Mysteriously Meant

Allen, Don Cameron

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

Allen, Don Cameron.


For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/71825
THE PROFESSIONAL MYTHOGRAPHER was a Renaissance creation, and the manuals he wrote were closely consulted by artists, men of letters, and all educated men. His primary sources were the literary texts of Greece and Rome, the earlier commentaries on these texts, the curious mythologies of the Middle Ages, and the newly discovered classical interpreters. From these works he gathered his raw material, which he classified and summarized. Although there are restrained exceptions like Giraldi, the force of tradition was too much for most of these compilers, and they found it impossible to avoid the euhemeristic, ethical, or moral readings of the Christian apologists and syncretists and of the symbolical and allegorical commentators on all ancient writings. Their readers found in their pages the same fascination with hidden meanings that impelled the scholiasts on Homer, Virgil, and Ovid.

By the middle of the sixteenth century the ancient mythographers Apollodorus, Hyginus, Antoninus Liberalis, and Cornutus had joined authorities like Proclus, Porphyry, Heraclitus, and Diodorus Siculus in the mythographers’ libraries. An accomplished scholar like Natale Conti does not hesitate to cite Silenus of Chios, mentioned by Eustathius, and Pherecydes, known through Celsus. However, it was Apollodorus and Cornutus, assisted by Cicero’s celebrated conversations On the Nature of the Gods, who furnished the warp for most mythographers’ webs. The first author was available in print in 1555 and the second in 1563; Cicero’s engaging little dialogue on religion was first published in 1471.

201
and reprinted many times before 1500. These authorities and the allegorical commentary of Heraclitus gave men of the Renaissance solid training in the Stoic modus legendi.

II

A man of the Renaissance learned from Dio Chrysostom's *Discourse on Homer* that Zeno of Citium, founder of Stoicism, said that Homer must sometimes be read in accordance with "appearances" and other times as "truth." This literary means of judgment might have pervaded his *Homeric Problems*, a book known to Cicero's Epicurean spokesman, Velleius, who remembers that Zeno identified Zeus with æther and said that the names of the gods "have been assigned allegorically to dumb and lifeless things." Zeno's disciple Persæus, Velleius said, believed that great men had been deified and was dismayed that divine honors have been awarded "to mean and ugly things and the rank of gods to dead men." Velleius, true to his master's prejudices, also talks about Chrysippus, the third in the Stoic succession, whose allegorical anatomy of the Moirai based on the etymology of their names got him quoted by both Theodoretus and Eusebius. He made nature myths of Jupiter, Ceres, and Neptune, identified Jupiter with Necessity or Fate, and "attempted to reconcile the tales about Orpheus, Musaeus, Hesiod, and Homer with his own theology . . . so that he makes it appear that even the earliest poets of ancient times, who had no glimpse of these doctrines, were all Stoics."1


2 The second in the Stoic succession is Cleanthes, who wrote a "Hymn to Zeus" so Christian in theme and expression that it might have been sung in Augustine's City of God. He interprets mythology after the manner of the *Cratylus* (394a-422b). He looked for the represented natural phenomena in the names of the gods or in their Homeric qualifications. Apollo represents the sun because "sometimes it rises here and sometimes there" ("απ' αλλον και αλλον τόπον"). If report is correct he may have invented the allegorization of the Labors of Hercules: see Cornutus, *De natura deorum*, ed. F. Osann (Gottingen, 1844), 225.


4 Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* VI. 263.

5 Cicero, *De natura deorum* I, 15. Apollo, Chrysippus thought, means that "the sun is not one of the many" ("a + pollon") "harmful manifestations of fire" (Macrobius, I. 17. 7). Plutarch (*Amatorius*. 757) is too religious for linguistic games but records that Chrysippus derived Ares from "anaires" or "cut-throat." As a priest of Apollo he had little tolerance for people who said Aphrodite was only "desire" and Hermes, "eloquence." "You surely will see
From the *Biblirca* of Apollodorus men of the Renaissance got a supply of learned but baffling information, without symbolic interpretation, about the Greek gods and heroes; but if they required further understanding, they had only to listen to Balbus, who defended under Cicero's guidance the faith of the Stoic sect against the criticisms of Velleius the Epicurean and Cotta the Academic. It was probably the one time in unburned pagan literature that a quasi-Christian advocate is harshly but safely treated by pagan opposites. In the course of his defense Balbus, a Stoic of the old school, reveals a knowledge of Stoic exegesis. This is as it should be because Cicero knew that Balbus was an accomplished reasoner worthy of being compared with the Stoics of Greece.  

When his turn to talk comes in *On the Nature of the Gods*, Balbus announces that most of the divinities known to the Romans got their haloes as rewards for the benefits which they bestowed on men. Heracles, Aesculapius, Romulus, and Quirinus were deified for this reason alone. But Balbus also knew that myths, sometimes called "superstitions," grew, as Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus stated, from scientific attempts to explain the ordinary workings of the universe. There was, for example, an old Greek belief that Caelus was mutilated by Saturn and that Saturn was put in bonds by Zeus. At first this myth seems immoral, but it masks a clever idea. Fire, the highest element, does not require genitals in order to procreate. Balbus is also a sublime philologist and is able to find merits in the divine nomenclatures. Cronus got his name from "time"; Saturn ("satur + anni") is sated with years; the names of Jove and Juno come from "iuvar e," or "to help." Neptune is "nare," or "to swim"; and Demeter is "earth-mother," or "Ge + mater." Once he has placed this evidence before his associates,
Balbus can agree that allegory, once in the myths, has been perverted by time into old wives’ tales.8

Cotta, a disciple of Carneades, looks coldly at any religion and is hardly contented by Balbus’ assault on superstition. “These are the superstitions of the unlearned,” he says in reference to the common myths, “but are the dogmas of your philosophers any better?”9 Are those “allegorizing and etymological methods of expounding mythology” superior to bare tales themselves? Balbus’ allegorical interpretation of the castration of Caelus, he goes on, implies that the “idiots” who invented these legends were also philosophers.10 As for the meddling with significant names—it is not only dangerous but in a religious sense foolish. “What sort of interpretation can be gotten out of Vejovis or Vulcan?” The great Stoics, Cotta complains, wasted too much time on “rationalizations.” But Cotta said all of this a generation before the birth of Christ; had he lived a little later, he would have been appalled at how far rationalization had pushed the universal lust for allegory and symbolism under the auspices of Lucius Annaeus Cornutus, not to mention Heraclitus.

Cornutus, or Phornutus as he was sometimes called in the Renaissance, was a Greek who came to Rome at the time of Philo Judaeus and St. Paul. He wrote a lost commentary on Virgil and a treatise called The Hellenic Theology, of which the extant On the Nature of the Gods is assumed to be a fragmentary and corrupt version.11 His fame rests on the fact that he was the teacher of Lucan and Persius.12 In the fifth satire of the latter he is revealed as a man of letters with a literary doctrine, qualities which do not appear in the compendium of Stoic allegory which the sixteenth century knew so well. In this inane volume, so often reprinted, names of gods and heroes are linguistically dissected for significances, and myths are scrutinized to uncover their moral or physical meanings. Everything is presented to stress the philosophical directions of Stoicism.

For Cornutus, as for most Greek symbolists, Zeus is aether, brother of Hera, or “aer.” She rises from the earth; he descends; and

8 Ibid., II. 23-28.
9 Ibid., III. 16.
10 Ibid., III. 24.
11 Decharme (op. cit., p. 261) thinks his work is simply an anthology of the opinions of Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus, but Bruno Schmidt in his De Cornuti theologiae Graecae compendio (Halle, 1912) (pp. 44-50) argues for Apollodorus as his source.
12 The relation between Cornutus and Persius is described in the Vita Persii found in most editions of the satirist.
from their fecundating union in mid-air, all is created.\textsuperscript{13} The rebelling Titans represent diverse or contrary qualities of things, as is suggested by the name of the Titan Koios, a slip of the pen for "poios" or "of what sort?" Hyperion, on the other hand, gets his name from the fact he is at "the top."\textsuperscript{14} Briareus, who helped the Olympians, symbolizes former times when the elements, or Giants, were contending for supremacy and Thetis, or Providence, called on this monster, whose name is derived from "airein," or "grasping" to put them in order.\textsuperscript{15} For Cornutus, as for Cleanthes, Apollo is the sun and is born of Leto, or "lethe," "oblivion"; because when the sun sets, night brings forgetfulness to men. His name may also be formed from "aploun," because he dissolves the shadows of night, or from "apoluein" because he "frees" men from disease. His father Zeus is pure fire, but domestic fire is called Hephaestus from "ephthai," or "kindling." Some say, Cornutus recalls, that Hephaestus is the son of Zeus and Hera; but others think that Hera bore him by parthenogenesis and point to the fact that flames fed by pure air become thicker. He is lame and walks with a stick because sticks are required to build fires; his fall from Heaven merely symbolizes lightning, man’s first source of fire. He is married to Aphrodite in order to provide the animal heat required in her work.\textsuperscript{16}

The vigorous virtue of Athena, Cornutus writes, is a symbol of the purity of abstract thought; nonetheless, Hermes is the Logos sent to men to make manifest the will of the gods. Hercules is also the personification of reason. His lionskin is a symbol of invincibility, but "it would also have been unseemly for such a great leader to wander about naked."\textsuperscript{17} Cornutus has similar explanations of other Hellenic deities, but his account of Dionysus is a fine example of his allegorical technique. The god is doubly born to represent ripening of the grapes and their treading in the wine vats. Because men are stripped bare of all defenses under the influence of wine, the god of wine is always shown in the nude. To show that staggering drunks must be supported, he carries a thyrsus which ends in a point to warn men that drinking often ends in violence. In some accounts Dionysus is said to cohabit with nymphs to emphasize the necessity of diluting wine. The goat is his symbolic animal and the magpie his accompanying bird. The first indicates by its lascivious nature

\textsuperscript{13} Cornutus, \textit{Theologiae Graecae compendium}, ed. C. Lenz (Leipzig, 1881), p. 3.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 30.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 27.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., pp. 33-34.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., pp. 62-64.
the aphrodisiacal nature of wine; the second is an emblem of drunken chatter. In its tendrils and black berries his ivy crown recalls the grape. His flight with his nurses, his plunging into the sea to escape the violent Lycurgus, and his rescue by Thetis form an allegorical series. The nurses are the vines that suckle the grapes; Lycurgus is the vintner; and Thetis is sea water, usually mingled with wine as a preservative. When Dionysus is torn to pieces by the sycophants, the tearing of the grape bunches, which will be resurrected as wine, is intended.18

The Stoic rationalization of myth, which, as Balbus put it, had been debased into old wives’ tales, found a ready reception among the medieval symbolists and allegorizers. However, the concern of antiquity with this matter does not end with Cornutus’ account of the nature of the gods. Almost two centuries later the myths were raised to a higher understanding when Julian the Apostate attempted to revive old beliefs. Julian admitted that these legends were invented by a pastoral folk for the instruction of childlike souls and that poets converted them into fables which entertained “but conveyed moral instruction besides.”19 Because “Nature loves to hide her secrets and does not suffer the concealed truth about the essence of the gods to be flung in naked words to the profane,” myths have serious philosophical value. Philosophers from Orpheus and Plato onward have used myth ethically, “not casually but of set purpose.” There is an incongruous element in a myth, he thinks, which “warns us not to believe the bare words but to seek diligently for the hidden truth.” The incongruous element is in the thought and not in the words, and Julian demonstrates how under “the guidance of the gods” there is something higher and graver in the myth of Dionysus leading the reader away from the “common euhemeristic explanation.”20

In his “Hymn to the Mother of the Gods,”21 Julian searches for “the original meanings of things” in the myth of Attis, which is intended “to remove the unlimited in man and lead him back to the definite.” It is possible that Proclus, who lived a century later, read these remarks when he was inspired to say that myths stimulate the reader to seek the truth, to avoid superficial concepts, and to explore the obscure intentions of the original writers in order to learn “what natures and powers they intend to signify to posterity by mystical symbols.”22 But Sallustius, author of

18 Ibid., pp. 57–62.
20 Ibid., 216c–221d.
21 Ibid., 169d–170c.
Concerning the Gods and the Universe and the close friend of Julian, is a proper exponent of the Emperor's idea.

When the Cynic Heracleios summoned Julian to a conference on these matters in A.D. 362, Sallustius, Prefect of the Orient, accompanied him and unquestionably read Julian's response to Heracleios and his hymn (both results of the confrontation) as soon as the ink was dry. Like his master, Sallustius knew that the old religion required philosophical reformation, but he likewise saw only superstition in Christianity. Foolish ideas, as he says, do not form the basis of a reasonable theology, which must rest on essential, bodiless divinities. To return to the old truths one must inquire why the ancients hid them in myths, "a question belonging to philosophy." Myths have many shades of understanding, but they inform men that "the gods exist, telling us who they are and of what sort," provided we are able to know. The very obscurity of myths and their seeming infamy and licentiousness are meant to teach the soul by their strangeness immediately to think, "the words a veil and truth a mystery."

Sallustius classifies myths as theological, physical, psychical, material, and combinations of these categories. He has almost no patience with material myths invented by "ignorant" Egyptians, who think the earth is Isis; moisture, Osiris; heat, Typhon; the fruits of the soil, Adonis; wine, Dionysus. "To say that these things, as also plants and stones and animals, are sacred to the gods is the part of reasonable men; to call them gods, is the part of madmen." The myth of Cronus is at once both theological and physical. A good example of the blended interpretation is found in the myth of the judgment of Paris.

Here the banquet of the gods signifies the supramundane powers of the gods, and that is why they are together; the golden apple signifies the universe, which, as it is made up of opposites, is rightly said to be thrown by Strife; as the various gods give various gifts to the universe, they are thought to vie with one another for the possession of the apple; further the soul that lives in accordance with sense-perception (for that is Paris), seeing beauty alone and not the other powers in the universe, says that the apple is Aphrodite's. 23

Before he attends to his full theological doctrine, Sallustius also offers a reading of the Attis myth which is less elaborate and different in some points from Julian's, but, nonetheless, echoes some of his phrases. Both

of these allegorists were unknown to the Middle Ages, but the late sixteenth century knew Julian; thanks to Naudé and Thomas Gale, the seventeenth century had a text of Sallustius.

III

It is no secret that Christianity made the majority of its early converts among women. The *paterfamilias* might be visiting the temple of Mars or Salus, but his wife and his daughters-in-law would be exchanging pious letters with St. Ambrose or St. Jerome. Gregory of Tours preserves the remarks of Queen Clotild to Clovis, who was reluctant to agree to the baptism of their firstborn son.

The gods whom you worship are nothing; they cannot help others or themselves because they are images made of wood, stone, or metal. The names you have given them are of men not of gods. Saturn was a man, fabled to have fled his son to escape being dethroned; Jupiter, a lewd practiser of debaucheries and unnatural vices, the abuser of his women relatives, could not abstain from fornication with his own sister, as she admits in the words “sister and spouse of Jove.” What power had Mars or Mercury? They may have known magic arts; they never had the power of the Divine Name.

St. Clotild had readily accepted the euhemeristic convictions of the Fathers; but Gregory, writing in the latter half of the sixth century, knew that there were other ways to look at the pagan gods. When he reaches the end of his history of the Franks, he recommends as the best instructor in elegance the curiously popular compendium of Martianus Capella.

The *De nuptiis philologiae et Mercurii et de septem artibus liberalibus libri novem* was brought together sometime between 410 and 419 by a grammarian contemporary with the grammarian Macrobius. Both of these men had no prejudices against allegory; both were polymaths; both were converts to an esoteric philosophy; and both were indispensable authorities for the Middle Ages. Their books were also well thumbed by Renaissance readers. Macrobius, like Athenaeus, garnered learning for sheer joy, but sections of the *Saturnalia* describe the physical meaning of the divine myths, which is invariably betrayed by the etymology of the names of the gods. Macrobius’ theories of proper interpretation, un-
ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION OF RENAISSANCE MYTHOGRAPHERS

commonly close to those of Proclus and Julian, are found in that second Bible of medieval men, his *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*, where myth as an instrument of the philosopher is defended against the strictures of the Epicurean, Colotes of Lampsacus. Macrobius does not recommend all myths as philosophically acceptable. Those that charm the ear but contribute nothing to the enhancement of truth or the teaching of virtue are to be rejected. Of those that lead to right uses, only those the subject of which is true and decently related are admissible. Those in which the subject is untrue, or true but indecently uttered, are of no philosophical importance. But even the properly phrased myths are useful only for dissertations on the soul, daemons, or the lesser gods. When it is a matter of the First Principle of the Intelligences, which encloses all Ideas, these matters "which surpass discourse and human thought," it is necessary to seek out "images and examples."

What Macrobius meant by "similitudes et exempla" is never explained, but lack of explanation is a habit with exotic thinkers.

Only the first two parts of Martianus Capella's hierogamy fully feed the hunger of the allegorist. The book, which is in the tradition of Varro's disciplinary writings, although its literary form follows that of the Menippean satire, manages to outdistance its allegorical predecessors like the *Choice of Hercules* of Prodicus or the *Tabula Vitae* of the so-called Cebes. The limping Litae of Homer's *Iliad* and Parmenides' poem about his encounter with Queen Philosophy had sown allegorical seeds of vigorous growth. Philology adds together the numbers found in the letters of her name and that of her spouse, introduces the mystic theory of the upsilon, and restates various Pythagorean formulas to prove the divine nature of the marriage. The Orphic egg, the rites of Leucas, and other symbolical items are carried into the mystic ascent to the circle of Juno, a divinity to be adored in silence. In the Milky Way, place of the blessed, she enjoys her apotheosis. All of this is part of the abracadabra of the Neo-Platonists and the mystery religions, and Gregory of Tours might well have spurned it. What he could not overlook was the minute symbolical evaluation of the attributes of the gods and the allegorizations of their myths, which appear not only in the two initial ceremonial books but also elsewhere when Martianus is discoursing on solid subjects like geometry. The pagan pantheon might be filled with cancerous tales, but they could be cured with

---

28 Martianus Capella, *De nuptiis philologiae et Mercurii*, ed. U. F. Kopp (Frankfort, 1836) 567.
ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION OF RENAISSANCE MYTHOGRAPHERS

What Martianus failed to remark in his interpretations his medieval exegetes supplied or extended; he also had a worthy successor in Fabius Planciades Fulgentius.

Sometime in the latter part of the fifth century or the first part of the sixth, the author of the *Expositio Virgilianae contentiae* gathered seventy-five myths together in a *Mythologiarum libri tres*. At least a dozen editions of the work were called for between 1500 and 1600, and the seventeenth-century compilers of mythographers’ collections, Müncker and Van Staveren, included it in their volumes. When it was first published, the pious author was confused with Bishop Fulgentius of Ruspe or his biographer Fulgentius Ferrandus, a misidentification which continued even after Francisco Modio had faulted it in the sixty-first epistle of his *Novantiquae lectiones*, published in Frankfort in 1584. The medieval renown of Fulgentius was immense. John of Salisbury, Henry of Hereford, Bernard of Sylvester—to name a few—leaned on his interpretations, and Remigius of Auxerre, who wrote a commentary on Martianus Capella, did not scant him. The width of his influence can be seen in a poem of the goliards, where the names and attributes of the horses of the sun are all derived from him.

Dedicated to the Presbyter Catus, the opening pages of the *Mythologia* describe the composer’s retreat to a hidden country villa at the time of a barbaric invasion. When peace is restored he wanders in the best medieval fashion through a meadow and espies a shady place under a tree. Resting here, he sleeps, but he first utters his impressions of the devastations of war in a series of trochaics. His old friend Calliope appears to him in a dream to tell him that the maidens of Helicon, once at home in Athens and Rome, have now moved to Alexandria; but even this formerly brilliant city has now sent Galen and his companions into exile. She is amazed that in these declining days Fulgentius still pursues the Muses. He assures her of his continued devotion, and she encourages him to write more poems. Fulgentius informs Calliope (and his readers)

29 See him on Apollo (p. 212), Juno (p. 168), Jupiter (p. 32), and Vulcan (p. 49).
30 There were commentaries on Martianus Capella by Johannes Scottus, Notker, Hadoardus, Gunzo, and Hucbald. That of Remigius of Auxerre has been edited by Cora E. Lutz, *Remigii Autissiodorensis commentum in Martianum Capellam* (Leyden, 1962).
32 *Carmina Burana*, ed. A. Hilka and O. Schumann (Heidelberg, 1941) I. 2. 31 is based on Fulgentius' details.
that he plans to write a mythology, not one in which possible impossibilities are brought together, but one in which the poetical fittings of Hellas and her poets will be removed to reveal the underlying truth or mystical meaning. Calliope recommends that he use the comforts of Philosophy and Urania (to whom she introduces him), and that for relaxation from his serious studies he seek the aid of Satire. After a short explanation of idolatry (he repeats the ancient anecdote about the beginning of idolatry attributed to Diophanus of Sparta, the story of Syrophanus’ statue to his dead son) he turns to his explanation of the myth of Saturn.\footnote{Fulgentius, \textit{Opera}, ed. Rudolf Helm (Leipzig, 1898), pp. 3–80.}

Supporting Fulgentius’ readings of the myths stands his great skill as an etymologist. In scores of instances he supplies the classical word or phrase behind the proper name, so that “nomen” becomes without any delay the same as “omen.” Phaeton, thanks to this system, is from “phainon,” Leda from “loide,” and Ulysses from “olov xenos”; on the Latin side, Venus derives from “vana res”; Lavinia, from “laborum via”; and Vulcan, from “voluntatis calor.” All of this philology is sound enough, but Fulgentius really triumphs in the allegorical interpretation of myths. Neptune is also called Poseidon because water reflects images (“poiounta eiden”), and he carries a trident because water is liquid, fecundating, and potable. He is married to Amphitrite, or “circumfusing three,” to signify that water is found in the heaven, the air, and on earth. Proserpine, daughter of Ceres, or “joy in crops,” symbolizes the roots serpenting through the soil. Mercury, or “mercium cura,” has to do with business; his winged talaria mean “negotia tions everywhere”; his caduceus represents the scepter of mercantile rule and its snakelike powers of wounding. In this manner the myths of Hercules, Endymion, Leda, and many other famous legends are unhulled; but Fulgentius’ treatment of the story of Hero and Leander shows his approach to myth in full dress.

The third book of the \textit{Mythologia} contains several accounts of ancient romances, and that of Hero and Leander reads in this fashion:

\begin{quote}
Love and danger are frequently companions, and while Leander, driven by Eros, the Greek for “love,” swam toward his desired one, he did not know this. Some think he was called Leander from “lusin androgunon,” that is “weakness of men.” He swam at night, attempting risks in the dark. Hero is the symbol of Love. She bears a lamp, and what should Love carry but a flame to show the dangerous way to the yearning one. It is a flame quickly extinguished because young love does not endure. Finally, Leander swam in the nude because Love knows how to strip her disciples and throw them in a sea of danger. With the lamp out both found death in
\end{quote}
the sea. The significance of this is that the libido in both sexes dies when it is put out by the vapors of advancing years. They were, therefore, said to die in the sea just as if it were in the cold humors of old age. The little fires of heated youth chill in old age to a torpid lethargy.

A medieval monk with his mind on the *amor divinus* and a class of youths to instruct could hardly ask for a better reading of Musaeus' poem.

In Isidore of Seville sixth-century Spain furnished the early Middle Ages with a final encyclopedist whose compendium of information rivalled that of Martianus Capella. A short section of the eighth book of the *Etymologiae* is called the *De diis gentium* and is filled with more than a hundred euhemeristic, moral, etymological, and physical accounts of ancient idolatry. The emphases are not out of order because Spain was still not a totally Christian country. In 572 the bishops attending the second Synod of Braga were urged to persuade their people to abandon the worship of idols. About the same time the Archbishop of Bracara in a “De correctione rusticorum” complains that godless men are still worshiped as gods. The *Etymologiae* was printed at least ten times before 1500 and many times afterwards; hence, without probably intending to do so, St. Isidore supplied the next thousand years with an epitomized guide to symbolical and allegorical interpretation.

The mythological section begins by explaining that all pagan gods—Isis, Jove, Juba, Faunus, Quirinus—were formerly human beings. They were deified for merit: Aesculapius for medicine; Vulcan for ironmongering; Mercury for merchandising. Idols were first erected in Egypt to commemorate the dead, but demons persuaded men to venerate them. Certain of the Gentiles used significant names to express physical laws or to describe the nature of the elements in vain fables which were twisted by poets into histories of persons who were infamous or licentious. Saturn, for example, meant one “full of years”; if Cronus, or Time, devoured his children, it only meant that he swallowed his offspring, the years. Jove derived his name from “iuvare”; when he appeared as a bull and carried off Europa, it was in a ship of that name. His seduction of the Danae teaches that gold will buy the virtue of women. Neptune is “nube tonans”; Vulcan, “volans candor,” and

---

34 Isidore derived a great amount of information from Martianus Capella; see Jacques Fontaine, *Isidore de Séville et la culture classique dans l'Espagne Wisigothique* (Paris, 1959), pp. 969-70.

“mors” is the root of Mars. Isidore, a master of the patristic allegorical methods, had little need for instruction in the art, but it is also clear that he had both Macrobius and Cornutus in his library.36

Martianus Capella, Fulgentius, and Isidore had medieval imitators,37 but the original texts of these followers were not printed in the Renaissance. A poor exception is the Libellus de imaginibus deorum, which the sixteenth century attributed to the twelfth-century Albericus of London, author of “Vaticanus Tertius,” from which this epitomized but highly influential pamphlet was derived. Unlike its source text, it is mainly concerned with the manner in which artists represented the gods, goddesses, and demigods of Greece and Rome.38 In doing this it bridged the temporal distance between the Imagines of Philostratus and the Delle imagini degli dei degli Antichi of Cartari.

The compiler of the Libellus did not overwhelm his readers with symbolism and allegory as the true Albericus had done. The deities are described in proper posture with their designating implements, birds, beasts, and reptiles. Mars, one learns, is called Mavors from “mares vorans.” Juno is the air. Mercury carries a reed pipe as a sign of eloquence. The section on Hercules, which dwarfs all the others, is closest to the real text of Albericus. The demigod’s name comes from “herocleos” or “glory of strong men.” In his victory over the centaurs he demonstrates the triumph of the virtuous soul over carnal concupiscence. Each one of the twelve labors is expounded in terms of a conquest of a virtue over some human weakness. In his final feat of taking the weight of the skies from the shoulders of the famous astrologer Atlas,

36 Fontaine, op. cit., pp. 944, 968.
37 See Chapter VII, notes 1-10.
38 Robert Raschke, De Alberico mythologo (Bratislava, 1912). The twelfth-century Byzantine Joannes Tzetzes followed a more sophisticated mode of allegorical interpretation than his European contemporaries. His Allegoriae Homerica was printed for the first time in F. Matranga, Anecdota Graeca (Rome, 1850), I, 1–295 and was generally unknown to Renaissance scholars, but a Greek-Latin text of his Allegoriae mythologicae, said to be extracted from the thirteen thousand line Historiarum variarum chiliades was published in Paris in 1616 as Allegoriae mythologicae, physicae, morales. I have been unable to find this text in that edited by T. Kiessling in Leipzig in 1826; in fact, the meters of the two texts are not the same. Kiessling bases his text on the one published by Nicolaus Gerbel at Basel in 1546 as an appendix to Lycophron’s Cassandra. I have not been able to see this edition. In the 1616 text Tzetzes defines allegory as a form of eloquence, shading the real direction of thought and expressing the unexpected. He classifies it as elemental, spiritual, and a combination of both as found in the things of nature. He interprets the myths of the major gods as they express ideas about the elements, the human mind and heart, and the physical functions of man and his world. Cosmogony, he states, was first established by the Egyptians before the birth of Moses, and the Greeks had it from them. He hastens to add that none of these people got it as correctly as the prophets of the true God.
Hercules, himself learned in the way of the stars, attends what might be called the first astronomical congress. But all the efforts of the Middle Ages to find meanings in pagan mythology, similar in nature but probably not so intense as those they found in the Scripture, helped sweep the way for Giovanni Boccaccio, the first of the systematic mythographers.

IV

In the sixth circle of the Inferno Dante is frightened by the sight of the Erinyes, and, as Virgil comfortingly takes his hand, the voice of the narrator is heard advising those of “sound mind to contemplate the doctrine hidden under the veil of mysterious verse.” The passage in the Divine Comedy closely coincides with the letter to Can Grande della Scala, where Dante, remembering Servius’ remarks on Virgil’s first line, describes his own poetry as “polysemos,” or of several meanings, the literal and the allegorical or mystical. Petrarch, son of Dante’s fellow exile, loudly defended the theological worth of poetry in his famous apologetic letter to his monastic brother. To support his views—and he quotes St. Isidore—he sends one of his own allegorical bucolics with an explanation of what he intended. There can be little question that Petrarch read the classics for symbolic meaning; but if there was a doubt, his letter to Aretino on the moral truths of the Aeneid would help dispel it. For Petrarch as for Fulgentius, Aeneas was “Man on the Way of Life.” The storms endured are those of anger and desire, which can be checked by Aeolus, or reason. As the son of Venus, or pleasure, he is inclined to his mother’s passions; when she meets Aeneas in the midst of the forest, Virgil is thinking of those middle years of life when men pursue pleasure more avidly. The garments of the goddess are girded so that, as pleasure, she may flee quickly; she is clad as a huntress “who

39 Auctores mythographi Latini, ed. A. van Staveren (Leyden and Amsterdam, 1742), pp. 931-37. This famous work is a revision of Muncker’s revision of Commeline’s Mythologici Latini (Heidelberg, 1599); it also contains the texts of Hyginus, Fulgentius, and Lactantius Placidus. The Libellus attributed by the Renaissance to Albertus Philosophus was first printed in 1490 in Venice with L. Fenestella, De Romanarum magistratibus. There were subsequent editions of the two works, but the Libellus is usually found in the more congenial company of Hyginus. Liebschütz dates it at 1400 and thinks it derives from Bersuire; but since Wilkins shows it was used by Chaucer for his descriptions, it must be somewhat earlier; cf. “Description of Pagan Divinities from Petrarch to Chaucer,” Speculum XXXI (1957), 511-22.

40 Divina Comedia IX. 61-64.


42 Petrarch, Lettere familiari II. 486-96.
hunts the souls of us miserable ones." To charm and then smite her victims her hair is unbound and she carries a bow.

About 1350 Petrarch’s great friend Boccaccio was asked, through the offices of Donnino of Parma, to furnish King Hugo IV with a "genealogy of Gentile gods" and "an explanation of the meanings illustrious men found under the cortex of the fables." Protesting his lack of knowledge and skill, Boccaccio agreed to accept the commission so that the King might understand "not only the art of the ancient poets and the consanguinity of the false gods but the natural truths hidden with surprising art." The compilation of the Genealogia deorum gentilium required much of Boccaccio’s attention for the remainder of his life. The compilation, originally planned for thirteen books, finally included two additional books in which poetry was described and defended as a kind of theology. It is evident too that as Boccaccio came on new information or ideas, he inserted it in the margins of his manuscript, which, consequently, grew. In keeping with the traveler’s metaphors of Virgil, Dante, and Petrarch, Boccaccio represented himself as an explorer of the lost land of myth.

In one section of the Proem, Boccaccio describes the spread of paganism which "blazed up on the Cyclades and other Aegean islands" during the youth of Abraham. This "foolishness" he proposes to follow as it wanders through mythological manuscripts as if he were a Marco Polo of libraries. He will carry out the King’s wishes if mountain passages are easy, desert roads open, rivers fordable, and seas tranquil. He will succeed "if Aeolus . . . sends me strong winds and favorable from his cave, or if I may have on my feet the golden sandals of Argeiphontes." At the end of the preface he requests the help of the Christian God in the management of his boat. Keeping the navigation metaphor in mind, Boccaccio begins each book with an entry in his ship’s log. In the second book he descends to Erebus; in the ninth he ascends Mt. Ida; he is at the Pillars of Hercules in Book Ten; and he is in the Polar Regions in Book Seven. In the last two books he represents himself as a sea-tired sailor ready to defend the purpose of his voyage and its possible success. It is then that he presents his theory of interpretation.

43 Petrarch, Lettere senili I. 240–58.
Myths, according to Boccaccio's preface, are "polysemos" in understanding; Books Fourteen and Fifteen, though filled with other matter, explain what Boccaccio meant by multiple meaning. Convinced that the first Christian emperor and Pope Sylvester had committed all opprobrious pagan literature to the flames, Boccaccio held that only the nobler kind, "wherein they exhibited the work of both men and nature... under an appropriate guise of myth and image," remains. All literature, in Boccaccio's opinion, can be placed in four categories of which fiction-like-truth and fiction-like-history can be read in a second sense. Fiction-like-truth dresses "divine and human matters in fiction"; fiction-like-history (Aeneas in the storm) seems to be history, "but its meaning is much different." Boccaccio knew the mythographer Varro through St. Augustine and spoke of him in the Proem; now he expatiates on the Varronian modes of explication. "Physical theology is found in great poets, who conceal physical and moral truths in their inventions." The ancient theology should be called "physiology or ethology," according to whether the myths "embody truth concerning physical or human nature." Sometimes, when Boccaccio takes his method to the myth, he finds nothing; but it is he and not the method that fails. Because of the manifold contradictions, he turns the Io-Isis myths over to "the experts"; at other times he leaves untwistable intricacies up to God. He can compare himself to Argus, who once slept in all his hundred eyes. "What wonder, then, if I with only two eyes am overcome sometimes? Let my detractors interpret the myths I cannot, altering inadequate explanation and correcting what is based on error." If the author is a pilgrim he is also a genealogist descending a heraldic tree. Boccaccio looked for the founder of the pagan pantheon and identified him as Demogorgon, which is Lactantius' annotation on Statius' Thebiados IV, 516 ("triplicis mundi summum"). Theodontius, a medieval collector of classical detritus, who owes his immortality to Boccaccio, had promoted this slip of the pen to the father of the gods. For Boccaccio, Demogorgon is a frightful deity living with his consorts, Eternity and Chaos, in a cavern at earth's center. From

45 Boccaccio, Genealogia XV. 4.
46 Ibid., XIV. 14.
47 Ibid., XV. 8; XIV. 9.
48 Ibid., IV. 6.
49 Ibid., VII. 24; V. 1, 16.
50 Ibid., XV. 4.
51 C. Landi, Demogorgone, con saggio di nuova edizione delle Genealogie deorum gentilium del Boccaccio e silloge dei frammenti di Teodonzio (Palermo, 1930). Lactantius' gloss reads, "Dicit autem deum demioourg, cuius scire nomen non licet."
Aether, son of Demogorgon's child Erebus, springs a line of gods and heroes. Of course there are confusions, but like mythologists before him, Boccaccio settles problems by assuming that there are several gods of the same name. There are a few divinities in the Genealogia known only to Boccaccio, and there are occasional variations in the myths; Perseus, for instance, rides Pegasus, and Bellona gets to be Minerva. But considering the handicaps under which he labored, Boccaccio is amazingly correct.

Ordinarily, when Boccaccio is on the proper offshoot of the divine tree, the Genealogia provides a simple summary of the depending myths. But Boccaccio, who had acquired small Greek, makes an occasional stab at an etymology, which is sometimes correct. On the other hand, Mors, eighteenth child of Erebus, gets his name from the fact that he bites, or from the bite of our first parents by which we die, or from Mars, or from "amarus," meaning "bitter." His allegorical readings of myths are in keeping with the traditional theory. In his account of Demogorgon's eldest child Litigium, Boccaccio relates the several ways of reading the myth of Perseus' encounter with the Gorgon. It may be accepted as a historical event, or it may be read morally as a wise man's victory over sin; allegorically the myth may be understood as the soul spurning the mundane and rising piously to celestial regions; analogically the myth suggests Christ, conqueror of the princes of the world, ascending to his father. "These senses, though given different names, can all be called 'allegorical'... which comes from 'allon' which means 'alien or different' in Latin and signifies any sense not historical or literal." Other moral or physical translations of myth—some taken from Fulgentius, Lactantius Placidus, Ugucio, Theodontius, or Pronapides, and some, mayhap, original—turn up throughout the Genealogia; but Boccaccio's reading of the Aeneas-Dido story is example enough.

The enemies of poets, Boccaccio recalls, object to Virgil because they hold that no wise man would ever tell Dido's story, which the Roman knew was not historically true. But Virgil had four reasons for so doing. First, like his master Homer, Virgil began in the middle of

52 Boccaccio supplied a genealogical tree with his manuscript, and good examples of it can be found in E. H. Wilkins, The University of Chicago Manuscript of the Genealogia deorum gentilium (Chicago, 1927).
53 Ibid., I. 6; III. 22.
54 Ibid., X. 27.
55 Ibid., V. 48; IX. 3.
57 Ibid., I. 32.
58 Ibid., I. 3.
things, and, wishing to have someone present to hear Aeneas' tale, made Dido his hostess "although she did not dwell then but many generations later." He also wanted to show how human passions are subdued. Boccaccio explains:

So he presents Concupiscence as Dido and the attracting power of Love armed with all that is needed; and in Aeneas, a figure ready for such acts and succumbing. But after showing the enticement of Lust, he demonstrates how we are led back to Virtue by bringing in Mercury, interpreter of the gods, to reprove Aeneas for his vanity and lasciviousness and remind him of glory. By Mercury, Virgil means the prick of conscience or the reproof of some eloquent friend which awakens us, sleeping in a bed of shame, and brings us back to the beautiful, straight path of Virtue.

Virgil also desired, Boccaccio continues, to praise the Julian gens by showing Aeneas scorning fleshly immodesty and female enticements. Lastly, in Dido's dying execrations, the Punic Wars and Rome's triumph are prophetically implied. 59

V

Shortly after Boccaccio's Genealogia was available in print, his readers could scan the advice of Cornutus on the interpretation of myth. Certain that both Homer and Hesiod incorporated the science and philosophy of older and wiser men in their verse, Cornutus urges moderation in second readings and protests against Cleanthes' Herculean allegories. The exegete should not play with words or extract something too clever for the wits of an ancient philosopher from a myth. 60 Strange as these observations seem when voiced by Cornutus, they had the advantage of being overlooked since most Renaissance mythographers shared Ficino's belief in the divine mysteries found in these pieces, 61 an opinion supported by his worthy disciples, Pico della Mirandola 62 and Cristoforo Landino. 63 Though Gianfrancesco Boccardo only rarely gets off the literal track in his De orum genealogiae of 1498, 64 Pietro Montefalcio can

69 Ibid., XIV. 13.
60 Cornutus, De natura deorum, pp. 45-46, 64.
61 Ficino, Opera, p. 1537.
62 Pico della Mirandola, De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, de ente et uno, e scritti vari, ed. E. Garin (Florence, 1942), p. 580. In the Heptaplus Pico describes his theory of the three worlds from which all allegorical discipline is derived.
63 We have seen Landino at work on Virgil; see the preface to his edition of Dante (Venice, 1578), sig. B3v.
64 This is a five-book poem in hexameters expanding Hesiod; the author, a Salo schoolmaster, occasionally makes an etymological or allegorical comparison.
derive Vesta from "vi stando," Mercury from "medius currens," and Vulcan from "volcano." In a generation or so experts like Antonio Cingale would compose allegories to rival those of Fulgentius and Bernard of Sylvester, but Boccaccio’s first sixteenth-century imitator, though a modest one, was Georg Pictor, a German scholar-physician.

Between the completion of Boccaccio’s *Genealogia* and the 1532 publication of Pictor’s *Theologia mythologica*, neither the science of mythology nor the allegorical rendering of myth sank out of sight. During these years Landino wrote his commentary and essays on the *Aeneid*, and Salutati, his *De laboribus Herculis*. Poliziano, Filelfo, and other humanists made fresh use of the mythology in their poetry but never forgot its subtler meanings. Late in the fifteenth century the pagan deities, often explaining their names and sometimes their other values, trooped into the *Elucidarius carminum et historiarum vel vocabularius poeticus* of Herman van Beek. During the next two hundred years this small onomasticon published in Holland in 1501 would widen to almost a thousand pages in the Oxford edition of 1670, “emaculated” by Nicolas Lloyd. In 1506 Raffaello Maffei of Volterra furnished his deceptively named *Commentariorum urbanorum libri triginta* with a section on pagan gods, and Jean Tixier de Ravisi, who listed gods under appropriate moral headings in his *Officina*, supplied brief biographies as headnotes for his alphabetical collections on them in the *Epitheta* of 1518. Few of these reference works were as complete as Pictor’s volume, which proposes to expound the names, describe the appearance and significant symbols, and provide the allegory attending each antique divinity.

By his own admission Pictor draws his material from Albericus, Fulgentius, Isidore, Martianus Capella, Palaephatus, Cornutus, and other euhemerists, etymologists, and allegorists of classical and humanistic stripe. He never mentions Boccaccio, but he knows Theodontius’

---

65 *De cognominibus deorum* (Perugia, 1525). Montefalcio is the first modern mythographer to classify the epithets applied to gods, and he makes an effort at unification, pointing out that Ops, Cybele, Rhea, Alma Mater, Mater Phrygia, Mater Idaea, etc., are the same goddess.

66 In 1586 Giovanni Bevilacqua’s translation of Claudian’s poem as *Il Ratto di Proserpina* appeared at Palermo with Antonino Cingale’s commentary. A disciple of Landino, Cingale would read ancient poetry, as he does the Bible, not with “lazy ears” but as deeply as he can. Allegories precede each of the three books of Claudian’s poem. Pluto is a rich man whose conscience is obfuscated by transitory affairs. When Jove grants him Proserpine we see Providence dealing better with us than we suppose. Although Ceres has trained Proserpine well (witness her skill as a weaver), when she leaves her we are thereby warned not to leave virgins unprotected, seeing that Proserpine promptly goes out to gather flowers and slips incautiously into momentary and seeming delights.
comments from the *Genealogia*. He is especially attracted by the true meaning of proper names as invented by Greeks but preserved by the Germans with their Burgharts, Erharts, Gebharts, and other meaningful Christian appellations. As he writes his accounts of the fifty-seven higher powers known to the Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, and Syrians, deities that include Occasion, Favor, the twelve months, the nine Muses, the three Parcae, and the Harpies, he omits no rational etymology. Saturn gets his name from “satura”; Venus from “venustas”; and Minerva from “minitans armis.” After the explanation of name, Pictor always offers, in the manner of Albericus whom he sometimes copies, a description of the artistic representation of the deity and a symbolical or allegorical exposition of the description. Hercules’ name comes from “Hras kleos,” or “praise of Juno”; but sometimes identified as the sun, his name may mean “aeris cleos,” or “glory of air.” He is represented in statues as a stern man clad in a lion’s skin and holding three apples and the club with which he slew the dragon-custodian of the Garden of the Hesperides. His hands are calloused; his hair, disordered. The dragon, or “ever-watchful concupiscence,” is destroyed by the club of “philosophy” and the apples of “control of rage”; “restraint of desire” and “conquest of voluptuousness” are thereby gained. The lionskin symbolized prudence, which contains the mad passions of the soul; the calloused hands stand for the patient virtue of labor which scorns ornament and colors. For all of this wisdom Pictor thanks Macrobius, Apuleius, Varro, Diodorus, Seneca, Plautus, Ovid, and Caelius Rhodiginus.

In 1558 Pictor published *Apotheoseos tam exterarum gentium quam Romanorum deorum libri tres*, which repeats some of the material of the *Theologia* but adds much that Pictor had learned in the intervening quarter of a century. The *Apotheoseos* is a series of dialogues between Theophrastus and his pupil Evander about thirty-nine divine powers who are now properly divided into Magni Dei, Selecti, and Indigetes. The descriptions of the gods and goddesses are assisted by fairly crude woodcuts, but the same cut sometimes has to serve two deities, and toward the end of the book blanks are left for Volupia, Harpocrates, Angeronia, Osiris, Isis, and nine other divinities. Unlike the *Theologia*, which began with Janus, the *Apotheoseos* starts with Varro’s discriminations and a long lecture on Jupiter. Pictor represents the series of dialogues as a form of recreational pedagogy in his dedication to the “generous” Count Werner von Zimber. The interlocutors of the *Apoth-
eseos follow Pictor’s instructions, and Theophrastus cheerfully answers Evander’s constant questions to provide him with the moral and physical values inherent in myth. At the end of the last book the magister concludes this exploration of paganism with a prayer to “the true and eternal God of all gods.” While he was praying Pictor was undoubtedly collecting note slips for his Pantopollion of 1568, a treatise in which he personally defended “omnium deorum Deus” against the metaphysical strictures of the non-Christian philosophers.

Pictor’s second mythology was preceded by De cognominibus deorumorum of Julianus Aurelius, the nom de plume of J. A. Haurech. This substantial study, the work of many years according to the preface, appeared with the 1543 Basel edition of Cornutus. Its composer excuses himself on the ground that Tertullian, Lactantius, and St. Augustine had busied themselves with pagan faiths and that recently Fulgentius and Boccaccio had followed the same course. If Augustine and Fulgentius, both elderly bishops, had studied mythology, he inquires, is there anything wrong with his attempt to sort out the various Jupiters and to record the fact that Diana, whose name may come from “duana” or “deviana,” is also known as Opin, Trivia, Dictynna, Britomartis, and many other titles? First Haurech presents his readers with a euhemeristic theory of the gods, who, he is sure, were supported handsomely by cacodaemons in order to frustrate the contrary Christian convictions of Anaxagoras, Xenophanes, Plato, and Aristotle. Then Haurech, who knows Varro’s distinctions, writes essays on the twelve great gods in two books and devotes a third section to lesser deities like Janus, Bacchus, and Pluto. There is little allegory save what enters in the course of expounding an etymology, but Haurech is far more learned than Pictor and is a worthy predecessor of Giglio Gregorio Giraldi, the first scholarly mythographer.

Since he was born of poor parents, Giraldi’s struggle to obtain an education was the first act in a life of tragic experiences. He graphically describes them in the almost desperate Progymnasma adversus literas et literatos and in poems to Antonio Tebaldo and Celio Calcagnini. Although each one of his books must have cost him heroic effort, Giraldi managed to be the first to write a history of Greek and Latin poetry and to compose an account of the poets of his own time. His superior Historia de deis gentium was published in 1548 as a reference work for men of letters. It differs vastly from all medieval forerunners in that Giraldi, who had written treatises on sacrifices and on funeral rites, perceived certain unnoticed aspects of the religions of Greece and Rome,
like local gods and those derived from human affection. This learned masterwork was also preceded by two trial flights, which were later incorporated in the Historia, the De Musis, completed in 1507, and the De Herculis, in 1514.

The De Musis, published in 1511, traces the development of the harmonious sisters from an original three or four with unfamiliar names and different duties until the occupants of the choir coincided in number with the nine spheres and Apollo was added as the tenth, or presiding Muse. Giraldi notices that even then the haunts of the Muses vary from account to account, as do their powers and rites. After writing a fully annotated section on each of the nine, he concludes his libellus with a study of Hercules Musagetes, the Odeum, and the Museum.68 The De Herculis, which was not published until 1539,69 had behind it the moral readings of Albericus, the Christ-Hercules comparison implied in the Inferno,70 the three allegorical books of Coluccio Salutati's account of Hercules' labors, and a dialogue between a poet and theologian about the virtues of Hercules written by Marcus Marulic.71 In his preface to Ercole d'Este, Giraldi tells him that as a boy, he himself wrote a life of Hercules in imitation of Plutarch's Theseus, "adding interpretations of the fables and histories or what the Greeks call allegories." He thinks that this was good enough for a child but not worthy of a man ("nec maturo satis homini dignus"); hence, he now proposes to supply a biography of this hero, whom he clearly regards as once having been a man on whose broad shoulders the Greeks loaded many a tall tale or historical happening thinly concealed.

Giraldi's general avoidance of the symbolical or allegorical readings, which enchanted him as a youth, is rather impressive since he published in 1551 Aenigmata pleraque antiquorum explicantur, a collection of some forty riddles including that of Samson-Hercules, and Philosophi Pythagorae symbolorum interpretatio, an attempt to make sense, even Christian sense, out of the Pythagorean prohibitions and admonitions. These books depended on what Giraldi could find in other authorities of a trustworthy nature and not in his own inventive mind. Thus,

68 Giraldi, Opera omnia (Leyden, 1696), I, 555-68.
69 Ibid., II, 570-98.
70 Inferno IX, 98-99. If the canzone "O alta prole del superno Giove" published by Curt Rothe, "Dante Dresdensia" Deutsches Dante Jahrbuch, XII (1930), 136-38 is Dante's, the overt connection between the two heroes is even earlier than has been supposed.
71 In 1549 there was published in Venice a book with the title Dialogo di Marco Marullo delle eccellenti virtu e maravigliosi fatti di Hercole, di latino in volgar nuovamente tradotto per Bernardino Chrisolpho. I can find no information about the original.
they were fittingly companioned by the *Historia*, a work praised by Joseph Scaliger, Claude Saumaise, Casaubon, and G. J. Voss and owned by Montaigne, who complains in "Of a Defect in our Policies" about the bad treatment accorded Lilius Gregorius Giraldus by Italy. The book deserved its contemporary fame because, as Giraldi once again informs Duke Ercole, it came into being because of all the errors he encountered not only in reading the poets and viewing the work of painters, but also in the mythological handbooks themselves. Too much emphasis had been given the book of "Johannes Buccatus," a man studious and erudite for his age but expressing himself better in Italian than in Latin and having less than no Greek. The work of Boccaccio, says Giraldi, begins with the error of making Demogorgon the father of all the gods. Unhappily, no ancient ever heard of Demogorgon, let alone worshiped him; Boccaccio's primary deity was simply a misreading of "demiourgon," a word used by Plato and other great men to signify "the highest God, Creator of all."\(^{72}\)

In the first *syntagma*, Giraldi relates that Gentiles were inclined to worship God's creatures such as the sun and moon, or, like Euhemerus, to assume that all gods had been men, or, like Diagoras, to deny the existence of a deity. Although he regards as ridiculous the assumption that Noah is Janus, and, consequently, does not subscribe to the beliefs in Hebrew derivation of some of his prized patristic authorities, he hastens to excuse the Jews from polytheism by repeating the conventional explanation of the plural "Elohim" of Genesis as "confirming the mystery of the Trinity."\(^{73}\) He inspects the notions of men of various nations, including some from Germany, about a supreme God and collects the views on the Absolute of scores of Greek and Latin philosophers and poets. In similar wise he presents the various ancient classifications of gods: the "consentes," "semidei," "selecti," "aeviterni," "indigetes," "divipotes," and "novensiles." He discovers and lists divinities based on human actions such as Truth, Hope, and Concord; he also lists miscellaneous gods like Fever, Laughter, and Fear, and "dei topicici," or deities whose veneration was limited to a small or particular geographical area.

Giraldi proceeds to classify the major deities into thirteen groups based on their powers and functions, a method which enables him to fit Venus, Cupid, the Graces, Vulcan, and Adonis into the same mansion. In the fifth *syntagma*, he writes about Neptune and his various manifesta-

\(^{72}\) Giraldi, I, 157.
tions as Phythalmius Neptune, Aegaeus Neptune, or Canobus Neptune; then he surrounds the great god with lesser marine deities such as Phorcus, Glaucus, Portunus, and scores of Nereids. The Dioscuri are then introduced probably through their association with the Argonauts, and, finally, Giraldi writes about Aeolus and the winds in his charge. The adjustment of some divinities to their categorical companions is sometimes difficult to understand, and it is also true that Giraldi often gets lost in his notes and presents classical witnesses who contradict each other.

Though he is proud of his purely scientific approach, Giraldi is not loath to offer etymologies or to reprint the allegorical readings of others. He prides himself on the use of ancient texts, but he cites more recent allegorical mythographers like Martianus Capella, Lactantius Placidus, and Macrobius. Sometimes he looks at the embossing on coins or at a suite of classical descriptions when he writes on the physical appearance of a god or goddess. There are times, however, when he simply copies Albericus, “a lower-class author in whom I have no confidence,” or looks, as he does in his delineation of Fraud, at the account in “Dante Alighieri” or the scorned “Buccatio.” He frequently turns to Fulgentius, although he does not “wholly approve of what he says or how he says it”; on one occasion, having referred his readers to the allegory “concocted” by Fulgentius about Attis, he says that now that he has mentioned it, he will omit it. In spite of these regular objections to the African allegorist, he sometimes must agree with him. It is obvious, for example, that the “cinthus” of Hyacinthus is the Greek word for “violet.” Proud as he is of his knowledge of truly ancient and authentic authorities, Giraldi, in spite of his protests, can quote the suspect. He is unable to make a break with the past; though he has reached man’s estate, he cannot pass up a good etymology, a nice euhe-merism, or a moral and physical allegory. Whenever he recalls something

74 Ibid., I, 5, 75, 158.
75 Cornutus, of whose work he has a manuscript, on Jupiter (ibid., I, 89–90) and pseudo-Heraclitus on Proteus (ibid., I, 168).
76 Ibid., I, 77, 121, 160.
77 Ibid., I, 118, 131.
78 Ibid., I, 121, 123, 155.
79 Ibid., I, 123.
80 Ibid., I, 76–77, 86.
81 Ibid., I, 153.
82 Ibid., I, 37.
83 Ibid., I, 158.
84 Ibid., I, 142.
85 Ibid., I, 146.
of this nature, he shakes his head and puts down a footnote. His mythology is, nevertheless, a milestone on the road of classical scholarship; it is far better from a modern point of view than its very popular successor, the *Mythologiae sive explicationis fabularum libri decem* by Natale Conti first published in Venice in 1551 (?).

Little is known about Conti besides his writings. He wrote a volume of Latin verse, which includes *Myrmicomachia*, or the *Battle of Flies and Ants*. He wrote a *History of His Own Times*, an account of the Turkish Wars, and translated into Latin selected works of Aristotle, Athenaeus, Menander, Plutarch, and other Greek authors. In its 1581 edition the *Mythologiae* was annotated by the famous editor of classical texts Frederick Sylburg. In 1583 Geoffroy Linocier’s treatise on the Muses and Antonio Tritonio’s *Mythologia*, first printed separately in 1560, were added. Between 1600 and 1650, there were at least five Latin and five French editions because Conti’s book was almost a mythological library by itself. Paolo Frambotti, who published the 1637 Padua edition, supplied a bibliography of worthy mythographers prior to Conti; in his mind they are Hyginus, Albericus, Sallustius (newly discovered and being edited by Leone Allacci), Fulgentius, Haurech, and Giraldi.

In his own bibliography of more than three hundred authors, among whom—to pull a few names from the P’s—are rare faces like those of Perimander, Phaestus, Phanodemus, and Phanodius, Conti lists only Hyginus from Frambotti’s parade. Boccaccio and Giraldi, fellow countrymen and competitors, are unnamed in the bibliography and not mentioned in the text. Conti may have wished to seem completely independent of his predecessors, and in some respects he was. His system of organization is his own, although on occasion his immortals cluster in a manner which recalls Giraldi’s arrangements. His knowledge of Greek and Greek authorities is clearly better than Giraldi’s, and his translations into Latin appear generally to have been his own. On the other hand, he is not overtly writing a book for men of letters (although he certainly did) because he has been bitten by the same doctrine that Steuco and his successors were promulgating. No king had asked him to lift the myths to see what was beneath them, but that is one of his major purposes; he spends the first five chapters of Book One, which is a short history of pagan religions and religious rites, explaining his theory.

Conti subscribes to the belief that before the time of Plato, Greeks, who learned a venerable philosophy in Egypt, concealed this wisdom from *hoi polloi* in fables, which were in time twisted in the studies of
lying poets into a "theology of fools." For this reason the earliest Church fathers cried out against those who transferred the worship of the true God to natural objects or pure fictions. Nonetheless, under these fables are philosophical teachings about natural forces, the movements of the heavens, and ethical conduct. He plans to do nothing with sottish or superstitious legends; he will interpret those which elevate mankind to the consideration of celestial matters, lead towards virtue, and discover natural secrets necessary to life. The explicator, Conti proposes, should be versed in ancient literature (and he eventually demonstrates his training in the rhetorical theories of Aristotle and Aphantius), and, like a good herbalist, should distinguish what is spiritually salubrious from what is not. Realising the essentially evil nature of man and wishing to teach the fear of God, the ancients invented fables, which instructed and morally disciplined men but also cheered and encouraged those of troubled hearts. Possessed by this intention, Conti cannot understand the literalists who deny the existence of hidden meanings which are "more divine" and worthy of knowing.

Were it not for the headings of each of the following nine books, it would be difficult to see a rationale in Conti's grouping of gods, goddesses, demigods, daemons, and heroes. One wonders why Hercules, the Harpies, the Gorgons, Medea, Pelops, and Atalanta were in the same society. But Conti is actually supporting the common notion that the Greeks and Romans had ideals similar to those of the Christians; hence, his first aggregation suggests a belief in one God; his second, a belief in a Hereafter; and his third, notions about the generation of men. The associates of Hercules teach that the best men pursued fame for the ends of justice and usefulness. The purely literal account of each mythological figure, profusely illustrated by references and quotations from Greek and Latin poets, is ordinarily completed with a moral, physical, or historical exposition, which is sometimes traditional, although Conti is not inclined to give credits in these sections. But to show his method in full scope, one may look at his history of Circe.

Homer, Hesiod, Dionysius of Miletus, Herodian, Apollonius of Rhodes, Pausanias, Ovid, Virgil, Pliny the Elder, Tzetzes, and Strabo are searched to provide information about Circe's genealogy, her murdered husband, her discovery ofaconite and vervain, her residence in Tuscany or Colchis, her composition of apotropaic, and her adventures with Odysseus. Her name means "to mix" and as daughter of Helios and Perse, child of Ocean, she mingles heat and moisture from which everything is generated. The four maidens who help her cull herbs are the
elements. Since elemental things do not perish (although they change), she is said to be immortal. The idea of change is also signified by her transformation of men into animals. She dwells in Aea, designating the Greek plaintive outcry of those who are weary or ashamed. She cannot enchant Odysseus, who symbolizes the immortal soul gifted by God, but the companions of Odysseus, the body and its passions, are subject to alteration and destruction. It is possible that she is also the moon affecting by its powers the growth of plants and the course of fountains. In a moral sense Circe is simply animal pleasures, and men are transformed by her into whatever beast-passion dominates them. The ancients have wished, then, to advise men to govern themselves by reason and reason’s copesmate, temperance.  

The last sections of most of Conti’s legends conclude similarly. The myth of Pasiphae is historically the seduction of Minos’ wife by General Taurus; morally it represents a soul abandoning its reason and beauty and receiving the form of an animal with the chaotic results symbolized by the windings of the Labyrinth. Aesculapius signifies the healing power of the sun, which enables men to put off maladies as his symbolic serpent sheds its skin. His crow symbolizes prognosis; his cock, diligence in the care of the sick. The congress of Mars and Venus only means that adultery is incited by a conjunction of these planets. Saturn’s expulsion from his realm shows that a wicked man cannot be happy for long. Charon is the “joy” one has when, thanks to God’s mercy, he passes through waves of trouble and dies certain of his innocence. Jason’s voyage, like that of Odysseus, is an allegory of man’s life; listening to Medea, the Greek word for “advice,” he avoids avarice and injustice, teaching men to fear and honor God and the kings of their lands.

To make the interpretations of the myths easier for the average interested reader to finger, Conti’s tenth and final book bears the title “That all philosophic teachings are contained in the fables.” He apolo-
gizes for composing this section by confessing that he will have wasted his labors unless he briefly summarizes what his earlier books contain. This admission is followed by a series of sententious theses epitomizing the metaphysical opinions of "Plato, Aristotle, Empedocles, Parmenides, Pythagoras, and others." The philosophical series begins with "That God created the world, which consists of universal matter and is, consequently, one, not many"; the series concludes "That after death each soul is punished according to the nature of its sins." Learning all of this from the Egyptian hieroglyphic texts, the Greeks converted it into Olympian fables, which have one or more plausible interpretations. The historical, moral, and physical translations provided by Conti enabled the allegorist to grasp the handle of meaning. To Christianize Conti's allegorical emphases, "Anonymous" adds to the exegesis by comparing Eden to the Garden of Adonis; Bacchus, Deucalion, and Janus to Noah; Japhethus to Japheth; Orpheus to Christ; Vulcan to Tubalcain; and Saturn to Adam. Tritonio concludes the complete editions by classifying the deities and heroes, as Tixier de Ravisi had done, under moral headings such as "Audacious," "Cruel," "Proud," "Envious." The search for the second, third, and fourth meanings, carefully played down by Giraldi, was firmly reestablished in the best ancient and medieval manner by this authoritative and immensely popular mythology.

In 1556 a very different book, *Delle Immagini de gli Dei de gli Antichi* of Vicenzo Cartari was published in Venice. Cartari lived between 1520 and 1570, but almost nothing is known about him and the bibliographical states of the volume he wrote. There were thirteen Italian editions, five French editions, a German edition, and an English translation by Richard Lynche before the seventeenth century ended. The Venice edition of 1556 is illustrated with a prefatory woodcut portrait of Cartari, but the 1571 edition is filled with eighty-five etchings of a very romantic nature by Bolognino Zaltieri. The same etchings appear in the Ziletti edition of 1580 and the very rare edition of 1587 by the same Venetian printer. Reversed and possibly redone, they were used in Antoine du Verdier's Latin translation of 1581; somewhat better copied by Paul Hachenberg, but not so well turned out as the originals, they were published as the appendix to the Frankfort reprint of du Verdier's text in 1687. More than 160 illustrations adorn most seventeenth-century editions, but these illustrations are rather crude. Some of them are new, but in general the illustrator simply breaks up one of Zaltieri's original drawings into component parts. The two figures of an original etching become in this way two separate illustrations. An at-
tempt is made to flavor them with the spice of antiquity by inserting pertinent ancient coins or engraved gems as detail reproductions.

The original text of Cartari, which concludes with an essay on the Graces, remains constant, but the indices become more and more exact in order to enable the reader to use the book more efficiently. In the French version of du Verdier, published in 1606 and 1610, there are additions by the translator and Laplone Richette. With the Padua text of 1615 Cesare Malfatti supplied what is called an “allegoric,” and Lorenzo Pignoria, who explained the Bembine Tabula, adds learned emendations and annotations in a long appendix. This additional material appears in all subsequent Italian reprints but not in the Latin versions. The immense popularity of the Imagini is indicated by the accretions, but the bibliographical problems of the book are as yet unsolved.

The first publisher, Marcolini of Venice, prefaced the editio princeps with an address to the reader, where he pointed out that many men had written about the gods but no one before Cartari had described their statues or their other representations; hence, this volume should not only please the ordinary reader but be of great service to sculptors, painters, and poets. In the 1615 edition, this preface is replaced by one written by Pignoria, where man’s superiority in joining his head and hands in the composition of “figures” is praised. Taking Hor Apollo as his most ancient point of departure, Pignoria praises the essays on analogy, or symbolic compositions, by Guido Pancirolo, Piero Valeriano, Andrea Alciati, Gabriel Faerno, Antonio Agostini, Fulvio Orsino, Abraham van Goorle, Joost Lipse, and other scholars who had published and explained antiquarian objects. Antiquarianism can hardly be said to begin with Cartari, but his volume of descriptions certainly was a telling stimulus to its advancement.93

It cannot be assumed that Cartari was an antiquarian in the seventeenth-century sense of the word; nor had he the pioneering instincts of Peter Apian, whose copied inscriptions, the Inscriptiones Sacrosanctae Vetusstatis, were printed in Ingolstadt in 1534 and were liberally used in the Imagini. Cartari undoubtedly saw the reproduction of the symbolic ship in the Church of St. Agnes, to which he alludes in his section on the “Nave di Bacco,”94 but it was not antique. His other references to plastic objects, such as the “Fidii simulacrum,” are generally taken from the

93 Because of its availability I have used the 1647 edition of Cartari’s Delle Imagini de gli Dei degli Antichi reproduced by the Akademische Druck (Graz, 1963) for reference. I have seen six of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century editions.
94 Ibid., p. 226.
work of Guillaume Du Choul on Roman religion. His description of coins of Faustina to illustrate “eternity,” Juno Lucina, and Concordia were all published by this French antiquarian. The same may be said of his emblem for Macaria. Sometimes he errs, as when he describes Concord as portrayed on a coin of Nero whereas it is really the reverse of a medal of Augustus on Du Choul’s facing page. His descriptions of a coin of Nerva and of a Pax reverse could, on the other hand, be from actual observation or from another publication. In the main Cartari’s descriptions of antiquarian monuments are taken from sound classical authorities like Philostratus, Pausanias, and the elder Pliny.

Among his contemporaries or recent predecessors, Cartari draws on Alciati, Giraldi, and very heavily on Alexander of Naples or Alexander ab Alexandro, whose Dies Geniales, a suite of scholarly classical articles, appeared first in Rome in 1522. He also refers to Petrarch, to Leo Hebraeus, to Landino’s commentary on the Aeneid, to Alciati’s emblems, and to Giraldi. Among the ancient mythographers, he used Apollodorus, Diodorus, Hyginus, Macrobius, Cornutus, Palaephatus, and Hor Apollo as well as the Christian revilers of myth, Lactantius, Firmicus Maternus, Arnobius, Tertullian, and Augustine. Among medieval experts, he leans most stoutly on Martianus Capella, but he has read Lactantius Placidus, Fulgentius, Eustathius, and Albericus of London. Boccaccio receives special attention. He says of Boccaccio’s Demogorgon, “But I have never seen any ancient writer who speaks of him.” He mentions Boccaccio’s comparison of the peacock of Juno to the rich and powerful of his day, “which could be said of many today.” Boccaccio and Fulgentius come together to furnish his description of Thetis, but Boccaccio alone tells him why crowns of grass were sacred to

95 Ibid., p. 36, and Du Choul, Discours de la Religion des anciens Romains (Wesel, 1672), p. 30. The first edition of Du Choul is that of 1555. In the following footnotes the page numbers in parentheses refer to this work.
96 Ibid., pp. 12 (p. 128), 96 (p. 158), 283 (p. 27).
97 Ibid., p. 255 (p. 208).
98 Ibid., p. 169 (p. 16).
99 Ibid., p. 105.
100 Ibid., p. 168.
101 Ibid., p. 263.
102 Ibid., p. 272.
103 Ibid., p. 118.
104 Ibid., p. 196.
105 Ibid., p. 276.
106 Ibid., p. 12.
107 Ibid., p. 98.
108 Ibid., p. 138.
Mars. On numerous occasions Cartari stands ready to repeat Boccaccio's allegorical or symbolic explanations. Pan's two horns symbolize "the courses and distances of the planets and their affect on the earth"; the Magna Mater's crown and scepter indicate "human riches and the power of kings"; the Sirens in meadows of scattered bones signify "the ruin and death brought by lascivious thoughts"; and Pluto's three-wheeled chariot is "a warning against the uncertainties of ambition."

The Imagini opens with an essay on religion, which is, in Cartari's mind, an innate characteristic distinguishing men from beasts; but man, who had only to lift his eyes to the heavens to see the works of God, was so shortsighted that he mistook the sun, moon, and even animals for the ruling divinity. In fact as each nation, sometimes each man, selected a deity, polytheism, which embraced gods, demons, and heroes, spread beyond belief. In general, however, the great twelve, or the Consenti, were mainly worshiped, but every site on land or sea was said to have a divine spirit inhabiting it. In due course, although there were pagan objectors and the Hebrews, knowing the true God, were totally opposed, images of these gods were created and revered. Thousands of these figures were to be seen in the ancient world, and Lactantius attributed the creation of the first idol to Prometheus, a historical event which begot the myth that it was he who created the first man of mud. Plato, for Cartari, wrote the better explanation of the myth when he stated that Prometheus was Providence, creatrix of all, a goddess adored by antiquity in the form of a grave and governing mother.

The Imagini, each section of which is controlled by an etching or woodcut based on a classical literary description or on a published antiquarian object, begins with Eternity. The account of this primal being is succeeded by discussions of Saturn, Apollo, Diana, Jupiter, Juno, the Great Mother, Neptune, Pluto, Mercury, Minerva, Vulcan, Mars, Bacchus, Fortune, Cupid, Venus, and other gods and goddesses. Each major section is further divided in order to explicate a reconstruction of a statue, bas-relief, coin reverse, or other classical object in which the deity under discussion appears with identifying symbols or in association with other divinities. Cartari goes beyond the religious limits of Greece and Rome. The essay on Diana not only treats her triform

109 Ibid., p. 215.
110 Ibid., p. 74.
111 Ibid., p. 112.
112 Ibid., p. 132.
113 Ibid., p. 151.
nature but also describes her further manifestations as Isis and Dea Natura. Apollo is, consequently, related to Osiris, Adad, Adargate, Serapis, Aesculapius, Salus, and Hygeia; Mercury, however, is compan­ioned with Concord, Eloquence, Sleep and Dreams, Anubis, and Her­cules. In this fashion no deity is overlooked and the abstract divinities, handsomely remembered by Giraldi, attend the Consenti and demigods to provide painters and poets with a congregation of symbolic personifi­cations.

Cartari’s method is to weave together the mythic literary material with etymological, euhemeristic, symbolical, and allegorical expositions. He is an arranger and adjuster of what has been written and not an inventor of interpretation. He is actually the first modern to attempt the explanation of ancient works of art, and he uses learning to support what he says. His margins or his text usually credit his authorities. Fulgentius, for example, enables him to find the secret meaning for the three heads of Cerberus and to spell out the etymology of the names of the Parcae. The section devoted to Saturn is characteristic of Cartari’s customary procedure.

What Cartari has to say about Saturn comes principally from Macrobius, Pausanias, Eusebius, Plato, Ovid, and Martianus Capella. The exposition is introduced with lines from the eighth book of the Aeneid describing the westward flight of the dethroned king. Cartari relates the happy reception of Saturn by King Janus of Latium and the united rule of the two monarchs, which was of so much benefit to mankind that King Saturn was deified. Saturn’s symbol is a scythe because he taught man the arts of agriculture; but he is also drawn as an old man, badly dressed, bareheaded, and about to devour a bundle containing his children. In this portrayal he stands for Time, or Cronus. He is old and ill clothed because Time is either eternal or began when all things were made out of Chaos and the measurable movements of the heavens commenced; hence, Saturn is also said to be the son of Uranus. Some think his shabby dress symbolizes the plain living of the Roman Republic and his uncovered head, the reverence of early Romans for open and undisguised truth. Cartari turns to the common myth of Saturn, Rhea, or Ops, and their four children and repeats the old allegory of the four elements devoured by time. He reprints Martianus Capella’s

---

114 Ibid., p. 149.
115 Ibid., p. 162.
description of Saturn holding the “ouroboros” serpent, illustrated by Zaltieri, and adds his astrological explanation. He likewise describes two statues (one of which is reproduced) of the three-headed Saturn, who symbolizes past, present, and future. Platonists think Saturn is an allegory of the pure mind which finds a Golden Age in contemplation, but there is also an ancient picture of Saturn with tied feet to indicate the close relation between moments in time and the regular flow of causes according to natural law.

When Cesare Malfatti’s “allegoric” was added to Cartari’s text, it supplied an index to each drawing with an epitomized explanation of the artist’s intent. Mercury is “to be seen with the caduceus, symbol of concord, unity, and peace, and with animals consecrated to him and signifying industry and vigilance in contracting and negotiating.” In an adjoining woodcut Mercury stands with Minerva to represent the necessary union of “eloquence and prudence.” Editions containing Malfatti’s allegorical indices have Pignoria’s appendix of annotations and additions, which are sometimes correctives and often augmentative and more definite. As an accomplished antiquarian Pignoria adds the gods of India, Mexico, and Japan to Cartari’s gods of Greece and Egypt. Cartari’s method had been anticipated by Albericus and Pictor, but he brought it to perfection and was one of the founders of the school of antiquarian interpreters which would flourish in the seventeenth century. As a symbolist and allegorist he steers between the sparingly careful approach of Giraldi and the carefree abandon of Conti. All three mythographers made such impressive advances over Boccaccio and his immediate successors that they dominated the field; no seventeenth-century scholar, man of letters, or artist could do without their mythologies.

VI

The vast success of Giraldi, Conti, and Cartari, especially of the latter two, made the publication of further mythological handbooks hardly worth the effort. In 1577 Stephen Bateman wrote The Golden Boke of the Leaden Gods, which moved from a pantheon of forty-odd pagan deities into secular ones beginning with the Pope and going on to heretics like the Anabaptists. Bateman describes how the god was represented and then writes a “signification.” His representations are in the manner of Albericus and are usually translations from Pictor’s Theologia Mythologica with an occasional addition from Cartari. The “significations” are drawn mainly from Pictor or from an authority described
by him. Seventy years later Milton's "Chaplain Ross," brought out his *Mystagogus Poeticus*, a lexicon of mythology. Ross, whose *Pansebeia*, a history of world religions, is the target of a jesting, offhand allusion in *Hudibras*, supplied Christian allegorical interpretations for all of pagan mythology. Beginning with Achilles and concluding with Zetus, Ross uncovers a double handful of deeper meanings in every myth; but while he was opulently inventive, as Addison observed, he drew heavily on the symbolic interpreters, stirring in their equivalents with those of his own concoction. After summarizing a myth he summons the "Interpreter" to supply an hors d'oeuvre of meaning in which he often finds a biblical story distorted or thinly disguised.

Shortly after Ross disclosed the heart of ancient legend, Pierre Gautruche, a Jesuit of Caen, finished in 1653 his *L'Histoire poétique, pour l'intelligence des Poètes et auteurs anciens*, which was turned into English by Marius d'Assigny as *The Poetical Histories*. Gautruche spent his first book on major and minor gods; his second, on demigods and heroes, the Trojan War, and the subsequent adventures of the Greek magnates; and his third, on honors rendered pagan gods. In the second book he places an essay on the truth of fable, in which he relates with examples the several Greek methods of seeking history or a moral and physical understanding of these myths. It was not, he writes, a consequence of popular error because the philosophers to whom "the truth of one God was evident" through the ministry of the Natural Light accepted these superstitions either "from a shameful fear of the common law or from a weak and detestable complaisance."

In his translation d'Assigny adds to each chapter notes which are sometimes larger than the original text. To Book One he appended an essay on heathen deities mentioned in the Bible and those worshiped by the English. He contributes to Book Two famous pagans "not mentioned by Gatruchius" and a chapter on gods who were formerly men. There is a fourth book on "Roman Curiosities" and a fifth on Egyptian hieroglyphics in which he points out the similarities between Egyptian and Christian theology. Subscribing to the theory of the demonic perversion of the true belief, d'Assigny attacks allegorical readings.

For I look upon such Expositions as have been already given to the Fables of the Heathen Gods, as silly productions and groundless fancies of Religious Minds,

---

118 Gautruche, *L'Histoire poétique* (Caen, 1673), pp. 174-84. In his *Mythologia deorum et heroum* (Stargard, 1660), Heinrich Schaevius produced an onomasticon identifying geographical places, mythical figures, and historical moments in classical literature; there are no attempts at interpretation.
who have laboured to find in the ignorance of Paganism, the knowledge of the Gospel. In the contrivances and inspirations of the Devil, the sublimest Mysteries of Christianity. Such interpreters of the Poets, are near related to the wise Expositor of the Revelations, who would need declare the meaning of the Visions of S. John, by certain Characters found upon the back of some Fishes taken near the North Pole. The wit of Man may stretch out a comparison between Light and Darkness, between Virtue and Vice, between Christianity and Gentilism; but I see no reason to believe the latter was a favourer of the former.\footnote{Gautruche, \textit{Poetical Histories} (London, 1672), pp. bi-biv.}

The efforts of Cartari and other mythographers to instruct the designers showed an impressive influence in Renaissance painting, but it can also be seen in the vogue of handsomely illustrated mythologies such as Michel de Marolles, \textit{Tableaux du Temple des Muses} published in 1655 and in the subsequent parallel French translations and Latin texts of Ovid by Pierre du Ryer and Antoine Banier. The Abbé Marolles' book was commissioned by the Royal Councillor Jacques Favereau, who had in his cabinet a collection of mythological drawings by "the best masters." These drawings engraved by the Dutch artist Abraham Diepenbeek are the raison d'être for the \textit{Tableaux}. Favereau, who died before he saw the book, was a poet and an antiquarian. Among other works, he brought together in 1613 a collection of French, Greek, and Latin verses by divers hands to celebrate the discovery of a statue of Mercury in the excavation for the Luxemburg Palace. The drawings turned over to Marolles by Pierre Favereau were sixty-eight in number and were intended, it can be gathered, "to represent the vices and virtues in the most famous of ancient fables." Sonnets of an allegorical nature were supposed to accompany each drawing, and Marolles preserves one of them on Proteus in his "advertissement." By way of a preface there is an allegorical explanation of the Temple of the Muses (the etching on the title page), which might be Favereau's; but his proposed intention to search "for the moral, physical, and political sense" of each myth was hardly pursued by Marolles.

The \textit{Tableau} separates into seven mythological classifications, which would have startled any professional mythographer; they are: the origin of the world and creation, loves of gods and men, hunts and combats, twins and sea-gods, adventure in air and on water, events on earth, and death, mourning, Hades, and sleep. Each illustrative plate is followed by a highly literary prose description and the pertinent myth, which is annotated learnedly by the author of the prose. All of ancient literature is combed for information, and the mythologies of Albericus, Boccaccio, Eustathius, Fulgentius, Conti, and Giraldi are often con-
sulted. Marolles does not shun etymological considerations, and sometimes he supplies euhemeristic or allegorical explanations; but with the careful phrase "according to Phornutus" or "as Palaephatus writes," he detaches himself from responsibility. In this cautious manner Marolles differs from the Jesuit François Pomey, whose Pantheum mythicum, seu fabulosa deorum historia, cleared for publication by the provincial of Lyons in April, 1658, was published in the succeeding year.

The Pantheum mythicum became the mythological handbook of the following two centuries. The famous classical scholar Samuel Petiscus, engaged by the publisher to correct the sixth edition, advises the "Friendly Reader" that this book, deriving from Boccaccio, Giralde, and Conti, was invaluable in the classical instruction of "studious youths." Translated into English in 1698 by Andrew Tooke, who was silent about the author of the original, it became known as Tooke's Pantheon of the Heathen Gods and Illustrious Heroes and was reprinted twenty-three times by 1771. It was published as "adapted for the use of students of every age and either sex" in America as late as 1859. The original seventeenth-century plates engraved by J. van Vianen were altered in later editions, but they followed the earliest designs in both their delineations of figures and their reproductions of numismatic reverses.

In his first five sections Pomey wrote about celestial gods, terrestrial gods, marine gods, infernal gods, and minor or miscellaneous gods. His last section, "De Diis adscriptis, seu indigetibus" is a discussion of demigods and heroes such as Hercules, Achilles, and Jason, the Egyptian divinities such as Osiris, Apis, and Serapis, and the "virtutes deae," Honor, Faith, Hope, Justice, Laughter, Fame, and Fortune. Most of the discussions are in the form of a dialogue between Palaeophilus, who asks questions, and Mystagogus, who furnishes the answers, which are supplied with learned footnotes and quotations from the classical poets. Palaeophilus, for example, looks at the second plate and inquires, "Who is this beardless unshorn young man, holding a bow and arrows in his right hand, a cithara in his left hand, crowned with laurel and dressed in shining gold?" Mystagogus responds, "It is Apollo," an answer producing further questions and replies that often border on lectures. But the Pantheum begins, as was the custom, with a colloquy on idolatry.

Pomey finds four reasons for the invention and dissemination of false gods. First, there was the folly of men who denied God, the true fountain of all good, in order to seek Him in muddy streams. After admiring some man for his physical beauty or intelligence, they respected him profoundly and, finally, worshiped him. Second, to flatter the conceit
of a ruler, the commonality erected altars to him and burned incense to him as if he were a god. Third, many men too desirous of immortality left images of themselves in hope that their names would live in marble after they were dead. Fourth, men were made gods to perpetuate their reputations for excellence or usefulness. Ninus, in Poméy’s mind, invented idolatry by raising a statue to his father Belus and decreeing its adoration. Other nations worshiped the elements, the planets, animals, birds, reptiles, and “though you may laugh,” scallions and the portulaca. Worst of all, the Romans worshiped every god brought to the city until it was so crowded with divinities that they were forced to send them, as they did men, into the colonies.

Each section of the Pantheon opens with a symbolic explanation of the facing illustrative plate. Jupiter holds a scepter of cypress, the sign of eternity. Mercury’s face is both black and white because he converses with celestial and infernal gods, and his wings are emblematic of the wings language gives to human thoughts. The symbolic explanation is ordinarily succeeded by the genus of the god or goddess, his or her deeds, lovers, and offspring. The etymological exposition of the deity’s name is never omitted, and the rites are sometimes described. Although it was becoming unfashionable and was selectively omitted in later reprints, a “sensus fabulae” or a “sensus moralis” was appended to the chapters on Jove, Apollo, Bacchus, Mars, Juno, Minerva, Venus, Saturn, Janus, Vesta, and Proserpine.

Most of Poméy’s allegorical readings are secondhand. Conti is responsible for those of a moral or physical nature; the investigators of the biblical basis of Greek myth—Huet owned a copy of Poméy’s sixth edition—furnish the identification of patriarchal heroes. Jove, who is Abraham, is also air, fire, aether, Fate, and the Anima Mundi.120 The fable of Mars and Venus shows the discovery of adultery by Divine Justice and the adulterers caught in a net of conscience.121 Saturn is both Noah and time; Janus, Noah and prudence;123 and Vesta, fire and vital heat.124 The exposition of the myth of Bacchus, which concludes with a temperance lecture and a summary of the symbolic qualities of inebriation to be seen in Bacchus’ nudity, ivy crown, youthfulness, femininity, maskings, and hilarious mirth, begins with a solemn treatment of his other appearances as Moses and Nimrod.

120 Poméy, Pantheon mythicum (Amsterdam, 1730), pp. 21–23.
121 Ibid., pp. 67–69.
122 Ibid., pp. 120–22.
124 Ibid., p. 142.

237
Nimrod Bar-Chus, or son of Chus, also takes his name from Hebrew "namur" or "tiger." Bacchus is also called "Nebrodes" or "Nimrod." Nimrod was "a great hunter," and this is implied in Bacchus' other name, "Zagreus." Bacchus and Moses are the same because they were both found in arks in Egypt, both had double natures, both were educated in Arabia, both were horned, both were connected with serpents, both drew water from a rock, and both opened ways through water; moreover, Orpheus called Bacchus "Mosen" and "Legislator." Such parallels lead Pomey to but one conclusion:

From this you may gather that the early architects of fables have taken matter very altered from Holy Scripture to stitch together their tales. So in Nonnus, Bacchus wrestling with Pallene and giving in is the story of Jacob wrestling with the angel. Similarly Pausanias recalls that the Greeks before Troy found an ark sacred to Liber, which when Eurypilus opened it and saw the image of Bacchus hidden within, he was immediately insane. This account is taken from first Kings where the Bethshemites are said to have been smitten by God because they looked curiously into the Ark of the Covenant.125

Gautruche's *L'Histoire* was the official mythological textbook in all Jesuit schools until the publication in 1705 of Joseph de Jouveney's *Appendix de diis et heroibus poeticis* as an addition to the Paris edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which, often printed separately and in translation, contended with Pomey's *Pantheum* for generations as the official guide to classical mythology. Father Jouveney does not shun the translation of the godly symbols, the moral and physical understanding of the myths, or the figurative Old Testament shadows cast by the pagan gods. In his final chapter he urges "the Christian expositor . . . to see what is hidden under the covering of fable and to bring forth truth involved in darkness" because, as he puts it, they must "turn the poison of impious antiquity into antidote." Jouveney had learned from Conti, whom he recommends, and from the seventeenth-century Christian seekers, especially from Thomassin, how the Light of Heaven shone on the human past. But the attitude towards the interpretation of classical literature and the Greco-Roman myths was shifting, and this turn in approach has a certain history.

VII

Although the majority of western explicators were intoxicated by the doctrines of nonliteral reading, there were men who were doubtful.
of its value for the understanding of both sacred and profane texts. In
1530 Cornelius Agrippa, possessed of a mysterious sense of the cosmos
and not at all averse to symbolism when it was astrologically engraved
on talismen, wrote in the first modern anti-intellectual treatise about the
fourfold and confused methods of the biblical exegetes. "This interpre-
tative theology," he states, "consists only in liberty of speech and is
wisdom separate from the Bible. . . . Everyone has the right to abound
in his own sense . . . nor are we to believe all they say."126 His contem-
porary and faithful reader François Rabelais, who consulted his per-
sonal copy of Hor Apollo when he explained the white and blue blazon
of Gargantua, is as unfriendly to the allegorizers of Homer as Agrippa
is to those of Sacred Writ.

Do you believe upon your conscience that Homer, whilst he was couching his
Iliads and Odysseys, had any thought upon those allegories, which Plutarch, Hera-
clides Ponticus, Eustathius, Cornutus squeezed out of him, and which Politian
filched from them? If you trust it with neither hand nor foot do you come near to
my opinion, which judgeth them to be as little dreamed of by Homer as the gospel
sacraments were by Ovid in his Metamorphosis though a certain gulligut friar and
ture bacon-picker would have undertaken to prove it if perhaps, he had met with as
very fools as himself.127

Friar Lubin, the bacon-picker, is assumed to be Thomas Walleys, but the
opinions of Agrippa and Rabelais about allegorical interpretations were
supported by the leaders of the Reformed Church.

Luther's view on "these whores of allegory" is not so stout as his
epithet might suggest; in fact, he is inclined to wobble. He confesses his
early infatuation with allegory, although even in youth he thought it an
empty speculation, mere froth compared to the literal. Nonetheless, he
found it difficult to extinguish his fervid interest. History is the best
form of theological exegesis, he insists, but "after this has been treated
and correctly understood, one may turn to allegory as an adornment and
flowers to embellish the account." Bare allegory has no virtues; even
when it is properly pursued, one does best to follow the allegorical
examples of the Apostles.128 In his younger days he was impressed by the
allegories of Origen;129 but later he regarded them as so much "twad-

126 Agrippa, De incertitudine et vanitate omnium scientiarum et artium liber (Leyden,
1643), pp. 287-88.
127 Rabelais, Gargantua and Pantagruel, trans. T. Urquhart and P. Motteux (London,
1863), I, 96-97.
128 Luther, Works, ed. J. Pelikan (St. Louis, 1955-64), I, 232-34; II, 68.
129 Ibid., II, 150-51; XXVI, 433.
dle," and he also finds the allegories of Augustine and Hilary on Creation simple "fabricating." In his maturity Luther is ready to say that allegory is pleasurable, a series of pretty pictures which, like those of Apelles, merely approximate nature. In many places in his scriptural commentaries Luther emphasizes his conquest of his allegorical vice. Moses, he regularly repeats, writes history, not allegory. This is all very well, but he can also find allegory in Genesis, the Psalms, and Galatians. He even goes a little beyond this when he criticizes the vicious lives of the Germans by calling their attention to the traditional interpretation of Odysseus' visit with the voluptuous Circe. But this is only a momentary weakness because in his commentary on Genesis 30:9-11, after pointing to the Turkish allegorizations of the Alcoran, Luther writes:

For allegory is like a beautiful harlot who fondles men in such a way that it is impossible for her not to be loved, especially by idle men who are free from a trial. Men of this kind think that they are in the middle of Paradise and on God's lap whenever they indulge in such speculations. At first allegories originated from stupid and idle monks. Finally they spread so widely that some men turned Ovid's *Metamorphoses* into allegories. They made a laurel tree Mary, and Apollo they made Christ. Although this is absurd, nevertheless, when it is set forth to youths who lack experience but are lovers and students of literature, it is so pleasing to them at the onset that they devote themselves completely to those interpretations. Consequently, I hate allegories, but if anyone wants to make use of them, let him see to it that he handles them with discretion.

Melanchthon, the grave scholarly associate of Luther, while ready to practice a rhetorical form of allegory which he calls "mythologian," a form of euhemerism enabling him to understand the Cyclopes as a former barbarous people whose single eye symbolized their use of a shield with a loophole, is inclined to agree with Luther. He observes that the method has no value to the preacher, who should be clear in statement, and that it is particularly offensive when practiced by illiterates. When the Bible is seemingly allegorical, he finds the meaning so plain that no comment is required; but he sees a sound possibility in moral metaphors. A tyrant can be compared to the nature of a wolf or an

---

134 *Ibid.*, XII, 204.
astute man to "a little fox."\textsuperscript{137} Although a reasonably good aesthetician and a master of the \textit{figura mentis}, Calvin espouses the same position. Playing with the Bible by turning the literal into allegory is bad practice, but even when there is scriptural allegory one should follow the custom laid down by Paul in Galatians, where the interpretation arises directly from the literal reading.\textsuperscript{138}

Luther’s opponent Erasmus, more radical in his theology than his adversary, makes a full statement of the theory in his \textit{Ecclesiastae sive de ratione concionandi libri III}.\textsuperscript{139} For Erasmus as for his classical models, allegory is a “translatio,” an unfolded metaphor, a “perpetua metaphora,” and it may be accomplished with a single word as in “youth flies” or in “the mind burns.” A metaphor is a means of changing the meaning of the nominative by either a verb or a complementary object. He reviews, with examples, the theory of the fourfold interpretation, but he deplores its incorrect use. He accepts the old reading of the Song of Songs as the marriage of Christ and the Church, but he finds a recent explanation of it as foreshadowing the Immaculate Conception totally absurd. Noah’s Ark as the Church is a sound allegory, but Noah’s Ark as the Virgin is not. Allegory, to his mind, is useful for stirring up the languid, consoling the dejected, confirming the wavering, and delighting the fastidious. Its use does not imply that the Bible is uncertain but is to the contrary a sign of its riches. The Holy Spirit wishes the several meanings to be discovered, and those who find them should be thought inspired. Nevertheless, it must be carefully recalled that in Adage 2878 Erasmus takes a position strongly opposed to those who convert the fables of poets into Christian allegories.

English reformers such as Myles Coverdale agree with Erasmus that the interpreter “must have respect to the Spirit and his fruits and not to the flesh and his fruits.” There is mystery in both the Bible and the Book of Creatures; “the spirit whereof, and not the bare letter, must specially be searched out, and the allegories handled, not dreamingly or unfruitfully, neither with subtle disputations . . . but well favoredly after the ensample of the old doctors.”\textsuperscript{140} William Tyndale, Coverdale’s presumed associate, shared some of the wariness of Luther and Calvin, but he also saw a value in the study. At the conclusion of his prologue to Leviticus, Tyndale temperately warns the Bible searchers.

\textsuperscript{137} Melanchthon, \textit{Elementa Rhetorices, Opera} (Halle, 1846), XIII, 466–74.
\textsuperscript{138} Calvin, \textit{Opera}, ed. W. Baum, E. Cunlitz, E. Reuss (Brunswick, 1887), XXXV, 466.
\textsuperscript{139} Erasmus, \textit{Opera}, ed. Le Clerc (Leyden, 1704), V, 1028–46.
\textsuperscript{140} Coverdale, \textit{Writings and Translations} (Cambridge, 1844), p. 511.
Finally, beware of allegories; for there is not a more handsome or apt thing to beguile withal than an allegory; nor a more subtle and pestilent thing in the world to persuade a false matter than an allegory. And, contrariwise, there is not a better, vehementer, or mightier thing to make a man quick witted and print wisdom in him, and make it to abide, where bare words go but in at the one ear and out the other.\textsuperscript{141}

Tyndale blames Origen and his followers for distracting men's attention from the literal to the degree that they thought it "served but to feign allegories upon." These specialists were followed by "sophisters" able to draw out of "an antitheme of a half inch" a "thread of nine days long." He knows all about the four methods of "strange speaking," but he fears for the man who leaves the literal way unless he follows Paul's allegorical expounding of the story of Hagar or of Peter's cutting off of Malchus' ear. Even then the allegory does no more than fix the lesson "in the hearer's heart." Now that the Pope has destroyed the whole literal sense, "thou shalt find enough that will preach Christ and prove whatsoever point of the faith that thou wilt, as well out of a fable of Ovid or any other poetry, as out of St. John's gospel or Paul's epistles."\textsuperscript{142} An attitude of a similar nature appears toward the end of the sixteenth century when the dissenter William Whitaker complained in his \textit{Disputation de Sacra Scriptura} of 1588 about those who maintained that there were as many senses as words in the Bible. While admitting allegory, anagogy and tropology, Whitaker insisted that they were but "collections" from the literal, "the true, proper, and genuine sense of Scripture."\textsuperscript{143}

As the sixteenth century passed into the seventeenth, Protestants, while preserving a respect for analogy, looked more and more askance at the nonliteral readings of Scripture. This objection led, of course, to problems in the explanation of difficult sections of the inspired texts, problems that the Romans could gloss over with allegory. G. S. Menochio, who flourished in this age and furnished a commentary for all of Scripture, represents the Roman opinion that God made Scripture difficult so that men should labor over it and thus it would be fixed in their memories. Like his great Catholic predecessors, he insists that the literal be understood in accordance with other texts, the tradition, the actions of councils, the glosses of the Fathers and the Scholastics, and the findings of philosophy and science. After the literal is known the mystical

\textsuperscript{141} Tyndale, \textit{Doctrinal Treatises} (Cambridge, 1848), p. 428.
\textsuperscript{142} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 503-12.
\textsuperscript{143} Whitaker, \textit{A Disputation in Holy Scripture} (Cambridge, 1849), pp. 404-5.
senses, if they are present, may be sought, but "they will not be accepted by all." The Church can, however, establish a further "sensus accommodatus," just as the Council of Trent did in the fourth session when it adjusted Ecclesiasticon 44:17 to the work of confessors.\textsuperscript{144} What Menochio says is in keeping with Alphonso Salmeron’s observations in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh chapters of his Commentarii in evangelicum historiam et in Acta Apostolorum, published in Cologne in 1602–4. In these sections Salmeron, one of St. Ignatius’ original followers, also attacks the Christian allegorizers, who see the creation of Adam in the myth of Prometheus, the story of the Virgin Birth in the tales of Bacchus, Minerva, the Danae, and Perseus, and the Crucifixion in Actaeon’s fate. Salmeron points his long finger at Thomas Walleys and cites II Peter 1:16–19 against him and his allegories.

The Protestant theory on the interpretation of Scripture is evident in the Philologia sacra of Salomon Glass, published in 1623 and a learned clergyman’s vademecum until the end of the eighteenth century. The last five hundred columns of Glass’ treatise are devoted to the various rhetorical figures to be found in the Bible, which are, consequently, legitimate for ecclesiastical use. His major emphasis is on analogy, but he includes all allegories, both "simple and allusive," which can be found in Holy Writ.\textsuperscript{145} For him allegory is basically a continued metaphor, but it may be found infrequently in the Bible as a continued metonymy, irony, or synedocche. He approves of the use of legitimate allegory, but he has no tolerance for the rabbinical cabala or the allegorizations of the Gesta Romanorum, the Legenda aurea, and the Metamorphoses of monks like Berchorius.\textsuperscript{146} Glass’ Philologia stands behind the later lexicons of analogy like Benjamin Keach’s Tropologia: A Key to Scripture Metaphor of 1682; in fact, the whole first book of the Tropologia is little more than a summarized translation of Glass’ latter pages; hence, the German theologian is mentioned by Keach in his preface to the reader as a "Precedent," which, indeed, he was.

An occasional Protestant, such as the mystical Henry More, might object to attacks, especially Quaker attacks, on allegory, holding it was a common practice of rhetoricians and poets and praising the ease with which moral lessons can be found in story as opposed to the difficulty of inventing story to illuminate an ethical idea.\textsuperscript{147} More recognizes the

\textsuperscript{144} Menochio, Commentarius totius Scripturae (Paris, 1719), I, e3v–e4.
\textsuperscript{145} Glass, Philologia sacra (Leipzig, 1705), cols. 1425–2076.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., cols. 408–42.
\textsuperscript{147} More, A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings (London, 1662), pp. 17–18.
objections to the allegorical method of biblical interpretation, but he defends it in a manner which Glass would have found offensive.

That Natural Things, Persons, Motions and Actions, declared or spoken of in Scripture, admit also many times a Mystical, Moral or Allegorical sense. This is worth proving, it concerning our Souls more nearly then the other. I know this Spiritual Sense is as great a fear to some faint and unbelieving hearts as a Spectre or Night-spirit. But it is a thing acknowledged by the most wise, most pious, and most rational of the Jewish Doctors.¹⁴⁸

Continental Protestants from Sixtus Amama, who thought allegory "the unskillful study of the insane,"¹¹⁰ to Francisco Turretini, who argued that because the mind of God is infinite, the Bible is not necessarily so in meaning,¹⁵⁰ would have agreed only with immense difficulty with their British colleague. It can be assumed that when the mystical interpretations of the Bible were increasingly held in doubt, similar readings of Homer, Virgil, Ovid, and the Greco-Roman mythologies were in the same state.

VIII

Some evidence of the steadily altering approval of the interpretive reading of Greco-Roman fable can be observed in the writings of Francis Bacon, the best English allegorizer of mythology. In The Advancement of Learning he attacks Paracelsus and his followers for seeking in the Bible "all Natural Philosophy," an effort that not only scandalizes "all other philosophy as heathenish and profane" but also debases Scripture. He advises readers not to be overwise but to fear enigmatical or physical interpretations of the Bible which imitate the manner "of the rabbins or cabalists." Regardless of these admonitions he doubts that the Scripture should be studied "according to the latitude of the proper sense of the place." For him the literal sense is "the main stream," but the church has actually the most use of "the moral sense chiefly, and sometimes of the allegorical or typical."¹⁵¹ Bacon’s sensitive views on biblical exegesis became much bolder when he read ancient poetry and fable.

Parabolical poetry, one of his several classifications, contains "secrets and mysteries of religion, policy, or philosophy." The explication of these secrets and mysteries in Divine Poetry is "authorized" and the

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 54.
¹¹⁰ Pearson, Critici sacri (London, 1660), ad loc.
¹⁵⁰ Turretini, Institutio theologiae elencticae (Geneva, 1688), I, 165-70.
same method used in the reading of fable often results in great felicity. To show how happily the method works, Bacon writes a short explanation of Jupiter's war with the Giants and Achilles' education by Chiron, thereby planting the seed for the fuller treatment of fable in the *De augmentis* and in his allegorized mythology, the *De sapientia veterum*. In the *De augmentis* he admits that there is some doubt about the mystic meanings concealed in myth, but he is ready to confess as indeed he should, that "a mystery is involved in no small number of them." But his earlier opinion in *The Advancement of Learning* is definitely worth knowing.

Nevertheless in many the like encounters, I do rather think that the fable was first, and the exposition devised, than that the moral was first, and thereupon the fable framed. For I find it was an ancient vanity in Chrysippus that troubled himself with great contention to fasten the assertions of the Stoics upon the fictions of the ancient poets. But yet that all the fables and fictions of the poets were but pleasure and not figure, I interpose no opinion. Surely of those poets which are now extant, even Homer himself, (notwithstanding he was made a kind of Scripture by the later schools of the Grecians), yet I should without any difficulty pronounce that his fables had no such inwardness in his own meaning; but what they might have upon a more original tradition, is not easy to affirm; for he was not the inventor of many of them.153

The *De sapientia veterum* (1609) appeared midway between *The Advancement of Learning* (1605) and the *Opera* of 1623, in which the Latin version of the *Advancement* became, by the augmentation of the second book into eight, the great *De augmentis*. In this ultimate version, the myths of Pan, Perseus, and Dionysus were rewritten from the texts of the *De sapientia* to make Bacon's theory of hidden mystery more concrete. In spite of the ease with which the material is apparently set forth, the *De sapientia* absorbed an enormous amount of learning, and there are few ancient or recent mythographers unknown to Bacon.154 Thirty-one myths are expounded, many of them according to Bacon's prime doctrine of utility. Cassandra's troubles can be read as an essay on plainness of speech; Endymion's fate illustrates in practical terms the careers of royal favorites; Homer's Diomedes demonstrates the psychological nature of religious zeal. Other myths such as those of Pan, Coelum, Proteus, Cupid, and the Sphinx help and are helped by the physical philosopher; those of Atalanta and Daedalus, however, put all

152 Ibid., I, 520-21.
153 Ibid., III, 344-45.
men in touch with the more material aspects of useful learning. But Bacon is also aware of his century’s search for Christian doctrine in mythology; hence, his recognition of this movement intrudes quietly into his explications.

Two of the accounts of the generation of Pan can be, in Bacon’s view, connected with the Divine Word, “which was entertained by all the more divine philosophers.” The “god’s horns,” or the “universal forms,” “reach up to God”; his staff is a symbol of Providence; his office as a messenger suggests that next to the Bible the world is the best witness of divine wisdom and goodness.\(^{155}\) Proteus stands for the matter of creation,\(^{156}\) and Cupid, as atom, not only symbolizes the divine creative impulsion in things but makes providential foresight clear in its contrast to his blindness.\(^{157}\) The preface to the *De sapientia veterum* recapitulates and augments the notions set down in *The Advancement of Learning*. Some will think, Bacon supposes, that he is amusing himself with the discovery of inner meanings; but while he fully realizes the “versatile nature of fable,” this is not his intent. He knows that others—Chrysippus and the alchemists—twist the fables to more than was meant. “All this has been explored by us, and we have seen and made not of them all the levity and looseness of wit expended on allegories; however in spite of this, we cannot give up our opinion.” Bacon claims that he was fixed in his conclusions by the strange nature of myth and the significance of names, which imply unavoidable meanings. Sometimes the myths contain real history; sometimes matter added for adornment becomes, in due course, important; sometimes there is a confluence of fable resulting in new allegory; and finally, some myths are so absurd that they must have deeper interpretations. He reiterates his old belief that fables came before interpretations, just as hieroglyphics preceded letters; but no matter how the complaints fall, all men must admit that they are the most pleasant means of presenting a lesson.\(^{158}\)

The vogue of the *De sapientia veterum* was not small, and it is not surprising to find Bacon’s name mentioned with those of Heraclitus, Fulgentius, Lavinius, and Conti as one of the principal interpreters of myth as late as 1684 by Andreas Eschenbach in his *Ethica mythologica*. By this time very learned, almost scientific, studies of pagan religion and of individual deities clearly were beginning to elbow out mythologies


\(^{156}\) Ibid., VI, 651.

\(^{157}\) Ibid., VI, 655–56.

\(^{158}\) Ibid., VI, 625–28.
that emphasized deeper meanings. In 1659, Johannes Stiegler wrote a book about the Dei Selecti in his *De theologia gentili*; but by the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth, works like J. G. Milich’s *De diis, deabusque veterum gentilium Milichiis* (Leipzig, 1699), Joachim Hasenmuller’s *De fabulis et mythologia* (Lund, 1705), and Johannes Gnospius’ *De Teletis, sive Graecorum theologia physica* (Wittenberg, 1706) were mapping out the positivistic program of classical investigation which would become modern mythological study. Besides this new direction, there had long been—J. V. Andreae’s *Mythologia Christiana* of 1619 is an early example—a serious discussion of the old patristic problem of whether or not a Christian poet should use pagan myth. In 1709 George Neumann summarized the whole range of contention in his Leipzig dissertation, *De mythologiae deorum gentilium abusu in poesi Christiana*. He found that none of the common excuses—poetic license, ornamentation, liberty of conscience in matters indifferent to Christianity, the designation of God in the names of the gods, or right of custom—had any validity for a Christian. The mythographers were turning to myth as history or folklore, to the euhemerism of an Abbé Banier, who supplied curious minds, like those of Herman van der Hardt, with historical rope enough for an allegorical hanging.

There is no question that the allegorical technique which enabled the proper interpreters to find so much Christian, moral, or physical wisdom in classical literature, in Homer, Virgil, and Ovid, in the mythographers, or even in the unreadable Egyptian hieroglyphics, was very seriously in trouble by the end of the seventeenth century; nonetheless, it had dominated hermeneutics for two hundred years or more. The demise of the method was hastened to some degree by antiquarianism, which began in the sixteenth century and reached a rather splendid apex with the massive publications of Abbé Montfaucon in the 1720s. But the objects discovered in the soil of antiquity were as hungry for allegorical exposition as the texts of the Greeks and the Romans, and there were antiquarians who could extract as much wisdom from the reverse of a coin, a bas-relief, or an elaborate cameo as the best literary interpreters; in fact both groups of expounders depended on each other, and membership in both professions was often shared by the same man.

---
