

The Employment of Mythology as a Means of Empowerment in Selected Poems by Yeats, Dunqul and Lorde: An Intertextual Reading

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The incorporation of myths is adeptly created in the literary production of three poets, namely the Anglo-Irish poet W. B. Yeats (1865-1939), the Egyptian Amal Dunqul (1940-1983) and the African American Audre Lorde (1934-1992). This paper offers an intertextual reading of selected poems, in which the use of myths is a tool for political and social commentary. Julia Kristeva coined the term intertextuality in the 1960s to refer to the relationship between the “intertext” and other texts. Kristeva proposed that the text is “a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another” (Kristeva 1980, 36). However, Kristeva’s understanding of intertextuality disregarded the role of the author. For her, intertextual relations exist as an integral part of the text without the conscious decision of the author. She asserted: “Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Kristeva 1980, 66). This proposition was supported by Barthes² in his essay “The Death of The Author” in which he states: “The author enters into his own death, writing begins” (120). Barthes’ essay encouraged generating limitless interpretations of the text. However, this view was challenged by postcolonial and feminist critics, who placed emphasis on the voice of the author. In his paper “The Author Never Dies: Roland Barthes and the Postcolonial Project”, Senayon Olaoluwa states: “The place of the author in literary analysis will thus remain inalienable just as history... To avert to the contrary in the postcolonial world is to strip literature of its human pivot and by implication its signage of credibility, which is why authors will always remain alive and kicking”. Examining the socio-historical context of the text and the background of the author offers a deeper understanding of the literary work.

This paper contends that the intertextual reading of the three selected poems by Yeats, Dunqul, and Lorde demonstrates that they implemented mythology consciously as a tool to gain power and resist the oppressive powers under which they were subject. The three poets experienced different forms of crises. Yeats was concerned with the revival of Irish culture and the reworking of Irish myth to defy the suppression of colonialism evident in his poem “Red Hanrahan’s Song About Ireland”. Dunqul expressed a sense of loss and grief after the 1967 Setback *naksa* by remodelling the Arabic myth of Zarqa al-Yamāmah in his poem “Crying before

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Zarqa al- Yamāmah”. Comparably, as a form of empowerment, Lorde resisted the racism she was suffered from through the incorporation of the African myth of Yemanjá in her poem “From the House of Yemanjá”. This paper explores the intertextual relations between the three poems as intertexts, their socio-political contexts, as well as the significance and implications of the respectively incorporated myths.

Exploring the socio-historical context of the literary work is essential in Kristeva’s theory of intertextuality, which is based on Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism. Bakhtin argued that an utterance is embedded in a dialogue, namely, a historical and social context:

The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. (1981, 276)

Bakhtin asserts that examining the historical and social context is an integral part of understanding the meaning of an utterance. For him, the utterance refers to a network of other utterances which is the crux, according to which Kristeva developed the term intertextuality. She credited Bakhtin’s suggestion that “the literary word” is “an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character), and the contemporary or earlier cultural context” (65). Kristeva replaced “the word” in Bakhtin’s theory with the literary work. She argues that the text has two axes: “horizontal axis (subject-addressee) and vertical axis (text-context) coincide, bringing to light an important fact: each word (text) is an intersection of word (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read” (Kristeva 1980, 66). Thus, the horizontal axis refers to the relationship between the writer and the reader, while the vertical axis refers to the relationship between the text and the outer texts or context. The two dimensions create a spatialization, in which these four elements of author, reader, text, and intertext interact and produce intertextual relations in different patterns. She argues that texts are ideologeme, elucidating that “by studying the text as intertextuality, [one] considers it as such within (the text of) society and history” (Kristeva 37). The proposition of the text as ideologeme entails that the author is living in and interacting within a socio-historical context.

Intertextuality takes different forms: parody, translation, adaptation, appropriation, allegory, allusion, pastiche, anagram, and imitation. The form of intertextuality used by Yeats in his poem “Red Hanrahan’s Song About Ireland,” Dunqul in his poem “Crying before Zarqa al- Yamāmah,” and Lorde in her poem “From the House of Yemanjá” is adaptation. The three poets transformed the mythic into the poetic. In addition, the rewriting of the myths by the three poets aims at providing social and political commentaries. Key terms that are pertinent to

adaptation are rework, rewrite, remodel, and echo (Sanders 18). The research question proposed by this paper is how the employment of myths functions as a social and political commentary at the time of crisis in Yeats's "Red Hanrahan's Song About Ireland," Dunqul's "Crying before Zarqa al- Yamamah," and Lorde's "From the House of Yemanjá."

1. Yeats' "Red Hanrahan's Song About Ireland"

The use of mythology by W. Butler Yeats is significant in relation to the history of Ireland under English colonialization. Yeats' poetry maintains Irish identity and culture despite the attempts of colonization to stifle Irish people. Ireland commenced its struggle against English intrusion and colonization as early as 1167. Since the 12th century, the Gaelic language has experienced suppression and was replaced by English which became the official language. The 1800 Irish Act of Union resulted in the uniting of the kingdom of Britain and Ireland (Beckett 1966, 282). During the 1880s, there were constant demands by Irish nationalists to achieve home rule and land ownership. In 1842, the Home Rule movement (aka Young Ireland) aspired to attain independence and establish the Irish language as the official language. However, the demands of Irish nationalists were denied, and the leader of the movement was sentenced to death. In 1858, another movement emerged, known as the Fenians. The name of this movement is significant because it is derived from Irish mythology of Fionn Mac Cumhail and his great warriors who are renowned and celebrated Irish heroes (Monaghan 181). In 1898, the Local Government Act resulted in establishing a local government in Ireland (Beckett 1966, 283). Nonetheless, English colonization continued to exercise its power to keep Ireland under poor political and economic conditions. The repression of Gaelic led to the gradual erosion of Irish culture.

Preserving Irish heritage as a tool of empowering Irish people was carried out by Yeats on two levels. Firstly, he cited Irish myths in his poems so that his poetry would record Irish mythology. Secondly, he tried to maintain the use of Irish myth through creating an analogy between contemporary Irish poets and Irish mythological figures. Hirsch explains the following:

During the early years of the 1890s Yeats studied the exemplary lives and poems of several Gaelic poets...One result of his study was his idealized use of the fable of Raftery, to him the Irish Homer, and Mary Hynes, Yeats's Irish Helen, in *The Celtic Twilight* (1893), *The Speckled Bird* (1896-circa 1902), and "The Literary Movement in Ireland" (1899). (882-883)

In addition, he created the mythological character of Hanrahan in "Stories of Red Hanrahan." He proudly states in his poem "The Tower" (1925): "And I myself created Hanrahan/...For I need all his mighty memories" (*Collected Poems* 1951, 194-195). The character of Hanrahan was based on the Irish poet Owen Roe O'Sullivan (1748-1784), who was known as the last of the great Gaelic poets. He

stated that his intention behind the creation of Hanrahan is that “I had some hope that my invention . . . might pass into legend as though he were [a] historical character” (*The Autobiography* 1965, 294). Yeats aimed to create a link between his literary works and Irish heritage through the inclusion of the character of Hanrahan as a historical character. Hanrahan represented the modern hero, who sings about and for Ireland, as well as its history.

Yeats’ poem “Red Hanrahan’s Song About Ireland” amalgamates and reworks different Celtic myths. The fifteen lines poem, which is divided into three quintans, stimulates feelings of grief and sorrow about the condition of Ireland under English colonization. In each of the quintains Yeats creates a recurring pattern which he follows in each quintain: He incorporates an Irish myth, exposing the negative influence of colonization, and ends the quintain by promising to be loyal to Ireland. Adapting Irish myths signifies the rich Irish heritage. However, the reworking of the myth is evident when Yeats presents the mythical figure or object as being in crisis as a result of colonization. He also cites Irish places such as different areas in Sligo County in Ireland, where Yeats had spent his youth. In this poem, Yeats adapts the character of Hanrahan that he created in his short stories “Stories of Red Hanrahan.” He believes that Hanrahan is the persona in this poem and he sings to Ireland. He says:

The old brown thorn-trees break in two high over Cummen Strand,
Under a bitter black wind that blows from the left hand;
Our courage breaks like an old tree in a black wind and dies,
But we have hidden in our hearts the flame out of the eyes
Of Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.

The wind has bundled up the clouds high over Knocknarea,
And thrown the thunder on the stones for all that Maeve can say.
Angers that are like noisy clouds have set our hearts abeat;
But we have all bent low and low and kissed the quiet feet
Of Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.

The yellow pool has overflowed high up on Clooth-na-Bare,
For the wet winds are blowing out of the clinging air;
Like heavy flooded waters our bodies and our blood;
But purer than a tall candle before the Holy Rood
Is Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan. (*Selected Poems* 38)

In the poem, Yeats adapts the character of Cathleen Ní Houlihan, who is the main character in his play *Cathleen Ní Houlihan*, which he wrote in collaboration with Lady Gregory, and performed in 1902. Yeats rewrites the character of Cathleen Ní Houlihan in the poem to represent her as the symbol of Ireland. Centring the poem on Cathleen Ní Houlihan creates links between the poem and the play. The play is

about an old woman who asks for the help of young Irishmen to retrieve her land. Those willing to help her must sacrifice everything in exchange for immortalizing their names (Welch 1966, 89). Thus, Cathleen Ní Houlihan needs the help of young Irish people to liberate her from colonialization. Therefore, Yeats remodels the same symbol of Cathleen Ní Houlihan as Ireland in the poem. Moreover, Cathleen Ní Houlihan is the Irish goddess of sovereignty (Monaghan 78). The reference to the Irish goddess enhances the link between Cathleen Ní Houlihan and Irish land. Furthermore, the context of the play itself is suggestive because it was performed during the rebellion of the Irish organization, the United Irishmen by Maud Gonne, the Irish actress and activist. Consequently, both poem and play fight against colonization.

Yeats rewrites the Irish myth of the thorn tree, presenting it as broken in order to express the oppression that Irish people face. In spite of this oppression, Irish people derive their power from Ireland, its history, and its culture manifested in the character of Cathleen Ní Houlihan. The image of the broken thorn tree expressed in the first line: “The old brown thorn-trees break in two” is suggestive. It refers to the deteriorating condition of Ireland under colonization. Yeats incorporates the myth of the thorn tree, also known as a Fairy Tree, which is a symbolic plant in Irish culture (Mongham 446). In Irish myth, these trees belong to the Fairies who are gods, ancestors of the Indigenous people, or the dead Irish (Monaghan 167). The Fairy trees are sacred; if anyone breaks a Fairy Tree, he/she suffers from the punishment of the Fairies (Monaghan 430). Thus, in Irish culture, breaking or cutting a thorn tree is an ill omen because it foreshadows the anger of the Fairies. The poem opens with bad luck and anger because of the breaking of the thorn tree.

The first quintain reflects the analogy between Irish heritage, represented by the broken thorn tree, and suppressed Irish people. Moreover, the persona describes the resistance of Irish people and their loyalty to Ireland, represented by submitting to Cathleen Ní Houlihan. The breaking of the long-standing thorn tree because of the “black wind” signals the suffering of deep-rooted Irish heritage because of the cruelty of colonization. Moreover, there is an analogy between the breaking of the old tree and the “break[ing]” of the “courage” of Irish people. The poet acknowledges that although English colonization tries to ruthlessly suppress Gaelic and Celtic culture, Irish people derive their strength and hope from the “eyes of Cathleen the daughter of Houlihan,” who represents both Ireland and Irish heritage.

In the second quintain, Yeats remodels the myth of Maeve, who is an Irish mythological figure and a legendary queen (Monaghan 108) to depict her in a distress. In addition, the persona offers another promise of patriotism and loyalty to Ireland. The first two lines in the second quintain are a remodelling of the myth of Maeve because these lines show her being subjected to the evil forces of nature. This is reflected when the persona says: “The wind has bundled up the clouds high over Knocknarea,/ And thrown the thunder on the stones for all that Maeve can say” (*Selected Poems* 38). According to Irish myth, Maeve (aka Medb) is buried on the top of the hill named Knocknarea or Cruachan (Monaghan 108). However, Yeats does not refer to the mythical queen Maeve as resting in peace in her tomb. She is

endangered by the harsh elements of nature evident in wind, clouds, and thunder. These evil natural elements represent the tyrannical authority of colonization, which has a destructive influence on Irish heritage. However, the persona stresses the loyalty of Irish people. They are left in a dreadful state where their hearts are beating with anger. Despite these plights, they hold onto their faith and reverence for Ireland, evident when the persona says: "But we have all bent low and low and kissed the quiet feet/ Of Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan." Describing her feet as "quiet" refers to the resilient stance of Ireland despite the destructive agenda of colonialism.

Similar to the first two quintains, Yeats adapts another Irish myth, namely the myth of Cloothnabare (aka Cailleach Bhéirre), who is an Irish fairy. In contrast to the first two quintains, which subvert the myths to express the distress of Irish people, the reference to Cloothnabare is a promise of a new beginning beyond suffering. The first line echoes the myth of Clooth-na-Bare when the persona says: "The yellow pool has overflowed high up on Clooth-na-Bare." Yeats rewrites the myth of Clooth-na-Bare where she was searching for a lake deep enough to drown and achieve transformation because she was tired of her fairy existence. The image of the overflow of the water over Clooth-na-Bare is a sign of liberation. The "wet wind" is a sign of hope because it dismantles the "clinging air." Yeats breaks the recurring pattern of each quintain, where the mythical figure suffers. The reference to the liberation of the mythical figure of Clooth-na-Bare from her weary fairy life is a promise of the liberation of Ireland. The persona concludes the poem with a hopeful image of Cathleen Houlihan standing purer than a candle, signifying guidance and hope. The image of the Holy Rood, i.e., the Cross, suggests that Cathleen Houlihan appears in the image of the Virgin Mary standing before the Cross. In Catholicism, the candle signifies the light of God. This promising ending is a prayer for the emancipation of Ireland.

2. Dunqul's "Crying before Zarqa al-Yamamah"

In "Crying before Zarqa al-Yamamah," Amal Dunqul adapts the Arabic myth of Zarqa al-Yamamah, to express his grief and feelings of defeat because of the 1967 *naksa*. The main character of the poem is a soldier who has just returned from the war. The poem is divided into two parts. In the first part, the soldier expresses his trauma because of the defeat. In the second part, he expresses oppression and marginalization. This paper uses the translation of the Arabic poem by Mohamed Enani in his book *Arabic Poetry in Egypt*.

Dunqul refers to the Arabic myth of Zarqa al-Yamamah in his poem "Crying before Zarqa al-Yamamah" to create intertextual relations between the defeat of al-Yamamah tribe (The tribe of Zarqa al-Yamamah) and the historical context of the 1967 War. In his poem, Dunqul remodeled the myth of Zarqa al-Yamamah, who was known for the gift of clairvoyance as she could see three days ahead. However, her tribe did not believe her and accused her of madness when she told them that she saw the trees moving as the enemy soldiers carried the trees while walking to hide behind them. As a result, her tribe was defeated and the enemy tore out her eyes in order not

to foresee any imminent disasters (“The Story of Zarqaa al-Yamamah” (Qesat Zarqaa al-Yamamah)).

In the first part, Dunqul has the soldier addressing her in an apostrophe. He expresses his traumatized feelings because of the defeat and asks her to tell him her prophecy. He says:

أيتها العرافة المقدّسة..
 جنّث إليك .. مُثخناً بالطعنات والدماء
 أزحف في معاطف القتلى، وفوق الجثث المكّسة
 منكسر السيف، مغبرّ الجبين والأعضاء.
 أسألُ يا زرقاء..
 عن فمك الياقوت عن، نبوءة العذراء
 عن ساعدي المقطوع .. وهو ما يزال مُمسكاً بالراية المنكّسة

(Al-A'mal al-Sha'raya 1987, 123)

O sacred oracle!
 I have come to you,
 Badly mauled and bleeding,
 Crawling on the coats of the dead,
 Over the piled bodies,
 With a broken sword
 And a dust-covered brow!
 O tell me Zarqa
 Of your ruby lips,
 Of your virgin oracle,
 Of my lost arm, still holding
 The downed banner (Enani 1986, 124)

Referring to and glorifying the Arabic mythical figure of Zarqa al-Yamama is an attempt to draw strength from her in times of national crisis. In contrast to her tribe, who humiliated Zarqa al-Yamamah, the persona addresses Zarqa al-Yamamah with reverence calling her “Oracle” and “Prophetess.” The soldier complains to her so she can offer help and guidance by leading him through prophecy. The wounds of the soldier are expressed in the images of “badly mauled” “bleeding,” “crawling,” and “my lost arm” which showcase his trauma and devastation after the defeat. He conveys his sense of bitterness and shame after the War questioning “How did I carry my shame/... How could my flesh not fall apart?” (Enani 1986, 125). The feeling of shame and grief was prevalent in the Arab world after the defeat. Addressing Zarqa al-Yamamah as a mythical powerful figure and asking her for a prophecy allows Dunqul to express the weakness and hopelessness of the Arab world after the defeat.

In the second part, Dunqul adapts the character of Antar Ibn Shadad, with whom the soldier identifies himself, expressing his marginalization and suffering. Antar Ibn Shadad complains to Zarqa al-Yamamah that he has been disregarded as a slave until he is needed by his tribe. Antar was a pre-Islamic poet and a warrior, who was known for his mythical power. He was the son of a black mother, Zabiba, and a prince in

the 'Abs tribe, Shadad (*Serat Antara* 1865, 2-8). Including Ibn Shadad signifies the injustice the speaker suffers from because Antar was oppressed and subjected to racism. Dunqul identifies the 1967-war-soldier with Antar Ibn Shadad to comment on the suffering of the soldiers and the lack of freedom of speech during the Nasserist's reign. Addressing Zarqa al-Yamamah, the persona laments,

أيتها النبوة المقدسة ..
لا تسكتي .. فقد سكّتُ سنَّةً فسنةً ..
لكي أنال فضلة الأمان
قيل لي "الخرس" ..
فخرستُ .. وعميت .. وائتممتُ بالخصيان !
ظللْتُ في عبيد (عبيس) أحرس القطعان
أجتزُّ صوفها ..
أردُّ نوقها ..

(Al-A'mal al-Sha'raya 1987, 124)

O sacred Prophetess!
Break your silence!
You have been silent, year after year,
To ensure my safety.
"Shut up" they said,
And I was quiet and blind,
Acquiescing in a leadership of eunuchs!
I stayed behind, among the slaves of ['Abs]* tribe
To guard our flocks (Enani 1986, 126-127)

The rewriting of the character of the folkloric figure of Antar in the poem is to articulate an analogy between the suppression shared by Antar and the soldier . The reference to Antar in "I stayed behind, among the slaves of ['Abs] tribe" is significant because it creates an analogy between the experiences of 1967-war-soldier and Antar. The three figures of Zarqa al-Yamamah, Antar, and the soldier are subjected to oppression and lack of freedom of expression. Similar to Zarqa al-Yamamah, who was suppressed, Antar was not allowed to speak. He was forced to be passive and not to voice his opinions and objections. This is evident when Antar complains to Zarqa "Shut up" they said, And I was quiet and blind." By identifying the soldier with Antar, Dunqul criticizes the lack of freedom of speech in Egypt in the 1960s. This is evident when the government attempted to initially suppress the news of the defeat. The government commissioned the announcer Ahmed Said to broadcast threats to Israel and false claims about the victory of the Arabs ("1967 War" (Harb

* My addition. The omission of the name of the tribe in translation leads to the loss of the reference to Antar Ibn Shadad, who belonged to 'Abs tribe.

1967)). Moreover, Dunqul asserted in his interview with *al-Bayan* that this poem was not published for years because of censorship and the lack of freedom of speech (“Al Sadma” (الصدمة)).

The soldier, identified with Antar Ibn Shadad, addresses Zarqa commenting on the poor condition of Egyptian soldiers. Antar was discriminated against because of his skin colour. Since his father denied his lineage, Antra was treated as a slave in the ‘Abs tribe. However, when the tribe was defeated and Abla, his cousin, and others were held captives, Antar was called upon by his uncle to save them. Identifying the voice of the soldier with the voice of Antar allows Dunqul to convey the inequality that the soldier is subjected to because he lives in poor conditions, but he is called to fight for the country in times of war. The persona addresses Zarqa saying:

أنام في حظائر النسيان
طعامي : الكسرة .. والماء .. وبعض الثمرات اليابسة .
وها أنا في ساعة الطعان
ساعة أن نخاذل الكماة .. والرماة .. والفرسان
دُعيت للميدان !
أنا الذي ما ذقت لحم الضأن ..
أنا الذي لا حول لي أو شأن ..
أنا الذي أقصيت عن مجالس الفتیان ،
أدعى إلى الموت .. ولم أدع إلى المجالسة !

Myself asleep in the fold of oblivion
My food a crust of bread and water,
And some dried dates.
But here I am,
In the thick of the fighting, called up,
When the swordsmen, the archers and knights
Had flinched.
Never had power,
Was of no consequence,
Banished from the councils of aldermen,
Now invited to die,
Though not to parley with the men!

The analogy between Antar and the soldiers is significant because both were marginalized but desperately needed in times of war. The image of being “asleep in the fold of oblivion” signifies that soldiers are disregarded. They are not cared for by the government who do not offer them a sustainable life. The poor living condition of the soldiers is evident when he says: “My food a crust of bread and water,/ And some dried dates.” Nevertheless, the soldiers were recruited to fight for the country, which denied them the right to a decent life. Dunqul criticizes social injustice, inequality, and the gap between social classes. He argues that these poor soldiers

were scapegoated. They were denied their main right to live. They did not participate in decision-making.

3. Lorde's "From the House of Yemanjá"

Audre Lorde was one of the first feminists who criticized the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s by drawing attention to the aspects of race and class in African-American women's lives. The term intersectionality was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her paper "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," pertaining to the field of legal studies. The term conveys the twofold oppression of African-American women. She is marginalized and she suffers because she is a woman and is African American. Crenshaw asserted that the theoretical framework was inadequate at that time because it introduced a "single-axis analysis that distorts these experiences" (139). She explained that intersectionality is needed because the "focus on the most privileged group members marginalizes those who are multiply-burdened and obscures claims that cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination" (140). Lorde applied the concept of intersectionality to feminist literature. In her introduction to *Sister Outsider* (1984), which includes essays and speeches by Audre Lorde, Nancy K. Bereano credited Lorde for being "central to the development of contemporary feminist theory" (7). Lorde acknowledged that the second wave of feminism does not reflect her identity or address the overlapping oppression she is subjected to as a "Black woman, lesbian, feminist, mother of two children, daughter of Grenadian immigrants, educator, cancer survivor, activist" (11).

Although Lorde is known mostly for her novel, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, she valued poetry above all else, asserting that "poetry is not a luxury" (*Sister Outsider* 36). Her novel is a "biomythography," a genre Lorde invented to refer to the combination of biography, myth, and history. However, Lorde asserts the primacy of poetry by stating:

For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. (*Sister Outsider*, 1984, 36)

For Lorde, poetry is powerful; it serves as a tool for changing and challenging the status quo. It offers women a chance to express their dreams and hopes for a better life, and this expression triggers change. For her, the process of changing society starts with writing, which leads to awareness of ideas women attempt to convey, and this is the first step towards actual change.

Lorde employed African mythology in her poetry and specifically African myths of goddesses to empower African women. In "An Open Letter to Mary Daly," Lorde

criticized Mary Daly (1928- 2010), who was an American feminist, for being white-centered in her book *Gyno/Ecology*. She stated:

So I wondered, why doesn't Mary deal with Afrekete as an example? Why are her goddess images only white, western european, judeo-christian? Where was Afrekete, Yemanje, Oyo, and Mawulisa? Where were the warrior goddesses of the Vodun, the Dahomeian Amazons and the warrior women of Dan? Well, I thought, Mary has made a conscious decision to narrow her scope and to deal only with the ecology of western european women. (*Sister Outsider* 67)

Lorde poses a list of questions that reflect the richness of African heritage, which is disregarded. As she was concerned with incorporating race into feminist theory, Lorde examines African goddesses such as Afrekete, Yemanje, Oyo, and Mawulisa. To empower herself and her race, Lorde capitalizes the names of the African goddesses while writing: “western” “european” and “judeo-christian” in small letters in order to subvert power relations. In 1992, before her death, Lorde attended an African naming ceremony, during which she changed her name to the African name, Gamba Adisa, which means “Warrior: She Who Makes Her Meaning Known” (Brandman, “Audre Lorde”).

In order to understand Lorde’s “From the House of Yemanjá,” Yoruba’s culture and mythology must be explored. The Yoruba is an African tribe that lives on the west coast of Africa in Nigeria. Most enslaved people brought to America have Yoruba roots (Hearst 9). According to Yoruba mythology, Olorun is the supreme being and his offspring are the divinities known as Orisha or Orisa (“Editorial: The Yoruba Religious System”). In the cosmology of Yoruba, the most prominent Orishas are Osun Seegesi, the deity of wealth, and Yemanja, Oya, and Osun are associated with waterways and rivers (“Editorial: The Yoruba Religious System”).

In her poem “From the House of Yemanjá,” Lorde adapts the Yoruba myth of Yemanjá as a means of empowerment to overcome the intersectional experiences of racism and sexism. She rewrites the myth of the Yoruba goddess Yemanjá, “the great mother goddess who gave birth to all other orisha. Mostly Yemanjá is considered the senior of all river goddesses. She is the water of life itself” (Beier, 1980, 77). Reference to the Yoruba mythical figure of Yemanjá is a way to acquire power through returning to her roots. In Yoruba, culture and religion cannot be separated. The religion of Yoruba is based on the worship of the deities known as the Orishas (Menoukha 1). According to Eric Sipyinyu in “Audre Lorde: Black Feminist Visionary and ‘Mytho-poet,’” the incorporation of African mythical figures performs two roles for Lorde: “For her, an understanding of Myth as a dominant form of black ancestral worship might allow blacks to achieve a better understanding of history on the one hand, and on the other, create new values and meaning from its rich reservoirs” (94). However, the most significant accomplishment resulting from the use of Yoruba mythology is to acquire a space for Lorde to articulate her suffering and that of African American women.

In her free verse poem “From the House of Yemanjá,” Lorde adapts the myth of Yemanjá, who represents for Lorde the figure of the mother and a link to her Yoruba roots. Lorde’s problematic relationship with her mother led Lorde to search for another mother who is identified as Yemanjá. The title of the poem signifies Lorde’s attempt to reconnect with her heritage asserting that she is “From the House of Yemanjá,” that is, she belongs to the House of Yemanjá which is a symbol of the Yoruba tribe. Her belonging to Yemanjá offers her refuge from her unaccepting mother and empowers her to stand against racism. Lorde introduces her intricate feelings and the dual identity of being an African American woman. Although Lorde was grateful to her mother, she refers to her complicated relationship with the latter, who wished her to have a lighter complexion. She states:

My mother had two faces and a frying pot
where she cooked up her daughters
into girls
before she fixed our dinner.
My mother had two faces
and a broken pot
where she hid out a perfect daughter
who was not me
I am the sun and moon and forever hungry
for her eyes. (*Collected Poems* 1997, 235)

As an African-American, her mother has “two faces” referring to her dual identity as society prevents her from embracing her Black identity. The pot is a symbol of nurturing, motherhood, and home. Her mother uses her “frying pot” to “cook” her daughters, which connotes shaping them. However, image of the broken pot indicates that she failed to raise and shape her daughters the way she aspired. Moreover, the broken pot can refer to the broken bond between Lorde and her mother. The mother managed to preserve a “perfect daughter,” yet this daughter is not Audre Lorde. Expressing that she is both the “sun and the moon” emphasizes the dual identity of Lorde. She is African-American and she embraces her culture; however, society and her mother expect her to denounce her roots in order to be properly integrated into society. This chasm between what she desires and the pressure of society and her mother created in her a sense of inner conflict and split.

In her poem, Lorde rewrites the myth of Yemanjá known as “Mother of all life” (Morgaine 2021, p. x) to acquire the sense of belonging and security she was deprived of because of her mother’s rejection. She admits that her inner conflict and her dual identity became an integral part of her. Yet, she intends to strengthen her African roots with the help of Yemanjá. She says:

I bear two women upon my back
one dark and rich and hidden
in the ivory hungers of the other
mother
pale as a witch
yet steady and familiar
brings me bread and terror
in my sleep
her breasts are huge exciting anchors
in the midnight storm. (*Collected Poems* 1997, 235)

Her dual identity is evident in the image of “I bear two women upon my back.” Lorde asserts her preference for her black self which is “rich” according to her. Yet, her black self is “hidden” because it is not accepted by either her mother or society. Her black self is hidden in the “ivory hungers of the other mother” referring to Yemanjá. Lorde expresses her yearning desire for her other mother Yemanjá. Her feelings toward Yemanjá convey her emotional bond with her and at the same time her fear. The image of Yemanjá as a mother with “her breasts are huge exciting anchors” echoes the myth of Yemanjá, who is described as having huge breasts because she nursed an enormous number of children. Lorde is grateful that Yemanjá is a haven during her distress.

Echoing the myth of Yemanjá, as a goddess and a motherly figure, Lorde resorts to Yemanjá to cure her unstable relationship with her mother and as a sign of her belonging to African heritage, the persona says:

Mother I need
mother I need
mother I need your blackness now
as the august earth needs rain.
I am

the sun and moon and forever hungry
the sharpened edge
where day and night shall meet
and not be
one. (*Collected Poems* 1997, 235)

Implementing the Yoruba religion whose adherents worship the goddess Yemanjá, Lorde implores Yemanjá to reconnect with her. The refrain of “mother I need” refers to the sincerity of her request. Lorde’s relationship with her mother traumatizes her. Thus, she searches and finds another mother, Yemanjá, in order to overcome the trauma. “Blackness” in “mother I need your blackness now” stands for her African identity and heritage. By resorting to Yemanjá, Lorde can stand against her mother and society. Reconnecting with her African roots empowers her. To fight sexism and

racism, she has to embrace her female-; African identity rather than assimilate with the dominant patriarchal-;white culture. Her “hunger” is the hunger for her Black roots. She is determined not to merge “day” and “night,” referring to whiteness and blackness. She refuses to assimilate and erase her black, “hidden” side. She is self-conscious of this duality and hopeful to reconnect with the African goddess to enhance her black identity.

Unlike Kristeva’s assumption that intertextual relations are not intentional, the myths are directly incorporated by the three poets in order to shed light on social and political contexts. Lorde’s statement that “Poetry is not a Luxury” reflects how the three poets, namely Yeats, Lorde, and Dunqul reworked myths into their poems as a tool to express their beliefs, suffering, and hope. The shared sense of oppression and the socio-cultural crises between the three poets enticed them to employ the same tool of reconnecting with their mythological past to produce social and political commentaries. In other words, reviving history and connecting to roots is not an end but a means to gain a voice. Identifying the intertextual relations between the intertexts/poems and circumstantial reality offered a better insight into the message of the selected poems. The dynamic relationship between the myths and the contexts of each poem helped the poets create their own platforms to voice their opinions and beliefs. The rewriting of the myth by Yeats was carried out on two levels. Firstly, his adaptation of Irish myth involved changing the form of the myth into a poem. Secondly, Yeats remodels Irish myth by presenting the mythical figure or object as being in crisis to create an analogy between the myth and the condition of Ireland and Irish people during colonization. In addition, the interplay between the Arabic myth of Zarqa al-Yamamah, the folkloric figure of Antar Ibn Shadad, and the political context of the 1967 War in the intertext of “Crying before Zarqa al-Yamamah” suggests the oppression and lack of freedom of speech in Egypt in the late 1960s. Dunqul rewrites the myth of Zarqa al-Yamamah along with the folkloric figure of Antar Ibn Shadad to create a platform for himself to express what he cannot directly say. Moreover, Lorde empowers her gender and race by echoing the matriarchal Yoruba myth Yemanjá. She shared her story with African American women to expose Western culture, empower African American women, and eliminate the feeling of the diaspora.

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