

ence, they are all such good examples of the genre that they reach a much broader cross-section of readers. Many other mysteries intended for gay audiences (usually of a far less professional character) have appeared. Gay and lesbian characters are also much more prominent in the general mystery fiction of the two decades after 1970 in both the United States and Britain, their numbers far too numerous to mention. Such well known authors as Ian Fleming, Ngaio Marsh, Ruth Rendell, Josephine Tey, John MacDonald, and Amanda Cross have included both lesbian and gay characters in their novels. In most cases the gay characters are far more well-rounded and emotionally balanced individuals than those created in earlier decades.

The success of mystery novels with gay male detectives has also led to an increase in novels with lesbian characters and at least one series with a lesbian detective. Three novels by Heron Carvic published between 1968 and 1971 featuring Miss Seeton as the detective have lesbian characters, as do three mysteries by Peter Dickinson published between 1972 and 1976, and three well-received works of P. D. James published between 1971 and 1980, including *Death of an Expert Witness*. The well known mystery novelist Robert Parker wrote about lesbian characters and the lesbian subculture in his 1980 work *Looking for Rachel Wallace*. In the early 1980s, Vicki P. McConnell started a series of whodunit novels featuring the lesbian detective Nyla Wade.

See also *Novels and Short Fiction*.

James B. Levin

### MYTHOLOGY, CLASSICAL

The concept of mythology in Greek civilization refers not merely to the gods, but to the demigods as well—the heroes renowned in song and story. Nineteenth-century German scholars, reversing the formula that “God created man in his image,” held that man had created the gods in his own image, endowing them

with his attributes and passions. Since *paiderasteia* was institutionalized in Greek civilization, boy-loving gods and heroes figure prominently in Greek mythology, in contrast with the suppression of the homoerotic theme in the Judeo-Christian scriptures.

*The Loves of the Gods.* Zeus, the father of the gods, is renowned principally for his love of the Phrygian boy **Ganymede**, the fairest of mortals, whom the god carried off to make him his cup-bearer. By the time of **Pindar** Ganymede is enshrined as the *eromenos*, the beloved boy of his heavenly patron. In earlier myth Ganymede is abducted by a whirlwind, but from the fourth century B.C. onward he is seized by Zeus in the form of an eagle. This later became a common theme of literature and art, despite the unlikelihood that an eagle could carry an adolescent boy in its talons. The name Ganymede was also extended in time to any handsome boy with a male lover and protector. Moreover, Ganymede never ages; he is the mythical embodiment of the *puer aeternus*, the pederast’s dream of the beloved lingering forever in the prime of his adolescent beauty. Another theme that appears in the following centuries is the rivalry of Ganymede and Hera, which suggests that in the Greek household the *eromenos* and the wife could find themselves competing for the husband’s favors. Ultimately the opposition served for debates over the merits of homosexuality (boy-love) and heterosexuality (woman-love). By contrast, Zeus has no heavenly mistress; his amorous adventures with mortal women are conducted solely on earth.

The pederastic affairs of the other gods, while mentioned sporadically in classical literature, never attained the celebrity of Zeus’ passion for Ganymede. However, Poseidon, according to Pindar, preceded Zeus in loving Pelops, the son of Tantalus, the ancestor of the Atrides. Tradition had it that his father cut the boy into pieces and served him to the gods, but only Demeter, famished and distraught,

consumed a shoulder. The gods recognized him and repaired his body with a shoulder of ivory, of which the city of Elis boasted that it had the relic. Pindar himself rejected the myth that ascribes cannibalism to the gods and instead had the boy carried off by Poseidon in a golden chariot. Later the boy invoked the aid of the god of the sea as recompense for his amorous favors.

Apollo, himself of exquisite beauty, had one unhappy affair after another—twenty in all—even if, as *paideras-tes*, he was worshipped as the ideal and patron of man-boy love, and his image accompanied those of Hermes and Hercules in every Greek gymnasium. The most prominent of his *eromenoi* were Cyparissus and Hyacinth. The former was the son of Telephos who dwelt on the isle of Ceos. The boy was especially fond of the tame stag with golden horns who was his companion at play. On a hot summer day the boy accidentally killed his pet with his javelin, and wishing to die, he had himself transformed into a cypress in order to sympathize eternally with the grief of others.

Hyacinth had a tragic death when struck by a discus thrown by the god while the two were playing on the shores of the river Eurotas. In Ovid's version of the story Apollo is driven to despair when he sees that he is powerless to heal the wound, yet he exclaims: "My only crime is that of having loved!"

Dionysus, the god of the vine, is given a lover named Ampelos, who is the vine itself. First treated by Ovid, this episode was further elaborated by Nonnus of Panopolis in the *Dionysiaca*, where in the course of a march to India Ampelos is carried off by a homicidal bull, but is reborn metamorphosed into the fruit of the vine.

Another story reflecting the homosexual aspect of ancient fertility rites has Dionysus, to descend into the nether world, ask the way of a peasant named Polymnus, who as a reward wished to be penetrated anally by the god. Dionysus

promised to grant the favor on his return, but in the meantime Polymnus died. Dionysus then carved a branch of a fig tree in the form of a phallus and thrust it into the tomb, thus symbolically performing the sexual act that would have gratified the deceased.

*Heros.* The story of Laius and Oedipus has a pederastic background that is often overlooked or suppressed in modern treatments of the myth, including the psychoanalytic derivatives. The first author who treated this affair was Pisander of Cameiros, who lived late in the seventh century B.C. Laius, banished from Thebes by Zethus and Amphion, took refuge at the court of Pelops, where he fell in love with Chrysippus, the son of his host and the nymph Axioche, and abducted him. Defiled by Laius, Chrysippus took his own life with his sword. Because the Thebans did not punish the perpetrator of this outrage, Hera avenged the crime by sending them the Sphinx. Pelops for his part uttered the fateful curse on Laius: that he would have a son who would "kill his father, marry his mother, and bring ruin on his native city." In the tragedy of Euripides entitled *Chrysippus*, Laius is made to express his pederastic desires openly, while in a later version of the story, Laius' motive for becoming a boy-lover is exactly to avoid having the son who would fulfill such a dire curse. In Plato's *Laws*, 836, Laius is held to be the inventor of pederasty, while before him the law "in accord with nature" had forbidden such relations. The deeper meaning of the legend suggests that the Greeks were ambivalent on the subject of sexual aggression between males: Laius' violence against Chrysippus is avenged, in accordance with the principle of the *lex talionis*, by the murderous act of his own son that Sigmund Freud chose as the symbol of the rivalry of the son with the father, the conflict between the younger generation and the older one. Oedipus compounds his crime by marrying his own mother Jocasta in violation of the incest taboo.

Hercules, the very model of the Greek hero, is the lover of Hylas, whom he teaches everything that he needs to fulfill the ideal of the noble warrior, including the military arts that the young squire had to master in order to play his role in combat. His most faithful companion, however, is Iolaos, the son of Hercules' twin brother Iphicles. In the version of Hercules' combat with Cycnos, in the *Aspis* of pseudo-Hesiod, Hercules is clad in the conventional costume of the warrior of the period, while Iolaos is to him the "dearest of mortals," just as Patroclus was to Achilles. *Ioläus* was to be chosen by Edward Carpenter as the title of his 1902 anthology of homoerotic passages from world literature.

Orpheus figures in the list by virtue of his having invented male love after losing Euridice; his *eromenos* was Calais, the son of Boreas, who had also taken part in the expedition of the Argonauts. This novelty so angered the Thracian women that they murdered him and severed his head from his body; but attached to his lyre it was carried by the waves to the isle of Lesbos. Those who found the head buried it together with the musical instrument.

Orestes and Pylades were another pair of faithful lovers who accomplished great feats because of the erotic bond between them. After they kill Clytemnestra as if they had both been the sons of Agamemnon, Orestes is pursued by the Erynies, but Pylades supports him in his great trial against the avenging furies.

*Androgynous Themes.* Highly developed in Greek mythology was the myth of the *androgynos*, the man-woman. Ovid tells the story of Hermaphroditus, a dazzlingly handsome boy, who at the age of fifteen kindled the love of Salmacis, the nymph of a spring of the same name in Caria; against his will she enticed him down into the water and forced him to copulate with her; the gods granted her plea never to be separated from her lover by uniting them into a single being of two

sexes. But Hermes and Aphrodite granted the wish of Hermaphroditus by giving it the magical property of turning every man who bathed in it into a *semivir*, an effeminate half-man. In Hermaphroditus the Greek mentality expressed its consciousness of the androgynous unconscious of human beings who worship in an artistically refined and perfected guise as the good spirit of the household and private life. The importance of Hermaphroditus for plastic and pictorial art was enormous: after the fourth century B.C. rooms in private houses, gymnasia, and baths were adorned with statues or painting representing him, and especially beautiful are the numerous sleeping hermaphrodites that have survived from antiquity. Openly sensual and even obscene are the depictions of Hermaphroditus having sexual connection with Pan or with Satyrs, shown in a half or wholly completed embrace.

The figure of Tiresias has an androgynous motif. Hesiod asserts that Tiresias once watched two snakes copulating in Arcadia and wounded one of them, after which he became a woman and had intercourse with men. But Apollo told him that when he again watched the serpents and wounded one, he would be turned into a man again. This happened; and so when Zeus and Hera were disputing whether man or woman experiences greater pleasure in orgasm, they asked Tiresias, who answered that the male experiences one-tenth of the pleasure, the female nine-tenths. Offended by the reply, Hera made him blind, but Zeus compensated him with the gift of prophecy and long life.

All the homoerotic myths of ancient Greece pertain to male homosexuality; lesbianism was invisible to the mythopoetic consciousness of the Hellenes. The figures of antiquity associated with lesbianism were all historical, the poetess Sappho being merely the most celebrated among them.

Plato in the *Symposium* has Aristophanes relate a myth that is meant to explain the origin of the differences in

sexual orientation among human beings. The first such creatures were double beings, male-female, male-male, and female-female; to weaken their potency Zeus cut them in half, then refashioned them so that each half could find and unite with the other. The members of the androgynous pair would accomplish the act of reproduction. Deriving from a Babylonian myth reported by Berossus, this fanciful account of the cause of homosexuality shows that the ancients, aware of the phenomenon, invented an etiological legend that covered all the facts of sexual attraction, unlike the Judaic version in the book of Genesis that leaves only the proto-heterosexual pair.

*Afterlife.* The suppression of the homosexual element in the anthropology of Biblical Judaism later contributed to the defamation of homosexuality as "contrary to the will of the creator," but since the classical texts preserved into the Middle Ages and the Renaissance kept alive the homosexual mythology of Greco-Roman paganism, this offered an inexhaustible source of inspiration for writers and artists, and also a code by means of which tabooed and unnamable subjects could be raised with subtlety and double entendre. Although the conventional treatments of Greek and Roman mythology, especially in school texts, bowdlerized homoerotic themes, they persisted in the literature which those versed in the ancient languages were always free to consult. Allusions to heroes of homosexual love affairs were enough to suggest to the initiated the author's intent, as in the case of Whitman's *Calamus* poems; the language of Aesop conveyed the message despite Christian and then Victorian censorship. So the afterlife of the Greek myths undercut the heterosexual bias of Judeo-Christian theology, and for the sophisticated modern reader these legends revive the profoundly homoerotic ambiance of the "glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome."

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## MYTHS AND FABRICATIONS

Prejudice against any human group manifests itself in stereotypes. Male homosexuals are said to be effeminate, superficial, and clannish, while lesbians are accused of being mannish, homely, and aggressive. Apart from these characterological ascriptions, however, historical study brings to light antihomosexual myths—purported true stories which are invented and propagated to validate bigotry.

### *Myths of Judeo-Christian Origin.*

The most ancient and influential of these myths is the Biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah. Genesis 14, 18 and 19 tell of these arrogant cities and of their destruction by a rain of brimstone and fire. Over and over again, Christian statesmen and preachers have used the tale to demonstrate that if people do not renounce their wicked acts, they will go the way of Sodom and Gomorrah—whose historicity modern critical scholarship has utterly rejected and consigned to the realm of geographical legend.

According to a medieval legend, on Christmas eve, at the very moment of the Nativity of Jesus, all mankind guilty of homosexual sin died a sudden death. Unless human nature were purged of unnatural vice, the Savior could not be persuaded to assume human flesh. Although the story is often ascribed to St. Jerome in the fourth century (and in part to his contemporary, St. Augustine), in fact it cannot be traced back in manuscript sources before the Biblical Commentary of Hugh of St. Cher (about 1230–35), who claimed to have learned it from Peter the Chanter of Paris.