CALAME AND DETIENNE ON MYTH

C. CALAME: *Myth and History in Ancient Greece. The Symbolic Creation of a Colony*. Translated by D. W. Berman. Pp. xx + 178. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003 (first published as *Mythe et histoire dans l'Antiquité grecque. La création symbolique d'une colonie*, 1996). Cased, £26.95. ISBN: 0-691-11458-7.

M. DETIENNE: *The Writing of Orpheus. Greek Myth in Cultural Context*. Translated by J. Lloyd. Pp. xvi + 199. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003 (first published as *L'écriture d'Orphée*, 1989). Cased, £39.50. ISBN: 0-8018-6954-4.

These welcome new translations will make more of Claude Calame's and Marcel Detienne's work accessible to an English-speaking public. C.'s book keeps the same organization as the original, although bibliographical references and content have been updated, whereas D.'s is a new and expanded version, but secondary literature has not been brought up to date consistently.

Although very different in content and form, these two books offer case studies illustrating the authors' theoretical positions concerning Greek myth. Both books consider the meanings of the words 'myth' and 'mythology', and examine different treatments of them from antiquity to the present.

The first part of C.'s book, 'Illusions of Mythology', develops a critique of the use of 'myth' in social and cultural anthropology as a 'universal category of "savage thought"' (p. vii). The main body of his study presents texts of diverse nature and times that narrate the foundation of Cyrene in Libya. Pindar's *Pythian* 4, 5, and 10, and the versions that Herodotus, Apollonius, and Callimachus give of this event are carefully analyzed with the scalpel of 'semionarrative theory'. These intertextual readings not only illuminate difficult texts, but, as C. affirms, they reveal 'the inadequacy of the anthropological category of "myth": we should always prefer indigenous notions to taxonomies with universal pretensions' (p. viii).

D.'s book starts with four essays (Part I) that were not in the French original. They examine the conceptual status of the categories of 'myth' and 'mythology', and how scholars have used them in their analyses of 'myths'. The essays that follow, most of them included in *L'écriture d'Orphée* (1989), deal with a variety of subjects and are presented under three headings: 'Does Mythology Have a Sex?' (Part II), 'Between the Labyrinth and the Overturned Table' (Part III), and 'Writing Mythology' (Part IV). They exemplify—sometimes, brilliantly—the thought-provoking readings that can be achieved with D.'s structural methodology. Yet they are presented as suggestions that need 'to be checked out, reconsidered, and challenged from different perspectives' (p. xv).

Both authors highlight the fact that the ancients used 'myth' in many ways and that they did not produce a simple definition of the concept. For D. '. . . among the Greeks themselves, the category of "myth" eluded the kind of simple and positive definition that we might expect' (p. 15). C., for his part, speaks of the 'constant ambivalence the Greeks demonstrated towards the narratives, and indeed the concept itself that we, without hesitation, call myth' (p. 26) and concludes: 'Myth is not a universal reality, mythology not a kind of cultural substance; consequently, it is not a genre, not some "Idealtyp"; there is simply no ontology of myth' (p. 27).

Both authors stress the rôle that Greek mythography played in shaping the

The Classical Review vol. 55 no. 2 © The Classical Association 2005; all rights reserved

https://doi.org/10.1093/clrevj/bni276 Published online by Cambridge University Press

concepts of 'myth' and 'mythology'. For D., only at the end of the fifth century did *muthos* come 'to designate a more or less autonomous discourse or form of knowledge' (p. 18). This transformation, which took place mainly in the works of Thucydides and Plato, produced the birth of 'mythology' in the beginning of the fourth century B.C., when 'as a result of the combined action of two types of thought –the one philosophical, the other historical—what had furtively been called myth was wiped out, melting away into a new landscape, now known as *mythology*, where mythographers, already professional figures, deploy their writing skills' (pp. 20–1). This is what D. calls mythology as knowledge (as opposed to mythology as tradition), which culminated in the *Library* attributed to Apollodorus (p. 32). C. also relates the birth of 'mythology' to mythography, which, in turn, is born in the collections of 'myths' compiled by the Alexandrian antiquarians. For him the paragon of these mythological manuals is the *Bibliotheke*, erroneously attributed to Apollodorus (p. 24). The problem is the dating of this work and its model, but C. does not elaborate on this point. Where C. and D. differ is in their interpretations of Thucydides; but even here, it is a question of nuance. Although C. detects in Thucydides a 'certain suspicion of poetic narrative forms, . . . meant more to charm the ears of the public than to serve the city', he sees is in him 'no "radical rupture" between the marvelous fictions of myth and the lights of rational history' (p. 22). D., on the other hand, writes: 'With Thucydides, the distinction becomes cut and dried: on the one hand there is tradition, which continues to express itself even in the public recitations . . . of the late fifth century; on the other, writing, now sure of itself, which rejects pleasure and . . . is aimed at a silent, solitary, reader' (p. 19).

Both authors rebel against the 'traditional' divide between *muthos* and *logos*. D. affirms that 'so-called mythical thought is not radically opposed to what is called rational thought' (p. xii). C. characterizes as fruitless 'all attempts at a great division and strict distinction between the logical (or scientific) and symbolic (or savage!) thought' (p. 32), and affirms that Greek culture did not accept the idea of an 'evolutionary development from *mûthos* to *logos*' (pp. 108–9).

In the preface to the English edition (p. xiv) D. explains his methodology in almost identical terms to the ones he uses to describe Lévi-Strauss's classic structuralist approach (pp. 29–30): meaning only emerges from how terms stand in opposition to each other; analyzing a myth involves taking account of all versions of that myth and others akin to it; this type of analysis requires a knowledge of the ethnographic context, that is, calendars, social institutions, rituals, vegetables, animals, etc. D. anticipates and rejects in strong terms a classical criticism of structuralism: 'Contrary to the perceptions of those who have never practiced it nor understand it, the structural analysis of myths involves not only the myths themselves but also an understanding of the concrete circumstances of the relevant societies' (p. 30).

C. is equally aware that the 'mythic' narratives themselves 'establish metaphorical connections between the various domains of ecology and other general knowledge of the society in question' (p. 32). In studying them, 'we must take into account the production and the function of these symbolic manifestations within their historical, social, and ideological contexts' (p. vii). For those unfamiliar with C.'s semionarrative approach and its terminology, the 'Introduction to the English Edition', by D. Berman, will be most useful. After explaining that 'C. is most indebted to the semiotic methodology developed by Greimas, which itself has roots in . . . Lévy-Strauss' (p. xiv), and criticizing classic structuralism—contra D.—as operating 'at the expense of the social and ideological context of specific narratives' (p. xvii), Berman describes C.'s methodology as post-structuralist. C. himself specifies his methodological claim

https://doi.org/10.1093/clrevj/bni276 Published online by Cambridge University Press

as one of 'critical asceticism' based on traditional scholarship and semionarrative, at a moment in our discipline in which 'the polish of appearances and superficiality supports claims made for the sake of competition and immediate profit' (p. vii).

In many ways these two books are excellent examples of what can be gained by the combination of advanced methods and good old scholarship.

Although these translations are for the most part clear and readable, C.'s book has moments of occasional awkwardness, and the reader will wince at misplaced accents in transliterated Greek words. *Errata* and typos remain in both, some irritating, e.g. D., p. 174 n. 7: Aeschylus, *Helen*, 2 should read Gorgias, *Encomium to Helen,* 2.

Brown University PURA NIETO HERNÁNDEZ
doi:10.1093/clrevj/bni276

INTRODUCING GREEK RELIGION

J. D. MIKALSON: *Ancient Greek Religion*. Pp. xiv + 225, maps, ills. Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005. Paper, £16.99, US$27.95 (Cased, £55, US$64.95). ISBN: 0-631-23223-0 (0-631-23222-2 hbk).

Jon Mikalson, with several previous books on aspects of Greek religion, is well placed to write a book entitled *Ancient Greek Religion*. In his Preface (p. xi) he sets out his aim to write a 'first introduction' to ancient Greek religion, dealing mainly but not exhaustively with the classical period, with his intention to have most of the focus on Athens. To overcome the sheer weight of topics involved, Mikalson has decided to deal with 'some basic concepts, . . . a select group of deities and cults, [and] religion as practiced [*sic*] in the context of the family, the village, and the city-state, and . . . the religious life of the individual . . .' (p. xi).

To this end, the book is divided into eight specific chapters. In the first chapter ('Overview: Greek Sanctuaries and Worship'; pp. 1–31), M. takes the example of the temple of Poseidon at Sounion (which he spells as Sunium) to describe a typical sanctuary, as a means of discussing the physical place of worship, its location, the altar, temenos, priests and priestesses, sacred days, dedications, statue, temple, and worship. By taking Poseidon's worship at Sounion as an example, he constructs for the reader an actual sanctuary and what took place there. Unfortunately, Sounion is not altogether a satisfactory example, as so little is known about so many aspects of the operation of this cult (as can be clearly seen in M.'s own account). M. would perhaps have been better off choosing a sanctuary about which there is substantial information with which to fill out his chosen categories.

In the second chapter, 'Greek Gods, Heroes, and Polytheism' (pp. 32–54), M. surveys the gods and heroes, ouranic and chthonic, and the nature of Greek polytheism. There is no discussion of each of the gods, but examples are given, such as Poseidon at Sounion for a god, and Theseus at Athens as a hero. The third chapter, 'Seven Greek Cult Myths' (pp. 55–67), takes seveal major myths, mainly from Athens, with about a page description of each. (Erechtheus is here identified with Erichthonios, but this is far from certain, p. 58.) M. describes the origins of the Athenians and the main deity Athena, as well as Poseidon, Dionysos, Artemis Brauronia, and

The Classical Review vol. 55 no. 2 © The Classical Association 2005; all rights reserved

https://doi.org/10.1093/clrevj/bni276 Published online by Cambridge University Press