Saint Gaga: Lady Gaga’s Nostalgic Yearning for Queer Mythology, Monsters, and Martyrs

Lady Gaga, one of the biggest popstars of the 2000s, produces a genuine queer nostalgia, an emergent collective memory with its own sensuous and sensational aesthetics. Her extravagant look, outfits, hairstyles, songs, and concerts, as much as her outrageous public statements, constitute an accumulated (counter)cultural phenomenon which integrates hyper-technological contemporariness with imaginary, legendary pastness, and spectacular, almost prophetic retro-futurism. In her unique status as a young and classic pop star she combines innovativeness and iconicity, unruly womanhood and calculated marketing, global fandom and queer identification. Her multi temporalities are interwoven with her multicultural, intercultural, and countercultural identifications. In her queer way, she creates a fantastic, imaginary, and imaginative history, an invented history that transcends the limitations of reality, naturalness, daily routine, and traditional or conventional frameworks. She creates legendary landscapes, legendary spectacles, and legendary worlds. She is a legend.

As an already mythic icon, Lady Gaga genuinely creates a new mythology with its own iconography and role models in a cybernetic pantheon that oscillates between mutation and bravado, mutilation and perfection, oblivion and vitality, Eros and Thanatos. “Myth,” according to Joseph Campbell’s The Hero with a Thousand Faces, “is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation. Religions, philosophies, arts, the social forms of primitive and historic man, prime discoveries in science and technology, the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic ring of myth” (cited by Kidd and Spear, 1).

The queer visual pop culture is highly interested in invented mythology and constructed mystic symbolism. Meatmen, an anthology of

G. Padva, Queer Nostalgia in Cinema and Pop Culture
© Gilad Padva 2014
Gay Male Comics, for example, features a few genuine graphic gay mythologies. In vol. 21, for example, pseudo Satanic emperors with intimidating masks or Zombie-like skulls and mechanical arms practice sex with naked muscular men with giant erections in Osze’s *Black Sun*; an aroused high-school boy arrives at a surrealist, mythic planet populated by strange phallic monsters and later, his desired sport coach is transformed into a werewolf in Jon Macy’s *Tail* (see Padva, “Dreamboys, Meatmen and Werewolves”); Joe’s *The Sons of Ramus* visualizes the oral and anal delights of the men of hyper-muscular Ramus, “God of all that is masculine and erotic, lord of man to man sexual pleasure, [who] had developed a powerful position, which when consumed, was capable of transporting a man into a state of insatiable sexual hunger. The intoxicating drink,” as the author explains, “required many strange and exotic ingredients, including the semen of Ramus himself” (Leyland, 119).

In Howard Stangroom and Stephen Lowther’s *Prime Cuts*, a collection of all-male strips, Stangroom and Lowther’s mythic sci-fi *Hot Pursuit!* is set in 2197, when man had conquered space and taken his place among the stars, and his colonies span the galaxy. This comic visualizes diverse sexual encounters between mighty kings, Pharaoh-like snake worshippers, sadomasochistic blue aliens, hirsute hyper-masculine commanders, and the blond, blue-eyed superhero Captain Alpha.

In Bruno Gmünder’s gay comic anthology *Stripped: The Illustrated Male* there are numerous gay mythologies and superheroes, e.g. Sean Platter’s red Satanic men and centaurs, Brad Rader’s hirsute warriors flame-throwing erections, Craig Hamilton’s angelic warriors with sharpened swords and axes, Logan’s black hero fighting a gigantic octopus, and Glen Hanson’s black genie ejaculating on an oriental flying carpet etc. Similarly, Justin Hall’s queer comic anthology *No Straight Lines: Four Decades of Queer Comics* includes the mystic tale “Happily Ever After” by Eric Shanower, a story of two infatuated high-school boys (one of them is closeted and full of self-hatred) and their meeting with an oriental, hearted genie named Fouad-Wadi-Nasr-Ras-Daroun-Boun-Ali-Meht-Mahani-Pal The Perspicacious, who helps the pubescent boys to come to terms with their complicated relationship and unfulfilled desire.

One of the most famous motion-pictured gay mythologies, however, is portrayed in James Bidgood’s classic film *Pink Narcissus*, a poetic manifestation of a young hustler’s fantasies. Bidgood’s fantastic myths, as portrayed in the film and in a series of photos in Bruce Benderson’s book *James Bidgood*, include flamboyant settings, colorful scenes of oriental dancing, and royal regalia. *Pink Narcissus’s* fantastic world includes Neo-mythic icons (played by the legendary Bobby Kendall)