

Comparative Study on the Mythological Archetypes of the Forest in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Wilderness*

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ABSTRACT

*Myths reflect the wisdom of ancient people. In the mid-20th century, Northrop Frye proposed archetypal criticism (myth criticism) and claimed that literature is displaced mythology; in other words, literary works are imitations of myths. The forest plays a significant role in mythology and is an essential imagery for archetypal criticism. As the primitive home of humankind, the forest is more than a vegetation world in literature; it is endowed with profound cultural implications, providing the motifs for literature. The forest imagery in *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, a well-known American Romantic novelist, and *The Wilderness* (Yüan-yeh) by Cao Yu (Ts'ao Yü), a prominent Chinese playwright, displaces mythological archetypes. However, due to the diverse cultures of the authors and the different themes they intended to convey, the mythological archetypes of the forest in the two works have similarities and differences. According to the holy scriptures and tales from Greek mythology, by using myth and archetypal criticism and qualitative research methods such as comparative method, biographical approach, and textual analysis, this paper attempts to analyze the similarities and differences between the mythological archetypes of the forest in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Wilderness* to reveal the resemblance and diversity of human culture, psychology, and literary creation, as well as the significance of myth to literature. Findings show that the forest imagery in both works primarily displaces the archetypes of the Bible and Greek mythology and that the displacement focuses on the themes of atonement and redemption, expressing both authors' ideals of goodness and self-redemption.*

*Keywords: the forest imagery; mythological archetypes; the Bible and Greek mythology; *The Scarlet Letter*; *The Wilderness**

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INTRODUCTION

For primitive man, the main characteristic of myths is the use of metaphorical language, which he uses to personalize the forces of the natural world that he attempts to understand and dominate (Cohen, 1969, p. 339). The renowned Canadian literary theorist Northrop Frye proposed archetypal criticism (myth criticism) in the mid-20th century and claimed that myth “is a structural principal in literary texts” (Dubois, 2012, p. 2). He argued that though realism or naturalism often removes the explicit connection with myth, the framework or context of every literary work can be found in myth, and this “indirect mythologizing” is named “displacement” (Frye, 1961, pp. 602-604). Forests have been intimately associated with human life since ancient times. Almost all races, at a certain stage of their development, have considered trees as “home, haunt, or embodiment of a spiritual essence” (Philpot, 1897, p. 1), indicating that forests and trees have long been embedded in the human psyche and culture as an archetype. Forest stories in mythology provide the motifs for literature, and forest imagery has appeared in literary works from almost any nation and period. Examples include *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) by the well-known American author Nathaniel Hawthorne and *The Wilderness (Yüan-yeh)* (1937) by the prominent Chinese playwright Cao Yu (Ts’ao Yü), where their forest imagery is reflected in various aspects such as the setting of the stories, the creation of the atmospheres, and the shape of the characters. Both Hawthorne and Cao were deeply influenced by religion and mythology while growing up, and the forest imagery in the two works displaces the archetypes of the Bible and Greek mythology.

Since the publication of *The Scarlet Letter*, scholars have studied it with enduring interest, mainly in terms of symbolism, archetypal criticism, feminism, transcendentalism, psychology, and ecologism. When exploring the relationship between *The Scarlet Letter* and mythology, most scholars focus on Puritan myths or character archetypes. For instance, in “Dissenting Puritans: Mythological Resignification in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*” (Drescher, 2020), the author discusses how Hawthorne transforms the Puritan myths, which belong to the Christian mythology with North American regional features. Another example is in “Reflection on Hawthorne’s Use of Biblical Allusions and Symbolism in *The Scarlet Letter*” (Li, N., 2019), in which the author analyzes the counterparts of the themes and characters to biblical allusions. Although the study of mythological archetypes in *The Scarlet Letter* has developed in scale, mythological archetypes of the forest are less frequently concerned by scholars but are often employed as an incidental part of the analysis of characters and themes. *The Wilderness* is not as renowned as Cao’s other dramas due to Chinese politics and some other reasons. Scholars have been concentrating on its anti-feudal theme and characters with wildness but giving limited attention to its mythological archetypes and tending to take it as part of the analysis of all Cao’s works. In “Rituals, Prototypes and Theme Presentation in the Early Dramas by Cao Yu” (Li, Y., 2020) and “On the Consciousness of Original Sin in Cao Yu’s Early Dramas” (Zhang, 2020), for example, the authors underline the influence of the Bible on Cao, while the latter uses *The Wilderness*, as an illustration, to elaborate the Christian concepts of original sin and confession in Cao’s works.

The forest imagery, rich in symbolism, plays a significant role in both works. However, the study of the mythological archetypes of the forests has yet to be emphasized in either *The Scarlet Letter* or *The Wilderness*. By employing qualitative research methods, such as comparative method, biographical approach, and textual analysis, this study applies myth and

archetypal criticism to comparatively analyze the mythological archetypes of the forests in the two works. This study aims to find the answers to the following questions:

1. What are the similarities and differences between the mythological archetypes of the forest in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Wilderness*?
2. What are the variations of the same mythological archetypes, and what are the similarities of different mythological archetypes in describing the same imagery in the literary works of different nations?
3. What is the significance of mythology for literary creation?

FRYE'S MYTH-ARCHETYPAL CRITICISM AND THE FOREST IMAGERY

Based on a comparative study of myth in J. G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890), the Swiss psychologist C. G. Jung asserts that from the relationships between archetype and "myth, esoteric teaching, and fairytale," the meaning of "archetype" is rather obvious "in the nominal sense" (Jung, 1981, p. 5) and also suggests that some symbols in myths and dreams are leftovers of ancestors' memories that have been stored in the collective unconscious. In the mid-20th century, the Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye developed myth and archetypal criticism founded on Frazer's anthropological ideas and Jung's psychological views, applying the concept of archetype to literary criticism, and published *Anatomy of Criticism* in 1957.

Some scholars regard archetypal criticism and myth criticism as two schools of thought, with Jung founding the former and Frye representing the latter. For example, both Ian Buchanan and Chris Baldick include an entry for myth criticism, distinguishing from archetypal criticism, in their literary dictionaries. Nevertheless, regardless of scholarly perspectives on archetypal criticism and myth criticism, archetypes are inseparable from myths. A number of scholars have mentioned mythology in their interpretation of the concept of "archetype". Baldick (2001), for example, defines "archetype" as the symbol or theme that recurs in mythology, literature, and so forth, and then argues that "it embodies some essential element of 'universal' human experience" (p. 19). The theory adopted in this study is Frye's archetypal criticism (myth criticism), grounded in Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and Jung's theory of the collective unconscious. Archetypal criticism stands as one of the most influential literary theories in Western literature in the 20th century, functioning as a connection to the spiritual essence of humanity through myth, imagery, symbol, and other perceptual contents. Frye maintains that "literature is 'displaced' mythology" (Dubois, 2012, p. 2); that is to say, literary texts are interpreted as creative transformations of myths. Critics have tried to identify the original mythological archetypes behind all literary works, such as "the Divine Father, the Earth mother, the descent into Hell, the purgatorial stair, the sacrificial deaths of the gods, etc" (Wellek, 1967, p. 288).

The forest is a common archetype of mythology. In "Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths," the third chapter of *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye (1973) explains the three organizations of myths and archetypal symbols in literature: apocalyptic imagery, demonic imagery, and analogical imagery. The apocalyptic and the demonic are also described as "the two undisplaced worlds" (pp. 139-140), as they draw heavily on the myths of which the Bible is the primary source. Frye argues that the vegetable world is identified with "divine and human worlds ... in the Christian doctrine of transubstantiation" (p. 143) and then explicates apocalyptic imagery and demonic imagery with the forest as an example. Later in this chapter, he also presents the concept of "the Green World" in terms of Shakespeare's comedies. The so-

called Green World is the natural world mainly of the forest, a place full of magic, often served as a mission to escape from social constraints, “with a symbolism of the victory of summer over winter” (p. 181). The examples of the forest repeatedly appear in Frye’s writings, indicating the crucial significance of the forest imagery in archetypal criticism.

RESEARCH METHODS

As a literary analysis, this study employs qualitative research methods such as comparative method, biographical approach, and textual analysis to comparatively analyze the mythological archetypes of the forest in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Wilderness*. This study is a comparative study of two works from different nations, and it is therefore based on the comparative method. By collecting secondary data through public publications and online databases, the data collected include two major parts: one is the life experiences of Hawthorne and Cao and the context of their works, and the other is the texts and interpretations about the forests in the two works. To analyze literary works, an investigation of the artists’ biographies and milieus, such as social, cultural, and intellectual context, is required (Kennedy & Gioia, 1995, p. 1798). According to Byrne (2001), hermeneutics is a common method of textual analysis that mainly uses texts, like tales, as a source of data to interpret the meanings of the written words (p. 968). After collecting the data, hermeneutics is adopted as the primary method to analyze the data. Specifically, this study illuminates the significance of the forest imagery in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Wilderness* by interpreting the texts and demonstrating its displacement of biblical and Greek mythological archetypes. Thus, based on comparative method, this study uses biographical approach and textual analysis, with hermeneutics as its data analysis method, throughout the stages of data collection and analysis.

However, it is undeniable that interpreting texts through hermeneutics is inevitably subjective, which makes it challenging to establish the credibility of the data analysis. Qualitative researchers have argued that if one wants to measure the credibility of interpretations, “the context under which these interpretations were made must be richly and thickly described” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 539). This study thoroughly describes the authors’ life experiences and the context of their works before interpreting the forest imagery. Therefore, the results of the data analysis are credible as they are established on a thick description of the research context.

COMPARISON OF THE MYTHOLOGICAL ARCHETYPES OF THE FOREST

The Scarlet Letter is about the tragic love affair between Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale, set in the 17th century when the Boston colony was controlled by the Puritans. Hester commits adultery with this priest, and as a result, she is exiled and obliged to wear the scarlet letter “A”, symbolizing adultery. However, instead of giving in to fate, she lives diligently and eventually gains the respect of others. *The Wilderness* concerns the tragic revenge of Qiu Hu, a peasant in the early years of the Chinese Republic. Qiu’s family has been destroyed by the warlord bully Jiao Yanwang. Therefore, Qiu escapes from prison and returns to his hometown to take revenge, directly or indirectly causing the death of Jiao’s son and grandson. While on his way to elope with Hua Jinzi, the wife of Jiao’s son, Qiu commits suicide because the death of two innocent people weighs his conscience.

The two works embody religious elements and mythological archetypes. Based on the previous scholarly findings of Hawthorne's and Cao's life experiences, it is noticeable that they share a striking similarity: they were both strongly influenced by religion and mythology during their formative years. Hawthorne was born into a Puritan family and was inevitably subject to the impact of Puritanism. Therefore, he could not eliminate Puritan culture in his literary work. Many readers' impression of American Puritanism comes from Hawthorne's description of his works. From "Hawthorne's portrait of the Puritans," readers could "associate Puritanism with superstition, excessive moralism, intolerance, and patriarchal oppression" (Person, 2007, p. 17). Since Greek mythology and the Bible are two primary sources of Western literature, Hawthorne was unavoidably inspired by mythology. Scholars generally acknowledge that Hawthorne borrows from biblical allusions and displaces many biblical archetypes, as Hester "is a simulacrum of Eve" (Splendora, 2020, p. 5), and Adam is the archetype of Dimmesdale. Some scholars hold that the protagonist, Hester, represents the archetype of Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty in Greek mythology. They have found that the name of Hester is pronounced similarly to Hestia, the goddess of the hearth, in Greek mythology.

Cao Yu's parents were Buddhist believers, and subtly, he was impressed by Buddhist beliefs. His works embody Buddhist concepts such as the clear identification of good and evil, quality, and reincarnation. Although Cao was a Chinese playwright, Western culture strongly influenced him. Some ancient Greek tragedians, Ibsen, Shakespeare, Chekhov, and O'Neill, for example, had the most profound impact on him, and thus Cao became familiar with the Bible and Greek mythology. Cao once said that he came into contact with the Bible at an early age and often went to church when he was a child to think about and explore life issues. It seems that "religion brought Cao Yu revelations about the way of human existence and the meaning of life" (Zhang, 2021, p. 42). The archetype most analyzed by scholars in *The Wilderness* is revenge. For instance, Chinese scholar Zhu Meijie (2010) analyzes the archetype of revenge in *The Wilderness*, comparing it with *Medea* (431 BC) of Euripides in ancient Greece and concludes that Qiu's revenge against Jiao reflects the archetype of revenge in Greek mythology with biblical and Chinese Confucian doctrines.

The two works share many similarities in their plots and themes, in which the forest imagery plays an essential role. However, when analyzing the mythological archetypes of the two works, scholars have concentrated mainly on the characters and the main plots, neglecting the significant forest imagery. As mentioned earlier, the forest is a common archetype in mythology, and the forest imagery occupies an influential position in archetypal criticism. Therefore, it is necessary and worthwhile to investigate the mythological archetypes of the forest in both works.

The forest imagery in the two works is strongly inspired by the Bible, while the archetypes of Greek mythology and Chinese Buddhist and Taoist mythology are also displaced by it. In the following, the forest imagery in both works will be explicitly compared in terms of the same and different mythological archetypes.

SAME MYTHOLOGICAL ARCHETYPES OF THE FOREST

Due to the similarity of some plots and themes of *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Wilderness*, as well as the Christian culture that both authors shared, the forest imagery in the two works mirrors the Biblical archetypes of Original Sin and the Land of Canaan.

FOREST AND THE ARCHETYPE OF ORIGINAL SIN

Original sin is one of the fundamental Christian doctrines. In the Old Testament, when talking about the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God told Adam and Eve, “Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die” (King James Version, 2017, Genesis 3:3). However, Eve was tempted by the serpent to eat the fruit and gave it to Adam as well. Subsequently, they were expelled from the Garden of Eden and embarked on an eternal journey of atonement. This sin, passed on to their offspring by God, became the original sin inherent in human beings and the root of all sins and disasters.

The forest imagery in *The Scarlet Letter* displaces the archetype of original sin. In the Bible, Eve tempted Adam to commit original sin, while Hester is criticized and blamed by all as a sinner for adultery. Scholars generally agree that Hester reflects the biblical image of Eve, and Dimmesdale, as a priest, is the hidden sinner. Arthur Dimmesdale’s first name associates him with “Adam”, and the initials of his name, “AD”, imply the crime of adultery he has committed. Dimmesdale is highly reputable since he graduated from a leading English university, “bringing all the learning of the age into our wild forestland” (Hawthorne, 2007, pp. 53-54). Dimmesdale, believed to be perfect and devoted to God, falls in love with Hester and eats “the forbidden fruit,” which inevitably reminds readers of Adam, enticed by Eve to commit the original sin.

Some scholars speculate that in this Puritan society with strict laws, it is impossible for Hester and Dimmesdale to be together in public, and “the only place for them to meet and love each other is the forest where no one would notice them” (Pu, 2021, p. 30). This speculation is supported by Dimmesdale’s habit of strolling along the forested hills near the country. At the same time, the forest is gloomy and frightening, with only witches and the Black Man active in it. Besides, their daughter Pearl is even closer to nature and welcomed by the forest, as Hawthorne describes that “the mother-forest, and these wild things which it nourished, all recognized a kindred wildness in the human child” (Hawthorne, 2007, p. 160). Furthermore, Hawthorne devotes four chapters to depicting Hester’s meeting with Dimmesdale in the forest. She persuades him to elope, and he once again accepts her temptation. In this sense, the forest imagery in *The Scarlet Letter* embodies the archetype of original sin.

The forest imagery in *The Wilderness* also displaces the archetype of original sin. In the prologue, Cao depicts a giant tree that stands upright in the wilderness “with its enormous trunk scratched with old and cracked grains” (Ts’ao, 1980, p. 1). This giant tree symbolizes the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Bible. The story of *The Wilderness* starts with Qiu Hu leaning against this giant tree to take off his manacles. Later Qiu and Hua reunite under the tree and realize that they still love each other, so they decide to elope. Their meeting under the giant tree is the original sin. After the revenge, Qiu flees into the forest with Hua, and they can only hope to escape from the dark forest to a faraway and liberal place. However, just like Adam and Eve, who were expelled from the Garden of Eden eternally, Qiu and Hua are also banished from paradise because of their guilt. Qiu eventually commits suicide the moment before escaping from the forest. When he is dying, he sees the giant tree again but can never return to it, in that he has expelled himself from the Garden of Eden in his heart. Thus, the forest and tree imagery in *The Wilderness* represents the archetype of original sin.

FOREST AND THE LAND OF CANAAN

One of the similarities between *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Wilderness* is that both Hester and Qiu are eager to elope with their lovers to a distant and free land. The archetype of the land of

Canaan in the Bible is displaced in both works. In Exodus of the Old Testament, God told Moses to lead the Israelites to “a land flowing with milk and honey,” referring to ancient Canaan. From then on, people have begun to use the land of Canaan as a metaphor for fertile and beautiful places.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, when Hester and Dimmesdale meet in the forest, they make up their mind to elope. Hester prefers going deeper into the forest, but on account of Dimmesdale’s poor health, they decide to leave the New England colony for the European continent. In the prologue of *The Wilderness*, Qiu convinces Hua to escape by describing where they will reside—“gold covers the ground there, the houses can fly; open your mouth and people will fill you up with food” (Ts’ao, 1980, p. 28). Although “that gold-covered land” is what Qiu deceives her into eloping with him, this non-existent place has become the motivation to support their escape from the dark forest. Both the European continent in *The Scarlet Letter* and “that gold-covered land” in *The Wilderness* are the dream of Canaan for the protagonists who have been suffering and trying to run away from reality. In this sense, the forest symbolizes the journey Moses led the Israelites to Canaan, with untold difficulties and dangers.

DIFFERENT MYTHOLOGICAL ARCHETYPES OF THE FOREST

Hawthorne and Cao lived in different periods and grew up in different cultures. Previous scholars have analyzed and summarized the context of their times in detail. The 1850s witnessed a wave of immigrants in the United States, and Rufus Choate, an American politician contemporary of Hawthorne, appealed to a cultural force: “works that would offer national origins, common values, and a shared destiny” (Drescher, 2020, p. 428). Cao authored *The Wilderness* in the 1930s, when the Chinese people were surviving and revolting against the oppression of feudal forces such as warlords and landlords (Li, Y., 2020, p. 184). Thus, the social reality they want to reveal and the morals they intend to convey in their works are quite different, which leads to the displacement of different mythological archetypes for the forest imagery.

GARDEN OF EDEN AND HELL

The forest in *The Scarlet Letter* has a duality. On the one hand, it represents a dark and heretical world that repels humans, and on the other hand, it brings peace and shelter to those who are close to nature, and readers can sense “this deep and profound harmony, between the biophilic characters and the wilderness” (Ahmad et al., 2022, p. 384). The forest, to some extent, acts as the Garden of Eden, a paradise without sin or competition. Here, Hester dares to drop the letter A, representing the weight of guilt and suffering left by her spirit. Even after removing the formal cap binding her hair, her sex, her youth, and the entirety of her attractiveness return. Meanwhile, Dimmesdale throws off his hypocrisy and spiritual burden in the forest, confessing that Pearl is his daughter. He is no longer a respectable priest but an ordinary human with desires. Having decided to elope with Hester, the priest seems to have flung himself—“sick, sin-stained, and sorrow-blackened—down upon these forest-leaves, and to have risen up all made anew” (Hawthorne, 2007, p. 158). He releases himself from the moral standards imposed by Puritan society and discharges the overwhelming feelings long hidden in his heart. Hester and Dimmesdale are reborn in the forest, the Garden of Eden for them.

However, the forest in *The Wilderness* is not a paradise; on the contrary, it represents Hell in a certain sense. The dark forest is more than ghastly and horrible woods, but a reflection of their hearts—Hell and death. Qiu suffers a hallucination in the forest, seeing some dead people, the king of Hell and the judge of Hades, and believes that he is in Hell. The forest in *The Wilderness* is a combination of various mythological archetypes of Hell. The New Testament has a specific and vivid description of Hell, a place where “their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched” (King James Version, 2017, St. Mark 9:48). After death, the sinners “shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb” (King James Version, 2017, Revelation 14:10), and those who are irreverent to God shall be thrown into the lake of fire, where they will perish a second time. Although Cao was familiar with Western culture, his works mainly adopted traditional Chinese culture. Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism are the mainstream of Chinese traditional culture, in which the myths of Buddhism and Taoism have continuously blended throughout China’s long history, resulting in the images of Hell in Chinese folklore—Eighteen Levels of Hell, the King of Hell, the Judges of Hades, Ox-Head and Horse-Face, and so forth. Chinese folklore has been saying since ancient times that if one had done evil deeds, he or she would “climb a mountain of swords or plunge into a sea of flames” after death. The origin of this saying is that Buddhist canons define “Hell” as “Scorching Hell, Great Scorching Hell, Embers, Razor Blade” and others, and stipulate that “the evildoers are intensely boiled” and “placed into an iron room and their flesh is broiled”; some of the guilty are forced to walk on “a road covered with knives” and “their feet and bodies are cut” (Van Put, 2007, pp. 217-219). The dark forest in *The Wilderness* is sinister and gloomy. Qiu sees old trees killed by lightning and fore, and amid “the profuse vegetation and poisonous flowers under the trees there are autumnal insects droning lowly” (Ts’ao, 1980, p. 164). The “autumnal insects droning lowly” scene appears three times throughout Qiu and Hua’s escape from the forest. Later Qiu hallucinates due to guilt and “participates” in the judgment of Hades, seeing his father and little sister being sentenced to climb a mountain of swords, only to find that Hades, the judge, and all ghosts are the incarnation of Jiao Yanwang. For Qiu, the forest is a symbol of Hell.

Why are the symbols of the forest imagery so different in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Wilderness*? The sin committed by Hester and Dimmesdale is only adultery, and Hawthorne even intends to use their love tragedy to convey his anti-Puritan ideas. In this sense, the forest in *The Scarlet Letter* represents redemption. On the contrary, in *The Wilderness*, Cao attempts to reveal the miserable life of ordinary people under the rule of the warlords in the early Republic of China, with strong realistic significance. Although Qiu Hu, whom the bureaucratic warlords oppressed, suffers a tragic life, he causes the death of two innocent people. Thus, the forest in *The Wilderness* is a place for him to atone for his sins, without the slightest tenderness, but only destruction.

DEMETER AND PROMETHEUS

In addition to the Bible, the forest imagery in both works also displaces Greek mythological archetypes.

The forest in *The Scarlet Letter* represents the archetype of Demeter, a goddess in Greek Mythology, “whose name means ‘Mother Earth,’ ... holds the power of fertility and agriculture” (Bolton, 2002, p. 57). It is said that the Thessalian hero Erysichthon, who desired timber to build a new hall or palace, ignoring the warning of the goddess, insisted on acquiring “the necessary timber by felling trees in a grove of Demeter” (Hard, 2004, p. 133) and is eventually

harshly punished by Demeter. In *The Scarlet Letter*, the forest does not welcome the Puritans. The community they have established in New England is built at the expense of the wilderness. The timber from the forests they cut down is used partly to construct cemeteries and partly to erect the prison that Hawthorne calls “the black flower of civilized society” (Hawthorne, 2007, p. 39). Indeed, the forest is not as cruel as Demeter, but it responds to the destroyers in its way. It seems that nature, mainly the forest, only nourishes native plants, such as the “wild rose-bush” rooted on the threshold of the prison. On the contrary, it nurtures few exotic plants, so the inhabitants have given up keeping the British love of ornamental gardening “in a hard soil and amid the close struggle for subsistence” (Hawthorne, 2007, p. 84). The forest, like Demeter, warns and punishes people and things that destroy nature.

The forest in *The Wilderness* embodies the archetype of Prometheus. Cao portrays and personifies a giant tree in the prologue, saying that it commands “dignity, malice, defiance, and a dark, lonely anxiety, like a chained Prometheus tied upon his precipice” (Ts’ao, 1980, p. 1). The wilderness is supposed to be free and rich in primitive vitality. However, this giant tree is firmly imprisoned in the wilderness, like Prometheus, who is chained to the Caucasus Mountains to suffer eternal torture. The giant tree represents Qiu, bound by hatred in this wilderness. Cao conveys Qiu’s depression, repression, and helplessness by displacing the Prometheus archetype from Greek mythology.

The forest imagery in the two works displaces different Greek mythological archetypes based on the different themes that the authors intend to represent. One theme of *The Scarlet Letter* is the disharmonious relationship between man and nature. Due to the American tradition of “conquering the wilderness” and the emergence of the Industrial Revolution, nature was severely damaged, which led many American Romantics with transcendentalist ideas to advocate for the protection of nature. Therefore, Hawthorne gives the forest and nature the qualities of Demeter. In contrast, *The Wilderness* primarily elaborates on the struggles and resistance of the oppressed peasants during the warlord period and does not concern the relationship between man and nature. Thus, Cao personifies the forest with the image of Prometheus to depict the time’s background and the characters’ features.

ATONEMENT AND REDEMPTION BEYOND THE FOREST IMAGERY

The displacement of mythological archetypes by the forest imagery in both works focuses on the themes of atonement and redemption. In Greek mythology, both Erysichthon and Prometheus are atoning for sins committed before. Chinese Buddhism preaches karma, meaning that the suffering in this life serves to atone for the sins committed in the previous life. In Christianity, redemption is a critical concept in theology. In order to be blessed by God, humans must atone for their sins by following the procedure prescribed by God. Therefore, Christians have always believed that “because of sin, death, and other forms of evil, all human beings need to be redeemed” (Patte, 2010, p. 1057). From the various mythological and religious illustrations of redemption, it is clear that redemption is inseparable from sin and atonement.

Hester commits adultery, and Qiu not only commits adultery but also kills two innocent people. The forest serves as a judge in the two works and provides a field for the protagonists to atone for their sins and be redeemed. In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester is expelled from the Puritan community and forced to live on the edge of the wilderness, but she makes the forestland her home. She works hard to make a living, turning her “Adultery” into “Able”.

Having atoned for her sin, Hester throws away the scarlet letter and is redeemed in the forest. Qiu Hu in *The Wilderness* runs into the forest after committing a sin that cannot be forgiven, and he is confronted with a frightening Hell that seems filled with white ghosts. Qiu suffers six hallucinations in the forest, which makes him lose his determination to escape and even his faith in life. He finally kills himself and flings the manacles with great force onto the distant railroad in order to seek freedom and redemption for his soul.

Despite the different fates of Hester and Qiu, by depicting their atonement journey and redemption ending, Hawthorne and Cao express the ideals of goodness and self-redemption.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The forest is a common image in mythology, and Frazer, Jung, and Frye, the founders of archetype criticism, have all emphasized forest imagery in their treatises. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* originates from an ancient custom about the King of the Wood and the tree god's worship. The forest is one of the essential mythological archetypes.

Hawthorne and Cao Yu were deeply influenced by religion and mythology, bringing prominent mythological elements to their works. As the displacement of mythological archetypes, forest imagery plays a significant role and meaning in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Wilderness*. Due to the similarity of some plots and themes, the forest imagery in both works reflects the biblical archetypes of Original Sin and the Road to Canaan. Meanwhile, depending on the different backgrounds of the two authors and the social issues they focus on, the forest imagery in both works is also slightly different. For example, the forest in *The Scarlet Letter* somehow displaces the archetype of the Garden of Eden, while the forest in *The Wilderness* symbolizes Hell. In addition, the forest imagery in both works displaces different Greek mythological archetypes. Hawthorne endows the forest with the archetype of Demeter, who punished the destroyer of nature, to indicate the disharmonious relationship between man and nature, while Cao personifies the giant tree as Prometheus to reflect the struggle and resistance of ordinary Chinese people during the warlord period. After analyzing the mythological archetypes of the forest in both works, it is discovered that the forest carries the role of the judge and has a significant function in the atonement and redemption of the protagonists.

The mythological archetypes of the forest in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Wilderness* are different, but they both support Frye's view that "literature is 'displaced' mythology," reflecting the significance and contribution of mythology to literature. Although the mainstream since the Enlightenment has been to worship reason and criticize ignorance, more and more scholars recognize that "most of the enlightened still retained a belief in God" (Barnett, 2003, p. 2). As science develops, human belief in gods has gradually weakened, but it does not imply the demise of mythology. Myths reflect the wisdom of ancient people, the origin of civilization, with profound and rich moral significance, providing an everlasting source for literary creation. Even though archetypal criticism (myth criticism) is not as popular as it was at the end of the 20th century, it will not be outdated because myths are immortalized in literature. The displacement of mythological archetypes by literature remains a worthwhile field for literary analysis.

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