

VIEWPOINT

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We owe a great amount of thanks to the past Editor, Jim Brooks, who did an outstanding job during his two years as founding editor of the publication. The high standards which he set for the quality of the Journal are apparent as one reads the past issues.

We need your help to ensure the Journal will continue to be a good publication. We solicit your articles--whether they are the research or the how-to-do-it type; we also need qualified people who will volunteer to serve as readers for articles that are submitted for publication.

We would also encourage your delving into a type of article not usually carried by journals--but still needed--the activist type. There are critical issues we constantly face as educators and Speech Communicationists. What is our role, as you perceive it in such areas as collective bargaining, free speech, the rights of faculty members? If you have a point of view article, we encourage you to submit it and also to reply to any article of that type.

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**THE JOURNAL OF THE
TENNESSEE SPEECH COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION**

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GOALS OF THE SPEECH PROFESSION FOR 1977 AND BEYOND

Valerie Schneider

I have been asked to make a brief commentary on what I regard as the current objectives of the Tennessee Speech Communication Association. I wish to state at the outset of this discussion that I regard the objectives of our field nationally and those of our state speech association as being similar, with only the level and degree of implementation being different. I will proceed to discuss what I regard as two of the most important goals of the speech profession for the next few years, adding brief observations regarding the role of TSCA in helping to implement these.

I truly believe that the broad field of speech, including the communication arts--broadcasting, drama, oral interpretation, as well as rhetoric and public address--is probably the most important of any secular field of knowledge in its potential to help prepare persons for realistic problem-solving in the various facets of contemporary living. The broad field of speech arts can contribute significantly to the work preparation not only of our own majors and minors, but to others as well in the increasingly tight job market they will face. This advantage is well-illustrated in a recent comment by Vernon Wallace, Director of Career Placement at San Francisco State University, "We are trying

to teach liberal arts students to take advantage of their communication skills. Generally they speak and write more clearly than graduates in other fields. We teach them to wrap this into a package that is going to be of value to an employer."¹

The widespread appreciation of the value of communication skills in coping effectively, not only with work situations but also with other problems of living, is indicated by a number of current trends. On my desk are several books and several articles, written for popular audiences, treating such topics as assertiveness training, nonverbal communication, the art of negotiating, and how to achieve more effective communication among family members. Several magazines that I subscribe to advertize various leadership, communication, or sensitivity training, workshops for business personnel, civic leaders, or church groups. Yet a close look at who has written these publications or who directs these communication-related workshops will indicate that most of these persons are not specialists in the field of speech communication.

Either speech practitioners are not given these potential clients what they feel they need, or at least we are not engaging in enough effective public relations to show these groups what we can offer them. I suspect that our problem stems partly from both causes. I believe that

too often we who are college professors teach everyone, regardless of academic level, just as we were taught by our graduate professors. Aside from the fact that this is inappropriate in many instances, we need to gain input from people in the so-called "real world" regarding the kind of communications instruction they feel that they need. Certainly we have failed to define clearly to others what our field includes as well as failing to publicize the practical values of the techniques and concepts that we teach.

The preceding discussion can be summarized as CURRENT GOAL NUMBER ONE. We need as a profession to inform the public regarding the contributions of our field to those many areas which can benefit from our expertise. As a subsidiary part of this goal, we also need to get more input from professionals in the various fields which we can assist. By presenting programs at our conventions and articles in our journal which relate in a practical way to cognate areas, we can achieve participation by some of these professionals in our state association's activities. These individuals can give us the input we need to make the speech arts as practical and relevant to contemporary life--its activities and problem-solving--as possible. In addition, these experts from cognate areas will go back and serve as "opinion leaders" to their colleagues, informing and persuading them regarding how our knowledge and skills can assist them.

GOAL NUMBER TWO is closely related and is actually a derivative of the first goal. We need to utilize the best counseling for as well as planning and preparation of our departmental majors and minors for the ever-worsening job market that they will face. Probably all of us who are involved in college teaching are meeting a number of our recent graduates who are working (they hope) temporarily as cab drivers, waitresses, or store clerks, while seeking to find permanent jobs more in line with their college training. This kind of situation is projected to grow much worse in the next several years.

Traditionally, most of our majors or minors have gone into such fields as education, social services, church work, law, journalism, or business. Opportunities are decreasing rather than expanding in all of these except some business-related occupations. We need to advise our students of this development. Through careful counseling and probably also the development of some new courses or programs, we might steer more of our students (especially those with a public address or mass communication specialization) toward business fields with a communication emphasis such as public relations or personnel positions.²

Students with an emphasis in theatre-oral interpretation may find good opportunities within the rapidly expanding leisure services occupations, provided that they plan their programs carefully, developing a good combination of

marketable skills. During the past twelve months Americans spent nineteen percent more than they did in the preceding year for leisure and recreational activities. Moreover, the research unit of U. S. News and World Report predicts that outlays for leisure services can be expected to double every eight or nine years. Popular among these leisure activities are not only traditional theatre and related performing arts, but also outdoor historic dramas, dinner theatres, and theme parks (which make extensive use of theatrical personnel).³ Those who are prepared to function in some of these less traditional theatre settings and who also have some managerial or public relations skills will find greater opportunities to practice their chosen vocation. There should also be more opportunities for those with certain other combinations of specialization. More use is being made of role playing and dramatization in counseling and mental health settings. John Gaines, who has headed the secondary education curriculum planning unit for the Tennessee Department of Education stressed to me in a recent phone conversation the need for more development of and training in the use of speech and drama techniques for classroom teachers of other academic fields.

Our state, regional, and national associations, all should provide programming and publications on vocational opportunities for speech-trained personnel in changing or

newly-developing fields. Convention programs, featuring workers from other fields, explaining how they use speech skills and also assessing the future communication training they think desirable for their colleagues, would be helpful. More survey-type studies or published interviews with specialists in cognate areas regarding how they think the skills of our field could be strengthened or better promoted would be valuable and must be encouraged.

Through these channels of influence and information-seeking, as well as through the general implementation of the two basic goals I have outlined, I believe that we can strengthen our profession at both the state and other levels. We can also market our skills more effectively, not only to help ourselves, but also to help solve the many societal and work problems which require our specialized skills.

Valerie Schneider (Ph.D., 1969, University of Florida) is professor of speech at East Tennessee State University. She is also currently serving as President of TSCA.

1

"Jobs: A Look at the Nation's Most Staggering Problem," U. S. News and World Report, p. 66, Feb. 21, 1977.

2

For an excellent discussion of job trends in the various occupational fields see: "Careers '76: An Index to Jobs for College Grads.,," in The Graduate: A Handbook for Leaving School, 1976. (Knoxville, TN: 1975), pp. 34-54. This publication can be ordered from Approach 13-30 Corporation, 1005 Maryville Pike, SW. for \$2 per copy.

3

"Americans Splurging in Big Ways, Cutting Back in Small Ones," U. S. News and World Report, pp. 26-27, April 25, '77.

IN Pursuit of an American Mythology: Some Definitions
and Their Application

Caren J. Deming

INTRODUCTION

Since the days of the dime novel, mass media have been criticized for their supposed deleterious effect on American morality. In 1954, Fredric Wertham touched the usual bases in his critique of comic books bearing the remarkable title, Seduction of the Innocent. Wertham decried the "chronic stimulation, temptation, and seduction by comic books, both their content, and thier alluring advertisements of knives and guns, [which] are contributing factors to many children's maladjustments." ¹ These pernicious maladjustments were violence, sadism, and cruelty, and the "Superman philosophy." In the Superman philosophy described by Wertham, supermen were saviors of common folk from "foreign-looking men," and superwomen were always horror types. Wertham accused comic books of using the "most sinister methods of suggesting that races are fundamentally different with regard to moral values." ² He called for a drastic revision of formulas in which the hero is not a hero unless he acts like a criminal and the criminal goes out like a hero. ³

In the twenty years since Seduction of the Innocent, the rhetoric of media critics has come to include more sophisticated sociological and psychological terminology. Nonetheless, the elements of content under attack have remained essentially the same: violence, racism, and the heroic machismo that has serious

ramifications for the roles of females as well as males. Regardless of the critical stance we take toward them, we cannot fully understand these stock elements of America's mythic life. This endeavor, in turn, suggests the means by which change occurs. This paper defines certain terms that are necessary for understanding the relationship between culture and communication, a discussion of their application to media content, and their implications for effecting change in the content of mass media products.

Culture

A basic requirement of this approach is a workable definition of culture. Anthropologist Leslie A. White's definition is useful because it clearly distinguishes cultural events from psychological and physiological ones:

Culture is a class of things and events dependent upon symboling...considered in an extrasomatic content.⁴

The inclusion of all things and events dependent on symboling accounts for the cultural significance of verbal and nonverbal symbols, whether these are being utilized in interpersonal communication as "body language" or in visual media as the "language" of objects arranged in space, for example. The things and events dependent on symboling include:

Ideas, beliefs, attitudes, sentiments, acts, patterns of behavior, customs, codes, institutions, works and forms of art, language, tools, implements, machines, utensils, ornaments, fetiches, charms, and so on.⁵

The second half of White's definition limits the study of these

things and events to the extrasomatic context, or "in terms of their relationship to one another rather than to human organisms." ⁶ Thus, White distinguishes culturology from disciplines such as psychology, or things and events considered as human behavior and examined in terms of their relationship to the human organism.

Placing things in an extrasomatic context focuses attention on the ways in which the constituents of culture are interrelated. Thus, to borrow again from anthropology, media products may be considered as artifacts (elements of material culture fashioned by human work), or cultural documents. These media artifacts occur in sets as comprehensive as literature, films, or television programs and in sub-sets as exclusive as phonemes (when they are congealed by recording them). The cement that binds each set internally and links the various sets is symbolic communication. The specific function of culture in this context, is to limit communication events and products to symbols and meanings that are comprehensible to the culture group on whatever level that group may be defined.

Myth, Mythos, Ethos

This overall effect of cultural parameters upon communication messages may be explored in detail by examining certain social structures and how they interact within a culture. Mythos and ethos, framers of ideas and behaviors, are central to this view of culture and cultural products. The general confusion surrounding the use of the term mythos and its

narrative counterpart, myth, requires that a careful explanation of how these terms are being used begin this discussion.

Mythos is the vision of the imaginative and experiential lives of a people articulated in symbols. It acts as a lens through which culture flows and by which culture is informed. Mythos is a fusion of a people's collective imaginative life with the external reality of history. The imaginative life of a people includes the culture's mythology.

The moral structure of a culture is implicit in the narrative structure of myths. Myth is defined by Northrop Frye as "the union of ritual and dream in a form of verbal communication." Ritual, "a recurrent act of symbolic communication," is identified with dream, the unarticulated "system of cryptic allusions to the dreamer's own life,"⁷ in myth. Dream embodies the dialectic of wish-fulfillment (desire) and nightmare (repugnance). It is this dialectic that is acted out in ritual. The verbal expression of the dialectic in narrative form is myth. Thus, myths are stories, whose meaning is embodied in recurrent symbolic figures and events. As such, myths constitute one aspect of mythos.

Some figures and sequences of events appear in the mythologies of many cultures. These figures and sequences we know as archetypes. Because of the existence of archetypes, the myths of any culture bear resemblances to myths found elsewhere in the world. In addition to being universal, however, myths are also culture-specific because they

bear the imprint of the culture in which they occur. The unique qualities of myths are part of a culture's mythos. Thus, it is necessary to account for the significance of figures and events that recur within a culture but which do not necessarily appear in monomyth, to use James Joyce's term. In order to distinguish them from archetypes, these culture-specific motifs may be called stereotypes. The imaginative aspect of mythos is constituted of both monomythic and culture-specific elements.

The societal function of mythos is to provide structure, or coherence, for existence in all of its varieties and complexities. The structuring premises of a culture are beliefs, attitudes, norms, and values. The things that recur in the mythos of a people are the things that are valued and feared by that people. This is the sense in which myth embodies in narrative form the dialectic of desire and repugnance which Frye describes. Mythos also functions as the embodiment of the ambiguities of life and the related contradictions in a culture's interpretation of its existence. It is this function which, according to Claude Levi-Strauss, accounts for the element of recurrence within a culture's mythos. The recurrent patterns are the attempts by various myths, or various versions of a single myth, to overcome the contradictions.⁸

In practical terms, "myth has a perennial function to perform in providing a basis for social faith and action."⁹ In order to do so, mythos must reshape the people and events

in terms that are compatible with group convictions. This is not to say, however, that actual experiences have no impact upon the mythos. Mythos is a fusion--to some extent a confusion--of nonrational, mythic, or imaginative experiences, and sensory experience. The two kinds of experience are equally real. In mythos, both kinds of experience are brought together in a coherent vision of the meaning of life. This collective vision makes social cohesion and social continuity possible:

History cannot happen--that is, men cannot engage in purposive group behavior--without images which simultaneously express collective desires and impose coherence on the infinitely numerous and infinitely varied data of experience. These images are never, of course, exact reproductions of the physical and social environment. They cannot motivate and direct action unless they are drastic simplifications, yet if the impulse toward clarity of form is not controlled by some process of verification, symbols and myths can become dangerous by inciting behavior grossly inappropriate to the given historical situation.¹⁰

The interaction between the impulse for clarity of form and the verification of the principles of form in external reality gives mythos its dynamic quality.

The ethos of a culture is a projection of the mythos into the realm of action. Ethos is "the sum of the characteristic culture traits by which one group is differentiated and individualized from other groups."¹¹ Trait most often refers to a pattern of behavior, such as a method of making fire or of transmitting television signals, or the habit of mobility. Different cultures may have traits in common, but no two cultures have

exactly the same configuration of traits, or ethos. In other words, cultures may not necessarily be distinguished from one another on the basis of traits taken individually, but rather on the basis of how traits combine to form the character of each.

The discussion of traits leads to the identification of a cultural function of mythos in addition to those already discussed. As well as giving form to belief and providing a means of interpreting experience for a culture, mythos perpetuates culture traits. As a part of the socialization process, the individual is supplied with the acceptable means of overcoming fears (in the psychoanalytic view) and the concomitant means of fulfilling desires. To the extent that individuals accept the mythos as viable for themselves, they will act in accordance with the ethos. In other words, as the mythos provides for cultural integration and continuity through shared belief, so the ethos provides for cultural integration and continuity through the shared behavior patterns that reflect the mythos.

Another, even more concrete, manifestation of a culture's mythos occurs in the artifacts produced by that culture. Individual artifacts may be viewed as art or as tools, each of these views indicating an aspect of the artifact as it functions in culture. The practical aspect of an artifact is reflected in its use as a tool to effect some result. The artistic aspect is reflected in an artifact's embodiment of "the deep appreciation and powerful expression of values in human life."¹²

By "congealing" the human effort to deal with life, artifacts perpetuate--even eternalize--culture. Artifacts are informed by the mythos at work in the creators of artifacts and their "audience" share a common mythos, the artifacts (whether pots or poems) may be understood and perceived as "useful" by a people. The more the creator relies upon mythos in a work, the more conventional the work, and the more readily it is understood by large numbers of people. But artifacts are not mere media or transmitters of culture. They are an organic part of culture because they contribute to it. Artist and artisans are, in varying degrees, creative. And yet,

Culture and creativity cannot be examined separately for, as [M.J.] Herskovits expresses it, "The creative life does not lie outside the influence of the enculturative experience." On the contrary, "in his experimentation" the artist is "unwittingly" guided by it.¹³

Artists articulate the mythos they absorb in the neculturation process, and their works carry it forward, disseminating and enriching it. The primary means by which mythos is enriched is the introduction of new symbols into it.

Symbols and Heroes

The symbol is the vehicle for the articulation and objectification of mythos in artifacts. Recalling White's definition of culture, "things and events dependent on symboling," it may be seen that symbols occupy a central role in culture. By symboling, White means "bestowing meaning upon or an act, or grasping and appreciating meanings thus bestowed." ¹⁴ Thus, symbols are the core of the

communication process, the place where the initiation and the reception of messages come together.

In literature, for example, the ultimate "meaning" of a symbol is its reference to some truth of human existence. Any author's vision of such truth is conditioned to some extent by the mythic context in which s/he operates along with the rest of the culture. What is acceptable as "true" on a culture-wide basis is that which is consistent with the mythos. Thus, the aptness of a literary symbol for a culture, or any other symbol used expressively in a cultural context, is in proportion to its ability to signify the mythos for the initiator and the receiver. In other words, the symbols likely to take on the greatest cultural significance are those which embody the belief structure of the culture most effectively. This view is consistent with the psychoanalytic approach to symbols taken by Erich Neumann:

All symbols and archetypes are projections of the formative side of human nature that creates order and assigns meaning. Hence, symbols and symbolic figures are the dominants of every civilization, early or late.¹⁵

The heroes of a culture perform this symbolic function:

[The hero] is an index to the collective mind and heart. His deeds and qualities are those which millions endorse. He speaks words that multitudes want said; he stands for things that they are often willing to spill their blood for. His legend is the mirror of the folk soul.¹⁶

The characteristics of the hero tend to conform to the traits identified in the ethos of a culture. As was suggested earlier,

the qualities deemed most important by a culture are those which recur within its mythos. Specifically, then, these qualities are the ones that recur in the heroes of a culture. Some, but not all, characteristics of any culture's heroes are archetypal. For an understanding of heroes as symbols for a cultural group, we must look at all recurrent qualities of the culture's heroes, regardless of whether these qualities are also archetypal.

The hero is a natural focal point for the study of symbols. The hero is at the center of a whole cluster of symbols that derive their significance from their association with him. For example, the gun is a symbol of masculine capability in American frontier legend. The significance of the gun is verified through its association with the hero in his successful defense of ordinary people against hunger, savages, outlaws, and other "varmints." Skill with a gun is associated with manly virtue--with heroes--in frontier myths from Daniel Boone and his long rifle through the cowboy and his six-gun. Often the gun itself takes on the association with manliness, quite apart from the virtue or lack of virtue in the gun-fighter and from the need to kill for survival. The gun becomes symbolic of strength and skill--of manhood--in its own right, even though the vision of the hero never recedes very far into the background of such a symbol.

The symbols of a culture, and especially the heroes--taken with the symbols that surround them in their myths

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and legends--are the product of conscious and unconscious thought processes. As the embodiment of mythos, symbols share the duality of consciousness and unconsciousness, and of imaginative reality and external reality, with mythos. Myths, legends, and tales are constructed of symbols. In folklore, symbols are used descriptively and expressively to embody mythos in language. A myth, or legend, or tale is in this sense a construction of symbols informed by mythos.

Here again, however, it must be stated that mythos does not operate autonomously. The symbols themselves and the process of symboling have a significant impact upon mythos. The influence of language (verbal symbols on thought is documented in the work of Benjamin Whorf and others. Also, once they are established, symbols have a way of seeming to develop of their own accord, in the way that authors describe the takeover of the creative process by characters in a novel. All of the elements of culture discussed here are interrelated and, in various ways, interdependent. All of the interaction occurs through mythos and symbols: mythos because it is a culture's mode of "seeing" life, and symbols because they are a culture's means of expressing and developing that vision. Through mythos and symbols, the collective life of a people grows out of the heritage of its past, is responsive to the exigencies of its present, and is poised in anticipation of its future.

Application to Media Analysis

The application of the terms discussed above to communication messages amounts to analyzing media products as artifacts which manifest the mythos. The elements of the mythos with which one is concerned in a particular piece of research (such as patterns of violence, sex-role or racial portrayals) may be isolated in a set of media products (such as comic books, mysteries, or western films) by identifying recurrent symbols. From the traits of heroes and other characters as they appear in recurrent patterns, one may infer normative statements about the nature of heroes and villains, men and women, Indians or Italians, for example, as they function in a given dramatic framework. When one finds the same symbols and meanings in different formulas in American media, they are verified as symbols of American culture and not merely as elements of western movies or children's cartoons.

It is the nature of art to fuse the actual and the imagined and to articulate the resultant vision in appropriate symbols. Because artists partake of mythos and contribute to it, their works are valuable sources of cultural information. Artistic constructions bring us closer to the symbols of our most deeply-rooted values than sources that often are considered to be more objective. This point is substantiated by Graham and Gurr, who at the time were co-directors of the Task Force on Historical and Comparative Perspectives on Violence in America for the National

Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence:

Students of national character rightly assume that a close scrutiny of the folklore and creative literature of a culture will isolate certain fundamental themes and images that are far more revealing of its cultural values than are opinion polls or official rhetoric.¹⁸

The "fundamental themes and images" that are isolable in literature are more likely to reveal the components of the mythos than are opinion polls and official rhetoric because they are more consciously employed by the artist than by the society at large. Furthermore, some of the norms that manifest the mythos turn out to be morally questionable in the light of conscious, objective evaluation. As a result, they are not articulated--often not even recognized--except by dissidents and artists intent upon crystallizing the essence of the American ethos in their work, for whatever artistic or pragmatic purpose.

The usefulness of popular media for the isolation of the mythos is inherent in their formulaic quality. A formula (a conventional system for structuring cultural products) is distinguished from invented structures, which are new ways of organizing works of art.¹⁹ In addition, as John G. Cawelti has pointed out, the formula tends to be culture-specific as opposed to the genre (which embodies a pattern of universal significance). The formula "represents the way in which a particular culture has embodied both mythical archetypes and its own preoccupations [stereotypes] in narrative form."²⁰

The formulaic work thus performs straightforwardly the function of articulating and reaffirming a culture's mythos. The brevity of popular novels, for example, contributes to the clear, efficient communication of the mythos. Popular works utilize the mythic conventions without the complicating interference of archetypal and idiosyncratic constructions. On the other hand, the tendency of more original authors to communicate their personal visions in the context of cultural and archetypal meanings generally causes them to write longer, more complex works.

Great artists perceive the mythos more profoundly than ordinary people and project it in a fabric of complex relationships among the American mythos, monomyth, and the idiosyncracies of their own imaginations. To the extent that they invent symbols that are compatible with the mythos, they contribute to it. For example, Yoknapatawpha County is Faulkner's invention, but it is so apt a symbol that Americans recognize it as the embodiment of a whole set of premises of American life.

The fact that mythos is manifested in media products of all sorts justifies the use of content analysis as a basis for cultural interpretation of messages. All such research--whether defined narrowly (seeking patterns of occupational portrayals by race or sex, for instance) or more broadly (such as the physical and social "world" of television drama described in the Surgeon General's report on television

and social behavior)--ultimately rests upon this premise. This relationship between the mythos and the media products of a culture allows us to understand media content in the context of the culture as a whole.

This view of communication and culture also provides an avenue for the synthesis of the content studies that currently are proliferating. A somewhat startling example of this occurred in my own research on educational films.²¹ One would expect films used in the classroom to be less violent than television cartoons. However,, 53.9% of the educational films coded contained physical violence, whereas 46.8% of the cartoons coded by Gerbner in 1969 contained physical violence.²² In an earlier study, a colleague and I found that females were portrayed in larger numbers and in a greater variety of roles in comic books than in eudcational films.²³

Comparing the findings of content analyses executed on different media illuminates the cultural base shared by those media. Contrasting the findings on various media isolates differences that may be attributable to unique social or economic pressures upon producers or unique physical properties of the media. Such comparisons and contrasts prove useful in cross-disciplinary, as well as cross-cultural, efforts to understand media messages. More practically speaking, the analysis of media content

in terms of cultural norms clarifies the means by which writers, producers, and others responsible for media content reinforce traditional patterns of behavior which are of questionable social value.

On this score, a note of caution is in order. It may be suggested that, by demonstrating that violence, racism, or antifeminism is embedded in so potent a force as the American mythos, we unwittingly endorse conservatism in the mass media. Indeed, the television networks insist (with the Nielsen ratings as their evidence) that they are selling what American viewers want most to see. Realistically, those who would advocate change in media content must be aware of what they're asking for. Given the close affinity of our public media and our mythos, a major change in television stereotypes must accompany modification of the mythic framework that supports those stereotypes. Any such change that challenges the limits of acceptability as defined by the mythos is likely to be anything but popular.

This brand of cultural determinism, however, overlooks the dynamic character of the mythos and the potential for creators of media messages to introduce new symbols into America's mythic repository. As in the case of culture-heroes, media heroes may not fly in the face of all that the society sanctifies. The greatest hero is, paradoxically, the perserver of order in the mythos and at the same time the embodiment of its creative aspect.

By way of illustration, we may look at M.A.S.H.'s Hawkeye Pearce, as played on television by Alan Alda. Set in a background of war, the traditional locale of epic heroes, Hawkeye is a pacifist. Even the names Hawkeye and Trapper evoke the tradition of the frontier woodsman, begun in literature with Leatherstocking (or, Hawkeye), and the western mountain man. Also in the best American heroic tradition, Hawkeye is an inveterate guzzler capable of heroics despite the enormous number of martinis he consumes. Despite his education and sophistication, Hawkeye's criticism of the army as an institution is made more palatable by his personal charm and wit. By thus combining conservative and liberal elements, Hawkeye illustrates one process by which mythos is enriched and, ultimately, altered.

It is a slow process, to say the least. M.A.S.H., whose success is due in part to the widespread disapproval of the Vietnam war, is founded on an idea whose time apparently had come. The assault on the social order mounted by Hawkeye and Trapper is far from revolutionary. Values, because of their unconscious, formal quality, are not easily changed. For example, technological and economic progress traditionally has held a high position in the hierarchy of American values. The value placed on progress has been greater than the value placed on natural resources. As a result, resources have been used--and used up--in the belief that life was getting better in direct proportion to the increasing amounts of goods consumed.

With the realization that natural resources can be exhausted, the importance of preserving these resources has increased, and their value has risen. The increasing importance of one value in relation to another necessitates an adjustment in the value structure to accommodate the shift. Such adjustments do not come easily. So we hear the ecology-minded with one ear and the advocates of progress with the other. The length and loudness of the arguments over this issue in times of energy shortage reflect the tenacity of established values and the difficulty with which they are changed. But change they do; and mass media have a role to play in that change.

The capacity for positive, as well as negative, role-modeling effects of television and film is well established. Even though this research is limited by the difficulty of distinguishing mass media effects from those of other socializing agents, certain role-modeling functions of television and film have been documented. These include the fact that media users personalize media content by identifying with certain characters and applying the characters' experience to their own lives. In addition, young media users, in particular, use media as a source of insight into adult roles; and they imitate behavior (both antisocial and prosocial) they see. ²⁴ It also has been shown that the sex, race, and social class of characters and viewers are important influences on differential viewing habits and role-modeling

effects of media. These findings indicate the power of mass media not only to reinforce traditional norms, but also to participate in their revision.

The analysis of media content along the lines proposed here suggests a means by which those in control of media content might separate mythic material necessary for social cohesion from the gratuitous and the dispensable. In this manner, the potential of the mass media as a positive social force might be fully realized without necessarily sacrificing profits on the altar of public good. The success of programs such as M.A.S.H., The Jeffersons, and Good Times indicates that American audiences will accept formulas that feature central characters other than white male pugilists. That any of these characters will enjoy the longevity of, say, Matt Dillon or Steve McGarrett is impossible to predict. Yet, their present success is cause for at least guarded optimism regarding the future of mass media content.

NOTES

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Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. x-xi.

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Erich Neumann, The Origins and History of Consciousness, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Bollingen Series, Vol. 42 (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 371.

16

Dixon Wecter, The Hero in America: A chronicle of Hero-Worship (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), p. 488.

17

The blurring of the lines between myth (a narrative about gods or demigods performing deeds at the conceivable limits of desire), legend (an unverifiable story, usually about a real person or place, handed down by tradition and popularly accepted as historical), and tale (a narrative purporting to relate the facts of a real or imaginary event) need not confound the attempt to identify the recurrent figures and events of a culture's mythos. See Stith Thompson, "Myth and Folktales," in Myth: A Symposium, pp. 174-75, for a discussion of the unimportance of differentiating among folklore genre to most kinds of research problems.

MYTH IN HIGH CULTURE AND IN LOW: RESONANCE AND REFLECTION

Billie J. Wahlstrom

I chose the title, "Myth in High Culture and in Low: Resonance and Reflection," because it indicates a fundamental difference between the way myth is used in high culture and in low. The phrases high culture and low culture carry with them elitist connotations which no amount of protest on my part can fully eradicate, yet they are more useful than the terms mass media and popular culture because they are flexible, have pedagogical applications, and because we all know quite well what "fits" in each category. High culture includes those modes of expression which are canonical; that is, modes which are taught, analyzed, and preserved in our academic institutions. This system of classification has few ambiguities in a given age, yet remains flexible. What is considered low culture in one age--the novel, for example, several hundred years ago--can become canonical, or high culture, in another. This flexibility renders most elitist arguments in favor of high culture myopic.

Low and high culture products cannot be distinguished one from another simply by their medium or other external differences. For example, novels are not automatically high and magazines low culture. The distinction comes on other levels, as we will see. Yet, these terms are useful pedagogically. Students understand this division particularly well, and this fact argues its utility. If, for example, I, as

professor of English, come up to a student of mine who is obviously engrossed in reading a mystery, pornography, a comic book, or the latest Star Trek log, and say, "What are you reading?" I nearly always get the same response. The student closes the book, turns it over so I cannot easily see the cover, smiles, and refusing to look me in the face says, "Oh, nothing, really." Students get caught reading or using low culture. They would never feel embarrassed if one found them reading Shakespeare. One need not hide high culture. This distinction applies to more than literature. One can get caught waiting in line to see Jaws for the second time in a way that cannot happen to one waiting to see Bergman's Face to Face.

The differences between high and low culture are multiple: format, durability, language, effect on the audience are a few. Many of these differences have as their common cause the way in which cultural products utilize myth. Professor Deming has defined myth and its relation to culture thoroughly, so I feel free to move toward a discussion of its use by simply emphasizing a few definitions. Myth, in its broadest sense, is a narrative in which characters--who are generally super-human--engage in unrealistic activities in such a way as to illustrate some truth about human life and its meaning. Simply, myth deals with the desires and repugnances of humans in a stylized, non-rational fashion. When myth deals with the desires and repugnances of a given culture, it is considered culture-specific. The cowboy is the most often

cited example of a culturally-specific American mythic figure. His indigenous nature is clearly seen if he is contrasted to the Vaquero who is the culturally-specific myth figure of Hispanic South and Central America. Each figure does essentially the same work, but is dressed differently, has different attitudes about work, and exhibits different values. In contrast to culture-specific myth is monomyth. As Professor Deming suggested, monomyth is a myth that has universal or near-universal concurrency. The figures in monomyth are archetypes--universal forms and ideals. The figures of culture-specific myths are stereotypes--the familiar forms and ideals of a given culture. In the most obvious way low culture is dominated by stereotypes and high by archetypes, but this fact does not fully illuminate the process of myth utilization, its purpose, or its effect.

Let us first look at myth utilization in high culture and in low. The distinction is clearest in the following analogy. If one looks at the old Chinese legend about the origin of the game of chess, one finds the following story:

Three hundred and seventy-nine years after the time of Confucious, Hung-Ko-Chu, king of Kiang-Nan, sent an expedition into Shen-Si under the command of Han-Sing. After a successful campaign the soldiers were put into winter quarters, where they became impatient and demanded to be sent home. Han-Sing realized the urgent necessity of calming them if he was to finish his operations in the following year; he was a man of genius as well as a good soldier, and after considerable contemplation he invented the game of

chess which would serve as an amusement in times of leisure and, being founded on the principles of war, would excite military ardor. The strategem fulfilled his expectations; the soldiers were delighted and in their daily contests forgot the inconveniences of their position. In the spring the general took the field again and added the rich Shen-Si territory to the kingdom of Kiang-Nan.¹

Turning to the Persian, Indian, or Japanese legend of the game's origin, one finds that each makes the same point: the game was invented as a substitute for battle. In what follows I will speak in more detail about his point in order to develop the analogy with the use of myth. But stated in its simplest form, the analogy is that the relationship of chess to war parallels the relationship which obtains between myth in low culture and in high.²

The most obvious difference between chess playing and warfare is that the game is an abstract mode of combat. Chess play is a form of absolute order. The order is determined by rules of chess, the borders of the field of engagement, the time frame in which action is allowed to occur, and by the furniture of the game. The vast sweep of battle is reduced to sixty-four perfectly symmetrical squares, and armies are compacted to thirty-two pieces. The movements of troops are replaced by the "inflexible symmetry of permissible moves."³

If one does not follow these rules, one ceases to be playing chess. The game, though founded upon the principles of war is only a patterned and stylized approximation. Chess is not war partly because it lacks war's complexity, ambiguity, and chaos.

Myth is used in low culture in the same stylized and conventionalized way that chess utilizes the principles of war. There are strict rules governing the usage. The primary rule of myth usage in low culture which corresponds, in a sense, to the playing board, is that myth must always remain within the boundaries of cultural values: it must be faithful to cultural desires and repugnances. Therefore, it is used first to clarify and to abstract rather than to introduce ambiguities. In this mode it serves as a template or pattern upon which to build a narrative edifice. For example, Frank Herbert's Dune--a science fiction novel involved with the issue of ecology--bases much of its plot on Greek and Roman myth. Paul Atreides, the novel's central character traces his family back to the ancient Greeks. And because we know that his name Atreides is Greek for the son of Arteus, we are conveniently able to know what visions of the past that character has. In the trilogy of which Dune is the first novel, we find the basic narrative shape is derived from Sophocles' vision of the Oedipus myth.

All kinds of myths lend themselves to this low culture template utilization. Mary Stewart frequently uses mythic patterns like King Arthur and Camelot upon which to fashion her novels, The Crystal Cave being a particularly popular one. Robert Heinlein, for example, makes use of the Christ story as the basis of his novel Stranger in a Strange Land. In this case, even the book's title is derived from a biblical

source. The result is not intended as a thorough philosophical exploration of the proper nature of religion or of man's search for meaning as one expects to find in James Joyce's high culture novel Finnegans Wake which also relies heavily on Christian mythology. Instead, Heinlein uses the myth to create an exciting narrative. Myth is used less for its meaning and ambiguity than for its overall form. How does this translate itself in Heinlein's novel? Heinlein uses a complex ritual based on the sharing of water with one's waterbrothers as the counterpart of baptism. He replaces transubstantiation and communion with a Martian brand of cannibalism. He provides the Christ figure--Michael Valentine Smith--with twelve close friends and an old mentor whom Mike calls Father. Heinlein has Mike stoned to death after he succeeds in converting his twelve friends into disciples and in starting his own church. While Christ was not stoned to death, Stephen Promartyr, the first Christian martyr was, and so again myth provides the pattern for the narrative. Mike even returns from the dead to help another character in his moment of despair. The novel ends with the remaining disciples boiling up a pot of soup made from the freshly dead Mike. They gather together and have a last supper at which--in less than a symbolic way--they share the body and the blood of the new Redeemer. The novel is interesting, has action and other sub-plots, but its edifice is clearly raised on the pattern of the familiar myth.

The second way low culture utilizes myth is an overlay, as a source of gimmick, as a means of providing recognizable furniture to cast a particular color upon a piece of narrative design. To return to the chess analogy, it is possible to find chess sets in which the pieces are designed to represent historical personages, Napoleon and so on. Yet most chess pieces--even those in the Star Fleet Manual--are in the Staunton design. These pieces are lathe created, highly symmetrical, and capable of being mass produced. Chess reduces the many people involved in actual war to a series of interchangeable pieces. In this systematic way, low culture abstracts from myth certain forms, patterns, and people and utilizes these pieces in plots which are not otherwise consciously reliant upon myth.

This usage of mythic pieces is not limited to a particular medium. Representative Star Trek shows like "Who Will Mourn for Adonis" are replete with planets and people that have Greek and Roman mythological names. The films Westworld and Futureworld are salted and peppered with names out of traditional mythology, having their primary action taking place in an amusement park of the future--somewhat astonishingly named Delos, after an island in Greek mythology. In Jerome Brunner's novel, Jagged Orbit, we find the same sort of thing. The central character, Lyla Clay, is called a pythonesse and takes Sybil pills, again evidence of a sprinkling of traditional myth in the sauce of modern low culture. Comics and television too utilize myth in this fashion. DC Comics bring us Isis who is also the star

of a Saturday morning children's television show. Her only tie to the Egyptian goddess whose name she bears is an Egyptian costume and an occasional Egyptian enemy. Otherwise Isis is Andrea Thomas, Chemistry Teacher at the High School. Marvel Comics give us The Mighty Thor, also a children's television show character, whose home is in Asgard but who in reality is the "lame mild-mannered treater of the sick" Dr. Don Blake. Though the comic god of thunder does use the mythic hammer and has occasional spats with his father Odin and his evil half-brother Loki, the primary action involves his earth life and its complications. This is not intended as criticism of the way low culture utilizes myths, but it is to make clear how they function. Implied here is the idea that high culture used myth differently, and we will examine that point shortly.

The third way low culture utilizes myth is quite different from what we have already discussed because it involves creation of new myth rather than abstraction of that already existing. The creator of low culture is essentially a story teller. She or he wants to grab the audience and carry them somewhere--usually along an emotional line. This creator wants to engage the audience actively, making the reader or watcher stick around until he sees "who done it and how." After that he can go home, having experienced a satisfactory emotional response. The creator of high culture works with a different premise. As Wallace Stevens suggests, high culture is "an allegory addressed to the intellectual

powers." That means the emphasis is not on narrative or plot but, instead, on the creation of a controlled illumination of the whole. The hoped for response to canonical art is detached, intellectual and full-conscious. It occurs after the reading and viewing is complete--not during it as does the response to low culture--and criticism of high culture involves an examination of the work seen as a simultaneous whole. It is a common misconception that the creator of low culture lacks a conscious vision of the process of myth making. Stan Lee, long-time editor of Marvel comics exhibits a high level of self-conscious awareness of his role as creator of myths:

...we are creating an entire contemporary mythos, a family of legends that might be handed down to future generations just as those we had read as children had been handed down to us...Marvel's heroes have some of the charisma, some of the flavor of ancient fairy tales, of ancient Greek and Norse mythology. And that was what grabbed me.⁴

Although he or she is conscious of being a creator of myth, the low culture artist is also conscious that he must use his created myths in a different fashion than does the high culture artist. She or he is bound by a different set of rules. As in chess, the playing area is restricted because the low culture creator must work more closely with the culture. Marvel heroes, for example, are tied to America. They drink coke and drive American cars, though also an occasional Rolls Royce. DC Comics show superheroes who

attend rock concerts at which the Woodworkers--the comic book equivalent of the Carpenters--play. These characters are drawn from contemporary America. They are all, though they do not bear his name, the counterpart of the mighty Marvel hero, Captain America. That they say something to a great number of Americans is obvious, especially when we consider that the press run per issue of a Marvel comic is 48 million. The goal of these mythmakers is not to create figures which transcend their culture but to have their characters represent it in the same way the familiar chess figures are abstractions of things greater than themselves.

High culture creators of myth seek to move beyond their cultures. They want to get beyond themselves as Northrup Frye says and point to a superior reality with such urgency and clarity that what they have created disappears into that reality. The low culture creator worries about frequent deadlines for production; the high culture creator seeks to move outside of time. Thus, he or she uses myth not to capture this culture, or to work exclusively within it, but to point through time at places where this world is tangent to worlds of the past and to worlds to come. Therefore he or she uses myth in order to get that image of reality to resonate. When one strikes a key on a piano, related wires vibrate giving that note resonance. In a similar fashion, the creator of high culture utilizes myth not to give a narrative pattern to his creation but to provide trans-temporal and cross-cultural resonances. That makes high

culture more difficult to read and understand. It is ambiguous, and its language is not explicit. The function of this utilization of myth is not to clarify values or provide plot, but to rouse the faculties to act, as Wallace Stevens said.

To fault a creator of low culture for not creating resonant fictions is to misunderstand and misvalue what he does. This sort of inaccurate criticism is commonly done by those who apply critical standards of canonical art to low culture and then get upset to find they do not work. This point is easy to document. Stan Lee talks about the difficulties he faced when he sought to create a suitable language for one of his mythic characters, Dr. Strange. Dr. Strange is a magician, a master of the mystic arts, whose function is to protect good from evil. When Lee was trying to figure out what would be appropriate language for this character he admitted he "didn't know an authentic mystic chant from a Martian egg roll,"⁵ and yet he could not expect this fighter against rooftop lurkers to go around saying things like "Hocus Pocus, go to another dimension" when he wanted to get rid of them. Lee relied on phonetics and chose words he called "totally meaningless." He ended up with characters saying things like

"Demons of Darkness
 In the name of Satannish,
 By the flames of the Faltine
 Let Spider-Man vanish!"

Lee goes on to say in his history of Marvel comics that academics reacted very strangely to these inventions:

Suddenly the mail started pouring in--from colleges, if you will. In ever-increasing numbers students were actually devoting term papers and theses to the language of Dr. Strange, investigating the derivation of his various spells and incantations. And the payoff was--many, many of those theses explained, in detailed chapter and verse, how I had obviously borrowed from the ancient Druid writings, or from forbidden Egyptian hieroglyphics, or at least the writings of H. P. Lovecraft...But the worst part was when they ended their letters by asking me to confirm that their conclusions were correct. After they had done all that research, all that probing and digging, how could I tell them that it wasn't so--I had made it all up? Finally I copped out by admitting I had been a vociferous reader in my younger days, and perhaps I had subconsciously retained a lot of what I'd read to use it later in recording the sage of Dr. Strange. No need to tell them I'd never studied Egyptian hieroglyphics and wouldn't know any ancient Druid writings if they were tattooed on my dome.⁶

Such enormous wastes of energy and such unproductive work can be avoided if we more clearly understand the nature of myth and how it is used. Low culture artifacts need to be examined as cultural documents because they provide ready access to the mythos of a culture, its values and beliefs. High culture research needs to focus on what Professor Deming rightly calls, "the fabric of complex relationships among the American mythos, monomyth, and the idiosyncracies of the imaginations of high culture creators."⁷ There seems to be plenty yet to do. As we are told by the Silver Sufer, "The cosmos lies before us--and the Spaceways beckon."

NOTES

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3

Holquist, p. 134.

4

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5

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6

Ibid., pp. 225-26.

7

Caren Deming, "In Pursuit of an American Mythology: Some Definitions and Their Applications," Journal of the Tennessee Speech Communication Association, III: (Summer, 1977), p. 26.

MYTHS, SYMBOLS, STEREOTYPES: THE ARTIST AND THE MASS MEDIA

LINDA J. BUSBY

Every form of communication involves, to some extent, the use of myths, symbols or stereotypes. Birdwhistell, in his book Kinesics and Content noted that ". . . communication can be regarded in the broadest sense as a structural system of significant symbols (from all the sensorily based modalities) which permit ordered human interactions."¹ Discussions of myths, symbols and stereotypes center around recurring patterns--some recurring patterns are simple and easily decipherable while others are complex orderings.

Concerning myths and symbols, John Cawelti explained: ". . . a symbol or a myth is simply a generalizing concept for summarizing certain recurrent patterns in writing and other forms of expression. Insofar as it explains anything, the myth-symbol approach simply indicates that a group of persons has a tendency to express itself in patterns."² Myths occur in communications as the synthesis of a cultural history conveyed in majority values and beliefs; myths occur many times in daily communications as the unconscious strivings to fulfill those values and beliefs nurtured over time.

Symbols are the basic building blocks of any communication, and just as myths, they may be simple or very complex. Cawelti elucidated: ". . . symbols . . . are defined as images or patterns of images charged with a complex of feeling and meaning and they become, therefore, modes of perception as well

as simple reflections of reality."³ Symbols have been used as instruments to measure artistic works from film to painting to high literature to television programs.

Stereotypes are encountered in nearly all forms of communication as a means of conveying a limited message in a short form; stereotypes are communication short-cuts which allow communication to engender images without the effort of full description by the artist. Stereotypes have been particularly associated with popular art and researchers have offered analyses of stereotypes in everything from Playboy and Penthouse magazines to stereotypes found in children's coloring books. In general, the artist of high culture assumes the burden of complex descriptions while the artist of popular culture uses symbols which have a commonly held cultural understanding and require minimal delineation.

When considering myths, symbols and stereotypes in mass media, it may first be helpful to document some of the characteristics which define one artifact as a piece of popular art and another artifact as high cultural art. Most writers who have attempted to decipher the differences between the products of high culture and those of mass culture have found distinctions. One of the most striking differences is in the structure of the work itself. A piece of high cultural art is extremely inventive and may be greatly or slightly different in structure from the work of any other artist or even different from any other work produced by the same artist. While structure is only one aspect of high art, popular art is dominated by its structure; the structures of mass cultural products occur and recur in the works of

many authors. The works of William Faulkner or Willa Cather, for example, may support volumes of criticism on structure, while one episode of television's Perry Mason is closely related structurally to every other episode of Perry Mason and closely related to nearly every other TV mystery/detective program.

The test-of-worth of the two types of art also varies. David Madden, in his article "The Aesthetics of Popular Culture" wrote: "The aesthetic attitude of high culture is effort of popular culture is receptivity."⁴ High culture is indeed measured by complexity of invention which constitutes effort. There have been some questions about whether writer Joyce Carol Oats is a writer of high culture or a writer of mass culture because, while her works may be complex and inventive, she produces very rapidly. At least one critic has faulted her with producing too rapidly. A popular artist, on the other hand, is measured by the audience that her/his product attracts and by the rapidness with which the object can be produced. Norman Lear is considered the finest of popular artists because his programs get high Nielson ratings and because he is prolific.

Social mobility is another distinctive characteristic of the arts. Mass culture enjoys a freedom of social mobility unknown to high culture; this social mobility functions both in terms of audience composition and audience size. A product of mass culture may be enjoyed by the uneducated and by the highly educated whereas a product of high culture is apt to be enjoyed by a limited audience of scholars and university students. High culture moves slowly to influence a society while mass culture can be

revolutionary in its ability to influence a society quickly and completely. A great work of literature or a great painting may not be realized as such or may not directly affect a society for decades, while mass culture is seen in terms of immediate effect. Horace Newcomb in his book TV the Most Popular Art wrote: "Both the visionaries and the social scientists have seen television as a thing, an influence in people's lives. They have sought to measure, predict, restrain, or foster aspects of that influence."⁵ Many researchers have noted that mass media have been evaluated in terms of social effect and not in terms of artistic value. Concerning this Elihu Katz and David Foulkes observed: "It is a most intriguing fact in the intellectual history of social research that the choice was made to study mass media as agents of persuasion rather than agents of entertainment."⁶ Because of its social mobility, mass art has tended to fall under the research domain of the social scientist, and not the domain of the humanists.

Both mass art and high art serve a multiplicity of functions including: entertainment; expressions of social concern; expressions of cultural values; and, as cultural artifacts. As noted above, both high art and popular art utilize myths, symbols and stereotypes, but the ways that popular art utilizes myths, symbols and stereotypes is affected directly by structure, social-worth and social mobility.

Structure in popular art can be discussed in terms of: 1) social structure of the medium; 2) physical structure of the medium; and 3) internal structure of the medium product itself. Indeed, these three structural considerations have a greater bearing on myths, symbols and stereotypes in

popular art than any other factors. The contents of popular art can be defined by these three structural considerations. The social structure of the medium is determined by its economics, its management goals and management personalities, its potential audiences, its historical growth and development and its particular social functions. Television art, for example, is characterized by: its commercial status; its governmental regulations; its competitiveness; and its founding principle that the air waves belong to the American public as a whole--not to the station owner. These four characteristics dictate the type of programming that will appear on commercial television. In order for a commercial network to be competitive, it must air those programs that are apt to draw large audiences, since advertising dollars are usually dictated by audience size. Financial competitiveness causes the networks to walk a tight line in the presentation of social values for two reasons. First, if the social values presented within a program are adhered to only by a small segment of the potential viewing audience, the masses may become disinterested, disenchanted or angry and tune the program out, thus losing the high advertising dollars that the program could draw if it attracted the masses rather than alienated them. If a network decided to be daring and air a program showing social values not commonly held, the advertiser willing to settle for a relatively small share of the potential audience might be forced to abandon the program for fear that such values may be associated by the general public with the advertised product and thus be detrimental to product sales. This situation makes it difficult for ideas not in the mainstream of American thought and

action to find sponsors. If the networks aired social values that were contrary to those generally accepted by the majority of Americans, the public might petition the FCC to encourage the networks to program more generally acceptable social values. There is a long history of programs being discontinued, not being aired at all by the networks, or not being relayed by an affiliate for one or more of the above reasons.

The social structure of commercial television will, therefore, determine, to a large extent, the use of myths, symbols and stereotypes. Myths, the collective imaginative life of a people, will be presented only in terms of the most popular interpretations. While a single myth might have numerous interpretations if examined carefully, television examines only those aspects that are easily acceptable to the vast audience. Programming created specifically for television deals almost exclusively with right and wrong behavior and good characters and bad characters. Television is not a land of subtleties, but is a land of actions and characters that are easily comprehensible. This accounts for there being so many heroic-type characters on commercial television. Dixon Wecter's description of "the hero" makes clear why television, the medium founded on attracting the largest possible audience drawn from every socio-economic and socio-political spectrum, is fertile ground for the development of heroes.

[The hero] is an index to the collective mind and heart. His deeds and qualities are those which millions endorse. He speaks words that multitudes want said; he stands for things they are often willing to spill their blood for. His legend is the mirror of the folk soul. 7

On commercial television the hero becomes the recurring symbol who acts out the majority-acceptable imagination of the American public and the majority-understood stereotype of good-guy. Other stereotypes--bad-guy, suburban housewife, Jewish mother, thug--fill in the dramatic spaces.

The social structure of other mass media dictate different kinds of content development. Popular or drug-store-fiction, for example, appeals to a limited audience whose demographics are definable and who may be more receptive to ideas outside the mainstream of majority opinion. In the same way, publishers of Ladies Home Journal, Redbook or McCalls know that economics dictate appealing to a particular audience and marketing the product in particular ways. The audience lifestyle and desires dictate the endorsement of American family life, home cooking, family crafts, elegant entertaining and home-front sustenance. A photograph of a living room in these publications generates notions of restrained suburban family living whereas this same symbol in another publication might engender notions of a polished bachelor-pad and sexual encounters. The symbols would be interpreted in light of the social functions of the publication and the social stratification of the audience. Because of the social functions they serve, all the fiction in the publications directed to American housewives reaffirms American family values; a wife may consider the possibility of an extra-marital affair, but she will always opt for hubby with all of his foibles. The use of all literary conventions will ultimately be constrained by the social structure of the particular mass medium--its audience, its social function, its economics, its history, its development, and its management goals and personalities.

High culture is less likely to be limited in its utilization of myths, symbols and stereotypes than is mass culture because high art functions with fewer social restraints. The artist of high art is not concerned about appealing to a large heterogeneous audience, not concerned about satisfying the management censor, not concerned about government regulations, not concerned about industrial self-regulations, and not concerned about marketing strategies. Historically, the artist of high culture satisfies her/his own sense of creativity/invention and might be recognized only very late in life. History is replete with stories of the poor struggling artist concerned only about quality, and history is also replete with stories of the public artist, creating for the patrons and satisfying all of the demands of marketability. The status quo has blurred, to some extent, this distinction between the elite artist and the public artist, since even the elite artist is now marketed by the large book publishing companies and art galleries and appears on the Today Show and the Tonight Show and the Tomorrow Show and publications are approved by an editorial staff. But, even so, the elite artist functions with fewer social structural restraints than does the popular artist.

The physical structure of the medium will also dictate the use of myths, symbols and stereotypes. The physical structure is the medium itself-- the smallness of the screen of the television set, the chapter structure of the novel, the darkness of the cinema, the colored jells and sound effects at the theatre. Horace Newcomb makes it clear how the physical structure of a medium affects its content:

The smallness of the television screen has always been its most noticeable physical feature. It means something that the art created for television appears on an object that can be part of one's living

room, exists as furniture. It is significant that one can walk around the entire apparatus. Such smallness suits television for intimacy; its presence brings people into the viewer's home to act out dramas. But from the beginning, because the art was visual, it was most commonly compared to the movies. The attempts to marry old-style, theatre-oriented movies with television are stylistic failures even though they have proven to be a financial success. Television is at its best when it offers us faces, reactions, explorations of emotions registered by human beings. The importance is not placed on the action, though that is certainly vital as stimulus. Rather, it is on the reaction to the action to the human response. 8

Entrepreneurs have attempted to cash-in on cheap film making by filming a theatre production for the cinema, but the limitation of camera movement and the actors' performing for a live audience instead of for the camera lens makes these efforts artistic failures. Even "Give Em Hell Harry," one of the most successful theatre productions put on celluloid, is still just one medium observing another. Quality in media productions is obtained only when the physical characteristics of the medium are integrated into the total product.

Physical restraints on artistic output become obvious when comparing creative techniques used in various media. How is the concept of tension created in the various media, for example?

The novel builds to an exciting moment and cuts to a new chapter or cuts to the development of other characters or events. The reader moves to the next chapter to find out how the complication will be resolved and encounters another complication which is continued in the next chapter.

In the theatre, the lighting, sound effects and the total mannerisms of the actors create tension. Dark colored lights tell the audience that trouble lurks, sound effects pierce the environment and the entire body of the actor is involved in conveying the message of alarm.

On television the sound elements are probably the most prominent method of creating tension. Television is a secondary activity, which means that its audience is usually engaged in another activity and only casually watches the small screen. The alarming tempo and the eerie musical chinks indicate to the auditor that the good-guy is in trouble or that the bad-guy is about to be captured or that the plot has thickened. Even a child who has not been involved in the program development will tune into the final television program segments because the sounds summon attention. The next most important element for creating tension in television is the close-up--the tight shot showing the twitch in the jaw muscle and the fear in wide eyes. Lighting in television may also be a minor factor in creating tension.

In the cinema, tension is created by the total involvement of the audience. The darkness of the movie house and the largeness of the screen make cinema viewing a primary activity. When the house is darkened and the outside world dissolves, the large screen transports the viewer to an all-involving new world and a total artistic experience. Tension is not totally dependent on the sounds and the close-ups; the artist has the complete attention of the viewer and can experiment with camera angles and fields of view.

Even the same artistic genre will vary in its development from medium to medium because of both the social and physical structures of the particular medium. Newcomb observed:

. . . with television there is another level of complexity, for we quickly realize that the television Western is more akin to the television mystery than it is to the literary Western. It is

even possible to say that the television mystery or Western is more comparable to the television situation comedy than to the literary forms of either of those two standard formulas. Television creates its own version of the traditional popular arts." 9

The combination of social and physical structural factors will thus control to a great extent the use of myths, symbols and stereotypes. The combination of these social and physical restraints are easily listed for at least one medium--commercial television:

1. Time limits (Thirty-minutes or one hour.)
2. Time divisions (Segmentation for commercial breaks and station breaks.)
3. Advertisers (Program ideas must sell.)
4. Market research (All program ideas are tested and retested; new concepts are untested and are less likely to be bought by networks.)
5. Competition between networks (Known program formulas are sellable and draw audiences; network competition limits new program ideas.)
6. Current structure of the industry

The ways in which these physical and social structural factors affect a popular artist can be seen in the following statement by a writer of half-hour television programs:

Okay, so you have 23 minutes to establish your exposition, to delineate characters, work to your climax with as much action as possible, and bring your tale to a thrilling and moral conclusion. Oh yes, you must provide suitable breaks for commercials, too. You use as many shortcuts as possible: you want to paint a "bad" guy or someone outside the social norm quickly and simply. You fall back on a stereotype of some sort which presumably your audience will understand without full explanation. . . . The run-of-the-mill half-hour TV film is as stylized as the Japanese Noh play. 10

Because of its physical and social structural features--its furniture-like characteristics, its secondary role in daily activity, its social functions, its vast audiences--television has adapted its content to fit these

structural characteristics. In its beginning, observers thought television was doomed to failure because of its physical characteristics, but TV programming has become part and parcel of its structure. In 1939 a reporter for the New York Times wrote:

"The problem with television is that the people must sit and keep their eyes glued on a screen; the average American family hasn't time for it. Therefore, the showmen are convinced that for this reason, if for no other, television will never be a serious competition of broadcasting." 11

Indeed, the physical structure of television could have doomed it to failure, if it had not adapted. No one would spend hours sitting and keeping "their eyes glued on a small screen." But, with common interpretations of myths repeated over and over again with different characters and settings and easily understandable symbols and communication short-cuts or stereotypes (musical, character developmental, settings, etc.), the television audience can pursue hundreds of activities and "watch" television too.

Content can be viewed in terms of the physical and social structure of the medium, but there is also an important structural consideration in a work of popular art itself. Most observers of popular art define the inherent structure in that art as formulaic. John Cawelti has defined formula as:

. . . a conventional system for structuring cultural products. It can be distinguished from invented structures which are new ways of organizing art. Like the distinction between convention and invention, the distinction between formula and structure can be envisaged as a continuum between two poles; one pole is that of a completely conventional structure of conventions--an episode of the Lone Ranger or one of the Tarzan books comes close to this pole; the other end of the continuum is a completely original structure which orders inventions--Finnegans Wake is perhaps the ultimate example. 12

Formulas are easily adaptable to mass media because the audiences for popular art are most often seeking release, relief, and transformation

from the immediate by a quick and easily attainable medium of transport--TV, dime-store novels, magazines, movies. High art requires major efforts of concentration and commitment, whereas popular art offers similar experiences of catharsis and requires only minor commitments of time, an often only divided time at that. Concerning popular art and its audience, Tom Sullivan has written:

A formula plot is one in which conventional characters engage in conventional action involving conventional incidents. Since the plot is conventional, a very similar explanation of experience prevails in all of the stories which adhere to the same formula. One reason for the popularity . . . of a particular explanation provided by a specific formulaic plot is the wide-spread acceptance of that explanation. In spite of the many arguments that fiction appeals because it presents the mysterious, or the unknown, we tend . . . to be most comfortable with those stories that reaffirm our beliefs, thereby telling us what we already know. . . . a formulaic plot . . . is one means by which a "constituency" . . . reaffirms group values. It is through formulaic stories, the plots of which rigidly reaffirm their beliefs, that many readers and viewers find ways to explain the events in their world. 13

To understand how a formula is constructed, the inherent structure must be carefully examined from a variety of perspectives. Cawelti has been the academic leader in formula research and his book titled The Six-Gun Mystique is, at present, the most in-depth exploration of a particular formula to be offered by a popular culture researcher. Cawelti explores the Western formula--the film Western, the television Western, the novel as Western. In defining the Western formula, he deals with: "setting;" "complex of characters;" "types of situations;" and "patterns of action."

Considering "setting" Cawelti sees the Western set in an epic moment of conflict between lawlessness and the advance of structured civilization. Cawelti notes that in the Western ". . . the social and historical aspects of setting are perhaps even more important in defining the Western formula than geography." (p. 38) The western half of the United States

became America's last great frontier and the ultimate challenge to individual and institutional survival. The geographic setting is always west of the Mississippi River--the lonely rolling plains of Kansas; the arid, tempestuous Mexican border areas; the mountainous, dirty little mining towns. Cawelti observes that costumes have also become part of the setting and we can detect Western characters and know something about their roles by the costumes they wear.

Cawelti sees Western characters as divided into three groups: "the townspeople or agents of civilization;" "the savages or outlaws who threaten this first group;" and "the heroes . . . who possess many qualities and skills of the savages, but are fundamentally committed to the townspeople." (p. 46) Plots revolve around the relationships of these three types of characters.

The "situations and patterns of action" develop out of the epic moment "when the values and disciplines of American society stand balanced against savage wilderness." (p. 66) The hero, who is no stranger to violence and savage methods, maintains the "commitment to the agents and values of civilization." The hero is usually cleaner, more physically appealing and better educated than the adversary--indications that he has internalized civilized standards in an uncivilized environment.

While Cawelti has defined the formula in terms of a genre (the Western), Horace Newcomb has gone beyond the definition of a popular genre-formula and has examined formulas in terms of a particular medium--commercial television. Newcomb would agree with Cawelti that popular art is formulaic and that formulas can be presented for Westerns, romance novels, pornographic films, dime-store detective novels, etc., but, Newcomb believes that the social and physical characteristics of a medium account for closer relationships

in formula than do genre distinctions. Newcomb sees the television Western as more closely related to the television situation comedy, the television soap opera, or TV news than to the Western in film or novel form. Newcomb sees three elements of television as composing a frame for a television aesthetic, and as uniting all of television's formulas--intimacy, continuity, and history.

The sense of intimacy that is apparent in the TV situation comedy or soap opera is also apparent in the television Western. While a key element of the film Western is its scenes of vast expanses of land--the rugged desert, the lonely plains, the isolated mountains--the TV Western revolves around smaller sets--a saloon, a cabin, or a campfire. We never really sense the vast Kansas prairie of "Gunsmoke" or the immense lands of the Ponderosa. Just as in the television situation comedy or television domestic comedy or the television soap opera, we concentrate on individuals caught up in individual relationships. Television lends itself to the examination of the individual situation; it is the medium most adapted to the close-up.

Newcomb argues that continuity on television is really illusive. The viewer believes that there is continuity to the program context because there are twenty-six programs in a series; but when more closely examined, the series lack continuity because they are really self-contained weekly episodes that have their own beginning and ending. "Because . . . shows conclude dramatically at the end of a single episode, and because the necessity for a popular response calls for an affirmative ending, we lose sight of the true complexity of many of the issues examined."¹⁴ Because of this surface continuity and lack of real continuity, television formulas have a strong resemblance in plot development and denouement. Major events must happen at

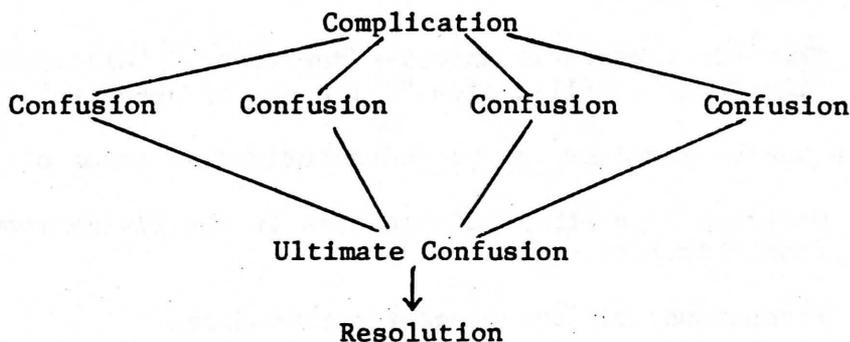
specific points in the thirty-minute time frame to allow a satisfactory affirmative conclusion. This structure of twenty-six individual episodes all developing and ending within the same time limit accounts for a similarity of plot structure within all types of television programming.

According to Newcomb, the third element which unites all television formula is history:

The television formula requires that we use our contemporary historical concerns as subject matter. In part we deal with them in historical fashion, citing current facts and figures. But we also return these issues to an older time, or we create a character from an older time, so that they can be dealt with firmly, quickly, and within a system of sound and observable values. That vaguely defined "older time" becomes the mythical realm of television. 15

Thus, in television formula, times are mixed and contemporary conflicts can be settled in the old West or Old England or in the years 2000 or 2100. In television, history provides settings and costumes, but, not necessarily plot or conflict.

With this understanding of the medium defining the formula, in his book TV the Most Popular Art, Newcomb presents television formulas for: situation and domestic comedies; adventure shows; soap operas and news programs. In its simplest form, situation comedy can, for example, be defined as: complication leading to a multiplicity of confusion and finally to the ultimate confusion, which can't get any more confused, and thus must lead to the resolution.



. . . confusion [is] the heart of what is comic about situation comedy. Situation comedy, like most television formulas, does not conform to the artistic standards of "high" art in the development of action, character, event, and conclusion. Events, the things that "happen" in sit com, are composed solely of confusion, and the more thorough the confusion, the more the audience is let in on a joke that will backfire on the characters, the more comic the episode. Individual shows are frequently structured on various layers of confusion that can be generated out of a single complication . . . the characters slip into deeper and deeper confusion. Expression and reaction follow complication, gesture follows reaction, slapstick follows gesture.¹⁶

In the situation comedy, both the characters and the settings can also be defined in terms of formula. Newcomb contends, for example, that all situation formula characters have the same predominant traits:

1. They are young American suburbanites.
2. They are neat.
3. They are beautiful and healthy.
4. They are prosperous.
5. They are never troubled in profound ways.
6. Sorrow never touches their lives.
7. Stress, as a result of confusion, is always funny.
8. They are surrounded by supporting characters which fall into two types--individual characters who fall victim to the star's antics and the regular characters who serve as foils for the antics.
9. They exhibit great innocence and do not seem to understand that particular actions are absolutely certain to lead to particular consequences.
10. They are frequently unreal--"Bewitched," "Gilligan's Island," "The Beverly Hillbillies," "I Dream of Jeannie."

And situation comedy settings can be characterized in terms of:

1. One-room sets--the action occurs in the living room, dining room, kitchen, etc.
2. Prosperous, but not elegant surroundings.
3. Neatness.

With the television situation comedy formula easily understood by the audience, complete attention from the auditors is not required. A standard utilization of myth, symbol, stereotype in a completely anticipated formula is what the medium demands and what the audience gets. A development of complicated myths or symbols or the lack of stereotypes would require complete attention from the auditors and would prohibit the viewer sitting in the easy chair with divided attention--reading the newspaper and "watching" TV, for example.

The television mystery is another example of the TV formula which delivers exactly what is expected in terms of myths, symbols and stereotypes.

. . . the world of the popular mystery story [has been] expressed for us over and over again as novel, movie, radio series, comic strip and comic book. . . . For television, then, the task is to draw on a vast body of material which could appeal to an already existing mass audience in an even more massive way, to use the mystery form in existence, and to begin to adapt the form in terms of its own aesthetic attitudes, its own set of cultural expressions."¹⁷

In its broadest sense the television mystery can be defined in terms of: a setting which is "a world of pain and corruption"; this setting is instrumental in creating a crime (usually murder), which challenges the skills of a detective; the detective follows numerous leads which prove to be dead-ends; suspense increases; the detective cleverly reassembles the clues to develop a unique solution which indeed turns out to be the right solution to the mystery and leads to the conclusion.

Because the mystery form demanded violence, action, adventure, tension and excitement, and because television demanded a sensitivity to social values and a concern for a delicate mass audience, the television mystery had to develop some unique formats. Newcomb detects at least four types of television mysteries which follow the same broad formula structure as any mystery/detective:

1) the documentary style mystery; 2) the private-eye mystery; 3) the anti-authority, rebellious detective; 4) the family-group detective programs.

The documentary style detective program was a means of satisfying the restrictions on television sensationalism and still offering the mass audience adventure and violence. "The more 'realistic' the show, the better. So we come to 'Dragnet' From the opening sequence of narrator's voice over aerial shots of Los Angeles to the concluding report on the fate of the offenders, 'Dragnet' creates a documentary tone that argues for itself the portrayal of truth rather than fiction."¹⁸ Other mysteries in the documentary format have included: "M Squad," "Naked City," "FBI," and "Highway Patrol."

Programs in the mystery-private-eye tradition have included Perry Mason and a current program, "Rockford Files." The private-eye type character is outside the police department and is summoned to the "crime" by outside forces. "The series seem to mediate between the more hard-boiled detectives and the factual police-oriented shows by offering a complex who-done-it framework for murder."¹⁹

The third type of television detective program is the family-type mystery which involves a close-knit group working together to solve the crime. This type of program includes: "The Rookies," "Mod-Squad," "Ironside" and "McMillan and Wife." The family-type group is protective of its members and is united in its quest for good over evil.

The fourth type of detective program can be characterized by the star--the angry, disillusioned individual who knows that corruption can be deterred but never defeated. This lonely individual strives for at least minimum order in a chaotic world. The detective is on the side of law-and-order, but isn't opposed to stepping outside the law and using questionable

means to get the really bad guys. This type of mystery seems to be the type most often seen on television today--"Baretta," "Kojak," "Serpico," "Delvecchio." As can be seen by the names of the programs:

What television now offers in the area of mystery entertainment is a world of personality. Each star brings a different attitude toward the nature of crime. The struggle is not between good and evil, for as in all popular formulas we know that there is no real contest there. Rather, the struggle is between a certain type of detective and the very idea of crime."²⁰

All four formats have the usual broad formulaic structure and each has the detective star who has a similar role in every detective formula whether film, novel or television:

He takes us into the world of pain and corruption and brings us out again in the end. Would we enter such a world without such a guide? Would we enter knowing beforehand that there might not be the safe conclusion at the final moment of tension? The prospect of the mystery is one of forbidden excitement, and the detective allows us to experience it without being dirtied by it.²¹

But, again in this art form as in others, we can see television creating formulas that are unique to itself and can be discussed in terms of television's unique social and physical structure. Myths, symbols, and stereotypes in mass culture can be examined in terms of complex social and cultural relationships surrounding each medium. In his book Open to Criticism, Robert Lewis Shayon makes these complex relationships clearer.

The mass media are phenomena that transcend even broad worlds of literature. They call for the discovery of new laws, new relationships, new insights into drama, ritual and mythology, into the engagement of minds in a context where psychological sensations are deliberately produced for non-imaginative ends, where audiences are created, cultivated and maintained for sale, where they are trained in nondiscrimination and hypnotized by the mechanical illusion of delight. When the symbols that swirl around the planet Earth are manufactured by artists who have placed their talents at the disposition of salesmen, criticism must at last acknowledge that "literature" has been transcended and that the dialectics of evolutionary action have brought the arts to a new level of practice and significance.²²

It is a recent phenomenon for scholars to be interested in what Shayon calls the new level of practice and significance in popular art. But, scholars are now interested in popular art as a means of telling us more about ourselves and about art forms. John Cawelti has observed that a more careful examination of patterns in popular art would tell us more about our society and its basic values and attitudes. He notes further that: "In addition, the concept of the formula as a synthesis of cultural symbols, themes and myths with more universal story archetypes should help us to see where a literary pattern has been shaped by the needs of a particular story form, and to differentiate these from patterns which are expressions of the network of assumptions of a particular culture."²³

Myths, symbols and stereotypes in mass art can be examined in terms of structure--the social and physical structure of the particular medium which directly affects the medium content and the inherent structure of the art form itself, or the formula. By more carefully examining myths, symbols, and stereotypes in popular art we can learn more about values in this society and about the various audiences to whom a particular kind of popular art appeals.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹Ray L. Birdwhistell, Kinesics and Context (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), p. 95.
- ²John G. Cawelti, "Myth, Symbol, and Formula," Journal of Popular Culture, VIII:1 (Summer, 1974), p. 3.
- ³Ibid., p. 1.
- ⁴David Madden, "The Necessity for An Aesthetics of Popular Culture," Journal of Popular Culture, VII:1 (Summer, 1973), p. 13.
- ⁵Horace Newcomb, TV the Most Popular Art (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1974), p. 15.
- ⁶Elihu Katz and David Foulkes, "The Use of the Mass Media as 'Escape': Clarification of a Concept," Public Opinion Quarterly, 1969, p. 378.
- ⁷Dixon Wecter, The Hero in America: A Chronicle of Hero-Worship (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), p. 488.
- ⁸Newcomb, TV the Most Popular Art, p. 245-246.
- ⁹Ibid., p. 23.
- ¹⁰Quoted in George Gerbner, "The Structure and Process of Television Content Regulation in the United States," in Television and Social Behavior, Vol. 1, pp. 386-414.
- ¹¹New York Times, March 19, 1939.
- ¹²John Cawelti, The Six-Gun Mystique (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Press, 1971), p. 29.
- ¹³Tom R. Sullivan, "The Use of a Fictional Formula: The Selkirk Mother Lode," Journal of Popular Culture, VIII:1 (Summer, 1974), pp. 35-36.
- ¹⁴Newcomb, TV the Most Popular Art, p. 253-254.
- ¹⁵Ibid., p. 258.
- ¹⁶Ibid., pp. 33-34.
- ¹⁷Ibid., pp. 83-84.
- ¹⁸Ibid., p. 91.
- ¹⁹Ibid., p. 95.
- ²⁰Ibid., p. 101.

²¹Ibid., p. 86.

²²Robert Lewis Shayon, Open to Criticism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), pp. 48-49.

²³Cawelti, Journal of Popular Culture, p. 7.

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