**BOOK REVIEW**

*The Shadow of Creusa: Negotiating Fictionality in Late Antique Latin Literature.* By Anders Cullhed. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015. Pp. xxii + 703. Hardcover, €121.45. ISBN 978-3-11-031086-3.

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his book is remarkable for the breadth of material covered and the clear presentation of the narrative, unencumbered by excessive footnotes. The author writes with evident enthusiasm for the Muses who were, however, “a constant source of trouble for early Christian intellectuals” (vii). The ‘fictionality’ of the subtitle is tied to the mythological poetry of Greece and Rome, and proponents of truth (from Xenophanes to Isidore) are its opponents, though they are not always constant. Isidore, for example, appears in one section as imposing a “categorical ban on fiction” (613), while in another he stands for those authors who saw their writing as extending “in an unbroken line of descent from … their classical Greek and Latin predecessors” (623). The author explains as follows his goal of offering both sides of the story:

“It has been my intention to stress the ambiguous outcome of the main story running through this book. Despite the development I have indicated, from Late Antiquity’s recurrent doubts about the value of art or poetry down to the triumphant cathedrals in words or stone of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Christian scepticism of fictional representation remained strong.” (628)

The author acknowledges the range of responses to literature through the centuries, and he admirably reveals the extent to which truth and fiction weighed on many minds.

The breadth of vision offered here is partly explained by the author’s background; unlike most scholars who write on the literature of late antiquity, he is a professor of comparative literature, and he writes in the tradition of E.R. Curtius’s *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. Cullhed’s book is an updated and translated version of his *Kreousas skugga* (2006, Höör), and all of us who do not read Swedish will be thankful for the work involved.

Five sections of varying lengths divide the book. Part 1, “In the World of Make-Believe” (6–79), functions as an introduction, with chapters explaining fictionality, the long tradition in Greece and Rome of criticizing the lies of poets, and late antiquity as a period; the author also explains that the title “The Shadow of Creusa” was inspired by *Aen*. 2.772.

Part 2, “Augustine: A Restless Farewell. Renouncing *Ficta* in Late Antiquity” (80–300) addresses Augustine’s thoughts on language and its uses. The author shows that Augustine distrusted the fictions he loved in his youth, but many readers will still turn to Sabine MacCormack’s study of Augustine and Vergil in *The Shadows of Poetry* (1998).

In many ways the heart of the book is Part 3, “Oblique Speech: Implementations of Allegory in Late Roman Learned Culture” (301–467). The author discusses the allegorical interpretation of mythology in Lactantius, Servius, Macrobius, Martianus Capella, Fulgentius, and Boethius; together they engineered the survival of ancient poetry by investing its material with contemporary and often Christian meaning.

Part 4, “*Poeta Christianus*: From *Ficta* to *Facta* in Early Christian Poetry” (468–602), sees a similar development in Christian poetry, a development culminating in Arator’s exegetical *Historia apostolica*. A brief Epilogue: *Ecclesia Triumphans*. Fiction and Figuration on the Threshold of the Middle Ages (603–632) extends and nuances the claim that hierarchical Church leaders handicapped the development of fictional literature in the Middle Ages.

Cullhed writes with clear sympathy for mimetic fiction (Aristotle) and above all for the Ovid of the *Metamorphoses*. I am not fully convinced by the story he tells, a story where philosophers and Churchmen are responsible for sacrificing literary fiction on the altar of rigorous, orthodox, metaphysical, and ideological truth. The Muses had always been subject to the whims of their human audiences, and no one knew that as well as Ovid, who after all ended up in Tomis in return for his poetry. Another book might have given more consideration to the various contexts and reasons for which individuals criticized different aspects of ancient poetry at different times.

Of course, this does not in any way detract from the value of such a magnum opus on late antique Latin literature. The really surprising thing is not that classical mythology was criticized but that it survived the political and religious transformations of late antiquity. Although Vergil was already read as an ancient poet by Servius and Augustine and others, his *Aeneid* survived, and it has never ceased to play a central role in Western literature. We should continue to wonder at the recent influence of Homer and Vergil on Derek Walcott and Seamus Heaney and be amazed that such ancient poets are poised to continue as foundational figures of the new world literature.

In place of a full discussion, we can offer here only brief comments on a few important and representative features of this text and the questions it raises: Fictionalized aspects of hagiography could have played a role in this book, for example the desert satyr of Jerome’s *Vita Pauli* or the eponymous hermit himself, since he was probably invented by his author. Even a dogmatist like Jerome could find a use for fiction.

Too often Cullhed invokes such things as “the pagan world of fiction” (489). We should remember that Roman religion and mythological poetry were not the same, and they were often quite distinct. A full study of the reception of Ovid in late antiquity could go a long way toward teasing out how and when mythological poetry continued to be influential.

Cullhed mentions at one point that orthodox Christianity “as a matter of principle did not recognize any ambiguity, authorial distance or conjectural discourse” (518). But Augustine’s *De doctrina Christiana* offers a thorough discussion of ambiguity, and his *Confessions* are obsessed with the distance between author and reader.

For the section on Prudentius, Maria Lühken (*Christianorum Maro et Flaccus*, 2002), Carsten Heinz (*Mehrfache Intertextualität bei Prudentius*, 2007), and Marc Mastrangelo (*The Roman Self in Late Antiquity*, 2008) see Prudentius as having a far more productive relationship with classical poetry than Macklin Smith did (*Prudentius’* Psychomachia, 1976) or Cullhed does. The chapter on Prudentius ends with a discussion of *Cathemerinon* 6.137–140, in which Cullhed concludes that “in the final lines of this hymn … there remains little or nothing of its introductory projection of the dreaming spirit’s free flight through the air” (543). However, the final two lines of the hymn actually suggest that Prudentius embraces the dreams of poetry: *Christum tamen sub ipso / meditabimur sopore* (“Nevertheless, we will meditate on Christ even in sleep”). Although the content and modality of poetry have changed, the dreams are still there, like the double meanings remaining in the cloudy heart of the *Psychomachia* (*nouimus ancipites nebuloso in pectore sensus*, *Psychomachia* 893).

If these are criticisms, they are offered only in appreciation for and in response to the enormous effort of this remarkable work. The transformations of Latin literature from the fourth to the sixth century offer a fabulous blend of material, and the author takes us on a grand journey through many of the central texts of late antiquity, a journey that culminates in a quiet moment with Ausonius “on the shimmering waves of the Moselle” (632). Ausonius’s images of the river are a fitting end for the book, as they offer the reader an interlude from his or her carping concerns.

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