

BOOK REVIEW

English Mythography in its European Context 1500-1650. By ANNA-MARIA HARTMANN. Oxford, UK and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. 304. Hardback, \$94.00. ISBN: 978-0-19-880770-4.

English Mythography in its European Context 1500-1650 is clear about both the subject and argument from the opening lines: “This book tells the history of English Renaissance mythography. It argues that the six mythographies published in England between 1577 and 1647 constitute a distinct group within the wider context of Renaissance mythography in Europe” (1). This directness of argument continues throughout the entire book. The book consists of an introduction, six chapters, a conclusion, a References list, an index of names and authors pre-1800 and a general index.

The Introduction chapter reviews the concept and practices of mythography in 16th- and 17th-century Europe, as well as some of the approaches taken within Classical reception studies. Hartmann then reviews some of the key questions related specifically to the mythographies produced in England, and presents four main angles from which the questions of how myth was understood and treated in Renaissance culture might be addressed: iconography, literary, allegory and modern theories of myth. After reviewing the structure of the argument to follow, the Introduction concludes with the observation that another necessary question to consider both for contemporary scholars and those in the Renaissance is “what is myth?” “Myth” in this case applies exclusively to the Greco-Roman traditions. Each subsequent chapter considers a specific text or two as well as the definitions and approaches it applies to the mythology. As noted by the Introduction, intertextuality plays a large part of the arguments. Primary sources in Latin and Renaissance English sources are quoted and cited heavily and the Latin always translated, as are the few bits of German quoted. Where possible, secondary scholarship is cited and engaged with, but in some cases there is little previous work to consider. Chapter 1 presents three stages of mythography development in Europe in general, and illustrates some of the current scholarship concerning certain individual mythographers from continental Europe.

Chapter 2 presents Stephen Bateman and *The Golden Booke of Leaden Goddes* (1577). Hartmann compares Bateman to a reading of Spencer's *Fairie Queene*, suggesting that the historical model used in Bateman was applied by Spencer. Bateman also made an innovation in using partisan religious views to create "a tightly integrated, argumentative text" (76) as opposed to simply a collection of old stories.

Chapter 3 considers *The Third Part of the Countesse of Pembrokes Yuchurch, Entitled, Amintas Dale, Wherin Are the Most Conceited Tales of the Pagan Gods in English Hexameters Together with Their Auncient Descriptions and Philosophical Explications* (1592) of Abraham Fraunce. Connections to Ovid and the use and emphasis on imagery are the two key interpretive techniques explored. Fraunce's approach to myth is linked to Phillip Sydney's discussions of the importance of poetry, its creation and interpretive potential in "A Defense of Poetry."

Chapter 4 examines Francis Bacon's *De sapientia veterum liber* (1609) and how Bacon treats Greek fables. Hartmann argues that Bacon's mythography bases the definition of myth in a definition of poetry, but enlarges the capacity of myth to make it a form of philosophical communication of eternal truths, similar to Bacon's concept of *prima philosophia*, the unity of knowledge of God, nature, and humanity. She also points out that of the six focal mythographies, Bacon's was the only one widely translated and read across Europe.

Chapter 5 explores the *Mythomystes* of Henry Reynolds (1632) as a text which presents fables not only as single stories with individual meanings, but also as a "unified phenomenon that is greater than its parts" (205). According to Hartmann, Reynolds focused on the original ancient purpose of fables as a form of expressing knowledge and connections to the divine, similar to Plato's *Ion*.

Chapter 6 introduces the final mythographer, Alexander Ross, and his *Mel Helicorum* (1642) and *Pansebeia* (1653). The key to understanding the presentation of myth in Ross, Hartmann argues, is the connection of the stories to their parallels in contemporary issues of Church and state. His mythologies present stories showing a noble state and good government, and a religion exhibiting positive qualities such as rationality and charity. Hartmann also mentions a third work by Ross, *Mystagogus Poeticus* (1647), but does not discuss it until the Conclusion.

The final Conclusion chapter re-emphasizes the initial claim that mythographies from England did not follow the trends of Renaissance continental works. Instead of being collections of stories with interpretations, Hartmann argues the English works share the feature of operating "with an underlying concept of myth that gives coherence to the entirety of the mythography and that can be extracted

in the form of a definition” (240). Hartmann suggests that the reason why the focal mythographies analyzed do not engage much with each other is that each author was working within a specific set of theological, cultural and literary rhetorical goals. This thought is my one point of complaint. While each author may have had his own goal and approach, they were all still writing in a similar genre with similar general purposes within a single century in the same country and language, often using similar sources. This is a small part of the overall discussion, and the book is not diminished much by its lack, but its neglect feels like a lost opportunity.

Overall, this book is a strong contribution to reception studies and literary history and theory, both for scholarly contribution, useful at any level of scholarship and for its direct argumentative style which makes it highly accessible to undergraduates and beyond.

KATHLEEN BURT

Middle Georgia State University, kathleen.burt@mga.edu