CHAPTER VI

INTERFACING MYTH, FICTION AND HISTORY

Writing about James Joyce’s work in *The Dial* (Nov. 1923), T.S. Eliot prophesied that fiction will not merely use the narrative method but the mythical method. "In using myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. They will not be imitators, any more than the scientist who uses the discoveries of an Einstein in pursuing his own, further investigations. It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. . . ." While this is true, the postmodern, postcolonial writers have used the mythical method not only to control and give shape to the chaotic facts of history but also to establish an arena where the author counterpoints, subverts or challenges the myths of the metropolitan cultures with those of his own. The mythical method of these new writers helps us to see the world in new ways and engenders a desire for change. It is a method that criticizes and satirizes, and it has a
ious social and political purpose. What is interesting is that Eliot has
inted to the significant relationship between myth and contemporary
history.

In Chapter I it was said that the literary artist can be a myth user and
a myth creator as well. The variety of ways in which the four novelists
studied here do this is interesting. Ngugi is a myth user who shows us the
power of myth to change society. He uses patterns from Christian myth like
the resurrection and the Second Coming for two purposes—to satirize the
double standards of the missionaries and to delineate the character of
Matigari on the lines of a saviour. Ngugi shows us how people can
spontaneously create a myth or deliberately craft it. When the people
themselves create the myth of Matigari the saviour, it becomes the
expression of a deeply felt need. It therefore attains the power to motivate
people and unite them, helping them to overcome a strong emotion like fear.
Those who craft myths, like the politicians, do so with the specific purpose of
obtaining power and wealth. The way in which the Minister in the novel
appropriates shares in the name of the party of the people, and the way in
which the Voice of Truth and Justice engages in the myth-building exercise
that is disguised as news, are telling examples. Such a myth-building
exercise is invariably accompanied by coercion and fear and this is seen in
the way in which the police and the organization called the Hooded Justice
work. The truths of Ngugi's novel are amply demonstrated by the repressive
regimes in many parts of Africa and the world.
Ihimaera is predominantly a myth user. The long lyrical narrations of Maori myth is a retelling with a sociological purpose. Ihimaera helps us to see the correspondences between Maori and European myth. On another level, both the matriarch and Te Kooti can be seen as myth creators. By using the biblical style and imposing patterns of Christian myth onto her narration, the matriarch turns Te Kooti into a prophet and saviour. In one sense, the myth of Te Kooti has been created and written in the space provided by fiction. He can be compared to Matigari the saviour, a figure created by the people's imagination. The difference lies in that Te Kooti is historically true. Yet the ambivalence of his status, and the tricks played by perspective, are clearly indicated in the novel. Te Kooti himself understands the importance of the hybridization of myths which is necessary for the hybridization of cultures. This is seen in the way the Ringatu Church fuses elements of Christian faith and Maori faith. The matriarch's narration makes use of the story of Moses and the myth of the promised land and does not incorporate any elements from Christ's life. The selective use of myth is necessitated by the historical condition.

Tharoor's purpose is more satirical in nature. He uses myth in order to deconstruct archetypal figures both in myth and in politics. By mythologizing history he draws attention to the myth-making that goes on in the process of recording history. This becomes clear when he deflates or deconstructs the public image of leaders like Nehru and Indira Gandhi. Tharoor also overturns the myth of white superiority by using verbal and situational humour in the episodes concerning Heaslop. The significance of
Tharoor's novel lies in his ability to show us how the lessons of myth can have continued relevance.

Rushdie is both myth user and myth creator. He has created the literary myth of the midnight's child. In delineating Saleem, he uses the characteristics of the mythical hero only to deconstruct them subsequently. By inverting and subverting well-known mythical motifs or characters, Rushdie makes us think about our own attitude to myth. In the postcolonial situation there is need to go back to one's mythology. The question that Rushdie asks is whether we are doing it the right way. In the act of turning back to myth, are we becoming more irrational and unscientific? Like Ngugi and Ihimaera, Rushdie draws attention to the myth-making exercises of those in power.

The postcolonial situation has affected the way these writers use myth. In the post-independence phase, it is possible to criticize the myth systems of the colonizer. The reassessment of imperial attitudes has necessitated a reassessment of their religion and myth as well. Often, variable and conflicting attitudes can co-exist. Matigari's explanation at the end, that the true church of God exists in the hearts of the people is the essence of Christianity. Yet Ngugi rejects the Christianity of the priest in that comic-serious encounter in the novel and shows up his double standards. Ngugi also shows that the values of love and charity, and Christ's teaching "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you" is completely inverted in the so-called Christian Democracy. Imperialists and capitalists make use of religion for their own ends. This indictment is reiterated by Ihimaera when
shows how the Bishop makes the Maori chiefs sign a treaty that makes him the owner of thousands of acres of Maori land. However, Ihimaera does not satirize or deconstruct the religion of the colonizer, but shows how hybridization is necessary for co-existence. Tharoor does not draw on the myths of the colonizer at all while Rushdie includes the version that Christ had come to Kashmir and died there. There is also the humorous treatment of Mary's question about the colour of God, Christ being the white man's god.

The interface between myth and history is seen in the idea that the nation itself is a narrative and is therefore invented. This forms an important part of the postmodern postcolonial dialectic. This idea gained currency with the publication of Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's book *The Invention of Tradition*. Speaking of Europe in the early nineteenth century they say:

"It is clear that plenty of political institutions, ideological movements and groups--not least in nationalism--were so unprecedented that even historic continuity had to be invented, for example by creating an ancient past beyond effective historical continuity either by semi-fiction (Boadicea, Veringetorix, Arminius and Charuscan) or by forgery (Ossian, the Czech medieval manuscripts). It is also clear, that entirely new symbols and devices came into existence... such as the national anthem... the national flag... or the personification of the 'nation' in symbol or usage" (1983:7).

This tallies with the view of Cassirer when he says that those who craft political myths, like the Nazis, come up with new 'magic words' and symbols. It is also similar to what Barthes says about the process of
naturalization. The fiction writer exposes the fact that much of what passes for tradition is in fact a myth created by the system. Ernest Gellner sums it up when he says, "Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it invents nations where they do not exist" (Quoted by Anderson 1983: 15). Rushdie reiterates this idea that both India and Pakistan are myths in *Midnight's Children*. Benedict Anderson and Timothy Brennan have also discussed this idea.

The rise of the modern nation state in Europe goes hand in hand with the rise of vernaculars. These works of fiction assisted in the formation of a 'national literature' thereby validating the notion of a nation state. Edward Said goes a step further when he says in *Culture and Imperialism*, that the novel was immensely important in the formation of imperial attitudes. "Stories are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world; they also become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history." It has been demonstrated in the preceding chapters how the subaltern histories can only be written, disguised as fiction. Said says, "the power to narrate or block narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them. Most important, the grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment mobilized people in the colonial world to rise up and throw off imperial subjection; in the process, many Europeans and Americans were also stirred by these stories and their protagonists, and they too fought for new narratives of equality and human community" (xiii). Said also says that in
imperialism the basic conflict is over land, who owns it, who has the right to settle and work on it and who plans its future. These issues are also reflected, contested and even decided in narrative. This is clearly what Ngugi and Ihimaera are trying to do.

This brings us to the fact that texts and narratives engage one another in active discourse. In her essay 'Transculturization and Autoethnography: Peru 1615/1980' Mary Louise Pratt draws a distinction:

"If ethnographic texts are those in which European metropolitan subjects represent to themselves their others (usually their subjugated others), autoethnographic texts are representations that the so-defined others construct in response to or in dialogue with these texts. Autoethnographic texts are not, then, what are usually thought of as autochthonous or 'authentic' forms of self-representation . . . Rather, they involve a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or conqueror. These are merged or infiltrated to a varying degree with indigenous idioms to create self-representation intended to intervene in metropolitan modes of understanding . . . Autoethnographic works are often addressed to both metropolitan audiences and the speaker's own community. Their reception is thus highly indeterminate. Such texts often seem to be a marginalized group's point of entry into dominant circuits of print culture" (Barker, Hulme and Iversen eds. 1994:28).

The four novels studied here do adopt strategies of selective collaboration and appropriation and are meant to intervene in Eurocentric
discourse. They are therefore autoethnographic texts. All this helps us to see the ways in which fiction interacts with contemporary history, while helping to shape the political and cultural patterns of the future. The four novels engage the Eurocentric canon in the fields of literature, myth and history.

Postcolonial writers and theorists see history as a series of erasures and inscriptions. In fact, it is both cultural and geographic. Starting as erasure in culture and religion, it gradually extends to the identity of the race, and the erasure of historical and geographical identity which results in dispossession of land. Frantz Fanon in Wretched of The Earth says, "Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of a people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it" (1967:210). This is what Ihimaera tries to reverse in his novel The Matriarch. We see how Aotearoa becomes New Zealand and how Kupe is forgotten to be replaced by Abel Tasman and Captain Cook. Jose Rabasa in his essay 'Allegories of Atlas' says, "The transposition of the image of palimpsests becomes an illuminating metaphor for understanding geography as a series of erasures and overwritings that have transformed the world. . . History thus naturalizes particular national formations and institutionalizes forgetfulness of earlier territorializations in the perception of the world" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin eds. 1995:358,362). History thus validates the spatial boundaries inscribed by Europeans. The truth of this is seen in the birth of several new nations in Africa, the partition of India and the conversion of Australia and New Zealand into areas of white domination.
the progress and ambitions of the present. Voltaire knew what he was talking about when he said ‘History is a lie commonly agreed upon.’ Our view of the past is a fiction we create to rationalize our position of power in the present and our view of the future is simply a magnification of our present” (1971:144-145). David Lowenthall points out that a destruction of public monuments is followed up by a slaughter of the intellectuals so that the old order will be completely forgotten. Rushdie’s description of the Bangla Desh war in Midnight’s Children demonstrates this.

The very title of Lowenthall’s book The Past Is A Foreign Country makes a significant comment. He says that both the past and the future are inaccessible to us and yet they are integral to our understanding of the present. “Hindsight and anachronism shapes historical interpretation” (1986:217). The past when revisited, can only be reinterpreted in the light of the present. Lowenthall says that every generation disposes of its legacy, choosing what to discard, ignore, tolerate or treasure. It also decides what to respect and what to restore. These choices can alter the past and our attitude to it (363).

In addition to these factors that influence the past, another important factor is memory and by its very nature it is unreliable. All the four writers studied here express their anxiety about this in one way or another. Ngugi is concerned that the ideals of the revolution have been forgotten because of propaganda or fear. Ihimaera, at the very outset says that he is creating a jungle of facts and fiction and in his journey down memory lane, the more doors he opens the more bewildering reality becomes. Vyasa, in Tharoor's
wel, says in the end that he has to narrate the story all over again because he has taken the wrong perspective. Time and again he tells us how memory shapes what we consider historical fact. Rushdie reinforces this idea with the important metaphor of pickle-making and chutneyfication. All the writers are acutely conscious of the complex relationship between history, truth, memory and perspective.

The logical outcome of these arguments is to say that fiction reveals a truth about history, which though not factual, is of significance. Historians, theorists and fiction writers have similar concerns and use similar strategies. As Arthur Saltzman says, “The historian and the novelist face the same problem of shaping recalcitrant material into expressive form and their comparable enterprise provokes a series of obstacles that are foregrounded in recent fiction . . . Next arises the problem of language itself, for language promotes its own structural ‘mandates’ that interfere with or at least obscure, the transmission of meaning. And if we supplant the structures of the world with configurations of the mind on what lines are the genuine and the spurious to be differentiated?” (1990:30). His way of looking at the problem helps us to see the close links between history, fiction and myth. All three are concerned with the problems of narration and meaning. Saltzman also says that fiction rewrites the world to give shape to our longing and therefore helps to shape the future. There are common areas of interest for the literary artist, the critic and the historian.

Issues regarding the methods of history, the purpose of history and the truths of history are the concerns of the philosophers of history. W.H. Walsh
in *An Introduction To the Philosophy of History* (1967) discusses the following questions: Is history explanation or narration? Is history an elaboration of empirical data? Is history speculative or objective? Does a historian bring with him a hypothesis when he writes? Is there a law of causation in history? Does a historian have to necessarily interpret? Does the historian perforce have to deal with questions of necessity, motivation and freewill? It becomes obvious that many of these concerns are those of the fiction writer and critic as well. Myth, fiction and history deal with the relationship between action and mind, necessity and chance, and the constraints of freewill. They seek a purpose for man's actions, and they strive to give a direction to human thought and action.

All four novelists deal with history, yet they are concerned with the state of society in the present and the shape of things to come. Rolf Gruner points out that the modern philosopher of history is "future-directed, ameliorative/redemptive, universalist, secular and Promethean" (1985:29). He is a man driven by discontent with the situation in the world, and he has the belief that through man's own effort and through a secular historical process, a deliverance from the poor state of affairs is possible. The improved future state is brought about by man himself in some kind of Promethean effort. This may involve greater rationality and moral progress. This secular attitude is seen in the four novelists studied here. Both Ngugi and Ihimaera make use of Christian myth and yet the interpretation of society that emerges from their novels is secular. Gruner says, "While history has been de-Christianized, Christianity has been historicized. The conception of
history as a meaningful whole with a linear and progressive structure is retained, but the meaning has become a secular one” (27). What Ngugi wants to show is that the ideals of a Christian democracy have been subverted in every way. He does not think that the Church or religion will bring about change, the people will have to bring about the transformation themselves. The ideal is Marxist and what Gruner says about Marx's philosophy seems to describe what Matigari in the novel attempts to achieve.

“Marx did believe in a relationship between interpreting and changing, philosophy and reality. For he thought of philosophy as something which makes demands on reality, demands which reality has not met... Marx, in short, asked for the realm of reality and the realm of ideas to be made identical. He wanted to have embodied in the sphere of action what is characteristic of the sphere of contemplation, and vice versa... Thus no knowledge of historical/social world is possible, he thought, without changing the prevailing social/political conditions -- for as long as these conditions remain unchanged there can be no knowledge but only ideology” (Gruner 1985:73).

This is the reason why Matigari persists in asking the question, “Where can I find truth and justice?” There is a gap between the professed ideology of the government and the reality, and Matigari wants to draw attention to that fact. Only if the people act without fear can the reality approximate to the ideal.

Ihimaera’s thrust is on a proper synthesis of Maori and Western culture, epitomized in the new marae Rongopai. That this is dependent on
human effort is clear in the mandate given to Tamatae by the matriarch, that he must keep the struggle alive till the Maori obtain their rights. Though Tharoor draws from Hindu mythology, he renders the text secular by adopting an irreverent tone and equating the hero with a modern politician. Rushdie, as has already been shown, draws from several myth systems, but the hero Saleem is not concerned with religion and is even confused about his nationality. Tharoor and Rushdie are undoubtedly concerned about progress, but uncertainty about moral and material progress is emphasized in many ways. These authors show us that no theory or belief is immutable and that more than often, man hides selfishness or evil designs under a facade of goodness.

History can be seen as a linear development in which movement is unidirectional and irreversible. Each individual occurrence is unique and history is “a process of continually emerging novelties.” History can be viewed as cyclical or repetitive, and like a wheel that keeps turning, the patterns of development, growth and decay, are repeated over long periods of time. Ngugi and Ihimaera are really concerned with changes in the short term and hence their perspective is linear. Tharoor on the other hand makes us see the repetitive patterns in history. Rushdie achieves something different. By making his protagonist Saleem emphasize the law of causation throughout, and then subverting it, Rushdie seems closer to what is called the chaotic view of history. The sequence of events is seen as completely irregular and unpredictable. Any kind of occurrence can follow any event.
Though there is this difference in perspective, the four writers seem to have a common platform, for each in his own way asserts that there cannot be just one version of history that is true or complete. Both Ngugi and Ihimaera try to give voice to the subaltern view of history through their fiction. Tharoor upsets the comfortable assumption of many historians that India has had a succession of good leaders. His deflation of leaders like Nehru and Indira Gandhi forces us to see history from another perspective. Rushdie’s Saleem is really the enfant terrible, for he overturns our notions of history, myth and literature. Saleem’s greatest worry is that there are so many stories/histories to tell and there may not be time to complete them. All this is concerned with questions that philosophers of history debate upon: Can history be objective? What are the truths of history? Even if we set aside personal bias, the historian has to work with a hypothesis. He has to have a point of view in order to be able to give coherence to the chaos of facts around him. W.H.Walsh gives four reasons for disagreement among historians. The first is a choice of emphasis on the role of individuals, classes of persons or nations. One would see history as the outcome of the deeds of great men (heroes) or leaders, and the other would see it as the fluctuating fortunes of the different classes of society. Yet another view may emphasize the role of nation/race in civilizing the rest of the world. The second reason for disagreement is that the historian has to make assumptions that are coloured by the fact that he belongs to a nation, race, social class or religion. Thirdly, the theories of historical interpretation can be conflicting. Fourthly there are differences regarding moral beliefs and different conceptions of the
nature of man (1967:99). Ngugi's perspective is that of the poor working class and Ihimaera is for the Maori. We get the Indian-Hindu perspective in Tharoor's novel, and the Indian-Pakistani-Muslim perspective in Rushdie's novel. Ngugi makes his work universal in that it is the voice of the exploited anywhere in the world. Ihimaera though overtly Maori, is also speaking for the dispossessed. Tharoor makes us feel that history is no different from story telling while Saleem makes us understand that all our notions about historical causation can be wrong. In short, there is no one truth, truths are multiple or they can even be indeterminate. Like Vyasa, we must ask, "Whose truth?" for it is invariably linked to a perspective.

The four works of fiction considered here seem to put to test both the correspondence theory and the coherence theory of history. "A statement, we say, is true if it corresponds to the facts; and conversely, if it corresponds to the facts it is true. Truth and correspondence to fact thus seems to be interchangeable terms, and the theory simply consists in stressing their equivalence" (Walsh 1967:74). Ngugi would no doubt ask, which fact would you highlight and which fact would you suppress? Facts like the children's village are not facts. Facts like police brutality would pass for the law. Ihimaera discounts the theory in two important sections of the novel--the Te Kooti Retaliation and the spider episode. In both, we have multiple and contradictory perspectives of one and the same event. Tharoor shows us how the partition of a country was just a matter of drawing a line on the map for those in power, whereas it meant death, loss or devastation for many. Saleem shows how routinely facts are distorted, discoloured or ignored when he says
that we see only things that we want to see. Facts can have meaning only when explained and this is where the ambivalence comes in. Fiction writers help us to see this.

In the coherence theory, truth is seen as a relation, not between statement and fact, but between one statement and another. "A statement, it is maintained, is true if it can be shown to cohere, or fit in with all other statements we are prepared to accept" (Walsh 1967:76). No statement is made or a belief held in isolation. It is part of a system that comprises a whole. The theory therefore admits that this involves interpretation that stems from an accepted hypothesis. If we look at the period of history dealt with the four novels studied in this thesis, it is within the realm of well-documented and recorded history. We are therefore not concerned with questions of authenticity, but questions of how the statements are made to cohere. It is obvious that all the four texts are meant to have a dialectical relationship with what the historians have already said about the periods under consideration. The texts themselves can therefore be construed as statements that seek to alter the configured whole. Paradoxically, many of the truths of history, many truths about historical, political and sociological processes are revealed better through fiction. Here, it is not a question of the authenticity of fact, but of truth of a higher, more general kind.

The relationship between history and art is a dynamic one. Historians now look upon art and literature as providing valuable information about the culture and society of the time. As Agnes Heller puts it, "Art is conceived of as historical product. The choice of a particular historical past determines the
choice of a particular genre of art, style, creative vision of the world. It expresses a preference of a way of life. Every way of life and the genres, works of art etc. adequate to it can be gradually appreciated . . .” (1982:24). African writers now integrate techniques of the oral tradition into their writing. Tharoor and many other Indian writers make use of the epic form and the technique of story within a story in their work. Both in terms of style and content, Ihimaera shows a remarkable synthesis of two traditions. The hybridization in art forms reflects the inescapable hybridization of culture in the era of globalization. As Edward Said says, “Cultures are not impermeable . . . Culture is never just a matter of ownership, of borrowing and lending with absolute debtors and creditors, but rather of appropriations, common experiences, and interdependencies of all kinds among different cultures. This is the universal norm” (1994:261-262).

Like history, myth also has a legitimizing function. As Heller points out, myths are explanations of our Being and they legitimize our existence in the world. Myths always have a “lesson” for they tell us what we must do and what we must avoid doing, what we must fear and what we can hope for. Myths also deal with questions of necessity and freewill (1982:7). This is another area where the interests of fiction, myth and history converge. Northrop Frye’s insights about knowledge, education and the arts is relevant here. In the opening essay in *Stubborn Structure*, he says that all art, especially literature, deals with emotions and values and hence exhibits concern. This same concern enters philosophy, history, political theory and psychology. “Briefly, the language of concern is the language of myth. Myth
is the structural principle of literature that enters into and gives form to the verbal disciplines where concern is relevant. Man's view of the world he wants to live in, of the world he does not want to live in, of his situation and destiny and heritage, of the world he is trying to make and the world that resists his efforts, forms in every age a huge mythological structure . . ." (1980:18). Frye also points out that in this scientific age, religion is inevitably de-mythologized and some of the things that were held true or sacred are no longer so. Yet, he feels, the word 'de-mythologizing' is inappropriate because the process is actually 'mythologizing'. "What reality can now be attached to the word 'God', if it no longer means anything objective? Is it a word that can still be used like 'mind' in psychology or 'life' in biology, as a kind of metaphorical signpost, pointing to things that manifest themselves as complexes of observable behaviour?" (1980:24).

The complexity of the task for the literary critic is such, that no one focus can give a satisfactory interpretation. Criticism has become interdisciplinary and the text is a hieroglyph that can be interpreted in many ways. Raman Selden in his essay "The Plural Text and History" (1984) first takes the example of a painting--Degas's 'A Woman Ironing'. This may be regarded as a work or social realism, a study in form or the depiction of class struggle in painting or a stylistic transformation of the real. If we consider the painting outside the historical context, it is evident that no one reading has greater validity than another. The 'text' remains an enigma, a hieroglyph, and can be reinscribed in various ways. The play of meaning can
be set in motion in various directions, by superimposition of various metalanguages—psychoanalytic, economic, moral, formalistic or scientific.

We can consider yet another perspective. Joseph Campbell in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* says that every one indulges in myth-making. Every individual is the hero of his own life story. He is the one who conceives the story and gives all others the role of minor characters. But since the story seldom shapes the way he would like and since so many other stories impinge on it, he is constantly reconceiving just the sort of hero he wants to be. Thus, "fiction isn't a lie at all, but a true representation of the distortion that everyone makes of life" (1968:36).

Wole Soyinka points out that myth and ritual in African societies helped to integrate man with the cosmos, giving him a place, a meaning. The European imagination on the other hand has created a split between the world of fact and the chthonic realm and this gives rise to a world view that sees everything as a series of oppositions (1992:2-3). This is borne out by what W.W. Douglas says about myth. Our view of myth implies a whole series of antitheses that are important in modern criticism. Myths are opposed to facts, to ordinary knowledge, to positivism, to the intelligence and will, to the finite. The critic talks as if "the mind had two functions or faculties, the speculative reason and the mythopoetic imagination, which correspond to the 'world' of fact and the 'world' of nonfact. This is the important assumption, for on it are grounded the moral attitudes that are the ultimate subjects of modern criticism. This view of the mind validates the critics' dramatization of modern history as a constant and furious struggle between these two aspects
of mind ... the predominantly rational and the predominantly mythopoetic” (Vickery ed. 1966:127). Here we have a view that integrates the role of the critic and the historian.

At this juncture, it is interesting to see what Ivan Strenski has to say about myth and theory. In his book *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth Century History*, Strenski places four important theorists in the historical situation in which they produced their theory, examines the influences on each of them to show how the theory is dependent on the intellectual climate of the time. The four theorists are Cassirer, Eliade, Levi-Strauss and Malinowski. His opening definition of myth is very like Gould’s definition included in Chapter I, but his conclusions about myth theory are rather radical:

“Myth is everything and nothing at the same time. It is *the* true story or a false one, revelation or deception, sacred or vulgar, real or fictional, symbol or tool, archetype or stereotype. It is either strongly structural and logical or emotional and pre-logical, traditional and primitive or part of contemporary ideology ... Thus, instead of there being a real thing, myth, there is a thriving *industry*, manufacturing and marketing what is *called* myth” (1987:1).

It is the range and variety of what is called myth that makes Strenski say this, for myth is ‘Genesis’ and ‘General Strike’, ‘Oedipus’ and ‘Frankenstein’, ‘Master Race’ and ‘Chosen Race’, ‘Millennium’ and ‘Eternal Return’ and so on.
So where does this leave us? Myth is invented, myth is fiction, history is a story, fiction is more real than history. We seem to be criss-crossing boundaries, invading territories and amazing ourselves in terrible word mazes. The literary critic who thrives on such confusions has only created more labels, metafiction, metalanguage and metacriticism. We even have *Metahistory* by Hayden White. John Barth says in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, “The Poet Wonders Whether The Course of Human History Is a Progress, A Drama, a Regression, a Cycle, an Undulation, a Vortex, a Right- or Left-Handed Spiral, a Mere Continuum, a What Have You Certain Evidence Is Brought Forward, but of an Ambiguous and Inconclusive Nature.”

The most interesting achievement of postmodern writers is their uncanny ability to fictionalize theory itself and thus either anticipate or subvert the critic. *Matigari* illustrates the binary oppositions of Levi-Strauss, includes Marxist theory, and Barthes’s theory of Myth on the Right and Myth on the Left. Ihimaera anticipates the new-historicist critic by converting his strategy of interpretation into a narrative method. Tharoor’s Vyasa is both narrator and critic and Rushdie usurps the deconstructionist’s role by doing it within the text. If the deconstructionist has killed the author and his intention, Rushdie renders the deconstructionist himself redundant. There is this clever reversal of roles and part of the pleasure of reading is this constant game being played between reader, critic and writer— who leads and who follows. Postmodern postcolonial fiction has shown how history can be disguised as fiction and fiction made to look like historical documentation. Myths are politicized or politics resembles myth. We must now live with
overlapping categories, and therefore, the method of having a single focus in literary criticism must give way to interdisciplinary and multipronged approaches.

The multicultural and multidisciplinary approach to the texts in this thesis seems to confirm Rolf Gruner's observation:

"A survey of the past it will be reaffirmed, shows a succession of different doctrines, one after another entering and leaving the stage of history, entry and exit being associated in each case with a change in scene. By way of comment it has to be said, first, that even if all these views were incompatible with each other, and even if every one of them were clearly co-ordinate to a way of life, this would not prove that none of them is simply true, or that none can be called true or false" (112).

If criticism follows art, then let me conclude in the true postmodern fashion by quoting first the final prayer of Frantz Fanon in Black Skin, White Masks:

"O my body, make of me always a man who questions"

and then with the opening prayer of Wole Soyinka in Myth, Literature and the African World:

"I shall begin by commemorating the gods for their self-sacrifice on the altar of literature, and in so doing press them into further service on behalf of human society, and its quest for the explication of being."


---. 1969. Images and Symbols. Translated by Philip Mairet. New York: Sheed & Ward,


