

The Transformation of Mythological Stories into the Art of Painting

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Abstract: Mythology tells about the character traits and relationships in human society. Topics are about tenderness, betrayal, motherhood, or the courage of love. In the visual arts, the mythological genre was formed in the Middle Ages; He painted legends and traditions. Images of ancient heroes and gods appeared in the pre-Christian period and occupied an important place in the works of Renaissance artists. In the 18th century, mythological scenes became part of the national ideology and began to have social and political overtones. Depicting generals and rulers as ancient gods, artists conveyed state events through "Heavenly" battle or genre scenes. At the center of the mythological scene are gods, heroes of fairy tales and legends, fairy creatures and fictional historical characters. The artist pays great attention to image perspective and volume to give the viewer a realistic impression of what is going on. A large number of vivid images, attention to detail, rich and dynamic subject matter, an abundance of nudity distinguish this type of painting. Using the play of light and shadow, bright tones and deep contrast, painters brought their subjects to the fore, created image depth and increased the effect of the canvas on the audience. In this article, based on the stories of mythological characters, the connections between mythology and the art of painting are explained, the use of mythological elements in the art of painting and its transformation into the art of painting are exemplified.

Keywords: Mythology, Painting, Mythological Elements

Introduction

The Word mythology is formed by the combination of the words 'myth' and 'logia'. While Myth; means the spoken words, or a story told, logos; means science and reason of mind. Mythology, on the other hand, means "the knowledge of myths, the systematic sum of myths" (Necatigil, 1973: 7). Mythology is defined as a branch of science that examines all the extraordinary stories about the creation and end of the universe, gods, and humans, created by societies that could not explain the events, by blending reality and imagination (Kaya, 2003:19). People in mythology are supernatural beings and are known for the qualities they represent. Mythology; was born out of an instinctive need that drives people to search for the cause of events around them.

It emerges with the description of a lived past (Köktan, 2014:262). For example, comparative mythology is the study of connections between myths from different cultures, whereas Greek mythology is the body of myths from ancient Greece. In a very broad sense, the word can refer to any traditional story (Muniz, 2010). The main characters in myths are usually gods, supernatural heroes, and humans.

Myths as sacred stories are often endorsed by rulers and priests and are closely linked to religion or spirituality. In society, a myth is often considered a true account of the distant past.

Myths usually take place in a primitive age when the world has not yet reached its present form and explain how the world reached its present form and how traditions, institutions and taboos were established. Artists used the content of myths as the medium for depicting dramatic or idealized scenes, often involving nude figures. Western art is, of course, dominated by the mythologies of Greece and Rome. For example, in Renaissance art, examples of these abound, considering the spirit of the time. Artists of that period saw classical and religious themes in light of the humanistic principles that characterized their time. They tell mythological and biblical stories about their experience of place and time as made up about it. It is not uncommon to see paintings by Raphael or Titian in which Roman soldiers in the scene of the Passion of Christ are represented as Italian soldiers of their time. In mythological scenes, someone like Botticelli would paint Venus and the Graces as women considered the most beautiful in Florence (Muniz, 2010). Mythology has played an integral role in every civilization on earth. Prehistoric cave paintings, stone engravings, tombs, and monuments show that people developed a belief structure that corresponded to the definition of 'myth' or 'legend' provided by Leach and Fried, long before they could put their myths into words. According to twentieth century psychiatrist Carl Jung, myth is a necessary aspect of the human psyche that must find meaning and order in a world that often manifests itself as chaotic and meaningless. Jung (1923:23-24) writes:

“The soul, as a reflection of the world and man, is something of infinite complexity that can be observed and studied in many ways. We are faced with the same problem that the world causes: since a systematic study of the world is beyond our powers, we have to content ourselves with only the rules of thumb and especially those that concern us. Everyone makes his own world segment for himself and builds his own special system, often with airtight partitions, so that after a while it seems to have grasped the meaning and structure of the whole. But the finite can never comprehend the infinite.”

Jung's endless references are the myriad qualities of the mysterious, sacred, and powerful that provide the essential appeal of mythological tales and themes, as they give an ultimate meaning to human existence. The concept of something bigger and stronger than oneself gives hope for direction and protection in an uncertain world.

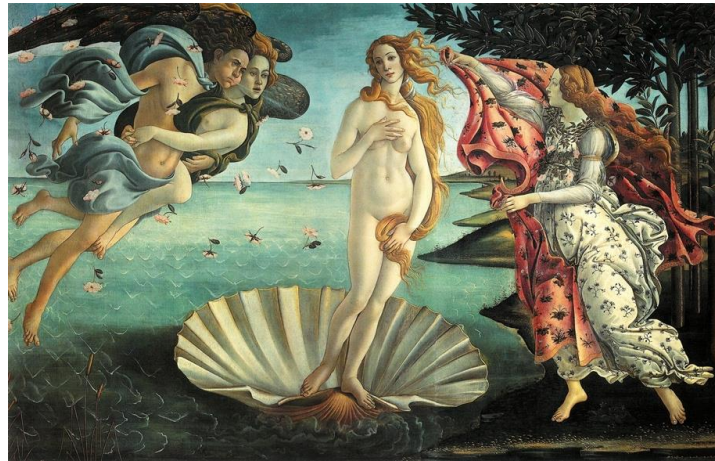


Image 1. The “Birth” of Venus, Tempera on canvas by Italian artist Sandro Botticelli

At the center of the mythological scene are gods, heroes of fairy tales and legends, fairy creatures and fictional historical characters. Christian themes are well known in modern Western culture to the point where they have almost become "cliche". Christian images are much more recognizable than most images in mythology. While Christian icons have spread to the masses, mythological scenes are often found in intellectual circles who enjoy good literature and art.



Image 2. ‘The Last Supper’ by American artist, Ron English

From the angels to the last supper, contemporary artists have often dedicated and infused these well-known symbols with new interpretations and personal meanings. These artworks can challenge the assumed religious institutions and prevalent beliefs in our society. They can also serve as reminders of ancient celebrations, practices, and stories that need to be retold in the modern sense. These artistic interpretations can make us aware of the value we give on mass media, consumer objects, and the way we experience pop culture day in and day out. What about legends? Although popular in film, literature, and art, the legends seem to belong to a different realm. We don't treat myths the way we treat religion. Since religion is the choice and preference for people, the work done may become respect or disrespect. In any case, the subject of religion in art can be troublesome and

disturbing to most people or mentality. But this is not the case with legends because legends are different. Ancient religions that believed in the existence of many Gods are now considered mythology because no one really believes in them except Neopagans and other new age sects. Not only are references made to ancient religions with many Gods as mythology, but also to other existing polytheistic religions.

Have you ever wondered why Krishna and other Hindu gods are found in mythology books? For a Hindu, Krishna is as real as Jesus to Christians. We see why there are elements of Jesus in many mythologies. We can see that mythology is a word with negative connotations that we use to distance ourselves from gods and other divine beings we don't believe in and reject them as possible truths. In our modern language, myths are defined as a false story or anything that is not true. For example, a crucified saviour born from the virgin, along with the Garden of Eden, the devil, angels, Noah's ark, and other stories from the Bible, can be traced back to its ancient roots in Babylonian or Egyptian myths. In fact, most of the Near Eastern religions that existed in ancient Rome during and before early Christianity shared similar beliefs and rituals. These religions basically told the same Jesus story with a few variations. For example; Other "mythological" figures such as Orpheus, Mithra, Adonis, and Dionysus, as well as others, have much in common with Jesus, including his birth from a virgin, miracles, crucifixion, resurrection, and the promise of Salvation through his sacrifices.



Image 3. "Gaia Altarpiece" Oil painting on canvas, 48" x 48 " by French American Artist Elsie Russell

Monotheistic and patriarchal religions suppressed polytheistic tendencies in the past, but the Neoplatonist custom has not been able to prevent it from re-emerging since the early Renaissance. In this global age we live in, there is no better language than that of legends to describe what is going on around us. If we use the term "legend" in the modern sense, we can say that we live in the age of legends. There is the myth of "greenwashing" and "green companies", the myth of a "global village", the myth of "border countries", and the

myth of a luminous populist leader who will save us all. Today there are many myths about beauty, culture, art, justice, war, food, energy, and many other topics that consciously aware artists must address in their work.

E.g.; Pandora was the first woman in Greek mythology. Regarding Hesiod, each God helped create her by giving her unique gifts. Zeus ordered Hephaestus to remove her from the earth as part of humanity's punishment for Prometheus to steal the secret of fire, and all the gods joined in offering her "tempting gifts." Pandora, or her other name, Anesidora, inscribed against his figure in the white-ground kylix in the British Museum, alludes to "The Sender of gifts", "from below" within the earth. According to legend, Pandora opened a jar (pithos), sometimes mistranslated as "Pandora's box" in modern accounts, releasing all the evils of humanity, but besides certain evils, plagues, and diseases, (explained in detail by Hesiod) after closing it again then they just leave no hope. He opened the jar out of simple curiosity and not as a malicious act (Image 4).



Image 4. 'Pandora' by Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema



Image 5. 'Sappho and Alcaeus' by Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema

Sappho was an ancient Greek poet born on the island of Lesbos. Later, the Greeks included him in their list of nine lyric poets. It was between 630 and 612 BC. He is said to have died around 570 BC, but little is known with certainty about his life. We have lost a large part of his poetry, which was widely known and greatly admired in antiquity, but great pieces of his reputation endured with surviving. Alcaeus of Mytilene (620 BC–6th century BC), Ancient Greek lyric poet who supposedly invented the Alca verse. He was included in the canonical list of nine lyric poets by Hellenistic Alexandrian scholars. He was an earlier contemporary and may have allegedly exchanged poetry He was a Sappho lover. He was born in the aristocratic ruling class of Lesbos, the main city of Lesbos, where he was involved in political disputes and blood feuds. According to another example; In Greek mythology, the Sirens were three dangerous bird women, depicted as seducers who, with their enchanting music and voices, lured nearby sailors to a shipwreck on their island's rocky shores. Roman poets placed them on an island called Sirenum scopuli.

In some later rationalized traditions, the true geography of the "flowery" Anthemoessa or Anthemusa island is fixed: sometimes at Cape Pelorum and on the islands known as the Sirenuse, near Paestum or at Capreae. All these places were surrounded by cliffs and boulders. When the sirens were given a parentage, Terpsichore, they were considered the daughters of the river god Achelous, who was the father of Melpomene, Sterope, or Chthon. For the Greeks, the sirens "who played with flowers in their meadows" were not sea gods, although they did attract sailors. Their numbers are variously reported, from two to five. In the Odyssey, Homer says nothing about their origins or names, but gives the number of the Sirens as two.

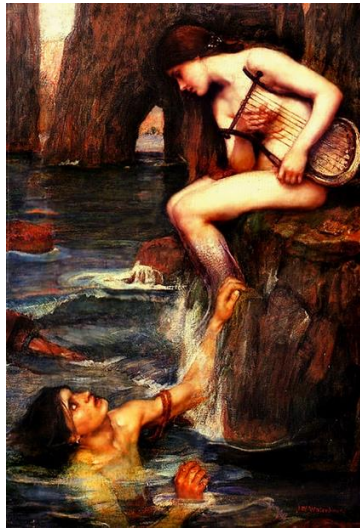


Image 6. 'Sirens' by John William Waterhouse

Orpheus was a legendary musician, poet and prophet in ancient Greek religion and myth. The main stories about him focus on his ability to enchant all living things and even stones with his music; the attempt to take his wife from the underworld; and his death at the hands of those who could not hear his divine music. An archetype of the inspired singer, Orpheus is one of the most important figures in the reception of classical mythology in Western culture, depicted or alluded to in numerous forms of art and popular culture, including poetry, opera, and painting. He was the founder and prophet of the "Orphic" mysteries. A collection of surviving Orphic Hymns is credited with the composition. Shrines containing the supposed remains of Orpheus were considered oracles. Ancient Greek sources note Orpheus' Thracian origins.



Image 7. 'Nymphs Finding the Head of Orpheus' by John William Waterhouse

1. Nicolas Poussin (5th of June, 1594 - 19th of November, 1665)

Nicolas Poussin (5th of June, 1594 - 19th of November, 1665) was a French painter of the classical style. His work predominantly includes clarity, logic, and order, and he prefers line to colour. His work serves as an alternative to the dominant Baroque style of the 17th century. It remained the main source of inspiration for classically oriented artists such as Jacques-Louis David, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, and Paul Cézanne until the 20th century. He spent most of his working life in Rome, except for a brief period when Cardinal Richelieu ordered him to return to France to serve as the King's First Painter.

Initially, Poussin's genius was recognized only by small circles of collectors. (A particularly large collection of his works was collected by Louis XIV in the twenty years following his death.) It is also acknowledged that he contributed a new theme of "classical seriousness" to French art.



Image 8. Bacchanal before a Statue of Pan



Image 9. Et in Arcadia Ego

2. William-Adolphe Bouguereau - (1825-1905)

After he started to draw, a realistic approach outweighed the belief and used mythological themes, giving a modern interpretation of classical subjects, and also emphasizing the female body. William Adolphe Bouguereau was a staunch traditionalist, and alongside his genre paintings, he used mythological themes, a modern interpretation focusing on the nude female form. are classic topics in interpretation (Era, 2017). He brought to life bathers, shepherds, goddesses, fairies and madonnas in a way that appealed to the wealthy art patrons of the period.

Bouguereau used the old-fashioned way of working on a painting containing pencil and oil paint sketches, providing a nice and accurate version of the careful painting style of the human form. Hands, arms, feet, and skin were especially appreciated in his paintings. He is considered a unique figure in the art world and is said to have given his canvas an elegant and perfect treatment (Era, 2017). Bouguereau had boundless industry and enthusiasm. Although he painted portraits, the real dam was not found in them. He preferred mythological and religious themes, ruling them with extraordinary grace and loyalty. It softened the individuality that can be seen

in the weathered faces of peasant children and women, and in the goddesses made to swim in the misty ether of a floating stream set in a traditional landscape.

His brush was very creative and his popularity continued to increase with each of his works. The number of canvases is probably higher than other contemporary artists (Era, 2017).



Image 10. 'The Youth of Bacchus' (1884) by William-Adolphe Bouguereau



Image 11. 'Battle of the Centaurs and the Lapiths' (1825-1905) by William-Adolphe Bouguereau

3. Frederic Leighton (December 3, 1830 – January 25, 1896)

Sir Frederic Leighton is an English painter and sculptor. His works have depicted history, the Bible, and classical subjects. His 1877 sculpture, the Wrestling athlete with a python, was recognized in his time for the opening of a Renaissance in contemporary British sculpture, referred to as the New Sculpture. His paintings represented Britain at the major 1900 Paris exhibition. He is the first painter to take place in the New Year's Hall of Fame in 1896.

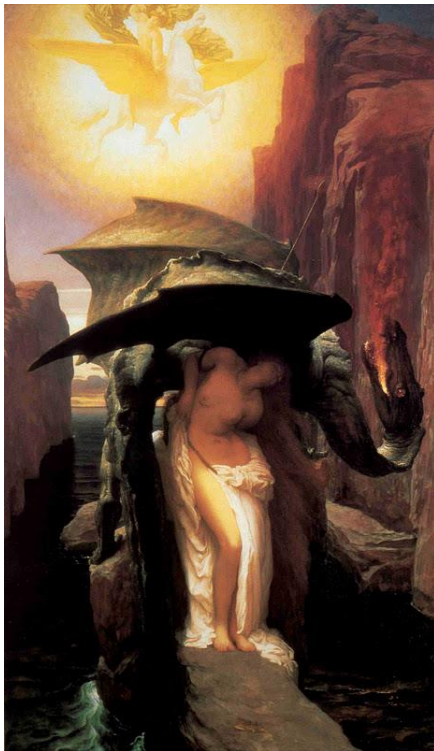


Image 12. 'Perseus and Andromeda' (1830- 1896)



Image 13. 'The Bath of Psyche' (1830- 1896)

Conclusion

Mythology is the study and interpretation of usually sacred tales or fables of a culture known as myths, or the collection of such stories that deal with various aspects of the human condition. Good and bad; the meaning of suffering, human origins; origin of place names, animals, cultural values, and traditions; the meaning of life and death, the afterlife and heavenly stories of gods or a single god. Myths express the beliefs and values that a particular culture holds on these matters.

Myths tell tales of ancestors and the origin of humans and the world, deities, supernatural beings (satires, fairies, mermaids) and heroes with superhuman, often God-given powers. Myths also describe the origins or nuances of longstanding traditions or explain and illustrate natural phenomena such as sunrise and sunset, the cycle of the moon and the seasons, or thunder and lightning storms. Whatever their origin, these paintings often involve figure painting. Good - bad, death - birth are seen in the works that the artists approach with their own perspectives and styles. In addition, artists, apart from these concepts, which are the leading roles in human life; They also mentioned physically different bodies, the form of the earth and sky, reflection and reality, beauty, and the transience of beauty, valuable and worthless. Mythological and religious themes have a long history in the painting tradition. The term mythology refers either to the study of myths or to a set of myths. In the academic field of folklore, myth is defined as a sacred narrative that explains how the world and humanity came to be as it is. Many scientists in other fields use the term "myth" in slightly different ways. Mythological scenes, characters in paintings depict traditions and characters of ancient legends, folk tales, legends.

Gaia, Zeus, Aphrodite, Apollo, Artemis, Athena, Dionysus, Hera, Hermes, and Pandora, who were the main gods and goddesses of mythology that we all knew until the 20th century, are the characters most often transferred to canvases in painting art. Roman deities such as Apollo, Diana, Juno, Jupiter, Mars, Mercury, Neptune, and Venus were also popular subjects. The topics are still in direct connection with the message to be conveyed, besides their popularity in the art of painting, and they also act as a source of support for us to deal with many untouched issues.

Today, what is called "mythology" are the characters and beliefs of the ancient past that should be remembered. The stories that make up the body of ancient mythology, the stories from accepted scriptures are known to serve the same purpose for the people of the time as they do for people today. They put an audience at ease, and also provides a sense of unity, harmony, and protection to a community of like-minded believers.

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