

distinguished by being completely and avowedly false, is read by J.R. Morgan, in one of the more thought-provoking essays in the entire collection ('Fiction and History: Historiography and the Novel', 553-64), as asserting 'a legitimacy for invention, provided that it does not claim to be that which it is not. At the same time Lucian affects to employ this as a position from which he can attack writers who invented in illegitimate contexts: history and philosophy. And in suggesting that these writers supposed that no one would notice what they were doing, he actually denies the existence of any fictional contract in their texts: he assumes that they intended their readers to believe in the literal truth of what they read, and their failure to carry this belief marks them as unsuccessful liars rather than producers of fiction.' This appropriately brings the reader back to one of the oldest polemics among ancient historians, the conflict between dry unadorned truth and pleasure. Historians knowingly included material they knew to be untrue, or rather unsourced, for rhetorical reasons, to persuade and vivify (cf. Quint. *IO* 8.3.67). The Greek and Latin historiographical corpus contains "utopian fictions" of far-flung, largely imagined peoples, whose description crosses the line of credibility.

Despite the obsessive attention given today to storing all the world's knowledge in digital archives — akin to Ptolemy II's legendary library in Alexandria? — works of literature, with which ancient historiography is classified, survive in a living sense only if they are read. To this end, this Companion should perform its highest function: it should make a barely initiated reader want to read the historians themselves. Even learn Latin and Greek to do so. If this happens, then the ancient historians, and not just their companions, will survive another generation.

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Catalin Partenie (ed.), *Plato's Myths*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. xvi + 255 pp. ISBN: 0521887909.

According to a myth told in Plato's *Protagoras*, Epimetheus assigned gifts and talents to all the animals and thereby missed the opportunity to provide humans with what they needed to survive. *Plato's Myths* will remind readers of the Epimethean story in many ways. The book features contributions from supremely gifted scholars (Michael Inwood, David Sedley, Gábor Betegh, Malcolm Schofield, G. R. F. Ferrari, Christopher Rowe, Charles Kahn, Myles Burnyeat, Richard Stalley and Elizabeth McGrath). Each chapter is richly outfitted with insight, argument and analysis. Yet so much talent has been expended on examinations of individual myths that the overall account of myth in Plato is left 'naked, unshod, unbedded and unarmed' (Pl. *Prt.* 321c5-6) for Partenie (henceforth P.) to deal with in a brief introduction. His task is Promethean. He recognises what is lacking and attempts to supply it, but as in the story from the *Protagoras*, the business is left incomplete.

Among the pressing concerns for an account of myth in Plato is just what counts for Plato as a myth in the first place. P. provides a useful review of the term *mythos* in the Platonic dialogues. Yet, his review is only sufficient to flag some of the difficulties. For example, while the dialogues use additional terms to denote stories, legends, and oracles, they also use the term *mythos* in contexts where they present philosophical views that are devoid of fabulous images. One could be forgiven for suspecting that Plato intentionally presents a blurry picture. It is not even clear whether, or in what way, Plato takes philosophy to be distinct from myth. P.'s discussion does not clarify the matter. He mistakenly asserts that Plato 'explicitly opposes philosophical discourse to myth' (xiii, cf. 20). Rather, Plato makes his character Protagoras draw a distinction between *mythos* and *logos* — a distinction whose boundary the sophist comically fails to observe, both in exposition and conception (see *Prt.* 322d5-324d6). P. then goes on to say that despite the distinction between *mythos* and *logos*, Plato 'mixes philosophical discourse with myth' (5).

Unfortunately, we get no general account of the epistemology this mixing involves, except that it locates Platonic myth somewhere between archaic truth and modern fantasy. P. then makes the further suggestion, not consistent with the mixture model, that myth is the *complement* of Platonic philosophy, distinct from it, yet bound to it like ‘that strange hermaphrodite creature of the *Symposium* myth’ (21). Thus, what counts as a myth and how myth is to be distinguished from other forms of discourse is not clear.

A related issue, noted by Charles Kahn in his chapter on the *Statesman*, is the connection (or distinction) between myth and the many forms of images, similes, allegories and analogies used by Plato. Kahn suggests that the Allegory of the Cave (*Rep.* 514b-517a) is not strictly a myth, since it has no supernatural elements and is not presented as something to be believed. *Plato’s Myths*, however, does not observe Kahn’s distinction, since it uses a Flemish painting of Plato’s Cave for the jacket cover. This illustration, along with two others depicting the “myth” of Plato’s Cave (231), is discussed in detail in Elizabeth McGrath’s chapter, ‘Platonic myth in Renaissance iconography,’ which, for all its wonderful erudition, does not contain ‘seventeen ... illustrations of Platonic *myths*’ as the book jacket advertises (*italics mine*), but seventeen illustrations of Platonic themes in general. Such is the confusion in this book about what is to count as a Platonic myth.

This problem has two further repercussions: (1) it presents an issue of selection — what stories deserve to be included in the contents of the book and why; and (2) it puts pressure on the issue of the function of Platonic myths, since function may turn out to be one of the criteria for distinguishing myth from story, image or even doctrine. Neither the issue of selection nor the issue of function is addressed sufficiently in *Plato’s Myths*. The principle of selection, in fact, is not addressed at all. Yet, there are many stories in the Platonic dialogues whose absence from this volume ought to be explained. First and foremost among them is the myth of Atlantis in the *Timaeus* and *Critias*. Absent also is any significant discussion of the myth of the bees (*Ion*), the myth of Recollection (*Meno*), the fable of Poros and Penia (*Symp.*), the legend of the cicadas (*Phaedrus*), the story of Gyges’ ring (*Rep.* II), and the legend of re-civilisation after the flood (*Laws* III). Some of these, perhaps, ought not to count among Plato’s myths, others surely should, but we are not told which, or why.

The function of Platonic myths presents a more serious issue still. P. spends some time with this issue; it is however troubling that his discussion focuses on the familiar elitist speculation that Plato’s myths are intended for ‘the less philosophically inclined’ (7, 9, 10, 24). Fortunately neither the dialogues nor the contributors to this volume support the claim. On the contrary, many chapters support the opposite view. For example, in ‘Glaucón’s reward, philosophy’s debt: the myth of Er’ G.R.F. Ferrari shows how the myth of Er in the *Republic* is directed specifically at Glaucón, and how it is designed to appeal to specific ways that Glaucón thinks justice should be valued and praised. Yet Glaucón is one of the most avid devotees of philosophy in the dialogues. Or, to take what might appear to be a more difficult case, David Sedley’s chapter, ‘Myth, punishment and politics in the *Gorgias*,’ shows that the complex allegory of moral, social and political life contained in the myth of the *Gorgias* is not necessarily addressed only, or even primarily to Callicles (who *is not* philosophically inclined, but *not* because he is not philosophically able, 487a). Rather, like those whose punishment in Hades is exemplary, the myth may be addressed to Callicles as an example to others who may benefit from it even if he will not. Those others would include especially the philosophically inclined — those who “get the picture” so to speak. Similarly, in ‘Tale, theology and teleology in the *Phaedo*’ Gábor Betegh’s careful analysis of the fable told at the beginning of the *Phaedo* suggests that it plays an important role in clarifying the structure of explanations of the sort Socrates prefers. If so, then this sort of fable is hardly intended for ‘the less philosophically inclined’ (and anyway, none of those to whom Socrates addresses the fable are among such people).

Perhaps, then, it is in the political myths that we should look for Platonic propaganda. Malcolm Schofield's excellent chapter, 'Fraternité, inégalité, la parole de Dieu: Plato's authoritarian myth of political legitimation', indicates otherwise. Schofield argues that the goal of the Noble Lie is to get citizens 'to care more for the city and each other' (103). Yet, as he points out, nowhere in the *Republic* does anyone propose 'that these are things that a person can be argued into by rational considerations' (ibid.). The foundation myth of the *Republic*, then, is not for the less philosophically inclined; it is for everyone. Support for P.'s view might be noted in the *Laws* if Richard Stalley's argument in 'Myth and eschatology in the *Laws*' is correct. Stalley explains the difference between Plato's earlier eschatological myths and the eschatological myth of *Laws X* by the hypothesis that the earlier works are intended to persuade people to engage in philosophy, while the *Laws* is intended to persuade people to be obedient without philosophy. Note, however, that if Stalley is correct, then only the *Laws* would target the less philosophically inclined. In fact, however, even the myth of the *Laws* is not so targeted. Rather, it is directed specifically at a certain kind of atheist, as an 'epode' (903b1) to the 'dispassionate' (887c7) arguments already presented to him. This atheist, we should recall, demanded to be 'convinced by sufficient proof' (885d1-3) and was therefore treated to the most philosophical, subtle and complicated argument in the entire *Laws* (892d-899c). The myth of the *Laws*, then, is not intended to engender unphilosophical conviction in those incapable of anything else, but to add a further and different kind of conviction to that supplied by intellectual argument (cf. Schofield, *op. cit.* and Burnyeat, '*Eikōs mythos*').

There is a meta-question here that lurks about the entire book, namely: which myths are really *Plato's* myths? When we talk about the Myth of Er, for example, do we mean the myth that Socrates tells Glaucon in Plato's *Republic*, or do we mean something extracted from the dialogue and assigned to Plato. In each case, the target audience is different. Ferrari shows how important it is to observe the difference: if he is correct, there are many indications within the *Republic* that the Myth of Er is directed specifically at the character of Glaucon, and that the right interpretation of the myth depends on noticing those indications. Most of the authors are careful to observe the distinction between the inner world of the dialogue and the outer, historical world of Platonic philosophy and *its* interpretation. Perhaps because the outer world is more contentious, the authors mostly restrict themselves to the inner one. Notice, however, that we are then required to speak about Protagoras' myth, or Aristophanes' myth, or Socrates' myth, or the Eleatic Stranger's myth, or Timaeus' myth, or the Athenian Stranger's myth. These are not *Plato's* myths.

There is much to be gained from such restriction — it would seem important to the understanding of myths in Plato's dialogues generally that we should understand each myth in its specific context. But, ultimately, if we are to understand *Plato's* myths and *Plato's* audience, we have to grasp the nettle of the dialogue form. For it is not the case that, as P. claims, the dialogues can be divided into 'conversation' and 'picture' ('once in a while the conversation is interrupted and then the pictures appear,' xiii). As soon as we begin a Platonic dialogue, the pictures have begun in the stories that are told to the reader (there is a hint of this in Sedley, 109). It is plausible that a complete understanding of the stories contained in Plato's dialogues would also involve understanding why he wrote philosophy in the form of (admittedly peculiar) stories and for whom he wrote such stories. P. resists treating the dialogues themselves as framing myths (or indeed as myths in any sense), calling this strategy 'radical' (19). Yet on his own terms, there is nothing to distinguish between a Platonic myth and a Platonic dialogue. 'A Platonic myth,' he says, 'is a narrative that may serve as an "embodiment" of abstract content' (9). What is the *Republic* but a narrative (told by Socrates) that serves as an embodiment of abstract content?

I have said nothing so far about the *eikōs mythos* of the *Timaeus*. For a long time this has seemed to commentators a special case, needing a special explanation. In '*Eikōs mythos*', Myles Burnyeat argues forcefully that commentators have failed to appreciate the status of Timaeus' cosmogony as myth. His argument shows, I think, how implausible it is not to treat the dialogues

themselves as framing myths. Burnyeat shows that Timaeus' cosmogony is as much a myth as Critias' tale of the flood, or Socrates' narrative of an ideal city (all three are called *mythos* without any discrepancy). What is distinctive about Timaeus' cosmogony is rather the qualification, *eikōs*: it is a *reasonable* or *appropriate* myth. Meeting the standard of reasonableness makes an *eikōs mythos* also a *logos*, but a *logos* distinct from that of a mathematical demonstration or deductive argument. Instead, Timaeus' tale of cosmogony meets a *practical* standard. For all its apparently scientific detail, it is no more than the 'modest and reasonable pastime' of a modest and reasonable man (181). It is possible to extend Burnyeat's view and treat each Platonic dialogue as a practical *mythos* along the same lines. Indeed, if we are to believe the peculiar self-referential message embedded in the *Phaedrus*, this is exactly how Plato thinks of his own dialogues: as the pastime of a modest writer (see *Phaedrus* 275c-276e, esp. 276d-e). Again, the connection between myth and dialogue beckons.

*Plato's Myths* is a very fine collection of articles about specific myths, or specific themes in myths, found in the Platonic dialogues. Indeed, the standard of scholarship is uniformly excellent. For all that, the collection lacks a genuine organising principle, and fails to provide much insight into either the meaning or the function of myth in Platonic philosophy. Of course, that is all too easy to say with hindsight.

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Mark Payne, *Theocritus and the Invention of Fiction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 183 + viii pages. ISBN 3978-0-521-86577-7.

Mark Payne's book, based on his Columbia University doctoral dissertation, is a virtuoso analysis of the imaginative role play in which the characters of Theocritus' *Idylls* find themselves engaged. It consists of Introduction, four chapters ('The Pleasures of the Imaginary', 'The Presence of the Fictional World', 'Becoming Bucolic', 'From Fiction to Metafiction') and Conclusion ('The Future of a Fiction'). While there is no doubt that the book makes an important contribution to the study of Theocritus and bucolic poetry as a whole, its main interest, at least in the eyes of this reader, lies in general rather than in particular issues, and it is on these general issues that the present review is focused.

'Each age possesses its own idea of fiction' — this is the first thing to spring to mind upon reading *Theocritus and the Invention of Fiction*. For the idea of fiction with which the book is permeated is not the one that would embrace the novels of Dickens or Dostoyevsky nor even those of Joyce or Virginia Woolf. It takes the reader to the realm of the postmodern novel with its possible worlds, retellings of previous fictions by marginal characters, author's encounters with his/her own characters, and its endless role play. Small wonder, therefore, that the modern authors whose names are encountered throughout the book are Henry Darger, J. M. Coetzee, Christa Wolf, John Gardner, Fernando Pessoa, Timothy Findley. Theocritus, the world of whose *Idylls* is, as is emphasised more than once, 'fully fictional' rather than simply 'mimetic' (cf. e.g. 91), is this fiction's founding father.

The programmatic distinction between the 'mimetic' fiction on the one hand and the 'fully fictional' fiction on the other is made explicit on the very first pages of the book. 'At this point then', Payne writes, 'I want to distinguish between two kinds of fiction: on the one hand, fictions that are a useful model for understanding the reality that we ourselves inhabit, and, on the other, fictions that offer an alternative to it' (1-2). Needless to say, the quintessential partisan of the former, conspicuous as he is for his 'pro-mimetic prejudice' (Gérard Genette's expression, quoted on 57), is Aristotle.