

GREEK MYTHOLOGY

Myths are not simple narrative plots. In ancient Greece, as in other traditional societies, these tales existed only in the poetic or artistic forms in which they were set down. To read them from an anthropological point of view means to study their meaning according to their forms of expression – epic recitation, ritual celebration of the victory of an athlete, tragic performance, erudite Alexandrian poetry, antiquarian prose text; in other words, to study the functions of Greek myths in their permanent retelling and reshaping. Falling between social reality and cultural fiction, Greek myths were evolving creations, constantly adapting themselves to new conditions of performance. Using myths such as those of Persephone, Bellerophon, Helen and Tiresias, Claude Calame presents an overview of Greek mythology as a category inseparable from the literature in which so much of it is found. The French edition of this book was first published in 2000.

CLAUDE CALAME is Directeur d'études, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, and has published widely on Greek poetry and myth. His most recent books include *Myth and History in Ancient Greece* (2003), *Masks of Authority: Fiction and Pragmatics in Ancient Greek Poetics* (2005) and *Poetic and Performative Memory in Ancient Greece: Heroic Reference and Ritual Gestures in Time and Space* (2009).

GREEK MYTHOLOGY: POETICS, PRAGMATICS AND FICTION

CLAUDE CALAME
TRANSLATED BY JANET LLOYD



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
 978-0-521-88858-5 — Greek Mythology: Poetics, Pragmatics and Fiction
 Claude Calame, Translated by Janet Lloyd
 Frontmatter
[More Information](#)



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,
 a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of
 education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521888585

Originally published in French by Hachette Livre as *Poétique des Mythes dans la Grèce Antique*
 by Claude Calame

© Hachette Livre 2000

First published in English by Cambridge University Press & Assessment

© Cambridge University Press & Assessment 2009
 English translation

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions
 of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take
 place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

First published 2000

This English edition first published 2009

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data
 Calame, Claude.

[*Poétique des mythes dans la Grèce antique*. English]

Greek mythology : poetics, pragmatics, and fiction / by Claude Calame ; translated
 by Janet Lloyd.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p. 268) and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-88858-5

1. Greek literature – Themes, motifs. 2. Mythology, Greek, in literature.
3. Epic poetry, Greek – Themes, motifs. 1. Lloyd, Janet. II. Title.

PA3055.C3513 2009

880.9'15–dc22

2008040779

ISBN 978-0-521-88858-5 Hardback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence
 or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this
 publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will
 remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page ix</i>
I. Narrative and poetic creations	I
1. Mytho-logies	5
1.1. Myth as seen by anthropologists	5
1.2. The story of the rape of Persephone	8
1.2.1. Ancient versions	8
1.2.2. Native interpretations	14
1.2.3. Modern hermeneutics	18
1.2.4. Critical perspectives	37
2. The poetics of <i>muthoi</i>	39
2.1. The practices and pleasures of fiction	39
2.2. Recent views on fiction	47
2.3. An enunciative and pragmatic approach	53
2.3.1. Procedures of discourse production	54
2.3.2. The poetics of heroic stories	58
2.4. Core and Demeter as used by ritual	60
2. Bellerophon and the pragmatics of epic narrative	67
1. A duel of genealogical stories	68
1.1. The context of a heroic episode	69
1.2. The <i>Iliad</i> 's version of the story	72
2. Interpretative views	76
2.1. The reference to the Bible	77
2.2. The reference to initiation	81
2.3. The reference to the heroic time	84
3. The contextual constraints of a verbal duel	87
3. Clytemnestra and Orestes at the Pythian Games	94
1. The metamorphoses of a matricide	95
2. 'Performative' poems	98
2.1. From the statement of the utterance to the communicative situation	99
2.2. A converse heroic example	103

2.3. Feminine figures and the process of heroization	107
2.4. The poetics of praise and reproach	111
3. An active poetic memory	114
4. Io, the Danaids, the outside and tragic inflections	119
1. How genealogies frame geo-political spaces	119
1.1. The architecture of a mythological treatise	120
1.2. How foundation stories organize territory	122
1.2.1. The centre and the periphery: Io and Danaus	123
1.2.2. Frontiers: Europa and Cadmus	126
2. Genealogical journeys in Aeschylean tragedy	130
2.1. Io's meeting with Prometheus: the beginnings of civilization	131
2.2. Pelasgus, the aboriginal of Argos and the Danaids from Egypt	136
3. Autochthony and marriage: a return to classical Athens	142
3.1. Fertile soil and fecund marriage	143
3.2. Births from the earth and autochthony in Attica	146
4. From Aeschylus to Hesiod	149
5. Helen and the purposes of historiography	152
1. The 'myth' of beautiful Helen: responsibility and culpability	152
2. The Egyptian version produced by the author of one enquiry	154
2.1. The story told by the priests of Egypt: sources of discourse	155
2.2. The historiographer as narrator	158
2.3. Herodotus as an arbiter and history's attorney	163
3. Stesichorus and Plato: the absolution of the divine Helen	166
4. The beauty of Helen and poetry of praise	170
5. Eros and the powers of poetic speech	174
6. Tiresias in an Alexandrian hymn	179
1. The effects of poetic aetiology	179
2. Argive cults and Theban legends	184
2.1. The baths of virgin goddesses	188
2.2. Versions of the 'myth' of Tiresias	192
3. Alexandrian poetic fictions	194
3.1. Hymnic variations	197
3.1.1. The <i>evocatio</i> and mimetic appeals	197
3.1.2. Aetiological insertions	199
3.1.3. Performative forms and enunciative distances	201
3.2. Poetic and prophetic voices	205
3.2.1. Favourite haunts of the Muses	206
3.2.2. The social roles of adolescents	210
3.2.3. From story to speech-act	213
4. Inspired words and the speech of a poet	215
4.1. A poetic epiphany	215
4.2. A mimetic hymn	219

<i>Contents</i>	vii
7. Pausanias and the pantheon of Troezen	222
1. Topography and historiography	223
1.1. Aetiological links	223
1.2. Pausanias and places full of memories	226
2. The logics of local legendary time	228
2.1. From land to territory: primordial kings and deities	229
2.2. Back from the frontier to the political centre: heroic sovereigns	232
3. The way to produce a representation of a religious space	237
3.1. The agora and its civic figures	239
3.2. The city: heroic values	242
3.2.1. Pittheus, the judge-king and orator	243
3.2.2. Orestes and the connection with Argos	245
3.2.3. Hippolytus and the Athenian paradigm	247
3.3. The slopes of the Acropolis and the <i>khora</i> : agricultural values	251
3.4. The periphery: transitional places and rites of passage	254
4. Temporality in a religious space	259
Conclusion: Virtual realities	263
<i>Appendix 1</i>	267
<i>Select Bibliography</i>	268
<i>Index</i>	271

Preface

This essay has been prompted by my desire to provide useful teaching and the necessary information for a readership of students seeking to initiate themselves into the Hellenic culture by reading Greek texts. But as well as being a practical essay on the poetics of what it has become customary to call Greek mythology, I regard it, quite unashamedly, as a kind of act of faith, a personal reaction to structural analyses which, though inspired by a perfectly legitimate comparative perspective, have all too frequently been so sensitive to the points shared in common by diverse symbolical systems that they have totally disregarded their differences, contrasts and, above all, contexts of performance. This essay also represents a quest for an approach that is conscious of its own presuppositions and that requires a certain rigour. Finally it also constitutes a protest against the supermarket brand of neo-liberalism that has now invaded even the human sciences and that, in the name of eclecticism, competition and individualism (ideally involving the media), has relegated to the dustbins of Western intellectual history all preoccupations relating to epistemological methodology and coherence.

As a result of the need for interaction in the production of any erudite artefact, the present work has nevertheless benefited from a number of other formative advantages. Most of its chapters have been presented to the audience that attended the Session of Linguistics and Literature organized by the CLELIA (Colloques de Linguistique et de Littérature Ancienne) group of the École Normale Supérieure in August 1997 on the Alpine plateau of Aussois, at the invitation of Jean Bouffartigue and Jean Lallot. Subsequently they were the focus for a seminar attended by a group of (for the most part) graduate students of the University of Yale, thanks to the generous hospitality offered by Heinrich von Staden and the Department of Classics on the banks of the Quinnipiac River throughout the spring term of 1998. The stimulating tranquillity that the Princeton Institute for advanced study provided also helped me to complete the introductory first chapter.

On a more one-off basis, some of the papers in this collection have been presented, in a partial and provisional form, at a number of different gatherings. A limited part of the Introduction was thus presented first at a colloquium entitled 'Imagem e Narrativa na Antigüidade classica' organized by Jacyntho Lins Brandão in Diamantina (Brazil) in the name of the Federal University of Minas Gerais (August 1998) and later at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris, at the invitation of François Hartog, when I was working there as an Associate Director of Studies in the autumn of 1998. An early version of the chapter devoted to the travels of Io, as represented by Aeschylus to his Athenian public, was presented at the colloquium on 'Mythical Genealogies', organized by Danièle Auger and Suzanne Saïd in Chantilly in September 1995 within the framework of the activities of the Centre de Recherche mythologique of the University of Paris X Nanterre. Similarly, the study of the figure of Helen in Herodotus was discussed at the Sixth 'Coralie' (Cornell–Harvard–Lausanne–Lille III–Princeton) meeting held in Lausanne in May 1995, which was devoted to 'Greek Myths Questioned: The Stories about Helen'. The Istituto di Filologia Classica of the University of Urbino was the setting, in July 1997, for a colloquium organized by Paola Angeli Bernardini and entitled 'The Presence and Function of the City of Thebes', at which I read a few pages devoted to the legend of Tiresias as retold by Callimachus. Finally, Troezen and its pantheon, as seen and described by Pausanias, slotted neatly into a meeting that was devoted to 'City Pantheons. Origins and Developments', co-ordinated by André Motte and Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge at the University of Liège (CIERGA) in May 1997.

All these courses and meetings presented the opportunities to question, criticize and exchange ideas that are indispensable for all scholarly work. The pages that follow have certainly been marked by them and I should like to thank all those involved for their comments. The present volume was originally intended to be a work of collaboration shared with Christian Jacob. But unfortunately too many commitments to other projects eventually ruled out our hopes of working together. However, the material preparation of the manuscript greatly benefited from the meticulous and precious aid of Lilamani de Soysa and Eric Le Berre.

The concept of the fictional and pragmatic effects of the symbolic and poetic manifestations of the Greeks that is developed here furthermore thrives on the input of collaborative work conducted with my colleagues in Lausanne – Jean-Michel Adam, Mondher Kilani and Claude Reichler – which inspired the postgraduate and interdisciplinary seminar on 'The Anthropology of Cultures and the Anthropology of Discourse' (despite, I have to say, the absence of any support, moral or financial, from the

Preface

xi

University of Lausanne). In the course of the various sessions devoted during the academic years 1995/6 and 1996/7 to the theme 'Fiction and Knowledge in the Human Sciences', which led to a dozen or more diplomas in advanced studies, many questions were raised and are inevitably reflected in the first chapter of the present work. The same goes for the twice-yearly discussions and meetings of the 'Patonimipala' Group organized by Silvana Borutti (Pavia), Ugo Fabietti (Milan), Franco Remotti (Turin), Francis Affergan (Nice and Paris) and Mondher Kilani (Lausanne) on the subject of 'Cultural Transcendence: The Destruction and Construction of Anthropology and Its Objects'. These exchanges, which have to date led to three collective productions, were frequently centred upon the question of conceptual and discursive means used in the construction of a partly fictional subject in order to restore it to its public as a new source of knowledge. Without a doubt, they strongly influenced the general concept that runs through the studies that are presented in the present volume in a temporal succession designed to embrace some of the poetical aspects of Greek culture across the board.

All the interchanges with colleagues working to repatriate Greek knowledge with a view to making it available to everyone made necessary the inclusion of the essentially bibliographical notes that support the themes developed in each chapter. Contrary to a whimsical practice, often Parisian in origin, that is growing more widespread, these references appear in a multinational form designed to avoid producing a 'doxa' effect. Furthermore, so that this essentially scholarly study should also be helpful to the students for whom it is partly intended, the titles of the works cited to stimulate further research have been repeated in a complete form in each of the chapters to which they seemed relevant. For this reason, the bibliography that appears at the end of the book contains only works of general interest, which are cited in a shortened form in the notes and relate to the question of what is nowadays commonly known as Greek mythology.

I would like to thank Anne-Aymone Brana for her very accurate work in producing the index, and the Foundation Irène Nada Andrée Chuard-Schmid at the University of Lausanne for funding this translation.

This English-language version, thanks to the magnificent translation of Janet Lloyd, has to be considered as a second, revised edition of the French original, which is by now out of print.