

MYTHOLOGICAL REPRESENTATION OF SPACE IN ANGLO-SAXON AND
ENGLISH FOLK NARRATIVES

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20097219>

Abstract: This paper examines the mythological representation of space in Anglo-Saxon and English folk narratives, focusing on the epic Beowulf and the folk tales Robin Hood, Jack the Giant Killer, and The Laidly Worm of Spindleston Heugh. The study analyzes how spatial images such as forests, halls, swamps, castles, and magical territories function within folklore narratives and reflect cultural beliefs and mythological worldview. Through comparative analysis, the research demonstrates that space in these texts is closely connected with concepts of danger, heroism, civilization, and the supernatural. The findings reveal that mythological spaces in English folklore serve as symbolic models of cultural imagination and collective memory.

Keywords: mythological space, folklore, Beowulf, English folk tales, cultural worldview, symbolic landscape, Anglo-Saxon literature

Introduction

Space plays an important role in folklore and mythological narratives because it reflects cultural beliefs, collective fears, and traditional worldview. In epic literature and folk tales, locations are not simply physical settings but symbolic spaces connected with heroism, danger, mystery, and social values. Mythological representation of space helps readers understand how different cultures interpret the relationship between human beings, nature, and the supernatural world.

English folklore literature contains a rich system of symbolic spaces that combine historical reality with mythological imagination. In the Anglo-Saxon epic Beowulf, halls, marshes, and distant lands create a world divided between civilization and chaos. Similarly, English folk tales such as Robin Hood, Jack the Giant Killer, and The Laidly Worm of Spindleston Heugh present forests, castles, and magical territories as spaces connected with freedom, fear, adventure, and transformation.

The aim of this study is to analyze the mythological representation of space in Anglo-Saxon and English folk narratives and to determine how spatial images reflect cultural worldview and collective memory. The research also compares the functions of space in epic and folk traditions.

Literature Review

The concept of mythological space has been widely studied in folklore, literary criticism, and cultural studies. Researchers argue that space in mythological narratives carries symbolic meanings and reflects cultural perception of the world. Eliade states that mythological space is divided into sacred and profane zones, where certain places become culturally significant centers of meaning (Eliade, 1959, p. 21).

Scholars of Anglo-Saxon literature have examined the symbolic geography of Beowulf. Tolkien notes that the poem creates a contrast between the ordered human world and the



threatening world of monsters (Tolkien, 1936, p. 19). Hume also emphasizes that spaces such as Heorot and Grendel's swamp represent civilization and chaos respectively (Hume, 1975, p. 63).

English folk tales have likewise been analyzed through spatial symbolism. Briggs argues that forests and distant lands in British folklore often function as liminal spaces connected with transformation and supernatural encounters (Briggs, 1970, p. 217). In tales such as Robin Hood and Jack the Giant Killer, mythological landscapes shape the hero's journey and reflect social and cultural values.

Although previous studies have explored symbolism and folklore motifs, comparative research on mythological representation of space in both Anglo-Saxon epic and English folk narratives remains limited. Therefore, this study investigates how mythological spaces function across different genres of English folklore tradition.

Methodology

This research applies a qualitative comparative approach to the analysis of mythological space in English folklore literature. The primary sources include the Anglo-Saxon epic Beowulf and the folk tales Robin Hood, Jack the Giant Killer, and The Laidly Worm of Spindleston Heugh.

The study employs descriptive, comparative, and contextual analysis methods. First, spatial elements and landscape descriptions in the selected texts were identified and categorized according to their symbolic and mythological functions. Then, these spaces were analyzed within their cultural and narrative contexts.

Special attention was given to the opposition between civilized and dangerous spaces, natural and supernatural territories, and sacred and profane environments. Comparative analysis was used to identify similarities and differences in the representation of mythological space in epic literature and folk tales.

The theoretical foundation of the research is based on studies in folklore, myth criticism, and cultural symbolism, particularly the works of Eliade (1959), Tolkien (1936), Briggs (1970), and Hume (1975).

Analysis and Discussion

Figure 1. Mythological Spaces in Anglo-Saxon and English Folk Narratives



Figure 1. Mythological Spaces in Anglo-Saxon and English Folk Narratives



Figure 1 illustrates the symbolic organization of mythological spaces in the selected narratives. The map demonstrates the contrast between civilized, liminal, and supernatural territories represented in English folklore tradition.

Mythological space in Anglo-Saxon and English folk narratives reflects cultural imagination and traditional worldview. The analyzed texts demonstrate that spatial images often symbolize moral, social, and supernatural oppositions.

In *Beowulf*, space is divided between the civilized world and the world of monsters. **Heorot**, the great mead hall, symbolizes order, social unity, and royal authority, while Grendel’s swamp represents chaos, isolation, and danger. The hero’s movement between these spaces reflects the struggle between civilization and destructive forces. Tolkien describes the monsters’ territories as symbolic spaces of fear and uncertainty (Tolkien, 1936, p. 22).

In *Robin Hood*, **Sherwood Forest** functions as a mythological and symbolic landscape. Unlike the royal court and the city of Nottingham, the forest represents freedom, justice, and resistance to oppression. The forest also acts as a liminal space where social rules are transformed and heroes challenge authority.

In *Jack the Giant Killer*, castles, mountains, and distant territories create a magical environment connected with adventure and heroic trials. These spaces emphasize the unknown and supernatural nature of the hero’s journey. Mythological landscapes in the tale symbolize fear, courage, and transformation.

Similarly, in *The Laidly Worm of Spindlestone Heugh*, the landscape combines real geography with mythological imagination. The location becomes associated with supernatural transformation and local legend, reflecting collective memory and regional folklore traditions.

Figure 2. Mythological Representation of Space in Selected Narratives

Literary Work	Main Spatial Image	Spatial and	Symbolic Meaning	Mythological Function
Beowulf	Heorot	and	Civilization vs.	Heroic struggle



	Grendel's swamp	chaos	
Robin Hood	Sherwood Forest	Freedom and resistance	Liminal/social space
Jack the Giant Killer	Castles and distant lands	Danger and adventure	Hero's journey
The Laidly Worm of Spindleston Heugh	Mythic regional landscape	Supernatural transformation	Collective memory

The analysis demonstrates that mythological spaces in English folklore narratives are closely connected with cultural values and symbolic thinking. Such spaces structure the narrative and help preserve traditional beliefs and collective imagination.

Conclusion

The present study examined the mythological representation of space in Beowulf and selected English folk narratives. The analysis showed that spatial images in these works function not only as narrative settings but also as important symbolic structures reflecting cultural worldview and mythological imagination.

The research revealed that Anglo-Saxon and English folk narratives frequently oppose civilized and dangerous spaces, natural and supernatural territories, and social order and chaos. Mythological landscapes such as halls, forests, swamps, and magical lands symbolize heroism, fear, freedom, and transformation.

Furthermore, the comparative analysis demonstrated that both epic literature and folk tales preserve collective memory through symbolic representations of space. Therefore, mythological space can be considered a significant element of English folklore tradition and cultural identity.

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