



José Manuel Losada  
Antonella Lipscomb (eds.)

**Mito: teorías de un  
concepto controvertido**

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de Pensamiento  
y Ensayo  
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MITO: TEORÍAS DE UN CONCEPTO CONTROVERTIDO





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*Madrid, 7 de febrero de 2024*

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## INTRODUCTION

José Manuel Losada

EVERY two years in October, «ACIS, Research Group of Myth Criticism», Asteria, International Association of Myth Criticism, and *Amaltea, Journal of Myth Criticism*, organise an «International Conference on Myth Criticism» at the Complutense University.

In previous International Conferences on Myth Criticism, more than 1,500 participants from thirty countries have addressed various problems around the adaptation and interpretation of myths in our contemporary society:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Conference: «Myth and Subversion in the Contemporary Novel» (Complutense University, 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> March 2011).
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Conference: «Myth and Interdisciplinarity» (Complutense University, 29<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> October 2012).
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Conference: «Myths in Crisis. The Crisis of Myth» (Complutense University, 21<sup>st</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> October 2014).
- 4<sup>th</sup> Conference: «Myth and Emotions» (Complutense University, 24<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> October 2016).
- 5<sup>th</sup> Conference: «Myth and Audiovisual Creation» (University of Alcalá, University Autónoma of Madrid, Francisco de Vitoria University and Complutense University, 15<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> October 2018).
- 6<sup>th</sup> Conference: «Myth and Science Fiction» (Complutense University, 27<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> October 2020).

The 7<sup>th</sup> Conference «Myth: Theories of a Controversial Concept» (25<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> October 2022) analysed the difficulties encountered by critics in defining myth, discussed traditional definitions and proposed a renewal in the epistemology of myth.

A Scientific Committee external to the Organising Committee subsequently selected the texts received that stood out for their methodological rigour. The articles that had included a comparative emphasis have been published in *CompLit*

(journal of the European Association of Comparative Literature, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2023); others appear here. I will present them briefly hereafter.

Any definition of myth requires, beforehand, the delimitation of other terms closely related to it; for this reason, **Alberto Filipe Araújo** and **Rogério de Almeida** deal with the concepts of symbol, archetype and scheme. Based on Gilbert Durand's theory, they meticulously explore these concepts in order to grasp the «archetypal and symbolic semanticity of myth»: myth acquires its semantic charge thanks to the narrative and symbolic organisation resulting from archetypes, which in turn originate from unconscious gestures or dominant reflexes. Thus considered, myth appears as an expression of the complex structure in which the human machinery is summarised.

Furio Jesi published his essay *Myth* in 1973. **Marco Carmello's** article delves into the concepts of myth and symbol according to the Italian philosopher. The starting point is the distinction between mythology and myth (the latter as a conceptual category that gives rise to the former). Myth is a symbol which rests on itself, which refers only to itself, and which finds in itself its own origin and fulfilment (here the Bachofenian position on self-reflexivity and openness is evident); that is, myth is a document formulated in a primordial language, which is the reason for its symbolism and actuality. Thought-provoking words: if Jesi is right, myth speaks only of its own presence, not of any other; that is, despite the ideological uses and abuses imposed on it, myth would not be, properly speaking, a hermeneutic word.

After some very interesting observations on terminology and a review of some relevant definitions, **Vicente Cristóbal** adopts the definition of myth proposed by Antonio Ruiz de Elvira: «any narrative of events that are uncertain and unprovable, but about which there is a tradition that presents them as having really happened». Three notes of this premise –uncertainty, tradition and pretence of truth– are subsequently brought into play to distinguish myth from legend; also from fairy tale, without forgetting the scarcity of popular tales in the classical world (the exclusive scope of the article). These pages conclude with interesting disquisitions on the myth-logos struggle, a story riddled with contradictions that could easily be resolved if it were to be summed up as a struggle between myth and rationalism.

**Ricardo Ibáñez Ruiz's** article is based on the Aristotelian proposal of myth as the art of weaving. Thanks to myth, the poet generates a narrative causality capable of bringing together heterogeneous elements of nature within a plot for its understanding as an argument. The theories of another thinker complement the article: Paul Ricœur, who presents myth as a hermeneutic operation particularly suitable for analysing identities refractory to any scientific methodology. Myth makes it possible to refigure the passage of chronological time in a narrated time. This is

markedly visible in the field of history and politics, where myth can be presented as a useful tool, provided it is never emptied of its essential sacred transcendence.

If Vicente Cristóbal's article ended with the false battle between myth and logos, **Jorge Latorre Merino's** article proposes a path towards their reconciliation: the reflections of Georges Sorel (irrelevance of the veracity or falsity of the narrative), of Ernst Cassirer (myth as preparation for logos), of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (dialectical relationship between myth and Enlightenment), of Hans Blumenberg (myth as an escape mechanism from the absolutism of reality), of Claude Lévi-Strauss (the capacity for abstraction inherent in myth in primitive societies). Despite the flagrant abuse committed by some of these thinkers (the pseudomyths of the general strike and the State), the article is valid for rejecting the unfounded thesis about the opposition between myth and reason.

**José Manuel Losada's** article traces the main vectors that have contributed to the configuration of a scientific definition of myth. The organisation of seven conferences and one hundred and twenty-five seminars has shown the need to provide a methodology, a hermeneutics and an epistemology of myth. Myth is presented here in a holistic way: in its essence, manifestation and function. The framework of study is Western culture, taking into account its Greco-Latin, Judeo-Christian, Celtic, Slavic, Finno-Ugric origins, and its diachronic conformation, in which modern myths (Melusine, the Grail, Faust, Don Juan, Dracula) reveal, as in a palimpsest, an inveterate tendency towards moral and religious autonomy. In short, the itinerary of a research condensed in his recent book *Cultural Myth Criticism* (*Mitocrítica cultural*, Akal, 2022) appears here.

Coleridge argued that symbol, because of its 'tautegoric' character, is characterised, above all, by the translucence of the eternal both 'through' and 'in' the temporal. The poet implied the distinction between a biblical 'tautegory' (without allegorical meaning) and a mythical 'tautegory' (with allegorical meaning). Based on this premise and others of renowned figures (Friedrich Schelling, Jean-Pierre Vernant), **Ben Pestell** elaborates a careful journey towards a myth criticism that studies myth in itself (not as allegory) and that allows us to re-dimension the importance of symbols in our contemporary experience. Here we have a stimulating article that presents myth and myth criticism not in terms of other concepts and fields of study, but in itself and as a tool that contains within itself the mode of its analysis.

The most current myth criticism puts forward the study of the survival of myths in their contemporary manifestations. **Cristina Salcedo González** proposes to combine myth criticism with classical reception. To this end, she draws on the work of experts in myth criticism (Gilbert Durand, Claude Lévi-Strauss) and reception (Hans Robert Hauss, Wolfgang Iser, Lorna Hardwick). This conjunction

results in a proposal that combines structural and symbolic analysis with textual and cultural analysis. Myth criticism provides the archetypal, psychological, ahistorical patterns, while classical reception offers the mythological interpretations in terms of ideological parameters: such a conjunction allows us to delve deeper into the phenomena of the myth's survival.

Hans Blumenberg is not so much interested in the concept of myth as in its function, its operability in the naming of objects in order to narrate true stories. **Miguel Vega Manrique** applies this philosopher's theories to the 'myth' (or rather the fantastic character) of Peter Pan: James Matthew Barrie's work can be seen as a development around the protagonist's proper name. Other genuinely mythological narratives (e.g., *The Odyssey*) help to underpin the purpose of the article. They also explain the recourse to the spirit of the time of composition, at the height of the decadent tendency, when philosophers and poets were announcing that Pan was dead. A work of great intuitive capacity that concludes with rich references to Mallarmé's faun, Debussy's music and Nijinsky's ballet as evocations of a phantasmatic presence that also operates in the narratives and plays of Peter Pan.

I am sure that the reader will appreciate the work hidden behind these pages and, above all, the importance of valuing myth in our times: its origins, its reason, its evolution and its effectiveness in helping us to understand who we are.

José Manuel Losada

Madrid, 3 April, 2023

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