

## On Myth

I believe myth is a plot with an evident beginning, middle, and end. It is least understood by rational discourse, best by simple narration.

It attracts its narrators itself by its correspondence with their main points of experience.

In other words myth is an informing story of one's life the original nature of which one could no more invent than one could invent oneself.

The myth of Gilgamesh, for instance, tells of loss and defiant quest and final acceptance of mortality, and it urges its correspondents to go on a similar journey, one that will end in understanding.

It is a tale told and retold over time because of its power to realize experience.

The quality of such a myth living as it were apart from one's contemporary (and beyond its own original) time, is what gives it its strangeness, its elusiveness, its aura of transcendent wisdom. But, in truth, it is simply a plot residing in its own clear, self-contained time and pattern of inevitability,

Myth, some say, teaches us what we already know but failed to believe. Its connection with religion is in this matter of belief, in our practical acceptance of the truth about ourselves; but religion institutes truth by redirecting our memory into ritual devotion, obedience, and piety; myth ends its work with us in understanding of story whose conclusions it leaves to religion to draw.

Those in the liberating grips of myth delight in the infusion of a sense of irony about themselves and their presumption of wisdom. So much so that, like the old sage of the Gilgamesh story, Utnapishtim, they tap their heads in mockery at their own achievements.

Myth reveals to us our spring of inner madness that guides us to poetry and self-surrender.

-Herbert Mason