

Public Abstract

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Title:SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE: MYTH AND STRUCTURE IN PULITZER PRIZE FEATURE STORIES, 1997-2012

Myth and its components have structured ancient narratives and modern journalistic works. This foundational qualitative study was conducted to understand how myth was used in 15 of the most recent winning Pulitzer Prize features by examining patterns in structural elements and cultural messages communicated in each story.

This study found myth is inseparable from the feature story and subjective writing. In these narratives, myth was observed to influence the version of reality authors conveyed. Mythic elements found in characters' quotes suggested authors internalized myths conveyed by sources and perpetuated them in these stories. This cycle suggests myth lives outside journalistic texts and in the writer, reader, and modern American society. Amid negative themes, the mythic elements within stories were mended with the values of family, hard work, duty to profession, sacredness of finality, and adherence to religion. Authors' reinforced those values by representing characters' complications and the resulting consequences into mythic frameworks.

By addressing a gap in the literature by building on past research in myth and journalism, this study shows that these authors use myth to achieve a variety of effects and that certain components could be considered more award-winning than others. This study's findings support that viewing journalism as myth can reveal patterns in how stories are crafted and provide clues about a culture's values and beliefs.