Alberto Martinengo (Ed.)

BEYOND DECONSTRUCTION

FROM HERMENEUTICS TO RECONSTRUCTION

These essays provide welcome evidence that the debate around deconstruction has at last moved beyond the stage of swirling polemics and risen to its challenge in a purposeful way. The authors are divided on a good many issues, often going to the intellectual heart of what this movement signifies – for better or worse – in relation to the values of enlightened critique and the philosophical discourse of modernity. Their contributions are uniformly perceptive and acute though frequently at odds when it comes to assessing the longer-range stakes and implications of Derrida's address to that theme. The book will undoubtedly be of great interest not only to students of deconstruction but also – and especially – to those whose primary focus is its critical bearing on topics in ethics, law, political theory, international relations, and modern intellectual history. Altogether a notable and exceptionally well-conceived volume.

Christopher Norris (Cardiff University), author of *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, *The Contest of Faculties: Philosophy and Theory After Deconstruction*, and *Deconstruction and The Unfinished Project of Modernity*.

The "urbanization" of Heidegger's legacy, to which both hermeneutics and deconstruction have contributed, is not only a method. It is a philosophical project which aims at opening a world.
Although they approach it from different points of view, this is the common purpose of the essays brought together in the volume edited by Alberto Martinengo. This is what the contributors describe as "reconstruction", providing valuable insights into the philosophical basis of deconstruction and highly instructive guidance with regard to its bearing on the spheres of literary studies, the social sciences, and law.

Gianni Vattimo (University of Turin), author of *Beyond Interpretation*, *Nihilism and Emancipation*, and *Art's Claim to Truth*.

Beyond Deconstruction

From Hermeneutics to Reconstruction

Edited by
Alberto Martinengo

De Gruyter

Towards a Dramaturgy of Suspicion:
Theatre and Myths in 20th-century France

Franca Bruera

In memory of Christa Wolf

In 1956 Natalie Sarraute published a study with the emblematic title *L'Ère du soupçon*,[1] in which the author proclaimed the urgent need for a revolution in writing, inspired by the definitive supercession of canons and of traditional conventions. The study, which consists of four articles published between 1949 and 1955, invites the reader to enter into the so-called 'era of suspicion', through the filter of a new way of conceiving textual strategies: not merely a 'terrain d'entente', but a place of 'méfiance réciproque' and 'terrain dévasté', in which the author and the reader would finally be able to confront one another.[2]

Though the category of the 'masters of suspicion' was formulated in 1969 by Paul Ricoeur to identify the inventors of a new 'art of interpretation' within the contemporary philosophical context,[3] the dimensions of doubt, of uncertainty, and of 'diffidence', as Sarraute asserts, were evoked as early as the end of the 1940s and made nearly official in France by writings – both theoretical and otherwise – of a mainly literary variety which attempted to offer instructions for a new use of the existent forms of communication: *La vie mode d'emploi*[4] within its very title shows the

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1 Sarraute 1956.
2 Sarraute 1956, 62–63.
3 Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud are the masters of suspicion that Paul Ricoeur identifies in order to position hermeneutics within the context of the philosophical reflections of the 20th century. See Ricoeur 1969.
4 A novel by Georges Pérec, published in 1978, whose characteristics are synthesised in chapter 26: 'Imaginons un homme dont la fortune n'aurait d'égale que l'indifférence à ce que la fortune permet généralement, et dont le désir serait, beaucoup plus orgueilleusement, de saisir, de décrire, d'épuiser, non la totalité du monde – projet que son seul énoncé suffit à ruiner – mais un fragment constitué de celui-ci: face à l'inextricable incohérence du monde, il s'agira alors d'accomplir jusqu'au bout un programme, restreint sans doute, mais entier, intact, irréductible.' Perec 1978, 152.

spirit of experimentation that the era of suspicion had cultivated during these years.

Literature from the postwar era is punctuated, in fact, by numerous challenges that stress the need to make sure that readers recognise the urgency of this new literature: one only needs to look at the paratextual threshold of these writings to find it. From the famous question posed by Sartre in 1947, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*, which calls into question both writing in its social function and the writer 'in situation',[5] to the experience of isolation and of solitude of Maurice Blanchot, elaborated in 1955 by way of the question *Où va la littérature?*,[6] the dimensions of doubt and of uncertainty force themselves upon the attention of artists and writers in their functions as aesthetic parameters and essential keys of interpretation, confirming one of the most evident traits of modernity: its nature is both self-referential and self-critical.

These are merely a few crucial examples[7] of a fertile theoretical activity that developed by delving into its roots in a postwar period of social, political, economic and cultural reconstruction that underwent, from an artistic and literary point of view, a veritable crisis of representation. This was a crisis to which the theatres, those that presented spectacles of a mythic nature, amply testified starting in the 1920s, bringing to light a large part of that culture of suspicion that would become its legacy to the deconstructive sensibility and which would eventually make the desire to destroy, to decompose, to fragment and to sow the seeds of doubt the basis of literary-philosophical reflection for a large part of the second half of the 20th century.

The following study is intended as an intervention into the debate about deconstruction with the principal intention of recognising the dual force of myths as they were represented onstage: it is both normative and destructive at the same time, conscious of the principle of the dialectical correlation between the deconstructive experience and the reconstructive thought of the 20th century.

From their first reworkings in the 20th century, myths seem able to settle and to facilitate their sense by way of an extraordinary and uncommon capacity to power themselves thanks to an ever stronger narrative

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5   Sartre 1964.
6   Blanchot 1959.
7   To these can be added by way of example the various forms of suspicion formulated by Alain Robbe-Grillet (see Robbe-Grillet 1963), as well as the interrogations of Julien Gracq (see Gracq 1961), and of Bernard Noël (see Noël 1997).

potential, this in turn is favoured by the dialectical process of desemanticisation and resemanticisation which the myths themselves produce. The examples to be discussed in our study will elucidate the specificity of this intrinsic polarity of myths. Independently of the outcomes of the diverse rewritings, of which we will show a few models, it seems possible, in fact, to recognise during the 20th century a marked tendency to overcome the traditional acceptance of myth as mere repetition as a result of its renovated conception within the dialectical framework of deconstruction/reconstruction.[8]

The first point to underline is that the quite diffuse tendency in France from the end of the First World War to deconsecrate the great myths of antiquity, seen for the most part in the theatre, is much akin to the progressive erosion of those parameters and traditional conventions that had always preserved the uniqueness of the work of art. The massive movement toward a general revisitation of myths corresponds perfectly to the historical/cultural crisis that the accelerations and radical transformations of the short 20th century had inevitably engendered.[9] The idea of myth, in fact, became involved in that progressive cultural projection of the crises of history, of the fragmentation of language and of speech, of the end of 'the work of art' as a finished product resolved in and of itself. Myth, in the end, is a key factor within the critical debate over the 20th-century crisis of Cartesian self-evidence.

Within this context, the sheer number of works from the first half of the 20th century that have a mythical subject is evidenced by the extreme degree of porosity that the myths bear for the first time in history. Having overcome the traditional understanding of myth as an archetypal model of inertia, of stability, and of restoration or repetition of the sacred period of their origin, over time these myths assume an increasingly marked function as a generative and dynamic model, in that 'myth is not an idle tale, but a hard worked active force'.[10] As will be demonstrated shortly, it is the theatre that brings the myth onto the scene as a vehicle for the transmission of the twofold stance of 20th-century thought and criticism, in that it shares both the specificity of the deconstructive and demystifying gesture that was inaugurated by the 'masters of suspicion' and the more specifically reconstructive instances of contemporary reflection.

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8   For more on the debate on the dialectic polarity of deconstruction and reconstruction, see Lingua/Martinengo 2010.
9   Hobsbawm 1994.
10 Malinowski 1954, 101.

Within artistic and literary society it was this reflection, beginning at the end of the First World War, which contrasted the reordering force of narration to the crisis of subjectivity and of writing in general.

During the period between the end of the First World War and the end of the 1940s there was, and not only in France, a large-scale reappearance on the literary scene of paradigmatic mythic models which provide interesting examples of the overthrow of traditional readings that had conventionally been applied to them. From Cocteau's *Antigone*, which in 1922 prematurely launched the program of formal restoration known as the *rappel à l'ordre*, to Anouilh's *Médée* (1946), a dense tragedy replete with the motives of incommunicability and of the insufficiency of speech, the myth seems to rise both to a symbolic and privileged space and to a hermeneutic standard. This new status was acquired by means of the dialogical dimension which vitalises the myths themselves as well as for their capacity to harmonise with modern events and to measure dialectically against their own traditions. The many examples that one can find in French poetry, prose, and especially in dramaturgy from those years do not set themselves up as conventional ways of revisiting an ancestral and collective space within the automatic mechanism of its reprise; rather, they appear to be key moments in the search for poetic modalities and for new aesthetics which, taken together, identify within the myths a new referential horizon of a fertile, dynamic and innovative nature.

From the last years of the 19th century onwards, myths became a point of convergence for literary, religious, anthropological, psychoanalytical, ethnological, and philosophical experiences while, as far as the more strict relationship between myth and literature is concerned, the beginning of the 1930s saw the first studies on *mythanalyse*, inaugurated by Denis de Rougemont in his famous study *L'Amour et l'Occident* (1939). Myth, from the end of the First World War, falls within the dynamic of an ample debate taking place among various fields of study, not the least of which is linguistics. From the simple forms of André Jolles through the more thorough studies of Emile Benveniste and Roman Jakobson this science announced the specificity of a language that was starting to declare itself in crisis. As mute as the sirens of Kafka and Beckett that Ulysses can no longer hear, language presents all the characteristics of a modernity that moves attention away from the content and towards the methods and the codes of communication. If T. S. Eliot, as early as 1923, signals the importance of comparing the archaic and the modern in Joyce

– speaking in terms of a 'mythic model'[11] – it seems possible to underline the epistemological value of myth which in the first half of the century seems to relate more and more, as far as method is concerned, to scientific knowledge. The potential of myth to form an investigative path marks a change in aesthetic consciousness, recognising in it a certain rigour and identifying it as 'der Mythos ist kein Kontext, sondern ein Rahmen, innerhalb dessen interpoliert werden kann'.[12] We are presented, then, with a scenario that is circumscribable, flexible and fertile that enriches and is enriched by different meanings based on the various configurations in which it finds itself involved.

The first theatrical rewritings of myths date to the prolific French climate of the 1920s and signal a radical change in aesthetic experience compared to the first two decades of a century that is notoriously dominated by the iconoclasm of the historic avant-gardes. Myth, having overcome romantic titanism, profaned and reduced to a putrid carcass of Baudelairian memory,[13] inserts itself with difficulty, though dynamically, in the dialectical process of *incontro-scontro* with the tradition launched by the avant-gardes, thus sustaining its own vital force within the new myths that celebrate historicity, through its sense of *bricolage*,[14] and in virtue of its intrinsic analogical weight.

Immediately after the First World War, in parallel with a more cautious relationship with historicity, to an ever more accurate reflection of historic sense[15] and of the concept of duration inspired by Bergson,[16] the possibility of communicating the world seems more and more remote and problematic. In this climate, myth, understood as an opening onto possible other worlds that transcend the defined limits of our actual world, seems to offer literature the opportunity to draw from a fertile narrative material, already on the one hand guarantor of universal categories and on the other, in its very nature a lack of fixedness and its metamorphoses and oscillations, a great source of stimuli for the production of new meanings.

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11   Eliot 1923, 480–483.
12   'A frame within which interpolations can be added.' Blumenberg 1971, 51 (my translation).
13   Cf. in particular Curi 1996, 3–39.
14   Lévi-Strauss 1996. This important aspect is underlined by Curi 1996, 155–161.
15   Eliot 2001, 392–402. The reference is to *Tradition and Individual Talent* (1919).
16   Curi 1996, 171.

Myth, just as Paul Ricoeur asserted in *Finitude et culpabilité*,[17] thus returns in the 20th century in virtue of its capacity to configure itself as a possible new set of norms and values.[18] 'Nous racontons des histoires parce que finalement les vies humaines ont besoin et méritent d'être racontées', as Ricoeur likewise asserted in *Temps et récit*.[19] In literary text with a mythical setting, this specificity, which is strictly connected to a general desire to reconstruct, combines with characteristics that are apparently contrary and destabilising: myth, as Marguerite Yourcenar writes in her *Électre ou la chute des masques* (1954), is ultimately a sort of 'admirable chèque en blanc sur lequel chaque poète à tour de rôle peut se permettre d'inscrire le chiffre qui lui convient'.[20] It therefore conserves its structure as a model of normativity and regenerates itself in essence by way of a process of desanctification which manifests itself, according to modalities that are always different, through its own deconstruction. In the end, the identity of the myth, as Derrida might argue, does not seem to be *per se* in the 20th century, but is rather something that can be determined only in relation to something else, as differing from itself.[21]

If Jean Giraudoux, Jean Cocteau, Jean Giono and other authors were able to construct some of the most original re-readings of the ancient myths this was only by disregarding the linearity of historic time and the solemnity and the authority of the various mythical figures as well as by interweaving plots constructed on the basis of alchemical associations. The absurd death of Agamemnon at the edge of a pool (in Giraudoux's *Électre*, 1937),[22] the ill-concealed nymphomania of Jocasta (in Cocteau's *La Machine infernale*, 1934),[23] the prosaic utterances of a lying and do-nothing Ulysses (in Giono's *Naissance de l'Odyssée*, 1930),[24] the foolishness of the young Paris (in Giraudoux's *La guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu*, 1935),[25] to limit ourselves to but a few of the paradigmatic examples, even while demystifying, parodying, and desanctifying the classical myths, do not translate a necessity to destroy either

17 Ricœur 2009.
18 Martinengo 2008b.
19 Ricœur 1983, 143.
20 Yourcenar 1971, II, 19.
21 Derrida 1967b.
22 Giraudoux 1982.
23 Cocteau 2003.
24 Giono 1971.
25 Giraudoux 1982.

good taste or common sense, nor do they perpetuate the profanation of the sanctity of the myth, *à la* Baudelaire. Rather, they overcome the limit of an instrumental interpretation or use of the myth – understood as a vehicle of founding values and therefore used for its marble fixedness – empirically translating the intuitions of T. S. Eliot concerning myth as a method of interpretation and as a cognitive investigative tool that is able to render the modern world accessible to art.[26]

No longer the champion of universal and immutable values, now the receptacle of particular fragments and ever-changing, the mythological material began to accommodate new content and to participate in a critical dialogue both with its own past and with the present in which it began to be used, assigning in this way a decidedly surprising meta-literary character to the different rewritings.

No longer to recognise but to interpret, no longer cultivated as a medium of homogeneous, consistent, monolithic meaning but understood as an accumulation of citations and analogies which, through a process of dissemination, can be pieced together in different ways, myth is subjected to the tastes of the reader/spectator. For Cocteau it is possible to re-read Sophocles's *Antigone* only by flying over Greece in an airplane:

> A vol d'oiseau, de grandes beautés disparaissent, d'autres surgissent; il se forme des rapprochements, des blocs, des ombres, des angles, des reliefs inattendus. Peut-être mon expérience est-elle un moyen de faire vivre les vieux chefs d'œuvre. A force d'y habiter nous les contemplons distraitement, mais parce que je survole un texte célèbre, chacun croit l'entendre pour la première fois.[27]

In this way the poet draws from myth in its sense of a system in permanent revision, proposing to the public an adaptation of *Antigone* which is both faithful to Sophocles's model and a revisiting of the form, beginning with the telegraphic recitation[28] modelled on the verbal duel,[29] then concerning the costumes, the scenery, and the music, entrusted respectively to Coco Chanel, Pablo Picasso and Arthur Honegger, not to mention the dialectic between ancient and modern that transforms the disobedience of Antigone into an act of anarchy.

26 Eliot 1923, 483.
27 Cocteau 2003, 305.
28 'L'extrême vitesse de l'action n'empêche pas les acteurs d'articuler beaucoup e de remuer peu. Le Chœur et le coryphée se résument en une voix qui parle très haut et très vite comme si elle lisait un article de journal.' Cocteau 2003, 307.
29 'Antigone et Créon se parlent de tout près; leurs fronts se touchent.' Cocteau 2003, 313.

Caught up in the spinning wheels of modernity, the phenomenon of the rewriting of myths in France is inscribed in the search for new expressive forms, in the vein of a recouping of the communicative power of the word that the recourse to myths can, perhaps, guarantee. On a thematic-expressive level such a search shows itself through a general loss of depth and centrality of the mythical figures that are used, often at the very limit of aphasia – as is the case of Cousteau's Orpheus – or, on the contrary, through the loss of meaningful speech, as seemingly represented by Giono's Ulysses or Anouilh's Medea. Meanwhile myth, repository of sense within a new frame, transfuses contents, is renovated in form and accedes to a new mode of signification within an intertextual and stratified rewriting which, just like myth itself, becomes a dynamic model of infinite connections and possibilities of 're-production'.[30] It is in this capacity to reconstruct and resemanticise itself that myth translates that unequivocal polarity that identifies itself in the deconstructive and reconstructive thought of the 20th century.[31] In its intrinsic nature as a story myth – according to a prospective reading that is either Ricoeurian or reconstructive – is the champion and reconstructor of sense, independently of its possible dead ends and its aversion to any form of all encompassing truth, unambiguous or objective as it may be, which would be unacceptable in the 20th-century context in which it is positioned.

Among the works that most explicitly convey the dialectical process of desemanticisation and concurrent resemanticisation of myth, we will now focus on *Orphée* by Jean Cocteau which, within the physical space of the scene – a privileged place of the semiotic transfusion of the myth – celebrates the encounter between the demystifying gesture and the reconstructive operation, all within the framework of an original 'backwards' reading of myth.

Cocteau brings to the stage an Orpheus who, already in Act I, is presented to the audience metaphorically dismembered, decomposed, 'in pieces', as he is deprived of the generative capacity that the legend had attributed to him. Inconsolable and conscious both of the crises of poetic sensibility and of his own intellectual aridity, Orpheus seems to be suffocated to the point of aphasia, infertile and sterile, just as his dialogues

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30 For a more in depth approach to the motive of the re-production of the myths, see my study Bruera 2008, 549–560.

31 Ferry 1996.

with Eurydice suggest.[32] The originality of the play is found in its structure, which on the one hand seems to interrogate the quest for mythical unity and stability while on the other it accompanies the new Orpheus down a tortuous path of the retrieval of the lost word and along the long walk of the progressive reconstitution of his own 'fragments'. Starting out from the metaphorical meaning of the *mythème* of dismemberment, Cocteau leads Orpheus towards the discovery of his very identity; deprived of his generative capacity, the character draws the resources required to regenerate himself from the narrative material of the myth, while also regenerating and reconstructing the sense. In this way Cocteau founds his aesthetic experience both upon the value of persistence and on the porosity of the mythological material: through the demystification of the characters – all of whom are incomplete and capable only of an understanding of the world that is both relative and defective – and through the desemanticisation of the message that is actualised and standardised through language, the new Orpheus offers the possibility to think about a return of the myth: this time revisited in terms of the capacity to translate both the insufficiency of any conservative interpretation and, perhaps more importantly, its meaning as a productive dimension with re-compositional and reconstructive capacities.

If Orpheus is born again from his own ashes and begins his existence 'from the end', Jean Giono's Ulysses is reborn paradoxically from his character as 'Nobody' and through the power of the narrative, which confirms once again the reconstructive meaning of myth when he is subjected to a series of upheavals. In his condition as 'different from himself', or

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32 To explain briefly, the following is one of the opening dialogues of the work: 'Eurydice. – Orphée, mon poète… Regarde comme tu es nerveux depuis ton cheval. Avant tu riais, tu m'embrassais, tu me berçais; tu avais une situation superbe. Tu étais chargé de gloire, de fortune. Tu écrivais des poèmes qu'on s'arrachait et que toute la Thrace récitait par cœur. Tu glorifiais le soleil. Tu étais son prêtre, et un chef. Mais depuis le cheval tout est fini. Nous habitons la campagne. Tu as abandonné ton poste et tu refuses d'écrire. Ta vie se passe à dorloter ce cheval, à interroger ce cheval, à espérer que ce cheval va te répondre. Ce n'est pas sérieux.
Orphée. – Pas sérieux? Ma vie commençait à se faisander, à être à point, à puer la réussite et la mort. Je mets le soleil et la lune dans le même sac. Il me reste la nuit. Et pas la nuit des autres. Ma nuit. Ce cheval entre dans ma nuit et il en sort comme un plongeur. Il en rapporte des phrases. Ne sens-tu pas que la moindre de ces phrases est plus étonnante que tous les poèmes? Je donnerais mes œuvres complètes pour une seule de ces petites phrases où je m'écoute comme on écoute la mer dans un coquillage. Pas sérieux?' Cocteau 2003, 391–392.

as 'other', Ulysses reveals himself by lying, which in the *Naissance de l'Odyssée* acts as much as a *fil rouge* as a mechanism for bringing both sides of the myth face to face: those of the original and eternal versus those of the merely derivative.[33] Myth, presented with anti-sublime characteristics, puts Ulysses's legendary charm and prodigious ability as a mendacious narrator to the service of the narrative, celebrating the transitory aspect and the vitality of a word which has become paradoxically unofficial, ambiguous and blasphemous.[34] Nevertheless, Ulysses's lies fly from one person to another and in their germination and diffusion are transformed into official doctrine – mythical though it may be – which is recognised by the masses. And it is precisely on this dialectical contrast between the monologue-heavy epic material and the need for dialogue inherent in the narrative structure of the piece that *Naissance de l'Odyssée* is formed. In this light the novel becomes an acute meta-narrative operation, played out using the extraordinary generative potential of mythic language, confirming the diffuse return of an interest in the traditional forms of communication and sharing of meaning.

These are just a few examples taken from a rich patrimony of rewritings of myths that come from the 1920s, to which one might add the ample selection of mythic figures that were revisited in the 1930s: the Atreids, Oedipus, and quite a few reworkings of the myth of Medea,[35] taken up again in the 1940s and 1950s by Sartre, Anouilh and Camus, principally, within the framework of a search focused on questioning, by use of the mythic model, the intersubjectivity and the dialogical exchange that are at the origins of individuality. If Antigone is the emblem of the paroxysm of conflicts, Medea reaches into the universality of her tradition in order to free herself from the mythic spell which locked her into the static image of the jealous woman, witch and child killer.[36] In keeping with a theatre ignorant of psychological mechanisms,

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33 Durand 1996, 87.
34 "'J'ai juré le nom des dieux? Je me suis mêlé à leur vie terrible! Pourquoi?" Le mensonge surgit par morceaux horribles devant lesquels il trembla. "J'ai attiré leur œil sur moi!.. Étais-je pas bien caché dans les herbes? Je les ai défiés par le dard de ma langue, puis j'ai clamé mon nom vers eux, comme un couillon! Plus il réfléchissait, plus il se sentait prisonnier de son mensonge, comme un bûcheron dont la main est prise dans la fente refermée d'un tronc."' Giono 1971, 37.
35 On this subject, see Ruiz 1982.
36 Anouilh 1967. The reference is to *Antigone* (1942) and *Médée* (1946).

Orestes[37] leaves the responsibility of his actions completely to the act itself and to the spoken word; in so doing he gives the myth the possibility of contributing to the exploration of shared situations within the compass of human experience and to affirming an intensely existentialist outlook with regard to human rights and values.

In the second half of the 20th century, closely following a hybridisation and a mixing of experiences and values, myth is also deeply characterised by extreme variety and difference. As an example one can look to the Orpheus of Olivier Py,[38] an 'anti-genealogical' model, as Gilles Deleuze might put it, of a rewriting that proceeds by way of variation, expansion: 'conquête, capture, piqûre'.[39] In the same way as those models that preceded it, the Orpheus of Olivier Py takes shape within the economy of an intertextual and stratified writing that, just like myth itself, becomes a dynamic model of infinite connections and inexhaustible possibilities of reproduction. In conformity with the myth as it was handed down by antiquity, Py's Orpheus was torn to pieces by the Bacchae yet still perseveres in his song, gaining the attention of a sculptor who sets his face down in stone. Orpheus, who lies as a cadaver in the laboratory of the artisan, wakes up, summoned in his own right by the power of the word of the person who is searching for him. Having disrobed, he undertakes a long journey through the various places of individual and collective memory. Among archaeologists, searchers of corpses, alienated people and professors, the strands of the plot of the myth of Orpheus interweave, called forth allusively or in fragments, initiating a critical dialogue with those universal categories of which the myth is the champion and holder.

The model of revisitation seen above, ascribable to the last years of the 20th century, constitutes further confirmation of the bipolarity that myth has retained throughout the entire century. The regenerative force that Antonin Artaud attributed to it, its function as an escape route from the theatrical dead ends that Eugène Ionesco saw in it, and its responsibility to undergo renovation in order to translate the urgency of the word that Claude Ber, Hubert Colas and other contemporary authors stressed, all help to confirm the extent to which mythical material continues to conserve its meaning as a widely shared symbolic space and

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37 Sartre 2005. The reference is to *Les Mouches* (1943).
38 Py 1997.
39 Deleuze/Guattari 1980, 30.

hermeneutic sphere. Guilty of 'impatience',[40] Py's Orpheus negates and at the same time affirms his mythic origins and in so doing – or rather, in so saying, in contradicting himself and in deconstructing himself in a continuous oscillation between reality and illusion – he translates the crisis of the 20th-century subject. But at the same time, in his oracular function, Orpheus is the incarnation of the saving power of the word which constructs meaning, which reclaims its speculative nature and which, in recouping its ancestral mythic patrimony, finds its inspiration. Myth, therefore, as a discovery and reconstruction of the word in a contest of 'moral atony',[41] that of postmodernism and deconstruction which, combined in different ways and variously wound together, have translated not only the absence of any direction that might indicate the possibility of arriving at a greater truth, but also the lack of any projects that might fulfil the function of a compass for the human journey.

With the definition of myth understood as a space in which there are masses that attract and repel each other, Paul Ricoeur saw properties within the mythic constructions that are analogous to those found in a gravitational field that has been disturbed by forces in continuous dialectical movement.[42] The importance of Ricoeur's reflections has persuaded us to begin a search, within the framework of studying theatrical literature of a mythic character written in the 20th century, which confronts myth in its generative, constructive, and dynamic potential as well as in its trans-temporal 'classic' fixity.

For this reason, the models of rewriting that we have proposed in this study must be considered empirical evidence of an investigation which has an ambitious, but necessary, task. I aim to identify interpretative parameters that permit the study of a highly diffuse phenomenon of rewriting in the 20th century. I will attempt as well to overcome those often incomplete perspectives of reading that, in order to explain the rush to revisit the classical myths, use terms such as 'imitation', 'parody', 'second-grade literature' or, more generally, talk about them as 'second-hand' works.[43]

To explain the contemporary space one would say that, beginning with Jean Cocteau and moving on to the works of Olivier Py, the aesthetic of mythical representation has been called into question through a di-

alectical process of demystification and a contemporaneous appropriation of the mythological material shorn of the sacredness of its original treatment and reconstructed in the uncertain present of writing. And on the basis of the dynamic connection between the constitutive elements of myth and new elements inserted into it in the last century, of the desemanticisation and resemanticisation of the characters and the events already codified in antiquity and the break with logical consequences of the events in question, the act of rewriting myth in the 20th century has become an important instrument in reading, identifying, receiving and – above all – revisiting cultural models. The 20th century has infused myth with a new energy, not by reclaiming the sacredness that it lost in the face of the deconstructive emergence of modernity, but rather by seeing in myth a substantial component of reconstruction and revision. In the wake of the increasing popular interest that the new sciences have invested in myth, mainly regarding its repetitive aspects and widely understood as a dialectical moment, literature and theatre have drawn inspiration for their conception of myth as a basis for a new beginning: myth has become a new form of dialogue and of textual polyphony, translating the need for a substantial renewal of writing as well as the increasingly lively interest in its own polymorphic and synthetic nature.

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40 See Blanchot 1955.
41 I have borrowed the definition of moral atony from Segre 2005.
42 Ricoeur 2009, 527.
43 See Compagnon 1979; Genette 1982.