

Boris Petrović¹
Université Paris Sorbonne, Paris, France

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TRANS-MEDIAL NATURE AND THE MYTHICAL NARRATIVE OF SHAKESPEARE'S OPUS

Abstract

The focus of this paper is the notion of mythical character of Shakespeare's opus (mythification of history, repetition of certain topoi, particular usage of symbols and archetypes, thematic and structural usage of myth, etc.) Furthering this notion, we are to explore that his opus was not of mythical character only due to the themes coming from classical myth, but to the specific structure of his works as well. Finally, we explore and substantiate the main premise of the paper – that the nature of myth is to be flexible and adaptable to different media; it is exactly the quality of mythical narrative that allows for the great adaptability of Shakespeare's plays into many different media (movies, comic books, paintings, etc.).

Key words

Shakespeare, myth, mythical narrative, flexibility, trans-media

The basic premise of this presentation is the transmedial character of mythical narrative, substantiated using the works of William Shakespeare as an example. More than other types of narratives, those that can be defined as “mythical” bear that capacity of being transformable for and adaptable to different media. It is indeed one of the basic characteristics of myths to be represented in all of the media available to creative expression. The examples are plenty: almost all of the plays of Greek tragedians that found their inspiration in myths; *Metamorphosis* by Ovid; proto-nationalistic² epic *Aeneid* by Virgil; a number of

1 boris.djordje.petrovic@gmail.com

2 Dumezil, Georges, *Mythe et Épopée I, II, III*, Editions Gallimard, Paris, 1995, p. 438. Albeit this being an anachronistic notion, as the idea of “nation” as we know it today did not exist in Virgil's time. Still, we use it here on account of the socially formative and ideological capacity of this work that so closely resembles that of the post-industrial revolution societies, where we can in fact speak of nations and nation forming capacities of various works of art.

paintings done by classical and neo-classical painters deeply immersed in the context of the Greco-Roman myth; finally, the mythical character of western movies³, even the sci-fi movies based in western, like the *Star Wars* serial.

We can equally invoke the usage of mythical narrative in a political propaganda, be it the case of important referendums⁴, presidential or parliament elections. An example of a singular narrative embodied in different media, that illustrates this notion well is the mythical narrative of the exploits of Hercules that we can find repeated in variations in poems, paintings, films, theater, novels etc. This type of narrative possesses the ability to be adapted into different media, each of them constricted and defined by their own specificities.

And while other types of narratives can also be transformed into different media, we shall argue that the mythical narrative has this capacity raised to a superior level. The reason for that being the case is the fact that the mythical narrative is defined (among other things) by *the set of values it is carrying* – by the ideology implicitly present within it and its relevance for the society it is representing. We take an example of Richard Slotkin who states that the mythical narrative is among other types of narrative especially well-suited to act as the carrier of ideology:

Myth does not argue its ideology, it exemplifies it. It projects models of good or heroic behavior that reinforce the values of ideology, and affirm as good the distribution of authority and power that ideology rationalizes. Although its traditional character makes it most useful to conservative ideologies, myth can also be invoked as part of a radically critical ideology. In either case, myth uses the past as an “idealized example”, in which “a heroic achievement in the past is linked to another in the future of which the reader is the potential hero. (Slotkin, 1986: 19)

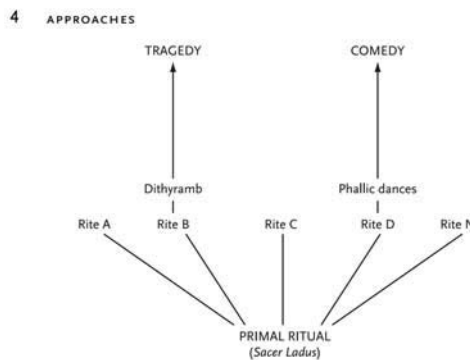
This pertains remarkably well to Shakespeare and his plays, especially the ones who take historical events as a subject matter. The heroic and virtuous nobility that belongs to the “old world” is confronted by the opportunistic (and, in Shakespeare’s point of view, vulgar) up and coming class of the merchant capitalists. Much in line with the structure of the mythical narrative, the “old”, heroic and sacred world is bound to disappear, and the new, “pro-

3 Of which I wrote a doctoral dissertation titled « *National myth in the works of John Ford and Veljko Bulajic* », Université Paris Sorbonne, defended the 12. 12. 2014. A concrete reference to back up that claim, one of many – ASTRE, Georges Albert and Hoarau, Patrick, *L’Univers du western*, Seghers, 1973, p. 204.

4 Brexit, for example.

pane” and banal is to take over. It is a clearly linear, evolutionary process of the maturing of a given society. The importance of this aspect of the mythical narrative, *to structure a given community*, is stressed by scholars such as Northrop Frye. To him, myth’s primary function is to be the carrier of the values that define a society, much rather than to explain and inquire into the inner workings of the nature: “Mais le véritable intérêt du mythe est de tracer une circonférence autour d’une communauté humaine et de regarder à l’intérieur vers cette communauté, non d’enquêter sur les opérations de la nature.” (Frye, 1984: 81)⁵.

At the very bases of this claim is the hypothesis articulated by a line of researchers taking their grounding in the famous “Cambridge thesis” of the evolutionary model of the mythical theatrical narrative (Sir James Frazer, followed by Sigmund Freud, Claude Lévi Strauss, René Girard) that the ritual preceded myth as a composite of all arts that would later be developed out of it. In its own right, like Richard Schechner argues, the “Cambridge thesis” is essentially in line with the Darwin’s theory of evolution⁶. It is the theory of evolution applied to the development of theater from myth and the ritual. Richard Schechner proposes a scheme of how this took place, then criticizes it as a mere unproven hypothesis:



A schematic visualisation of the development of genres and medias from the ritual, by Richard Schechner⁷

5 “But the true interest of myth is to trace a circonférence around a human community and to look inside of it, not to inquire into the operations of the nature”. (Translation by Boris Petrovic).
 6 A famous study done by E. B Tylor *Primitive Culture* inspired the works of R. R Marett and Henry Balfour, which both have had a decisive influence of Sir James Frazer, who in his turn had an important influence on Sigmund Freud and the sequent line of researches already mentioned.
 7 Schechner, Richard, *Performance Theory*, Routledge Classics, London and New York, 2004, p. 4.

According to this theory, ritual that was initially a totality of all media (dance, narrative, painting, theater, music) and was by later development segmented and profiled (Bell 1997). It is interesting to denote the essential proximity of ideology to the transmedial character of the ritual (and the mythical that stems from it): “The embodied character of such forms of ritual practice goes with their conflation of ideological and sensory poles in the manner stressed by Victor Turner for symbols generally (Rappaport 1979: 203-4). Ritual practices will thus tend, like symbols, to be multi-vocalic, and Rappaport speaks of the complexity of liturgical representations here (Rappaport 1979: 206). They are multi-modal in sensory terms also, ‘employing at one and the same time words, music, noise, odors, objects, and substances’ “ (Steward, 2010: 86).

According to this notion, it is exactly the transmedial character of the ritual and of myth that enables them to carry the ideology in different media in a manner best adapted to that particular media. Developing from this statement, we can hypothesize that the myth is the aspect of the ritual that is a verbal formulation of the ideology carried by the ritual practice.

The initial separation was that of the myth from the ritual. Myth, from the Greek word *mythos* (to tell a story) continued to carry and articulate the message present in other branches of expression developed from the ritual. Following this hypothesis – stated by Sigmund Freud in *Totem and Taboo* (Freud, 2001: 218-219), we see how not only the mythical narrative carries a distinctly religious dimension, but is also from the very beginning (bearing its connection to the ritual) transmedial, if not panmedial. It is also, and that is of no lesser importance (again, by its proximity to the ritual, by definition a sacred practice) heavily infused with the quality of the *sacred*. This is of great importance for the aspect of the mythical narrative that interests us the most – carrying a set of values of a given society, its ideology, acting as an agent of social cohesion. The theater as a medium, especially in the genre of tragedy, has a key role in this. René Girard is agreeing with Sigmund Freud on this account:

Si l'on est d'accord, et comment ne pas l'être, avec l'ethnologue qui décrit dans le rite sacrificiel un drame, ou une espèce d'œuvre d'art – Victor Turner, par exemple, dans *The Drums of Affliction* (p. 269): « The unity of a given ritual is a dramatic unity. It is in this sense a kind of work of art » – la réciproque doit être vraie: le drame représenté sur le théâtre

doit constituer une espèce de rite, la répétition obscure du phénomène religieux.⁸

This quality of the theater plays – their capacity to carry the kernel of values of a given society, makes them of prime political and ideological importance. We need to however come back to Richard Schechner's criticism of the evolutionary model of the development from ritual to theater. While he contests this notion as a mere cultural construct taken from the Darwinist school of thought⁹, and denies the evolutionary, diachronical model of development, he does not negate the key aspects of our hypothesis: first, that both the myth and the ritual pertain to the quality of the sacred, and second, that they are supreme carriers of ideology that defines a certain society. For this particular inquiry, the question of how the theater came to be (was it developed from the sacrificial ritual or not) is of lesser importance; its propensity to carry ideology and to pretend to model a society in which context it exists is of major importance.

Furthermore, since Richard Schechner focuses on the ritual and does not address the myth per se, it is our own interpolation that the myth is the aspect of the ritual that carries most of its ideology. Again, this separation of myth from ritual does not need to be diachronical and evolutionary; ultimately, it is of no importance for this particular inquiry. Whether the myth came before the ritual or the ritual before the myth is of no importance – the capacity of myth to carry the ideology that structures a society; ritualistic nature of the theater play (whether the genre was developed from the ritual or not) are not contested by Richard Schechner's hypothesis.

Therefore Richard Schechner's criticism of the evolutionary model according to which the theater developed from the ritual can still stand without compromising the ritualistic nature of the theater (as well as it cannot deny the

8 Girard, René, *La violence et le sacré*, Editions Bernard Grasset, Paris, 1972, p. 403. Translation Boris Petrovic: If we are to agree, and it is impossible not to, with an ethnologist who describes the sacrificial rite as a drama, or a type of work of art – Victor Turner, for example, in the *Drums of Affliction* (p. 269): “The unity of a given ritual is a dramatic unity. It is in this sense a kind of work of art” – the opposite must also be true: the drama represented in theater must also constitute a type of rite, the obscure repetition of a religious phenomenon.

9 That was in its turn criticized by David Harvey and being under a decisive influence of the capitalist ideology and capitalistic mode of production, and is therefore a projection of the social modus on the model of evolution, a case of “reading into” the subject matter rather than the theory based on the analysis on the natural model of evolution. See David Harvey's web series *Marx's Capital Vol. I* with David Harvey, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqEKLuPCgZ0>, last accessed 23/03/2017.

obvious theatricality of certain rituals, like for example the Mass, and their evidently superbly sophisticated dramaturgy), and especially in the aspect that is important to us, in this particular intervention – the quality of the transmediality of the ritualistic and the mythical narrative of Shakespeare's work.

II

Speaking of the mythical character of Shakespeare's work, we first have to define what exactly we are referring to. Adjective "mythical" is commonly used in a certain way, whereas our definition tends to be different than the one that can be found in the vernacular.

Most common usage of the term "mythical" nowadays colloquially refers to a made up, fictional, false quality of a given work or narrative. More often than not it is a derogatory term that aims at dismissing a certain narrative, or more often discourse, as archaic, primitive and fable-like, or a simple misconception. This is not how we aim to use this term – our definition strays from the vernacular and aims at more substantial qualities of the "mythical" that are in relation to Shakespeare's opus.

In this vein, the term "mythical" can be defined in two main ways: structurally and thematically. First is of greater interest to us, though the second is not of small importance in the context of Shakespeare's work. Structural nature of the mythical narrative is afore all what we have in mind when we define Shakespeare's work as being mythical in nature. We aim to show how his work conform to the (structural) definitions of the mythical narrative *as well* as its intended function.

The most famous definition of the myth that was used by all subsequent researches of the subject comes from Mircea Eliade: "Le mythe raconte une histoire sacrée, c'est-à-dire un événement primordial qui a eu lieu au commencement du Temps, *ab initio*". (Eliade, 1987: 84)¹⁰.

The myth is a sacred narrative that happened long time ago at the beginning of time. This is a vast definition. To narrow it down, we need to continue

10 The myth speaks of a sacred story (attention – this can easily also be translated as "history"), that is to say a primordial event that took place at the beginning of time, *ab initio*. (Translation by Boris Petrovic).

inquiring. What is sacred, and how is that quality obtained? What makes a text sacred? This question is more interesting. According to Eliade, as well as the researchers who worked on that subject, the quality of sacred in myth is closely related to the function of a certain narrative. That function, off course, is tightly connected to the affirmation of the social order in question the text is pertaining to (Girard, 1978: 86).

Society and communal order, according to Georges Dumézil (Dumézil, 1195: 1422) (but also Gilbert Durand, as well as Sigmund Freud and René Girard) are legitimized by a notion of sacred – blessed by a being of supreme authority, from where all the laws and the very social structure and stratification come from (Frye, 1984: 144).

Rules that order a certain society are issued by the God(s) and are as such above question. In order to produce this aura of intangibility, the notion of taboo is created. The taboo, as shown by Sigmund Freud, René Girard, Claude Levi Strauss (as well as Mircea Eliade) stems from ritualized and rationalized violence, of which there is plenty in many Shakespeare's plays.

For this, Shakespeare's plays would qualify easily. Especially if we take into account the rest of the Eliade's definition – that the myth pertains to the events that have already happened (many of Shakespeare's plays or historical in theme) at the beginning of time (for that given community – on local level, Shakespeare's plays are set in the defining periods of English and European history). They are strongly moralistic and highly political; a good number of them deals in marking historical events that have defined English history (four of his plays dedicated to the war of the Roses, among others), as well as those that have defined European history (*Julius Cesar*, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, etc.); also, thematically, a good number of plays is set into mythical and/or fantastical décor (*The Tempest*, *Midsummer's Night Dream*), anchored in the events that are themselves on the crossroads between history and myth (taking for main themes the events such are the Trojan war and the Roman conquests).

The interesting question, however, is this. If a certain narrative pertains to embody values that are supposed to be immutable, and if we claim that Shakespeare's plays bear this quality, what are we to do with the notion of *transition*? It is an essential trait of not only Shakespeare's work, but we might say of all of the texts that can be defined as mythical. It is a trait of Shakespeare's opus that confirms our hypothesis of his plays bearing the quality of mythical

rather than denying it. From the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the Old Testament, many of the stories taken from the Greek classical myth, to the work of the Greek tragedians, we are witnesses of the works that are mythical in character all bearing a key notion of transition.

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* speaks of the end of the era of heroes (Gilgamesh being one of them, a half divine creature) and beginning of the era of common men. The Old Testament is a collection of compiled books and narratives that speak of a progress of the tribe of Israel from barbarism to civilization, from the mythic, heroic time towards a historic one; from the cyclical (again, mythical) time to the linear. In the same vein, the Greek tragedians adopt the same subject (and in order to legitimize it, they use the narrative “fodder” from the classical myth) – in almost all of their works, we are witnesses of the clash between the Old and the New, old gods and the new gods, divine law and human law, old rules versus the new. Much like Shakespeare, they speak of *transition*. Pierre Brunel invokes this notion, speaking of the decisive moments in the Greek history when the theater is being created:

[...] un déchirement fondamental qui correspondrait au moment de la tragédie grecque, à cette « période de transition entre un ordre religieux archaïque et l'ordre plus moderne, étatique et judiciaire, qui va lui succéder ». Au cours de cette période de transition, « les croyances religieuses sont compromises par la désintégration du rituel », le sens du sacrifice se perd, le système sacrificiel s'use. (Brunei, 198: 70-71).

Old values and laws, social order in general, are gone, and the new ones are setting in. This is off course a painful and violent process, as is clear from many of his works. Mythical narratives are transitional in nature, as well as they are political and engaged. One of the key qualities of a mythical narrative is his capacity to not only explain, for example, the creation of the world (as many myths do), but to do it in a way that justifies and explains a certain order. In this manner, myths indeed act as carriers of ideology. It is exactly in these periods of transition that the stability of the social order needs to be confirmed by a mythical narrative. We do not wish to engage in the further discussion with the thesis presented by Richard Schechkin (disputing the evolutionary character of the development of theater), but would still like to present a possibility – is it not conceivable that the falling apart of the ritual is exactly what disseminated different arts and myths? That it was, as Pierre Brunel suggests (and Shakespeare, in its own artistic way, elaborates), right from the death of a source of art, religion, ideology and social cohesion that all

these notions came from? Could it be that all of them, but myth specially (as the most important carrier of ideology) are therefore prone to transmediality (but also are in the constant state of development, that goes faster or slower, but seldom stops) – exactly on account of their *transitional* character?

Shakespeare's own period was that of transition, one of a considerable importance. The feudal system was falling apart and the mercantile capitalism was setting in. The Old versus the New; as Shakespeare saw it, the Old world full of honor, virtue and valor was disappearing and the new one, filled with greed and opportunistic ambition was setting in. His plays *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Tempest* and *King Lear* among other less well known plays are a very prominent and poignant testament to this. Unlike the Greek tragedians, he shows no enthusiasm towards the new order and the coming values. Here is a good example:

Moreover, if, as I have here argued, the great house represents the feudal way of life and feudal concept of value, so the city represents the bourgeois way of life and the bourgeois concept of value. The specific city Shakespeare chose as his setting – Venice – represented what may well have been the highest development of mercantile capitalist, just as today the United States represents the highest development of monopoly capitalism (Garvin, 1980: 98).

This notion is further underlined in the following passage:

I argued in the first half of this chapter that in *King Lear* Shakespeare sees feudalism dying and watches capitalism's bloody birth. He sees the new forces of capitalism and especially its competitive basis as in the end monstrous and tragic. But 1681, when Tate's *Lear* succeeds Shakespeare's, marks the start of a violent decade in which capitalism takes important steps to establish itself. The crushing of Monmouth's rebellion in 1685, the so-called Glorious Revolution and the dethroning of King James II in 1688, and William's victory over James at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 are some of those steps. The Glorious Revolution changed English society. It made the crown a clearly circumscribed, bourgeois monarchy, deprived of control over the army and the judges. It set up the Bank of England and instituted the National Debt, thus laying the basis for the development of full-scale capitalism. A society moving rapidly in a direction Shakespeare defined as blind and mad would find his play bewildering and remote. It preferred the "Regularity and Probability" of Tate's happy version (O'Flinn, 1976).

We therefore see that the transitional quality of Shakespeare's own time was reflected in his works. We can say that his works are in that particular manner both political and ideological. To further precise, his works are an artistic formulation of a certain ideology (criticism of coming capitalism and favor of the disappearing feudal regime) that is expressed through drama. All of the elements of a play are therefore oriented and themselves instrumentalized to carry this notion. As was stated by Paul O'Flinn, the plot of *King Lear*, the motivation of the characters, the furthering and the resolution of the play are there as devices of showing (as the author sees them) shortcomings of one ideology and the (disappearing) virtue of another.

This is a very important notion because it leads us back to the previously stated hypothesis that Shakespeare's plays are mythical in character thematically and structurally. In the previous chapter, we gave a brief insight into a partial thematic character of the mythical nature of his work (not addressing the propensity of some of his works to be situated within the actual mythical décor, as that is a different subject altogether) – we are now to address the structural aspect of mythical character of Shakespeare's work.

III

The structural aspect of the mythical narrative is of key importance to our hypothesis, much more so than the question of origin of myth or ritual. This was the reason to dedicate so much space to the discussion with attitudes on the subject presented by Richard Schechner. Whereas he disputes the origin of theater from ritual (and consequently myth), we adopt the position that it doesn't matter from which source it comes from; what interests us is how it's structured and what is its function. Roger Bozzetto stated it best while discussion the structural aspect of myth: "La quête du mythe d'origine est aussi vaine, certainement, que la quête de l'origine du mythe ; le mythe n'est pas une donnée initiale et primordiale dont seraient tributaires toutes les leçons ultérieures; ce sont des versions qui constituent le mythe" (Bozzetto, 2005: 175-176)¹¹.

It is on this basis that we are approaching the main hypothesis of the mythical character of Shakespeare's work. It is rooted in a definition given by Pierre

11 The search for the origin myth is as vain as is the search of the origin of myth; the mythe is not a given, is not a primordial fact that is repeated in the ultirieur itterations; the versions are what consitutes a myth. (Translation by Boris Petrovic).

Brunel (Brunel, 1992: 81-86), that a mythical narrative is recognized by the three fundamental traits: *irradiation*, *emergence* and *flexibility*.

Let us start from the last and the simplest trait. Flexibility is an important aspect of the capacity of mythical narrative to be “condensed” into a single archetypal symbol (a *mythème*, as Claude Lévi Strauss defined it) and to act within different contexts and different mythical decors – also, most importantly for this presentation, in different media. Flexibility insures that a certain “kernel” of myth will be equally effective in different media and in different narratives. We expressly do not use the term “text”, but opt for “narrative”, having the transmedial character of the *mythème* in mind.

Within Shakespeare’s work, we can see major traits being repeated throughout his work; similar symbols, *mythèmes* and narrative lines, sometimes even entire plots, being repeated in different contexts and decors, that range from Trojan war, the Roman empire, the war of the Roses and the fantastical settings of *The Tempest* and of the *Midsummer’s night dream*. We shall take for example a narrative pattern that repeats – yet in a flexible manner, “surviving” all the different contexts, eras and decors in which it is being placed – in most, if not all of Shakespeare’s plays (the one that is, also, highly political and ideological): the crisis of power and failing of the state. This theme is indeed very easy to observe both in major plays, like *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, as in minor, like *Pericles*. These are but few examples. The subject matter is the crisis of authority that comes from betrayal and braking of the law¹². This narrative line, in itself a *mythème* of archetypal character, is found in many different shapes, and situated in different eras and cultures. Yet, being of mythical character and in possession of the quality of flexibility, it manages to be incorporated and repeated with success. It goes without saying that this quality is of great relevance to any narrative that pertains to the quality of transmediality and the capacity of not only existing as a part of different narratives, but also as a part of different media. It is in this particular aspect that we see how the mythical narrative is inherently transmedial.

Second in line is Pierre Brunel’s notion of *emergence*, exceptionally relevant to the mythical narrative and the notion of coming into existence. As Shake-

12 Much in line with the mythical nature of his work, Shakespeare’s heroes brake divine laws, those that more important than the human ones. The main strife and indeed drama of his plays come from a very mythical situation – human ambition and greed are attacking the divine order. This is the case with plays such are *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, but even more interestingly with *Pericles*, where the oldest of all interdctions, the incest, is being committed at the very seat of power and law.

spere repeatedly deals with the clash of Old world and the New, the old (idealized) order being destroyed by the opportunistic new (another major theme that is flexible in repetition), he also, by analogy, deals with the notion of the new world emerging. Famous (and famously ironic) words “brave new world” come from *The Tempest*. Much in line with the thematic axis of Shakespeare’s work we already touched upon, the mercantile capitalism *emerging* and replacing the feudal order, many other traits of Shakespeare’s work pertain to the mythical quality of emergence. It is not a stretch to say that Shakespeare was busy making his own creation myths, feeling as an observer of the new world coming and old dying off, which is a mythical subject extraordinaire. Destruction where was once order (like in the case of *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*), blind ambition where there was once virtue, and many other traits of the new world that is coming instead of the old. This quality is of great relevance for Shakespeare’s work and is a constantly present notion throughout his creative endeavor.

The third and possibly the most interesting quality of a mythical narrative is that of *irradiation*. We say this especially having the context of transmediality in mind, and how relevant the quality in question is for the representation of one narrative in different media. Irradiation refers to the “agreed upon” quality of archetypal nature that does not need to explicitly be in the text for its presence to be felt. It is a notion of a certain idea that “goes without saying” – a lecturer is familiar, consciously or not, of a certain notion and he can recognize it in the text even if it is not even named. This quality situates itself in the subtext rather than in the text, and for it to be functional, it needs to be a part of a certain already familiar cultural context.

It is by no accident that Shakespeare would therefore situate his plays into eras of great historic and mythical, but in both cases symbolical, relevance; the Roman Empire, the Trojan War, the war of the Roses. Quite famously, Shakespeare pulls from the “communal well” of topics, symbols and motivations in order to promote his ideological position. This praxis aligns the trait of irradiation perfectly with the previous two, emergence and flexibility – the author is interested in the crisis of the power, the shattering of the old world and coming of the new. We recognize this preoccupation regardless of the décor and the era – it may very well be the Medieval Denmark, or the Roman Empire, or the late Medieval England, or the renaissance Venice. The ideological position remains solid despite the changing settings.

It is clear how this quality is of great importance if a certain “message”, or the ideological kernel, is to be preserved and perpetuated not only through different texts, but also through different media. That is the essential quality of the mythical narrative, drawing upon the heritage of oral or visual transmission of ideas, where one couldn’t rely on a document that was sure to be preserved.

Pierre Brunel’s definition however is built upon an already existing, older definition of a mythical narrative, that of Claude Lévi Strauss, that invokes rather different (but not mutually exclusive) qualities of the text. Claude Lévi Strauss states that what constitutes a mythical narrative are the traits of: flexibility, complexity, super structure, and repetition. The first one is already explained by Pierre Brunel; complexity and super structure pertain to the capacity of a single narrative to constitute itself into a super structure made of diverse works, sometimes (more often than not, actually) coming from the different authors and different periods of time, yet bearing the traits of similarity that align them together. Shakespeare’s entire work, if we take the characteristics of his ideological agenda, historical commentary, criticism of society, authority, transition of order etc., is one *coherent* super-structure. This opus, instead of having different authors situated in different eras, has one author that instead situates works into different historical eras (therefore producing this mythical quality artificially and perhaps intentionally).

The quality of repetition is crucial, and perhaps the most important one, as is stated by many different research of the subject of the mythical narrative, starting with Claude Lévi Strauss (Lévi-Strauss, 1958: 241), then continuing with Pierre Brunel (Brunel, 1999: 7), Danièle Chauvin (Chauvin, Siganos, Walter 2005: 235), Jean-Jacques Wunenburger (Chauvin, Siganos, Walter, 2005: 72-73) and others (Bottici, 2007: 47). Repetition, a quality closest to the ritual (intrinsically connected with the genre of drama and the theater, as was shown in the first part of the intervention), is a key component of the mythical narrative. Repeating certain traits with variations is what constitutes a mythical narrative and at the same time ensures his survival through different ages, cultures, cultures and ideologies. It goes without saying that it is the quality essential for the transmedial character of any given narrative. Repetition in different media is, amongst other aspects, what constitutes a mythical narrative, as we stated at the beginning of this intervention.

Variations through which the repetitions are done are seen as especially important by Claude Lévi Strauss. He states that it is through variations one

narrative achieves his life and vitality. They are all equally important and they all constitute a mythical narrative. We can take Danièle Chauvin's (Chauvin, Siganos, Walter, 2005: 47) analysis of the Bible for example – Shakespeare's work is much the same on that account: "D'un livre à l'autre, la Bible se répète: ici un scénario complet, là quelque éclair mythique... Le sens circule entre les livres, se précise et s'approfondit sans crainte des redites, des oublies, des contradictions: la réitération devient un lieu de son émergence."¹³

It is much in line with the announced attitude of Claude Lévi Strauss – there is no such thing as a singular "original" version of the myth – it exists through its variations: "Il n'existe pas de version "vraie" dont toutes les autres seraient des copies ou des échos déformés. Toutes les versions appartiennent au mythe" (Lévi-Strauss, 1958: 242)¹⁴.

So, to conclude – it is the very essence of the mythical narrative to be reproduced not only in different versions, but also in different media. It is that very quality that ensures its existence as a mythical narrative.

Before we get to concrete examples of transmedial character of the Shakespearean mythical narrative, we need to address another important aspect of it that constitutes it as such. A crucial element of the structural image of myth is the world separated in two's; in dichotomies.

The presence of dichotomies in a narrative is a very clear sign of the mythical image of the world, of myth-makers trying to make sense of their society by adhering to this Manichean dualism. Shakespeare does that abundantly, and thus situates his work in the domain of the mythical narrative. The most important dichotomy, the one between the Old and the New, has already been mentioned and substantiated. There are however others, equally prevalent and important.

One of them is that between duty and pleasure. This is easy to trace in Shakespeare's play *Anthony and Cleopatra*, where Rome is seen as the male principle (duty, law, and structure, military) and Egypt as a world of senses and

13 Translation Boris Petrovic: From one book to another, the Bible repeats itself: here a complet scenario, there just a hint of myth... The meaning circulates between books, becomes more precise and profound without the fear of repetition, forgetfullness or contradictions: the reiteration becomes a site of its emergence.

14 Translation Boris Petrovic: There isn't a "true" version of which all the others are copies or deformed echoes. All of the versions belong to the myth.

pleasures. Even the title of the play brings about a dichotomy male-female (Rome-Egypt):

”Le monde est articulé sur deux pôles: d’un côté Rome et de l’autre l’Égypte. Ces deux univers se dévisagent, s’aiment et se méprisent. Cette confrontation est rendue particulièrement manifeste dès les premiers mots de la pièce. En effet, Shakespeare a décidé de faire commencer Antoine et Cléopâtre(i) sur cette discordance. La sévère Rome (”Censuring Rome”, 5.2.56) regarde l’Égypte et dit son affliction devant le spectacle indigne que donne son Capitaine:

”Those his goodly eyes,
That o’er the files and muster of the war
Have glowed like plated Mars, now bend, now turn
The office and devotion of their view
Upon a tawny front
(1.1.2-6)” (Claret, 2000: 35)¹⁵.

Much down the same line and further substantiating this position is this statement:

Le dramaturge dresse le portrait d’une société romaine fondée sur la vertu et place à l’autre extrémité un monde égyptien de plaisirs. Le contraste entre ces deux pôles sert de moteur à l’intrigue qui oscille entre la froideur, la rigidité et la rigueur romaines et la chaleur, l’exubérance et la volupté égyptiennes (Jackson, 1988: 36)¹⁶...

... une charge érotique susceptible d’au moins deux destins: soit elle se heurte à un refus acharné qui se paie au double prix d’une déssexualisation du corps et de sa transformation en une agressivité morale redoutable en ce qu’elle emploie l’énergie érotique primitive pour chercher à détruire autrui. (Ibid, p. 30)¹⁷.

15 Translation Boris Petrovic: The world is articulated between two poles: from one side Rome and from the other Egypt. These two universes are unmasking one another, love each other and despise one another. This confrontation manifests itself from the first words in the play. Effectively, Shakespeare decided to start Anthony and Cleopatra off of this discordance. The strict Rome (”Censuring Rome”) regards Egypt and exclaims his affliction in front of the undignified spectacle given by its Captain.

16 Translation Boris Petrovic: The dramaturgy dresses the portrait of a roman society founded on virtue whereas on the other end is the Egyptian world of pleasures. The contrast between these two poles is the motor of the intrigue that oscillates between the coldness, the rigidity and the rigueur of Rome and the warmth, exuberance and voluptuousness of Egypt.

17 Translation Boris Petrovic: An erotic charge susceptible to at least two destinies: or she launches herself in the carnal refusal that pays itself the double price by a desexualization of her body

This idea of a clearly divided (mythical) world, down the lines of the dichotomical principal, invokes another mythical situation dear to Shakespeare – braking of the law (taboo) and the crises that ensues. A famous line from Macbeth attests to that – the queen, driven by her opportunistic ambition, casts aside her nature and breaks the Old (divine) law. The crisis ensues that will ultimately destroy her; but for the moment, she willfully confronts nature so as to better serve her ambition:

“Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top full
Of direst cruelty; make thick my blood,
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect and it! Come to my woman’s breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature’s mischief!” (*Macbeth*: 5.1.41-51).

This famous passage also invokes a mythical and even archetypal image of the metamorphosis; that is also a state of *transition*, from the human and natural (Old) to the artificial and inhumane (New). Many other Shakespeare’s plays are animated, motivated and structured around the notion of dichotomy. *Troilus and Cressida*, *Titus Andronicus*, already mentioned *Anthony and Cleopatra*, *A Midsummer’s Night Dream*, *The Tempest*, the list goes on. These are but the most obvious examples.

Conclusion

Shakespeare’s work has been adapted many times, in many different media, set in many different contexts. We argue that this is mostly because his narrative is of mythic nature – as such, and in proximity to the ritual, endowed by a superior capacity to carry the ideological kernel that it is centered around, it bears no issue of being applied in the most different contexts. A good example is a streak of movies done by Akira Kurosawa, who reenacted Shakespeare’s plays using a setting of the feudal Japan. *Ran*, one of his finest achievements,

and the transformation into a morally doubtful male aggressiveness, in which she employs her primitive erotic energy to try and destroy the other.

is an adaptation of the *King Lear*; *Throne of Blood* an adaptation of *Macbeth*; *The Bad Sleep Well*, an adaptation of *Hamlet*.

These plays translate well, even to a very different culture set in a different era, reenacted in a different media (from play to a movie). It is on account of their simplicity and universality, both of which (again) pertain to the mythical narrative.

Speaking of *flexibility* (and irradiation and emergence), a key aspect of a mythical narrative, we can take a very loose adaptation of several different Shakespeare's narrative lines, done in Takashi Miike's *Sukiyaki Western Django*. If there ever was an example of flexibility of a certain line of narrative, this would be it. Within it, we clearly see the warring faction of Whites and Reds, invoking the war of the Roses (and making a rather engaged comment on both Kurosawa and Shakespeare, all the while playing with another genre very comfortable with the mythical narrative, the western).

Much of flexibility can be said when it comes to the various paintings inspired by the work of Shakespeare, like for example a rather well known *Ophelia* (also known as *The Death of Ophelia*) by Sir John Everett Milais. We have a static image of a girl submerged in water, but thanks to the iconic scene that is already widely accepted – Pierre Brunel would add “irradiated” we know not only who she is, but are able to develop a rather complex narrative as well a set of feelings and impressions that go along with it. Flowers scattered around her, traditionally worn by brides, invoke another mythical and archetypal (hence dualistic and dichotomic) sentiment of the proximity of marriage and burial, Love and Death (Eros and Thanatos). It is exactly because of these mythical aspects, to recapitulate and to conclude, that certain threads of narrative are able to be so successfully transported into different media.

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MITSKI NARATIV I TRANSMEDIJSKI KARAKTER ŠEKSPIROVOG OPUSA

Apstrakt

U fokusu ovog rada je pojam mitskog karaktera Šekspirovog dela (mistifikacija istorije, ponavljanje toposa, specifična upotreba arhetipova, tematska kao i strukturalna upotreba mitskog narativa, itd). Razvijajući dalje ovu pretpostavku, članak istražuje kako mitski karakter Šekspirovog dela leži ne samo u tematskoj upotrebi motiva iz klasičnog mita, već i u naročitoj strukturi njegovih dela. Konačno, istražujemo i argumentujemo glavnu hipotezu ovog članka – da je u prirodi mita da bude fleksibilan i adaptibilan spram različitih medija; upravo je kvalitet mitskog narativa taj koji objašnjava veliku prilagodljivost Šekspirovih dela različitim medijima, kao i uspešnost adaptacije Šekspirovih komada za različite medije (filmovi, stripovi, slike, itd.)

Ključne reči

Šekspir, mit, mitski narativ, fleksibilnost, transmedijalnost

