

## Mythical Elements in A.D.Hope's "A Song for St. Cecilia's Day" and "Prometheus Unbound"- A Reading

**G. Dhali**

*Asstt. Prof., Deptt. of English, Women's Christian College, Nagercoil*

**Abstract :** *Alec Derwent Hope, an Australian poet and critic is a contemporary of Judith Wright. His poems are enriched with mythical elements. To him, the use of myth in poems no way subdues the theme or the essence of the poem. Myth plays a major role in literature. In the poem "A Song for St. Cecilia's Day" Hope shows the wrong usage of music. Music is meant for pleasure and enjoyment, but hunters in this poem use it as a weapon to hunt the 'Kastura' deer, which is becoming extinct. The hunters go to the deep jungle, where Assam and Tibet meet; to hunt the Kastura deer for their musk pods.*

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

**G. Dhali,**

*Mythical Elements in A.D.Hope's "A Song for St. Cecilia's Day" and "Prometheus Unbound"- A Reading,*

Notions 2018, Vol. IX, No.1,  
pp. 23-26, Article No. 4  
Received on 04/03/2018  
Approved on 27/03/2018

Online available at :

[http://anubooks.com/  
?page\\_id=34](http://anubooks.com/?page_id=34)

The uprising passion for listening stories has catalysed the renarration of myth and its stories. Adopting myth in stories and poems has become unavoidable. Several theories prevail regarding the origin, structure and use of myth. The writings based on myth are often criticized because the writers opt readymade materials and nothing is new in it. But still, myths are used by writers least bothering about criticism. Bronislaw Malinowski proclaims: "The myth in a primitive society, that is in its original form, is not a mere tale told by a reality lived ... the assertion of an original, greater, more important..."(qtd.in Cotterell 2).

Alec Derwent Hope, an Australian poet and critic is a contemporary of Judith Wright. His poems are enriched with mythical elements. To him, the use of myth in poems no way subdues the theme or the essence of the poem. Myth plays a major role in literature. Mythical elements in Hope's poems are commented by Graham as: "... to him myth, serves as a pattern of meaning for himself and fellowmen. Some of his best poems are those in which he has utilized the mythic core to the best advantage of revitalizing old stories to bring their significance up to date,"(135). This paper tries to explore the mythical elements in two poems of A.D.Hope's "A Song For St. Cecilia's Day" and "Prometheus Unbound".

St.Cecilia's Day was celebrated on 22<sup>nd</sup> November by the seventh century English Poets. St.Cecilia is a Roman martyr of the second or third century. She is considered as the inventor of organ and the patroness of music. It was believed that an angel was drawn to earth from heaven by her music. Dryden has composed a poem in praise of St.Cecilia in "Alexander's Feast".

In the poem "A Song for St. Cecilia's Day" Hope shows the wrong usage of music. Music is meant for pleasure and enjoyment, but hunters in this poem use it as a weapon to hunt the 'Kastura' deer, which is becoming extinct. The hunters go to the deep jungle, where Assam and Tibet meet; to hunt the Kastura deer for their musk pods.

In the jungle where Assam meets Tibet  
The small Kastura, most archaic of deer,  
Were driven in herds to cram the hunters' net  
And slaughtered for the musk pods which they bear.(*Selected* 101 )

In the deep and thick forest few tiny creatures survive each year. The hunters employ different methods to hunt them. "Fewer and fewer survive each year... the search/ Employs new means, more exquisite and refined!" (*Selected* 101 ). Three hunters with their bow and a slender flute choose a tree and climb it and a piper among the hunters sits against the root. They wait patiently till there is no trace of

man. The piper starts to play the music that fills the forest.

And there they wait until all trace of man  
And rumour of his passage dies away,  
.....  
The glade below, their comrade starts to play.  
Through those vast listening woods a tremulous skein  
Of melody wavers, delicate and shrill: (*Selected* 78)

Suddenly it rains; the music is modulated by the rain but it is heard in the forest continuously. The hunters feel sad. After a long wait, in the noon they find a trace of deer and feel happy. The young musk deer with pricked ears is moved by the music and the deer ascends the trap step by step and becomes a victim and falls in the snare till the poisoned shafts bite sharp. In the mean time, the music reaches its peak. Later, when the forest seems to be empty and at dusk, the hunters climb down the trees and count their prey. They remove the little musk glands and allow the carcasses to rot. Suddenly the piper realizes his sin of misusing music, he prays and submits his song to divine Cecilia.

Divine Cecilia, there is no more to say!  
Of all who praised the power of music, few  
Knew of these things. In honour of your day  
Accept this song I too have made for you. (*Selected* 102)

In this poem, A.D.Hope glorifies music and shows how music soothes animals too.

Prometheus is a Titan in Greek mythology who disliked to live in Mt. Olympus, and lived with humans. He finds people suffer because of the ignorance of fire, so he pleads Zeus to gift humans with fire. But Zeus refuses. Finding a piece of wood at Mt. Olympus, Prometheus takes a spark from the lightning of Zeus and gives it to humans. Zeus finds people warming themselves in winter and understands the act of Prometheus and puts him in chain. Later he was rescued by Hercules.

“Prometheus Unbound” is another poem in which A.D.Hope has adopted the myth of Prometheus, who was according to mythology punished by Zeus for stealing fire from heaven for the sake of humanity.

Cotterell narrates Prometheus as:

The Greek fire god and friend of man-kind; the son of the Titan

Lapetus and Clymene, a nymph, and brother of Atlas, Menoetius and Epimetheus... Prometheus dared to steal a flame, either from the workshop of Hephaistos or from the hearth of the gods on Mount Olympus, and Zeus retaliated by promising the creation of evil.(180)

According to the myth, Prometheus was fettered and was brought before God. But in the poem, interestingly Prometheus is not set free by Hercules as in the myth, but by his strongly founded hope he stands casual. Hermes, son of Zeus and Maria, messenger of Gods strikes off the chain of Prometheus and asks whether he had repented of his sin of stealing or Zeus has ceased from reigning. "As Hermes, swooping down, struck off the chain/ And raised him, smiling, in that dazzling light,"(Enright 17).

From the judgement seat God replies that his wisdom must not be mocked; he must be punished severely and orders that he must be set free and his torment is to wander the world and collect all the ashes from sea to sea because he tried to save humanity from being destroyed in the hands of Zeus. "And let his torment be to wander wide/ The ashes of mankind from sea to sea,/ Judging that theft of fire from which they died"(Enright17).

. The thematic application of the myths make the readers participate and comprehend the presence of it in the existing world. Myths, place, characters and all facts of ancient myths can be transformed to the manner, place and time of the recent century. Indeed the re-narration of myth serves as an eye opener, to view the unknown world of the known characters.

#### References

- Cotterell, Arthur. *A Dictionary of World Mythology*. New York: Oxford,1990. **Print.**  
Enright D.J. ed. *The Oxford Book of Contemporary Verse 1945-1980*. 1980. **Britain: Oxford,1988. Print.**  
Graham, Suzanne. "Myth and the Poetry of A.D.Hope". *Australian Literary Studies*. **7.2(Oct 1975) 135. Print.**  
Hope A..D. *Selected Poems*. Britain: Carcanet, 1986. **Print.**