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**The Pop-Culture Fixation of the Mythologies; How Science and Fantasy Fiction Integrate Mythological Elements**

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**Abstract:** What myths can not explain, science does and what is impossible in science could be understood in myths. However, a fusion of both opens gates for unimagined possibilities because it answers questions that both myths and science refuse to address. One can then talk about flying cars, multiple universes, deformed creatures, and more.

When these impractical-looking possibilities are introduced to curious individuals in the form of stories, they become a genre of literature called Science Fiction and Fantasy Fiction.

In this paper, the authors have tried to explore how modern writers have integrated mythological elements and storylines and have written their science or fantasy fiction. The work of fiction taken into consideration here are namely Chronicles of Narnia by CS Lewis and the story of Thor as adapted by the Marvel comics by Stan Lee.

This has been studied under the Adaptation Theories and Medium Theories to explain how the traditional narratives were modernised and how they changed from the initial oral mediums to written and further into visual mediums.

**Keywords:** Myths, Mythologies, Science Fiction, Fantasy Fiction

**Introduction:** Generation after generation kids grow up listening to stories about good over evil. It all started with priests narrating stories about god winning over the evil forces and sustaining the rule of heavenly and moralistic law and order. All of these oral stories then got written and preserved by the holy places; the temples, churches, mosques etc. In the later periods, all of these were printed and published and various versions were created which were then circulated for the people to read. These plethoras of stories about god, goddesses and other supernatural beings and their mystical deeds are called myths. Every religion or

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culture has its integral myth or rather a different myth that has been the origin of various religions and cultures.

These myths also answered many questions that humans could not answer. All of these functions of a myth were then replaced by science. Not only did it provide logical reasoning in place of stories behind various phenomena that were previously explained with the help of fables in myths, but it also formed the basis of our origin and, over time, altered our way of life.

There have been and still are endless debates about the supremacy of either science or mythologies. While the debate remains unsettled what gives a slight nod to the settlement is the literature with the fiction that talks about the amalgamation of both. These fictional stories are categorised as science and fantasy fiction which uses myths to tell stories which are fantastical and hence combine the idea of mythologies and the new avant-garde of life and living giving birth to two completely new genres of fiction which eventually become popular among the new generation of fiction consumers.

This paper is an attempt by the authors to investigate how science and fantasy fiction are the modern retelling and reimagining of myths. It will further also try to analyse how in doing so, the modern authors also shift the medium with which the stories are told from oral to printed.

There are rules which make a story a myth; the making of a hero, the essence of good over evil, the stakes, a prophecy and a lot more get involved in the making of a mythology [Indick and Dowling]. And all of this is vividly presented in science and fantasy fiction. Where the heroes are children who were prophesied to be the saviour and are meant for a bigger purpose. They are then taken on a series of adventures or made to fight adversaries which then lead to them coming out victorious and the victory is not just an ordinary victory but one where the role of the hero is fully realised and makes them into almost divine figures. Apart from that these fictions also use mythological symbolism.

The works of fiction taken into consideration here are The Chronicles of Narnia written by CS Lewis and the story of Thor as adapted into a science fiction comic by Stan Lee. Both these works have used mythologies to build their plotlines.

The Chronicles of Narnia by CS Lewis was published in seven parts in the 1950's. The series which started with the book called The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe had four Pevensie siblings at the centre of the story. Born and brought up in London they were sent to the countryside for their safety purposes during the Second World War. They are fostered by Professor Digory Kirke, in whose house the youngest of them all Lucy finds a wardrobe which leads them to the land of Narnia where they set off for an adventure.

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The story that follows from there on has a similar build-up as they have it in the mythologies. The Pevensies are the heroes who are kids uprooted from their original place of being and pushed to a foster place due to circumstances. They are then sent on an adventure where they also learn that they are part of a prophecy and are therefore meant to be at the place they are at and are there to be a saviour and hold a purpose higher than they think. By the end of the adventure, they are given positions of a higher order when they are made kings and queens of the place. They then remain so until they are forced back to the real world until they are required to be back.

Amid this, the story also focuses on ideas and learnings quite similar to that of the myths. CS Lewis has proposed the idea of a human being a traitor when they get tempted with the fulfilment of their desires but a little repentance and the ability to fall back to the greater good could lead to forgiveness. Here he has made the third of the Pevensie siblings an example of the same where he made him lured to the dark side by a small wish fulfilment but then he has to face the consequences which gives him time to re-think his decision and comes back to the 'good' side. Not only does he come to the 'good' side he also becomes a knight fighting for the side and shows readiness to sacrifice his life for it. This is a message for the readers similar to that of the mythologies; to stick to the morals.

Another message that it gives the readers is that of belief. When Lucy first goes inside the wardrobe (which has Narnia inside) she doesn't go in knowing that she will find something inside however, she is a believer and is ready for any sort of surprise that might come her way hence she finds out about Narnia. Later, the others who did not believe Lucy at first went inside the wardrobe to hide from the professor whose window they had broken playing cricket. However, while going inside they too were ready to be surprised and that led them to find Narnia. CS Lewis who had been a faithful and religious person himself right from his childhood made a point time and time again to let his readers know that Narnia could only be found by those who believe in it which is also true about all the mythological lands including the heaven.

Other than the story structure and the basic learnings of the novel what else is similar to the mythological stories are the symbolic elements which resemble the Christian mythology. The land of Narnia to begin with has its resemblance with heaven. A place which could only be reached by people who believe just like how Lucy did at first and is then followed by Edmund and then the other siblings as well. Apart from that it is also a place which relishes under only the positive forces and its charm depletes when the negative ones take over. Where at first it is the White Witch and then it is the Talmarians all of them representing the faithlessness with which the siblings are supposed to fight and turn the fortune of Narnia (heaven) from bad to good [Wilson]..

When we talk about Pevensie siblings as the saviours what also is important to note is that they are always denoted as sons of Adam and daughters of Eve who are supposed to rule the kingdom of Narnia. Adam and Eve according to Christian mythology deserved

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heaven before getting banished from there and by making the Pevensie siblings equivalent to the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve CS Lewis tries to say that the faith and the purity of heaven can only be restored by the humans themselves, the ones who have a strong believe in the morals on which the heaven is held upright which in the case of the fantasy is the land of Narnia.

Moreover, the names that have been given to these characters uphold very significant biblical meanings [Wilson]. The eldest of them all is Peter which according to the Bible means stone or in the case of a human it could mean a stone-like strength which we see in Peter both in and outside of Narnia. The second eldest is Susan which in biblical terms means Lily but it is also equivalent to grace and we see that in the character. Edmund is the third Pevensie sibling and the name according to the Bible means a protector, the character although lured by the White Witch gets back to his siblings and fights on the side of the Narnians. He is shown to have the most courage and often protects others. Lucy means the light in the dark in biblical terms and the youngest one of them all is given that name. Here she is the believer and always looks up to the good in every situation [Eretova]. These are all also the traits which are required in the 'kings and queens' of Narnia or a heaven-like place. CS Lewis has also created a god-like figure which is the omnipresent ruler of the whole of Narnia and under whose rule only the kings and queens of Narnia persist. He has made him into a lion and called him Aslan the name here again has a mythological significance as it means a god-like figure and also a lion both of which stand true to the character here. He is also shown to have died to protect the humans in this case the Pevensie siblings and then resurrected just like how Jesus does in the bible [Eretova].

The White Witch is also symbolical of Satan or the evil power who wants to take over Narnia for which she even lures the humans to get on her side which in this case what happens with Edmund. The name that Lewis has chosen for the witch is Jadis which is equivalent to Satan.

It is hence, considerable to say that CS Lewis indeed had the intention to impart the readers of his fantasy fiction with Christian ideologies.

The discussion could be moved to science fiction. As a genre, scientific fiction is considered the opposite of mythological literature. It talks about the apocalypse and dystopian societies which insist on the idea of science taking over the world hence, having no place for god and faith. However, the comic writers of the U.S. believed otherwise and that is why they decided to create a superhero in the modern world which was based on a Norse god. He is called Thor both in the comic strip and in Mythology and is one of the most interesting characters in a universe of superheroes who fly and fight using science. The creators were Stan Lee and Jack Kirby who wrote and illustrated the story of Thor respectively as a superhero comic strip in the Marvel Magazines. Superheroes are an integral part of the science fiction genre and this adaptation of the Norse god into this modern genre of fiction somewhat debars the idea of the genre being the opposite of mythology. It also

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becomes a case study for understanding how mythology has been blended or re-told as science fiction.

Thor is the god of war and thunder in Norse mythology and according to the mythology, the story revolves around how he proves himself worthy of being a ruler of Asgard the place which is equivalent to heaven in the mythology. This was then adapted into the comic strip and it became a god who is sent to the earth with the same reason as to prove himself worthy. Here, however, he is exposed to modern life and adventures with the superheroes on the earth [Ayala]. And that is how from a god he gets blended into a superhero for the humans in the modern world. Not only Thor but a lot of other characters have also been adapted in the comics. All of these characters are significant in the life of Thor and Norse mythology hence making it a complete adaptation. The list of characters includes Loki and Odin himself.

Odin is the king of heaven in Norse mythology and also in the adaptation. He is considered to be the 'All god' of war wisdom and death. He has adapted to be a similar figure for the Marvel comics.

Thor is the son of Odin in Norse mythology and the god of thunder who is known for being easily agitated this trait of his is used by Stan Lee when he wrote that he was banished to earth by Odin because of his reckless behaviour. His weapon which is a hammer called Mjolnir has also been taken into consideration for the adaptation and it plays a significant role in the comics and its power is recalled over and over.

Loki the trickster god of Norse mythology is the son of giant Farbauti and goddess Laufey. He has been known for being a companion to Odin and Thor however, in the comics he has been remolded a bit. He is the god of mischief here as well but in the comics, he is made to be Thor's adoptive brother [Ayla]. Here as well he is accompanied by Thor but also goes through his misadventures which lead to worries and restlessness for both the humans on the earth and the gods including Thor and Odin. Unlike the usual essence of mythologies where the characters are either good or bad, Loki is a character whose arc lies somewhere on the edge where he seems to be evil but could turn out to be a nicer one at the end.

This is how Norse mythology has been refashioned to be made into a science fiction superhero comic.

While it has been established that the science and fantasy fiction works are reworks of different mythologies, especially in the case of the two works taken into consideration for this study an important aspect that needs to be understood is the framework which has been used by the authors to prove the hypothesis. The cases presented here have been studied under the lens of two theories essentially which include the theory of Adaptation and the theory of Medium.

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The theory of adaptation is an essential framework required to study the process of adapting a work of literature into another or a different form of art. Which is what has taken place here. When a myth is turned into a modern form of re-telling it is not told exactly how it has been told in its traditional forms. Science and fantasy fiction are alternative forms of modern fiction which is why adapting the myths in this new genre requires a lot of re-working for the adaptation to take shape.

Both the writers whether it is CS Lewis or Stan Lee have taken elements of the Christian and Norse mythology respectively and then have moulded them into the stories they needed to tell hence adapting the myths in a modern setting.

In the Chronicles of Narnia, the story is that of the human race who become the saviour of heaven and its moralities. However, the setting is 20th-century London amid World War II. In the Marvel adaptation of Thor, however, Stan Lee has taken only the characters and some settings from the original mythology and has then twisted them into a modern retelling of the story taking creative liberty. The characters, although similar to the mythology have a wider arc than just being gods. He has taken the liberty to go beyond the morals about good and bad and has talked about the greyness of the characters as well. The setting here is Earth for most of the storyline in place of Asgard which is their heaven. With the creative liberty held for the re-telling of the story Thor makes it an interesting case of adaptation.

The adaptation theory is hence used in the case of both the works of fiction that have been studied here.

The next theory that has been used for the research report is the theory of Medium. Which talks about how the message gets transferred from one form of media to the other. Myths from the time they came into being have been oral forms of fiction. They were preachings given by the priests who were considered higher authorities and closer to the god who had gained worldwide knowledge and then imparted it to other people. These were later turned into handwritten and further into printed books which was the first time the form of medium changed for the imparting of the preachings. When the modern writers however adapted them into science and fantasy fiction they were again changed into a different form while the medium remained somewhat similar (the printed text). Later, these fictions were created into the movies for the big screens and hence, the medium shifted once again. This is what happened in the case of both the works studied for this paper hence, the theory becomes essential for the study.

In conclusion, Fantasy and Science fiction could be called a variation of mythology or it could be considered that these two forms of fiction are created from the ripping and re-molding of the mythologies. The myths which are stories of god and morality and good over evil form the basis for these modern forms of fiction. Because even within these two forms the authors are trying to convey a similar sort of learning outcome. Moreover, the structure

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on which the science and fantasy fiction base its storyline are the ones adapted from the mythologies itself where the birth and journey of a hero/es is shown. They sometimes even have symbolic references which hint towards their origin from the mythologies such as the name of the characters, settings and use of elements as well. Like in the case of CS Lewi's Chronicles of Narnia, the plotline is about the adventures of the Pevensie siblings in the land of Narnia however, there is a lot of symbolism including their name, the setting etc which points out towards the underlined Christianity.

Another way of adaptation is the re-telling where the myths are imagined in a modern setting. The characters remain the same but the settings and the plot become different. This has been the case with Thor comics made by the Marvel Universe. Along with that it also shows how the medium of retelling of the myths has changed over the years from the oral forms to the written and then their retellings as well.

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