PALOMA ORTIZ-DE-URBINA (ED.): *GERMANIC MYTHS IN THE AUDIOVISUAL CULTURE*, TÜBINGEN, GUNTER NARR VERLAG, 2020, 218 PAGES

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In the last decade there has been a revival of interest in the Middle Ages in general, and of Old Norse mythology in particular, mainly as a result of the initiative of digital games companies such as Paradox Interactive and Ubisoft games,[1] and of the release of the Thor movies produced by Marvel Studios. The worldwide impact of television series such as *Vikings* and *Games of Thrones* —which has also been turned into a videogame— have undoubtfully added to this recent reinvigoration of the Middle Ages in popular culture with its markedly Nordic atmosphere. In this respect, a volume of scholarship devoted to the use of Germanic myths in audiovisual culture is both pertinent and up-to-date. The book deals primarily with the contemporary revisitation of the myths but also includes some chapters on older productions. This allows us to trace a continuity between the present elaborations and those of the beginning of the last century.

The fourteen chapters, written in English and German, have been distributed across four parts. As sometimes happens in volumes coming from conferences[2] written by different authors about a shared topic, there are some unavoidable repetitions, as, for example, the description of Wagner's sources for the *Ring* cycle or the definition of the word 'myth' as a collection of narratives.

The foreword and the first chapter written by Paloma Ortiz-de-Urbina give the reader an excellent introduction to the historical conditions that brought about the Wagnerian mythical turn and how Norse myths attracted the attention of the opera writer. Still on Wagner's productions, Miguel Salmerón Infante problematizes productions of *The Ring* in the third chapter, 'Staging Wotan: Chéreau, Schenk, Fura dels Baus'. The figure of Wotan and its adaptation in the opera is central to the very interesting analysis of his text. Salmerón Infante states that there is a certain identification between Wagner and this god and that this somehow influenced the forging of the opera character Wotan. However, we must interrogate the fact that the author

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[1] Paradox Interactive's various iterations of *Crusader Kings* have been very popular, and Ubisoft's latest game, *Assassin's Creed Valhalla*, fictionalizes the Viking invasion of Britain.

[2] The book publishes some of the papers presented at the conference 'Germanic Myths. Myths and Audiovisual Creation' held at the Universidad de Alcalá (15th -17th October 2018).

connects Wagnerian Wotan's hesitations with an insecurity that is supposed to be observable in the mythical Wotan. It is indeed certain that Norse gods were not conceived as omniscient and that they have a yearning for knowledge, but Odin does not show hesitation as a result of not knowing, at least not the Odin represented or characterized in the mythical texts. Wagner's relocation of the god's uncertainty to the inner self and its hesitations —which may well have the aim of humanizing him— might have rather been a legacy of the Hamletian character. Important questions on fidelity and infidelity in scenography arise at the end of this chapter. Salmerón Infante discusses the different productions of *The Ring* from the perspective of a translator, taking into consideration the 'treachery' dimension of the versions when diverging from the original one.

Ana Melendo Cruz's chapter on the television series *Vikings* also traces a comparison made with Odin —on this occasion, with Ragnar. She examines the adaptation of the Norse myths not on the basis of the historical accuracies but understanding the series as an autonomous work of art. She brilliantly analyses the significance of the presence of mythology in the series, asserting that one of the most significant elements in ensuring audience acceptance of the series is the connection between its main protagonists and the most prominent gods of Norse myth, as is the case of the relationship established between Ragnar and Odin.

The use of Nordic mythology in audiovisual products such as comics or video games is another important topic discussed in the book. Jesús Pérez-García's chapter on the comic adaptation of the Wagnerian tetralogy gives an exhaustive and detailed account of the syncretic character of popular reception in the work of Sébastian Ferran. His reflections on the *heroic fantasy* genre and its repercussions, as a mass culture product, are indeed questions that still need to be answered. With a similar perspective, Irene Sanz Alonso shows how video games can rewrite myths in order to satisfy a large number of consumers. The gaming industry uses mythology as a source of inspiration to create and give substance to the complex plots and characters of the games. It would have been interesting to discuss what lies behind the current success of the inclusion of all these Nordic mythological elements, as the player becoming part of the story world is something that can happen in any game. Nevertheless, Lorena Silos Ribas' chapter does point in the direction of an answer from the perspective of one of the most popular discourses of our day, namely the ecological one. The importance given in *How to Train Your Dragon* to sustainability, co-existence and a balanced environment leads the characters to establish a new relationship between humans and dragons that differs from the Nordic legends.

It is not the rejection of tradition but its revitalization that is the focus of the group of authors that deal with Fritz Langs' *Nibelungen*. Just as Heidi Grünewald affirms in her chapter, Lang uses modern filmmaking techniques to revitalize German myth, but his film is not thought of as a mass culture entertainment product. Compelled by a strong artistic and political

commitment, the director aimed to create an eternal work of art for German people. Grünewald's description of Lang's masterful use of image and its connections with painting brings up one of the most important topics discussed in the book: the forging of mythical images and its political impact. Right from the first chapter, Ortiz-de-Urbina indicates the innovation of the visual element introduced in Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* and its relevance for twentieth- and twenty-first-century audiovisual culture. Thereupon Melendo Cruz underlines the centrality of the 'moving image' as an everyday product in our consumer society and its power of attraction when associated with emotions. Spectators sympathizing with images has been the desire of many creators of art, especially in the political field. From an imagological approach, Laura Arenas offers a necessary chapter on the image of Germany in German films and the study of national stereotypes in adaptations of the *Nibelungenlied*. The theoretical contributions she makes are the perfect prelude for María Jesús Fernández-Gil's 'Intersemiotic Analysis of Nazi Posters'. In these two chapters, the authors highlight the dichotomic character of the visual rhetoric of both the films and the propaganda posters.

In conclusion, *Germanic Myths in the Audiovisual Culture* offers an innovative approach to the study of the reception of Germanic myths from an interdisciplinary perspective. Its authors discuss a range of disruptions and continuities presented in the most recent audiovisual products in respect of the old mythological literary material. There is, though, an issue with the adjectives used to describe those myths, which these authors could have problematized themselves. Although the title of the book opts for the word 'Germanic', we find throughout the book other terms employed, such as 'Scandinavian', 'German', 'Nordic', 'Norse' and even 'Anglo-Saxon'. We agree with John Lindow[3] that this corpus of myths should be referred to as 'Norse mythology', as Norse is the language in which these myths were written. Norse myths were not recorded until the 13th century in Scandinavia. The extant articulation of Norse mythology is therefore a consequence of the Christian technology of writing.[4] The German-language tradition tends to establish a continuity between the Germanic people and the texts written in the 13th century in the North, and to consider those texts as the literary heritage of a common Germanic mentality. This tendency should be critically revised and regarded as the product of cultural and historical appropriation active in nineteenth-century German scholarship.

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[3] Lindow, J. (2005), "Mythology and Mythography," in *Old-Norse Literature: A Critical Guide*, Clover, C. J. and Lindow, J. (eds.), Toronto, University of Toronto Press.

[4] There are mythological characters and motives in the kennings of skaldic poetry composed before the conversion, but the poems were written down after it.