

BOOK REVIEW

La mythologie classique dans la littérature néo-latine: en hommage à Geneviève et Guy Demerson. Edited by Virginie LEROUX. Collection ERGA 12: Littératures et représentations de l'Antiquité et du Moyen Âge. Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2011. Pp. 524. Paper, €40.00 ISBN: 978-2-84516-379-9.

Virginie Leroux states in the preface that the French Society of Neo-Latin Studies was founded in 1998 to encourage the study of Latin from Petrarch to Descartes. Leroux has assembled an international group of scholars chiefly from France, Italy, Spain, Canada, Belgium, and the UK to write essays for this volume.

The book is divided into 5 chapters/sections, each followed by essays written by scholars/specialists in their fields: (1) Homage to Geneviève and Guy Demerson, which includes a 7-page bibliography of the published works, conferences, and colloquia of Geneviève and Guy Demerson; (2) Introduction to this collection by Leroux (Université de Reims/Institut Universitaire de France); (3) Twenty-four essays on classical mythology found in Neo-Latin literature; (4) Conclusion to this collection by Nathalie Dauvois (Université de Paris 3); and (5) Back material, including: an index of authors before 1800, chiefly Greek and Roman authors, Renaissance authors and artists, and figures from classical mythology; a list of the contributors and their affiliations; and the table of contents.

Of the essays in this collection, three are described in this review. The first, by Philip Ford (Cambridge University), is "The Homeric Myth of Ares and Aphrodite in 16th-century Neo-Latin literature." Ford states that to many 16th-century humanists, as well as Plato and his contemporaries, this myth of adultery recounted by Demodocus in *Odyssey* 8.266–366, is one of the most striking in Homer and reappears in twenty lines of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 4.169–89. Ford proposes that we consider the presence of this myth in many different 16th-century works to determine both its proper literary context and to suggest more generally the various functions of Latin in the diffusion of ancient myth. He says that although Ovid tells the main points of this myth in his brief account, the Latin version lacks the psychological impact that Homer reveals dramatically in the dialogue of the two deities. The allegorical significance of this myth is evident:

Aphrodite has succeeded in overcoming the warlike nature of Ares. Despite its moral ambiguity, the tale of Ares and Aphrodite became one of the most widespread Homeric myths of the Renaissance. It became one of the favorite themes of artists, poets, and humanists of that period. Its popularity, according to Ford, is due to the huge shift between the shocking sensuality of the Homeric myth and the moral, physical, and historical interpretations attributed to it. This appreciation of the myth came about in large part because of the Neo-Latin texts wherein a myth considered immoral by Plato received a certain respectability in the Renaissance.

Another essay, by Carine Ferradou (Université Paul-Cézanne–Aix–Marseille 3), is “The Model of Iphigenia in the Tragedy of *Jephthah* (1554) of George Buchanan.” The Latin tragedy, *Iephtes siue Votum*, published in 1554 in Paris brings to light a biblical episode from the Book of Judges: the sacrifice by Jephthah of his only daughter Iphis after his victory over the Ammonites, for which he had promised God to sacrifice the first person whom he met on his return from the war if the Lord helped him beat the enemy. This story is analogous to the Iphigenia myth, especially in the Euripidean version, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, of which Erasmus produced a Latin translation in 1506. Buchanan, a Hellenist, had translated *Medea* into Latin in 1544 and *Alcestis* soon after, and he modeled his *Jephthah* on Euripides’ original *Iphigenia* as well as Erasmus’ translation. Ferradou says that Buchanan not only realized the importance of the Greek theater but he was also inspired by Seneca’s adherence to Greek models. Following this essay are excerpts from Buchanan’s *Jephthah* and from Erasmus’ Latin translation of Euripides’ *Iphigenia* for comparison.

A third essay, by Émilie Seris (Université Paris-Sorbonne [Paris IV]), is “The Death of Dido in the *De casibus* of Boccaccio translated by Laurent de Premierfait and painted by Fouquet (1458–1465).” Dido is one of the females of antiquity who most inspired Boccaccio. She appears in almost all of his works. Seris says that the *De casibus uirorum illustrium* marks a turning-point in Boccaccio’s interpretation of the myth of Dido. The poetry that he composed ca. 1340 always looks at Vergil’s myth of Dido and Aeneas. In *The Vision of Love*, Dido returns from the Underworld to lament the treachery of Aeneas in imitation of the famous passage in *Aeneid* 6.450–76. In the *Elegy of Fiammetta*, the heroine, suffering from the departure of her lover, intends to follow the example of Dido’s suicide after the flight of Aeneas. The model is surely Dido’s death at the end of *Aeneid* 4. When Boccaccio chose, after his meeting with Petrarch, to follow this topos on the spiritual road to Christianity, Dido became for him in *De casibus* the

object of a real conversion. Boccaccio, reinterpreting the myth of Dido in Christian terms, transformed Dido's passionate suicide into a moral and civic achievement. Vergil's heroine became a symbol of good government and an allegory of virtue.

The other essays in this volume are as finely crafted as the above three. There is a wealth of information about the use of Classical mythology in Neo-Latin literature that is sure to find an appreciative audience among classicists and non-classicists alike. That the volume is almost entirely in French (one essay is in Italian and another in Spanish) should not be a problem for anyone who has a good reading knowledge of French and is familiar with Italian and Spanish. The essays touch on some of the major Greco-Roman myths and how they were used (reinterpreted) in the Renaissance. The notes and appendices are useful as well. En un mot, c'est un chef-d'oeuvre, grâce à l'éditrice, Virginie Leroux, et les auteurs.

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