

MYTHS, LEGENDS, FOLKTALES, AND THEIR PLACE IN LITERATURE

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ANNOTATION: This scholarly article is devoted to the essence, distinctions, and the role of myths, legends, and tales—considered the oldest and most fundamental genres of oral folk creativity—in the development of national and world literature. The article theoretically analyzes the ontological function of myth in primitive thinking, the supernatural-artistic nature of legend, and the historical-moral foundations of tales. Furthermore, it examines how mythological plots and characters enter written literature as archetypes and universal motifs, and their role in enriching the semantic and aesthetic layers of literary works. In particular, using the examples of Navoi's works and contemporary mythopoeitics, the article demonstrates the literary transformation of these genres and their significance in preserving cultural codes. Overall, the article substantiates the decisive role of mythological sources in ensuring the continuity of the literary process and the development of artistic thinking.

Keywords: Myth, Legend, Tale, Archetype, Mythopoeitics, Oral Folk Creativity, Literary Genres, Universal Plot, Artistic Thinking, Cosmogonic.

АННОТАЦИЯ: Данная научная статья посвящена сущности, различиям и роли мифов, легенд и преданий — считающихся древнейшими и фундаментальными жанрами устного народного творчества — в развитии национальной и мировой литературы. В статье теоретически анализируются онтологическая функция мифа в первобытном мышлении, сверхъестественно-художественная природа легенды и историко-нравственные основы преданий. Кроме того, рассматривается, как мифологические сюжеты и образы входят в письменную литературу в качестве архетипов и универсальных мотивов, а также их роль в обогащении семантического и эстетического слоев произведений. В частности, на примере творчества Навои и современной мифопоэтики демонстрируется литературная трансформация этих жанров и их значение для сохранения культурного кода. В целом статья обосновывает решающую роль мифологических источников в обеспечении непрерывности литературного процесса и развитии художественного мышления.

Ключевые слова: Миф, Легенда, Предание, Архетип, Мифопоэтика, Устное народное творчество, Литературные жанры, Универсальный сюжет, Художественное мышление, Космогонический.

Myths, legends, and tales — the earliest manifestations of human thought and worldview — are considered the roots and foundation of any national literature. As witnesses of humanity's spiritual evolution from the primitive community to the modern era, they embody the philosophical, aesthetic, and moral perceptions of a people. These genres form the most ancient layers of folk oral creativity and have had an immeasurable influence on the formation and development of written literature. Mythological concepts and their artistic representations have left deep traces not only in the themes, plots, and systems of imagery in literature, but also in its linguistic and stylistic features. Modern literary studies view these forms not merely as folklore material but as sources of artistic archetypes and universal plots [1].

This scientific article analyzes the essence of myths, legends, and tales, their mutual differences and similarities, as well as their role and functions in literature from a theoretical and scholarly perspective.

Theoretical Foundations of the Concepts of Myth, Legend, and Tale

The myth (from the Greek *mýthos* — “narrative,” “story”) is a complex of primitive, belief-based ideas of ancient people about the origin of existence, the universe, humankind, and natural phenomena. Primarily, myth served as an initial form of understanding the world, in which reality was explained through imaginary, supernatural forces and divine heroes [2].

In the earliest periods, myths were regarded as genuine phenomena, expressing the worldview and cosmogenic beliefs of a people. Myths are divided into several types: cosmogonic (about the creation of the universe), anthropogonic (about the origin of humankind), astral (about celestial bodies), and ethnogonic (about the origin of ethnic groups) [3]. According to E. M. Meletinsky, myths constitute a “synchronous” model of the world, explaining events and phenomena through repetition and cyclical patterns.

A legend is an epic genre of folk oral creativity in which reality is often narrated through imaginary and supernatural elements [4]. Unlike myths, legends exhibit a weakened belief system, though they still feature strong supernatural imagery such as demons, fairies, dragons, and divine powers. Legends primarily serve an artistic and aesthetic function and are often associated with historical events, famous place names (toponyms), or the origins of tribes and clans (etiological legends).

Due to their epic form, legends have had a direct impact on the formation of written literary genres. The tale (*rivoyat*) is another epic genre of folk oral creativity, characterized by its connection to specific historical figures (such as Amir Timur or Babur), place names, or significant socio-political events, and possesses a realistic foundation [5]. Unlike legends, tales contain fewer fantastic elements, though exaggeration and fiction may appear as a result of oral transmission. They serve the functions of conveying historical information, providing moral instruction, and preserving collective memory.

The tale is generally perceived by both narrator and audience as close to reality, and it performs a didactic function.

The Archetypal Role of Mythological Plots and Images in Literature

Myths, legends, and tales have served as archetypes (according to C. G. Jung’s theory) and as artistic sources in the formation of written literature. Many of the world’s fundamental literary works — including ancient epics such as *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *The Iliad*, and *The Odyssey*, as well as the great Turkic epics *Alpomish*, *Gorogly*, and *Manas* — trace their plots and imagery back to mythological concepts [6].

In these works, the archetype of the mythological hero’s journey (the call to adventure, trials, victory, and return) forms the main compositional framework.

Mythological plots entered literary works in two ways — directly or in transformed forms [7]. Archetypal motifs such as the struggle between Cosmos (order) and Chaos (disorder), the hero’s resurrection after death, the journey between the underworld and the upper world, and the triumph of good over evil occupy a central place in the structure of epics, fairy tales, and even novels.

For instance, in Alisher Navoi’s poem *Farhod and Shirin*, the image of Farhod embodies the archetype of the mythological builder and savior hero. Mythological figures such as *Afrasiyab* (in Turkic mythology) have evolved into symbolic characters in written literature that fulfill specific ideological and aesthetic purposes.

Uzbek literature also possesses rich material based on mythology and tales. From the Avesta to later prose, this influence is clearly evident. In Alisher Navoi's works, particularly in his epics, the plots and characters (for example, the figure of Iskandar Zulqarnayn) demonstrate a synthesis of Eastern and Western narratives. Sufi tales and Quranic stories have acquired profound philosophical and spiritual meaning in written literature [8]. In modern literature, for instance, Chingiz Aitmatov's *The White Ship* portrays the historical and spiritual tragedy of a people through the ancient Turkic mythological symbol of the Mother Deer. Such examples show that mythological consciousness in contemporary writers' works acquires new philosophical and artistic significance.

Aesthetic, Semantic, and Functional Role in Literature

Myths, legends, and tales introduce strong symbolism and allegory into literature. They allow authors to universalize their ideas at the level of fundamental human values — goodness, justice, and love — and to reveal the inner world and destiny of characters through archetypal images (for example, the symbols of Evil or Wisdom). Mythological concepts enhance the artistic impact of a work through the use of fantastical elements. Semantically, mythic images can carry multiple layers of meaning, giving literature a multidimensional significance.

In the 20th and early 21st centuries, the mythopoetic approach (recreation of myth) became widespread in literary studies. This development is associated with contemporary writers' efforts to reinterpret traditional mythological plots, images, and motifs from new philosophical and psychological perspectives. They employ mythic elements not only to enrich aesthetics but also to highlight global human issues such as war, ecology, and spiritual crises. For example, in world literature, James Joyce's *Ulysses* transfers ancient mythological plots into everyday life, while in Turkic literature, modernized interpretations of myths of good and evil are frequently encountered.

Mythological layers have served as the foundation not only for epic genres (epics, fairy tales) but also for lyrical and dramatic works. Ancient tragedies, such as Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, are directly based on mythological material. These genres play an important role in preserving a people's historical memory, traditions, and values — that is, in transmitting cultural codes from generation to generation. The presence of strict moral standards and didactic spirit in these works strengthens the educational function of literature.

In conclusion, myths, legends, and tales represent an invaluable source of a nation's historical memory, cultural code, and aesthetic ideals. They are not merely relics of the past but constitute a fundamental basis ensuring the continuous development of literary processes. Literature has drawn its universal plots, archetypal characters, and profound symbolic meanings from mythological concepts. In particular, in Uzbek literature, these genres have played a decisive role in the formation and development of epic poetry, prose, and poetry. A thorough study of these sources allows us to understand not only the genesis of national literature but also the essence of contemporary artistic thought. Therefore, the role of myths, legends, and tales in literature remains ever relevant, and their study is of great importance for understanding national identity.

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