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JOURNALISM, MYTH AND METAPHOR

by

ALEXIA A. WILKINSON, B.A. HONS.

**A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of**

Master of Journalism

School of Journalism and Communication

**Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
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**JOURNALISM, MYTH AND METAPHOR
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in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Journalism**

Thesis Supervisor

Director, School of Journalism and Communication

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This thesis explores the concepts of mythical story structure and metaphorical language in North American journalism. The theoretical framework is centred around the work of Canadian philosopher Northrop Frye who wrote that myth and metaphor are related language structures that are part of the imaginative world. While journalism has been primarily focused on a scientific methodology, the issue of creativity should not be set aside. However, there is a tension evident in journalism between what is thought of as the art of journalism and the science of objective reporting. By using Frye's concept of the educated imagination, journalism can be grounded in the realms of both science and art. The argument is made that myth and metaphor are essential elements of social communications and, therefore, are crucial to journalism studies. The thesis provides examples of journalism in which myth and metaphor have been used to produce outstanding works of journalism.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The day-to-day events of our lives are usually the ones that are never noticed: commuting between work and home, making breakfast, reading the newspaper. Yet, it is often those everyday things that are the most telling elements of our personal and social reality. They say a lot about what we think is important, and how we prioritize our lives. So, it is equally important to have a closer look at what is loosely termed "culture," in order to discover some of the essential truths of our existence.

Truth is something that has been the object of many forms of inquiry, both scientific and artistic. What is rarely considered, however, is that it can be the project of both. Journalism, it can be argued, has firm roots in both the artistic and scientific realms; and, if one could identify the most fundamental ideal underlying journalism, it would be the search for truth. It is often held that such a quest holds both deception and naivete at its core. That might be the case if the expectations were too grand, or the results considered too final. Journalism, though, is very much a part of a day-to-day process of discovery and re-discovery.

How is it that, each day, journalists can give us everything from the most anxiety-ridden to the most glorious glimpses into who we really are? They do it by taking on the special role of "storyteller", and the language of the storyteller is

that of myth and metaphor. Nietzsche touches on this way in which language is the primary element of truth. To him truth is:

a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms - in short a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people.¹

A good look at some of the best newswriting on the North American continent would, indeed, uncover a good deal of "truth", by this definition. Journalists enhance, transpose and embellish in order to convey their stories. Indeed, most stories would be quite incomprehensible without having gone through this process.

For some reason, the elements of metaphor and myth tend to be ignored or, at least, unidentified, in journalism. For a number of historical and social reasons, journalism has identified itself more closely with the ideals of science, rather than those of art. While science has its place in journalism, the artistic project should not, for even a moment, be forgotten, by the journalist. It is through art that some of the most important truths of our present reality can be found. Sometimes, in rare instances, through the most insightful and poetic use of

¹ Nietzsche. "On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense". The Portable Nietzsche. New York: Viking Penguin Books, 1982.

myth and metaphor, the words of journalists also reveal who we want to be. This thought is inspired by the work of Northrop Frye who sought, during his lifetime, to show how humans try to express both their reality, and their most lofty hopes, through the language of the imagination.

However, the imagination is not encouraged in journalists in the processes of education and apprenticeship. For to explore the imagination would be to explore concepts of interpretation and subjectivity, which may violate doctrines of objectivity. Such doctrines do a disservice to the act of reporting and the art of storytelling, since the imagination plays a crucial role in both. To stimulate imagination and creativity is to foster better journalists.

Indeed, it is essential that attention be given to creating room for the imagination, since there are many counterforces to this. There are a variety of factors that lead journalists to write news in the same way they would write a business letter; it can easily become a process of filling in the blanks or stock response. This may be due to the exigencies of production, the socio-historical pressures on the news culture or, undoubtedly, some lack of talent. What is clear is that while this kind of journalism is not "wrong," it is not the best we can do. It is important, then, to make room, however meagre, for the development of a more literary, philosophical and "concerned" journalism. It is through this kind of journalism that we can see some of the best, and certainly some of the more

interesting, uses of myth and metaphor.

There are examples then, of news stories that, through the artistry of their authors, open worlds beyond what may lie at the surface. Oftentimes, the artistry of journalism can really only flourish where deadlines are loose, or non-existent. This being the case, the newsroom may be a difficult place for art to flourish. Nevertheless, whether it be through an extraordinary degree of personal experience, the impact of the particular story, or an inherent seed of talent, some journalists are able to skilfully mould the elements of myth and metaphor into their deadline writing and thus expand the cognitive range of the text they are creating.

Underlying this discussion is the assumption that there is a form of journalism to which one can aspire, but that not everyone will be able to attain. This form is a product of what Frye called the "educated imagination" - a force that must be nurtured, but is also somewhat elusive. To strive for the best use of the imagination, with its metaphorical language and its mythical structure, is one way that the journalist can discover truth. While the philosophy supporting this may have been explicated by Frye, such ideas go far beyond to Cassirer, Vico and, indeed, to Plato.

Applying Frye's theories of narrative, myth and metaphor to an analysis of

the news, while intriguing, is not unproblematic. Frye, like James Carey and others in the cultural studies field, does not distinguish between highbrow and lowbrow culture and, therefore, would likely have no qualms in discussing the artistic merits of reporting. Nonetheless, he has often labelled the media as being ideological vessels of dead metaphors; his enthusiasm or optimism at the thought of journalism as an instrument of enlightenment might be reserved. Frye, however, may have been speaking more of the daily reportage for which clichés have somehow become the most favoured shorthand. He, undoubtedly, would have ascribed some merit to those stories which create their own genre -a blend of observation, analysis and the imagination.

Those in the newsrooms and journalism schools, on the other hand, are also wary about forays into the "story" aspect of news. The sentiment is that if journalism is a mirror on reality, then moulding that reality into a temporal or thematic framework distorts that reality. This illustrates certain assumptions which can be argued. First, the role of the reporter is to communicate events and ideas to her community in the language of that community. It will be argued here, that although the content of metaphor and myth may differ from one community to another, both structures are fundamental and essential elements of communication. For the reporter to avoid using metaphoric language and mythical form would be to ignore the most fundamental aspects of social communication. Therefore, not only would her language be empty in the sense of not representing

commonly held values, it would also not be representative of "reality" as her society knows it. The construction of reality depends, therefore, upon the utilisation of the linguistic constructs of the group of speakers.

Journalism, it seems, is guilty of resisting a close examination of the language structures it uses, preferring to see itself as a common sense reflection of reality. The words "story," "myth," and "imagination" all carry the connotation of something that is not true. To incorporate them into a vocabulary for journalism troubles some people. Frye discusses this on a more societal scale:

All through history there has run a distrust and contempt for imaginative language, and the words for story or literary narrative - myth, fable, and fiction - have all acquired a secondary sense of falsehood or something made up out of nothing. Overcoming this perversion of language takes time and thought, and besides there are as many evil myths and vicious metaphors as there are evil doctrines and vicious arguments.²

Journalists are also skeptical about sculpting an article or broadcast segment around temporal or thematic frameworks which put an emphasis on some details and not others. Yet, these approaches are essential for good storytelling and do no injustice to what is being reported. In fact, bringing a story into the realm of wider truths might help cure the media's tendency to fragment reality,

² Frye, Northrop. The Double Vision: Language and Meaning in Religion. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1991: 19-20.

leaving their audience/readership with a warped or inconclusive understanding of the world around them.

Frye points out that the modern century is one in which society begins the exercise of trying to evaluate itself objectively. Perhaps, by using his work as a guide, it might be possible for journalism to do the same. The imagination, he says, is the way for the active mind to truly discover reality, rather than living an illusion.³ This, of course, is radically different from the more traditional journalistic approach which assumes that reality can only be found by dismissing the imagination. That means that myth and metaphor, the integral elements of the language of imagination, are also dismissed as useful tools. Yet, myth and metaphor are the way in which a society retains a sense of continuity: a continuity which the ever-increasing speed of the news media so often fractures.⁴ Finally, they are the tools used to express and, therefore, to teach the matters that are central to any society: the values or ideals of what it wants to be.

The assumption is made here that the journalist has an obligation to inform and to educate. To do this well, a variety of devices are necessary; one may be better than another in different situations, and one reporter may be handier than another in wielding each tool. Yet, the journalist takes over, in the

³ Frye, Northrop. The Modern Century. Toronto: Oxford University, 1967:47.

⁴ *ibid*: 31, 48-49.

modern era, the honoured position of storyteller. This work should not be excluded (or, in some cases, differentiated) from the other responsibilities.

Thinking of news as narrative has two major consequences. First, it gives the news item, just like the story sung by the bard from one village to the next, an emotional understanding which should not be excluded from reporting. The range of emotion it might elicit ranges from suspense to elation. Second, it lends a degree of importance to what is being told - we tell stories only about those events in our lives which are somehow special. Other news structures are less successful in conveying these elements which are often essential to understanding.

The narrative form has become increasingly popular in newspaper writing and has always been a characteristic of broadcast journalism. A structural form with even more impact, however, (although it has narrative as its framework) is the myth. What differentiates the narrative from the myth is that the latter carries a message that is not limited by geography or time. Rather, it carries certain truths about what is important to people in many places, throughout time. It represents the underlying values, and hopes, of any given society; and while it is ubiquitous, it is not always immediately apparent.

There are only a limited number of mythological themes, all of which can be found in the news. According to Frye, they include: "the myths of creation, of

fall, of exodus and migration, of the destruction of the human race in the past (deluge myths) or the future (apocalyptic myths), of redemption in some phase of life during or after this one, however, 'after' is interpreted."⁵ Sometimes, the mythical element is fairly clear, perhaps because the reporter purposely framed his story within a myth. This, however, is rare. More often, the case is that even at the level of the most mundane story - a car crash or an old building being torn down - one can find the mythic concern about which Frye writes. Examples of newswriting which illustrate Frye's mythological themes will be discussed in Chapter 4.

The use of narrative, in general, and myth, in particular, represents the desire to express more than what is on the surface of life. At the level of language, the creative project is found most profoundly in the metaphor. The metaphor, with few words, can bring forth a multiplicity of ideas. Thus, the journalist can be frugal with space and time, while developing more penetrating analysis or providing more evocative details. To shed its reputation for being meaningless fluff or a simple play on words, the metaphor must be better understood. This means, first and foremost, an understanding of the poetic; that is the task that Frye addresses.

However, as with the discussion of the existence of narrative and myth in

⁵ Frye, Northrop. Words with Power: Being a Second Study of the Bible and Literature. Toronto: Penguin, 1990:23

newswriting, any talk of metaphor is treated with some trepidation by most journalists. Ambiguity is not coveted; clarity is. Yet, it will be argued in this paper that metaphor, well used, is a means to achieve far greater understanding than by avoiding metaphorical constructs. Indeed, to even suggest that they are not omnipresent in every level of journalistic writing (in fact, every level of all language), would be misleading. What could be said is that there is a great deal of cliché and "dead metaphor" which clutters the pages of newspapers and airwaves. However, with a renewed emphasis on the imagination and creativity, the use of metaphor in journalism could be improved. In fact, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, there is already evidence of the way in which journalism can be strengthened by the artistic use of metaphor.

Frye's scholarly study of western literature and the Bible seems far removed from the frazzled day-to-day dash of the newsroom. Yet it is, perhaps, a sign of the best academic work, and certainly of his, that it is highly concerned with the 'real world'. Frye believes that by training the imagination, which is done through the study of literature, the attainment of a social vision is more possible. Therefore, Frye looks at how we use language to express not only what we are, but also what we want to be.

Frye's concept of the "educated imagination" is a key to great journalism. This is so for a few related reasons. First, Stuart Adam writes that journalism

"should be bathed in the light of the Imagination and the idea that journalism can be and often is one of our highest arts."⁶ Therefore, the study of narrative, myth and metaphor and their most skilled use in journalistic writing contributes to the idea of journalism as art. While the reporter tells what happened, and the poet tells what happens, the best journalist combines elements of both.⁷

Second, Frye suggests that the imagination is a path to a healthy form of detachedness, not to be misconstrued with objectivity. The former indicates openness and tolerance, while the latter underlines a subject-object dichotomy which myth and metaphor reject. Frye suggests that the imagination opens up a world "where anything is possible and anything can be assumed, where there are no rights or wrongs and all arguments are equally good".⁸ This is not the slippery slope toward relativism. It is, rather, an approach that should be the goal of the journalist: an openness and fairness that does not exclude emotion or hide bias. It is curiosity.

What humans are most curious about is our future and, ironically, it might be the role of the best journalists to help define what that might be. Through the

⁶ Adam, G. Stuart. "Notes towards a Definition of Journalism: An Essay in the Theory of Culture and Education". Ottawa: Carleton University, 1992: 61.

⁷ This idea follows closely the discussion in Frye's chapter "The Motive for Metaphor" in The Educated Imagination. Montreal: CBC Enterprises, 1963.

⁸ *ibid*: 32.

best use of myth and metaphor, the journalist illuminates our greatest hopes and worst nightmares. He underlines our uncertainty about where we are going and, almost imperceptibly, by the very treatment of the story, offers an ending to it.

Adam writes:

Imagination is a property of culture. In this sense, it is made up of the methods and practices established in the culture for framing experience and forming consciousness... Journalism, or more precisely the Journalistic Imagination, is the primary method of framing experience and forming the public consciousness of the here and now.

The public consciousness is, inevitably, a blend of what has past and what is hoped for. The journalist, as social communicator, as storyteller, adds something to that mixture.

The format of this paper is intended to lead the reader to a better understanding of two facets of journalism that are, for the most part, unexplored. Myth and metaphor have been discussed, at length, by theorists in a number of fields. To bring together some of the more pertinent and interesting of these will be the task of the next chapter. It will begin with a discussion of metaphor, and the value of semiological analysis of the news, and will follow with an examination of myth which, as will be argued, communicates what our greatest wants and needs have, are and will be. Since myth is often embedded in a narrative framework or, in any case, is closely wedded to the narratological project, the art

of storytelling will be incorporated into this section.

The third chapter will attempt to illuminate the metaphorical nature of the news through a variety of some of the best examples. To understand the difference between the metaphorical language that is being prescribed, in this paper, and the omnipresent repertorial clichés, some comparisons will be made. The distinction, although sometimes one of artistic taste, is usually highlighted by the amount of ingenuity and insight present.

The fourth chapter will explicate three of Frye's mythological themes by illustrating them with actual examples of journalism. The object of this is to show how the mythic is a ground of knowing, in its own right, and to demonstrate how some journalists have used myth in a beneficial way. This is an important goal since it goes a certain distance in unmasking the nature of news. Some reporters fulfil their assignment in a unique and, arguably, artistic manner. Others do not. Those that do, tend to tap into the mythical construct that is communally held. It is important to understand how that is done, in journalism.

The implications of myth and metaphor for journalism will be examined in the final chapter; for whether either are used well, or used at all, is of some consequence. The purpose of this paper, ultimately, is to add something to the mixture of journalism studies: to suggest that myth and metaphor are valid and,

indeed, obligatory, elements of the best journalism. A "mobile army of metaphors", a panoply of myths, and an array of narratives can be called upon to buttress the essential stories of our society. They are the paint of the journalistic art; and it is through art that we can catch a glimpse of the truth of human existence. The truth might not be timeless and the effort might yield only momentary satisfaction, yet, it is a process that is worthy in the end.

CHAPTER TWO

The Theory of Metaphor and Myth

A. Metaphor

It is generally held that the language of the journalist should not be characterized by subjectivity or ambiguity; that clarity is desirable and, indeed, observable in most journalism; and that there is something natural and, perhaps, ahistorical about these characteristics. Yet, in Frye's work, the argument is made that communication in general, and language in particular, is highly contingent upon the cultural and historical factors present in the society. In fact, language is one of the forms of social interaction that facilitates a mutual indebtedness between individuals as they move into the social realm.

Moreover, within a given society there are a variety of purposes to which language may be adapted, in effect creating a variety of "sub-languages". Frye develops two language paradigms which may prove useful in the study of journalism: one is based on the work of Vico, and deals with language on a more 'macro' level. The other, is more "micro" in nature, looking at the uses of language within modern western society.

According to Vico, the development of a given society is accompanied by

changes in the mode of expression, essentially creating separate languages which he identifies as "poetic," "heroic," and "vulgar." Although each progresses from the former, they should not be seen as an evolution or improvement of language, merely as representing different ways that humans have attempted to understand and relate to the ominous non-human environment. Frye agrees with Vico, stating:

"We have to look at the figures of speech a writer uses, his images and symbols, to realize that underneath all the complexity of human life that uneasy stare at an alien nature is still haunting us, and the problem of surmounting it still with us."⁹

He then mirrors Vico's work with his distinction between what he calls the "hieroglyphic," the "hieratic," and the "demotic" forms of language.¹⁰

Frye writes that the hieroglyphic mode of language is used most extensively in Homer, in pre-Biblical cultures of the Near East, and in much of the Old Testament, and is characterized by a lack of distinction between subject and object. Words in this mode are "concrete", carrying their own unique energy - as reciting the words of a spell creates magic. The worlds of myth and metaphor are fundamental to the hieroglyphic realm; and the poet, Frye argues, uses myths and metaphors extensively. In the Educated Imagination, he writes, "Literature's world

⁹ Frye. 1963:22.

¹⁰ Frye, Northrop. The Great Code: The Bible and Literature. Toronto: Penguin, 1982: 5.

is a concrete human world of immediate experience. The poet uses images and objects and sensations much more than he uses abstract ideas...."¹¹ In The Double Vision, the poet's use of the creative energy present in hieroglyphic language is underlined:

Such purity of speech is not simply a creative element in the mind, but a power that re-creates the mind, or perhaps has actually created the mind in the first place, as though it were an autonomous force deriving from an authentic creation; as though there really were a Logos uniting mind and nature that really does mean 'Word.'¹²

Hieroglyphic language, therefore is powerful, creative and concrete - characteristics which should attract journalists.

The development of hieratic language, however, means that subject and object become divorced, meaning that "words become primarily the outward expression of inner thoughts or ideas." As well, with the concept of a dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity, comes the additional dichotomy between the emotional and the intellectual. Therefore, "abstraction becomes possible, and the sense that there are valid and invalid ways of thinking," meaning that logic and argument are now in ascendance.¹³

¹¹ Frye. 1963:8.

¹² Frye. 1991:83.

¹³ Frye. 1982:7.

The most prevalent form of language today is one that gained ascendancy in the 1700s and which Frye calls the "demotic". In it, the subject and object become entirely distinct. Now, "thinking or reflection follows the suggestions of sense experience, and words are the servomechanisms of reflection."¹⁴ Observation and fact-gathering take precedence over a deductive process, so that description, rather than logic or argument, becomes the primary form of expression of "truth." In Words with Power, Frye expands on what he calls a "descriptive" language which mirrors the demotic in The Great Code:

"The descriptive style minimizes the aspects of writing that call attention to the relations among the words, to what is - in vulgar speech, 'merely verbal.' Ambiguity, pun, multiple meanings within the same word, are avoided."¹⁵

In theory, the journalist's strategies for writing are based on the demotic/descriptive approach which avoids figures of speech. In practice, this is not really the case, nor is it entirely desirable, as will be discussed later.

Once the individual communicates on a social level, the "language of practical sense" emerges. This is the "working or technological language" that belongs to journalists amongst others. There is also a language that speaks for the imagination and which produces literature and which combines both praxis

¹⁴ Frye. 1982:13.

¹⁵ Frye. 1990:5.

and vision.¹⁶ By looking at these uses of language, Frye argues that one can finally identify the fundamental difference between art and science - a dichotomy which suggests, not that one is better than the other, but that both are equally useful in the search for 'truth'. Science gathers data from the world as it is and, from there, constructs theories to interpret the data. On the other hand, art begins with a vision of the world that the artist wishes he could have and then relates that vision to the world at hand, making it recognizable. Frye suggests that the two directions seen here are responsible for science being seen as intellectual and art as emotional.¹⁷

The realm of journalism, like many other sectors of modern life, tries to live with this distinction which, at least during this time in history, heavily favours the scientific approach. This is too narrow since it excludes all that can be accomplished through embracing poetic creation - which has its own peculiar characteristics. There is a rhythm, for example, that is unique to poetry. It is "a rhythm based not on the syntactical sequences of prose, which express the rhythms of waking and consciousness, but on a steady repetitive and recurrent beat like that of verse."¹⁸

¹⁶ Frye. 1963:5-6.

¹⁷ Frye. 1963:7.

¹⁸ Frye. 1990:17.

As well, "[t]he preference of poetry for concrete and simple words, for metaphor and simile and all the figures of associative language, and its ability to contain great reserves of meaning in the simple forms that we call myths and read as stories, are equally important."¹⁹ Metaphor, then, is really counter-logical in its nature while myth is counter-historical. "[Metaphor] presents the continuous paradox of experience, in which whatever one meets both is and is not oneself."²⁰ Myth, meanwhile, tells both what has and has not happened.

Obviously, in the demotic/descriptive writing, such ambiguity of meaning would be seen as a negative attribute. However, if, as Frye argues, "all intensified language sooner or later turns metaphorical" then journalism may be more indebted to the metaphor than it claims.²¹ The writing used in reporting could certainly be defined as "intensive," in that it attempts to convey large quantities of important information in very few words. Therefore, it seems likely that metaphor - even the implicit metaphor of juxtaposed images and words - would be a profitable tool to the journalist. If a writer is not given the luxury of many words or large quantities of time, then the metaphor, which "can sustain a number of varying and yet consistent renderings of its discursive meaning", might add depth to an otherwise superficial account.

¹⁹ Frye. 1963:52.

²⁰ Frye. 1991:17; Frye. 1982:65.

²¹ Frye. 1990:28.

In fact, Cassirer argues that even in the case of the purest mimetic language, the attraction of the metaphor becomes inescapable:

[E]ven where language starts as purely imitative..., it constantly strives to extend and finally to surpass its limits. It makes a virtue of necessity, that is, of the ambiguity inevitable in the linguistic sign....[I]t compels the spirit to take the decisive step from the concrete function of 'designation' to the universal and universally valid function of 'signification'.²²

Understanding signification and, therefore, semiotics is essential for having a good grasp of metaphor. Semiotics, or the study of signs, is one of the many methodologies that have been constructed in the twentieth century to analyze cultural values. The innovators of this approach, Saussure and Peirce, suggested that their new 'meta-science' could be used to dissect practically every sector of human science. Yet, it was not until the 1970s, a decade when the social sciences underwent a variety of paradigm changes in response to post-war empiricism, that semiotics was applied to the study of news discourse. Since then, the paths of semiotics and news have still crossed relatively little, despite the importance of journalism as a form of widespread cultural communication. The work that has been done, in this area, has often come under the rubrics of "humanism", "interpretive anthropology" and "cultural studies". The common element, however, is that all "assume that human beings live in a symbolic as well as physical

²² Cassirer, Ernst. The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol 1. New Haven: Yale University, 1953: 197.

environment, both of which must be accounted for in understanding social behavior".²³

Semiotics is helpful in a discussion of metaphor because it addresses the fundamental issue of how meaning is constructed and communicated. There is a tendency amongst newspeople to reject any notion of a creative or constructive element in the news; their very livelihoods depend upon maintaining the perception that they are capable of mirroring an objective truth. Yet:

whatever the nature of external reality, humans perceive it only through their own concepts, and therefore always 'construct' it. This means that creation is thus an integral and constitutive element of human behavior, not an afterthought tacked on to existence.²⁴

This construction takes place through the "sign" and its basal elements of the "signifier" and the "signified". The signifier is the word or image used to indicate the idea or object, the signified. For example, the signifier "cat" is set for the signified: a small furry animal that scratches furniture. Yet, there is no pre-existing natural link that determines this process of signification; rather, it is an

²³ Joch Robinson, Gertrude. "Television News and the Claim to Facticity: Quebec's Referendum Coverage". in Willard D. Rowland et al eds. Interpreting Television: Current Research Perspectives. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1984: 199-200.

²⁴ *ibid*: 200.

psychological construct.²⁵

The meaning is created through two external relations, identified by Barthes. There is a "paradigmatic relation" which "unites the sign to a specific reservoir of other signs it may be drawn from in order to be inserted in discourse".²⁶ As well, there is a "syntagmatic relation" that "unites the sign to other signs in the discourse preceding or succeeding it".²⁷ Each word, therefore, gains its meaning from how it is combined with others in a linear fashion.²⁸ Put simplistically, syntagmatic analysis focuses on how stories are told, whereas paradigmatic analysis is concerned with what stories are being told.

In order to make any sense at all of signs and the relations between them, it is essential to first have a "code" which describes both a system of sign interrelationships as well as the rules to interpret these relationships and meanings.²⁹ The code is agreed upon, perhaps tacitly, perhaps unconsciously, by the particular group of language speakers involved. Therefore, it soon becomes clear that signification is predominantly a social, rather than an individual,

²⁵ Saussure, Ferdinand de. Course in General Linguistics. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966: 67.

²⁶ Barthes, Roland. "The Imagination of the Sign". in Susan Sontag ed. A Barthes Reader. New York: Hill and Wang, 1982: 211.

²⁷ *ibid*: 211-211.

²⁸ Saussure: 123.

²⁹ Fiske, John. Introduction to Communication Studies. New York: Routledge, 1990: 64.

phenomenon. Saussure argues, "[T]he individual does not have the power to change a sign in any way once it has become established in the linguistic community."³⁰ The individual does, however, have the power of initial creation which is, essentially, art.

The relationships between signifier and signified, as well as between signs, becomes extremely interesting in the realm of the metaphor. One could argue that in metaphor the signifier overtakes the signified in an unusual way, providing an instance of profound creation rather than reproduction. In fact, to establish a metaphoric expression requires a rather complex combination of factors. Sapir identifies three major elements: there must be two terms placed in juxtaposition, from separate semantic domains; as well, there must be a number of shared and defining features.³¹ In the case of "external metaphor" or analogy, these features are unimportant and the focus, instead, is on the relation of each terms to "their respective semantic domains: A is to A's domain as X is to X's domain".³²

Sapir points out the obvious critique of metaphor, one that is often used by reporter-types. He writes, "[There] is a common view of metaphor as little more than a verbal game....Metaphor is an ornament that at best breaks up the

³⁰ Saussure: 69.

³¹ Sapir, David. "The Anatomy of Metaphor". in David Sapir et al eds. The Social Use of Metaphor; Essays on the Anthropology of Rhetoric. University of Pennsylvania, 1977: 5-6.

³² *ibid*: 23.

monotony of 'plain talk' and at worst reduces all communication to little more than fancy babble." Yet, in the words of Samuel Johnson, "a metaphor gives you two ideas for one".³³ That is because by contemplating the placement and relation of the terms, new meaning arises.

Ricoeur hints at this when he asks, "Why should we invent new meanings, meanings which exist only in the instant of discourse, if it were not to serve the poesis in the mimesis?"³⁴ In other words, metaphor "is more than a simple substitution whereby one word would replace a literal word, which an exhaustive paraphrase could restore to the same place".³⁵ He argues that the metaphor is an enlightening form of language which provides insight into the human condition. Sapir agrees:

The metaphoric (and by extension synecdochic and metonymic) process is not a simple game of substitution, but rather a creative game where the pregnant...interplay of two disparate terms provides insight that, although it might at times be trivial...can also be...profound and revealing of important and deep cultural understandings.³⁶

However if, in the modern world, the mind is transfixed by a subject-object

³³ *ibid*: 9.

³⁴ Ricoeur, Paul. Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation. Cambridge: University Press, 1981: 180.

³⁵ Ricoeur: 172.

³⁶ Sapir: 32.

dichotomy, then the metaphor is a difficult verbal structure to truly master. Frye describes the metaphor as "neither subjective nor objective, though it interpenetrates with both."³⁷ He adds that this does not detract from the 'truthfulness' of the metaphoric expression. The metaphor only loses its qualities of "event" and "meaning" once it has been absorbed into a language community. It then becomes what Sapir calls "ornamental cliché" and what Ricoeur calls a "dead metaphor".³⁸

The metaphor, therefore, is a poetic project of discovery. It discloses what may seem to be the most inconsequential details and relays their underlying significance. Like all creative acts, it tends to be both laborious and inspired; and, like other art forms, the more it is reproduced, the less its value. Finally, the metaphor is an important component of the best journalism - which must learn to embrace the hieroglyphic as well as the demotic, as Frye would say. As well, it must encompass both praxis and vision, science and literature - this is the path from clichés to enlightenment.

³⁷ Frye. 1990:xxii-xxiii.

³⁸ Sapir:9; Ricoeur:170.

B. Myth

In Christian theology, there is the story of how "God's people periodically fall into bondage and are then rescued by a leader."³⁹ In political philosophy, there is a Leviathan who delivers men from "the condition of mere Nature, (which is a condition of Warre of every man against every man)."⁴⁰ In today's world of high-tech communications, there are stories of conflict and chaos on the evening news or in the daily newspaper.

It is the myths found in journalism, according to Richard Campbell, that play the central role in "sustaining modern western society."⁴¹ Campbell actually describes a "mythology" - a set of narratives or story constructs which uphold "a common ground for understanding ourselves and multiple realities."⁴² A discussion of narrative and myth, however, is considered appropriate in fields such as theatre, literature or anthropology; it is rarely welcomed in the journalist's domain.

The squeamishness evident in journalists when it comes to close

³⁹ Frye. 1990: 192.

⁴⁰ Hobbes, Thomas. Leviathan. edited by C.B. MacPherson. London: Penguin, 1968: 196.

⁴¹ Campbell, Richard. 60 Minutes and the News: A Mythology for Middle America. Chicago: University of Illinois, 1991: 138.

⁴² *ibid*: 27.

examination of how their "stories" are constructed, may well be the fallout of the profession's attempts at scientific objectivity. Back in the 1930s and 1940s, a territorial dispute developed between print journalism and the very popular radio broadcasts. "Entrenched in and protective of its doctrinaire practices in neutral, factual reporting, print tried to saddle radio with the 'inferior' role of news commentary - the explicit explanation or interpretation of experience."⁴³ During World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II, the interpretive model, often couched in narrative, gained in importance by helping to explain events that were difficult to communicate in an inverted pyramid.⁴⁴

Both journalists and their readers/viewers have continued to make a distinction between objective and subjective reporting, even though the difference between them is not always entirely clear. The narrative structure might be seen as a further blurring of the lines between fact and fiction, drama and news. The new literary journalism of the 1960s and the arrival of television shows like "60 Minutes" continued to "[merge] the content of the journalist with the form of the novelist" in an attempt to depict both objective and subjective realities.⁴⁵

Some may argue that by staying away from the issue of subjectivity and, by

⁴³ Campbell, Richard: 70-71.

⁴⁴ *ibid*: 72.

⁴⁵ Campbell, Richard: 20.

extension, staying away from the narrative, would keep the reporter out of this philosophical quagmire. Yet, the narrative form may be the best for many news stories because it is our most natural and most comfortable way of communicating. It has been used throughout time and throughout the world. As well, opting to tell the story in a chronological fashion may help to catch elements that would otherwise be missed. A narrative can better convey the mood: people eating their lunches, the mother shielding her son, the grief, the elation.

Moreover, objectivity is quite compatible with the narrative structure; journalists make complex objective experiences comprehensible to their audience through methods of storytelling. This is, for the most part, a beneficial project, representing not only a desire to impart information, but an often inspiring use of the imagination. In fact, rather than obscuring the nature of reality, the narrative story structure may be more of an all-encompassing way of communicating.

"Being a reporter who deals in facts and being a story-teller who produces tales are not antithetical activities."⁴⁶ The best stories may be those which combine both good repertorial, fact-finding skills and the narrative structure. Northrop Frye voiced this desire to have the best of both worlds:

[S]cience is its own world-view, and should be distinguished from the mythical one, even though it may be another mythology. Any cultivated person can become acquainted

⁴⁶ *ibid*: 96.

with both without trying to reconcile them, and without suffering from schizophrenia through failing to do so. Doubtless the world we see and the world we create meet somewhere at some point of identity, but keeping the two eyes of knowledge focused on that point seems better than a cyclopean vision.⁴⁷

By 'myth', Frye is talking about "mythos, plot, narrative, or in general the sequential ordering of words."⁴⁸ However, returning again to the discussion of language, Frye sees three phases of narrative. In the hieroglyphic phase, narrative is projected through the process of storytelling. It changes, in the hieratic phase of language to the sequential narrative structure of an argument. Finally, in the demotic phase, narrative is simply the sequential ordering of words. Frye even suggests that a telephone book could be perceived to have a narratological form in the demotic phase.⁴⁹ Reporting, it could be argued, carries elements of all three of these narrative, or mythical, forms.

Fundamentally, then, there are "two aspects of myth: one is its story-structure, which attaches it to literature, the other is its social function as concerned knowledge, what [stories are] important for society to know."⁵⁰

Obviously, not all stories carry equal import. Nonetheless, what can properly be

⁴⁷ Frye, Northrop. The Stubbhorn Structure: Essays on Criticism and Society. London: Methuen, 1970: 18-19.

⁴⁸ Frye. 1982: 31.

⁴⁹ Frye. 1982: 31.

⁵⁰ *ibid*:47.

seen as myth are the stories that weigh heavily on the social mind. In The Great Code, Fry describes the significance of those which convey knowledge about a society's "gods, its history, its laws, or its class structure"; and in The Modern Century, he brings it down to the fundamental level of the "ideas, images, beliefs, assumptions, anxieties, and hopes which express the view of man's situation and destiny".⁵¹ The myth, therefore, will likely be present in all significant forms of communication. There are substantial links between the individual myths which tie them into a societal "mythology."

Interestingly, the very modern news media may have astounding similarities with its traditional storytelling predecessors. For example, while there seems to be a bewilderingly large number of myths, there is only a small number of mythological "types".⁵² Similarly, one can see that there is an endless array of news stories, but only a small number of story themes. Frye suggests that all stories essentially:

express the human bewilderment about why we are here and where we are going, and include the myths of creation, of fall, of exodus and migration, of the destruction of the human race in the past (deluge myths) or the future (apocalyptic myths), of redemption in some phase of life during or after this one, however 'after' is interpreted.⁵³

⁵¹ *ibid*:33; 1967:105.

⁵² Frye. 1982: xviii.

⁵³ Frye. 1990:23.

Frye argues that not only the shaping of the story, but also the various characters and themes that make up its content are constant over time and between cultures.⁵⁴ That is because myth is "counter-historical", as Frye puts it: the significance of the story is not bound to a particular time or place. This does not mean that myth is 'untrue', but that it may carry more 'truth' than history which is "the continuous record of what ascendant ideologies do."⁵⁵ Ideology, according to Frye is simply an "applied mythology", which selectively chooses elements of social myths which support its cause and which expects total adherence to these tenets.⁵⁶

Once myths have the stature of being unquestioned, they become "history" - in other words, "descriptive accounts of what 'really happened.'"⁵⁷ Yet, both history and news narratives, while claiming an external ordering of events, are representative of certain choices of data and a certain verbal structure that is not necessarily inherent in the events themselves but, rather, on a storytelling design.⁵⁸ In fact, Frye would argue, "Symmetry, in any narrative, always means that historical content is being subordinated to mythical demands of design and

⁵⁴ Frye. 1963: 14,18.

⁵⁵ Frye. 1990:61.

⁵⁶ *ibid*:23.

⁵⁷ *ibid*:34.

⁵⁸ Frye. 1982:32.

form."⁵⁹

The myth is structured around "primary concerns"- food, shelter, and sex - and the "anxiety about not getting them satisfied."⁶⁰ While they are human-centred, they also focus on the relation between human society and nature which makes apparent the underlying anxiety of alienation. Generally, they portray heroic figures who endure a downfall in fortune followed by a 'comeback', "suggesting in their story the movement of the sun across the sky into the dark or the progression of seasons through winter and spring."⁶¹ In other words, there is a direct connection between the cycles of nature and the structure of mythical storytelling. This cyclical feature can certainly be seen in the nature of newswriting over time.

Gaye Tuchman touched on this in her analysis of newswriting:

news sometimes uses symbols as the representation of reality and presents them as the product of forces outside human control. That is the typical presentation of economic activity and civil disorders, such as riots. These facets of social life are presented as alien, reified forces, akin to fluctuations in the weather, a natural phenomenon.⁶²

⁵⁹ *ibid*:43.

⁶⁰ Frye. 1970:43.

⁶¹ Frye. 1963:19.

⁶² Tuchman, Gaye. Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality. New York: The Free Press, 1978:213-214.

What Tuchman does not realize is that these are concerns over which people do feel they have little or no control. This is not a project of obfuscation; rather, these are long-time concerns.

The reporter, therefore, will tend to tell particular stories within the boundaries of well-known genres, addressing a variety of fears or uncertainties. They will also tend to underscore and, ultimately, resolve tensions between conflicting actors and values. Therefore, narrative has, as one of its major objectives, the establishment of social and moral order. By choosing particular stories to tell and by selecting certain ways of telling the stories, whether of an individual or of a community, one is adopting a moral overtone which defines the conflicts between "success versus failure, tradition versus change, and the personal versus the social."⁶³

Gaye Tuchman writes, "[U]sing the conventions of news story as frame, reporters do more than make an event public; they define what an event is and which amorphous happenings are part of the event. As frames, news stories offer definitions of social reality."⁶⁴ The role of the journalist, therefore, may be far more potent than originally imagined, helping to support the most fundamental societal values. Campbell noted this in his study of the television news magazine

⁶³ Campbell, Richard: 75.

⁶⁴ Tuchman, Gaye. "Telling Stories". Journal of Communication. Vol 26, No 4, 1976: 94.

"60 Minutes".

In spite of the apparent detachment of reporter-characters, just by virtue of selecting certain kinds of experience to tell stories about and by presenting that experience as dramatic conflict, '60 Minutes' and its reporters engage, as do all reporters in all news narratives, in implicit moral judgments about what is right and wrong, good and evil, normal and deviant."⁶⁵

Thus, "news" stories apparently convey many of the same dramatic tensions that have been the nub of storytelling since Sophocles. Yet, it is interesting that as society increases in complexity, the narrative method has not profoundly changed. In fact, a common feature in the structure of the news story is that it is told very simply - as you would tell a friend about an event that happened to you that day. As well, according to the journalism textbooks and the newsroom experts, the story should be understandable by anyone. Murrow put it this way:

Imagine yourself at a dinner table back in the United States with the local editor, a banker, and a professor, talking over coffee. You try to tell what it was like, while the maid's boyfriend, a truck driver, listens from the kitchen. Talk to be understood by the truck driver while not insulting the professor's intelligence."⁶⁶

In television news stories, more so than in print, there is the presence of a

⁶⁵ Campbell, Richard: 66.

⁶⁶ Kendrick, Alexander. Prime Time. Boston: Little, Brown, 1969: 278. quoted in James R. Hood and Brad Kalbfeld eds. The Associated Press Broadcast News Handbook. 1982: 17-18.

"voice", or a "storyteller". The reporter, in most television stories will appear at least once in an on-camera stand-up. As well, they may appear in interview shots, walking or talking with sources. This tendency of the reporter taking part in the story is stretched to its limit by news programs such as "60 Minutes". "In '60 Minutes' reporters emerge not merely as recorders of information but as participant-performers who are intimately involved with their subjects....[as] detectives, referees, therapists, and tourists."⁶⁷

When a reporter puts experience into a news format, whether print and broadcast it is, as Frye would say, a "technical verbal device", contributing to understanding in a unique way.⁶⁸ "There is thus a combination of continuity and repetition in history-writing, and the repeated or sequential themes are a mixture of fact and organizing fiction, or myths."⁶⁹ The product helps to maintain daily social life and to meet periodic crises: two of the services that reporting often provides, or attempts to provide.

Bird and Dardenne's work, however, adds an important qualification to Frye's observations by distinguishing what they call "myth" (which is put forward in narrative form) and "chronicle". They write, "Chronicles are not stories, but are

⁶⁷ Campbell, Richard: 30.

⁶⁸ Frye. 1991: 49-50.

⁶⁹ *ibid*: 50.

still vital, myth-repairing narratives." They describe them as "the daily background of routine stories in terse, unremarkable crimes, day-to-day local or national government business."⁷⁰

Unfortunately, many other stories found in the media are often in the realm of the cliché and do little more than train a passive citizenry.⁷¹ Frye argues that to create a mythology, that does more than that, requires training the imagination through advanced education. This provides the "mythical structure formed by the humanities and the vision of nature afforded by general science, the purpose of which is to create the informed and participating citizen."⁷² Frye insists that mythological thinking is the underlying structure of all thinking and cannot be overtaken by other verbal structures.

As with most of Frye's writing, therefore, the primary focus could be identified as concern. He identifies the various ways in which the natural and the spiritual, which might also be seen as 'what is' from 'what should be', are very different. However, he does not prescribe a new society or a new vision. Rather, he discusses the way in which it can be found and created: It is through myth -

⁷⁰ Bird, S. Elizabeth and Robert W. Dardenne. "Myth, Chronicle and Story: Exploring the Narrative Qualities of News". in James W. Carey ed. Media, Myths and Narratives: Television and the Press. Newbury Park: Sage, 1988: 67-86.

⁷¹ Frye. 1967:110-111.

⁷² Frye. 1970:20, 112.

concerned knowledge, imagination and a deference to storytelling.

CHAPTER THREE

Metaphor in Newswriting

By day's end, even the hairs on their heads seemed weary.
All through the long hours, the jurors had fingered the dust
of an August night in Bensonhurst, sifting and packing it,
trying to form a clod of truth.⁷³

One wonders if the reporter who wrote these words was experiencing the same weariness as he attempted to mould some truth out of a murder, a trial, and the imperfect quest for justice. The way Jim Dwyer chose to convey that truth was through the use of metaphorical language. The arduous task the jurors faced in trying to form a verdict is so much clearer to the reader when it is seen as "dust" that is being sifted and packed to "form a clod of truth". For Dwyer to create this image, and to avoid the usual court reporting cliches, took a good deal of imagination and talent. His use of metaphor adds to his readers' understanding in a way that less inspired journalism does not.

News writing is full of ornamental cliché and dead metaphors, as a glance at a page from any newspaper reveals. Here are some of the leads from The Ottawa Citizen: "The latest report card on the economy didn't seem to provide good news Friday for the Conservative government;" "Canadian Airlines

⁷³ Dwyer, Jim. "Simple Justice: Beyond law lies a matter of life, death". New York Newsday. May 18, 1990.

International won another round Friday in its fight for a life-saving cash infusion from American Airlines;" "Israel and Arab guerrillas finally silenced their guns in south lebanon Saturday, ending a week-long war that delivered a heavy blow to the staggering Middle East peace process;" and "For many suburban and rural politicians, regional reform is a nightmare. But for some on local councils, it could be a dream come true." Television and radio reports tend to be even worse, since there is an assumption (and perhaps rightly so) that the spoken language, which the broadcast media try to emulate is, indeed, full of cliché.

The reason that these metaphors are "empty" is that, rather than providing an imaginative and insightful view into that which is being reported, they are used as a kind of shorthand, which adds little to the reader's or viewer's understanding. Read, instead, the metaphor used by Jim Dwyer in another of his articles, "Central Park jogger makes appearance in court":

She was a walking crime scene. For 17 minutes yesterday, she spoke not of rape or assault, but about a stolen spring: of hanging up a phone on Wall Street in April and waking at the end of May in a hospital in Harlem.⁷⁴

There are a few interesting points in this paragraph which are evidence of the way Dwyer tried to report the reality of the woman's experience despite the numbing forces of the courtroom and the news format. Since he specifies that she testified

⁷⁴ Dwyer, Jim. "Central Park jogger makes appearance in court". New York Newsday. July 17, 1990.

for precisely 17 minutes, he underlines the fact that the time granted her in the courtroom, or the space given to the story in the newspaper, seems so insufficient to understanding a "stolen spring". Both the newsroom and the judicial system tend to see the incident in scientific or bureaucratic terms. Dwyer's metaphor "[s]he was a walking crime scene" illuminates the humanity that is so easily forgotten. Finally, the term "a stolen spring", while not particularly original, nicely brings in multiple meanings: the woman was not only deprived of a significant portion of her life, but there is also the sense of a lost innocence. Overall, Dwyer's use of the metaphor here is a wonderful example of how it can be used, in journalism, to illuminate the story, without being accused of ambiguity or artistic elitism.

On occasion, then, when both insight and creativity combine, a journalist will bring together narrative, myth and metaphor to uncover truths that are easily overlooked. Jimmy Breslin did just that in his article "Life in a cage." It has all the elements of the narrative while, in essence, acting as a metaphor for larger societal problems. Breslin reports on the death of a young boy who went into the water at the zoo's polar bear cage. It begins:

That winter, when the landlord didn't give any heat because, as people in the building remember him telling them, he simply forgot to do it, Juan Perez would wake up and go right into the shower. All the time that anybody knew him, the little boy started the day with a shower. All that winter it was a shower with icy water, which made all the other people

cringe, he couldn't wait to jump in each morning.⁷⁵

This introduction does three things: it is an intriguing beginning to a narrative; it foreshadows Juan Perez's death in the icy waters of the polar bear's moat; and it is a metaphor of the difficult conditions faced by a large number of New Yorkers. Breslin brings the metaphor to a head, halfway through the story, with this statement:

But at the same time, perhaps somebody should stop just for a paragraph here this morning and mention the fact that there are many children being eaten alive by this bear of a city, New York in the 1980s.⁷⁶

The use of the metaphor, here, is essential in bringing forward an aspect of the story which might otherwise be entirely lost; that is what makes some newswriting better than others. Critics might protest that by using metaphorical language, Breslin is making his report more emotional or that readers might be confused by his meaning. Yet, the metaphor "children being eaten alive by this bear of a city" carries meaning that is easily understood, since language is, essentially metaphorical. Therefore, the issue is whether or not it is done well.

One way to determine how well metaphor is used, is by taking a close look

⁷⁵ Breslin, Jimmy. "Life in a cage". Daily News. May 21, 1987.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

at how well it converts difficult or confusing ideas and renders them more easily comprehensible. Sidney Blumenthal wrote an intelligent narrative on the controversy surrounding the nomination of Zoe Baird to the position of United States' Attorney General. He used some interesting metaphors to explain the complex workings of the federal power structure. The following is actually one paragraph which has been divided up for illustration purposes:

The Baird affair revealed Clinton just beginning to connect his synapses with those of Washington. It is a process more complex than replacing outmoded computers in the Old Executive Office Building and rewiring phone lines in the West Wing. Clinton acted initially as though Washington would run on automatic pilot, without his taking over the controls. He assumed the good faith of the machines that is Washington, a machine that is not fuelled by faith, good or bad.

But the capital did not bend its contours to him naturally. And he had not yet learned how to mold the capital to the shape he sought.

The American Reunion, for all its altruism, failed to account for the separation of powers. Congress can help the President extend executive power, but it is not one of his limbs. Despite Clinton's preliminary overtures to the capital, and his embraces, he stopped short of intimate knowledge.

He trusted that to his wise man. The gates of anti-politics in the country, as happened with Bush's Presidency, were opened by a failure of politics at the center.⁷⁷

The four metaphors listed here are examples of reporting that goes beyond what is usually the norm. Blumenthal creates a "Clinton" who is, in turns, a machine,

⁷⁷ Blumenthal, Sidney. "Adventures in Babysitting". The New Yorker. February 15, 1993.

an artist, a lover, and a king under siege. None of these metaphors go a great distance in contributing to the reader's empirical knowledge of the story.

Nonetheless, the complexity of the situation and the difficulties faced by the new administration are made more clear by using this sort of imagery, in addition to traditional reporting techniques.

Another important qualification should be underlined at this point. The value of metaphor in journalism is different than its value in other domains. In other words, there is a concern for the artistic and the creative; however, there are other considerations as well. In Blumenthal's piece, the heavily metaphoric language he uses, chiefly at the beginning and end of the article, is additional to the several pages of empirical observation and analysis. He does not use his metaphors as a way out of having to provide the important details of the story. Nor does he use them as mere decoration.

Heavily-metaphorical language does seem to be placed predominantly at the beginning and ending of the articles. This is evidence of the way it commands our interest as well as consolidates meaning. For example, in Blumenthal's article, he began like this:

Bill Clinton entered by bus from the south. The enemy was vanquished, its shock troops in retreat to the provinces or left to fill out unemployment-benefits forms. His partisans in the capital, having survived twelve years of occupation, eagerly

awaited the liberator. Washington was an open city.⁷⁸

While the metaphors used here are somewhat tongue-in-cheek, Blumenthal did capture the essence of a long struggle and the newness of the in-coming regime. The metaphor of the siege allows the story to become more visual, more comprehensible, than the complex set of circumstances that made up the Baird affair. The reporter went on to describe those circumstances, but the reader was first given this metaphorical image to set the scene.

To understand why an intelligent use of the metaphor is special in newswriting, one only needs to look at the myriad of examples where it is used as shorthand, rather than illumination. The omnipresent metaphor of country or institution as individual is a common example, as a look at the international sections of various papers will show: "Nigeria closes newspapers, radio station;" "Italy seeks tighter rules on military actions;" "Cuba dealing in dollars;" and "Canada pushing to expand Security Council." Compare these to Blumenthal's metaphors: "Congress can help the President extend executive power, but it is not one of his limbs. Despite Clinton's preliminary overtures to the capital, and his embraces, he stopped short of intimate knowledge." This also speaks of Congress and Washington as being individuals. However, to speak of the relationship as an intimate, and frustrating, one between individuals is meant to clarify the struggle

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

between actors.

In Alma Guillermoprieto's report on the capture of the Shining Path's Abimael Guzman, she also capitalized on some interesting metaphors that contribute to character development while explicating the conflict of the story.

She writes:

In his incarnation as Presidente Gonzalo, as he is now known, he is its godhead: its creator, patriarch, and single source of inspiration. It is he who moves his followers to self-immolation, and he who authorizes the car bombs and the mutilating punishments.... There are songs to Gonzalo, and poems. When he is depicted in murals or in easel paintings, he is shown wearing glasses, as befits a scholar, and rising out of the mountains or shining from the sky like the sun.⁷⁹

Guillermoprieto presents the information in such a way that it embellishes the metaphor already constructed around Gonzalo. Gonzalo's supporters depict him "shining from the sky like the sun" while Guillermoprieto depicts him as a "godhead" and a "creator". So while he may be the "bad guy" in the conflict, the reader can understand something of why he is a sympathetic character as well. The story would probably carry less meaning, and be less truthful, if Guzman had not been explicated so well.

The use of metaphor to illuminate character and conflict appeared again,

⁷⁹ Guillermoprieto, Alma. "Down the Shining Path". The New Yorker. February 8, 1993: 64.

in Guillermprieto's article, in a scene describing the leaked video tape of Guzman's capture. The tape had been shown on national television, eliciting sympathy for Guzman and turning his captor, Ketin Vidal, into the "bad guy". Guillermprieto described the situation like this:

Vidal, a character straight out of Simenon, is clearly not listening. Dressed casually in a leather hunting jacket and dark gray slacks, slightly built, with an intelligent, beaked face, he is standing next to his prey, looking down on him in amazement, trying to comprehend the fact that he, Vidal, has just bagged the Minotaur.⁸⁰

Vidal was the successful bird of prey while Guzman, on the other hand, was described as "owlish, bearded, riddled with psoriasis" - hardly the demon that people had imagined. As well, the phrase "just bagged the Minotaur" underscores the mythic aura that had surrounded Guzman. Vidal, therefore, did not just catch a common criminal, but someone who inspired profound fear in Peru.

The use of metonymy in journalism should not be overlooked since it is an important way that reporters explain larger situations through specific examples. A metonymic word or phrase is an expression that stands for, and is a part of, something else. The most common example is the word "Crown" which stands for the powers and personage of royalty. Nathaniel Sheppard Jr., a reporter for the

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

Chicago Tribune, wrote a story that was metonymic in nature. He described a hotel, in Honduras, which reflected the condition of the whole country.

In its heyday, the Maya Hotel stood as a symbol of Honduran prosperity... For Americans, the Maya was the unofficial headquarters for those who came here to help - or watch - the United States try to purge neighboring Nicaragua and El Salvador of communist threats. For Hondurans, though it symbolized the silver lining in the bloody civil wars that raged next door... Now, the Maya is quiet and seedy, a poignant metaphor for the country itself.⁸¹

This approach to explaining the broader issues is extremely common. It helps to interest the readers, by presenting them with the images of an exotic Central American hotel. At the same time, it makes the political and economic reality of Honduras a little more concrete.

John Stackhouse is also known for using this type of reporting method. In one story, he was faced with the task of reporting on the economic changes taking place in rural India - specifically the effects of an increase in disposable income. Stackhouse opened up the story with a vivid description of a fair.

Rupee notes in hand, the children broke through the crowd,
racing to the puppet shows and hand-powered Ferris wheel.
Their mothers took in the stalls of jewelry, lipstick,

⁸¹ Sheppard, Nathaniel Jr.. "Like Honduras, formerly elegant hotel is quiet, seedy". Chicago Tribune. July 17, 1993.

washboards and sweets. Their fathers slumped under a tree to eat ice cream and gossip in peace. From afar, the festival may seem like any other country fair, but in Biharipur it symbolizes the economic metamorphosis that is breaking generations of rural tradition. A decade ago, almost no one in Biharipur could afford consumer goods or enjoy a day at the fair, let alone invest in their homes and farms. But several years of surplus crops and deregulated markets have brought an entirely new concept to the village - disposable income - in virtually every walk of life.⁸²

Puppet shows, lipstick and ice cream are not only the new consumer goods in rural India. They are also the images with which readers can relate. The fair is a small part of the significant economic changes taking place throughout the Indian countryside.

Likewise, a report on the current condition of the American space program was made more understandable by using metaphor. John Noble Wilford wrote:

As workers at Cape Canaveral prepare for the somber task of burying the debris of the space shuttle Challenger in an abandoned missile silo, the greater wreckage of the American space program still lies everywhere, picked over but by no means reassembled into a vibrant whole.⁸³

People who saw the horrific images of the space shuttle Challenger explosion

⁸² Stackhouse, John. "Rural lifestyle changes lanes". The Globe and Mail. July 24, 1993.

⁸³ Wilford, John Noble. "Threat to nation's lead in space is seen in lack of guiding policy". in William J. Kendall, ed. The Pulitzer Prizes: Vol 1, 1987: A Legacy of Distinguished Reporting, Powerful and Unforgettable Images from America's Best Journalists. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987: 317

might better understand an article about "the greater wreckage of the American space program". This metaphor is successful in alluding to the shock and embarrassment of the breakdown of a program that had the facade of perfection. It also adds a funereal atmosphere in that "burying the debris of the space shuttle" marks the death of program's claim to innocence or goodness.

In a similar fashion, Jonathan Freedman uses metaphor in his article on immigration law reform, in the United States. In "Easter sunrise on the border" Freedman uses flowers as metaphor for hope, and fences as metaphor for the barrier to freedom. He also uses both flowers and fences as metaphors for hypocrisy. He wrote:

The night before Easter, three companeros crawled through a hole in the chain-link fence - into America. The border where they crossed is a no-man's land. But in the spring, yellow flowers bloom waist-high beside the torn fence... Far away from the border, it is cherry blossom time in Washington. There the House of Representatives is taking up immigration-law reform once again. Immigration law, like the fence on the border, is riddled with holes. And each loophole in the law is defended by a lobbyist, paid to keep that loophole open.⁸⁴

What the metaphors do effectively, in this article, is to powerfully draw two scenes

⁸⁴ Freedman, Jonathan. "Easter sunrise on the border". in William J. Kendall, ed. The Pulitzer Prizes. :399.

together in a way that purely descriptive language might not do. The power struggles that take place in Washington easily maintain a detachedness from the day-to-day reality faced by those whose lives are impacted by the laws. To say that the vote of a Congressman might affect the life of a *campanero* would probably do little to inspire the emotions or the intellect of readers. Metaphor, on the other hand, can do both.

What all of these examples of metaphor have in common is that they are not part of the genre known as deadline writing. Broadcast news and most newspaper stories have such difficult constraints on their production that inspired creativity is extremely difficult and, therefore, extraordinarily rare. One of the factors that is normally required for the creation of any type of art is time for reflexion. News, by its very nature, is rarely reflexive and time is a commodity in short supply.

These authors have all brought metaphor into the realm of newswriting in order to reveal some of the more important truths about their stories. Generally, when metaphors are used well, they help to bring complex situations into a more meaningful context. Second, they also inspire the imaginations of readers and viewers. Undoubtedly, this can only help to gain interest for their stories and to improve understanding of the information they provide. Metaphor, therefore, is a practical tool for newswriting. More than that, it is an essential element of the

creative project.

In Dwyer's article, on the trial, he brings home the jurors' desire to find some "truth" in the courtroom. By extension, he also writes of journalism's project. He writes: "Some truth had been heaped together, perhaps not sturdy enough to stand the winds of an appeal, but enough so that three jurors could walk from the courtroom weeping, holding each other up, and with them, an entire city." The project of uncovering truth, therefore, is never finished, nor is there only one way to search it out. While the empiricists poke and prod, and the poets weave meaning with words, journalists have the unique opportunity of doing both. And many count on them to do so.

CHAPTER FOUR

Myth in News

In newsrooms, journalists make decisions each day on which stories to cover and, inevitably, the use of news judgment must sometimes lead to covering "stories which weigh heavily on the social mind". Northrop Frye identifies these stories as being myths, and as having both a story structure and an element of "concerned knowledge". It is not possible, in this paper, to discuss all of the mythic types delineated by Frye. Nonetheless, to understand the mythic in news, a close examination of a few news stories is required. Therefore, a selection of articles, which highlight the myths of fall, apocalypse and redemption, will be explored.

Northrop Frye writes:

Man, born into the ...physical world, is subjected to a moral dialectic from his birth. He must either go downward into sin and death, sin being a demonic state that the animals cannot reach, or upward, back as far as possible, to his original home.⁸⁵

The concept of "fall", therefore, assumes that humans are given the opportunity to make a choice between two directions and that there is a voyage of sorts that

⁸⁵ Frye. 1990: 170.

must be undertaken. Chip Brown's extraordinary article chronicling the life, and death, of a young man in the wilderness, the tension is a story that precisely describes such a fall.

Brown takes a story that probably would have received little, if any, coverage and, through great reporting and writing skills, made a masterpiece. His subject, Chris McCandless, was a young man who gave up all worldly goods to search of the ultimate adventure; it was a quest that finally led him to the Alaskan wilderness, where he died of starvation. Through McCandless' diary, interviews with friends and family, and a long trek to follow his path, Brown came up with an intriguing - and timeless-story.

What makes this story so special is its mythic elements. It is one that, like most myths, has a close relationship with the movement of the sun, or the change of the seasons. Brown begins by describing his trip to the scene of McCandless' death. "It would have been better to go on the ground, as the boy had gone when he came into the country in the spring." Although McCandless was 24 when he died, Brown underlined the fact that he was still a "boy", eternally caught in his spring years. He writes:

What makes his death so memorable is the narrative he was enacting: it is an old story, the tale of the boy on the brink of manhood who ventures into the wilderness in a rite of passage. It is supposed to end with his transformation and return - the new-made man reunited with his community, a

community that relies on his wise new eyes to renew itself. And, true to form, Chris had often spoken of writing a book about his travels. But this time the narrative was broken, its promise cut short. There was no return. There was no homecoming. There would never be a book. There would only be the diary that is inevitably found later beside the body, and the last words "God bless" and "goodbye," and one more name to add to the litany of travellers who never made it back.⁸⁶

It is rare for a reporter to so clearly understand not only the narrative aspect of his story, but also its mythic implications. In other words, he saw the tale of Chris McCandless as more than "Man dies in abandoned bus." He followed the chronological order of the story, introduced characters and painted vivid scenes. However, more than that, he knew the wider personal and societal implications - the meaning that is the same today as in any other time, or any other place.

What makes this story one of "fall", instead of "tragedy" is that a promising young man, "good enough for Phi Beta Kappa", "ignored the advice of his teachers, frustrated the expectations of his parents, and rejected the conventions of his class". By shedding all things material and running away from the familiar, McCandless was rejecting what his society expected of him. Frye explains that "because the garden of Eden has gone, what is humanly natural can only be what is decreed by custom and authority to be natural."⁸⁷ The fact that McCandless

⁸⁶ Brown, Chip. "I Now Walk into the Wild". The New Yorker. February 8, 1993.

⁸⁷ Frye. 1990: 170.

died in his attempt to go against what custom and authority would dictate to him, is the proof of his fall.

Moreover, Brown writes, "It was as if he believed he could pare away whatever was false or superficial and, as he got more adept at it, he seemed almost to revel in the power of doing without the euphoria of dispossession." Unfortunately, "whether by tragic miscalculation or unknowable design, he pared away himself". In other words, what may have originally been a spiritual quest became something corrupt and unworthy.

The myth of fall can be the foundation for a societal story, as well as a personal or individual one. In the news, one can see a host of stories that chronicle the movement to ultimate failure. In an article, by Ben Barber, the introduction of technology in the third world - once thought to be the answer to all problems - is shown to have widened the gap between rich and poor. He begins:

Thirty years ago, the invention of small-scale technologies such as portable electric-power generators and radio phones led to the dream of a planet in which people would consume less and waste less, sharing the Earth's bounty under an ethic known as "small is beautiful".⁸⁸

The opportunity was there to have the "perfect" life. Unfortunately, according to

⁸⁸ Barber, Ben. "Technology backfired in Third World". The Hamilton Spectator. August 6, 1993. (Originally printed the Baltimore Sun).

Barber's article, the resources were so badly squandered and poorly allocated, that the situation for the poor is now far worse. He does not attempt to hide the moral to the story:

Where there is no will to behave compassionately and share the resources, wealth and technology of a nation, even the finest tools do not build a more just society but become instruments of social and economic repression.⁸⁹

The opportunity to build a just society, following independence from colonial masters, was lost in many countries - the movement, here, being one of despair, through hope and promise, and finally down into despair again. Blaine Harden wrote an award-winning article on the fallen state of Zaire. Harden recalls the old Zaire - the Congo Free State under King Leopold - this way:

It was a savage operation. Quota systems were established for production of rubber and ivory. Those who failed to meet the quotas were beaten, raped, or killed by soldiers of the Free State. To prove they had been enforcing the quota, soldiers cut off the hands of those they punished. Smoked hands became a kind of currency. Conrad called it the "vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience."⁹⁰

Unfortunately, all the hopes that independence might have brought a different reality to Zaire were dashed, as a new tyrant took power. Zaire fell ever more deeply into a Hell-like condition.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ Harden, Blaine. "Life, death, and corruption on an African mainstream". The Washington Post. November 8, 1987.

In Harden's article, he describes his travels along the Zaire River, and he recalls how "Joseph Conrad used this river, then called the Congo, as a metaphorical highway to the black reaches of the human soul."⁹¹ What Harden goes on to describe, is as horrific as Conrad's Heart of Darkness. What makes it somehow worse, however, is that there was the chance to be something more - that this is now a kind of masochistic state. With relentless detail, Harden recounts his travels down the river, on the "Major Mudimbi" - a vessel symbolizing the corruption of the Zairian state. Every detail he elicits builds a picture of unmitigated horror:

Glaring white morning light poured over heaps of mottled fur and squirming legs. It was hot and some of the carcasses were ripening. The night's harvest was mostly monkeys - hundreds of them, some smoked, some rotting, some freshly trapped and twitching. They were tied together by their long tails in easy-carrying bundles. There also were antelope, bushbuck, and a couple of giant forest hogs. A well-muscled sailor with a sharp knife and bloodstained sneakers was methodically cutting throats.⁹²

Harden goes on to describe a boat - and a country - in disrepair, where lives have little value and the "scramble for loot" is the overriding concern. Most importantly, what he tells his readers is not just what has become of Zaire, but what any society is capable of becoming.

⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁹² *ibid.*

There are many other stories, that reporters tell, which are equally horrific, but that relate more of an "apocalyptic" myth. In Pamela Mercer's article on street children in Bogota, there is no narrative movement from fall, to rise, to fall. Rather, it describes a situation that has only continued to worsen. Yet, by the very fact that what Mercer reports is so awful, there is the sense that something - or somebody - must come along to change things, that surely this is the worst that society could be expected to endure. This is the Bogota that Mercer saw:

Old men and young children on Cartucho Street lie drooped on the sidewalks that divide derelict buildings from unpaved roads. Their blank stares suggest how they make a precarious living: by selling cheap drugs like marijuana, glue and a highly addictive cocaine derivative called bazuco. In other parts of this isolated area of downtown Bogota, about 16 square blocks of destitution, petty crime and child prostitution, street urchins get their paltry food supply from local peddlers who sell crumbs from the garbage cans of nearby cafeterias.⁹³

The residents of these "16 square blocks" are of interest to people thousands of miles away, not just because they are sympathetic, but because they become characters in a larger play. Despite Mercer's dedication to detail, these people are not "real". They represent a world of darkness.

Even when Mercer mentions some of the programs in Bogota which help these children, she underlines how little they can actually do to alleviate the

⁹³ Mercer, Pamela. "In the Street Urchins' Dark Haunt, No Ray of Hope". The New York Times. August 6, 1993.

situation. Her final paragraph looks like this:

Although volunteers and social workers have brought hope to a lucky few, many children are thought, even by the most zealous of social workers, to be beyond a helping hand. Mr. Lara... said, "Nobody quite knows what to do with them and few want to be the ones who try."⁹⁴

The reader is left with two impressions: first, that the situation is so terrible, it is far beyond the capability of any individual to change it and, second, that the situation is so offensive it must be changed. Where the power will come from to do this, is something that is beyond these individuals - a hero, god, or greater force of some sort.

Fearing both the present and the future, therefore, is a mythological theme that weighs heavily in the news. Stories about the population explosion, environmental catastrophe, imminent nuclear war, economic collapse and social calamity are all part of this genre. It is this very same mythic type that is seen a lot of the coverage of natural, rather than man-made disasters. A glance at some of the coverage of flooding in South Asia, during the summer of 1993, provides an example of humans fear of, and bewilderment about, the power of nature. Tim McGirk was reporting from India on the rising death toll.

South Asia depends on the summer monsoon rains for life.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

Without these seasonal rains, large swaths of the subcontinent are punished by drought. But this year, the worst monsoon deluge in four decades instead of bringing renewal has brought death.⁹⁵

The rains, in McGirks article, become a mythic character. Frye writes, "The enemy is, first, the human enemy encountered in warfare and, second, the unshaped and chaotic element in nature, identified with drought, floods, and natural sterility of all kinds."⁹⁶ McGirk, then, uses the most fundamental mythic construct of the omnipotent power, that can bring either life or death to helpless humans. Most reporting of natural disasters will have this element to it - even when it seems "objective" and "factual".

Sometimes, however, there are stories of hope and redemption. Isabel Vincent also wrote about street children in Latin America, based her story on a different mythical construct. Her article, "How street kids found salvation", illustrates perfectly the hope that, no matter how bad things may get, society can redeem itself. Vincent reports on a program in Brazil that is trying to get the children off the streets. It describes the overwhelming magnitude of the problem: "nearly 16,000 children living on the streets of Salvador, a city of just over two million. Nearly 35 million children live in 'absolute poverty'."⁹⁷

⁹⁵ McGirk, Tim. "Officials fear disease will increase death toll". The Ottawa Citizen. July 28, 1993.

⁹⁶ Frye. 1990: 187.

⁹⁷ Vincent, Isabel. "How street kids found salvation". The Globe and Mail. July 26, 1993.

Despite the apparent hopelessness of the situation, one organization has "reformed 780 children by taking its educational programs directly onto the street of Salvador". Mercer provides a long list of the hard work the Axe Organization has accomplished including drug rehabilitation, accommodations, and a clothing design workshop. What is emphasized, overall, is the humble nature of this organization. Mercer writes, "By keeping the program's costs down and drawing from a wide variety of sources, Mr. La Rocca says he is able to educate a child for one-tenth the cost of similar public-sector projects." This combination of hard work, humbleness and renewed hope for the future leaves the impression that it is possible to be saved - even from the profound Hell in which these children live.

Hope is very precious to humans, at all times and in all places. For many Canadians equating hockey stars with gods is not far-fetched; and the promise of a first-choice draft pick represents the shared hope of the entire community. Roy MacGregor was able to write about Alexandre Daigle's accomplishment of being the first to be drafted, by the National Hockey League, as a parallel to an ascending god. It might seem that this would be rather tasteless or cliché. However, MacGregor illustrated the story this way:

When Jimmy Jobin woke up on the most exciting day of his life, he had wet himself. He was 22 months old, it was dawn, and his parents wanted to get an early start on the drive in from Beauport to make the front of the line that was already forming in front of the old Manège Militaire. By the time they got there more than a thousand were already waiting for a glimpse at the newest god in the game that means as much

here as life itself.⁹⁸

MacGregor was not overstating the case: especially in these hard times, many Canadians find hope in the ritual of hockey. No matter how bad the everyday world may be, it might be possible for someone to come along as a kind of saviour. MacGregor includes a quote to bring this home, adding a Christlike quality to Daigle:

"Il sera la future vedette," Lynda Jobin explained. He is the coming star. He is the future..."⁹⁹

Again, MacGregor infuses the story with a Christian element when he describes the crowds around the new player:

They were bringing babies to him to be touched... as if the hands belonged to a 17th Century bishop instead of a hockey player who is not expected to give his full blessings until the 21st Century.¹⁰⁰

Whether they write stories about individuals - the fall of Chris McCandless or the Messiah-like Alexandre Daigle - or society - the despair of Zaire or the hope in Brazil - reporters are telling stories that are mythical in nature. Through their stories, the full range of human experience can be communicated and, in

⁹⁸ MacGregor, Roy. "The Chosen One". The Ottawa Citizen. July 27, 1993.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

many ways, both conscious and unconscious, cause society to reflect more profoundly on that experience. In Frye's words, the myth, "presents a unity to the imagination more intense than the documentary materials."¹⁰¹ Some reporters are able to bring more than just the facts, the figures and the quotes to their readers and audiences. They can convey what is "concerned knowledge" - those stories which, in one way or another, really matter.

¹⁰¹ Frye. 1982:25.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

A critical approach to life means the acquisition of "knowledge of the conditioning that was formerly accepted uncritically."¹⁰² The imagination is key to discovering the truth, at least about "the human condition".¹⁰³ This provides a more interesting form of detachment than journalism's traditional code of objectivity. Objectivity assumes the polarity of dogma, while all things in the imagination are possibilities:

"[Myth] is not addressed directly to belief: it is rather a reservoir of possibilities of belief. It is the area of free discussion which Mill, in his Essay on Liberty, felt to be the genuine parliament of man and the safeguard of social freedom as a whole."¹⁰⁴

In the realm of the imagination, one can ignore the subject and object and concentrate on "the more important categories" of "necessity and freedom".¹⁰⁵

Freedom, especially in the area of expression, is a concern to journalists and Northrop Frye alike. The role of the imagination is to be a force against

¹⁰² Frye. 1991:14.

¹⁰³ *ibid*:37.

¹⁰⁴ Frye. 1967:115.

¹⁰⁵ Frye. 1963:4.

societal illusions - an ironic role considering the modern view of imaginative structures. Some of these "illusions" are found in advertising, cliché, jargon, and what Frye calls "pastoral myths" and "progress myths".¹⁰⁶ They are the language of the mob, rather than the free society, and "lead from illusion into hysteria".¹⁰⁷

To go beyond this requires a vision of society which is ultimately the point of all of Frye's writings. He believes that "not merely communications media and public relations, but the whole structure of society itself, is an anti-art, an old and worn-out creation that needs to be created anew." To keep imagining the good society requires an "open mythology", a concept which is fundamentally liberal. It requires people to seek the best that language can do for them through incorporating the artistic into the realm of social communication.

However, in journalism, tension seems to exist between what is thought of as the "art" of journalism and the "science" of objective reporting. Both, if one follows Frye's logic, are indispensable. "The distinctive intellectual virtue of science is detachment, the objective consideration of evidence, the drawing of rational conclusions from evidence."¹⁰⁸ In demotic expression, "social consensus" is the legitimizing factor, meaning that "'objective' means real, because it allows of

¹⁰⁶ *ibid*:60.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*:64.

¹⁰⁸ Frye. 1970:17.

such a consensus, and that 'subjective' means unreal because it does not."¹⁰⁹

The arts, however, are "concerned" and exclusively deal with "emotion, value, aesthetic standards, the portrayal of objects of desire and hope and dream as realities, the explicit preference of life to death, of growth to petrification, of freedom to enslavement."¹¹⁰ The language used to portray these things, says Frye, is found in myth and metaphor.

Art and science also have negative attributes that need to be recognized; neither can be embraced unquestioningly. While the arts are "concerned", the flip side of the coin is "anxiety". "We have anxiety when a society seizes on one myth and attempts to pound the whole of knowledge and truth into a structure conforming to it."¹¹¹ The sciences, however, also have their "vice", which Frye describes as "indifference" and which excludes from discussion the individual or societal good.

To suggest, then, that journalism should only exist in either the realm of art or that of science, would be a mistake. Rather, the best journalists should understand the opportunities and the limits of both. To combine the skills of

¹⁰⁹ Frye. 1982:21.

¹¹⁰ Frye. 1970:17.

¹¹¹ *ibid*:19.

observation and logical weighing of evidence with the imaginative use of metaphorical language and mythical story structure promises a more fruitful genre of journalism.

Just as there are difficulties with art and science though, so to can metaphor and myth pose problems. It cannot be assumed that the use of either assures skill or, indeed, honesty. Frye suggests some of the problems that arise in myth and metaphor. He discusses the rhetoric of oratory as a vehicle for ideology and its "strong emphasis on figurative or purely verbal language, metaphor, allegory, simile, antithesis, and above all repetition."¹¹² This may be used, he says not to illuminate but, rather "to put the watchdog of consciousness to sleep."¹¹³ This is done, above all, by the use not of the imagination, but by the cliché. Just as with myth, metaphor has inherent dangers.

Of course, 'metaphorical' is as treacherous a conception as 'truth' or 'reality' could ever be. Some metaphors are illuminating; some are merely indispensable; some are misleading or lead only to illusion; some are socially dangerous....But for better or worse it occupies a central area... of both social and individual experience. It is a primitive form of awareness, established long before the distinction of subject and object became normal.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Frye. 1990: 17.

¹¹³ Frye. 1990:18.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.* 1990:xxiii.

So what then, is the essential difference between the use of metaphor and myth for the betterment of journalism and those myths and metaphors which are hurtful or unnecessary? What is the distinction between science which is curious and science which is indifferent or illiberal? And what, finally, is the difference between art which illuminates and art which is dogmatic? The difference, ultimately, is one of intent - the intention to search for truth.

That is what made the work of journalist Edward R. Murrow so special. Back in the Second World War, Murrow reported for the International News Service. His reports were filled with what seems to be the straightforward facts of a world at war. The language he used is not ambiguous or lofty; his references are not elusive. Yet, he conveyed to his listeners the profound truth of the situation. The following is an excerpt from one of his reports during the German blitz against London:

Up toward London we could see billows of smoke fanning out above the river and, above our heads, the British fighters climbing almost straight up, trying to intercept the bombers before they got away. It went on for two hours, and then the all-clear. We went down to a nearby pub for dinner. Children were already organizing a hunt for bits of shrapnel. Under some bushes beside the road there was a baker's cart. Two boys, still sobbing, were trying to get a quivering bay mare back between the shafts. The lady who ran the pub told us that these raids were bad for the chickens, the dogs and the horses. A toothless old man of nearly seventy came in and asked for a pint of mild and bitters, confided that he had always, all his life, gone to bed at eight o'clock and found now that three pints of beer made him drowsy-like so he

could sleep through any air raid.¹¹⁵

His list of observations here might seem plain enough. The characters and actions he presented to his listeners have a subjective reality as well as an objective existence. He tried, to show the truth of wartime England through the "characters" he saw -symbolic of the many people who suffered through a time that must have seemed like the end of the world.

It is true that the truth of any situation can not be complete without the human element. Without it, stories lack meaning and are difficult to comprehend. Edward Gargan wrote a particularly interesting article, for the New York Times Service, about the post-war hardship experienced by people in Afghanistan. He has a paragraph as follows:

Along the main street of the old town, Haji Haider, Herat's oldest kebab maker, fans the coals of his grill as skewered lamb and fat sizzle under a tattered awning that marks the entrance to his earthen-chambered restaurant.¹¹⁶

After being introduced to the "oldest kebab maker", Gargan begins to write about the historical and political difficulties experienced in Afghanistan since the Afghan-Soviet conflict began in 1979. His story includes other characters, like

¹¹⁵ quoted in Bliss, Edward Jr. and John L. Patterson. Writing News for Broadcast. New York: Columbia University, 1971: 19.

¹¹⁶ Gargan, Edward. "Shattered by war, Afghans building new lives". The Globe and Mail. July 28, 1993.

Haji Haider, who make the reader conscious of the reality of a country very far away.

Humans need both art and science to make sense of their world. Even the genre of science reporting is no exception. In Tony Emerson's feature, "Probing the Darkest Chasm Under Sea", he reports on the latest deep sea exploration technology. More importantly, it explores the conflict between nations and between humans and nature. He begins like this:

This is the tale of a Japanese expedition to the deepest place on Earth - the Challenger Deep, 11 kilometres beneath the Pacific, off the island of Guam. It's also the story of American adventurers striving to outdo Japan by building futuristic vessels to reach this dark undersea chasm.¹¹⁷

The addition of this paragraph is evidence of the way reporters mediate where there are "contradictions between nature and civilization, between tradition and modernization, between the familiar and the exotic, and between the self and society."¹¹⁸ They do so not only by providing evidence, but also by conveying it in a way that brings a common meaning to the story.

Myth and metaphor are powerful tools in conveying meaning. They are related language structures that are part of the imaginative world. That does not

¹¹⁷ Emerson, Tony. "Probing the Darkest Chasm Under Sea". The Ottawa Citizen. July 11, 1993.

¹¹⁸ Campbell, Richard: 96.

mean that metaphors are frilly words and myths are fairytales. Myth and metaphor convey our most serious thoughts and emotions. They say what is there as well as what can be. Finally, they make up an indispensable part of social communication - particularly journalism.

For too long journalism, in North America, has had a narrow definition of what it should be. That lack of vision has led, not to excellence, but to stagnation. Few reporters have the ability, or are given the opportunity, to tell stories well. The best journalists, like some of those discussed in this paper, have somehow managed to incorporate elements of myth and metaphor into their news writing. Whether this is the product of training or intuition is not clear, although Frye's "educated imagination" is a product of both. What is evident is that the most exemplary journalism is visionary.

Perhaps, as Peter Dahlgren notes, "[W]hat is at stake, at least in the long run, is definitional and ideological control over what journalism is, can and should be." On a grander scale, what may be at stake is what society is, can, and should be. If consent should only be obtained, if authority should only be upheld, because there are viable choices, then communication should be as inclusive as possible. Robert Bly writes, "Our work then as men and women is not only to free ourselves from family cages and collective mind sets, but to release transcendent

ings from imprisonment and trance. That's what the story says in the end."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Bly, Robert. Iron John. New York: Vintage Books, 1990:233.

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