). Gilman suggests that the form of a stereotype is only seemingly discrete and always contains its antithesis: “Stereotypes represent a crude set of mental representations of the world. They are palimpsests on which the initial bipolar representations are still visible” (12). Gilman's reading of stereotype as palimpsest suggests a far greater depth of signification than Bhabha's “Other” who, in colonial discourse, appears to be fully knowable.
Only when the notion of a binary structure – the antagonism between colonizer and colonized – is replaced by an analysis of the dynamics of rejection and desire is it possible to achieve a more profound understanding of colonial discourse and break the chain of endless repetition. However, an important change has to be made when Bhabha's inquiry into colonial discourse is transferred onto the postcolonial condition: if the 'dirty secret' of colonial discourse is its desire for the other...in postcolonial discourse it is the persistence of derision, the trace of racial stereotyping in both critical and fictional writing. The valorization of hybridity and liminality in Bhabha's writing runs the risk of ignoring the fixing of the postcolonial subject by the continuing effect of the stereotype. (64 Italics mine)

Richter's theory of 'fixing the postcolonial subject by the continuing effect of stereotype' is helpful when brought into the context of the ambivalence at the core of Filipino laughter. If we agree with the fact that the laughter is directed inwards, towards a discrete image of the self which is also, in this case, stereotypical, the fixing of the subject is tantamount to a fixing of the self, the act of stepping away from the perpetually multiplying significations of hybridity towards a sense of identity that is at one and the same time ridiculous, but claimed.

If we follow Richter's theory that humor involves a fixing of the postcolonial subject through stereotype, we may read Yuson's use of the Juan Tamad figure in Leon's story as
a method by which to construct an elaborate stereotype that allows us to see into Leon's position as a colonized subject and the construction of Leon (via Aguinaldo's postcolonial rewriting) as the agent for revolution. While on one level, we see how Leon uses laughter as a potent weapon to decenter his opponents, when we analyze moments in the text in which he laughs, we do not really know what causes his laughter, except that it arises organically through the body. As such, Leon's laughter, in typical burlesque fashion, depends quite literally on the body and a sense of absurd mortality, rather than on humorous narratives such as jokes, witticisms or comic irony. Leon laughs out of an open textual space to which the text ascribes no tangible interpretation. Yuson invokes familiar readings of colonial and postcolonial stereotype which he punctuates with Leon's uncanny magical laughter. This laughter produces an ambivalence that goes further than dismantling stereotype, it provokes a hesitancy that paradoxically allows the potency of myth to survive. In *The Café*, laughter contains our questioning awe of Leon's prodigiousness; it is a paradox that is *both* mythic and mundane. The notion of a mythic laughter is thus imbued with internal ambivalence that guards against a simple reading of the subversive capacity of the burlesque.

7. **A Textual Example**
The two “myths” at work in *The Café* are the myth of the magical Banana charm and the myth of Juan Tamad-like ridiculous heroism. Shortly before he swallows the magical banana charm by accident, Leon follows his brother-in-law Melechio in a mad race through a forest (17). A powerless Melechio and Leon have just been stripped and turned
out of a hut into the rain by a group of revolutionaries including the fantastic wild woman Pintada (15). At this point in the text, Melechio and Leon are simply two hungry wet men who have stumbled, unwanted, into the revolutionaries’ hut. Leon bears no hint of the future leader he is about to become. Thrown out into the torrential rain, Melechio and Leon run like mad from fear and rage, and eventually find themselves among banana clumps. Melechio believes in the ancient lore of the banana charm which promises perpetual fortune to the one who receives its power. Leon however, is agnostic and unconcerned with the promise of power that the charm offers:

Naked, crouched on all fours, Melechio craned his neck desperately before his chosen leaftip [sic], his mouth agape. Leon laughed, and his laughter soon became as robust as it had been in the company of Sisa. Leon arched his back and laughed hard against the withered stumps. The mountain echoed his bold joy.

Suddenly his laughter stopped, choked off by a drop. It was sweet, the very taste of luck. The banana charm was in his mouth. (17)

We may say that at this point Melechio and Leon are twin revisions of Juan Tamad. They have been degraded and forced into the body through their own inadequacy. As we see, what causes Leon's laughter is Melechio's absurd stance as he crouches on all fours like an animal with his mouth agape in hope of catching the magic charm. Melechio's absurdity has to do with the ironic distance between his desire for supernatural power and the physical expression of this desire in his body. It is significant that his stance mimics that of an animal and thus appears in every sense as an “unaccommodated” creature.
Leon's laughter primarily arises out of recognition of Melechio's absurdity. But very soon it progresses into the “robust” phenomenon over which Leon has no control. Laughter rises of itself through the body and eventually provokes the magic that lies in the banana heart. The banana charm eventually silences this laughter, but not before Leon “tastes” its luck.

Leon's laughter rises directly in response to the absurd, and in this case, specifically, through his recognition of his ridiculous shared plight with Melechio. Stripped of everything but his essence, Melechio furiously seeks the magical banana charm as a means to regain some part of his lost agency. That he turns into a groveling animal in his angry quest for power strikes Leon as absurd and triggers his laughter. It is the image of Melechio's mouth that sets off Leon's laughter. While laughter arises primarily as a conscious phenomenon born of recognition, it progresses into an independent entity that gathers a force of its own. Leon laughs uncontrollably, and his mouth becomes the open boundary between self and the natural world. It is through this broken or porous boundary that the “magic” of the Banana charm enters. However, we might also say that this is a double-sided entry since it is the laughter itself, arising through the hero's consciousness, that beckons or provokes the charm. What we see in this moment is a textual convergence of the two central myths in the text – that of Juan Tamad and the Banana charm. Through Yuson's treatment, this convergence becomes a trope that highlights the issue of power imbalance. Melechio (who seeks power for himself) is set against Leon who is simply along for the ride. Leon's lack of desire for power marks him
as the innocent fool who will become the hero. Seen at a different level, both myths serve as commentaries on the issue of a “People's Power”. The image questions the motives behind the desire for power and, at the same time, hints that power is an entity in itself that can possess the “innocent” subject.

Returning to Bakhtin, we realize that the fascination with bodily orifices of all kinds is a fundamental characteristic of the grotesque:

The unfinished and open body (dying, bringing forth and being born) is not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries; it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects...it is an incarnation of this world at the absolute lower stratum, as the swallowing up and generating principle, as the bodily grave and bosom, as a field which has been sown and in which new shoots are preparing to sprout. (27)

The bodily orifice is a liminal space, a border crossing in which the self dissolves into undifferentiated matter. That Bakhtin reads the possibility of regeneration into this moment suggests that the opening body is the “natural” other to constructions of the self. Read within this frame, Melechio's open mouth and Leon's open mouth signify two sides of the same coin. What separates them is laughter. While Melechio's mouth opens into nature in quest of power, Leon's opens without will, in relation to recognized absurdity. The laughter which issues from Leon begins through a recognition of the absurdity in his position as disenfranchised indigenous subject. However, when he ingests the magical banana charm, this recognition is transformed into a potent mythic weapon that gives him
the “knowing” power of subjectivity.

There is little narratorial mediation in the image of Melechio's naked, desiring body. It is a form that repels as it brings consciousness. As Bakhtin points out, “the grotesque ignores the impenetrable surface that closes and limits the body as a separate and completed phenomenon. The grotesque image displays not only the outward but also the inner features of the body: blood, bowels, heart and other organs. The outward and the inward features are often merged into one” (318). It is in this sense that the image of Melechio's distended mouth is distinct from any other grotesque image that we encounter in the text, for in all of these images, the mock epic form mediates between the lower physical order and a higher rhetoric. The image of Melechio's mouth, however, cannot be mediated, it is the abyss, passionately, if ridiculously, open to receive the world. Leon laughs in recognition of the grotesque image. However, the object of his laughter (the recognition of absurdity in Melechio) also points to the ambivalence in his construction of Melechio as the “other” to his more conscious “self”. Leon's laughter is caused by his perception of Melechio as both absurd and abject; it is not laughter in which Melechio participates, as he is already “fixed” in the stereotype of the greedy ridiculous subject (the subject defined purely by appetite). In turn, Leon's laughter also draws an uneasy reaction from the reader as we realize, almost immediately, the gargantuan colonial drama played out in Melechio's feelings of rage and impotence at losing his dignity with his pants.

We might say, therefore, that Leon's laughter is filled with an exuberant ambivalence that
brings us to the recognition that Melechio's absurdity is no different than his own.
Melechio's open mouth, distended with his craving for a drop of power with which to
regain his agency, extends its boundaries and exposes himself from the inside out. It
becomes the orifice through which Leon recognizes himself, and his laughter therefore is
directed less against Melechio, than at the absurd events which stretch back to include his
encounters with the Castillian priest (3), the Guardia Civil (7) and the revolutionaries
(15), all people who rob Leon of power and agency. Leon laughs because he knows that
no Banana charm can bring Melechio's pants or his dignity back to him; he laughs
because he knows that in spite of this, Melechio will keep opening his mouth under
Banana leaves hoping, eternally, for transformation. Leon's laughter is secular and
completely agnostic. At this point in the novel, it comes from the joyous participation in
lost agency. However, this knowing laughter disappears completely from the book
hereafter as Leon's laughter provokes the Banana charm and brings him the magical
capacity to use laughter as a potent “decentering” ideological weapon.

Immediately after swallowing the Banana charm, Leon seeks redress for what has been
taken from both Melechio and himself. As we see, his primary weapon against the old
priest and the Guardia Civil, is a destabilizing laughter. It is in this sense that laughter is
used in the following passage, as a kind of blind weapon that strikes fear in his opponents
and punctuates his magical invincibility. Yuson begins each successive paragraph with a
description of Leon's laughter, which builds with each improbable feat of strength. We
might say, therefore that Leon's laughter possesses him, works through him at decentering
his opponents:

Leon strode forward [...] Leon collected the rifle and laughed [...] Leon wrestled the bolt and cast it aside, laughing and moving forward [...] Leon tore off the barrel, metal sights and all, and flung them to the ground. His laughter became more robust as he came close to the retreating crowd [...] With a roar of laughter Leon jumped up across the crowd, soaring quickly and magnificently past everyone agape to land right beside the astonished Padre Salsa, whom he now gave a resounding smack on the tunicked bottom...Leon went after the Guardia Civil and not one of them proved too quick for his cane and laughter. (28-29)

This “cinematic” passage visually reminds us of action stars who laugh before they beat the bad guys, and has been prefigured in Robert Aguinaldo's daydream of the novel as a film in which the action star Lito Lapid plays Leon. However, the passage also demonstrates the way in which laughter tips the scales of power as it dissolves the fear of authority in the laughing subject. Laughter dissolves fear in the subject while simultaneously arousing fear in the object. However, as we see, there is nothing “funny” about the passage. The laughter is intended to appear separate and outside the domain of human action. Using laughter, Yuson suggests that the hitherto marginalized and colonized subject has magically regained a position of power57 from which he takes the “center” stage. In this textual example, the center is the town square, the literary and

57 In this example, laughter is primarily masculine, and filled with a potency that has to do with reclamation. However, there are several other examples of supremely ambivalent laughter that are used instead to reiterate the subject's position of abjection. An important example of this in postcolonial literary criticism is, without doubt, Spivak's translation and reading of Mahasweta Devi's “Draupadi”. See Spivak, In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics.
figurative center of the “little” colonial drama. Leon's central position eventually exceeds
the boundaries of the town, to encompass that of the nation, and as the novel concludes,
all eternity. Leon's laughter in these passages springs from a source that cannot really be
defined. We know that it stems from the magical banana charm, and therefore, originates
from a fantastical space that is perpetually beyond reach. This sense of laughter as a form
of mystical consciousness is reinforced by Leon, as he acknowledges that laughter itself
is the supreme mystery of all: “In his stillness Leon knew that the mysteries meant
nothing else but alternating currents of laughter and rubble” (19).

One has to ask, therefore, if the mystery of laughter that Yuson creates in The Café
depends on a mythic understanding of laughter as an archetypal destabilizing force. After
swallowing the banana charm, Leon's laughter comes out of nowhere and is not linked in
any formal manner to humor. It cannot even be linked to farce or bodily humor and thus
becomes a kind of magical laughter that is completely outside a known frame of
reference. As Leon continues to “laugh”, he creates a gap in our understanding of the
logic of the narrative. While Leon's laughter is a weapon that serves a similar purpose to
any other revolutionary weapon, it is, nevertheless, an uncanny laughter that circulates
outside the bounds of humor, a laughter that is both unfamiliar and awesome. If we
understand that laughter can be mythical, we encounter a fundamental paradox in which
laughter, through destabilization, forces the reader to inhabit a space in which s/he cannot
understand the humor of the text and cannot form a centralized reading of the events of
the text. I would argue that “not getting it” poses a radical problem for the reader, for, in
the absence of any shared sense of the boundary erected by laughter, we are left with a
narrative strategy that constructs humor from the distance between center and margin,
self and other. This distance does not contain any recognizable issue such as resistance or
recuperation or the construction of identity; it is a blank space that, on close reading, only
admits ambiguity and ambivalence. Furthermore, because laughter is linked to the
supernatural, it is beyond the frame of human agency. That Leon is “subject” to this
power demonstrates his dazed lack of willed or conscious heroism. Leon is a body set in
motion by the power of laughter, a body that wins revolutions through no effort of its
“self”.

After Leon swallows the banana charm and enters the magical space of the laughing hero,
we cease to be able to comprehend his subjectivity. His laughter, resounding outside the
known polarities of self and other, does not allow us to “fix” either Leon or the subjects
of his laughter in a matrix of recognizable types. If, as Richter suggests, types are
essential to fixing the process of humor, then Leon's humorless “magical” laughter robs
us of ways in which to construct types and breaks down our understanding of the bounds
of subjectivity. We arrive at the conclusion, therefore, that Yuson's Leon Kilat, while
seeming to fit into the recognizable type of the Juan Tamad-esque laughing hero, doesn't
inhabit the role he has been ascribed. Leon's laughter cannot be read as a celebratory
metaphor for the people's resistance to the forces of colonial servitude. While the laughter
certainly does seem to emancipate the revolutionaries and magically transform every man
and woman it touches into mythical heroes who oust the Spanish from their town squares
and citadels, there is, nevertheless, a fundamental core of ambivalence and discertitude in
this laughter that diminishes any possibility of reading the tale of Leon Kilat as a simple
allegory of resistance.

8. Ending Without Conclusions
Yuson writes a novel about the construction of contemporary notions of Filipino
nationalism via myth. Using scholarly and fictional material on myth including plays,
theses and documented conversations, the narrator, Aguinaldo, outlines multiple possible
narrative frames for his characterization of Leon Kilat. However, in each example, he
deconstructs these narratives via an uncanny knowing laughter which foregrounds the
construction of Leon as character and legend. In Yuson's revision of the Kilat story
“laughter” becomes a narrative technique that dismantles heroism. Although laughter in
itself is an act of subversion of various forms of authority, the metaphor of the open,
laughing mouth of the hero also signals a textual opening in the form of the narrative. The
magical laughter holds up a mirror to the ideological fallacies of heroism, but it does not
suggest alternative meanings or forms that can replace these ideologies. As the novel
concludes, language dissolves into laughter, and characters enter and exit the permeable
boundaries of the great party in the Jungle Energy Cafè at will. Laughter becomes the
common language and suggests the dissolution of self into the collective.

Unlike the conclusions we associate with trickster myths where heroes triumph over their
adversaries through wily circumventions, the stories of both Leon and Aguinaldo end in

58 While this pattern is common in trickster myths it is certainly not definitive. There are several narrative
the dizzy babble of the great Philippine jungle energy café where no story takes
precedence over another and all voices jostle for airspace and attention. The chaotic
vocality of the last chapter, runs on for eighteen pages without caesura. As the novel
degenerates into babble, our understanding of narrative structure is completely violated,
and we are as lost as Leon. Leon wanders, dazed, through the café. Through his
resurrected (and inebriated) ears we hear snippets of conversations that range from heated
discussions about the politics of the day, to drunken toasts to Sandra Dee. Notably absent
from the party is Aguinaldo, the seeming omniscient narrator who disappears from the
narrative after the events at Mendiola Bridge. In his absence, Aguinaldo is taken to task
for his aesthetic choices by some of the characters (213). If we assume that Aguinaldo
still writes his self-conscious para genre, then his “Leon” seems to retreat into the
collective space of contemporary Filipino consciousness in which historical figures such
as Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo rub elbows with contemporary authors such as Joaquin and
Abad, or historic figures such as Rizal.

For Aguinaldo, Leon has no more revolutions to fight and has thus stopped laughing.
Instead, Leon wanders through the café, dazed, and unable to respond to the vast army of
heroes that have gathered, of which he is only one. In the cacophony of the café, the text
becomes a cavernous mouth that swallows all narratives and narrators. As suggested, the
text itself is no more than a metaphor for Aguinaldo's imagination. Therefore, it is in this
somewhat dazed and lowly imagination of the artist-everyman that the myth of the

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traditions where trickster myths end ambivalently or tragically. See Lewis Hyde's reading of “Coyote
and the Shadow People” *Trickster Makes This World* (85-87).
laughing hero concludes – in a drunken party, where, while Sandra Dee rules, both revolution and salvation are completely beside the point. As the novel ends without a conclusion, we realize that Yuson's ambivalent sense of heroism is at the heart of both Leon's and Aguinaldo's anti-heroics. Caught in a historical moment in which most urban Manilaeans are forced to witness the demise of democracy and human rights within the Philippines (the martial law period and its aftermath), Yuson writes from within a nexus of instability wherein artists and writers take on the roles of witnesses and chroniclers to the struggles of their contemporaries. Yuson's “present” in the martial law period under Ferdinand Marcos, is the mode from which his fictional doppelganger Aguinaldo re-imagines the story of Leon Kilat. Yuson thus refashions the myth of the hero to reflect the contemporary sense of self-knowledge in which the artist and everyman is abject in the face of rank power, and, left no other means of expression, chooses laughter as the only modal weapon available. To Yuson's credit, *The Café* does not seek to build up a false sense of empowerment. Rather, it is charged with intricate misalignments of power and a fundamental sense of ambivalence about the roles of heroes past and present. Even though Aguinaldo's retelling of Kilat's story fancifully reverses the positions of power between master and subject, ultimately, the conclusion of the *The Café* suggests the artist's retreat into the dazed comfort of a collective imagination, a warehouse of a million stories that becomes the crucible in which the myth of the text is dissolved.
III Asking The Right Question: Mythical Inflections in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* and I. Allan Sealy’s *The Everest Hotel A Calendar*

1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the way two contemporary South Asian novelists deconstruct the myth of “nation” in relation to notions of community and selfhood. Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992) and Allan Sealy's *The Everest Hotel A Calendar* (1998) are novels from very different contexts. However, both novels rework the myth of the Fisher King as a way to contain and interrogate more contemporary narratives of nationhood. In both novels, we encounter mythemes constructed out of the Fisher king myth, and both novels frame a core question (that is both secular and mystical in nature) which the “hero” must learn to articulate. Thematically, both novels explore the love, loss and betrayal of the individual within moments of national or global destruction. However, despite the apparent similarities between *The Patient* and *Everest*, Sealy's use of the Fisher King myth is distinctly different from Ondaatje's. This chapter will analyze the way both authors use ancient mythical story as a way to deconstruct the rise of the secular myth of nation through archetypal images. Both authors consciously explore the archetypal power of myth while maintaining a critical distance that alerts the reader to the ideological potency of archetypal imagery. This calls for a new approach to reading myth that simultaneously interrogates the ideological power of myth while keeping its

59 Hereafter referred to as *The Patient*.
60 Hereafter referred to as *Everest*.
Ondaatje uses the myth of the Fisher King as a way to explore the emergence of post-national definitions of community based on transnational issues and concerns. Sealy's version of the myth provides a critique on contemporary India that speaks to the emergence of a local, pre-national sense of the individual within community. While both Ondaatje and Sealy construct myth in archetypal terms, Sealy interrogates the archetypal content of his writing through a sustained use of dramatic irony. The ironic revisions of the central myths in Everest set up alternative narratives that probe and question the function of the myth in the text. The use of irony also recalibrates the language of myth to suit Sealy's new vision of community. The similarities and dissonances in Ondaatje and Sealy's approach provide us with a complex example of the way two authors writing out of distinctly different locations and contexts handle the problem of narrating community through the same myth. Sealy's and Ondaatje's use of the Fisher King myth to tell radically different stories demonstrates the multiple trajectories a myth can take and its adaptability to address the very specific and individual concerns of the postcolonial writer.

Sealy's novel appears six years after The Patient and, like Ondaatje, addresses the problem of narrating community within collapsing world orders. As romances, both novels depict the demise of shared communal values due to geopolitical strife, and explore the rise of the individual as a messianic agent of change. We could argue that the
success of *The Patient* partially lies in the appeal to transcend the confines of local boundary through the invocation of the universal themes of romantic and filial love. This sense of the universal is sustained through archetypal images that amplify the themes of the novel, rendering them both individual and transcendental. While they are contextualized within particular historical and socio-cultural moments, Ondaatje's characters become mythical because the aesthetic treatment of each figure lifts the character out of the confines of realism. These aesthetic gestures (such as the presence of non-synchronous action or the marriage of unlikely images) produce an affective quality in the narrative that invokes the power of archetype.

Ondaatje has demonstrated his affinity to myth in his own writings. His approach to myth follows the high modernists in that it seeks to relocate the reader within the mythical moment. Following Eliot's dictum that myth provides “...a step towards making the modern world possible for art”, Ondaatje's mythic vision is intimately linked to the act of narration. In Ondaatje's vision of the Fisher King myth, the characters (who represent a “global” community brought together in the task of war) inherit the narrative of the “English” patient, which has to do with reconstructions of certain humanist questions and principles in the chaos of war. The narrative inhabits each character and, at the conclusion of the novel, travels with them back to their various communities around the world, building a sense of renewal through memory. I will argue that Ondaatje's novel ends with an aesthetic vision of the sacred marriage in which the two young lovers, Hanna and Kip, are reconciled. However, this reconciliation happens outside time and the particularities

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of their contemporary moments, and is an entirely figurative union. This union also suggests the renewal of the destroyed lands and relationships that form the thematic core of *The Patient*. Ondaatje's vision involves a reconstruction of community in primarily mythic terms. The renewal is only brought about by the inheritance of narratives. Thus, the historic romance of the patient serves as a parable that enables the other characters, Hanna, Kip and Caravaggio, to reconstruct their individual subjectivities in a post-lapsarian world.

This chapter will briefly place *Everest* within the tradition of mythical narrative in Indo-Anglian fiction and will scrutinize its position within the post-Rushdie novelistic engagement with myth. For Rushdie, myths represent racial narratives that evoke metanarratives about notions of culture. Rushdie frequently narrates witty, satirical inversions of myth that depend on the reading of archetype as stereotype. For Sealy, however, myth functions as a framing device that punctuates the themes of the central narrative and provides an alternative vision of a history. This method of framing narrative via myth involves the mobilization of critical archetypal images that lend potency to the underlying ideologies that inform the two novels. My study will analyze the archetypal images invoked through the Fisher King myth, and demonstrate Sealy and Ondaatje's critical engagement with the problematic nature of archetype. Sealy constructs his own critical commentary on the question of the individual's relationship to “nation” and identity within newly emergent visions of community. His novel provokes resonant parallels with Ondaatje's *The Patient*. Both Ondaatje and Sealy construct quest narratives
as allegories of postcolonial reality. In Ondaatje's vision of the quest, the patient's narrative outlines the strain that narrow geopolitical definitions of identity place on larger humanist concerns. For Sealy, Ritu's quest narrative provides a critical allegory on Indian identity politics through examining the position of the new postcolonial subject as female and “othered”.

Sealy's vision of community is distinctly different from Ondaatje's in that his central characters, despite the fact that they are marginal and belong to communities that are often written out of the concerns of the post-independence nation state, are all Indian. Sealy also shifts the focus of the central myth in two critical aspects – his central protagonist is a woman, Sr. Ritu, and her quest is a journey into consciousness as a woman. Likewise, in Everest, the transformative question which is at the core of the Fisher King myth does not pass from the wounded Fisher King figure to Ritu, but arises of itself from her own engagement with the socio-cultural and environmental issues of the region which, however, she is incapable of renewing. Sealy further brings in the myth of Prince Nachiketa from the Kathopanishad as a complementary narrative to the Fisher King myth. However, he frames and interrogates both the myth of Nachiketa, and the Fisher King myth, in a Bengali folk lyric (the Baromasi) which outlines the desire of a woman awaiting the return of an absent husband over a twelve month period. The Baromasi thus functions as an alternative narrative that punctuates the quest for enlightenment set up by the myths of the Fisher King and Nachiketa.
The myth of the Fisher King is primarily about custodianship both of the self and the land. By using the Baromasi as a framing device, Sealy suggests that his central character, like the women of the Baromasi, has been forced into a position of custodianship through the failure of traditional masculine power structures. The central theme of the Fisher King myth is about the renewal of community and land through the compassionate consciousness and right action of the hero (who is also male). However, in Sealy's vision, the community is already doomed, and the heroine must flee with her mystery and her Grail (symbolized by a child) to an uncertain future. Unlike Ondaatje's Hanna or Kip, Sealy's Ritu has no community to return to, she is a nomad who can be everywhere but claim no place or people. Likewise, Ritu's “right action” involves her recognition of the necessity for individual activism against the forces of progress and development set in motion by the political “center” of the nation, Delhi. Her quest thus provides a commentary on the failure of the nation to meet the needs of marginal communities and individuals who are written out of India's progressivist approach to modernity. By setting the myth of the hero outside conventional definitions of community, Sealy seems to suggest that constructions of “nation” and “community” in contemporary India are inadequate in the face of the multifaceted ethnic, religious and social backgrounds of characters who are simultaneously “local” and “othered” in the narratives of the nation state.

Sealy's novel reconstructs a hero myth as a way to explore the difficulty of narrating the marginalized female subject. By creating a character that falls outside conventional
depictions of the “Indian” woman Sealy addresses the difficulty of narrating a hybrid sense of female subjectivity in the contemporary Indian context. Through exposing the failure of community to address the needs of the individual, Sealy gestures to the need for radically revising contemporary visions of community, and suggests that this can only be accomplished through a revision of notions of selfhood. Sealy's construction of Ritu as the quest hero also invokes the archetypal image of the “nationalized” mother myth that we encounter in notion of Bharat Mata, or India as the Great Mother. As the virgin keeper of the Grail, and as Bharat Mata, Ritu's character also draws on the Christian iconography of Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. Sealy thus invokes a sense of a “mythical” feminine through the allusion to powerful cultural and religious images of the divine feminine.

However, Sealy problematizes this vision of the marginalized female subject as messianic nationalized hero by couching her story within a tragic narrative frame that dismantles any positivist reading of her quest motif. Sealy thus offers us a vision of myth-making which, while couched in a hybrid form of narration, attempts to renegotiate the notion of community within the emerging specificities of time and place.

Given that Sealy's novel appears six years after *The Patient* we can only assume that Sealy was, in fact, writing a sophisticated answer to the central question of Ondaatje's novel – the problem of narrating community in a world locked in abjection. Ondaatje's novel captures a moment of “worldwide” collapse in which the boundaries of self and other shift and reconfigure according to the dictates of human subjectivity. His central character is constructed beyond the concerns of nation and willfully eludes markers of
race, class and creed. Sealy's vision of community is distinctly different from Ondaatje's in that his central characters, despite the fact that they are marginal and belong to communities that are often written out of the concerns of the post-independence nation state, are all Indian. Read in this light, Everest is perhaps Sealy's answer, the answer of a “local” writer, to the aesthetic of dislocation that Ondaatje, as a diasporic writer, invokes. This shift from a vision of community as differentiated yet cosmopolitan (in Ondaatje), to differentiated yet national (in Sealy), is significant as it outlines Sealy's assertion of an idea of “nation” that is essentially, a myth of modern India. It is a myth in which “difference” becomes the defining characteristic of the newly envisioned “national” subject.

2. Reading Myth in Post-Independence South Asian Fiction
Critical material on the function of myth in South Asian fiction in English has thrived mainly in the context of the Indo-Anglian novel. Twentieth-century myth criticism in the Indo-Anglian context has a tendency to define myth in terms of racialized religious narrative, and focuses on identifying and analyzing the presence of Hindu myths within post-independence narratives. The discourse on myth often becomes a way of elevating certain notions of the indigenous self and leads to a sense of the local that depends on “characteristic” depictions of people and place. “Myth” becomes a narrative that reclaims the pre-colonial imaginative space of the postcolonial indigenous subject, and the function of myth is intimately connected to the process of building cultural identity in the post-independence moment.
While several studies on myth in the Indo-Anglian novel exist, Chitra Sankaran's reading of R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao in *The myth connection: the use of Hindu mythology in some novels of Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan* (1993) provides a characteristic reading of myth as racial narrative and serves as an interesting point of departure for the present study. By narrowing the scope of mythical narrative to the study of Hindu religious texts and cultural practice, Sankaran ignores the presence of non-indigenous symbolic systems (in the work of Raja Rao for example) or reads such moments in purely literary terms. It is significant that although Sealy uses myth and legend as a framing device in all his novels, no critical analysis of the function of myth in his texts exists. Because Sealy's portrayal of marginal communities such as the Anglo Indians or the so-called “tribals” involves a complex syncretic maneuvering of European and Indigenous mythical frames, a novel like *Everest* seems to fall outside the conventional notions of mythical narrative even though it is a novel that suggests a return to a “pre-national” sense of place and identity that is fundamentally mythical.

Conversely, a writer like Ondaatje whose corpus has attracted significant appraisal in South Asia and around the world, fares better because his work is more widely disseminated and attracts a greater variety of critical approaches. Furthermore, Ondaatje's scholarly foray into the study of myth and the mythopoetic style of his fiction make for

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62 Ondaatje's MA thesis “Mythology in the Poetry of Edwin Muir” alerted critics to his own early fascination with myth. Even though Sealy didn't write a thesis on myth, his doctoral thesis on Wilson Harris demonstrates an engagement with the function of myth in the Modernist experimental novel. The clear absence of critical material on Sealy's use of myth and legend in his novels (when each of his
a body of literature that is more congenial to myth criticism. From George Elliot Clarke's essay “Michael Ondaatje and the Production of Myth” (1991) to Bill Fledderus's reading of the Fisher King myth in *The Patient*, “The English Patient Reposed in his bed like a Fisher (?) King” (1997), we see a sophisticated body of criticism that explores Ondaatje's approach to myth. However, these readings do not attempt to contextualize the presence of myth in Ondaatje's texts and often conflate narrative “gestures” as images of the self. For example, the specificities of Ondaatje's writings on Sri Lanka are seen as elaborate metaphors of the authorial self and not subject to rigorous scholarly scrutiny that would expose Ondaatje's troubled negotiations of a “Sri Lankan” imaginary in relation to the failed experiment of the post-independence nation. Critics such as Marlene Goldman and Kristina Kyser have attempted to recalibrate their readings of Ondaatje's negotiation of the Lankan, but often do not address the concerns that local critics bring to reading Ondaatje. Given that *The Patient* precedes Ondaatje's most political novel, *Anil's Ghost* (2000), and appeared in 1992 (the period parallel to the events in Sri Lanka that Ondaatje writes about in *Anil's Ghost*) we might infer that in constructing a myth of the “post-national” community, Ondaatje explores the allegory that he was to contextualize and make political in *Anil's Ghost* at a preliminary “archetypal” level.

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63 The general confusion over Ondaatje's construction of an imagined Sri Lanka gathered to a head with the critical reception of *Anil's Ghost*, published eight years after *The Patient*. The furor over Ondaatje's misrepresentations of local character and setting was spearheaded by Sri Lankan diasporic critics Qadri Ismail, Kanishka Goonewardena and Ranjini Mendis. These positions are revised by Chelva Kanaganayakam's critical evaluation of representation and artifice in the novel. Demonstrating the distance between Ondaatje's seemingly universalist aesthetic and the problem of representation, Kanaganayakam foregrounds the ambivalences in Ondaatje's writing on Sri Lanka. See Kanaganayakam, “In Defense of Anil's Ghost”.

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3. **Situating Allan Sealy within the Indo-Anglian Novelistic Engagement with Myth**

Sealy's use of myth arrives out of the Indo-Anglian novelistic tradition where myth often frames the chaotic experience of modernity in the contemporary nation state. Sealy uses myth in one form or another to structure and interrogate the thematics of all his texts. However, it is in *Everest* that Sealy's “myth-making” is most pronounced, and at the same time, most complex. In *Everest*, Sealy’s approach to myth goes through a transformation from his previous novels. *Everest* demonstrates a significant stylistic shift in his approach to the problem of narrating contemporary India. In his previous novels *The Trotter-Nama* (1988) and *Hero* (1990), Sealy frames his narration of India within magical realist strategies that also draw on myth. However, Everest marks a distinct shift from the witty linguistic fantasy of the previous novels to an archetypal mythic vision. This shift informs the use of legend and myth in *The Brainfever Bird* (2003) and *Red* (2006), which postdate *Everest* and are significantly different in tenor from *Trotter-nama* and *Hero* because of a complex intertextual engagement with mythical narrative. In his three later novels, Sealy's use of myth becomes a narrative frame in which to interrogate the potency of lived experience within the contemporary Indian context. While Sealy often constructs witty, ironic revisions of the myths in his early novels, in his later novels, this irony depends on an Aristotelean sense of *mythos*, or plot. When read within the literary tradition of the Indo-Anglian novel, Sealy's later fiction marks a turning point where a resurgence of the archetypal qualities of mythical narrative comes to the fore. Sealy's myth-making signals a return to a more potent allegorical vision of myth than that seen in the late twentieth century postmodernist myth-fictions of Indo-Anglian writers like
Myth, in mid-twentieth century Indo-Anglian fiction is predominantly dependent on Hindu mythical narratives which frame constructions of selfhood, identity, and notions of community in an emerging postcolonial world. For example, in *Kanthapura* (1938), Raja Rao depicts Gandhi, via the *Harikatha* tradition, as an embodiment of Krishna in the role of guru. He narrates a secular myth in recognizably sacred language. Approximately fifty years later, in *Midnight's Children* (1981), Salman Rushdie draws on the pantheon of Hindu gods and goddesses to depict the ironies of invention and inheritance in his vision of post-Independence India. While there is a significant distance between the approach to myth in Narayan and Rushdie, even in its postmodern form, myth still functions primarily as an allegory of India. Myth provides a narrative strategy that uses the figurative amplification of allusion to intersect and interrogate notions of the historical.

Significantly, as writers like Rao and R.K. Narayan were drawing on Hindu mythology and religious texts in their novels, others, such as Kamala Das and Mulk Raj Anand, were using myth in its sense as “false speech” to signify the occultism of caste and class in the Indian context. While the narration of myth in early twentieth-century novels significantly differs from later exponents such as G.V. Desani, Salman Rushdie or Manil Suri, the function of myth in Indo-Anglian fiction primarily negotiates the problem of community, imagined and otherwise.

Meenakshi Mukherjee's rigorous analysis of Mulk Raj Anand's fiction in *The Twice Born*
Fiction (1971) gives us a glimpse at the post independence critical approach to reading myth in the Indo-Anglian novel. While Narayan and Rao drew on the framework of classical Hindu mythology as a means to negotiate the emerging sense of identity in post independence India, Anand's approach to myth was radically different in that he set out to puncture the mythical foundations of cultural systems of caste and class. Anand's vision was outside what was commonly considered to be “myth”. Thus, in “Beyond the Village: An Aspect of Mulk Raj Ananad”, Mukherjee claims that Anand, “... like his heroes, is alienated from a traditional framework of values; while rejecting the superstitions and the narrowness he has also cut himself off from the strength-giving continuity of a culture. Neither technology nor the tenets of socialism can be an adequate substitute for the myth of a race” (230). Mukherjee's critique, which identifies the political foundations of Anand's ideological stance, nevertheless draws a genealogical line between myth, tradition, and race, that presupposes each category to be homogeneous. This is demonstrated when she claims that a “sustaining myth” is a “system of belief that explains why the world is what it is and why things happen the way they do” (230). Mukherjee's approach to myth provides an example of the tendency to define the critical categories of myth in terms of racial narrative. In Mukherjee's reading, myth serves the purpose of defining and sustaining new visions of race and community in the flux of post-independence identity politics, but her critical matrix sustains a reading of identity through racialized myth.

However, Anand writes from a radicalized narrative tradition that is strongly influenced
by Marxist ideology. Anand's approach to mythification aims to dismantle traditional visions of race and community. Mukherjee misreads Anand because her critical frame for reading myth is at odds with Anand's concept of myth. As Anand attempts to write against the potency of certain cultural categories, he also constructs a Marxist utopia that functions as a new myth of nation. In Mukherjee's reading of Anand, myth functions exclusively within the realm of tradition as defined in opposition to both technology and political ideology. The notion that narratives of “technology” or “socialism” can become contemporary myths does not enter Mukherjee's argument because “myth” is defined within a critical paradigm dependent on the inheritances of racialized narratives. A critical discourse on modernity that reads socio-political narrative as a modern myth does not arise. Mukherjee is not alone in constructing and sustaining a vision of myth via a particular set of assumptions about race and tradition. The tendency to define myth in originary racial terms leads to the absence of a critical vocabulary that interrogates the function of secular myths.

Mukherjee's approach is important because it influenced subsequent critical approaches to myth in Indo-Anglian fiction. Following in this tradition, Chitra Sankaran writes extensively on the puranic tradition in the work of Narayan and Rao. Sankaran provides excellent studies on the Bhasmasura myth in R.K. Narayan's *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1961) or on the Radha/Krishna myth in Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* (1968). Her study is helpful in that it draws our attention to the functions of intertextuality and allusion within the early twentieth century Indo-Anglian fiction. Sankaran's approach is

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64 Such a discourse is paradoxically present in studies on the function of myth in writers like Narayan.
defined by a desire to build congruences between mythical narratives in the fiction of Narayan and Rao. In her words:

> Though several critics have theorized about certain philosophical schools which they find relevant to certain texts, there has been little or no account taken of certain vital features characteristic to the novelists, for instance, the fact that both Narayan and Raja Rao hail from South India and hence would have imbibed some features of the Dravidian cult of the south. (11)

The fact that both Narayan and Rao are of South Indian origin becomes a point of departure from which to construct myth as the shared cultural narrative of a “Dravidian cult”.65 Sankaran goes on to claim that “Tracting [sic] these motifs may illuminate the achievements of each novelist and may take us a step closer to the cultural springs that have inspired these works” (11). We see that for Sankaran, myth is a means by which to explore notions of an archetypal source of “pure” cultural narrative as suggested in the metaphor of the spring. This leads to unfortunate critical evaluations where Narayan and Rao's rather distinct approaches to narrating myth are conflated into a singular mythic vision that portrays the “faith and innocence of the archetypal villagers” (34). Sankaran then goes on to surmise that this process of reading will “successfully unravel their [the villagers] thought processes, to show us what influences them most” (34). Within such a critical matrix, myth becomes a way of decoding the indigenous subaltern other. For Sankaran, mythical writing serves the purpose of setting up a particular approach to mapping that rather problematic notion of the “Indian psyche”, which is, more often than

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65 Sankaran's terminology is unfortunate and symptomatic of the tendency to mis-identify racial and cultural categories.
not, the psyche of the indigenous subaltern subject. This approach to reading myth can lead to rather difficult questions on authority and representation of the indigenous “other” in Indo-Anglian fiction.

Following Mukherjee, Sankaran seems to ignore the presence of non-Hindu mythical motifs that are apparent in the work of Raja Rao. In her reading of Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), Sankaran reads the central figure Rama entirely in terms of “Sadhana”, or the spiritual quest that culminates in the devotee's mind merging with the consciousness of God (97). For Sankaran, Rama's quest explores a pluralistic Hindu consciousness that can draw with equal ease from differing philosophical traditions within the Hindu canon of religious texts and practice. By reading the central figure as the quintessential modern Hindu, Sankaran conflates the various threads of Rao's philosophical discourse in the novel into a monolithic statement on Hinduism in the modern moment:

> The most valuable aspect of modern Hinduism remains its spirit to believe that every human thought has a right to exist. Rama, who is very much a product of the twentieth century and steeped in the spirit of not just brahminism, but a whole corpus of Hindu ideas, then becomes a representative of this inclusive spirit that is the essential quality of Hinduism. (132)

To read Rama in this way is to miss the ambiguities and ambivalences that permeate Rao's discourse on Hinduism. Likewise, it misses the struggle between Christian,
Buddhist and Hindu philosophical discourses that Rao interrogates in the novel.\textsuperscript{66}

Sankaran thus constructs a reading of myth that focuses primarily on allusions drawn from Hindu epics. Such an approach not only conflates significantly different mythical traditions within Hinduism itself, it also ignores the presence of non-Hindu mythical frames that may be present in the texts under survey.

In contrast to a scholar like Sankaran, A.K. Ramanujan argues for a reading of myth that takes local cross-pollination into account. In “When Mirrors are Windows: Towards an Anthology of Reflections” Ramanujan suggests that it is impossible to speak about mythical traditions in the Indian context without acknowledging the depth of influence and intervention that local traditions have on each other:

I would like to suggest the obvious: that cultural traditions in India are indissolubly plural and often conflicting but are organized through at least two principles, (a) context sensitivity and (b) reflexivity of various sorts, both of which constantly generate new forms out of the old ones. What we call Brahminism, Bhakti traditions, Buddhism, Jainism, Tantra, tribal traditions and folklore, and lastly, modernity itself, are the most prominent of these systems. They are responses to previous and surrounding traditions; they invert, subvert and convert their neighbors. (189)

Unlike Mukherjee or Sankaran, Ramanujan recognizes the discourse of modernity as

\textsuperscript{66} Sankaran briefly analyzes the relationship of Rama and his wife, Madeleine, in terms of a Buddhist/Hindu dialectic (112), but she fails to explore the problematic ideological positions which are magnified by the oppositional alignment of two differing religious traditions. Likewise, Sankaran completely ignores the discourse on Catharism and Catholicism which is sustained throughout the novel. The conflation of differing religious traditions and philosophies under the mantle of a “pluralistic” sense of Hinduism is problematic to say the least.
contemporary myth. This revision of myth to include contemporary secular myths resurfaces in studies on myth by Ashis Nandy and Sudhir Kakar. For Ramanujan, the negotiation of a “great” or “little” tradition depends primarily on a thorough understanding of intertextuality. As he suggests, the tendency to define tradition within narrowly indigenous terms has lead to the construction of monomyths: “Stereotypes, foreign views and native self images on the part of some groups all tend to regard one part (say, the Brahminical texts or folklore) as the original, and the rest as variations, derivatives, aberrations, so we tend to get monolithic conceptions” (190-191).

However, despite the assertion of a multi-ethnic, multi-racial sense of Indian cultural identity, Ramanujan does not read outside indigenous conceptions of mythical frames. Therefore, while he lists the narrative traditions of Brahminism, Jainism and Bhakti traditions, he overlooks the equally present traditions of the peoples of mixed heritage such as the Anglo-Indians whose narrative traditions include (but are not confined to) Biblical narratives and the multifaceted body of European mythical literature inherited through colonial influence. Ramanujan does go on to suggest that Christianity and Islam should be included in the reading of intertextuality within the Indian context “for later times” (190) but his several analyses do not attempt such a cross-cultural span of engagement. Ultimately, Ramanujan's more pluralistic reading of Indian cultural tradition still provides no textual space for the difficult syncretism of a character from a novel by Sealy. The Anglo-Indian or Christianized “tribal's” negotiation of modernity and its relationship to inherited colonial cultural traditions that we encounter in a novel like
Everest remains under erasure within the method of reading myth fostered by critics like Mukherjee, Sankaran or Ramanujan. I do not wish to suggest that racial identity cues Sealy's use of myth. Nevertheless, when Sealy draws with equal ease on a medieval Christian myth, and the myth of Prince Nachiketa's descent into the realm of Death, and when the intersections of both these narratives are framed within the form of an indigenous Bengali folk song tradition, we are looking at an approach to myth and to framing devices that is multilateral and polyphonal and which redraws a mythical vision of contemporary India as “differentiated” in the most radical sense of the word.

4. Shifts in Sealy’s approach to Myth
Sealy's early novels are characteristic of the new writing emerging out of India and the Indian diaspora and bear stylistic similarities to the early work of Salman Rushdie that demonstrate a preoccupation with the function of myth as a linguistic trope and vehicle for satire. Sealy belongs to a generation of Indo-Anglian novelists who, having experienced the throes of Independence in early youth, have produced a body of fiction that negotiates the dialectic between hybridity and nationalized visions of identity within the Indian context. In The Fiction of St Stephen's (2002) Salim Yusufji claims that, “the new outburst of Indo-Anglian writing is not so much “who-are-we” as “this-is-who-we-are”. It is assertive, rich and playful and no more confused about its status than its peers or predecessors anywhere else” (71).67 This “rich and playful” sense of narrative gave

67 Sealy himself wears the Stephanian mantle with certain discomfort. In “Notes on the St Stephens School of Literature” he outlines his positions as follows: “The simple division between caste and consciousness allows an outsider to distinguish between the college and the attitude. But the formalizing, stylizing bent of the caste has benefits for the insider too: you are bred to the manner but not condemned to it, you can take it or leave it” (37).

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birth to a multi-vocal, experimental approach to the novel that also drew heavily on magical realist strategies that used mythification as a means to narrate the subjective confusion of lived history. The single most influential Indo-Anglian novelist in this mode was, of course, Salman Rushdie. However, critics such as Harish Trivedi point out that Rushdie draws on the intellectual privilege of a representative bilingualism that was the privilege of the educated middle class writing in English. Trivedi also asserts that this sense of bilingualism is at the core of the so called “magical realism” that became a defining characteristic in this body of fiction. Trivedi further suggests that it is, in turn, a phenomenon on the wane:

Creatively, it may be argued, the most important role played by English in the total context of modern Indian literature has been not that some few Indians have written poems or novels in the language, but that it has served as a channel for fertilizing and nourishing literature in all the Indian languages through the visible and invisible influence of the West.

Conversely, Indian writing in English has all this while (from Narayan, Anand, Raja Rao and even Jhabvala and Anita Desai, right up to Rushdie in fact) been sustained and vitalized by the fact that though the medium of expression is English, the medium of experience in the life described was by and large not English but one or more of the Indian languages. But now, such implicit symbiotic bilingualism – which contributes for example to so much of Rushdie's verbal 'magic' as well as 'realism from Midnight up to Haroun –seems to be passing away from Indo-Anglian literature. This

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68 Trivedi, “The St. Stephens Factor” The Fiction of St Stephen's (3--7).
literature is now increasingly written by and for the English-knowing alone. (5)

Trivedi's observation may accurately reflect the rise of a body of cultural production for the English-speaking middle class. His assertion that bilingualism is the foundation of Rushdie's magical realist strategy suggests that in these novels, myth functions primarily as a linguistic trope. Trivedi also points out that such forms of mythification can only speak to the educated English-speaking class whose concerns are different from the more multilingual authors and critics that produced the Indo-Anglian literary tradition. However, Trivedi's suggestion that Rushdie's aesthetic signals the end of Indo-Anglian literature is premature when read in relation to a writer like Sealy, who shares a similar privilege of the educated middle class, but, unlike Rushdie, is not a diasporic writer. It is precisely a sense of language and story honed through an engagement with local linguistic and literary traditions that sets Sealy's work firmly within the Indo-Anglian tradition and speaks to its healthy contemporaneity. However, Trivedi's assertion that Rushdie's treatment of the magical is primarily a linguistic strategy is important, and suggests an approach to the process of mythification that is fundamentally secular and agnostic in nature.

Sealy's early work demonstrates similar preoccupations with the problem of narrating history that we encounter in Rushdie. Sealy's monumental *Trotter-nama* was stylistically most proximate to *Midnight's Children* and perhaps gathered less critical attention than it was due because reviewers from New York and London could not read beyond stylistic
maneuvers that they associated with Rushdie. For example, Timothy Mo's review of *Trotter-nama* finds Sealy's literary pyrotechnics “execrable” and makes the charge that the new Third World novel is, essentially, a “flash in the pan” phenomenon: “At a time when the high-tech state-of-the-art novels come from Latin and Indian writers of the third world rather than their more insular American contemporaries, Sealy can be saluted. But in retrospect, there was an awful lot about the Kitchen Realists that one misses”. Mo's concerns arise out of a critical bias that reads magical realism as a post-Marquez and Rushdie phenomenon. The polemics he sets up between magical realism and realism, and between America and the so called “Third World”, highlight the anxieties that surround the question of writing the “other”. Stephen Slemon identifies and warns against this tendency when he suggests that magical realism can become a “catch all” phrase for narrating the “massive problem of difference” in the Third World context.  

However, as Chelva Kanaganayakam points out, Sealy's experimentation arises out of a particular engagement with notions of containment and erasure of marginal groups like the Anglo-Indians from historical narrative: “Consciousness about the limitations of linearity coexists with the desire to record the history of those whose roles have been sidelined by political and cultural circumstance. Hence the experiment, the self-mockery, the constant punning, and wordplay”(185). The linguistic experimentation that Kanaganayakam describes in Sealy echoes Trivedi's analysis of Rushdie's language.

*Trotter-Nama* and *Hero* use myth as a sophisticated counter narrative that dismantles the
dominant ideologies at play in secular constructions of “nation” and “community”. In these novels, myth functions through satire, and is transformative only in as much as it punctures the potency of more pervasive ideological structures through laughter. This laughter depends on an intricate, witty language which, as discussed by Trivedi and Kanaganayakam, is born of the tragicomic linguistic dislocations of the English speaking middle class. Such linguistic experimentation is characteristic of magical realist (or counterrealist to coin Chelva Kanaganayakam's term) narrative strategies that dismantle the myth of the “real” as it is socially and politically coded in narrative. Such an engagement also arises out of the contextual circumstances of location in a text. In Kanaganayakam's words: “Having located themselves on the cusp, counterrealist writers are often ideally placed to deal with 'meta' issues that relate to history, religion, politics and, in a general sense, the construction of identity. They do not have to face the conundrum of replicating the “real” while working with a readership that is alienated from what is being portrayed and a medium that is resistant to the material” (186). In his early work, the linguistic trickery that produces Sealy's magical realism seems to suggest just such a disavowal of the modes of realism and arises, perhaps, out of the need to puncture particular visions of Indian society through the lens of satire.

However, we see a marked stylistic change in Everest, Sealy's third novel. While continuing his experimental project of writing in forms that complement the novel

70 For example, in one of the many “bibliographic” digressions of the Trotter-nama, Sealy uses the fable of the monkey and crocodile as a device that figuratively describes the deceit of both local subject and colonial overlord. This “conclusion” is then destabilized by the suggestion that myths, or folk tales, provide tricky ways to narrate the indigenous subject (40-41).
(Trotter-nama is a “chronicle” and Hero is a “fable”), in Everest, Sealy constructs a fictional “calendar” based on a folk lyric tradition to address the question of communal and environmental collapse in a fictional town in India. While Trotter-nama and Hero use form as part of the satirical process, Everest uses the folk lyric as a framing device that builds situational irony tinged with a sense of the tragic. In Everest and his subsequent works, folk lyric forms, puppetry, and abecedaries act as framing devices that provide alternative narratives to the central themes of Sealy's texts. Through the invocation of predetermined, “mythical” structures, these frames superimpose meaning onto Sealy's contemporary India.

As his vision of the novel changed with each successive novel, Sealy also tempered the use of magical realist strategies that abounded in his early work. Used sparsely, and with critical engagement, the magical realism of Everest is filled with a sense of mystery and ambiguity that cannot be read as a purely allegorical. Unlike Rushdie, Sealy's more recent approaches to narrating myth are characterized by subtle self-reflexive allusions that probe the ideological foundations that lie at the core of myth. I would characterize this as a shift from playing with stereotype, to a critical engagement of archetype in Sealy's contemporary India. Therefore, in Everest we see a return to a more classical sense of myth as a narrative that constructs and sustains the boundaries of selfhood within the collective mores of community. This renewed vision of selfhood is necessarily located within Sealy's vision of the contemporary nation, and is narrated via the detailed verisimilitude of realism. The realist narration of archetypal contents in contemporary
socio-cultural contexts provokes a vision of India that is, essentially, mythical.

5. The Myth of the Fisher King in *The English Patient* and *The Everest Hotel*

Both *The Patient* and *Everest* are based on the medieval romance of the Fisher King which first appears in Chrétien de Troye's *Conte du Graal* (1181). The *Conte* outlines the story of a foolish young knight who sets out to find his mother but eventually finds the holy Grail.\(^71\) The Grail romance is built on the mythemes of custodianship, human agency and salvation which, in turn, influence the direction of plot in *Everest* and *The Patient*. In contrast to Ondaatje, Sealy uses the myth of the Fisher King as a narrative that, because of its fixity within the strictures of patriarchal narrative, fails the subject of his novel – a “heroine” who is always already dislocated and othered within the framework of nation and community. In Sealy's vision, the conflict of romance proceeds to a conclusion that denies the sacred marriage between the hero and heroine and introduces a new mythic element in the ascendance of a divine child. While Sealy gestures to the biblical romance of the immaculate birth of Christ in this development, he also constructs this mytheme in purely secular terms that foreground the specific socio-cultural circumstances of the woman and the child. However, Ondaatje uses the myth of the Fisher King in broadly universal terms, he also follows the form of the romance in a quite classical sense.

\(^{71}\) As Dame Jessie Weston points out in *From Ritual to Romance* (1920), the Grail myths demonstrate affinities with early agrarian harvest rituals. Weston's approach, which was based on Frazer's *Golden Bough* (1890) and the “myth and ritual school”, reads the Grail myth as a vegetation myth. In this reading, the life-quest of a central heroic figure follows the cyclical pattern of the natural world. Weston's mode of reading myth, while flawed, influenced the high modernist mythopoetics of Eliot, whose fascination for the myth produced *The Waste Land* (1922) which is, in every sense, the “prior-text” of both *The Patient* and *Everest*. 

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Ondaatje's style is dependent on narrative experimentation based on a highly individualistic sense of poetics. But his use of the Fisher King myth ultimately constructs a vision of community that echoes the ending of a romance as in Wolfram's *Parzival* (1197-1215). *The Patient* ends in a “sacred” marriage (albeit in purely aesthetic terms).\(^2\)

### 6. *The English Patient*

Ondaatje's preoccupation with myth dates back to his Masters thesis: “Mythology in the Poetry of Edwin Muir” (1967). Later, in “O-Hagan's Rough Edged Chronicle” Ondaatje went on to define myth as “biblical, surreal, brief, imagistic”, demonstrating that the drama of myth provides the affective experience of myth in literature (24). This sense of myth is reinforced by George Elliott Clarke's analysis of myth in Ondaatje: “Myth, therefore, is drama, the story of mutability – the tendency of matter to become something other than what it first appears to be...Thus, 'plot' is action that produces change. Ondaatje's *oeuvre* chronicles, then, the genesis of myth from structure, the fiction of fact, the generality of genre, the imprecision of definition, and the realization of form as a dramatic forum for the play of metaphor”.\(^3\) However, as Sam Solecki has argued in *Ragas of Longing: The Poetry of Michael Ondaatje* (2003), Ondaatje's definitions of myth have always been highly idiosyncratic. In Solecki's words: “For him [Ondaatje] myth is any powerful story with an archetypal or universal potential” (60). Solecki argues that in Ondaatje's narration of myth, “readers are exposed to as direct and seemingly

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\(^{2}\) The notion of the sacred marriage is used with situational irony, since the two characters in question (Hana and Kip) have already consummated physical union, an aspect that Ondaatje treats, however, in highly ritualized language that invokes notions of the sacred in the symbolism of the objects with which they surround themselves, the abstract rituals of their lovemaking and the mysterious discipline with which they attempt to protect themselves from psychological penetration (*Patient*, 126). The novel's conclusion ultimately sublimates this union into a metaphysical revision of the sacred marriage.

\(^{3}\) Elliott Clarke, “Michael Ondaatje and the Production of Myth.” *N. pag.*
unmediated a representation, or better, a re-enactment of the original act as art will allow” (60). Clarke's and Solecki's readings hinge on the inherently dramatic function that myth plays in Ondaatje's narrative. However, both critics also suggest that this sense of drama arises out of the distance, or tension, between myth and the action of the plot. In The Patient, Ondaatje admits us into a fictional space in which we are participants, through the narrator, in the myth of the Fisher King. However, it is the seeming incongruity between Ondaatje's revision of the myth and the echoes of the original Grail romance that propels the narrative force of the novel.

I do not wish to speculate on Ondaatje's choice of the Fisher King myth except that in telling a myth of the demise of the “modern” age, he chooses the central mytheme of the great literary myth that defined it – that of Eliot's The Waste Land. Ondaatje preserves a similar mythopoeisy in the brief, detailed visions of characters locked within possessing inward traumas, and the larger catastrophe of a world on the cusp of destruction. Ondaatje carries over the technique he perfected in his poetry of providing what Solecki calls “brief, self-contained, often cinematic lyrics” (61) which, adapted to the novel, shape his narrative with a peculiar visceral lyricism. It is also this sense of the minimalist “cinematic” image that heightens the power of archetypal image in The Patient. Ondaatje's stylistic sparseness works to dismantle the critical mediation that the reader brings to character and plot. Rather, these images produce hidden, alternative narratives that magnify the characters and plot outside the immediate context of realism and

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74 Among several concordances, we find, for example, Eliot's concern with the evident sterility of socio-sexual ritual reflected (in an aestheticized form) in the failed relationships of The Patient's central characters.
verisimilitude. Thus, the sparse imagism of the narrative functions as the surface of a palimpsest under which myths are invoked with full archetypal potency. While Ondaatje uses the Fisher King myth as a framing device for the stories of his characters, he further shapes the phrasing of the novel according to the solo and antiphonal structures of jazz. Ondaatje thus seems to suggest that the logic of the novel, which is quintessentially about storytelling, is musical.\textsuperscript{75}

Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to give a detailed analysis of the influence of jazz on the text, following Malcolm Douglas's essay on Ondaatje's use of jazz in his early fictional work,\textsuperscript{76} we see the continuing presence of jazz used to develop the thematics of the text. Likewise, we could say that the notion of improvised identity and the largely antiphonal structure by which the novel is constructed follows the lyrical structure of jazz, the “popular” music of the era Ondaatje writes about. Jazz also affects the question of language and identity that is central to the thematics of the text, and acts as the binding thread that brings all four characters together. Music is their primary “shared” language, the first sound that bridges the distances between the identity politics in which they are in constant play. Ondaatje thus inflects the structure of the romance with poetic strategies characteristic of the lyricist.\textsuperscript{77}

Ondaatje's novel places a seemingly haphazard collection of characters together in an

\textsuperscript{75} This is a popular framing device, and is also present in Ondaatje's latest novel \textit{Divisadero} (2007) which is based on the structure of a Villanelle.


\textsuperscript{77} In contradistinction, Sealy's novel is framed through the folk song form of the Baromasi, also “popular” but in the local context.
abandoned villa left by the departing forces of the Germans and the Allies. While it is tempting to suggest that these characters are beyond the concerns of race, creed or nation, this sense of radical cosmopolitanism is only true of the so-called English patient, who has all physical markers of race and nation burned away leaving only the remains of his mercurial “English” language. All other characters in the novel are identified (albeit in aestheticized revisions of place and time) within specific references to the regional. Thus, Caravaggio and Hana are resolutely “Torontonian”. Ondaatje's brief insertions of Toronto are intimate and phrased in imagistic juxtapositions that recall his earlier work *In The Skin Of A Lion* (1987). For example, describing various thieveries committed in Toronto, Caravaggio retells an encounter with an Indian family that reflects the changing demographics of a “modern” Toronto. His story explores the incongruous negotiations of relationship among communities thrown together by migration who are forced to invent their own rituals of hospitality in the absence of shared cultural mores. Likewise, when Hana gleefully dubs herself the “Mohican of Danforth Avenue”, she gestures to her own urban upbringing in Toronto (224). Developed with less detail is the Sikh sapper Kip's history in pre-partition Lahore. Nevertheless, Kip's intimate descriptions of the intersections between the public and private spheres including the emerging struggle for independence against the British in which his brother has become an active participant also demonstrate a sense of geographical and historical location that is impossible to ignore.\(^78\)

The central problem of Ondaatje's novel hinges on the question of belonging. The novel

\(^78\) See *The Patient* 217.
traces the manner in which people who once belonged to places, to communities, to traditions, have been thrown haywire into a deculturated, deracinated postwar limbo. In Caravaggio's words:

“The trouble with all of us is we are where we shouldn't be. What are we doing in Africa, in Italy? What is Kip doing dismantling bombs in orchards, for God's sake? What is he doing fighting English wars? ...Even the trees are thick with diseases we brought. The armies indoctrinate you and leave you here and they fuck off somewhere else to cause trouble, inky-dinky parlez-vous.” (122)

Ondaatje's answer to the fractures and dislocations of war seems to be a vision of community in which aspects of self and other are determined by memory and story, rather than history. It is a hopeful juxtaposition of difference thematically sustained through the love of Hana and Kip – two characters who, if not for the incongruity of war, would be incapable of transcending their particular cultural codes in order to come together. Thus, it is vital that Hana attempts to bring Kip to her world: “I want to take you to the Skootamatta River, Kip...I want to show you Smoke Lake...I want you to meet Clara of the canoes, the last one in my family” (130). It is a gesture that speaks to the capacity of this community to extend beyond the deracinated center of the villa, where the lovers form a dyad made possible by the temporary dissolution of the bounds of religion, culture and society. However, though Ondaatje's characters carry a defined sense of personal history and national identity within themselves, it is understood that within the villa, they inhabit a space in which the nation is dismantled in place of a post-national Utopian
community. Each character also bears a symbolic presence invoked by the archetypal images associated with the Fisher King myth. Thus, we have a “King”, a “Perceval”, a “Grail maiden” and, as in Wolfram's Parzival, we have the “King's brother” who functions as a shadow figure, or double to the King. These characters, and their “wasted” land, create a resonant allusion that interrogates the personal and the historical. The embedded Fisher King myth elevates the theater of confessional narrative to the level of the archetypal. It also serves as an interrogation and commentary on the idea of nationalism in the text.

The "English" patient, as the figurative wounded “king” of the company, locates his personal tragedy, as well as the collective tragedy of the war, in the failure of nation: “We were German, English, Hungarians, African – all of us insignificant to them [the desert tribes]. Gradually we became nationless. I came to hate nations. We are deformed by nation-states (138). The patient then goes on to outline the erasure of self that the desert offers in a passage that speaks to the heady inflation of leaving identity behind: “...Ain, Bir, Wadi, Foggara, Khottara, Shaduf. I didn't want my name against such beautiful names. Erase the family name! Erase nations! I was taught such things by the desert” (139). The patient's passionate need to erase identity is set against a recognition of “beauty” that is constructed in universalist aesthetic terms – the place names are not translated in the text and as readers we relate purely to a sense of the musical in the words. However, the patient's bitter denial of context arises out of a tragedy of mis-identification that is the core of his inner wound and the outward signification of his
charred body. We realize therefore, that despite the universalist claims of the patient, “healing” does eventually involve a return to identity that admits the national. The catholicity of the patient's eventual expiation arises through the gradual “confession” of his tale.

It is only through the patient's desire to reveal the “mystery” of his identity and inequity that it becomes possible for Caravaggio, Hana and Kip (as well as the reader) to “identify” him and to locate context within his otherwise deracialized narrative. I do not need to rehearse the parallels of the Fisher King myth with Ondaatje's novel, however, in keeping with the thematics of the myth, we would assume that the dying king is symbolic of decaying world order that awaits the arrival of the young hero. Though Fledderus suggests that the hero in question is the young Sikh sapper Kirpal Singh (Kip), I would argue that Ondaatje's characterization is more fluid, and that he combines Perceval-esque characteristics in Hana, Caravaggio and Kip at different moments in the novel. Each of these three characters surround the “English” patient, drawing from him the story that defines his identity, and each acts as a sounding board to the claim that he is an “international bastard” (176). The patient's erasure of a racialized, nationalized identity makes his “oral” story vital to the three listeners for it suggests the impossibility of emergent definitions of self and other (in narrowly geopolitical terms) to stand as symbols for the complexity and irrationality of human endeavor, instead, it foregrounds the primacy of narrating and ingesting story. As in the place names of the desert, the patient's story sketches a tragedy which is about the loss of self, both in the act of love

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79 See Fledderus for full concordances.
and in the project of nation building.\textsuperscript{80}

The core of the patient's story contains a parable about the tragedy of assuming the mask of identity. As the patient “tells” his story to Caravaggio we discover that the root of his trauma lies in his inability to save his lover because he gave her his “name”. His refusal to adopt identity is as much a figurative sign of his “wound”, as the scarred remains of his body. Willingly captured by the Allied forces, the patient seeks aid for the wounded woman he has left behind in the desert, but, as he demonstrates, his pleas fall on deaf ears:

'No one listened.'

'Why?'

'I didn't give them the right name.'

'Yours?'

'I gave them mine.'

'Then what—'

'Hers. Her name. The name of her husband.' (250)

When the patient claims his lover, Katherine Clifton, as his wife (250) he gives her the “wrong” identity. His concerns, as a “Hungarian” are of no interest to the Allied forces from whom he seeks help. The irony here is that either as Almásy or as Clifton, Katherine is identified by the names of the men who claim her – her husband, Clifton, and her lover, Almásy. Her death is “always already” tragic in this act of identification. Thus, when the

\textsuperscript{80} Significantly, this deracinated identity is a fiction that only the patient himself sustains. Kip and Hana are convinced that he is an Englishman due to his “eccentricities” (265) and Caravaggio is convinced that he is Almásy, the explorer turned double-agent who received the Iron Cross from Rommel (247).
patient adopts the strategy of erasing his identity in the narration of his “history” it stands as a metaphor for the impossibility of national and global concerns to comprehend the flux of human subjectivity. This is the core of the story that he “gives”, as Fisher King, to the inhabitants of the Villa San Girolamo. We note that the patient's story may in fact have no foundation in “reality” – we are at his figurative mercy. As Stephen Scobie points out, “Whether Caravaggio's version of the English patient's identity is true or not scarcely matters, but what does matter is that the story he tells satisfies, precisely, the need for story” (92). The patient's story works on the assumption prevalent in the romance form, that love can only transcend the boundaries of self, nation, and morality within the fiction of the text. The core problem of the novel narrates the impossibility of the marriage of difference to take place in material terms, whether between the patient and Katherine, or Hana and Kip. Figuratively, this becomes an allegory for the failed experiment of modernism.

Ondaatje's insistence on the “fiction” of the story is foregrounded through a systematic aestheticization of historical material – dates, places and people function as figurative devices rather than realistic depictions of historical events. As such, he draws directly on the conventions of romance that involve a mythification of the historical past. As Fledderus points out, all significant points of characterization, plot and style of narration

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81 Ondaatje could have extended this argument to address the issue of female subjectivity, but his female characters, though extremely radical and even in some cases liminal, are characteristically depicted as trapped in patriarchal definitions and institutions. I would argue, that Sealy takes up this gauntlet in Everest, when he shifts the focus to Ritu and her struggle to comprehend her subjectivity within the resolutely patriarchal structures of her contemporary reality.

82 This is a shared thematic premise in the early metrical romances of which Le Conte is a definitive example. Likewise, it is a common thematic link in all the Arthurian romances.
refer to the romance mode: “many of its [The Patient's] aesthetically surprising moves appear sensible in light of romance” (23). Most significant of these moments is the widely criticized “turn” in the novel, where Kip abandons both Hana (his lover) and the patient (his surrogate father) when he hears of the cataclysmic events of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (282). In novelistic terms, this moment makes no sense at all – it violates the internal consistencies of the plot and seems to reduce the complexity of Kip's character to that of a stereotype. However, if we read the patient's story as a morality tale that cautions against the grand inflation of an identity-less utopia, we see that Kip's reaction to the shock of the bombing works to provide the denouement that the quest hero experiences in the romance mode. History intrudes, monstrously, to reinforce the paradox of identity in the patient's tale and, necessarily, dismantles the occult, magical sphere of the Villa.

On hearing of the bomb, Kip rushes into the patient's room, determined to shoot him based on the fact that he is English. When Caravaggio points out that the man before them is in all probability “not English” (285), Kip retorts “American, French, I don't care. When you start bombing the brown races of the world, you're an Englishman” (286). Kip's reaction, in which he suddenly identifies himself (and the Japanese victims of the bomb) among the “brown races” is directly at odds with the historical specificity with which he previously criticizes his brother's pan-Asianism. In his earlier critique, Kip speaks against Japanese hegemony in particular, demonstrating a grounded and differentiated sense of the multiplicities involved in constructing a notion of “Asia”: “Japan is a part of Asia, I say, and the Sikhs have been brutalized by the Japanese in
Malaya” (217). Thus, when Kip shifts from a sense of socio-politically differentiated identification, to a paradigm of East versus West, we have a moment that seems to have no internal coherence with the thematics of the text. It is a moment which makes sense only if read in terms of a particular ironic revision of the myth of hero within the archetype of romance; it is the ironic inversion of the “Grail” of modernity that the burned patient holds out. When Kip chooses to identify himself with the “brown races” of the world, he seems to signal a return to the politics of race based on grossly essential terms. However, he is in fact, enacting a similar erasure of self that the patient has already brought about. Divisive and inchoate as it seems, Kip's identification is based on the comprehension of colonized subjectivity within the new paradigms of modernity. It also signals the end of his flirtation with “eccentric” English fathers, and a return to Lahore, his family, a career as a doctor and his eventual marriage to a local woman of his family's choice.

Kristina Kyser suggests that Kip needs to “see better” and that his vision of self is recalibrated in the moment of the atomic bomb (889). However, I would argue that this cataclysm signals the difficulty of mythical narrative to ameliorate the trauma of the modern moment. Until this moment, Hana and Kip have been fixed in an aesthetic that invokes the sacred. Kip is frequently aligned with the asceticism of saintliness (104) that complements Hana's virginal stewardship of the dying patient (51). Likewise, Hana and Kip's union is narrated in terms of a ritual and suggests a notion of romantic love that borders on the sacred (126-7). Within these terms, Hana and Kip's love story has the
significance of providing the archetypal marriage between various signifying dyads in the text: the marriage of masculine and feminine, self and other, and “white” and “brown” – the external signifiers of a colonial economy of relation. Kip's return to Lahore happens through a sacrifice of the dyad, the sacrifice of love, and his violent rejection of Hana. As Hana struggles to comprehend Kip's sudden transformation, we realize that Kip's “vision” makes him incapable of comprehending her subjectivity, even as he recognizes his own:

“Kip.”

He says nothing, looking through her.

“Kip, it's me. What did we have to do with it?”

He's a stone in front of her. (288)

Kip neither recognizes Hana, nor is he capable of articulating the burden of racialized guilt that he projects onto the “white” races of the world. The moment forcefully outlines the impossibility of sustaining the post-national utopia in the modern moment.

Despite the seeming destruction of Hana and Kip as utopian post-national dyad, the novel ends with a gesture that brings back their communion through the invocation of artifice. *The Patient* concludes in the narration of the “spectral” author-narrator. As Solecki points out, this is a familiar stylistic gesture that characterizes Ondaatje's conclusions: “the books don't end so much as dissolve suggestively back into the author” (Solecki qtd. in Fledderus, 23). When Kip, Hana and Caravaggio return to the specificities of their “renewed” nations, they carry within themselves the story of the English patient as post-national counter-text. Even though the novel does not end in the “sacred marriage” which
should conclude the romance, it is resolved in an aesthetic gesture of union that foregrounds the capacity for narrative to bridge the gap between “self” and “other” in the newly erected boundaries of nations. It is also a metaphoric device more common to poetry that returns the novel into the allegorical mode, creating the spectral presence of the sacred marriage within the specificities of the local, personal sphere:

And so Hana moves and her face turns and in regret she lowers her hair. Her shoulder touches the edge of a cupboard and a glass dislodges. Kirpal's left hand swoops down and catches the dropped fork an inch from the floor and gently passes it into the fingers of his daughter, a wrinkle at the edge of his eyes behind his spectacles. (301-302)

Ondaatje's appears to resolve the problem of modernity in literary terms drawn directly from modernist poetics. Basing his novel on the archetype of romance, he colors his reading of Eliot's Fisher King myth with preoccupations specific to his own vision of the end of the modern age.

Fledderus suggests that Ondaatje's engagement with the mythic (and, I would argue, the modern) arises out of the perceived postmodern moment through which the author writes: “Myth may also be appealing to those whose personal boundaries of identity and ethnicity are being re-drawn as a result of migration, an increasingly visible population in Canada and around the world. Generally speaking, the shifting confusions and complexities of today's postmodern moment offer rough parallels to earlier eras when myth was popular” (23). Perhaps the “in-betweenness” of Ondaatje's position as a
migrant writer who has notoriously eluded various critical markers of nationalized identity, lends itself to a particular engagement with notions of the universal in myth. However, because Ondaatje always returns his mythic vision back to the flux of the authorial voice, he offers it primarily as an aesthetic device that foregrounds the fictionality of his writing. His use of myth is not primarily concerned with locating myth in specific socio-cultural moments. Rather, in keeping with his own definitions of myth, Ondaatje draws on the immediate, archetypal power of myth to transform the chaos of the “real”.

In *The Patient*, the story of the patient germinates within the listeners and takes root in them to create a concept of a fictional community. The story works to bind the characters together in a fictional thread of shared meaning symbolized in the narrator's final gesture of resolution. Binding narrative is also the central premise of the Fisher King myth. Thus, we see that Ondaatje preserves the internal coherence of the Fisher King myth and uses its archetypal foundation as a means to interrogate the idea of nation in the postwar moment. Through the plasticity of his narrative strategies, Ondaatje foregrounds the notion of an imagined community that is bound together by shared narrative within the redefined cultural, social and national limits of the postwar world. It is in this sense that *The Patient* constructs a post-national myth of identity that the community of the Villa San Girolamo carry within themselves even after they return to the “closures” of their own nation states.
7. *The Everest Hotel*
Sealy's central approach to myth underlines the capacity of the postcolonial writer to locate myth, and adapt its ideological force to the specificities of narrating regional histories. Echoing *The Patient*, in *Everest*, this mythical vision narrates the collapse of a world order and simultaneously signals the coming to being of a new age. I will begin by briefly outlining the significant conceptual shifts that Sealy sets in motion against the thematic matrix Ondaatje sets up. Most importantly, while Ondaatje explores the problem of female subjectivity peripherally in relation to the issues of identity, Sealy makes it the central focus of his text, reorienting the myth of the Fisher King to narrate the tremendous quest for selfhood undertaken by a contemporary Indian woman. Sealy explores and interrogates the traditional roles of the contemporary woman as lover and mother, and ultimately reconstructs these relationships outside patriarchal power structures. Sealy reworks the myth of the Fisher King in radical terms, shifting the focus away from the young, male hero to the Grail maiden who nourishes both king and hero. In this revision it is the Grail maiden who nurtures and inherits the secret of the Grail, and it is her story that follows the heroic path – a revolutionary subversion of the patriarchal polemics of the original Grail romance. As I will argue, Sealy's revised myth is exceptionally hopeful in the archetype of womanhood that it reconstructs. Developing the sense of impending environmental chaos, *Everest* draws an apocalyptic vision of a people and place on the cusp of destruction. When Sealy constructs his central heroine as an archetypal image of motherhood that conflates the secular myth of “Mother India” with the sacred iconography of Mary, the mother of Christ, he invokes the feminine principle as the sole possible ameliorating force that rejuvenates the land and its people. Thus,
Sealy revises the mytheme of patriarchal custodianship in the Fisher King myth. This revision is heroic, but tragically so, and requires a feat of selfhood that is mythic in every sense.

If Ondaatje's novel is an essay into the problem of modernity, Sealy's novel is set within his contemporary moment, within the civil insurgencies in the northwest and northeastern frontier regions of India. Sealy's engagement with the question of the modern is not as an era, but as an ideological system that evolved within the flux of post-independence nationalist identity politics in India. For Sealy, the modern necessarily includes the fissured, fractured relationship to notions of community and selfhood that the local subject constructs within rapidly globalized visions of self and other. Likewise, if Ondaatje draws on a sense of modernist poetics and Anglo-American pop culture through the structuring device of jazz, Sealy uses a folk song motif, the Baromasi, that has its roots in pre-medieval India, but has evolved into a contemporary, popular oral tradition that crosses boundaries of religion and caste within the country. Sealy signals the presence of the ancient within the contemporary even in terms of his structural choices.

In Everest, Sealy tells the story of Drummondganj, a small fictional outpost in North East India, where persistent logging and the construction of mega-dams leads to the destruction of the environment and widespread political unrest. In order to amplify the thematics of the novel, Sealy uses the myth of the Fisher King, and the pre-medieval myth of Prince Nachiketa from the Kathopanishad as framing devices that narrate a
morality tale about a hero's quest for selfhood and his/her custodianship of a land and its people. The myth of the Fisher King outlines the relation between the exercise of conscious compassion and the capacity for right governance; the myth of Nachiketa provides a commentary on the individual's search for enlightenment and transcendence from mortality. However, Sealy's use of the Nachiketa myth is deeply ironic and echoes concerns about popular constructions of masculinity via Hindu mythical frames. Sealy's use of the Fisher King and the Nachiketa myths is a study on the notion of custodianship of the “self” in a postcolonial world. The novel can be read as a contemporary allegory on the effect of neo-colonial forms of governance at the national level that lead to issues of destitution and the collapse of social and moral values in marginal communities.

In Sealy's vision, the cyclical structure of the Fisher King myth is framed in the poetic structure of the Bengali folk song tradition, the Baromasi. The Baromasi are songs describing a twelve-month period in which a Virahini, or abandoned woman (in most cases, a wife of a merchant away on business) awaits the return of a lover/husband. Like the polemics of death and rebirth that are central to the Fisher King myth, the Baromasi invoke agrarian cycles to demonstrate the passage of time. While time and the seasons of the natural world may change, the loss and desire of the waiting woman remains the same. The poetics of the Baromasi, which are traditionally set in the voice of a lamenting woman, inflect the patriarchal tenor of the Fisher King and Nachiketa myths with a counterpoint of abjection, leaving us with a sober meditation on the insurmountable subjectivity of the postcolonial Indian woman. While the Baromasi are not myths, they
function as a “femininized” narrative strategy, that subverts the power of the “masculine” myth by exposing the dialectic of subjectivity that is the ideological core of the Fisher King myth. However, in Sealy's novel, this process leads to the construction of a “feminine” myth in which the central character, Ritu, is elevated to the status of Bharat Mata (Mother India). This narrative strategy ultimately fixes the faceted, plural vision of the heroine within a mythical discourse that simultaneously elevates her story to the status of myth while using the socio-political frames of the novel to remind us of the difficulty of her position as abject, whether goddess-like or not.

As mentioned, Sealy draws on the structuring principles of the Baromasi as a way to interrogate and comment on the thematics of Everest; the plot is shaped by the balladic structure of the Baromasi. However, the romance mode of the Fisher King and Nachiketa myths intersects this structure. On one hand, the action of the plot plays on the reader's conception of the medieval romance mode (in both its Hindu and European avatars) and its heroic/chivalric code of action inflects the reader's understanding of the plot. On the other, the novel follows a folk lyric mode and succeeds, to a large extent, in working through the reader's conception of the balladic structure within the narrative. This dialog between folk lyric and romance negotiates the way myth is narrated in the text. By forging this unique marriage of myths from a pre-medieval Hindu Vedantic text with the chivalric romance mode, and by framing both myths within a lyric structure based on oral folk traditions, Sealy sets up a distinctively hybrid sense of form that requires the reader to negotiate the relation between myth and literary inheritance.
Drawing on the metaphor of the waste land that is present in the Fisher King myth, the Everest hotel and the surrounding area of Drummondganj are developed in several microcosmic visions of a world locked in abjection. They symbolize the collective abjection of the marginal within the greater idea of India. The inhabitants of the hotel are the lost and forgotten, people abandoned by their families and forgotten by society. The central protagonist of the novel is Sr. Ritu, a young catholic nun who comes from a tribal background. But, Sealy's cast includes comatose twins, an aging Anglo-Indian nurse, an alcoholic Latvian sailor, an epileptic Goongi, and eventually, a refugee child, Masha, whose past horrors have made her mute. Sealy extends his vision of marginality to the outskirts of Drummondganj where we encounter a leper colony who live a life of destitute alterity within the forests that surround the town. Their lives have been thrown into confusion by the appearance of loggers who threaten to destroy their habitat. Sealy's novel is peopled by characters who are thrown together by circumstances that are outside the concerns of nation and state. Foregrounding a multifaceted sense of hybridity, they are also characters who, despite their very different social, racial and cultural backgrounds, share a tacit understanding that they belong to the community that makes up Drummondganj. Sealy builds a sense of the local that narrates the radically alternative personal histories of the marginal (in this case, people of mixed racial descent, or foreigners who have chosen to remain in the place). Sealy's vision of hybrid community interrogates notions of “Indian-ness” by foregrounding the internal dislocation and socio-cultural alienation of each character.
Developing the idea of the waste land further, Sealy draws on contemporary concerns of the environment in the northern frontier states of India. In the novel, the forests that skirt Drummondganj and cover the foothills of the Himalayas, are systematically destroyed by indiscriminate logging. Barren patches of undergrowth scar the surface of the land and are likened to mange creeping over the skin of a helpless animal (10). As the forests recede, the habitats of hill-dwellers disappear, and environmental calamities, including severe drought, wreak havoc and cause destitution among already impoverished communities. The environment is further ruined by the construction of vast mega-dams that do not provide energy to the people on whose lands the dams are built, but fuel the needs of Delhi – the seat of government and the figurative “center” of India. Set against the stories of Ritu, the inhabitants of the Everest hotel, and the leper colony, are the upheavals that marked the Northeastern and Northwestern states of Uttarakhand and Arunachal Pradesh in India in the late 1980s. Most notably, the novel depicts the struggle for an independent state here dubbed “Varunachal” gesturing to the turbulent past of Arunachal Pradesh, and protests against the largely troubled Tehri Dam that roused the furor of hapless villagers for socio-political and cultural reasons. Sealy conflates the two states, constructing a Drummondganj that highlights the plight of marginalized communities within the project of nation building.

Sealy further stretches the idea of the marginal by including the legendary creature Yeti, 

83 Sealy puns on the name of “Varuna”, god of the sky and water and “Aruna”, or “dawn”, suggesting ironic revisions to the independence struggles depicted in the novel.
who signifies the first, primeval lost man in a changeable world. The inclusion of the Yeti works as a magical realist strategy which highlights the question of radical alterity and the archetypal presence of the old within the new. The presence of Ramapithecus, or Yeti, works as a narrative strategy that interweaves a fantastic or “mythical” creature into the otherwise “realist” events of the novel. It is tempting (and perhaps, productive) to read the character of Ramapithecus as a metaphor through which Sealy further elaborates the themes of loss and a collapsing world order. To read the Yeti figuratively, is to fix the metaphor within a recognizable frame of reference. However, Sealy offers no easy symbolic congruence through the figure of the Yeti. We are ultimately unable to draw on familiar links of meaning between signifier and signified and are left with a core of mystery that cannot be resolved through symbolic means. The Yeti functions as a symbol that cannot entirely be contained within the frame of meaning set up by the themes of the novel, he is a sign for which we have, perhaps, lost meaning. Because of the Yeti’s relationship to Jed (the fisher King figure) and Ritu, he is part of the Grail mystery. However because Sealy offers us no direct frame of reference in which to place the Yeti, he remains a mystery that defies meaning except within the somewhat eccentric, individual symbolic order of each character he encounters. The image of the Yeti is archetypal in that it ultimately leaves us with a symbol for which we can only attach tangential, idiosyncratic meaning. My reading of the Yeti as Grail mystery provides only one of numerous possible frames through which we can read this character.

The underlying narrative mode of Everest, is that of tragic romance. We have two themes
that are meant to mirror each other. The first, is the theme of lost, or blighted love, in which the lovers are separated by circumstances that preclude their eventual coming together, the most conclusive, of course, being death itself. The second theme is that of an environment poised on the cusp of destruction brought on by Man's colossal hubris. In the novel, this theme is developed through commentary on the mega-dam which will flood hundreds of villages and disrupt the fragile ecosystem of the Himalayan foothills. The indiscriminate logging of precious woods sanctioned by local and national authorities further exacerbates the collapse of the environment. Sealy explores narratives of the subaltern through the conflict between the members of a forgotten leper colony (a group so radically liminal that they are written out of caste), and the corrupt loggers who are in the pay of local petty officials. Sealy's interweaving of the themes of lost love and a lost environment mirror the connection between personal story and historic narrative. The individual is part of a collapsing world order that desperately needs reversal. In the face of chaos, even the most insignificant human action can become a catalyst for change.

The two themes of lost love and a lost environment are mirrored in Sealy's reference to the Baromasi and Kalidasas's *Ritusamhara*, which, while linked in terms of thematics, are distinct in one significant aspect: the measurement of time. While the Baromasi measure the wife's lament over the cycle of months, the *Ritusamhara* measures desire, loss and death in terms of the cycle of seasons. “Time” thus, has a figurative presence in both poetic forms, that propels the fundamental thrust of the song/poem cycle forward – the seasons will change, the months will follow their course, and thus, the cycles will be
renewed. However, through the myth of the Fisher King, Sealy suggests that it is precisely “time” that has run out, both for the inhabitants of Drummondganj and the Everest hotel (whose paths more often than not, end in the Ever-rest Cemetery). Sealy frames the collapse of Drummondganj within a commentary on the relationship of modernity to the contemporary project of the nation building in India. Notions such as political autonomy, economic stability and scientific endeavor are couched in ambivalent terms and framed by images of socio-cultural chaos and the collapse of the individual. His answer to the failure of the contemporary nation state involves narrating the story of the Yeti, a story that speaks to notions of custodianship that are nomadic, and predate definitions of the “self” as a participant in the project of nation.84

Sealy's ambivalence to the project of nation building is apparent in the opening chapter of the novel. When Sr. Ritu arrives in the hill station of Drummondganj, insurgent factions have closed the town and its services for a strike. Ritu quickly learns that the people of the area are agitating for the formation of an independent state, “Varunachal”. Ritu eventually discovers that the villagers seek to form a new state in order to gain representation in the governing center, Delhi. Although the cause seems just, the menace of the opening passages suggests that within the political arena, notions of “self” and “other” always exclude those who inhabit the margins. As Ritu, and the party of nuns who have arrived to welcome her, journey back to the convent, their hired vehicle is

84 We may see a similar preoccupation with Ondaatje's “patient”, who is fascinated by the nomadic peoples of the desert. The patient outlines the fallacy of nationalist projects through “pastoral” metaphors that depict the relation between the desert peoples and their environment. Likewise, the Yeti can be read as a metaphor for compassion and right action towards fellow creatures that exists outside the bounds of society and culture.
attacked by strikers who are hostile towards the nuns:

A young man leans into the scooter and whips out a pocket comb. He runs his thumb along the teeth with a pinking sound. Then he studies himself in the rearview [sic] mirror and, with great deliberation, does his hair while passing his eyes over the passengers behind him. His friends snigger, then grow serious. One of them says to no-one in particular, 'Out'. 'Out,' everyone agrees and it becomes a chant. 'Out! Out!' (21)

The strikers believe that the nuns' journey is symptomatic of a lack of sympathy with the local cause. The young man's action bears a subtle sexual innuendo that alerts the nuns to the magnitude of the danger that they are exposed to. The chant also gestures to the local attitude towards the nuns – they are not welcome within the town because they represent a seemingly neo-colonial institution. As Christian, “westernized” women, the nuns represent one end of the spectrum of “otherness” in the town of Drummondanj (the lepers being the other). Unlike Ondaatje, we do not find Sealy's characters outlining positions towards notions such as “nation” or “community”. Rather, brief dramatic passages alert the reader to the position of the indigenous yet “Christianized” subject as outside the Indian imaginary. Failed by “nation” and “community”, such characters necessarily maintain an uneasy co-existence with their environment in which they are “always already” outside the idea of India.

It is significant that Sealy uses a folk lyric to frame the story of Ritu as the indigenous
outsider. As a narrative strategy, this suggests a return to a poetics of identity based on local traditions. Sealy also reworks the Baromasi through a creative adaptation of its classical categories. Because the novel's cast of characters come from radically hybrid backgrounds, their differing cultural backgrounds shape their responses to the central themes of the Baromasi, often causing ironic inversions. As outlined, the Baromasi are songs that describe the separation of lovers over a twelve month period. The Baromasi narrate the seasons through pastoral depictions of the local which also invoke a poetics of desire. Sung primarily in a feminine voice, the Baromasi tend to sublimate the physical desire of the waiting woman into a transcendental “love” for the absent husband/lover that simultaneously reinforces the woman's subject position within the socio-cultural frames of her society and contains her sexuality within the bounds of chastity and piety.

Dušan Zbavitel wrote one of the earliest monographs that provides a brief sketch of the form of the Baromasi:

It [the Baromasi of separation] tells the whole story, covering the whole twelve months, basically in eight verses, retaining, at the same time, even the characteristics of most of the months but in a peculiar way. It divides the twelve months into two categories, characterizing eight of them and reserving the remaining four to speak about the sufferings of the lonely wife. (598)

Sealy follows this structuring principle of eight stanzas by organizing his story in eight chapters. However, instead of using the traditional Indian names of the seasons, Sealy
translates the seasonal divisions into English. We have eight chapters and seasonal divisions depicting Autumn, Winter, Spring and Summer to which Sealy adds the significantly local divisions of the seasons “The Rains” (87) and “Frost Time” (163). The seasons are named in English while simultaneously invoking the seasonal divisions in Hindi.

However, while the seasons are named in English, Sealy introduces the months in Hindi within the first lines of each chapter. For example, the first chapter “Summer” opens with a description of Jeth: “JETH, May-June, is the first gusting of hot winds, the singing of an empty tap, a carpet of hailstones on a withered lawn” (15). Sealy does not provide simple translations of the Hindi. Rather, in keeping with the theme of environmental chaos, his transliterations create brief, heightened depictions of the natural world. Though he draws on the elemental image of the “gusting hot winds”, he also brings in the issues of chronic water shortage and rapidly changing weather systems that cause hail in the middle of summer. Likewise, the “singing water tap” becomes a motif that also figuratively speaks to the absence of the elemental source of life – the Everest hotel is as much wasted from drought as it is from the collective despair of its inhabitants. If we compare Sealy's description of “Jeth” with its “hailstones”, “hot winds” and “withered lawn” (15), to Zbavitel's description of the same season “Jyaishtha” in which “there are sweet fruits” (600), we see that Sealy's portrait of the month narrates the vision of chaos that figuratively invokes the waste land.

85 Sealy chooses to describe the months in Hindi, though the Baromasi is predominantly a Bengali form, and the Bengali names of the months differ slightly from the Hindi.

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Furthermore, when Sealy draws on classical figurative imagery, as in the description of “Kuar” which signals the end of the rains and the fields of ripening rice (135), he does so with an irony that dismantles the classical poetics and demonstrates its limited figurative capacity for characters from differing racial, linguistic and cultural backgrounds:

'Smell the rice?' Major Bakshi asks Miss Sampson, who replies with a paean to wheat. Ritu, breathing in the same air a floor down, remembers a song of her hills:

The rice is ripe
The sickle stone wet,
O my love let the blade
Strike sparks in the night!

Brij comes every day to visit Jed, but Ritu doesn't appear. Down in the walled garden he tests the empty water pump twice, trumpeting like a bereft crane, but she doesn't come there either. (136)

The “ripeness” of the rice fields has a different significance for Major Bakshi than it has for the Anglo-Indian, Rose Sampson. For Ritu, it provokes the memory of folk song which now punctuates her growing desire for the young man, Brijeshwar. As is traditional with the Baromasi, the theme of absence and desire is transfused into the heroine's surroundings and the sense of “ripeness” provides the necessary foil to the barrenness of the waiting lover, Brij. The empty water pump, functioning as a refrain, once more brings out the metaphoric link between the desolation of the land and the thwarted desires of
both Brij and Ritu. The external waste land becomes a metaphor for internal fragmentation and a desiccated sense of desire that sublimates the substance of love into “songs” of desire.

Within the frame of the Fisher King myth, the theme of the waste land suggests the need for consciousness custodianship brought about by the protagonist. However, in the opening chapters of the novel, Sealy introduces the issue of Ritu's custodianship in a very different way. As a nun, the strictures of her order require Ritu to surrender all aspects of custody to her religious community (in this case, the nuns of her order). However, the opening chapter of the novel establishes the fact that Ritu is filled with a custodianship of memory that is specific to her personal history. It is a kind of custodianship that she cannot fully surrender:

> Level crossings touch a chord in Ritu. Her father kept one in the forest. There the gate didn't come down, but swung shut. White, its two red half-discs met when it shut to form a warning sun. The ratchet bell going as you pushed. Their two-room quarter adjoined, with a bed of marigolds at the door and a garden of cockscombs and lady's fingers. A fenced-off grove of mahua trees. The only house with a handpump. Whitewashed not in October, for Diwali, but in December. Christians. (17)

These memories amplify the few possessions she carries, among which are two photographs of her parents and her lost brother. Ritu's sense of custodianship is at odds with the doctrine of poverty practiced by her order. It is a covert psychological defiance
that is immediately noted by her superior, Cecelia. Cecilia observes that Ritu exercises different forms of custodianship in direct opposition to the strictures of her order: “Ritu takes in her surroundings with Frank curiosity: the billboards, the beggars, the soldiers, the weighing machine with the flashing lights. Custody of the eyes, notes Sister Cecelia” (19). This phrase, “Custody of the eyes” is repeated throughout the text in relation to the five senses, and becomes a refrain that punctuates the narrative, as we witness the progression of various custodianships that Ritu refuses to surrender.

The theme of custodianship is also central to the theme of loss encountered in the Baromasi, as the waiting virahini laments the absence of her husband (who is also depicted as master and god) as custodian of her daily life. By introducing this theme as a refrain, Sealy creates an echo of the Baromasi structure in which the “story” of the virahini is punctuated by the refrain of longing. However, he revises the character of the virahini by making her seek custodianship of the self (rather than of the beloved). Unlike the traditional virahini, Ritu inhabits the role of the waiting woman but effects a significant revision in that she ultimately seeks freedom and agency when she claims a future for herself that is outside the bounds of the church as well as the conventional “marriage” that a union with her lover would signify. The theme of custodianship that is central to both the Fisher King myth, and the Baromasi, forms a common thematic thread between both forms, intersecting and complementing the issues of identity formation and the construction of selfhood in the contemporary nation.
It is significant that Sealy frames Ritu's quest for selfhood within the myth of the Fisher King. Written at a time when the question of Christian conversion was becoming a fierce debate within the growing dialectic of right wing Hindu nationalism, a character like Ritu provokes the difficulties of “locating” a Tribal Christian woman within notions of the contemporary Indian female subject. The symbiotic conflation of symbols of femininity with “land” is a trope that goes back to the dawn of colonialism and has demonstrated a surprising tenacity in the symbolic systems of independence politics and the construction of nationhood from the rallying cry of *Vande Mataram* onwards. Sealy is quick to demonstrate the awkward position that a Christian woman, particularly a nun, holds in the consciousness of the indigenous people by token of her more seemingly “westernized” appearance. As nuns who wear habits that “actually shows their legs”, Ritu and her fellow nuns fall outside the familiar images of the indigenized Indian woman (158). Sealy constructs a female subject who is outside the vision of selfhood constructed in the nationalist imaginary. Therefore, in its invocation of difficult hybridities, Ritu's story brings about a transformation of the myth of the Indian woman as indigenous and nationalized. However, although Sealy constructs Ritu as a *Bharat Mata* figure while simultaneously invoking the Christian iconography of Mary, her consciousness of tragic

86 Although the judiciary system in India upholds the right of citizens to convert and to practice their various faiths, harassment and discrimination against Christians is still a widespread phenomenon in certain states. As an entry in the *World Christian Encyclopedia* suggests, “in the Subansiri District of Arunachel Pradesh in northeast India, Christians have experienced severe harassment at the hands of anti-Christian elements since 1971, including the burning of churches and dwellings. A team of OM missionaries were attacked by Hindu militants in Orissa in 1992; 6 workers were severely beaten”(365). Sealy's engagement with the question is thus, extremely topical, more so since Ritu belongs to a missionary order that attempts, and fails, to convert the underprivileged in the fictional Drummondganj and Varunachal.

87 The song, *Vande Mataram*, was composed by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay in 1876. It became the rallying cry of the early independence movement. However, it has since become the site of controversy over its primarily Hindu frame of reference – India constructed as the divine mother and the goddess Durga.
subjectivity and her powerlessness in the face of the more pervasive ideological systems temper our ability to read her as a mythic figure. Thus, while Sealy invokes an archetype in Ritu, he also subjects its power to the specificities of Ritu's quest for selfhood (which is also essentially Christian in its moral form) within the Indian context.

Sealy's Fisher King figure, Emmanuel Jed, is characterized by his irascibility, and seldom draws real sympathy from the reader. By constructing Jed as the wounded King who keeps court in the Everest Hotel (which is also a convent), Sealy invokes the archetypal image of the Fisher King, if only to systematically dismantle it through irony and inversion. As a collector in the first half of the twentieth century, Jed is a colonial lackey, whose intellect has been put to the purpose of filling in the blanks in a colonial knowledge system still busy cataloging the natural world of British Dominion. Jed's passion for collecting demonstrates an obsession with the exotic: “You could walk along a snowmelt [sic] stream and see fifty kinds of primula. Top of the rise and there was an acre of poppies. Mind you, we were looking for freaks: grey poppies, green cyclamen, black cosmos. The great age of collecting was over, the blue poppy was a catalogue number” (177). However, Jed “collects” more than rare flora, and at the beginning of the novel he awaits his death while suffering hallucinations brought on by advanced syphilis. Jed's “wound” is the syphilis which he “collects” from the hill women on one of his many missions (178). Echoing The Patient, Jed's wound, like the patient's, is the outward sign of the “sin” of adultery.88

88 This echoes Wolfram's Parzival where the sin of the Fisher King, Anfortas, is of a sexual nature.
Jed's transgression outlines his fundamental lack of understanding of the nature of relationship – he collects women as if they were fascinating specimens. As such, his “collection” echoes the fundamentally colonial frame of his actions – women, like rare flora, are to be collected and cataloged without any attempt at mature relationship. Jed's “wound” is, fundamentally, a transgression against the feminine, and in this case, there is a strong suggestion that it is a transgression against the indigenous feminine. Jed's conquests are largely within remote village communities where, in his words, the “villages are full of rhododendrons and syphilis” (178). His sexual abstention with his wife (who is his one “true” love) alerts us to the curious rites of purity that his colonial frame admits – he will not endanger her with his taint, though he's quite cavalier with the village women he beds at every station. The issue becomes more complex in the implicit cordon sanitaire Jed constructs around the beloved, and in this case, Anglo-Indian woman. Ritu, who bears a synchronistic physical resemblance to Jed's dead wife, is a tribal woman. Thus, in keeping with the internal consistencies of the Grail myth, Jed's atonement should lie in her hands.

Jed, as the Fisher King figure, is also the keeper of the Grail. At first glance, Jed's almost militant secularism works against this reading. Likewise, we would assume that Jed's mystery is his wound – the physical and psychological decay brought on by syphilis. However, over the course of the novel we discover that Jed bears a strange tale – a tale of salvation. Jed's tale is of the Yeti, who has, until this point, been a strange, spectral figure appearing at the margins of the text. Jed is the sole witness who can corroborate the Yeti's
presence. Jed encounters the Yeti during a tracking accident in the Himalayas. Waking from a deadly faint, Jed believes himself close to death, only to find that he is in a cave, covered in herbs and leaves that protect him from hypothermia. At the foot of the cave is the Yeti, his apparent benefactor (197). Jed's encounter with the Yeti works at many levels: It signals the Yeti's uncanny, primeval benevolence, and Jed's position as the keeper of the Yeti's mystery. In its archetypal sense, this simple story reflects the central theme of the novel – the ability of right action (that is also developed organically through lived knowledge of the environment) to save life. In keeping with the polemics of the Fisher King myth, we expect that Jed will eventually narrate this story either to Brij (as Perceval) or to Ritu. However, Sealy steers us away from such simple conclusions. Brij inherits many of Jed's stories, but not this particular tale. Ritu never hears Jed's story, and thus, his story never lives within her in the way the English patient's story inhabits his listeners.

When Jed adopts Brij as his “spiritual heir”, he also “gifts” Brij a particular relationship to his-story (echoing the Fisher King's relationship to Perceval). Brij is first introduced within the frame of the wise simpleton, and seems to epitomize the characteristics of Perceval in his uncomplicated heroism and confused inarticulacy. However, Sealy dismantles an archetypal reading of Brij as Perceval by demonstrating that he is not capable of the consciousness required to bring about the transformation of the waste land. Sealy also frames the relationship between Jed and Brij within the myth of Prince Nachiketa's descent into the realm of Yama (Lord of Death). Jed and Brij self-
mythologize themselves as Yamaraja and Nachiketa, mostly to comic purpose. In the following passage Sealy uses comic anticlimax to suggest that the myth has lost its potency and functions more as a pseudo philosophy that enables Brij to perpetuate a self-exoticizing fantasy. Thus, when Ritu questions Brij about the story he provides her with the following explanation:

'Nachiketa was a prince who went to meet the God of Death' ...
'The god was away, so for three nights Nachiketa waited, fasting. When Yama returned he was impressed, so he granted Nachiketa three boons. First Nachiketa asked for forgiveness, then for the way to heaven, and Yama granted both boons. The third boon was the secret of death. What comes after life? Yama said 'Ask for immortality instead. Ask for jewels, for heavenly women.' But Nachiketa was determined. So Yama told him the secret.'

'Which was?' Because Brij appears to have finished his story.
'There is no death. The soul doesn't die.' It doesn't sound convincing, so he soldiers on. 'If you free yourself of all attachments on earth you put an end to the cycle of reincarnation and gain eternal life.'

'Oh.' She feels let down, too. Always this sense of disappointment. You're led to the brink of special insight and then -words. (71)

Portraying themselves as Yama and Nachiketa, Jed and Brij indulge the complacent inflation of their personal egoisms within the Hindu myth of quest for transcendental truth. As a modern-day incarnation of Nachiketa, Brij is anything but wise, and his
knowledge of esoteric sacred texts arises primarily from a desire to transcend his meager social circumstances. Characterized by his muscular inarticulacy, Brij, despite his evidently non-violent demeanor, is a self professed radical and a permanent fixture at local strikes and rallies. He claims to have a passionate desire to seek justice for his people and champions the agitations against the construction of the mega-dam which has submerged the lands of his ancestral home. Brij's activism is sophomoric and ill-executed and parallels the confusion and misapprehension that dogs his love for Ritu. Sealy's treatment of Brij is a rather simple inversion of the Nachiketa myth and functions as an ironic commentary on myths of masculinity and the tragic misdirection of heroism within current socio-political contexts. Brij's self-mythologization is part of the narrative that he inherits from Jed, and is tinged with Jed's central problem – a pathological inability to nourish and sustain a relationship to the feminine. It is characteristic that Jed's and Brij's “myth” makes no sense to Ritu – it is a myth without the power of persuasion, an empty archetype whose “words” are hollow and cannot lend form to the chaotic contingencies of her perceived reality.

As Jed continues to misidentify Ritu within his fantasies as the beloved and unattainable object of sexual desire, he fixes her within a frame of subjectivity to which she does not belong. His “heir” Brij, is trapped within similar misunderstandings of Ritu, and is unable to articulate or consummate the marriage that should proceed from their “romance”. Inheriting Jed's cavalier attitude to women, Brij eventually replaces his desire for Ritu with a fascination for a young German visitor, Inge, whose proximity to the “West”
renders her the ideal object of exotic desire for Brij. Significantly, Brij's relationship with Inge is based on several layers of mutual exotification reminiscent of what Dipankar Gupta calls the tendency to “westoxification” within the Indian elite and middle class.  

This kind of union is the direct antithesis of the hopeful vision of hybridity that he sustains in relation to Ritu. Inge, as a neo-Nazi, recalls the specter of perverse modernism. Her violence and inability to relate herself to her surroundings in Drummondganj lead to her early death, and the contaminated myth of heroism that she inspires in Brij. Significantly, it is to Inge that Jed, in search of sexual favor, reveals the mystery of the Yeti. Likewise, his plea that she learn to “Live. Love” (201), which should be the transformative core of the Fisher King myth, falls on deaf ears. In keeping with the myth, when the mystery is “lost” to Inge, we know that the land will revert to a waste land, and the lives of the people will fall to further ruin. The transformative potency of the Yeti's action ceases to engender potential meaning for the right listener.

Sealy brings the reader within the immediacy of myth in a manner similar to Ondaatje's imagistic revisionings of myth. However, Ondaatje does not provoke the fantastic in his retellings of myth. When Sealy introduces the fantastic, through the Yeti, he does so in brief narrative strokes that are almost tangential. The Yeti hovers on the edge of story and we can read him either as an interesting anecdote narrated by Jed, or we can trace his

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90 Inge's excesses are problematic, and Sealy never really resolves the issue of her terrifying otherness. The theme of innocent bestiality in an adolescent or young adult is one that we encounter for the first time in Everest. It appears subsequently in The Brainfever Bird (2003) and Red (2006). In each case, the character is a young adult going through adolescence whose actions provoke Sophoclean consequences. Unfortunately, a full study of this particular characterization in Sealy's work is beyond the scope of the present study.
spectral presence within the plot and analyze its influence on Ritu's quest. Because of the realist mode of narration, and the absence of the fantastic, we are caught off guard by the introduction of the Yeti. The hesitation we experience in our reading of the Yeti destabilizes the construction of meaning in relation to metaphor. The Yeti is, quite simply, there, and we don't really know what to make of him. Sealy constructs the Yeti within the bounds of magical realism in order to mobilize the archetypal potential that he carries. The Yeti's ability to “appear” across time, and outside the strictures of the Fisher King or Nachiketa myths, suggests a numinous intervention that functions outside the logic of the central myths in the text. The Yeti becomes a narrative strategy that mobilizes the persuasive power of archetype that was stripped away in Sealy's earlier configurations of myth.

Because Ritu does not inherit the “story” of the dying king, her “quest” for selfhood is constructed through her relationship to the radically marginal within the limits of Drummondganj. Ritu's transformation happens when she urges the leper community among whom she does missionary work to Chipko against loggers who come to destroy their forests. By urging Chipko she brings the colony into a tradition of activism within the place (Uttarakhand) that inspires them to claim agency for themselves from within the margins. Unlike Brij, Ritu's activism seems to arise organically out of her lived interaction with the land and its people. Sealy thus sets up the dichotomy between planned political activism, and the unplanned emergence of grass-roots activism. Ritu's

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As legend, the Yeti also functions as a narrative that is local to the folk tradition of Nepal. See *Folk Tales of Yeti and Sherpa*. However, the Yeti also draws on visions of the primeval man as a universal mytheme (as Big Foot or Sasquatch, for example) within other mythical traditions.
activism eventually leads to her own “saving” encounter with the Yeti which enables her to guess the secret of his primordial humanism without the intervention or inheritance of Jed's prior narrative. When Ritu is attacked by a thug for her involvement with the Chipko-ing leper colony, a “long, simian cry” rings out through the forest, startling her attacker, and saving her life (285). Once again, Sealy significantly revises the Fisher King myth, causing the mystery to reveal itself spontaneously to the new hero through action rather than narrative. Sealy sets up an important inversion where the central “heroic” character encounters the living myth without the mediating force of narrative. In this moment, Ritu is truly “outside” the narrative frame of the Fisher King myth, and thus, outside the inheritances of Jed's colonial narratives.

However, when he constructs Ritu as “nourisher” within a political and spiritual context, Sealy also fixes her within the *Bharat Mata* image. Ritu, as “mother India” steps in to mobilize the downtrodden and the truly liminal. Constructed outside narrowly nationalistic terms, Sealy's radical revision of the *Bharat Mata* image is both archetypal and political. This shift in the narrative is problematic at many levels, not least because the very question of selfhood (and the capacity to claim female subjectivity) which is at the core of Ritu's story, runs the risk of being constructed within the gendered, archetypal role of motherhood. And Ritu's “virginal” motherhood paradoxically invokes notions of purity and chastity that are also built on the failure of her quest for a vision of self as “lover” and “wife”. This archetypal image of Ritu as *Bharat Mata* is further reinforced when she adopts a refugee child whom she names Masha. Masha's traumatic history is
coded in her muteness, bearing witness to the horrifying fractures of primary social
groups in the divisive politics of communal violence. Significantly, Masha's muteness is
washed away in the most iconic of local metaphors that Sealy could draw on – the
seasonal Monsoon (268). Masha signals the future in more senses than one, and her
capacity to find healing through the elemental cycle of the land is once more a powerful
revision of the thematics of the Fisher King myth – it is an autochthonous vision in which
cycles of the land wash away the trauma of history in the child, (who may also be read as
a symbol of the Grail). Such a revision entirely changes the dialectics of the myth in
which the land is rejuvenated by the right action of the hero. It also revises the poetics of
the Baromasi with the attendant structure of the woman whose waiting is immune to
cyclical change. When Masha begins to speak, she unlocks Ritu's capacity to envision
herself within the role of mother, and it is in this role that she is capable of moving
beyond the tragedy of the eventual loss of her lover, Brij.

When Ritu decides to adopt Masha, she leaves behind the trappings of her vocation and
enters the secular world. Likewise, she leaves behind both the radically hybrid
community of the Everest Hotel, and the radically liminal community of the lepers, and
begins a journey into the unknown. The struggle to adopt Masha, her traumatic loss of
Brij, and her final isolation from the comfort of the Catholic order, suggest that her return
to a secular world is marked by the consciousness of isolated subjectivity that is set in
apposition to the comforts of community. Ritu has no community to return to. As such,
Ritu's story is about a sense of individual heroism that demonstrates the struggle for self-
hood that a woman, stripped of the props of religion and community must face. However, the final dyad of mother and child that concludes the novel reinforces the idea of Ritu as the archetypal mother. Constructed within a paradigm that links her emergent consciousness of subjectivity to the child, and by extension, to the land, Ritu becomes the embodied archetype of the indigenous woman as India. But Sealy accomplishes this by secularizing the nationalist thrust of the *Bharat Mata* motif and fixing it within a vision of nurturing land/woman as hybrid, nomadic and marginal.

Sealy's vision of the heroic woman hinges on an engagement with the problem of constructing identity within the flux of Indian modernity. Sealy's characterization of Ritu is also radically different from the dialectics of tradition and modernity set up by writers who preceded him. Unlike Narayan or Rao, Sealy's vision calls for a critical revaluation of the notion of community sustained by what Dipankar Gupta calls root metaphors.92 Sealy pushes his heroine into a situation where such metaphors, and the myths in which they are found, have been emptied of their transformative power, and become, simply, “words” (71). Ritu cannot belong to the communities that surround her because, at a fundamental level, their narratives exclude her. She requires a narrative that is capable of addressing the specificities of her subjective recognition of self as woman, mother, tribal, hybrid and “other”. Our last image of Ritu is set, significantly, within the great Indian metaphor of modernity – the train. This is an image that carries a symbolic history of the relation between colonial and neo-colonial myths of economic progress and the grand illusion of mobility.

92 See Gupta, 44—48.
While Partha Chatterjee has provided us with several scathing critiques of the question of modernity within the Indian context, in “Our Modernity”, he offers a defining vision that attempts to negotiate the distance between tradition and modernity. Chatterjee defines his sense of the modern based on a metaphor of an eye painted on a boat that is yet capable of witnessing the passing of an age. The eye figuratively weeps from a sense of attachment to what must necessarily change. Following this metaphor, Chatterjee suggests that Indian modernity is based on the paradoxical ability of historical consciousness to bear witness and provoke the desire for change: “This sense of attachment is the driving force of our [Indian] modernity. We would be unjust to ourselves if we think of it as backward-looking, as a sign of resistance to change. On the contrary, it is our attachment to the past that gives birth to the feeling that the present needs to be changed, that it is our task to change it” (210). By encoding the notion of attachment into a vision of Indian modernity, Chatterjee provides us with a framework from which the newly envisioned subject incarnates the problem of modernity within a dialectic of desire – the modern is simultaneously the inherited boundary of tradition and the capacity for the individual to claim subjectivity and agency through desire. This sense of modernity is particularly resonant within a reading of Sealy's Ritu who is characterized by her drive to resolve the tension between her various notions of custodianship, and her inability to remain within the configurations of identity to which she is bound.

93 Chatterjee quotes this passage from Kamal Kumar Majumdar's novel Antarjali Yatra.
8. Conclusion
When Michael Ondaatje invokes the myth of the Fisher King in *The Patient*, he foregrounds the myth's insistence on the transformative power of story to provide healing both for the individual and the collective. Ondaatje's insistence on the capacity of "storying" to interrogate and contain the chaos of the modern moment is present in all his novels to varying degree, but is most pronounced in *The Patient*. It is only through the transmission of story, the poetry of language that functions outside the boundaries of meaning, and the narrator's capacity to bring about the sacred union of opposites, that myth reworks the denuded categories of meaning. Ondaatje's discomfort with the project of nation building prompts his assertion of a hopeful hybridity which mobilizes the notion of a global imaginary. The dissemination of "story" in *The Patient* engenders meaningful revisions of the original notion of community in the hybrid space that his characters inhabit even after they return to postwar Canada and, eventually, post-independence India. The relationship of the patient's story to myth functions as a narrative that defines and sustains the idea of the post-national community that gathered in the Villa San Girolamo. It functions as an "imaginary homeland" that will continue to warn of the perils of the nationalist imaginary while celebrating the possible potential of cohabital difference.

*Everest* on the other hand, does not end with the sacred marriage, even in figurative terms. Thus, both heroes do not unite to form a dyad of radical potential that lifts the community of Drummondganj out of chaos. Unlike Ondaatje, by the end of the novel, Sealy's mode of narration has shifted from romance to tragedy. For Ritu and Brij, the
recognition of self-hood is the realization of a profound struggle for agency that ends in their inability to belong to the community of Drummondganj. We might say that the social waste land of both characters proves too formidable a force to redeem. Sealy's treatment of the Fisher King myth is profoundly ironic. Like Eliot's despair at the decay of a European world order in *The Waste Land*, Sealy's mythic vision is based on the premise that there is an ideal marriage, an ideal community, ideal city and ideal nation, but, these are ideals that cannot exist even in a utopia of the literary imagination. The myth of Prince Nachiketa resonates in and against the myth of the Fisher King, creating the illusion of the figurative meeting and marriage of “East” and “West”. However, the action of the plot deflates and deconstructs any happy conjunction that could occur between these two narrative traditions. Sealy's use of tragic irony creates a commentary on two foundational myths of community, suggesting that within the socio-political realities of marginal states like “Varunachal” redeeming visions of community are fundamentally impossible.

As *Everest* opens and closes we see the image of hill women journeying with bundles of firewood, their conversations outlining the absence of their menfolk and their continuing struggle for survival epitomized by the bundles of twigs which must provide food and brief warmth for their young. Ritu's first and last visions as she enters and leaves Drummondganj, are of these women, and their eternal journey. As she flees the chaos of Drummondganj, she blindly embraces Masha saying, “my love, my dear love”(330). We are unsure whether her words refer to the lost Brij, or to the child in her arms whose
future as a woman appears as bleak as her own. Ultimately, Sealy encodes his particular vision of archetypal womanhood within a dialectic of despair. Ritu's story is a tragedy, and as such, it works to build *anagnorisis* and *catharsis* within the reader. Sealy's Ritu is a woman whose act of claiming selfhood involves a Sisyphian struggle for articulation that is mythic and tragic at the same time. What Sealy constructs, therefore, is a mythic reading of the feminine in contemporary terms, which, in turn, he links to questions of custodianship and right governance of the land.

The figurative link between woman and land is familiar to all scholars of colonial and postcolonial literature. And, without doubt, in Sealy's vision, the waiting, toiling woman is, figuratively, also India. Sealy's vision is an example of the vision of the postcolonial female subject as tragic, saving hero. Several other fictional examples of the tragic female subject are roughly contemporaneous to *Everest* suggesting a shared preoccupation among author's from South Asia, and the South Asian diaspora with this particular mytheme. Arundati Roy's Rahel, in *The God of Small Things* (1997), Ondaatje's Anil in *Anil's Ghost* (2000) or Amitav Ghosh's Piya in *The Hungry Tide* (2005) are all novels that have tragic, female protagonists that bring about revolution through individual action. What we see, therefore is the resurrection of a powerful and troubling archetype in which woman, once more, is the site of social and political allegory. To be sure, these constructions of heroic women also stand as metaphors for the hopeful reclamation of selfhood. But, as in any narrative that invokes archetype, we have to ask...
whether such notions of womanhood can ever transcend their figurative bounds and speak with the transformative power that myth mobilizes?

What tempers Sealy’s mythical vision is his insistence on the capacity of the mythical moment to renew and adapt itself to the changing needs of each contemporary moment. The story of the Yeti repeats and returns, not merely as “story”, but in the actual occurrence of the mythical act. By incarnating the figure of the Yeti cyclically, in the story of Jed, and then again, in the story of Ritu, Sealy uses the magical realist moment to bend the power dynamics inherent in the transmission of myth. If the transformative power of myth is no longer the charge of Jed, the syphilitic father and “king”, its power is no longer contained in the patriarchal voice of authority. However, by making Ritu the new keeper of the myth, Sealy does not go so far as to demonstrate what she in turn, will accomplish through conscious negotiation of its power. Rather, he suggests that the narrative that she will bequeath to her “daughter” Masha, will be tempered with a consciousness of tragic subjectivity that subverts any possible elevation of the self into mythic terms or space. Thus, while we may identify Ritu as the archetypal mother of the nation (or virgin mother of the next messiah), the weight of her personal journey leaves us fractured and dislocated and precludes any reading of her story as a myth that defines or sustains a notion of community. Sealy thus provides us with a highly nuanced reading of the function of myth which demonstrates the difficulty, and paradoxical necessity, of forming mythical congruence within the minutiae of lived postcolonial reality.
By reading the function of myth in *Everest* in counterpoint with *The Patient*, I hope to demonstrate that we cannot construct generalized categories of meaning in relation to myth. Even though Ondaatje and Sealy can both be read as “South Asian” writers, this essay demonstrates the striking differences in approach and tenor in their respective constructions of the Fisher King myth. Furthermore, if we place this reading of *The Patient* and *Everest*, beside the mythical projects of Alfred Yuson's *The Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café* and Wilson Harris's *Jonestown*, we are forced to acknowledge an even greater variance in the way myth is invoked to construct alternative narratives around notions of “nation” and “community”. While Yuson playfully does away with the notion of archetype and demonstrates its ideological power within twentieth-century constructions of the “mythical” Filipino, Harris self-consciously invokes the plural significations of archetype to set forward his own reading of the surreal as radically a-political historic fiction. Thus, sharing an archetypal foundation does not necessarily guarantee shared ideological frames. Rather, the specificities of location intimately define the sense of a mythical imaginary in each writer's vision. Reading with an awareness of the function of myth thus encourages nuanced cross-cultural negotiations of the problem of ideology in each text. Far from providing metanarratives on the postcolonial experience, the presence of myth can signal plural, polyphonic negotiations of categories of meaning such as “nation” or “community” and demonstrate the capacity for dialogue and interplay between authors and texts that speak, once more, to the vast multivocality of the postcolonial novel. Reading myth thus involves us in a critical conversation between text and cultural space that expands and enriches our understanding of the
postcolonial imaginary. It also demands that we move beyond a sense of the mythical that is bound by homogeneous notions of racialized narrative to one that encompasses the differentiated hybridities of writers like Allan Sealy and Michael Ondaatje.
IV  The Ideology of Archetype: Mythical Strategies in
Wilson Harris's *Jonestown*

1. Introduction

Wilson Harris's *Jonestown* (1996) was born out of the author's attempt to read the holocaust of the People's Temple in Jonestown, Guyana (1978), as a hieroglyph of death that resonated against narratives of sacrifice depicted in the ritual art of pre-Columbian cities such as Tikal, Bonampak, Palenque and Chichen Itzá. Concerned with the permeability of time and space, Harris constructs his novel as a dream book that simultaneously explores the past as present and vice versa. Reading the events of the People's Temple as a palimpsestic narrative on the disappearance of entire peoples, Harris employs several myths of the region as framing devices that interrogate the story of the People's Temple via archetypal images. For Harris, the units of meaning in myth are archetypal and invoke notions of the numinous that elevate narrative from secular speech to the realm of sacred, oracular pronouncements. The function of myth in *Jonestown* provides a meditation on the rehearsal of trauma through storytelling that suggests an eventual expiation and conscious release for the colonized psyche. Harris sets the Christian myth of salvation in counterpoint to key Indo-Guyanese, Afro-Guyanese and pre-Columbian mythical narratives. Focusing on the archetypal nature of these myths, Harris invokes their images as prophetic forms that transgress beyond the frames of realist narrative. I argue that by stripping away the differentiating categories in myth, and by foregrounding a sense of numinous prophecy, Harris paradoxically exposes the difficult negotiation with ideology that is inextricably bound to his project of narrating
Harris bases the novel loosely on the events that happened in Jonestown, Guyana on November 18th 1978, when 918 followers of the People's Temple founded by Rev. Jim Jones committed mass suicide or were murdered by Jones' hired militia. Significantly, the members of Jones's community were predominantly from African-American backgrounds. Harris's reading of the events at Jonestown as a universal metaphor for colonial and imperial consumption glosses over this fact and suggests, rather, that the victims of the Jonestown massacre were local. Harris makes his narrator a Guyanese man whose psychological return to the traumatic events of Jonestown becomes a meditation on the figure of New World conquest from the pre-Columbian world to the present. Harris suggests that narrating the Caribbean involves a process of “re-mythification” that addresses the psychological erasure of the indigenous imagination through the trauma of colonization. Harris's narrator and hero, Bone, suggests that the layering of time and space is a way to address the “haunting” sense of collective amnesia, here symbolized by his uncanny inability to remember his participation in the events of Jonestown. In his words: “the mixed peoples of African or Indian or European or Chinese descent who live in modern Guyana today are related to the Aboriginal ghosts of the past... if not by strict, biological kinship then by ties to the spectre of erosion of community and place which haunts the Central and South Americas” (7). Bone's amnesia describes the Guyanese subject's inability to “re-member” the unconscious tapestry of kinship that links the contemporary world to its pre-colonial past. Harris explores myth through the narration
of a dream text that functions as an oracle that resonates against this “haunting” amnesia. As oracle, it also revises categories of meaning through renegotiation of key archetypes. Drawing on the notion of archetype as “a form shorn of violence in its intercourse with reality” Harris's narrator suggests that the negotiation of archetype involves a “reach” of the human imagination that transcends the closures of communal frames (8). Thus, he lifts the events of Jonestown out of the specificities of their socio-cultural and historical frames and places them within a dream-space in which American and Guyanese (and their mythical ancestors) are linked in perpetual symbiosis.

In “History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas” Harris suggests that “primitive manifestation” is the epic stratagem available to the “Caribbean man” (25). Harris's mythical project hinges on this recapitulation of projected notions of the “primitive” indigenous imagination. Narrating the Caribbean experience thus involves a constant revisioning of mythical strategies that define cultural and communal categories of meaning. For Harris, such revisions also explore subtly complicit constructions of “self” and “other” in colonial and imperial projects. While the notion of an inherent duality in myth can create narratives that deconstruct the unifying categories of realism, in Harris's fiction, such visions of mythic dualism and interdependency also create subtle narrative maneuvers that privilege certain myths over others. This sense of internal hierarchy in the novel's mythical narratives is based on affective responses elicited through the author's evocation of certain universal humanist ethical codes. The narrative encourages and directs our emotional and sympathetic responses to the myths in the text.
via Harris's notions of a common, “human” moral impulse.

Harris mobilizes the Christ myth against the myths of Anancy and Kali to narrate a “dream” history of the events that occurred in the Jonestown massacre. Harris intuitively frames the image of the Christ-hero figure within the Mayan myth of savior heroes. While Harris claims that he was unaware of the Mayan *Popol Vuh*, Bone's story bears striking structural and figurative resonances with the myths of the divine twins, Hunahpu and Xbalenque, as outlined in the ancient text. By framing the narrative trajectory of the central heroic figure, Bone, within the Christ myth and the myth of the divine twins, Harris invokes a narrative of ritual sacrifice in which the central hero must take on the role of the *pharmakos*. Likewise, in keeping with the frames of the Christian and pre-Columbian myths, the *pharmakos* is judged and slain by a community who believe in the purification of the ritual sacrifice. In *Jonestown*, Harris constructs this “community” as the indigenous forest dwellers of Mount Roraima, Guyana. Even though Harris claims a revisionist stance in his mythical projects in *Jonestown*, ultimately, his mobilization of the hero archetype leads to the somewhat problematic configuration of the “native” as bound to a benighted, superstitious wheel of belief that perpetuates the tragic ritual sacrifice of the hero without the resulting force of communion between *pharmakos* and society that is present in both the Christian and Mayan myths.

This problematic vision of the indigenous subject leads to the critical response encapsulated by Samuel Durrant when he claims that Harris's texts work as the “hosts” or
ritual morsels that transubstantiate collective historical amnesia. In Durrant's reading, Harris's construction of myth and history speaks in place of the indigenous myth. The kind of critical approach that Durrant espouses is in keeping with the salient criticism on Harris's work. With the exception of a few early denouncers, Harris has, by and large, garnered an eager following due to his particular method of narrating the Caribbean imaginary via archetype and myth. For example, an otherwise sharp critical voice like Kamau Brathwaite claims that Harris is the “one true MR [magical realist] revo [revolutionary]” (26), a claim born out of an almost mystical reverence for Harris's narrative experimentation that is echoed throughout the vast body of criticism on Harris's fiction and essays. The notion that Harris is the “one true revolutionary” of the Caribbean imagination is problematic because it does not foster a truly critical engagement with the ideological implications that arise in his employment of myth. Likewise, this vein of criticism continues to foster the primacy of the author's vision as oracular and shamanic, a tendency that preempts any rational critical frame that reads the text as no more (or less) than a work of fiction. Harris's use of myth provides an interesting glimpse at the way the employment of myths, and the archetypal images they contain, become powerful affective narrative strategies that can blind and bind the reader within fixed currencies of meaning even when the author claims a radical opposition to notions of containment in myth.

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95 See Durrant, “Hosting History: Wilson Harris's Sacramental Narratives.”
96 For example, in “Tradition and the West Indian Novel”, Harris draws on the metaphor of alchemy as symbolic of the melding of cultural narratives that speaks against hermetic significations of the idea of Caribbeanness (32-33). Harris, “Tradition and the West Indian Novel” hereafter referred to as “Tradition”. 193
2. Contemporary Caribbean Literature and Harris's Mythical project

I begin by situating Harris's mythical project within the larger body of Caribbean Anglophone literature that employs myth as a narrative strategy. It has been argued that Harris writes out of a tradition of a New World magical realist imaginary that hearkens back to Alejo Carpentier's *Los Pasos Perdidos* (1953). Although Harris himself never espoused the term “magical realism”, it has routinely been used to describe his work by fellow writers and critics.\(^\text{97}\) The tendency to read Harris via critical practices applied to New World magical realism was reinforced by the contemporaneous explosion of magical realist writing that emerged from Latin America during the mid-twentieth century. This approach to reading myth through magical realist frames remains a central influence in the development of a critical vocabulary around myth in literature and is present in discursive explorations such as Brathwaite and Timothy Reiss's *Sisyphus and El Dorado* (1996) which define the function of magical realist writing in the Caribbean. Writing on Harris's place within this magical realist ouvre, Michael Dash suggests that magical realist writers “turned to myths, legends and superstitions of the folk in order to isolate traces of a complex culture of survival which was the response of the dominated to their oppressors” (66). Dash reads Harris's use of myth via the strategies of recuperation that are characteristic of New World magical or marvelous realism. Harris's specific approach to myth is subsumed under the larger theoretical and conceptual frame of Latin American magical realism (which has a separate and distinct linguistic and cultural trajectory).\(^\text{98}\) This points to a method of reading in which magical realism

\(^{97}\) For examples, see Kamau Brathwaite “MR” (26); David Mikics' discussion of Harris in “Derek Walcott and Alejo Carpentier” (4); and Selwyn Cudjoe's *Resistance and Caribbean Literature* (255-257).

\(^{98}\) We might read a similar preoccupation with the relation of myth to issues of cultural recuperation in both writers. For example, when Harris claims that “primitive manifestation” is the epic stratagem of
becomes a unifying mode of analysis applied to indigenous myth, folklore and legend. It is in this vein that David Mikics suggests that the “lucid fantasia that the magical realist mode offers is not an aesthete's intoxicant: magical realism appeals to Caribbean writers because it addresses the weight of historical memory that survives in the day to day life of the West Indies” (373). While Mikics claims that magical realism transcends the purely aesthetic realm, he does not address the difficulties that arise when indigenous mythical narratives are re-appropriated via strategic aesthetic maneuvers as frames for particular authorial visions of history.

Echoing Mikics's reading of “historical memory”, Barbara Webb suggests that universalist readings of myth should be framed in contextual terms. Webb begins her study on myth and history in the work of Harris and Carpentier by reminding us of the interdependency between the Caribbean and Latin American literary projects of resistance. Quoting Roberto Echevarría's work on Alejo Carpentier, Webb draws on Echevarría's notion of the “apocalyptic” when she suggests that Harris writes out of a tradition that was framed by the revolutionary consciousness of the colonial moment that signified the birth and death of historical and mythical ages. Webb states that Harris “proposes a revolution in the novel based on a philosophy of history that takes into account the unexploited 'subconscious imagination' of the West Indian people”(2). Webb

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the Caribbean man (History, Fable and Myth, 25) he revises Carpentier's assertion in “Magical Real in America” that “the marvelous real is found at every stage in the lives of men who inscribed dates in the history of the continent” (67).

99 “Because the Caribbean was the proscenium of Latin America [New World] history, the area where the most overwhelming historical phenomenon in the modern times – the conquest of America by Europe – began, Caribbean meditations on history have always had an apocalyptic quality” (Echevarría qtd. in Webb, 2).
argues that Harris's idea of revolution is framed within the notion of a universal mythic consciousness. Likewise, she claims that Carpentier's sense of the real maravilloso provides a synthesis of myth and history that eventually moves towards a dialectical revision of the Latin American “real” (19). Drawing on Edouard Glissant's critical reading of Carpentier, Webb points out that Carpentier “...does not reject European culture but seeks a re-definition of universal culture that would make it possible to assert the value of his own culture and focus his literary efforts where he deemed they would be most fruitful – in the Americas” (19). In Webb's reading of Carpentier, we recognize the invocation of the syncretic that will later define her reading of the universal mythical consciousness which Harris terms the “world's unconscious”.100

Webb's reading of Carpentier is significant since it unwittingly demonstrates some of the issues at heart in this particular kind of syncretic mythification. Webb attributes a revisionist mythical project to Harris, which is dependent on two central issues. The first, that the notion of a “European culture” provides a central frame that can be used in the process of validating Carpentier's cultural re-appropriation of the Americas via myth. The second, that the function of a “universal culture” can provide a mediatory and praxial relationship between the seemingly discrete notions of European culture and its “other” – the culture of the Americas. Webb foregrounds the question of erasure in which the vast plurality of European and Latin American cultures are collapsed into monolithic constructions, suggesting cultural binaries that require a mediatory function – the so-called “universal culture”. This sense of a “universal” or “world” mythic consciousness is

100 See Harris, The Radical Imagination, Lectures and Talks 26.
key to a critical understanding of the difficulties inherent in Harris's use of myth. While we locate Harris within the tradition of Carpentier's *real maravilloso*, we are also required to renegotiate the categories of cultural determinism that shaped the tradition of magical realist writing from its inception.

As Stephen Hart and Wenching Ouyang suggest, the relationship between myth and magical realism lies in a narrative strategy that produces the “fantastic” through the improbable intertextuality: “Magic... may easily be the result of a concoction of materials taken from 'local' myths and religions and the literary tradition effected through strategies of intertextuality” (17). Foregrounding the literary function of “magic” (through intertextuality), Hart and Ouyang urge a critical response that is based on analyzing the narrative function of magical realist strategies. It is in this sense that a brief analysis of certain critical approaches to the question of magical realism in myth among Harris's contemporaries is helpful. While several writers from the Caribbean mobilize myth as a vehicle to narrate the complexity of postcolonial Caribbean experience, Derek Walcott, Erna Brodber and Kamau Brathwaite have distinctive approaches to narrating myth that provide an important counterpoint to what Harris attempts. What sets Brodber, Walcott and Brathwaite in counter-distinction to Harris is the fact that while engaging notions of hybridity and creolization in their writing, they do not demonstrate a desire to write or invoke a universal conscious or unconscious. Thus, the presence of syncretic symbolism is constructed and read as a characteristic of cultural pluralism that is cognizant of the violence that is “always already” coded in readings of the colonial encounter.
Significantly, all three writers caution against the desire to read the Caribbean via universalist narrative constructions. Harris's contemporary and fellow Guyanese Roy Heath also employs a mythical frame in his fiction, but one that is separate and entirely different in form and approach. Conversely, a writer like V.S. Naipaul has a radically different approach that treats religious or mythical narrative within a text with self-conscious irony. These complex approaches to the function and narration of myth in fiction highlight issues of communal and cultural difference in Caribbean literature. Any productive discussion of the function of myth requires a multifarious approach that accounts for the separate and distinct strands of mythification we encounter in Anglophone Caribbean literature, whether through magical realist narrative strategies or within the confines of the realist mode of the “novel of persuasion”.

In “Beyond a Boundary: Magical Realism in a Jamaican Frame of Reference”, Erna Brodber demonstrates that notions of the magical are symbiotically linked to the repossession of communal narratives that the experience of slavery had permanently disfigured among the Afro-Caribbean communities in the Anglophone Caribbean. Demonstrating the difference between the socio-cultural and historic contexts of slavery and emancipation in the Anglophone, Francophone and Latin Americas, Brodber points out that the myths that informed and inflected the narrative strategy known as magical realism arose out of the recognition of a psychological context of erasure. Using Vera Kutzinski’s reading of the influence of an “African” imaginary on García Márquez as a point of departure, Brodber provides a thoughtful recalibration of magical realism via the

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101 A fact which doesn't register in Harris's reading of Naipaul's *House for Mr. Biswas* in “Tradition” (40).
polemics of resistance and recapitulation drawn from a centrally Africanist reading.

Brodber’s choice is deliberate, and it demonstrates the necessity for reading magical realism within the pretext and context of a specific socio-cultural moment (the seemingly magical time-space continuum of colonialism) while negotiating what seem to be universal patterns of desire that can arise from the collective experience of suffering:

Towards this Africa-derived culture which partly produces magical realism, several forms of behaviour present themselves. First, the metaphors exist and people are not socialized into putting them in their frame of reference. Second, people have them in their frame of reference and are not socialized into engaging them in their writing. Add to these another cluster of possibilities which arise when we factor in the term “black African slave.” Considering the matter through the lens of these possibilities leads us to see in a historical perspective the African elements which lend themselves to the creation of that perception of reality called “magical realism,” and which manifest themselves in a certain tale found wherever there were African slaves. (Brodber qtd. in Reiss, 16)

The “tale” that Brodber speaks of here is the collective story of spirit thievery that is the central metaphor for colonialism in all her works of fiction. By remaining within the Africanist frame and dismantling it from within, Brodber demonstrates the hopeful “magic” of its inherent inconsistencies. As in her fiction, the three words “black African slave” are differentiated and do not remain a symbiotic narrative construction. It is this sense of recalibrating history within story that prompts her critique of the whole notion of
magical realism as “filling in” the narrative gap of invisibility: “To conclude, Jamaicans who write… may have felt a pressing commitment to fill the gaps created by an absence of a Sociology and History of the English-speaking Caribbean and in such a way that they would be accessible to non-Caribbean people who had seen them as invisible and, at best, history-less. Was it for these latter, magical realism, no; social realism, yes?” (23). Brodber’s conclusion to the essay demonstrates that the process of locating the magical realist text within the history of resistance is vital since it is only through this radical contextualization that the false story of “invisible”, “history-less” peoples can be redressed. Brodber extends this sense of reclaimed myth and communal ritual in her novels that articulates this position and outlines her sense of the magical as the space from which myth regains contemporary relevance in relation to constructions of selfhood.

When Kamau Brathwaite articulates his approach to magical realism he reads it primarily as a strategy through which to negotiate the issue of creolization in the Caribbean post colonial contemporary. In his seminal essay “MR” Brathwaite echoes Harris, whom he heralds as the only truly innovative magical realist writer from the Anglophone Caribbean, when he suggests that the textual strategy of magical realism is that of liminal middle passage between the tenses of a Caribbean past, present and future:

Magical realism (MR) is? simply a legba or lemba or limbo xperience: the sudden or apparently sudden discovery of threshold or watergate into what seems 'new' because it is very ancient; be- comes capable of infinite detail,
if necessary; where the 'real', since it has entered continuum, hold ing
within its great wheel all the 'tenses' – past present & future – no longer in
so-call chronological tension, but, like the computer, w/'random access
memory from all or any of the time-compass, becomes 'magical' because,
w/this access of what i repeat is a kind of blindness, we find ourselv es in
a capacity of trans-limitness, erasure of xpectant boundaries into mineral
or plant or zemi or Iwa or angel orOther. (Brathwaite 6)

Brathwaite's reading of the magical realist strategy as a “blindness” that fosters a sense of
the “trans-limitness” points to the ambivalence present in the figurative gesture of
magical realism. It also demonstrates that the construction of myth within the magical
realist strategy is a tentative reach into a remote past that can only be “accessed” (as in
his metaphor of the computer which produced the mythical/magical polysemy of The Zea
Mexican Diary), via partial and fractured visions of cultural coherence.

Brathwaite's metaphor of blind-seeing gestures towards Harris's reading of myth as a
gateway that provides porous visions of history in memory. It also recalls the narrator of
Harris's Palace of the Peacock (1960) whose colonizing and colonized imaginary is
implicated in his prodigious double-vision. Harris's narrator famously opens the novel by
waking to a “dead seeing eye and a living closed eye” (Guyana Quartet, 19). Brathwaite's
reading approximates the figurative bridges that Harris constructs between the
postcolonial negotiation of colonial history. However, when Brathwaite claims that “MR”
opens the possibility of “establishing certain synchronisms” between Europe and the
Caribbean, he prefaces this cross-cultural exchange with the prescient understanding of text as a traveling narrative that carries indigenous narratives or “truths” to the Anglophone centers of the world (1). This important recalibration locates the Caribbean text within the global literary market and acknowledges the important function of indigenous myths that continue speaking through the magical “blindness” of the colonial history. For Brathwaite, myth, within the magical realist text, becomes a mode of resistance that creates a narrative continuum, albeit fractured and partial, that seeks redress for the cultural erasure of the colonized peoples of the Caribbean. Brathwaite's mythical project differs from Harris in that it does not attempt to redeem the economies of consumption that are historically coded into the exchange of narrative in the colonial and postcolonial encounter between “self” and “other”. While determining the coded cultural and linguistic exchange that is central to notions of creolization, Brathwaite never goes so far as to suggest (as Harris does) that the indigenous subject is an implied participant in the act of colonial violence.

Derek Walcott's musings on the function and validity of myth to the West-Indian imaginary bear a somewhat different approach that foregrounds the working of myth as an internalized narrative function. When Walcott “names” his fathering muses, he reminds us that the function of myth is always already within and beyond the pale of linguistic, cultural and historical barriers. In “The Muse of History” Walcott claims “… a memory of imagination in literature which has nothing to do with actual experience, which is, in fact, another life, and that experience of the imagination will continue to
make actual the quest of a medieval knight or the bulk of a white whale, because of the power of a shared imagination” (63). Walcott draws our attention to a colonization of the imaginary but also outlines the vast capacity of the speaking West-Indian subject to render narrative present through investing it with the power of myth. The power of a “shared imagination” speaks to the acknowledgment of the hybrid shaping of the mythical imagination which, however, Walcott locates in the experience of the Caribbean subject. This recalibration of the seemingly archetypal image to its fixed point of departure within the self is important because it frames the “power” (and, therefore, the violence of negotiation that is always coded in the presence of such images in the postcolonial context) within a subjectivity that is unique to Walcott's sense of the West-Indian poet.

As Walcott points out, a tragic understanding of the split self/tongue shapes the internal poetics of the self-conscious state of postcolonial hybridity. In his somewhat problematic reading of the West-Indian “everyman”, Walcott claims that “Fisherman and peasant know who they are and what they are and where they are, and when we show them our wounded sensibilities we are, most of us, displaying self-inflicted wounds” (63). Despite the unfortunate projection of class-based naivety on to “fishermen” and “peasants”, Walcott argues persuasively for an understanding of the hybrid imaginary as a question of poetics – the poet must speak his wounded, multi-fathered mythology. When Walcott claims a reading of myth as the “partial recall of the race” (37), he reads myth through his own vision of a distinctly Caribbean poetics. Walcott implies a fundamental abyss of
difference between the poet and the peasant, and suggests that this “partial recall” is spoken through the hybrid imagination of the poet, not the peasant. Walcott's approach to narrating personal and communal myth negotiates a sense of the prefabricated hierarchies of the imagination that are the legacy of the colonial process. I would argue that consciousness of the racialized, class-based privilege of articulation shields Walcott from adopting the position of a prophet or shaman for a silenced people since the distance between poet and peasant marks a crucial fracture between artifice and representation in mythical narration.

Brodber, Brathwaite and Walcott have a defined relation to myth and the magical realist text that stems from their engagement with the legacy of the middle passage and the sense of a shared, if primarily African, mythical past. Their entry into mythical narrative is mediated via a primarily Afro-Caribbean narrative tradition articulated in their separate work on creolization, hybridity and nation language. The case is not necessarily the same, however, for Caribbean writers of Indian descent. While there is an engagement with notions of hybridity, the function of myth often does not reflect the concerns of the magical realist text discussed above. In *A House For Mr. Biswas* (1961), V.S. Naipaul uses particular mythical motifs drawn from Hinduism as ironic foils to the more secular myth of identity that his protagonist, Mr. Biswas, attempts to construct. Mr. Biswas's desire for a “house” or storehouse of personal (liberal, secular and humanist) myth is set against the Tulsi clan's “Hanuman House”, which is constructed as the bastion of pugilistic traditionalism and stultifying spiritual decay. “Hanuman House” and its
inhabitants make a textual mockery of the mythical motif of Hanuman's “blind” devotion to the gods, suggesting, rather, a figurative portrait of cultural ossification that will eventually erode Mr. Biswas's equally problematic desire for transcendence from his communal background.

Significantly, unlike so many of his contemporaries, Naipaul never attempts to write in a magical realist mode,\(^\text{102}\) choosing to ground his novels in a tragi-comic naturalism. This approach to myth is not confined to Naipaul; David Dabydeen, Ramabai Espinet, Shani Mootoo and Ismith Khan write primarily within the realist mode that uses sparse mythical allusions to highlight issues of cultural dislocation and the clash between notions of modernity and projected notions of tradition and communal identity. The function of myth in Indo-Caribbean fiction demonstrates the primarily antithetical clash between religious narrative and the seemingly incongruous Caribbean present. Mythical narratives in Indo-Caribbean fiction are fraught with ambivalence and irony and speak to different kinds of cultural and spiritual displacements than those discussed in the Afro-Caribbean context. We see no sense of myth as a window into a lost spiritual domain. Rather, myth becomes the focal point for the conflict between religious narrative and ritual that signals the anxiety between traditionalist visions of “Indian-ness” and the present dislocation of “Indo-Caribbean-ness” as a continuing cultural taxonomy of identity. This approach is significant because it forces us to rethink the validity of a syncretic approach (as espoused by Harris) that welds Hindu religious iconography onto

\(^{102}\) We cannot, for example, consider Naipaul's *Loss of El Dorado* as a magical realist text although it self-consciously negotiates the myth of El Dorado.

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Amerindian and African religious and mythical systems. Although Harris's syncretism suggests the shared subjectivity inherent in notions of Caribbean-ness, the still present and viable belief systems of the peoples of the Caribbean resist such ideological crossovers.

3. Myth in Guyanese Writing

I have discussed the function of myth as a largely “Caribbean” phenomenon, focusing on painting a picture in broad strokes rather than providing a detailed analysis of local narrative traditions. However, it is necessary to pay particular attention to the body of Anglophone literature that has emerged from Guyana because it demonstrates one of the salient issues present in novels that employ mythical and magical realist narrative strategies. The origins of narrating Guyana via mythical/magical realist strategies lie with Wilson Harris and Roy Heath who were contemporaries and shared the expatriate experience of living and writing in Britain. However, their individual approaches to myth are radically different. While Harris approached myth as a bridge or window into the synchronous tenses and texts of memory and history, Heath (while fostering a similar synchronous approach) uses myth as a sustained structuring principle that shapes his construction of contemporary Guyanese subjectivity. As Chiji Akoma suggests in “Folklore and the African-Caribbean Narrative Imagination: The Example of Roy Heath”, Heath's use of myth stems from an oral sense of storytelling that is part of an aesthetic of narrating the folk (83). Heath's narratives do not use myth as inter-imagistic allusions that enrich the plot of the text. Rather, they are contemporary re-tellings of the myths or folk
stories and are driven by a strong force of pre-extant communal narrative. Heath's work is best read within an aesthetic of the local that goes beyond linguistic strategies of creolization into a mythical imaginary born out of a folk voice. It is significant that although Heath suggests the influence of the Jungian collective unconscious in his essay “Criticism in Art: A View from the Diaspora” (169) his writing remains firmly entrenched within a folk idiom that eludes a purely archetypal mode of analysis. Unlike Harris, Heath demonstrates no interest in employing universal archetypal images in his narratives, neither does he seek to build bridges between the folk legends and myths that he employs and their possible global counterparts. However, Heath does claim a preoccupation with notions of local myth as a characteristic of diasporic nostalgia, a fact that he uses (unlike Harris) to locate his aesthetic.

Unlike Heath, Harris foregrounds the synchronous, translatable nature of universal archetypal images in his mythical narratives. At any given point in Harris's texts, indigenous myths are constructed as palimpsests that bear referentiality to archetypes. Following Harris's critical insistence on the subject, Kenneth Ramchand points out, in his introduction to Harris's *Palace of the Peacock*, that Harris's sense of the mythical is born out of a transliteration of the encounter with Guyanese landscape and Amerindian peoples as a narrative figure of conquest in the psychological interior. Harris uses the figure of conquered land as a metaphor from which to build the seemingly endless rehearsal of conquest that begins with pre-Columbian migrations and ends in the present. In his words, “...the mainstream of the West Indies in my estimation possesses an enormous
escarpment down which it falls, and I am thinking here of the European discovery of the New World and conquest of ancient American civilizations which were themselves related by earlier and obscure levels of conquest”.

Harris's construction of universal culpability in the colonial project stems from this critical phase in his early writing. The slippage between land and story is intentional and is the figurative gesture that defines much of the “marvelous” narrative strategies in Harris's fiction. Reading the history of colonization through geological metaphor, Harris creates an autochthonous sense of language to narrate his vision of the Caribbean. It demonstrates his preoccupation with narrating Guyana (both as subject and object) through a notion of post-lapsarian “geomancy”.

Significantly, the importance of myth as a vehicle for narrating the Caribbean contemporary is a characteristic that defines much of Guyanese diasporic writing. However, the narration of myth via magical realist strategies becomes the dominant mode in the generation of writers that directly follows Harris. Beginning with Harris and Heath, we see the tradition shape the literary trajectories of Fred D'Aguiar, Pauline Melville and Oonya Kempadoo. However, unlike Heath, whose employment of myth is structural, D'Aguiar, Melville and Kempadoo predominantly use magical realist strategies in their works of fiction that gesture, implicitly, to the influence of Harris. Harris's aesthetic provides a frame of narration which offers a more archetypal approach to narrating myth. The archetypal mythical approach provides a bridge between local and diasporic sensibilities that is more accessible to the global reading public than the sustained use of

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103 Harris "Tradition"(30-31).
local myth as a structuring principle in the novel. The preponderance of diasporic magical realist novels from Guyana suggest that as a strategy for narrating the local, magical realism brings up several interesting issues. We may agree with Heath that the distance of exile forced an introspective subjectivity upon these writers that fostered a return to myth as a gateway into notions of identity. In “Criticism and Art” Heath claims: “Those who went to live abroad – especially after independence – galvanized by the energy of nostalgia, seized the opportunity to take a good look and found some very fascinating things: for example the wealth of material offered by the cultural modes brought from India, and the possession cults that abound among Afro-Caribbeans in the countryside” (167). We cannot ignore the fact that Heath's sketch of “nostalgia” is based on psychologically excavating the “otherness” of shared narrative traditions that are not owned by the diasporic writer but approximated from projected notions of racial and communal narrative. However, Heath's preoccupation with notions of recuperation leads to a sustained exploration of local mythical systems in his fiction that do not attempt to build archetypal or universal referentialities.

Harris's approach to myth clearly outlines an archetypal foundation that attempts to narrate a “Caribbean psyche” with frames of a “collective” or “world” unconscious. This particular approach influenced an entire generation of diasporic Guyanese writers who narrate the fissures and erasures of Guyanese history in archetypal terms. Thus, as Paula Burnett suggests in “Where Else To Row But Backwards”, these “younger Guyanese writers cannot avoid writing in Harris's shadow (with echoes of Jung, perhaps)” (27).
Burnett correctly surmises that writing in Harris's shadow involves the evocation and subscription of his particular approach to archetypal mythologizing. However, this leads to several issues that arise through the archetypal project. For example, does Pauline Melville's *The Ventriloquist's Tale* (1997) actually succeed in voicing the story patterns of the Amerindian narrative tradition she employs, or does her fiction bring us face to face with the problem of cultural appropriation of indigenous narratives? We have to question the extent to which these fictions really engage with notions of local mythical traditions while being critically conscious of a sense of magical realism that continues to be based on a privileged consumption of indigenous storying. As Stephen Slemon argues in “Magical Realism as Postcolonial Discourse”, “the concept of magical realism itself threatens to become a monumentalizing category for literary practice and to offer to centralizing genre systems a single locus upon which the massive problem of difference in literary expression can be managed into recognizable meaning in one swift pass” (408-409). I argue that this sense of “difference” is built, primarily, through the invocation of projected notions of indigeneity by itinerant writers. What emerges from a study of this particular use of myth, which is exemplified by Harris's archetypal fiction, is that the employment of indigenous myths within universal archetypal imagery can lead to the unfortunate re-appropriation of local and indigenous imaginaries even when an author wishes to accomplish the opposite.

4. **Reading Archetype in Harris's Fiction**

As discussed, Harris's approach to narrating myth foregrounds the notion of archetype as
a partial truth or palimpsest. *Jonestown* opens with a fictional letter addressed to “W.H.” (presumably the author) by one Francisco Bone who claims to be the sole survivor of the Jonestown holocaust. The letter builds on the familiar artifice of the “unstable” first person narrator by foregrounding Bone's traumatic memory of his experience of the events at Jonestown. Bone refers to the text of the novel as a manuscript of a dream book, thereby invoking the sense of narrative arising from unconscious psychic processes. This device also gestures to the function of “dream books” in the healing processes of depth psychology. The text of the novel is constructed as a layered dream in which the events of Jonestown are negotiated as palimpsests on the disappearances of more ancient cultures and civilizations. Harris claims that a preoccupation with the disappearances of Mayan civilizations within Central America prompted him to read the “holocaust” of Jonestown as a recurrent event in the history of humanity.

Central to Bone's negotiation of trauma is the revisionary and “revisitory” approach to archetype that characterizes Harris's fiction. Bone asserts that the ritual rehearsal of extinction and trauma can radically decenter fixed definitions of “self” and “other” in what he identifies as colonial economies: “Without Memory theater – and the art of self-rehearsed 'extinctions' in a series of stages upon which one retraces one's steps into a labyrinth of deprivations and apparent losses – the 'peopling of the Void' in all its

104 In his introduction to *The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination* (1999) Andrew Bundy suggests that Harris's entire fiction is best read as a dream book (13). However, in *Jonestown*, Harris explicitly refers to the text as a dream book and draws on the function of dream as an oracular system that compensates for the trauma of psychic disintegration experienced by his central characters.

105 I use the term depth psychology intentionally since Harris's interest in the theories of Jung shaped his own understanding of the relevance of archetypal fiction to contemporary reality. Likewise, the function of dreams and dream books in the Jungian analytical process parallels the narrative process through which Bone constructs the story of Jonestown as archetypal fiction.
extremities of explosion and implosion will not embody heart-searching conscience, heart-searching caveat, but will cement predatory blockages, predatory coherence” (8). The novel functions as ritual “Memory theater” in which rehearsal involves praxial renegotiations of colonial and imperial taxonomies. The passage points to Harris's anxiety with the notion of taxonomy as “predatory”, and his desire to build a resonant system of opposites within the “terms” of history that fosters internal commentary. Central to this passage, and to the entire novel, is the figurative depiction of the “predator” which also symbolizes the predatory nature of consuming definitions. In *Jonestown*, definitions are the precondition through which the predatory politics of Jonah Jones and his mythical reflection, Carnival Lord Death, construct a gross material capitalism born out of the consumption of the body – the body of the land, and the body of the people symbolized in the threefold image of a ravished woman. Set in counterpoint to the predator is the savior archetype embodied by Bone, the narrator, who is constructed via Christian and Mayan mythical frames. However, Harris intends us to read both the predator and savior as symbiotically linked. The negotiation and interplay between the two figures function as a probing dialogue that brings Bone to the conscious self-hood that concludes the novel.

Harris draws on a familiar trope that we encounter in most of his novels when he constructs a four-fold signification of the feminine as courtesan, mother, virgin and goddess.¹⁰⁶ Therefore we encounter three human figures of Marie of Jonestown (Marie Antoinette), Marie of Albouystown (Bone's mother and saviour) and Marie of Port

¹⁰⁶ Harris's typification seems to be drawn from a very classical reading of Anima types based on the work of Jung. This is further reinforced by the fourth “demon” goddess figure symbolized by Kali.
Mourant (Deacon's wife and Bone's dream wife). The stories of the three Maries create parallel rehearsals of the ritual of sacrifice but are completed by the figure of the fourth, demonic and devouring figure of Kali, who reverses the position of the three Maries as mystical sacrificial victims into a vision of divine predatory femininity. This sense of rehearsal and reversal suggests a process of working through the multiple possible significations of the predator and victim that can exist in colonial and imperial contexts. It is through the revision of his own complicities in predatory, colonial and imperial crimes against the feminine that Bone can transcend the narrative “will to power” that, within the colonial myth, fixes the image of the indigenous woman, and the land, within a rhetoric of abject dispossession.

While Harris uses the term “archetype” with caution, his reading of archetype is as a symbol or motif of universal significance. However, as he cogently argues in his critical essays and his interviews, the notion of the universal needs to be recalibrated to activate its potential range of signification. Perceiving a stasis or ossification in the reading of universals, Harris attempts to mobilize duality within symbols as a way to destabilize hierarchies of meaning. Harris outlines this position in an interview with Mark Williams and Alan Riach: “These are truths of fiction that address one, and one has to get at them by sensing the way they have been bottled up in certain formulae. Reversing this in order to find bridges and connections which one has lost, bridges and connections with other cultures: that is how the universal thing, it seems to me, operates” (59). Harris's fiction seeks to disrupt the formulae of certain myths through foregrounding the complex
internal dualism at the heart of these symbolic systems. Harris's symbolic order always attempts to demonstrate the mediation between categories of “self” and “other”: “…when you go to the so-called Third World, the archetypes, if I may use that word... which they call 'native' archetypes, are all overlaid by European skeletons and archetypes as well. You will never activate them unless you activate the so-called European skeletons as well” (60). For Harris, writing archetype involves a vision of colonizer and colonized as interdependent categories that provide shared, fluid boundaries of meaning.

Harris claims that a recalibration of archetype can expose the hidden symbiosis of meaning between seemingly discrete categories. His most radical contribution to the postcolonial novel lies in his attempt to construct mythical systems that are self-mediated and carry within themselves internal incoherences that can potentially throw their ideologies into sharp relief. In *The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination* Harris states:

> As the prime imaginative source for literary fiction, the archetype puts a burden of conscience on the artist; it acts as if it is inviting the artist to address those diffuse areas of consciousness that seem to stand outside the world of sense-perception. The artist is obliged to create a 'new conceptual language' with which to transpose nonsensational [sic] realities... A literary medium that deals with these things proceeds, as it were, by posing new riddles. (39)

Harris's “new conceptual language” suggests that the construction of meaning, via
archetype, is an “eccentric” and highly individual process that changes with each individual reading of the text. This points to an extremely fluid and versatile sense of mythic construction that is based as much on the negotiation of internal discontinuities within myth, as it is based on a tacit sense of communal participation in mythic narrative.

Central to the project of decentering narrative through mobilizing archetype is Harris's impatience with structures of formal realism within the novel. Having criticized his contemporaries for their dependence on the legacy of realist narratives, in “Tradition” Harris claims:

...the novel written by West Indians of the West Indies (or of other places for that matter), belongs – in the main – to the conventional mould [sic]. Which is not surprising at this stage since the novel which consolidates situations to depict protest or affirmation is consistent with most kinds of overriding advertisement and persuasion upon the writer to make national and political and social simplifications of experience in the world at large today. Therefore the West Indian novel – so called – in the main – is inclined to suffer in depth (to lose in depth) and may be properly assessed in nearly every case in terms of surface tension and realism. (30)

This passage outlines Harris's suspicion of a rhetoric of persuasion which he associates with realism. His argument suggests that realist narrative leads to the “social simplifications of experience” (30) that obscure the internal fractures and complicities of self and other within the colonial and postcolonial experience. In response to the
structures of realism that he associated with the West Indian novel, Harris developed a new mythical language that foregrounds the inherent slippages that occur when narrating the colonial past in the Caribbean present. Harris argues that such slippages arise directly out of his experience of the landscape of the Guyanese interior which forms the palimpsest of myth and history. The figure of the mythic-historic land remains the muse for Harris's linguistic sense of the marvelous.

In his essay “A Talk on the Subjective Imagination” (1973) Harris outlines his early recognition of the symbolic paucity of certain formal linguistic structures to articulate the density of his experience of the Guyanese landscape: “One was aware of one's incapacity to describe it, as though the tools of language one possessed were inadequate. It was pointless describing the river as running dark... all this seemed less to do with the medium of place and more to do with the immediate tool of the word as representing or signifying 'place’” (38). Harris's response to finding a medium of expression that articulates place and space results in his mobilization of archetype as a resonating post. For Harris, the imagistic resonances within archetypes can evoke the density of landscape and experience associated with the “epic strategy” of Caribbean narrative. Drawing on Alejo Carpentier, Amos Tutuola and Janet Frame as writers who employ a similar sense of fissured “magical” realism, Harris suggests that in order to activate the radicalism of the postcolonial novel, narrative needs to be charged with the fractures and fragments of non-representational narrative strategies.
In “The Fabric of the Imagination” (1990) Harris suggests that writing with a consciousness of the marvelous is, in fact, an act of radicalism that exposes the rigid boundaries of persuasion set in place by the formal strategies of realism. In his words, “The revisionary strategy therefore discloses the deprivations within progressive realism, the deprivations of linear bias, deprivations endemic to a ruling story-line by which historical conquest (sometimes refined to a model of absolute persuasion) gains its cultural and material ends at the expense of all other perspectives” (72). We see that Harris draws a genealogical parallel between conquest and the rhetoric of persuasion in realism. Writing against the formal strategies of realism becomes an act of radicalism that recalibrates Harris's figurative exploration of the categories of conquest. As Bundy suggests in The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination, Harris's fascination with the partial brokenness of archetypal image gives rise to a revised approach to form and narration: “Breakage or fragmentation from previous habit enables the dream to rewrite itself into new structures, and... also to write new structure into the author” (38). Bundy's critical reading is productive in that it articulates the reading of Harris's fiction as a phenomenon in which the story “works” upon the author. Bundy also outlines the inflation and conflation of the authorial process with unconscious content, arguing that the archetype arises in and of itself. In such a reading the novel is merely the vehicle for numinous speech, and the author the mediating shaman. While this critical reading is fostered by Harris's own archetypal methodology, it demonstrates the slippage between authorial voice and the context of the work, and furthers the occult notion of the writer as priestly historian.
In *Jonestown*, the notion of numinous or oracular speech is invoked through the allusion to the archetypal content of myth. Harris draws on the myth of Christ and the Mayan myth of the divine twins as subtexts to Bone's story. He then sets these narratives against revisions of the Kali and Anancy myths. Harris conjures up a structuring principle for the novel that depends on the narrative paths of these myths. While Harris might wish to use myth and story as mutually destabilizing categories, a close reading of *Jonestown* proves that despite the radicalism of his project, the archetypal content of myth leads to a persuasive ideology that echoes its own “rhetoric of persuasion”. When Harris constructs the story of his central character, Bone, within the frame of the Christ myth, he primarily suggests that Bone is Lazarus, and that Lazarus is the unconscious double and “other” of Christ. The myth of Christ suggests a framing device that speaks of death and resurrection through ritual sacrifice. By invoking the story of Lazarus, Harris suggests an alternative vision of the Christian myth – Bone's exploration of traumatic resurrection from the events of Jonestown enable him to commit the willing act of ritual sacrifice that concludes his “dream book”.

Set in counterpoint to the Christ myth is the Mayan myth of Hunahpu and Xbalenque which also outlines a story of ritual death and miraculous resurrection. Both the Christian myth and the Mayan myth contain “shared” categories of meaning. We have the archetypal roles of protagonists and antagonists, the archetypal figures of women whose fate is intimately tied to the protagonist's course of action, and we have the tragic
blindness of a judging “multitude” who demand the death of the protagonists. If we are to follow Harris's theory of archetypes, each of these archetypal categories should involve dual systems of meaning that would interrogate the seeming coherences and synchronicities of the Christian and Mayan myths. However, although Harris's project of layering attempts a critical destabilization of the archetypal categories of each myth, it does not fundamentally change or disrupt the course of the myth. In consequence, the myths curiously reinforce systems of binaries that they seek to dismantle.

5. **Harris and Jung**

Harris's theories of archetype draw directly from the work of Jung's “collective unconscious”. In the series of lectures and talks entitled “The Radical Imagination” (1992), Harris suggests that the concept of the collective unconscious can orchestrate hidden resonances in seemingly dissimilar narratives. Drawing a figurative bridge between ancient Carib myth and the work of Dante, Harris outlines his understanding of the function of the unconscious in narrative in the following passage:

This kind of fiction [allegorical fiction] therefore takes its ground in a judgement which I would call, for the sake of argument, the collective unconscious. C.G. Jung first used the term, “collective unconscious.” I don't know if it is the best term. I would rather call it the world's unconscious. But call it what you like. I am saying two things about it. One is that it must have a native side to it because one's background affects one's judgement. Thus the scene of the infinite rehearsal comes out
of the uncertainties that lay in my background as a young man when I
travelled into Guyana. Yet it also comes out of the revisionary faculty that
unleashes a formidable connection between the ancient Carib world and a
great Italian poet. The connection is there, it is unleashed. Something is
validated, something is proven. (26)

The passage demonstrates that the recognition of imaginary bridges (the “formidable
connections” that Harris speaks of) have the capacity of reinforcing the validity of a piece
of fiction. For Harris, this validity has to do directly with bridging the gaps between
notions of “self” and “other” in the contemporary Caribbean imaginary. Harris argues that
the figurative negotiation of such gaps can demonstrate unlikely synchronicities within
seemingly disparate narrative traditions.

For Harris, the shared imaginary which he terms the “world unconscious” enables
imaginative bridges between disparate narrative traditions. Harris also argues that the
archetypal foundations of the “world unconscious” contain images that are “always
already” paradoxical. To illustrate this paradox Harris draws on Gertrude Stein's famous
axiom that “a rose is a rose, is a rose”, which he counters with the opening lines of his
Palace of the Peacock where Donne, the horseman, appears to be hung, shot and
suspended or lifted up by the very noose that throttles him. In “Judgement and Dream”
(1989) Harris argues that “‘a rose is a rose is not a rose,' -- ’a noose is a noose is not a
noose’” (21) The image of the noose thus demonstrates an example of the internal
paradox of the archetypal image: “... the noose is an image that appears: it seems to be
solid, it is there. But as the novel moves on, new content comes into the image of the noose and eventually we have a noose which does not execute Donne who hangs in it, but sustains him, holds him up” (21). Harris suggests that the plot of the novel eventually assists in the process of destabilizing the seemingly discrete category of the noose. Reading “noose” as a symbol of death, Harris works to expose inward architectures of meaning invoked in this word by constructing multiple layers of metaphor around it. The “noose” can mean both death and resurrection, and Harris often intends it to mean both. However, while it may be possible to read within Harris's multiple layers of paradox, there is a process of authorial choice, a construction of a hierarchy of symbolisms, which is not as egalitarian as Harris would suggest. In the example from the *Palace of the Peacock*, it is relatively simple to keep the internal dualism and partiality of the symbol of the “noose” alive. However, in *Jonestown*, there are several instances where Harris invokes a hierarchy of meaning in relation to archetypal image that is based primarily on his own ideological preoccupations.

Harris's assertion of the presence of a world unconscious needs to be read in and against Jung's notion of the collective unconscious. In his essay “Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious”, Jung describes his theory of the collective unconscious in the following passage:

> The collective unconscious, being the repository of man's experience and at the same time the prior condition of this experience is an image of the world which has taken aeons to form. In this image certain features, the
archetypes or dominants, have crystallized out in the course of time. They are the ruling powers, the gods, images of dominant laws and principles, and of typical regularly occurring events in the soul's cycle of experience.

(93)

We note that Jung defines archetypal images as symbolic forms that refer to recurrent experiences in the human psyche. His assertion of the notion of “soul” immediately sets Jung apart from standard psychoanalytical practice, in that it invokes a rhetoric of religious thought through a principally Christian vocabulary. When Harris chooses to invoke these notions, he also draws on this system of rhetoric which provides an underlying structuring principle to his writing. While Jung's notion of the collective unconscious was meant to address the presence of seemingly universal symbolic systems, it was constructed and mobilized primarily through a notion of Christian consciousness. While Jung attempted to demonstrate the far reaching significances of archetypes through studying the mythical and symbolic systems of cultures far removed from his own, his interpretative frame was fundamentally Christian – a fact that was a differentiating factor in his own relationship to archetype. As Stephen Walker points out in *Jung and the Jungians on Myth* (1995), Jungian archetypal analysis is most productive when read within the contextual frames that determined Jung's own approach to archetype: “there is much to be gained by frankly facing the subjective origin of the concept of archetypal images – its origin in Jung's own mind [...] it was primarily Jung's own experience of the unconscious, and his own long self-analysis, that led to the creation of such major categories of archetypal images and their corresponding myths”.

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Walker argues that it is necessary to reorient Jung's rhetoric on archetype within the distinctions that Jung himself drew. Most significant among these distinctions is the difference between Jung's notion of “archetype” and its manifestation in what he terms the “archetypal image”. Walker quotes a response given by Jung in a letter in which he seeks to elucidate the difference between archetype and archetypal image:

The Christ archetype is a false concept, as you say. Christ is not an archetype but a personification of the archetype. This is reflected in the idea [=archetype] of the Anthropos... The spiritual (as contrasted with the worldly) Messiah, Christ, Mithras, Osiris, Dionysos, Buddha are all visualizations or personifications [=archetypal images] of the irrepresentable archetype which, borrowing from Ezechiel and Daniel, I call the Anthropos. (15, editorial comments as in original text).

The important distinction between archetype and archetypal image is pivotal to understanding the distance between a symbol and its usually unconscious (and therefore unknowable) content. An archetype is unknowable and is at best described as an impulse. It can appear to be universal because in differing cultural contexts, seemingly similar imagistic content is attached to it. The archetypal image, on the other hand, is a product of culture, place, space and time and therefore “always already” contextually coded. As such, archetypal images must be read within their contextual frames. Not to do so is to indulge in attaching notions of universal synchronicities to psychological processes that we have already established to be unconscious and therefore, unknowable.
Jung described myth as the “textbook of archetypes”, thereby intimating that while myths themselves are not archetypes, they are built upon archetypal structures and are formed from strings of archetypal images and situations. As Jung suggests in *Alchemical Studies* (1967), “the symbol not only conveys a visualization of the process but – and this is perhaps just as important – it also brings about a re-experiencing of it, of that twilight which we can learn to understand only through inoffensive empathy, but which too much clarity dispels” (199). Myths function by evoking the experience of archetype – an experience for which no defined process of interpretation can exist. Jung's insistence on “inoffensive empathy” suggests a process of interpretation based on intuitive rather than deductive processes. It is this process of empathetic reading that proves the most controversial in Jung's analysis of myth since it appears to subsume the particularities of cultural production involved in the narrative process of any myth. However, when Jung introduced the process of differentiation into the practice of depth psychology, he brought into being the check and balance of “integration” that required the Subject to locate him/herself as separate and individually different from the archetypal presences of myth. As Walker points out, “Integration is the process of relating the ego carefully and cautiously to the archetypal material put forward” (33). This process involves maintaining a necessary distance from the archetypal image – it guards against the process of identifying with mythic material, while allowing for the recognition that arises from the initial exposure to archetype within myth.
We do not encounter this rather important condition of the Jungian analytical frame in Harris's adaptation of Jungian archetype. When Harris draws on Jung's notion of the collective or world unconscious, he does not set in place the tempering strategies of integration that were characteristic to a Jungian analysis of myth within the individual psyche. For Harris, the presence of archetype provides a form of revalidation of the inner moral bias of the story. In “Judgement and Dream” Harris claims the following:

We see connections. We see that there is an unbroken thread which runs throughout humanity. However, that unbroken thread cannot be taken for granted. We cannot be complacent about it. At times it seems to be severed that means we have to adjust ourselves afresh. Our expectations are overturned and we have to adjust ourselves afresh to what that unbroken thread means. It is not absolutely given to us. We are on trial and to some extent unless we understand that, we will lose our way. (Harris, 26)

Harris's reading of archetype as the “unbroken thread” is proximate to Jung's reading of archetype in “Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious”, as a protean symbol that has taken “aeons to form” (105). However, Jung's theories were addressed to his patients who suffered from the traumatic fractures of a twentieth century world upturned by two global catastrophes. Jung's concern was with the individual psyche governed by archetypal and collective policies masquerading as post enlightenment socio-politics. Harris's concern is different in that it evokes the position of the writer as witness and oracle. In the previous passage, when Harris claims that the “unbroken thread” manifests
throughout humanity, he suggests a self-generating phenomenon that occurs in and of itself – outside the province of human action and deliberation. His assertion that the thread is “not given to us”(26) once again invokes a somewhat theistic approach in which archetypes arise of themselves rather like numinous cosmic forms that attach themselves to human thought and action. To take such a stance is to suggest that archetypal images are infused with a greater significance than what is discernible through human interpretation. When Harris suggests that “we are on trial”(26) in the act of interpretation, he also implicitly suggests a right and wrong way to attach meaning to symbol, a delicate balance on which he goes so far as to place the future of humanity.  

The inflation of archetype, from a symbol of collective significance, to that of contemporary oracle, poses several problems for the postcolonial reader. It lessens our capacity to read the function of myth in the text against itself. Likewise, it assumes a heightened relevance to the figurative validity that the author introduces in his own contextual frames. In short, Harris inflates the function of archetype to an oracular position without inviting a process whereby the inner voices of the novel can bring contextual (and therefore differentiating) interpretative frames to the construction meaning in relation to symbol, or symbolic plot. Harris's use of archetype, as visionary as it may seem, leads to a paradoxical assertion of ideology which, radical as it is, depends on the construction of inner moral heirarchies based on the author's sense of his voice as oracle.

107 The notion of the trial of words also calls up the notion of a primordial riddle on which the future of the human race depends.
6. Mythical Doublings: Lazarus and Christ, Hunahpu and Xbalanque

In his second preface to *The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination*, Harris claims that the presence of doubling is a way to figuratively address the negotiation of difference that, in turn, leads to a process of healing in the text:

In pre-Columbian legend 'ear' and 'eye' and 'head' could assume different personalities to be combined and re-combined into a music of the senses. My intuitive interpretation of such recombinations is that a hidden capacity slumbers in nature and everywhere to address a labyrinth of healing in a conflict ridden age. Within such a labyrinth, adversarial twins – not necessarily connected by blood or race – become psychically supportive one of the other in trials of the imagination. (56)

The presence of doubling provokes a figurative conflict between self and other in which both categories are permeable and interchangeable. Harris suggests that such a conflict is productive in offering incomplete and mutually dependent visions of history in which hidden myths resonate against each other, providing alternative significances to seemingly coherent and contained narratives.

*Jonestown* is an experimental *Künstlerroman* that explores the relationship of the confessional work of art to ritual art. The plot follows the form of a quest narrative that builds intertextual references to the biblical story of Lazarus of Bethany, the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ; and the sacrifice and resurrection of the Mayan deities...
Hunahpu and Xbalenque. Harris claims that he drew no conscious reference from the Mayan myth of the divine twins and was unaware of its resonance with the text until Paula Burnett's review of *Jonestown* outlined the intertextual parallels between the novel and the *Popul Vuh*. However, Harris seizes on this moment of intertextual synchronicity to demonstrate that such unconscious allusions are entirely in keeping with the archetypal “collective” intuition that shapes his storytelling: “I had read of the Mayas but I had not read that particular book, and I knew nothing of this, and yet I understand that the Mayas have a legend in which the head moves around in that way. But I had entered into this intuitively. I do not know whether people sense that intuition means you know what you do not know” (235). Harris constructs the quest as a play of doubles in which the central figure/s perform parallel narrative acts that produce complementary significances and build a sense of polyphonic and multidimensional storytelling.

Of central importance to the notion of mythical doubling is the narrator's various doubled relationships to key characters within the text. Constructed as Bone's double (and nemesis) is the Skeleton Twin – a spectral memory of Bone's mortal and moral self who becomes Bone's guide when he returns from death to renegotiate the events of Jonestown as a “Carnival” history. Bone and his Skeleton Twin invoke the Maya myth of the divine twins, Hunahpu and Xbalenque, who, as offspring of the Maize god, hold a similar position to Christ within the Maya religious frame. As part of a cyclical vision of history that draws on a key characteristic of the Hunahpu/Xbalenque myth, Harris incorporates

the legendary Maya dice game into the text as a way to explore the disappearance of cultures. Suggesting that the ritual sacrifice of war victims in these games is a partial reason for the cultural collapse in these ancient cities, Harris uses the theme of the game to narrate the disappearance of Jonestown. Set within this historico-mythological frame, Bone and his Skeleton Twin become complementary revisions to the themes of death and resurrection encountered in the Christ/Lazarus myth. Both myths work as doubled narratives that frame and interrogate the events of the holocaust of Jonestown. Harris introduces a final mythical doubling when he draws on the figures of Kali and Anancy as agents of chaos and change. By drawing on ancient and contemporary mythical systems as framing devices, Harris elevates Bone's dream history to the level of myth, albeit, a myth constructed as a palimpsest of the collective cultural and religious mythical systems of Guyana.

The myths of Hunahpu and Xbalenque, and Christ, share thematic elements that constitute their archetypal building blocks. In both, we have central heroic figures who perform a ritual act of sacrifice in order to right an ancient wrong and to re-instigate the religious/spiritual law of older “father” gods. This ritual act is, in both examples, only achieved through willing submission to death. Such a death is dealt at the hands of a multitude who “judge” the heroes and find them guilty. The archetypal images of the “old/father god”, “hero”, “multitude”, “judgment” and “sacrifice” become the key

109 Kali and Anancy are religious and mythical figures of the Caribbean contemporary who have been intimately associated with narratives of resistance and recuperation for Indo-Caribbean and Afro-Caribbean communities. Harris revises both figures as participants within the predatory ideological cycles of Jonestown. I will discuss the relevance of the Kali/Anancy dyad in greater detail in the following section of this chapter.
mythical categories that function within the text – they provide a structural frame for the narration. If we follow Harris's notion of “trials of the imagination”, we would expect that his construction of these myths will invoke internal inconsistencies and dependencies that probe and interrogate the seemingly discrete symbolic categories of each myth. 

*Jonestown* offers us a rich foundation from which to scrutinize the function of archetypal images within mythical narratives. Such an engagement can, in turn, throw light on some of Harris's assertions about the capacity of archetypal narratives to ameliorate failures within contemporary social and cultural ideologies.

Murals and ritual art dedicated to propitiatory sacrifice are a clear presence in the pre-Columbian cities that Bone cites in his introduction and dedication of the novel (3). Bone begins by drawing an imaginative parallel between Jonestown and the pre-Columbian cities in which sacrifice, as a colonial and imperial act of propitiation, becomes a way to explore cyclical visions of holocaust: “Was Jonestown the latest manifestation of the breakdown of populations within the hidden flexibilities and inflexibilities of pre-Columbian civilizations? The Maya were certainly one of the great civilizations of ancient America and the fate of their cities – such as Palenque, Chichén Itzá, Tikal, Bonampak – has left unanswered questions” (4). Citing the example of an Arekuna Indian who persuades representatives from many indigenous peoples to offer themselves as human sacrifices in order to find an “enchanted kingdom”, Bone goes on to explore the significance of the notion of sacrifice to the continuation of cultures whose religious frames involve supplication of the divine through human sacrifice (4-5). The category of
“sacrifice” figuratively demonstrates the anxiety of the colonial/imperial project in which
the sacrifice of conquered/colonized victim is the occult act by which the conqueror
supplicates a natural order that has fallen into decay through consumption. While Bone
does not offer a clear understanding of the nature of sacrifice, his example draws on the
“El Doradonne” illusions that make up the fabric of colonialist and imperialist narratives
of conquest. Bone then draws his allusion to its symbolic conclusion when he outlines
the colonial pun at the heart of his imaginary construction of El Dorado: “Elusive El
Dorado (City of Gold? City of God?), whose masthead is consumed and refashioned on
sacrificial alters in every century around the globe, may have a buried harbour in that
compass or 'land of waters' [Guyana]” (10). As Bone's words indicate, the myth of El
Dorado both as a city of gold, or city of God, is a narrative about the nature of sacrificial
conquest in colonial and imperial narratives. This sense of conquest, figuratively linked
to notions of ritual sacrifice, becomes a “compass” in Bone's dream book by which to
chart the mystery of holocaust encountered in Jonestown. It is a mystery that functions as
a palimpsest through which the other myths of ritual sacrifice in Bone's “dream book” are
read.

The notion of divine duality is a central concept in Classic-period Maya mythology. Although, the myth of Hunahpu and Xbalenque is only one within several Maya mythical
narratives on twin-ship, it is most relevant to the novel because of the intertextual
parallels that it bears with the action of Jonestown. The myth of Hunahpu and Xbalenque

100 This is a recurring trope in Harris's fiction first encountered in the Palace of the Peacock, where it
signifies both the colonial thirst for material land and treasure and the paradoxical opposite of the
spiritual promised land, or palace of the soul, which is the inversion of material desire.
111 See Miller and Schele, The Blood of Kings Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art 51.
is found in the *Popol Vuh*, the hieroglyphic chronicle of the Quiché Maya that depicts their creation myths. The story outlines the miraculous birth of divine twins (Hunahpu and Xbalenque) from the spit of the dismembered body of the Maize god – the most powerful of the Maya deities. The twins are required to enter the kingdom of death, submit to playing a ritual ball game (which they must willingly lose), be put to death, only to resurrect themselves, and in the process, resurrect their dismembered father, the Maize god. The narrative of the *Popol Vuh* demonstrates that this game is never fair, since at every stage, the lords of the kingdom of death seek to outwit the young heroes by trickery. When the lords of the kingdom of death fail to outwit the divine twins at their ritual games of death, Hunahpu and Xbalenque offer themselves to death by leaping into an oven and sacrificing themselves. This act of willing death makes them invincible when they eventually choose to resurrect themselves and bring their father, the Maize god, back to life. Historically, the ritual ball game was part of a process of arraignment through which victorious Maya lords would judge their captives. Captives of war were forced to partake in the game, which was always rigged in support of their victorious overlords. The consequence of defeat was ritual sacrifice, deemed necessary in order to supplicate the gods and thus ensure the continued power and prosperity of the victorious rulers.

Although Harris does not refer explicitly to the Hunahpu and Xbalenque myth, the structural parallels between this section of the novel and the myth of the divine twins are striking. For example, we encounter the descent of the twins into the land of the dead in

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112 I use the Tedlock translation that is based on the 18th century transcription by Fracisco Ximenez but informed by twentieth century scholarship on Maya hieroglyphs. Tedlock's translation is recalibrated towards a Quiche understanding of the mythology through the interpretative focus of the Quiche “daykeeper” Andrés Xiloj.
Bone and his twin's descent into the land of Carnival lord Death (146). The ritual ball game is figuratively played by Bone as a child (151-152) and by the primeval hero god referred to as the “Prisoner” who is, figuratively, Bone's predecessor (155). The prisoner loses the ritual game (161) for which both he and Bone suffer a symbolic decapitation (161). Bone is subsequently resurrected to fulfill the final sacrifice that concludes the novel (162). The parallels between the Maya myth and the Christ myth are likewise apparent. The narrator, Bone, refers several times to the Christian subtext of his mythical vision when he names the “Prisoner” a “Christian surrogate God” (157). Within the Mayan mythical frame, human sacrifice of war victims from adversarial kingdoms or cities through the ritual game was a way to propitiate the gods and ensure the continuation of existing power structures for the victorious. Drawing on narratives that outline the environmental collapse from over population and non-sustainable agricultural practice that led to the decay and disappearance of the Mayan kingdoms, Bone suggests that the ritual game served a propitiatory function by which conquering lords created ritual spectacles that reinforced their dominance through religious means.

The ritual game figuratively outlines the imbalances of power involved in the imperial processes by which certain cities rose and fell at the expense of others. The myth of Hunahpu and Xbalenque provides an imaginative recalibration of these power imbalances and offers an alternative vision in which the heroes claim transcendental spiritual victories. This is echoed in the Christ myth where the pharmakos triumphs over death. The victory of the spirit proves the resuscitating force for the sacrificed body, serving as a
metaphor for the constant renewal of significant ideological values and belief systems. In
Bone’s dream book, the myth of the divine twins and the Christ myth function as
evolutionary recalibrations of the Mayan approach to sacrifice. Bone's revisionist
narrative explores the relation between figurative and real sacrifice as a way to address
the collapse of community due to failed ideological structures. Bone then introduces a
twist to his narration when he suggests that significant recalibrations of myth can only
happen through the recognition of his own complicit guilt over the subjugation of the
indigenous feminine and the land.

The notion of a subjugated land is further developed through the metaphor of a deathly
space, alternately called a “grave land”, “waste land” and “limbo land” (143-144). Bone
and his Skeleton Twin enter this space in a narrative act similar to Hunahpu and
Xbalenque. Within the realm of “death”, Bone and his twin see the people of the waste
land as the dancing figures of the Bonampak murals. Recognizing their participation
within the ritual ball/dice game, Bone begins to construct a thread of narrative around the
murals that outlines the significance of the game as a vision of imperialist power. Bone is
already conversant with the nature of the game and its figurative resonances with
narratives of power when, as a boy, his mentor and spiritual guide Mr. Mageye initiates
him into the strategies of violence that characterize the ball game: “Mr. Mageye had told
us in a class of the ball games in the ancient Maya Circus. They played with a hard rubber
ball like a boxer's fist that they bounced on a wall in the Land of the Dead. It was a hard
bruising game of Death and Life in Bonampak” (152). Although he has been offered a
revisionist history lesson as an explanation of the ritual game, Bone continues to remain unconscious of his power within the structures of the game. Bone's participation in the game suggests his complicity within the ancestral dialectics of power that defined processes of subjugation in conquest. But Bone remains unconscious of his participation in the imperialist symbolism of the game until he remembers a dream in which his mother probes the relation between the ritual of propitiation and the dialectics of abjection in the chosen victims of the game.

As an avenging muse, Bone's mother, Marie of Albouystown, uses the figurative language of the Bonampak murals to outline the predatory aesthetics that blur the boundaries between ritual sacrifice and imperialist endeavor. As she reveals her vision of the game to Bone in his dream, he is forced to come to terms with the significance of his role in a perverse conflation of the figurative with the real:

She [Marie of Albouyston] drove me to reflect on famines, on starving peoples who mask their hunger in a cloud that rains on Paradise still where dancing peasants are happy as larks. Do they dance now or do they dance in the long ago? I planted the seed of a game that hungry generations play. Sometimes they are driven by a destructive priesthood or statehood to swarm on battlefields, to lift the game into a killing spectacle. Thus it is that the Virgin gives birth through her son to the necessity to look deep into the furies. (153)

Marie's vision makes Bone conversant with the strategies of power and powerlessness
that the game invokes. It also calls on Bone to revise the Christian myth of sacrifice through the vision of the divine feminine, here characterized as virgin, mother, muse and goddess.

The vision of the Mother/Muse narrates the history of the subjugated land as a recalibrated myth of savior gods and ritual sacrifice. Through her revised mythical lens, Bone understands that the natural world cannot be resuscitated through empty figurative ritual. However, this also suggests that there is a converse incarnate ritual which, through the Muse's recalibration of the archetypal categories in Bone's mythical consciousness, can create healing revisions to his narration of the Jonestown history/myth. Bone's narration of the ritual game played in the waste land (which invoke Christian and Maya narratives of ritual sacrifice) becomes the Muse's vehicle, providing a critical glimpse of the transformative nature of the figurative within narratives of sacrifice. The Muse, or divine feminine, becomes the catalyst in Bone’s figurative revisions of the key myths of the text. She is eventually developed into a fourfold goddess made up of the three Maries and the Hindu goddess Kali. The evolution of the Muse into the terrifying aspect of Kali is intended to disrupt the internal patriarchal frames of the Christian and Mayan myths and provide a commentary on the psychic and symbolic repercussions that occur when the feminine/land becomes the abject victim of colonial and imperial violence.

Of key significance to Bone's revisions to the Hunahpu and Xbalenque myth, and the Christ myth, are the archetypal images or categories of the judging multitude and the
protagonist/pharmakos that are characteristic of the Christ myth and the myth of Hunahpu and Xbalenque. In Bone's mythical revisioning of the ritual game that precedes the judgment of the conquered hero god, the conquering multitudes are the peoples of Central America (156). Bone also suggests that the ghostly corporealities of these deathly inhabitants represent predetermined collective tendencies: “The ghost-players and Bankers and Peasants and Teachers and Politicians at the table – giants of chaos they were – dressed in natural, unnatural flesh like embalmed figures, underpinning ideologies and dogmas”(157). We note that within the conflating image of the “multitude” there is no barrier between the privileged and the destitute – bankers and peasants sit at the same gaming table within Bone’s vision of the Mayan ritual. Within Christian biblical narrative, the Christ myth resolutely places the culpability of the ritual sacrifice of Christ on the shoulders of the multitudes who call for his death. The invocation of this particular archetypal image invokes several problematic contextual frames whose historical repercussions I don't need to rehearse here. Harris's invocation of the archetypal image of the multitude does not revise or recalibrate the notion of antagonism within the Christian myth. In his invocation of the crucifixion, the indigenous people of Roraima become the antagonistic judging hordes of the savior-protagonist, Bone.

The two hero myths involve a cyclical vision in which the conscious participation in ritual sacrifice of the young hero-god restores the spiritual and natural order of the world. Both the Hunahpu and Xbalenque myth and the Christ myth end in resurrection and renewal, invoking, in Northrop Frye's terms, the archetype of Spring. In such a reading,
Bone, by incarnating a radical sense of divine compassion when he dies as the ritual *pharmakos*, would have performed the figurative sacrifice that could renew the collapsed ghostly communities of the Maya and their contemporary incarnation in the people of Jonestown. However, Harris's reading of the Christ myth is more complex, and he steers us away from this conclusion primarily through his interrogation of the narrative of salvation through the Biblical myth of Lazarus. As Lazarus (who has been brought back from the dead for reasons he does not entirely comprehend) Bone's quest journey through the events of his own life involves the eventual arrival at the moment of his second death – a death which is enacted in divine mythical terms, but is, in fact, mortal. Unlike the myths of the hero gods, Bone is not resurrected from this second death and the novel concludes by foregrounding the elements of classical tragedy in which the death of the hero is constructed in terms of the sacrifice of the *pharmakos*. Bone dies with the recognition of the multiple layers of subjectivity signified in the multiple masquerades that he enacts. His ritual masquerades have also brought into being a magnified “collective” consciousness which contains the colonial and imperial transgressions of history as markers, or points of entry, through which Bone revisits and re-negotiates the trauma of his people. Given the subtext of spiritual conquest through resurrection that is cued into the myths of the hero gods, Bone's death becomes a key revision in the mythical structure of the story. Bone's willing death demonstrates a disavowal of the notion of immortality (and the relation between religious ideology and narratives of immortality). The willing death of the protagonist signifies the capacity for human action to revise the contexts of material and spiritual holocausts without resorting to the
resurrection and renewal of ideological masks. Through the death of the first person narrator, Harris also suggests the death of prior narrative systems that have failed their subjects. As the sole survivor of the Jonestown holocaust, and as the narrator/artist of the “dream book”, Bone's figurative self-judgment and death invoke a process of intertextual interrogation and judgment of the differing myths of the text. The novel as “self-judgmental art” functions as a figurative arraignment of the mythical narratives and ideologies that have shaped the course of colonial and imperial histories, both ancient and contemporary, within Harris's reading of the Caribbean.

7. Kali and Anancy: Mythifying the Caribbean Contemporary
Harris's negotiations of differing mythic systems create a radically polysemous sense of narrative. However, his universalist approach to archetypal image diminishes the contextual frames that provoke culturally differentiated responses to myth. Harris claims that the structure of Jonestown calls for the recognition of “adversarial twins” within ideological and mythical systems.\(^{113}\) We have already explored narrative doublings of the Hunahpu and Xbalenque myths with the Christian myth of the savior god. Harris interrogates these narratives through images of the Hindu goddess Kali and the trickster Anancy who act as “adversarial twins” to the quest myths. Harris links Kali, the feminine aspect of divine creation and destruction within the Hindu religious traditions of the Indo-Guyanese, to Anancy, the trickster figure from the Afro-Caribbean mythical tradition, suggesting a syncretic, cross-gendered symbol that addresses the core belief systems of the two largest communities of Guyana. Harris's construction of this syncretic image

\(^{113}\) *Theatre of the Arts*, 235.
brings up several problematic questions about the function of myth when invoked primarily as artifice. The syncretic image of Kali and Anancy affords us an opportunity to scrutinize Harris's claim to cross-cultural mythical intuition. Likewise, it provides an example from which we can analyze the difficult narrative conflation that occurs at moments where the mythical systems of the contemporary Caribbean are read outside their socio-cultural referentialities. Such issues lead us to examine the importance of cultural differentiation within the process of narrating myth.

Kali is first introduced into the narrative in the episode of the grave land/waste land when Bone and the Skeleton Twin begin their conversation about sacrifice, repentance and salvation in relation to the events of Jonestown. Significantly, Bone has just outlined his unwitting participation in the ritual game in its more contemporary form, and just understood that his mother, Marie Antionette of Albouystown is, in fact, an avenging muse who now plays a part in Bone's reconstruction and comprehension of the significance of the Jonestown events as ritual sacrifice/atonement. Bone encounters Kali when his Skeleton Twin alerts him to her significance within the carnival marriage he must enact as Deacon. Both Deacon and his wife-to-be Marie are foundlings who have been taken in by the indentured peasants of South Indian heritage. Kali is thus part of a mythical narrative system that is keyed into the cultural consciousness of two Indo-Guyanese characters. Drawing on the notion of the muse as the hidden judge in such narratives, the Skeleton Twin suggests that his own oracular foresight locates Kali as such a judge:
She [Kali] is a pin-up Goddess for the peasants of Port Mourant. She came from India with indentured servants in the nineteenth century who are amongst Marie of Port Mourant's antecedents. She is a severe and terrifying judge who walks in the shadow of Marie. There again one comes upon a frontier between caring love and judgment shawl that Kali wears. These shall be visible at Deacon's and your wedding feast when you both wed the Virgin of Port Mourant: concretely (in Deacon's tragic marriage to her), apparitionally (in your retrial of the wedding and of Deacon's hubris of immunity to pain in planting the seed of foetal majesty and great but illusory fortune in her). These are riddling terms but you shall see. A seer tests the Imagination to re-examine all “futures” in the light of “pasts”. You shall see I trust. (153)

This passage outlines Bone's role as an oracular seer via the trope of the dream book. It is a passage that outlines the central imaginative project that Harris wishes to accomplish through his narrator. It is interesting that the notion of “seeing” is framed within Bone's encounter with Kali as muse and archetypal image of an entire mythical system (that of the Port Mourant Indo-Guyanese). “Seeing” Kali involves a process of critical re-imagining that establishes a reading of mythical narrative in the Indo-Guyanese context. The narrator draws out a synchronistic relation between the mythical system under scrutiny and the “themes” of the dream book.

Invoked as a “pin-up” goddess, the narration places Kali, and the Hindu mythical and
cultural system that surrounds her in Guyana, within a somewhat reductive frame that suggests a facility of ideological significance apparent in her popularity among the peasants of Port Mourant. As a “vengeful” goddess, Kali is the antithesis of the Christian scapegoat hero god/archetype who is a “non-judging” sacrificial victim in the Jonestown arraignment. Perhaps Harris refers to early Kali ritual practice in Guyana where, in the absence of a Kali statue, prints of the Goddess were used in worship. In Translating Kali's Feast (2000) Stephanos Stephanides and Karna Bahadur Singh outline the use of such ritual prints and their relevance to the construction of community among the Indo-Guyanese (14). Stephanides and Singh's research demonstrates that the Indo-Guyanese peasants of the Courantyne were not economically privileged enough to commission a Kali statue and used prints of the Goddess in their worship practices. The prints bore the tremendous significance of being the ritual embodiments of an entire religious and mythical system. The use of religious prints thus alerts us to the position of deprivation that the Indian indentured laborers held in the Guyanese plantation economy and society.

By using the term “pin-up” Harris attaches an almost derogatory reading of Kali as a populist image, thereby invoking strikingly different codes of reference to the practice of ritual worship for the Indo-Guyanese. Harris uses a form of distortion to invoke a kind of artifice in his construction of the goddess. Kali becomes a symbol of a complex avenging force that “follows” the local female victim, Marie. Since Marie draws her ancestry from the Courantyne Indo-Guyanese, the suggestion is that Kali preys upon unconscious colonial processes that victimize the local female. Kali is constructed as a “diasporic”
goddess whose power extends principally within the imported religious and cultural frame of the Indo-Guyanese. As part of a religious system that is intimately linked to processes of migration and colonization, Harris also constructs Kali as a perpetuation of the cycle of predatory ideological currencies that Bone associates with the events of Jonestown. We cannot really read Kali as a protector of the feminine because the text ultimately suggests that the Kali myth bears a highly ambivalent relationship to both masculine and feminine.

When Bone describes Kali's relationship to Marie, he outlines a curious link between Kali's mythical significance and the dream of economic prosperity and greed within the Indian indentured peasants: “She was the many-armed Goddess of antiquity that indentured peasants from India had brought to the Guyanas in the hope of finding El Dorado and renewing the potency of gold” (193). When Bone suggests that Kali's mythical presence is linked to the desire for “gold” and the elusive quest for the mythical city of El Dorado, he sets the goddess within a mythic frame that has little to do with her function within the religious and cultural frames of the Indo-Guyanese. Although Kali is, in some cases, linked to her counterparts Lakshmi (goddess of wealth) and Saraswati (goddess of learning), her function is primarily that of a protector goddess. As Stephanides and Singh's study of Kali rituals in Guyana demonstrates, Kali worship has a

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114 We notice that Harris constructs genealogies of mythical origins as he traces the migration of religion in each mythical system he invokes. Thus, he links the migration and dispersion of the Maya in relation to the decline of their temple complexes (4). He traces the ascension of Christianity to the arrival of European missionaries and hence, colonialism (53). The arrival of Kali is linked to the South Indian indentured laborers (193), and Anancy stories speak to the trauma of the middle passage (201). Likewise, the arrival of the new messianism of the Temple of the People describes the American missionary movement of the late twentieth century (17).
continued spiritual relevance for the Indo-Guyanese that is socially and culturally complex. Stephanides and Singh cite an overseer's observations on the ritual in the following passage that demonstrates the multiple aspects of Kali's protection: “Leslie Phillips who served as an overseer on the Albion estate, witnessed a puja there in 1923, remarking on the thousands of people on the final day of worship and the presentation of petitions by suppliants to the Goddess. These petitions, the observer notes, includes requests for 'improved health', 'relief from poverty', more 'remunerative employment', liberation from 'devils', and 'fertility for barren women’” (13). We see that the concerns of the supplicants are manifold, and articulate generalized notions of prosperity that include physical health, spiritual wellbeing and economic stability. Furthermore, the study suggests that for the Indo-Guyanese, Kali worship still addresses the terrifying history of the “Kalapani” and serves as a religious narrative of survival for the Indo-Guyanese in much the same way stories of Anancy speak to the histories of spiritual re-invention for the Afro-Guyanese peoples.

When Harris primarily frames the propitiation of the goddess within terms of material “potency”, he narrows the multifaceted function of the goddess within the mythical and religious consciousness of the Indo-Guyanese population. His rationale for this figurative maneuver is that it revises and interrogates the archetype of the virgin/feminine that he previously constructs in relation to the three Maries. Within the themes of the text, Kali functions as a fourth to the triad of Maries. She is the only recognizably divine figure and does not share the same character development as the three Maries. As previously
discussed, the three Maries are constructed as a triad of muses who enlighten Bone on the “visionary” narration of history. Constructed as an antagonistic fourth, Kali is primarily the embodiment of judgment and retribution that is, in turn, linked to the feminine. When the Skeleton Twin draws Bone's attention to Kali's presence at Bone/Deacon's wedding feast, he alerts Bone to the notion of predatory ideological currency which is the integral “fault” at the heart of Bone's and Deacon's transgressions. We discover that these transgressions are lesser versions of the more pervasive imperialist greed of Jonah Jones who believes that the saving force of his vision of civilization must be literally bred into the Indigene via strategies of predatory sexuality (120).

Kali appears to follow in the wake of particular constructions of predatory sexuality in which the indigenous female victim (here constructed in the image of the virgin-archetype) becomes a cog in the wheel of colonial and imperial process. The introduction of Kali into the text invokes a revision of notions of the feminine by positing an image of the judging, consuming goddess. She provides an alternative mythical narrative to the virgin-archetype. However, in Harris's construction of the Kali myth, Bone is horrified to discover that the goddess “strangles” female infants, thereby suggesting a fundamental paradox in her role as protector of the feminine and judge of the predatory masculine. Bone's mentor Mr. Mageye attempts to demonstrate that this aspect of Kali arises out of the consequences of economic deprivation which is, in turn, linked to the aftermath of colonialism. In his words: “Kali kills out of brutal economic necessity. The male child is privileged, the female is sometimes a liability...Kali is associated with the guardianship
of the Virgin yet kills infant females! It's a bleak parable, civilization fuels Kali, civilization sustains her; when economic necessity incorporates violence into itself and Love, the Virgin's Love, becomes an ornament” (204). It is apparent that Mr. Mageye links the practice of female infanticide to the worship of Kali. We understand the revisionist polemics that link forms of violence to the “economic necessity” of survival (which makes violence a paradoxical gesture of salvation). However, this also makes it impossible to separate the rather problematic ideological construction of Kali worship as a cultural practice that condones female infanticide from Harris's mythical vision of Kali as postcolonial avenger.

This revision of text and archetype is outlined by Mr. Mageye in the following terms:

When one reads reality differently from slavish alignment to literal frame or code, when one reads by way of indirections that diverge from formula or frame, by way of weighing another text (a hidden text) in a given text, then the privileged male discloses privilege as a form of perversity, a trauma, that cracks open to hint at the saviour-archetype dressed in partialities and biases that civilization should never absolutize or it is forever trapped in the venom of history” (204).

The passage suggests that the function of Kali needs to be read through a “hidden text” that reveals the ossification of mythical and ideological symbolism within “reality”. Harris's sense of “reality” revolves around the problem of female infanticide that is sanctioned and condoned via the spiritual practice of the Indo-Guyanese. However, to
suggest a cultural and spiritual link between female infanticide and Kali worship is to set in motion an extremely problematic and reductive stereotype which frames Harris's narration of the Indo-Guyanese. When Harris links the pernicious practice of female infanticide to ritual sacrifice in Kali propitiation (even though there is no social or cultural link between the two in the Guyanas) he constructs a figurative link between two projected aspects of Indo-Guyanese cultural practice that masquerade as aspects of the “real”. By doing so he fundamentally violates the social, cultural and religious practices and beliefs of an entire community in the name of artifice.

Harris's rationale for constructing the figurative link between sacrifice and propitiation is to further extend the visionary thematics of the novel. By identifying the function of culture-specific “sacrifice” with culture-specific religious practice, he can demonstrate the numinous potency of certain ideological drives (in this case, the drive to propitiate “economic necessity”) in certain communities. However, by framing this discourse within a humanistic mode of reading that ascribes a universalized cultural significance to sacrifice, Harris can invoke these figures primarily as metaphors that elaborate the savior archetype. This enables him to further expand his sense of the savior archetype in such a way that it addresses the fundamental crime against the feminine that is linked to the processes of colonialism and imperialism in Jonestown. Harris reinforces this reading with a figurative sleight of hand, or “turn”, in which a sacrificed female infant “doubles” as the savior-archetype: “Likewise, the pathetic female infant on Kali's wheel may still break the shell of brute economic necessity to reveal the Virgin-archetype on the Cross of
the Wheel. The chasm between gender, male and female, is momentarily bridged” (204).

To suggest that the savior-archetype may be a doubled vision of the virgin-archetype would be a radical revision to the gendered polemics of the Christ myth which frames Bone's narrative. However, the novel's conclusion offers us none of the hermeneutic, double-gendered symbolism that this textual moment promises.

Harris pushes the notion of a syncretic mythical symbolism further when he links the figure of the spider and the narratives of Anancy as the tricksterish icon of resistance for the African diaspora to the many-armed image of Kali. Drawing on the figurative resonance between Kali's many “wheeling” arms that are also instruments of mortal judgment, Harris superimposes the spider's multiple lineaments onto Kali in an image that invokes notions of mystical transmutation and yet, at the same time, outlines a nightmarish metaphorical construction of “monstrous” spiritual and ideological power. As Bone attempts to come to terms with his vision of gendered violence in Kali, he watches the mystical spider creep through the cracks and align himself with the goddess:

The Spider knew how unprepossessing it was, it knew the terror it could infuse in others. He (or It) knew it had edged itself into the lineaments of the nightmare guardians of the Virgin. But, on the other hand, its attunement [sic] to the mystical technology of the Gods, exercised in my phantom fingers, gave it a grasp or hold on the Virgin's unconditional love... (205)

Although the spider aligns himself with the “nightmare guardians” of the virgin, his
strange perception of the “technology” of Gods, or, the mechanics of ideological function, enables him to grasp (Harris intends the pun) the unconditional love of the virgin. Therefore, although the spider is aligned, with the goddess Kali, this passage suggests that the function of mythical tricksterism, with its doubled polysemic approach to language, affords a differing strategy of adaptation than that of the devouring goddess.

Bone's meditation on the function of Anancy-tricksterism draws a parallel between lying speech and necessity. We note that the word “necessity” was used previously in the passage describing Kali worship where, as “economic necessity”, it provides the reason for female infanticide within Harris's construction of sacrifice as artifice. Likewise, as Harris adds figurative density to the image of the judging goddess by aligning the Anancy spider to her wheeling limbs, he expands the allusion to involve the first human trickster, Prometheus. Harris reworks the notion of “necessity” in each new textual moment to signify differing degrees of a compulsive “will to power”: “Prometheus lied to cover his rebellion. He lied in order to conceal himself, in order to plot. Violence was born out of apparent necessity, necessary rebellion, necessary lies. Why did he lie?... He saw his chance to rule” (207). This “play” of language which adds layers of textual and textural meaning to the core phrase, builds a dense yet systematic reading of the relation between forms of resistance available (via myth) to the Indian and African communities in Guyana, and the adaptation of such mythical narratives as vehicles for strategies of predatory power politics. In her early essay “The Metaphor of Anancy in Caribbean Literature” Helen Tiffin points out that there are frequent narrative threads within Anancy
stories that demonstrate Anancy's predatory nature. These narrative threads function as strategies that outline the dire need and consequence of adaptation. Tiffin suggests that the internal ambivalence within Anancy stories may have arisen in part due to projected notions of “self-contempt” on the part of the disenfranchised African slave population from whom the stories draw their genesis. Tiffin argues that the predatory nature of Anancy provides an important narrative surface on which notions of self-contempt can be worked out in mythical terms. Tiffin's early reading of the ambivalence at the core of the Anancy stories (which she constructs in relation to Caribbean fiction including the work of Harris) has clear relevance to Harris's revisions of the Anancy myth in Jonestown. As part of the artifice of layered, decentered mythical narrative, the extended metaphor that links Kali to Anancy, and then to Prometheus, works via the invocation of the classical function of anagnorisis. Bone begins to comprehend the multi-layered metaphor and its relevance to his narration of the events of the Jonestown massacre through his gradual recognition of the ideological function of each archetypal image and the mythical narrative it invokes.

Harris draws on two mythical figures who play key roles in the respective communal narratives of resistance to colonialism of the Indo and Afro-Guyanese, and suggests that these figures play ideologically neo-colonial roles within the collective psyches of these communities. Harris's constructions of Kali and Anancy as part of the narrative fabric of the Predator (206) suggest a rather damning reading of the function of myth in postcolonial Guyana. Furthermore, because the polemics of the text suggest a saving
counter narrative to these myths and ideologies of power based on a Christian mythical frame, Harris falls back on a position wherein, on an ideological plane, the differing mythical narratives are ultimately contained and redeemed by the Christ myth, or as he calls it, the “savior-archetype”. As Bone concludes: “I perceived why the huntsman Christ held the Predator in his net when he saved my life. Its marking and hieroglyphs and signatures needed to attune themselves to changing natures of nature, memorials of catastrophe, therapeutic Bone-fire, and the ultimate hoped-for withdrawal from lies in the ambiguous technologies of Prometheus” (208). The “withdrawal from lies” suggests a withdrawal from the “technologies” tricksterish ideological narratives. When Harris equates the speech of the trickster with “lies” he suggests a disenchantment with riddling speech as a function of resistance, radical mimicry and adaptation in the violence of the colonial and imperial moment. Harris critically revises the entire discourse on tricksterism in language and history that is central to the postcolonial project of writing back and speaking back to the center. Conversely, this disavowal of Promethean “lie” (with its concomitant invocation of the anxiety of modernity) is built on the predication of the “hidden text” which, however, does not function through processes of riddling speech but through a sense of the oracular. Given the fact that these oracular, hidden narratives are primarily mediated via the vision of the narrator, and that they are contained by partial, chosen symbolism with constructed resonances selected from the vast body of cultural narratives attached to these mythical images, Harris ultimately falls into the pitfall of constructing the selfsame ideologically coded speech that he attempts to write against.
The conflation of universal and local in Harris's syncretic mythical maneuvers encourages a particular critical response that indulges the erasure of cultural specificity and thus propagates an act of “reading over” the indigenous mythical systems. For example, in Translating Kali's Feast, Stephanides claims that Harris uses the figure of Kali to invoke a notion similar to Walter Benjamin's “pure language” (106). For Stephanides, Kali invokes the sense of the permeability of language; “The Goddess Kali is figured as a site of translatability, and is the force behind the masks of the three Maries. Her womb space is not configured as the site of birth, but of rebirth and, therefore, as the non-original site of irreducible waste or lightning relics that constitute history's desire, claiming and claimed by the translator” (107). It is curious that a scholar such as Stephanides, who does meticulous research on the origins and practice of Kali worship in Guyana, remains inured to the difficulties attendant in Harris's adaptation of the image of the goddess as artifice. Stephanides's reading of Kali as the “non-original site of irreducible waste” once more brings up the issue of the seemingly a-historical site of the archetype. Having provided a detailed ethnographic study on the function of Kali worship and its importance as a form of cultural resistance and survival for marginalized Indo-Caribbean communities, Stephanides is unconcerned by Harris's construction of Kali within the figurative explorations of the Predator. His theoretical apologetics on the translatability of Harris's Kali imagery reinforce the appropriation of local mythical systems and symbols for the a-historical reinvention of a universal mythical narrative.
8. The Process of Differentiation
Harris's reading of archetypes within the Indo/Afro-Guyanese mythical systems is problematic because it employs archetypal images within an undifferentiated socio-cultural vacuum. Furthermore, although the novel's conclusion employs the trope of the resurrected savior god archetype as present in pre-Columbian ritual art and Christian myth, it does not revise or open a radical possibility of the category of resurrection beyond figurative death for the so-called “native”. The judging hordes of Roraima do not partake in Bone's ritual death, nor do they share his redemption in the “net of the huntsman Christ” (233). Likewise, the thematics of the text suggest that because they perpetuate a colonial cycle of propitiatory, judging sacrifice of the pharmakos (as distinct from willing sacrifice of the self in the case of Bone), these peoples are bound to an eternal rehearsal of the dialectics that define colonial and imperial constructions of “self” and “other”. While the conclusion of the novel constructs anagnorisis in relation to Bone and, by extension, to the reader, it does not suggest that this consciousness is shared by the other characters in the text. The novel suggests that the “community” that is transformed through the archetype of the savior god is primarily Harris's audience, the projected postcolonial reading public who participate in the journey of the hero, consume his body as ritual morsel and heed his oracular speech. It is the redemption of the contemporary reader that is implied and implicated in Bone's leap of faith that concludes the novel. Harris's reading public is not the local or indigenous subject but the literate consumers who are “always already” outside the contextual immediacy and historical bias of the events at Jonestown. It is thus important to question what Harris accomplishes for the global reader by invoking this quest myth when the text does not create a space
for the collectivized local or indigenous subject to participate in the narrative. Does this narrative bring us any closer to a conscious reading of the events of Jonestown? Can we really claim to dream the depth of tragedy required to read this text through the devices Harris employs?

In his essay “Imagination Dead Imagine”, which is a proximate critical piece to Jonestown, Harris outlines his desire to construct what he terms a “self judgmental” art form. Drawing on his notions on the cross-cultural genesis of the imagination, Harris suggests that the creative negotiation of strange, or othering, mythologies provides a necessary fluidity of self definition that is key to the function of memory when narrating historical process:

We need today, it seems to me, an openness to the language of the Imagination simultaneous with a grasp of the sacred, which requires self-confessional and profound, self-judgemental art rooted in a spectrum of variable identity... the alert to the lapses and legacies of the past would be unbearable if it did not acquire a degree of density that steeps us in diverse personae – sometimes virtually abreast of each other – which help us to see ourselves differently, see ourselves broken into many players within ourselves and within stranger cultures” (191-192).

For Harris, the ability to acquire and inhabit “variable identities”(191) through the “hosting” text gives the contemporary reader the ability to revise his/her own personal frame of identity. This process also involves the author's creative entry into “stranger
cultures”(192). In Jonestown we see this argument played out in his layering of the Christian savior god archetype with parallel archetypal images from Maya iconographies. Likewise, we expect that Harris intends a similar cross-cultural fluidity in his construction of the syncretic Kali and Anancy iconography hitherto discussed. However, the character of the divine predator outlined in the image of Kali and Anancy, while providing a double-edged vision of a complex cultural ideology, foregrounds a reading of local myth as cultural “other” to the Christian myth of the savior. If we participate in the ritual drama of the text, we also participate in the “othering” of the images of Kali and Anancy in Harris's discourse on predatory polemics. Despite the porous nature of the mythical invocations at work, the structure of the text foregrounds moral binaries which, though interdependent, invoke a desired hierarchy of myth.

Harris's use of the notion of archetype is problematic because he foregrounds the notion of the text as oracle and urges his readers to participate within the numinous personae of the archetypal images he employs. The sense that Harris's work is oracular largely stems from statements where he suggests that the role of the writer is to produce the text that brings about the effect of transubstantiating traumatic memory. Such a living revision of the trauma of history allows for a recognition of the sacred as a possible frame by which the postcolonial subject may negotiate the strictures of punitive identity politics. Harris outlines this sense of textual transubstantiation when he suggests that the text is a vehicle of the sacred: “An elusive deity or creator who one may view, so to speak, through a series of windows – all of which are meaningful self-deceptions – alerts us to the
fallibility of human discourse, a purely human discourse. We need to revise our understanding, I find, of the nature of the Voice we hear – the nature of our utterance – in dialogue with the sacred” (189). According to Harris, this text revises the fated nature of human endeavor by foregrounding the cracks and gaps through which the author provides significant reversals to the unities of plot and characterization that are standard novelistic practice. But, as this passage suggests, such gaps or “windows” in human discourse are the spaces in which a numinous utterance arises. The capitalization of “Voice” suggests a theism where human speech affects a quality of oracular statement. Such notions of “oracular” speech contaminate the capacity for human voices within the text to speak with agency since the speaking voice becomes a primarily figurative vehicle for the author's ideological propositions.

For Harris, the invocation of the sacred as a figurative strategy is in keeping with his disavowal of the modes of realist narration that we first encounter in “Tradition”. Likewise, in “Imagination Dead Imagine”, Harris maintains his assertion that the function of realism in the novel invokes an aesthetic of persuasion which can, at best, only provide a partial vision of linear coherence: “Even as we perceive the usefulness of realistic narrative, we become aware, surely, of its partial stance in illuminating the legacies of the past, the motivations of the past that run far deeper than the surfaces of facts” (189). Curiously, Harris's reading of realism leaves no room for the function of realism as a formal aspect of fiction. His criticism that realism espouses a “partial stance” toward historical fact strikes any reader as unusual since it is precisely partial and fragmented
historical image that characterizes Harris's own aesthetic project. Likewise, Harris's assertion that realism provides partial illumination of complex history suggests that non-realist narrative strategies provide an entry point into notions of historical motivation by disrupting notions of verisimilitude and structural unity. This assertion is problematic because it suggests that the non-realist text provides a porous narrative frame in which the reader can attempt an ideological free-fall into historical event. Furthermore, the suggestion that the text is oracular brings the reader into a space in which the construction of meaning is already framed by the sacrality of the text. Such a text leaves no room for critical agnosticism and contains the act of interpretation in a pre-conceived “dialogue with the sacred”.

Harris goes on to suggest that the fictional text speaks against realism by invoking the sacred, which, in turn, speaks via myth. Harris's strategy of narrating history through foregrounding gaps is largely accomplished by invoking mythical narrative: “Myth – a despised concept in an age of realism – endorses a series of instinctualities in all useful but partial windows that we erect upon and into reality” (190). Harris's assertion that myth “endorses a series of instinctualities” suggests that the mythical narrative largely plays on the desire for a pre-extant frame that arises through instinct. Therefore, myth can only function via the “affect” produced by instinct. This reading of myth places a primacy on the capacity of the reader to produce an instinctual interpretative relationship to mythical narrative, and, in turn, suggests that this sense of the instinctual is a window, or frame, by which to approach the materiality of the “real”. Fundamentally, the reader
intuits an interpretative frame onto reality that is garnered through myth. We see that Harris's disenchantment with formal realism does not affect his desire to bring about a transformation of the “real” via strategies of imaginative re-mythification. His concern in “Tradition”, that realism binds the categories of the “real” within an overly accessible “rhetoric of persuasion” (30) is slightly at odds with his understanding that myth “persuades” via an internal rhetoric of emotion or affect. This slim distinction depends on the fact that the former is constructed via conscious recognition and participation in narrative frame, and the latter via the unconscious “affect” of the mythical frame. However, the affective quality of the instinctual that Harris invokes is perhaps even more persuasive than formal realism precisely because (by his own admission) it functions via unconscious processes. Harris's mobilization of myth rests on the slippery ground of projected unconscious process and content which contributes to the problematic ideological positions that underscore his treatment of the Kali and Anancy myths in Jonestown.

Harris's problem may paradoxically lie with his disavowal of the process of differentiation that was an essential part of Jung's approach to archetypal image. In “The Technique of Differentiation”, Jung foregrounds the necessity of the artist to maintain an oppositional stance to the fantastic elements in a work through conscious process. Speaking of a text in which the unconscious archetypal image is presented as a phenomenon sui generis Jung states that: “...the vision is experienced artistically, but not humanly. By 'human' experience I mean that the person of the author should not just be
included passively in the vision, but that he should face the figures of the vision actively and reactively, with full consciousness... a real settlement with the unconscious demands a firmly opposed conscious standpoint"(211). Jung's approach suggests an oppositional function that provides the check and balance that contains the archetypal content of fantasy. Such a process ensures that the subject is not ultimately subsumed in archetypal content. The process of conscious opposition also depends primarily on the subject's capacity for differentiation and eventual integration of the archetypal image into the world of the conscious psyche.

Likewise, although responsible for the notion of the collective unconscious from which Harris draws his sense of the “world unconscious”, Jung states quite clearly that the symbolic nature of the unconscious vision in dreams is entirely related to the individual creative vision of the subject, no matter how collective it might appear. Jung reiterates that it is fundamentally impossible to enter into the symbolic universe of the “other” since he/she is always already differentiated from the self:

The vast majority of people are quite incapable of putting themselves individually into the mind of another. This is indeed a singularly rare art, and, truth to tell, it does not take us very far. Even the man whom we think we know best and who assures us that we understand him through and through is at bottom a stranger to us. He is different. The most we can do, and the best, is to have at least an inkling of his otherness, to respect it, and to guard against the outrageous stupidity of wishing to interpret it.

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The passage argues forcibly against the process of projecting the symbolic structures of the self onto the other. And while Jung suggests in *Alchemical Studies*, that myth is the “textbook of archetypal image” (199) this passage suggests (in keeping with the polemics of psychoanalytical discourse) that the function of individuation is to arrive at a differentiated personal myth that is separate and distinct from collective myths. Jung asserts that the individual who indulges in universalizing mythologies remains fundamentally trapped within collective processes: “If these contents [archetypal images of the collective unconscious] remains unconscious, the individual is, in them, unconsciously commingled with other individuals – in other words, he is not differentiated, not individuated” (223).

While Jung's theories on personal and universal symbolism relate specifically to the work of the dream, they provide an interesting recalibration to the notions of archetypal and collective iconography that Harris invokes. Paradoxically, Harris's sense of the archetypal image invokes a sense of porousness which is meant to open “partial windows” into the “instinctual”. 115 Although such a project has the capacity to create a space for the reader to negotiate and build individual significance out of mythical tropes, Harris's construction of the “instinctual” as a humanist impulse is problematic because it invokes a universalizing discourse on the “human condition”. Harris's reading of the “instinctual” is actually Jung's “collective unconscious” by another name. Furthermore, while Harris revises inherited mythical visions such as Kali or Anancy within his recalibrated

115 See Harris,” Imagination Dead Imagine” 191.
understanding of contemporary Guyanese socio-cultural issues, his re-mythification of
the contents of these images happens via personal ideological perspectives that are
specific to his own cultural consciousness. The capacity for the reader to build a sense of
the “instinctual” is thus “always already” mediated via Harris's revisions of the mythical
frame.

9. Conclusion
In conclusion, I wish to return to the issue of realism and its possible relationship as a
mediating and differentiating frame to the potential inflation of affect that one
experiences in Harris's narratives. When we place *Jonestown* beside *The English Patient,*
*The Everest Hotel* and *The Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café,* we encounter the
radically different approaches to myth that the authors mobilize in each individual text.
Sealy and Ondaatje have a subtle, nuanced approach to narrating myths of community.
Sealy's narrative form is primarily realist with a measured use of myth as structuring
principle or allusion. Ondaatje is most proximate to Harris in his experimental narrative
techniques and dense multi-layered intertextual allusions. For Sealy, myth inhabits the
realist narrative and is a necessary punctuation to the seemingly enlightened discourses
on modernism that frame and contain the idea of a contemporary India. For Ondaatje,
myth defines the plot of the text, revising and reworking its archetypal power. While
Yuson's novel may appear most proximate to *Jonestown* in its experimental narrative
techniques, Yuson's irreverent approach to myth as a problematic ideologically coded
category, is mediated through a sustained use of irony that is entirely distinct from
Harris's employment of myth. By juxtaposing layers of bibliographic material on myth against the personal historical narration of the events of the Marcos regime, Yuson explores and exposes the evolution of certain national myths and their potentially potent (or impotent) ideological influence on contemporary Filipino identity politics. Both Yuson and Sealy are concerned primarily with notions of the local, and their novels foreground the sense of “recalibrated” negotiations of myth that speak to the socio-cultural specificities of their respective historical legacies. Ondaatje uses myth to frame his vision of historical fiction, but because his concern is not with narrating the local, his employment of archetypal images and narratives foregrounds a sense of universal symbolism that works as transnational parable. Harris, on the other hand, uses a particular historical event to invoke the permeability of universal mythical systems. *Jonestown* becomes something of a universal allegory on the greed of imperialism that ignores the specificities of the historical climate that gave rise to the events of the Jonestown massacre.

The particular kind of porousness invoked by Harris's syncretic mythological imagery is filled with resonances that are constructed and mediated by the author himself. Therefore, as we read the character of Bone within the framing narratives of the Christ and Lazarus myths, and as further mythical images are brought into play through intertextual, or rather, inter-imagistic allusion, we are distinctly discouraged from reading the events of the Jonestown massacre through a historical perspective. In this approach to narrative, despite the richness of the intertextual mythical dialog that Harris sets up, metanarratives
that function via the myth of the savior are written over the specificities of people, time and place. It is precisely the victims of Jonestown who never arrive at articulation. Given the fact that survivor accounts of the holocaust are documented, and that a vast body of material that negotiates the trauma of the event exists, it is curious that none of this makes it, even in figurative form, into Harris's narrative. Jonestown becomes a Tabula Rasa on which Harris traces his own preoccupations on neo-colonial consumption behind the masquerade of archetype. While his intention is profoundly humanist and entirely devoid of self-reflexive irony, his project nevertheless underscores the difficulty of invoking the archetypal potential in myth, specially in the context of narrating localized traumatic histories, without providing a parallel conscious narrative container for its projected numinosity.

In The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective (1992) Antonio Benitez Rojo voices a particular concern over seemingly accessible exoticism of the magical realist project. Describing the appropriation of notions of local storytelling as characteristic of the mythical function in the magical realist text, Benitez Rojo states:

Their stories [the narratives of the 'lumpen'], (dis)ordered, (un)wound and (un)authorized, whose discourses spring out of mutilations and abusive practices that happened in all of the times and spaces of the world, are here drained of all the social violence that they carry, put on an equal

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116 Shiva Naipaul's Black and White (1980) is a striking example of a text that provides a vital historical and political reading of the events of Jonestown through a resolutely personal narration. In a different vein, the survivor account of Deborah Layton, Seductive poison: a Jonestown survivor's account of life and death in the People's Temple (1998) demonstrates the dense culture of paranoia that Jones fostered that led directly to the holocaust.
ahistorical plane, and heard as homogeneous and legitimate signifiers that constitute knowledge itself. In passing into the genres of literature, this “other” discourse helps to inform modes of expression now known as magical realism, the neo-baroque, the real maravilloso, forms of expression which are at bottom the same, which in the case of the Caribbean, refer to the same socio-cultural space, trying to decenter the violence of their origins with their own excess, looking for legitimation in their own illegitimacy. (212-213)

At root, Benitez Rojo alerts us to the ever present issue of appropriation that is at the heart of this kind of mythical revision. Are these revised myths ever going to speak to the peoples from whom they trace their genesis? Do they not rather address the de-racinated body of the global reader and feed the ever expanding boundary of the cosmopolitan story?

*Jonestown* concludes with Bone's judgment. Having finally arrived at consciousness of his complicity in the colonial/imperial crime, Bone recognizes the colonial in himself, and understands the meaning of wearing the Predator's skin. In this moment, Bone enters, in deadly seriousness, into the masquerade of self and other. When Bone allows himself to be sacrificed in place of his nemesis, the resolutely “colonial” Deacon, he enacts a willing “Christian” sacrifice. At the moment of his “sacrifice”, Bone finds that he carries the power of both the predator and the savior child within himself. In his moment of ritual death, the two are resurrected with equal potency: “I fell into a net of music, the net
of the huntsman Christ. The Predator peered through me, in me, but was held at bay in
the net. We stood face to face, Dread and I, Predator and I. Old age and youth parted and
I was naked in the lighted Darkness of the Self. The Child rode on the Predator’s groaning
back” (233). As Bone becomes the willing sacrifice, the “net” of Christ intervenes and
provides a frame of containment for both the resurrected predator and the child.

This archetypal synthesis of darkness and light only happens within the protagonist's
“self”, and we are left wondering what relevance or significance this pairing of opposites
has for the “waiting populace” and the “judges” who literally threw their “savior” off the
cliff? If we take into account that the text of the novel is Bone's dream book, and it is
written from “Trinity Street, New Amsterdam”(3), we carry the dim hope that in his
posthumous imaginary, Bone remains in Guyana, locates himself within the urban center
of New Amsterdam and attempts to re-negotiate the recurring trauma of his inner myth.
As such, his narrative demonstrates to the palimpsestic nature of Harris's writing that
Andrew Bundy speaks of in his Preface to The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination.
Bundy suggests (in a coincidentally Jungian reading) that the archetypal arises from the
states of unconscious figurative ambulation:

...the hypotheses of archetypal fiction are approximative concepts.
Approximative because they issue from chronic states. States that come
about from the fact of not-knowing and a not recognizing: Harris's
overlapping layers and environments and theaters of legend and history.
One associates such layers with discontinuities in our experience of Being;

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moments of terminus and fall from the fixed stars (disaster); trauma and
disappearance; but also redemptive movements from the future and
reversal of the past. (38)

Bone's dream book frames his trauma and gives it form, a form which can help him bring
consciousness to his subjectivity. However, Bone's figurative letter to W.H. reminds us
once again that Bone's story does not go back to his people. It travels across the seas to
the sympathetic exile through whose mediation it enters the global literary market. Harris
uses the figurative device of the author as editor over and again in his novels, gesturing to
an “other”, indigenous authorial source for the narrative. While Harris's characters may
remain localized, their fictions aspire to and eventually attain the universal archetypal
“currency” that their subjects cannot ever hold.
V Squaring the Postcolonial Circle: From Stereotype to Archetype

I conclude this work by referring to Jung's imagistic metaphor for individuation “the squaring of the circle”, because it symbolically captures the kind of critical effort required to read myth in postcolonial literature.\textsuperscript{117} Jung used this symbol to suggest the eternal tension and play between collectivity and individual consciousness. If a circle symbolizes the universal and eternal, the square is the finite, individual, “containing” frame of the circle. For Jung, the square symbolized the conscious negotiation of the infinite power of archetype. For the postcolonial writer, the narration of history via myth has produced a preoccupation with cyclical themes that hint at shared anxieties over the dialectics of dispossession that lurk beneath the specificities of local historical moments. However, in postcolonial studies, we have grown increasingly uncomfortable with notions of the universal, and, by extension, with the archetypal. In part, this is due to a theoretical slippage that associates universalizing discourse with archetypal symbols. This anxiety has framed our discourses on myth, ritual and cultural practice, and their representations in literature, in overtly narrow terms that ascribe a neo-colonial frame of reference to archetypes. As a result, the postcolonial critic has shied away from a productive exploration of the archetypal categories of narrative even though archetypal narratives have been a constant presence in postcolonial literature. While there is a significant critical discourse on the function of myth in literature, at root, we have no critical discourse that can productively analyze the notion of a cross-cultural imaginary.

\textsuperscript{117} See Jung, \textit{Zarathustra} 1088.
Our discomfort with the notion of archetype springs from the foundational theoretical explorations on the construction of otherness in colonial discourse. For example, few would disagree that Sir William Jones's Third Anniversary Discourse (1786) invokes a symbolic reading of the colonized other that simultaneously magnifies and diminishes the vast plurality of a multiracial, multicultural and multilingual people into a monolithic symbol of an originary culture (demonstrated via Jones's philological theses). Essentially, Jones constructs a myth that serves a vital purpose in the colonial project of British India. It is in response to such colonial frames of reference that postcolonial critical practices outline the way discourse produces, defines, and sustains the notion of the “other” in relation to colonial knowledge systems. Thus, when Homi Bhabha outlines the construction of colonial stereotype, he provides an analysis of the way unifying images contain the radical,polysemous nature of otherness. Read another way, we might say that Bhabha recalibrates the myth of the “other” by exposing the dialectics of power at work in colonial discourse. Bhabha correctly identifies stereotype as a frame that invites rupture. However, rupturing stereotype is a relatively facile process because the image of the stereotype, unlike archetype, speaks in recognizable binaries. As postcolonial critics, we are well versed in the many avatars of colonial stereotype from Kipling's Hurree Chunder Mookherjee to Naipaul's Mrs. Tulsi. These characters are hardly mythic, and their functions, within the ideological frames of their texts, are only somewhat complex. They do not really invoke a sense of a cross-cultural imaginary as a character like Sealy's Yeti does. Thus, the recognition of stereotype produces the relatively clear boundary

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118 See Bhabha, “The Other Question: Stereotype, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism.”
between “self” and “other” which is far easier to negotiate than the polymorphous boundaries of archetype.

When a writer invokes myth through archetypal narrative patterns, or archetypal images, he/she draws on a very different mode of narration than that of stereotype. The potential of archetypal image to invoke a sense of numinous, oracular speech demonstrates its capacity to invoke powerful symbols that speak beyond themselves. The function of archetype as a storehouse of ideological persuasion, and its ability to inhabit a middle space that is both between and beyond the polemics of “self” and “other”, suggest a form of narration that radically destabilizes the ideological structures of storytelling. Through archetypal images, narratives of identity, human relationship, land, nation and agency, and the eternal swordplay of the individual against the collective, function like signifying explosions that grasp the reader “from behind” suggesting an unconscious logic that is far more potent than the recognizable frames of stereotype. Thus, reading archetype in fiction also requires a herculean critical effort which brings analytic, contextual containment to the power of these narratives. It is because Harris's narratives are so densely archetypal that he remains one of the most “difficult” writers of the twentieth century. It is also the reason why so many critics speak with such surety about the humanism of his narratives.

In narratives that invoke a sense of oracle or prophecy, it is vital to scrutinize the internal rhetoric of affect that persuades the reader towards particular ideological positions in as
nuanced a manner as is possible. In *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories? Finding Common Ground* (2003) Edward Chamberlin suggests that the act of postcolonial reading involves the constant critical recalibration of inner mythical space that recognizes the fact that we read the myths of “others” via the potencies of our own. Writing on the nature of prophetic speech, Chamberlin states:

...the stories in which the secular and the sacred are bound together are sometimes hard to believe, like those that say aboriginal people have been here since time immemorial or that one prophet is truer than another. But prophets don't speak that kind of truth. That's the whole point of prophets; they speak prophecy, which transcends the category of truthtelling without rejecting it... We don't need to listen to these stories in a different way; we need to listen to them the same way we do to all stories of a certain sort. Did the Greeks believe in their myths? Yes and no. Were they true? Absolutely. (51)

Chamberlin's call to listen in the “same way” we listen to our own stories is a necessary reminder of the way we read and respond to myth. His manner of reading myth recognizes the to and fro of internal affective projection that must happen in order for a myth to speak with potency. Myth functions within a category of “truth” that is defined by inward communal and individual negotiations. The sense that prophetic speech “transcends the category of truthtelling without rejecting it” reminds us of the vital (if somewhat spectral) presence of categorical constructions of truth within the mythical process. In Chamberlin's reading, “truth” functions as the resonant “other” in the
reader/listener's inward journey through myth. Chamberlin's call for respect outlines our location within the process of reading myth and demonstrates the socio-culturally coded dialectics of self and other in mythical discourse. Chamberlin reminds us that the nature of prophetic or oracular speech begins with questions that ask, “whose oracle, whose prophecy?” Who do we fix in constructions of self-hood and otherness in the narrative container of myth?

I hope the present study demonstrates that reading myth in postcolonial fiction, without a functioning discourse on archetype, misses half of the point. Discourses on religion, ritual or cultural practice cannot serve the same critical function as an analytical study of archetype because they are locked into temporal frames that only signify within the specific contextualities of historical moments. This study demonstrates that authors can use the archetypal nature of myth to transcend history in fiction. While I agree with Barthes that myth is always already ideologically coded, I also suggest that archetypal images narrate ideology in difficult, slippery ways. It is for this reason that I insist on a critical recalibration that brings context back to myth – the only method by which the free-fall of the universal or archetypal image can be contained in a socio-culturally responsible reading. While all four novels in this study are quest romances, the specificities of the authors' engagement with issues of region ultimately create separate and highly individual negotiations of the power of myth within text. These negotiations demonstrate that the postcolonial author ascribes a continued relevance to myth as a vehicle for collective narrative significance. This struggle between the collectivity of
mythical narrative and the author's deconstruction of its ideological power brings a complexity to the novels in this study that has hitherto been largely ignored. While this study is specific to the four novels under survey, I would venture to suggest that this method of reading myth can be productively used in a far greater variety of contemporary fiction to demonstrate the difficulty of negotiating the gaps and resonant silences of mythical pasts within a postcolonial present. I hope that the evolution of this method of reading myth in literature will eventually include inter-regional studies of fictions from around the world that will further probe and question our reading practices. For example, can a reading of myth expose the concordant dissonances between Mudrooroo and Thomas King, or Sunetra Gupta and Zadie Smith? Is the narration of myth gendered? Can we conceive of a “postcolonial archetype”? Such future readings can only serve to further enrich our understanding of the depth and complexity of the function of myth in postcolonial literature.
VI Works Consulted


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