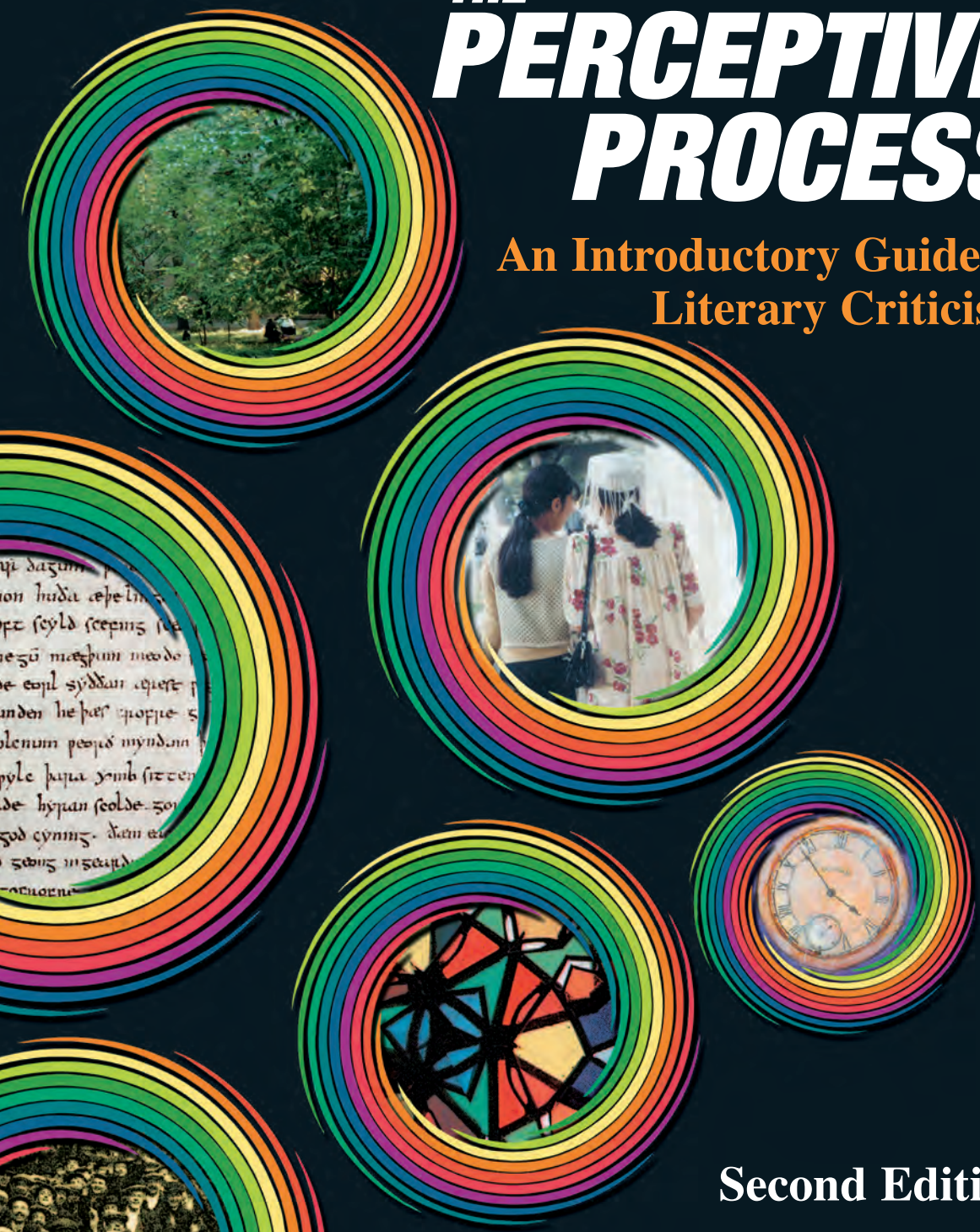
THE PERCEPTIVE PROCESS

An Introductory Guide to Literary Criticism



Second Edition

Kari Meyers
Gilda Pacheco

EDITORIAL UCR

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Chapter I

A Concise Introduction to Mythic Approaches to Literature

Of all the different critical perspectives, the mythic approaches play a fundamental role in the literary field; their very essence justifies the existence of literature itself. Being innate to literature, these approaches parallel the history of the human race since people have always looked for explanations and meanings for their existence and their position in the world. Their literary works show these concerns, and by exposing universal issues, the mythic approaches analyze the literary images that stand for these shared preoccupations. In addition, the human mythopeic faculty ensures that literature keeps nourishing itself from mythic potential and universal validity.

Myths can be defined as symbolic projections of human hopes, fears, and values. Myths transcend time and go from generation to generation as a manifestation of a feeling of togetherness. By adopting individual ways and shapes of expression, such as legends and folk tales typical of a particular group or a given region, myths are not only communal but also collective, for they are demonstrations of concerns and aspirations of a whole nation, and of the whole human race as well. Myth critics, then, study universal symbols that constitute the literary work and that make it perennial. Myth critics analyze the resonance of the universal human values inherent in the images that

provide the literary work with structure. Myth critics observe and interpret dreams and anxieties that have arisen from a collective psyche. In short, mythic approaches study, analyze, and emphasize the universal transcendence of a literary work perceived in the recurrent motifs and universal symbols known as "archetypes."

Similar themes are found in different mythologies. Sharing a common meaning, certain images can be traced in the myths of peoples from distant places and of different times. Examples of these images or archetypes are seen in literature, and they go from natural elements such as water (creation, purification), or the sun (consciousness, enlightenment), to colors (red: sacrifice; green: hope), to shapes (the circle: wholeness), to numbers (three: spiritual awareness; seven: perfect order) and to human figures such as the Good Mother (nourishment, protection), the Wise Old Man (the savior and redeemer), and the Trickster (the joker and fraud). Besides, since myths link literatures by means of archetypes, one finds out that the trickster could be Costa Rica's beloved "Tío Conejo" and that "La casita de las torrejas" was first visited by "Hansel and Grettel." One also finds out that the archetype of the Terrible Mother could be incarnated in the Costa Rican "Llorona" who, by the way, is not exclusively Costa Rican, and who could have other names in other parts of the world. Therefore, from the garden (innocence and total bliss) to the desert (sterility and spiritual aridity), from the color white (purity or terror) to the color black (darkness and chaos), from the Soul Mate (The Holy Mother) to the Terrible Mother (the *femme fatale)*, hopes and fears are exposed in literature by means of archetypes.

In addition, archetypes combine to form patterns, such as that of creation (a group of archetypal images explaining how humanity was brought into existence), that of immortality (a group of archetypes illustrating the concepts of "escape from time" and "cyclical time"), and the hero archetypes, such as the quest (when the hero/heroine overcomes obstacles to achieve a goal), initiation (when the hero/heroine matures by overcoming ordeals or facing difficult situations) and the scapegoat motif (when the hero/heroine dies to restore balance and equilibrium for his/her community). But the structures of these imagery patterns can

vary. The journey motif, for instance, can be not only physical but also spiritual; the initiation archetype can be either a painful process of discovery or a sudden act of revelation; the image of the hero/heroine can be transformed from the one who faces obstacles, showing his/her courage and willingness to sacrifice, to the one depicted by Joseph Campbell, the individual trapped in his/her own world, a materialistic milieu that denies any possibility of heroic dimension and involves the hero/heroine in a quest without meaning, where he/she faces his/her own sordid thoughts and torturous dilemmas.

In their development, the mythic approaches have had significant influences, one of which has been modern anthropology. The work of Scottish anthropologist Sir James Frazer proves to be a good example. Exploring the archetype of crucifixion and resurrection in ancient peoples and primitive tribes, Frazer demonstrates how human desires are reflected in ancient mythologies and how the scapegoat archetype is recurrent and central in the tragedies of Sophocles and Aeschylus as well as in the most remote and isolated tribes of the world. Seen as rites, magical powers or religious beliefs, "the killing of the King" and the ceremonies of sacrifice and purification of ancient peoples become universal in Frazer's work. They transcend geographical barriers, time, and cultures, and their vestiges and transformations are even seen in our own "civilized" world. Not only literary classics but also contemporary literary works embrace these themes and motifs.

Besides anthropology, other social sciences have proven to be influential in the development of myth criticism; such is the case of psychology, mainly the works of the well-known Swiss psychologist and psychiatrist Carl Jung. His main contributions are his theory of "racial memory" (the presence of a collective unconscious shared by the human race) and archetypes (psychic predispositions or instincts inherited by individuals), and his theory of "individuation" (a psychological process of self-recognition and development). According to Jung, the process of individuation rests upon three archetypal components: the shadow (the darker side of the unconscious), the persona (the social mask(s) an individual wears) and the anima (the contrasexual part of the psyche

revealed in dreams or in projections). In literature, characters facing problems of personality integration or immaturity are interpreted as results of failures of individuation, that is, when one psychic component is not accepted or recognized by the character.

Another significant area of mythic approaches is the analysis of the social mythology of a specific culture. The so-called "American Dream" constitutes one such "social mythology," used mainly for analysis of U.S. literature. Such a versatile and elusive term acquires different meanings in different fields and at different times in U.S. history. However, from a literary perspective, the American Dream is a group of three myths: a) the myth of Edenic possibilities (America is seen as a paradise, an uncorrupted and peaceful land that offers possibilities for improvement and happiness), b) the myth of the American Adam (the hero who lives in this perfect land, characterized by his courage, self-reliance and loyalty, Adam before the fall), and c) the myth of success (embracing the image of the self-made man that goes "from rags to riches"). Even though these three myths are undeniable elements in U.S. literature, their variations, transformations, and distortions demonstrate the paradox and tension of the American character. And so, by analyzing literature one sees how the perfect land becomes corrupted, the Adam falls, the success turns into pure greed, and all spiritual values are destroyed; in short, the dream turns into a nightmare.

Hence, nourished by ancient myths, folklore and legends, affinities with social sciences, collective necessities and the innate human search for explanations, mythic approaches constitute versatile tools for literary analysis. While the archetypes celebrate the universality of human manifestations, Carl Jung's theoretical concepts of racial memory and individuation explore the psyche from a mythic perspective. While modern anthropologists, like James Frazer, explore the links between primitive tribes and Greek mythologies, other critics, like Frederick Carpenter, go back to history to reevaluate the mythic conception of the American Dream in literature and help forge the identity of a nation. Within the connections between the particular and the universal lies the significance of the mythic scope. These

approaches not only show that every individual of every ethnicity, sex, culture, and social group is part of a universal whole, but also that the past, the primitive, the roots, the ancient are not obsolete but meaningful elements to clarify the present and to better visualize the future. To have a theoretical framework that exposes the validity of myth is primordial not only in literature but also in other fields. That explains why modern mythologists are interdisciplinary and how their works renew and strengthen mythic approaches.

A Synthesis of Mythic Approaches to Literature

Basic premise:

Universal human psychic realities and behaviors are manifested in literature by means of archetypes.

Key assumptions of mythic literary criticism:

- Myths offer communal explanations of human nature and life itself.
- People reveal their innate mythopeic faculty in their search for meaning and explanations.
- Myths are both collective and perennial.
- Mythic studies expose similarities among different cultures, peoples, and nations.

Basic questions for analyzing a text from a mythic approach:

1. What are the basic archetypal patterns depicted in the text?
2. How does the imagery contribute to the theme and universal content of the literary work?
3. How are the mythic journey and its stages developed in the text?
4. To what degree is Jungian collective unconscious represented in the literary work?
5. How is the role of the hero/heroine and his/her mythic transcendence seen in the text?
6. How are the concepts of time and life cycle and their mythic potential depicted within the work?
7. Following the mythic figures such as the *femme fatale*, the Soul Mate, and the Good Mother, how is the female image presented in the literary text?
8. Are the Jungian concepts of anima(us), shadow and persona recognizable in the textual characterization? If so, how?
9. Is the mythic transcendence of colors and numbers significant in the thematic content of the work? If so, how?

Mini-Glossary of Mythic Terminology for Literary Criticism

American Dream: in literature, a cluster of three myths: the myth of Edenic possibilities, the myth of the American Adam, the myth of success.

Anima(us): the contrasexual part of the psyche revealed in dreams or projections; life force, vital energy.

Apotheosis: the last stage of the quest which leads to the hero's exaltation to divine rank; a culminating state of fulfillment.

Archetypal patterns: groups or combinations of archetypes working as a whole to reveal the symbolic potential of a literary work.

Archetype: a universal symbol. For Jung, archetypes are psychic predispositions inherited by all individuals.

Collective unconscious: Jung's theory of racial memory that asserts the presence of a universal unconscious shared by the whole human race.

Epiphany: a sudden manifestation of essence or meaning, a perception of reality by sudden realization.

Femme fatale: a literary representation of a sensual, powerful female figure that lures and destroys men.

Good Mother: the female character that stands for nourishment and protection in the literary work.

Hero/Heroine: the extraordinary individual who faces obstacles, showing his/her courage and willingness to sacrifice; the ordinary individual as protagonist of his/her own life story.

Individuation: a psychological process of self-recognition, acceptance, and balance.

Initiation: the stage during which the hero/heroine matures by overcoming ordeals or facing difficult situations.

Myth: symbolic projection of human hopes, fears and values; depersonalized dreams.

Persona: the social mask(s) the individual wears, very different from his/her real self.

Quest: the mission, the process during which the hero/heroine overcomes obstacles to achieve a goal.

Scapegoat: the hero/heroine who dies to restore balance and equilibrium for his/her community.

Shadow: the dark part of the psyche, the undesirable, inferior and less pleasing elements of the psyche.

Trials: the ordeals that the hero/heroine must undergo on his/her journey.

Trickster: the character who plays the role of the joker or fraud in a literary work.

Mythic Mini-Analysis #1 (Poetry): "Ah Sun-Flower"

(by William Blake)

Ah Sun-flower! weary of time,
Who countest the steps of the Sun,
Seeking after that sweet golden clime
Where the traveller's journey is done;

Where the Youth pined away with desire,
And the pale Virgin shrouded in snow,
Arise from their graves and aspire,
Where my Sun-flower wishes to go.

(from *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*
(W. W. Norton, New York, 1962), 1314)

Introduction

According to Carl Jung, the great artist is an individual infused with "primordial vision," a special sensitivity to archetypes that s/he uses to communicate her/his experiences, fears, and hopes through art; William Blake and his poems exemplify such notions. A multifaceted artist, poet, painter, and engraver, Blake was also a visionary whose artistic works present the desires and worries of the human race. Blake's well-known, concise poem "Ah Sun-flower" is proof of his universal transcendence, mysticism and huge mythopeic capacity.

Mythic Points to Ponder

The archetypal motif of time: According to the speaker's viewpoint, the sun-flower is "weary of time" and dares to count "the steps of the Sun" in order to enjoy a "sweet golden clime." The flower illustrates, then, the pattern of mythical submersion into cyclical

time. The sun-flower wants to be immortal and looks for an escape from this world into eternity. As its very name suggests, the sunflower looks for the sun, but the radiant star withers the flower, a predictable destiny, for the flower is rooted on earth and so its chances to achieve this elevation are null. The flower's wish illustrates the human desire for eternity, and the flower's end stands for the brevity of life. The end of the natural cycle is reinforced by the snow image (6) and the image of the graves (7) which lead to the end of the flower and to the end of the poem itself.

The sun archetype: Seen as an archetypal image of energy, life and law, the sun rules and dictates the sun-flower's destiny. The flower cannot "aspire" to share with the sun "that sweet golden clime." The sun is divine, supreme, "golden," while the flower is common, fragile and limited. The sun-flower is on earth and can neither reach the sun's level nor share the sun's enlightenment.

Human and divine figures as mythic beings: This poem presents human and divine figures that have mythic transcendence. The first stanza, for example, introduces the image of "the traveller's journey." The traveller stands for any individual, and his/her journey would be life itself. Life is visualized as a voyage characterized by obstacles, and the traveller is a hero/heroine on the path of life who seeks, like the sun-flower, "a sweet golden clime." The second stanza presents two more figures: the Youth and the pale Virgin. This Youth (5) has been associated with Narcissus, a well-known character from Greek mythology, the extremely beautiful youth who rejects the nymph Echo's love and whom Artemis punishes by making him fall in love with himself. Narcissus kills himself because he is unable to bear his self-love, like the sun-flower is unable to bear the rays of the sun without withering, like human beings are unable to bear the passing years without getting old and dying. Besides, Narcissus' blood is transformed into a flower, the narcissus. Thus, the reference to the Youth can be connected to both death and life encompassed in a flower image. Finally, the pale Virgin (6) has been associated with Persephone, the goddess of springtime, Demeter's and Zeus' daughter, who has to descend to Hades every winter. This image reinforces the idea of death as well as the cyclical nature of Blake's poem and of myth.

Conclusions

Even though the speaker seems to accept the destiny of the sunflower which parallels the end of the traveller's journey, his/her desire to prolong life is still evident. The rebirth of the Youth and the pale Virgin and their wish to break the laws of nature, to transgress physical limitations, to join the Sun, are not only elements of content, but also manifestations of the universal human desire for immortality. In short, the agony and paradox of life and death and the desire to surpass one's humanity are depicted in Blake's work. By means of a fragile, beautiful flower, William Blake presents the idea of human limitations, of the brevity of human life accompanied by fears and desires.

Mythic Mini-Analysis #2 (Prose): "Doña Sebastiana"

(anonymous)

Once there was a poor man who earned his living cutting wood in the common land of the land grant and selling it in the village. When he sold his wood his family ate well, when he couldn't sell it his family went hungry. He lived that way for a long time, but one day he was tempted by hunger and he decided to swipe one of his wife's setting hens.

He waited until everyone was asleep and then stole into the chicken coop, took a chicken and killed it. Then he stealthily made his way into the mountains where he planned to indulge himself. He made a big fire and put the chicken on a spit to roast. He was flavoring the chicken with a few spices and enjoying the drippings when he heard someone approach his camp.

God help me! he thought. Even here I can't be left alone to enjoy myself! Well, whoever it is, I'm not going to invite them to eat!

"How do you do, my friend," said the stranger as he approached the camp. The stranger's noble stature made the woodcutter cautious.

"*Buenas noches,"* the woodcutter responded. "Who are you?"

"I am the Lord," the stranger answered. "Will you invite me to eat with you?"

The woodcutter looked at the small chicken and thought awhile. "No," he finally said, "I don't think I'll invite you to share my meal, and I'll tell you why. I think you neglect the poor. You give everything to the rich and so little to the poor. You don't treat us equally."

And so the woodcutter kept the chicken for himself, and the Lord went away saddened. The woodcutter was satisfied, but shortly he heard another person approaching.

"Good evening, my friend," said the woman as she drew near.

"*Buenas noches, señora,"* the woodcutter replied. "And who might you be?"

"I am the Virgin Mary," the woman answered. "Will you share your food with me?"

The woodcutter scratched his beard, looked again at the small chicken and finally said, "No, I am not going to share my food with you, and I'll tell you why. I think your Son neglects the poor. Since you are the mother of God, you should intercede for us so He would make us equal. Either we should all be rich, or we should all be poor. The way it is now, He makes some very rich and some very poor, and unfortunately I am one of the poor ones. For that reason I am not going to share my food with you."

So the Virgin Mary left, but it wasn't long before the woodcutter heard someone else approach. This time it was Doña Sebastiana, Death herself, who approached the woodcutter's fire.

"How goes it, my friend?" Doña Sebastiana asked.

"*Buenas noches,*" the woodcutter answered, trembling at the sight of the old hag in front of him. "Who are you?" he asked.

"I am Death," Doña Sebastiana answered as she slowly got down from her cart. "Will you share your meal with me?"

"I never realized Death was so thin!" the woodcutter said as he looked at the skeleton in front of him. "Of course you are welcome to share my food, and I'll tell you why. You do things very well. You don't play favorites with the wealthy because of their money, not the beautiful because of their beauty, nor do you play favorites with the ugly or the old or the young. No, you treat us all equally. Sit down and share my meal."

After they had finished eating the roasted chicken Doña Sebastiana was very pleased, so she told the woodcutter to ask for any favor he wished and it would be granted.

"*Señora,*" the woodcutter said in his most humble voice, "I can't ask for a favor. If you wish to grant me one, then grant me what you will."

"Very well," Death answered, "I am going to grant you the power to be a healer, a *curandero*. You shall be able to cure all kinds of sickness. However, I leave you with one commandment: When you are asked to cure a sick person and you go to that patient's bed and see me standing at the head of the bed, don't cure that person regardless of what his relatives will pay or promise you. I warn you, if I am there, don't cure that person! That person has no remedy but to die. He has been called by God."

"But if you see me at the patient's feet, then go ahead and cure him. Use water or earth or curing powders, and the patient will get well. But remember, if you see me at the head of the bed, don't dare to attempt a cure, no matter what you are promised!"

So the curandero practiced his craft for many years and he cured many people and became famous for his powers. But one day the richest man in the region became ill and offered the curandero a fortune for a cure, and so the healer broke the commandment of Doña Sebastiana.

When the curandero arrived at the rich man's home he saw Doña Sebastiana seated at the head of the bed where the sick man lay. The curandero immediately grabbed her and wrestled her back and forth until she was so dizzy that he was able to move her to the foot of the bed. In that way Death was overpowered, and the curandero then cured the rich man.

But when the curandero was returning home Death met him on the road and reminded him that he had broken the one commandment he had promised not to break when she had given him the power to cure sickness.

"I warned you never to cure a sick person if I was at the head of his bed," Doña Sebastiana said angrily. "Now you must come with me."

She took the curandero to a dark room and showed him two candles. One candle had burned low and was flickering as if ready to go out, the other was a tall candle burning brightly.

"You have made a grave mistake," Death told the curandero. "Once you were like the tall candle and the sick man was like the short candle. But now you are the small candle and the man you cured is the tall one."

At that moment the flame of the short candle went out, and the curandero's soul was added to Doña Sebastiana's cart as it slowly made its way into eternity.

(from *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, Vol. I (Heath, Lexington, MA, 1990), 1230-31)

Introduction

Seen as symbolic projections of human hopes, fears, and values, myths are, by definition, universal. However, these shared human concerns are diversely reflected in the shape of the different legends and folk tales of a determined region, social group, or nation. In short, oral narratives develop into legends that, although nourished by universal hopes and fears, vary according to the distinctive geographic, cultural or social traits of the group that generates them. "La comadre Sebastiana/Doña Sebastiana," for example, is a Hispanic legend that explores the religious and social values of that group by means of archetypal images, archetypal figures and binary oppositions.

Mythic Points to Ponder

Archetypal images: The legend presents archetypes that help structure the line of action of the tale. At the beginning, the woodcutter goes to "the mountain" to enjoy the chicken he stole from his wife. The mountain is a variation of the dark forest archetypal image which is associated with self-indulgence, desire, a lack of social restraints. So, in the wilderness, driven by selfish desire and "tempted by hunger," the woodcutter tries to enjoy his booty, but he is interrupted by three visitors. "Number three" is a common archetypal number that stands for equilibrium and unity. And it is the "third" visitor, Doña Sebastiana, who personifies Death and represents balance and equality in the narrative. At the end of the story, Doña Sebastiana intercepts the woodcutter on the "road" (life) to take him to a "dark room" (danger, gloom) and to show him a short candle whose "flame" (light/life) went out. Following the archetypes, the woodcutter's death seems inevitable.

Archetypal figures: The archetypal figures are unconventional and exhibit a clear class-conscious critique of Christian values and social problems. For example, the Virgin Mary is not invited to share the woodcutter's chicken, for she does not fulfill the role of the archetypal Good Mother that she is supposed to be. Here, the mother of God does not protect the poor as well as the rich. She does not nourish all her children. On the other hand, Doña Sebastiana, as a personification of Death, normally represents the

Terrible Mother. However, in this legend she succeeds in keeping a balance, in establishing equality since she "do[es] not play favorites." The archetype of the Wise Old Man cannot be seen in the image of the Lord, the first visitor, for he is not a savior or a redeemer; he neither saves the poor nor sees that his children are suffering. In fact, it is the woodcutter, after he receives the power conferred upon him by Doña Sebastiana, who plays this role for a while, for he is transformed into a guru or *curandero* that helps and comforts people. But his ambition turns him into a fraud, the trickster, who thinks he can trick Death itself. One unusual feature of this legend is that there is no traditional hero; however, Doña Sebastiana's actions have heroic potential.

Binary oppositions: The use of binary oppositions consolidates the mythic potential of this legend, for myths move in cycles composed of different stages which are characterized by opposing meanings. For example, there is the mythic circular movement of birth-death-rebirth and the mythic cyclical process of separation-transformation-return. Opposing pairs with this mythic dynamic transcendence are abundant in "Doña Sebastiana." In this Hispanic legend, we have the rich and the poor, the sick and the healthy, light and dark, the tall candle and the short candle, and Death standing at "the foot" and standing at "the head" of the bed. Not only the presence of these opposing pairs but also their dynamism reinforce their cyclical vitality. Thus, in "Doña Sebastiana" the poor can become rich, the sick can be cured, light can turn into darkness and a healthy healer can easily take the place of a dying man.

Conclusions

Clearly, "Doña Sebastiana" is a legend that exhibits universal concerns, values and views. It is a moral tale that presents human greed and its detrimental consequences; it is a narrative that embodies a plea for equality and depicts the inevitability of death. The fear of dying, the wish for well-being, and the concern for humanity provide this legend with universal mythic transcendence. Like the nameless woodcutter, other literary figures—for example, the Costa Rican Uvieta, the Mexican Macario, and the British Scrooge—face Death in similar circumstances and in tales that are told and retold in other parts of the world.

Mythic Approaches: Reading Suggestions

Poetry:

Bryant, William Cullen:	"Thanatopsis"
Dickinson, Emily:	"Nature—sometimes sears a Sapling" (#314)
Frost, Robert:	"Acquainted with the Night"
Hughes, Langston:	"The Negro Speaks of Rivers"
Keats, John:	"On First Looking into Chapman's Homer"
Lawrence, D.H.:	"The Snake"
Pastan, Linda:	"Lost Luggage" "Spring"
Poe, Edgar Allan:	"Annabel Lee"
Rukeyser, Muriel:	"The Poem as Mask"
Silko, Leslie Marmon:	"Prayer to the Pacific"
Swenson, May:	"Snow by Morning"
Tennyson, Alfred:	"Ulysses"
Williams, William Carlos:	"Seafarer"
Wright, James:	"The Journey"
Yeats, William Butler:	"The Second Coming"

Short Stories:

Bambara, Toni Cade:	"Raymond's Run"
Cather, Willa:	"A Wagner Matinée"
Collier, Eugenia:	"Marigolds"
Forster, E.M.:	"The Road from Colonus"
Hemingway, Ernest:	"A Canary for One"
London, Jack:	"To Build a Fire"
Parsons, Elizabeth:	"The Nightingales Sing"
Porter, Katherine Ann:	"Flowering Judas"
Shields, Carol:	"Words"
Steinbeck, John:	"Flight"
Tam, Amy:	"Two Kinds"
Warner, Sylvia Townsend:	"The Phoenix"
Welty, Eudora:	"A Worn Path"

Drama:

Synge, John M.:	*Riders to the Sea*
O'Neill, Eugene:	*The Hairy Ape*

Short Novels:

Conrad, Joseph:	*The Secret Sharer*
Fitzgerald, F. Scott:	*The Great Gatsby*

Notes on the authors

Kari Meyers Skredsvig is a native of Minnesota, U.S.A., a resident of Costa Rica since 1970, and a naturalized Costa Rican citizen. She holds a B.A. degree in Spanish and English literature from the University of Minnesota and *Licenciatura* and M.A. degrees in English Literature from the University of Costa Rica, where she taught and did research as a full professor at the School of Modern Languages while coordinating the Master's Program in English Literature until her retirement in 2002. She has published multiple articles of literary criticism in academic journals and, with Gilda Pacheco, has co-authored three books.

Gilda Pacheco Acuña, Costa Rican, has published many articles and stories in academic journals and, with Kari Meyers, has co-authored three books. She received a B.A. in English, a B.A. in French, and a M.A. in English Literature from the University of Costa Rica. As a Fulbright scholar, she earned a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature at The Pennsylvania State University, U.S.A. A full professor at the University of Costa Rica, former Coordinator of the Master's Program in English Literature and former Director of the Graduate Program in Literature, she is currently the Director of the School of Modern Languages at the University of Costa Rica.

The Perceptive Process, as its title suggests, is designed to serve as an introductory guide for students and other avid readers of literature who are initiating their adventure into literary criticism. It offers the basic tools (premises, terminology, and perspectives) which provide a foundation for analyzing literature from six types of theoretical approaches: mythic, feminist, new historicist, reader-response, gender studies and cultural studies. Its concise, practical content will help novice critics understand the fundamental aspects of each approach in accessible, enjoyable fashion. The practical applications included for each approach, as well as the sample student essays and the writing guide, will facilitate the transition from the theory of literary criticism to its practice by illustrating how to relate abstract concepts to a literary text. Just as literature is a never-ending story, literary criticism is a constant process of discovery and position-taking, as diverse and as multi-layered as the critics who approach it. This book will help readers develop their own skills and talents as literary critics while inviting them to fully enjoy the endless potential of literature.

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