

CHAPTER ONE

Thinking through Myth, Thinking Myth Through

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Mythology as System

Everyone knows the Greeks had myths. But the use of the word ‘myth’ in modern times only goes back to its use in 1783 by arguably the first modern theorist of mythology, Christian Gottlob Heyne (Bremmer, CH. 28). Myth is therefore as much a product of the modern history of ideas from the end of the Enlightenment onwards as it is an objective product of ancient Greece. It is more than mere stories, but in describing that ‘more’ and conducting the *interpretation* of myth we play out the intellectual history of our own times – the romantic and anthropological revolutions of the nineteenth century, and the crises, grand theories, interdisciplinary certainties, and doubt triumphant of the twentieth century. And on top of all this there lurks behind mythology its failure to be scripture, to provide the holy books the Greeks surely ought to have had – in order to be an intelligible nation to us and to our nineteenth-century forebears.

It is vital to realize that there is no one thing called ‘myth’, and for that reason there is no definition that will satisfy all significant uses of the word. ‘Myth’ (which derives from the Greek word *mythos*, not always ‘myth’ in our sense) refers to a network of Greek stories to which it is conventional to apply the term ‘myth’. This is a matter of empirical fact, not philosophy or circular definition. We know a Greek myth when we see one and have need of no definitions, guidance, or codes of practice to identify it as such. It is, however, not a random network but has a strong core of a system that was on occasion told as a system. Thus, Apollodoros’ *Library* (first century AD) may serve to

define that system for us, as his lost predecessor, ‘Hesiod’ had in the *Catalogue of Women* (see Dowden, CH. 3). Anything that forms part of this is myth. Anything that looks like this is myth. Homer, himself, knew an astonishing repertoire of myths (see Létoublon, CH. 2) and then, like a tragedian, but one much more wayward and self-confident, bent the mythology he had inherited to develop his own economical but panoramic epics.

This system of myth exists not only on paper or papyrus: it is internalized by all Greek poets, all their historians and thinkers, and by the whole Greek nation. And it was externalized in the sculptures, paintings, and decorative arts for which we still celebrate Greece (Woodford, CH. 8 – and the key moment captured at the beginning of that chapter Thus Greek mythology defines what it is to be Greek (Graf, CH.11), and Greeks by their common agreement to *remember* these myths forge a powerful tool of social identity that has been explored by Halbwachs (‘Collective Memory’) and more recently by Jan Assmann (‘Cultural Memory’). Myths are not, however, remembered in isolation: they are interactive, with each other and on countless occasions with every aspect of Greek life and thought. They are a continual point of reference, or system of references, and they constitute what since the late 1980s has been recognized in literature under the term ‘intertext’ (see Dowden 1992: 7–8). Anything that can be thought can be thought better with myth, or against its backcloth, or against it altogether (as in the case of Plato – Murray, CH. 9).

Mythology as History

As a condition of its being woven into a system, Greek mythology must gain internal links and sequences between its component myths. Thus, genealogy connects one myth with another and gives the illusion of narration in time. The action occurs, too, for the most part in real Greek landscapes. Indeed, geography is a key principle of the organization of the mythological system (see CHS 3, 11). Myth may exist across a gulf, across the ‘floating gap’¹ in another time system altogether – *in illo tempore*, as Eliade used to say (e.g., 1969: ch. 2) – but there remains a sense that the genealogies that reach down from gods to heroes and from heroes to other heroes might in the end cross that gulf and link aristocrats of today to heroes of the past (Graf 1993a: 128–9). With this the illusion of history is complete and the mythology has now become the history that Greece did not have, neither the history of transmitted written record nor that of archaeology.

So if myth has wrapped up oral traditions and masquerades as the history of the world from the beginnings of the gods to the Trojan War and its aftermath, what credence did the Greeks give it? *Did the Greeks Believe in their*

Myths? – the title of a classic book of Paul Veyne (1988). Almost any answer can be given to this question – yes, no, or it depends what you mean by ‘believe’. There are wonderful insights in Veyne’s discussion:

The truth is the child of the imagination. The authenticity of our beliefs is not measured according to the truth of their object ... As long as we speak of the truth, we will understand nothing of culture ...

The Greeks ... were never able to say, ‘Myth is completely false, since it rests on nothing.’ ... The imaginary itself is never challenged. (1988: 113)

But Thucydides (1.11) certainly thought it was worth accounting for the length of time it had taken the Greeks to capture Troy and the historians themselves can disconcert us by their acceptance of, or subscription to, myth (see Alan Griffiths’ discussion in CH. 10).

This particular difficulty extends to our own reading of Greek myth. Can we really say that there is *nothing* preserved of the lost Greek history in Greek mythology? Some have come close to this extreme position (Dowden 1992: ch. 4). Yet even they will acknowledge that some genuine movements of Greek peoples are reflected in the mythology: the colonization of Rhodes by peoples of the Argolid may be reflected in the mythology (Dowden 1989: 150) and Troy may reflect the takeover of the Asia Minor seaboard by the colonizing Greeks (Dowden 1992: 68). But Troy is the key case where we need to set aside naive views, stemming from Schliemann, which dignify material finds through association with mythic culture as though it were simply history. Hertel tests the case of Troy in CH. 22 and demonstrates, with due caution, what sort of moves may be involved in trying to cut myth down to a possible historical core. A different approach has been that of Margalit Finkelberg (2005) who has looked at how succession to kingdoms works in Greek myth and found in it a system so intelligible in the light of systems that are known elsewhere in the world that she considers the mythology to preserve *actual* successions. It is a powerful case and perhaps we do not yet have the measure of how to detect history in myth.

Local Mythology, National Mythology, Inherited Mythology

There can be no doubt that myth grew out of local traditions. This lesson, first understood clearly by Karl Otfried Müller (1825), is repeatedly forgotten in the history of the study of mythology and is forcefully restated in this volume by Graf (CH. 11). Many myths remained local; for instance, accounting for

landscapes and customs (Dowden 1992: ch. 8.1; Buxton 1994: e.g., ch. 6). Such a mythology might seem much more like the mythologies we learn about in simpler societies. It was their incorporation into a system, and above all their historicization in the trans-local epic as a tale about manhood at war, the society of heroes, that led to what we know as Greek mythology. This was not, however, some one-off spontaneous generation of mythology as we know it. The collection of the mythology in the Dark Ages was only the latest unification in a dialectic between the national and the local. We sometimes think of nations as a modern structure, as indeed in some senses they are. But a consciousness of one tribal people as belonging to a larger grouping suffices:

I resume, Gentlemen: man is a slave neither of his race nor his language nor his religion nor of the course of rivers nor that of mountain chains. A great gathering of men, sound in spirit and warm in heart, creates a moral awareness that is called a nation. (Renan 1992 (1882): 56)

The history of religion is full of tribal groupings marking their affiliation through ceremonies held at multi-year time intervals (see Dowden 2000: ch. 14). It is likely that a unificatory mythology is maintained in such groupings, as the memory of mythology is necessary for the maintenance of identity. It is therefore no surprise that other ‘nations’ related to the Greeks should display some elements of parallel mythology (see Puhvel 1987), notably the Sanskrit tradition in India that finds expression in the huge epic *Mahābhārata*. The nations related to the Greeks are the Indo-European peoples – such as the English whose kings descended from Woden – and it is there, in the hypothetical reconstructed Indo-European grouping of peoples, that the story of Greek mythology, in one sense, must start (Allen, CH. 18). Here we confront the extraordinarily doctrinaire approach of Georges Dumézil (1898–1986), who claimed to identify the underlying ideology of the Indo-Europeans and the ways in which it found expression in myth. Many classical scholars have simply rejected Dumézil, and his sympathy for some forms of fascism scarcely helped, but there are more intelligent ways forward than this and his system has been thoughtfully and temptingly extended by others, such as, notably, Nick Allen himself (CH. 18) and Pierre Sauzeau.²

Borrowed Mythology

However, ancestry is not all. Peoples do not move from one quarantined area to another. The tale of migration is also a tale of merger and of communication with new neighbours creating new mutual influences. Very few indeed of the names of Greek gods stand any chance of going back to Indo-European

(Dowden 2007: 48). Zeus does, perhaps Poseidon, perhaps even Dionysos (< *Diwos-sunos, 'son of Zeus'?). Helen and the Dioskouroi probably belong there too. But not Athānā (as Athene originally was) and not Artemis or Aphrodite either: Athene and Artemis go back to the Bronze Age, appearing as they do on the Linear B tablets, and must belong with the populations of Greece before the Greek-speakers or with the populations that preceded or influenced them. Aphrodite stands a fair chance of being a form of the Phoenician Ashtart (Greek Astarte). Not only the names of gods, but the mythology that gives them substance can follow these paths. It is clear that the societies of the Near East above all possessed highly developed mythologies and were in seamless contact with each other, and in every period – Mycenaean, Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic – with the Greek world.

Several scholars worked on the influence of Near Eastern cultures on Greek and in particular on Hesiod. After the pioneering studies of the Hittitologist Güterbock (1946, 1948), this subject increasingly interested classicists until two key publications of 1966 by Peter Walcot and Martin West dealt squarely in their own ways with the issue of Hesiod and his relation to Near-Eastern material. Meanwhile Astour (1967) produced a study of Near-Eastern influence on Greek religion and culture in Mycenaean times, not well received. Then later Burkert (1992 [1984]) produced a brilliant, idiosyncratic, study of the archaic and orientalizing period; and a decade later again West (1997) produced a characteristically massively informed study of influence on archaic and classical literature.³ We did not want to repeat this work in the present volume, but decided in the end that it was time to give the experts on the Near East their voice (which they had not had in this discourse since Güterbock, with the partial exception of Astour), so that the character of this mythology might shine out on the basis of the latest and most accurate information, particularly given that primary material is constantly being read for the first time in this discipline, a very different situation from the world of Greece and Rome where there is a huge bedrock of established texts and authors. This is what Livingstone and Haskamp provide in CH. 19, in a substantial contribution which authoritatively marks new ground in the presentation of Near-Eastern mythology to students of mythology.

However, in the travelling conditions of Greek times, the Phoenicians were the Greeks' immediate port of call in the Near East, though we know little about Phoenician mythology. That changed, at least for their prehistory, when we discovered the archives of Ugarit. Here was a rich seam of religious and mythological material, and one which bears interesting relation to Old Testament material. This is to be expected as the Canaanites are in effect the Phoenicians looked at through an Old Testament window. A treatment by Wyatt of the Ugaritic (and some Hebrew) material on the afterlife and the Beyond and by Marinatos of Egyptian material and the influence which it

appears to have had on conceptions of the Underworld, or rather the Beyond, in the *Odyssey* are, unusually, brought together in CH. 20. These are the sorts of contexts in which the choices of Homer, and the mythology he represents, are made.

The Implementation of Mythology

By this stage we can see how huge and complex a job it is to define Greek mythology and situate it within its diachronic and synchronic historical contexts. The next task is to understand the implementation of mythology in Greek culture. This is a question partly of generic horizons, partly of audiences and their expectations, and partly of the ingenuity of the individual writer.

What Homer does with myth is to use it as a backdrop for conspicuously modern plots in a genre that had previously, maybe, served more to bring traditional episodes to life.⁴ Though his work amplifies and extends what later generations will accept as myth, he presents a starkly realistic portrait of very mortal heroes against what they perceive as a mythology: Achilles is found singing the *famous deeds of men* (*klea andrōn*, *Iliad* 9.189), that is, traditional mythology but also the deeds he is thwarted from undertaking by his industrial action; and Helen weaves a web of what for us is mythology of the Trojan War (3.125–8) but for her is a regretful photograph of reality. As Létoublon observes (p. 27) Homer is far from a recitation of myths. But, equally, his world depends on a multidimensional adoption of mythology as a framework of reference and meaning. From the cosmogony to the endgame of Troy, the mythic section of the ‘Homeric Encyclopedia’ flows over with ambience (pp. 38–40).

We do not know as much as we would like about early performances of epic poetry, though Homer gives us imagined glimpses both of the professional singer at work, in the shape of the bards Demodokos and Phemios of the *Odyssey*, and of the more amateur performance of Achilles mentioned above.⁵ Epics were clearly performed competitively at festivals; Hesiod mentions travelling to Euboeia for such an occasion (*Works & Days* 651–9), and a later legend arose of a rather peculiar song-competition which pitted Hesiod against Homer himself. This was only a small part, however, of a much wider song culture, in which almost every significant occasion was marked by its appropriate form of song, often accompanied by dance and other forms of performance, and often presenting myth. (The particular way in which such performances make myth present, connecting the ancient and traditional with the here and now, is described in more detail by Calame, pp. 517–20.)

Our most important representative of this song culture is Pindar (late sixth–mid-fifth century BC), a poet who comes late in this tradition and at its pinnacle of sophistication, but who is also in some respects quite conservative.⁶

Pindar's use of myth is analysed by Rutherford in CH. 5. Where Homer uses myth as a foundation for his own highly individual plots and as a backdrop lending depth to the epic landscape, for Pindar, it is a system within which he works, and a world which he and his aristocratic patrons inhabit. For Pindar (as for Homer) the function of myth is not primarily to be *told* in any straightforward way. These are family stories; we may remind each other of them, take pride in them, derive solidarity from them, occasionally debate which is the authentic version, but we do not need to be told them. Where the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* mark a seam or caesura between the heroic then and the everyday now, in Pindar's songs there is no such seam: the world of myth is superimposed on the world of the victorious athletes and other great figures whose achievements he celebrates.

To say that the world of myth is familiar is not, of course, to say that it is ordinary: it has a magical glamour akin to that of the golden Sparta of Menelaos and Helen in the *Odyssey*. In Pindar's victory odes in particular, myth is used to demonstrate how the victor's extraordinary achievement in winning a Panhellenic contest places him on a par with the heroes of legend, close to the gods. Here as often, the telling of myth places often local or familial traditions in the context of a wider Panhellenic system of stories, a dynamic which is obviously appropriate when celebrating local potentates for whom victory at the Olympic, Pythian, Isthmian, or Corinthian games represents a moment of Panhellenic stardom (a moment which the poems themselves, of course, serve to perpetuate). Pindar's poems are good examples of two functions of myth of lasting importance. First is the use of myth as an allusive poetic shorthand, making it possible to communicate and evoke a great deal in very few words; this role of myth is increasingly important as the classical literary tradition travels and mutates from Greece to Rome and beyond. Second is the role of myth as a rhetorically powerful virtual world, like and yet unlike reality, and highly charged (with authority, glamour, beauty, and emotive force), in such a way that intense effects may be achieving by linking the two. Here Pindar stands near the head of the very important tradition of praise and (to a lesser extent) blame in ancient oratory, in which myth (and later, mythologized history, though as Alan Griffith makes very clear in CH. 10 this is never an easy line to draw) plays an important role as kings and princes are likened to heroes of old. Myth can also be used to deliver warnings – especially, not to aim beyond the pinnacle of human achievement by aspiring to equal the gods. (Such warnings also, of course, function as praise by implying the person's success is so great that he might actually be in danger of starting to feel like a god.)

From the performance of mythic song emerges drama, above all, though not exclusively, in Athens in the fifth century BC.⁷ The question of why a city with a burgeoning democratic system should wish to devote a significant part of some of its most important festivals to rehearsing, in tragedy, the household traumas

of Bronze Age princes and princesses has been much discussed. The importance of this question has in turn itself been called into question.⁸ Almost all tragedies, as well as their less well-known relatives the satyr plays, tell stories drawn from myth, and from epic in particular.⁹ Comedy is generally set, at least partly, in a world closer to the reality of contemporary Athens, but it too makes extensive use of myth, sometimes in parodies of tragedy or epic. (It is also clear that if more comedies had survived, especially from the early fourth-century BC period of the genre's history conventionally known as Middle Comedy, we would have many more examples of extended mythic plots.)

Drama obviously represents a new development in the 'making present' of mythic events which we have already encountered in the performance of lyric, and here, once again, powerful effects result from the superimposition of different worlds. Myth helps drama to tackle the extremes of emotion, the horrors of war, the pain of familial conflict and bereavement, the deepest personal dilemmas, while also retaining a measure of reflective distance. Through using myth, the plays can confront darkest the most terrifying aspects of human experience while also providing the audience with enjoyment and – according to prevailing ancient Athenian assumptions, at any rate – edification from the experience. Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood provided the helpful metaphor of 'zooming' and 'distancing' devices by which the tragedians make us aware at one moment of the heroic remoteness of their characters, at another of the closeness of their concerns and experiences to our own (whether 'we' are modern readers or members of an Athenian audience, though, of course, somewhat differently in each case).¹⁰ This is one instance of the wider phenomenon of myth functioning as a lens through which things are seen in a new light, the familiar made unfamiliar or vice versa.¹¹

One Athenian comic dramatist teased the tragedians for having such an easy life: not only are their plots ready-made for them, coming as they do from myth, but the audience knows them already!¹² As Jean Alaux demonstrates in CH. 7, however, the tragedians were very far from adopting any passive approach to their mythic material. Myths are not simple hand-me-downs; nor are they a straitjacket. The availability of different versions enables playwrights to make highly significant choices and changes of emphasis, and to engage in constant dialogue with the tradition (including previous plays, as well as epic and other poetry) and with their audience-members' expectations, a point once made exceptionally strongly by Peter Walcot.¹³ The experience of myth is also transformed by its presentation in the theatre in front of a mass audience as the citizens of Athens together watch the affairs of mythical cities brought to life and, often, their leading figures brought to ruin, before their eyes.¹⁴ This, then, becomes a matter of 'pragmatics' (cf. Calame, CH. 27), the vital significance of the occasion for the meaning. But it is a much harder question whether myth in itself necessarily conveys the messages that the

tragedians found in it. It is a remarkable fact about myth that it constantly serves new purposes and one of those purposes, a powerful one, has been to reflect the new interest in women's studies that began in the 1960s. But perhaps we have rushed too readily to the conclusion that myth is a 'source' for attitudes to women and should pause to consider the provocative paradox which Lewis drives home in CH. 23: 'the centrality of mythology in gender scholarship has never been matched by a strong interest in gender amongst those who study mythology.' And at root, as she demonstrates, lies the *polysemy* of myth – its capacity to bear meanings, many meanings. Myth is Protean, but the myth of Proteus might direct our thought to many other things instead.

So myth provides virtual worlds which are, in a variety of ways, good to think with. A particular case of this is what we may call, if we are forgiven for invoking a contemporary cliché, virtual learning environments. The fashionable teachers known as sophists of the fifth century BC and onwards use myth to add appeal and authority to their classes in ethics, politics, and persuasive speech: Prodikos instructs the young with a tale of Herakles choosing between personified Vice and Virtue, while Hippias has a Spartan audience spellbound with advice supposedly given by Nestor to the young Neoptolemos. N. Livingstone dips into this tradition in CH. 6. Like so much else, it goes back to Homer, in whose poems examples from myth, *paradeigmata*, are already powerful if far from straightforward instructive tools, and whom the sophists themselves are predictably keen to hail as their model and ancestor.

The greatest 'thinker with myth' of them all, however, and the most fascinating and influential, is the sophists' leading critic: Plato, whose myths are Murray's subject in CH. 9. Where the sophists borrow mythological settings such as the Trojan War or the Labours of Herakles for didactic performances, Plato does something much more radical, creating philosophical myths which use traditional material and 'feel' old, but are in fact (probably: the case of Atlantis, for instance, has been much discussed) essentially new. It seems strange that he should choose to present us with such fictions, in view of Socrates' relentless insistence in his dialogues on the absolute importance of Truth and Reality and on dialectical reasoning as the means of attaining it. Murray demonstrates that, in spite of this paradox, myth is no add-on, but central to Plato's philosophy. Platonic myth is a way of exploring the inadequacy of our understanding of what Truth really is, of pushing at the limits of our understanding and ability to understand, and of groping our way towards understanding of things which, within the limitations of the written dialogue and until such time as the light of philosophical enlightenment dawns, we are unable to talk about any other way. This insight is not restricted to philosophy, as Griffiths makes clear in CH. 10. His examples from the ancient and modern worlds alike demonstrate just how hard it is to eliminate myth from storytelling, and especially from the telling of stories about the past.

So far this discussion may have given the impression that myth in the ancient world was primarily a verbal phenomenon. This is far from being the case: visual images of myths were almost as pervasive in ancient cities as brand and advertising images are in the modern developed world.¹⁵ Scenes from myth were in private homes on more-or-less everyday pottery, a good deal of which survives, and on deluxe precious-metal ware, most of which is lost; they were in public buildings such as temples and porticos in the form of wall paintings – of which, again, sadly little survives – and sculpture. Woodford vividly reminds us of the importance of this visual world of myth by opening CH. 8 with a remarkable first scene in one of Euripides’ tragedies. Here, a group of women find a sense of being ‘at home’ on a visit to an unfamiliar city because they recognize the stories the temple sculptures tell. The women excitedly report to each other what they see: for the benefit of the audience, of course,¹⁶ but at a naturalistic level this is also a reminder that, for ancient Greeks as for us, visual representations of stories provoke an impulse to tell the stories verbally. The old saw that ‘a picture is worth a thousand words’ cuts both ways. How we, like the women in Euripides’ chorus, can know what we are seeing, Woodford explains in CH. 8. Having thus assisted and emboldened us, she sounds a note of caution later in the volume, in CH. 21, where she warns us of a number of ways in which this enterprise of ‘telling what’s in the picture’ can go wrong.

The long reign of Philip II of Macedon (lived c. 382–36 BC, ruled 356–36 BC) and the short, brilliant career of his son Alexander III (the Great, 356–323 BC, ruled 336–323 BC) transformed the Greek world. Philip progressively brought the cities of mainland Greece under Macedonian control and established Macedon as a dominating power. Alexander’s conquest of the Persian empire expanded Greek horizons unimaginably – though in fact this was precisely what the Athenian political writer and teacher Isocrates (438–336 BC) *had* imagined, and had lobbied Philip, amongst others, to do.¹⁷ Not surprisingly, Alexander became mythologized in his own lifetime, fulfilling, as Mori explains in CH. 12, a childhood ambition to rival Achilles; the gods Dionysos and Herakles were also role models.¹⁸

In the ‘Hellenistic’ world shaped by Alexander’s successors, the collective Hellenic identity which (alongside local identities) myth had played such an important part in constructing in the Archaic and Classical periods became a kind of reality. This was facilitated by the spread of the ‘common speech’, or *koinē*, as the basic language of literacy and, above all, by the prestige of Greek literary culture, *paideia*, which became a route to prominence for mixed Greco-Macedonian and non-Greek elites in cities across a huge swathe of the Near and Middle East. Isocrates’ favourite fantasy had been that Athens would lead the Greeks in war against the barbarians, and he would have bitterly regretted the loss of the city’s freedom (one story has it that it was news of the defeat of Athens and her allies by the Macedonians at the battle of Chaironeia

that finally led to the old man's death at the age of ninety-eight). He would have been gratified, however, by the hegemonic role of Athens, culturally though not politically, in the emerging Hellenistic identity. The *koinē* was a modified version of Attic, the dialect of Athens, and Athenian texts – the plays, histories, speeches, and philosophic writings – formed, together with Homer and others, the bedrock of *paideia*.¹⁹ Mori demonstrates the importance of this identity, and of myth in particular as its vehicle, to Alexandrian Greeks making themselves at home on the threshold of North Africa, a 'kindred other'.²⁰ She shows how the flexibility of myth enabled Hellenistic Greeks to maintain an equilibrium between assimilation of non-Greek ideas and practices and assertion of the primacy of old Hellenic traditions.

The Hellenistic age was an age of collecting, not least collecting information. The information is now in the books (*ta biblia*), the books are in the library, and, if we are in Alexandria (home to the most famous, but not the only, great library of the period), the catalogue 'tables' (the *Pinakes*) of the great scholar-poet Callimachos are there to help you find it. Myths are sorted and organized, for example into aetiologies, explanations for the way things are, as in Callimachos' hugely influential (but now sadly fragmentary) poem the *Aitia*; unusual and obscure versions are competitively sought out, evaluated, and put to poetic use.²¹

The Problem of Rome

The Hellenistic collation (gathering and sorting) of Greek culture, including myth, left it conveniently packaged for its next great cultural step: appropriation by Rome.²² It is hard here to avoid quoting the brilliant poetic soundbite of the first-century BC Roman poet Horace: *Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit*, 'captive Greece captured its savage conqueror' (*Epistles* 2.1.156); an instance of the principle, which has applied throughout human history, that colonization can also happen in reverse. We might draw an alternative metaphor from myth itself: the story in which Zeus' first wife Metis – Cunning Intelligence personified – is pregnant with the wise goddess Athene, and Zeus is warned that his next offspring will be a son destined to overthrow his father. Zeus pre-empts this by swallowing Metis. Metis becomes the Intelligence of Zeus, and Zeus himself gives birth to Athene (Hesiod, *Theogony* 886–900; F 343 MW, F 294 Most). In the case of Rome and Greece, though, what is swallowed is not so much intelligence as memory. The consequence is that Greek myth in Roman literature and culture has an added dimension, another level of potential mythic remoteness to be exploited, becoming a kind of 'myth squared'. The virtual world of myth is mediated by the additional virtual world of its Greek landscape and cultural contexts.

Of course, the analogy with Zeus and Metis is a slightly strained one (as mythic analogies often are). For one thing, Roman ‘consumption’ of Greek myth certainly did not happen in one big gulp; it had begun long before Rome came to dominate the Mediterranean world including Greece, itself a process which took some time.²³ For this reason, as Fox shows in CH. 12, the history of Roman myth is inextricably bound up with Greek myth. At one level this might just seem like a further extension of the Panhellenic umbrella, with another set of local traditions to be found a place and incorporated. And sometimes it does seem to work that way. Where were the Romans in the Trojan War, say? Their ancestor, it turns out, was the Trojan Aineias/Aeneas. On the wrong side, then, but it could be worse: Aeneas gets quite a good press in the myths, and after all the Trojans of the *Iliad* are not so alien as all that. They seem to have no problem communicating in Greek, for one thing, unlike the ‘babble-voiced Karians’ of *Iliad* 2. 867, and, as Dieter Hertel points out in CH. 22, their champion Hektor, the defender of his city, is a representative of quintessentially Greek *polis* values.²⁴ So we have Vergil’s *Aeneid*: a foundation epic for Rome which is also, at one level, just another *Nostos* or hero’s ‘return’ from Troy in the Greek epic tradition – with the difference that Aeneas’ old home was Troy itself, and he can never reach his ultimate destined new home because it lies in the future. Such naturalizing approaches found favour in particular with Romanized or Roman-friendly Greeks. Thus the historian and literary critic Dionysios of Halikarnassos (first century BC) held that the Romans *were* really Greeks and that the Latin language was a dialect of Greek.²⁵ We may compare this with other integrative ventures like Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives* (first–second centuries AD) of prominent Greeks and Romans both legendary and historical, setting up a kind of shared myth-history.²⁶

Fox emphasizes, however, that the reality is by no means that simple. It is possible to integrate Roman myth with Greek myth and to Romanize Greek myth, but the fact remains that Roman myth is not the same kind of thing as Greek myth. This is because Roman myth is inseparable from traditions which lay claim to historical veracity, such as the biographies of the early kings of Rome. Of course, it is true that in Greece, too, the line between myth and history is often hard to draw, as we see CH. 10 and elsewhere. The difference here is that the question of the veracity of these Roman traditions is important to Roman writers in a way we do not see in the Greek world. The Romans, by contrast with what Veyne says of the Greeks above, *did* challenge ‘the imaginary itself’. (This is not the same phenomenon as Greek philosophers’ scrutiny of myth from a moral perspective, although, when we come to look at the close relationship between myth and religion, similarities do emerge.) Roman authors’ interest in the authenticity of their myths has also, as Fox demonstrated, affected the way modern readers have responded to them from the eighteenth century AD onwards, and has often led to them being regarded as

somehow 'inauthentic', whether relative to Greek myths or relative to some more 'original' version of Roman myth which we might somehow uncover.

The visual presence of myth was no less strong in the cities of the Roman world than in Greece, as Newby makes clear in our second Roman chapter, CH. 14. Interestingly, we are not much concerned here with the specifically Roman myths examined in CH. 13. Scenes such as the infancy of Romulus and Remus do appear occasionally, but for the most part we find the stories already familiar from Greek art and literature. Public art in Rome used myth to convey political and ideological messages, to glorify those who put works of art on display and demonstrate their connoisseurship (many of these artworks were plundered or otherwise acquired from Greece), and simply to entertain the public. In the decoration of lavish dining rooms, art could be used to transport guests into the virtual world of myth, an effect intensified when visual representations were complemented by dramatic re-enactments by actors. Slave attendants in costume and character as figures from myth could also be intermingled with statuary in order to blur the gap between myth and reality, life and art still further. Such entertainments had a grisly counterpart in the staging of executions as gruesome mythical death scenes, presenting an audience with, for example, Orpheus (in a slightly unusual version of his story) not charming wild animals with his singing but being savaged to death by them instead. On a happier note, the highly elaborate mythical decoration of some dining rooms seems designed to set the tone for appropriately erudite and witty conversation: as in Euripides' play above, pictures are an excellent talking-point. Another kind of mythic 'virtual world' is the *trompe l'oeil* wall-painting, designed to make a room seem to open into an imaginary mythic landscape extending beyond the wall. Myth may be organized thematically around a room or rooms; in collections of pictures, just as in collections of poems, juxtaposition and arrangement can be used to create a whole which is much more than the sum of its parts.

Religious Change

This, then, is myth as décor, myth as culture, myth as providing the coordinates for your identity – personal or national. But myth also continued to belong in the world of religion and religious thought. Myth may not be scripture, as we have argued above, and it is certainly not Bible or Koran. However, once we have understood that much and freed ourselves from the danger of anachronism and misconception, we can look at the points at which myth and scripture do in fact resemble each other and at how evolving religious demands on mythology created a new sense of myth that eventually interacted with Judaeo-Christian scripture and was able to welcome it into the textual imagination of the Greek and Roman worlds.

Myth was tradition, and tradition was authority. It was commonplace in Plato's Athens to appeal to Homer as an authority (N. Livingstone, CH. 6), and tragedians in confronting the deepest ethical, religious, and political issues spoke through the vehicle of myth, perceived as enshrined above all in the works of Homer (Alaux, CH. 7). Did not Aeschylus himself pronounce his work 'slices from the great banquets of Homer'?²⁷ If Homer's mythology had not had this authority, the philosophers would not have been so concerned to attack it or defend it. Tragedy was not a medieval European Christian Mystery play, but it did employ traditional stories and did teach lessons. Thus it became increasingly possible for those that wanted to teach lessons or reveal truths (or indeed advertise truths by concealing them) to employ a mythology for the purpose. Such were the creators of literature by Orpheus, Mousaios, and such hallowed gurus, whose purposes were so distant from their contemporaries as well as from those of modern scholars that Edmonds in CH. 4 provides us with a radical revision and reconceptualization of this 'new-wave' activity. But such too was our revered Plato when he composed (better, of course) myths of his own (Murray, CH. 9). And such were those who allegorized myth or exploited its capacity to depict the soul and its salvation (Dowden, CH. 15). It is ironic in the light of later European history that Philo must draw out the authority of Old Testament scripture by turning it into Homer, and deploying the tools which non-scriptural Greeks had developed for ratcheting up the religious and philosophical significance of Homer's epics, in order to match his authority. Thus the models for the authority of Judaeo-Christian scripture amongst thinking people in the ancient world were in fact, on the one hand, the increasingly doctrinaire pronouncements of philosophers and, on the other, the literary mythology – such that it barely mattered whether you were talking about Odysseus, Abraham, Pythagoras, Jesus, or Apollonios of Tyana – or indeed Aeneas in Vergil's *Aeneid* (see CH. 15).

Somewhere, then, in the mid-ground for more general consumption, at least amongst the wealthy, lies the stone sarcophagus. Replete with mythological images, sometimes almost baroque in their profusion, but surprisingly limited in their range, the myths serve to suggest a discourse about death and the Beyond. And somewhere between the Pythagoreanism of Franz Cumont (1942) and the later twentieth-century AD suspicion of the grand view lies a judicious understanding of the hints and proprieties of this rich medium, as shown by Newby (CH. 16).

In the end the triumph of the Christians would be more or less complete. But it did not mean that all those who became Christian lost their literary, cultural, and mythographic heritage. They might have adopted the cultural memory of a different tradition, a remarkable shift in identity, but their individual lives should not, as Graf shows (CH. 17), be fictionalized into a pagan phase and a post-conversion phase just because they wrote works that rested on Greco-Roman

culture. The ever-flexible tools of allegory and *exemplum* take myth well into the sixth century AD and set us up for the Middle Ages (CH. 17).

<i>subsidio</i>	with the help
<i>Fortune labilis</i>	of slippery Fortune
<i>cur prelio</i>	why in battle
<i>Troia tunc</i>	does Troy once
<i>nobilis</i>	notable
<i>nunc flebilis</i>	now weepable
<i>ruit incendio?</i>	blaze in ruin?

Carmina Burana 14.4 (twelfth–thirteenth century AD, the work, maybe, of a bishop)

Myth and the Moderns

The history of myth in modern times is even more voluminous and even more complex than its history in ancient times. Four-fifths of Bremmer's chapter (CH. 28) rightly deals with the period from the Renaissance to the present day, when in some ways the notion of myth was invented.

Myth is a much huger subject that we imagine when we first encounter it, perhaps at an early age – occupying the same mental space as fairy stories – now Jack and the Beanstalk, now Theseus and the Minotaur. But myth is more than merely imaginative Greek stories that happen through a quirk of history and an accident of education to have become a common inheritance of European and to some extent global culture. Yes, it has provided rich material to art since the Renaissance sought other material than the Judaeo-Christian repertoire (itself a mythology), and it has provided plots for numerous operas.^{28, 29} Even there it would not have done so unless it had provided a space for meaning, for ideas, for argument that was applicable far beyond the narrow limits of an ancestral Greece. Greek myth, in fact, is universal, and it is in the nature of myth altogether to be universal.

It is exceptionally hard to describe the relation between a myth and its 'meaning' as it is applied to some new circumstance. There is something indirect about it, the recognition that the apparent meaning of the story (once upon a time ...) must be transmuted into a rich new source of reflection and realization in a second level of meaning. This, according to Roland Barthes,³⁰ was how myth worked. To study myth is, in this sense, to study meaning itself, to study systems of signification, namely *semiotics*. Barthes was run over by a laundry van in Paris in 1980, on his way home from lunch, notably, with President Mitterrand – a myth in itself. His work had aroused the interest of

advertisers as they sought to tap the wellsprings of human motivation. It was with remarkable power that he had evoked the mythic quality of steak and chips, or of the Citroën DS, that glorious emblem of modernity, at the 1955 Paris motor show. This was the same car that the obscurantist neo-psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan bought, and in which the Lacans and the Lévi-Strausses used to go for outings,³¹ a surreal icon for the reader of this book. These Barthian explorations spill over into another area that we would have wished to include in this volume, that of *mythocritique* – the ‘myth-criticism’ of literature, analysing its power as deriving from the myths it tells, not maybe myths in our Greek sense but in a much deeper one. This was the area ploughed, largely in ignorance of each other, by Northrop Frye in the USA,³² still revered, and by Gilbert Durand (e.g., 1992) in Grenoble, less so. Particularly in the hands of Durand, this approach to mythology swung very close indeed to the psychoanalysis of Carl Jung.³³ That, in turn, had coincided, to the extent of some partnership in writing books,³⁴ with the work of Carl Kerényi, whose oeuvre, particularly the series ‘Archetypal Images in Greek Religion’,³⁵ largely puzzles and frustrates readers today if they have not approached it with an understanding of his effectively psychoanalytic convictions.

No book can rise to the total challenge of myth and our readers will look in vain for some of the above (classical tradition, Barthes, *mythocritique*). But we are delighted to be able to take the story up to the opening of the Christian Middle Ages (Graf, CH. 17), and to open up, in a profound and challenging way, modern developments in semiotics – from the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss to pragmatics (Calame, CH. 27). These chapters are both characterized by a sense of the huge variety of thinkers and writers whose variety and inter-relationships need to be made intelligible. That is also the challenge posed by trying to master ‘psychoanalysis’ as though it was one thing. The story of psychoanalysis unfolded by Armstrong (CH. 25) is itself riven by factions and complicated by variants: was Oedipus too negative an example? should we have turned improvingly instead to Odysseus’ very healthy relationship with Telemachos?

Theories that look different do merge into each other, as we have seen with *mythocritique* and psychoanalysis. And structuralism itself supposes that we think, in groups or universally, in particular ways, which again is the general presupposition of psychoanalysis. It is no coincidence that one formative moment in the life of Lévi-Strauss was when his girlfriend’s father turned out to be the man who introduced the thought of Freud to Paris. In a way, his whole system of thought was designed to make better sense than psychoanalysis had, but on rather similar suppositions. At the same time, the theory of initiation (Dowden, CH. 26) may appear at first to be a classic and distinctive individual theory, tracing mythology back to particular customs and rituals which are known from anthropology. However, it eventually becomes clear

that this type of behaviour results from the power of an underlying myth, realized in actual mythology, ritual, and even literature. At this point the theory has morphed into *mythocritique*, and it might as well be evoking a Jungian archetype, that will account for Frodo's triumph in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* as well as for Sophocles' *Philoktetes*. What, then, of the theories of Georges Dumézil (above, p. 6)? Shall they be exaggerated statements of the commonplace, or shall they make clear the thought of ancestral Indo-Europeans, inherited by their successors such as the Greeks and Indians? But maybe there is a third possibility: the addition of the fourth function to his system (Allen, CH. 18) may, after a little more work, join up initiation theory and psychoanalysis.³⁶ If myth is to be interpreted (and that is everyone's supposition, without which this volume and hundreds of others would be wholly pointless), then that is because there is a level of thought and a type of thought that all these approaches imply, maybe unwittingly, or explore.

Omissions and Controversies

It is customary for authors to beg the reader's forgiveness for whatever defects remain after they have received advice they were unable in their human frailty fully to implement. Our omissions are worse. From antiquity we have not really covered the rise of commentary (300–100 BC), except briefly (Mori, CH. 12; Graf, CH. 17); or the exciting period in the first centuries BC and AD when myth at times became a free-for-all and some took Homer to task for his inaccuracy;³⁷ or the role of myth in the rhetoric and imagination of the Second Sophistic (AD 100–300), when Greek culture reigned supreme in a Roman empire.³⁸

From the modern period it will become apparent that mythology is a rich part of European tradition and identity (see above), and there is much more discussion than we can present here. The interplay of the myth of the wise Orient with the study of classical literatures at the end of the Enlightenment is worth a lifetime's study in itself; and it is this that leads to the remarkable authority in the second half of the nineteenth century of Max Müller, reinventing Greek mythology from the Sanskrit *Rig Veda* with a romanticism inherited from his poet father Wilhelm Müller, author of the *Winterreise*. Sadly, though we talk about initiation (Dowden, CH. 26) and about the 'structural' anthropologist Lévi-Strauss (Calame, CH. 27), we have little time to sketch in the imperial mission of nineteenth-century powers, above all Great Britain, and the competing ethnologies that they led to. Every paragraph of Bremmer's chapter encapsulates something worth study in its own right as part of the history of Greek mythology and part of the ideas we and our modern intellectual forebears have lived through in order to build, or maybe weave, the subject we now study.

It may seem to some readers that the history of a subject like mythology is a history of its errors and mistakes, of ideas now exploded. But every exploded idea teaches us something and forms part of the fabric. It is a shame that we have not in this volume confronted J. J. Bachofen (1815–1887), with his supposition of matriarchal societies.³⁹ Matrilinearity, certainly. But matriarchy? – the evidence is not there, and the Amazons (Lewis, CH. 23) constitute ideology, male ideology at that, not historical testimonial (Dowden 1997). That is not to say, however, that these myths cannot speak to our own times: Euripides' *Trojan Women* can tell us through the power of myth about Iraq or Afghanistan; Amazons can speak archetypally to those concerned with women's proper place in twenty-first century society – the fact the myth did not mean that to ancient Greeks does not imply that it is illegitimate in a different society to hear a different voice; and issues of race and the relative role of cultures supreme in European education compared with the worlds that Europe has exploited are worth new consideration provided we do not lose our critical instincts. The time has come to digest Bernal's *Black Athena*, or find an alternative path – as is done by Rutherford in CH. 24.

It is delightful to see what huge passions can be aroused by the theory of mythology. The theories of Bernal led to a furore of controversy.⁴⁰ Dumézil was denounced in his time for some fascist sympathies, but really reviled for constructing a theory that was too ambitious for the digestive tract of scholars (cf. Allen, CH. 18). In the 1980s, in Dowden's hearing, Carl Kerényi (see above), little cited in this volume, was denounced by a leading mythologist, also little cited here, as having done 'great damage' to the study of mythology. Lévi-Strauss almost whimsically conducted, in implicit contradiction of Freud, a counter-analysis of the Oedipus myth in an algebra which at once appalled empirical scholars and enticed them into imitating him,⁴¹ and led even the magisterial figure of Walter Burkert to pronounce that 'I do not think Lévi-Strauss has proved anything' (1979: 11), but not without somehow reflecting the method himself (1979: ch. 1). Dowden has learnt that the wickedness of initiation theory is to propose an almost 'Kuhnian paradigm',⁴² but perversely has come to the view that the theories of Kuhn (1996) – about scientific revolutions and 'paradigm shifts' – are not at all a bad way of viewing the sudden shifts in the kaleidoscope of thought about myth as one generation of scholars succeeds another (Dowden 2011). We need to understand how theories are made, how they decay, and why they so engage our energies. Mythology is arguably the finest scenario for this Kuhnian drama.

But it is perhaps psychoanalysis – not just in the study of mythology – that has roused the strongest passions, particularly with the publication of the withering 1,000-page French volume of 2005, *Le Livre noir de la psychanalyse: vivre, penser et aller mieux sans Freud* ('The black book of psychoanalysis: live, think and do better without Freud'),⁴³ full of articles like 'Freud: Profit, and

Taking Advantage of Weakness’, or ‘Why is Lacan so Obscure?’, or a particularly cruel piece on the psychoanalyst of fairy-tales (Bettelheim 1976), ‘Bettelheim the Imposter’.

This volume aims to provide a more civil and more liberal approach to the great variety of a hugely exciting and challenging subject. Mythology underpins all our lives at all times, and Greek mythology, because of its unique inner force (however one understands it), has pride of place amongst mythologies even today. It is worth understanding, and perhaps this volume will give some sense of how much there is to understand and of some of the routes by which that understanding may be reached.

FURTHER READING

On the nature of Greek mythology see especially the systematic books of Dowden (1992) and Graf (1993a); Buxton 1994 is more sensitive to ‘feel’ and context; a fresh, distinctly theoretical, approach (as in CH. 27) is deployed by Calame 2009a. Stimulating collections of essays include Bremmer 1987, Edmunds 1990 and Woodard 2007. On the history of the study of mythology see the helpful handbook of William G. Doty (2000) and the penetrating study of Von Hentey (2002), as well as, naturally, Jan Bremmer’s overview of the history of the study of the subject in this volume (CH. 28).

NOTES

1. Assmann (1992: 49), building on work of Jan Vansina.
2. See Sauzeau: online.
3. For all these strands, see Dowden (2001).
4. Cf. Dowden (2004: 196–204).
5. On the way Pindar contends with the negative connotations of ‘professional’ poetry see Nagy 1989.
6. Even ‘the most Indo-European of Greek poets’ (M. L. West (2007: 15, quoting Calvert Watkins)). For discussion of myth in earlier Greek lyric see, for example, Nagy (2007) and chapters in Parts One and Two of Budelmann (2009).
7. Myth, and Homeric myth in particular, was clearly an important ingredient in the works of the early comic playwright Epicharmos (active in the Syracuse in Sicily in the early fifth century BC), who wrote plays with titles like *Odysseus the Deserter*, *Kyklops*, and *Sirens*, as well as a *Prometheus* or *Pyrrha*. Sadly, only meagre fragments of his works survive.
8. For the ongoing debate about the extent and nature of connections between drama and the social and political institutions of the democratic city see, for example, Goldhill (1987); the essays in Winkler and Zeitlin (1990); Cartledge (1997); Saïd (1998); Griffin (1998); Seaford (2000); Goldhill (2000); Rhodes (2003); Finglass (2005).

9. Exceptions: Aeschylus' surviving *Persians*, presenting a version of very real and recent events but providing distance through its setting in the far-off Persian capital (and Xerxes, his mother Queen Atossa, and the shade of his dead father Darius are 'mythical' figures enough from the perspective of an Athenian citizen); and Phrynichos' lost *Sack of Miletos*, which, Herodotus tells us, caused offence to the Athenians by presenting, in the recent fall of a great Greek city to the barbarians, sorrows which were too close to home. Then there is the odd case of Agathon's *Antheus*, also lost, but tantalisingly mentioned by Aristotle (*Poetics* 1451b21) as unusual in having both an invented subject and invented characters; a significant departure from tradition, then, but not necessarily a non-mythical setting: Agathon may have 'found' new figures in established mythical family trees.
10. Sourvinou-Inwood (1989: 136).
11. Cf. Wendy Doniger's idea of 'telescopic' and 'microscopic' functions of myth (Doniger 1998: 7–25); Jean Alaux in CH 7 uses the metaphor of the prism.
12. Antiphanes F189, from a play called *Poiesis* ('Poetry' or 'Composition'): for text, translation, and discussion of the fragment's implications for comedy as 'fiction', see Lowe (2000: 260–9); also Olson (2007: 154 f. (text), 172–5 (commentary), 437 f. (tr.)).
13. Walcot (1976).
14. Not all tragedies are set in cities (Sophocles' *Philoktetes* and Euripides' *Hecuba*, for example, are not), but most are. Satyr plays, by contrast, seem often to have been set in the wilder places where the part-human, part-animal followers of Dionysos who formed their chorus were at home.
15. And, as Roland Barthes persuasively suggested (1957), there is a sense in which brands and advertising *are* the modern world's mythology: see further below.
16. It is interesting to speculate, but impossible to know, how much effort Euripides' production team made to realize the spectacle of Apollo's temple visually in the theatre.
17. On Isocrates' Panhellenic project see, for example, Livingstone (1998).
18. On the Alexander myth in the Roman world see Spencer (2002).
19. For a brief, clear discussion of *koinē*, see Colvin (2007: 63–6) ('essentially an expanded, international variety of Attic, heavily influenced by Ionic', 65). On Hellenistic education (a narrower field than *paideia*), see Cribiore 2001, and on literature and social identity, including questions of the availability or otherwise of *paideia* to non-Greek elites, Shipley (2000: 235–70); on the later legacy of Hellenism under Roman rule, see Swain 1996, Whitmarsh 2001, and essays in Borg (2004).
20. On how citizens of other Hellenistic *poleis* used myth to make themselves at home both in new locations 'abroad' and within a Panhellenic framework see Scheer (2003) and Graf in CH. 11.
21. On Hellenistic poets' use of myth see Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004, for example, 43–88 (Callimachus' *Aitia*), 224–45 (Aratos' *Phainomena*)).
22. On the relationship between Hellenistic and Roman literature see Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004: 444–85).

23. Less than fifty-three years according to a famous musing of Polybios in the opening of his *History* (1.1.5), but actually much longer: see Shipley (2000: 368–99).
24. On the ‘Greekness’, or at any rate non-Otherness, of the Trojans in Homer and in the Archaic period in general (by contrast with their later ‘orientalization’) see J. M. Hall (2007b: 346–50).
25. On Dionysios’ approach to myth and history see Fox and Livingstone (2007: 555 f.), and on ‘Aeolism’, the theory of Latin as a dialect of Greek, Stevens (2006–7).
26. Though, Fox reminds us, Plutarch is also well aware of the oddness and Otherness to the Greek mind of many Roman traditions, as his work *Roman Questions* demonstrates (see pp. 000).
27. Athenaios, *Deipnosophists*, Epitome 2.1 p.164.
28. Art: Reid (1993); Hunger (1959).
29. Opera: Poduska (1999); Hunger (1959).
30. Barthe (1957: ‘Le Mythe, aujourd’hui’ (‘Myth today’)).
31. Lévi-Strauss and Eribon (1998: 107).
32. Frye (1957, 1963).
33. Cf. Durand (1992: 35–7).
34. For example, Jung and Kerényi (1951).
35. See Kerényi (1976a, 1976b).
36. See the ingenious solution of Sauzeau (2010).
37. Dowden (forthcoming). ‘Fact and fiction in the New Mythology: 100 BC–AD 100’, in J. R. Morgan, I. Repath (eds), *‘Where the Truth Lies’: Lies and Metafiction in Ancient Literature*, Groningen.
38. See Borg (2004), in which several essays are of interest to the student of mythology.
39. Bachofen (1861, 1967).
40. Lefkowitz and Rogers (1996), and the riposte of Bernal (2001).
41. Kirk (1970 and especially 1974); Leach (1974: ch. 4).
42. Dodd and Faraone (2003: xiv).
43. This is Meyer *et al.* 2005

