

Reflections on the Epistemology Of Myth(M1)–and–Literature Transactions

Zsolt Virágos

[1] Preliminary observations

Two prefatory remarks are necessary at the outset. One, there can be no valid discussion of the protocols of the incorporation of M1-type prefigurations in the literary text without problematizing and sorting out the epistemological status of the “received” material, that is, of the “borrowed” constituent element. Indubitably, most of the epistemological noise tends to be generated by uncertainties involving the conceptual instabilities pertaining to the difference-and-likeness polarity between texts.

To some extent, let’s face it, these uncertainties are an admission of failure: despite spectacular advances in human thought and speculation, we still find ourselves unable to pin down the precise extent to which the external and internal formal building blocks of two texts should overlap for us to accept the components of comparison as “objectively” similar. Clearly, in inquiries of this nature we cannot avoid looking at analogy as one possible mode of cognition. Indeed, intertextuality and its satellites (interdependence, interlink, influence, the *ad infinitum* “play of texts,” source, residue, etc.) and analogy (together with its satellites: resemblance, sameness, difference, anomaly, archetype, paradigm, etc.) are interrelated within the same cluster of networking. However, simply because analogical reasoning can be both “correct” and “incorrect” (likely to be tinged by conative impulses or the simple desire to find meaning that appears to be coherent or simply “satisfying”), in our search for reliable interpretive options the question we ultimately have to ask is this: when can we accept analogical thinking as reliable? Put differently, to

what extent do cognitive operations based on analogy provide new, and preferably verifiable, knowledge? Contrariwise, we are involved in the same kind of game when focusing on the perception of difference. Indeed, it is ultimately legitimate to ask the question whether in borderline negotiations we can indeed separate analogical relationships from anomaly.

Although the above line of reasoning would certainly be convenient to pursue, as indeed it has been elsewhere, this is not what is going to be discussed in the present context. My discussion of “epistemological status,” therefore, will be considered in different, and apparently more peripheral, contexts. Status, in the given frame of reference, will include issues of authenticity, authority, authenticated version, meaning and interpretation, the problematic of the intelligibility of the M1-type configuration in the mythical correlation, as well as choosing between variable M1-type paradigmatic models, this last one focusing on what the ultimate prefiguration should be among rival versions.

The common denominator of these well-rehearsed points of entry is the concept of *sense-making*, at least in two basic functional ramifications: (1) in signifying the primordial *generation* of (obvious or latent) meaning; and (2) sense-making in the cognitive, every-day meaning of the cerebral appropriation of existing (even if dormant, because potential) relations, links, and significance. This is to show that in the final analysis I am talking here about *signification* versus *comprehension*. In sum, I see myth(M1)–and/in–literature transactions as manifestations of a special order of communication: a kind of communicative relationship which is essentially intertextual and intergeneric in nature. In order to avoid unnecessary mystification, it will also be necessary to remember the dual nature of sense-making: the *creation* as opposed to the *perception* of meaning. Without these demarcations no interpretation can exist.

My second remark pertains to conceptual delimitations. Throughout the present text I will be using the concept of myth in a special sense: I will be talking about *M1* or *M1-type/coded* myth. What is M1-coded myth? In the present discussion M1 will mean paradigm-generating ancient myth; myth thus will mean here sacred narrative or a high-prestige equivalent.¹ In this logic, throughout the discussion that follows,

¹ The rationale behind the “high-prestige equivalent” alternative is that if we accept the extant text of, say, one of Euripides’ dramas as the ultimate source of the myth of Medea,

the M1 code will variably connote the archaic, the primitive, the sacred, the theomorphic, the traditional, the canonized, as well as the time-honored and time-embalmed phenomenon. From the vantage point of the present, M1 is thus a fundamentally premodern, if not preliterate, phenomenon: a treasured relic of man's adolescence, a record of a particular kind of imaginative thought patterning generated at the dawning of human speculation. Consequently, it is legitimate to conceive of M1 as "received/borrowed" material: received/borrowed as a contributory stream for the benefit of—as well as against the background of—subsequent literary cultures. As such, it will connote the shared, the derivative, the "quoted," the rule-governed, the paradigmatic, the archetypal, the foundational, the primordial. It leads to the shared structural forms of common experience, to the larger narrative systems and archetypal forms—archetypal images, characters, and situations—constitutive of human culture. M1 constitutes meaningful links with tradition and convention, thus—emphatically so, for instance, in the modernist sensibility—with the notion of unchangeability, therefore of stability and order. Thus it should come as no surprise that in the modernist aesthetic sensibility M1 came to be radically upgraded as the ultimate target of a new quest for a saving paradigm, for a sort of higher discourse.

[2] "Why are we here?"

M1 is thus important for the present as "memory," as "relic," and as "residue" in the sense that this configuration of cultural continuity, thus of the social consciousness, comprises and conveys what I call the *OIs*: the "Original Inquiries." By these I mean questions, both existential and speculative, queries that no human community can shun. These are questions about the oldest known responses to inquiries about existence (the whys and hows of mankind's ontological roots), about the world and its parts, about men, women, as well as about men *and* women. I am talking of answers in response to inquiries pertaining to the basic human predicament, most typically to the kind of questions summed up in the

why not accept a select group of plays by Shakespeare or *The Brothers Karamazov*, or Melville's *Moby-Dick*, or dozens of further classic and classical texts as high-prestige artifacts of mythical rank and magnitude? This is a substantial theoretical issue involving border negotiations of a special kind that will not be addressed here.

title of a painting by Paul Gauguin: *Doù venons-nous? Que sommes-nous? Où allons-nous?* The questions, as we well know, have multiplied through the ages, the answers have been purified and scientized, but there is no escaping the awe that haunts the modern in the face of the original scrutiny. Indeed, this understanding of myth shows a close affinity with what transpired in the beginning, “in a primordial and non-temporal instant, a moment of sacred time” (Eliade, *Images* 57).

With these restrictions maintained, M1 should be seen as offering a perspective on myth that is very different from what its distant cousins have been called upon to serve: M2 and M3. M2, for instance, is a self-justifying intellectual construct which represents an inquiry into the ideologically attuned and the epistemologically suspect modern, the recent, the contemporaneous. It can appear in a large variety of guises, including propaganda, heroification, artistic schematism, stereotypy, iconography, political priorities and other ideological statements. Thus in the dilemma whether myths (or rather myths of a certain kind) are “interested” or “disinterested” formulations, M2-type thought patterning is clearly of the former type. M2 will be briefly referred to later in this discussion; M3, which in my system primarily denotes present-day responses to well-rehearsed and time-tested inquiries, will not be dealt with at all in the present discussion.

To sum, from the vantage point of literature, one of the main reasons for the relevance of M1 lies in its paradigm-generating potential, its potential for serving as a vast matrix for subsequent myth-using and myth-recycling applications, as well as for its prefigurative and archetypal uses.

[3] Authenticity and Authority

In ascertaining the status of M1-type configurations of different orders of magnitude, it is essential to take a close look at what we have on hand by way of borrowal and/or inheritance. Questions are also in order, and in this probing attempt the apparently simplest questions tend to be the most problematic. Thus: can we reconstruct what the myth *says*; or, more precisely, what an M1-type myth *says*? In other words, can we reconstruct the original meaning of the prefiguration, that is, *can we break the code*?

If by M1-type myths we mean “primitive” traditional oral tales of unknown authorship, that is, unsophisticated and non-literary narratives that are told in non-literate cultures, repeated and developed by anonymous storytellers, the answer is bound to be less than tentative, if not negative, for the simple reason that our knowledge of the early myths is vague and meagre. It would be unwise to disregard the implications of G. S. Kirk’s sobering observation that “[o]ur understanding of the constitution of these earlier [i.e., preliterate] myths must necessarily be defective, almost non-existent” (“Defining” 53). Or, as Mircea Eliade has remarked, “the mythology that Homer, Hesiod, and the tragic poets tell us about is the result of a selective process and represents an interpretation of an archaic subject which has at times become unintelligible” (“Definition” 3).²

Thus, if we want to meet the requirements of philological accuracy, we have to acknowledge that like ancient poetry, traditional myths, because they are not accessible (1) in their original form and (2) their immediate and particular cultural environment, cannot be interpreted reliably. Or, cannot in any *pure* and *primitive* sense, anyway. The explanation of certain features can only be approximated by means of comparative analyses of different myths and different versions. Even then, precise correlations are impossible to establish that would link a given myth to a particular place and time, or to the human conflict that may have given rise to it. And since most myths have been handed down to us through the filter of subsequent interpretations and reworkings, we have to content ourselves with a kind of conventional abstraction or a sort of “working-knowledge” version pieced together from compositions (from the pens of Homer, Hesiod, Hyginus, Stesichorus, Ovid, etc.) produced many centuries *after* the myths themselves had been born. In other words, there is no escaping the fact that in dealing with M1 we have no access to the original narratives: we are bound to deal with retellings, already “quoted” variants. Hesiod in his *Theogonia* (Theogony) and Homer in his epics—or the compilers of these works—were believers in tradition and transmitters of it, but they probably allowed themselves

² Eliade also claims that “[o]ur best chance of understanding the structure of mythical thought is to study cultures in which myth is a ‘living thing,’ constituting the very support of religious life—cultures in which myth, far from portraying *fiction*, expresses the *supreme truth*, since it speaks only of realities (3).

some freedom of interpretation or poetic expression. As Róbert Falus has argued, “it was not only Homer who drew upon the tradition of the singers of legends. The lyrical poets and playwrights of later centuries reworked the inherited myths and they competed in how novel and appealing variations on the traditional subjects they were capable of producing”(9).

The sobering fact is that the mythology of antiquity survived the ancient Greeks and Romans *only* in subsequent literary and other artistic renditions, i.e., in “quotations.” In this sense, none of the known forms of Greek and Roman mythology has an existence other than the heavily mediated, quoted versions. The myth of Prometheus, for instance, which is in fact the oldest Greek myth we know, survived from preliterate times in three texts: two epic versions by Hesiod and a tragedy from the pen of Aeschylus.³

Indeed, all modern texts recycling classical mythology quote quoted versions. Martin S. Day designates this quoted-recreated-mediated form *intermediate myth*, and by way of comment he observes:

Such myth is founded almost wholly upon archaic myth, but intermediate myth is skillfully shaped by highly conscious writers in a literate era. During the period in which intermediate myth is produced, the populace or the author or both still believe in the sacral nature of the myth. Aeschylus seems a devout worshipper of almighty Zeus, and Lucian of Samosata appears as sceptical as Edward Gibbon or Thomas Henry Huxley. The accomplished Greco-Roman purveyors of myth ranged from the sturdy agriculturist Hesiod to the ultra-sophisticated urbanite Ovid, but scholars agree that uniformly these ancient writers, even the pious Aeschylus, deemed myth a plastic substance that they were free to mold and interpret. (5)

W. Richter is even more specific on this point:

[A]ny attempt to attribute literal meaning to Greek myth will be shot through with ambiguity, for the tales are so immersed in their own cultural context that any careful study of them shows their un-reliability as a source of intelligible models for any kind of critical purpose. Far from containing any ready intelligibility they are remote, complex, mysterious and opaque. (80)

³ *Prometheus Bound*, which is the first part of a trilogy. Its sequel, *Prometheus Unbound*, exists only in fragments, and the concluding tragedy, *Prometheus the Firebearer*, is completely lost.

Most often, therefore, what is borrowed by the modern writer can seldom be thematically “innocent,” that is, meaningful in its unadulterated, original purity. To quote Righter again,

“[M]any modern versions of the classical myth, say Antigone or Theseus, are not exactly simplified models so much as a frame on which to construct an intense and immediate story, which uses its classical source more for its narrative shape than for any particular meaning the myth might be thought to have had” (42).

If, however, the received myth is not only abstracted, but also vague and indeterminate, it is hardly likely that its symbolic language could be adequately translatable. In this case what we have in terms of prefiguration is a nonreferential symbolic pattern with a soft focus of meaning that inevitably produces a kind of problematic residue of sense-making that is difficult to control.⁴

[4] Paradoxes of the Opaque Text

Apparently paradoxical though it may appear, the relative lack of analyzability and familiarity—as well as the open-endedness—of the inherited formula are attributes that can be imaginatively exploited by writer and critic alike. Indeed, once the myth, denuded of its historical reality, stands not for a concrete and single thing with precise delimitations but for a series of related possibilities, authorial expectations are likely to be fanciful, if not transcendentalizing, and the critical attitude to mythical meaning can often be arbitrary. The special alcove reserved for myth among other forms of expressiveness—primarily imagery and symbolism—, the added dimensions of vagueness and suggestiveness deriving from the very notion of mystery and “depth,” the portentous aura of the “mythic significance,” of the “deeper forces,” can easily lead to the assumption that myth, even when incorporated in subsequent literary (con)texts, is something apart and subject to special rules. It might be remarked parenthetically that mythological fiction, for instance, has even been considered to occupy a special place in terms of the very act of, say, novel-reading. According to J. J. White, “we must

⁴ For the *soft focus* metaphor I am indebted to Philip Wheelwright, especially as elaborated in his “The Archetypal Symbol.” (cf. *Perspectives in Literary Symbolism*, 214–243.)

read [this kind of literature] in a different way from works for which no such classical analogy has been offered" ("Mythological" 75).

What has been outlined above can potentially, though not necessarily, lead to speculative vagaries of interpretation. By saying "not necessarily," I simply mean that, remaining within the bounds of a kind of common-sense approach, one should be aware of the fact that in the continuity of literary history the intertextual dependence of literary works on the formal and thematic properties of their predecessors is inevitable. Literature, in a certain historical sense, has been dependent on the clichés of previous stages of expressiveness, and much of the success of subsequent writing has hinged upon new modes of refreshing the received convention. Or, to put it in more elegant phrasing, the development of literature has been the result of a series of continuities and discontinuities within the dialectic of tradition and innovation, and there is no reason why myth, one of the oldest, thus specially valorized, elements of the human heritage, should be excluded from this sequence.

It is also easy to realize that the individual sensibility, of writer or reader alike, may find a degree of rapport and can be touched emotionally by its confrontation with primitive and archaic presence, with something remote and alien, or even exotic. Indeed, the very sense of remoteness, the presentness of the past, the culturally conditioned attribution of high seriousness and approval can be contributory to affective involvement, a recognition of importance, even a sense of imaginative liberation in the cultural consumer. In spite of the possible lack of familiarity. "The very unfamiliarity of a body of myth or legend may ... be exploited precisely because its distance seems imaginatively useful..." (Richter 30). Not to mention further subjective and subjectivizing factors, such as "receptive snobbery."

Myth motifs as meaningful forms or symbols are abstract in the sense that they are relatively open, not elaborately controlled, are free from localizing restrictions or precise delimitations. It can often be precisely this built-in soft focus of connotative potentials that is likely to make them capable of eliciting a potential richness of imaginative extensions. There are, however, two aspects that should be borne in mind. One, myth for the ancient world may have expressed a conflict, a contradiction, blind alleys, deadlocks and incomprehensible terrible forces. They were born out of conflict, social and private human tensions. As Claude Mettra has noted, "the gods were born from the tears of mankind; men invented myths to console themselves, for the gods were

all silence and opacity” (“Epilogue” 1231). In this special sense I would even risk the claim that at the time of their genesis what we regard today as sacred tale or traditional narrative (M1) was simply M2: in their original meaning-context they must have been as distinct and localized—and ideologized—as modern myths.

As indicated earlier, however, the original literal meaning of most borrowed myths is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct. Further, as Righter claims, “the modern writer chooses something which is inevitably in some degree alien even if it forms a part of an accepted literary tradition” (41). Because of this apparent distance, slight as it may be, and no matter how organic the internal connection between myth and artifact, it is difficult to accept—as some influential spokesmen of Anglo-American Modernism claimed—that myth alone could automatically function as a catalytic agent in creating the universality (or “order,” “shape,” “significance,” “tradition,” etc.) of a given work of art. Myth may be used in furthering this aim, but not necessarily by mere presence or even by a kind of topic and comment relationship, but by internal position and the particular aesthetic function it is called upon to serve. In the final analysis, it is reasonable to claim that the presence of myth in a work of art cannot possibly guarantee the quality of the artifact in advance.

In fact, the fallacy of the intrinsic value of mythic paradigm and archetype has contributed to producing a lot of clichéd works. As one critic has remarked, “there is a tendency to regard works using great symbols *ipso facto* as great literary works. Certainly Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Blake, and Goethe are conspicuous for their use of archetypes, but so, unfortunately, are trashy lesser works, best sellers, third-rate movies, and comic books” (Friedman 315). Or, as Ruthven suggests, “archetypal images ... may pop up in a toothpaste advertisement as readily as in an epic poem” (77).

[5] The Intelligibility of M1 in Literature

The cultural situation of the author, any author for that matter, may be substantially qualified by the decisions s/he is called upon to make whenever confronted with the issue of intelligibility. To generate prose, to write a book is to invoke the possibility of a reader. Ideally, the relationship of both novelist and reader to myth is tacitly assumed to be

one of familiarity. However, one does not even have to consult school curricula to come to the realization that the expectations of intelligibility of received M1 material are just not valid. G. Steiner was undoubtedly right in claiming in the 1960s that “the world of classical mythology, of historical reference, of scriptural allusion, on which a preponderant part of European and English poetry is built ... is receding from our natural reach” (*Language* 81). It would seem that prefigurative techniques for this reason should be foredoomed to failure because [1] if the incorporated material is not understood, it cannot convey the weight of evocation, and [2] normally it has not been the aim of literature as a communicative art to deliberately rub the reader’s nose into their own ignorance. Paradoxically, however, the very obscurity of a body of myth (consider much of the myth material used by Yeats or by the numerous Native American and Chicano authors emerging for over three decades in formal American prose) may be exploited precisely because its distance seems imaginatively useful. The obscurity of myth may be functional in literature, since myth can draw its strength from its very unanalyzability.

The potential lack of understanding may also have the opposite effect for subjective reasons. It is at this point that the cult of the merely curious and the awe-inspiring has a role to play, not to forget about what I labeled above as “receptive snobbery.” Once myth has established itself as the in-thing to go in for, it is not bound to lose its appeal even if the built-in meaning is lost on the recipient. To offer an analogous example, even he who has never heard a symphony in his life will agree that Beethoven was a great composer. Of symphonies.

The problem with a large proportion of myth critical writing is that the correlations established between an aspect of plot or character and its actual or assumed mythical prefiguration are often made to move out of what the literary example demands. The forcing of the mythical dimensions, the “do you see it?” aspect of clue-hunting, the uncanny reverence in which the presence of the ingeniously unearthed resemblances is held has produced so much loose tissue of “obliquely” and “elliptically” meaningful allusions and suggestions that one cannot help feeling the finder often becomes his own creator.

[6] Which Version of the Prefiguration is “Authentic”?

Our test case will be the above-mentioned myth of Medea, a favorite and oft-rehearsed prefigurative dramatic narrative for subsequent recycling transactions. The abstracted summary of the story-of-mad-revenge paradigm (formulated somewhat in the spirit of Stith Thompson’s motif-index) would sound something like this: murderous mother gets even with the father of her son(s) when he abandons her for the sake of another woman. Within the European frame of reference, the most influential and memorable objectification of this tragic pattern is a drama first produced in 431 B.C.: *Medea* by Euripides. This ancient text in turn has spawned a large number of more recent incarnations in such diverse areas as literature (L. A. Seneca, P. Corneille, F. Grillparzer, J. Anouilh, etc.), music (e.g. L. Cherubini), the fine arts (from Delacroix to Veronese), the cinema (above all Pasolini’s famous film [1969] with Maria Callas acting in the role of Medea), also including numerous more recent adaptations such as one of the dozen or so Chicano dramas by Mexican and Chicano authors. A brief look at a one-act play by Chicano playwright Carlos Morton (1945–) will shed some light on the precarious status of the M1-type text as a fathering/implicating source.

The setting of Morton’s *La Malinche* (1983) is part of Mesoamerica which subsequently became Mexico.⁵ The plot begins with a scene of preparation: in the ruined Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán—today’s Mexico City—the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés is getting ready for his second wedding. His chosen mate this time is Catalina, daughter of the Spanish viceroy. La Malinche, who still loves the conquistador, feels that she has been betrayed and taken advantage of. In her rage, to get even,

⁵ Like the Virgen de/Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, the golden eagle in the national flag of Mexico, the grandiose mural paintings of Diego Rivera (as well as of J. C. Orozco and D. A. Siqueros), tequila, Frida Kahlo’s world-famous canvases, the feared and venerated volcano by the name of Popocatepetl, the sweeping popular music known as mariachi, the indigenous woman of the early 15th century who came to be known as La Malinche is one of the unmistakable iconic signifiers of Mexico. Despite the fact, I should add, that the very mention of her name has elicited both praise and denigrating overtones. Her contradictory, if indelible, role in the early history of Mexico, particularly in the war of conquest led by the conquistador Hernán Cortés against the Aztec Empire is fittingly illustrated by these words: “el personaje ausente presente”: someone who is both there and here, equally in the distant past and the accessible present.

she schemes a cruel revenge. She joins forces with two prehispanic women, Cihuacoatl and La Llorona: the names of both women are associated with the rape and murder of children as well as with transitions between life and death. La Malinche schemes to pretend that she will accept the Spaniard's betrayal dispassionately as an inevitable fact and outwardly she acts as if she accepted the imminent marriage as unavoidable. Surreptitiously, however, she concocts a plan of action in which Catalina is to meet her violent death on the day of the wedding. La Malinche prepares two gifts for the would-be bride: a golden headdress and a gownlike ornamental dress. These she douses with poison and she orders the young boy Martín—Cortés and Malinche's own son—to deliver the wedding gifts to the conquistador's fiancée. When Catalina opens the present delivered, she is dazzled by the glittering dress and the splendid quetzal-feathered headpiece. She tries them on and she immediately senses the hidden poison's impact. She screams as her body burns and disintegrates. Expecting help from her uncle, Bishop Lizárraga, she holds on to him who thus also falls victim to the cruel revenge. Infuriated, Cortés goes to find Malinche so as to kill his one-time interpreter, confidante and lover. He soon locates her and finds that the woman is mourning: she is keeping vigil over the inert body of their dead son. As hinted by Martín's own mother, the young mestizo child has been killed by La Llorona—with the conquistador's own sword.

CORTÉS: It wasn't I who slit his throat.

MALINCHE: It was your blade, forged in Spain.

CORTÉS: He died because you did not want him raised a Spaniard?

MALINCHE: He died because you would not allow him to be raised a Mechica.

CORTÉS: Give me his little body so that I may bury him in a Christian way.

MALINCHE: No, you used your religion to deceive us.

CORTÉS: Have mercy on his soul!

MALINCHE: We will cleanse him in the lake, where Tlaloc reigns. (55)

Malinche and Cortés blame each other for Martín's death, and the tragic scenes end with mutual vituperation and curses flying both ways.

It is unlikely that to a spectator/reader with a European cultural frame of reference the above plot—the shape of the story—should be unfamiliar. Indeed, as the story of the jilted/abandoned, jealous and revengeful woman is unfolding, the direction of the plot tends to become increasingly more predictable: the events of the play, segment by

segment, come to be dictated and guided by the plot segments of another text embedded in the European literary culture centuries earlier. Morton's text is clearly determined (if not overdetermined), and it is not necessarily an archetypal plot model inherited through the Jungian unconscious that we should have in mind when we look at it but a much earlier objectification of the story dating back to the fifth century B.C., of which the foundational pattern is *Medea*. Foundational, that is, in the sense that each and every subsequent recycling of the theme will, by necessity, return to the play performed in 431 B.C., even if—Trencsényi-Waldaffel claims—"it consciously challenges it either in its motif-structure or solution" (xxxvii).

It would be a waste of time and effort to devote critical ink to considerations of the possibility or justifiability of the comparison of the two dramas: the Euripidesian tragedy versus Carlos Morton's Chicano text. As a critic of John Steinbeck's put it almost three decades ago when this critic commented on the Nobel-awardee's prefigurative technique through which ancient myth was incorporated in modern texts, that the oscillation between the two levels was "blindingly obvious" (Davis 4).⁶ We could say the same thing about Morton's myth-and/in-literature transactions: the Chicano version (the Cortés-Malinche paradigm) is clearly prompted by the Greek Jason-Medea model, etc.

However, this is not really the issue here. What is crucial to consider in this particular instance is whether the Greek playwright's version established a normative recycling mode in the literary culture; "normative" in the sense that Euripides's plot would be generally accepted as—with the later versions echoing—the exemplary *myth of Medea*. The drama version of the plot—which thus is also a torso version—concludes with Medea killing the two sons and she escapes Jason's wrath in a sky-borne chariot drawn by dragons. Her fate seems to

⁶ This "blindingly obvious" aspect is further underscored by the sheer historical and demographic factuality of Latin American reality. The "sensation of orphanhood" that Fuentes is talking about, the need for a sense of parenthood, a father and a mother, became a permanent fixture of post-Columbian Spanish American existence. "Most mestizos," Fuentes explains, "did not know their fathers. They knew only their Indian mothers, the common-law wives of the Spanish. Miscegenation was certainly the rule in the Iberian colonies..." (144). In addition, the contrast between the Christian conquistador of the European Renaissance versus the "barbaric Indian" woman of Nueva Espana offered effective ideological support for philandering behavior without the least consideration of the moral consequences of "practical amalgamation."

be sealed, her luck is running out, and her subsequent life appears to be conforming to a downward spiral. In terms of the logic of dramatical plot construction this is a creditable and satisfying conclusion, and Euripides orchestrates the termination of the sequence of revolting scenes with great mastery.

However, if we look at the “unabridged” myth of Medea, which actually would be the untold sequel of the Euripides story, we find that Medea’s fate is far from being linked to an unpromising alternative; indeed her life is off to a fresh start, full of promises and surprising happy endings. In the larger myth of Medea, although she has to suffer the consequences of her conspiratorial disposition (she unsuccessfully plots the death of Theseus), Jason’s former enchanting sorceress mistress finds a father (King Aegeus of Athens) to her new son (whom she makes the king of Colchis), becomes a famous woman warrior and the founding mother of the Medes, a people living in Media, south-west Asia. An action-filled life, no doubt. However, the dilemma is not dispelled: which version of the Medea myth should be accepted as genuine and authentic? In one of these Medea rises and falls. In the other one she ultimately triumphs, against formidable odds. Which is a substantial difference.

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