

Myth and Woman's Mythic Erotic Voice: The Creation of a Feminine Poetic Discourse

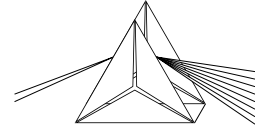
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To study the feminist poetic literary production requires approaching myth. With this theme in mind, we propose to analyze a thematic ground less explored: our Caribbean heritage as one that focuses on the entity of symbolic mythic, the individual or collective role of all the women who transformed the voice of the Greek mythical female as one to be appraised or empowered.

Myth, as a narrative of plural character, determines themes and characteristics that have been used throughout the history of literary tradition. Myth is associated with the religious act, the cosmic rite and hierophany (Schajowicz, *Mito y existencia*, 1990). This allows for a realization of an act of creation and establishes bonds with the sacred. It is also a means of knowledge and revelation because in knowing the myth, the origin is revealed and with the origin, the subject is defined as a person; knowing who he or she is and what can he or she can do (Schajowicz, *Mito y existencia*, 1990). It is for this reason that myth has been a resource that endows woman her voice and identity. The figures of Antigone, Daphne, Galatea, Circe, Callisto, Medusa, Ariadne, Andromache, Pasiphae, the Danaids and Clytaemnestra, Yemayá, Isis and Astarté, stand out, among others.

People integrated in a movement can modify certain aspects of a society or change its structure completely. It is important to notice, that in most cases, demanding the fulfillment of ideas in a society is a subversive request, because these ideas are already dead for many of those who hold economic and political power. It is for this reason that men reiterate women's obligations towards them as representatives of government, in terms of law and order. On the other hand, one cannot lose perspective that, even in their female roles, women can lean towards a revolutionary role; external factors will always exist that have the intention of changing them. One of those factors is repression from persons who symbolize positions of power.

Most of Puerto Rican female poets resort to myth in order to break centuries of silence and to communicate their vision of love. They take possession of passion as the power that destroys the norm to reconstruct it as a means to confront males, while, simultaneously, analyzing

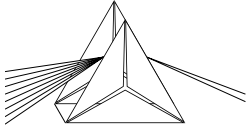


themselves. Why do they do this? Because myth provides them with models of human behavior; it grants meaning and value to their existence (Eliade, 1968). With myth, they give structure to a strong authentic and subversive feminine voice. Antigone's voice continues to be heard directly or indirectly throughout female poetry. The women poets in this paper work, consciously or unconsciously, with the cultural, historical and referential baggage of women. It is worth noting that, aside from the linear schism between theory and history, it is interesting to observe how all of them represent the profound sides of Antigone, those that should fight for love.

It is from the opposites of male/female that I am going to talk about the uses of myth as a presence in the poetic voice of women poets in Puerto Rico. Clara Lair, Amelia Ceide, and Olga Nolla are among the Puerto Rican female poets that have worked with myth as a space where women find their voice and can speak. They are voices that reveal the conflict with the masculine canon, which has defined them as inferior beings and which has silenced their voices. It is for this reason that one cannot find in either State or Church the support to break the subordinate role of women. As it is, they resort to the power of words to be heard and to rewrite myths or take elements from them that serve their formation as identities, as individuals. With myth, the male canon is subverted and the image that is reflected the mirror enables them to see each another. In their works, we find poems about the triumph of love. It does not matter if this love was recently initiated or recovered, if it was a short or an extensive experience, what is important is the enjoyment of the sensual and sexual experience, the kisses and caresses.

One must clarify, however, that, more important than the praise of eroticism, it is the power of that feminine voice that breaks forth through centuries of silence imposed by the male that is exalted. Eros and Thanatos are still together. She talks. She decides and acts. We do not pretend this to be a historical continuation of the problem to later outline a definition of the concept of gender, or that it is political theme, but, rather, it is the myth itself and its validity as an instrument of reinterpretation among contemporary poets (their poetic production, ideas and opinions).

Let us take a look at Clara Lair (1995-1973) and her poem *Pardo Adonis*. In this beautiful poem we find ourselves before a lyrical, white speaker who reclaims in an audacious and revealing manner, her right at having a lover. However, he is not just any man: he is a dark, swarthy man. Her passion grants her a voice and this decision violates all of the



patriarchal canons as well as those of the Catholic Church. She, a bourgeois and married woman, decides to become unfaithful to her white, bourgeois husband.

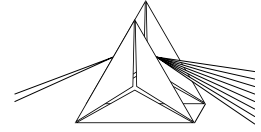
The significance of this social and cultural rupture within the white, masculine norm is more complex because the transgression is more profound. She decides, furthermore, to offer herself as a victim so her *Pardo Adonis*, takes as revenge upon her the sufferings of the Black race. The poem does not make reference to her as a silenced and passive victim. She is a joyful victim that, through her words, affirms her sensuality and exalts the vital potential of carnal desire. The heroic resides in taking the initiative without fear, in enjoying the human body and amorous passion.

Pardo Adonis

De la uva exhausta de mis cinco sentidos exprimo
en tu honor, pardo Adonis, esta gota de vino...
¡Vino de tedio tinto!
¡Hincha a solas el río seco de mi instinto!
¡Hincha y suelta mi río hacia el bosque perdido de
lo desconocido!
[...]
...Tú... que fuiste mi esclavo:
¿no palpas la carcoma de mi raza?
Tú... a quien yo quemé la piel y di mordaza:
¿no gozas en el rictus de mi alma quebrándose,
el espasmo salvaje de tu alma vengándose?
(Arras de cristal, 1979: 75-78)

Moreover, it is a verse that breaks with the traditional feminine lyric of today since it does not praise nature or one's country. Neither does it praise marriage or children. It praises the forbidden, the sexual nakedness, and the universal force of passion. It glorifies the carnal act as one of joy, where the woman decides and participates actively. The theme of her body is now announced as text for self-discovery and her writing. The body is a means of being heard; the voice is enunciated throughout it. By doing this, she usurps a male role: that of sexual control and pleasure.

Then there is the case of Olga Nolla (1938-2001) one of the main cultivators of poems on a mythical basis. She resorts to myth in order to



advocate for female emancipation, above all else, sexually. In many of her poems, she destroys the image of the woman-doll. She presents a lyrical speaker and her world, her social class. It is through the feminine perspective that the world is perceived. For example, in the title and epigraph of the poem, *Dafne en el mes de marzo*, the allusion to the classical myths that deal with love and the erotic is evident. It deals with a rich collection of allusions through which the myth leads us to the erotic to divinize man; evoke the figure of the god Cupid and invoke the erotic as a vital and joyous experience.

Dafne en el mes de marzo

Cuando florecen los bucajos quiero
Que me veas extender mis más altos brazos
Para lucir las llamas pequeñas
Flechas de sangre, dardos atrevidos
Que me brotan de la piel de mis entrañas...

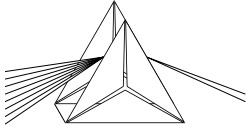
Sin una hoja y roja me estremezco
Cuando el recuerdo de tu voz me asalta.

(Nolla, *Dafne en el mes de marzo*, 1989: 11)

Reencuentro con la diosa

Para llegar a ti
me anduve desnudando por los siglos.
Me despojé de todo lo aprendido.
Las leyes de los hombres
y el orden de su ira.
Y te maldije muchas veces...
[...]
Y ahora te reencuentro
viviendo en mi espejo.
Y me visto tu túnica,
tu corona de estrellas,
los rayos de tus manos, Virgencita,
parada sobre el mundo te recuerdo.

Pero yo no pisaré la serpiente.
Me la enrosco en los brazos,
mis poderosos brazos que otorgan y desgarran.

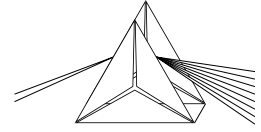


Y la serpiente sonr e
porque al fin he comprendido su secreto.
(Nolla, *Dafne en el mes de marzo*, 1989: 11)

There are also mythical motives that resort to produce a social critical poem confronting the absurd. It denounces the falsehood of the bourgeois and its wide and ecstatic vision of the feminine self, as in *La educaci n sentimental*.

La educaci n sentimental

Primero me dijeron que
deb a obedecer a mi padre y a mi madre.
Despu s me dijeron que Dios exist a
que tambi n deb a obedecerlo,
que este mundo era un tr nsito
hab a otro mundo mejor [...]
que en este mundo
Sin embargo algo anda mal.
He cumplido mis instrucciones al pie de la letra:
Soy una se ora respetable y pertenezco a grupos
que movilizan actos caritativos
Mis hijos est n aprendiendo ingl s
Doy unas fiestas que son la admiraci n y envidia
de los m s prestigiosos c rculos de la sociedad
Pero todas las noches
cuando me siento frente al espejo
para aplicarme los cosm ticos de rigor
encuentro que mi cara huye despavorida
no puedo acordarme de c mo era mi boca
[...] Yo s lo quiero que me dejen acostar
y quedarme muy quieta
y no mover m s nunca
ni un solo m sculo de cuerpo
Quedarme para siempre as ,
mirando el vac o.
Despu s de todo,
tengo derecho.
He cumplido mis instrucciones al pie de la letra.
(*El sombrero de plata*, 1990: 15-16)



Her denouncement of the sad condition of bourgeois woman extends into poems such as *Análisis y contranálisis*. The first part, *Análisis*, exposes bourgeois woman as appraised only in a sexual point of view; it is for this reason that she lives immersed in a false world that destroys her or turns her into an unsatisfied woman. The second part, *Contranálisis*, launches a challenge as a result of the analysis of feminine reality. It is erected as a challenging voice that mocks and questions the system of values that appropriates women.

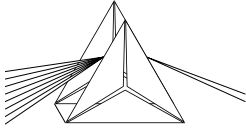
Análisis y Contranálisis

Análisis

En el curso de la historia moderna
la mujer burguesa a menudo articula
su reclamo a la libertad
en términos exclusivamente sexuales
Causa inmediata:
se la valora como un objeto sexual
Resultado:
Primera alternativa -
una serie en cadena de adulterios
(reales o imaginados)
la atrapa en la prisión perpetua
del engaño
y corroe,
con la lenta inclemencia del salitre,
la fibra moral que otorga fundamento
a su búsqueda auténtica. [...]

Contranálisis

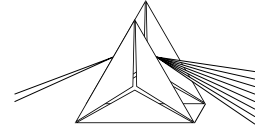
Lanzo un reto contra todo aquel
que diga:
cualquier tiempo pasado fue mejor.
Opino todo lo contrario
Vivimos en el mejor de los tiempos
Por lo menos,
ser mujer en nuestra época
a pesar de las evidentes desventajas
socioeconómicas,
es lo más estupendo que me podía



haber sucedido.
Estoy absolutamente encantada
de ser una mujer.
Si me tratan como un objeto sexual
ya no me enfado,
diría que me divierte
Me río a carcajadas de los donjuanes
crédulos
y me parecen,
a fin de cuentas,
bastante simpáticos [...]
En verdad en verdad os digo:
ser mujer en nuestra época
es lo más estupendo que me podía
haber sucedido.
(Nolla, *El ojo de la tormenta*, 1976: 31-32)

Dulce hombre prohibido (1989-1991) develops an amorous theme, above all else, sexually. This collection can be seen with the synthesis of the use of mythical structure in Nolla, since myth serves as the framework of all its poetic conception. The allusion to that structure begins with the illustrated cover of the book, thus the torsos – which the readers understand are Adam and Eve – going back to the archetypal structure or mythical creation in Genesis.

On the other hand, eroticism serves as a mediator because the work of art is an open refusal of the subordinate feminine role. Woman validates her experience through her passion. Her voice, no longer silenced, is heard. It directly declares the feminine enjoyment of women's sensuality and sexuality as happiness in a couple's relationship. Here the female is recreated in her corporal knowledge. Sexuality ceases to be a punishment, turning into a joyous praise of a voice that defines itself without guilt. It is praise to erotic joy, to nudity, where the woman is pleased to recognize herself as a sexual object and to make the male equal to herself. Her sexuality is presented as a sacred act because it produces life. Woman is a giver of life. It is clear that an act of life cannot be a sin. Because of this, woman acquires divine power and creates; with her power she organizes the natural world:



Credo olganollano

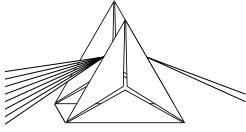
Yo creo en los milagros de la Virgen
y creo la estrellas son dioses que se inmolan
para crear la vida en otras superficies
y creo en Jesús, en Zeus y en Yemayá,
y en Isis y Astarté
y en Ogún destructor de corazones malévolos.
Y creo en la Justicia y en su reino
que va a llegar, heroica ella montada
sobre un tigre blanco
y sin la venda sobre los ojos.
No habrá más pobres en el mundo.
No habrá opresores ni oprimidos.
Creo en todas y en cada una
de las imágenes poéticas que inventa
la necesidad humana:
esa diosa todopoderosa. [...]
(Nolla, *Dulce hombre prohibido*, 1994: 34)

In this poem, Nolla grants primogeniture and superiority to the Virgin; in this manner, she questions the patriarch-god because the Mother-God antecedes the Father-God. She resorts to Yemayá (Caribbean goddess taken from the Yoruba tradition (associated with maternity), Isis (mother goddess of the Egyptians) and Astarté (goddess attached to Venus, who in turn is associated with beauty, love and passion). They are all powerful figures and they acknowledge this when she kneels before them. In this way, the equation woman/earth/divinity/fecundity is determined. With Nolla, the lyrical voice postulates woman's ability as creator and to have creativity. Woman is the fertility of life's pleasures, of passion.

The reverence to the Mother-Goddess is reiterated in the poem, *Los nombres de la diosa*, where the lyrical voice collects all of the goddesses as ONE. That voice is privileged and is revealed as universal:

Los nombres de la diosa

Conocí eras extensa
en la escarpada sierra de Cataluña:
estabas rodeada de velas encendidas,
de muchedumbres de devotos.



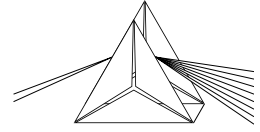
Tu rostro era negro; tu traje era de oro
y eras perfecta.
Eras hermosa y poderosa como la tierra.
Un recuerdo antiguo me habitaba,
como si comprendiera la imagen de tu fuerza
por la herencia del cuerpo.
Ahora te reconozco en los altares
de África y Europa;
[...] Sé que tu cuerpo es uno con mi cuerpo.
Sé que he vivido mucho;
me conozco vestida de serpientes;
me recuerdo guerrera de los griegos;
me recuerdo gritando de dolor
al parir el mundo.
El tiempo tiene tanto mundo dentro
y es tan sólo un hilo de la vida.
Por eso
con tu nombre construyo mi alegría,
por eso.
(Nolla, *Dulce hombre prohibido*, 1994: 61)

The validity of the goddess' power is manifested in the recurrent strengthening of woman's sexuality. This is seen in poems such as *A Dios gracias impura* and *Me encanta ser un objeto sexual*, among others:

Me encanta ser objeto sexual
Debo decir sin miedo ni tapujos,
en lo alto de un monte y a viva voz,
que tengo un cuerpo de mujer que quiere
ser objeto sexual...
(*Dulce hombre prohibido*, 1994: 13-14)

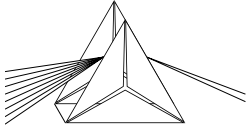
In her last book of poems there is *El caballero del yip colorado* (2001), where she continues working with themes that have ruled her poetic universe, above all else, love as passion, as a carnal experience, as joy and pleasure of the senses.

Pigmalión
Me gusta ese cuerpo que tus piernas sostienen
y el olor de tus labios cuando besan mis labios.



Sólo dos cosas quiero callar, pensar;
tu olor y esa fuerza
de tus espaldas.
Así te toco con el pensamiento
y te acaricio largo, largamente entregada
a la pasión que nace del centro de mi vientre
y fluye, y se despeña.
Mis manos te recorren creando tu belleza
y se detienen en tu rostro;
moldean tus labios, tu barbilla, el arco
de la nariz,
moldean los ojos donde brillan soles
de otros universos.
Cuando me hablas hablo.
Bajas del pedestal y me tomas en brazos.
Bailas un vals conmigo.
Salimos al balcón a ver el mar,
las nubes
adelgazan hasta no ser,
el cielo
cae en mi corazón
y se hunde,
llega al fondo.
El manantial de mi pasión lo absorbe,
exprime, chupa.
Bailamos nuevamente.
Me penetras de pie, contra una puerta.
Volvemos a bailar, quieres besarme
los senos mientras giramos y no sé
y no puedo y no quiero
detenerte, impedir
que el deseo nos arrastre.
(*El caballero del yip colorado*, 2000: 67-68)

Olga Nolla resorts to myth because of its possibilities to transcend the immediate reality of women, because myth allows them to access the irrational, the dreams. Through myth, the lyrical voice reveals its most occult and profound dimension: the true self. In synthesis, her poetry is seen as a means of denouncing all insults against women because of their

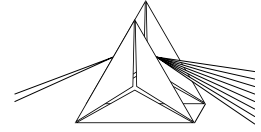


acquisition of knowledge through erotic experience. It reveals an intimate world that differs from the external worlds presented in her previous poetry. Love is seen as joyous, as pleasure in the presence of their loved one, sensual, even in the pain experienced before the separation.

Woman deconstructs her false identity in order to construct her true self. She leaves her position in the margin to gain access to life within her own inner self. Man and his “phallogentrism” become the other. Thus, the roles are inverted. The poems are a unit. In all of them, the voice of mythical women can be heard as a symbol of liberty, revolution and anarchy. For example, Antigone is an example of desacralization of social values as defined by man and takes into her conscience the self and feminine duty. It is passion, conscience, strength and anger.

The female poets of the Puerto Rican Poetic Parnassus re-elaborate myths in order to sacralize sexuality and exalt the feminine body as a source of self-pleasure and fertility. The reconstruction of myth allows the reforming of the self through a process of profound consciousness. Antigone’s passion is the constant element, thus it gives voice to silence and a body for the reflection in the mirror.

It is important to note Antigone’s problematic status inside and out of classical perimeters. This is also noticed in her international context, above all because of the changes that have occurred on a world-wide base during the last centuries. Antigone continues to be purified and transformed into the written lines of hundreds of women that stem from their “incompleteness” in order to explore their experiences, their needed freedom and their inner hunger for dignity toward every female and male. The individual woman is elevated above an androgyny with universal connotations. In this way, myth provides a space to search for the fundamental truth that leads to self knowledge, to the understanding of the self. Woman defies herself, discovers and proclaims her passion and enjoys her sexuality without Christian-patriarchal guilt. The love which has been used to cover the feminine body, to submit women, is the emotion through which she wakes up her passion and listens to her voice. She stops being an object to become the subject of passion and love’s pleasure. Thus, she elevates herself above the man-god. She abandons the silence which has been forced on her by the male and sees her nudity. She discovers her voice, speaks, defines herself, and rewrites herself as being woman.



In synthesis, myth provides a rich space in power and strength. It allows the feminine lyrical voice to recover the absence, the visibility and the written word. It concedes power and acts as an organizing element of her works.

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