

Presentation of the Contributions

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This third volume on the Eternal Return of Myth addresses the persistence of myths in contemporary visual and audiovisual cultures. The visual becomes a key element in the reflection included in the articles that comprise this volume, not only in the context of myth, but also in our culture in a broad sense. Certainly, the visual transforms mythical paradigms as well as establishes new ways of transmitting information and affecting the readers/spectators, and therefore it is pertinent to ask how new artistic and cultural contexts influence myth and its capacity to provide explanations of our current world. This issue contains nine contributions from different areas of study and considers four artistic disciplines in which the visual emerges in a particular manner: cinema, comic books and graphic novels, photography and videogames. The rich dialogue among the different topics provides a variety of tools to approach the endurance of myth in contemporary (audio)visual culture as well as it allows the readers to grasp mythical phenomena as a multifaceted occurrence.

Despite the diversity of scholarly backgrounds and research interests, we can identify common trends among the contributions. As current times invite us, the rise of female characters inspires compelling studies on the mythical structures and references that contributed to their creation and, thus, the first articles coincide in finding in female characters—both protagonists and those that are being observed—a suggestive object of study. On the other hand, heroes are also a common interest in many of the contributions, whose diverse approaches raise relevant questions from a myth criticism point of view.

In their article “Myths of femininity in American Gods,” Luis Alberto Pérez Amezcua and Ethel Junco examine the potentiality of myths in a hypermodern product, i.e. the TV series *American Gods* (2017-present). The return of the myth in this context is explained in the light of the uprooting of a migrant society, which also crystallizes in the coincidence in space and time of different mythical traditions. In this article, Pérez Amezcua and Junco explain how myth is incorporated in the TV show as a central element that influences the characters and the plot, instead of a mere reference that can bring a mythical echo to the viewer. In this sense, they explore two groups of mythical figures: Ostara, from the Germanic tradition, and the Zoryas, from the Slavic tradition. The myths inserted in the show by Neil Gaiman and Bryan Fuller are associated with current identity issues, such as those formed after the crisis of rampant capitalism in recent times, or the long-standing concern with feminine identity, which is addressed from a cosmological tradition.

Another contemporary heroine who has gained in popularity on the big screen in the last years is Katniss, the protagonist of *The Hunger Games* film series (2012-2015). In her contribution, “Virginity, wilderness and bows: Diana’s return in contemporary cinema,”

Laura Pereira looks at the creation of the hero and its exploitation by the market and advertising industry. Her contribution also explores the resonances between the symbolism of a mythical figure and the elements that identify a popular person as an object of economic exploitation. Particularly, Pereira analyses spectacular actions performed by the protagonist, unveiling her ethos, while these outstanding actions are potentially repeated in order to affect intradiegetic and extradiegetic spectators. Contemporary culture has changed our consideration of women and their references in history. Heroines from the past are now retrieved by current fiction, but also classical categories, such as the hero, can be appropriated and reshaped in favor of female identity. In her article, "*Game of Thrones: Ser Brienne of Tarth and a Feminine Reinterpretation of Classical Heroes*," Rosa María Stoops goes through the most classical definition of the hero, pinpointing the attributes and moments in the narrative where Ser Brienne reveals herself as a true classical hero, in opposition to other characters in the trilogy and in the show. As the author points out, even though the characteristics of the hero were not associated with either men or women in the first place, male heroes' narratives ended up absorbing them; however, nowadays, heroine accounts such as Ser Brienne's reclaim these elements, as a reflection of women's social advancement.

The growing importance of feminine characters in contemporary audiovisual culture correlates with the number of scholarly works devoted to this topic, even though it is not a completely new interest. Literature has served as a departing point for many of these characters, which continue their journey in film adaptations. The mere change of medium means a shift of our approach to the character and to myth. Following Gilles Deleuze's understanding of cinema, Indrani Mukherjee approaches the Malinche myth as nomad subject, in Rosi Braidotti's terms. In her article, "'Seeing' the Malinche Myth as Nomad Subject in Laura Esquivel's *Como agua para chocolate*," post-human seeing entails a political act that changes the viewers, also making them nomadic as they circulate the moving images that constitute cinema. In addition to suggesting a new engagement with filmic representation, the text analyses the Mexican figure of the Malinche as myth, departing from María Lugones's decolonial feminism.

The gaze is the motif that guides the work of Juan González-Etxeberria, appropriately associated with the myth of Orpheus. In his article, "The Forbidden Gaze: Orphic Visuality and Loss in Atom Egoyan's *Exotica*," he explores the intertextual linkages between Atom Egoyan's *Exotica* (1994), the ancient myth, and Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), creating a relationship between ancient Greece and post-modern Canada. More importantly, González-Etxeberria reveals the crucial role of form in the work of both filmmakers. He identifies two main elements shared by Hitchcock and Egoyan: the relation between sexuality and death in their films, and the exploration of the gaze, an essential component of the myth of Orpheus. According to González, Egoyan's film stands out for his intention to connect with the irrational side through images, which are displayed in a particular form conceived to achieve catharsis and access the psychological component attached to the myth.

Beyond film, the influence of the visual can be noted in other artforms, such as comics and graphic novels, as María Porras's contribution shows. In her article, "Monstrous Heroes, Epic Monsters: A Contemporary Graphic Adaptation of Beowulf," she elaborates a comprehensive reflection on the figure of the hero in the graphic novel *Beowulf* (2013, 2018), by Santiago García and David Rubín. Porras guides the reader through the course of translations and cultural adaptations of the legendary story of *Beowulf*, which actually

started the Spanish graphic novel. Then, she addresses innovations that the comics artform add to the literary Beowulf: firstly, comics facilitate the contact between the medieval hero and the postmodern shape of the legend, that is, the superhero, an entity very much linked to mythology, according to authors such as Umberto Eco or creators such as Stan Lee. Porras argues that the visuality given by the comics enables other significant encounters that might change the very meaning of the legendary character, such as the graphic encounter between the hero and the monster, which facilitates an ambiguous reading that questions the ideas of margin/center or self/others.

Moving on to a different art, Pablo Medina offers a suggestive explanation of the shift in the narrative of the *God of War* videogame saga, firstly constructed as a series of situations that seek action, and then focused on the story of Kratos and his evolution as a character. In his article, "Kratos, mythical father," Medina examines the changes that take place throughout the saga, from the inclusion of Greek mythology as a backdrop for Kratos' action to the integration of Norse mythology in the character's evolution and his relationship with his son.

Taking a turn on the visual, Katarzyna Jerzak's article focuses on photography. In her contribution, "Mutilated Images in Contemporary Martial Society: Between Mythology and Memory," images are treated in relation to their role in our culture, and in other cultures that preceded ours. Jerzak deals with harsh images, images that sometimes are difficult to contemplate. Mythological references, she argues, became a part of the quotidian and of the modern culture, while they still connect us to the time of the heroes. The article explores a collection of photographs that were taken at major moments, when "images [were] imperative," as Jerzak suggests.

Finally, forming the coda to this issue, Xiana Sotelo provides her critical review of *Myth and the Audiovisual Creation*, a book closely bound with this volume, both for its object of study and for the coincidence of some contributors. In her article-review "Testing the Resilience of the Myth in the Audiovisual," Sotelo analyses in depth all the chapters of the book, edited by José Manuel Losada and Antonella Lipscomb. Sotelo sharply identifies and evaluates the most relevant topics in the volume, which encompass diverse myth-critical interests and different artforms.

The present volume addresses a broad range of topics, but inevitably it also poses several questions. These contributions note different narratives and images where myth emerges and establishes diverse relationships with contemporary spectators. Images are an essential part of our everyday life to the extent that we do not always notice them, but the visual, as these articles show, alters myth even when it continues to represent old narratives.