Re-Mythologising the Amleth Narrative: A Mythological and Psychoanalytic Study of *The Northman*

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DISSERTATION

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AJAY VAISHNAV A.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **Re-Mythologising the Amleth Narrative: A Mythological and Psychoanalytic Study of *The Northman*** is a record of the studies carried out by **AJAY VAISHNAV A.** at the department of English, T.K.M. College of Arts and Science, Kollam under the guidance of **Mrs. Deepa Ramachandran** and submitted to the University of Kerala in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in English Language and Literature.

Mrs. Deepa Ramachandran
Asst. Professor in English
T.K.M. College of Arts and Science
Kollam

Dr. Shafana Shaffi
Head, Department of English
T.K.M. College of Arts and Science
Kollam

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the dissertation entitled **Re-Mythologising the Amleth Narrative: A Mythological and Psychoanalytic Study of *The Northman*** submitted to the University of Kerala in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of Master of Arts in English Language and Literature is the original record of studies and research carried out by me during 2024-2026 under the guidance of Mrs. Deepa Ramachandran, Assistant Professor of English, T.K.M. College of Arts and Science, Kollam and it has not formed the basis for the award of any degree, title or recognition.



Ajay Vaishnav A.

M.A. English

T.K.M College of Arts and Science

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Ajay Vaishnav A.

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Preface

Myths have always been one of the most persistent narrative forms in human civilization. Prior to written literature, myths served as culture archives where societies explained their origins, outlined their morals, expressed their collective ideas regarding fate, identity, heroism, and humankind's relation to the divine. Robert Eggers's *The Northman* (2022) takes an important place in the current wave of cinematic myth-making. It is the hypothesis of the project that the film is a re-mythologisation of the Amleth story by reestablishing its ritualistic, archetypal, and cosmological roots within contemporary cinema. While the play *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare transformed the medieval story into a psychological drama, *The Northman* seeks to return to its mythic roots by putting emphasis on ritual, fate, and destiny of heroes. The application of Mythological Criticism as the main method, along with Psychoanalytic Theory, allows us to explore the way the film reinvents the Amleth story.

The study investigates the mentioned issues through the analysis of the film *The Northman* based on the notions of myth, archetype, ritual, symbolism and psychoanalysis. In particular, the paper looks into the way the film reinvokes mythological archetypes where identity is seen as an ancestral role defined not only by cosmic order but also by lineage and community needs rather than inner self-reflection of an individual. Although Psychoanalytic Theory can be considered the second method of the film analysis, the research shows that director Eggers emphasizes mythic consciousness over psychological realism.

The project consists of four chapters. The first chapter – "Introduction" – discusses the history of adaptation of myths, introduces the Amleth tale and the way it was adapted through literature and cinema and states the theoretical approach used in the study. The second chapter – "Mythic Revival and Archetypal Structure in *The Northman*" – utilizes Mythological Criticism to analyse the archetypes, rituals, symbolism, mythic patterns found in *The Northman* and shows how this film recasts the ancient myth through modern cinematic medium. The third chapter – "Externalising the Unconscious in *The Northman*" – discusses the depiction of Amleth in the film as an archetype of an avenger hero by exploring his identity, destiny, violent ritual and symbolic meaning from mythological and psychoanalytical perspectives. The last chapter – "Conclusion" – summarizes the results and proves that *The Northman* serves as an example of timeless adaptability of myths and that archetypal stories still relevant in order to understand heroism, violence, identity and destiny in modern films.

Chapter One

Introduction

Literature, history, and cinema constitute distinct yet interrelated modes of human communication, each governed by its own formal conventions and cultural functions. Across centuries, human societies have relied on narrative not merely for entertainment but as a means of preserving collective memory, ethical systems, and metaphysical beliefs. In the contemporary information age, the interaction between these forms has intensified, particularly through the adaptation of literary and mythic narratives into visual media such as television and cinema. Adaptation, however, is not a derivative or secondary practice; rather, it is a fundamental cultural process through which stories survive, transform, and renew themselves. For those who cherish both film and fiction, the cinematic adaptation of literary works holds a timeless allure. The pull of the cinema, when it promises an adaptation of a favorite book, is irresistible to the dedicated reader. From ancient oral traditions to written epics and dramatic performance, myths have always been retold to suit the ideological, ritualistic, and aesthetic needs of successive generations. An early and significant example of this process can be found in the works of classical Greek dramatists. Homeric material was frequently revisited by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, who transformed epic stories into tragic drama. The adaptability of mythic storytelling is highlighted by Aeschylus' observation that his plays were only "slices cut off from the great banquet of Homér's poems." These dramatists did not aim at faithful reproduction; instead, they condensed, intensified, and reinterpreted myth in pursuit of moral and philosophical truth. Beneath the variations in plot and character lay a stable mythic structure—stories that had been told before and would continue told again. Early modern literature, Renaissance play, and medieval romances all continued this tradition of mythic adaptation. Christian moral systems, national histories, and newly developed ideas of individual subjectivity all incorporated myths. However, their fundamental archetypes—the hero, the avenger, the usurper, and the betrayed father persisted

in spite of these changes. Therefore, myth serves as a living system of symbols that changes in reaction to societal shifts while maintaining its fundamental patterns rather than as a static story.

Cinema was an inevitable culmination of the developments of the nineteenth century, which went on to conquer our lives are now styled so much by what we see through the moving visual world of television and cinema that there is perhaps not a single moment in our lives that isn't shadowed by it. The emergence of cinema marked a significant shift in the way myths could be represented and experienced. Unlike literary texts, which rely on language and imagination, cinema constructs meaning through a synthesis of image, sound, movement, and rhythm. The visual medium possesses a unique capacity to evoke the ritualistic and symbolic dimensions of myth, often bypassing rational explanation in favour of sensory and emotional impact. Through controlled lighting, stark landscapes, symbolic imagery, and physical action, cinema can recreate the atmosphere of archaic belief systems with remarkable immediacy.

At the same time, the cinematic medium is bound by specific temporal and spatial limitations, which necessitate narrative condensation and a clear, direct presentation of events. Consequently, when adapting myths to film, there is a tendency to emphasize externalized conflict, visual metaphor, and physical enactment rather than internal soliloquy or discursive philosophical examination. From this, two principal approaches have emerged in the filming of myths: a more recent movement strives to restore their ancient, ritual-based narrative form, while another updates and reinterprets them through a psychological lens. Initial cinematic treatments of myth commonly made supernatural aspects logical or presented them as manifestations of inner psychology, thereby aligning age-old tales with modern sensibilities. However, contemporary filmmakers have increasingly sought to recover the strangeness, violence, and spiritual intensity of myth itself.

Cinema is not only the vehicle that retells the myths but it redefines the mythic quest because of the possibilities that it provides for working with

archetypes and rituals. Visual exaggeration, physical pain, and symbolism are some of the means that may allow bringing myth back to the community and emotion. Although oral and literary traditions have always been the main bearers of myths since the dawn of time, cinema represents the next step in the evolution of the ways of processing and experiencing such stories. It goes beyond mere retelling because of the unique language that it has and that allows it to revive and reinvent myth. Cinema has its own powerful way of conveying archetypes through actors, costumes, and symbols. An appearance of a certain actor, a certain style of clothing, or even repeated images (circle, certain color) may convey the ideas of "wise mentor," "trickster," or "holy grail" without further explanation. For example, George Lucas in *Star Wars* was able to use the language of cinema in order to address directly Joseph Campbell's "monomyth," which allowed him to identify immediately the archetype of the hero in Luke Skywalker.

Film may either emulate or create ritualistic experience, by way of their inherent formal devices. Conducive for an entrancing experience can be achieved through relevant recurring editing patterns, 'ritualistic' timing and through usage of long and reflective shots. For instance, the deliberate editing sequences in the films by Andrei Tarkovsky do not seem to be just the means of telling a story but rather resemble participation in a spiritual or metaphysical ritual. In addition, the communal experience of watching the film in the theater enhances this effect, thus constituting the modern ritual where the myth is experienced collectively. Modern filmmaking actively employs mythical elements not in order to reaffirm traditional stories but rather to scrutinize and deconstruct them. Such films as *The Matrix* (1999), for example, offer the ancient philosophical questions (what is real?) in the context of a cyber-myth.

Some films, like *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), oppose harsh realities of history with the dark fairy-tale mythology, criticizing one with the help of the other. Thus, in modern films, myths are tested against new values of gender, power, and destiny.

Amleth myth has its own place in the extensive history of mythical transformations. As written down in the late twelfth century by the Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus in his work called *Gesta Danorum*, the Amleth myth belongs to the world of medieval Scandinavia culture and politics. Written in Latin and presented in the framework of a chronicle that is historically oriented, the myth of Amleth undoubtedly represents the form of a pre-existing oral revenge myth. The myth of Amleth contains the elements of a world view of an ancient culture influenced by the concepts of pre-Christian warrior ethics, kinship loyalty, and rigid honor code. According to the myth of Amleth as told by Saxo Grammaticus, Amleth is the son of King Horwendil – a respected and famous king of Denmark. Amleth's father, the king is brutally killed by his brother – Feng, who succeeds his brother and marries Gerutha – his brother's wife and widow. The murder and subsequent marriage represent the betrayal of not only personal values, but also of dynastic and cosmic harmony. In medieval Scandinavia, kingship was more than just governance – it was sacral.

The king stood for abundance, fertility, and safety within the kingdom. Consequently, his illegal killing meant an enormous disruption to the ethical order of society. Amleth's reaction to the crisis is not a matter of delay; instead, it is a form of cleverness. Since defiance of the king would mean instant death, he goes into madness, acting irrationally and destructively. But this madness is not accidental; it is a form of disguise which has its roots in a mythic archetype known as the "wise fool" or trickster. In this way, Amleth disguises his smartness

and gives himself some time before planning his revenge. The structure of Amleth tale incorporates the most essential features of the mythic patterning as it was suggested by Northrop Frye and Joseph Campbell. The narrative unfolds along the path of exile, hiding, testing, and return. Amleth faces test after test in the form of Feng trying to uncover his pretended madness through sending spies to spy on him, setting up meetings with women, and finally sending him off to England with a death warrant. In each case, he proves his cunning and ability to adapt. These tests serve not only as part of the plot but as ordeals that legitimize his right to be an avenger and heir. Crucially, the notion of revenge in the Amleth story is not presented as moral ambiguity but as religious duty. In the pre-Christian Norse ethos, vengeance was a legal and ethical obligation inherent in the institution of blood feud and honor. Not avenging one's father would be tantamount to accepting dishonor and disrupting genealogy. Thus Amleth's promise is not a personal expression of his anger but a religious pledge to restore his genealogy and balance in the community. The violence committed by him is restorative rather than anarchic. When he finally performs his revenge of burning Feng and his men in a hall and restoring his kingdom, his action becomes a means of cleansing and restoration of proper order. The myth incorporates also a number of fatalistic motifs that are typical for the Norse cosmology. While Saxo narrates the story from an ecclesiastical perspective, the presence of pagan beliefs is evident in stressing the concept of destiny and inherited responsibility.

Amleth seems to be a tool of the ancestral will rather than an independent modern person. Identity and family are intimately intertwined; his purpose in life is to play out a role in the wider web of survival for the royal line. His identification with destiny contrasts starkly with later renaissance

reinterpretations that highlight conscience and moral ambiguity. Moreover, the Amleth tale emphasizes the physicality of the action rather than inner contemplation. The protagonist's wit operates through deeds and not introspection. Violence, planning, and performance shape the story. From the mythical perspective, actions are what give significance to the story. There is no sense of inner conflict in his actions since, in his society, there was an ethical basis upon which revenge is both necessary and morally justified. In this way, the Amleth story can be seen as the archetype of a revenge tale based on archetypical structures, ritual duty, and community ethics. This mythic foundation becomes essential when examining later adaptations, particularly Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which internalises and problematizes the revenge imperative, and Robert Eggers's *The Northman* (2022) which consciously reclaims the archaic, ritualistic intensity of the original legend. Understanding the cultural and mythological matrix of Saxo's Amleth is therefore crucial to tracing the transformation—and eventual re-mythologization of this enduring narrative across time and medium.

Whereas in *Hamlet* by Shakespeare, the emphasis had moved from ritual to psychological struggle. However, in Robert Eggers's *The Northman* (2022), the filmmaker is intentional about going back to the archaic roots of the Amleth myth. Instead of modernizing or internalizing the theme of vengeance in the story, the filmmaker attempts to recreate the mythic context from where the story came. This film creates its story set in an extensively researched Viking world that draws heavily on Old Norse sagas, archaeological findings, and pagan theology in order to create a setting that is less historical than mythic. Robert Eggers. Emerging as a distinctive voice in contemporary cinema, Eggers is known for his meticulous historical reconstruction and his sustained engagement

with folklore, ritual, and archaic belief systems. His earlier films, such as The Witch (2015) and The Lighthouse (2019), explore psychological disintegration within rigorously researched historical settings, blending mythic symbolism with intense interior conflict. Released in 2022, *The Northman* represents Eggers's most ambitious project to date. Drawing directly from the medieval Scandinavian legend of Amleth, the film reconstructs a Viking world saturated with prophecy, ritual sacrifice, shamanic vision, and ancestral obligation. Unlike modern adaptations that privilege psychological hesitation, Eggers foregrounds mythic structure and collective cosmology, positioning his protagonist within a universe governed by fate rather than introspection. Through this deliberate aesthetic and thematic commitment, *The Northman* becomes not merely a historical epic but a cinematic restoration of mythic consciousness — a return to the ritualistic origins from which the *Hamlet* narrative once emerged.

Even from the beginning of *The Northman*, we see a kingdom that is dominated by prophecies, blood, and holy kings. The connection between King Aurvandil and his son Amleth is not just an act of affection; it is the inheritance of a dynasty. As part of a shamanic rite of passage, the young Amleth engages in a ceremony that involves an animalistic transformation, trance, and invocation of ancestors. This ceremony reveals the fundamental mythic notion that identity is not a matter of choice; it is something that is passed down. The kingship is political as well as metaphysical, and the fate of the prince is decided in advance by his heritage. While Shakespeare's Hamlet struggles with doubts, depression, and moral dilemma, Amleth of Eggers is defined throughout his life by his oath: "I will avenge you, Father. I will save you, Mother. I will kill you, Fjölnir." This oath can be considered a mythical incantation which makes the plot develop towards fulfillment inevitably. Adult Amleth does not think about

revenge at all but acts accordingly. Thus, his becoming a berserker warrior becomes another reflection of the archetypal myth of the avenging son, when one's personality dissolves into the mission imposed upon him by his ancestors. In *The Northman* violence is not a meaningless demonstration but ritual execution meant for restoring the violated order.

As far as visual features go, the film confirms its mythical character by its Icelandic landscapes, constant use of the imagery of fire and blood, as well as seers and Valkyries' presence. All of them create a mythology which makes us see the plot in terms of the cosmology, where the supernatural elements do not represent any symbolical meaning but reality. Aesthetics of the film rejects psychological realism to embrace symbolical significance of action. Dialogue in the film is minimal and consists of pronouncements; meaning is conveyed through gesture and ritual rather than through characters' self-reflection. Also, the film emphasizes the principle of cyclical violence. The revenge is not an act of catharsis for a character but involvement into a long process of blood-feud tradition. The destiny of Amleth is marked by a fight that is performed against the background of volcanic terrain, which symbolizes both apocalypse and cleansing from sins. In this way, it is possible to see *The Northman* as re-mythologisation. Whereas Shakespeare's *Hamlet* reinterprets the legend of Amleth in terms of the inner world of
Renaissance man, Eggers does precisely the opposite: He returns the narrative into the context of belief, ritual, and archetypal destiny.

Unlike *Hamlet*, which shows a certain detachment from and skepticism toward myth, *The Northman* presents a myth that takes itself seriously. Therefore, *The Northman* is much more than just an adaptation of a medieval tale; it is also a restoration of the mythic consciousness of the past. For the purpose of this study,

The Northman will be analyzed as a contemporary reinterpretation of the myth of Amleth. Its conscious recourse to ritual, fate, and bodily action makes it a perfect object for mythological analysis and allows seeing the difference between collective myth and psychological individualism exemplified in *Hamlet.* In order to analyze the development of the Amleth story through legend, drama, and cinema, Mythical Criticism is the most significant theory in this study. Mythical criticism views texts as the manifestation of archetypes which come out of human experience. Narratives are not treated as stand-alone art forms; rather, they are seen as components of a mythical structure beyond time and medium.

The roots of myth criticism can be identified in the works of scholars such as James Frazer, who investigated the ritual and sacrificial structures associated with the anthropological background of myth; Carl Jung, who introduced the idea of the collective unconscious and archetypes; and Northrop Frye, who asserted that mythic modes are the basis of literary structure. The ideas of archetypes introduced by Carl Jung, including such archetypes as Hero, Shadow, Father, and Avenger, can be considered directly related to the plot of Amleth, since the story concerns the son obliged to restore the order through the act of violence. In addition, Frye's definition of tragedy, developed from the mythic patterns of death, sacrifice, and rebirth, is crucial for understanding the structural continuity between the medieval legend, Shakespearean drama, and modern cinematic adaptation.

Under this approach, the story of Amleth can thus be said to be a prototype of *Hamlet* insofar as the former is an archetype of a revenge myth based on divine kingship, disruption of royal dynasty, and blood justice. The play *Hamlet* by Shakespeare is, in turn, a major development of this myth, which involves internalization of conflicts and ritual obligation turning into

psychological struggle. Eggers's work on the other hand, consciously revives the archaic aspects of the revenge myth with emphasis on fate, prophecy, and filial duty over self-doubt and hesitation. Consequently, through mythical criticism, this research will find the way to define the symbolic background common for all these transformations. As such, the major focus of analysis will be the application of mythological criticism; however, Psychoanalytic Theory will be used secondarily as the basis for analysis of the psychological dimension of the transformation of the revenge myth embodied in *Hamlet* by Shakespeare. The notions like repression, melancholy, and the Oedipal Complex are expected to be particularly useful for this purpose.

The succeeding chapters of the dissertation uphold the argument that *The Northman* reclaims and reactivates the archaic mythic foundations of the Amleth narrative, which Shakespeare transformed into a psychological tragedy in *Hamlet*. By using Mythical Criticism as the main theoretical approach to analyzing the two films, with Psychoanalytic Theory being used in addition, the dissertation states that the development of the Amleth myth is associated with the transformation from ritual awareness to psychological awareness and finally to the contemporary remythologisation of the themes of revenge and heroism. The comparison of the two films shows that through the process of remythologisation, The Northman becomes more of a recovery of the mythic form, a movement made manifest in the film's concentrated emphasis on fate, prophecy, ancestral duty, and sacrificial violence; whereas Hamlet's modernist, self-conscious protagonist internalizes ethical conflict and epistemic hesitation, Eggers's Amleth is reconfigured as an almost ritualized embodiment of archetypal identity—his subjectivity shaped and stabilized by destiny, lineage, and enacted ritual rather than by reflective doubt. Reading these films alongside

one another therefore makes visible how narrative form mediates cultural attitudes toward agency and meaning: Shakespeare foregrounds the crisis of conscience and the fracturing effects of political and psychological modernity, while Eggers recuperates premodern structures of value in which communal obligations, omen-laden causality, and reenacted origin myths govern action. Thus, by analyzing both texts through complementary mythological and psychoanalytic frameworks—attending to symbolic repetition, mnemonic practices, Oedipal and filial dynamics, and the role of communal ritual—the current project aims to demonstrate not only the continued cultural significance and existential power of mythic structures for human life but also how cinematic form can reactivate, revise, or resist those structures to negotiate modern questions of identity, morality, and social cohesion.

Chapter Two

Mythic Revival and Archetypal Structure in *The Northman*

The emergence of myth in modern cultural manifestations prompts a new examination of how ancient narrative techniques endure in the present forms of media. Although films are seen as a form of media that has a realistic, deep psychological, and innovative nature, there are films that deliberately go against this trend by using archaic techniques of storytelling based on rituals, symbols, and beliefs. The film "*The Northman*" (2022) by Robert Eggers is a perfect example of a film that does precisely this.

In order to analyze this film properly, it would be useful to look at not only at it from the usual cinematic viewpoint but also with the help of some theoretical approach able to work with its symbols and archetypes. One of such theoretical approaches is Mythical Criticism. This theoretical approach was developed based on the ideas of such scholars as James Frazer, Carl Jung, and Northrop Frye. In his works, Frye states that myths are basic structural elements underlying all literary forms (Anatomy of Criticism), that is to say that all the stories have some underlying myth structure.

It can be observed from Frazer's anthropological research, especially the study of ritual sacrifices and the fertility cycle in *The Golden Bough*, that there is a connection between myth and practice. Frazer indicates that the myths are not just tales but also symbolic representations of humanity's essential issues. It is important to note that myths have often been used as a means of explaining and giving justification for the rituals (The Golden Bough). This concept is significant when considering Eggers's film because of the role of rituals in it.

It should be noted that rituals like initiations, sacrifices, and funeral customs form the core of Eggers's story and represent a mythic worldview where people's acts become a part of cosmic cycles.

Building on this point, Carl Jung states that myths derive from the collective unconscious, which stores common psychic structures in the form of archetypes. According to Jung, "the archetype is a tendency to form representations of a motif" (The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious). This means that there are motifs or symbolic patterns that appear in different societies irrespective of any kind of communication between people. For example, such archetypes like the Hero, Father, Avenger, and Shadow are employed in narratives that go beyond the limits of the personal sphere of experience. Thus, Amleth from *The Northman* can be seen as the archetypal avenging hero who fulfills his destiny not due to his personal will but rather because of his position within the symbolic world order.

In addition, Northrop Frye's theory on literature being a system organized by mythic modes is important for the interpretation of the narrative structure of the film. According to Frye, "Literature is a displaced mythology" (136), implying that no matter how contemporary the literary work may be, there will always be something primitive and archaic in its symbolic structure (Anatomy of Criticism). In fact, tragedy as a genre has been based on mythic cycles of sacrifice and regeneration. Such a cycle can be seen in the film in Amleth's way to his sacrificial fate. What sets *The Northman* apart among current films is the fact that it does not allow for any sort of psychological explanation. Often in modern stories, the presence of elements of mythology is either denied or interpreted as being a part of some kind of mental experience—

dream, hallucination, or metaphorical symbolism. In the case of the film by Eggers, however, such interpretation does not take place at all. The existence of the supernatural is acknowledged within the narrative world; visions, prophecies, and communication with supernatural beings become an integral part of the life of the characters involved.

Through the emphasis on ritual, fate, and archetypical action, the story recreates the form of storytelling where meaning is generated through externalized action rather than inner thinking. The protagonist does not ask himself questions about his position in life, he lives it out. Identity is not created by the process of introspection but passed down by lineage and established by ritual action. Violence is not a perversion of order but a means of returning to equilibrium and continuity. This concept is highly reminiscent of mythological criticism which prioritizes the collective nature of storytelling over individual psychology.

Thus, this chapter will discuss *The Northman* from the perspective of mythic reanimation. By employing mythological criticism, the aim is to show how the film uses archetypes, rituals, and symbolism in its construction of the mythic Amleth narrative that defies any interpretation via psychology of the modern age. In doing so, the chapter is meant to establish *The Northman* not as just another adaptation of an old medieval work but rather as a modern example of re-mythologization—a film that confirms the importance of mythology for shaping narrative form and perception. This process of re-mythologization is especially apparent via the character of Amleth, whose role in the narrative is a clear example of the survival of archetypal structure within contemporary films. Within the scope of Mythical Criticism, Amleth is a character that embodies the archetype of the avenging hero. This particular character type appears in

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different mythologies and is a symbol of restoration. Unlike modern heroes who are psychologically complex and morally ambiguous characters, the mythic hero operates within the pre-established world of symbols, where his or her identity is not built but rather inherited and where his or her actions are not discussed but rather carried out.

The theory of archetype as formulated by Jung plays a pivotal role in this analysis. According to Jung, the definition of archetype includes "a tendency to form representations of a motif" (75). Based on this understanding, the archetypical characters like the vengeful son should not be considered unique literary figures, but rather examples of the universal psychological patterns common to all people. In this respect, the legend of Amleth is a representation of the archetypical pattern.

The identity of Amleth is immediately defined at the very beginning of the film through ritual and lineage and not through the process of individual development. Initiation by the hero's father, King Aurvandil, is seen as a ritual transfer of an archetypal role to the protagonist. In such an initiation, Amleth is not just informed about the duty he is supposed to fulfill but is made part of it. The ritual with its animal-like actions and shamanic performance is placed in the mythological dimension where kingship and vengeance are closely related concepts. It corresponds to the idea suggested by Jung that archetypes emerge during ritualized experiences when actions are used as symbols for the reinforcement of collective meaning. After the death of his father caused by Fjölnir, the transformation of Amleth into an avenger becomes an absolutely natural thing. His oath, "I will avenge you, Father. I will save you, Mother. I will kill you, Fjölnir" is more than motivation for the actions of the hero because it is a performative act which makes the hero a part of his archetypal role. Whereas

Hamlet is characterized by his indecision when faced with an analogous predicament, there is no such internal struggle in Amleth. This character's entire being is defined by his task of revenge. This fact clearly highlights the mythical nature of the hero.

This distinction can be further understood through Northrop Frye's theory of mythic structure. Frye argues that "the central myth of literature is the story of the hero whose life follows a pattern of departure, struggle, and return" (Anatomy of Criticism). Amleth's journey adheres closely to this pattern: he is displaced from his rightful position, undergoes a period of exile and transformation, and ultimately returns to confront and eliminate the usurper. However, unlike the romantic hero who restores order and survives, Amleth's trajectory aligns more closely with the tragic mythos, where fulfilment is achieved through sacrifice.

Amleth's bodily character adds another dimension to his archetypical qualities. In the film, Amleth becomes a means of mythical action—trained, strengthened, and weaponized in support of his vow. In particular, the film frequently stresses how Amleth transforms into a berserker figure using the Norse traditions of warriors becoming enraged in a trance. Violence is shown to be a natural part of Amleth's actions; it is portrayed not as some kind of psychological disturbance, but as something that was destined to happen, with violence playing the role of a means to restore cosmic harmony. Furthermore, all of Amleth's actions take place in connection with something bigger than the man himself. It seems that visions, prophecies, and supernatural events always accompany Amleth and prove the fact that he follows the predestined path, with the hero being used as a tool of fate and not an independent actor. Individuation, a process in which the individual merges unconscious aspects of his personality

to form his wholeness, is nowhere to be seen in the case of Amleth. In addition, the lack of any internal struggle in the character's personality becomes especially important considering the way modern literature treats its heroes. Usually modern readers expect a hero to struggle with self-doubt and moral ambiguity; however, the film makes no attempt to follow the tradition by offering the viewer a hero who has complete clarity about his goals and intentions and thus adheres to an older form of story-telling.

Finally, Amleth's death needs to be interpreted from the perspective of mythic fulfillment rather than tragic failure. The final battle with Fjölnir against the symbolic background of fire and volcanic eruption holds significant connotations. Such an interpretation allows seeing how the act of death becomes part of a bigger cycle of rebirth. This fact can be explained with Frye's idea about how tragedy usually means hero's integration into a bigger order. Amleth never survives in order to taste the reward of vengeance, which he has gained through his actions. Instead, his death helps to complete the mythic cycle of events and bring balance back. In such a way, Amleth appears to be a truly archetypal figure whose deeds are controlled by the mythic structure and not inner motivations of the character. By creating Amleth, the film once again affirms the importance of the image of an avenging hero as an archetypal symbol and not just historical personage. In such a way, the film recreates the mythic legend of Amleth and opposes it to more recent interpretations of this legend.

One of the most remarkable aspects of *The Northman* is the depiction of violence as a sacred act. Today's viewers, accustomed to viewing violence through an ethical lens which finds it problematic, will find the violent acts in question brutal and over the top. However, when viewed from the perspective of a mythological lens, violence becomes a regenerative act. In line with Frazer's

research on ritual killings, violence is performed in relation to beliefs where death signifies rebirth. In his research, Frazer notes that in most primitive cultures, "the life of the individual is sacrificed for the welfare of the community." Consequently, destruction is an integral step towards continuity. This trend is observable all through the film since violence becomes a source of continuity.

The formation of Amleth's identity is established through a ritualized initiation at 00:11:01, where symbolic gestures, bodily enactment, and elemental imagery such as fire collectively structure his transformation into the archetypal avenger (see Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Amleth's initiation ritual with King Aurvandil in *The Northman*.

Consequently, Amleth's murders need to be viewed not only in terms of individual revenge, but as actions which help establish the cosmic equilibrium. This logic which dictates the murders committed by Amleth is above morality which exists in today's world. It cannot be either condemned or justified; it is necessary. Such an approach to the act of murder is essential in distinguishing the myth from psychology and ethics. Finally, death is another element of the

film which contributes to its mythic structure. Detailed scenes of funerary rituals (preparation of bodies, the invocation of ancestors) highlight their cultural and symbolic significance. These rituals emphasize the point that death is just a transition stage of life. Frazer's book pays much attention to the cyclical nature of mythic thinking – life, death and rebirth being just the parts of a certain process. In such a way, death of a king or a warrior in mythology is not a tragic event for mankind because it is part of the process of existence which continues despite the end of a king's or a warrior's life. Within the film, the rituals place death on an individual level within the context of the greater cosmic order, thus placing less emphasis on personal tragedy and highlighting the importance of the event in a broader context. The ritual process in the film is strongly connected to the notion of fate, as the latter is an ultimate governing power behind people's actions. Various prophecies, revelations and encounters with the supernatural beings shape Amleth's way, implying that what he is about to do was predetermined and not chosen by him.

According to Frazer's approach, rituals were an attempt to synchronize humans' activities and the divine will of the cosmos. Performing right rituals and following certain patterns, people became parts of the universal order. In the case of Amleth, his dedication to his vow can be treated as ritual submission, where personal desire is controlled by the preordained fate. Such an approach is opposite to *Hamlet*, where the main character questions the authority of the spirit and the moral aspects of revenge. In Egger's film, however, there is no place for such doubts, and supernatural beings possess power, and rituals are the only answer. The culmination of Amleth's story comes in his fight with Fjölnir, which contains many elements of ritual significance. The battle is performed against the background of volcanoes, and its symbolism connects with the forces of fire

and destruction. It is the final ritual act and climax of the story. Following Frazer's ideas, such a moment can be seen as a kind of sacrificial culmination, when the death of the hero fulfills the circle begun by the crime. In restoring order, however, it involves the removal of the usurper, but the integration of the hero into the process of death and rebirth. The death of Amleth is not failure; it is part of fulfilling the function of the mythic paradigm.

By focusing on ritual, sacrifice, and the order of cosmos, the story shown in the film can be considered the embodiment of the characteristics of the mythological narrative identified by James Frazer; in other words, the film tells about a series of acts of violence, yet at the same time builds up a mythological universe where each act is placed into a bigger symbolic/cosmological context. By presenting ritualistic actions as the main means through which meanings are generated, *The Northman* recaptures the logic of storytelling that existed before the psychological interpretation of myths, thus proving that a myth is not a thing of the past but rather a living entity of contemporary storytelling. Such a focus on ritualized actions also sets apart this film from later interpretations of the Amleth story that will be discussed below. In this way, through its depiction of violence as ritualistic, purposive, and essential, the film challenges modern notions of what violence is and how it functions in a story. With the help of ideas from scholars such as James Frazer, Northrop Frye, and Carl Jung, the previous section has shown that violence in the film is a tool of restoration, which works in conjunction with an overarching mythic structure. Instead of portraying violence as chaotic or ethically complex, the film contextualizes it as something meaningful by focusing on balance and obligation.

In the contemporary context of narratives, death, especially that of the protagonist, is often perceived as a failure or tragedy. Nevertheless, when

dealing with mythology, death gains quite another meaning—it ceases to be an ending, but becomes a necessary final stage in the narrative process. The death of Amleth in the film should be perceived not as the denial of his destiny, but as its complete fulfillment. It is possible to say that this approach is close to the theory of Northrop Frye, who asserts that many tragic narratives are completed by the submergence of the hero in the greater symbolic whole. In his work, *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye says that tragedy is usually ended by the incorporation of the individual in the greater pattern of meaning.

Indeed, sacrifice is one of the major features of mythological thought represented in works of James Frazer. In the book *The Golden Bough*, the author frequently states that sacrifices are not acts of destruction but those of restoration aimed at maintaining balance between life and death, order and chaos. "It was recognized that the death of the individual might be necessary for the preservation of the community." Indeed, Amleth's final duel with Fjölnir could be seen as the culmination of the sacrifice. Unlike modern stories, where survival of the main character plays an essential part, in the film, it becomes evident that survival of an individual means nothing if there is a necessity of maintaining the established balance. The fulfillment of the oath made by Amleth restores cosmic balance disturbed by the murder of Aurvandil. It should be noted that this sacrifice is voluntary and is not forced on him because, from the perspective of mythological thought, an individual's life is insignificant if there is a higher aim to achieve.

The dramatic fight scene between Amleth and Fjölnir does not constitute merely a violent encounter, but it becomes a highly symbolic ritual taking place in an elementarized environment. It should be pointed out that the role of fire, symbolically represented by the volcanic eruption and molten lava background,

adds up to the significance of the event in question. In many mythological narratives, fire represents two sides of the same meaning: destruction and purification at once. On the one hand, it implies the end of a certain cycle, on the other hand, it brings about the possibility of renewal. With regard to this, the domination of images of fire makes the entire duel take on a sacrificial character, and both participants become a sacrifice within the framework of the mythic resolution of events. As the elements of the mythological criticism imply, the elementarization of human action places it within the cosmic order; the inevitability and necessity of Amleth's death become evident in this way (see Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Final duel framed by fire and volcanic eruption at 02:06:56 in *The Northman*, symbolising ritual destruction and mythic fulfilment.

When viewed from a mythological angle, this symbolism gives the fight a cosmic dimension that moves it beyond the scope of an ordinary human action. Here, the fight takes place not merely between two individuals, but between two conflicting forces that need to be brought into harmony through destruction. The link between human actions and elemental forces highlights the fact that the story moves at a different scale than an ordinary one. This connection with

elemental forces is linked with the cyclic thinking of myths where destruction and rejuvenation cannot be separated.

The importance of lineage in the process of mythic closure in the film lies in the fact that although Amleth doesn't live anymore, the storyline provides for the continuity of his family lineage through Olga and their future offspring—an element that isn't insignificant but rather crucial for the understanding of the mythic closure concept. It is precisely this scheme that correlates with one of the key ideas of mythology, according to which there must be some kind of continuity of lineage after the death of a protagonist. The reason for that is that, even though the individual is dead, the system survives, and the community prevails over the individual.

Jung's concept of archetypes supports this interpretation, since archetypes function as recurring patterns of image and behavior rather than unique, one-time forms. Amleth's story, in this sense, becomes one instance of a repeatable mythic structure that can be reactivated across generations. His death does not simply terminate the narrative; it completes the pattern of sacrifice, vengeance, and return that the film establishes. The conclusion of *The Northman* exemplifies what may be termed mythic closure: a resolution in which the narrative aligns with an underlying symbolic order rather than leaving meaning open-ended.

The mythological paradigm advanced by Frye in his discussion of the structures of literature based on the repetitive mythoi is especially pertinent to the current discussion. The tragic mythos of Amleth is completed with a resolution that underscores the irreversibility of the pattern instead of delaying it. The combination of Amleth's demise, restoration of order and the implicit continuity of the lineage results in a sense of closure that is both definitive and

cyclical. Such a closure is distinct from that typical for modern fiction since it validates the cohesiveness of the mythic system rather than leaving room for doubt. In terms of its consistent use of archetype, ritual, fate, violence and sacrifice, Eggers's film turns out to be an excellent case of a mythological revival in contemporary filmmaking. Based on the theories by Carl Jung and Northrop Frye, the chapter has demonstrated how the film uses a mythological narrative structure emphasizing symbolic coherence over psychological reality.

Amleth's journey determined by archetypal identity, ritual performance and determinism exemplifies a mythic storytelling characterized by mythic recurrence. In such a context, violence represents the restoration while death represents the necessity of sacrifice.

In thus revitalising these mythic structures, The film not only adapts the story of Amleth but brings it back to its pristine power and unity. It resists the process of psychological interiorisation that pervades the later versions of the myth, and instead offers a story that revolves around the action and the cosmic order. Through this process of re-mythologisation, not only is the continued relevance of myth asserted, but also a stage is set for a discussion on the way in which the story undergoes changes in texts such as *Hamlet*, in which the same story is reworked in the context of psychological conflict.

With respect to characters, the protagonist Amleth is not a psychologically complex individual but is rather the manifestation of the archetypal avenging hero. He does not construct his personality through processes of introspection and moral evaluation, but rather acquires his identity by virtue of inheritance and ritualised actions. Such identification of the hero with the principles of archetypal theory in Jung establishes the protagonist in the

collective symbolic system, where his personal experiences get overshadowed by recurrent motifs of meaning.

Furthering the mythological character of the film, ritual plays a significant role in *The Northman*. It is through initiation rituals, sacrifices, and burial rituals that the film creates a world where human actions become intertwined with the cosmic processes. According to Frazer in his analysis of the ritual in *The Golden Bough*, rituals serve as the instruments of sustaining the balance in a cycle of life, death, and rebirth. In addition to ritual, fate and prophecy play a very significant role in determining the structure of the plot of the film. The plot of the film is not determined by uncertainty or contingency but through the understanding that there is some predetermined destiny of the characters. This structure is consistent with Frye's definition of myth as a form of literature that follows a certain pattern. According to Frye, the importance of any event lies not in its unpredictability but in how much it conforms to the certain pattern.

Within this paradigm, violence is given a meaning that contrasts sharply with the way in which it is portrayed within modern stories. Rather than portraying violence as a moral dilemma or an indication of some kind of psychological disorder, the violence that takes place within *The Northman* becomes a means of restoring order and is necessary in order for order to be restored. The murder of Fjölnir is not a personal vendetta on behalf of Amleth; it is a ritualistic necessity that must take place in order to restore order from the initial murder. It is in the combination of these two paradigms that the final element, death and sacrifice, becomes fully clear. The death of Amleth, contrary to the perception of it being a failure on Amleth's part or the end of his mythic mission, is the final stage in Amleth's mythic journey. It concludes the cycle

begun by the murder of his father and restores balance within it. It also perpetuates the mythic journey through death as discussed by Frazer and Frye.

These elements show how *The Northman* is a clear example of a process of re-mythologization within contemporary film production. When most of the films produced nowadays are built around stories that prioritize the importance of psychological realism and personal subjectivity, the choice of the director to go back to archetypical elements and ritualized actions is definitely a step apart from the norms. Instead of making myths conform to the modern sensibilities, the film reconstructs the mythic mindset where the meaning of things arises from being involved into the collective and cosmic order. The re-mythologization that takes place in *The Northman* acquires particular significance when viewed in connection with the whole development of the Amleth myth. As was discussed above, the change that takes place in *Hamlet* is the decisive point where the myth is shifted from the sphere of external actions to the sphere of psychological conflicts. While Amleth performs actions, Hamlet is hesitating. While Amleth accomplishes his fate, Hamlet questions it.

In this way, the film successfully reverses the trend of the transformation mentioned above, bringing back into the spotlight the kind of storytelling that had been marginalized as a result of the emergence of modern psychological drama. The film both re-reads the story of Amleth and offers an interesting critique of contemporary notions regarding narrative, identity, and meaning. The significance of the process of re-mythologization goes beyond the scope of the film and implies a new look at the relationship between myth and modernity. Mythic structures are not just the remains of the ancient world; they still influence our understanding of stories and their meaning. This chapter has therefore established a critical foundation for the study as a whole,

demonstrating that *The Northman* operates within a mythological framework that foregrounds archetypal action, ritual significance, and cosmic determinism. In contrast, the next chapter will examine how this same narrative undergoes a profound transformation in *Hamlet*, where the emphasis shifts from external fulfilment to internal conflict. Through the application of psychoanalytic theory, the subsequent analysis will explore how the figure of the avenger is reconfigured within a framework of doubt, desire, and psychological complexity.

Chapter Three

Externalising the Unconscious in *The Northman*

The development of the Amleth story in literature and in film shows not just the evolution of narrative style, but also a change in the very way human experience is envisioned. While *Hamlet* changes the mythic form of the Amleth story into one of interior struggle, *The Northman*, on the surface, may be seen as an attempt to undo this evolution by going back to a mode of storytelling based on action and destiny. Yet this backwards move is neither naïve nor simplistic. Rather, it represents a shift in narrative meaning worthy of analysis using the framework of psychoanalytic theory.

Psychoanalysis, in particular the work of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, is fundamentally about the workings of the unconscious—the mechanisms of repression, desire, and subject formation. As it has been used in literary criticism, these concepts have been particularly useful for examining texts like *Hamlet*, which feature a protagonist whose behavior is marked by hesitation and contemplation. This hesitation can be understood in terms of disruption brought about by the workings of the unconscious. However, once these psychoanalytic ideas are introduced in connection to *The Northman*, an intriguing contradiction arises. In the film, there is no element of repression and psychological hesitance; rather, one witnesses an immediate transformation of desire into action and an affirmation of identity through ritualistic performance. The absence of psychological dilemma in the film brings up an important question: is this film too simple for psychoanalysis, or does it challenge the entire idea of psychology? The position of this chapter is more in support of the latter. It suggests that *The*

Northman, far from obliterating the unconscious dynamics, makes them visible by materialising them through physical actions and rituals. What manifests itself in *Hamlet* in the form of repression, hesitation and internal conflict becomes enacted in the film through physical action and transformation. In such a way, the film does not negate the psychoanalytical interpretation of the characters but rather moves it from the realm of the internal to the realm of the external.

This duality is therefore not merely one of opposition, but of structural difference. While Hamlet's failure to act has often been explained, in terms of psychoanalysis, as the product of an unconscious identification with the person that he needs to kill, Amleth experiences no such crisis of delayed action. His actions are not symptomatic of any process of repression, as his desires, far from being internalized, are manifested through a process of ritual and violent performance. The psychological becomes performative and the unconscious becomes visible.

In terms of Lacan, such a change is a move from the fragmentation of the subject through language to a more stable form of constructed identity through symbolism. While Hamlet finds himself trapped in a world of linguistic instability, riddled with questioning and doubt, Amleth lives in a world where meanings have been stabilized through ritual and mythological structures. The crisis of subjectivity of the modern individual is thus exchanged for the predetermined nature of a being whose identity is already decided and performed. Such a shift bears important consequences for the understanding of concepts like revenge, madness, and the supernatural.

In psychoanalytic interpretations of *Hamlet*, the concept of revenge is associated with unconscious drives and morality. In *The Northman*, revenge is seen as a direct and unavoidable manifestation of identity. Madness, which in

Hamlet serves as a means of masking one's true feelings, is presented in *The Northman* through transformation, where the lines between acting and reality blur out completely. The supernatural is also not a matter of doubt here but an inherent part of the life of the characters. Through the analysis of these factors on the basis of the psychoanalytic approach, this chapter hopes to prove that *The Northman* is not a step backwards to the pre-psychological way of narrating myths, but rather a refined version of the interplay between the myths and the unconsciousness. It shows how the separation between what is internal and external, psychological and ritual depends on the structure of the narration. In sum, this chapter contributes to the discussion of the project as a whole in the sense that the journey from Amleth to *Hamlet* to *The Northman* is not one of linear progression, but rather that of a cycle. Not only does *The Northman* revive an old myth in a new form, but also reinterprets it in view of the modern concepts of the human psyche, thus creating a new kind of storytelling where the unconsciousness is no longer inside a person, but performed in the world around him.

Any discussion of the psychoanalytical approach to understanding revenge stories has to revert to the essential contribution of Sigmund Freud. His theory of the Oedipus complex has become instrumental to the comprehension of modern literary texts. Specifically, according to Freud, the inner wish of a child to possess his/her opposite sex parent and envy for the same sex parent creates a deep psychological conflict which stays hidden and is transformed in adulthood. It manifests itself unconsciously through hesitation, displacement and symbolism. In a well-known example of the psychoanalytical interpretation of *Hamlet* by Freud, the reason why Prince Hamlet is hesitant in his revenge is explained as follows. Hamlet's reluctance to kill Claudius is caused by the unconscious wish to identify with him, since Claudius fulfilled all Hamlet's suppressed wishes.

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud claims that the one whom it is necessary to destroy is also the self. Therefore, the hero cannot commit revenge on the king. Using a Freudian perspective, the absence of the Oedipus complex as an element causing inhibition becomes one of the most remarkable aspects of the film. The story has all the necessary components to evoke such a complex: the killed father, mother supporting the killer, and son whose task is to avenge the murder. Such a situation allows for the comparison of the film with *Hamlet*, however, the psychological effect created is completely different.

Amleth shows no hesitation. In reaction to his father's death, he makes a decision at once: "I will avenge you, Father. I will save you, Mother. I will kill you, Fjölnir" (The Northman). It is not followed by any doubts or self-reflection but only actions aimed at revenge. From the Freudian perspective, the question that arises here is why the film does not create the inner conflict characteristic of Hamlet?

This can be understood in terms of the configuration of desire in the film. Unlike *Hamlet*, where there is a tension between the desire of the individual and the expectation of society since the former is repressed, Amleth's desires coincide perfectly with his social/symbolic position in the world. There is no tension between expectation and desire. There is, therefore, no Oedipal tension in the film since the desires are not repressed but are part and parcel of the structure. The Freudian model assumes the existence of repression as the means through which unacceptable desires are relegated to the unconscious mind. This is the basis of symptoms such as hesitation, anxieties, and displacements. In *The Northman*, on the other hand, there seems to be a total absence of repression. The desire is not latent; it is manifest in action. This does not mean that the film lacks psychological dimensions but only that it follows a different set of rules. Here, the unconscious is made manifest in rituals and performances.

Thus, Amleth's behavior is not an act of repression of his desires but rather their expression without any intermediaries. This scenario raises questions regarding the universal applicability of Freudian approach. As repression does not seem to be an integral part of the structure of desire, it makes no sense to speak about its general applicability to all narrative structures. In this regard, the film under analysis provides an example of a narrative that contradicts the cultural and structural presuppositions of the psychoanalytic approach. The mother figure is one of the key points of Freud's analysis of *Hamlet* since her connection with the usurper increases the hero's inner conflict. In *The Northman*, the mother seems to play a similar role; however, the film denies this assumption.

It is the discovery that Amleth's mother does not fit into his idea of her that causes him problems with his self-perception and his mission. Nevertheless, there is no paralysis or long-lasting psychological crisis because this experience is instantly incorporated into his path and strengthens his resolve to move forward. If we examine the scene from the point of view of psychoanalysis, there appears to be a completely different link between desire and knowledge. Whereas Hamlet's knowledge about his mother's sexuality becomes a cause of his paralysis, the experience of Amleth is instantly incorporated into the framework of necessity and does not result in any repression.

The comparison of *Hamlet* and *The Northman* shows a basic change in the interaction between the characters' desire and their actions. In the first film, desire is conflicting and repressed, resulting in hesitation and self-reflection. In the second one, desire is consistent with identity and performed without hesitation, leading to continuity and resolution. It is not only about different characterizations, but about more general changes in the narrative structure. *The Northman* alters the Freudian narrative scheme by eliminating all the circumstances that result in

psychological impediments for action. Thus, it recreates the form of storytelling where the action is not obstructed by the unconscious but motivated by the consistency between inner impulses and outer demands. Through revising Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex, this part of the analysis has shown that *The Northman* cannot be described as being outside the realm of psychoanalysis, but actually undermines its core ideas. The absence of repression, the consistency of desire with role, and the absence of hesitation altogether imply a narrative structure where psychological conflict is not the decisive factor.

While the play represents an individual who is split within himself, the film provides a model of identity that finds unity in myth and rituals. Rather than the psychological paralysis experienced by Hamlet, the life of Amleth shows how continuity can be established through desire, duty, and action. While the Freudian theory cannot be discounted, it is displaced here to demonstrate the boundaries of its application in the light of a story where the dynamics of the unconscious have been externalized.

Another core concept of the psychoanalytical theory is the concept of repression. It involves excluding all of the unwanted and unacceptable ideas and impulses out of conscious mind into the unconscious part of the mind. The idea of repression creates a struggle within the self, splitting it into two separate parts of conscious intention and unconscious desire. The psychoanalytic approach to *Hamlet* interprets it through the prism of repression, explaining the prince's inability to do anything. This failure is not associated with a lack of motives; Hamlet has plenty of motives, but his inability to act lies in the psychological impossibility of the reconciliation between his duty and desire. Thus, the action in *Hamlet* takes place mainly in the inner space of his mind, where action is obstructed by thought and desire is unstable. *The Northman* operates under an entirely

different logic. Even though the film addresses the topics that psychoanalysis would relate to the problem of repression (such as violence, trauma, family problems and desire), it does not put them in the subconscious mind. On the contrary, the film externalises them in the process of ritual actions and bodily performance.

For the most part in *The Northman*, ritual plays the key role of communicating the characters' identities and desires. The initiation rite carried out between Amleth and King Aurvandil is one clear example of how this happens, as here transformation is not shown as an inward psychological journey but as a shared physical act. Using animal-like movements, vocal expressions, and symbolic actions, ritual gives outward manifestation to what modern stories see as inner instinctual forces. The importance of such rituals can be better understood by applying the ideas of James Frazer, whose book *The Golden Bough* offers his theory of ritual as a way for linking the individual act to larger cosmic and social contexts. In the film, ritual not only goes alongside emotional experience but makes emotion socially and symbolically meaningful. Violent emotions, such as grief, revenge, and loyalty are expressed openly, and not kept inside. The focus on performance is thus in direct opposition to the repressive psychoanalytic theories. Instead of hiding the instincts within, the film gives them legitimacy and structure through ritual.

Yet another important distinction between the psychoanalytic narrative and the mythological narrative of *The Northman* comes from the treatment of the body itself. In contemporary psychological theory, it is common for meaning to be found in inner awareness, and the body is seen only as an additional form of expression of psychological processes. But in Eggers's film, the body takes precedence over the mind, becoming the main means of expressing identity and emotions. Amleth's change is manifested precisely through bodily experiences: fighting, ritual

movements, perseverance, violence. Identity here does not emerge from introspective analysis or from any kind of analysis of one's own thoughts and experiences; it emerges through physical expression.

The Regression to the form of primitive existence also manifests itself in the lack of clear distinction between man and animals. From a psychoanalytic angle, it is important to note that the moments in question symbolically manifest those desires that usually belong to the subconscious realm. Instead of hiding under the mask of civilized personages, rage, aggression, and desire are openly performed by the body. Therefore, the film does not accept the modern idea of separating instincts from social identity and offers violence as an integral part of life in its mythic universe. In psychoanalytical theory, violence is usually considered a symptom of some inner conflicts or of a repressed desire of a person. Aggression can be treated as the displacement of this tension, which manifests some cracks in the personality of a subject.

In *The Northman*, violence does not perform the function of the symptom. The murders committed by Amleth are not only acts of revenge but ritualistic acts which restore harmony in the universe. Violence is embedded within a symbolic system where actions carry mythological and social importance. This is important because it demonstrates to what extent the film avoids making use of modern psychoanalytic assumptions. The behavior of the main character is not treated as an illness but as something normal and legitimized through storytelling.

One of the best examples of this concept can be seen in the final battle between Amleth and Fjölnir. This confrontation takes place against a backdrop of a volcano full of fire and transcends personal hostility to become an element of a ritual sacrifice that fulfils the will of the higher powers. Thus, the film makes use of the mythological imagery to express the emotions and psychology of characters

in the form of symbolism. Undoubtedly, the most important aspect in relation to psychoanalytic theory that this film brings to light is the treatment of the concept of the unconscious.

Unlike the traditional psychoanalysis where the unconscious cannot be observed directly but revealed through such phenomena as dreams and slip of tongue, in this film, it is brought into reality through visions and other supernatural elements. In this film, prophecies, supernatural beings, and other aspects of the unconscious are not ambiguous, and do not turn into illusions in the head of the character. Rather, they are shown as real parts of the story that make up the diegetic world. The mythic landscape thus becomes a material representation of psychic reality.

This passage has thus shown that *The Northman* avoids the logic of repression on which psychoanalytic stories rest. Instead of keeping desire locked away in the unconscious, the film releases psychic energy through ritual, bodily performance, violence, and mythological symbolism. The unconscious does not lie beneath action, but rather emerges in action. Through turning psychological conflict into action, *The Northman* questions the idea that psychological depth is conveyed only through introspection and hesitation. This film provides an example of an alternative story form where the formation of identity and desire happens through collective ritual enactment. *The Northman* thus reworks the psychoanalytic categories into the mythological framework in order to show that the unconscious is a place not only interior and hidden, but exterior and collective as well.

Whereas Sigmund Freud sees psychological conflict arising from repression and unconscious desire, Lacan rethinks the theory of psychoanalysis from the perspective of the structures of language and symbolic order. In Lacanian thought, man does not represent a whole or an undivided entity – he is

always divided and constructed by the existing systems of meaning which preexist him. Therefore, identity is never complete and fully formed, but rather is constructed by language, desire and symbolic structures that constantly defer fulfillment. What is most distinctive about *The Northman* is the rare use of reflective dialogue by the main character. Where many psychologically-driven films have the character reveal his psychological issues and conflicts in dialogue form, Eggers's film favors physical action and ritual above speech. In such cases the emotional state of the main character is rarely analyzed through language, but rather is conveyed through rituals, physical actions and symbols.

Moreover, the theory proposed by Lacan provides the key for the analysis of the importance of the body as a carrier of symbolic significance within the film. The body usually plays a secondary role in many modern plots where it serves as the physical manifestation of the state of mind of characters. However, the film *The Northman* turns this correlation upside down and emphasizes the physical embodiment as the central instrument of constructing the identity of the characters. For example, Amleth's body is connected with the images of transformation, survival, and violence. Performances related to the animalistic nature of his actions, the experience of physical pain and battles indicate that identity can be constructed only through the physical body. Transformation between humans and animals becomes an additional element of the same concept.

The Northman does not present silence as an absence, but as a narrative certainty. In the case of psychological films, silence can symbolize repression, uncertainty, and disintegration of the psyche. Characters stay silent because the language cannot capture their internal struggle. In Eggers's film, however, silence often accompanies acts of ritual clarity and symbolic intensity. This is especially true of the scenes with visions and prophecies when meaning is

communicated through visual and ritual means instead of through the spoken word. This film relies on symbols more than on explanations and interpretations. It is fire, blood, swords, mountains, and animals that tell the story of the film through the visual imagery without needing any explanations. This methodology is very similar to that used by myths, where symbols have immediate and collective meaning. The viewer is expected to partake in the symbolic narrative rather than analyze the psyche of the character.

The overall result is the creation of a subjectivity that is far from the fragmented, alienated self of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Amleth is not depicted as psychologically conflicted and estranged from his symbolic function. Instead, his subjectivity acquires coherence by virtue of being situated within rituals and mythologies greater than the individual. But this does not imply that *The Northman* does away with complexity and ambiguity. It only means that the complexity is displaced from the inner life of the individual to the outer world of action and cosmology. In *The Northman*, the subject gains stability not through self-reflection but through the symbolic systems he participates in. In emphasizing ritual at the expense of self-reflection and embodiment at the expense of language, *The Northman* contests the hegemony of psychological realism in contemporary narrative forms.

The film argues that meaning can be constructed by participating in shared symbolisms rather than the fractured consciousness of the individual alone. In a Lacanian analysis, *The Northman* represents a radical departure from narratives which are based on linguistic fragmentation and self-conscious psychology. Whereas the split subject of modern tragic drama is marked by a psyche characterised by doubt and division, Amleth becomes a case of identity that is constructed by way of myth and symbol. In *The Northman*, language ceases being

a source of confusion and ambiguity and becomes secondary to ritual enactment and visual symbolism. The unconscious, consequently, does not exist hidden inside uncertain interiority but is exposed via ritual act and mythic image. By refusing the dominance of psychological language, the film *The Northman* revives an old narrative tradition where identity is created by means of ritual and myth rather than endlessly explored by means of introspection.

In today's literature and film, supernatural phenomena tend to be understood in terms of psychology, which means that visions, ghosts, and prophecies can all be reduced to mental states of the characters. Ghosts become either hallucinations, projections of trauma, or symbolic representations of desires of the unconscious mind. Such understanding is a result of the prevalence of psychological realism, when exterior supernatural happenings have to be subordinated to interior consciousness. It can be seen in the way critics understand *Hamlet*. In *Hamlet*, the apparition of Hamlet's father is in an uncertain ontological status, because even though it sets up the action of vengeance, its credibility is questionable and causes hesitation in Hamlet's mind. Thus, supernatural becomes intertwined with uncertainty.

However, *The Northman* is based on a completely different concept. Unlike in the previous film where supernatural elements are used ambiguously, the visions, prophecies and spiritual encounters become the part of reality in the mythological world of the film. Thus, the supernatural is not seen as metaphors for psychological state but as an active factor which shapes the destiny of people. In *The Northman*, visions play the role of revelations, and not signs of mental problems. It is through prophetic characters, rituals and symbols that knowledge necessary for the protagonist becomes available.

Another key example can be found in the scene where Amleth meets the seeress, and her prophecy shows the inevitability of his destiny. The scene is not shown as a dreamy vision unrelated to the actual world, but rather as an authentic event that happens in the film's cosmology. The prophecy does not induce uncertainty, on the contrary, it induces certainty because it embeds the protagonist into a predetermined mythic narrative. This approach to visions is radically different from approaches used in psychological plots where any supernatural phenomena are considered as signs of one's repressed trauma or unfulfilled desires. Thus, Eggers' film recreates the pre-modern worldview where there is no separation between the physical and spiritual realities. Madness is often understood in modern psychological theory as a break away from reality, irrational, disintegrated and unstable experience.

From the psychoanalytic perspective, madness may happen as a result of one's unresolved trauma or repressed desires. Nevertheless, *The Northman* avoids such categorizations by portraying altered states of mind not as illnesses but as ritual transformations. This becomes especially clear from those moments when Amleth and other characters act in an animal-like manner, thus undergoing their berserkers' rituals. Though their growls, physical movements and trance state Seem to be irrational if approached from a contemporary psychological standpoint, they are culturally sanctioned transformation rituals in the context of the film. They are not pathological but rather collective and ritualistic acts. In this way, the film blurs the line between madness and sacred ritual. Something that would be considered mental illness from the perspective of modernity becomes the way to achieve mythic powers.

One of the most distinctive features of *The Northman* is the absence of attempts to rationalize the supernatural elements of the plot. From the vision of

Valkyrie to meeting ghosts and mystical travel, all of these experiences are treated seriously from an ontological point of view. Unlike other films that provoke viewers to wonder about the "reality" of such events on a psychological level, *The Northman* invites the audience to explore the world, in which the mentioned above experiences represent reality. Thus, this film is similar to mythological narratives since supernatural powers are not used as symbols but actual elements of existence. The film plot is ruled by destiny, prophecy, and divine interventions. Human actions are performed in the world animated by the sacred. For example, the volcanic ending of the film can be seen as one of the best examples of mythic reality. The duel between Amleth and Fjölnir occurs in the landscape, which goes far beyond realism. Due to this fact, the conflict becomes a ritualized event under the influence of elementarism and cosmism.

Trough the merging of experience and revelation, the film restores a cosmological perspective whereby the supernatural is imbued with objective power and narrative efficacy. Madness turns into ritual change, visions turn into revelations, and destiny into the organising principle of existence. By rejecting psychological reductionism, *The Northman* proves the relevance of mythological consciousness for modern cinema. In so doing, the film questions modern notions about reality, subjectivity, and rationality, showing that mythology remains a potent vehicle through which human experience can be articulated and understood.

Thus, this chapter has sought to illustrate how *The Northman* reframes the relationship between myth and psychology through the externalisation of conflicts that are normally internalised in modern narratives. Through the use of psychoanalysis, specifically, through the insights of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, the analysis revealed how the film rejects the psychological division

typical of modern tragedies and creates its sense of identity through ritual, body, and myth.

The juxtaposition with *Hamlet* highlights an essential difference in the form of the narrative. Unlike Hamlet's quest for revenge that revolves around repressing, hesitating, and pondering, Amleth's mission is guided by ritual and symbolism. Instead of being repressed or sublimated, desire in *The Northman* is fulfilled through violence, rituals, and body movements. Consequently, the unconscious is externalized through mythic action rather than being hidden inside the inner psyche of the characters.

It has been stated throughout the chapter that the film relies on silence, symbolism, and physical actions while downplaying the significance of language and self-analysis, thus questioning the supremacy of psychological realism in contemporary filmmaking. Moreover, the vision, prophecies, and supernatural elements of the plot are depicted as real mythic elements rather than being perceived as hallucinations or manifestations of madness.

In the end, however, The Northman does not discard psychological complexity but merely relocates it into larger symbolic group structures. In the film it becomes clear that psychoanalytic and mythical ways of reading are not contradictory systems but rather one is simply an externalization of what is internalized in the modern narrative. It also manages to reassert the archetypes behind the Amleth legend even while posing challenges to contemporary concepts of subjectivity and human behavior.

Thus, the evolution of the Amleth myth to *Hamlet* and finally to *The Northman* can be seen as a dialectical relationship of mythic consciousness and modern psychology: as each retelling refracts the core narrative through its own cultural and intellectual milieu, the story accumulates layers of interpretive

possibility from the ritualized vengeance and collective beliefs of Norse saga, through Shakespeare's introspective exploration of subjectivity and moral ambiguity, to Eggers's cinematic synthesis that reanimates archetypal motifs, fate, and ritualized action within a contemporary aesthetic and by deliberately returning to the formal and thematic textures of myth, Eggers's film not only stages a confrontation between inherited cosmologies and modern psychological realism but also asserts the continued validity and power of mythology to shape meaning, ethical orientation, and emotional experience in modern cinema.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

The present study examined how *The Northman* (2022), directed by Robert Eggers, reconceptualises and revives the old Amleth story within the sphere of modern cinematography. Within the framework of the analysis conducted in connection with *Gesta Danorum* by Saxo Grammaticus and *Hamlet* by Shakespeare, the current research has shown that *The Northman* is a considerable process of re-mythologisation, which reintroduces the ritualistic, archetypal, and cosmological aspects of the old story. The interplay of Mythological Criticism and Psychoanalytic Theory has led to the discovery that the transition from Amleth through *Hamlet* and down to *The Northman* demonstrates a developing balance of mythic and modern psychological consciousness.

The core of this undertaking is the understanding that myths and legends do not stay constant throughout history, but are actually alive due to their transformation through the ages in accordance with the demands of a specific period in terms of knowledge, culture, and art. An example of such transformation is provided by the very legend of Amleth. In its most ancient version, the myth is built upon the tradition of a pre-Christian warrior society where revenge is not an ethical question but rather a sacred vow related to blood and honour, as well as the idea of cosmic order. Identity in this myth is collective and not individual, and human action is connected to rituals and fate. However, in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare masterfully reworks this narrative pattern by moving the whole concept of revenge from the outside world into the mind of an individual subject. Evolution from Amleth to *Hamlet* signifies a crucial cultural paradigm shift from outer action to inner psychological conflict.

Revenge in *Hamlet* is never straightforward or unquestioning; it gets entangled with hesitation, doubt, repressions, and philosophical contemplation. Tragedy of Shakespeare's play is not only due to outer circumstances but also to disintegration of consciousness. Hamlet's incapacity to unite thought and action turns revenge plot into a new kind of a modern tragedy of subjectivity. The reason why this reworking is so important is that it illustrates the larger pattern of change within Western narrative tradition from outer mythic pattern to inner psychological one. Modern narratives increasingly favour consciousness, ambivalence, and introspection as opposed to mythic structures which often serve a symbolic meaning for them. Under these conditions, the supernatural becomes psychologically ambiguous, while the violent ritual acquires meanings of repression or existential uncertainty. In contrast, *The Northman* explicitly subverts this trend towards psychological interiority by recreating the elements of externality and ritual in the story of Amleth. Instead of portraying revenge as the trigger for paralysis and introspection, the movie sets the act within a mythic framework defined by fate, prophecy, and religious duty. In addition, Amleth is not depicted as a split personality struggling with his unconscious reluctance but rather as an archetype of the avenging hero whose identity can be understood only through the framework of the ritual duties of his lineage and his fate.

The application of Mythological Criticism for the analysis of the study has been essential in showing how *The Northman* recontextualizes ancient narrative traditions in a modern cinematic setting. Using the theoretical contributions of James Frazer, Carl Jung, and Northrop Frye, the study has proven that the movie uses specific archetypes and ritual elements. This concept of myth and ritual as symbolical performances of communal order is very important for the interpretation of the film in terms of its use of violence and ceremony.

The rituals in the film are not just historical elements designed to add some authenticity to the Viking period setting of the movie; on the contrary, the rituals depicted in the film are one of the key elements that serve as means of performance of the identity, power and destiny of the characters. There are many kinds of rituals performed by the characters, such as initiation rites, sacrifices, funeral ceremonies and encounters with prophets. All these rituals belong to the worldview in which the actions of people have a special cosmic significance. The most important ritual scene in the film is the opening scene when the identity of Amleth is constructed through ritual performance, body training and transmission of the lineage.

Violence in the film, however, like all other events in it, is connected to this ritual structure. It is not a simple brutality, but the part of the sacred cycle of disruption and renewal. In a similar vein, Jung's idea of archetypes sheds light on the use of recurring mythic archetypes within the collective unconscious of the film. Amleth becomes an archetypical vengeful hero whose course takes a symbolic route defined by his sense of inherited responsibility and his sacrificial fate. The roles of the king, the mother, the usurper, the prophetess, and the warrior are all part of identifiable archetypical categories that are not confined by time. The strength of the film thus lies not just in its realism, but in its use of archetypical symbols that still have the same power in many different times and cultures. It is for this very reason that the film is both ancient and modern; it not only reconstructs a historical time, but symbolic tradition that persists through time.

The theories by Northrop Frye about the mythic modes and literary structure also support this reading. According to Northrop Frye, the works of literature tend to organise themselves around mythoi, which are basically the representation of the basic human experiences in conflict, sacrifice, death, and rejuvenation. The film *The Northman* follows this mythic pattern, where there is a

continuous theme of ritual violence and sacrificial completion. The ending of the film does not only solve a conflict but also restores the order of cosmos through the ritual violence and death. In this way, the analysis shows that *The Northman* is not only an epic or a cinematic version but a mythic rebirth of consciousness of the present era. The film avoids becoming another modern narrative, which turns myths into either psychological explanations or allegories. Nevertheless, the implementation of Psychoanalytic Theory has shown that the relation between the film and modern psychological analysis is much more complicated than the mere denial of interiority. Using the theories by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, the project has investigated how *The Northman* makes external psychological conflict which usually is made internal in modern narratives.

Interpretation of *Hamlet* by Sigmund Freud is considered to be one of the most famous examples of psychoanalytic interpretation in literature. By considering the hero's hesitations the results of unconscious Oedipal desire and repression, Freud made a revenge tragedy a psychological conflict. The problem of Hamlet's indecision was caused by the fact that the character whom the hero needed to kill psychologically symbolised his hidden repressions. Thus, the structure of the tragedy became a tragic structure based on psychological paralysis and dual consciousness. In this sense, *The Northman* provides an evident contradiction. Having similar structural elements (the murdered father, usurped uncle, and maternal figure connected with betrayal), the film doesn't make its characters experience repression and hesitations. Amleth doesn't have any internal conflict since his psychological desires and duties of his symbolic role coincide. This differentiation uncovers one of the key premises of this work: "The Northman" projects the drives that modern psychological storylines internalize. The unconscious is not conceptualized as an underground domain producing neuroses and repression; on the contrary, it is performed through ritual actions and violence.

Hence, the film proves wrong the presupposition that psychological profundity has to be depicted through self-doubt and fragmentation. The strength of the plot lies not in the representation of the self-doubt but in the performance of the destiny. The further examination of Lacanian theory helps to analyze the relation of language, subjectivity, and symbolic order in the movie. Modern psychological stories often present the fragmented subject through language as well as trapped into interpretive system that leads to the instability of one's identity. *Hamlet* becomes an example of such narrative as it includes many soliloquies and selfawareness through language. The main character of this story is constantly interpreting, questioning, and analyzing himself which results in the delay of actions and psychological fragmentation of identity. However, in *The Northman,* the role of language becomes much less important. The director prefers ritual actions, silence, gestures, and visual symbolism to self-referential language.

The meaning is expressed through bodily performance, not verbal self-analysis. Amleth's identity is not interpreted through language in the endless loop but performed by means of ritual obligation and physical actions. It is evident that this approach significantly changes the understanding of subjectivity in the movie. The body in the story becomes a medium of symbolic expression and the means of manifestation of mythic identity through violence, endurance, and ritual transformation. Another very important difference between mythic and psychological interpretations is how the supernatural elements are treated in the story. Modern stories usually tend to use psychological uncertainty, delusions, and projections to explain supernatural phenomena that occur. However, visions, prophecies, and other supernatural occurrences in *The Northman* are seen as the real part of reality in the context of the movie. For example, the ghost in *Hamlet* is part of the interpretative uncertainty. But Valkyries, prophecies, spiritual guides, and ritual metamorphoses presented in *The Northman* are considered real elements

of sacred and mythic powers. Therefore, the movie does not reduce mythic elements to psychology, which is one of the greatest merits of the movie. Due to its ontological legitimacy, *The Northman* creates the world in which the lines between spiritual and material reality remain blurred. The movie offers a cinematic re-mythologization of the Amleth story through the use of ritual structure, archetypal symbols and spectacle to avoid reductionist interpretation of the narrative and bring back myth as a living explanation of reality.

The visual language of the film – fire, blood, mountains, volcanic environment, darkness and animal symbols – functions symbolically in the film narrative to create the atmosphere of ritual and archetypes. The ultimate fight of Amleth and Fjölnir in the volcanic environment becomes a climax where violence, sacrifice and symbolism merge together, making fire the symbol of destruction, purification and transcendence. The multiple abilities of cinema make it an ideal medium for mythic recreation. Unlike prose, cinema combines visual elements, sound, movement, performance, scenery, and spectacle to allow the myth to be sensed rather than recounted. Robert Eggers's accurate portrayal of rituals, costumes, buildings, settings, and spirituality of the Vikings helps create the mythic ambiance that is above historical reality. The historical accuracy of *The Northman* is not intended for documentary purposes but serves to build the symbolic world in which mythic thinking prevails. In this way, the film shows how modern cinema can bring back old forms of narratives and proves that myth still works as a form of explanation and expression even in technologically developed societies. People continue to find issues of fate, sacrifice, vengeance, self-identity, and transcendence important because they are rooted in the very nature of human existence.

It also challenges the concept of adaptation by presenting it as transformation and not just fidelity. *The Northman* is neither a conventional

adaptation of *Hamlet* into film nor a true medieval adaptation of Amleth – instead it operates in a liminal space that incorporates elements from both traditions and reworks them in accordance with the film's own mythic and cinematic concerns. Examining how the story has evolved, from oral myth through medieval chronicle to Shakespeare's tragedy and finally to modern film, demonstrates the adaptability that enables myths to endure. What keeps the story of Amleth alive is not the fact that it has stayed the same, but the way in which each time it is told it changes meaning, even as it retains its mythic archetypes: the mythic legend favours communal honour and ritualistic violence; *Hamlet* focuses on psychological disintegration and existential uncertainty; while *The Northman* revisits archetypal action and explores modern theories of subjectivity.

The primary theoretical contribution of the project stems from the synthesis of Mythological Criticism with Psychoanalytic Theory. While not pitting myth against psychology, *The Northman* reveals how they intersect. Concerns of psychoanalytic theory—the workings of unconscious impulses, drives, and identifications—are present but manifest collectively through ritual activity and symbolism rather than being strictly relegated to the realm of the individual interior. Myth takes psychic structures out into the world of communal symbols and rituals, psychoanalysis takes them inwards. This dialectic is performed by the film, showing how ritual action can express unconscious motivations and thus problematizing modern assumptions about subjectivity, violence, and reality.

Lastly, *The Northman* can be understood as a response to the cultural condition of modernity in its aspects of fragmentation and interiorization. By restoring the ritual form and archetypal certainties, the film reintroduces the collective symbolic framework which modern narratives tend to sideline even as they engage modern critical theory. The accomplishment of the film does not lie in returning to the certainty of ancient myths but in the productive synthesis of

mythic activity with theoretical contemplation.

In conclusion, *The Northman* proves itself to be a strong revival of the Amleth myth in the contemporary age due to its resurrection of rituals, archetypes, and cosmology. This analysis of the film in relation to the myth and in connection with Shakespeare's *Hamlet* illustrates a historical path from mythic acts to psychological inner world and back to re-mythologicalization of cinema. In this way, the film proves that myth is not an artifact of the past, but a living and adaptable entity of storytelling and culture. Through the cinematic medium, Eggers resurrects archaic structures and opens them up to theoretical interpretation.

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