JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY SCIENCES AND INNOVATIONS

VOLUME 04, ISSUE 11
MOPNTHLY JOURNALS

ISSN NUMBER: 2751-4390
IMPACT FACTOR: 9,08

MYTHOPOETICS AND MYTHOLOGICAL IMAGERY IN MODERN BRITISH FICTION: KAZUO ISHIGURO AND WILLIAM GOLDING

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Abstract. This article provides an in-depth examination of mythopoetics and mythological imagery as fundamental narrative strategies in modern British fiction, with particular reference to the novels of Kazuo Ishiguro and William Golding. The study seeks to explore how mythological patterns, archetypes, and symbolic structures operate within modern narrative forms to shape character construction, ethical reflection, and philosophical meaning. Drawing on mythopoetic theory and comparative literary analysis, the research investigates selected novels in order to identify both convergences and divergences in the authors' artistic approaches.
The analysis demonstrates that William Golding consistently employs explicit mythological frameworks, archetypal characters, and ritualistic imagery to expose the primal instincts and moral contradictions inherent in human nature. His novels transform myth into a moral allegory through which the collapse of civilization and the fragility of ethical order are examined. In contrast, Kazuo Ishiguro adopts a more implicit and internalized mythopoetic strategy. In his fiction, myth manifests through memory, silence, repression, and symbolic narrative structures rather than overt mythological references. The article argues that despite stylistic and generational differences, both authors confirm the enduring relevance of myth as an artistic and philosophical instrument in twentieth- and twenty-first-century British fiction. By reworking myth within modern narrative contexts, Ishiguro and Golding address universal concerns such as identity, responsibility, trauma, moral choice, and the limits of human self-knowledge.

Keywords: mythopoetics; mythological imagery; modern British fiction; Kazuo Ishiguro; William Golding; archetype; symbolism; narrative identity

Introduction

Myth has historically functioned as one of the most powerful forms of human expression, offering symbolic narratives through which societies articulate collective beliefs, fears, moral values, and existential questions. In literary tradition, myth provides archetypal plots, characters, and images that transcend temporal and cultural boundaries. However, in modern literature, myth is rarely preserved in its original or sacred form. Instead, it undergoes transformation, reinterpretation, and secularization, adapting to the psychological and ideological conditions of modernity. This creative transformation is conceptualized within literary studies as mythopoetics. In twentieth- and twenty-first-century British fiction, mythopoetic strategies acquire particular significance due to the profound historical disruptions experienced during this period, including world wars, imperial decline, technological advancement, and the erosion of stable moral frameworks. As traditional belief systems weaken, writers increasingly turn to myth not as a source of certainty but as a critical and symbolic language capable of expressing moral ambiguity, trauma, and existential anxiety. Myth, therefore, becomes a flexible narrative tool through which modern fiction negotiates the tension between civilization and chaos, memory and forgetting, ethics and power.
Within this literary context, William Golding and Kazuo Ishiguro represent two influential yet contrasting approaches to mythopoetics. Golding's post-war fiction frequently employs explicit mythic and allegorical structures to reveal the latent violence and moral instability of human

nature. Ishiguro, writing in a later historical moment, integrates mythological thinking into restrained, introspective narratives focused on memory, identity, and ethical responsibility. The aim of this article is to analyze and compare the mythopoetic strategies used by these two authors, demonstrating how mythological imagery continues to function as a vital interpretive framework in modern British fiction.

Literature Analysis

The interaction between myth and literature has been a central concern of literary theory and cultural studies. Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious provides a psychological foundation for mythopoetic criticism, proposing that archetypes embedded in myth represent universal patterns of human experience and behavior. Mircea Eliade interprets myth as a means of engaging with fundamental existential and sacred dimensions of reality, emphasizing its role in shaping human consciousness. Northrop Frye's structuralist approach situates literature within a system of recurring mythic modes, arguing that literary narratives continually reproduce and transform ancient mythological structures.

Critical scholarship on William Golding has consistently emphasized his reliance on myth, allegory, and symbolism. Lord of the Flies is widely interpreted as a modern myth of the Fall, incorporating ritual violence, sacrificial symbolism, and the disintegration of social order. Scholars have also analyzed Golding's broader oeuvre through archetypal criticism, highlighting themes of original sin, moral responsibility, and the tension between rational order and instinctual savagery.

Studies of Kazuo Ishiguro's fiction traditionally focus on narrative memory, trauma, repression, and unreliable narration. Although mythological imagery is less explicit in his works, recent research has increasingly acknowledged the mythopoetic dimensions of novels such as The Buried Giant, where legendary motifs and mythical creatures symbolize collective amnesia and unresolved historical violence. Nevertheless, comparative studies that examine Ishiguro and Golding within a unified mythopoetic framework remain relatively limited. This absence underscores the originality and scholarly relevance of the present research.

Research Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative comparative literary methodology grounded in mythopoetic and symbolic criticism. The study is based on close textual analysis of selected novels by Kazuo Ishiguro and William Golding, chosen for their thematic relevance and representative use of mythological imagery. Particular attention is paid to mythic motifs, archetypal characters, symbolic spaces, and narrative structures that contribute to the construction of meaning within the texts.

The methodological framework integrates thematic analysis with narrative and symbolic interpretation. Mythological elements are examined not as isolated references but as structurally significant components shaping character development, ethical dilemmas, and philosophical reflection. The comparative approach enables the identification of both shared mythopoetic patterns and distinct authorial strategies, thereby offering a comprehensive understanding of how myth functions in modern British fiction.

Conclusions and Suggestions

The findings of this study demonstrate that mythopoetics constitutes a central and enduring narrative strategy in the novels of both Kazuo Ishiguro and William Golding. Golding's fiction is marked by the explicit use of mythological and archetypal structures that foreground the

instinctual, violent, and morally ambiguous dimensions of human nature. Through mythic allegory, his novels interrogate the collapse of civilization and the fragility of ethical order.

In contrast, Ishiguro's mythopoetics operates through subtle narrative mechanisms rooted in memory, silence, repression, and emotional restraint. Mythological thinking in his novels is internalized rather than overt, shaping identity and moral responsibility from within the characters' consciousness. Despite these differences, both authors confirm that myth remains an effective medium for articulating universal human concerns that transcend historical specificity.

Future research may expand this comparative framework by incorporating other contemporary British writers or by examining the relationship between mythopoetics and postmodern narrative techniques such as fragmentation, metafiction, and narrative unreliability. Such investigations would further illuminate the adaptability and significance of myth within modern literary discourse.

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