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Spring 2006

The Modern Construction of Myth [Review]

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REVIEW ESSAY

The Modern Construction of Myth. By Andrew von Hendy.
Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2002. Pp. 400. hc. $39.95. 0-253-33996-0.

REVIEWED BY ERWIN COOK

*T*he Modern Construction of Myth, by Andrew von Hendy, is an interdisciplinary survey of the construction of myth in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The author's thesis is that modern theories of myth can be divided into three broad groups, folkloristic, ideological, and constitutive, and that they all derive from an original, romantic, construct. The survey is organized diachronically, with some attention to taxonomy and axiology. I find the author's thesis entirely persuasive: what follows is meant to serve as a guide to the overall argument and additionally to highlight various important threads that remain somewhat diffuse in a book of this scope.

In brief, the author argues that romantic authors created the category of myth to designate narrative that provides insight into transcendental truths, communicated in symbols whose irreducibility makes them an inexhaustible source of meaning. In the first three chapters, von Hendy charts the development of this view: renaissance belief that myth is a form of moral instruction is discredited by early romantic authors, who increasingly accept myth on its own terms as a product of the savage mind, and as the expression of unmediated religious experience, particularly of nature. To illustrate, von Hendy contrasts Bacon, who follows ancient tradition in treating myth as allegory, with Fontenelle, whose progressive model of human history leads him to treat myth as the irrational speculation of primitives endeavoring to explain the world about them. Von Hendy finds this shift of perspective so radical and definitive of subsequent theorization of myth as to justify the claim that the modern understanding of myth originates in the romantic era.

Vico shares Fontenelle's historical assumptions, but draws from them the revolutionary inference that since culture itself is a product of the human mind, the evolution of culture must itself mirror the evolution of human consciousness: "in more current diction, consciousness itself turns out to be historically conditioned; assumptions about a universal human nature must be reconsidered" (9). And although men of the first age were irrational primitives, they were also poets of unmatched imaginative power: their expe-

rience of the world was unmediated by knowledge, reason, and abstract thought, and they communicated that experience in "imaginative universals" (as opposed to "intelligible universals," or simple abstractions drawn from particulars). Vico's concept of the imaginative universal thus anticipates the later romantic "symbol" in which signifier is united with the signified, and, still more astonishing, it has a pronounced affective dimension: "in its ambition to unite cognitive generalities with affective particularities it is the initial registration of [a problematic] that will come to seem endemic to modern theories of myth" (11). Myth itself is identified as a symbolic mode of cultural construction belonging to the first stage of a stadial metahistory leading from the Age of Gods to that of Heroes and finally of Men. No serious student of mythology will be unaware of the central role played by Vico in modern theories of myth, but the juxtapositions von Hendy creates between these various seventeenth- to nineteenth-century authors, and their contextualization in the romantic movement, are most welcome and illuminating.

Several enduring trends in theorizing myth emerge already at this early date. The degenerative model of human history inherited by Bacon is replaced by a progressive model that aligns myth with "primitive" thought. The development of abstract modes of thought diminished the immediacy of human experience and with it our mythopoeic faculty: whereas for Vico this loss was compensated for by the rise of culture and its emoluments, for early romantic poets such as Schiller, Wordsworth, and Hölderlin, the loss was painful, creating nostalgia for an unmediated experience of nature, a world before the mechanistic worldview, the "entgötterte Natur," bequeathed to man by Newtonian physics. But even as these romantic authors mourn the dissociation of sensibility and the lost unity of Vico's first man, others affirm humankind's mythopoeic power as ongoing and universal. Chapter Two is devoted to the role these authors play in the construction of myth. Blake and Novalis, for example, construct allegorical accounts of how modern man may overcome the dissociation of sensibility that are themselves demonstrations of that power. For these authors, myth is the means of restoring coherency and unity to Western culture, and they see their demonstration that mythopoeia is a universal human faculty as legitimizing modernity. They also play an important role in the process of psychologizing the hero by internalizing the quest romance.

In the latter half of the eighteenth century, Heyne and Herder helped popularize the term "myth" and frame its romantic meaning (discussion of the two should have been further developed, especially as von Hendy refers to Herder's views in passing). Herder's belief that myth is a religious response to nature finds echoes in the poetry of Schiller, Hölderlin, and Wordsworth (and is treated as a given a century later by Ruskin). At the turn of the century, Schlegel, in *Dialogue on Poetry*, has Schelling argue that modern poetry is inferior to ancient because "we have no mythology" representing a unified sys-

tem of belief (a point he has in common with Herder and Schiller). His solution is in effect an endorsement of Blake and Novalis's project: that is, the answer to having no mythology is to create one. Schlegel's view that mythopoeia is a universal human faculty is fundamental to numerous subsequent theories of myth.

Schiller adopts the use of "symbol" in the sense of Kant's "aesthetic idea," and is soon followed by Schelling, Schlegel, and Goethe. Symbol and myth are both seen as tautegorical, "a self-referential category that eludes exhaustive allegorical explanation" (36). Over time, the meaning of symbol is transformed from that of a tautegorical mode of communication to one that is "miraculous"—that is, the symbol participates in transcendent religious reality. This is the view taken by Coleridge, Creuzer, and Schelling himself, and it becomes canonical in the later nineteenth century. Whereas Schlegel has Schelling blur the distinction between myth and poetry, Schelling himself conflates symbol and myth. Creuzer, on the other hand, confronts the fundamental distinction between the immediacy of the symbol and the temporal dimension of narrative and ends up demoting myth to secondary status vis-à-vis the symbol. Each of these conceptual moves has an enduring legacy among twentieth-century theorists.

Schelling contributes two additional tenets to the romantic construction of myth that remain influential in the twentieth century: 1) myth "belongs to an unconscious, teleological process" that stands outside time and history, and 2) as in Vico, humans create their own social world and myth is constitutive of it (39). While Schelling accepts the enlightenment view that human consciousness has evolved from savagery to scientific rationalism, he does not accept the view of Vico and Schiller that such progress entails a loss of creative imagination. Instead he sees consciousness as evolving in stages along a circular or spiral path that will one day reconstitute the dissociated sensibilities mourned by Schiller.

In Chapter Three, von Hendy charts two divergent and often opposed trends in nineteenth-century attitudes towards myth. Among literary authors and artists, myth is increasingly seen as a means of achieving transcendence. During this same period, however, Marx, Nietzsche, and the Brothers Grimm laid the groundwork for post-romantic theories that reject this view. The path that von Hendy here takes from Hegel to Marx *via* D. F. Strauss and Feuerbach is a familiar one, but his larger thesis again allows von Hendy to present the material in an interesting light: von Hendy zeroes in on Hegel's argument that "belief," a sum of social practices driven by prejudice, superstition, and other errors, constitutes a tissue of "false consciousness." Hegel's view that history is structured by a struggle between enlightenment and false consciousness is fundamental to subsequent dialectical approaches to myth.

D. F. Strauss, who accepts the view that myth reflects a society's *Weltbild,* relegates "myth" to the status of false consciousness and thereby explicitly historicizes it as belonging to an early phase in humanity's progress to true religion. In response to Hegel and Strauss, Feuerbach argues that all theology and with it attempts to imagine divinity are simple projections. Marx, in turn, applied Feuerbach's arguments on the nature of religion to the study of material culture in order to unmask its underlying "ideology," which thus corresponds to Hegel's false consciousness. Marx, however, criticizes Feuerbach for treating the "human essence" as an abstraction situated in the individual, arguing instead that it is the ensemble of social relationships within a given culture.

Carlyle shares the romantic view that myth can restore unity to modern culture, and he affirms our ability to attain transcendental knowledge. Symbols are viewed as the means by which humanity constructs its social worlds, while myth constitutes religious symbolism and is a communal product that in turn produces cultural cohesion. Thus historicized, Carlyle reaches the conclusion that myths and symbols can "die" with the cultures that produce them. He also historicizes the hero with a devolutionary model of myth in which the hero begins as divinity, but is transformed over time in a series of displaced avatars of which the last is the hero as king. Versions of this model will be taken up by subsequent authors of a historicizing bent, such as Frye.

The Brothers Grimm helped popularize an ethnographic approach to myth that posed a more immediate challenge to romantic theory. The Grimms treat myth seriously as a distinct genre of narrative that at once is bound by and informs the culture that produces it. They also introduce the modern distinction between myth, legend, and fairytale. This taxonomy, with its implicit historical model in which myth degenerates over time to the status of mere tale, is a recurrent feature of subsequent theorizing on myth, especially among anthropologists. Von Hendy might have noted that these categories have no basis in ancient taxonomy (on Boas's findings, see below).

Von Hendy next briefly treats Tennyson and Wagner, who are said to produce "parables of myth" (64) and to share the belief of Carlyle and Grimm that myths promote cultural cohesion. Ruskin and George Eliot, on the other hand, hold that "myth offers *private* access to religious inspiration" and to eternal verities (67; my emphasis). In Eliot's *Middlemarch* "we encounter a suggestion that people may actually embody mythological archetypes, and in *Daniel Deronda* that 'myth' operates within us at an unconscious level" (68). Von Hendy concludes with a discussion of Nietzsche, whose early forays into the ritual origins of Greek tragedy in ecstatic choral performance were a formative influence on the myth and ritual school. In his later work, Nietzsche is said to treat myth as a socially constructed, and necessary, illusion, a "vital lie" that can be extended to understand all cultural constructions (74).

In Chapter Four, von Hendy shows how in academic circles the transcendentalist view of myth loses out to anthropological approaches in the latter nineteenth century. Myth is increasingly viewed as the sacred narrative of primitive societies, remote in either time or place. Thus, although they reject romantic transcendentalism, these early anthropologists maintain the link between myth and religious experience. Von Hendy begins with Müller's theory of myth as cognitive failure, which is shown to be regressive in many respects, above all in treating ancient mythology as having degenerated from an original monotheism. This degeneration is a consequence of linguistic errors—for example, of taking metaphors literally.

Von Hendy next turns to the cognitively based theories of Comte, Tylor, and Spencer. Comte argues that human consciousness progresses through three "states" of development: theological, metaphysical, and scientific (following in metahistorical traditions as old as Vico and Schelling). The theological phase is in turn divided into fetishism, polytheism (itself having three phases), and monotheism. Comte sees myth as originating in polytheism, and perhaps not even in its earliest phase, so that myth is developmentally late and a secondary rationalization. Since Comte believed that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, mythopoeia becomes a property of the savage and childish mind. Romantic belief that artists too have mythopoeic ability can now be explained as a case of arrested development.

Tylor and Spencer share Comte's view on the lateness of myth and on its status as religious narrative. Tylor adapts Comte's tripartite model of religious development by subsuming fetishism and polytheism under the rubric of animism, which is in turn followed by monotheism. Myth, located in this animistic stage, is again mental error, as in Müller, though the causes of such error are much broader and myth does not degenerate over time, but instead mirrors the evolution of human thought. His belief in pre-linguistic "material" myth again raises the issue of the relationship between myth and narrative, and he follows the romantics and Comte in holding that myth originates in personifications of nature. Tylor, who introduces the "hero" to anthropological discourse, situates the hero in his historical framework, concluding that similarities in the heroes of world mythology reveal universal mental laws governing the imaginative process. Tylor is also remarkable for the emphasis he places on myth in his anthropology, an emphasis that proved highly influential in the future course of the discipline.

In the last quarter of the century, myth is increasingly understood in affective terms. W. R. Smith is identified as a transitional figure who treats myth as cognitive and religion as affective, the latter consisting not of a system of beliefs but of ritual action by the group. Myth is again viewed as a secondary rationalization, of little value in the study of

religion. Smith thus lays the cornerstone to the "ritual theory of myth": whereas romantics understand myth in terms of symbol, anthropological approaches link it to ritual.

Von Hendy next seeks to explain the far-reaching cultural impact of Frazer's *Golden Bough,* a work whose shortcomings were immediately recognized by the scholarly community. Von Hendy argues that part of the work's attraction came from its sprawling dimensions and its promise of uniting an enormous body of diverse material under the aegis of a ubiquitous fertility religion with its dying god (a promise T. S. Eliot did much to promote). A further attraction of the *Golden Bough,* especially among creative writers, is a darker undercurrent suggesting that beneath the thin skin of civilization we are all savages. Under the influence of Tylor, Smith, and Mannhardt, Frazer assumes that the human mental processes remain identical across time and cultures, and on this basis he expands Müller's comparative method to link myths based on simple analogy. By 1900, he had also adapted Tylor's tripartite historical model as: magic, religion, science. He follows Comte, Spencer, and Smith in viewing myth as a secondary aspect of religion, which he understands as a system of belief.

From the ridiculous to the sublime: Durkheim was inspired to investigate the origins and nature of religion by Smith, whose influence is evident above all in his approach to religion as group behavior, and his identification of religious with social institutions. The key for Durkheim is to isolate the source of the intellectual "categories" on which understanding is based. As opposed to the idealistic view that these categories are innate, Durkheim argues that they are based on "collective representations" which a given culture extrapolates from its own social structures. Myth is a religious mode of collective representation, usually connected with religious rite, to which it supplies the etiology (98). It follows that myth is a system of classification, a taxonomy, though Durkheim excludes it as an item of sociological study because, like Comte, he sees it as late and secondary, and because it has a complex evolution that must be approached by other means. He also follows Comte in stressing the role of religion in providing social cohesion. Numerous subsequent theorists of myth rewrite Durkheim in emotive terms.

The first individual to do so was Durkheim's friend Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, who in his later work treats collective representations as powerfully "expressive conceptualizations of the sacred" (103). He subscribes to Durkheim's view of myth as secondary and late, but as a collective representation he finds that it too is loaded with affect. For Lévy-Bruhl, myth mediates between the intangible supernatural world and quotidian sensory experience. The actual performance of a myth, together with its contents, also serves to reinforce social cohesion.

The Cambridge Ritualists also theorize myth in emotive terms. Like Frazer, they met with immediate and damning criticism, but exercised enormous influence on contemporary writers. The basis of their approach is that, as in Comte, ritual is primary and myth a secondary rationalization. In *Themis,* however, Jane Harrison gives myth enhanced standing as simply an alternative mode of expression: ritual expresses emotion through action, myth through words. Myth, then, does not originate in order to explain, though it may become etiological if the corresponding rite is lost. Like Lévy-Bruhl, Harrison thus takes Durkheim's intellectualist theory of primitive religion and recasts it in emotive terms—in her case under the acknowledged influence of Nietzsche's vitalism—so that religion unites the community in its celebration.

In Chapters Five through Eight, the emphasis shifts from diachronic history to taxonomy, as von Hendy surveys the resurgence of romantic thought among modernist authors and popularizers in the early twentieth century. This resurgence was fueled by the contemporary shift from cognitive to affective approaches to myth, and a corresponding shift from the search for origins to that of structure. Chapter Five is devoted to the role of depth psychology. Romantic influence on the approaches to myth by Freud, Jung, and their disciples is evident in their concept of the "symbol," and their belief in mythopoeia as a universal human faculty. Jung also adopts romantic transcendental assumptions, but Freud does not and he cannot therefore be considered neo-romantic. Freud's own investigations into the psychological roots of literature led him to treat all imaginative activity, including myth, as analogous to dream consciousness. Myth thus becomes disguised wish fulfillment, a cultural fantasy of displaced libidinal desire that remains constant across cultures and millennia, and is also simultaneously the fantasy of the individual. Such analysis relies heavily on a universalizing of the human psyche and on a relatively fixed symbolism.

For Freud's disciple O. Rank, hero myth is informed by the libidinal development of boys: hero myth thus becomes a psychological adventure story in which the hero represents the ego. In striking continuation of the path taken by Blake and Novalis, depth psychology thus helped domesticate and interiorize the hero and his quest by treating him as the product of a universal human fantasy. Behind this lies a Lamarckian belief, shared by Freud, that psychological states such as Oedipal guilt are biologically inherited.

Jung and his followers loom rather larger in this narrative than I am accustomed to seeing, though there is no denying their impact, particularly among creative writers. Jung develops a theory of cultural origins in a spiritualized libido that is not reducible to sexual drives, although cultural taboos cause the libido to become creative. The libido is viewed as a benign, dynamic force that transforms animal into higher urges and all symbols can be reduced to it. Jung accounts for the universality of the symbol, a term he

takes directly from Creuzer, with his theory of a collective unconscious containing arche-
types that are the basis of culturally mediated symbols and myths. While for Freud, myth
disguises unconscious urges in symbolic form, Jung holds that symbols mediate
between consciousness and the unconscious, "their function being to convert libido
from a 'lower' into a 'higher' form" (131). Jung also sees hero myth as structured by the
process of libidinal development: the hero is now the subject of a quest romance in
search of his adult identity. Myth remains the sacred narrative of primitive society, but it
is also a universal mode of thought accessible to the modern imaginative faculty, and its
cultivation a key to mental health.

Chapter Six shows how modernist authors such as Yeats, Lawrence, and T. S. Eliot pop-
ularize assumptions about the nature of myth so successfully as to spark a revival of the-
orization. Affective theory in anthropology and depth psychology emboldened these
authors to assert that myth can provide an immediate experience of our racial past. Myth
is thus affirmed as expressing eternal truths and as the vehicle of our escape from
modernity by offering access to a timeless mystery religion. The attempt of these early
modernists to regain a lost unity of sensibility thus continues in the tradition of Blake
and Novalis. Yeats and Lawrence not only subscribe to romantic transcendentalist
assumptions about myth but also to their spiral historical patterns and to their belief that
mythopoeia is a universal human faculty that can restore cultural coherency. Joyce by
this reading emerges as a model for postmodern approaches to myth, with his recogni-
tion of the self-consciousness of modern myth making. He thus subverts the views of his
fellow modernists: his practice is ultimately ironic, and modern mythopoeia is exposed
as simply another form of intertextuality.

Chapters Seven and Eight survey the rise of mid-twentieth-century neo-romantic theo-
ries stimulated by the anthropologists, psychologists, and literary authors discussed in
the previous chapters. Chapter Seven treats authors interested in the "linguistic, episte-
mological, and aesthetic implications of a universal mythopoeic faculty" (154). Cassirer
is inspired by the work of Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl to use myth and religion to chart the
evolution of human consciousness (I would have welcomed a more systematic engage-
ment with Schelling's influence here). Cassirer distinguishes among various symbolic
modes of thought that originate in, and to various degrees remain permeated by, a fur-
ther category of "mythic," itself affirmed as a permanent feature of human conscious-
ness. For Cassirer, all thought is symbolic, though he does not use the term in its roman-
tic sense, but rather as designating signs within a semiotic system: their function is to
mediate our experience of reality which we can no longer confront directly. He thus
denies the symbol its transcendental value but affirms its affective dimension, thus
returning us to a problem as old as Vico. All symbolic thought, in turn, serves to objec-

tify: myth objectifies feelings, specifically of life as a unity, and does not distinguish between appearance and reality. The affective dimension of mythical thought leads Cassirer to argue that myth includes an original action and emotive experience as well as narrative, which is viewed as a secondary mediation: "we encounter once again this fundamental stumbling block of romantic speculation" (156). At the same time, "Cassirer's message that mythical thought is enmeshed in the *symbolic form* of the artist's work constitutes an important mediation between nineteenth-century romanticism and mid-twentieth-century theorists of a New Critical bent" (160). On these foundations, he develops an Hegelian inspired model of the history of religion in which mythic thought gradually achieves self-awareness as a symbolic mode with an affective core. Throughout much of his career, Cassirer's view of mythic thought is thus benign. In his final work, however, written in the aftermath of National Socialism, Cassirer acknowledges the danger of myth's affectivity: Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl's image of a people united in the ecstatic dance of their religion is reconfigured so that myth becomes a totalitarian mentality, a beast waiting in the shadows.

Urban adopts Cassirer's semiotic concept of the "symbol" and similarly distinguishes among various symbolic modes, of which poetry, instead of myth, stands opposed to science. Myth is itself the narrative expression of religious emotion, an encounter with what Otto famously termed the "mysterium tremendum," but it can also be viewed as analogical thought generally and as inherent in all language. He thus exposes "what turns out to be in the twentieth century a significant split between 'myth' in the relatively narrow generic sense and 'the mythical' as the fictive aspect of all our mental constructions" (163).

Wheelwright develops an opposition between expressive and referential language, in which science is again opposed to myth along with poetry and religion. In the course of his career, he seeks to reconcile his view of myth as the narrative of primitive cultures and, following Cassirer, as a primary mode of thought. He accomplishes this by treating myth as a two-stage process in which a "mythoid" stage of awareness motivates a narrative rationalization of—especially religious—experience. His analysis owes much to Cassirer and Frye and is significant chiefly as a first attempt at a fully semantic approach to myth. Von Hendy also finds that Urban and Wheelwright leave open the possibility that myth is simple self-projection, thus anticipating "constructive" theory.

Frye combines Frazer and Freud in a unified theory of literature based on myth, viewed as the union of ritual, which supplies the narrative, with dream (i.e., libidinal fear and desire), which supplies the thematic content. Behind this fusion of anthropology with depth psychology stands a synthesis of romantic speculation centered on deriving literature from myth and religion that also owes a good deal to Blake, from whom Frye

derives his theory of literary symbolism. For Frye, as for Freud and Rank, the hero represents the ego, and he continues Carlyle's project of charting the evolution of the hero through Western literature, which he does in terms of the hero's democratization and psychologization. Frye thus posits five stages in the hero's development, in the first of which the hero is a god and the narrative a myth. He thus endorses Cassirer's metahistory but views that as ultimately cyclical, as in Schelling. But Frye also posits five phases in the evolution of the symbol, of which the fourth is the concrete universal of romantic theory, and it is within this matrix that he locates the creation of myths uniting dream and ritual. Von Hendy observes that these different conceptions of myth are never reconciled in Frye's work. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Frye is completely aware of the traditions in which he is operating, and his work is generally much more coherent as a result.

Chapter Eight is devoted to mid-century popularizers such as Eliade, Neumann, Graves, and Campbell, whose theoretical justification for assigning a place to myth in modern life continues the romantic project of a Yeats or Lawrence. Although they base their analyses on ethnology and psychology, these authors seem no longer aware of the larger intellectual tradition in which they operate. Eliade insists that whenever humans experience the sacred through ritual and myth "they enter the timelessness of the original event" (194). Myth is a narrative of creation that invests a culture with its values, beliefs, and rituals (a commonplace since Malinowski). For Eliade, this allows us to escape modernity, which he views with romantic jaundice, and Jungian psychology is an important tool in that escape. His concept of the symbol is taken directly from Jung, who as we have seen takes it from the romantics. Neumann, on the other hand, combines the Jungian model of libidinal development with a Hegelian inspired history of the evolution of consciousness. Myth is thereby viewed as the phenomenology of a teleological process.

Lord Raglan treats hero and god as interchangeable concepts: the hero is a god in ritual, and the god a hero in myth. The hero's reduced mythological status reflects romantically inspired notions of a decline explicit in Raglan's theory that when it becomes detached from ritual, heroic myth degenerates into saga and folktale in a series of "increasingly 'displaced' analogues of the plot and characters of the sacred original" (193). Raglan remains influential among theorists who seek to derive literature from myth and ritual: assertions, such as that romance is disguised myth, attest to his influence on Frye. Although Raglan scorned psychological approaches to myth, his justly famous diagnosis of a transcultural narrative pattern underlying hero-myth is broadly compatible with such approaches (and in fact significantly overlaps the one outlined by Rank). Raglan's findings would thus seem to support Tylor's view that heroic myth

reveals universal mental laws. He also observes that hero-myth commonly centers on liminal moments, concluding that hero myth develops out of commonly experienced rites of passage in early societies.

Robert Graves likewise belongs to the ritualist school. Graves argues that an early fertility religion centered on a mother-goddess has survived into modernity in disguised form. This goddess is the Moon, or the Muse, and myths honoring her are narrated in a magical, poetic language. He is thus working in the tradition of Frazer, whose work he sought to improve upon and supplant.

Like Neumann, Joseph Campbell takes a Jungian approach to hero myth, though he focuses on the latter half of the hero's career, while Neumann focuses on the first. And, like Neumann and Frazer, he seeks to disclose the "universal forms" of world mythology. The goal of this synthesis is to recover knowledge of Jung's "universal will," the acquisition of which defines Campbell's hero. Campbell's hero myth is based on Jung's model of youthful libidinal development, and he proposes a stadial history of the evolution of the hero reminiscent of Carlyle.

Chapter Nine returns us to the early years of the twentieth century and the rise of modern social anthropology based on systematic fieldwork. Von Hendy argues that thinkers of a positivist and pragmatic orientation belonging to Anglophone traditions of anthropology—in whose number he notably includes Lévi-Strauss—achieved the most significant progress on theorizing myth during this period. These early social anthropologists take from Durkheim the view that cultural phenomena must be understood as an integrated system; hence there is a need for a method that can "isolate and analyze the functioning of the variables" (203). Whereas Durkheim himself had little to say about myth, these later functionalists re-introduce it into the matrix of social functions in preliterate societies. Conversely, they introduce cultural context into the interpretive matrix of myth. By demonstrating the significance of that context they severely undermine the transcendentalist theories surveyed in the previous chapters.

Functionalism in a sense begins with Malinowski. Not since Tylor has myth been so prominent an aspect of anthropology, and Malinowski's contribution is a theory of myth as "functional, pragmatic, and affective" that has dominated British anthropology since (204). For Malinowski, performance context tells us as much about the meaning of the myth as the actual narrative. Myth itself is not simply sacred narrative but lived reality: indeed, it is this shared psychological response to its performance that distinguishes myth from other types of narrative (he continues to follow Grimmian taxonomy). Without such fieldwork, then, all theories about the nature and uses of myth remain speculative. Malinowski concludes that the job of myth is to codify a society's system

of belief, values, and rites. It does so by resurrecting primeval reality and allowing the community to live in the presence of the gods who created it.

Contemporary scholars usually distance themselves from Malinowski's later emphasis on biological determinism and individual psychology in favor of Radcliffe-Brown's conception of the social function of myth. Like Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown sees myth and ritual as affectively charged reinforcements of social values and cohesion, but he believes that the native story tellers and audiences of myth are unaware of its actual function. His legacy to British cultural anthropology is in fact a relative devaluing of myth as a tool in understanding oral cultures.

Von Hendy notes that Boas's distaste for "speculation" makes him an unlikely candidate as an important theorizer of myth. Nevertheless, Boas recognizes the importance of traditional narrative in oral societies, and through diligent observation refutes several nineteenth-century preconceptions about myth. Specifically, myth is not a response to natural phenomena (a view he and Malinowski share based on their fieldwork). Nor does it "degenerate" into folktale, and is not distinguished from folktale as "sacred narrative," but solely in that it describes events before humans became distinct from other animals. Even so, no sharp line can be drawn between them, and there is little place in Boas's taxonomy for "legend": the Grimms' tripartite schema thus collapses into two overlapping categories of tale. Still more important is Boas's finding that any given myth is a bricolage of pre-existing story fragments that have been ideologically elaborated for the purposes of social legitimization. As such, it is inherently no more stable than the social system that produces it. Nevertheless Boas accepts Wundt's distinction between narrative and mythical concepts, "a recurrent theme in the problematic of myth ever since Creuzer," although he allows "for a more conservative element in tales that undergo ideological elaboration" (220).

A second counter-trend response to the emergence of neo-romanticism is the subject of Chapter Ten, in which von Hendy traces the career and influence of Lévi-Strauss. Lévi-Strauss's work is described as an eclectic mix of French, specifically Durkheimian, sociology, structural linguistics, and American anthropology. Von Hendy focuses on the anthropological angle so as to provide a relatively fresh perspective on some extremely well-worn material, though his dismissal of structural linguistics makes this a chapter for the initiated. Von Hendy's major contribution here is in allowing us to see more plainly than in any other survey the degree and manner in which Lévi-Strauss can be seen as responding to and building on the work of Boas and his disciples. For example, he accepts Boas's diffusionist model, and goes on to provide an explanation of why myths can either "die" or be reinvigorated by crossing cultural borders. And, like Boas, he

argues that without a wealth of ethnographic comparanda it is impossible to understand a culture's myths.

Lévi-Strauss's notorious declaration that myth is able to communicate its structural message in even the worst translation is taken to imply that its messages transcend "any verbal function" (232). He is thus seen as confronting the central issue in Creuzer, and as adopting his solution. His innovation consists of asserting that myth conveys its meaning through the individual units of action, represented as simple sentences. But myth also transcends narrative in the sense that its message is not derived from the diachronic sequence of events, but from a synchronic system of relations organized by analogy and polarity. As a consequence, the meaning of myth eludes its audience as completely as in Radcliffe-Brown. Lévi-Strauss thus shares with the depth-psychologists the belief that myth is an unconscious process that communicates its messages in code, though the nature of the coding is different. By providing a model designed to overcome logical contradictions in a culture's beliefs through progressive mediation, it serves a pragmatic function, as in Malinowski, but that function is cognitive rather than affective, as in Tylor. He also provides an ingenious reformulation of the degenerative paradigms that litter modern theories of myth, according to which myth "degenerates" into literature by a progressive weakening of its oppositions, the final and most degenerate being the modern novel. Lévi-Strauss thus gives us a theory of myth that does not patronize "savage thought" but treats it as highly sophisticated. The chapter concludes with a survey of criticisms and modifications of Lévi-Strauss, along with a general retreat from "grand theory."

Whereas Chapters Nine and Ten structurally detach Lévi-Strauss from French scholarship, using Dumezil to introduce Chapter Eleven detaches the school of Vernant and Detienne from Lévi-Strauss. In this case, however, the resulting juxtapositions fail to illuminate—though the individual analyses remain of high quality—leaving us with a group of authors united only by topic and with very different approaches that von Hendy sometimes strains to connect. Dumezil is identified as the father of modern comparative mythology with his combination of historical linguistics, following in the tradition of Müller, and a Durkheim-inspired theory of myth based on social structure. As in Müller, myth is said to degenerate over time, albeit from an original trifunctional ideology, as opposed to theology, so that the gods of myth become the heroes of epic (more discussion of recent challenges to Dumezil would have been helpful here).

Burkert is credited with reinvigorating the "myth and ritual school" by basing it on different premises than his predecessors. In one of the more lurid moves in the book, von Hendy then uses Girard to illuminate the intellectual currents that inform Burkert (with

the result that he overstates the triangulation with Lorenz). License to do this is provided by Burkert's own remark that Girard and the school of Vernant and Detienne had helped revive interest in the role of sacrifice in ancient religion. But with Girard's Freudian-inspired explanation of the origins of sacrifice Burkert has nothing in common, and though he dutifully cites "the Parisians" when they treat identical themes, his French colleagues are less inclined to return the favor because they do not see their approaches as compatible.

Burkert's own contributions to the theorization of myth include establishing, more convincingly than any other ritualist, the priority of ritual to myth: ritual behavior precedes the human species, while myth is not only linguistic—a disputed point, as we have seen—but unknown to us before the invention of writing. Their different origins do not, however, preclude them from growing together to achieve a "symbiosis." Burkert also provides what von Hendy notes has become the "gold standard" among Classicists as a definition of myth: "the specific character of myth seems to lie neither in the structure nor in the content of a tale, but in the use to which it is put . . . *myth is a traditional tale with secondary, partial reference to something of collective importance*" (269; quoting Burkert).

Von Hendy introduces what he terms the "Paris School" by noting that whereas Burkert traces sacrificial ritual from its putative origins in the Paleolithic, Vernant, Detienne, and their followers investigate Greek myth and ritual as part of an integrated cultural system: their approach is thus temporally narrower and culturally more inclusive, and their goal is to disclose the collective representations that characterize ancient Greek thought. Whereas myth thus belongs to, and following Lévi-Strauss must be studied in terms of, this broader cultural system, myth and the gods of myth comprise their own interrelated systems and cannot be understood in isolation. The project of a Frazer or Graves is thus doubly damned. In its place, the school of Vernant and Detienne opens a perspective on the structures of Greek thought that is at once extremely rich and deeply unfamiliar.

Chapter Twelve returns us to the troika of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. Von Hendy notes a fundamental transvaluation of Marx's concept of ideology under turn-of-the-century affective theories, so that ideology increasingly comes to be seen as unconscious and its meaning broadened to include the entire superstructure. A consequence is what von Hendy terms a "mythward drift of ideology," myth being now understood simply as false belief (280). We are thus dealing with an abrupt shift in the material under investigation, partially masked by a common term, that could have been better sign-posted and justified. Some appeal to Plato is surely called for, and von Hendy could have used Horkheimer and Adorno's ideological reading of the *Odyssey* to show that whereas ide-

ological approaches tend to focus on the modern world, and to include non-narrative material such as photographs, they can also be applied to traditional stories.

Sorel, however, points to an important cross-current in these larger trends with his own positive view of myth as a group of mental images able to evoke an emotional response of such power as to inspire revolution. As von Hendy notes, the legacy of the romantic symbol, together with Creuzer's valorization of image over narrative, is clear. Whereas for Sorel "myth" is opposed to ideology, Mannheim treats myth as enforcing it. Althusser, moreover, very nearly conflates myth and ideology in his Lacanian inspired revaluation of Marxism that treats ideology as a "normally unconscious, affective, and universal" (289) mode of production used in the construction of culture. Myth, in turn, is identified as the narrative of ideology. If myth becomes virtually another word for ideology, then the proper task of the "mythologist" becomes unmasking its message. Most explicit in this regard is Barthes, whose theory of myth is a version of Adorno's negative dialectic: for Barthes, myth belongs to a semiological system that serves to "naturalize" and "universalize" bourgeois culture. Heidegger laid important groundwork for this approach by drawing out of Nietzsche—von Hendy speaks rather of finding it there—an antinomy between humanity's need to believe in life-enhancing lies and the need for an iconoclast to destroy them whenever they harden into idols. This amounts to an affective reformulation of Hegel's history of consciousness as the human struggle between our contradictory desires to live in the comfort of false consciousness and to achieve self-understanding.

Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* defines the terms of this struggle as being between enlightenment and myth, thus gesturing respectively to Hegel's faith in rationalism and to Nietzsche's alleged nihilism. As with Barthes, their objective is a systematic unmasking of the myths of bourgeois culture. They treat political ideology as a subset of the broader concept of myth, though the later Adorno actually conflates the terms. They agree with Mannheim in viewing myth as coercive, embodying cultural assumptions that produce a fatalistic outlook. Von Hendy finds that Derrida's "conception of myth as metaphor abused by metaphysics is especially close to Adorno's notion of it as rigidified identity-thinking" (300). Derrida is also seen as making an important if indirect contribution to the construction of myth through the effect of his work on romantically inspired claims about the possibility of achieving transcendence.

Chapter Thirteen is devoted to philosophers and poets whose "constitutive" approach views myth positively as the means by which humans construct their social realities. The most influential member of this group is Paul Ricoeur, who combines hermeneutics with the phenomenology of Heidegger and the Christian existentialists. In his early work, Ricoeur adopts the romantic categories of the transcendental symbol and myth. He

departs from the romantics, however, in his innovative view of symbols as always medi-
ated by language and narrative, or myth, which serve to render them intelligible. Myth
is thus the narrative of the symbol: it serves to "rationalize the gulf revealed by symbol
between signifier and transcendental signified" (311). He soon concludes, however, that
there is not one but two hermeneutics, the second being the "hermeneutics of suspi-
cion" championed by Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, and he places them in a dialectical
relationship rather than treating them as exclusive. Underlying his approach is the belief
that the sacred is immanent in language, but that symbols are capable of hardening into
religious idolatry: by smashing the idols, the iconoclast allows the symbols to speak
once more. Von Hendy concludes by demonstrating how very closely Ricoeur's later
work on metaphor and narrative cohere with his work on symbol and myth.

Like Ricoeur, Kolakowski's early work originates in contemporary phenomenology and
existentialism (although Kolakowski's existentialists are Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, in
addition to Heidegger). For Kolakowski, myth allows us to accept the contingency of real-
ity by endowing the world with value. Myth is thus an indispensable aspect of human
thought, and its influence can be wholly beneficent, as Kolakowski sees it as being in tra-
ditional cultures, though in modern societies it may also become a narcotic if it devel-
ops into ideology. We are thus once again in permanent need of a hermeneutics of sus-
picion, which Kolakowski identifies with the skeptical empiricism of a David Hume.
Although his theory of myth is not based on theological assumptions, it still remains
anchored in an external reality that includes Heidegger's *Dasein*.

Eric Gould is said to provide the first entirely non-transcendental theory of myth as
supreme fiction. Gould revives the romantic claim that modern authors such as
Lawrence, T. S. Eliot, and Joyce are no less able to create myth—what he terms "mythic-
ity" than the storytellers of traditional societies. Gould seeks to validate the romantic
equation of myth and literature with a phenomenological hermeneutics that draws on
structuralist and poststructuralist critiques of both (319). Von Hendy's principal objection
to the theory concerns his attempt to reconcile Lévi-Strauss's and Barthe's very different
approaches to "myth" and then apply them to his own. A more positive criticism con-
cerns Gould's narrow definition of mythicity as filling with signs of the numinous an exis-
tential gap between event and meaning. Instead, von Hendy proposes, mythicity can be
viewed more broadly as the "motive for the fictions that constitute the entire production
of human culture" (320). The resulting definition of mythicity is so broad as to be a gen-
eral theory of "necessary fiction."

Blumenberg offers a very different justification of the romantic belief mythopoeia is an
enduring human faculty. For him, "the work of myth" is to interpose itself between
humanity and our fear of the unknown. To accomplish its task, myth names to make

identifiable, employs metaphor to make familiar, and creates narrative to make accessible and explicable. It divides, limits, and confines the uncanny into a system of contraries. Myth is thus a response to existential *Angst* and a means of self-defense, comparable to the role Freud assigns to religion. If this is the work of myth, then "work on myth" commences already at the stage of naming, so that myth accomplishes its task while being worked upon.

For Blumenberg, what makes myths endure is their *Prägnanz*, an imprinted form at the core of all their variations, itself the sum product of what met with success during oral performances across the centuries. A result of this process is that myth is drained of the affect in which it originates, so that it very nearly approaches an objective status that helps explain its continued appeal. Myths with a high degree of *Prägnanz* naturally invite further "work on" them that produces new versions, but if a particular version gains widespread currency it can become "dogma" that threatens to bring myth to an end (cp. Ricouer's "idolatry"). Von Hendy criticizes the model on the grounds that it "requires the essentializing of universal experience" and would still seem to require some version of the Lamarckian hypothesis so that the affective response of numerous people can be seen as more objective than that of an individual (323). Blumenberg's demonstration that the social prestige of a myth naturally invites more "work on" it could be used, however, to argue that in the modern world such work is nothing more mysterious than intertextual allusion (though why restrict this important insight to modernity?).

Like Ricoeur, Adams believes that theories of the symbol must be based on linguistics, while avoiding Saussure's positivism. Adams seeks to derive a coherent theory of the symbol from Vico, Herder, and von Humboldt—and corroborated in the poetry of Blake and Yeats—that treats language as constituting reality. Otherwise, he argues, we are left with a theory of rhetoric. Myth is the product of symbolic thought and gives expression to all cultural fictions, itself seen as the result of humanity's innate need to invest the world with meaning. His dialectic is thus the mirror opposite of Horkheimer and Adorno's dark struggle between enlightenment and myth; and as in Blake and Yeats it does not admit of Hegelian synthesis, but is an infinite series of generative contraries. Although he affirms the romantic alignment of allegory with the positivist mentality of modern science, he refutes the romantic opposition between it and symbol and argues instead that the true contrary to both is the "secular symbolic." His reason is that treating the symbol as somehow embodying the numinous signified causes it to revert naturally to allegory. The secular symbol, by contrast, is seen as constitutive of cultural fiction. "Adams's theory is thus far the most systematic and detailed account available among those thinkers who view myth as the permanent fiction-making aspect of human thought" (332).

Von Hendy concludes by anticipating a problem that began for me with his discussion of Marx, namely that his diachronic approach is less successful in the latter two-thirds of the book. It also leads to occasional distortions: a casual reader might well conclude, for example, that Marx and Nietzsche were actively engaged in theorizing myth, as opposed to laying the groundwork for two of the most serious challenges to romantic theory in the following century. Von Hendy furthers the potential for misunderstanding with section titles such as: "Marx and Engels: 'Myth' as Ideology," perhaps in an unconscious attempt to anchor the discussion in his overall framework. His discussion is also very much influenced by later "work on" these authors, which they might well have served to introduce in a less rigidly diachronic survey. That said, I would have sorely missed the juxtaposition of Marx with Carlyle. Chapter Eleven, on the other hand, should be split up and the section on Vernant and Detienne reassigned to its rightful place following Lévi-Strauss. Lord Raglan should also be rescued from his current company in Chapter Eight and he and Burkert placed after Jane Harrison (perhaps with some discussion of A. Brelich).

Von Hendy again anticipates an objection I will not be alone in having when he treats folkloristic approaches—it is indicative of our differences here that von Hendy prefers the term "folkloristic" while I prefer "anthropological"—as an offshoot of romantic theory: his defense is that had it not been for Jacob Grimm and Max Müller, myth might never have found its way into social anthropology. It seems to me, however, that this confuses an historical accident with the intellectual traditions on which modern anthropological approaches to myth are based. Nevertheless, von Hendy's focus remains squarely on the individual authors and historical development as opposed to taxonomy, which seems to be primarily a hermeneutic convenience.

A third complaint, more serious than the other two, but understandable in the light of the author's thesis, is that linguistics is underrepresented in a book on the modern construction of myth. I consider it unfair, for example, to dismiss structuralist appeals to Saussure's linguistics as a "forced analogy" and wonder whether this is not simply a tactic designed to obviate discussion. The historical linguists come in for similar criticism and neglect. A more generous appraisal of Müller, for example, might have better explained his lasting impact on the discipline. Jan Puhvel is mentioned but once in passing, and no mention at all is made of the groundbreaking work of Calvert Watkins and Gregory Nagy. Semiotics is also underrepresented: Pierce needs a better introduction in order to explain Lizska, and Calame's important applications of Greimasian semiotics to the study of Greek mythology surely deserves more than a single reference to one of his articles in a footnote.

It is also unfortunate that von Hendy limits his readership by assuming fluency in German and by employing critical terms and concepts that will be out of reach of many. Indeed, von Hendy makes few concessions to his readers—an important exception being his regular and helpful summary passages—and the conversation sometimes gets weighed down by amassing detail that, while interesting in itself, may cause the reader to lose sight of the book's argument. Finally, the production of the book is uneven: there are a number of omissions and mistakes in the index which often makes it difficult and time consuming to track down the cross-references required to follow von Hendy's argument. There are also a number of typographical errors, especially in the German citations, and capitalization of German nouns is more or less random. The bibliography is likewise uneven in citing the first editions of works, something I find especially regrettable in a diachronic survey of scholarship. I also wished that von Hendy had cited the years of the initial publications more consistently in his discussion. I hope that these minor problems can be cleared up in a second, paperback, edition of the book that would then be within the reach of students as a seminar text (the division of the book into thirteen evenly spaced chapters makes it seem suspiciously as if it was designed for just this purpose). In the end, though, none of these issues affect what von Hendy has accomplished. For *The Modern Construction of Myth* is by some distance the most learned and ambitious history of theorizing myth ever read by this reviewer. Overall, the analyses of individual authors are of very high quality, and some are simply brilliant. It belongs on the bookshelf of any scholar interested in the modern history of myth or romantic literature, and it will prove invaluable to a good many others in the fields of philosophy, anthropology, and religion. I have personally learned a great deal from it about authors I thought I knew well, and about the history of a discipline in which I have long been professionally active.

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