Hit and Myth: Modernity, Mythography, and Cultural Incorporation

Tucker, Herbert F.

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About the Print Version

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Works Considered

- Baldick, Chris. In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing . Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.

- Bennett, Tony, and Janet Woollacott. Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a Popular Hero . London: Macmillan, 1987.

Davis, Paul. The Lives and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge . New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990.

- Green, Martin. The Robinson Crusoe Story . University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990.

- Gribble, Jennifer. The Lady of Shalott in the Victorian Novel . London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1983.

- Gross, John. Shylock: A Legend and Its Legacy . New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992.

- Landow, George P. et al. Ladies of Shalott: A Victorian Masterpiece and Its Contexts . Providence: Brown University, 1985.

- Rose, Jacqueline. The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction . 1984. Rev. ed. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992.

- Vaughan, Alden T. and Virginia Mason Vaughan. Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History . Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Each of these books concerns the vicissitudes of a modern myth , a term that seems self-contradictory but is actually no more than a paradox. Most of us, even us Victorianists who should know better, bring to the topic of mythology a set of thoroughly Victorian organicist prejudices. These add up, says Chris Baldick in my favorite book of the lot, to a "myth of myth," which holds that real myths, originating in the collective anonymity of oral tradition, may be ratified only in time's slow-chapped power, by gradual historical accretion. Yet consider a striking counterexample from our own day, the case of James Bond. In Agent 007, as Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott tell it, we have a figure who attained world standing within a single generation. If Bennett and Woollacott are even half right, then under the supersaturated conditions of mass communication the distribution of a manufactured figure like Bond--and the random, mythically crucial process of his collective appropriation as common property--may take place on a drastically foreshortened time scale. That this acceleration of cultural mythopoeia was well underway in Britain by the second third of the 19th century is strongly suggested by the ensemble of titles here under review. The Victorian heirs of Vico and Herder might not think it possible, but the making of a modern mythology got into full swing right under their noses.

I can't better the adroit discussion of this matter in Baldick's opening chapter; so I simply recommend it, framing things my own way instead with a two-step anecdote. Frame 1, 1984: A friend remarks to me late one afternoon, at an hour when our toddlers are receiving preschool indoctrination in the next room through the good graces of the Children's Television Workshop, that Sesame Street is providing the rising generation with just that common mythology which we have been taught the modern world distinctly lacks. I nod and ponder. Frame 2, 1992: I am sitting

in the waiting room of an orthodontist; my toddler has become a teen, and the Vice Presidency of the United States has devolved on a man whose youth appeal, as events have made plain even to his sympathizers, outshines his fitness for world leadership. In a book of drawings on my lap the wicked humorist Callahan depicts the Vice President's mind by means of a pie graph, one vast slice of which bears the legend "Big Bird."[1]

Several of the scholars this review treats could no doubt make nice analytic work of the cartoonist's happy capture of the quality, and the media modality, of national life in the 90s. I bring it up, however, as evidence of the categorical validity of modern mythology as such. The fact that so many of us from so many backgrounds continue to live together in a society that is no less civil than it is depends on another fact. We hold in common certain typical figures: stories, scenarios, images usually converging on a person whose name everybody knows everybody knows. Such figures may invigorate the culture or they may deplete it; but they manifestly, relentlessly inflect its currencies. One or two of my authors discuss these figures under the sign of the "hero" or the "legend"; but myth remains the term of choice, preferred the more strongly the more rooted a scholar's concern with culture in a generally anthropological sense.

Solicit cultures and they present you with their myths; map a myth and you have x-rayed the culture it lives in. But where that culture is modern culture--the one that produces, among other things, anthropologically oriented scholarship on myth--myths start to display arresting peculiarities. One curious feature that distinguishes a modern myth from the traditionary myths of premodern societies is that the modern myth is very likely to have been invented . Not in the trivial sense that every existing thing originated somehow, but in a quite specific, often legally defended and bureaucratically registered sense, the bulk of the myths we hold by started out as fictions : textually situated characters made up by an author whom history vouches for and given to the world in a particular work that bears a date and, in every recent instance, a copyright to match.

When does such an authored fiction become a modern myth? Taken as a request for historical information, this is a question on which my double handful of titles preserve silence: the transformation is seldom pinpointed on the calendar, but is rather perceived to have occurred after a due interval of percolation and seasoning. Taken more generally, though, as an inquiry into enabling conditions, the question of origins elicits wide agreement. A modern myth is born, my authors concur, when it escapes its founding text, breaking out of individual proprietorship and into the cultural imaginary.[2] Launched into the sphere of common knowledge by an original work of extraordinary popularity and stamina, the modern myth attracts such recognition that the ur-work, while it does not fall away, becomes strictly speaking superfluous; becomes indeed a version, quaint and creaky, of the independently living thing it has brought into the world. The once authored fiction attains and keeps mythic status through the self-propelling popular mechanics of fame in an era of mass publicity. Glistening with recognition, the modern myth infiltrates the cultural memory banks, where dwell the secular immortals. There it becomes available in a de facto public domain for appropriation by whoever wants it, and for purposes that may range from highbrow fiction through political cartooning to the selling of peanut butter.

The different uses to which a modern myth may be put make it a highly eligible index of divisions within the social formation it has fused with, and also of the formative changes that have constituted its history. So no wonder modern myths have attracted lots of scholarly attention during the ten years covered by our sample. At an epoch when literary studies have been conspicuously outward bound, compassing an expanded range of texts, genres, audience strata, and even material media, the renewed investigation of myth has offered the inquirer a whole menu of timely challenges. Here is an arena where textualism and contextualism both demand

their due; where an acknowledged classic has made an incalculably diffusive difference in the wide world, yet where the "text" under study entails, if it does not in effect become, the mobile context out of which any given mythic instance is produced; where a history of mythic instances provides a capsule history of culture in convenient synecdoche; where the myth's transgressions of genre, medium, and national language reward advancing methods of interdisciplinary research; where the cells of deep structure may be unlocked by a new, anti-essentialist archaeology of vogues and surfaces. Undertaking to read the air we breathe, the study of a well-chosen myth puts cultural studies in a nutshell.

Above all, such study offers to combine glamour with safety. The proving ground of modern myth is the zone where, by definition, literature directly and conspicuously merges with popular culture--not because somebody says so but by universal agreement. What the last decade's most energetically prosecuted theories have announced in general about the social imbrication of literature emerges in myth studies as a matter of historical fact that calls for no fancy special pleading. The student of a modern myth's career therefore enjoys at one and the same time the prestige that now attaches to cultural studies, and the methodological security of what proves in practice to be a quite uncontroversial explanatory maneuver. Patiently tracking the thread which your topic laid down before you, as a modern myth scholar you can hardly miss your way from the academic ivory tower into the marketplace of popular culture; yet if the weather should turn nasty your way back remains clearly marked too. At a time in literary studies when so many theories and approaches have been under construction that the critical air thickens with methodological dust, the hit-and-myth approach has clearly fortified the credibility of many a book project. It has also offered, to all but the most puritanically self-denying projectors (Rose, Bennett and Woollacott), certain retrograde satisfactions involving a hermeneutic fusion between the critic's understanding and the original author's meaning.

2

Malory's King Arthur being a traditional legend and Marlowe's Doctor Faustus in some sort a real 15th-century man, the first English mythmaker in our special sense turns out to be Shakespeare. The honor is highly appropriate for a writer who has been accounted (most recently by Harold Bloom) the early modern creator of reflexive self-consciousness, For some ironic residue of self-reflexivity inhabits most instances of modern myth--as it does, needless to say, all contemporary studies of the subject. In Shylock: A Legend and Its Legacy , John Gross has written a strongly personal book that traces the familiar yet still breathtaking miracle whereby Shakespeare wrought a strong personality out of doubly unpropitious circumstances: in this case, the blunt Tudor caricature of the Jew, and the generic drive of comedy away from individuality into a bland economy of the same. The emergence of personality also norms the history Gross narrates of Shylock's representations across 400 years and around the world. A raw clown in the 17th century and a sublime villain in the 18th, Shylock held on until, under Romanticism, Kean's sympathetic performance and Hazlitt's analytic vindication prepared the way that led through "the growth of 19th-century liberalism" (132) to Irving's portrayal of heroically dignified victimage.

Three centuries is a long wait for recognition, and yet Gross' metaphor of "growth" implies that it was just a matter of time before anglophone culture and its conditions of dramatic production caught up with the complexities of Shakespeare's script. This evolutionary, progressive understanding of mythic history merits emphasis here, since it represents one tendency to which

the hit-and-myth approach is markedly liable. To be sure, Gross is not simply a Whig historian of the Shylock myth. He knows too much to fall into the Victorian error of identifying contemporary perspectives with the vantage of eternity, and (like all the authors here reviewed) he expressly disclaims the privilege of uttering the last word on his subject. And yet (like almost all the authors here reviewed) he does exercise something like that privilege by putting his own interpretation of Shylock last within the book, where it has the effect of a fifth-act anagnorisis. Gross also ballasts that interpretation with the weight of a fairly strict-constructionist intentionalism, pronouncing on what "Shylock is meant to be" (347): viz., a villain who is menacing, in ways firmly associated with traditional images of the Jewish usurer, yet who is redeemed into sympathy by the greatness with which he is imagined.

This happens to strike me too as the truth of the matter, but it is my duty here to call attention to the pattern of reinforcement whereby the modern-myth critic makes his truth tell. The rehearsal of Shylock versions from many periods and venues ultimately authorizes an identification of the critic with the bard, and of the myth's durable meaning (Shylock according to Gross) with its first written instantiation (Shylock according to Shakespeare). The proliferating afterlife of the myth ultimately realizes a guiding principle that was present from the beginning. In theory modern mythographers like Gross hold the authorized version to be inexhaustible.[3] But in practice they mostly invoke its authority for the perennial purpose of setting standards and inventorying failures. That clicking sound you hear as their books approach closure indicates that the interlocking system of literary interpretation and literary history still works.[4]

This maneuver is exceptionally overt in Gross, I suspect for two reasons. One of them has to do with the special conditions of dramatic art, which is intrinsically conservative just as the symphony and ballet are. Even the most radical production of The Merchant of Venice must orbit Shakespeare's script more closely than a discrete narrative version of a myth will do. (The same principle a fortiori distinguishes the books here reviewed from reception histories.) Indeed, insofar as any actor is interpreting Shylock, his performance falls short of the escape thrust that impels the modern myth into being. Shylock arrived at that mythic threshold only in the 1930s, at a point in the history of the West when sympathy or antipathy for the figure of the Jew became, inescapably, more than a theatrical pastime. The terrible surcharge which Shylock then acquired is the second reason I would adduce for the moral watch Gross keeps over his myth. His most powerful sequence juxtaposes the evenhanded Gielgud production (London, 1938) and the coolly disengaged scholarship of Mark Van Doren's Shakespeare (New York, 1939) with the contemporaneous reports of the Austrian Anschluss , for which Nazi productions of The Merchant during the 30s had at some level helped pave the way. With this failure of the humane imagination Gross rings down part 2 of the book ("Interpretations") and opens part 3 ("A Citizen of the World"): clearly the transition thus marked is also the transition from scripted fiction to myth. Shylock's mythic latency was suddenly precipitated out of Shakespeare by the abomination of the Holocaust, which imparted an ethical amplitude so great as to unfit him as anything but a myth, enlarged beyond the capacity of stage representation in our time.

If the moral commitment of this book occasionally distends its argument or obscures its scholarship, these are the defects of the real virtues that found it (uniquely on our list) a home with an American trade publisher. A more serious defect, however, is the largely blinkered vision with which Gross regards the part played in the Shylock mythology by economics. A curt late chapter on "Economic Man" establishes Gross' contempt for Marxism, and its vitriol helps one guess why the previous 300 pages have said so little about money. This bias has a particularly unfortunate effect on the account of 19th-century reactions to Western literature's most notorious moneylender. Some of the best 19th-century commentary Gross quotes suggests that Shylock served others than Marx (among them Byron and Ruskin) as a lightning rod for the mystique of

capital in its superintendence of an ascendant credit empire. But Gross does not pursue these suggestions. Instead of sifting out economic implications from the racial remarks that have shadowed them throughout Shylock's history, Gross at every opportunity privileges the antisemitic over the anticapitalist alarm. Such priorities, as Ruskin once complained, have often been red herrings to distract and disable "wholesome indignation against usurers" (289). To the extent that Ruskin was right, Gross is wrong, in his contextual understanding of the Victorian Merchant and thus of an entire 19th-century movement of mind that wound the spring for Shylock's leap into mythology later on.

That said, give me Gross's myth of concern any day over the academic neutrality of its companion volume here, Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History . The impersonal profile of this book may result from its collaborative authorship, by critic Alden Vaughan and historian Virginia Mason Vaughan. But its tone-death also illuminates a problem that potentially besets all studies of the hit-and-myth kind: information overload. Any claim to mythic status that is advanced on behalf of a fictional character rests perforce on a quantitative data base. Since ubiquity and universal recognition are beyond demonstration, myth scholars are tempted instead to invoke the arithmetical sublime, amassing and marshalling instances so as to persuade the reader that those instances are as good as innumerable. The risk in this, of course, is that the trees of evidence will obscure the forest of thesis. The synchronic context that lends pattern and point to a given episode in the myth's career, or the narrative argument which links episodes into a history, will be crowded out by ill coordinated examples. To this risk the Vaughans succumb pretty badly. Shakespeare's Caliban is too arbitrary an omnium gatherum to be of much more than instrumental use as a hewer of wood and drawer of water for more powerfully theorized studies that may follow it.[5]

Not that no path of diachronic argument emerges, but you have to bushwhack in order to find it. Like Shylock, Caliban spent the 17th and much of the 18th century in grotesque disgrace, but Garrick's restoration of the original Tempest script signalled a revival of respect for Shakespeare that rubbed off on his creations (176). As Gross also demonstrates apropos Shylock, toward the turn of the 19th century actors found a tragic dimension in the monstrous outsider. In Caliban's case it remained for Romantic critics like Hazlitt to attach this tragic potential to revolutionary sympathies (104), and for visual artists like Robert Smirke to represent it in liberal images advocating indigene rights (233). By mid-century, abolitionist agitation and the shock waves of Darwinism sent Caliban over the top into myth, where he became variously available for Browning's dramatic monologue, Renan's dour essay on biological and political progress, and in our time Auden's lacerating soliloquy. It is the political valence of Caliban's servitude and resistance that has overshadowed 20th-century appropriations: Americans took him over concurrently with the rise of US imperialism (120-25); and postcolonialist writers have flung him in the face of oppression ever since, first as the brutal Yanqui and then as the unrepentant guerrilla.

This is an engaging and instructive story, but the reader has to piece it together with little help from the Vaughans. Their art history, intellectual history, stage history are herded into discrete chapters that discourage precisely the broader "cultural history" which their subtitle promises. Beyond that, the authors seem methodologically intimidated by the politics of their subject. They treat New Historicist readings at second hand and with kid gloves; the theme of Caliban's labor they leave nearly untouched. Time and again one feels the Vaughans drawing back from the large synthetic sweep, the bold gamble on a culturally significant resonance. Yet these are the ventures which studies of this kind must hazard if they are to overcome the drag of their own documentation and be more than catalogues raisonnees . The Vaughans' discussion of Caliban's presence in the film Forbidden Planet is admittedly venturesome and intriguing, but in just these

respects it stands out from their book as a whole, which even in its film and television coverage most often feels derivative, hurried, or both. Thus Shakespeare's Caliban offers neither the provocation of a strong thesis (such as Green and Baldick propound), nor the informational convenience of tabular chronology and bibliography (schemes which free Davis and Rose to write as vividly as they do).

That both Shylock and Caliban rode to respectability around 1800 on the coattails of their increasingly revered creator seems more than merely coincidental. It seems especially so when we try to think of a modern myth that is not, like them, indelibly associated with an outstanding character (as against such authorless and many-heroed traditions as the matter of Troy, the Nibelungenlied, the Mahabharata).[6] Take as a hard case A Christmas Carol , the one modern myth on our list not explicitly named for a protagonist: even here Dickens' tale has been Scrooge's show almost from the first, with Bob Cratchit for visual relief and an obligatory sound bite from Tiny Tim. We may summon up Wonderland or Neverland, but only by calling first on Alice or Peter Pan. So it is with the Shakespearean myths. When Caliban grabs the microphone, Prospero looks bad, Ariel evaporates, and Miranda needs to be rescued all over again.[7]

And yet it is crucial to the mythmaking process that these subordinates should live on, in however vestigial a way, as significantly resisting others. For it seems that a culture embraces a myth when it has discerned there a social image of itself; and our sample inventory of myths the West has embraced since the turn of the 19th century suggests that those fictions which graduate to myth have imagined society in terms that oppose individual to collective values. Shylock and Caliban may owe their mythic longevity to their origin not in tragedy but comedy, a genre that locks into place an essentially antagonistic relation between the outsider victim and the insider establishment. By enforcing this relation structurally, instead of through the free moral struggle of a tragic hero, comedy paradoxically leaves its gagged victim the freer to find mythic expression elsewhere, in subsequent works. Thus the extroverted grotesques Shylock and Caliban have become modern myths, while the introverted Hamlet has not.[8] If Romeo and Juliet have broken genre ranks and made it into myth from tragedy, this may be due to the fatalistic way Shakespeare pits their isolated naivete against family and city. Their case seems an exception that proves the generic rule: abstraction from a hostile yet comedic social order becomes, in them alone among Shakespeare's tragic protagonists, an ideal to die for--and to live again by.

3

From Shakespeare to Ian Fleming, then, the evidence of our modern myths shows how the abstraction of the individual from society is a definitive fantasy among us, perhaps a necessary one. That this fantasy nevertheless always bears social meanings is the burden of Martin Green's fine essay The Robinson Crusoe Story . This book, while quite legible on its own, should ideally be read alongside the pathbreaking work Green has been doing for the last two decades on the role which adventure narrative plays in modern formations of sexuality and nationality. Green's important critical oeuvre deserves wider exposure and discussion than it has to my knowledge received; within the context it provides, some of what can seem digressive or sketchy in The Robinson Crusoe Story falls into place in a searching and, yes, ruggedly individualistic analysis that goes to the heart of the modern mythmaking enterprise.[9] Green handles the endemic coverage problem with a veteran's deftness, frankly acknowledging that the Crusoe tradition is alive in many genres and tongues, and that as yet no one has even catalogued the torrent of

Robinsonaden , much less analyzed it. Green addresses his task instead by identifying a dozen successor texts to Defoe's, and devoting to each a meditative response that is founded on impressive historical learning and draws freely on dozens of other works in the tradition.

The resulting narrative runs as follows. Defoe's novel was always a hit, but the first step in its mythification was taken by 18th-century educational theorists, most importantly Rousseau. In selecting the shipwreck and island episodes as required reading for his Emile , Rousseau set the mythic parameters that were to matter to posterity. He also established the dialectically related categories--romantic and economic--in which the myth's commerce between individuality and society would be grasped. Crusoe as Romantic Man overcame the dualism of subject and object through a naturally developmental holism; Crusoe as Economic Man seized the world of objects for their immediate use value, deferring but never forgetting the exchange value they would eventually resume in the economized web of human relations. While the pedagogical function of the Crusoe myth never disappeared altogether, the variety of uses found for it during the 19th century makes it, in Green's hands, a virtual blueprint for stages in the phenomenon that contemporary pundits from all lands hailed as "the surge of Anglo-Saxon success" (206) and associated with Defoe's quintessential Englishman.

Early in the century a conservative Romantic organicism brought forth Johann David Wyss's Swiss Family Robinson , which performed the amazing cultural feat of making Crusoe's social bell jar the venue for a communitarianism rooted in family values. Green stumbles for once, I believe, in declaring Wyss's evangelicalism a brand new element (as if Bunyan had not been an indispensable resource for Defoe a century before). But Green shows very well how an unswerving patriarchy sustains the Gemutlichkeit of Wyss' work, while also acknowledging that the oddly diffracted circumstances of its publication made the Swiss Family from the first a multiple-versioned work well on the road to mythification.[10] Each of Green's four novelists from the middle of the century helped brick the wall of empire. Captain Marryat's Masterman Ready portended a siege mentality that was suitable for missionary and colonial outposts alike. Fenimore Cooper in The Crater put epic starch into the Crusoe tradition by introducing as a newly prominent motif the march of civilization under an elite leadership capable of holding the course against vulgar degeneracy. The Coral Island by R. M. Ballantyne, dividing its concerns between the sheer fun of boys' adventure and the administrative management of men, gave imaginative form to a primary Victorian dichotomy between work and leisure. Allied to these, Jules Verne's chief contribution to the myth was an updated stress on technology and on male bonding within the corps of Western engineers destined to implement it.

I have made the imperialist accretions of the Crusoe myth look more inevitably coordinated than Green's suppler chapters do, but my summary should illustrate the coherence of his demonstration that subliterary entertainment did important High Victorian cultural work. The next step in Green's demonstration is more intricate, and more problematic. At the acme of overt imperialism during the 1880s and 1890s, the most influential British Robinsonaden set about de-realizing the material conditions of expansion and conquest which had been staple topics since Defoe. Stevenson's Treasure Island aestheticized adventure, on the one hand, bearing boys'-book fun all the way back over the realist threshold into immaterial romance; on the other hand it replaced the evacuated materiality of the tale with a newly decadent mystique of evil. In Green's other major island escapade from the fin de siecle, Peter Pan , myth became not just an aestheticized entertainment but a knowing confection. Barrie's sly reduction of the Crusoe story carried fantasy to fairytale extremes, by arts of miniaturization which foregrounded not man's control over natural resources but the author's control over cultural ones. In the wake of the World Wars, the Robinson Crusoe story underwent ironic reductions symptomatic of recurrent crises in 20th-century masculinity (Greene, Waugh, Michel Tournier, and best of all Golding's Lord of the

Flies).

Still, it is the swath Crusoe cut across the 19th century that remains the heart of The Robinson Crusoe Story , and it prompts one further reflection here. Accounting for the century's late decadence elicits from Green a rhetoric of "subversiveness" (149) and "seduction" (157) that does not arise earlier in the book. Its appearance here seems due to a certain disappointment that the adventure story after Stevenson should have gone literary and begun trafficking with its sworn foe, the world of haute-culture and the academy. For Green's entire take on the adventure mode depends on a radical discrimination between it and literature as such. The two modes, he asserts, have been mutually exclusive for so long that intellectuals have signally failed to grasp in narratives of adventure the very imaginative forms which have done most to shape the modern world. A large and impressive claim, but one whose defense in 1990 probably necessitates a more comprehensive engagement than Green has thus far evinced with the more recent work of his comrades in "cultural studies" (12). For in this work the analytics of popular and and of elite cultural forms have witnessed considerable rapprochement. To stay only with our authors here, there are tendencies in the books by Baldick, Rose, Bennett and Woollacott which erode Green's basic distinction between the high and low roads of culture. One could also dispute the point from a more conventional position in genre criticism: a close look at the overlap between adventure writing and romance might do much to complicate Green's literary sociology, on grounds of narrative form as well as of class and gender. Still, Green's ideas are important ones, and it will be to everyone's advantage that they should be ventilated and debated.

4

19th-century scholars can learn much from Crusoe, Caliban, and Shylock because the cultural installation of modern myths is primarily a 19th-century phenomenon. This may be why Romanticists and Victorianists have been quicker than others to generate hit-and-myth studies. In any case, our books on Frankenstein and on the Lady of Shalott have been out long enough to obviate extended notice here, and to permit reflection instead on the critical mode they represent. Within the hit-and-myth mode In Frankenstein's Shadow by Chris Baldick seems to me the exemplary work to date. True, the extraordinary multivalence of the Frankenstein myth may have given Baldick a special boost, but by the same token the cultural power of this particular myth means that the competition is stiffer here than elsewhere. The Frankenstein materials are a multimedia labyrinth, and the critical works they have attracted are legion.[11] What makes Baldick's work so impressive is the way he threads the labyrinth by holding fast to a dialectical notion of the relation between a myth and its instances.

The uncanny, polyvalent dynamic of the Frankenstein myth remains Baldick's unifying topic, but as he moves across the 19th century he remembers that like other myths this one lives only in its textually and contextually specific actualizations. He keeps at his disposal a sliding scale of emphases that are elicited as needed by historically changing pertinences in diverse genres: Shelley's Gothic novel and its science-fiction progeny, a host of plays and pamphlets and political cartoons, history (Carlyle), social science (Marx), and the differing realisms of Eliot and Zola. This flexibility lets Baldick pursue analogical hunches which can seem at first blush implausible but nearly always secure conviction. Furthermore, the sequence of strong local readings enacts a sustained demonstration of the Frankenstein myth's power to evoke shifting ideological complexes about control and revolt. Baldick succeeds, in a word, where both Gross and the

Vaughans fall short: next to his flexibility, the former looks a bit stiff and cranky; where the latter suffer surfeit and indigestion, he assimilates and organizes. Sharing Green's capable sense of the reach and import of modern myth, in theoretical and generic terms Baldick is even more, well, adventurous. At the same time, In Frankenstein's Shadow does not induce the sense (not seldom oppressive in Bennett and Woollacott) that a myth is being analyzed in order to service a theory.

It is inevitably something of a comedown to move from the international electricity of Frankenstein to the insular handicraft of the Lady of Shalott, and from Baldick's triumphs to the comparative unsophistication of what are the earliest titles on our list: Jennifer Gribble's monograph and an exhibition catalogue consisting mainly of essays by graduate collaborators with George Landow at Brown a decade ago. No more than mythlet status may be claimed for Tennyson's Lady, not even here among Victorianist friends. But these two books make it plain that she does meet the basic criteria: her story does encapsulate pervasive conflicts concerning gender, class, and the instability of rival subcultural interests; and her representations do cross genre and media lines in ways that manifestly exceed her creator's purpose. In fact, the emancipation of the Lady of Shalott from Tennyson's influence is something that these books are if anything too ready to take for granted.

The Brown catalogue often treats images of the Lady as if she has an pedigree no different in kind from Arachne's or Guinevere's, and has as well a settled iconographic tradition sanctioning art-historical business as usual. Gribble likewise not only finds the Lady at large in the work of novelists from Charlotte Bronte to Henry James, but even goes on at one point (49-52) about Jane Austen, who died in 1817 fifteen years before Tennyson's poem appeared. This anachronism implies that Gribble is not studying a modern myth in our sense of the term, but is at most comparing versions of an archetype (imprisoned damsel, mirror on the wall)--or at worst itemizing the inscriptions of patriarchy on heroines posed in domestic interiors. Here, and also in several of the essays on the exhibition at Brown, an exclusive interest in later reworkings forfeits those opportunities for critique that arise when the versions of a modern myth confront their original. Where Dickens' Dorrit and Eliot's Dorothea can subject Tennyson's Lady to "critique," but not vice versa, it seems the ironic astringencies of early Victorian Romanticism are being evaded for the sake of upbeat discoveries that with the proper attitude a beleaguered heroine can learn to regard "herself and the world she reflects more directly and openly" (105). Not in Tennyson she can't. The more clearly Gribble's reader recollects the austerity of the original poem, the more ruthlessly the myth her book flourishes exacts its revenge.

The most interesting survivals of the Lady of Shalott turn out to occur in visual images rather than novels, and at the level of aesthetic form rather than represented content. This seems an appropriate development for a modern myth first given to the world in verse, and not in prose of such questionable shape as Defoe's and Shelley's. It may be that the relative elaborateness of poetry deters the cultural seizure of what can seem perfectly wrought already: formal polish in an initiating fiction may actually stunt mythic growth. At all events Tennyson's Lady, being herself a visual artist split by incompatible allegiances to art and to reality, enjoyed her most vivid Victorian afterlife in nonliterary media. This may be why Gribble's most memorable comparatist insight involves a painting (Hunt's "Awakened Conscience"), and why the most provocative essays from Ladies of Shalott prove to be those centering on painterly techniques that parallel Tennyson's in verse. Analyzing the famous images Holman Hunt made of the Lady, Marc Rolnik and Timothy Rodgers draw attention to formal features in the division and texture of the picture plane. These, while no doubt derived as the authors say from Dutch or Pre-Raphaelite masters, may also owe a thing or two to Tennyson's asymmetrical proportioning of the stanza and his neutrally flat management of images.

"My dear Hunt," the poet grumbled, "I never said that the young woman's hair was flying all over the shop." To which the painter replied, with mythmaker's license: "No, but you never said it wasn't" (Gribble 2). Extrapolation and its lucrative henchman sequelization have been the more ordinary methods of survival among modern myths: witness Shylock's Revenge , Son of Frankenstein , the naked opportunism of the next James Bond movie. It is worth remarking that the Victorian visual appropriation of the Lady of Shalott proceeded by interpolation instead: a weaving of detail into the spaces left by the original text.[12] Tennyson's successors filled out his poem by means of an embroidery that not only was quite Lady-like but in some respects was foreordained by the poem's staging of perception and reception as problems in optics. The precision with which its best illustrators seized on the crises of seeing that are represented within "The Lady of Shalott" suggests that these are the places where its mythic soul lay. Hunt bred his myth out of the artistic producer's dilemma (the Lady caught between mirror and window), D. G. Rossetti his out of the equal and opposite dilemma of the artistic consumer (Lancelot conning the Lady's corpse as aesthetic object). Both artists found, between the lines as it were, mythic gaps within the original text where Tennyson had figured, for those with eyes to see it, the price of fame under the conditions of an art given over to the market--which is to say, the conditions of modern myth itself.

5

What is true of the mythlet Lady of Shalott seems no less true of her robuster Victorian peers. Superstars like Ebenezer Scrooge, Alice in Wonderland, and Peter Pan (stars, too, of the second magnitude like the Pied Piper, Heathcliff, and Mr. Kurtz) were first introduced to the world in narratives that incorporated overtures that appear, in retrospect at least, to foretell their imminent mythification. Maybe a built-in logic of this prophetic sort animates modern myths right across the board. But there is special reason to seek such a logic in myths whose ur-texts appeared after 1800. For, from that time forward, the dissemination of enlightened ideas about culture and history made it an increasingly important part of a modern education to understand the role played in culture by the evolutionary transmission of legendary ballads and tales--and, for that matter, the classics and indeed the very scriptures. Some grasp of the life and death cycle of a society's traditions became indispensable equipment for living in an era that knew itself to be an era, and whose public discourse about culture was successively dominated by Carlyle's expostulations over the fortunes of the "Mythus," Max Muller's lectures on solar mythology, and the comparatist anthropology of Tylor, Frazer, and others. Such being the knowledge that made the Victorians modern, the most culturally ambitious popular authors capitalized on it by putting a steady flow of candidate myths up for collective adoption. And they made sure to equip these candidates with suggestions, if not outright instructions, for their own reproduction.

Paul Davis makes this point right away in The Lives and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge : "Rather than beginning as an oral story that was later written down, the Carol was written to be retold" (3). More is meant here by "retold" than the familiar scenario of hearthside reading, or the author's public performances, or even the nearly instantaneous machinery of appropriation whereby Dickens' text was fully pirated within three weeks of publication and, within three more, translated to several metropolitan and provincial stages. The spectacular explosion of A Christmas Carol into its fissioning versions forms the larger subject of Davis' book, which arranges these versions into the sort of sequential history we have been considering already. From the standpoint of the modern mythography analyst, though, the most intriguing moments of The Lives and Times are

those that give insight into features of the original text which facilitated so extraordinary a cultural destiny, by anticipating it as a matter of narrative form.

Davis distinguishes between "the Carol " (Dickens' 1843 fictional text) and "the Carol" (the myth it has effectively become)--a useful distinction, if one that can be carried too far. "The Carol is the sum of all its versions, of all its revisions, parodies, and piracies"; Davis accordingly "recognizes all the versions of the Carol as manifestations of an ongoing myth in the consciousness of the industrial era" (5). All the versions? Not today, thanks. When modern mythographers take to this hyperbolically totalizing way of explaining their work, start sniffing for incense, but don't take them at their word.[13] The principle of universal inclusion would if acted on make hit-and-myth books intolerably boring. In fact, we may be grateful that Davis like others has seen the practical wisdom of arguing by historical synecdoche. Neither the lavish dispersal of fourscore illustrations across his book, nor a discursive breeziness that is as apt to ruffle as to soothe, seriously distracts attention from a firm argument that moves in roughly twenty-year increments through phases in the Carol's development.

Davis links his several phases to definitive period crises. These are in every case cliches of social and intellectual history, but they serve as a background to Davis' real business, which is to find out what succeeding festive generations, and the customized Carol they made for themselves, can tell us about each other. The undercurrent theme of the Carol within Dickens' lifetime was ambivalence over urbanization, while in the 1860s and 1870s it turned to the struggle of faith with doubt. During the decades before the Great War the tale of Scrooge first became a children's classic; thereafter transatlantic users reclaimed it as an economic parable with which to diagnose the Depression: in Britain this meant indulging fantasies of plenty, in America prescribing a nostrum that mingled charity with gumption. The heady 1960s left social determinants behind for the sake of psychedelitherapeutic approaches to Scrooge's hangups, but by the mean 1980s the old man was back out on the streets confronting ills that were all too Dickensian. Davis conducts this sweeping panorama in a lively and amiable fashion, chapter by chapter, with side trips into such unexpected places as Browning's Christmas-Eve , a Doonesbury strip spoofing George Will, and Capra's It's a Wonderful Life , of which he offers a particularly full and discerning interpretation.

Yet the chapters taken together resemble a pageant more than a connected narrative, and in this respect the book is cumulatively disappointing. The transitional writing is nugatory, and by and large each chapter works the same tactic: label the epoch in question with an uncontroversial theme culled from received historical ideas, match it with elements from leading representations of the Carol, and admire the fit. Negative evidence that might disconfirm or complicate received ideas, and evidentiary lacunae indicating dormancy or atrophy in aspects of the myth, get next to no play. Confronting an admittedly overwhelming wealth of material, Davis has avoided information overload by electing to see just one thing at a time, one aspect of A Christmas Carol per chapter. This is an understandable strategy, but as a modern mythographer Davis has to pay for it twice.

It costs him, first, much of the historical complexity that a different approach might find in that "consciousness of the industrial era" he intends to illuminate. The Lives and Times become just that: plural, protean, capricious, without more than a hint of how, say, religious motives for charity might tangle with socioeconomic motives, or how either one might incite or engross the other through reciprocal causation and effect. A kind of festive Foucauldianism, Davis' division of his subject into brief epistemes not only suspends the question of change; it suffers a second loss by forestalling any full or consistent engagement with Dickens. It is seldom clear which themes of the Carol were present in the original Carol , or what happens when the proportional emphases

among Dickens' themes are altered, or even how one might go about deciding such questions. The radical peculiarity of modern myths, after all, is that with them we retain the ur-text. Here that ur-text remains present as A Christmas Carol Past: a standard to measure posterity by; or, conversely, a treasure to be inventoried afresh through a look at what has come of it. The march Davis leads across a century and a half leaves one little wiser about this entire aspect of the subject.

What Davis does show, to his credit, is in how apparently concerted a way Dickens' Carol , if it did not predict in detail the Carol which the years have made of it, nevertheless took pains to ensure that a Carol of some sort there would be. Like many a modern myth, and not by accident, A Christmas Carol is a ghost story, with a troop of spirits prominently including the narrator "standing in the spirit at your elbow," in the crepuscular, desacralized yet still ritual time which made Victorian Christmas cheer so creepy (63-64). The conspicuous invitation to revenance and reenactment thus issued by the narrative frame gets further exercise, Davis observes, in Scrooge's heavily ritualized dream sequences, and also in the typological relations that obtain between the Cratchit family and the Holy Family, between Scrooge and Tiny Tim as types of the Christ child (78-79). In consequence of these multiple structural reinforcements, "The therapeutic effect of the story does not derive from the dream itself but from its telling" (206). Because what the Carol most deeply desires is "to transcend the contradiction of innocence and experience"--the contradiction, we might say, between living a myth and knowing it--the all-reconciling Carol becomes "the means to achieve simultaneously a fresh experience and a retelling" (209). These are fine remarks on Dickens, and splendidly germane to the general operation of those manufactured legends which the Victorians embraced as classics. Modern myth in its 19th-century incarnations, like its first avatar the Ancient Mariner, convokes and instructs by its very form an audience who will thrill to have heard it already, once upon a time.[14]

That an ambitious modern text should formulate the recipe for its own reception is the most durably interesting proposition behind the title Jacqueline Rose gave her landmark study ten years ago: The Case of Peter Pan . The way Rose reads the outward wrappings and trappings of Barrie's premeditated classic--its strange "case" or cultural integument--remains a triumph of historically situated media analysis that is well worth returning to in the 1990s, and the Pennysylvania press is to be congratulated on its capture and paperback reissue. The years have been less kind, though, to another sense for Rose's "case": the sense which casts the cultural-studies exponent as social case worker. With a hairtrigger feel for scandal, and little patience with the creative imagination, Rose "exposes," "dismantles," and "demystifies" as nothing less than child abuse the projection of adult fears and fantasies onto a literature ostensibly for children; and the stridently whistle-blowing rhetoric of the book now seems the most dated thing about it.[15] Quizzing what her subtitle denounces as The Impossibility of Children's Fiction , Rose scorns any adult's pretensions to speak "for children" (9). Yet her case study, in its advocacy aspect, surely does aspire to speak for the child; and it does so to best effect, curiously, when Rose approaches her material as the child, looking at the Peter Pan phenomenon's cloudy textuality and posing some devastatingly naive questions about what is, and is not, there for all to see.

"The question of how things are done, as well as for whom, and by whom, they are produced, the question which the child first asks when confronted with the family drama" (34): here is what Rose most wants to know about the family romance or drama of culture, and her interrogations yield a three-ply result. As a matter of historical fact, she shows how complicit Barrie's work was from the beginning with Edwardian financial and educational institutions already in the ascendant at the fin de siecle. Peter Pan caught, then famously accelerated, late-Victorian movements that put childhood up for sale as both a target and a spur to consumer desires. En revanche, this nearly instant myth played a signal role in ongoing classist debates about paideia, democracy, and

the centrality of children's stories to the educational process.[16] The Peter Pan myth discharged these institutional functions, Rose shows at a second level, by means of a campaign that was bent on disclaiming them--a campaign sanctioned by Barrie's several scripts and books, but effectively conducted in his name by a squadron of publicists and experts sworn to uphold the white magic of the myth's integrity and innocence. What made this defense utterly fantastic was the actual disarray of the texts it was based on, for Peter Pan rapidly accumulated a primary bibliography so chaotic that as a "literary object" it can hardly be said to exist at all (143). As with many a myth before it (traditional or modern), the faux integrity that Peter Pan 's adorers claimed for it was a consensually enforced construct. Coming along very late in the game, Barrie possessed the special distinction--we might call it genius, though Rose would not--of reducing the mythmaking process to its essentials. He saw how to jump-start the social enginery of appropriative remembering, by unfixing Peter Pan textually from the beginning. Planting Babel, he sowed textual indeterminacy at, and as, the very origin of myth.

While Rose provides an abidingly valuable account of this complex bibliography, the one text on which she spends most time is not Barrie's 1904 play (withheld from print until 1928) but the long-delayed, quickly-overshadowed narrative that he published in 1911 as Peter and Wendy . This children's novel is a tale for kids, yes, but one whose ironic manner is pitched so consistently to the adult reader over their shoulders that its habitual wink gets hard to tell from a tic. At her third and inmost stage of inquiry into "how things are done," Rose shows how Barrie broke all the rules, flouted the orthodoxy that was even then arraying itself about the Peter Pan myth, and in the incorrigibly mixed address of his narrative trampled down the cordon sanitaire demarcating juvenile from adult spheres. "A travesty" (83); "an attack, or at least an affront" (86): such descriptions of Peter and Wendy are certainly accurate, yet all Rose does with them is pillory the author as a bungler or bully. It never occurs to her to credit Barrie with an ironic take on the conditions under which created myths get on in the modern world. Why not read the shocks of the text as the shock tactics of an artist ambivalent about the idealization of children which was going on all around him, and was hailing him as its prophet into the bargain? What if Barrie was already aware, in his own time and place, of precisely what Rose calls the "impossibility" of children's fiction?

With the benefit of a decade of Bakhtinian discourse analytics, or indeed of the better works reviewed here (like Green's chapter on Peter Pan), more might now be done with the disjunctions of perspective that Rose has discerned in Barrie's narrative and dramaturgy. Domesticity versus adventure, childhood versus adulthood: these are the major dichotomies with which the Peter Pan myth has to do. They sustain the thematics of the Nursery/Neverland plot frame and inhabit the doublings and forkings among major characters. And it is across the dialectical irresolution of these forces, their "impossibility," that the myth's modern ironies must keep winking, if the show is to go on. A myth of any provenance survives thanks to the conflicts which it contains without solving--and which, if solved, would cease to call for its services. But mythic modes of conflict containment vary historically. If 19th-century myths from Frankenstein to Dracula absorbed and expressed their energizing conflicts within the mechanics of narrative transmission, and 20th-century myths put their tensions into forms of irony, then the case of Peter Pan is admirably transitional. Its child and adult perspectives make mouths at each other incessantly; it ironizes home with empire, and vice versa, at a pace worthy Conrad, Kipling, and Wells. At the same time, though, there is a boundary drawn around all this 20th-century mischief by the indubitable Victorian privilege that Peter Pan gives to the telling and hearing of stories per se.

"Barrie had the power which is much greater than that of story-telling of compelling successive generations to invent his story afresh, to tell it to themselves and in their own terms" (110). This quotation comes from Rose's book, but Rose is herself quoting a TLS leading article fifty years

old, published on the occasion of Barrie's death in 1937. If a contemporary journalist could theorize the cultural power of myth so confidently, then Barrie--like Dickens and Tennyson, if not Mary Shelley--had no choice but to honor that power by giving it pride of place within his fiction. Rose is finally right to declare that "the only meaning of Peter Pan is the eternal sameness with which it (or he) recurs" (x), and also to surmise that it is the work of such repetition "above all to ward off something with which it is impossible to deal" (38). Just so: the repetition that makes myth is society's stutter, an impediment in the langue that is culture. But what was that forfended "something," that impediment at the threshold of our century? For Rose it remains (in 1992 as in 1984) an anxiety of adulteration, an unspeakable cultural misgiving lest every grownup imagination should turn out to be just a child's mind whose molestation we agree to overlook. Our survey here of modern mythography, however, proposes that the repetition-compelling impediment may be an anxiety of a different order: an anxiety of anthropology, a metacultural dread. What if every myth we can recall should turn out to be just a fiction whose molestation we agree to overlook? That is the malaise to which the grim bogey of the modern gives shape, as we connive at the aggrandizement of yesterday's fictions into tomorrow's myths. And the other figure, the grey blur loitering a little further off, the one who won't meet our gaze? That's the bogey of the postmodern, biding its time until the malaise of metaculture ceases to hurt and nobody thinks too much about myths any more.

Notes

[1] John Callahan, Do What He Says! He's Crazy! (New York: Morrow, 1992), p 82.

[2] Attempts at artificial insemination of a myth are not unknown. See, e. g., Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe: A Centennial Celebration , (New York: Knopf, 1988), for which editor Byron Preiss solicited from a range of writers new detective stories starring a gumshoe who, despite a degree of celebrity and even the help of Humphrey Bogart, cannot I think be said to have made the break into myth. (Bennett and Woollacott 14 compare Marlowe with James Bond on this score.)

[3] The interpreters of myth have frequent recourse to the sublime rhetorics of infinity and obscurity. For Denis de Rougemont myth "sums up an infinite number of more or less analogous situations" (Gribble 3). Rose calls it the "bearer and veil for a hidden history" (xvii), Green "a coded message from the culture," often diplomatically obscured (Dreams of Adventure [cited below] 55).

[4] The privilege of last word on Shakespeare is also reserved by the Vaughans and by Martin Scofield, The Ghosts of Hamlet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). Works in our mode on Shakespeare's greatest contemporary, Cervantes, follow much the same pattern: see Anthony Close, The Romantic Approach to "Don Quixote" (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); R. M. Flores, Sancho Panza Through Three Hundred Seventy-five Years (Newark, Delaware: Hispanic Monographs, 1982); Eric J. Ziolkowski, The Sanctification of Don Quixote (University Park:

Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991). The fantasy dimension that lurks within this closed hermeneutic system emerges in Erica Jong's 1987 novel Serenissima , where the heroine becomes Shakespeare's lover and inspires The Merchant of Venice .

[5] Can this possibly be a fate reserved for studies devoted to servant figures? It dooms Flores' book on Sancho Panza as well as the Vaughans'; maybe Leporello is part of the problem with J. W. Smeed's desultory Don Juan: Variations on a Theme (London and New York: Routledge, 1990). Prospective students of Figaro and Jeeves take note.

[6] Modern myths make it part of their regular business to put traditional myths in their place. Not only do Don Quixote and A Christmas Carol implicitly stand in for the Gospel (Davis, Ziolkowski); there often takes place a literal framing of traditional myth. Witness the subtitle of Shelley's novel (The Modern Prometheus); or the way Holman Hunt surrounds his Lady of Shalott with iconic miniaturizations from Christian scripture and allegory. The fate of modern myths, of course, includes subjection to exactly the same treatment by later fictions: young Ebenezer Scrooge devours Robinson Crusoe in Christmas Past, Peter Pan is read aloud during an episode from Spielberg's E. T. . Perhaps ambivalence about the modern displacement of oral traditions is responsible for a related urge to identify the myth with the author. Cervantes was Don Quixote; George du Maurier suffered the fate of his own Trilby at the hands of that insatiable Svengali the public; Crusoe merged with Defoe, Fleming with Bond. Such widespread fancies may bespeak a residual oral fixation within the modern mind, a compensatory need to exalt the storyteller as the spirit-medium through whom myth came and dwelt among us.

[7] Thus Shakespeare's Caliban 171. In a study contemporaneous with the Vaughans', however, Elaine Showalter argues for a renewed Miranda tradition in modern women's writing: see Sister's Choice (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

[8] See Scofield, The Ghosts of Hamlet ; Paul A. Cantor, Hamlet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[9] Green's related work includes Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire (New York: Basic Books, 1979); The Great American Adventure (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984); Seven Types of Adventure Tale (College Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991); The Adventurous Male (College Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993). It is a sign of Green's comparative isolation from other cultural-studies work that his Crusoe book nowhere cites Patrick Brantlinger's report from the field in Crusoe's Footprints (New York: Routledge, 1990).

[10] The emancipation of a myth through variant and even pirated versions of its founding text--witness Quixote, Crusoe, Scrooge, Peter Pan--constitutes a fascinating subtopic, the proper pursuit of which would lead across a spectrum of issues ranging from type fonts to copyrights. If we let ourselves enter here the immense Sherlock Holmes hoard, we should never get back again; but the proprietary interest which Conan Doyle's estate holds to this day in Sherlock Holmes is a salutary reminder that a modern myth can be simultaneously a household name and an assignable heirloom. For an exemplary look at technical and bibliographical aspects of modern mythmaking--at how microvariant casualties of the printshop must inevitably accompany, and in their way affect, a myth's macrocultural explosion--see Donald A. Redmond, Sherlock Holmes Among the

Pirates (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1990). The symbiosis of mythic dissemination with human error finds a perfect emblem in Sidney Harold Meteyard's handsome Tennysonian gouache, which blazons in the best period calligraphy the immortal culinary misspelling "The Lady of Shallot" (Ladies 10).

[11] Donald F. Glut, The Frankenstein Catalogue (Jefferson, N. C., and London: McFarland, 1984), described and indexed 2666 entries, and that was a decade ago.

[12] One outstanding example of an interpolation's complete merger with a developing myth is the idyllic waterside scene involving Frankenstein's Creature, a little girl, and some flowers. This scene is nowhere in Mary Shelley but has now become a fixture, thanks to Boris Karloff; ditto the gadgetry in Dr. Frankenstein's lab and the bolt through the neck. Such additions often prove susceptible of analysis along structuralist lines as recombinations of materials already there in the original--one way modern myths, like other forms of folklore, contrive to govern their own replication.

[13] See also Bennett and Woollacott's profession of allegiance to "the total range of cultural and ideological traffic" (259); even Baldick, while he does not pursue this utopian methodology, commits himself to it in theory.

[14] On the textual logic of self-fulfillment in the publication and reception histories of Coleridge's poem, see Jerome J. McGann, "The Meaning of the Ancient Mariner," in Spirits of Fire , ed. G. A. Rosso and Daniel P. Watkins (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990), pp. 208-39. While the invented myth and the authored scripture exhibit a good deal of functional overlap within modern culture, there are also significant differences between them as regards access and stability. Entrusted to the keeping of initiates, the secular "sacred book" is harder to get at than the myth; elaborate protocols, likewise, make it harder to change. And "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," as Harold Bloom has remarked, is a poem remarkably barren of poetic successors other than Wilde's "Ballad of Reading Gaol."

[15] Rose may by now have seen as much. Her new preface of 1992 ("The Return of Peter Pan"), while it reviews supervening scholarship and new productions in theatre and film, seems most attentive to current events with more front-page potential: the fortunes of the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children (Barrie's legatee for royalties until 1987), and the great leap in public knowledge concerning children's sexual abuse. In keeping with the increasingly direct engagement of recent cultural studies with contemporary politics, Rose's rapprochement between Barries Britain and Thatcher's in one sense affirms the pertinence of her 1984 analysis. In another sense, of course, the mere mention of such hot topics has a way of putting on ice the abstractly ideological concerns that simmer and hiss through the unrevised chapters themselves.

[16] Not only does the theme of education, as a plot matter, preoccupy modern myths from Caliban to Peter Pan; but the educational function of modern myths is partly responsible for the juvenile reduction they have all undergone at some point in the last hundred years. In reopening the question of how myth relates to education--which is what "culture" primarily meant in the 19th century--Rose performs an essential service. Her scholarship on 19th-century education, however, is partial; a more flexible and historically trustworthy account is Juliet Dusinberre's in

Alice to the Lighthouse: Children's Books and Radical Experiments in Art (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987).