

Editorial

In Classic mythology, the power of transformation (metamorphosis) usually appears in the form of either a gift of gods or a special punishment inflicted to humans. Arachne's metamorphosis at the hands of Athena has become, in its own right, a model of the mythical subject of transformation. Perhaps driven by her crave for vengeance, the goddess decides to save young Arachne in the last minute, just when the horrified victim was about to commit suicide by hanging herself with her own rope. The different interpretations the myth has arisen through history have provoked numerous reflections about art and literature, more specifically, about the way in which artists express the actual power / punishment symbolized in the myth.

Arachne was the daughter of a cleaner in Colophon, Lydia. She had a reputation for outstanding weaving skills and Athena, patron of weavers, heard about it. The young lady's vanity grew bigger and she ended up challenging the goddess. Then Athena appeared under the form of an old woman in order to warn Arachne about her immodesty. Arachne persisted in her attitude and the goddess had to reveal her true identity in order to confront the young lady. Athena wove several scenes dealing with the majesty of gods in combination with four different scenes of famous human defeats. Arachne, in turn, represented the most disgraceful feats of gods (as they were transformed into animals in order to obtain, one way or the other, the loving favors of their victims). Despite the young lady's work being perfect, Athena got extremely furious about the implicit offense represented by the motives Arachne had chosen. The goddess thus tore the young lady's tapestry and used the shuttle to hit Arachne. As a consequence, Arachne tried to hang herself out of fright but the goddess prevented her death, turned Arachne into a spider and doomed the young lady to weave with her mouth eternally.

Arachne's eerie story of pride and punishment has grown notably successful in history of literature: Virgil, Pliny, Dante, Boccaccio, G. Marino, E. Spenser, etc. Painters and other plastic artists have also shown a keen interest in the myth (Tintoretto, Rubens, Velázquez, Luca Giordano) and so have other artists, such as choreographers and musicians (Albert Roussel).

Beyond the obvious structural motive (challenging-competition-punishment), the myth harbors different narrative motives and symbols such as the association between the feminine self and the spider, the ban —for human beings— on behaving like gods, as well as the actual possibility to transgress gods' rules human beings may exert. Due to her transformation, young Arachne is notably associated to darkness and danger, but keeps her skill untouched, which makes her a suitable symbol as maker and centre of her own world. The woman as a monster who weaves her cobweb surrounding her victim represents a constant theme in literature and constitutes a notable instance of the fatal woman prototype.

Amaltea Journal suggests the myth of Arachne as subject of analysis for its number 2 (2010). Among the numerous articles the Journal has received in the six official languages of the publication, the coordination board has chosen the seventeen included in this website. All articles have been peer-reviewed by at least two different referees. Both the editorial and coordination board, complying with the general rules of the Journal have bestowed absolute freedom on the authors regarding the choice of works they might be interested in analyzing, as well as the genres and critical / epistemological approach they might have tackled. The Journal has favoured papers which put the above-suggested mythical referent in relation to the texts authors are willing to analyze. We, in the coordinator and editorial board, want to thank all the authors for their efforts as well as for their valuable contributions.

And, of course, we wish you all a pleasant read.

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