

cinema” (Majumdar: 2021, 161). This argument is significant in the last half of the twentieth century, when the angry young man has already been popularised in England and elsewhere, with the advent of Kitchen Sink drama and the iconic character of Jimmy Porter. What follows in this chapter is a detailed textual analysis of *Calcutta 71*, why the year 1971 was chosen, how it allowed for a political voice to be raised without any propaganda, and so on. The discussion, rich in references, serves as a critical commentary on the working class of Bengal in the nineteen seventies, while simultaneously dwelling on the reception, art and techniques of the film in surreptitious detail. Padatik follows a similar road in the subsequent parts of this chapter. Majumdar attempts to understand the salient features of the angry young man of Sen, who, despite odds, fought tooth and nail to survive in a belligerent world.

Satyajit Ray’s influence on the book and the writer comes to timely fruition in the last chapter of the book, ‘The Untimely Filmmaker: Ray’s City Trilogy and Crisis of Historicism’. Before going into the three films which constitute Ray’s City Trilogy: *Pratidwandi* (The Adversary, 1970), *Seemabaddha* (Company Limited, 1971), and *Jana Aranya* (The Middleman, 1975), the chapter offers a summary of his earlier works that allows the reader to better understand the position and development of his films over time. This essentially relates films from the past with more contemporary films, an attempt that was also visible in the earlier chapters of this book. It is here that the title of the book stands out, as Ray is rightly shown as a director ahead of his time, bound by the derelictions of money, equipment, technology and mindset. The city of Calcutta becomes a character in these films, as it did in Sen’s trilogy. The contemporary scenario, with the economy taking a hit and the employment reaching an all-time low, is depicted through stark dialogues like “*Ei shohore ki tumi ar ami mile ekta chakri o pabo na?*” (In this damned city, will neither of us get a job?)<sup>1</sup>. This chapter, like Ray’s films on Calcutta, is bleak but honest in its representation of the truth about Art Cinema in India.

The book then offers an epilogue which correctly states that there has been a decline in the production of art cinema, and most producers these days are concerned with making a profit rather than supporting quality content. However, Majumdar ends with a positive note, one full of possibilities and opportunities, that would lead India to a new dawn of Art Cinema.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Translation by the author of this review.

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ARITRA BASU

*Centre for Distance and Online Education  
Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata*

A FEMINIST MYTHOLOGY. By Chiara Bottici. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. 216 pp.

First published as *Per tre miti, forse quattro* (Manni, 2016), Chiara Bottici’s *A Feminist Mythology* (translated by Sveva Scaramuzzi and Claudia Corriero, Bloomsbury Academic, 2022) is presented by the author’s *Introduction: a book of books* (pp. 1–14) as a “journey through the myths of femininity [...] *sub specie modernitatis*” (p. 22). If Danto warned against the risks of expressive reduction, inherent in the attempt to restrict philosophy to the sole genre of professional paper<sup>1</sup>,

Bottici's *A Feminist Mythology* has above all the merit of highlighting the strength of a creative narration, which has its roots in her previous philosophical research.

Bottici herself underlines the potential of storytelling in the aforementioned *Introduction* where—following the studies of Adriana Cavarero and Judith Butler on narrative identity and on the performative character of language, but also the philosophy of narration of Hanna Arendt and Walter Benjamin—she argues that to build a new female narrative identity “we must [...] pass through the patriarchal imagery” (p. 29) that has shaped the vision of women over the centuries. As pointed out Jean-Michel Rabaté in his refined *Preface: a myth and a half* (pp. XI–XX), it is no coincidence that *A Feminist Mythology* begins with the figure of Scheherazade who, according to Benjamin's studies, embodies the function of the narrator *tout-court*.

The potential of creative narration has already been shown by feminist authors such as Monique Wittig in the 1980s, whose works Bottici openly admits to have been inspired by. However, the specificity of *A Feminist Mythology*, as it has been anticipated, is that of working on the myth. From this point of view, the feminist rewriting of classical mythology carried out by Bottici continues in a creative key the work begun by Simone de Beauvoir's *Le deuxième sexe*, whose first volume's subtitle is *Les faits et les mythes*, if not in 1642 with Mademoiselle de Scudéry's *Les femmes illustres ou Les harangues héroïques*.

*A Feminist Mythology* is divided into four parts (or “libri” in the Italian version, published by Castelvechi, 2022). The first, entitled *La città degli uomini* and *Two myth and a half* in the English version, begins with an immersion in the ruins of the City of Men, which had produced the myth of Sherazade, Ariadne and Europa. In particular, the “first-person-hysteric-philosophical flux of consciousness” (p. 26)—with which the three heroines of the ancient world remember and at the same time try to subvert their classical narrative identity, to find their own voice and face modernity—alternates with a third person narrator who tells stories of ‘woomanhood’ drawn from everyday life in a realistic and impersonal way, until the voice of the sea itself appears in the last chapter before the *Epilogue*. After having accompanied the memory and the lived experience of Sherazade, Ariadne and Europa as a leitmotiv, as well as the impersonal narration, the sea makes one last female figure swim and dance, and then throws it away. The mythical world, however, is only apparently abandoned. In the second part – the most humorous – of the book, the text takes on a dialogic form, alluding to the democratic illusion that gives life to the mythologem of *The City of Women*. Contrary to Aristophanes, who represents women in power only in the framework of utopia<sup>2</sup>, Bottici reuses the same mythologem fully following the thread (of Ariadne) of his creation. The thread thus reveals itself as a crack in a world which, although overturned, is not free from the “Name of the Father” (p. 110). After an *Intermezzo*, the third book, entitled *Bestiary*, questions the given boundaries of our heteronormative order by outlining a series of transindividual metamorphosis that show the links between the human and animal worlds but also between animate and inanimate forms. The style of magic realism that animates the third book also returns in the last one, *Herbarium*, in which new metamorphoses eradicate all the remaining illusions about the possibility of considering life as a whole in which species coexist separately, without any interconnections.

The first part of *A Feminist Mythology* transfigures the analytical language used by Bottici in *A Philosophy of Political Myth* (Cambridge, 2009) in a creative key, while the subsequent ones are more aligned with her *Manifesto Anarca-Femminista* (Laterza, 2022). Nonetheless, it is difficult to count all the implicit bibliographic references that constitute the skeleton hidden in the body of the book. Moving from prose in first and third person to dialogue and poetry to represent the incessant metamorphosis of the female condition in the struggle to change the patriarchal order, Bottici's multifaceted style itself also evokes numerous literary models. Through the stylistic *varietas*—which distinguishes Italian literature at least from Dante to Leopardi, who with his *Operette Morali* was among the first creators of a modern mythology—the author echoes the ancient and modern tradition of philosophical dialogue, of lyric poetry and mythographic catalogues, as well as the linguistic experiments carried out by contemporary feminist literature.

Similarly, the mythical references brought into play within *A Feminist Mythology* are numerous, as foretold by its original Lacanian title, *Per tre miti, forse quattro*. For example, it is difficult not to think of the myth of Antigone while reading the debate among the women—all with speaking names that make them personified allegories—who refuse to obey “some abstract law” (p. 101) in the third chapter of the second book, entitled *Rehab* in the English version and *Alcoliste Anonime* in the Italian one. Again, in the first part of the book, the woman thrown out by the sea could be identified not only with Europa, but also with Venus, who has lost her mythological name since Baudelaire, having fallen from Olympus into the contemporary capitalist world<sup>3</sup>. Another myth – this explicitly mentioned – is that of Orpheus and Eurydice, which accompanies the search for oneself carried out by the female figures of the book, as well as the musical progression of the whole narration. Indeed, in the conclusion, entitled *Grand Finale*, a dance of all living beings evokes in a Spinozian key the Dionysian mysteries which were connected to the cult of Orpheus<sup>4</sup>. However, the stylistic and content indeterminacy of *A Feminist Mythology* appears not only to be the result of an epistemological departure from any claim to exhaustiveness, but also a *myse en abyme* of the labyrinthine nature of the myth itself, whose procedural nature had already been highlighted by Bottici in the wake of Blumenberg.

Anyway, considering that almost all the characters represented in the book have speaking names, it is evident how Bottici combines the classical mythical heritage with a modern mythology, forged by her passion for lexicon and etymologies, which she shares with many philosophers and especially with a founding father of mythological science like Vico. Indeed, with in such a densely mythological narration, each narrative element takes on another allegorical meaning: this is the case of Ariadne’s dress or that of the vest that the nameless woman in chapter II of the second book sews to change her own partner besides herself. Semantically connected with the lemma “veil”, the theme of the dress is particularly central within a narrative that aims to strip the classical mythological heritage of its misogynistic character. It is significant that the theme also returns—alongside the shadow of the myth of Eurydice—in the conclusion of the book, in which several vicissitudes related to a mysterious tailor denounce the modern cult of scopophilia and voyeurism.

A feminist mythology therefore has an internal orchestration structured around multiple leitmotifs, functional to recalling the main themes of the book after several chapters. As Rabaté underlines in his *Preface*, “Bottici’s work [...] takes its place in a sequence of Italian authors like Dante, Giordano Bruno, Giambattista Vico or Benedetto Croce, all of whom insist on the power of imagination and its ability to link literature and culture, politic and myth, history and humanities” (p. 15).

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> A.C. Danto, *Philosophy as/and/of Literature*, in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, Columbia University Press, New York 1986, pp. 135-161.

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. M. Farioli, *Pratiche del potere e idea di Natura: donne e schiavi dalle utopie antiche alla distopia Europa*, in A. Camerotto, F. Pontani, *Utopia (Europa)*, Milano-Udine, Mimesis, 2019, pp. 101-114

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. Sylvie Thorel-Cailleteau, *Aphrodite wagnérienne ou la leçon de classicisme*, «*Revue de littérature comparée*», 1 (2004) 309, pp. 37-54, p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> Bottici finally returns the myth of Orpheus with all its initiatory character to the feminist struggle, from which it had historically been excluded. Indeed, the preface *Black Orpheus* published by Jean-Paul Sartre in 1948 in Léopold Sédar Senghor’s *Anthology of Negritude*, and the early black activists and early critics who created and studied the philosophy of negritude did not recognize the role played in its formation by the works of early black women activists. Cfr. T. D. Sharpley-Whiting, *Femme negritude. Jane Nardal, La Dépêche africaine, and the Francophone New Negro*, «*Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society*», II (2000), n. 4, pp. 8-18.