

Les chemins de la tradition: myths, mythemes, and the rewriting of origins
Department of French Studies Graduate Association Conference
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The stories and plays of the ancients have long been an inspiration, a *point de départ*, for Western literature. Across the centuries, French authors use and reuse these myths, transforming them while giving them new life.

During the twelfth century, Benoit de Sainte Maure retold the Trojan War. Racine rewrote the fatal love triangle in *Phèdre* in the seventeenth century; Balzac recycled the King Midas myth in *Eugénie Grandet* two centuries later. This reappropriation of myth in literature was especially popular in the twentieth century, whether with Camus's *Le mythe de Sisyphe*, Anouilh's *Antigone*, or Cocteau's *Orphée*.

Today we read beyond the Hexagon and its canon to read myths rewritten by Francophone and women authors. We think of Marie NDiaye's retelling of the Medea myth in *La Femme changée en bûche* or Assia Djebar's *Loin de Médine*, based partly on the Antigone myth.

The study of myth extends beyond literature, whether in Lévi-Strauss' anthropological work, philosophical interpretations by Derrida, or psychoanalytic versions by Lacan. In particular, French linguists have long studied myth as a vehicle for the evolution of language. We think of the work of Georges Dumézil, whose comparative linguistic study of Indo-European myths led to important hypotheses about prehistoric cultures and the origins of language.

Taken another way, which myths still cling to language? We think of the myth of superiority of *le français* over regional dialects and languages that prevailed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; to this day, this same myth affects the recognition and appreciation of Francophone culture outside of metropolitan France. What myths are there for today's linguists to debunk?

Why do we rewrite myth again and again? How do different cultures define myth, who rewrites them, and to what end? What is the life of myth in the twenty-first century?

We encourage submissions of papers that address the issues and questions raised here. This may include examining or comparing various genres such as film, music, or performance, as well as literature, both French and Francophone. Submissions on linguistics and culture are also highly desired. Papers, in either French or English, should be no more than 20 minutes in length. Send abstracts of 250 words as well as your university affiliation and contact information. Please send your abstracts by December 15, 2014 to:

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