

## Reactivation Of Narcissus Myth In Ernest Koliqi Poetic Proses: Narcissus' Seven Mirrors By Koliqi Compared To Ancient Myth

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Doi:10.5901/jesr.2013.v3n7p484

### Abstract

Purpose / to explain:

1. The retaking process of the Narcissus myth and his transformation from an antic myth into a literary myth.
2. The confrontation between antic myth and literary myth: similarities and differences.
3. New functions and new semantic in the new literary context. Observation in Ernest Koliqi's seven poetic proses named: Narcissus' seven mirrors.

Approach: an analytic, descriptive and semiotic method is needed on to conceive the insert process of the Narcissus myth into a new literary context. The semiotic approach on the text highlights the implication of the new meanings. Hypothesis: is to prove that the reactivation of an antic myth in a new literary material brings new meanings even contradictory with the well-known connotation of the certain subject involved. Values: the reception of positive symbolic versus pejorative connotation of Narcissus myth. New artistic constructive narcissism values derives from myth by activating the interpretation departed from the symbolic context. Conclusion: the primitive myth serves to literature to reform new meanings. Meeting point between: the preservation of the mythical old script with his literary transformation brings new literary myth rebuild. The new one is the base for the literary work as E. Koliqi's poetic proses are. There are stored some elements, but essentially mythical meaning has changed as far as the new context has no more connection with the first one from it was derived.

**Keywords:** Narcissus myth, literary myth, transformation, reactivation, new meaning.

### 1. Introduction

The World Literature has reactivated the myths back into contemporary time with different purposes, even with their meaning upside down. In any literature are found glorious works, based on the myths of different cultures, activated in many different shapes: covered, shimmered, degraded or not, their symbolism creates new creature. Researchers agree that literary works, a good part of them, consist of a subject taken from a borrowed cultural tradition, in any case they are not created *ex nihilo*, but the source, status, way of treatment, the extent of the presence of this substance are still a controversial issue.<sup>1</sup>

The myth of Narcissus, as part of Greek mythology, with its symbolism became an inspiring legacy for artists. He has known a life, a survival, and a rebirth, as well. When you enter inside the poetic prose of *Seven Mirrors of Narcissus*, a transfer of thought linking to this myth necessarily occurs.

But the key issue here is the meaning and interpretation of such reactivations in Koliqi poetic prose, the understanding and interpretation of which is often linked to the symbolic level. This kind of reactivation preserves the initial schemes, but also transforms their parts by adding new values and considerations, depending on the purpose of the new poetry as a myth of culture and as a contribute to the creation of intellectual identity.

### 2. The Reactivation and Reinterpretation of Ancient Myths

The work of art is created in order to serve as a message<sup>2</sup>(Gould, E., 1981). It comes in its real and artistic context. Koliqi takes from Greek mythology, the myth of Narcissus<sup>3</sup> and redefines it in his poetic prose. In this regard, we can initiate a

<sup>1</sup> Chevrel, Y. Letërsia e krahasuar, Tiranë, 2002, f.88

<sup>2</sup> Gould, E. Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature, USA: Princeton University Press, 1981, f.17

<sup>3</sup> Narcissus was the son of nymph Liriopa and the God rivers' Cephissus. Tiresia, the blind predictor foretells to the nymph Liriopa that Narcissus could live much longer if he would never recognize himself. He was very handsome and had many worshipers of both sexes who sought to win his affection. But Narcissus rejected them, as he did with the nymph Eco. Many of those who were refused sought

comparison approach, to prove how similar these two myths come in two different eras, through the re-functionalization and semantic subversion.

In one variant of the ancient myth of Narcissus it is reported that Narcissus died, just after he was introduced to himself.

*Narcissus is the son of the river's God Cephissus and the nymph Liriope. He was going to live very long if he hadn't seen himself*<sup>4</sup>. All known versions of him, although with changes, imply the same conclusion. Various aspects of the interpretation of this myth are united with the symbol. In the world literature, the myth of Narcissus is re-functionalized also at G. D'Annunzio, Paul Valery, etc., with different valence. Because, as Philippe Sellier states, it is not enough to reactivate an ancient myth, in order to consider it as a literary myth. The term "*literary myth*" is used in this case for what lies on the borders of "literary time and space", as part of a cultural tradition. Literary myth, adds to the primitive myth, new meanings<sup>5</sup>. It is important that this re-activation is due to the existence of a centralized scenario, an extremely stable organization.

On the other hand literary myth, adds to the primitive myth new meanings. As stated from Pierre Albouy, there is no such point of a literary myth without a "palingenesis", which revives the myth in an era where there it is be able "to express the problems of this age."<sup>6</sup>. Literary works are constructed thanks to the decomposition of hidden messages in text closely associated with the author's artistic consciousness.

### 3. Transformation into a Literary Myth

The purpose of a thematic study, according to Trousson, is the interpretation of variations and metamorphoses of a literary theme over time, in light of their connections with historical contextual orientation, The The The purpose of a thematic study, according to Trousson, is the interpretation of variations and metamorphoses of a literary theme over time, in light of their connections with historical contextual orientation, ideological and intellectual, thus highlighting *the adaptation of the building elements of the theme to the transformation of the ideas and customs and to the dynamic and developing character, which is the essence of the topic*<sup>7</sup>. Thus, according to him, the literary themes are related to the hero and situation. Trousson unites the topic with the myth, distinguishing two types of topics, (or myths): 1) – myths of heroes, 2) – myths of situations. Ernest Koliqi takes the myth of Narcissus and giving him special values, but at the same time respecting the situation of this myth (bending at the reflective surface of water, although sometimes is water and

Ernest Koliqi re-activates the myth of Narcissus, giving him special values, but at the same time respecting the situation of this myth (bending at the reflective surface of water, although sometimes is water and sometimes is a mirror (*An old mirror from Shkodra*) and sometimes a glass (*The glass of my window*). So, Koliqi myth retains the traditional form as a situation myth - in this myth the hero depends on the situation that he creates, so he may not be independent of it. He should have relations with this situation. Here is the situation of inflection to himself; here and so (with the reflective surface and inflection) Koliqi will find his face. In the context of inseparable duality image-reflection, as well as classification of literary myths, in the work of Koliqi, this myth except existing as a situation myth, it justifies the other type of myth, the one of a hero.

Therefore, it is a hero-myth, because it is related to a mythical figure, in this kind of myth, the hero is independent of the situations or contexts, becoming a typical embodiment of an idea. This myth is related to the image of Narcissus, who is the embodiment of someone loving himself. But Koliqi shifts from the scope of the lovers. He loves artistic identity more than himself. This search process is connected with art in general and poetry in particular. The poetic, the ideal, the new, the beautiful are all parts of "the re-functioning myth heroes".

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a kind of punishment for him. So it happened when Narcissus, one day wandering through the forest, encountered a bright silver source of water unpolluted by shepherds and birds, located in the middle of a very dense forest, which was not permeable by sunlight. Here when satisfying his thirst Narcissus saw the reflection of his image in the water, and after that he felt in love with himself. At first he was seeking to embrace the stunning image of a boy, but when later recognized himself, he died of despair. There were the Dryads and Naiads those who found him dead, but they would not be able to make him the funeral honors, because he soon transformed into a flower, which took his name.

<sup>4</sup> Barbara Colonna. Fjalor mitologjik, Tiranë, 2005, p. 242.

<sup>5</sup>P. Brunel. Mythocritique. Paris, PUF, 1992, f.137

<sup>6</sup> P. Brunel. Mythocritique. Paris, PUF 1992, f.37

<sup>7</sup> Anna Trocchi. Temi e miti letterari né: Letteratura comparata (gr. Aut.) Milano: Garzanti, 2002, f. 66.

#### 4. Confrontation: Protection and Innovation

But how does this myth comes to the poetic proses of Ernest Koliqi?

In the cultural path, myth is an authority, a reference more or less permanent, which tends towards repetition, towards ritualization.<sup>8</sup> It is the maintainance of the rite of reflection and differentiation of action modalities, the similarity and main difference. Practically, this myth takes you into a mysterious territory, to that of symbolic images, to poetry and dreams. On the other hand, the name of Narcissus, sends the thoughts to a hidden and dark origin, since the Greek etymology of the name is *narké*, or "numbness", "dormancy" of the same origin with the word narcotics. There is a paradox, but Narcissus myth tells us that this pairing of images is not only an external coupling, but its part in "darkness", discovered by the purity of the water, unknown hidden part, deep and underdeveloped it is the one from which he remains attracted. (*Narké*)

The ancient Narcissus is a teenager, not an adult, not a child. An age when the person tries to know himself, his relevant identity, existing affiliation in life as an individual before he reaches the responsibility of adults and definitions that takes his life. At this stage he is still subject to the unknown forces, arising from ongoing call of the water symbolism. The transformation itself of the boy into a flower, in the mythological context, it is a displacement. It is the spring that brings blossoms; viewed as a season where nature seems uncertain in its beginning, but safe for its awakening from hibernation.

Identification of own self inside a character known for his positivity and negativity at the same time makes it difficult, but not impossible maturation through thought, action, reaction. The myth of Narcissus comes to the description of the source as a place unreachable by sunlight, totally fittable to reflect the image of Narcissus. So the place is dark and reflective. But in this context, isn't it also in the mirror of the first poetic prose: *Waters of the well* of Koliqi? Wasn't it the smooth dark mysterious water, after which Narcissus was fatally attracted to? Even at Koliqi work it feels the attraction beyond what can be seen, toward the unknown, the unseen, mysterious, because only in half dark one can recognize ownself.

According to American researcher Eric Gould, art makes the transition from the sacred to the daily<sup>9</sup>. External indicators such as age, passion, vigor of youth of this character connect him with Narcissus as a protagonist and as an explorer of himself. Then, the psychological proceeding differentiate him from the fate of the first and gives a different way from the ancient character. His experiences through reflections and meditations in order to recognize and search the real truth, just keep the symbolism, and change the course.

In Koliqi's mirrors an inversion of the pejorative aesthetics of this figure occurs. The Greek Narcissus commences as a "hero" (in the positive sense of the protagonist and ends as an "antihero", referring to his tragic fate), whereas at Koliqi's prose the recognition process begins with an "antihero" (naive guy, self-admirer). Successive reflections make him grow; make him a "hero" (associated with prudence, perfection and balance that he achieves). Putting the human in the center of attention, recognizing trends of internal knowledge of its own, justifies the defining that Koliqi make to his poems, as "poetic memoirs", the purpose of which is knowing the human nature through themselves.

The emergence of the death concept refers to an evolutionary change or transformation. Narcissus must die in order to give life to an adult. His immature form is embedded in the emblematic image of the flower. This way we can interpret Greek narcissism referring to the human personality in relation to the commencement of Koliqi's prose (*Mirror One*). So far, we are still in a primal myth and general parallels.

When analyzing the poetics of Narcissus myth and consider the concept of poetry as palimpsest<sup>10</sup>, then it is understandable why the world art is revitalized through fables of mythical subjects, thus being adapted and shaped as authorial poetics as we may say for the poetic prose of Koliqi. It is not the coldness, asceticism or self-loving that give colorful images of Narcissus; these are not conveyed in art and poetry.<sup>11</sup>

The reflection at the work of Koliqi has a relative and moral extension to seven different situations. This literary myth, or "subject" as Trousson labels it, keeps three basic functions of ethnic-religious myth throughout his seven poetic prose; the narrative function which has to do with the mythical scenario (the situation of bending, reflection from the mirror), the explanatory function (granted from a known source) and the third function, the revelation one, concerned with the eradication of sacra's function. This function is directly connected to re-significations.

<sup>8</sup> Rousseau, Pichois, Brunel. *Qu'est-ce que la littérature comparee?*, Paris, 1996

<sup>9</sup> Eric Gould. *Mythical intentions in modern literature*. USA, Princeton University Press, f. 171

<sup>10</sup> Persida Asllani. *Poetika si palimpsest dhe historia e letërsisë shqipe në: Konferenca Shkencore - Historia e Letërsisë Shqipe*, Prishtinë, 2010, f.135.

<sup>11</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Erosi dhe qytetërimi*. Tiranë, UEGEN, 2008, f. 164

The mythical circumstances (Brunel) inside a text can be inserted or hidden. In this case the "reconstruction" of the original myth can add "underground" shades or some elusive ones holding a "radiant power" so strong and central on the basis of which, the reference to the mythical element results as being very remote. So, in *Mirror One* we will be confronted with the *Narcissus as a dreamer...* Narcissus of Koliqi has a similar origin to that of ancient myth, if not the loving process, that of consent or refusal of mirror-reflection, for sure.

Very soon this Narcissus will break links with the ancient one showing a sort of autonomy. The poetic Narcissus of Koliqi will go through different experiences that will change his ways of life. Unlike the ancient myth where he dies, Koliqi's Narcissus will live and will be reborn, because ultimately he is a free and modern Narcissus, of universal thoughts and not confusion of feelings. It therefore comes with a reversal of previously recognized connotation. This new feature of primal myth that connects the creative process of Koliqi with the connotation that Narcissus won in the contemporary myth, known as the (complex) myth of culture. This is a new way of perception. The simple structure of the ancient Greek myth, treated by Koliqi gains new values and it is not isolated or customized.

Thus, he goes from mythical context to the literary one. Philippe Sellier has distinguished some substantial changes between "ethnic-religious" and literary myth (Literature, 1984). According to Brunel: the "ethnic-religious" myth is a founding, anonymous and collective confession, considered as true, that while being analyzed some strong structural opposition appear. When myth goes to literature, it maintains "the symbolic saturation", the tight organizing and metaphysical light, but losing the founder character and the real (genuine) one among others, the works are signed and authored.<sup>12</sup> The modern European culture has re-functionalized many pagan myths going through metamorphosis and more universal archetypes are created. The literary fable seems, however, as a mythological story; then the literary qualities of myth and mythical qualities of literature should be close to similar.<sup>13</sup>

Even in our case the use of this myth is a variation of "confession" that means different things to different cultures. So therefore this archetype will not be the myth of Narcissus but transformation of human into another human being, even within a different natural realm.

It has also maintained a symbolic value, for our times as well. This is achieved by Koliqi by re-activation of this myth. Pierre Brunel, points out the major role played by literature and the arts (nowadays by the cinema, too); the role of the guardian of myths. This is why we say that literature "overlays" myth, keeping it alive.<sup>14</sup>

## 5. Resignification

The transition of the character "I", from one text to another, grouping according to topics, messages, creating a subjected framework to connect a series of charges that have essential autonomy makes the prose coherent as a whole. There are three forms of the interior of the man who Koliqi embodies in his mirrors providing so a separation from the end of the ancient pagan myth: desire, ability and obligation.

Desire – the form known as the cliché I want to do. So he *wants wisdom*, (*Mirror One- Water of the Well*), *universal harmony* (*Mirror Three*), *to achieve a successful poetry* (*Mirror Five*), *to achieve the clean man, dreams*, (*Mirror Six*), *to realize itself without conflicts* (*Mirror Seven*) etc.

Ability – the can-do option. The Narcissus of Koliqi can *revive the beautiful things of the past* (*Mirrors Two, Three*) can *find the required position* (*Mirror Six*), can *achieve the required beauty* (*Mirror Six, Seven*), etc.

Necessity – the must-do option. For example at *Mirror Seven*, he must face the harsh reality. Thus, in analogy with the ancient myth of Koliqi's Narcissus is one of internal clashes and uncertainties but the independence in the poetic prose of modern Narcissus is strengthened by opposition, reflecting to find the best solution, or at least to challenge what is impossible to change. Unlike the ancient Narcissus, the poetic Narcissus of Ernest Koliqi's prose chooses the path of freedom, new world and challenges to understand and reconcile with self.

*If there is something consistent in studies of myth, it is that there can be no myth without an ontological gap between the event and the significance of this event. Myth tends to be a symbolic representation suitable to fill that gap, aiming to be tautology.*

*A failure to define the origin, the arbitrary meaning of our place in the world, determines the mythical, at least in the sense that we cannot clearly identify and secure a definitive origin of ourselves in the world. Thus, the myth is a compromise and a hypothesis too. Its meaning is always open and universal because as soon as an ultimate meaning is missing, the gap itself requires interpretation, which can go on and on, because language is a system of an open*

<sup>12</sup> P. Brunel. Le dictionnaire des mythes littéraires, Paris: Éditions du Rocher, 1988, f.13

<sup>13</sup> Eric Gould. Mythical intentions in modern literature, USA, f.177

<sup>14</sup> A. Pierre. Mythes et mythologies dans la littérature française, , 1969, reed.1980, f.72

meaning.<sup>15</sup>

Building on a remote culture is the first step which identifies the element that is borrowed from the comparative study. A myth is borrowed here, symbolically dressed with a new connotative meaning.

In the analyzed poetic prose we encounter a Narcissus, in love, but not with himself. He needs to take seven meditations to reach logical and sound conclusions. As a result of those, seven reflections are created. There will merge and become as a uniform his intellectual world, (a sensitive and gifted poet); his spiritual affiliation, (being Albanian) and the world of artistic sensations, (his vast culture.) The poet's perception and his findings have no restrictions of any kind.

Re-activation of this myth at Koliqi's work shows the volatility of his intellectual image. It is reflected in various meditational situations to find beauty, aesthetics and to give life to the rhythm of poetry, the vast marine space, darkness and mimics of a human body.

It seems like the poetics of water of Narcissus – is formed in the poetics of soil, rock and its roots. So, Koliqi builds a world of his own, where space and time become relative.

## 6. Conclusion

In modern literature the borrowed myth, as in this case, is used with different valence adapted to time and situation. The rebuilt literary myth can only be studied in the intersection of two complementary processes: maintenance of a scenario and its transformation.<sup>16</sup>

"Seven Mirrors of Narcissus" holds an important position among the Albanian works in the way of treatment of the myth and innovations it brings. During this process the myth retains the element of the borrowing, but also develops the way it is integrated into the text either as a concept or as a component, exploring new functions free of pagan myth.

Narcissus himself is a symbol – a myth of desire through which Koliqi, in every Mirror, brings to us the desire, rush, energy and the impossibility to realize them as well. There lies the essence of the complexes; desire to be, to do and to change a reality that does not promise much. In this way it is projected the dual nature of this myth. Koliqi tries to find a balance between his existence as an artist and intellectual and the real opportunities to reveal. He sees himself as being fulfilled if his intellectual side balances his artistic one. Koliqi tries to find a balance between his existence as an artist and intellectual and the real opportunities to reveal. In the modern world the image of Narcissus represents the Complex of culture embedded in two elements of myth: 1 –The ability to see in a reflective surface, 2 - Water as a symbol consists of the essence of instability of poetic dimension where the writer sees himself.

The solution of his complex of culture and intellectualization comes through the inner voice. The inner voice of Koliqi refers to the muse of poetry and pure art, which therefore is in fact the voice of his soul. He would perpetuate this voice associating it with a strange reality that is concrete, historical and mythical. This interior voice is the voice of thoughts of rescue, feelings and belongings. In the poetic prose, life experience will be sublimed with the artistic one. All this is due to the fact that a simple pagan myth is overlaid with a new philosophical meaning while maintaining its structural elements such as: the bending ritual and the reflection process. These structural elements redefine the new literary myth, the symbolic essence of study and interpretation of seven meditations of Ernest Koliqi.

Seven artistic meditations of Ernest Koliqi artistically written as seven poetic proses particularly brought innovation and individuality in the Albanian literature where the essential tool is redefinition and revitalization of a familiar myth through a new literary re-activation, sometimes maintaining the symbolism and other times playing with its connotation.

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<sup>15</sup> Gould, Eric; *Mythical intentions in modern literature, USA*, f. 6

<sup>16</sup> Brunel, P. *Mythocritique*, France, 1992, f.37

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