

Reactivating the Myth of Lady Mengjiang  
in Cinematography

The Ruskin School of Art

Extended Text

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## Introduction

What is the truth of a myth? What is the core of the myth that has changed its shape across generations? How do we find history in a myth? In my current artistic practice and study, I drew my interest from an ancient Chinese myth, Lady Mengijang (孟姜女), that has been told through generations. Since my art practice focuses on undermining the truth of the past, this myth allows me to look for ways to build up an individual connection with historical characters. By revisiting its various narratives and researching the causes, I choose to activate the myth and to look for the truth behind it.

What makes a myth? According to the definition, it is a traditional story, typically involving supernatural beings or forces, which embodies and provides an explanation, or justification for something such as the early history of a society, a religious belief or ritual, or a natural phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> History is passed on through generations and regions as records, stories, and traditions. A story, based on tradition, either having factual or fictional origins, can be classified as a myth. Containing a symbolic narrative, a myth usually functions as a compass for generations. In comparison, the term “mythology”, as a gathering of myths, is defined as a body or collection of myths, where those relating to a particular person or thing, or belonging to a particular religious or cultural tradition.<sup>2</sup> Even though some myths may have portrayed one character as differently from another narratively, relative similarity can still be observed within the whole social or cultural collectivity. By looking into a culture’s mythology, we can understand its beliefs and customs. Considering the row of historical past within the process of myth creating, we could think about the creation of mythical narrative as symptoms in a psychoanalytic sense. Therefore studying myth allows us to excavate pasts that have been repressed or sublimated through symbol formation. In other words, the study of myth gives us insight into the historical expression of collective psyches while approaching its collective imagination.

Hence, in psychoanalysis, historical moments are constructed retroactively while following a symbolic framework. In addition to Slavoj Žižek, these traces are not just the past, but they all consider the future. These moments are merely meaningless traces, waiting to be realized in the future, where the repressed

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<sup>1</sup> "myth, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2023, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/124670](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/124670). Accessed 19 March 2023.

<sup>2</sup> "mythology, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2023, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/124702](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/124702). Accessed 19 March 2023.

ought to return from.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, mythical stories await to be constructed into a mythological collection retroactively and to be offered symbolic meanings by the framework. Jacques Lacan, proposed the development of a person's subjectivity in three "mirror stages", though the stages are not evolutionary: the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. In the Imaginary, the subject of an individual cannot differentiate between himself and the other. In the Symbolic, it faces separation and alienation from the society or the Other. In the Real, it sees a surplus which cannot be symbolized. Given that these are dense definitions, these terms will be articulated in later paragraphs.

With this in mind, the question is, how do we look for historical elements in a myth, or other words, how to revive mythical narratives back to singular historical events? If we shift our positions in different mirror stages, will we get closer to the historical truth? By looking for ways to restore the past through deconstructing mythology, and revealing actual historical moments, the essay will focus on studying the Chinese myth of Lady Mengjiang in juxtaposition with the Biblical myth of Mary the Virgin. Starting from Furio Jesi's term *The Mythological Machine*, the essay will first disintegrate the forming of mythology, followed by an according case study of the character Lady Mengjiang. In the next paragraph, the essay will examine a possible method of altering the myth by retelling the narrative, criticizing Jean Luc Godard's film, *Hail Marie* (1985). Then, the essay will look into a different methodology of reviving the past in cinematography which offers opportunities to allow the myth to break through the pre-existed symbolic construction. It is to reimagine the past where it does not exist and to create a new narration out of the Lacanian symbolic framework. This involves studying Anne-Marie Mieville's film *The Book of Mary* (1985), which opens up a whole new possibility for freeing the Virgin. Last but not least, the essay will end up with discussing the ways to recreate the myth of Lady Mengjiang in the making of my film, in which I intend to look for the historical truth of the character by reimagining the narratives through dreaming.

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<sup>3</sup> Zizek, S. (1989). *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Verso. p. 56.

## The Formation of Mythology and the Collective Body

Myth forms the collectivity where symbolic meanings are embedded and recognized as well as differentiating the framework thus becomes initial in the whole deconstructing process. Since the collectivity consists of the individuals, the question draws to how the representation of an individual is addressed in multiplicity and how to recognize it. Furio Jesi stated that to visualize a collectivity is to find out when the individuals without connection are gathered together. In this respect, myth becomes a force to construct a unified identity. In the essay, '*The Mythological Machine & The Collective Body*' (2020), Erick Beltran articulated Jesi's way of differentiating myth from mythology. For myth, it is a unit of attraction with no substance where "it is the promise of an explanation for the appearance of something in the real."<sup>4</sup> The meaning is vacant behind each myth, they await to be ideologically visualized by desire. However, mythology consists of social imagination which mediates the relationship between the collective and the individuals. With a collection of stories and metaphors, mythology creates a field for individuals to participate in exchanging signs and symbols in reality. However, neither mythology nor myth has anything to do with the real. Jesi proposed a model called the Mythological Machine. It produces narratives and replaces myths with an unapproachable core. The truth is thus hidden by forms of mythologies. In Jesi's words,

The horizon within which the model of the mythological machine is posed is the space where we can measure this constant equidistance from an inaccessible centre, to which one does not rest indifferent, but one is stimulated to establish the relationship of circling it around.<sup>5</sup>

However, the truth of the origin may become a visualization of the potential risk if the origin was continued to be looked for. By being brought into a contextualized narrative, the readers are forced to incarnate it as the real story. Therefore the story or the myth has to change accordingly to make itself meaningful while being read, while the question remains unsolved. Through this process, mythology forms a collective body of generations. Different parts of the body are thus able to communicate within themselves. With memories of images and metaphors, the individuals are trapped in time and space, since "the individual is the possibility to access this polyphonic narrative in one precise point. This singular 'reading' is limited and anchored by

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<sup>4</sup> Beltran, E. (2020). *The Mythological Machine & The Collective Body*.

<sup>5</sup> Jesi F. (1973). *Il Mito, Isedi*. p.105.

the unit which allows its ideological framework.”<sup>6</sup> This idea of Jesi indicates that the individual is trapped in a loop within the ongoing generation process of the myths. For him, interpreting and revising a myth originates from the intention of an individual, but he sees this pessimistically that one cannot break through the framework. However, this model is only founded if the ideological framework is stable, without facing any inner rupture or other challenge. Even then, Žižek imagines the situation where the rupture does happen, “Every historical rupture, every advent of a new master-signifier, changes retroactively the meaning of all tradition, restructures the narration of the past.”<sup>7</sup> That is to say, it is possible to the framework to be altered or replaced by another. With or without any rupture, there will always be a framework dominating the whole mythological machine.

## The Myth of Lady Mengjiang and Its Variations

T.S. Eliot in his book, *Tradition and Individual Talent* (1950), argued that the creation of artwork totally restructures the former entire framework:

What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new work of art among them.

Here, he mentioned the introduction of the new to the pre-existing framework: it acts as an intrusive force intervening in it. Does that mean that this situation allows the infrastructure loses its meaning in society? The myth of Lady Mengjiang, which appeared in feudal and patriarchal China, could offer an ideal example to testify to the operation of the mythological machine. Due to the change of dynasties in China through generations, traditional variation among regions, and the alterations of national ideologies, this myth has faced historical ruptures throughout thousands of years, and its variations have been created in historical books, folk stories, plays, and songs.

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<sup>6</sup> See note 4 above.

<sup>7</sup> Žižek, S. (1989). *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Verso. p. 56.



Fig. 1. *Meng Jiang nü bian wen*, Dunhuang Manuscript

In the beginning, the story was recorded in the chronicle *Zuo Zhuan* (左传)<sup>8</sup> which was written in the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC). Without a name, the lady was described as the wife of General Qi Liang (杞梁). After her husband's death in a battle, his lord, Duke Zhuang II of Qi (齐庄公) encountered her in the fields and paid his condolence. She refused and required the Duke to visit her house properly in front of the general's family clan. The Duke agreed. Consequently, in the book *Li Ji* (礼记) by Zeng Zi, written in the same period, Qi Liang's wife was portrayed as she was crying while welcoming her husband's coffin after returning from the battle. Later in Han Dynasty, the scholar Liu Xiang made an addition to the plot in his book *Shuo Yuan* (说苑), that the wife cried towards the city wall, and thus her wail collapsed it into ruins.<sup>9</sup> In his other book, *Lie Nü Zhuan* (列女传) or Biographies of Exemplary Women, functioning as a moral education of women in traditional China, the story narrates "When her husband died, she had no children, nor any relatives, and had no place to return to. She wailed over the corpse of her husband at the foot of the city wall, and the sincerity of her grief was such that none of the passers-by was moved to tears. Ten days later the wall toppled down." And later she said, "Now I have no father, no husband, and no son... All I can do is die."<sup>10</sup> Finally, she walked into the river and committed suicide. In Tang Dynasty, the poet Guan Xiu (贯休) altered the timeline to the Qin Dynasty, when the Great Wall of China was constructed. Later in the

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<sup>8</sup> 左丘明 (n.d.). 左传.

<sup>9</sup> 刘向 (n.d.). 说苑.

<sup>10</sup> 刘向 (n.d.). 列女传.

Ming Dynasty, the Great Wall version of the story was reinforced and was widely accepted by folk stories and theatrical plays due to forced labour in building the wall in the Ming Dynasty as a cause of exhaustion and death. In later versions of the narration, her name was altered to Lady Mengjiang—Meng means the eldest son or daughter, and Jiang means beautiful woman. As in these patriarchal narrations above, this female character is nameless, and the only way to mention her is by her husband's name.

As listed, the character in a myth can be portrayed differently in each narrative. While amplifying this myth under the structure of the mythological machine, it is clear to see that each myth does not simply direct to an intact meaning. However, as if the myths were contextualized culturally, historically, and socially, the collective meaning appears in coherence—the newly appeared narratives were improvised in order to follow the ideology of that period. Take the version in *Lie Nü Zhuan* as an example, the lady suicided for the first time in the story after her confession of a meaningless life without a father, husband, and son. In this book, the author recorded stories of groups of women for the Chinese emperor. As the consort kin was affecting the power of the monarchy at the moment, the book was thus used as a tool to educate the female around the emperor to behave from Confucius's moral standards. The title, for the group of stories with Lady Mengjiang, is listed as “Zhen Shun” (贞顺), meaning maintaining chastity with obedience. In the Spring and Autumn Period, crying was eulogized. But in Han Dynasty, when *Lie Nü Zhuan* was written, this eulogized act switched into a suicide, when the nation was ideologically affected by Confucianism and Taoism—where a person has to perform morally according to a social standard. Suicide, as a way of sacrificing physical body, thus replaced the act of crying. Therefore the myth improvised itself for the change. In this sense, Elliot's words are true, and the meaning of this improvisation always appears in a retroactive form.

Thus, this weaves the myths together while picturing a mediated relationship between the individuals and Lady Mengjiang. If we were to establish the relationship among these variations of this myth, it is clear that they all are circling around a master signifier or the “Other” in Lacanian terms. Even if in the Great Wall version, the character was portrayed as a rebellion fighting against authority—which also presents a historical rapture here—she still follows social and moral exemplary standards since she rebelled for her husband.

Consequently, by comparing each storyline throughout generations and regions, male literates and historians have portrayed this female character from their own perspectives by fulfilling her presence with their

expectations of a contra-sexual, and divine-like figure in compliance: she would rather sacrifice her life to maintain her husband's dignity, and her life suddenly becomes meaningless after the death of her husband. In order to make this myth meaningful to the readers, as the changing morality standards through time, the narrative has to be altered and improvised according to social circumstances. Collectivity in China is thus portrayed by picturing a patricentric society reflected in morality, culture, and history. Threads of each myth together entwine a general vision of social imagination in feudalism. Lady Mengjiang is trapped in a symbolic frame, a loop, circling around an inaccessible centre, as her story was repeated over and over—she cannot present herself, she can only be represented by others. So as in Beltran's description,

The machine throws us automatically into a loop of infinite forms or mythological versions none of which will drive us closer to the core. In this mechanism, truth is not understood as something we can reach, but rather as an inaccessible answer that teases us with the potential existence of a definite solution. Thus, truth is an infinite series of variables of a dream, all valid, all possible.<sup>11</sup>

### Revising a Myth—The Controversy of *Hail Mary* (1985)

The character's presentation is repressed in her representation in the narratives. If the myth was not narrated in forms of representation of the others, is it possible to approach the truth by focusing on the character itself? What if it is to incarnate the character once again in a non-feudal and non-patriarchal society? How does a historical story reenact itself nowadays and how does it incarnate in a modernized society? How is the incarnation different to the original myth story from its own repetition? Additionally, the former narrations are all created within the pre-modern period—what if the story is retold within a modern context while scandalizing the ideology itself?

Similar to Lady Mengjiang, the story of the birth of Mary the Virgin in the New Testament is a story repeated over and over. It is subjected to revision by the Church, according to real historical events and also in disguise of the dogma of the Catholic Church. In fact, the interpretation of this Virgin figure is narratively presented as an ongoing process throughout centuries: conceptions of immaculate, the mother of God, assumption, the virgin birth of Jesus, and perpetual virginity. As in the movie *Je Vous Salue, Marie*, or, *Hail*

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<sup>11</sup> Beltran, E. (2020). *The Mythological Machine & The Collective Body*.



*Mary* (1985), director Jean-Luc Godard revised the biblical story of the Virgin. The controversy this movie brought, is that the movie challenges the divine Biblical narration—Joseph doubting Mary's virtue and on the verge of ending the betrothal, Mary being 'greatly troubled' at this penetration of her enceinte, the angel Gabriel having to intervene with both, and Jesus playing tough with his dullard parents.<sup>12</sup>



Fig. 2. *Hail Mary (Je Vous Salue, Marie)* (1985)

As Mary in the movie, she is incarnated in modern-day France as a student and has a boyfriend Joseph which whom she maintains a chaste relationship. A stranger named Uncle Gabriel who arrives by jet plane encounters Mary and tells her that she will be pregnant without sexual intercourse. In confusion, Mary is shocked before she generally had a self-transformative experience followed by an unmediated acceptance from God. In this process, Mary explores her sexuality and tries to connect her body and spirit from a personal perspective during her everyday life. In the movie, the storyline is not being imprisoned by a patriarchal myth but from a rather personal perspective. Godard tried to state the myth from masculine and

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<sup>12</sup> Cunningham, S. and Harley, R. (1988). *Scandal to the jews, folly to the pagans: A treatment for Hail Mary*. *Continuum*, 1(2), p. 31–44.

feminine dichotomy, along with soul and body. At the end of the movie, Mary returns to her car. Godard offered an open ending which imagines an alternative fate for the Virgin to escape towards as if she is liberated from the myth.

If it was to identify the relationship between the Virgin story and Mengjiang, certain similarities ought to be found in their story structures and derivative narrations. They are revisioned repeatedly, narrated according to morality, and with a feminine figure awaiting redemption by the male. In the film, the myth was retold by offering the viewers a different narrative to approach the protagonist—it is more focused on the character's individual choice and her transfiguration process from an ordinary person to the Virgin. In this way, Godard abandoned most of the ideological framework which constructs the Biblical story. As similar to Prasenjit Duara's idea of "bifurcated" history, in which it recreates a repressed past as an opposition to the authority, *Hail Mary* (1985) thus "believe the claims of those who would harden the boundaries of society in the name of cultural authenticity."<sup>13</sup> However, does the film seem to be a feminist film, or, does Godard's position ought to be amplified in detail? Does he really set the narrative of this myth free? The answer is probably no. "From a feminist perspective, this tendency is especially problematic, since Godard tends to adhere tenaciously to a binary definition of sexual difference available in the masculine/feminine dichotomy, along with the various binary pairs that issue from this dichotomy."<sup>14</sup> As we can see, while Godard was challenging Christian ideology, he seemingly shifted the Christian symbolic framework to the masculine/feminine dichotomy by reinforcing it. Therefore the symbolization of the character, as the Virgin, stays and remains unchanged. The character faces the separation of the dichotomy, which can also be interpreted as a symbolization of gender. The historical rapture, as mentioned before, represents itself in the form of the replacement of the framework where it dominates the mythological machine. Thus, Godard's film is merely a representation in the Symbolic. If so, we should return to consider the issue in ways of the mirror stages—since the imaginary is pre-symbolic, is there any chance that these two stages intersect where we are able to inhabit ourselves? Or, is it possible to return the character back to the imaginary stage from the symbolic, as a way to flee the mythological machine?

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<sup>13</sup> Duara, P. (1996). *Rescuing History from the Nation*. The University of Chicago Press. p. 234.

<sup>14</sup> Er, C. (1993). *The Madonna's Reproduction(s): Miéville, Godard, And The Figure Of Mary*. *Journal Of Film And Video* 45.4.

Reimagining an Untold Story—*The Book of Mary* (1985)



Fig. 3. *The Book of Mary* (*Le Livre de Marie*) (1985)

Anne-Marie Mieville's Mary figure is totally imaginative, more progressive and more feminist. Different to *Hail Mary* (1985), the film, *Le Livre de Marie*, or, *The Book of Mary* (1985), narrates a missing story of Mary's childhood. It interrogates the Catholic purported truth of this myth and the reasons for its historical endurance. As a young girl, Mary experiences the separation of her parents, when she struggles to adapt to a new life of living between the homes of her parents. This film does not focus on the content of a biblical myth, while it presupposes that to be already acknowledged by the spectator. However, the inevitability set format of this myth is being confronted, as Mieville poses a child Mary, who is suspended from the paradox of male/female dichotomy, and represented as a mediator to her parents in between masculine and feminine realms. Therefore, unlike Godard, Mieville's film is not either a utopian description of the Virgin as an independent heroine who acts out her fate apart from God's exertion, or as a female imprisoned in a myth by the terms of the patriarchal determination—she is only an innocent child. However, the film indicates that

Mary is being gradually dragged into a patriarchal myth, and separated by gender roles upcoming in her life. In one scene, her father asks her what an angle is before he demonstrates a triangle with his fingers showing the apex at the top. In contradiction, Mary insistently presents her understanding, showing an inverted V-shape, which signifies that she is torn by confining gender roles. In another freestyle dancing scene by the protagonist, where Cynthia Erb described, “The dance ends when Mary falls in a heap on the floor, feigning death. When her mother finds her, the child complains, ‘It’s not like before,’ suggesting that, angered by the disruptions in her life, she would like to stop moving, to drop out of her history.”<sup>15</sup> As for Mieville, the process to become the Virgin involves a gradual transformation to enter into the biblical and patriarchal myth, or to say, to generally enter the symbolic stage. Like the Angel of history described by Walter Benjamin, the storm drives Mary irresistibly into the future, to which her back is turned, and the storm is called progress.<sup>16</sup>

If Godard’s Mary is still completely at the Symbolic, then Mieville’s Mary is not fully but mostly at the Imaginary. The subject in the imaginary stage is intuitive, it “is the realm of comprehension... where one takes things in *as* wholes rather than piecemeal.”<sup>17</sup> Since she is over 18 months old and is able to speak language, she has already been accepted partially in the Symbolic. However, there is still an overlap, she is not yet to be dragged completely into the Symbolic, and in this sense, the character is staying away from the ideological framework. Mieville’s approach did not conflict with the timeline of the Virgin’s story in the bible at all, but it narrates a life before since her childhood is never mentioned there. By undermining or reimagining a repressed perspective of the Virgin’s childhood, the film challenges the Catholic dogma of this character and exposes her traumatic experiences during the transfiguration process of becoming the Virgin. This allows the spectators to understand the Virgin in other non-patriarchal narratives, by freeing the character from the biblical narration. However, without a storyline, the film does not narrate the full story of the Virgin. If Mieville did not mention that is the story of Mary’s childhood, it can be every other character’s. In this way, the truth of this historical event is not restored and narrated—she has not approached the actual historical nature of this myth.

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<sup>15</sup> See note 14 above.

<sup>16</sup> Benjamin, W. (1940). *On The Concept of History*.

<sup>17</sup> Lewis, M. (2008). *Derrida and Lacan*. Edinburgh University Press, pp. 148–201.

## Reimagining Lady Mengjiang in Cinema—Seeing the Real in a Dream

So, how do we manifest the myth in our imagination as well as depict the historical nature of the myth? And if not portraying the character in the Imaginary and the Symbolic, then what can we do? Dreaming is used as the method to resolve this issue in my practice. In a two-channel film installation, the protagonist, a female figure encounters this mythical story in her daily life by reading the narratives of the myth appears on the left screen while a male voice narrating the patriarchal versions of the myth appears on the right screen. Under investigation and questioning the connection between the character and herself, she generally makes dreams about the mythical story in her daily life.



Fig. 4. *The Book of Meng Jiang* (2023)

The film is constituted by two dreams. The protagonist recalls her memory of visiting the temple of Lady Mengjiang in her childhood, before the happening of her first dream when she sees the collapsing wall as if she is sharing a similar experience as the character in myth. After waking up, she reflects on the dream and said, “Then I woke up and thought, did I become Lady Mengjiang in the dream, or did Lady Mengjiang have a dream of becoming me when I was awake?” Then, she—as if she becomes Mengjiang—sees a person standing in front of her bed who says a quote to her from Nietzsche’s book *The Gay Science* (1974), “The

eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust... Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?" The quote marks Mengjiang's never-ending fate. In the second dream, she reads a scroll with a portrait of the character in dark, and then realizes the character is merely just a symbolic construction under patriarchy and feudalism. In the end, she sees the ghost of Mengjiang in the middle of the water.

Here, dreaming is used to replace the ideological framework of a story. Zizek quoted Lacan in '*The Sublime Object of Ideology*' (1989): compared to our 'Reality', a dream seems closer to the Lacanian Real, since our so-called 'reality' is just "a fantasy-construction which enables us to mask the Real of our desire."<sup>18</sup> In a dream, without the alienating symbolic network, for Lacan, there is still a possibility for the subject to be equated to an object of fantasy by the dream. In his interpretation of the dream, a story is constructed in a dream to enable the subject to avoid awakening into reality. However what the subject encounters in the dream is "the reality of desire, the Lacanian Real". The Real is a "leftover which persists and cannot be reduced to a universal play of illusory mirroring."<sup>19</sup> The only method to approach this is through the dream, which allows the subject to get away from the symbolic framework.

In the film, after the protagonist woke up from her dream, she asked herself, how does she know now that she is not Lady Mengjiang dreaming of being the protagonist. Although in the film, the protagonist was an actual person dreaming of being the character from myth, what we also see, was the character dreaming of being the protagonist. It is a reference to a Chinese philosopher Zhuang Zi's dream: he dreamed of a butterfly being himself. To imply Lacan's analysis of Zhuang Zi on the movie, Mengjiang was "the object which constituted the frame of the protagonist's fantasy identity"<sup>20</sup> In the symbolic reality, she was the protagonist, but in the Real of her desire, she was Mengjiang. Being Mengjiang was "the whole consistency of her positive being outside the symbolic network."<sup>21</sup>

Hence, only in the dream, we can approach this fantasy and this symbolic framework. The protagonist produced a self-dialectic cognition, while the story of Mengjiang was not retold and depicted in the gaze of

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<sup>18</sup>Lacan, J., Jacques-Alain Miller and Sheridan, A. (2018). *The four fundamental concepts of psycho-analysis*. London, England ; New York, New York: Routledge. chapters 5 and 6.

<sup>19</sup> Zizek, S. (1989). *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Verso. p. 48.

<sup>20</sup> Zizek, S. (1989). *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Verso. p. 47.

<sup>21</sup> See note 20 above.

the viewers. She passed through the Symbolic and entered the Real, to look for the traumatic kernel embedded in this myth. In our so-called “reality”, ideology is “a dreamlike construction hindering us from seeing the real state of things, reality as such...we remain throughout 'the consciousness of our ideological dream'...The only way to break the power of our ideological dream is to confront the Real of our desire which announces itself in this dream.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See note 20 above.

## Conclusion

In cinema, the audiences regard the screen as a mirror of their subjectivity. There, we retreat from the Symbolic back to the Imaginary and project our repressed unconscious onto the characters on the screen. In such ways, cinema is used as a method of building up individual connections between ourselves and historical characters. In identification with characters, we project our fantasies and desire from the symbolic network. Hence, the methodology of story narrating is essential. It dominates our starting point of approaching a myth, and also the historical nature behind it. Here, recognizing the symbolic network from the mythological machine thus becomes the first task in reactivating a myth. By researching the birth of this character and variations of the changing narratives, the myth of Lady Mengjiang needs to be deconstructed symbolically. Considering historical features and causes in feudal China, sections of this myth gradually reveal themselves in such a manner—it is merely a patriarchal construct of a circling loop with an inaccessible answer.

To activate this myth outside the symbolic framework, Godard's methodology is completely inaccessible as being more of a Hegelian. He sees the form of the determinateness of a myth as completely free—"the externality of space and time existing absolutely on its own account without the moment of subjectivity."<sup>23</sup> In *Hail Mary* (1985), his notion of "absolute liberation" of the figure is based on the mediation of all otherness. In film, Catholic dogma of the Virgin seems to be completely abandoned and opposed to. Thus, Godard's way to set the symbolic framework free happens after the revision of the myth completely internalizing it. Hence, the film is just a repetition of past narratives, even if Godard let the myth happen in a different social context. There is a reconstructed symbolic framework after the internalization, with the functioning of the mythological machine unchanged.

For Mieville, instead of staying in the Symbolic, *The Book of Mary* (1985) depicts an imaginary mythical figure. Instead of retelling a Biblical story, she retreats the figure back to a pre-symbolic stage before the character even becomes the Virgin. However, the problem is that, this imaginary figure can be portrayed as an Ideal Ego of the character herself, lacking the proper historical nature of the actual event in the past. There, the viewer can't understand the Virgin as an actual subject.

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<sup>23</sup> Hegel, F. (1817). *Philosophy of mind : translated from the Encyclopedia of the philosophical sciences*. Par. 577.



In my two-channel film, I approach this matter from a Lacanian perspective. By accepting the disjunction of myths within mythology, I see there is a division that, “runs through the subject as well as through the substantial order of collectivity”<sup>24</sup> as well as uniting the two. The reconciliation between the protagonist and Lady Mengjiang occurs through the division that cuts across the two. I do not intend to resolve the antagonism between the protagonist and the patriarchal narrations, but to apply a “parallax shift” in which this antagonism is recognized by the viewers. Hence, the protagonist, in a positive role appears in the film. Through dreaming, she is allowed to recognize the symbolic framework and the patriarchal ideology in feudal China. And through dreaming, she is able to enter the Real to approach the truth behind the myth, and allow herself in such an imaginative way while staying inside historical features.

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<sup>24</sup> Zizek, S. (1989). *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Verso. Preface. xviii.

## List of Illustrations

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Figure 2. Godard, J. (1985) *Hail Mary (Je Vous Salue, Marie)*, [Film still] Available at: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0089366> (Accessed: 20 March 2023)

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Figure 4. *The Book of Mengjiang*, [Film still] Courtesy of Artist.

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