

Friar reading of “Archetypes of history and literature”

Muhammed Uvais PA

Guest Lecturer, Nilgiri College Tamil Nadu, India
Research Scholar, Bharathiar University, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract

My paper basically attributes the discussion of Literary narratives on the backdrop of archetypal references from Historical perception especially focusing on Northrop Frye's work “The Archetypes of Literature”. The connection between the author and the writer has been already maintained through accommodating many archetypal narratives in the work. Literature and History are intermingled in many ways and it cannot be eradicated. History incorporates literature and literature incorporates History. No human endeavor is independent and the work of an archetypal critic is inclusive of formalist criticism (or structural criticism) and historical criticism. Both J.G. Frazer and C.G. Jung opened up new vistas in archetypal or mythical criticism and Frye has obviated the impediments in the appreciation of a text. In mythical criticism, both the inductive method and the deductive method are effective tools and neither can be dispensed with, according to Frye.

Keywords: literature, history, archetypes, criticism

Introduction

Literature is always produced and read with the help of Historical narratives. History grips all the narratives and meta narratives to an extent that it becomes impossible and irrelevant to discuss any genres without the omnipresence of it. There are some mental images and typical examples in Literature, sometimes even as part of History, which would continuously hold your attention make the archetypes play a vital part in narration. It is even argued that the presence of archetypes in a work accommodates the connection between the writer and the reader. In addition, Archetypal Criticism is a type of critical theory that interprets a text by focusing on the recurring myths and archetypes in narratives, symbols, images and character types in a literary work. Such recurring themes are often claimed to be the result of elemental and universal patterns in the human psyche. When an effective embodiment of such things in a literary work happens, it evokes a profound response from the reader, because he/she shares the psychic archetypes expressed by the author. An important antecedent of this literary theory is the treatment of myth by a group of comparative anthropologists at Cambridge University like James G. Frazer, whose works like "The Golden Bough" deals with cultural mythologies. Frazer's argument was that the death-rebirth myth is present in almost all cultural mythologies and is acted out in terms of growing seasons and vegetations. Another most important antecedent was Carl J. Jung who applied the term "archetype" to what he called "primordial images", or "psychic residue" of repeated patterns of experiences which survive in the collective unconscious of the human race and are expressed in myths, religion, dreams and private fantasies as well as in literary works. Archetypal Criticism dates back to 1934, when Maud Bodkin published her book "Archetypal Patterns in Poetry" (where he applies Jung's theories about the collective unconscious, primordial images, and archetypes). It flourished during the 1950s and 1960s. Major practitioners of this theory were G. Wilson Knight, Robert Graves, Leslie

Fiedler, Joseph Campbell etc. They emphasized the persistence of mythical patterns in literature on the assumption that myths are closer to the elemental archetype. The death/rebirth themes are usually referred to as archetypes of archetypes. This archetype occurs in the primitive rituals of the king who is annually sacrificed and in myths of Gods who die to be reborn and in different texts including Bible, Dante's "Divine Comedy" in the 14th century and S.T. Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" in 1798. Archetypal Criticism was at its peak in the 1940s and 50s largely due to the work of Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye. In his "Anatomy of Criticism" (1957) Frye developed an archetypal approach while he combined with the typological interpretation of the Bible and the conception of imagination in the writings of the poet and painter William Blake. Frye proposed that the totality of literary work constitutes a "self-contained literary universe" which has been created over the ages by the human imagination there by assimilates the indifferent world of nature into archetypal forms that satisfies the human desires and needs.

Archetypes of Literature

Northrop Frye is a Canadian literary critic who was born in Canada in 1921. Initially he was a student of theology and switched over to literature. His first book "Fearful Symmetry: A study of William Blake" is considered as a classical critical work. The essay "Archetypes of Literature" is taken from "The Fables of Identity: studies in Poetic Mythology" (1963). In this essay Frye determines how an archetype is to be interpreted in a text. Frye critically analyses literature against the backdrop of rituals and myths. The essay has been divided into three parts where the first part talks about the concept of archetypal criticism, second part deals with the inductive method and the third part is concerned with deductive method. Frye starts the essay by pointing out that every organised body can be learned progressively and there is also something progressive in learning literature also. Art, like nature is a subject of

systematic study which has to be distinguished from the study itself, that is criticism. Frye says that literature cannot be taught in class and only the criticism of literature can be taught directly. Criticism deals with arts and may be something of an art itself. It also possess every characteristic of a science. Yet in studying criticism students become aware of a centrifugal movement that carries them away from literature. They find literature as the central division of humanities as bound by the history on one side and philosophy on the other. For the systematic mental organization of the subject, we should turn to conceptual framework of historian for events and philosopher for ideas. Even the more centrally placed critical sciences like textual editing seem to be part of background that moves back to history or some other literary field. The central area of criticism is the area of commentary according to Frye. He opines that this area is full of pseudo-propositions which contains no truth that it exists only because criticism prefers a waste space to an empty one. Study of literature becomes confused with a schizophrenic dichotomy between subjective-emotional and objective-descriptive aspects of meaning, considering that in order to produce any literary meaning, one has to ignore this dichotomy. Frye then speaks about two types of literary criticism; significant/ meaningful and meaningless criticism. Out of these, meaningless criticism would not help in developing a systematic structure of knowledge. It only gives background information and distracts readers from literature. In this sense, archetypal criticism is meaningful. Frye then speaks about causal value judgements. Casual value judgements are all judgements in which the values are not based on literary experience but are sentimental. Pseudo-criticism could be read in closer to casual value judgements, that is to criticise or flatter poets in an imaginary stock exchange. Pseudo-criticism cannot be a part of systematic study, because systematic study can only be progressed unlike the mere leisure-class conversation. Some critics see the foreground of criticism as the impact of literature on the reader. What Frye suggests is to keep the study of literature centripetal and provide the learning process a structural analysis of the literary work. The texture of any great work of art is complex and ambiguous and when we unravel the complexities we may understand more History and Philosophy only if the subject of our study remains at the center. If it doesn't work in this way, it would be like writing about literature without reading it. The weakness of this approach is that it is conceived primarily as the antithesis of centrifugal or background criticism like internal and external relations in philosophy. Antitheses are usually resolved by trying to keep away the antithetical way of stating the problem. A purely structural approach has the same limitation in criticism that it has in Biology, which does not develop any explanation of how the structure came to be formed. Co-ordinating principle is missing from literary criticism. It is a central hypothesis like the theory of evolution in Biology which will see the phenomena it deals with as part of a whole. Such a principle, though it would retain the centripetal perspective of analysis, it should try to give the same perspective to other kinds of criticism too. Criticism as a science is totally intelligible; literature as the subject of a science, is an inexhaustible source of new critical discoveries. Science would take a long time to discover something and until it makes a discovery it has not been born as an individual science but it just remains as an

embryo within some other subject. Frye fixes two points: one is that preliminary effort of criticism is the structural work of art and the second is the assumption that there is such a subject as criticism and that it would make a complete sense. Next, he looks into the inductive method of analysis of a literary work of art. Inductive method means to derive general truths from particular ones. Frye begins this section by pointing out that the unity of a work of art is the basis of structural analysis. This unity is not been produced solely by the unconditional will of the artist. Artist is only an efficient cause. An art has a form and has a formal cause. Poems, just like poets are born, not made. The task of the poet is to deliver the poem in an uninjured way and the poem is free to be cut loose from the poet's private memories and associations and all the neural strings. The critic takes over where the poet leaves off. Actually criticism cannot do its duty without a kind of literary psychology connecting the poet with the poem. Because the poem would include the private mythology of the poet, his peculiar formation of symbols of much of which he is unconscious. Problem of the formal cause of the poem is deeply involved with the question of genres. Criticism itself cannot say much about them. Two conceptions of the genre, for example when we deal with words like "novel" or "epic" are obviously fallacious just as the psychology of rumor, that is the truth about them will be lying down in between the two opposite extremes: pseudo-platonic conception and pseudo-biological conception. Pseudo-platonic conception is the conception that one genre as existing prior to the other and is independently of creation and the conception of genre as evolving species and as the reason for the development of this or that form. Next he inquire for the origin of the genre: for that he first turns in to the social conditions and cultural demands which produced it or the material cause of the work of art. These leads us into literary history. Historian treats literature and philosophy historically and philosopher treats those things philosophically. Apart from all these, the so called "history of ideas" enabled the attempt to treat history and philosophy from the point of view of an autonomous criticism. Frye points out that there is still something found missing. That each poet has his own peculiar formation of images. When so many poets use many of the same images, there arise many critical problems than that of biographical ones. He quotes W.H Auden's essay "The Enchafed Flood" to substantiate his view. Auden's says that the symbol of sea cannot be find only in the poetry of Shelley and Keats or Coleridge. It has been expanded over many poets in to archetypal symbol of literature. When we look into the origin of other genres like drama, what they conclude is that this is a problem of structure rather than that of origin. He suggests that there may be archetypes of genres as well as of images. Criticism cannot be systematic unless there is a quality in literature which enables it to be so. Archetype should be not only the unifying category of criticism, but itself a part of the total form. Actually this total literary history moves from primitive to sophisticated. Here comes the possibility of seeing literature as a complication of relatively restricted and simple group of formulas which can be studied in primitive culture. If it goes in this way, the search for archetypes is a kind of literary anthropology concerned with the way that literature is informed by pre-literary categories such as ritual, myth and folktale. The relationship between these categories and literature could be find as appearing in

greatest classics. He suggests that this coincides with a feeling that the study of mediocre works of art stays as a random form of critical experience. Whereas profound masterpiece draws us to a point at which we can see a huge number of converging patterns for those that held them together. Therefore literature could be seen as complicating itself in time in conceptual space from an unseen center.

Archetypal criticism is an all inclusive term which involves the efforts of many specialists. At every stage of interpretation of a text, it takes a scholarly organisation. An editor is needed to clean-up the text, a rhetorician analyses the narrative part, a philologist scrutinizes the choice and significance of words and a literary social history studies the evolution of myths and rituals. The contribution of a literary social anthropologist is also no less small. Frye gives the example of Hamlet. In its archetypal study, an anthropologist traces the sources of the drama into the Hamlet legend described by Saxo, a 13th century Danish historian, then to nature-myths. Here he is actually drawing closer to the archetypal form which Shakespeare recreated. Contradictions exists regarding the authenticity of the critical approach. Then Frye move on to the deductive end. He says that when we take the arts like music and painting, the organising principle is recurrence(repeatedness). If it is temporal, it is termed as rhythm and pattern when it is spatial. Usually we speak of rhythm of music and pattern of painting. In order to show off our sophistication, we says pattern of music and rhythm of painting. we can also say that, all arts may be conceived both temporally and spatially. Frye views literature as something intermediate between music and painting. Rhythm of literature is the narrative and pattern of literature is meaning. The attempts to reach near these boundaries of literature is what we call as experimental writing. We can hear or listen to a narrative, but it's only when we understand the total pattern, we "see" the literature. Criticism of literature is fostered by the representational fallacy than the criticism of painting. That is why we are able to think of narrative as a sequential representation of events in an outside "life" and of meaning as a reflection of some external idea. In critical terms we can say that an author's narrative is his linear movement; his meaning is the integrity of his completed form. He goes on describing about the rhythm and pattern mentioning that rhythm is founded in the natural cycle and everything in nature have an analogy with works of art. For example, the song of a bird or the flowering of a plant etc grows out of a profound synchronization between an organism and the rhythms of its environment, especially that of the solar year. We can also see this kind of synchronizations in animals too, like the mating dance of snakes which in turn becomes the idols of ritualistic practices. While coming to humans, it becomes something of a voluntary effort to recapture a lost rapport with the natural cycle, for example, harvest. In rituals, we can find the origin of narrative, Frye says. In such narratives, the conscious meaning of significance is latent; which can be seen by an observer but is largely concealed from the participators themselves. Frye speaks about the tendency of rituals to remain encyclopaedic. Rituals and patterns of imagery are oracular in origin and derive from an epiphanic moment with no direct reference to time. These things basically occupies a narrative in them and are encyclopaedic in tendency and thereby builds up a total structure of significance. Every myth has a central significance and the narrative in a myth centres on a figure

that may be a god or demi-god or superhuman being or legend. Frazer and Jung contend that in the development of a myth the central figure or central significance is the most important factor and many writers have accepted this view. Frye classifies myths into four categories:

1. The dawn, spring and birth phase. There are myths dealing with the birth of a hero, his revival and resurrection, defeat of the powers of darkness and death. Subordinate characters such as the father and the mother are introduced in the myth. Such myths are the archetypes of romance and of rhapsodic poetry.
2. The zenith, summer and marriage or triumph phase. In this phase, there are myths of apotheosis, (the act of being raised to the rank of a god), of sacred marriage and of entering into Paradise. Subordinate characters in these myths are the companion and the bride. Such myths are the archetypes of comedy, pastoral and idyll.
3. The sunset, autumn and death phase. These are the myths dealing with the fall of a hero, a dying god, violent death, sacrifice and the hero's isolation. The subordinate characters are the traitor and the siren. Such myths are the archetypes of tragedy and elegy.
4. The darkness, winter and desolation phase. There are myths dealing with the triumph of these powers. The myths of floods, the return of chaos and the defeat of the hero are examples of this phase. The ogre and the witch are the subordinate characters here and these myths are the archetypes of satire.

These are the four categories of myths, which Frye identifies and they recur in different types of works written by different writers. Indeed they constitute the bases of many great pieces of literature.

Frye also gives reference to the quest-myth. In the quest myth, the hero will be in a quest for truth. Quest of the hero tends to assimilate the oracular and random verbal structures. In most religions this quest-myth arises from ritual like the messiah-myth became the narrative structure of the oracles of Judaism. The tendency of both ritual and epiphany to become encyclopaedic could be find in the definitive body of myth that constitutes the sacred scriptures of religions. In Order to gain a comprehensive view of his subject, first a literary critic has to study these sacred scriptures. After understanding its structures he can move from archetypes to genres and how drama arises from the ritual side of myth and lyric from the epiphanic/fragmented side. Here, epic carries a central encyclopaedic structure.

The critic's business is to show how all literary genres derived from quest-myths. A critic who is studying the principles of a literary form has a different interest. Under this category, Ruth Benedict, an American anthropologist, in her essay named "Patterns of Culture" makes a distinction between apollonian cultures based on obedience to ritual and Dionysiac ones to epiphany. When literature develops from the primitive to self conscious, it shows a gradual shift of the poet's attention from narrative to significant values. Frye proposes that relation of criticism to religion is much more complicated. He states that a critic usually treats Gods as human artefact. Nothing in criticism compels the critic to have an attitude of ordinary working consciousness towards the dream or God. Now what have identified is that the central myth of literature will be the quest-myth. In Order to see this as a pattern of meaning we should have to start with the working of sub-conscious where the epiphany

originates. Both art and religion are alike and they aim at perfection. Perfection is the end of all human efforts. In art it is achieved through dreaming (imagination) and in religion it is through visualization. Perfection can be achieved in literary criticism also and it is the archetypal critic who does it through an analysis of the comic vision of life and the tragic vision as well in a work. The central pattern of the comic vision and the tragic vision in a myth is detailed below:

1. In the comic vision of life, in a myth, the “human” world is presented as a community, or a hero is portrayed as a representative of the desires of the reader. Here the archetypes of images are symposium, communion, order, friendship, and love. Marriage or some equivalent consummation belongs to the comic vision of life. In the tragic vision of life, in the “human” world, there is tyranny or anarchy, or an individual or an isolated man, or a leader with his back to his followers or a bullying giant of romance, or a deserted or betrayed hero. In addition to these, there will be a harlot or a witch or other varieties of Jung’s “terrible mother” in the tragic vision of life.
2. In the comic vision of life in a myth, the “animal” world is presented as a community of domesticated animals, usually a flock of sheep, or a lamb, or one of the gentler birds (usually a dove). The archetypes of images are pastoral images. In the tragic vision of life, in the “animal” world there are beasts, birds of prey, wolves, vultures, serpents, dragons and so on.
3. In the comic vision of life, in the “vegetable” world of a myth, there is a garden, a grove or park, or a tree of life, or a rose or lotus. The examples of the archetypes of Arcadian images are Marvell’s green world and Shakespeare’s forest comedies. In the tragic vision of life, in the “vegetable” world of a myth, there is a sinister forest like the one in Milton’s *Camus* or at the opening of Dante’s *Inferno*, or a heath or wilderness, or a tree of death.
4. In the comic vision of life, in the “mineral” world of a myth, there is a city, or one building or temple, or one stone, normally a glowing precious stone. These are presented as luminous or fiery. The example of the archetype of image is a “starlit dome.” In the tragic vision of life, the “mineral” world of a myth is seen in terms of deserts, rocks and ruins, or of geometrical images like the cross.
5. In the comic vision of life, in the “unformed” world of a myth, there is a river, traditionally fourfold, which influenced the Renaissance image of the temperate body with its four humours. In the tragic vision of life, this world usually becomes the sea, as the narrative myth of dissolution is so often a flood myth. The combination of the sea and beast images gives us the leviathan and similar water-borne monsters.

Conclusion

Of the different approaches of literary criticism, Northrop Frye has established the validity of the archetypal approach and its relevance in the elucidation of a text. Like works of literature, criticism is also creative and an archetypal critic discovers the meaning of a text and the motives of a character. No human endeavor is independent and the work of an archetypal critic is inclusive of formalist criticism (or

structural criticism) and historical criticism. Both J.G. Frazer and C.G. Jung opened up new vistas in archetypal or mythical criticism and Frye has obviated the impediments in the appreciation of a text. In mythical criticism, both the inductive method and the deductive method are effective tools and neither can be dispensed with, according to Frye. If one method explains a text based on the derivation of a general truth from the particular, the other method does it the other way round. Both the methods are complementary, and if either of them is unexploited, archetypal criticism will be incomplete. Archetypal approach to a text has contributed to the establishment of a systematic and comprehensive concept of literary criticism.

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