

## EDITORIAL: MODERN MYTHMAKING

by

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*I have often had the fancy that there is some one myth for every man, which, if we but knew it, would make us understand all he did and thought.*

– W. B. Yeats, “At Stratford-on-Avon,” *Ideas of Good and Evil* (1903)

*By emphasizing, omitting, or innovating, the poet could use a myth to express his own vision.*

– Herbert Golder, translator, introduction to *Aias* by Sophocles

This issue of *Echoes* collects eight creative pieces—works of fiction, poetry, and drama—written by undergraduate students from the School of English who, in Spring 2017, attended the creative writing workshop “Modern Mythmaking” with an emphasis on Greek mythology.

Charged with profound moral and philosophical questions, Greek myths were originally passed down orally, changing to reflect local customs, social and political conditions, and contemporary tastes. Tragedians innovated upon previous treatments of the myths to confound audience expectations and draw parallels between the ancient stories and present-day concerns. Modernist writers imbued myths with new meanings to address postwar anxieties: technological and urban growth, interest in the subconscious, spiritual malaise, disillusionment, and horror.

The work presented in this issue is the outcome of a semester-long creative writing workshop in which the students reimagined Greek myths in order to re-envision their position in the modern world. How might Persephone, Apollo, Medusa, Icarus, and Odysseus appear today? How can the situations, landscapes, and themes of mythology be remixed and reinterpreted to dramatize contemporary questions and struggles? The students read and analyzed American literary texts that approach and refresh classical myths by authors like Anne Carson, Louise Glück, Maile Maloy, Anthony Marra, Zachary Mason, and Lucia Berlin, then adapted these writers’ strategies for their own creative practice using a variety of writing exercises. The pieces presented in this issue represent the diversity of experience and imagination that invigorated our workshop. At the end of each piece, the author reflects on the myth that inspired his or her work.

In his cycle of poems, *Hollyweird*, Aris Kleiotis combines seemingly unrelated obsessions: the words of American singer-songwriter Lana Del Rey meld with the mantras of Modernist writers, and the courtly love between Odysseus and Penelope is recast first against the galactic battles of Sailor Moon, then in the sickly sweet desire of Lolita and Humbert Humbert. Like the inconstant moon, Kleiotis’ characterizations of Homer’s clever lovers metamorphose and illuminate.

Eleni Myrtsioti’s story “Life in Technicolor Pixels” brings Narcissus and his reflection to modern-day Paris as two ruthless workaholics grappling for control at a tech startup. Myrtsioti

toys with the glittering surface of Parisian culture, bringing to life opulent cafes, bars, and even the Parisian Catacombs as a black mirror of her characters' desires.

“On the black, charred mountain of Olympus,” Katherine Edwards’ cycle of spoken-word poems, *Arrow and Love*, re-imagines the spread of Orthodoxy as a bloody war between the Olympian gods and their Christian usurpers. A tale of star-crossed lovers unfolds against this backdrop of unceasing war in Edwards’ fresh, modern vernacular.

Hara Tsoukaneri treats the myth of Pandora in her story “Postmortem Present,” which complicates our perception of the curious woman by emphasizing her role as a victim of situation. Tsoukaneri sets her story in present-day Syria, and her descriptions of war-torn Homs underline the enduring relevance of myth.

In her tragicomic play “Prometheus at Colonus,” Elena Liapopoulou Adamidou depicts the meeting of three major figures of Greek tragedy, Prometheus, Oedipus, and Antigone in the sacred grove of Hippeios Colonus. Channeling Samuel Beckett and Charles Bukowski, Liapopoulou Adamidou’s tragic figures excoriate urban life with diatribes in turns solipsistic, existential, and absurd.

Like Liapopoulou Adamidou, Alexandros Tzitzios thrills in linguistic acrobatics. His story “What Is the Body?” dissolves the boundaries of gender and sexuality, of prose and poetry, weaving together Biblical and mythological allusions to explore a queer person’s complicated relationship to the body that entraps him and enables his pleasure.

Maria Tsaousidou’s cycle of poems, *Medusa*, gives agency and voice to one of the most fearsome monsters of Greek mythology. With fierce, unsettling images and by characterizing gods and heroes as infantile and petty, Tsaousidou upsets her readers’ expectations and invites them to consider the Gorgon in a new light.

In her story “Diaspora,” Eirini Bouraki brings the Venus de Milo statue to life to explore the complexities of the immigrant experience. Set in Paris, Greece, and America, the story bridges time and space, literally putting ancient and modern Greece in conversation. Quirky and poignant, “Diaspora” addresses the constellation of emotions inherent in crossing borders.

As Thessaloniki-based poet Chloe Koutsoumbeli said when she visited our class, “Writers write from the wound and write with blood. Their goal is ανατροπή: to upset, overturn, reverse, subvert.” The pieces in this issue do exactly that—they shake up and remix classical myths, and in doing so, make them relevant again to the world today. With the electric brilliance and surging force of Zeus’s thunderbolt, these young writers have sharpened Greek myths into crucial, wholly original stories for our time.

## Works Cited

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