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Cultural Narratives and Poetic Imagination: Myths and Fairy Tales in Robinson Jeffers' Poems

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Abstract

Aim: This study aims to establish the idea that myths and fairy tales in various literary forms and environments are reflections of the socio-cultural constructs in a particular society. It is also the objective of this essay to highlight the various pros and cons of myths and fairy tales in the poems of Robinson Jeffers.

Methodology and Approach: This essay discusses the terms 'myths' and 'fairy tales' in brief and their role in poems as socio-cultural constructs. It is also the essay's objective to reconsider the purpose of poets and other creative writers in telling and retelling myths, legends, and fairy tales in literature and other artistic discourses. Besides, this essay also tries to have an analysis of the experience of traveling or journeys while meditating through different myths and fairy tales through wonderlands, miraculous worlds, elfin grots, and fairy castles along with the realization that all these provide a sufficient background for poetry, drama and literature with the purpose of constructing culture, the ideals and values accepted by society

Outcomes: This study has sought to establish that myths and fairy tales, as socio-cultural constructs, play a vital role in shaping and reflecting societal values, beliefs, and norms

Conclusion: Myths and fairy tales not only preserve cultural heritage but also provide a platform for engaging with contemporary issues, offering new perspectives on identity, power dynamics, and social hierarchies

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Myths and fairy tales function as socio-cultural constructs that embody the values, beliefs, and standards of the communities they emerge from. Grounded in oral tradition and handed down through generations, these stories reflect the collective consciousness of their respective societies. By studying myths and fairy tales through a socio-cultural viewpoint, one can acquire a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between storytelling and the societal ethos of a group, illuminating matters of identity, power relations, and social structures. This essay investigates myths and fairy tales as socio-cultural constructs, tracing their origins, development, and transformation across various societies and historical epochs. It is also the aim of this research to affirm that myths and fairy tales in diverse forms are socio-cultural constructs specific to a given society. This essay highlights the different dimensions of myths and fairy tales as portrayed in the works of Robinson Jeffers. Additionally, this essay will address the definitions of ‘myths’ and ‘fairy tales’ and their significance in poetry as socio-cultural constructs. Furthermore, this essay will examine the objectives of poets and other creative writers in narrating and reiterating myths, legends, and fairy tales within literature and various artistic forms.

Myths are narratives that embody the core beliefs, convictions, and values of a community. Individuals often seek to emulate the heroes, deities, and demigods depicted in these myths. Myths and legends play a crucial role in the folklore of a society. Conversely, fairy tales are focused on magic or fairies, typically aimed at children, to inspire their curiosity, imaginative thinking, and fantasy. These tales can contain elements based on historical facts or entirely imaginative scenarios featuring enchanting elements, such as a castle on an island or a fairy tale wedding in a cathedral, intended to instill and build socio-cultural values in both children and readers, regardless of their age, background, ethnicity, beliefs, or education. Culture is a fundamental component of civilization. From a traditional viewpoint, culture encompasses everything that humans have created, including customs, traditions, institutions, religions, myths, legends, and material goods. Culture is not inherently present in individuals; it develops through interactions with others. The culture of a particular race is preserved, altered, and handed down through generations. This process of cultural transformation and transmission is primarily facilitated by art and literature. The realization of this

mission is ensured through the integration of myths and fairy tales in literary works. Poets and other authors aim to build and reshape the socio-cultural values present in society. This study seeks to demonstrate that myths and fairy tales, as depicted in various literary forms and contexts, reflect the socio-cultural constructs of a specific society. These narratives, deeply rooted in oral traditions and subsequently adapted into literary forms, serve as a reflection of the shared consciousness, values, and standards of the communities from which they arise. This essay specifically examines the relationship between myths and fairy tales as socio-cultural constructs in the poetry of Robinson Jeffers, emphasizing their complex role in shaping and mirroring cultural ideals. To do this, the essay begins by defining and situating the concepts of ‘myths’ and ‘fairy tales,’ offering a concise history of their origins and development. Myths generally serve as foundational narratives that elucidate the universe, human existence, and moral principles, whereas fairy tales usually impart lessons or truths through imaginative stories. Nonetheless, both genres are products of their socio-cultural contexts and encapsulate the values, beliefs, and power dynamics of their era.

Myths and fairy tales occupy a crucial role in human history, serving as mediums for conveying cultural knowledge and principles. Myths frequently tackle significant inquiries about creation, ethics, and the human experience, functioning as instruments for elucidating natural events and social hierarchies. Conversely, fairy tales often concentrate on personal journeys, moral challenges, and victories against hardship, typically set in imaginative realms. Both forms have been vital in influencing cultural identities and societal standards. Within their socio-cultural framework, myths and fairy tales act as indicators of the cultural elements of the societies that produce them. For example, Greek mythology offers insights into the values of ancient Greece, such as the focus on heroism, honour, and the unpredictable nature of divine force. Likewise, European fairy tales, like those gathered by the Brothers Grimm, reflect the moral and social issues of their era, including the significance of family loyalty, the repercussions of greed, and the victory of good over evil. By exploring these stories through a socio-cultural perspective, one attains a more profound comprehension of how storytelling both influences and is influenced by societal norms and values.

Robinson Jeffers, as a poet, similarly utilizes myths and legends in his renowned pieces with a comparable aim, perspective, and objective. By analyzing these frameworks through Jeffers' poetry, the essay aims to reveal their advantages and drawbacks, illuminating their lasting significance. The poetry of Robinson Jeffers offers a fertile ground for investigating the convergence of myths and fairy tales with socio-cultural elements. Jeffers frequently referenced classical mythology and archetypal motifs, intertwining them within the harsh terrains of the California coast. His works, such as *The Tower Beyond Tragedy* and *The Women at Point Sur*, reimagine legends to tackle modern challenges like ecological damage, human arrogance, and the repetitive patterns of history. Jeffers' incorporation of myths and fables emphasizes their dual function as perpetual stories and instruments for cultural examination. In his verse, myths serve as a way to question societal principles, confront human-centered viewpoints, and promote a more balanced connection between humanity and the environment. This reimagining of myths showcases their flexibility and significance, illustrating how poets and creative writers utilize these tales to connect with their socio-cultural environments.

The reimagining of myths and fairy tales in literature and other artistic mediums serves multiple functions. First, it enables authors to safeguard and carry forward cultural heritage, ensuring that these stories remain reachable for future generations. Second, retelling permits authors to reframe these tales in the context of modern issues, infusing them with fresh meanings and significance. For example, Jeffers' reinterpretation of Greek myths frequently mirrors his ecological beliefs, highlighting the interdependence of all living beings. Additionally, recounting myths and fairy tales offers a platform for challenging and dismantling established power dynamics and societal conventions. Feminist retellings, such as those by Margaret Atwood or Angela Carter, confront patriarchal narratives and present alternative views on female identity and agency. Likewise, postcolonial reinterpretations, such as Derek Walcott's *Omeros*, reinterpret traditional myths to tackle themes of colonization, identity, and defiance.

The act of traveling or embarking on adventures through myths and fairy tales provides deep insights into human life and the intricacies of the universe.

These stories frequently illustrate transformative expeditions through enchanted realms, wondrous worlds, hidden groves, and magical castles, acting as symbols for individual and communal development. The journeys depicted in these narratives reflect a quest for purpose, self-discovery, and resolution, paralleling the human pursuit of comprehension and satisfaction. In Jeffers' poetry, the motif of journey often merges with ideas of solitude, elevation, and the encounter with nature's enormity. By contemplating these journeys, readers are encouraged to examine the conflict between human aspirations and the greater forces of nature and history. This conflict highlights the socio-cultural frameworks integrated into legends and fables, emphasizing their influence on the understanding of human capability and constraint.

Myths and fairy tales offer a rich foundation for the development of poetry, drama, and literature. They present profound symbolism, archetypal figures, and universal themes that resonate through various cultures and historical contexts. By utilizing these stories, authors can create worlds that reflect and critique social values, providing fresh perspectives on engaging with the human experience. Additionally, myths and fairy tales act as instruments for cultural formation, influencing ideals and values embraced by society. They offer a structure for examining ethical challenges, societal roles, and human ambitions, enhancing our comprehension of life's complexities. In Jeffers' work, for instance, the incorporation of mythological and fairy tale elements not only enriches the poetic realm but also prompts readers to rethink their connection with nature, history, and their own identities.

Before exploring the role of poets and authors in incorporating myths and fairy tales in their creations, it is essential to consider the communal aspect of culture. A clear understanding of the foundational principle of the socio-cultural facet in myths and fairy tales is vital. Culture is not inherent to individuals; rather, it is developed through interactions with others. The heritage of a community is maintained, altered, and handed down through the generations. This shift and transfer of culture occur through education as well as artistic creation and distribution. Poets and authors fulfill this role through their works. To carry out this task effectively, they positively utilize myths and fairy tales in their writings. Culture is accumulated over time. This means each generation contributes its

unique elements to the existing cultural framework before it is passed along to the next, forming the cumulative wealth of the following generation. From this, one can infer that culture is in a state of continual transformation. Changes may occur gradually or swiftly, with material aspects more visibly affected than the non-material, intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual dimensions. Cultural evolution is typically steady and progressive, even though the pace of change can vary. Culture is expansive, in that cultural elements tend to circulate between groups, influenced by their interactions. It reflects a group's behavioral patterns. Myths and fairy tales seek either to alter individuals' behaviors or to cultivate favorable socio-cultural elements.

The primary purpose of myths and legends is to shape individuals within the societal framework according to its norms and traditions, while also serving as a catalyst for cultural transmission. Everything experiences change in this world, and culture is no exception. If culture had remained static, humanity would still be residing in primitive conditions within forest caves. Nevertheless, cultural evolution should align with the moral values of society. Myths and fairy tales are crucial in facilitating socio-cultural change through literature in daily life. One of the roles of these narratives is to help both children and readers adapt to current culture while also connecting them to the past. To achieve this, they must be presented with clear concepts regarding present values, beliefs, and customs. Additionally, opportunities for self-expression or critical analysis of those customs and beliefs must be provided. "Myths and legends offer us a chance to learn about the diverse cultures and civilizations across the globe over extensive periods, and this has led to a continuous international exchange of culture from ancient times to the present day." Igin F Hunt & David C. Colander, p. 234).

Values are realized rather than instructed. Values serve as benchmarks for what is treasured. They encompass attitudes associated with standards of behavior; they are integral to the philosophy of a nation and its educational frameworks. They represent the guiding tenets of existence that promote the cultivation of a well-rounded character. They are ideas laden with feelings. These encompass significant religions, ethical viewpoints, life philosophies, political beliefs, etc., which reinforce societal culture. Values are categorized as aesthetic, spiritual, moral, and social. Aesthetic value reveals itself through

creative expressions such as arts and crafts, music, dance, painting, and dramatization. Spiritual value steers one toward idealism, moral value towards an ethical life, and social value towards social awareness and effectiveness. “It is the role and aim of myths and fairytales to instill social values deeply in the readers.” Igin F Hunt & David C. Colanderp.425). Some of the primary and commendable values that are instilled and advocated through myths and fairytales include: love or affection, honesty, bravery, respect for elders, empathy, regard for all religions, the value of manual labor, modesty, integrity in word, thought, and action, peace of mind, teamwork, cleanliness, sustainable living, a harmonious relationship with nature, environmental conservation, and the safeguarding of nature, among others. These values become ingrained as a result of socialization. Myths, legends, and fairytales provide admirable examples of conduct and behavior for readers. They present worthy role models. They tap into people's inclination to emulate great heroes and the virtues within them. They promote positive behaviors and dissuade negative ones.

Robinson Jeffers, the renowned American poet, was deeply impacted by the area where he resided. He felt a strong connection to the stunning coastline of southern California and the imposing mountains that rise behind it. The recent surge in environmental literature and eco-criticism has increased the appeal of his works among academics and critics. Driven by his humanistic philosophy, which he describes as a transition of focus or importance from humanity to nature and the surrounding environment (Graeme Nicholson 28.), Jeffers juxtaposed the power and lasting beauty of the natural world with a bleak perspective on human suffering and insignificance. In his poems, nature acquires a more profound significance. He asserts that humanity can attain greatness and nobility only by re-evaluating the priority it assigns to human affairs in relation to nature. By integrating elements and motifs from Greek tragedy, the Bible, and Eastern mysticism, he utilized science, history, nature, and current events as sources of inspiration. “It is not the interpretation of a text that alters, but its importance... meaning is what a text signifies; it is what the author intended through a specific arrangement of signs... significance... refers to the connection between that meaning and an individual or a concept, or a circumstance...(it) always denotes a

connection and one constant, unchanging aspect of that connection is what the text signifies (E.D. Hirsch, p.8).

Robinson Jeffers' poem "Science" embodies Jeffers's involvement with scientific exploration and his intrigue with the natural environment. He delves into scientific ideas and findings, intertwining them into his poetic reflection on the enigmas of the universe and humanity's role within it. Jeffers assumes the position of the observer, reflecting on the marvels of the natural realm through a scientific perspective. He expresses awe at the complex patterns and functions of the cosmos, recognizing the limitations of human comprehension in fully grasping the intricacies of existence. The poem encapsulates the majestic beauty and awe-inspiring splendor of the natural world. Jeffers utilizes striking imagery and expressive language to depict the expansiveness of space, the brilliance of stars, and the cosmic movement of celestial entities, encouraging readers to ponder the magnificence of the universe. Throughout the poem, Jeffers expresses a sense of humility and wonder in light of the universe's mysteries. He acknowledges humanity's restricted viewpoint and the vastness of what is unknown, highlighting the necessity for humility in the quest for scientific understanding. While the poem mainly centers on scientific observation and reflection, it also alludes to ethical considerations. Jeffers implies that humanity's comprehension of the universe should cultivate reverence and regard for the natural world, promoting a sense of ecological awareness and guardianship. "Science" serves as an example of Jeffers's skill in merging scientific investigation with poetic artistry. He smoothly combines scientific observation with lyrical imagery, crafting a poem that resonates with both intellect and emotion, inviting readers to reflect on the interrelation of science, art, and the natural environment. That is to say, "Science" by Robinson Jeffers showcases his involvement with scientific concepts and his poetic examination of the marvels of the natural environment. Using striking imagery, reflective language, and an attitude of modesty, Jeffers encourages readers to set out on an adventure of scientific exploration and philosophical contemplation, honoring the elegance and enigmas of the cosmos.

This well-known lyric "Science" seemingly serves as a simple lament for humanity's hazardous control over the natural environment, a brief elegy for humans ahead of our extinction. The reference to Actaeon has given a mythical

emphasis to the articulation of his sorrow. The intricate language in the initial lines—the rapid transition from one metaphor to another—indicates the complicated manner in which humans have interfered with nature's path. His thoughts portend his own downfall, "Actaeon, who beheld the goddess exposed among the foliage, was ripped apart by his own hounds A bit of understanding, a stone from the gravel. A drop from the seas; who could have imagined this endlessly small to such an extent?"

The concluding line of the initial stanza sees the poet strongly condemning humanity's desire for wealth and materialism, which result in the reckless depletion of the earth's resources. Technological advancements harm the environment, and nature responds fiercely in various ways. Although humans are quite logical and possess the foresight to recognize that they are ultimately harming themselves, they continue down this path. The poet invokes the myth of Actaeon from Greek mythology to illustrate nature's retaliation against humans for their exploitative actions. Actaeon, a hunter in Greek lore, angers Artemis (known as Diana in Roman mythology) by observing her while she bathes, leading to her transforming him into a stag, whereupon his own dogs maul him to death. In this passage, he employs the myth to elaborate on the socio-cultural dimensions of humanity, whether in the East or West; it is inherent in our cultures to honor and respect nature. However, with the rise of hybrid technology, humanity has overlooked this vital responsibility. People have become so self-absorbed that they neglect the wellbeing of the biosphere. Consequently, they have turned into maniacs, forgetting their former friendship with the natural world, with their greed and avarice driving them to reckless exploitation of natural resources. The poet references Actaeon to stress the immediate repercussions of a careless observation. Nature, depicted as a goddess, is certain to reprimand humanity for violating her laws. The environment and mistreating it, serves as a reminder to both the audience and contemporary society about the necessity of reconnecting with nature and maintaining a harmonious relationship with it. It urges humanity to cease the exploitation of the environment and adopt a sustainable lifestyle; otherwise, one must be prepared to confront the consequences similar to those of Actaeon. Thus, it illustrates that Robinson

Jeffers, akin to other poets, employs myths and fairy tales in his writings to shape the socio-cultural aspects of readers across different contexts and eras.

In summary, Robinson Jeffers's incorporation of myths and fairy tales in his poetry acts as a significant instrument for shaping socio-cultural aspects and examining deep themes that echo throughout history and across cultures. By utilizing archetypal themes, symbolic visuals, and universal stories, Jeffers enhances his poetic perspective with layers of significance and resonance that go beyond specific cultures and historical backgrounds. His exploration of myths and fairy tales navigates intricate socio-cultural dynamics, tackling topics of human existence, environmental responsibility, existential dread, and the ongoing conflict between civilization and the natural environment. Through his poetic reinterpretations, Jeffers prompts readers to face essential truths about the human experience while reflecting societal collective awareness. His work emphasizes the lasting significance of myths and fairy tales, illustrating how these stories still offer new perspectives on modern issues and sensibilities. By reworking traditional narratives, Jeffers breathes new life into them, addressing concerns like humanity's influence on nature and the pursuit of balance with the environment.

Furthermore, Jeffers' poetry demonstrates the transformative ability of narratives, inspiring readers to venture into paths of self-exploration and cultural understanding. The timeless charm of legends and fairy tales resides in their capacity to shed light on the intricacies of the human mind and the enigmas of existence. For Jeffers, these stories are not just literary tools but deep inquiries into the relationship among culture, mythology, and human experience. His poetic perspective encourages readers to contemplate the interconnection of life, the vulnerability of human accomplishments, and the lasting influence of storytelling in shaping and questioning our perception of the world. Moreover, Jeffers's involvement

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