

BOOK REVIEW

**JOSÉ MANUEL LOSADA
GOYA AND ANTONELLA
LIPSCOMB, EDS. *MITO E
INTERDISCIPLINARIEDAD.
LOS MITOS ANTIGUOS,
MEDIEVALES Y MODERNOS
EN LA LITERATURA Y LAS
ARTES CONTEMPORÁNEAS.*
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The book under review is a valuable contribution to the field of myth criticism. Thus far, most of the academic efforts to trace and elucidate the mythological legacies of the world's cultures have been oriented in one single direction and within one art form (more prominently, literature and the visual arts). Noticing this general limitation and intending to overcome it, the lecturers and editors José Manuel Losada Goya and Antonella Lipscomb have compiled a large collection of studies that go beyond the confines of a single mode of artistic creation to explore the mythical spaces of convergence between different art forms and to demonstrate how versatile, dynamic, and protean myths can be –not just semantically, but also in terms of their modal or formal flexibility.

The compilation comprises 36 articles distributed in five parts according to their disciplinary affiliations. Although due mention will be made of each and every paper, the present review will focus primarily on the particular contributions to the sphere of English studies in order to offer a detailed assessment of any article that examines cultural, literary or artistic products that may interest those researchers exploring the interface between myth criticism and Anglophone traditions.

The first part, devoted to painting and sculpture, includes 10 articles and covers a wide range of archetypal analyses and reflections. The myths of Icarus and Eve, constantly present in Portuguese plastic artist José de Guimarães' imagery, are

construed as dovetailing Gilbert Durand's notion of katabasis in connection with a redemptive power attributed to women. The Greek figure of the Cyclops comes to dialogue with Odilon Redon's paintings and drawings, ripe with all manners of circular and ocular shapes that may symbolise indeterminacy, self-absorption or alienation. The Icarus myth reappears, this time interpreted as a self-portrait of the artist who seeks the spiritual, the absolute or the essential according to three different works: Serge Lifar's ballet *Icare*, Matisse's plate *Icare*, and Mário de Sá-Carneiro's poems in *Dispersão*. The legends of the Varsovian mermaid are presented as a particular case of reworkings not of previous literary material, but of sculptural representations. Graeco-Roman mythology is proven to constitute a generous source of inspiration for many Spanish avant-guard artists –writers, architects and sculptors– between 1900 and 1936. La Malinche engages in a comparative conversation with the Indian figure of Draupadi that reveals their close similarities: of unfortunate origins, betrayers, colonial accomplices, and revisited symbols of imperial violence. The myth of the giant Adamastor appears as a rationalised personification of the fears and dangers that Portuguese sailors had to face in their quest for a safe route to India – according to Graça Moura's poetical essay *Adamastor, Nomen gigantis* (2000) and E. S. Tagino's historical novel *Adamastor* (2008). Complementing all these critical accounts are two theoretical reflections: one underlies the materiality of myth in modern plastic works that prefer basic, earthy and traditional materials to avant-guard techno-creative devices, and the other proposes a general interpretation of contemporary mythological reformulations as exercises of formal experimentation and of aesthetic investigation into the very nature of art –as observed in different works by Ionesco, Kafka, Dalí or Nakamura.

Gema Navarro Goig's article merits special attention: it studies the controversies, metaphors and meanings of the mythical figure of the labyrinth in contemporary art, with particular focus on three artists of renown in the United Kingdom and America. The first is Michael Ayrton (1921–1975), an English novelist, critic, painter, designer and sculptor who, according to Navarro Goig, has such a deep interest in the Greek myth of the Minotaur, that he seems to identify with the figure of Daedalus –the craftsman– and, unsurprisingly, his major creation is the Labyrinth of Arkville (1989), an architectonic sculpture located in New York. The American artist Robert Morris (1931) is also fixated on the use of labyrinthine forms as spaces of artistic experimentation and symbols of social claustrophobia and despair. Among his works are the Philadelphia Labyrinth (1974), the Labyrinth at the Fattoria di Celle (1982) and the Labyrinth of Pontevedra (1999). The third artist that Navarro Goig mentions is Richard Long (1945), a well-known exponent of Land Art whose main production consists of temporary outdoor artworks inspired by primitive cultures, created with natural materials, and immortalised in photographs. The Connemara Labyrinth (1972) exemplifies both the symbiosis of his art with nature and his predilection for materials like pebbles, as well as his clear connection with the primeval figure of the labyrinth.

The second part contains 10 articles and offers a large number of case studies in which myths migrate to both the big and small screen (cinema and television). The myth of the Corinthian maid, as reformulated in Luis Guerin's audiovisual version (2011), is transformed into an etiological document proclaiming the birth not just of painting, but of drawing, image, and even cinema. Medea becomes a site of reflection on the problems of modern ultra-rationality, comes to represent a new form of femininity in Christa Wolf's eponymous novel, and articulates social and political pessimism in the films by Pier Paolo Pasolini and Lars von Trier and in Heiner Müller's play. The Orpheus myth intermeshes with Brazilian culture, art and music through the Franco-Italian film *Orfeu negro* (1959), which captures the beauty and diversity of Rio de Janeiro's landscapes and monuments in spite of turning a blind eye to the social problems around the favelas. Jupiter, Cassandra, Neptune, Paris, Hercules, Archimedes, Hamlet, Gulliver and many other mythical and historical characters are briefly studied as protagonists of Italian *Caroselli* (1957–1977), old TV shows which lasted over two minutes and included two parts: an audiovisual adaptation of ancient and modern stories and a commercial advertisement. The Spanish myth of Carmen is discussed as a plain example of reductionism, devaluation and stereotypicality in its different versions proposed by Carlos Maura, Claude Simon and Jean Genet.

Half of the articles included in the second part of the book deserve specific references for their direct relevance to the area of English studies. Esther Bautista Naranjo underscores the presence and importance of myths in silent films –such as Paul Wegener's trilogy based on Golem, F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* or Fred Niblo's *The Mark of Zorro*– and concentrates on associating the three essential mythemes underlying the story of Don Quixote –outdated heroism, bookish reverie, and visionary idealism– with three silent films, respectively: Charles Chaplin's *The Vagabond* (1916), Buster Keaton's *Sherlock Jr.* (1924), and Michel Hazanavicius's *The Artist* (2011).

In Leon Burnett's paper, the *Puer Aeternus* archetype and, more especially, its associated hand-to-lip gesture are identified as a symbol of childhood in ancient representations of Horus, as a metaphor for silence and mystery in the Graeco-Roman world, and as a persistent sign of indeterminacy –of the future and the inexpressible– in Kubrick's portrayal of the Star Child (1968).

Jorge Fernández Gonzalo carries out a general historical survey of the zombie myth and observes three stages in its evolution. The first, the Haitian phase, presents the figure of the soulless corpse as a representation of human alienation and materialises in W. B. Seabrook's novel *The Magic Island* (1929), Victor Halperin's film *White Zombie* (1932) and Jacques Tourneur's *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943). In the second stage, the so-called Romerian phase, it is the filmmaker George Romero who revisits the zombie myth in *The Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and transforms it into the token of an expansive society that fears the mass and the other. The third

stage, or the pharmaco-spectacular phase, begins with the release of *Resident Evil* (1996), develops largely in the sector of video-games, centres around the zombie epitomising the dark face of science and progress, and opens spaces of political subversion for those individuals (or bodies) who exist outside the (hetero)normative system.

Carmen Pérez González lists and explains a large plethora of optical and cognitive resources that commercial horror films employ to endow popular myths with spectacular effects aimed at instilling awe and confusion in the viewer. Among such tricks are phantasmagorical illusions (Erle C. Kenton's *House of Dracula*), stop motion techniques (George Waggner's *The Wolf Man*), claymation forms (Henry Selick's *The Nightmare before Christmas*), miniature effects (the city of Venice in Stephen Norrington's *The League of the Extraordinary Gentlemen*), metamorphic figures (Nymphadora or the Boggart in the Harry Potter film series) or special cosmetic technologies (The Underworld tetralogy or John Johnston's *The Wolfman*). All these resources, Pérez González argues, have the power to enhance plot-lines, create double meanings, and exploit the spectacular qualities of popular myths.

Metka Zupancic's paper combines literary and film studies in an attempt to draw a comparison between Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* and its recent film adaptation. The result is a thorough analysis that reveals the devaluation that the novel's mythical symbols and connotations undergo in their transposition to the big screen, where Western expectations of exoticism, romance, and traditional Orientalism are all fulfilled.

Reserved for music, opera and theatre, the third part of the book comprises 7 articles and looks into interesting and diverse points such as: the dynamism and evolution of the Ariadne myth in twentieth-century opera; the mythical origins of Italian folk dances collectively known as Tarantella; the characterisation of Aphrodite as a goddess, wife and prostitute in George Brassens's songs; the classical presences in Brazilian Zé Ramalho's musical production; the dialogue between the West and the East through common mythemes (such as the four elements, the fallen hero and the forbidden lover), and the appropriation of the Euripidean myth of the Trojan Women in a theatrical exercise of art and political engagement proposed by Spanish director Mario Gas.

In the fourth part, there are just three papers and three different myths under scrutiny. The figures of a deeply nostalgic Ulysses and a purely romantic Helen make their appearances in Italian *fotonovelas*, adapted from Mario Camerini's *Ulysses* (1954) and Robert Wise's *Helen of Troy* (1956). The myth of Narcissus is explored in association with digital self-portraits that aim to interrogate, discover and reflect one's individual identity. Particular emphasis may be placed on Ester Zanón's case study, since it thoroughly analyses English writer Neil Gaiman's comic *The Sandman* as a contemporary appropriation of a nineteenth-century German legend, as a product of

mythological reinvention, and also as an example of the aesthetic and thematic complexity that comics can reach.

Composed of 6 articles, the fifth and last part focuses on human sciences and politics, establishing links between modernist art and ethnographic accounts of primitive mythologies, shedding light on the psychoanalytical values of Greek tragedy, exposing the ancient and modern myths related to ill bodies (AIDS patients and victims, in particular), and offering three more papers of likely interest to the researcher in English studies. Helena González Vaquerizo assesses the discoveries of British archaeologist Arthur Evans, regards him as the inventor of the myth of Crete, and centres her attention on his influence on Nikos Kazantzakis' literary projects of tracing the roots of Greek identity and ultimately, of European identity. For his part, Benedikts Kalnacs turns to the Shakespearean myth of Caliban, defines it as the second term of the dialectic between the West and the Rest (between the self and the other), and evaluates its subversive potential in George Lamming's essay *A Monster, A Child, A Slave* (1960), Aimé Césaire's *Une Tempête* (1969) and Roberto Fernández Retamar's political pamphlet *Calibán: apuntes sobre la cultura de nuestra América* (1971). The third article, written by Keith Scott, is an in-depth reflection on the political power of myth: based upon an intimate connection between the mythological and the martial, it puts Scott Atran's study *Talking to the Enemy* in dialogue with Naif Al-Mutawa's comic *The 99* to come to the conclusion that the most effective weapon against terrorism may be to provide Muslim children and teenagers with alternative heroes that replace their fundamentalist paradigms.

The book ends with a section of illustrations that enable the reader to fully grasp the analyses of paintings, statues, film scenes, and photographs cited by many authors. With this useful appendix, alongside all the above-referenced articles, the attributes that the book here reviewed deserves are quite a few: originality, diversity and depth. It offers uncommon –yet legitimate– points of confluence between different art forms. In its pages numerous cultural and artistic genres –including hybrid forms– find ample room. Each of its studies reads with ease, clarity and undeniable curiosity. It is, in short, an excellent book, as well as a useful one for any specialist interested in the study of myth in Anglophone literatures and cultures.

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