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***Mythmaking across Boundaries*, edited by Züleyha Çetiner-Öktem**

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Mythmaking across Boundaries, edited by Züleyha Çetiner-Öktem

Additional Keywords

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MYTHMAKING ACROSS BOUNDARIES. Edited by Züleyha Çetiner-Öktem. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016. 367 p. ISBN (10) 1-4438-9017-0 ISBN (13) 978-1-4438-9017-5 £52.99

EDITOR ZÜLEYHA ÇETİNER-ÖKTEM HAS GATHERED TOGETHER a highly varied collection of essays in *Mythmaking Across Boundaries*. The given intent of the book is to address two questions, posed thusly: How are myths made in diverse cultures and literatures? And do all different cultures have different myths to be told in their artistic pursuits? Çetiner-Öktem has organized the various essays into seven sections: Theoretical Speculations, Historical Explorations, Spatial Dimensions, Dynamics of Storytelling, Meditative Reflections, Gendered Boundaries, and Passing the Threshold.

This is taking very large bites at an even larger, and challenging, subject: mythmaking and storytelling. One of the first things I did in trying to decide how to review this eclectic assortment of approaches was to check the notes of the various essays, to see which authorities they were citing to ground their approaches to the topic of myth generally. There are a handful of mythologists and mythographers who usually fill this role, but they each have their own approach. I mention this, because the focus of this book is attempting to find new patterns of mythmaking, and it helps to know what others have discovered in their own attempts at the same thing.

For Freud and Jung, myth took on representation of the psyche of the individual (“psyche” here being the personality of the individual, not she of Greek myth). For this psychological pair, myths were primarily metaphorical shapes for personal and relational aspects. Another mythologist who took the metaphorical approach to the meaning of myths was Northrop Frye. Frye preferred to look at mythic patterns as metaphorical representations of our human responses to the world around us; the cold of winter evoking the coldness of death, for instance. The most popularly famous mythologist, Joseph Campbell, also took the metaphorical approach for the meaning of myths. By Campbell’s definition, mythology is “an organization of symbolic images and narratives metaphorical of the possibility of human experience and fulfillment in a given culture at a given time” (qtd. in Abrams). But although Campbell may be the best known, his is not the final possible definition and approach to myth. For me, in my own studies of mythologies, of even greater importance than Campbell are two other mythologists: Mircea Eliade and Claude Lévi-Strauss. The Romanian Eliade, a historian of religion, not only focused on the religious aspect of myths (Adler), but also introduced the concept of paradigms to the study of myths. Lévi-Strauss, a French anthropologist and ethnologist was crucial to the development of structuralism, and brought a very objective approach to the study of myths. He concluded that “myth is language, because

myth has to be told in order to exist" (Klages). For Lévi-Strauss, myth related to the social structure of a culture, giving it meaning.

I've gone to this length in describing these mythologists to give some background to what the essay writers in this book are striving to do: to look for new structures and paradigms in stories, in various cultures and literatures, from ancient stories to modern books, movies, and television stories, from the well-known European myths to stories from Asian to Native Canadian storytellers. These essayists strive toward reaching across traditional boundaries of definition, thinking "outside the box" as it were.

Indeed, it is worth mentioning that the first chapter in the book consists of what I found to be the most approachable essay in the collection: "Interpreting Mythmaking Outside of the Box: Four Theories You Have Almost Certainly Missed" from Marek Oziewicz.¹ His choices for consideration might seem skewed at first glance, which is perhaps the point: we need a new perspective to find new concepts, instead of relying entirely on our older approaches. Thus, he takes us into the realms of Immanuel Velikovsky, Julian Jaynes, Sean Kane, and Jonathan Gottschall.

New perspectives need not of necessity be from brand-new stories, of course. They can also come from stories that are simply not generally familiar. The overwhelming shadow of European myths is being broken up by light from established stories from other cultures. Klára Kolinská considers Canadian author Thomas King's use of the figure of Coyote in a short story collection published in 1993. Since Coyote is a Trickster figure, this is an appropriate selection. Trickster figures are great ones for breaking boundaries and changing perspectives: it's their job, after all. Ercan Afacan comes to the issue of changing boundaries, by studying the circumstances in the novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*, where the "myth of Englishness" meets the cultural concept of hybridization as it affects the background myths associated with nations, and how our changing immigrant cultures are affecting those myths.

Two of the essays address works by the English poet William Blake. I find it very notable, in this volume which seeks new perceptions of mythology, that not one but two essayists turned to Blake, perhaps one of the most iconoclastic and idiosyncratic creators of his age in England. The choices Anca Munteanu and Ramazan Saral make in discussing Blake's *The Book of Urizen* remind us that the creative desire to go beyond traditional perspectives is not a solely modern impulse. Blake's personal mythology about breaking away from traditional mythology continues to resonate two hundred years after its original publication.

¹ Marek Oziewicz will be familiar to members of the Mythopoeic Society as recipient of the 2010 Mythopoeic Society Myth and Fantasy Studies Scholarship award.

If I were to make this an exhaustive review of the full contents of *Mythmaking across Boundaries*, I would still not be able to do full justice to the variety of subjects the essayists choose to address. Those subjects include examining a story drawn from the slums of Nairobi, various approaches to the cultural mythologies of America (as in the United States of, not the continents of the Western Hemisphere), changing gender perceptions especially toward women, and even new mythologies from works including the television show *Lost*, Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* saga, J.K. Rowling's considerations of death and immortality in the *Harry Potter* series,² and a comparison of *Star Wars* and the Classical myth of the Argonauts. The contents of this volume are best served by the definite recommendation that those interested in shaping new mythic perspectives plunge into the whole book; I do so make that recommendation.

In closing, however, I do want to mention the very first thing in the book, editor Çetiner-Öktem's opening discussion in her introduction. She begins by discussing Gustave Courbet's controversial nude painting of 1866, *L'Origine du monde*. She mentions its iconoclastic approach to the painting of female nudes, and she muses on the subversion of ancient earth-mother mythologies by masculine mythic patterns. Yet she never explicitly describes the painting nor includes a picture of it (a quick Google search will show anyone why: warning "Not Safe For Work"). To be blunt, it is a painting that gives full view to female genitalia without focusing on the personality of the subject female. Yet, what is being shown is truly the "Origin of the World," as it is the threshold that every human who ever lived (other than Adam and Eve, if we are going to be mythic about it) has crossed. Yet Çetiner-Öktem herself remains affected by the traditional masculine mythic dominance in our culture, holding back from the explicit description of the painting and only using the word "vagina" once. Obscuring the subject by obscuring the explicit terms leaves us still in the old, shadowed perspective. Even so, she has collected and organized essays that seek to break through that perspective and bring new light to new ways of presenting myths and mythmaking.

—Sarah Beach

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² Whatever one may feel about Rowling's personal and outspoken take on gender issues outside of the novels, the *Harry Potter* books themselves break boundaries in introducing very young readers to the quite adult issues of the perception of death.

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THE LORD OF THE RINGS TAROT DECK AND GUIDE. Casey Gilly (author) and Tomás Hijo (artist). San Rafael, CA: Insight Editions, 2022. 78-card deck and folded guide sheet. \$27.99. ISBN 978-1-64722-809-5.

SIDON AND SCHUSTER'S INSIGHT EDITIONS is one of several publishers to add Tarot to their catalog in recent years: their website currently includes no less than twenty Tarot and oracle decks, all of them connected with popular literature, film, and television. Among the latest of these is Casey Gilly (author) and Tomás Hijo's (artist) *The Lord of the Rings Tarot Deck and Guide* (2022).

Hijo is a professor of illustration at the University of Salamanca in Spain (2010–2022) with many professional credits, including a Best Artwork Award from the Tolkien Society (2015) and prop designer for the film *Nightmare Alley* (2021) directed by Guillermo del Toro. *Nightmare Alley* was first adapted into a film directed by Edmund Goulding in 1947, soon after the release of the original novel by William Lindsay Gresham (1946). This novel is well known for its incorporation of Tarot, so it is not surprising that Gresham also wrote the text for the illustrated Preface in the 1962 Noonday printing of Inkleing Charles Williams's Tarot novel *The Greater Trumps* (1932). (Further details about both Tarot and Williams's novel can be found in Nancy-Lou Patterson's *Divining Tarot: Papers on Charles Williams's The Greater Trumps and Other Works*, 2019).

Hijo has created two other decks with Insight, including *Tarot del Toro: A Tarot Deck and Guidebook Inspired by the World of Guillermo del Toro* (2020) and the *Labyrinth Tarot Deck and Guide Book* (2021) based on Jim Henson's film *Labyrinth* (2010). All three of these decks are characterized by his signature linocut style (see the artist's website < <http://tomashijoart.bigcartel.com/> >) which is visually akin to early playing cards, including Tarot, that were printed from carved wood blocks. Something of the woodcut effect can be seen in the Marseilles-style Tarot illustrations included in Williams's *The Greater Trumps* (Noonday 1962). These illustrations and *The Greater Trumps* narrative demonstrate the penchant many artists and authors have for reorganizing the trumps: Gresham comments on Williams's revised trump order in his Preface. Hijo's reorganization of *The Lord of the Rings Tarot Deck* trumps is far more