

## RECENSÕES

COUPE, LAURENCE, *Myth*, London and New York: Routledge, 1997, 219 pp.

Myth is one of those universal phenomena that are studied by a number of disciplines, including anthropology, psychology, philosophy, theology, literary criticism, and so forth. Laurence Coupe's book is published in *The New Critical Idiom* series, the purpose of which is to provide introductory guides to contemporary critical terminology. Although *Myth* is aimed primarily at the students of literature, its scope of discussion goes far beyond the works representing the traditional literary canon. It draws its material from very diverse sources, such as contemporary culture (fiction, film, popular music), anthropology, psychoanalysis, and women's studies.

The central idea of the book is that myth-making, or mythopoeia, and mythography, the study of myth, are very closely associated and, indeed, complementary activities. The idea of this close relationship is reflected in the structure of the book. The first part, 'Reading Myth', offers a fascinating analysis of Francis Ford Coppola's film about the Vietnam war, *Apocalypse Now* (1979), T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*, and the lyrics of Jim Morrison, the leading singer of The Doors. The reader is shown how these seemingly unconnected works are in fact closely related through the myths that are encoded in them. Coupe uses the theories of Frazer, Lévy-Bruhl and Eliade to demonstrate the presence and significance of such mythic themes as the dying god, to trace the phenomenon of contemporary performance arts back to the times of shamanism and mystical participation, and to point out the human urge to go back to the sacred time of origins.

The second part, 'Mythic Reading' focuses on a number of theories of myth. It establishes what Coupe calls 'two main kinds of mythic reading' (p. 94): allegory and typology. The former is identified with 'realist' and the latter

with 'non-realist' interpretations of myth. The author starts his overview with the analysis of ancient Greece and its first myth-maker, Homer, and the mythographer, Plato, and finishes with the discussion of myth as perceived in contemporary women's studies by the cultural historian Marina Warner and the novelist Margaret Atwood. In the course of his lively and engaging analysis, Coupe looks at the two faces of Freud, that of an allegorist and of a typologist. He also discusses the most static structuralism and 'hypermodern intellectualism' of Lévi-Strauss, Barthes's ideas of mythology as ideology and Frye's typological reading of myth in the area of literary criticism. The author draws links between these theories and literary mythopoeia represented by the works of Dante, Blake and Kafka.

Thus Coupe claims that myth is far from being left behind in the past. Rather, it keeps assuming various forms and being recreated by myth-makers as different as Dante and Jim Morrison. Coupe adopts a holistic view of culture and demonstrates that there is a mythic dimension in a great variety of works of art. The book is written in a very clear and lively style and will be delightful reading for both experts and novices.

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