

Wiley Blackwell Handbooks to Classical Reception

A HANDBOOK TO THE
RECEPTION OF
CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY

EDITED BY VANDA ZAJKO AND HELENA HOYLE



WILEY Blackwell

A Handbook to the Reception
of Classical Mythology

Wiley Blackwell Handbooks to Classical Reception

This series offers comprehensive, thought-provoking surveys of the reception of major classical authors and themes. These Handbooks will consist of approximately 30 newly written essays by leading scholars in the field, and will map the ways in which the ancient world has been viewed and adapted up to the present day. Essays are meant to be engaging, accessible, and scholarly pieces of writing, and are designed for an audience of advanced undergraduates, graduates, and scholars.

Published:

A Handbook to the Reception of Ovid
John Miller and Carole E. Newlands

A Handbook to the Reception of Thucydides
Christine Lee and Neville Morley

A Handbook to the Reception of Greek Drama
Betine van Zyl Smit

Forthcoming:

A Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology
Vanda Zajko and Helena Hoyle

A Handbook to Classical Reception in Eastern and Central Europe
Zara Martirosova Torlone, Dana LaCourse Munteanu, and Dorota Dutsch

A Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology

Edited by

Vanda Zajko and Helena Hoyle

WILEY Blackwell

This edition first published 2017
© 2017 John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, except as permitted by law. Advice on how to obtain permission to reuse material from this title is available at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions>.

The right of Vanda Zajko and Helena Hoyle to be identified as the authors of the editorial material in this work has been asserted in accordance with law.

Registered Office

John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, USA

Editorial Office

350 Main Street, Malden MA 02148-5020, USA

For details of our global editorial offices, customer services, and more information about Wiley products visit us at www.wiley.com.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats and by print-on-demand. Some content that appears in standard print versions of this book may not be available in other formats.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty

While the publisher and authors have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. It is sold on the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering professional services and neither the publisher nor the authors shall be liable for damages arising herefrom. If professional advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data applied for

9781444339604 (hardback)

Cover image: © lamiel/Gettyimages
Cover design by Wiley

Set in 11/13pt Dante by SPi Global, Pondicherry, India

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Notes on Contributors	ix
Introduction <i>Vanda Zajko</i>	1
Part I Mythography	13
1 Greek Mythography <i>Robert L. Fowler</i>	15
2 Roman Mythography <i>Gregory Hays</i>	29
3 Myth and the Medieval Church <i>James G. Clark</i>	43
4 The Renaissance Mythographers <i>John Mulryan</i>	59
5 Bulfinch and Graves: Modern Mythography as Literary Reception <i>John Talbot</i>	75
6 Myth Collections for Children <i>Sheila Murnaghan and Deborah H. Roberts</i>	87
7 Contemporary Mythography: In the Time of Ancient Gods, Warlords, and Kings <i>Ika Willis</i>	105
Part II Approaches and Themes	121
8 Circean Enchantments and the Transformations of Allegory <i>Greta Hawes</i>	123
9 The Comparative Approach <i>Sarah Iles Johnston</i>	139

10	Revisionism <i>Lillian Doherty</i>	153
11	Alchemical Interpretations of Classical Myths <i>Didier Kahn</i>	165
12	Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism: On the Gods of Greece, Italy, and India <i>Phiroze Vasunia</i>	179
13	The Golden Age <i>Andreas T. Zanker</i>	193
14	Matriarchy and Utopia <i>Peter Davies</i>	213
Part III Myth, Creativity, and the Mind		229
15	The Half-Blood Hero: Percy Jackson and Mythmaking in the Twenty-First Century <i>Joanna Paul</i>	231
16	Myth as Case Study <i>Heather Tolliday</i>	243
17	Mythical Narrative and Self-Development <i>Meg Harris Williams</i>	257
18	Finding Asylum for Virginia Woolf's Classical Visions <i>Emily Pillinger</i>	271
Part IV Iconic Figures and Texts		285
19	Orpheus and Eurydice <i>Genevieve Liveley</i>	287
20	Narcissus and Echo <i>Rosemary Barrow</i>	299
21	Prometheus, Pygmalion, and Helen: Science Fiction and Mythology <i>Tony Keen</i>	311
22	Dionysus in Rome <i>Fiachra Mac Góráin</i>	323
23	Cupid and Psyche <i>Julia Haig Gaisser</i>	337
24	Constructing a Mythic City in the <i>Book of the City of Ladies</i> : A New Space for Women in Late Medieval Culture <i>Kathryn McKinley</i>	353

25	Francis Bacon's <i>Wisdom of the Ancients: Between Two Worlds</i> <i>John Channing Briggs</i>	367
26	Pieter Bruegel the Elder's <i>Landscape with the Fall of Icarus</i> <i>Jeanne Nuechterlein</i>	379
27	Ancient and Modern Re-sounding: <i>Monteverdi's Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria</i> <i>George Burrows</i>	391
28	Shelley <i>Prometheus Unbound</i> <i>Michael O'Neill</i>	407
29	George Bernard Shaw: <i>Pygmalion</i> <i>Helen Slaney</i>	419
30	Camus and the Myth of Sisyphus <i>Kurt Lampe</i>	433
31	Creative Strategies: Lars von Trier's <i>Medea</i> <i>Mette Hjort</i>	447
32	Regarding the Pain of Others with Marsyas: On Tortures Ancient and Modern <i>Lisa Saltzman</i>	463
	Index	475

Notes on Contributors

Rosemary Barrow is a Reader in Classical Art & Reception at the University of Roehampton. Besides articles on art history and the classical tradition, she has published two monographs on Victorian classical reception – *Lawrence Alma-Tadema* (2001) and *The Use of Classical Art & Literature by Victorian Painters* (2007) – and a co-authored book with Michael Silk and Ingo Gildenhard entitled *The Classical Tradition: Art, Literature, Thought* (2013).

John Channing Briggs is the author of *Francis Bacon and the Rhetoric of Nature*, a chapter on Bacon's science and religion in the *Cambridge Companion to Francis Bacon*, and a close reading of Lincoln's speeches (*Lincoln's Speeches Reconsidered*). Educated at Harvard and the University of Chicago, he is Professor of English and McSweeney Chair of Rhetoric and Excellence in Teaching at the University of California, Riverside.

George Burrows is Principal Lecturer for Performing Arts at the University of Portsmouth, where he also leads the Centre for Performing Arts. He is co-founder of the *Song, Stage and Screen* international musical theater conference and a founding editor of the journal, *Studies in Musical Theatre*. His research most often considers the social functions and meanings of music and musical theater in the interwar period but he has also published work on the composers Claudio Monteverdi (1567–1643) and Charles Villiers Stanford (1852–1924). He has directed the University of Portsmouth Choirs for more than a decade and his book, *Andy Kirk and his Clouds of Joy*, is forthcoming.

James G. Clark is Professor of History at the University of Exeter. He has written widely on aspects of medieval clerical culture and has a particular interest in the reception of the Latin classics among learned clerks in the later Middle Ages. Recent publications include *Ovid in the Middle Ages* (2011).

Peter Davies is Professor of Modern German Studies at the University of Edinburgh. Publications include *Divided Loyalties: East German Writers and the*

Politics of German Division (2000); with Stephen Parker and Matthew Philpotts, *The Modern Restoration: Re-Reading German Literary History, 1930–1960* (2004); *Myth, Matriarchy and Modernity: Johann Jakob Bachofen in German Culture, 1860–1945* (2010). He has also written on topics ranging from East German literature, myth and literature, National Socialism and Holocaust writing, and Translation Studies.

Lillian Doherty is a Professor of Classics at the University of Maryland, College Park, where she has taught since 1984. Her home is in the Department of Classics but she is also a member of the affiliate faculties in Women's Studies and Comparative Literature. She specializes in archaic Greek poetry, with a special emphasis on the *Odyssey*. She is the author of *Siren Songs: Gender, Audiences, and Narrators in the Odyssey* (1995) and *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth* (2001) and the editor of *Oxford Readings in Homer's Odyssey* (2008).

Robert L. Fowler was educated at Toronto and Oxford, and has been H.O. Wills Professor of Greek at the University of Bristol since 1996. He has worked on Greek epic and lyric poetry as well as Greek historiography, mythography, religion, and the history of classical scholarship. His publications include *The Nature of Early Greek Lyric* (1987), *The Cambridge Companion to Homer* (ed., 2004), and the two volumes of *Early Greek Mythography* (2000–2013), which collect and comment on the fragments of the first 29 Greek mythographers. He is a Fellow of the British Academy.

Julia Haig Gaisser is Eugenia Chase Guild Professor Emeritus in the Humanities, Professor Emeritus of Latin at Bryn Mawr College.

Greta Hawes is Early Career Fellow and Lecturer in Classics and Ancient History at Australian National University. She is author of *Rationalizing Myth in Antiquity* (2014), is currently editing a collection of essays, *Myths on the Map: The Storied Landscapes of Ancient Greece*.

Gregory Hays is Associate Professor of Classics at the University of Virginia. He is the translator of *Marcus Aurelius, Meditations* (2003) and author of articles on various aspects of late and medieval Latin literature. He is currently finishing a new edition and translation of Fulgentius, with commentary.

Mette Hjort is Professor of Film Studies at the Department of Media, Cognition and Communication, University of Copenhagen. She is the author of *Small Nation, Global Cinema* (2005) and *Lone Scherfig's "Italian for Beginners"* (2010) and the editor, with Ursula Lindqvist, of *A Companion to Nordic Cinema*. She serves as co-editor, with Peter Schepelern, for the Nordic Film Classics series.

Sarah Iles Johnston is Arts and Humanities Distinguished Scholar of Religion and Professor of Classics at The Ohio State University. She has published widely on ancient Greek religion and myths.

Didier Kahn is senior researcher at the CNRS (Cellf 16e-18e). He is the author of *Alchimie et paracelsisme en France à la fin de la Renaissance* (2007). In 2010 he published an extensive annotated edition of Montfaucon de Villars' *Le Comte de Gabalis, ou Entretiens sur les sciences secrètes* (1670), and in 2015 *La Messe alchimique attribuée à Melchior de Sibiou*. He has recently completed a new book: *Chimie et alchimie: le fixe et le volatil, de Paracelse à Lavoisier* (forthcoming) and is currently editing the first volume of an annotated edition of Diderot's correspondence.

Tony Keen is an Honorary Associate and Associate Lecturer for the Open University, an Adjunct Assistant Professor for the University of Notre Dame London Global Gateway, and a Visiting Lecturer for the University of Roehampton; he teaches on classical studies, myth, cinema, and SF and fantasy literature. He writes extensively on classics and SF, and was chair of the 2013 conference *Swords, Sorcery, Sandals and Space: The Fantastika and the Classical World*.

Kurt Lampe is Senior Lecturer in Classics at the University of Bristol. His publications and teaching cross the boundaries between ancient Greek and Roman and contemporary literature and philosophy. In general, he likes to use the analysis of art (literary, visual, cinematic, etc.) in order to inspire reflection on questions of contemporary importance (e.g., agency, responsibility, selfhood, and their political and sacred contexts).

Genevieve Liveley is Senior Lecturer in Classics at the University of Bristol. Her principal research interests are Augustan literature, critical theory, and the classical tradition. She is co-editor and contributor to *Elegy and Narratology: Fragments of Story* and author of *A Reader's Guide to Ovid's Metamorphoses* and *Ovid: Love Songs*.

Fiachra Mac Góráin is Lecturer in Classics at University College London. He is currently preparing a monograph entitled *Virgil's Dionysus*.

Kathryn McKinley is Associate Professor of English at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Her research interests include Chaucer, Boccaccio, the medieval reception of classical antiquity and Ovid, images and the materiality of religious cultures in later medieval England. Her publications include *Reading the Ovidian Heroine: Metamorphoses Commentaries 1100–1618* (2001); co-editor, *Ovid in the Middle Ages* (2011); an article on Chaucer's House of Fame in *Meaning in Motion: The Semantics of Movement in Medieval Art* (2011); and *Chaucer and Boccaccio: Image, Vision and the Vernacular in the House of Fame* (2016).

John Mulryan is Distinguished Board of Trustees Professor, Emeritus, at St. Bonaventure University. He has published a co-authored translation of Natale Conti's *Mythologiae* (2006), a translation of Vincenzo Cartari's *Imagini* (2012), and a study of Milton and classical mythology (*'Through a Glass Darkly': Milton's Reinvention of the Mythological Tradition*), (1996). He has also published articles on classical mythology in Shakespeare and Ben Jonson.

Sheila Murnaghan is Allen Memorial Professor of Greek at the University of Pennsylvania. She is the author of *Disguise and Recognition in the Odyssey* (2nd. edn 2011) and the co-editor of *Women and Slaves in Greco-Roman Culture* (1998) and *Nostos: Odyssean Identities in Modern Cultures* (2014). Her current projects include a forthcoming study of Classics and childhood in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, co-authored with Deborah H. Roberts, and an edition with commentary of Sophocles' *Ajax*.

Jeanne Nuechterlein is Senior Lecturer at the University of York, where she has taught northern Renaissance art history in the Department of History of Art and the Centre for Medieval Studies since 2000. Her research investigates various aspects of religious and secular art in Germany and the Low Countries in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and their reception in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Michael O'Neill is a Professor of English at Durham University. His recent books include *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (2012), co-edited with Anthony Howe and with the assistance of Madeleine Callaghan, and *Poetic Form: An Introduction*, co-written with Michael D. Hurley (2012). His second collection of poems *Wheel* appeared in 2008.

Joanna Paul is Lecturer in Classical Studies at the Open University. Her monograph *Film and the Classical Epic Tradition* was published in 2013.

Emily Pillinger is Lecturer at King's College London, jointly affiliated with the Department of Classics and the Liberal Arts programme. Her research to date has focused on the representation of supernatural communications in the literature of the ancient world: she has published articles on the voices of prophets, witches, and the dead. Her book *Translating Cassandra: the Poetry and Poetics of Prophecy* is forthcoming. She has also published on classical reception in music and is currently researching Greco-Roman myth in music composed after World War II.

Deborah H. Roberts is William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of Classics and Comparative Literature at Haverford College. She is the author of *Apollo and his Oracle in the Oresteia* (1984), co-editor (with Francis Dunn and Don Fowler) of *Reading the End: Closure in Greek and Latin Literature* (1997), and translator of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* (2012) and other tragedies. Her current projects concern translation and reception and include a forthcoming study, co-authored with Sheila Murnaghan, of Classics and childhood in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Lisa Saltzman is Professor of History of Art at Bryn Mawr College. Saltzman is the author of *Anselm Kiefer and Art after Auschwitz* (Cambridge University Press, 1999) and *Making Memory Matter: Strategies of Remembrance in Contemporary Art* (University of Chicago Press, 2006) and is the co-editor, with Eric Rosenberg, of *Trauma and Visuality in Modernity* (University Press of New England, 2006).

Helen Slaney holds a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship at St Hilda's College, Oxford. Her current research concerns the reception of ancient material culture in the late eighteenth century, but her background is in theatre history and she has been an associate of Oxford's Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama (APGRD) since 2009. In 2013 she completed a doctoral thesis on the performance reception of Senecan tragedy, published in 2016 as *The Senecan Aesthetic: A Performance History*. Research interests also include Roman dance and its reception.

John Talbot teaches English and Classical literature at Brigham Young University. His publications on the classical tradition include chapters in *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature* and *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English*. His monograph on English poets and the Alcaic metre is under contract with Bloomsbury. He is the author of two volumes of poetry, *The Well-Tempered Tantrum* and *Rough Translation*.

Heather Tolliday read English Language and Literature. After researching social structures with the Kleinian psychoanalyst, Elliott Jaques – who was also her PhD supervisor – she developed her psychotherapy practice, retiring in 2008. She has now retired from most of her teaching commitments but continues to write, mainly poetry.

Phiroze Vasunia is Professor of Greek at University College London. He is the author, most recently, of *The Classics and Colonial India* (2013).

Meg Harris Williams read English at Cambridge and Oxford and for many years has written about and taught the relation between psychoanalysis, aesthetics, and literature, in the United Kingdom and overseas. She has published articles in literary and psychoanalytic journals and chapters for edited collections, and is editor for the Harris Meltzer Trust. She is a visiting lecturer in psychoanalytic studies at the Tavistock Clinic and in psychoanalytic theory for the Association for Group and Individual Psychotherapy.

Ika Willis is Senior Lecturer in English Literatures at the University of Wollongong. Her interdisciplinary research centers on reception theory and temporality, and has led her to publish on texts from Virgil's *Aeneid* (*Now and Rome*, 2011) through Derrida's *The Post Card* ("Eros in the age of technical reproductibility" in *Derrida and Antiquity*, 2010) to Harry Potter fan fiction ("Keeping Promises to Queer Children" in *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, 2007). She is currently writing a volume on Reception for Routledge's New Critical Idiom series.

Andreas T. Zanker is an Assistant Professor of Classics at Amherst College. He has published on the theme of the golden age in various authors. His first book, *Greek and Latin Expressions of Meaning: The Classical Origins of a Modern Metaphor*, appeared in 2016.

Introduction

Vanda Zajko

There is something faintly ridiculous about attempting to write an introduction to a volume such as this, the content of which spans so many centuries and covers such a variety of genres. It is certainly not the case that a summary of the kind that is so often attempted on these occasions will begin to do justice either to the historical detail needed adequately to contextualize all the material or to the conceptual challenges posed by its diversity. Instead, this opening narrative will engage with the overarching themes of the volume and explain their rationale; it will also point to some of the future directions of travel for studies of the reception of myth, acknowledging that now, perhaps more than ever, it is a field characterized as much by its impact on new and emergent cultural forms as on more traditional modes of artistic and literary expression.

The value of reception within classical studies is still being hotly debated, not because there is any question about its having a significant role within the discipline, but because of a lack of consensus about what that role is and what it could be in the future. Some maintain that classical studies are themselves a form of reception studies and that the reception of even the Homeric poems is indistinguishable from the texts themselves; others argue to preserve a difference between ancient texts and their receptions, while still regarding the study of the latter as a vital means of preserving the interest of the contemporary world in what otherwise might seem an irrelevant branch of learning. For some, there will always be a tension between understanding the historical context of the original audience for a work of art and recognizing its value to succeeding generations; for others, the distinction between the two can and should be blurred by focusing precisely on the way that whenever such a sense of value is articulated, the distinction between which aspects are “ancient” and which “modern” cannot be fully separated out.

There are also debates about the relation of reception to cognate fields such as intellectual history, comparative literature, and cultural studies that provoke questions about authority and expertise, as well as some resistance to what has been seen as reception studies' imperialist ambition. Whether one adopts a theoretical or a resolutely pragmatic position concerning these issues, classical reception studies today form part of the disciplinary landscape and "companion" volumes devoted to individual authors or to broad-based topics routinely include several essays about the ways ancient works have been read in various historical periods post antiquity and up to and including the present day.

When it comes to myth, a strong argument can be made that we cannot but deal with its reception because classical myth as we understand it today is classical myth as it has constituted itself through reception, through its oral, visual, and written dissemination throughout the ages. Pre-literate Greece is unavailable to us and yet many myths have their notional origin there: small sections of fragmentary texts are reconstructed from papyri or from citations in considerably later works and yet narratives now mainly lost to us may have been hugely influential in the shaping of a tradition. We sometimes refer to this tradition much too glibly as though it somehow stands outside specific textual instantiations and the very idea of a mythological tradition is arguably misleading because it suggests a freely available repository of narratives, able to be accessed and added to by successive generations engaged in a continuous practice of storytelling. In fact, the process of the transmission of myth is much more patchy and contingent than this and in some cases a story disappears completely for a time, only to be revived by a robust and surprisingly novel version.

The study of classical myth, then, renders visible the pragmatics of reception in a particularly apparent way and this is the explicit focus of Part I of the current volume, "Mythography." Here the whole idea of mythography as a mode of reception is show-cased and the series of innovative chapters demonstrates how important the mythographical collection has been to the survival, dissemination, and popularization of classical myth from the ancient world to the present day. This is a neglected topic and all too often regarded as the arcane territory of experts, but the chapters here are organized chronologically and include information about the important compilations in each era, as well as discussing thematic concerns. The first, by Robert Fowler, on Greek Mythography overtly addresses the question of the stance of the mythographer and argues persuasively that even when this stance is one of neutrality, the very act of collating pre-existing mythological stories involves some degree of interpretation and the exercise of imagination. Here modes of interpreting myth, which will be expanded upon and probed more closely in later chapters, such as allegory and rationalization are introduced, along with issues that will similarly reoccur, such as the relationship between "the" definitive myth and the versions of that myth fought over by those seeking, in Fowler's words "to dictate the terms of the collective understanding." One of the ideas to emerge from this first chapter is the continuity between methods of handling myth

in antiquity and in much later periods, including our own, even as the specific reasons for the on-going valency of myth have changed.

The next three chapters provide an invaluable overview of the reception of Greek and Roman myth in the anthologies of later antiquity up to and including the Renaissance. In the first of these Gregory Hays explores the highly influential collections of (mainly) Greek myth by the canon of Roman mythographers, lucidly discussing the uncertainty of their authorship and date and the obscurity and complexity of their manuscript traditions in a way that renders them accessible collectively to the non-specialist reader for the first time. Again the issue emerges of the continuity between ancient and modern practice, here with particular resonance for the question of the audience for these collections: “Just as many modern readers derive their knowledge of Greek myth not from Homer, Euripides, or Ovid, but from Edith Hamilton, Robert Graves, or Wikipedia, so their ancient counterparts may have found it more efficient to read Hyginus than Homer, and Pseudo-Lactantius than Ovid.” James Clark’s chapter describes how the Medieval church’s attitude towards pagan myth was not one of straightforward rejection but rather a complex process of accommodation and appropriation accomplished largely via the educational program in cathedrals and monasteries, which “conveyed the form and matter of classical myth into the verbal and imaginative currents of the clergy from the moment their instruction began.” This “arresting encounter between Christian doctrine and classical myth” is a theme that will reoccur in several later chapters. John Mulryan takes on the topic of Renaissance mythography, beginning with a chronological overview of both major and less well-known figures and building on the idea that “mythography differs from other accounts of myth in that it both complies and interprets.” In this chapter, the focus is on different ways of organizing mythological content such as genealogy, iconography, etymology, and allegory, all of which are picked up and addressed in later chapters. The centrality of the concept of translation to any understanding of the transmission of classical myth is also highlighted and explored.

The final three chapters in Part I turn towards the modern world and to genres that are increasingly gaining currency as important for the study of myth. John Talbot focuses on mythological handbooks, formerly somewhat denigrated, as “significant modern instances of mythography as a mode of classical reception.” A gap opens up here between the scholarly tradition of collating and interpreting myth, an activity which is grounded in (historically variable) understandings of the classical past and that seeks out classically trained readers, and the idea of myth as a narrative which can and should be read for pleasure. Working with his first case-study, Thomas Bulfinch’s *The Age of Fable*, Talbot investigates what constitutes a literary treatment of myth and demonstrates how this popularization and democratization of mythography aims to “assist its readers to an appreciation of English, not classical, literature”; his second case-study, Robert Graves’s *The Greek Myths*, with its preponderance of eccentric pseudo-scholarly notes and preoccupation

with the “monomyth” of the White Goddess, may seem at first sight to be a very different creature altogether. However, Talbot argues convincingly that this too deserves to be regarded as an important instance of literary classical reception and, in addition, as an important influence on modernism’s distinctive theorization and poetic deployment of myth.

Sheila Murnaghan and Deborah Roberts provide us with an authoritative and informative account of anthologies of myth for children, so often the medium via which readers first encounter the classical imagination. From the early nineteenth century to the present day, the authors show how earlier versions retold for children on the whole subscribed to a “fiction of myth’s authentic purity,” which led to radical revision, particularly in the collections intended for the youngest children. But even in the contemporary world, ideological preoccupations with, for example, polytheism or sexism, has led to certain stories being altered or excused. Ika Willis’s fascinating chapter on contemporary mythography emphasizes the freedom of those who engage with mythological stories in the texts of contemporary popular and mass culture and the way in which this activity is itself regarded as a form of mythopoiesis. She celebrates these creative additions to the mythological tradition as “pleasurably anarchic/anachronistic mash-ups of classical myth and ancient history” and throws down a challenge to those students of myth who reject such decontextualized and ahistorical treatments as simply false. What both these last two chapters demonstrate is that far from being side-shows in the history of the reception of mythography, contemporary genres that have hitherto been seen as marginal have much to offer the contemporary academy in terms of understanding the dynamics of storytelling: if we abandon the idea that historical accuracy is the only basis for judging the efficacy of a particular version of myth, we can begin to appreciate with more sensitivity its potential affective power. What is more, those versions of classical myths that eschew an over-reverential attitude towards their predecessors and acknowledge the diversity of contexts in which they will be appreciated may very well be those that end up becoming classics themselves: mythography teaches us that myth survives precisely because of bold revivifying interventions just as much as via the careful reconstructions of scholars. This is indeed the premise that underlies the organization of this volume.

The decision to dedicate a whole companion volume to the reception of classical myth forces a series of tough decisions concerning what should be included given the vast wealth of material that potentially fits the description. It also provides the opportunity to think through the ramifications of those decisions in relation to a category of discourse, myth, which is itself notoriously slippery. On the one hand, there are judgments to be made about how to represent the vast tracts of time between antiquity and the present day given that comprehensive coverage is clearly not going to be possible. On the other, there is no obvious consensus as to what counts as myth, a myth or a version of a myth even within antiquity: when we expand the historical boundaries of the enquiry, the question of what should be so categorized becomes ever more complex. It has been claimed, for example, that it

was the Greeks themselves who invented the category of myth by standing outside of it and criticizing it and it is certainly possible to trace a genealogy of criticism of the oldest Homeric stories along these lines. The debate concerning whether the resulting criticism amounted to new versions of the original myth or interpretations of it is also relevant to the evaluation of those modern versions of myth which fall within the disciplinary bounds of, say, political history, philosophy, psychology, or science.

Part II, "Approaches and Themes," focuses on this issue and on the distinction between the poetic and the theoretical aspects of myth, which has merited discussion since Plato. Each chapter takes as its starting point an interpretative strategy adopted by those who have invested in, reflected upon, and re-written myths for their own ideological agenda and attempts either to give an overview of the particular critical practice from antiquity to the present day, or to work with a specific textual example that raises paradigmatic issues. Taken together with the pieces in Part IV, "Iconic Figures and Texts," the aim is to provide readers with a range of chapters that offer both diversity and depth, a sense of chronological perspective, a sample of different genres, and a starting point for the investigation of cognate mythic texts. No attempt is made at comprehensive coverage, purely and simply because this would be impossible, and some of the more canonical material has been avoided in favor of that which is less well known and less extensively written about elsewhere. Given this high degree of selectivity, it is inevitable that those with specialist interests will feel there are significant omissions and it is certainly very easy to compile an alternative list of contributions that would fill another volume. One of this volume's strengths and not weaknesses is arguably that it has opted for a selective and imaginative strategy of inclusion.

Greta Hawes' opening chapter works with the myth of Circe to examine the dynamics of the ancient practice of allegoresis. She shows how its counter-intuitive readings and "overt embrace of non-literal meaning" do not operate in isolation but rather within a nexus of narrative assumptions and possibilities that enable both conservative and revisionist interpretations of myth. Scanning a range of texts from antiquity, Hawes demonstrates how allegorical treatments of Circe tend to flatten the Homeric character and reduce her complexity and ambivalence, but she also rejects the assumption that conventional and allegorical approaches are separate enterprises, suggesting instead that "we should consider the ways in which all reactions to myth feed into one another as organic components of the same conceptual vocabulary"; she concludes with a brief survey of feminist versions of the myth in the twentieth century, emphasizing continuities between ancient, medieval, and modern practice in terms of the interestedness of interpretations. Sarah Iles Johnston locates the origins of the comparative method in antiquity, and more specifically with Herodotus, but chooses to begin her detailed appraisal in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with accounts of the work of its major proponents in Germany and England. One of the major themes that emerges here is that the emphasis within comparative mythology has traditionally been on

similarity, on identifying and searching for explanations for repeated recognizable patterns. But Johnston ends by discussing the work of scholars from the Divinity School of Chicago, Jonathan Smith, Wendy Doniger, and Bruce Lincoln, arguing persuasively that the postulation of difference as the basis for comparison with which they have been identified has successfully revitalized the comparative method. Lillian Doherty directly addresses the question of the availability of classical myth for competing political agendas and picks up the issue of revisionism introduced by Hawes. She supplements the idea of how myth can be used for ideological subversion with her discussion of how aesthetic innovation has also been an important facet of revisionist mythmaking from Euripides, Ovid, and Petronius to James Joyce, Derek Walcott, and Margaret Atwood. Focusing on the figures of Odysseus and Penelope, she maintains that “although in a sense every version of a myth is revisionist, especially in the modern era when the ideological underpinnings of our societies are radically different from those of antiquity, there are still versions that stand out for the challenges they pose to literary traditions and social norms.” Here we see again that a continuity is traced between certain mythopoietic practices in the ancient world and modern worlds and the notion that willful and subversive revisionism begins in the modern world is comprehensively debunked.

The four chapters that follow take as their focus a theme or topic that has particular resonance for political life in the contemporary world. Didier Kahn’s highly original chapter on alchemy resonates both with Hawes’s chapter on allegory and with the discussions in Part I of *Medieval and Renaissance Mythography*: much of the material here will be entirely unfamiliar to the majority of students of myth, but the idea that classical myths can be dissected to reveal a hidden truth will not. Kahn makes a strong case that what we might call the alchemical tradition of interpreting classical myth should be afforded more attention than it has been afforded previously and points to the way in which it has influenced nineteenth- and twentieth-century theorists of culture, including the avant-garde theatre practitioner Antonin Artaud who appropriated the alchemical exegesis of the ancient mysteries in order to develop a radical theory of theatrical origins. This would seem to be a clear example of how the scrutiny of less familiar aspects of the reception of classical myth will open up new areas for research within unexpected domains. Phiroze Vasunia takes as his main example the work of the linguist and translator William Jones to show how, alongside nationalist treatments of myth, there existed in the eighteenth century cosmopolitan interpretations that “made classical Greece and Rome part of a broader discussion about the gods and culture in general.” Jones was particularly interested in the study of non-European cultures in the East and so he enumerated specific correspondences between Greek, Roman, Egyptian, and Indian myth, as well as debating some of the intellectual and political problems involved in comparative study. Vasunia’s analysis highlights how Classical myth has historically formed part of a discourse that helped to bridge the gaps between nations and peoples and it is an important contribution to contemporary debates about mythic narrative and group identity.

The myth of the golden age is one of western culture's oldest tropes for imagining the world as otherwise and Andreas Zanker provides an overview of the characteristics of its best-known instantiations before analyzing its use in the much less familiar work of Lactantius. In the *Divine Institutes*, this Christian writer employs the motif of the returning golden age from Virgil's *Georgics* to attack the pagan god Jupiter for bringing to an end an earlier age of universal Christianity and thus, by means of allegory, also to attack the persecutory emperor Diocletian. Zanker identifies this complex approach to myth-making as the 'creative ventriloquism' of key pagan authors for the dual purposes of satire and proselytization. In the following chapter, Peter Davies explores another utopian myth, matriarchy, as it developed in the nineteenth century to offer an alternative to masculinist theories of the origins of culture. Tracing the popularity of this modern example of mythopoiesis up to its contemporary instantiations in the feminist spirituality movement, Davies concludes that its valency comes not so much from historical data or specialist knowledge, but more from the "dream of a life more fulfilled and authentic than is possible under current conditions." His description of "identificatory, emotionally engaged readings" of ancient material leads us to the consideration of the ways that myth has contributed to human beings' sense of their inner selves, both in terms of psychological theory and of creative process which is the focus of Part III of the volume, "Myth, Creativity, and the Mind."

Connecting with ancient stories has equipped writers and readers with many resonant ways of conceptualizing mental activity and of expressing emotion and desire. Joanna Paul in her work on the Percy Jackson series argues that it "reminds us that the gods never have gone away," prompting the consideration of how in the ancient world, too, narratives about divine beings and their interaction with humans were a means for such expression. The interrelationship between public and social struggles and personal dilemma is one dimension that myth has always dramatized and it continues to do this with great effectiveness. The inspiration for Rick Riordan's popular children's series, Paul points out, was Riordan's own son, who was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and dyslexia. The titular hero of Riordan's series also lived with this condition, but upon discovering his divine parentage, his dyslexia was explained: Percy's brain was programmed to read ancient Greek and so, of course, reading and writing in modern English proves to be a challenge; what is more, his ADHD is a sign of superhuman capability. Myth here is not only up-dated and made meaningful to a young audience, it also provides a narrative means for rethinking the implications of a contemporary mental condition. In insisting on the continuing presence of the ancient world within the modern, Jackson (and Paul) offer a model of the reception of myth which refuses to fetishize its status as a medium of the past.

The importance of the role of myth in articulating the unconscious truths of human existence lies at the heart both of Heather Tolliday's chapter on myth and case study, and Meg Harris Williams's chapter on myth and self-development. Tolliday acknowledges that the facility of classical myth to make the material of

the unconscious accessible is a significant factor in its survival, emphasising the multiple ways in which mythical characters might be understood. She resists the idea that a myth and a case-study can be equated in any simplistic way, pointing instead to how reluctance to embrace the unconscious is a defining feature of clinical practice so that the work of the scholar of myth and the psychoanalyst in bringing its material to light can be “mutually beneficial.” Her argument is illustrated with a variety of insights from psychoanalytic theory which in turn are illuminated and evidenced by moments from individual myths. Harris Williams similarly attributes the on-going potency of myth to its ability to enact the unconscious conflicts that underpin the processes of development and illustrates her argument with examples taken from Shakespeare, that “sublime mediator of classical myths.” Both these essays by professional psychotherapists combine an attentiveness to the specific details of myths with a broader awareness of the ways in which psychoanalytic theory itself has come to operate as a significant form of modern mythopoiesis. Emily Pillinger turns to one of the foremost proponents of literary modernity, Virginia Woolf, for her discussion of the therapeutic potential of myth. She expounds the way that both for Woolf as a writer and for her fictional creations, the mythic past provides a form of sanctuary, and identification with mythical characters constitutes a form of writing therapy by means of which “trauma is transformed into art.”

Part IV, “Iconic Figures and Texts,” is more traditionally constituted and is made up of chapters that focus on noteworthy “versions” of individual myths, each carefully chosen to give glimpses of different historical contexts, genres, and audiences. It aims to show how the potency of a particular reception has the potential to transform the myth so that both its subsequent and previous identity is altered. Each of these chapters tells a story about the reception of a myth that is both specific to the text and in some sense exemplary; collectively they provide a picture of just how rich and all-encompassing is the reception of myth when it is considered as a discrete field of study. The first pair of chapters employ a transhistorical perspective, which demonstrates this abundance perfectly. Genevieve Liveley examines the “fragmented afterlife of antiquity’s most famous poet, lover, prophet, and priest,” Orpheus and draws an irresistible analogy between the form and content of the myth when she argues persuasively that “we cannot piece together an original form of the myth, intact and untouched by later receptions and mutilations: in the beginning, as in the end, Orpheus is composed of many parts.” Liveley attributes a revisionist feminist perspective to the treatment of the myth by both Virgil and Ovid, reminding us of Doherty’s earlier insistence on the origins of this practice in antiquity. Rosemary Barrow begins her analysis of the myth of Narcissus and Echo with the famous Dali painting *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* and proceeds to trace its diverse interpretations in visual art, poetry, feminism, and psychoanalytic theory, showing how “Echo is at first marginalized, then brought into play to take over the major role previously ascribed to Narcissus.” The preference of the twentieth century for a female mythic protagonist reflects a

pattern of preference repeatedly glimpsed in this volume. Turning to the field of science fiction, a creative genre that is often associated with myth because of the shared quality of conjuring up fantastic worlds, Tony Keen investigates the claim that SF constitutes a modern form of popular myth-making, a claim promoted by some writers and contested by others. There is synergy here with Willis' chapter on contemporary practice and Keen's focus on the three figures of Prometheus, Pygmalion, and Helen provides an invaluable resource for thinking through the general proposition that "classical mythology provides a number of touchstones for themes that are central to SF" in relation to three major examples.

The remaining chapters follow a roughly chronological route from antiquity to the near-present day. Fiachra Mac Góráin takes us to Rome and Italy and presents the methodological problem of how to interpret the early presence of the god Dionysus in these geographical locations when using evidence from later and fragmentary sources. Resisting simplistic narratives of cultural appropriation, he presents a multifaceted view of the dynamic forces at play in the associations of Dionysus with the Roman deity Bacchus/Liber and with the early Christian Christ figure: although, for example, Augustus "managed to sanitize Liber for the imperial court," the more suspicious aspects of Dionysus, "drunken debauchery, theatricality, and foreignness" were liable to reemerge at any moment. Julia Gaisser raises another methodological issue in her discussion of Cupid and Psyche, when she talks about how "Apuleius' invented story passed into myth": how exactly do we discriminate myth from literature? Looking at interpretations of the story from a range of historical periods in the form of allegory, visual art, translation, and literary imitation, Gaisser demonstrates that it is not the case, as has sometimes been supposed, that only myths that have their origins deep in the remotest past have the potential to tap into and energize the collective imagination. The focus of Kathryn McKinley's chapter is one of the most commented upon texts from the late medieval period, Christine de Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies*. Eclectic in its use of pagan and Christian sources, this allegorical work is widely regarded as a "proto-feminist" intervention in debates about the nature of women sanctioned by the Church. McKinley makes clear that de Pizan, like other medieval authors, "saw myth as infinitely malleable for different narrative ends" and that this gave her the freedom to use the character of Dido post Aeneas to "reconstruct the sexual hierarchy," valorizing the married woman and the figure of the widow, in particular. De Pizan, a widow herself, engages here in the kind of identificatory reading practice identified in an earlier chapter by Davies.

In the first of three chapters centered on the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, John Channing Briggs' fascinating chapter gives an account of Francis Bacon's seminal work *Wisdom of the Ancients*, which provides a commentary on 31 ancient myths and interprets them in the light of the new model of scientific learning with which Bacon is famously associated. Briggs shows clearly how Bacon "offers his readers a glimpse not only of ancient precursors of modern scientific discoveries, but of the dawn – fragmentary, perhaps largely subconscious, yet

strangely prescient – of a new, scientific understanding of the world deep in the wisdom of the past, beneath the common understanding of what wisdom is or can be.” We are reminded here, perhaps, of the rationalizing interpretations of the early mythographers excavated by Robert Fowler. Jeanne Neuechterlein analyses the famous painting *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, after Pieter Bruegel the Elder. This painting was unique for the time in its irreverent treatment of its mythological subject whose plight is reduced to an insignificant event that goes largely unnoticed in the contemporary Netherlandish landscape. Surveying a range of possible responses to the image and its classical sources, Neuechterlein concludes that “in re-telling the story for its own time, it also allows later audiences to re-tell their own viewing as they see fit.” George Burrows takes on an equally innovative and influential text, *Il ritorno d’Ullise in patria* by the librettist Giacomo Badoaro and the composer Claudio Monteverdi. He demonstrates how in this version of the myth within the developing context of opera, Penelope becomes a “metaphor for the meeting of ancient and modern cultures,” the tension between her use of musical speech and vocal lyric expressing the tension between a particular Venetian reception of ancient Greek tragedy and the expectations of a contemporary audience. All of these chapters are emblematic of one sort of appropriative response to myth which is boldly enabling of future receptions.

Michael O’Neill’s stark pronouncement that “Romantic poetry would not exist, were it not for its turbulent love-affair with classical myth” propels us into the early nineteenth century and a discussion of Shelley’s transgressive response to (among others) Aeschylus in the lyrical drama *Prometheus Unbound*. Offering a finely tuned analysis of the way Shelley works with a multitudinous sense of tradition, O’Neill argues that “if *Prometheus Unbound* deploys classical myth as a spring board for a leap into Utopian futurity, it also uses such myth to enact its own sense of the nature and function of poetry.” Helen Slaney explores George Bernard Shaw’s use of myth in *Pygmalion* and highlights the way it “brings the dynamics of gender into problematic conjunction with the dynamics of artistic creation” in the context of early twentieth-century theatre. Unlike the Ovidian version where erotic desire is the driver, Shaw’s transformation of his Galatea figure, Eliza, intends towards giving her a speaking voice; from Slaney’s detailed reading of the play in the light of contemporary debates about language and power, the question emerges of whether Eliza is truly liberated or whether, despite her new identity, she remains “encased in myth.” Turning to an iconic philosophical text, Kurt Lampe rejects the idea that Camus’s treatment of the myth of Sisyphus is simply “a crude allegory of supposedly eternal truths” and offers instead a reading that contextualizes the dramatization of Sisyphus as an absurd figure within a nexus of kaleidoscopic receptions of ancient and modern poets and philosophers. These three chapters, among the most detailed and complex in the collection, demonstrate admirably how the interpretation of a specific mythic text inevitably involves the recognition and negotiation of a whole host of previous receptions.

The final two chapters focus on two commissioned works of art that utilize classical myth in defiantly non-realist modes. The first of these, Lars von Trier's film *Medea*, is far more concerned with spectacle than with plot, reversing the famous Aristotelian hierarchy, and constituting "a highly aestheticized, tableau-like treatment of the myth." Mette Hjort identifies the markers of ingenuity and provocation that render the film a highly personal accomplishment, at the same time as tracing the complicated processes of collaborative creation. Anish Kapoor's *Marsyas* transforms the figure of the satyr flayed alive by Apollo for challenging his musical ability into a huge abstract sculpture which refuses explicitly to depict a body in pain. Lisa Saltzman constructs a lineage for this work that encompasses both the British painterly tradition of the portrayal of fleshly forms and the project of artists of the New York School such as Newman and Rothko who, in the aftermath of war, struggled with the question of how ethically and aesthetically to represent human suffering. Here we see what Michael O'Neill memorably describes as "classical myth's generous invitation to invent in unforeseen ways" writ large in forms of artistic expression synonymous with the contemporary, the experimental, the challenging. There is certainly no sign, as yet, that the myths of the ancient world have lost their imaginative power and it does not seem complacent to envisage that in the future, too, these stories will continue to generate more stories, in contexts, genres, and forms of which we can currently only dream.

Part I
Mythography

