

Present Myth

Myth adopts an infinite variety of style and mood. Some storylines end absurdly, others lead inexorably to a telegraphed end. They depict events both ordinary and implausible, featuring a cast of people, creatures, and unseen forces. Yet these tokens primarily serve as markers, a mnemonic device. **Once they catch the eye**, arrest the gaze, they do no more than distract. Almost immediately, we may set them aside with confidence, and attend other aspects of the story. Myth – I use the word, not as is current, but rather in the sense of revelation of truth in the form of a story. – Rama P. Coomaraswamy All games have rules, more or less evident to their players. Though knowledge is not always conscious, and rules not always explicit, it is fair to say games cannot be played without some familiarity with their rules. And yet, we should never confuse a set of rules for a depiction of the game itself. At best, rules may conjure a game board and help set out the pieces. In the end, **the game relies upon those willing to play**. We have been particularly interested in various sorts of communication which involve both emotional significance and the necessity of discrimination between [logical] orders of message. Such situations include play, humor, ritual, poetry, and fiction. Play, especially among animals, we have studied at some length. It is a situation which strikingly illustrates the occurrence of metamessages whose correct discrimination is vital to the cooperation of the individuals involved; for example, false discrimination could easily lead to combat. – Gregory Bateson · Don Jackson · John Weakland Myth greets us as something familiar, and faintly bizarre, all at once. The juxtaposition is deliberate, purposeful. Myth acquaints us with what is around us, but in a way that promises to remove some of the veneer, some of the familiarity. We think we know what it says, but pre-set translation leaves a sense of unease, hints at **something we are missing**. Myth offers a path away from the glass and into the encompassing sphere of a living world. Only after a life-time have I come to understand that even a real event may be the enactment of a myth, and from that take on supernatural meaning and power. In such cases myth is the truth of the fact, not fact the truth of the myth. – Kathleen Raine As with the stories from which it is built, myth entertains. And yet, no story, however intricate or convoluted, can present us with a mode of seeing the world. Stories only depict. The mythopoeic view derives not from an illustration or vignette, but from a faculty for penetrating the world. Myth challenges its audience, it ‘sees within’ as much as it ‘looks around’. While it may appear to present a static portrait, myth strives instead to **tap into momentum**. Myth is not a window for watching, but a pathway: an invitation to join in, to immerse ourselves. Man has the power to reason, to feel, to evaluate, to guess, to imagine, to project himself into nonexistent situations, and to articulate his resultant ideas. In him, therefore, instinct might not necessarily express itself as the raw impulse of the beast. – Philip Wylie