Women Poets and Myth in the 20th and 21st Centuries

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On Sappho's Website

Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

Myths are founding narratives usually associated with the dawn of cultures. They are ways of interpreting phenomena that the ancients had no explanation for, and their existence is based on shared experiences and knowledge. Within the genre we call myth it is often found that a supernatural being or force intervenes in human events. The belief in myths is maintained in cultures when there is support for those beliefs from accompanying rituals. Myths exist as a dimension of the human, whose presence is ontological, existential, and ethical, opening onto possible worlds. They invite the reader or viewer to interpret, to construct and negotiate a certain semiosis, and they take as one of their crucial features "the manifest elsewhereness of meaning" (Wallace and Hirsch 2011, 6).

In Plato's *Republic*, the mythmaker *par excellence* is the poet. In his response to Socrates's harsh warning, "We must begin, then, it seems, by a censorship over our storymakers, and what they do well we must pass and what not, reject" (1969, II, 377b–377c), in books II and X, Plato argues that poets are imitators of reality and thus are far from the truth. Poets also corrupt the youth and incite the passions instead of rational thinking and civic virtue. Poetry appeals to the emotions and due to its unruly and unpredictable consequences upon human behaviour should be discarded from the ideal society, and poets should go into exile and do their work outside the city gates.

This is exactly where the discourse we call myth is situated—precariously on the fringes of the polis, a type of discourse always concerned with collective rather than with individual communication.

As Eleazar Meletinsky has argued, "classical philosophy began with a rational re-evaluation of mythological materials and … dealt with the problem of the relation between knowledge and mythic narration" (1998, 3). His locating of myth at the beginning of philosophy exemplifies the mythic problematic in terms of a binary opposition between knowledge and narration, or logos and mythos. As mentioned, this is what informs Plato's condemnation of the poets in *The Republic*. Nevertheless, such a binary exposes philosophy to its origins and, in a parallel movement, its margins—the intrinsic literariness of myth produces problems that require the birth of a rational system that confronts any "poetic" hold on the real.

In this sense, myth is not a simple literary device but rather a mode of thinking in its own right whose presence in everyday life informs a particular social construction of reality (Lévy-Bruhl 1922; 1927). But myth also refers to the narrative structure of speech. It lies between some sort of middle zone between *poesis* and *logos* where they partially overlap.

Claude Lévi-Strauss's important work on kinship, myth, totemism, and culture contributed crucially to the structuralist moment, a time when anthropology and the study of "primitive" societies also led to a growing interest in myth in a comparative perspective. Lévi-Strauss argued that "myth is language: to be known, myth has to be told; it is part of human speech" (1963, 209). However, despite sharing properties with language, myth is also something different. Borrowing the distinction between "langue" and "parole" from Saussure, Lévi-Strauss posits the existence of a third element which will combine the synchronic and diachronic referents already present in language. In his view, "a myth always refers to events alleged to have taken place long ago … it explains the present and the past as well as the future," precisely because "the specific pattern described is timeless" (1963, 209). This is what gives myth both its "operational value" and its character. In Lévi-Strauss's view, this operational value of myth lies in its pattern, and the meaning of myth must reside, not in "isolated elements," but "in the way those elements are combined" (1963, 210). This exceptional amalgam of elements which grants myth its proper qualities is an unprecedented contribution to the understanding of this genre and its crucial value in society.

Prior to Lévi-Strauss's emphasis on language and myth, philosophers like Ludwig Wittgenstein had already effected the linguistic turn which will lead on to the structuralist and post-structuralist theorizations. Scholars in the Humanities and the Social Sciences have repeatedly used myth as a source of insight into their own fields, hence the reliance of Friedrich Nietzsche on both Apollo and Dionysus, Sigmund Freud on Oedipus and Narcissus, Herbert Marcuse on Narcissus and Orpheus, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno on Odysseus, Jacques Lacan on Antigone, and Maurice Blanchot on Orpheus, not to mention the attraction of Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Hélène Cixous to the myth of Medusa. Closer in time, María Zambrano, Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, Adriana Cavarero, and Tina Chanter have offered extensive readings of Antigone at the core of a feminist ethical-political imaginary.

Moving onto the domain of the feminist contribution to the critique of myth, Irigaray's work is a fundamental reference in the re-examination of the foundations of the symbolic order in Greek mythology and tragedy. Irigaray elucidates the symptoms of Western culture's pathology—the

repression of the feminine—in works by extremely influential canonical thinkers in the history of Western philosophy. She delineates this process in psychoanalysis, traces it in the history of Western ideas, and demonstrates its reification in theology. Her concepts of the maternal and the goddess are intuited as a threat to the phallocentric hegemony. Early in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray deconstructs one of the founding myths of the classical world—that of Plato's cave in Republic VII. The French philosopher expands the notion of the absent female representation in Plato's cave as the space itself (1985, 272). She concludes that the cave is a female presence and that this presence subverts man's male-centric movement out of it to become the philosopher-king and obtain knowledge. One of the ways in which Irigaray sees the cave as female is by considering it as a womblike site of preproduction. She states:

> He was held in a place that was, that meant to express, that had the sense of being like a womb. We must suppose that the womb is reproduced, reproducible and reproductive by means of projections. That is already subject to the laws of symmetry and analogy which, theoretically, would have given it the *form* of the grotto, would have transformed it into a cave. By/for representations. (1985, 279)

Irigaray attempts to escape the implications of this myth and takes these metaphoric resonances into the theory that women, and what they produce, already exist outside of phallocentric discourse. Irigaray's subversive intent re-appropriates Plato's cave, involving the cave itself as the female counterpart on which the male narrative is dependent. In her account, the French philosopher demonstrates how the cave and its female symbolic are full of potential possibilities.

In her recent book, *In the Beginning She Was* (2013), Irigaray returns to classical Greece to study tragedy, in the myth of Antigone, and the obliteration of the feminine since the dawn of time in the West. This volume is a return to archaic Greece to recover the memory of humanity and claim for Western history that the origin of knowledge is in nature, the woman, and the goddess. It was woman, not man who initiated the emergence of knowledge in the West, instilling a sense of truth to the wise. She inaugurated it, but quickly disappeared in the language forged by men, and her contribution to knowledge was never recognized. In order to dissociate itself from the maternal origin, the West founded a discourse of domination and built a social order which stayed away from life. The perception of the world was, in an opaque way, removed from the perspective of women. Since then, the Western tradition has constituted an authentic exile for humanity. In Irigaray's account:

> Man no longer listens to the Goddess, no longer exchanges with Her. He breaks the bond with Her—or her. But also with himself. He was born from her, and became starting from her. He forgets this origin of life, of his first energy: no longer singing her, no longer saying her. (2013, 49)

Recalling Ulysses and Antigone, Irigaray returns to that original moment—the era of the pre-Socratic philosophers, before thinking was cut off from the "becoming life"—in order to explore how to live together in the polis with respect for differences.

At that point, language can recover its expressive capacity as a shared medium, neither bent nor distorted. Women, art, and the natural environment should be able to return to occupy their primordial functions as rulers of life, and their indispensable role for a renovated evolution of humanity. For Irigaray it is the mythology, the world of gods and heroes, that guides us to reflect on the imbalance between the source and the origin, the patrimony of the feminine, and the establishment of the social law in which the feminine is separated and obliterated, excluded from its proper place.

Following Irigaray, we aim at recovering the primitive and transforming myth of the woman's language, and with this in mind we have combined both iconic figures—Lilith, Pandora, Penelope—and the texts of authors inscribed in the tradition of the crucial work of feminist criticism—Sappho and her followers—as well as pieces imbued with moments of human crisis—coincident with the Cold War in those of Denise Levertov or Ana Blandiana, or moments of tension in late capitalism in the poetry of Natalie Diaz or Layli Long Soldier—to reflect on the dynamics of exclusion in both ancient and recent history.

The following pages broach the phenomenon of myth in its myriad forms: as mythmaking, as tracing, as retelling, rendering a traditional story, entering the fabulous, and confronting received ideas. Involved are those characters whose appearance is necessary to such renditions—heroes and heroines, poets, storytellers, narrators, readers, and of course the gods and goddesses. Crucial questions of origins, native soil, exile and fate, and mortality and afterlife, together with the visible and the invisible, and the sensuous and the ineffable, all have a place here.

Stathis Gourgouris has suggested that "mythic thought would be seen as constitutively poietic, manifesting society's capacity to (re)imagine itself radically in terms of creating oneself as an other" (2003, 39). In this sense, *mythopoesis* can be recognized as an impulse casting a radical doubt that not only puts into play questions of experience, history, and language, but also has the ability to theorize these conditions; to question, speak, and reflect upon the world in a partial, but fundamentally open, correlation.

Sappho's Website: Myth and Women Poets

Sappho's poems and specifically the fragments that remain of her work will serve as a source of inspiration from the poet's own inexhaustible repository—Sappho's website, a great papyrus-hypertext in which all the voices of women poets will have a place, including Laura Riding Jackson, Denise Levertov, Gwendolyn McEwen, Margaret Atwood, Ana Blandiana, and Natalie Diaz. The metaphor of the text as a textile, as a fabric that is woven (and unwoven, as in the work of Penelope, and the inexhaustible weaving of the great spider mother of Louise Bourgeois[1]), joining two extremes, several points, different enclaves, will converge in varied paths and trajectories that testify to the great creative energy that poets instil in the world today.

The fascination with Sappho as a woman of legendary passion and unbridled sexuality had obscured her literary reputation by the end of the nineteenth century, when we see the proliferation of erotic images related to Sappho in a variety of contexts. In the public imagination, her life and its many interpretations had obscured her art. Sappho's fame as a woman—whether as an abandoned melancholic, a suicidal aesthete, or a lover of other women—took precedence over her standing as a creative artist. In Page duBois's authoritative view, "She is not a person, not even a character in a drama, or a fiction, but a set of texts gathered in her name." (1996, 3). Sappho's legacy and her iconic status have been of paramount importance in the history of women's writing. As Susan Gubar argues:

> Sappho represents, then, all the lost women of genius in literary history … the effort to recover Sappho illustrates how twentieth-century women poets try to solve the problem of poetic isolation and imputed inferiority. For the woman poet who experiences herself as inadequate or inadequately nurtured by a nonexistent or degraded literary matrilineage, for the lesbian poet who looks in vain for a native lesbian poetic tradition, Sappho is a very special precursor. Precisely because so many of her original Greek texts were destroyed, the modern woman poet could write "for" or "as" Sappho and thereby invent a classical inheritance of her own. (1984, 46–7)

Sappho comes to be the literary foremother of all women poets, and the founder of their matrilineal genealogical tradition. Her charismatic personality drew young women from many parts of Greece and Asia Minor to study the arts of poetry, music, and dance at her all-female school. She was the leader of the world's first sorority whose members were trained in the arts gaining autonomy and self-esteem as members of the community.

As a poet and educator, her role as an intellectual and her status as a woman who gained more independence with her profession projected a much-admired image of Sappho into the future.

This volume promises to offer both a state of the question on the studies of poetry written by women and myth today, and a revaluation of the approaches that emerged around the "revisionist mythology" in the 1970s and its validity and transformations at present.

For Alicia Ostriker, myth narratives are "sanctuaries of existing language, the treasures where our meanings for 'male' and 'female' are themselves preserved" (1986, 211). Therefore, revising myths opens the way to redefining the meaning of "male," "female," or, more generally, "human," and therefore changing the way humans relate to each other.

This change, in as much as it challenges established power structures, becomes a political weapon for those in search of changes in society. Thus, feminist revisionist readings of classic myths attempt to change patriarchal perceptions of women's roles. For Ostriker, we revise classical mythology because "the faces in mythology may be our own faces which we 'must explore' to gain knowledge of myth's inner meanings and our own" (1986, 215), and, in line with Rachel Blau DuPlessis, she believes that authors such as Doris Lessing, Margaret Atwood, H. D., and Sylvia Plath aim at subverting the balance of gender power in their myth revisionism. However, this revision of imbalances goes beyond gender and into culture. In DuPlessis's words: "women poets invent revisionary myths in the attempt to forge an anticolonial mythopoesis, an attack on cultural hegemony as it is, which necessarily has included a vision of gender" (1985, 107). In the United States, myth revisionism, as a political tool, has inspired women of colour, Native, Asian, or African American, who centre on cultural rather than gender oppression. For Paula Gunn Allen, myth revisions by writers such as Leslie Marmon Silko or Carol Lee Sanchez highlight how the myths of dominated cultures inform consciousness and direct awareness within their culture as well as outside (Allen 1986), while for Gloria Anzaldúa those myths and religions are often transformed, incorporated, or even destroyed within the stories and religions of the colonizers (Anzaldúa 1987).

Opposing the anthropological notion by Lévi-Strauss, best summarized by Northrop Frye, that "myth is the central informing power that gives archetypal significance to the ritual and archetypal narrative to the oracle. Hence the myth *is* the archetype, though it might be convenient to say myth only when referring to narrative, and archetype when speaking of significance" (1951, 103–4), DuPlessis argues that:

> myths may provide a charter for certain kinds of institutional authority by excluding stories that tell the "wrong" tale from the canon; by cementing or palliating contradictions; by assimilating the narrative of conquered peoples to the myths of a conquering nation. In short, making a critical mythopoesis goes against the grain of a major function of myth: the affirmation of dominant culture. (1985, 107)

Hence, feminist revisionist mythmakers attempt to "tell the wrong tale" and ultimately extricate the archetypal patterns informing the myths.

In permanent oscillation between past and present, moving between the historical setting and the time and language of its writing, poetry that reworks and re-presents myth is inherently engaged in a dialectical process, "explor[ing] the dissonance and displacement between then and now, making the past recognizable but simultaneously authentically unfamiliar" (De Groot 2010, 3). This is particularly true of poetry engaging with female central characters where poets deliberately enact a feminist intervention into the past, creating powerful portrayals of women who are intended to speak to us today, while at the same time maintaining their historical and contextual environment. As Lillian Doherty points out:

> In the late twentieth century, women writers have self-consciously sought to remedy [the] gaps in the classical tradition by retelling the myths from the points of view of the female characters. The range of genres and styles in which these retellings have appeared—from the poetry of Margaret Atwood and Carol Ann Duffy to the stories of Marina Warner, the novels of Marion Zinner Bradley, and the television serial Xena, Warrior Princess—suggests that the effort to reclaim a distinctive women's classical tradition appeals to many women and at least some men at the turn of the millennium. (2003, 21)

This increase in revisionist mythmaking takes place across genres and literary forms, from poetry to drama and fiction. Select examples of important poetic receptions of the classical past by women authors over the course of the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries include H. D.'s *Helen in Egypt* (1952–4), a hybrid prose and poetic retelling of Helen's story; Eavan Boland's "Daphne with her Thighs in Bark" (1980); Linda Pastan's series on the *Odyssey* (in *The Imperfect Paradise*, 1988), Louise Glück's *Odyssey* cycle in her 1996 collection *Meadowlands*; as well as, more recently, Carol Ann Duffy's poem "Beautiful" and *The World's Wife* (1999), Jane Rawling's *The Penelopeia* (2003), Adrienne Rich's "Reading the Iliad (as if) for the First Time" (2009), and Alice Oswald's *Memorial: A Version of Homer's Iliad* (2013). As Lillian Doherty points out, the trend towards retelling the stories of women from

the ancient world extends to contemporary visual media, from *Xena, Warrior Princess* (1995–2001) to the *Helen of Troy* miniseries (2003).

Gradually, the interest towards poets writing about women from antiquity included more than just historical or mythical women. At present, there is considerable interest in women connected to classical literature, whether as literary objects embedded within canonical texts like Penelope, Helen, Cassandra, Medea, and Antigone, or as authors like Sappho or Hypatia. The shift towards women authors writing about women from antiquity started in the late 1970s, and different explanations have been put forward to find reasons for this recent rise in retelling the stories of the women of the classical world. Broadly speaking, we can hold that both poetry and fiction have a great capacity to revise the past, and thus open up gaps for new readings of ancient myths. In her discussion of the fault lines between past and present which open up new opportunities for the revisioning of Homer, Lorna Hardwick suggests one should work across the gaps, "creating sometimes unexpected cultural sites in which the tremors impact in several genres, and cultural contexts can fracture or make new alignments" (2007, 51). Also, both poetry and fiction allow for a revision of the past through a specifically feminist lens, reinserting the stories of women into a history, society, and mythology from which they have been excluded.

The project of broadly rewriting history has received much attention in the wake of the rise of feminist theory. One of the pioneers we cannot forget is Adrienne Rich and her idea of Re-vision,[2] alongside Hélène Cixous and her continued work in her seminar on Études Feminines. Historians like Joan W. Scott and Natalie Z. Davies recast history as her-story, and "at once assert[ed] that history was a masculinist knowledge system, then reappropriat[ed] it with the insertion of a feminine pronoun" (Spongberg 2002, 185). This new generation of historians was committed to writing a historiography of the forgotten and misrepresented women in different times and societies. The conditions of women's work, the caveats on the generalization of women's experience, issues on reproductive rights and child rearing, and the relationship between women's history and feminism, quickly became crucial subjects for study and research.

Finally, this increase in women's rewriting of ancient history and the classics, can also be due to "the process of creating literary role models which enable contemporary women to forge empathetic links with the women of the ancient world" (Zajko 2008, 47). This open and reciprocal understanding of a shared womanhood that goes beyond historical, geographical, and cultural boundaries has been triggered by a sense of

sisterhood of the oppressed, now reinvigorated by forging more solid transnational links within feminist movements.

Writing and Mythifying

Behind every Heavenly Father there is a Great Mother. Behind each temple, each stone, there is an older stone, remnants of a time prior to recorded history. From early on, women poets have known this secret that the gods came to earth to eclipse the goddesses, to take their place and subdue them, but also that the time has come to resurrect their mothers, to pronounce their names and proclaim their freedom. To retell history and transform it into her-story.

In the texts of modernist women poets and the mid-twentieth-century generation—for instance, Laura Riding Jackson, Denise Levertov, Gwendolyn McEwen—the history of women is always told in a different way to the established historical tradition, as if the goddesses and heroines of the past had awakened to give us their own testimony, to raise their voices and denounce the patriarchal injustices to which were subjected. Eurydice accuses Orpheus of having condemned her to roam the Underworld, Calypso confesses with anger that she has no appreciation for Odysseus and, finally, Helen finds herself in the midst of war, in a world in turmoil, where only her intelligence and cunning can save her life. However, not only do the facts change in these new versions, but these poets develop aspects of myth that have been silenced or relegated to the background, such as the relationship between mother and daughter, female sexuality, women's lack of autonomy, violence against women, and so on. Thus, the figure of Helen always appears in relation to Leda and Hermione, but also to her sister Clytemnestra, who in turn was a victim of the patriarchal culture when Iphigenia was sacrificed.

For many of these poets, mythology has been a source of knowledge, a series of stories woven in antiquity which allowed an understanding of the present. But if the stories of the past are transferred to the present, change is inevitable. There lies the dual nature of myths—on the one hand, they are situated beyond history, in the place of dreams where all human beings share their deepest fears and desires. On the other, the pace of history dictates how the old stories must be modified to adapt to a totally new world.

The poets included in this collection know well this double character of myth, so they never tried to reproduce them "faithfully" in their work, but many took advantage of this oscillation to go into the gaps that the stories had left and to break their silences. At a time when women were

beginning to break free from patriarchal subjection, modernist women poets gave voice again to women from classical antiquity, for men had forgotten to tell what women thought and felt. The new women that appear in the work of these poets are often the product of careful reading and the fusion of different sources. Therefore, it is crucial to perform a close reading of every piece and to find out more about their influences and intertextuality in order to understand where myths arise from and how they have been transformed and re-articulated by women poets.

Finally, if modern and contemporary poetry can be said to reopen the question of poetry and myth by problematizing anew poetry and mimesis, poetry and discourses of domination, poetry and the imbalance of power and dispossession, contemporary poetry continues that call while at the same time establishing, through the linguistic turn of the humanities and the shift to a networked global society, an unprecedented critical moment in which to rethink the close and long-lasting relation between myth and poetry.

Our collection seeks to bring attention to a tradition centred on the importance of the rewriting, revision, and creation of new myths in the poetry written by women in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, overlooked or rarely approached in recent years. Echoing fundamental texts in feminine poetry and poetics, such as those of Alicia Suskin Ostriker, Adrienne Rich, Nicole Loraux, Michèle LeDoeuff, Ana Iriarte, Page duBois, and Anne Carson, this volume invites us to reconsider the role that poets play in the reception, transformation, and re-articulation of classic and contemporary myths.

The spirit of Sappho presides over this collection with the conviction that the disruptive quality of her poetic discourse aims at the assertion and recognition of a woman's voice in the midst of the tradition of the fathers. The vigour, clarity, and rhetorical force of her poems ends up offering a complete "reconstruction of the self in the poetic act" (Greene 1994, 46). In Sappho, gendering poetry comes by her addressing "an audience of equals, of singing, desiring women whose song and desire endlessly refract her own, that makes possible her characteristic mode of address: to the other woman …" (Williamson 1998, 263).

A quick revision of myths shows that the stereotypes held by tradition obey ideologies which preserve the values of patriarchy. In history, society, and culture, we are reminded that, "The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene" (Butler 1990, 272), and that, as social subjects, we

are always subjected to the law. The role of women in myth thus demands constant reinterpretation:

> Six women who could be described as Western myths, Eve, Circe, Penelope, Betsabé, Salome and Gioconda, express their inner feelings through a voice hitherto unknown, revealing character from the female point of view, showing an unknown side of these myths … (Morgado 2013, 3–4)

In "Reading Women in Ancient Myth," the first section of our volume, Anett Jessop revises the myths of origins in her engagement with Laura Riding's "The Lady of the Apples" and Lilith to show her main purpose of "recuperating marginal female figures to pen revisionist stories; imagining alternative accounts," the strategy giving a full dimension to the woman in the "epic creation of myth." Her aim is to illustrate the process far from the assumptions of male domination. Jessop concludes that the tales of creation have been portrayed over the centuries as an expression of "male-specific anxieties and patriarchal prejudice of female independence of free will and action." Riding's voice regards women as self-sufficient beings in the construction of an updated prophecy.

Robert Silhol, in his psychoanalytically informed reading of H. D.'s *Helen in Egypt*, argues that for psychoanalysis, the "truth" on which Greek myths and legends rest is the permanence of the triangular family structure, which also perfectly corresponds to what Lacan meant when he developed his triadic model of: Subject (always incomplete) / a gap or a wall, *la barre* / and an unreachable object which he called *objet petit a*. Looking at Greek myths and remembering that language, and by extension literature, cannot simply be reduced to a realistic representation of women, men, and society at large, Silhol holds that in our study of them we must be very aware of what is symbolic and of the structural edifice of symbolization, which in the end will help us make progress in any comparative historical perspective regarding authority, gender roles, and social and familial unbalance.

Section two on "Mythical Revisions" opens with the Jewish diaspora, a prominent subject since antiquity, which comes to the foreground as a result of conflict in Europe. Cristina Gámez describes how Denise Levertov rearticulates the myth of the Wandering Jew with the voice of a woman as the basis of her poetical work. Levertov's father, himself a Russian Jew and an immigrant in London, would talk to her on the potential quality of the imagination, on how a peddler would carry his sack of folded wings. The transcendence of the symbolism lays on a sensitive perception of reality, and the focus of the pilgrimage is not on its final

destination but on "the aimless quality of the journey," with all the possibilities lying ahead. For the poet, everyday reality is a source of inspiration, an unfolding of the imagination which is bound to transcend.

Along this line, José Manuel Rodríguez recalls Sylvia Plath's and Denise Levertov's struggles to find a voice of their own, very much in the spirit of Adrienne Rich, whom Rodríguez Herrera quotes: "it is the lesbian in us who is creative, for the dutiful daughter of the fathers in us is only a hack." While in Plath's poem "The Colossus" the borrowed language remains "inarticulate," a symptom of the damage to a woman's resolution to change of the male-oriented ideology of myths, Levertov succeeds in making the feminine agency in her discourse genuine: "it is the pig that has his 'hollow' fertilized by the moonbeams issuing from the moon goddess."

Gwendolyn MacEwen's poetry works with the awareness that there is a unified myth within the realms of phenomenal reality. MacEwen is concerned with the inner part of the individual, with the esoteric and magical that lay inside rather than outside, her aim is an exploration of women's poetic discourse from within. Her impulse is, as Leonor Martínez suggests, "to create a personal mythology suitable to her visionary art … to make the world whole again, to cleanse the human's inner vision and make them alert to what the eyes cannot see."

In our next section, "Myths, Women and Nature," Javier Martín analyses Margaret Atwood's Susana Moodie, a memory of her life in the forest in close contact with the land and its Native inhabitants which changed her life forever. The European perspective of space, the false expectations brought about by the Bible, and the idea of El Dorado that Captain John Smith brought about proved to be false. What matters is how deep the perception of nature has become for a life growing on the border of the unknown, particularly based on the experience that what she gets from the unknown are acts of benevolence and kindness. The gothic and gothicism have become some of our most vivid concerns, as Pilar Sánchez argues: "The erosion of boundaries between the self and the monstrous other, and the presence of doubles and the split selves are a mark of a gothic and postmodern sensibility." Eurydice's voice lets itself go free in Atwood's poems as it becomes the veritable door to intimacy, "the entrance into the wilderness of the self, into the split self, into the doubleness of identity and the monstrous other." In Atwood's verses: "the core of your own head_/ compacted fire,/ monstrous, horned, sacred." As Sánchez feels, the artist becomes the transitional oracle, identifying the existence of what lies deep within individual experience.

Stephanie McKenzie explores the natural agency of feminist discourse in Natalie Diaz's *When My Brother Was an Aztec*, a text dealing with drug-addiction in the First Nations: "The Mojave people themselves are plagued not only by addiction but also by other effects of colonialism, poverty, disease, suppression of traditional religions, loss of language, violence, and loss of self worth …" The white immigrants coming from Europe brought about their own myths—"The myth of the empty land … awaiting the fulfillment of civilized beliefs and explorers"—while the original inhabitants, now in reservation camps, are mercilessly intoxicated with the new catechisms of the so-called *civilized* countries, and urged to forget their own past. McKenzie quotes from Natalie Diaz: "I see the people for what they really are. They're so talented and good." Diaz regards addiction as a viral infirmity, a product coming from the external invasion to the land: "'bellies were filled/ with bullet holes' since the 'cavalry came'."

In her chapter, María Porras analyses the myth of the Native American Indian explained by the white tradition either as otherness to be colonized or destroyed, or as a superficial recognition of goodness as in Rousseau's "noble savage." Porras shows how Long Soldier avoids former preconceptions, her voice focusing on what she remembers, and the way she uses "language" becomes "an act of resistance": "I don't trust *nobody*/ [blank] *but the land*." In Porras's words: "Possibly what Long Soldier wants to emphasize is … languages, traditions, customs, divinities, and beliefs which have disappeared, families which have been broken; children who have been torn from their families and sent to distant boarding schools."

In "Recycling and Theorizing Myths," section four in our collection, Melania Stancu explores the far-reaching echoes of the imagination in Ana Blandiana's poetry, which deals with the necessity for the sacred in the use of metaphors and mythology. Angelic figures, ancient gods, and the Lord of Judeo-Christian tradition all come to exist through the eternal seed, and the cycles of life are the only glimpse of the eternity that we are bound to perceive. In her poems, "Gods taking the place of other gods, all encompassed in vegetal seeds buried deep in the ground, account for the flowing of time and the unstoppable succession of cycles of creation and destruction."

Esther Sánchez-Pardo elaborates on how Anne Carson reinvents genre in her acclaimed *Autobiography of Red: A Novel in Ver*se, an unconventional remake of an Ancient Greek myth. In her retelling of Stesichoros's "Tale of Geryon," a winged red monster killed by Hercules, the Canadian poet imagines a destructive love affair and is interested in

Geryon's survival through art, specifically photography. Carson's poem-novel shows how this compelling narrative problematizes contemporary practices of reading, and emphasizes a phenomenological relation between myth, the creation of space, and the link between perception and writing.

Dolores Juan analyses the influence of film and how it shapes our sensibility in our responses to life. She warns that "the autobiographical memory … is nothing but a notion established in relation to a collective mutual memory," and the screen makes it possible to "narrow the perennial and painful gap between the irreproachable space on the screen and the imperfect territory of the real life." On the assumption of how the individual experiences works of art, she analyses the poets Aurora Luque, María Sanz, and Ángeles Mora when dealing with the spirit of the mythical film *Casablanca*.

Miriam Fernández disentangles patriarchal discourses in order to show how they were used as structures of power to perpetuate domination. An alternative mythology fails in the sense that by simply opposing patriarchal patterns it becomes universal itself, and thus tends to imitate the inconsistency of former myths, copying the same modes of expression. The creation of a new "écriture feminine" should come from within, with the focus on "remembering" rather than "reminding," and ought to be natural and creative. The ethics and aesthetic values of such a discourse aim at gaining an effective communication, "[a] remembrance of who you are as a noble—because natural—savage woman."

Our collection closes with the myth of Pandora as read by Aurora Luque. Pandora, a beautiful woman who opened the box and let the evil go free all over the world in the midst of the patriarchal Ancient Greek society, comes to us as part of "the movie of humanity." A poet herself, Luque prays for "venoms to poison the words/ that usurped the throne for so many centuries …," and accounts for Sappho, the Tenth Muse, touched with the highest degree of wisdom and spirituality. The legitimate legend may provide authority to the voice of women. On these grounds, our poet chooses the litany to heroically celebrate (parodying Hesiod's epic tone) a new beginning: "re-creation, re-invigoration, re-thinking, re-considerations, re-flecting, re-birth, re-visionist, re-cognizing, re-nderings, rendered, re-reading, re-fashion, re-sponded, re-sponse, re-visiting, re-lationship and re-vision." The spirit, as she heartfully shows, is Adrienne Rich's as she recalls "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering a text from a new critical direction." Poetry and criticism go hand in hand in an urgent need for a "personal and political new myth." Undoubtedly, this is one of the purposes of our collection, which fits wonderfully within Luque's aesthetic understanding of tradition, "One

night, suddenly, we become rivers,/ and the thighs shine, drunk:/ slimy gold, enigmas, pyramids of light …," offering to bring the contents of what the poet calls "Pandora's new box" back to life.

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Notes

[1] Louise Bourgeois's mythic representation of the spider mother is a constant feature in her trajectory, "Spider (1997) portrays the maternal imago as a presence at once protective and menacing, magnificent and monstrous. This figure summons

early phantasies of the child in confrontation with the maternal body, a body littered with the enigmatic traces of past life, a bodily presence that is both refuge and cell" (Nixon 2005, 274).

[2] In Rich's view, a woman's response to the past is an act of revisioning, crucial for feminism, "Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for us [women] more than a chapter in cultural history, it is an act of survival" (1972, 18).

PART I:

READING WOMEN IN ANCIENT MYTH