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Beyond the Darkness: Exploring the Myth of Solar Eclipse  
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<sup>1</sup>Alvanita, <sup>2</sup>Nazra L. Hanifah, and <sup>3</sup>Aulia H. Muchtarom

<sup>1,2,3</sup>English Department, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia

<sup>1</sup>alvanita31@ugm.ac.id, <sup>2</sup>nazralutfiana@gmail.com, <sup>3</sup>aulia.hafidzah@mail.ugm.ac.id

# Beyond the Darkness: Exploring the Myth of Solar Eclipse in *The Total Solar Eclipse of Nestor Lopez* and *Every Soul A Star*

<sup>1</sup>Alvanita, <sup>2</sup>Nazra L. Hanifah, and <sup>3</sup>Aulia H. Muchtarom

<sup>1</sup>alvanita31@ugm.ac.id, <sup>2</sup>nazralutfiana@gmail.com, <sup>3</sup>aulia.hafidzah@mail.ugm.ac.id

<sup>1,2,3</sup> English Department, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia

**Abstract:** Children's literature often serves as a tool for conveying complex phenomena, and one such phenomenon is the solar eclipse. While lunar eclipses have been a recurring theme in children's literature, solar eclipses have received less attention in this context. Nevertheless, in the wake of the remarkable total solar eclipse in the United States in 2017, certain children's literary works have been popular because of the use of the solar eclipse as a central theme. Noteworthy examples include *The Total Solar Eclipse of Nestor Lopez* by Andrea Cuevas and *Every Soul A Star* by Wendy Mass, both narrate tales set against the backdrop of a solar eclipse. This study examines the role played by the solar eclipse in character development and the incorporation of mythical elements within these selected novels by employing David Leeming's theory of myth through close reading. This study demonstrates how the solar eclipse symbolizes character growth, fostering enhanced self-confidence and self-acceptance, thereby reflecting the mythological notion that solar eclipses possess transformative potential. Furthermore, these novels encompass myths such as the act of biting during a solar eclipse, the transformation, the rituals during the eclipse, and the euphoria of the solar eclipse. However, this study also reveals instances of misinterpretation of these myths, thereby highlighting potential issues of cultural appropriation, which may contribute to children's misunderstanding.

**Key words:** character development; children's literature; education; myth; solar eclipse

**Abstrak:** Sastra anak sering kali berfungsi sebagai salah satu media untuk menyampaikan konsep dan fenomena yang kompleks, salah satunya adalah gerhana matahari. Meskipun gerhana bulan telah menjadi tema yang berulang dalam literatur anak, gerhana matahari kurang dieksplorasi dalam sastra anak. Namun, setelah terjadinya gerhana matahari total yang jarang terjadi di Amerika Serikat pada tahun 2017, beberapa karya sastra anak menjadi populer karena menggunakan gerhana matahari sebagai tema utama. Contoh karya tersebut adalah *The Total Solar Eclipse of Nestor Lopez* yang ditulis oleh Andrea Cuevas dan *Every Soul A Star* yang ditulis oleh Wendy Mass. Kedua novel ini menceritakan kisah petualangan anak yang menggunakan gerhana matahari sebagai latar. Penelitian ini mengkaji peran gerhana matahari dalam pengembangan karakter dan juga bagaimana unsur-unsur mitos dalam novel tersebut dimunculkan. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori mitos David Leeming, melalui pembacaan yang cermat. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bagaimana gerhana matahari menyimbolkan perkembangan karakter, pemupukan rasa percaya diri, dan penerimaan diri yang lebih baik. Hal ini selaras dengan salah satu mitos bahwa gerhana matahari adalah simbol transformasi. Selain itu, mitos lain

*yang muncul adalah gigitan (seperti dewa memakan matahari), transformasi, ritual selama gerhana, dan euforia gerhana matahari. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga mengungkap contoh-contoh salah tafsir dari mitos-mitos tersebut, sehingga menyoroti potensi isu-isu apropriasi budaya yang dapat menimbulkan kesalahpahaman pada anak-anak.*

**Kata kunci:** perkembangan karakter, sastra anak, mitos, pendidikan, gerhana matahari

## INTRODUCTION

Myth and children's literature have a long-standing relationship. Many children's literature is written based on myths which are simplified and adapted to make them more accessible and engaging for children, such as adapting from the Greek, Welsh, Celtic, and Soviet (Fimi, 2017; Hale & Riverlea, 2023; Saenko et al., 2023; White, 1998). Myth helps children to understand complex concepts and issues, including morality, identity, and the nature of the world (Leeming, 2020; Schroeder et al., 2022). Even though myths are probably perceived as rather traditional, out-of-date and no longer relevant to children nowadays, children still need to be introduced to these stories nonetheless, whether it be by their representation in literature or being passed down orally by their guardian (Zehetner, 2013). Myth helps explain the relationship between humans and nature, which gives the human meaning of their life (Schroeder et al., 2022). Children will get a better hold of a framework for understanding the world around them and make sense of the complex and abstract concepts that may be difficult to understand through rational explanations alone, such as the basic origins, matters of birth and death, and it helps them to connect with their community (Allender, 2002; Schroeder et al., 2022). In addition, myth is not only limited to classical myth (Leeming, 1992) but also embraces modernity. It can also extend to contemporary myth. It can be secular and reflect contemporary societal values and concerns (Leeming, 2020). Contemporary myth reflects the aesthetics of industrial society and cultural industry and responds to the creator's aim and motive (Hocor, 2018; Yan, 2015), or Leeming (2020) would address it as a narrative to explain something difficult to explain.

This article focuses on solar eclipse and its myth in children's literature. It delves into the role of solar eclipse and its myth in children's literature and the portrayal of solar eclipse myth, by analysing it both from the classical and contemporary myth. The result of the analysis will also lead to the potential for misinterpretation of the solar eclipse myth depicted in children's literature. The occurrence of solar eclipse is quite rare to happen, especially compared to a lunar eclipse. Interestingly, it is also reflected in children's stories, as very few stories about solar eclipses exist, but stories about moons are abundant. However, it is worth mentioning that there are many myths regarding eclipse, such as the sun is eaten by God, wolf, dog, dragon, or monster (Bonnerjea, 1935; *Eclipse History | Total Solar Eclipse 2017*, n.d.; *Eclipses in Chinese Cosmology*, n.d.; Goldy et al., 2022; Haristiani et al., 2017; Izzuddin et al., 2022; Lee, 2013; Littmann & Espenak, 2017; Mohapatra, 1991) or the God fastened the moon and sun (Khalisi, 2020). Furthermore, there are also myths following the phenomenon, such as performing rituals (Haristiani et al., 2017, 2018; Mohapatra, 1991) or the perception that the eclipse is a bad omen for death (Kasim, 2018). This research is interesting to conduct because it supports the euphoria of a rare total solar eclipse in the USA in 2017 and the excitement for the solar eclipse in 2024 (Littmann & Espenak, 2017). This rare phenomenon will encourage children and parents to witness this quite rare phenomenon (Buxner et al., 2019).

Based on this focus, the researchers chose two children's books containing solar eclipse myths, *The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez* by Adrianna Cuevas (2020) and *Every Soul A Star* by Wendy Mass (2008) to be discussed in this article. The first book tells the adventures of a Cuban boy who finds strange things happening in the forest behind his house in New Haven, America. Rumors said his neighbours' pets disappear when passing through the forest. Apparently, the figure of Tule Vieja is gathering strength to become a powerful witch during a total solar eclipse. Meanwhile, the later book tells the story of a group of children who gather at a campsite in New England, America, to witness a solar eclipse firsthand. These children have their own flaws, and they try to embrace their flaws while witnessing the solar eclipse phenomenon. Both novels use a total solar eclipse as a story tie-in and a solar eclipse as a setting for the story. In addition, both novels have a setting in the United States and talk about the total solar eclipse that occurred in America, but have different approaches. Therefore, the researchers were moved to see how the solar eclipse and the story surrounding the solar eclipse appeared in this literary work.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Solar eclipse is frequently explained under scientific explanation in children's schools, and it is one of the natural phenomena that can be difficult for children to understand. However, myths can provide a more engaging way for children to understand this concept. Besides, solar eclipse myths from various cultures can introduce children to different cultural perspectives on natural phenomena; thus, it promotes cultural diversity and inclusivity (Boyd et al., 2015; Cajete, 2017; Haristiani et al., 2017; Nodelman, 1992; Schroeder et al., 2022). However, it should be treated carefully as without proper adaptations of these myths, with sensitivity and respect to cultural context and significance, it may lead to cultural appropriation (Chen, 2020; Manderstedt et al., 2021; Martin, 2021; Meade et al., 2022; Nodelman, 1992; Young & Haley, 2009).

The research on eclipses mainly focuses on the lunar eclipse, particularly scientific scope and empirical research of student's perception of lunar eclipse. Testa et al. (2015) discuss the development and validation of a learning progression on celestial motion, emphasizing spatial and causal reasoning, and proposes a single teaching-learning path for understanding astronomical phenomena. Meanwhile, Yalcin et al. (2012) explored pre-service primary science teachers' understandings of the moon's phases and lunar eclipses, finding that their comprehension was weak and suggesting that traditional instructional methods are insufficient for meaningful learning and should be replaced with alternative approaches. In addition, some authors have also investigated the portrayal of moon in children's literature (Trundle et al., 2008; Trundle & Troland, 2005) revealing the misconceptions of the lunar eclipse in children's stories. They found that many children books misrepresent the moon and reinforce misconceptions about lunar phases, potentially causing students to misunderstand scientific concepts. Thus, they provide tips on how to avoid these misconceptions. In addition, Sperl (2006) examines the significance of the lunar eclipse as a symbol of tragic events in a novel and how the myth of eclipse helps to build the magical realism genre in the novel.

Much research focuses on folklore studies or physics studies regarding the solar eclipse, but none of them embrace its portrayal and role in children's literature. For instance, the most recent research conducted by Poindexter (2023) suggests teachers to implement Earth and Space science activities to help the students understand solar eclipse. It can be done by incorporating several sources such as children's literature. The recommendation to use children's literature to teach

solar eclipse has also been suggested by Buxner et al., (2019) and Humphreys, (2023). However, they only provide reviews of selected children's literature on solar eclipse without examining the result of using those selected books. Meanwhile, other research on solar eclipse focus on the scientific phenomena and how to teach solar eclipse in classroom setting, such as the study conducted by Haristiani (2018), which evaluates the concept of science and language literacy of solar eclipse. It shows that students demonstrated a good understanding of the science behind solar eclipse, influenced by formal education and religious belief.

Considering the significance of solar eclipse myth in children's literature and the absence of research on this theme, this article will serve as one of the bridges to initiate research on solar eclipse, focusing on the myth surrounding it. The novels chosen for this article have not yet been examined in scholarly research. Therefore, this research will contribute to a new understanding of the myths of solar eclipse represented in children's literature.

## METHOD

This research adopts a methodology grounded in literary studies using a qualitative approach. It starts with a close reading of the two selected novels: *The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez* by Adrianna Cuevas (2020) and *Every Soul A Star* by Wendy Mass (2008). Throughout this examination, the researchers recorded excerpts related to the subject matter of solar eclipse and its myth. At the same time, a comprehensive literature review is undertaken to examine the myth of solar eclipse and the solar eclipse phenomenon in the United States in 2017. As for the framework of analysis, the researcher draws from David Leeming's (1992) theory of myth, encompassing both classical and contemporary myth. The classical myth is used to analyze the narrative surrounding Tule Vieja, the act of biting in a solar eclipse, and rituals related to the solar eclipse. In contrast, Leeming's theory of contemporary myth is applied to scrutinize contemporary myths, such as the belief that viewing a solar eclipse can result in total blindness or the euphoric experiences associated with a solar eclipse. The analysis is conducted through a comparative examination of the two selected novels in relation to the original myth. It focuses on the portrayal of these themes and the potential for misrepresentation, which may lead to cultural appropriation. In conclusion, the researcher synthesizes the findings to draw informed conclusions and its implication for young readers.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### A. The Portrayal of Solar Eclipse Myth in the Novels

Both *The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez* and *Every Soul A Star* portray solar eclipse myth, either the classical or the contemporary myth. The depictions do not precisely mirror myths in a certain culture but offer adaptations of the myth. Therefore, it is divided into three main patterns: the act of biting, the quest, and the transformation.

#### 1. The Act of Biting

The phenomenon of solar eclipse in the novel *The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez* and *Every Soul A Star* symbolized transformation and renewal for a set of characters as it represents the change in the look of the sun from a brilliant crescent to a dark disk surrounded by ghostly light

(Littmann & Espenak, 2017). In some cultures, such significant change bears a degree of uncertainty and bewilderment, creating a narrative—a myth—which represents their interpretation of the phenomenon based on their cultural belief. In these myths, there is an identified common cosmological myth pattern relating to the occurrence of a solar eclipse, which pointed out to the act of biting because, in some cultures, the process of the total solar eclipse is described as something—a creature or a force—that is slowly swallowing or biting the sun, a threat that needs to be removed, making the act of consuming sources of power and slaying evil central to solar eclipse myth. Although it is not connected directly to the classical myth, which explicitly involves the act of biting pattern, *The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez* highlighted this pattern with the portrayal of the Tule Vieja myth. To gain shapeshifting abilities, the creature must engage in the ritual of biting an animal just before the eclipse as concludes:

“...This one is trying to take the animal’s power”

“How does she do that?” Maria Carmen asks

“She bites them.” (Cuevas, 2020, pp. 185–186)

Seen from a folklorist lens, this act of 'biting' during an eclipse bears a striking resemblance to how various cultures and tribes across the world interpret the cosmological event of eclipses (Bonnerjea, 1935; Goldy et al., 2022; Haristiani et al., 2017; Izzuddin et al., 2022; Lee, 2013; Mohapatra, 1991).

Leeming (1990) mentioned that each cosmology myth reflects the experience of the culture that produced it. Myth reflects a society’s attempts to understand reality (Leeming, 2006). In their effort to understand the eclipse, people have generated eclipse myths (Fiske, 1902). Many of the eclipse myths are commonly related to the act of consuming, such as swallowing and biting. According to Littmann & Espenak, (2017) the earliest word for eclipse in Chinese is shih (食), which means ‘to eat’. Interestingly, in Panama itself, where the Tule Vieja myth originated, it is shown that the indigenous population believes in a similar myth. They believe solar eclipse is caused by a demon-half dog, half woman which eats the sun (Bonnerjea, 1935).

Similar to *The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez*, the act of biting also appeared in *Every Soul A Star*, portraying the belief of the Chinese that the eclipse occurred due to the dragon eating the sun (Littmann & Espenak, 2017).

“Yup! You know, ‘cause the ancient Chinese thought an eclipse was a dragon eating the sun.” (Mass, 2008, pp. 261–262)

However, this myth is not discussed further in the novel as the novel digs deeper into the scientific explanation of the solar eclipse. Therefore, it shows how the children feel weird knowing that such a myth exists.

## 2. The Quest Narrative

Both novels employ quest narratives as plot devices, a concept defined by De Lima et al., (2014) as a journey toward a particular goal where various adventures may unfold. The most common thread in eclipse myths, or their frequently recurring pattern, is the aspiration to restore the world, afflicted by the absence of celestial bodies, to its former state, which can be in form of ritual to chase away the sun eater (Nordgren, 2016). Nordgren (2016) further explained the reasoning that the sudden disappearance of the sun instils fear of the possibility of its non-return,

as it serves as our fundamental source of life. Fiske (1902) also stated that the fundamental idea of eclipse mythology is the victory of the solar god over the one who steals the light, meaning that restoring order is a necessary element to end solar eclipse stories. The uncertainty instills fear within people that they attempt everything, anything, seeking alternatives to repel whatever force is covering the sun, a quest to omit the bad luck it probably possessed.

In *The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez*, this pattern of seeking victory over the evil force is repeated as Nestor and his friends overpower the Tule Vieja, saving the animals from her threat once and for all. The novel does not portray the happening of the totality as something evil, but the mythical creature's feeding cycle is dependent on it and therefore shifting the interpretation of evil, not directly towards the eclipse, but to the threat that relates to it. This pattern is again repeated in *Every Soul a Star*, when a makeshift shrine dedicated to Ho and Hsi, historical astronomers from China, is found on the campground. Various visitors left offerings for the figures, including Kenny, who left a green stuffed dragon to remember the ancient Chinese myth about the eclipse:

"I turn to Kenny. "Let me guess. The dragon was your contribution?"

"Yup! You know, 'cause the ancient Chinese thought an eclipse was a dragon eating the sun." (Mass, 2008, pp. 261-262)

This resonates with the idea of a celestial dragon swallowing the sun or moon, symbolized by the word *shih* (to eat) in Chinese (Littmann & Espenak, 2017). This interpretation of solar eclipse brings along a specific quest where to restore the sun, they have to make loud noises—drum sounds—and perform physical action like shooting arrows towards the sky to keep the dragon from swallowing the sun wholly (Littmann & Espenak, 2017). Similar with *The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez*, the happening of the eclipse in this novel is not seen as a threat nor suspected of bringing a bad omen and instead a rare—yet normal—natural phenomenon which is worth celebrating. However, the characters still acknowledge the interpretation of total solar eclipse in some cultures as well as their quest to restore the sun without belittling them, which is essential in understanding the cultural context of total eclipse in traditional cultures, as seen in another exhibit of the pattern when the novel features an Egyptian Muslim character by the name of Bellana, whose family travels around the world to chase eclipses yet has never seen one:

"We come to pray during the eclipse. We pray for the sun's return."

"But you don't see it all?"

She shakes her head. "I will keep my eyes on the ground."

Ally will NOT believe this. In defense of the eclipse, I say, "But it's supposed to be really cool."

She laughs. "Yes, I have heard that. But this tradition goes back to the Prophet Muhammad. If he can miss it, I can miss it. It is for the greater good." (Mass, 2008, p. 281)

Bellana's family chases eclipses to perform *Salāh al-Kusūf*, a prayer (not mandatory but advised) done by Muslims whenever an eclipse graces their region. The reason why Bellana says that her family has never seen an eclipse is because it is advised that the prayer carries on until

the eclipse is over, as mentioned by al-Azhari (2022) that the purpose is to spend the time in the service of Allah. It can be in form of *salah* or *dhikr* (Kasim, 2018).

### 3. The Transformation

The presence of the “invisible force” which affects the face of the sun in the occurrence of solar eclipse has inevitably led to the change of behavior in humans and animals as observed and narrated since ancient times. This behaviour change was recorded with many stories and narratives dating back hundreds and thousands of years. One of the stories regarding the influence of solar eclipse is presented by Herodotus in 430 BCE, narrating a story of how a treaty was quickly made and sealed during the solar eclipse, which indicates how ancient people felt when confronted with a solar eclipse (Littmann & Espenak, 2017). There are also many stories about how the war ended due to the solar eclipse. It also indicates how the solar eclipse played a decisive role in the turn of events. Moreover, it can also serve as a dramatic element during an act. Not only do humans behave strangely, but so do animals (Littmann & Espenak, 2017). The solar eclipse can greatly impact society (Goldy et al., 2022). The myth of solar eclipse and transformation is also stated by Stella, one of the characters in *Every Soul A Star*, “And it changes everything around you. It changes you, too, on the inside. Some religious folk even say it’s the Eye of God.” (Mass, 2008, p. 80).

One particularly interesting subject to observe is the myth of Tule Vieja of *The Total Eclipse* of Nestor Lopez, whose behavior is influenced heavily by the periodical phenomenon. The novel features two renditions of the Tule Vieja: one told by Nestor’s Abuela’s father, which the characters deem to be the ‘mythical’ version, whereas the other one is the ‘real’ Tule Vieja who interacted with them.

Described by a character in the novel, the version of the Tule Vieja myth Abuela heard from her father is that she could only look like certain animals and not completely turn into one (Cuevas, 2020, p. 186). However, the ‘real’ Tule Vieja in the novel differs greatly, as the creature is motivated by her intention to capture animal powers by biting them during the total eclipse. If the Tule Vieja bites an animal during that period, she will be able to transform into the animals’ form and absorb their ability, including their unique powers which are against the natural order. Thus, the total eclipse, whose significance is emphasized in the title of the novel, marks the transformation period and the period of the renewal of the ability of a mythical creature. Tule Vieja’s life is greatly impacted by the phenomena, which functions as a magical and mysterious force, even though the motif for why the metamorphosis only happens during the total solar eclipse was rarely explored in the book.

The rarity of the total solar eclipse further fuelled Tule Vieja to move to where the eclipse would occur, explaining the different geographical nature of its current forms of snake, wolverine, and spider. In short, the creature went to great lengths chasing the eclipse to gain more animals’ powers, as far as sacrificing the wellbeing of its daughter and its family, signifying how crucial the eclipse is to the creature’s sentience (Cuevas, 2020, p. 257). Aside from affecting the Tule Vieja’s feeding cycle, the solar eclipse in the novel also influences the interpersonal relationships between the characters. For the main character Nestor, the incident involving the total solar eclipse has led him on a journey to embrace his inner self. Initially a recluse, friendship seems inevitable now that he and his friends Maria Carmen, Talib and Brandon have grown significantly closer in their effort to defeat the witch in a tight time constraint related to the occurrence of the eclipse which signifies another eclipse’s role as an attached limit of the main



action. In addition to that, Nestor starts to express his emotions, even the negative ones which are in contrast with his mom's "Always Be Happy" motto, as well as letting his secret be known to his closest friends.

Another character, Miss Humala, is no exception either. As Tule Vieja's daughter, she has constantly expressed distaste towards her mother's lifestyle. Appearing to have been stuck in a dilemma for decades, she was presented with no choice but to remain with her mother over protecting humans from possible threats. However, nearing the solar eclipse, Miss Humala is able to make up her mind and decides to stop her mother from creating further damage by telling Nestor that if the Tule Vieja "gains power from biting an animal, the opposite holds true as well" (Cuevas, 2020, p. 167).

The depiction of the solar eclipse in *Every Soul A Star* also represents transformation and renewal in the context of many characters' lives. The solar eclipse brought about enormous transformation to the Summers and the Holdens, acting as a time limit for both families to forego their current identities. This, indeed, is met with the rejection of several family members, especially those with attachment to their current lifestyle. One of the main characters Bree, a rather fashionable teenager who worries about her social life after moving to Camp Moon Shadow, expresses a prediction of how her life will transform:

"Everything will change. I'll talk to trees for company, and Claire will become best friends with Lara Rudy, who's been trying to worm her way between us since the fourth grade. My hair will lose all its sheen by being subjected to harsh outdoor conditions. I'll lose my sense of style and start wearing pink with red and last season's shoes." (Mass, 2008, p. 48)

Other main characters also experience similar concerns, with siblings Ally and Kenny from the Summers family expressing their distaste for the foreign city life:

"Kenny turns to me and says, "We can't leave here, Ally. This is our home. I don't want to go to Civilization. It's scary out there."

"I know, Kenny. I don't want to go either." (Mass, 2008, p. 106)

The events building up to the day act as small catalysts toward the characters' inner transformation. The other main character, Jack, starts as a timid and reclusive teenager. However, as the eclipse gets closer, he finds himself committing acts that are inherently unfamiliar to his timid personality, such as warning his teacher Mr. Silver about their bus engine breaking down and saving a boy's life by getting an EpiPen at the right time. Being regarded as a hero by many, Jack ends up embracing his transformation as a result:

"I've screwed up many times before. I know how it feels. But right then, sitting in that Sun Garden with shadows of light all around me, I make a decision. I'm not going to screw up again. Those days are gone. This is a new place, and I can be a new person here. I have to be. People are relying on me." (Mass, 2008, pp. 103-104)

The eve of the eclipse is depicted as a life-changing experience in the novel. For the main character Ally, the eclipse symbolizes a time when she rediscovers herself as an almost different person, as she has grown significantly from the time prior to the eclipse:

“And as the shadow of the moon carries the darkness away, it takes something from me too. It leaves me lighter and freer and for the first time since I found out about our move, I truly feel like myself again.” (Mass, 2008, p. 199)

Subsequently, when Ally visits her bedroom after the eclipse, she describes it as “smaller”, as if it could not contain her anymore (Mass, 2008, p. 200). The solar eclipse made Ally realize that she was meant to see the world rather than stay in the Moon's Shadow.

In another development, the main character Bree is led on a self-acceptance journey. She discovers joy in observing astronomical objects through the telescope, claiming that her “inner geek” has been released during the time she spent together with her friends in *Moon Shadow* (Mass, 2008, p. 154). Being a character obsessed with her own physical beauty, the eclipse made her realize that she had “never seen real beauty” until the totality happened (Mass, 2008, p. 297). At the end of the book, Bree is shown to opt out of returning to the city for summer modeling classes, demonstrating a commitment to a lifestyle she had previously rejected.

In *The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez*, the myth of Tule Vieja surrounding the total eclipse signifies that the phenomenon plays prominent roles both as an event directing the course of the story and as a narrative tool influencing changes within the characters. This thematic element is also well-portrayed in *Every Soul a Star*. The solar eclipse myth in both novels amplifies the narrative's dramatic effects and enables readers to witness the characters' acceptance of themselves and their embrace of changes in their surroundings.

The transformation of these characters supports the previous studies on how people's awe during witnessing a solar eclipse can affect not only their personality but also their interrelationship with other people (Bai et al., 2017; Goldy et al., 2022; Shiota et al., 2007). It can be seen that those characters can develop themselves and strengthen their bond with others as well as assist other to develop, which is in line with Piff's research (2015).

## **B. The Possibility of Misrepresentation of Solar Eclipse Myth**

As a celestial phenomenon, the solar eclipse is encased within a rich tapestry of diverse mythological narratives spanning classic and contemporary myth. Notably, certain solar eclipse myths within *Every Soul A Star* are interwoven with scientific perspectives. Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that, despite the diverse ways solar eclipses are portrayed in the literary works mentioned above, there is a major concern regarding the possibility of cultural appropriation that may arise from misrepresenting these myths. Fully understanding the culture portrayed may assist the reader to avoid misinterpreting the story.

Tule Vieja originated from the spiritual beliefs held by the people of Costa Rica and Panama. Her name originates from the Spanish words “tule”, meaning a brimmed straw hat, and “vieja”, meaning old woman. In Costa Rican mythology, the Tule Vieja was a young girl who suffered from an unwanted pregnancy after an encounter with a lustful man, who soon abandoned her upon hearing the news. The girl then drowned the newborn and herself in a river, transforming into an entity with swollen and erect breasts that drip trails of milk followed by ants (Cartin, 1998). The girl was demonified as a punishment for her premarital relationship and the sin of murdering her offspring. She wanders the riverbanks and village streets at night to devour men and “seeds of man”, or children.

*The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez*' narrative had little meaningful discussion of Costa Rican and Panamanian beliefs and thus failed to explain Tule Vieja's original role in her society. Among her people, she is remembered as a warning against the sin of lust and carelessness. She would appear among men who lead lecherous lifestyles with her breasts uncovered, inviting them to caress her as they danced. Only after her ants anesthetize her victims can they look at her original appearance: the head of an old woman, the wings of a bat, as well as the inverted legs of a hawk's claws. Aside from being a symbol of the danger of lustfulness, her role was also to ward off children from dangerous rivers or wandering outside their homes at night. It is said that she would breastfeed any baby she finds, resulting in inexplicable disappearances of village children.

In *The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez*, the depiction of the Tule Vieja differs considerably from her *espíritu vengativo* role as produced by local authors. Cuevas' Tule Vieja, who chases eclipses to replenish her powers, is stripped away from her cultural context in the authorial process. Cuevas builds upon *The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez*' antagonist by taking into account several aspects of the original Tule Vieja, including her being comprised of several animal parts and her tendencies to kidnap her victim, to develop her reimagination. The difference, however, was explicitly stated within the text. As mentioned, Cuevas acknowledged the original Tule Vieja through Abuela's dialogue:

"Tule vieja. A witch. When I was little, my papi would tell me ghost stories, monster stories, or any kind of scary story. Mami hated it because sometimes they gave me nightmares. But I loved it. I remember Papi telling me the story of the Tule Vieja from Panama. She was a woman who had the legs of a hawk, the wings of a bat, and the face of an old witch..." (Cuevas, 2020, p. 119)

However, she painted the description over with her own Tule Vieja, as outlined in this excerpt:

"But this one is different. A tule vieja just looks like different animals. She can't turn into an animal. This one is trying to take the animal's power." (Cuevas, 2020, pp. 186-186)

Although a faithful rendition was never promised, the emphasis on the conventional Tule Vieja's role as a punisher of human lust and carelessness was traded with her portrayal as a hungry monster in pursuit of power. There is little connection between the Tule Vieja myth and the real-world solar eclipse narrative.

*Every Soul A Star* also discusses several classic myths regarding the eclipse. It features an Egyptian Muslim character whose family travels around the world to chase eclipses yet has never seen one. Bellana's family chases eclipses in order to perform *Salāh al-Kusūf*. However, the story states that she has to perform *salah* and *dhikr* for the whole day (Mass, 2008, p. 282). Even she has to visit a certain place to catch the solar eclipse. It differs from Muslim practice, which only encourages Muslims to perform *salah al-Kusuf* during solar eclipses from their area (Kasim, 2018). This myth will lead to misunderstanding of culture for children. To some extent, it will also fail the mission to embrace diversity by misrepresenting the culture. From different perspectives, catching the solar eclipse emphasises the myth of solar eclipse euphoria, urging people to go to certain places to witness the solar eclipse.

Aside from classical myth, *Every Soul A Star* contains a wealth of scientifically accurate information about solar eclipses that balances wonder with logic. *Every Soul a Star* portrayed

solar eclipses as an infrequent and thus coveted natural phenomenon, which is true to several extents. Several hyperboles that describe the eclipse in a grandiose manner are strewn throughout the book, for example, how Jack's science teacher refers to the phenomenon as "Nature's Greatest Coincidence" (Mass, 2008, p. 59), as well as how Ally describes the excitement of the eclipse-chasers traveling to Camp Moon Shadow to watch the 2017 Great American Eclipse: "They knew that a decade later, hundreds, maybe thousands of people would travel to this exact spot to be a part of something that hasn't happened in mainland America for over seventy-five years and won't happen again for a hundred more." (Mass, 2008, p. 10).

Ally's description, in particular, contains several scientifically inaccurate statements. The last total solar eclipse visible from the contiguous United States happened in 1979, which was only about 38 years prior to the 2017 total solar eclipse, not 75 as told in the narration. Furthermore, the next solar eclipse in the mainland United States will happen in less than a hundred years from 2017—in fact, the next total solar eclipse is calculated to happen in 2024, which is only 7 years after. Therefore, the myth of solar eclipse as a scarce natural phenomenon remains true, but not to the extent the novel describes. Furthermore, the novel depicts Camp Moon Shadow's two-square-mile area to be "the only patch of land in the entire country to lie smack dab in the path of the Great Eclipse when it passes overhead" (Mass, 2008, p. 10). While it is typical for a solar eclipse to follow a narrow path of totality of about 9000 miles long and 90 miles wide, the 2017 Great American Eclipse itself was totally visible from the Pacific to the Atlantic coast, passing 14 contiguous states in the U.S. Furthermore, more than 50 eclipse viewing events were arranged across 12 states.

*Every Soul A Star* also mentions several times the necessity to wear glasses during the solar eclipse, except during totality, where they are safe enough to be removed. Ally educated the campers by warning them: "As soon as I said the words "you can go blind," people rushed up to get their glasses-making materials" (Mass, 2008, p. 138). The description does not mention the impossibility of going completely blind from looking at the eclipse directly. Therefore, it might be misleading because only the central part of the eye will be injured (Abramson, 2017). Therefore, providing young readers with accurate information about eye safety during eclipses is crucial to prevent unnecessary fear or misconceptions. In brief, the solar eclipse myth is portrayed in traditional and contemporary forms. It embraces the cultural myth portraying supernatural power and is balanced with scientific perspectives. Both portrayals provide the balance for children to understand the significance of solar eclipse and serve as a medium of diversity. However, some of the narratives are not taken meticulously, resulting in the misrepresentation of some myths, for instance, the relation of tula vieja and solar eclipse, the science, and the rituals.

The Tula Vieja was an example of subject appropriation, which Young & Haley (2009) describe as the instances when artists from one culture represent aspects of another culture. While not all subject appropriation necessarily takes away anything from a culture's insiders, it often contains several degrees of misrepresentation. Misrepresentation risks losing the authenticity and cultural specificity of each original myth, which leads the reader to a false understanding of the original myths. The misrepresentation of the solar eclipse and Tula Vieja's mythology in *The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez* was driven by a rather aesthetical motive of producing a literary product suitable for children, which in itself is more sympathetic than malicious. Cuevas' conscious choice, as outlined in her interview, came from a place of needing to shape the Tula Vieja with a more age-appropriate mold for her audience, therefore removing aspects of nudity and her relationship with the sin of lustfulness. However, Young & Haley

(2009) emphasize that even positive depictions of a minority culture might cause harm, and the negative impact on a culture due to appropriation might be more nuanced than commonly thought. Literary works such as *The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez* can, as Young and Haley phrased, prevent the audience from “seeing members of the culture as the individuals that they are” (2009, p. 274). This is further exacerbated by the fact that the author was not purely an outsider to the Panama and Costa Rican cultures, as she had experienced living in those two countries, with her distortion and abandonment of the Tule Vieja’s root narrative matter remains a conscious choice. Meanwhile, *Every Soul a Star* is packed with scientifically accurate information that helps children learn and connect with nature. Still, several historical and scientific misrepresentations of eclipses can be found within the pages, some of which could be attributed to how it was released prior to the event that it discusses. Eggerton (1996) mentioned that the careful selection of books containing scientific concepts is crucial for children’s precise understanding of events and concepts. This is particularly important considering that children often rely on books, rather than firsthand experience, to learn about their world. The media that children consume has the potential to foster misconceptions about scientific concepts, as they tend to retain both accurate and inaccurate information offered to them (Abell, 2008).

## CONCLUSION

It is worth noting that myth is significant to the role of children’s literature for children as the target readers and thus explains the surge of literature that employs myth as a theme, including the two novels analyzed in the research. In *The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez*, the author appointed the classical myth of Tule Vieja as the plot catalyst. Loosely influenced by the myth originating in Costa Rica and Panama, the novel portrays Tule Vieja as a creature devoted to pursuing power, chasing total eclipses to achieve it. *Every Soul A Star*, on the other hand, denotes the contemporary myth of euphoria in welcoming the scarce phenomenon of total solar eclipse. Both novels portray solar eclipse as an agent of change, referring to the internal and physical transformation of the characters. However, it is also important to pay attention to the portrayal of the myth in the literature because while aiming for entertainment, myth also holds a significant role in constructing children’s foundation in understanding the world, assisting them in making sense of the complex and abstract concepts within, as well as a source for early education and a media to ignite sparks of inspirations in children as target readers. Therefore, even a little misrepresentation of myth could come a long way as it possibly yields false conceptions, threatens children’s cross-cultural understanding, and interrupts their learning process in figuring out the truth in the world.

In *The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez*, the role and representation of Tule Vieja solely as a power-thirsty monster is different from that of the original myth, signifying the subtraction of its cultural authenticity and specificity. As in *Every Soul A Star*, while the depiction of the total solar eclipse phenomenon is almost accurate, there are several myths—consisting of scientific concepts—which are not portrayed accurately and are highly likely to harm children’s understanding of the truth behind science presented within due to their limited ability to distinguish correct and incorrect information. The misleading messages may also trigger unnecessary fear in children, threatening to overthrow the function of the literature as what is supposed to be educational media in introducing children to the love of science. These misrepresentations, thus, are arguably caused by the shift in the function of children’s literature itself. It appears that nowadays, numerous works of literature aimed at children are

commodified–adjusted to the commercial needs of publishers and/or authors–and no longer serve their initial function as pure literature or pure education for children (Bold, 2022; Brown, 2020; Taxel, 2002) However, while it seems that this has become a widely-known phenomenon in the world of myths’ representation in children’s literature, there is little to no empirical evidence on how it affects children, especially how they react to the misinformation presented, which is undoubtedly a new area worth researching.

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