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**THE FUNCTIONS OF MYTH IN JOHN UPDIKE'S NOVEL  
*THE CENTAUR***

**MA Paper**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The paper analyzes the functions of myth in an American writer's John Updike's novel *The Centaur* (1963). It is a wonderful example of a mythological novel; the Greek myth about the noble centaur Chiron, employed by the author, determines the content of the book, affects the system of images and characters. Many writers of the twentieth century turned to traditional mythologies in their works. Such books as Dorothy Baker's *Cassandra at the Wedding* (1966), James Blish's *Black Easter or Faust Aleph-Null* (1969), Pamela Hill's *Forget Not Ariadne* (1965) and many others illustrate how contemporary writers employ ancient myths in their novels.

Many critics and literary scholars of the twentieth century were interested in the literature employing myths. The search for archetypal patterns was made by Maud Bodkin, Joseph Campbell, Gilbert Murray, Northrop Frye and many others. Richard Chase remarked that "*an interest in the creative literature of our [twentieth] century forces upon us an interest in myth.*" (Quoted by White, p. 4) Updike's mythological novel *The Centaur* was analyzed by Granville Hicks, J. A. Ward, George Steiner, Larry Taylor, David D. Galloway and other critics. Some of them (Steiner and Hicks) saw Updike's myth as an "*obtruding allegoric scaffold*" (Rainstorms and Fire, p. 81). Other critics concluded that Updike succeeded in his attempt to integrate myth and reality (J. A. Ward). Nevertheless, Updike's novel *The Centaur* was not properly analyzed from the perspective of the functions of myth employed by the author.

Despite the fact that there are many thinkers who enriched the field of mythology and rendered it quite accessible, the paper is based on the theory of a famous mythologist Joseph Campbell (1904-1987). This choice appeals to the fact that Campbell was one of the most versatile scholars working in the sphere of mythology. His vision of myth was the most flexible and complete; for that reason his theory suits best for the purposes of this work.

Whereas the paper is based on Campbell's theory of myth, it employs the functions of myth introduced by this mythologist in order to better understand Updike's purpose of using the myth of Chiron in his novel. According to Campbell's classification, there are four main functions of myth: metaphysical, sociological, cosmological and pedagogical.

The aim of the work is to unfold the functions of myth employed by Updike in one of his most famous novels *The Centaur*. It is obvious that such an occurrence of the ancient Greek myth in the work of a contemporary writer is not incidental. Updike employed the myth as a tool which provided him with appropriate possibilities. So, the aim of the paper is to educe the myth's functions in the novel.

In this paper several objectives are set up. They are: to present the mythological literature of the twentieth century and to offer a few approaches to a mythological novel; to introduce Updike as an important writer in American literature and to prove that ritual plays a great role in the majority of his novels (*The Poorhouse Fair*; *Rabbit, Run*; *Of the Farm*; *Couples*; *Rabbit Redux*); to introduce the concept of myth and unfold its functions; to present the Greek myth about Chiron, to disclose deviation of Updike's myth from the myth proper and to determine its role and purpose.

The mythocritical-functional method is employed in the paper to achieve its goals, due to the fact that the research is based on the mythological criticism of Joseph Campbell and the main focus of the work is the functions of myth in Updike's *The Centaur*.

## 1. MYTH IN THE LITERATURE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

It is not by coincidence that the German novelist Hermann Broch named the twentieth century “the mythical age”. The return to myth is assumed to be a certain feature of the Modernist movement at the beginning of the last century. Such books as James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), Mikhail Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita* (1967), John Updike’s *The Centaur* (1963), Guido Bachmann’s *Gilgamesh* (1966), Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus* (1960), and many others, illustrate how writers of our times are still returning to traditional mythologies in their works. Despite the fact that many of them, including Eliot, Joyce, Pound and Yeats were interested in myths and employed them in their works, such an interest is also found in much subsequent twentieth-century literature. For example, the legendary motif of Faust and the devil occurs in the novel by John Hersey *Too Far to Walk* (1966). However, among numerous possible features characterizing the contemporary interest in myths, the novel based on a traditional myth remains the most frequently misunderstood example of the function of mythology in contemporary literature (Mythology in the Modern novel, pp. 3-7).

As far as myths employed in the twentieth century novels are concerned, it is crucial to draw a distinguishing line between a mythological novel and a mythic one. The most famous mythological novel is, certainly, James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. According to J. White, there are two basic features describing a mythological novel: first, the mythological parallel is suggested as an analogy or contrast to the contemporary world in which the events of the novel take place; second, the parallel is an extended one. Both features are brilliantly employed in *Ulysses* and many other mythological novels. So, it should be emphasized, that a mythological novel differs from a mythic one, because the latter remains in the world of myths despite the fact that it is written in the modern tone. The examples of such a kind of novel are, for instance, Thomas Mann’s *Joseph* tetralogy (4 vols., 1933-1943), Sir James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* (1890), Ernst Cassirer’s *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (4 vols., 1923-1929) and others. In conclusion, works that are mythical do not offer myths as analogies, but make them their main structural principal. This paper analyzes Updike’s novel *The Centaur*, which is one of the best examples of the mythological novels of the twentieth century.

It is also essential to note the distinctions between myths proper and mythological motifs. Actually, the moment that a myth occurs in one or another novel, it is no longer possible to speak about it as a myth, for it is set in a different environment, it is usually modified or even altered beyond recognition. Consequently, myths which appear in the modern literature are called mythological motifs, unless they are exact re-narrations of

traditional myths. However, in this paper the term “myth” (which has all the features of the mythological motif) will be used instead of the other term, because it is more acceptable and it prevails in the sphere of the mythological criticism. According to John White:

*Motif-patterns are more complex because they refer the reader not only to the archetypal patterns in the novel's plot when it is actualized, but because they are represented in such a way as to generate in the reader patterns of hypothesis, conjectures and illusions concerning what is going to happen to the fictive characters. (Mythology in the Modern Novel, p. 118-119)*

It is also worth mentioning that if mythology appeared in the literary forms in earlier times, it was not organized in a motif-pattern. There are, for example, Virgilian overtones to Fielding's *Amelia*, but they do nothing more than any classical epithet in the heroic epic. (Mythology in the Modern Novel, p. 14) At the same time, modern novelists use myths mainly to comment on part of the modern plot, they employ mythology for an analogy or a contrast.

Still, it remains vague why contemporary novelists turn to ancient mythology. In his influential essay “Freud and the Future” Mann wrote:

*[...] The ego of antiquity [...] received much from the past and by repeating it gave it presentness again. The Spanish scholar Ortega y Gasset puts it that the man of antiquity, before he did anything, took a step backwards, like the bullfighter who leaps back to deliver the mortal thrust. He searched the past for a pattern into which he might slip as into a diving-bell, and being thus at once disguised and protected might rush upon his present problem. [...] Life, then – at any rate, significant life – was in ancient times the reconstitution of the myth in flesh and blood; it referred to and appealed to the myth; only through it, through reference to the past, could it approve itself as genuine and significant. The myth is the legitimization of life; only through and in it does life find self-awareness, sanction, consecration. (Quoted by White, p. 20)*

Consequently, contemporary writers return to mythologies of the past due to the fact that they find in myths the necessary power and source which help them to face the present problems. Besides, the theory of the depth-psychology influenced the novelists of the twentieth century as well. Moreover, myths appear to be embodiment of timeless and global values that is why they seem to be a universal method of solving the main problems and contradictions of our times. Myth is a topical issue in the twentieth century literature and criticism because it helps to explain the particularity of archaic thinking, the so called fundamental principles of the mentality of a modern man. Myths enable writers to rise and solve global problems of existence. For some authors myths are a means of shifting to macro-

historical scale, escaping beyond social, spatial and temporal boundaries of personal and public behaviour.

One more reason for using myth in a contemporary novel is that mythology frequently plays a structural function. Some of the writers (Joyce, Mann and others), turn to mythological motifs as a kind of system due to the fact that it helps to organize the material of fiction. The feeling that a mythological pattern offers a particular network for further development of the work is encouraged by novels which present an extended mythological motif-pattern, such as *Ulysses*, *Doctor Faustus* or *The Centaur*. T. S. Eliot was the first to remark on this subject:

*In using myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. They will not be imitators, any more than the scientist who uses the discoveries of an Einstein in pursuing his own, independent further investigations. It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.* (Quoted by White, pp.113-114)

However, it is wrong to treat mythology employed in the contemporary literature merely as a structural aid. The main interest lies in the function of employing one or another myth, the impact it has on the novel and on the reader, which is undoubtedly more than that.

Nevertheless, some writers and critics tend to voice quite opposite approaches to the mythological novel in the twentieth century. For instance, Frank Kermode frequently wrote that myth in the modern literature is a sign of regressive tendencies. Rene Wellek thought that the method of employing myth in a novel is very dangerous for it eliminates the boundary lines between art and myth and even art and religion. Another important point comprises what is being done to myth in the modern literature. Some believe that it is vandal to alter myths, others state that myths should be altered in accordance to our present reality. Gilbert Highet was sure that “*every writer who attempts to create anything on a basis of myth must add, or subtract, or alter*” (Mythology in the Modern Novel, p. 82). On the other hand, E. M. Butler regreted that much alien material is added to classical myths in modern novels. One more complaint of the critics leveled against mythological novels is that they do not present myths in an optimistic light. A more strict criticism was revealed by Margaret Dalziel in her lecture on “Myth in Modern English Literature”:

*The free use of myth, especially in novels, has now become part of a literary fashion of writing [...] The age and associations, the suggestive and evocative power of myths have lured many people into using them as images for no very good reason, and the fashion has, I think, given rise to much pretentious and therefore bad writing.* (Quoted by White, p.87)

Consequently, there are many opinions and different approaches to the mythological literature, but the most important fact is that despite them myths very often appear in the works of the contemporary writers. Therefore, critics and literary scholars cannot negate the fact that mythology in one way or another penetrates in the literature of our times; and writers, employing this traditional heritage, are free to do what they want in order to achieve their aims.

## 2. MEANINGS OF MYTH

Myth is one of the central phenomena in cultural history and the oldest means of conceptualizing the surrounding reality and human nature. Furthermore, it is the cradle of diverse spheres of culture such as literature, art, religion and philosophy. For these reasons myth attracted scholars and philosophers of different epochs and ideology. Each of them was trying to understand the nature of myth, to work up the concept of mythological thinking, to expose the fountainhead of mythological consciousness. The modern theory of myth was coming into existence through opposition and cooperation of diverse schools dealing with its phenomenon. It is essential to depict miscellaneous versions or meanings of myth for it will help to expose the concept suitable for the present study.

Antique philosophers, stoics and sophists treated myths as an allegory. Plato (427-347 B.C.) symbolically saw in the myth a living universal creature. Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) emphasized the narrative of myths, approached them as plot or stories. Neo-Platonists compared myths to logical categories. Euhemerus (working in 4 B.C.), a Greek philosopher and mythographer, was famous for his radical interpretations of myths. He thought they were part of a long historical tradition by which the Gods were originally men, known for some great historical feat or some important social and cultural advancement and later raised to god-hood.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Joseph-François Lafitau (1681-1746) interpreted the pagan mythology as the germ of Christianity. The French writer Fontenelle (1657-1757), on the contrary, argued that searching for primary causes brought the savages to false ideas and superstitions. Voltaire (1694-1778) criticized Lafitau and saw in mythology only falsehood and lies of the priests. Besides, the eighteenth century was the beginning of the crisis of mythologies. The first serious philosophy of myth belongs to Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), who came to a conclusion that primitive men personified nature and that myths are the source of metaphors and other poetic devices.



Later brothers Karl Schlegel (1772-1829) and August Schlegel (1767-1845), Schelling (1775-1854) and other philosophers belonging to the Romantic school treated myth as an esthetic phenomenon, a symbolic model of any art. The end of the nineteenth century is characterized by the appearance of the so called remythologisation. Richard Wagner (1813-1883), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945), and Thomas Mann (1875-1955) appreciated artistic, psychological and philosophical value of myth. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Alfred Adler (1870-1937) and Carl Jung (1875-1961) emphasized the category of the unconscious. Finally, mythologists of the late twentieth century Joseph Campbell and Northrop Frye (1912-1991) treated myth as a universal pattern shaping humanity.

All these scholars and philosophers contributed to the study of the phenomenon of myth, however, “*there exists as little agreement about the concept of myth as about most other important concepts of literary criticism*” (p. vii), as Joseph P. Strelka wrote in his book *Literary Criticism and Myth*. Traditionally, myth is a narrative originating in the early times which personifies natural phenomena. According to later interpretation, it is a historically stipulated variety of cultural conscience. The modern view approaches myth as uncritically perceived vision. Consequently, this term roughly has the three meanings: 1) ancient legend or story; 2) myth-making or mythological cosmogenesis; 3) particular condition of the state of mind caused by historical and cultural factors. Each of these meanings encompasses many more aspects; however, they are beyond the scope of this study. It is of interest for this paper that in the twentieth century myth became one of the most important categories due to the third meaning – a particular state of mind.

### 3. CATEGORIES OF MYTHOLOGICAL FICTION

There exist particular types of mythological fiction where a motif can be employed. Theodore Ziolkowski distinguishes two approaches to mythological literature: the first is retelling myths from a contemporary point of view; the second is setting modern novels “*in the mold of traditional myths*” (Quoted by White, p. 51). Another critic, E. W. Herd, divides mythological fiction into five groups:

- 1) *The novel which assuredly sets out to retell an acknowledged myth;*
- 2) *Works in which the author uses myth as a means of literary allusion, intended to attract the attention of the reader and to add a significance to a theme or situation by means of illustration or parallel;*
- 3) *Conscious use [of myth] as a structural element;*

- 4) *A mythical structure [...] within the novel without conscious development by the author;*
- 5) *The situation of an author who claims himself, or who is claimed by critics, to be creating a new myth.* (Quoted by White, pp. 51-52)

However, this typology is quite awkward, and for that reason White's differentiation is worth mentioning. He divides mythological literature into four groups. The first two of them always name their myths; the other two may contain only veiled allusions to mythology. The four types are:

1. *The complete re-narration of a classical myth.* With this method the author names the mythological characters and settings described, so the myths involved are not the subject of doubt.
2. *A juxtaposition of sections narrating a myth and others concerned with the contemporary world.* The best examples of this type are the following novels: John Bowen's *A World Elsewhere* (1965) and David Stacton's *Kaliyuga* (1965). One problem with this kind of a mythological novel is that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish what is more important – the mythological parts or the contemporary ones; what, in turn, puzzles the distinctions between motif and the main theme.
3. *A novel set in the modern world, which contains a pattern of references to mythology running through the work.* The best known novels of this type are James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Mann's *Doctor Faustus* and Updike's *The Centaur*. The titles of these novels name their myths explicitly. However, there are novels which do not possess a mythological title and which employ a covert system of correspondences to their myths. Such novels are, for example, Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Les Gommages* (1963) and Bernard Malamud's *The Natural* (1952).
4. *A novel in which a mythological motif prefigures a part of the narrative (a single event, a character or a limited group of people), but without running consistently through the whole narrative, as in type 3.*

In dealing with types 3 and 4 it is crucial to distinguish between mythology and archetypes. In some cases, it is difficult to ascertain whether a veiled motif of a particular myth is embodied in the novel or whether it merely shares a particular archetypal pattern which does not relate to myth. The danger here arises because a reader or a critic may in such cases find mythological allusions which were not intended by the author.

#### 4. RITUAL AS AN UNDERLYING PRINCIPLE OF UPDIKE'S NOVELS

As Edward P. Vargo writes in his book *Rainstorms and Fire*, the majority of Updike's writings: *The Poorhouse Fair* (1959); *Rabbit, Run* (1960); *The Centaur* (1963), *Of the Farm* (1965); *Couples* (1968); *Rabbit Redux* (1971) have ritual as their main underlying principle. To be more precise, the writer very often employs ritual, which in its turn encompasses pattern, myth, and celebration.

On the most evident level, ritual is the performance of an easily defined pattern – a kind of repeatable form, usually consisting of language and gesture. However, on the deeper level ritual becomes the system of repetitions that makes time intelligible to man (*Rainstorms and Fire*, p. 16). Consequently, rituals extend over simple repetitions; they tend to become a special symbolic communication. The main function of ritual in this way is “*to sustain whatever belief man has and to make it meaningful by a rehearsed repetition [...] we need certain patterns of action which signify the way we look at things*”. (*Rainstorms and Fire*, p. 17)

By pattern – the first element comprising the notion of a ritual, the shape of the novel is meant. Updike enjoys working particularly on the pattern of his writings, he has even spoken of *Rabbit, Run* as a “*pattern of Zs*”. *Of the Farm* resembles an “*X*”, while *The Centaur* is shaped like a “*sandwich*” and *The Poorhouse Fair* like a “*gladiola*” (Quoted by Vargo, p. 18).

The next element in this structure is a myth. As it was mentioned above, the term of myth reckons up an endless number of definitions and concepts. Too often it is understood as an attempt to explain the natural phenomena, however, in this case, by myth “*a dramatic tale, a narrative which is a product of the human imagination*” (*Rainstorms and Fire*, p.19) is meant. Myth touches what have always existed and will exist in the future – the problem of life and death. It reflects what really happened, be it in time immemorial or in our childhood. Moreover, myth shapes our present attitudes and behaviour, it is a guide to our modern life.

Finally, the last element of the ritual is celebration. It exists on the emotional level of experience, as Vargo puts it, and is “*the existential initiation or achievement of an exaltation through the union of past and present, of the sensual, emotional, and rational*” (*Rainstorms and Fire*, p.20). Celebration in Updike's writings may even reach “*the point of communion with the ultimate, with total Being*” (*Rainstorms and Fire*, p. 20).

It should be also mentioned that myth in Updike's works is created by constant return to events of the mythic childhood or the past in general. These returns are always a significant point of the particular work, when the myth helps the characters to reconcile the clash

between inward and outward forces of their present lives, to overcome the disharmonies of life, and at that moment “*the stage is set for the flowering of ritual in celebration*” as Edward P. Vargo writes. “*The chief function of celebration may be considered the externalization of man’s religious feelings and the tangible embodiment of the transcendent.*” (Rainstorms and Fire, p. 20) Besides, this celebration resembles the Joycean epiphany, “*an event in which an encompassing whole is mediated to us through a particular object or action*” (Quoted by Vargo, p.20)

In conclusion, Vargo states, that as far as the notion of ritual is concerned, it is impossible to discuss *The Poorhouse Fair* without considering sacred time and *Rabbit, Run* without the need for repetition and celebration. *The Centaur* embodies all the elements of ritual to bring its protagonists to a new reality. *Of the Farm* illustrates the notion of sacred place, while *Couples* and *Rabbit Redux* focus upon desperate search for ceremonies. According to Edward P. Vargo:

*In these novels, ritual serves to fulfill the great desire of capturing the past, to make the present meaningful through connection with the past, to overcome death, and to grasp immortality. For John Updike, ritual leads to resurrection, to a foretaste of eternal life. In a decadent society, however, in a society that has lost all sense of the transcendent, ritual degenerates into an empty form, to fill the void with meaningless, unthinking activity. Or it must discover new patterns, new myths, new ways to reintegrate man and to celebrate his vital yearning for the transcendent.* (Rainstorms and Fire, p. 27)

## 5. JOSEPH CAMPBELL’S VISION OF MYTH

Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) was, perhaps, the most influential and extraordinary mythologist of the twentieth century. In his introduction to the book *The Power of Myth* Bill Moyers calls Joseph Campbell “*one of the world’s leading scholars of mythology and one of the most exciting teachers of our time; it was said that ‘he could make the bones of folklore and anthropology live.’*” (p. xv) Campbell presented the most universal studies of myth, for that reason this paper is based on his theory.

Campbell was not an ordinary academic, for he established a close relationship with the public; he transformed mythology from an inaccessible study into a popular “path” leading to a better understanding of ourselves and our world. Campbell relied on the texts of Carl Jung but he did not agree with every issue brought up by this psychiatrist. For instance, Campbell did not believe in astrology as Jung did. He was mostly interested in symbolism.

His approach to mythology was as original as it was radical. In the introduction to the book *The Hero's Journey* Phil Cousineau writes:

*Campbell's comparative historical approach to mythology, religion, and literature, in contrast to the conventional scholar's emphasis on cultural differences, concentrated on similarities. He was convinced that the common themes or archetypes in our sacred stories and images transcended the variations or cultural manifestations.* (p. xi-xii)

Hence it can be said that in his early stage of career Campbell already came to a thought that there are remarkable parallels in our world's mythological heritage. Besides, a very interesting idea came to his mind that at the heart of the nature, at the very core of all existence there is a fundamental unity. So, he started the search for that unifying theory which could explain everything existing on our planet. According to Phil Cousineau,

*To synthesize the constant truths of history became the burning point of his life; to bridge the abyss between science and religion, mind and body, East and West, with the timeless linkage of myths became his task of tasks.*" (The Hero's Journey, p. xi)

Campbell believed that all religions of the world, all the myths, rituals and deities are the "masks" of the same transcendent truth. He often quoted Vedas: "*Truth is one; the stages speak of it by many names.*" Campbell believed that none of the religions is right but every of them is searching for the same truth, same answer.

What makes Campbell's theory differ from others is the idea of "monomyth". When he became intensely interested in Joyce and his works, he approached Joyce's publisher, Sylvia Beach, who explained to him the writer's idea of the "monomyth". This concept means that, according to James Joyce, there is the only one overriding story that everybody lives out. This story is a single one for every individual despite the fact that every man may be of a different race, status, culture, etc. In other words, "monomyth" means that all myths originate from a common source: the communal past of the human race. This thought found its reflections in his best seller *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). In this book the mythologist described the hero's myth and explained that all story-telling, consciously or not, follows the ancient patterns of myth; and that all of them can be understood in terms of the hero myth. Moreover, the book states that all the stories of the world begin in a universal source of the collective unconscious and reflect universal concerns.

Campbell's quote: "Follow your bliss" has already become the maxim, a catch-phrase. The mythologist believed that at the heart of every hero myth was just that message. By it

Campbell intended that everyone should follow his or her own way, that there is a path for everyone and the thing is just to find it and follow it.

Campbell had a unique vision of myth. He wrote that “*Myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human manifestation.*” (The Hero with a Thousand faces, p. 3) According to the scholar, myths are the ‘masks’ of God through which people seek to relate themselves to the wonders of existence. To Campbell, mythology is “*an interior map of experience, drawn by people who have traveled it*”, “*the song of the universe*”, and “*the music of the spheres.*” (Quoted by Moyers, p. xvi) According to Campbell, myths enrich one’s personality; fill it with purpose and spirit, make people think about their souls and not of “*the news of the day and the problems of the hour.*” (The Power of Myth, p. 3) His view may be, obviously, best illustrated by his own words:

*These bits of information from ancient times, which have to do with the themes that have supported human life, built civilizations, and informed religions over the millennia, have to do with deep inner problems, inner mysteries, inner thresholds of passage, and if you don’t know what the guide-signs are along the way, you have to work it out yourself.* (The Power of Myth, p. 4)

For Campbell, myths were stories which reflect human search for truth through the ages. People are created to “*touch the eternal, to understand the mysterious*” (The Power of Myth, p. 5), and for that reason they have to be able to cope with death and to accept life. These tasks would not be achievable without the help of myths. Moreover, in Campbell’s view “*myths are clues to the spiritual potentialities of the human life.*” (The Power of Myth, p. 5) There is one more famous quotation by the mythologist:

*Read myths. They teach you that you can turn inward, and you begin to get the message of the symbols. Read other people’s myths, not those of your own religion, because you tend to interpret your own religion in terms of facts – but if you read the other ones, you begin to get the message. Myth helps you to put your mind in touch with this experience of being alive. It tells you what the experience is.* (The Power of Myth, p. 6)

Campbell believed that myths teach us the wisdom of life, while in schools people do not learn it. Schools provide pupils with technologies, information, different sorts of facts, while myths help to get the feeling and realization of a real life with all its mysteries and secrets. He claimed that “*Mythology teaches you what’s behind literature and the arts, it teaches you about your own life. It’s a great, exciting, life-nourishing subject.*” (The Power of Myth, p. 11) Campbell also compared myths to the world’s archetypal dreams which deal with great human problems.

The mythologist believed myths to be manifestations of human spirituality. They are the society's dreams, which come from the same source like human dreams do. They teach people how to live, how to cope with death, how to behave in the world; in other words, they bear special meaning. Myths are "*all the gods, all the heavens, all the worlds*" (The Power of Myth, p. 39) within us.

## 6. CAMPBELL'S CLASSIFICATION OF THE FUNCTIONS OF MYTH

Campbell distinguished four basic functions of myth: metaphysical, cosmological, sociological, and pedagogical. (The Power of Myth, pp. 31-32)

The metaphysical function serves to awaken people's minds to the mystery and wonder of life and creation, to open people's hearts and souls to the secrets of the world. In other words, this function helps to realize that the world is overwhelmingly extraordinary and inimitable, and to conceive the greatness and importance of human existence. Moreover, the metaphysical function of myth sharpens people's feelings, helps them to receive the hidden messages of the universe, to be able to appreciate its wonders fully. It is obvious that such things cannot be expressed directly, for that reason myths employ symbols and metaphors which are not bound to objective reality. To put it otherwise, this function gives way to metaphoric thinking and language which, accordingly, tune people to experience mystery of the world. (The Power of Myth, p. 31)

The second function – the sociological, helps to support a certain social order, it provides people with moral and ethic code to follow. So, myth makes it clear what ethical code is appropriate, what the institutional rituals are, etc. Campbell wrote about this function as follows: "*And here's where the myths vary enormously from place to place. You can have a whole mythology for polygamy, a whole mythology for monogamy. Either one is okay.*" (The Power of Myth, p. 31) Consequently, myths provide people with information concerning particular social patterns. The sociological function of myth serves to link a man to a particular society. Every person is not a separate segment; he or she is a member of a large group – the surrounding society. Moreover, every single man is a part of the universe. Campbell wrote: "*We need myths that will identify the individual not with his local group but with the planet.*" (The Power of Myth, p. 24) Societies may differ – some of them have polygamy, others practice monogamy, but generally all the people of the world live according to the same norms, rules and values. There exist unwritten laws which govern our behaviour and shape our attitude to other people and objects. These unwritten laws are reflected in the

sociological function of mythology – they are meant to support and validate a certain social order and produce the laws of life which form a good society.

The cosmological function of myth describes the shape of the cosmos and the universe. Due to it people get the vivid view of the total world surrounding them. According to Campbell, science deals with this cosmological dimension. This function shows us “*what the shape of the universe is*”, but it is done in such a way that “*the mystery again comes through.*” (The Power of Myth, p. 31) Every object existing on our planet is charged with meaning and significance; it has its place in the cosmological scheme which the myth provides. In other words, the cosmological function of myth comprises the explanatory aspect. It educes the mystery of the objects surrounding people. Campbell mentioned that interestingly enough, the more scientists learn about the Earth, the more mystical their knowledge becomes:

*Today we tend to think that scientists have all the answers. But the great ones tell us, “No, we haven’t got all the answers. We’re telling you how it works – but what is it?” You strike a match, what’s fire? You can tell me about oxidation, but that doesn’t tell me a thing. (The Power of Myth, p. 31)*

Consequently, the cosmological function of myth is responsible for describing people’s environment: every rock, every hill and stone has its particular place and meaning in the cosmological scheme. It can be well illustrated by the following example: if the whole humanity is a newborn child, then the cosmological function is to help him or her to explore the surrounding world and figure out how all the processes happen. Moreover, it has to help that child to recognize all these numerous surrounding objects as parts of a single great holy picture, to conceive the trees, the Sun, the animals, etc. as messengers of the mysterious knowledge.

Manny Otto, commenting on Campbell’s functions of myth, states, that the cosmological function seeks to invigorate every particle of the cosmological image with mythological references. According to Campbell, throughout the history, the cosmological function is performed by “the great seers”. In different cultures and at different times they have diverse names: they are “Rishis” in India; in Biblical terms they are called “Prophets”; in primary cultures they were called “Shamans”; and, finally, in contemporary society they are “Poets”, “Artists” and “Scientists”.

The pedagogical function of myth, Campbell believed, is the most important of the four main functions. According to him, everyone must try to relate to it, as it teaches “*how to live a human lifetime under any circumstances*”. (The Power of Myth, p. 31) The pedagogical



function of myth serves as a beacon leading people through the most significant stages of their lives – from dependency to the final passage, which is death. It also brings people into harmony with the “ground being” – a term often used by Campbell to refer to an unnamed, unspecified universal mystical power. Moreover, the pedagogical function allows men to make this journey through their lives with a sense of comfort and purpose.

Justin Muller and Lenore Harris analyzed the functions of myth, classified by Campbell, and came to the conclusion that the pedagogical function deals with the human values. It teaches people how to behave; however, it differs from the sociological function, which seems to have a similar meaning and purpose. From their point of view, the difference lies in the very scheme of these functions. The sociological one refers basically to a particular society (societies may differ, in some cases even absolutely); while the pedagogical one is referred to the universe (universal values are accepted by all the societies of the world). To put it simply, the pedagogical function pinpoints what is right and what is wrong on a universal scale.

## **II. THE MYTH OF CHIRON IN UPDIKE'S *THE CENTAUR***

Updike's *The Centaur* evoked different attitudes in critics and readers: some of them praised the book while others criticized it sharply. The aspect which shaped and influenced the critics' view was Updike's combination of the two plot lines in the book – that of the Classical myth and the modern narrative. The author interweaved the mythological layer with the realistic one and this synthesis provoked a great interest in the book. Despite various reviews, the novel became a best seller and won the National Book Award for Fiction in 1964:

*While some reviewers greeted the book as the first evidence of Updike's willingness to confront the so-called larger-than-life issues, others called it a roman manqué at best and a “sell-out” to the popular fashions of fiction at worst”* (John Updike, p.80)

It is crucial that the myth employed by the writer varies from the original, due to the author's aim to emphasize some points and to omit others. Consequently, it is important to find out what the discrepancy and congruity is according to the original myth and to draw the conclusions concerning their purpose and functions. However, at this point, it is necessary to present the original myth about the centaur Chiron.

According to encyclopedia Wikipedia, the myth about Chiron comes from the Greek mythology. It tells that Chiron was held as the superlative centaur among his brethren. Like

the satyrs, centaurs were notorious for being overtly indulgent drinkers and carousers, given to violence when intoxicated, and generally uncultured. Chiron, by contrast, was intelligent, civilized and kind. He was sired by Cronus, who took the form of a horse and impregnated the nymph, Philyra. As a result, Chiron came from a different lineage than other centaurs, who were born of sun and raincloud. However, Chiron's mother rejected her son as he was half man half horse.

Chiron was the father of Ocyrhoë, Hippe, Endeis and Carystus with the nymph Chariclo, and they lived on Mount Pelion. A great healer, astrologer, and respected oracle, Chiron was most revered as a teacher and tutored Asclepius, Aristaeus, Ajax, Theseus, Achilles, Jason and Heracles. As the last remaining centaur, Chiron had the gift of guiding his pupils.

His nobility is further reflected in the story of his death, as Chiron sacrificed his life, allowing humanity to obtain the use of fire. Being the son of Cronus, a titan, he was immortal and so could not die. Chiron had been poisoned with an arrow belonging to Heracles that had been treated with the blood of the Hydra, during the assault which once occurred. According to one of the versions of the myth, Chiron could not stand the pain which the poisoned arrow caused, so he asked Zeus to deprive him of immortality and take his life instead of Prometheus, who was then chained to the rock. Ironically, Chiron, the master of the healing arts, could not heal himself, so he willingly gave up his immortality and was placed in the sky. Edith Hamilton wrote in her book *Mythology*:

*“There is a strange story that the Centaur, Chiron, though immortal, was willing to die for him [Prometheus] and that he was allowed to do so. When Hermes was urging Prometheus to give in to Zeus he spoke of this, but in such a way as to make it seem an incredible sacrifice: -*

*Look for no ending to this agony  
Until a god will freely suffer for you,  
Will take on him his pain, and in your stead  
Descend to where the sun is turned to darkness,  
The black depths of death.*

*But Chiron did do this and Zeus seems to have accepted him as a substitute”.* (p.73)

There exists another interesting interpretation of the myth about Chiron, according to which Chiron was wounded twice – the first wounding came very early in his life when he was abandoned by his parents, while his second wounding came with Hercules's arrow. According to this interpretation, the centaur decided to sacrifice his immortality for Prometheus not because of the physical pain which was caused by the poisoned arrow, but

because of his emotional suffering which he experienced after he was abandoned by the family.

In his novel *The Centaur* Updike treats the mythological material quite freely. While generally the Chiron myth and the novel's main idea coincide – Chiron (Caldwell) gives up his immortality on behalf of Prometheus (his son Peter); there are some discrepancies in several details. There are three main differences between the original myth and myth occurring in *The Centaur*: first, in the original myth Prometheus is not Chiron's son; second, Hephaestus is not Chiron's friend; third, Venus and Chiron do not have any relationship. Updike deviated from the original Greek myth because it was not his intention to re-narrate the myth, what mattered for him was its main idea – great sacrifice for other people's sake.

One of the main distinctions between the myth proper and the myth occurring in Updike's *The Centaur* is the fact that in the book Peter-Prometheus is the son of Caldwell-Chiron. The author had several reasons for altering the real myth. First, Chiron was in some ways similar to Prometheus. He was the tutor of the Gods, but at the same time he was kind with people; he taught not only medicine and astrology, but also the most difficult art of justice. Passing his immortality to Prometheus, he seemingly adopted him. Second, Prometheus was chosen by Updike to serve Peter's role in the novel due to one more reason. It deals with Prometheus's brother, Epimetheus, who totally contrasted with him. Epimetheus was a clumsy character, even a loser. Scholars assume that primarily it was one single deity comprising opposite qualities, or divine twins who never grew apart. This might be the reason for Prometheus's failure in deceiving Zeus, despite the fact that he was quite cunning. Consequently, Peter can be treated as a son who conceived the deed of his father too late. He needed years to realize his father's greatness veiled by his nonentity and mediocrity. As Markish wrote, Peter was late to understand that his father's absurd figure reached the clouds and his head with the "imbecile cap" touched the stars.

Other instances of deviations from the Greek mythology are the following: Chiron's and Hephaestus's (Caldwell's and Hummel's) friendship and the passionate scene between the centaur and Venus (Caldwell and Vera Hummel) do not exist in traditional mythology.

As for Caldwell's and Hummel's friendship, Updike deliberately brings these two characters into contact in *The Centaur* in order to emphasize the difference between them. While Caldwell is an intelligent thinking man, a teacher working at an Olinger high school, Hummel is a mechanic working together with his helpers (savage one-eyed Cyclopes) in an overcrowded chaotic garage. The author strengthens Hummel's image by numerous descriptions of his face. At the beginning, when Caldwell enters the garage and meets his friend, Hummel's face is "pale" (*The Centaur*, p. 11), "delicate grey" (*The Centaur*, p. 11),

and “*dead-pale*” (The Centaur, p. 14). However, when he starts to pull the arrow out of Caldwell’s ankle and it “*slid out backwards with a slick of pain [...] Hummel stood up, his face pink, scorched by fire or flushed in satisfaction.*” (The Centaur, p. 15) Later, at the moment when Hummel’s and Caldwell’s conversation comes to the topic of the money and the arrow is already pulled out, Hummel’s “*face had regained its grey colour, its acetylene tan; crinkled and delicate like an often-folded sheet of foil, his face became almost womanly with quiet woe*” (The Centaur, p. 16) There is something animal and brutal in the changes of Hummel’s face and it brings the two characters to the opposite poles, emphasizes their differences.

Taking into consideration the discrepancies between the novel and mythology, Updike did not aim at re-narrating the Greek myth in all its details. The author used ancient mythology in order to put it at the heart of his novel, to make it its leading line, its backbone. In many ways, he succeeded, for the essence of the myth is reflected in the real characters and events and endows them with depth and significance.

As a real master of word, Updike created a complex and original structure of *The Centaur*. The time of the book is strictly defined – it comprises three winter days of the year 1947. However, the complexity of the novel enables the reader to travel between past and future. For example, on p. 46 Peter addresses somebody for the first time, and it becomes clear that all the narration is his remembrance of the past events: “*I wake now often, beside you, with a pang of fear, after dreams that leave a sour wash of atheism in my stomach*”. On p. 55 he says: “*I can still see everything. The downstairs was two long rooms, the kitchen and the living-room, connected by two doorways side by side*”. Nearly all the novel is narrated by Peter, Caldwell’s son. Despite the fact that several years have passed, he still remembers everything that happened during those three days, his recollections are vivid in his mind. The obituary dedicated to Caldwell which occurs in the fifth chapter, provides the reader with some additional information about the protagonist. It elucidates that he had a rather difficult life and changed a number of jobs.

Choosing from several variations Updike decided to introduce a mythological motif in the first point of the novel, i.e. in the title. The majority of mythological novels have a mythological motif in the title; however, they may as well have some additional or altered wording (e.g. *Doctor Faustus*). In *The Centaur*, the title gives no supplementary information except of the explicit name of a mythological creature.

The next mythological implication lies in the first epigraph to the novel, which is taken from one of the works by Karl Barth. It says: “*Heaven is the creation inconceivable to man, earth the creation conceivable to him. He himself is the creature on the boundary*”

*between heaven and earth*". (The Centaur, p. 3) Therein lies the main metaphorical purport of the novel – "heaven" and "earth" represent contradictions between poetic and matter-of-fact, ideal and real, high ideals and vile intentions. These oppositions pierce the whole book as the reader encounters Caldwell's high aspirations and his miserable milieu which at the end wins and deprives the protagonist of his ideals and desires. Moreover, in *The Centaur* the fear of death and death itself are confronted with searching for the purport of life, with the assertion of goodness.

The second epigraph embraces the part of the Chiron myth. It briefly presents the main idea of the novel – Chiron (Caldwell) gives up his life on behalf of Prometheus (Peter). At this point, as the title and the two epigraphs merge in the reader's mind, for the first time it becomes evident that Chiron is going to be the central figure of the novel. Employing ancient myths in the modern literature is quite a frequent case; however, the Christian idea of sacrifice on behalf of others is, probably, the most popular among contemporary writers. Consequently, when the reader finds out in the second epigraph the pain and torment of Chiron and then his lifting to the sky, he or she is immediately reminded of Christ and of antinomy of faith and unbelief, goodness and evil – oppositions standing at the keynote of the book.

Besides, the novel comprises a mythological index created by Updike himself. The key to the cipher of the index is simple – the real names of the characters begin with the same letter as their mythological counterparts (Peter - Prometheus, Zimmerman – Zeus, Minor - Minos). This index is treated in a number of ways: some critics think it is put to the novel for ironical purpose; others believe it helps to reveal the mythological background of the book, the parallel of each character and event. The second opinion seems quite reasonable – sometimes it is difficult or even impossible to decode the meaning of one or another scene, to extract additional information from them without the help of the index. On the other hand, the index may be treated as an ironical device (for example, taking into consideration the foreword to it, which says "*compiled at my wife's suggestion*" (*The Centaur*, p. 271)).

The very beginning of the novel illustrates Updike's brilliant skill of writing. "*Caldwell turned and as he turned his ankle received an arrow. The class burst into laughter. The pain scaled the slender core of his shin, whirled in the complexities of his knee, and, swollen broader, more thunderous, mounted into his bowels.*" (The Centaur, p. 7) Despite the fact that an arrow here does not relate fully to the mythological context (it is quite possible nowadays to hear of a pupil shooting or loosing an arrow to the teacher), the reader presupposes that the arrow hitting Caldwell's ankle might be the same one which smote Chiron. Hence, myth and reality do not contact, they clash at the very beginning of the story

in order to emphasize the great difference between the fancy world of legends and the rigorous present of Olinger.

Further in the novel one reads: "*He tried to keep his leg from touching the floor, but the jagged clatter of the three remaining hooves sounded so loud he was afraid one of the doors would snap open and another teacher emerge to bar his way*" (The Centaur, p. 8). In this sentence the reader is already aware of Caldwell being simultaneously the centaur. Comparing this sentence with the previous episode containing an arrow, it should be mentioned that in the novel both implicit and explicit methods of framing the mythological semantics occur. Consequently, it is obvious that Updike obtains a close contexture of myth and reality in *The Centaur*, what forces the reader to observe simultaneously Caldwell's misfortunes and the last days of Chiron preparing to leave the Earth.

## 1. METAPHYSICAL FUNCTION OF MYTH IN *THE CENTAUR*

In *The Centaur*, the metaphysical function of myth establishes mystical-transcendent, religious background of the novel. The myth extends the frame of the novel, adds it extra dimension as it enables the reader to travel back through time and approach some common archetypes. To put it otherwise, Updike turned his protagonist into the centaur in order to emphasize the importance of his sacrifice, suffering and pain. Caldwell is a very good man, a talented and unselfish one, however, it is questionable whether this character would be suitable to express the great idea Updike meant him to reveal. Consequently, in order to give Caldwell prominence, to make him greater, the author identified a modest teacher with the immortal centaur and at the same time with Christ, joined the three figures together.

As it was mentioned before, the myth of Chiron is probably the only one in the Greek mythology which is very similar to the biblical story of Christ. Generally speaking, Jesus Christ is one of the crucial figures in the cultural history of the West, a unique character and one of the greatest symbolic figures of humanity. His death and immediate resurrection emphasize that he was not a simple man but a divine being. For that reason writers and especially poets of different epochs tended to transpose the figure of Christ into their own days or, as Updike did in *The Centaur*, to evoke his image through other symbols.

So, why does Caldwell-Chiron become Caldwell-Christ? He abnegates his ambitions and life on behalf of his son, but it is not nearly all. He deprives himself of life on behalf of all the people. For instance, the episode with the hitchhiker, when Caldwell and Peter hurry up to school, illustrates it. Despite being late, Caldwell stops their car and picks up a man freezing on the roadside. The hitchhiker seems untidy: His "*dirty green scarf was tied around his*

neck”, “some force of misery or weather had scrubbed his white face down to the veins”, “broken bits of purple had hatched on his cheeks”, however, Caldwell is polite with this man and calls him “mister.” (The Centaur, p. 75) The teacher even says to him: “You’re a man I admire. You’ve had the guts to do what I always wanted to do: move around, see the cities.” (The Centaur, p. 81) When he finds out that the hitchhiker is a cook, Caldwell responds: “My hat’s off to you. You’re an artist.” (The Centaur, p. 82)

After these words the reader comes across Peter’s thoughts concerning the event taking place: “I cringed with the desire to apologize, to grovel before this stranger, to explain. It’s just his way, he loves strange people, he’s worried about something”. (The Centaur, p. 82) Unfortunately, at this point of the novel Peter is still too young to understand that his father loves not strange people but all the people, and especially those who are on a losing streak, who are not so successful in their lives, and experience misfortunes. Peter surely loves his father, but at the same time he is often annoyed by ridiculous situations his father gets in. Caldwell appreciates the first one who comes along due to the fact that his goodness does not favour one person or another, he loves everybody and is eager to help everybody. This feature of the character assimilates him with Christ, for he also loved every single person, especially those who were lost on the way of their lives and who needed help, guidance and compassion. The worst people with the worst intentions – those who want to deceive, hurt and steal from Caldwell, are simply unhappy people for him, he feels sympathy for them. Deep in his heart lays the feeling that these unfortunates are similar to him as he himself is a wretched man. Moreover, Caldwell-Chiron-Christ feels that he is responsible for all of them because if he does not help them, nobody will ever do it. At this point it is possible to conclude, that there are not many people like Caldwell. It requires much inner strength and love to become selfless and care about others, even when they do not appreciate it.

The hitchhiker did not even thank Caldwell. Moreover, he stole his gloves from the back seat of the car, the gloves his son had bought him, and still, Caldwell says to Peter: “That man was a gentleman”, “he needs ‘em more than I did”. (The Centaur, pp. 85-86)

In the other episode when the drunk importunes George and Peter in Alton, and calls Caldwell a “dirty man” (The Centaur, p. 143), the teacher gives the drunk his last thirty-five cents and even apologizes for not having more money. It may seem ridiculous at first sight; however, Caldwell is a man who can see and understand another person’s troubles and problems, who can forgive everything, who is capable of high and generous feelings, just like Christ was.

In the episode when Caldwell and Peter are stuck in the storm on the road and a Dodge passes by without stopping to help them, the father says to his son:

*'Did you notice the way that bastard didn't offer to give us a push?' 'How could expect him to? He just about made it himself.' 'I would, in his shoes.' 'But there's nobody else like you, Daddy. There's nobody else like you in the world.' He is shouting because his father has clenched his fists on the steering wheel and is resting his forehead on their backs. (The Centaur, p. 234)*

Peter is desperately shouting because he understands that his father is different and it is extremely difficult for him to live in the world of the wolfish laws. In his nightmare dream he sees the father convicted of some crime walking naked while the people of Olinger are cursing, laughing, and throwing dark objects at him. He is wearing his knitted cap on his head and this cap. In this episode an implicit allusion to the Bible can be noticed; hence, Caldwell's cap is simultaneously realized by the reader as a crown of thorns. In his dream Peter *"tried to explain aloud to the angry townspeople how innocent his father was, how overlooked, worried, conscientious, and anxious; but the legs of the crowd shoved and smothered him and he could not make his voice heard."* (The Centaur, p. 191) This scene is very symbolic as it reminds of the trials of Christ. Moreover, Caldwell resembles all the ancient martyrs (Socrates and others), despite the fact that he is a modern American, a funny and pitiful schoolteacher, the owner of an unnecessary and simultaneously absolutely invaluable treasure – his tender loving heart and his goodness. (Кентавр, стр. 279)

As Robert Detweiler writes: *"Updike uses Classical myth to shape a Christian-informed vision of life."* (John Updike, p. 91) According to the critic, Caldwell demonstrates the dual nature of a human being just like Chiron does. The centaur is half man and half horse, he lives on the Earth, but he possesses the divine intelligence and immortality. On the one hand, Caldwell loves people, especially those who are unsuccessful, and on the other hand *"he is constantly faced with the imminence of death"* (John Updike, p. 91). So, he seems to be a saint, he loves people and is ready to sacrifice for them, but the fact that he feels an endless persecution of death brings in *"the dimension that always recalls him to his humanity"* (John Updike, p. 91).

One more aspect which is emphasized by Detweiler is that *"the traditional God is no longer taken seriously"* (John Updike, p. 93). For instance, Caldwell responds to his colleague French teacher's *"Dieu est très fin"* (The Centaur, p. 176) absently: *"He's a wonderful old gentleman. I don't know where the hell we'd be without Him."* (The Centaur, p. 177) Neither God nor a science teacher is taken seriously in the present days. Edward Vargo expresses a similar point of view. He supposes that Updike does not write about God in a traditional key. To him, God is something different, not an image of an old man sitting on a cloud and making people's dreams come true, but something transcendent, something what is at the same time near and far away, what we cannot always see, but are sometimes able to recognize.



Once Updike said: *“I describe things not because their muteness mocks our subjectivity but because they seem to be masks of God”* (Quoted by Vargo, p.7). In these words lies the most general idea of Updike’s writings. Mocked by a great many critics for being too detail-oriented, he is perhaps the only writer who is able to turn simple unnoticeable things sacred, who is capable of recognizing the “masks of God”.

In one of his essays Michael Novak has analyzed what seems to be a major difficulty for many critics in analyzing Updike’s works:

*Updike’s sensibility, however, is specifically Christian – an alert, open, human, sensual Calvinism; a tension of the spirit stung by the pressure of death, uncommonly driven by passions of sensual and sexual nostalgia. Updike’s inner world is not Catholic. It is almost wholly Platonic: his art is ever bitten by the pain of memory. His vision forces itself to press through the hard, defined realities of toothpaste tubes, wooden shingles, sea coral, and exquisitely described female nakedness to a world more real. So deep is Updike’s confidence in that distant world that the hard, glorious shapes of this one are no danger for him; his exquisite control of sensual detail springs from a consciousness whose source is elsewhere. His radical dualism makes myth and symbol his necessary tools, familiar, warm and restful in his hand”* (Quoted by Vargo, pp. 7-8).

Consequently, turning back to *The Centaur*, Updike’s religion is more universal than Catholicism or even Christianity. It is multifaceted, it declares that God, love and happiness live in every single stone, so one has to recognize and extract them.

The theme of God is present in nearly all of Updike’s works. His protagonists frequently ask themselves rhetorical questions like “what is the purpose of living?”, “what is God?”, “what is there after death?” The three generations of the Caldwelles contemplate the same questions. Caldwell’s father, dying in his bed is frightened by the fact that he is going to be eternally forgotten. George Caldwell himself says to the doctor during his visit: *“I wouldn’t mind plugging ahead at something I wasn’t any good at [...] if I knew what the hell the point of it all was. I ask, and nobody’ll tell me.”* (*The Centaur*, p. 120) Finally, Peter refers to his girlfriend:

*I consider the life we have made together, with its days spent without relation to the days the sun keeps and its baroque arabesques of increasingly attenuated emotion and its furnishings like a scattering of worn-out Braques and its rather wistful half-Freudian half-Oriental sex-mysticism, and I wonder, Was it for this that my father gave up his life?* (*The Centaur*, p. 244)

Updike’s protagonists wonder what countervails against the unbearable chaos of life which will sooner or later destroy all the humanity. That chaos is felt throughout *The Centaur*; it flavors all the events with absurdity and presents the meaninglessness of contemporary life.

The resistance could be hidden in the absence of doubts, naïveté, and ignorance. Unfortunately, this possibility has already escaped Caldwell and is beginning to escape Peter. They cannot simply live without questioning themselves about the purpose and meaning of life. They do not accept living in a mechanized civilization where automatic mechanisms are appreciated more than people. The majority of people live for driving, listening to the radio and watching television. However, George Caldwell and the mechanized heaven worshiped by many Americans are sworn enemies; it is symbolized by the constant misadventures with his car.

Can religion play the role of the rescuer? Unfortunately, it did not rescue even Caldwell's father who was drearily searching for purpose while dying in his bed: "*Do you think I'll be eternally forgotten?*" (The Centaur, p. 86) His mournful experience closed the way to religion for his son and his grandson even. Caldwell says about him: "*Christ, the only place I can go if I leave this school is the junkyard. I'm no good for anything else. I never was. I never studied. I never thought. I've always been scared to. My father studied and thought and on his deathbed he lost his religion.*" (The Centaur, p. 225) In order to redouble this feeling Updike portrays a young priest Reverend March. He is "*tall and handsome*" (The Centaur, p. 211), a man made by war. However, when the science teacher wants to talk to him about some very important things – religion and faith, March "*has to leave off laughing with Vera to take the offered hand*" (The Centaur, p. 227). It is obvious for George that the priest does not want to talk to him despite it is his job.

Caldwell is serious in his intentions, he needs help and understanding, he needs advice: "*I hope I'm not interrupting you and Vera here; the fact is that I'm badly troubled in my mind.*" (The Centaur, p. 227) Nevertheless, March does not care about the teacher asking for help:

*With a nervous glance at Vera, who has turned her head and might slip from his side, March asks, 'Oh. What about?' 'Everything. The works. I can't make it add and I'd be grateful for your viewpoint.' Now March's glance travels everywhere but into the face opposite him as he looks through the crowd for some rescue from this tousled tall maniac. [...] In his anxiety and anger and embarrassment March reaches sideways and almost seizes Vera bodily to keep her with him during this preposterous interruption. [...] March's grey eyes are exploding with pain and irritation as the danger of Vera's leaving him grows. (The Centaur, pp. 227-228)*

Nobody can listen to George Caldwell; nobody can hear what he is saying and help him. The result of the talk with the priest is the following:

*Heavy and giddy with his own death, sluggish and diaphanous like some transparent predator who trails his poisoned tentacles through the adamantine pressures of the oceanic depths, he moves along behind the backs of spectators and searches the crowd for the sight of his son. [...] Humanity, which has so long entranced him, disgusts him packed and tangled like germs in this overheated auditorium. Even Cassie's empty land by contrast would look good.* (The Centaur, p. 229)

March is one of the modern priests who know that church is a hollow building and that faith does not live there:

*By his path he hoped to escape questions he could not answer. So it proved [...] He discovered, scraping away the rubble, his mother's faith, strange of shape but undeniable, like a splash of cooled slag. He was alive. Life is a hell but a glorious hell.*" (The Centaur, pp. 211-212)

For March church is an ordinary office, all he does is a bare citing of the Bible. He could have never cured Caldwell's sick soul: "*Though his faith is intact and as infrangible as metal, it is also like metal dead.*" (The Centaur, p. 214)

Despite all these attacks of meaninglessness of life and its absurdity, Updike's characters do not dissolve in them. What helps George Caldwell and leads him through his difficult life is goodness. However, it is dangerous to be good and kind in the world of the wolfish laws. Peter's fears have come true; his father is doomed to death, for he is helplessly kind, powerless and miserable. There is one more character in the novel whose goodness brings him death – the porter of the hotel who let Peter and George Caldwell stay for free. The next morning the porter is suddenly found dead: not a single good deed is left without punishment.

However, doomed and miserable Caldwell grows and becomes more significant with every following page of the novel while his ugly cap reaches the archer in the sky. This happens because he lives according to the commandments of God, he loves every single person whom he meets on his way and does not grade people according to their status and wealth. He is a modern Chiron and Christ – his eternal goodness separates him from the miserable world surrounding him. The mythological motif endowed with truly Christian meaning exalts the figure of the Olinger schoolteacher and raises him above everything.

As J. A. Ward writes, the mythological motif in *The Centaur* enables the author to express "*the preternatural view of the actual*" (Quoted by Vargo, p. 82). It eliminates the temporal and spatial plane of the book and hereby the events obtain the coating of significance. The author takes the readers "*beyond the confines of the immediate*" (Rainstorms

and Fire, p. 82); he emphasizes the gravity of Caldwell's situation, the importance of his sacrifice.

The theme of sacrifice appears at the very beginning of the novel. While presenting to his students the first organisms which appeared on the Earth Caldwell says:

*[...] the volvox [...] interests us because he invented death. [...] while each cell is potentially immortal, by volunteering for a specialized function within an organized society of cells, it enters a compromised environment. The strain eventually wears it out and kills it. It dies sacrificially, for the good of the whole.*" (The Centaur, p. 41)

This is a rule for Caldwell himself; he realizes his role in life being similar to that of the volvox. During all his life the science teacher sacrifices on behalf of other people: he moves to the country because his wife wants to live there, the hitchhiker takes his leather gloves, he gives his last thirty-five cents to the drunkard, and, finally, Caldwell-Chiron gives his life for his son.

Peter also contemplates the theme of sacrifice – in a reflex action it is close to him, however, he is too young to understand and accept his father's sacrifice. Thinking about the girl he likes, Penny, Peter states: *"And there was that in Penny, which now in the dream made vivid to me, what I had hardly felt before, a sheltering love, young as she was, recent as our touching was, little as I gave her; she would sacrifice for me."* (The Centaur, p. 50) Peter realizes deep in his heart that this sacrifice is the highest proof of love, the best feature of human goodness.

Besides sacrifice, another Christian attribute present in the novel is suffering. According to Campbell, suffering is one of the most important themes of myths. He wrote about it as follows: *"The secret cause of all suffering [...] is morality itself, which is the prime condition of life. It cannot be denied if life is to be affirmed."* (The Power of Myth, p. xiii). *The Centaur* opens with Caldwell's suffering from the pain the arrow caused him. Later in the novel, Peter thinks:

*I enjoyed at this age a strange innocence about suffering; I believed it was necessary to men. It seemed to be all about me and there was something menacing in my apparent exception. I had never broken a bone, I was bright, my parents openly loved me. In my conceit I believed myself to be wickedly lucky. So I had come to this conclusion about my psoriasis: it was a curse. God, to make me a man, had blessed me with a rhythmic curse that breathed in and out with His seasons.* (The Centaur, p. 51)

These thoughts seem to belong to Updike himself, for he believes that only through suffering it is possible to conceive the world and to preserve the human features. The novel

comprises the dichotomy – the difference between the approaches to the inner world appropriate to Ancient Greece and modern America. In his article, Larry A. Brown states that suffering was extremely important for ancient Greeks. He writes:

*Whereas the causes of suffering are diverse, the purpose of suffering in tragedy appears almost universally acknowledged: only through suffering does a person attain wisdom. The chorus in Agamemnon by Aeschylus recites: "Zeus, whose will has marked for man the sole way where wisdom lies, ordered one eternal plan: Man must suffer to be wise." In Antigone, the chorus counsels Creon that suffering is wisdom's schoolteacher. (Tragedy after Aristotle: [http://larryavisbrown.homestead.com/Tragedy\\_after\\_Aristotle.html](http://larryavisbrown.homestead.com/Tragedy_after_Aristotle.html))*

According to the American dream, every American believes that a person who is not happy is abnormal. The ancient Greek, on the contrary, thinks that the man who is constantly happy is abnormal. Greeks believed that suffering is a natural condition of one's soul, a feature which differentiates a man from an animal. For a Greek the notion 'to live' means 'to suffer'. Campbell had a similar point of view. He quoted Buddha and Joyce: "'All life is suffering", said Buddha, and Joyce has a line – "Is life worth leaving?" (Quoted by Campbell, p. 161) Caldwell suffers because his inner world does not coincide with the outer world governed by American dream which is so alien to the protagonist as well as to Updike. Suffering extends the human consciousness and thinking; it raises Caldwell and makes him similar to Christ.

There is one more place in the novel where Peter clearly states: "*The world of water was closed to me, so I had fallen in love with the air, which I was able to seize in great thrilling condensations within me that I labeled the Future: it was in this realm that I hoped to reward my father for his suffering.*" (The Centaur, p. 98) Peter conceives how difficult it is for his father to live in Olinger, to communicate with people who are strangers and do not care about each other, who are veiled enemies hidden behind the masks of artificial American smiles.

Besides moral suffering *The Centaur* is pierced with Caldwell's physical pain. The very first page contains four direct statements of "pain": "*the pain scaled the slender core of his shin*", "*[Caldwell desired] privacy in which he could be alone with his pain*", "*the pain extended a feeler into his head*", "*the pain seemed to be displacing with its own hairy segments*" (The Centaur, p. 7). These numerous references of pain create severe atmosphere of the novel, increase the level of the protagonist's suffering and, finally, parallel him with Christ and his great torment. As a result the reader feels a deep sympathy for George Caldwell, as his figure inspires love and goodness.

## 2. SOCIOLOGICAL FUNCTION OF MYTH

In *The Centaur*, the sociological function of the myth about Chiron has two main purposes: it portrays social and spiritual chaos in contemporary America and emphasizes degradation and deterioration of a modern individual.

From the very beginning of the novel the reader is thrown into chaos. The lesson taking place at a school of Olinger frightens with its mayhem and the pupils' cruelty. The reader meets the teacher George Caldwell who receives an arrow which was released by one of the pupils and as it happened "*the class burst into laughter.*" Later this laughter transforms into "*shrill bark*", which afterwards becomes "*deliberately aimed hooting*". Finally, when the teacher leaves the classroom unable to continue the lesson because of the terrible pain, the pupils already emit "*the furious festal noise*". (The Centaur, p. 7) The children studying at the school of Olinger are cruel people with the marble hearts; they torment their teacher and enjoy his suffering.

Unfortunately, this children's arbitrariness is not merely a literary device. The American psychologist Phillip Bonoski writes in one of his books that in the years 1974 and 1975 the number of crimes committed by pupils has reached 6811. This number comprises 1872 attacks over teachers and serving personnel (474 of them have been armed), 211 burglaries, 134 cases of illegal weapon bearing, 274 arsons, 678 cases of theft, 291 cases of keeping drugs, 58 sexual crimes. (Две культуры: Культура США, стр. 130)

Attacking teachers became a normal phenomenon in American schools. Respect for teachers disappeared; all that is left is the fear of physical strength and hate. American pupils, especially provincials, protest against knowledge which is meaningless from their point of view. Their inner world became extremely restricted and poor; they do not possess any moral values. Updike portrays the contemporary American school which symbolizes American educational system with all its outcomes: the chaos at educational institutions, pupils' immoral behaviour and highly difficult teachers' situations.

Throughout the novel reality is juxtaposed with myth, however, at some points the author makes the events fantastic in order to emphasize the effect of the chaos. For instance, the episode at the end of the first chapter, which describes the continuation of the lesson, reaches the apogee of the chaotic fantasticality.

When Caldwell returns from Hummel's garage with an arrow already put in his pocket he finds the school's principal, Zimmerman, in his classroom. The first words pronounced by the principal are: "*Mr. Caldwell has graciously returned to us.*" *The class obediently snickered.*" (The Centaur, p. 32) Zimmerman is not interested in what has happened to

Caldwell. Instead of asking if the teacher feels well and why he has left the classroom, the principal humiliates him in front of the pupils: "*the humiliated teacher licked his lips.*" (The Centaur, p. 32) Seeing such an example of Zimmerman's behaviour it is useless to expect children to react in a different way, to respect their teacher. Afterwards the principal says: "*I think such devotion to duty should be rewarded with a mild round of applause.*" (The Centaur, p. 32) The situation seems to be absolutely absurd, it is difficult to imagine a similar event in reality. However, by exaggerating, Updike stresses the problem of the contemporary American society – the disdain of a common teacher, the drawbacks of the educational system.

Desperately trying to explain everything to the principal, Caldwell bents and lifts his trouser leg attempting him to see the wounded ankle, but the result is the same: "*Your socks don't quite match [...] is this your explanation?*" (The Centaur, p. 33) Zimmerman continues to humiliate the teacher in front of the class, the pupils "*burst*". When he noticed an arrow-shaft jutting from Caldwell's pocket, the principal remarks: "*Are you carrying a lightning rod? Remarkably prudent, on a cloudless winter day.*" (The Centaur, p. 33) These words are an implicit allusion to myth, as Zimmerman represents Zeus, the God of thunder. For that reason he is afraid to touch the "*lightening rod*".

Further on chaos at the lesson intensifies with every page. Zimmerman takes his seat near one of the pupils, Iris Osgood, and begins looking down the top of her loose blouse at the dugs. Deifendorf, one of the country boys, begins to scratch his scalp and "*make monkey chatter*". Caldwell "*tapped the first one [word written on the blackboard] and the chalk turned to a large warm larva in his hand.*" (The Centaur, p. 40) Reality begins to merge with the fantastic elements; and their convergence expands the chaos taking place in the classroom. A paper aeroplane becomes a white flower effusing "*pale fluid*". Deifendorf not content with pencil-tickling puts "*his hands around the Davis girl's throat and with his thumbs*" caresses the underside of her chin.

The chaotic lesson is still proceeding: "*Fists, claws, cocked elbows blurred in patch-coloured panic above the scarred and varnished desktops; in the whole mad mess the only still bodies were those of Zimmerman and Iris Osgood.*" (The Centaur, p. 41) One of the boys sneakes a paper grocery bag into class and a clot of living trilobites dropped out onto the floor. "*As a sport the boys began to drop their heavy textbooks on these primitive arthropods; one of the girls, a huge purple parrot feathered with mud, swiftly ducked her head and plucked a small one up.*" (The Centaur, p. 42) Furthermore, the whole class begins to hum, "*no one's mouth moved; their eyes shifted here and there innocently; but the air was filled with a hovering honey of insolence.*" (The Centaur, p. 43) After the first bell the two pupils

rush to the door but bump: *“Their teeth gnashed; phlegm poured through their nostrils.”* (The Centaur, p. 43) The school’s principal undresses Iris Osgood and her breasts become seen by everybody. The lesson loses its thread with the real world and the reader gets the feeling that all events happening are taking place in someone’s dream.

Later the fantastical elements finally blur with reality:

*Deifendorf had pulled the Davis girl out into the aisle and she was giggling and struggling in his long hair-speckled arms. [...] The girl’s mussed skirt was up around her waist. She was bent face down over the desk and Deifendorf’s hooves shuffled in agitation in the narrow aisle. From his sleepy careful grin he was covering her; the whole room smelled like a stable.* (The Centaur, p. 44)

At this point Caldwell is not able to witness everything happening in front of him any more, he takes out his arrow-shaft and whips Deifendorf (who transformed into brutal satyr). The lesson is finally over but it has left a very strong feeling of the chaos and immeasurability in the reader. The exaggerated pupils doing whatever they want, even having sex during the lesson; the principal of the school, undressing one of the girls; the entire congestion of mess and disorder illustrate that contemporary America is losing its moral values and further sinking in the sea of the spiritual chaos.

The third chapter presents the lesson of the centaur Chiron; by juxtaposing the chaotic present with the divine past the author strengthens the feeling of the contemporary chaos. The whole chapter is written in such a way that the reader gets the feeling of harmony, order and the slow flow of time. For instance, as Chiron comes to the clearing in the wood, his students are already *“seated in a semi-circle on the warm orchard grass”* and they *“hailed him gladly”* (The Centaur, p.89) His students are clever and willing to study, *“Asclepios, the best student, was quiet and determinedly composed; in many respects he had already surpassed his master.”* (The Centaur, p. 89) One of the students is his daughter, Ocyrhoe, she is *“too intelligent to take her childhood easily”* (The Centaur, p.89) Further one reads: *“In the chorus of greeting, each child’s cry was an individual tint for him. In sum the polyphony formed a rainbow. His eyes wavered on the warm edge of tears.”* (The Centaur, p. 90) It is obvious that Chiron loves his students and they love him too.

*Chiron inhaled; air like honey expanded the spaces of his chest; his students completed the centaur. They fleshed his wisdom with expectation. The wintry chaos of information within him, elicited into sunlight, was struck through with the young colours of optimism. [...] the faces scattered in the deep green shade like petals after rain, were unanimously hushed and attentive.* (The Centaur, p. 92)



The atmosphere of the chapter describing Chiron and his students is very light and bright compared with the atmosphere of Caldwell's lesson. In one and the other cases the atmosphere is created with the help of an appropriate diction. For instance, in the chapter describing Chiron's lesson the reader finds the following words and phrases: *silver firs, Olympian blue, bloom, indiscriminate green, swift metallic song, speed of joy, light, fitful breeze, sun, warmer, white temple steps, hot marble, a great chestnut tree, honey, wisdom, optimism and love* (The Centaur, pp. 87-92). At the same time, Caldwell's lesson is described with the help of the following diction: *fear, paralysed victim, frightened children, humiliated teacher, sarcastic tones, dread, pain, awed daze, electric colours, dumb, monkey chatter, mute faces, poison, bastards, death, lechery, dull, blood, larva, disgust, torture, patch-coloured panic, mad mess, terror, insolence, phlegm, stable, sickening confusion, bastard beast, and horror* (The Centaur, pp. 32-45).

It is needless to mention all the cases where the words and the phrases presented above are used in the text, their effect is still tremendous. By comparing these two episodes it becomes evident that the author wants to stress the terrible chaos of the present day American life by juxtaposing it with harmonious divine past. Chiron's students are educated, respectful and civilized people while Caldwell's pupils as well as the school's principal are brutal, mediocre, and narrow-minded. Moreover, it is obvious that the Olinger School is an ordinary American school; consequently, the reader implies that the situation in America itself is quite similar to that of Olinger, as schools always reflect the spirit of the country. Thus, Updike portrays the ubiquitous chaos of contemporary America, depreciation of moral values, domination of club-law and people's indifference.

In his article "Rewriting the American Wasteland: John Updike's *The Centaur*" Sukhbir Singh remarks that similarly to T. S. Eliot, Updike depicts the widespread religious, moral, and social squalor in contemporary America through symbols selected from the common life abound with chaos: "*ugly rocks, stale water, vomiting volcanoes*", "*dirty old light bulbs*", "*dead meat*", "*old bones*", "*savage darkness*", "*pile of stones*", "*broken bottles*", "*broken umbrellas*", "*black cracks*", "*junk heap*", and "*heaps of ash*" (p. 61).

Apart from portraying social and spiritual chaos in contemporary America, Updike depicts the chaos of material things. The author believes that the habit of piling up a great number of unnecessary objects reflects the same mess taking place in people's minds. The best example of such chaos is Hummel's garage. It is similar to a cave; it is deep and dark. Hummel's helpers are one-eyed monsters called Cyclopes. And all the space of the garage is stuffed with millions of objects:

*A deep warm darkness was lit by sparks. The floor of the grotto was waxed black by oil droppings. [...] His eyes adjusting to the gloom, Caldwell saw heaped about him overturned fragments of automobiles, fragile and phantasmal, fenders like corpses of turtles, bristling engines like disembodied hearts. [...] The windows were opaquely spattered with paint from the outside; the walls between them were hung with wrenches aligned by size, ballpeen hammers with taped handles, electric drills, screwdrivers a yard long, intricate sprocketed socketed tools whose names and functions he would never know, neat coils of frazzled wire, calipers, pliers, and, stuck and taped here and there in crevices and bare spots, advertisements, toasted and tattered and ancient. (The Centaur, pp. 10-13)*

The quotation above illustrates the chaos of Hummel's garage very well. It is impossible to imagine Caldwell working there, his ambitions and values would never let him stay in such a place for a longer time. This garage is a proper place for Hummel-Hephaestus and his three helpers Cyclopes. In her book *Mythology* Edith Hamilton describes Cyclopes in the following way: "[They were] given the name Cyclops (the Wheel-eyed), because each had only one enormous eye, as round and as big as a wheel, in the middle of the forehead. The Cyclopes, too, were gigantic, towering like mighty mountain crags and devastating in their power." (The Centaur, p. 65) The Cyclops Polyphemus, for instance, was savage and primitive; his spiritual world was very narrow. He possessed only the physical necessities: food and sleep; and favoured club-law.

Thus, contrasting real and mythological lines in this particular case Updike raises the problem of decline, impoverishment and deterioration of social and private life in America. The author depicts moral crisis of values which became obvious in the nineteen sixties. By bringing Caldwell and Cyclopes into contact Updike seeks to draw the line of differentiation between them, to elicit the differences between an intelligent teacher and half-animal garage workers.

Caldwell's inner world is complex and conflicting, he keeps constantly questioning the purpose of his existence on the Earth. The teacher wants to do something important in his own life and the lives of other people; he is a thinking man wondering about the spiritual aspect of life. The image of the centaur enables Updike to contrast Caldwell's spiritual world with the material world. On the other hand, the author describes Hummel's helpers as "swarthy men". (The Centaur, p. 10) Then Updike writes: "*His three moronic helpers clustered around jostling to see the silver shaft, painted at its unfeathered end with blood.*" (The Centaur, p. 15) Cyclopes behave like half-men, half-animals, they get excited by the human blood: "*The three Cyclopes gabbled so loud the man turned, Archy, outpouring from his throat a noise like a butchery of birds, pointed to the floor.*" (The Centaur, p. 19) These characteristics given by the author present Cyclopes as the savages of the modern times. As

they are overtly dull, they are simultaneously extremely strong; these traits make them villainous.

Thereby, Updike inspires the school of Olinger and Hummel's garage with chaos. However, this is not all. Spiritual chaos is also present in Minor Kretz's luncheonette. The characteristic of it is the following: "*It was a maze, Minor's place. So many bodies; yet only a tiny section of the school ever came here. [...] the set at Minor's was the most criminal.*" (The Centaur, p. 108) Later, when Peter waits for his father while he is visiting a doctor, Caldwell's son remarks: "*I pushed my way through the bodies as if through the leaves of a close-set series of gates.*" (The Centaur, p. 108) Further on, Updike writes: "*The herd deserted Minor's.*" (The Centaur, p. 183)

For the three times people visiting the luncheonette are deliberately depersonalized, they are called "*bodies*" and "*herd*". By employing this device, which can be called depersonification, Updike seeks to depreciate the place and the pupils spending their time in it, due to the fact that this place deprives them of the common sense's relic. For that reason when Caldwell asks Peter to wait for him in Minor's luncheonette, he says: "*You got lots of time to kill.*" (The Centaur, p. 107) The teacher thinks that sitting in Minor's café is equal to killing time. The place is a veiled cultural centre of Olinger; however, it is really a maze, a labyrinth, which absorbs young people's minds and hearts and kills their personalities.

Minor Kretz himself is a cunning and cautious character; he possesses the features of his prototype Minos, a king of Crete. Because Minos failed to sacrifice a beautiful white bull to Poseidon, the Gods punished him. He caused Pasiphae, his wife, to conceive a lustful passion for the animal, by whom she bore the Minotaur, a monster with the head of a bull and the body of a man. The craftsman Daedalus constructed the labyrinth in which the monster was confined. Just as Minos wanted to deceive the Gods, Minor Kretz hopes to fool his visitors, selling them ice cream and lemon Pepsis and simultaneously serving the fascist ideology. In other words, Updike portrays a repulsive image of fascist salesman Minor Kretz. At first sight he seems to be a good man selling ice cream to the children all day long. However, the myth of Minos, underlying his figure, characterizes him as a cruel dissembler. For that reason Peter observes: "*I felt in this clouded interior a powerful secret lurking, whose nostrils exhaled the smoke and whose hide exhaled the warmth*" (The Centaur, p. 108), and later: "*Minor is a cauldron of rage; his hairy nostrils seem seething vents.*" (The Centaur, p. 183)

Minor's luncheonette compared to a maze obtains an interesting symbolism. Traditionally, labyrinth is meant to be an intricate building of chambers and passages, often constructed so as to perplex and confuse a person inside (Encyclopedia wikipedia). However,

there is one more meaning of a maze, which is a cultural one. According to it, prehistoric labyrinths are believed to have served either as traps for malevolent spirits or as defined paths for ritual dances. As far as Minor's café is concerned, it can be also treated as a place of entertainment. Pupils come here in order to eat an ice cream, to drink a cocktail, to date. However, there is one more interesting coincidence: ancient Greeks had labyrinths which had a pattern of swastika. In his article *Return to the Labyrinth* an archeologist Joseph Alexander MacGillivray writes that the city of Knossos began to mint coins of which the earliest show the Minotaur on the obverse and a labyrinthine swastika with a star or sun motif in the center on the reverse. Over time, the swastika gave way to the maze pattern.

Consequently, the form of the swastika was quite popular among the ancient Greeks. They simply liked it, found it original. It is significant that the Greeks had labyrinths in the pattern of swastika. Updike is a great master of combining reality and mythology. Making Minor's luncheonette a maze, the author inspires it with several meanings: the myth of Minos and the form of the labyrinth which obtained a new meaning with the appearance of fascism. Nowadays swastika is perceived as its emblem. Thus, Updike imparts Minor with this sign and makes him a fascist Minos, the larcener of people's souls. The mechanism of ideological processing is quite simple: first, students are served confection and after that they are stuffed with the ideas of militarism and fascism.

Turning back to the labyrinth, it performs one more function in the novel. Updike considers that contemporary America is being lost in the labyrinth of false values and spiritual hollowness. This fact characterizes the whole society, changes every aspect of it. Regrettably, the labyrinth absorbs more and more teen-agers; it produces mundane people who do not possess any moral values and ambitions.

The result is awful: young people, just beginning to live, declare: "*I love Hitler [...] He's alive in Argentina.*" (The Centaur, p. 185), or: "*We should've dropped an atom bomb on Moscow, Berlin, Paris, France, Italy, Mexico City, and Africa. Ka-Pow. I love that mushroom-shaped cloud.*" (The Centaur, p. 185) Johnny Dedman does not even differentiate towns from countries and even continents. All that is reflected in his words is his stubborn and brutish cruelty. He also says: "*I'm waiting for the war.*" (The Centaur, p. 187) The luncheonette's owner, Minor Kretz is the one who seeds such ideology in youngsters. Peter asks him: "*Why do you exploit us poor teen-agers so ruthlessly? Why are you so brutal?*" (The Centaur, p. 185) However, Minor does not reply to this question.

Minor Kretz is one of the characters who exemplify the degradation and decrement of a modern man, for he is sly and egoistic – he does not care about the teenagers who come to his café. All that matters for him is to deceive them by selling ice cream and then cramming

their young susceptible minds with the cruelest ideology of the world. However, there is another character in the novel, who embodies everything that kills people like Caldwell and symbolizes the cruelty of the surrounding world and moral degradation of a man. This character is the principle of the school, Zimmerman.

Zimmerman's image strikes the reader right from the beginning of the novel. He first appears in the episode when Caldwell returns from Hummel's garage and tries to finish his lesson. Zimmerman is already present in the classroom pleased with taking the chance to humiliate the teacher of science. Zimmerman belongs to the category of people who are not capable to do their duty. As soon as such people obtain power, they immediately change their attitude to their colleagues and treat them as inferior. Due to it, the novel is pierced with Caldwell's fear of the principal; and when the teacher returns from the garage he sees Zimmerman's face as "*a gigantic emblem of authority*" (The Centaur, p. 32) Then comes even more vivid description: "*An implacable bolt, springing from the centre of the forehead above the two disparately magnifying lenses of the principal's spectacles, leaped space and transfixed the paralysed victim [Caldwell].*" (The Centaur, p. 32)

Zimmerman inspires fear and constant tension in Caldwell; it is extremely difficult for the teacher to work in such conditions. The principal's pressure wears Caldwell out and emaciates his inner strength: "*He [Caldwell] felt the colours of the class stir under him; Zimmerman's presence made them electric.*" (The Centaur, p. 34) However, later Zimmerman reveals himself to be even worse than that – he starts to cuddle one of the girls, Iris Osgood, straight in the classroom: "*His [Zimmerman's] lechery smelled; the kids were catching fire.*" (The Centaur, p. 38) The climax of this episode was reached when "*Zimmerman had slipped Iris Osgood's blouse and bra off and her breasts showed above her desk like two calm edible moons rising side by side.*" (The Centaur, p. 44)

In one of her articles Orlova analyses this scene. She wonders if the similar event can really happen in the worst, most dissolute class of the worst American school. The answer is negative. However, she comes to a conclusion that the verity of this episode lies not in the equivalence to a real lesson but in the equivalence to Caldwell's feelings. Even the best teacher can sometimes feel separated from students. He can feel despair when all that he has learned and prepared with toil and love do not reach the pupil's minds. He may despond due to the fact that everyone around shouts and talks and hums but does not listen. Moreover, the teacher may be afraid of the school's principal (more than the Olympian Gods were afraid of Zeus), and he may feel ashamed because his students see that fear. Yet more, when the wounded ankle hurts, he has to conceal this pain because otherwise it can be even worse.

These are Caldwell's feelings which are encoded in the phantasmagoria of thoughts, sensations and actions in the first scene of the novel.

Consequently, the scene of the lesson seems at some places absurd, at others even fantastic. However, its core, its alpha and omega is the school's principal, Zimmerman. He made the kids to catch fire; he demonstrated them the skill of humiliating the teacher; finally, it is he who directed the pupils and set the model of behaviour. Zimmerman has the authority and because of that he goes the length of doing whatever he wants – even having many women and, what is more, having sex with them just in his office. All these aspects elucidate his degradation and moral decay. And it is not surprising that nearly all other teachers working at school are similar to Zimmerman – when in Rome, do as the Romans do. “*Living corpses*”, “*dead meat*”, “*pale eyes*”, “*waste, rot, hollowness, noise, stench, death*” (The Centaur, p. 226) – this is what surrounds Caldwell. One reads: “*As long as Mrs. Hummel is on the premises he [Caldwell] feels the school is not entirely given over to animals.*” (The Centaur, p. 208)

To conclude, Caldwell's environment, which reflects the contemporary situation in America can be described as spiritual chaos and degradation of the modern people; loss of values; and the triumph of mediocrity, depravity, and platitude. And all these features are intensified by the harmony and high morality of the Chiron myth.

### 3. COSMOLOGICAL FUNCTION OF MYTH

In *The Centaur*, it is an interesting coincidence that Caldwell is a science teacher (Campbell believed that scientists as well as artists and poets are responsible for performing the cosmological function). Moreover, there even exists the episode in the novel, in which he describes the creation of the universe. Consequently, Caldwell can be conceived as the “great seer”, who himself performs the cosmological function. According to Campbell's classification, he is, perhaps, the great Scientist, having the most valuable knowledge – the one which describes the very beginning of everything existing in the Cosmos. However, despite the inestimable value of his knowledge, nobody is interested in it. Caldwell tries to simplify the information transmitted to the pupils – he contracts five billions years in three days and continues his lesson in a comprehensible mode, but it is still not enough. The children studying at Olinger school are not interested in the cosmological dimension as well as contemporary America is not interested in it.

Another aspect of the cosmological function in relation to the novel comprises the mystery and significance of every detail and object present in the book. The first instance is

the arrow received by Caldwell. At the very beginning the reader perceives it as an element of the myth of Chiron (the two epigraphs preceding the novel evoke the mythological background): "*Caldwell turned and as he turned his ankle received an arrow.*" (The Centaur, p. 7) Then the arrow is perceived as a real object when Hummel extracts it from the teacher's ankle. After that the arrow again receives a mythological connotation, because Hummel sniffs it wondering if it can be poisoned (as in the Chiron myth). Then the arrow is perceived as a real and simultaneously mythical object when the arrow-shaft is jutting from Caldwell's pocket and Zimmerman wonders if it is a lightning rod. Finally, the arrow receives a fully mythological meaning when the reader finds out that Caldwell is ill.

The metamorphosis of the arrow presented before endows the simple object with mystery, majesty and significance. It illustrates how the cosmological function of myth operates in the novel – when ordinary things obtain additional purport and meaning.

Another example of how elements of the novel receive extra-meaning is the earth. The major metaphor by which Updike connects Caldwell and Peter with the earth is, from Vargo's point of view, the tree. In the teacher's mind the image of the tree is bound with women, because according to the myth, Chiron's father Kronos sired him in the shape of the horse; and after that his mother "*so loathed the monster she bore that rather than suckle you [Chiron] she prayed to be metamorphosed into a linden tree.*" (The Centaur, p. 23) Consequently, the earth, through the metaphor of the tree, obtains the purport of Caldwell's estrangement from the women around him.

The image of the tree is also encountered in Peter's dreams. However, its meaning is different there. Peter sees a dream in which his girlfriend Penny is turning into a tree, and this dream brings "*a sense of exaltation into Peter's adolescent life*". (Rainstorms and Fire, p. 89) Seeing Penny transforming into a tree he acquires a new insight into the nature of their relationship. The result is that Peter concludes that Penny would sacrifice for him, and this understanding raises their love on a higher level. Besides, the tree-metaphor "*also operates within the context of the dream to bring Peter to a kind of celebration of the mystery of human love*". (Rainstorms and Fire, p. 90)

The major element of the earth which is pervaded with holiness is the land itself – the farm on which the Caldwells live. George's wife Cassie feels that working the soil brings the wholeness to one's life. She lives in "*the mystical solidarity with Nature*" (Rainstorms and Fire, p. 90). However, Peter and his father cannot accept this viewpoint. While for Cassie the land represents purity and harmony, for George it is no more than dead and cold land. These attitudes remain stable throughout the whole novel. Cassie wants her husband to quit teaching and farm the land with her: "*Work with your hands, George. Get close to Nature. I would*

*make a whole man of you.*” (The Centaur, p. 262), but George definitely declares: *“I hate Nature. It reminds me of death. All Nature means to me is garbage and confusion and the stink of skunk – brroo!”* (The Centaur, p. 262) At the point when Peter’s grandfather says: *“Nature [...] is like a mother; she com-forts and chas-tises with the same hand”* (The Centaur, p. 263), Cassie is finally defeated and Peter is explicitly content with this fact: *“I was glad she had been defeated, for the thought of my father as farmer frightened me. It would sink me too into the soil.”* (The Centaur, p. 263)

Hence, Vargo concludes that Caldwell and his son, in Updike’s own terms, flee from the world of feminine earth and immerse into a world of masculine mind and spirit. Again, prima facie simple earthly things evolve in a sacral atmosphere.

One more element replete with meaning and significance is the sky. Innumerable descriptions present different states and moods of the sky hovering over Olinger. However, the sky implicates more than it seems at first sight: *“The sky shows itself to be infinite, transcendent. It is pre-eminently the ‘wholly other’ than the little represented by man and his environment.”* (Quoted by Vargo, p. 91)

The very first pages of the novel prove that the sky (as the manifestation of the transcendent) affects Caldwell. As he walks to the Hummel’s garage to have the arrow removed from his ankle, *“The clear blue of the towering sky seemed forceful yet enigmatic. [...] Outdoors, in the face of spatial grandeur, his pain seemed abashed.”* (The Centaur, p. 9) Afterwards, before re-entering the school, Caldwell *“Before entering, he gasped fresh air and stared sharply upward, as if in answer to a shout. Beyond the edge of the orange wall the adamant blue zenith pronounced its unceasing monosyllable: I.”* (The Centaur, p. 21) According to Vargo, in general, Caldwell views the sky as the source of the thunder, the lodgment of the terrible Zeus-Zimmerman. The threat of this God’s punishment breaks off his seduction by Venus-Vera. Similarly, when the teacher accidentally catches Herzog leaving the principal’s office with her lipstick smeared, he feels in the sullen sky the oppression of his hastening fate. Taking into consideration that the sky symbolizes heaven it may be concluded that Caldwell *“is weighed down with a sense of estrangement even from the elements of heaven.”* (Rainstorms and Fire, p. 91)

When it begins to snow between basketball games, the reader gets the feeling that all the people of Olinger are united with the sky: *“Snow puts us with Jupiter Pluvius among the clouds”* (The Centaur, p. 215). When Caldwell and his son are driving home through the storm, Peter’s observations of the snowflakes lead him to cosmic thoughts: *“It fascinates him; he feels the universe in all its plastic and endlessly variable beauty pinned, stretched, crucified like a butterfly upon a frame of unvarying geometrical truth.”* (The Centaur, p. 231)



Further on Peter starts thinking about the stars and, finally, his mind reaches an “*infinite and small universe [which] both ends and does not end.*” (The Centaur, p. 231) These thoughts make him contemplate life after death; and, “*like practically all of Updike’s characters, Peter feels the dipolar attractions of life. In his mind he moves back and forth over the mysterious boundary called death.*” (Rainstorms and fire, p. 92)

It is symbolic that in the last two chapters of *The Centaur* the descriptions of the sky become very frequent: “*the salmon flush of the sky*” (p. 255), “*an indigo sky*” (p. 256), “*in a sky still too bright*” (p. 256), “*There was a star before us, one, low in the sky and so brilliant its white light seemed warm.*” (p. 256), “*the cobalt dome was swept clean of marble flakes*” (p. 257), “*steep smooth dome that capped a space of Pennsylvania a hundred miles wide*” (p. 257), “*the blank blue of the sky*” (p. 264), “*Was the dome bronze or iron?*” (p. 265), “*Sky, emasculate, had flung himself far off raging in pain and left his progeny upon a white waste that stretched its arms from sunrise to sunset.*” (p. 266), “*the sky of his father’s God*” (p. 267). The centaur is gradually approaching death, thus he is drawing near the sky and, consequently, near heaven.

Finally, at the end of the last chapter, Caldwell-Chiron comes to the edge of the abyss and casts his eyes “*to the dome of blue*” (The Centaur, p. 269), after what the sky accepts him and sets him among the stars. In this final episode the sky is also present for it carries a great cosmological meaning of heaven.

Notwithstanding, apart from the real items gaining extra-meaning and significance, the novel also contains elements of the “*invisibilia*” (Vargo), which similarly obtain the features of the cosmological dimension. One of the major *invisibilia* images present in *The Centaur* is time. Throughout the book both Caldwell and Peter are preoccupied with the thoughts about time – its loss in the past, its flow in the present, and its hope in the future. Closely intertwined and almost inseparable from time there exists another *invisibilia* – death. The three days in the lives of Caldwell and his son make them aware of the great power of time, of the possibility that “*time constitutes man’s deepest existential dimension; it is linked to his own life, hence it has a beginning and an end, which is death, the annihilation of his life.*” (Quoted by Vargo, pp. 92-93) Peter and his father believe in the “*reversibility*” of time and in “*eternal mythical present*” (Rainstorms and Fire, p. 93). For that reason, for instance, George Caldwell reconstructs his life in terms of the Greek mythology, as he feels estranged from his environment. Likewise, Peter converses his memories into myth.

Caldwell’s contemplations about time reflect in his desire to grasp the meaning of the proverb “Time and tide for no man wait”, which is repeated manifold throughout the novel. This proverb seems quite odd for him, because he believes that “*God made Man as the last*

*best thing in His Creation. If that's the case, who are this time and tide that are so almighty superior to us?"* (The Centaur, p. 60)

Peter's determination to overcome time's tyranny is even stronger than his father's. Vargo presupposes that his desire to become an artist embraces:

*the wish to answer in a human way the inconceivable elements of heaven, to stop time and give immortality to the fleeting moment. Art is the ritual by which Peter will achieve the eternal mythical present."* (Rainstorms and Fire, p. 93)

Consequently, both Caldwell and Peter search for possibilities to escape death; and myth serves as a means to succeed. The final and most significant episode is Caldwell's acceptance of life in the final chapter. As he walks from his house to the car, he struggles with his desire for death and his feel for life. First, the white fields covered with snow make him think about the disharmony between earth and heaven: "*White, she was white, death's own colour, sum of the spectrum, wherever the centaur's eye searched.[...] There was no help.*" (The Centaur, pp. 265-266) And: "*Sky, emasculate, had flung himself far off raging in pain and left his progeny to parch upon a white waste that stretched its arms from sunrise to sunset.*" (The Centaur, p. 266)

Yet even through the deathly whiteness of winter signs of hope break out. The incipient buds upon the trees and bushes show promise of the future. Seeing these signs Caldwell gets the feeling of hope and harmony. He comes to the conclusion that the desired freedom can be reached through giving of his life to others. At this point, as Vargo suggests, "*a mood of religious celebration overwhelms him.*" (The Centaur, p. 99) He conceives, that only goodness lives, and he is capable of giving that goodness to other people despite the fact that they may not appreciate or even notice it. Finally, Caldwell finds the key to the enigma tormenting him all his life – he will continue to live; death is not ready to take him.

To sum up, all the elements of *visibilia* and *invisibilia* mentioned above obtain additional meaning and significance, and penetrate into a higher level of sacred being. Moreover, Caldwell and Peter are brought into contact with God not in a direct fashion - through the Church, but namely through these elements, "*humanly attainable and humanly transcendent which are contained in God's creation*" (Rainstorms and Fire, p. 100). In other words, the father and the son are able to face the inconceivable because they are sensitive to the universe. The following quotation vividly explains the inconceivable, or God, as perceived by Caldwell and Peter:

*In The Centaur, this sign value of the world is implicit, but God is still vague, bloodless Being, not much more specified than the Something Beyond after which rabbit runs. The name of the Lord occurs repeatedly in conversational clichés, spontaneous ejaculations, or brief prayers of petition. On various occasions, Caldwell expresses a basic trust in God's providence. But the God of Caldwell and Peter is at its best not vividly conceived, personal God. (Rainstorms and Fire, p.102)*

This is the way Updike expresses religious reality in the twentieth century. In the time of atheism and religious fanaticism there are people (Updike's characters Caldwell and Peter) who believe in their personal God and the sacrality of the universe, and whose motto is, perhaps, the most humane of all: "goodness lives".

#### 4. PEDAGOGICAL FUNCTION OF MYTH

In *The Centaur* the pedagogical function of myth emphasizes Caldwell's inner strength and spiritual integrity. Despite his poverty and numerous misfortunes he does not lose his honour and values. In other words, he is an example of how everyone should behave to get the right to be called a man. Then, the myth helps the reader to understand that the journey from life to death must have a purpose. However, the pedagogical function of myth may be differently perceived by different readers due to the fact that any book invokes distinct thoughts, emotions and reactions in every separate individual. It pertains to a reader's inner world, background and culture how he or she understands the pedagogical value of the myth of Chiron employed in *The Centaur*. This paper presents the aspects of the pedagogical function mentioned above; however, there might appear other interpretations.

In order to clearly realize the level of the pedagogical function in *The Centaur*, it is necessary to discuss its protagonist's life condition. So, from the very beginning of the novel it is clear that George Caldwell is a poor man. In the text there occur numerous proofs of this fact: the Caldwells "*had been too poor to afford a baby carriage*", (The Centaur, p. 15). They were "*poor and therefore slow to call a doctor.*" (The Centaur, p. 116) George's "*father had been the poor minister of a poor church*", (The Centaur, p. 22). Caldwell was "*a poor dresser, his clothes were so nakedly shabby*", (The Centaur, p. 33). He usually wore "*his overcoat, a tattered checkered cast-off with mismatching buttons, which he had rescued from a church sale, though it was too small and barely reached his knees. On his head he wore a hideous blue knitted cap that he had plucked out a trash barrel at school.*" (The Centaur, p. 61)

Caldwell's childhood was very difficult, his father died at the age of forty-nine, leaving his family "*a Bible and a deskful of debts*" (The Centaur, p. 83), so the boy had to work in order to survive. George says: "*I never had time to eat either. Get your carcass away*

*from the table is all I ever heard. Poverty's a terrible thing.*" (The Centaur, p. 63) George also mentions: *"I've been trying to catch up on sleep since I was four years old."* (The Centaur, p. 149) Consequently, he did not know *"what it was like to be young."* (The Centaur, p. 99) He was engaged in a variety of jobs – beginning with door-to-door salesman of encyclopedias, the driver of the sightseeing bus, and ending with a hotel bellhop and even a dishwasher.

Throughout the novel Caldwell experiences moral as well as physical pain, he lives in a *"world with all its oppressive detail of pain"* (The Centaur, p. 127). First, the arrow piercing his ankle during the lesson causes him unbearable pain. Then, his tooth hurts all the time, he even replies to Peter when his son mentions the coldness of the wheel: *"To tell the truth, Peter, my tooth hurts so much I don't notice it."* (The Centaur, p. 72) Caldwell experiences pain low in his body, *"the ache [...] revives and enwraps him like a folded wing."* (The Centaur, p. 173) There is an interesting phrase in the novel pronounced by Doctor Appleton: *"Health [...] is an animal condition. Now most of our ill-health comes from two places-the brain and the back. We made two mistakes; one was to stand up and the other was to start thinking."* (The Centaur, p. 124) These words as if prove that Caldwell is different from the others – he is a bag of different kinds of pain because he thinks, he is not an animal-like:

*By searching through his body he can uncover any colour and shape of pain he wants; the saccharine needle of the toothache, the dull comfortable pinch of his truss, the restless poison shredding in his bowels, the remote irritation of a turned toenail gnawing the toe squeezed beside it in the shoe, the little throb above his nose from having used his eyes too hard in the last hour, and the associated but different ache along the top of his skull, like the soreness left by his old leather football helmet after battering scrimmage down in the Lake Stadium.* (The Centaur, p. 180)

Caldwell had a dream to travel across the country, but in reality he *"never got within smelling distance of" Florida*". (The Centaur, p. 77) It seems that everything is wrong, everything is miserable in his life. Talking with a hitchhiker George observes: *"I was awake all last night trying to remember something pleasant and I couldn't do it. Misery and horror; that's my memories."* (The Centaur, p. 81) He also states: *"What does it feel like to win? [...] Jesus, I'll never know."* (The Centaur, p. 130) His life is blank and monotonous. When Peter says his father that he has hope, George replies: *"Do you? That makes me awfully proud to hear that, Peter. I never had any."* (The Centaur, p. 172) He himself has no room for hope: *"his illness, his debts, the painful burden of land his wife has saddled him with – all these problems itch in his brain for expression."* (The Centaur, p. 175)

Teaching ignorant and indifferent pupils tortures Caldwell: *"That's the one thing you learn in teaching; people forget everything you tell 'em. I look at those dumb blank faces*

*every day and it reminds me of death. You fall through those kids' heads without a trace.*" (The Centaur, p. 86) He compares teaching to fighting for life; he must do it in order to feed his family. His words make sense, as Peter narrates:

*That was the way of the cruel children. An hour after they had goaded him to the point of frenzy (flecks of foam would actually appear in the corners of his mouth and his eyes would become like tiny raw diamonds), they would show up in his room, anxious to seek advice, make confessions, be reassured. And the instant they had left his company they would mock him again.* (The Centaur, pp. 93-94)

Peter notices that at school his father looks *"sallow and nauseated, his temples glazed and hollow; [...] addled and vehement shipwreck of a man; Deifendorf had stolen his strength; teaching was sapping him."* (The Centaur, p. 96) Caldwell thinks he is a loser; he experiences misfortunes all his life:

*This is the kind of thing [...] that's been happening to me all my life. I'm sorry you got involved in it. I don't know why the damn car does not move. Same reason the swimming team doesn't win, I suppose.*" (The Centaur, p. 137)

He does not belong to the world he lives in, he is different, he is *"literally invisible"* (The Centaur, p. 139) to the rich and prosperous people living in Olinger. Caldwell talks about people of that kind in the following way: *"A man like that would walk over your dead body to grab a nickel. That's the kind of bastard I've done business with all my life."* (The Centaur, p. 153)

Caldwell never had enough money: *"You and I are penniless orphans"* – he says to Peter. (The Centaur, p. 134) He with his family lives in the house which is *"a half-improved farmhouse. The upstairs was unheated."* (The Centaur, p. 50); a *"primitive place"* as Peter himself calls it. The kitchen was simply *"the narrow space"* (The Centaur, p. 56), an *"improvised corner"* (The Centaur, p. 246). After spending a night in Vera Hummel's house, Peter remarks: *"That surely was the difference between these Olinger homes and my own; they were able to keep bananas on hand. In Firetown, on the rare times my father thought to buy them, they went from green to rotten without a skip."* (The Centaur, p. 247) At the present moment, working as a teacher and earning the money which is not nearly enough to feed and enrobe himself, his son, his wife and his father-in-law, Caldwell is constrained to borrow from the school athletic funds. At the very end of the novel Caldwell-Chiron thinks: *"Poor kid [Peter], needed everything. Poverty. His inheritance, deskful of debts and a Bible, he was passing it on."* (The Centaur, p. 266)

Thus, as it becomes obvious from all the examples illustrating Caldwell's environment, his life is extremely difficult, sometimes almost unbearable, due to all the misfortunes, poverty, endless pain, people's indifference and lack of hope. However, against this dark background of his life he stands as a figure deserving great respect and adoration. The reason for that is that Caldwell remains a real human under any circumstances. Life tests him, it brings about new challenges, pits him against new problems; but he comes through and does not lose his main and precious treasure – his goodness and love. As before, he loves more those people who suffer: the poor hitchhiker, the drunk, the old clerk working in the "flea bag".

The myth, intertwining with reality, teaches *The Centaur's* readers to remain human despite any unexpected and uncongenial turns of their fates. Moreover, the reader, comparing the real world with the divine one, realizes that the material aspects of human life are not worth sacrificing one's life for them. Money cannot be the purpose of life and Caldwell understands it clearly. Throughout the novel Updike emphasizes that material world is alien to his protagonist: "*material things meant little to him [Caldwell]*" (The Centaur, p. 67). He even does not like his own body, as it also reminds him of the fact that it is material: "*I hate the damn ugly thing. I don't know how the hell it got me through fifty years.*" (The Centaur, p. 118)

The pedagogical function of myth serves to emphasize Caldwell's interest in universal immaterial aspects of life. He is not concerned with his own being; all that matters for him is his inner world and other people. Despite the fact that the obituary presented in the novel is written in an ironical mood, it comprises the sentence which best explains Caldwell's character: "*What endures, perhaps, most indelibly in the minds of his ex-students [...] was his more-than-human selflessness, a total concern for the world at large which left him, perhaps, too little margin for self-indulgence and satisfied repose.*" (The Centaur, p. 159)

The Chiron myth describing the centaur's sacrifice for Prometheus demonstrates that everybody's life must have a purpose. In contemporary America money is widely treated as a kind of purpose of life, however, money should be merely a means. Updike regrets that American society worships material wealth and transfers it into the state of highest achievements. A "*material hymn to material creation*" (The Centaur, p. 13) is seen everywhere around; and "*everything mass-produced. Waste. If one wears out, get another. Biff. Bang. Smash 'em up.*" (The Centaur, p. 20) By purpose the ancient Greeks meant the highest values of humanity – goodness, love, and sacrifice.

Caldwell's life is purposeful because he is not one of the Americans who make their pile and do not care about anything else in their lives. The purpose of his life embraces his

great sacrifice on behalf of his family. The real world is too narrow, spoiled and ferocious for him. David Galloway writes:

*George Caldwell maintains his intentions in the face of a hostile reality by retreating into a mythological kingdom in which Olinger, Pennsylvania, becomes Olympus. George's experiences are almost wholly psychological, but like Rabbit's they constitute a significant rebellion against the meaninglessness of life.* (The Absurd Hero in American Fiction, p. 32)

Caldwell wants to escape that hostile world. For that reason the fact of his supposed illness exhilarates him. He is preparing to die: *"In these last days he had been saying goodbye to everything, tidying up the books, readying himself for a change, journey. There would be none."* (The Centaur, p. 268) At the end of the book Caldwell realizes that he cannot afford himself to die. He must sacrifice, must live in this ugly vile world because otherwise his family will experience poverty and hunger. In this way the protagonist makes his life purposeful and this deed raises him above the grey mediocre population of Olinger, and, as a result, above the contemporary America.

Caldwell ought to become a model for the readers of *The Centaur*. It does not mean that they should copy his way of life, his manners etc. What matters is his life taken as a whole – his deed made in the name of his family and other people. Campbell wrote in *The Power of Myth*, that *"When a person becomes a model for other people's lives, he has moved into the sphere of being mythologized."* (p. 15) Consequently, Caldwell himself is a mythologized character; however, paralleled with Chiron, his figure gains even more prominence.

It should be mentioned that, according to Campbell, sacrifice itself is wrongly perceived nowadays. He states that sacrifice is extremely important and meaningful; and that only people, who deserve being called Gods, are capable of sacrifice. In his book *The Power of Myth* he presents an interesting example of this statement: the Mayan Indians had a kind of basketball game in which, the captain of the winning team was at the end sacrificed by the captain of the losing team. In other words, the ritual's exemplified above main purpose was to identify the man, being worthy to be sacrificed as a God. Campbell writes: *"You have to have death in order to have life."* (The Power of Myth, p. 109)

Despite the fact that Caldwell does not sacrifice himself in the literal sense, he sacrifices a part of his inner world – the centaur, and due to it he is entitled to be called a real man, even a God.

At this point another aspect of the pedagogical function of myth emerges: every individual has the right to choose how to live his or her life, which existential path to go –

either to sacrifice on behalf of others and become a God, or to fasten to one's ego, become wealthy, prosperous, and spiritually empty.

In *The Power of Myth*, Campbell presents one more example of sacrifice, which is worth mentioning. He contemplates the essay written by Schopenhauer, in which the author asks, how it can happen that one man can sacrifice in the name of another person. Campbell writes:

*Schopenhauer's answer is that such a psychological crisis represents the breakthrough of a metaphysical realization, which is that you and that other [man for whom you sacrifice] are one, that you are two aspects of the one life, and that your apparent separateness is but an effect of the way we experience forms under the conditions of space and time. Our true reality is in our identity and unity with all life. This is a metaphysical truth [...] the truth of your life. (p. 110)*

Consequently, Caldwell, sacrificing on behalf of his family and other people, is a God, a winner, who is awarded with the highest gift – the unity with the whole life, the universe. Again, Campbell quotes Jung writing about sacrifice: “*You don't have to die, really, physically. All you have to do is die spiritually and be reborn to a larger way of living.*” (*The Power of Myth*, p. 114)

To conclude, the pedagogical function of myth in *The Centaur* plays an important role of teaching, how to live one's life with dignity despite endless obstacles stationed by fate. It guides people and emphasizes the significance of purpose which must be present in everyone's life – not the vile desire to prosper, gain the temporal material wealth; but to improve oneself spiritually, for instance, to sacrifice something on behalf of another person, herewith passing to a higher level of existence.



## CONCLUSIONS

The twentieth century was “the mythical age” due to the fact that writers of that time widely employed ancient myths in their works. Updike’s *The Centaur* is one of the best examples of a mythological novel. The Chiron myth, employed by the author, shaped the novel and offered an extended contrastive parallel to the contemporary world.

Updike treated the mythological material quite freely in *The Centaur*. He altered the original myth of Chiron and presumed some other deviations from the traditional Classical mythology. The three main distinctions between the myth proper and myth occurring in *The Centaur* are: first, in the novel, Peter (Prometheus) is the son of Caldwell (Chiron); the second difference comprises Caldwell’s (Chiron) and Hummel’s (Hephaestus) friendship; the third is Vera Hummel’s (Venus) and Caldwell’s (Chiron) passionate relationship. There might be several reasons for deviating from the original myth, but the most important is that Updike did not aim to re-narrate the Chiron myth; he used it as a core, backbone of the novel.

In *The Centaur* both implicit (mythological images serve as symbols) and explicit (reality overtly intertwines with the divine world) methods of framing the mythological semantics occur.

On the basis of Campbell’s myth theory four main functions of the Chiron myth in *The Centaur* were identified and analyzed. They are: metaphysical, sociological, cosmological and pedagogical.

- The metaphysical function of myth establishes transcendent-religious background of the novel. Despite being identified with the noble centaur, Caldwell is also paralleled with Christ. The protagonist not only abnegates his ambitions on behalf of his son, he also does it for all the people. Moreover, the metaphysical function emphasizes the importance of Caldwell’s sacrifice, his suffering and pain.
- The sociological function of myth has two main purposes: it portrays social and spiritual chaos in contemporary America and emphasizes degradation and deterioration of a modern individual. The chaos prevails nearly everywhere: at Caldwell’s lesson, in Hummel’s garage, in Minor Kretz’s luncheonette. People, surrounding the protagonist are spiritually hollow, narrow-minded and mediocre.
- The cosmological function of myth endows every image and object of *The Centaur* with mystery and prominence. It also elucidates that particular elements of the novel (elements of *visibilia*: the arrow, the earth, the tree, the

sky, and the element of *invisibilia* which is time) are loaded with additional significance which adds the novel extra dimension.

- The pedagogical function of myth, which is the most important one, comprises an educational aspect. It teaches how to live a human life under any circumstances, on the example of Caldwell-Chiron. It emphasizes that despite his poverty and numerous misfortunes the protagonist remains a good and honest man. Moreover, this function helps the reader to understand that the journey from life to death must have a spiritual purpose.

The underlying theme of *The Centaur* (as well as other Updike's novels), presenting the problems of an average American living a trivial life, achieves the level of the eternal themes. The novel is structured according to the dichotomies given in the first epigraph: heaven and earth, good and evil, ideal and matter-of-fact worlds. These oppositions illustrate duality of the human nature (as well as the centaur symbolizes the duality) – spiritual and physiological aspects always countervail against each other.

Updike's *The Centaur* is a philosophical novel because it evokes philosophical questions such as: how and why one should live, how to make the world better, etc. The author implies that one should try to change and improve his or her own life in order to perfect the hostile world. Caldwell-Chiron-Christ serves as a model of behaviour – anyone can follow his example and reach the higher level of existence.

## SANTRAUKA

Darbe nagrinėjamos mito funkcijos Amerikiečių rašytojo John Updike'ų (1932) romane *Kentauras* (1963).

Darbe taikomas mitokritinis-funkcinis metodas. Jo pagrindą sudaro mitologo Joseph Campbell'ų teorija ir jo išskirta mito funkcijų klasifikacija. Anot mokslininko, pagrindinės mito funkcijos yra metafizinė, sociologinė, kosmologinė ir pedagoginė.

Pagrindinis šio darbo tikslas - atskleisti ir paaiškinti mito apie Chironą funkcijas *Kentaure*. Pagrindiniai darbo uždaviniai – pristatyti dvidešimto amžiaus mitologinę literatūrą ir pasiūlyti keletą požiūrių į ją; pristatyti Updike'ą kaip rašytoją ir įrodyti kad ritualas yra būdingas daugeliui jo kūrinių; pateikti mito koncepciją ir jo funkcijas; pristatyti Chirono mitą, atskleisti panašumus ir skirtumus tarp jo ir rašytojo Updike'ų mito, taip pat nubrėžti nukrypimo nuo tikro mito priežastį ir tikslą.

Buvo nustatyta, kad Updike'ų romanas *Kentauras* yra mitologinis, kadangi jame yra sugretinami mitologinis ir realus pasauliai; be to, mitas atlieka kontrastinės paralelės dabartiniam pasauliui vaidmenį. Modernaus pasakojimo ir klasikinio mito sintezė suteikia romanui papildomo masto ir svarbos. Mitologiniai *Kentauro* elementai yra implicitiniai taip pat ir eksplicitiniai.

Darbe buvo nustatytos ir paaiškintos keturios mito funkcijos. Metafizinė funkcija suteikia romanui religinį-mistinį foną. Pagrindinis veikėjas yra sutapatintas ne tik su kentauru, bet ir su Jėzumi. Jo aukojimas, kančios ir skausmas įgauna svarbos. Sociologinė funkcija pabrėžia socialinį ir dvasinį chaosą šiuolaikinėje Amerikoje, taip pat ir žmogaus nuosmukį. Chaosas yra visur: Caldwell'ų pamokoje, Hummel'ų garaže, Kretz'ų užkandinėje. Kosmologinė mito funkcija suteikia svarbos ir prasmės tokioms romano detalėms kaip strėlė, medis, žemė, dangus ir laikas. Pedagoginė funkcija turi savyje auklėjamosios galios ir moko skaitytoją, kaip galima išlikti tikru žmogumi šiame pasaulyje, nepraradus kilnumo ir orumo. Sekant pagrindinio veikėjo pavyzdžiu, galima pasiaukoti vardan kitų žmonių ir tokiu būdu pasiekti aukštesnę egzistencijos pakopą.

Romanas *Kentauras* yra filosofinis, nes jis kelia tokius filosofinius klausimus kaip: „Vardan ko mes gyvename?“, „Kaip mes turime gyventi?“, „Kaip pagerinti mūsų pasaulį?“.

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