

Introduction

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Myths still talk to us. This second volume on the Eternal Return emphasizes the relevance of myths in our world. As a matter of fact, its main objective is to show how these emotional and structural narratives have been adapted to modern times in different artistic disciplines, such as literature, cinema or graphic novels. Quite far, at first glance, from the more cosmological and transcendental reading of Nietzsche's conception presented in the influential *Gay Science* (1882) but fully developed in the four parts of the often misquoted *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-1891), the contemporary translations presented here mainly connect with the indigenous American and Asian notion of the circularity of time. Breaking the linear projection that characterizes the western tradition of the passing of time, the new versions may change scenarios or characters but the same conflicts remain and return again and again, functioning—at least at a symbolic level—as a key element to deal with diverse moral, economic and political contexts.

The circular structure insists on the cyclical reappearance of issues that have

obsessed human beings at different times and in distant spaces. As an answer to modern positivism and its optimistic consequences, Nietzschean thought constitutes a critique that can still be applied to our contemporary realities, recreating some of the classical myths and their approach to the complexities of human existence. The cyclic way in which myths are rendered offers the opportunity to observe and especially to compare various versions. This, in turn, allows establishing parallelisms and differences among texts in a seductive example of spatio-temporal intertextuality, proving how attractive creating artistic works with mythical references is, as it can offer new perspectives to traditional questions, sometimes to confirm and some others to revise or reject their original meaning.

This second thematic issue on the reinterpretation of myths consists of nine contributions from vast fields of the academic world, which deal with how these mythical constructions work in our days. A common trend can be discerned as regards the authors of these articles, all of whom make boundaries disappear in order to

explore the way in which a text can be read differently depending on a new context or a particular point of view. For instance, the female perception of reality has been explicitly established as an important focus on women's role in our world in order to re-elaborate the patriarchal paradigm, as it was also clearly the case in the first volume on *The Eternal Return of Myth* in this same journal. Moving away from their conventional limitation to observe male characters' activity, women have broken their historically imposed silence and, as a result, in an attempt to balance the unequal treatment between male and female spheres, some myths, or various particular characters, have been interpreted in a different way in more contemporary texts.

As a good example, Greek mythology is full of women who need to be given a voice. The female perspective has gone a long way in its evolution and establishment in myth and history from the Greek peninsula in the last few thousand years. Through the writings of Eugenia Fakinou and Antri Polydorou, two of the most relevant contemporary female authors of modern-day Greece whose works' value can be appreciated in comparison to myths pertaining to Ancient Greek culture, Stefanie Savva and Eirini Apanomeritaki will explore in their article "The Arretos Kore: Mythical Voices in Contemporary Greek Fiction" this slow but sure growth. From the writers' personal retellings of the myths of Persephone and Cassandra in their *The Seven Garment* (1983) and *The Generations of Silence* (2008), the contributors explain how these two formerly silent female characters are finally given a voice and a place in history, exchanging their image of "mad witches", to that of powerful and wise

women. All the while questioning the "unspeakability" of women in modern history.

Following the discourse of the female voice, Mayron Cantillo elucidates how, in her article "Clytemnestra Returns: A Philosophical Inquiry into Her Moral Identity in Colm Tóibín's *House of Names* (2017)", through the figure of Clytemnestra's revived character in Irish novelist Colm Tóibín's *House of Names*, myth becomes philosophical and transgressive. In this article, Cantillo follows Clytemnestra's psychological evolution from the stereotyped malleable Greek woman to a much more robust philosophical voice which climaxes into an incredibly methodological act of revenge that brings her no satisfaction, making her become a voice that ties myth with contemporary ideas of metaphysics, existentialism and rationalism. Therefore, we are given a look into the mind of the new Queen of Argos: "a vengeful rationalist, a circumspect rebel, and a prophet for our liquid modernity."

The issue of silenced women in myth and history has also expanded from human women in literature to mythological creatures of the female gender and/or sex. The figure of the siren, from ancient times to modern literature and pop culture, has been constantly silenced and manipulated visually for easier consumption from males for thousands of years without paying attention to their challenging nature. In her article, "Siren's Song: Getting out of the Bird Suit", Carmen Botamino presents how "The images of the mermaid and siren have undergone a gradual process of change" in their double powerful role of seduction and creation. The author will guide the reader through several texts such as the epic poem

of the *Odyssey* all the way to the fairy tale of the *Little Mermaid* to dismantle all the stereotypes these mythological figures have been imposed, and helping us find their voices.

Still connected to the classical world, even if no longer seen just as a representation of a violently male-centric society, but analyzing how some of its works have been a constant inspiration in art and literature since their publication over two thousand years ago, Jeremy Patterson in his article, “The Metamorphoses of Magic: *The Tempest* and *A Tempest* read from the perspective of the *Metamorphoses*”, specifically deals with Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and offers one of the best examples of a text whose influence is undeniably relevant. William Shakespeare is one of many who have taken inspiration from the Latin writer’s work. In fact, more than a few times. As the English churchman and author Francis Meres said, “the witty soul of Ovid lives in mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare.” Patterson follows a close reading of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* through the eyes with which Ovid wrote his magnificent narrative poem, followed by a radical revision of Aimé Césaire’s *A Tempest* (2002) where the supernatural is rejected, proving the similarity between the three in relation to the thematic element of magic, and how it manifests itself in human affairs. And here again, within the reading from this point of view, Patterson finds similitude in the way each author uses his art to confront the sociopolitical problems of his own time and age.

Patterson’s contribution shows once again that the classical world, as stated before, has been a great source of inspiration. Pietra Palazzolo’s article, “Desire, Pursuit

and Loss: The Making of *Athena*”, also pinpoints the recurrence of myths in contemporary literature, more specifically in John Banville’s *oeuvre* and the last novel, *Athena*, from the trilogy he published between 1989 and 1995. Through the Blumenbergian lens based on the idea of “myth’s versatility” to allow variation as an addition to the main core, the author reads the text within the context of the late twentieth-century writing and its epistemological crisis. Scenes from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* representing the cycle of desire, pursuit, and loss are included in a missing painting titled “The Birth of Athena” that is used by Banville to work on the indeterminacy of the creative process. According to Palazzolo, it is Banville’s reading of Keats and Stevens’s poetry on the metamorphoses of Apollo that reinforces the idea that myths can be seen as multiple signifiers—both in fictionalized and metafictionalized terms. The concept of return as an inherent aspect of myth’s structure in Cassirer’s subversive idea of its appliance to the eternally flowing here and now serves to criticize epistemological discourses in literature and to defend the loss of authorial control in fiction produced at the end of the twentieth century.

Taking a modernist turn on myth, Josh Torabi addresses the literary uses of music and myth, and the relation between the two, in Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus* (1947). In his article, “Music, Myth and Modernity: From Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* to Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus*”, the roles of music and myth are treated in their intrinsic relationship. In a comprehensive exercise of close reading, Adrian Leverkühn’s compositions related to the ‘Faustian’ episodes are juxtaposed to the

central Apollo/Dionysus dichotomy and the concept of Dionysian music in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). Taking into account the German tradition, where music functions as the foundation of all art (including literature) and focusing more specifically on its even bigger weight in modernist examples, the article illustrates Mann's attempts to test the linguistic and artistic limits of the novel. The universal value of myths offers modernist authors the possibility of transcending historical conventions; moreover, myths in which music plays a central role were revitalized and popularized by those artists who used them as symbols of a holistic form of expression uncovering the individual's thirst for knowledge.

With a little bit of a quirky twist on the modern side of myth, Vanessa Del Prete's article, "Modern Heroes: Classical Mythology and Classical Values in the Contemporary Acquis, the Case of Captain America", attempts to find patterns and lines of comparison between modern hero Captain America and his mythological predecessors. Fictional superhero Captain America has been a patriotic role model for American children and troops for several decades, inspiring young and old and giving them courage to survive the toughest of times. As we have seen in previous works, it is not uncommon for contemporary characters to be heavily influenced by ancient myths and legendary creatures. Thus, Del Prete puts her best foot forward to locate common archetypes of heroes pertaining to classical mythology in the history and idiosyncrasy of American hero Steve Rogers who reflects the identity, morality and the collective unconscious of his society.

Moving on to the 21st century, Jesper Skytte Sodemann in his article, "American

Gods and Where to Find Them: Modern Myth and Material Experience", explores the concept of modern myth and its ties with the world as we know it today. Based on various different readings of English author Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* (2004), in which the reader is taken on a journey with protagonists Shadow and Mr Wednesday, the novel allows an unsettling look into America's soul through a number of incredibly diverse characters, who embody gods from several different cultures throughout history, in contrast with readings of the novel which try to prove the contrary. Skytte, working on the choice between intensity and authenticity as the main conflict of the novel and its mythic content, finds in the novel "an expression of post-industrial mythopoeisis". This look into mythmaking goes way further than psychological and/or spiritual experience, delving instead into what he calls a "topological and material" one, proving how the modern world's relationship with myth is as material and biological as it is existential and psychological.

Finally, the influence of myths also dominates the last contribution of this volume, Salvador Oropesa's "Twenty-First Century Noir: From Stieg Larsson's *Millenium Trilogy* to Dolores Redondo's *Batzán Trilogy* and Eva García Sáenz de Urturi's *White City Trilogy*. The Arrival of Constitutional Heroes". In this case, Basque and Celtic myths are analyzed in the twenty-first century Spanish noir following Barthes' idea of the recycling of old myths and the mythification processes that make visible the ideology of any cultural practice. Following the example of Stieg Larsson's novels, contemporary evils such as terrorism or violent misogynistic acts are considered

in the Basque trilogies as rooted in a pre-Christian world where the fear of the Other can lead to self-destroying processes that should be controlled by the development of constitutional rights and defeated by forces of the state under direct supervision from the judicial system. As in most other cases, this example shows that the epistemological value of ancient myths can still be used to interpret our reality in postmodern capitalist societies.

The present volume, which concludes with Inés Portillo's review of *Myth and Emotions*, a collective work on mythical-emotional phenomena edited by José Manuel Losada and Antonella Lipscomb in 2017, can be summarized, regardless of the individual content of each article, as an attractive exploration of some mythic re-enactments revised through the Nietzschean idea of the Eternal Return. With examples taken from European and American cultural traditions, this fresh perspective widens the possibilities of re-interpreting various texts from the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries in dialogue with mythical material.

From a myth criticism point of view, the different contributions will hopefully increase the readers' appreciation of the everlasting power of myths. No matter how much structural mythemes are altered, transformed or omitted, each of these articles confirms the circular projection of myths, and how it is precisely their apparent fragility what proves their ability to overcome time and space limitations. Without myths, social and moral principles and ideologies could be much more easily accepted without any questioning, so it seems only logical as well as necessary to continue working on the mythological universal legacy. Far from disappearing, myths result into new forms of reinterpreting the different dimensions of human reality, as well as their interpenetration. The reason for this is to be sought in the way myths—as rebellious narratives—can still produce further possibilities to understand contemporary themes and concerns, and keep their main quality of making us getting to know ourselves. After all, they talk about us and will continue to do so.