

Analytical Study of the Status of Myth in the Creation of Literary and Artistic Works

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Doi: 10.7575/aiac.all.v.7n.1p.208

Received: 06/10/2015

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.all.v.7n.1p.208>

Accepted: 15/12/2015

Abstract

The prevalent question raised in literary theories has been the quiddity of literature. However, the question of “what is literature?” is a philosophical issue. On the other hand, the relationship between myth and literature has always been raised by most scholars and many have considered literature a subtype of myths. In this paper, while pointing transiently to the concepts and definitions of myth from the perspective of the great thinkers, with a different view, the role of myth in creation of artistic works is discussed. In this review, the critic attempts to interpret the literary work - or some sources in the text - to its prototype or archetype with its deep structure. With the help of this method, tracing the old or new mythology, distorted or worn, it is understood how they have passed over the whole cultural field and have found their specific formation.

Keywords: Literature, Myth, Creation, Imagination, Démythologisation, Remythification, Gilbert Durand

1. Introduction

The concept of creating a work of art, most of the time is oscillating between two opposite interpretations. According to some scholars, the ability to create a work, is first of all the product of an artist's talent and intelligence, in the materialization of her mental images and reshaping and substance in order to grant the manifestation of a work of art. In fact, as Plato points out, creativity is associated with a kind of delirium and uncontrollable inspiration force; the force which originates from specific ingenuity and represents a unique natural order, which allows the real world to look the other way. Contrarily, according to the other group who looks more classical into the issue, creating a literary work, among other things, depends on the will and volition and cumbersome work of the artist, in order to be able to vindicate and complete the specific programs that have already been prepared. It is believed that some of the processes of artistic creation follow these two kinds of processes, because artistic activity is deeply multifaceted, and cannot be accommodated in model-specific frameworks. However, on the other side, we should not deceive ourselves into this duality and separation which, on the one hand occurs between the spontaneous inspirations and somehow is the creator's want. The creating imagination that is expressed in the language of literature, painting and music, allows us to understand the other aspect of the formation of works, which have found their origin in the heart of myths, because understanding the mythic imagination can help us to understand that at the heart of many of these creations lays a format of life and a cache of hidden secrets, which already organizes even the unsaid things and grows in the mind of the artist and transmits the ability to express. In this way, myth appears as a symbolic structure and especially as a motivating and guiding factor for the work of art.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that not every imaginational narration is some kind of myth, and a narration only becomes a myth when it possesses symbolic value. In other words, its meaning should be far greater than it appears. Mythical narratives have two main features. The first feature is their close relationship with reality. Although these stories are fictional and have scientifically deniable properties and characteristics, there are always real aspects and a strong bridge connects them to the realities of life. The second feature of these stories is sustainability. In other words, one narration is converted to myth when it can pass from one period to another, and it incurs some changes in every period, which enriches it without distorting its structure.

2. Myth

Now it is better to signify some definitions of myth to make this article more tangible:

1. Myth (Mythe) in French has been adopted from the Greek word “Muthos”, which means speech and event. At first, myth is a sacred story that expresses a truth. The myth states the origin of the human and his place in the world. Understanding the origin of myths is due to theology, studying pedigree of gods as well as cosmology, or the study of the world history events (Djavadi, 2004).

2. Maybe in the beginning, myth was a verbal story (which still remains the same in many parts of the world) and gradually by publishing it in books, has remained unchanged and has experienced a variety of changes more or less in some works. What is important is that a myth tells a story.

3. This story portrays the tale of the unusual and magical elements, which intellectually look completely absurd. These elements, called myth-theme by ethnologists, are the events that can encompass the atmosphere of the story and characters –which are usually humane, divine, and heavenly, in the form of animals and plants or merger of all of them– and the meaning of each symbol, must be measured in its symbolic value context. If we assume the myth, its super human characteristics and human in the form of the sides of a triangle, myth as an independent side, in addition to being one of the complementary factors of this geometric shape, due to its breadth of imagination and the ability to interpret, looks like the dominant side. Consequently, in emersion of myth, there are both human and superhuman principles, which in addition to its impact on life, human understandings and his social interactions are effective in his artistic and aesthetic creativity (Grimal, 1988).

4. This story involves both the speaker and listener (i.e. the writer and the reader of the story). It is a belief with religious roots. Throughout history, every belief can lose its flavor. Nevertheless, As soon as in some ways it transforms into a movie or a book, or manifests as a poetry or music, it will have much stronger dimensions. Freud says with certainty in this regard, I know that is not true, however ... (Vierne, 1993).

5. A mythical story is not a pure fiction or a false illusion. A myth seeks to find an answer to a question (in its philosophical concept), the question that logic cannot solve. The experts call this question Mythologème. Another point is that the number of these questions is not very large and most of them are about life and death, human relationships, man's status in the universe or in the society (individual entirety and demos) and the question that “where have human beings come from and where will they go”. In this regard, there are other themes, but these are the foremost important (Vierne, 1993).

6. It should also be noted that these questions cannot reasonably be answered convincingly (The logic that is based on science, and much of the philosophical thinking is based on it).

In literary criticism, criticism of “structuralism” (its reference is ambiguous) is the summit. Today, science is considering this issue subtly, and allocates a great place to imagination. An imagination that is not basically dependent upon logic and could be manifested in some arrays of the literary rhetoric, like oxymoron (companionship of two contradictory phrases), for instance:

“Darkness lights everywhere” by Budler, and “Black sun” by Nerval, which depict the opposite poles in a common image, to the extent that it does not talk about the gray colour, but on the one hand had expresses a very dark black colour, and on the other hand, a very bright light (Vierne, 1993).

It is important that confluence of opposites, which is not only expressed in the Alchemy, but in the third period of imagination as well, according to the theory introduced by Gilbert Durand, all of these points recall Breton Andre's theory, which is written in his second statement:

“It is believed that in a part of the understanding of human, words such as life and death, reality and fantasy, past and future, top and bottom are not in conflict with each other anymore” (Breton, 1924, p. 92).

7. Mircea Eliade, in Volume IV of *Mythologie* (naked human) states:

Myths do not teach anything other than the order of the universe, nature and the origin of man and his destiny, we cannot expect the myth's metaphysical actions, and myths will not support miserable ideologies. In contrast, the myths we learn teach us much about community and societies where they come from. Myths help us to understand their internal motives and performance and clarify causes of beliefs, customs, and traditions, which were incomprehensible and indiscoverable at the outset. Finally, myths allow us to identify performance methods of human thoughts, which have been implemented over the centuries (Djavadi, 2004).

2.1 *Myth and creativity*

Myths before being used as the fabric of artistic works, use awareness and conscience that belongs to intellectual and cultural climate and are effective in any kind of creative work. Thus, it should be asked that is this due to the fact that the myth and the creation, both have the same originality, and this matter that art creation “poïétique” and myth production belong to the same psychological level (Bilen, 1989). In fact, both for the author and the Visual Arts artist, mythic images are the product of a special creativity and dynamism, because the myths open a window to the creation for the artist. Because -as the science of anthropology and hermeneutics has also mentioned- a myth always matches the discourse, which talks about the origin of life (Eliade, 1969). Mythical history has always shown us the emergence of a law, a universe, a series of events, and a chain of events.

The human being, since his creation, and throughout history, to respond to the events that were occurring in his surroundings and to understand what was unknown and fascinating to him, sought for the properties of gods, absolutes, eternities, Timelessness and placelessness. Therefore, we can interpret that myth and legend are the creatures of the human being's beliefs, and his creative thinking. Thus, the myths and mythical communities fall inside the area of human imagination or his possible world. A world which is very convenient for artistic creativity and its creative areas are beyond the boundaries of reality, time, and space (Assadolahi, 2004).

Hence, the myth involves an imagination that is more or less “transient” in order to create any form of creation. Instead

of lying the artist in confusion and in a situation that he has no clue on how to start his book, or what to write, and stands in a perplexing condition, the myth will rush to help him and will illustrate the initial action that creates the context of the story. The first text, which may already be expressed or demonstrated. In fact, the creation will not be achieved unless it is leaned on the story of the first creation. The myth is a cause-cognitive issue. Every myth explains the story of the origin of the universe (Wunenburger, 2005).

In all cultures, the study and search for the origin of the universe and the story of the first creation has led to studies of cosmology, which features the origin of creation to the creative power of supernatural objects (either to God or the gods).

“Creation”, the first part of the Bible, is narrated in the form of an adventure and a story, which the reader can consider in the real or virtual meaning of the word, or as the transmission of an old-fashioned belief.

“In the beginning, Elohim (God in the Hebrew Elohim) created the heavens and the earth. The earth was barren. Elohim said to the light to be, and there was light ...”

Here creation of the universe refers to the initial periods of time. The name Elohim is the name of the supernatural God of all human beings, the origin of the earth and time (day and night), seasons, plants, animals, and ultimately humans (Djavadi, 2004).

When we look at other stories and narratives about the origins of the universe, we can observe a semblance with the story that was mentioned above, which in turn can be discussed and pondered. It should also be said that the myths do not just deal with stories about origin of the creation, but they are events and adventures that interpret the events of the aftermath of the creation of the universe, which are always related to the preliminary periods and speak about the “existentiatiy” of humankind.

Apart from mythical awareness and understanding, mythical stories and narratives other than just being able to revive a kind of static and passive, unchanging and iterative mythology, include an inherent generation, which is one of the primary matrices of art. To have a better understanding of this self-generation (self- poïétique), the myth, before being referred to as a literary degree, it is best to refer to its oral nature, because it shows its plasticity. As studies on humanities considering mythology have shown, a mythical narrative regardless of its richness, complexity and being the base of meaning, if it has not transferred period to period, cannot be regarded as a living myth. Thus, the territory of myth is essentially applicable and hermeneutic, meaning that it develops this territory by means of using the intellectual and social practices such as quoting it, listening to it and getting and absorbing (Wunenburger, 2005). From this perspective, first of all, the myth is an anonymous and always current story. Its origin is a forgotten tradition, which addresses every recipient, and its acceptance depends not on the author nor to the identity of its first narrator, who is usually unknown. It is important that the story flows, and can be repeated, and in this way, it will be meaningful for those who transfer it. Therefore, mythical narration does not rely on private matters or those liabilities relating to the creation and transmission. A mythical story is basically impersonal and anonymous, and like an anecdote without an author, is being written in the third person format, and will be expressed again for another group, which are only the transferors of the myth in this theme.

Therefore, the first owner of a myth is an accident that passes the big chain of a social group, and thus, generates a story that is not about any peculiar person, but involves many concepts. In this regard, Jung puts it further in his analytical psychology, inferring that an artist like other people, is a human with his own ideas, habits, and his own special daily life. However, when he starts creating, he has no identity, and none of his individual characteristics and features accedes into work. Because the artist plays only the role of a mediator in the transmission and reflection of primitive and eternal symbols and images of previous generations. Ignoring the creativity and personality of the artist in the process of creating works of art is not only limited to Jung's analytical psychology. Many of the prevalent currents and influential figures in contemporary criticism and philosophy such as New Criticism, Heidegger and Existentialism, have also paid special attention to this matter.

In this regard, Philip Slyer, the famous mythologist, expresses six great features of a myth, as it appears on the outside of literature, in this way:

1. A myth is a story, a fundamental and constructive narration, and returns to the early times.
2. This narration or story, is anonymous and collective and is associated with mass belief.
3. A myth has a social and religious mission and teaches social principles to the human. A myth also teaches behavioral, moral, and social patterns.
4. A myth is a reality, as mythologists show that the communities that a myth is still alive among them differ from those communities in which anecdotes and stories are considered fantasy and imaginational.
5. A myth as a narrative of story and events, involves the heroes that possess power and fundamental realities. A myth has a distinguishing feature that Loy Stroos emphasizes, and a myth represents a set of contradictions such as ups and downs, insides and outsides etc. (Djavadi, 2004).

A myth, undoubtedly, is a reservoir of potential opus, not an immortal memory, which always has to be repeated. A myth is a coherent whole, however, it is subjected to change, but it sets up and maintains its position. Some essential elements are required to create a myth. Without these elements, the structure of the myth would not exist. A myth is a coherent and dynamic set, which based on its specific needs and internal factors, is subject to changes. Consequently,

according to Aristotle, a new work of art cannot change the inherited myths; however, artists should show their creativity, and this dynamism lies on the principle of imitation (i.e. Mimesis). A myth collects countless small creations for its life, in order to be able to survive thanks to its continuous innovations. Mythical creativity is more dependent on its common (generic) symbolic structure than the frequency of substitution of the story- like a fertile and an infertile myth (Wunenburger, 2005). A myth is a series of stories that calls for unveiling and manifestation, and these two factors both belong to their receptor to perform this job both in the present and the future in the best form possible. Lying in a mythical fantasy is like inheriting something in which repetitions and changes are intricately interwoven. A myth whether it is about ancient mythology (primary myth) or about modern mythology, for those who recreate it, is an alive adventure. It activates again in every referral and feeds the literary fantasy.

2.2 *Myth, Demythologization, and Remythification*

Hitherto we found that a myth is an alive source and a never-ending fountain of contents and themes for the creation of works of art. However, most of the times the process of “recreating” is not limited only to resuming and repeating of a story, but on the contrary, implies a dialectical change, which even involves the process of Demythologization. While mythology shows the modern and objective formation of the story, a myth, in itself, is mostly representative of the semantic matrix and symbolic core, which makes it possible to produce stories about a certain structure. Thus, from a branch (phylum) of myth - special and known myth (Oedipus myth, Tristan etc.)- transude various mythological themes and a multitude of branching stories and extremely diverse narrations (Durand, 1996), as a living myth is constantly evolving, because it is more a driving narrator (schème récitatif) and a stereotypical archetype -than being a fabricated story or anecdote- in which different versions of a story can be situated. According to Pierre Brunel, the story of Columba by Mrymh is one version of the Electra myth; also, Daniel Madlra believes that Jehre by Faust follows some characters such as Louis Lambr or Rafael de Balzac Vlantn, hero of Shagreen leather book (Huet-Brichard, 2001).

An artist discovers a full set of creatures and events in the core of the past myths, which can be resumed or reapplied. A myth grants potential ideas to the creative mind (logos spermatikos). The myth is not just an example, and does not act as a gun trigger, but it offers a global structure that can be used to produce a variety of works. Hence, myths are as generative grammar of story and the prospect for creative thinking, and should connect and collect this imagination in the form of a specific language. (Guirand & Schmidt, 1996).

Nonetheless, the paradox of creation is that a myth will only be creative when it has been demythologized, as long as the primitive stories are centered on faith (e.g. Religious faith), a myth will not be dynamic. Since it is inseparable from identity, it acts like blinds and shutters by repetition. In this regard, the mere act of testimonial and uttering religious faith is against the creative action, because by committing to the content of myth, it will be the ultimate purpose, and there will be no room for creativity. Thus, religious art is impersonal and is basically the guardian of the sacred founding. The creative imagination of the artist will be effectual only when the mythical space becomes a game space, shows all its potentials, and comes out of sanctity (Wunenburger, 2005, p. 71).

For example, Tulchyn, author, poet, and scholar of English texts, in his famous story “The Lord of the rings”, has used many myths. In this regard, in the first place, he has demythologized myths by removing myths out of their tissues and then by using scattered mythical structures, brings them together and creates new myths. We can also mention “Der Ring des Nibelungen” by Richard Wagner, which is inspired by Germanic myths. Various performances of operas often have benefited from several concepts and different symbolic aspects of myths, which Wagner has used and has focused on one of these aspects or concepts and has shown them.

Hence, story-writing can be considered as a type of activity in which a myth egresses from its primitive holiness and the work becomes an open work. Victor Hugo, in the introduction of the first series of “the myth of centuries” (1859), summarizes the purpose and direction of his work in this way:

In this volume, the mythical aspect is precedent and has affected the poems by giving them its own colour and scent. The torch of human tradition has been transmitted, hand to hand, like runners (Quasi cursors) among these poems. This torch, which its flame is a reality, endows unity and homogeneity to the work of art.

On the other hand, writing is bilateral, like any other work of art. On one hand, it suspends infinitely the repetition of the myth, and then in a peculiar formation, imports to the text through symbols. Writing, on the other hand, distorts myth by entering it into the text, and this deformation tries to reveal what is hidden in the main discourse. As the reference myth disintegrates and forfeits its original formation, to be displaced by personal possession and recreation, we behold the creation of a story. Here again, we mention Wagner and Wagner’s opera, Parsifal, as an example. He made this work of art based on the book “Wolfram von Eschenbach” (13th century) and Curtin du Trojan (12th century). However, he has presented a personal interpretation, changed the details of the stories, merged and dissolved some characters, and presented notions of time and space, which are fully distinct than those of the medieval. Moreover, the psychology of his personalities has not been mentioned in the main texts. In this way, he has created a sacred drama, which is immersed in a mixture of influences and ideas, and has linked revised Christianity with the basic concepts of Buddhism and the influence of the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (Kinderman & Syer, 2005).

Hence, we must ask ourselves what is the fate of myth in the written civilization, and if the entrance to the scope of writing necessitates copying the speech, how copying a myth often becomes an opportunity to rewrite. A process which, in turn, will become a strategy for continuation and even revival of a myth. In summary, whether changing from speech to writing and encountering logos is an opportunity for emergence of a new shape of mythical poïétique, which is alongside with the self-motivated creativity of speech, understanding the relationship between oral and written myth is

inseparable from emergence of different literary genres, especially in the west. In fact, the literary heritage is a place for dialogue and transformation of the religious heritage of the past.

It should be reminded, what we consider today as the “modern novel” and has a destroying and autistic role, in fact, uses the mythical foundation, abundantly, to build the story. For example, Alan Gray uses the Oedipus story to write the novel “Eraser tool” and utilizes myth to portray the novel “the labyrinth”. We should also mention that the myth Tzeh is abundantly evident through the story “use of time” by Michel Butor. In any case, even if the intention of the author is a protestation to the primary common movement between myth listeners and readers of the novel, this is not only a testament to the power of myth, but in this rejection, the symbols of stability of myth are clearly visible. However, we should not be satisfied with myths that have been extracted from the heart of Greek and Roman cultures, even if the culture has penetrated into the eastern or western cultures (Vierne, 1993, p. 45).

Similarly, can we not assume the novel as a distortion of an oral myth? Undoubtedly, the emergence of the literary form of novel represents the triumph of individual subjectivity and fictional fantasy, in the era of the world’s “frustration”. Nevertheless, even if the novel is a different form of narration, throughout history and in all of its forms, this type of literary has reiterated similar stories from myths and has divided and transferred the culture. Therefore, the literary quotation, other than being limited to the Démythisation, has helped to the positive epiphany of some themes of myth, and has perpetuated them.

3. Gilbert Durand's method

It seems that myth has an infinitely variable enigmatic form. When we assume that it has been destroyed, it revives again and its flexibility reduces the intensity of differences and changes. Myth is not a single meaning and eternal structure, which we have maintained with fear and unsteady, but it is a stereotypical archetype that helps imagination to recreate, revive, and make new stories. Nothing better than changes of myths reflects their vitality. Change should be considered in two senses of the word, the internal changes of a myth, and changes of mythical references in the history of culture. On the other hand, this change of myths, not only involves literary and artistic myths, but also involves social and political myths, because all myths throughout history often respond to each other and are interconnected (Wunenburger, 2005).

A myth cannot be considered as a fixed and principal narration. It cannot be defined as a primary text, which thereafter has created different shapes and derivative versions. A myth since its appearance has exhibited different shapes and variability of its components. These shapes do not disarrange the “original narration”, which is confined in its unique essence, but they enrich the myth further and endue it in the form of a “mythical narration” (Walter, 2005, p. 65).

The methodology of Gilbert Durand’s literary criticism is based on reevaluation of the epistemology of myth. In this way, Gilbert Durand restores the ideal version of the Prometheus myth, according to the original mythology-themed, which have fixed quality and quantity and relate to the events, situations and environments - great nature, subtle disobedience, punishment, and the father of mankind, freedom, and immortality. However, in the second phase we can examine their historical fluctuations through several families of myths, which all lead to a rationalist, humanist, progressive, and science-believer ideology. But then again, during all of these reconstructions, the structure of myth, in some situations, has witnessed the distortion of myth themes. In this way, Gilbert Durand noticed the phenomenon of distortion and weariness of myth, which led to its decline in the culture. Consequently, with the help of such an approach, following the footsteps of ancient or modern, common or heretical, and distorted or worn mythology, we can understand how they have passed the past cultural scope, and how systematically, constellations or coherent clusters have been formed through their social or artistic declaration. In this way, we can recognize obvious and hidden myths in a peculiar period of time. The period of life and dominance of these myths can be estimated around three generations. Moreover, on the macro scale (Macro-history) and in the long-term, we can discover the periodic return of a group of myths, which are constantly the common interpreter of social experience (Wunenburger, 2005, p. 80).

Thus, Gilbert Durand observes that in Christian Europe, there is a true atlas of cultural geography, which based on a fixed number of poles, contains different typical myths of a certain time. For example, Celtic socio-cultural climate - that leads myths to “natural images” or even real images - can be compared with Germanic climate - which leads myths to “internalization”. Therefore, in all of these images, there is a dynamism for plurality, and this will result in a strong presence of myth in a specific culture.

At the end of these different routes, we realize that a myth in its heart has a creative figure, which is shapeable in itself, and this creativity, somehow contradictory, is based upon a kind of demythologization. Demythologization here refers to transferring the myth imprecisely and undermining acceptance behaviors, and is an advocate in the tortuous movements of story, which opens room for subjectivity. This results in repossessing the mentality, shape, concept, form, and scope of meaning. However, this creativity is expressed only partially, and part of it remains hidden; so in this way, it makes remythification feasible within the dynamic, directional, and polarized structures, which lead mythopoïétique culturally (Wunenburger, 2005, p. 81).

4. Conclusion

At this point, it should be determined that the approach of a myth, via humanities theories and especially literary criticism, whether or not participates in this transformational. This approach probably will change myth in an unprecedented way, and deeper than any past analogy processing, will give it objectivity, and will cause unforeseen epistemological obstacles, which deludes us from the anthropological perspective, about homo sermonis, but because of history’s deception, maybe knowledge of myths or mythology, is the reason for birth of new myths and mythologies-

which are the transformational form of the old mythology- because the humanities logos, unlike any expectation, have realized its limitations again, and have reopened a space for myth. (Wunenburger, 2005, p. 82).

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