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Changing Attitudes towards Classical Mythology and their Impact on Notions of the Powers of Music in Early Modern England

Classical myths such as those of Orpheus, Amphion, and Arion held a central place in musical culture around 1600. With little in the way of musical exemplars from classical antiquity to inspire Renaissance musicians as literary and architectural remains might, the reputation of Greek music was founded instead on theoretical treatises and myths of music's wondrous powers. Apologists for music drew extensively on classical mythology for exemplars of its distinguished history, powerful effects, and importance to society.[1] Composers attempting to recapture something of music's affective powers as reputed in myth were inspired to new genres such as monody, recitative, and opera.[2] These myths were not merely fictional tales providing themes for song and spectacle, but constituent parts of musical knowledge – particularly of a moral or philosophical kind – in the early modern period.

This work was supported by the British Academy for the Humanities and Social Sciences. Early modern spelling and punctuation has been maintained, but contractions have been expanded and the use of i/j , u/v has been modernized.

[1] For example: Thomas Lodge, *Protogenes Can Know Apelles by His Line* (1579), 1[7]-[1]8, 26, 31; *The Praise of Musicke* (Oxford, 1586), 1-19, 48-53; John Playford, *A Brief Introduction to the Skill of Musick in Two Books* (1664), sig.A2r.

[2] Vladimir L. Marchenkov, *The Orpheus Myth and the Powers of Music*, Interplay: Music in Interdisciplinary Dialogue (Hillsdale, NY, 2009), 62-70; Frederick W. Sternfeld, *The Birth of Opera* (Oxford, 1993), 1-30; Mark Evan Bonds, *Absolute Music: The History of an Idea* (Oxford, 2014), 55-8; Ruth Katz, *Divining the Powers of Music: Aesthetic Theory and the Origins of Opera* (New York, 1986), 111-13.

Yet did early modern people really believe that there had been an Orpheus whose music had tamed wild beasts and gained him entry to the underworld, or an Amphion whose tunes had built the walls of Thebes? While in the Christian era they could not have faith in them as gods, they did regard them as historical musicians and held the stories as benchmarks against which modern music could be judged and often found wanting.[3] Yet they also referred to these stories as the feigning of poets and subjected them to complex allegorical interpretations to try to find meaning behind their apparent incredibility.[4] Indeed literary historian Arthur Ferguson has described the English Renaissance approach to mythology as one of 'half-belief', combining a 'subtly pervasive scepticism' with an equally strong 'will to believe'.[5] What were the implications of these different approaches and degrees of belief for attitudes towards the powers of music, and how were these mythical foundations altered by the increasing importance of empirical and experimental philosophies during the seventeenth century?

In *The Untuning of the* Sky, John Hollander argued for a 'demythologizing' of music during the seventeenth century, which he traced particularly through representations of music in poetry. He suggested that musical myths and images of heavenly and earthly concord were reduced to 'decorative metaphor and mere turns of wit', reflecting a diminishing belief in

[3] For example: Vincenzo Galilei, *Dialogue on Ancient and Modern Music*, trans. Claude V. Palisca (New Haven, 2003), 213-15; Sir William Temple, 'An Essay Upon the Ancient and Modern Learning', in *Miscellanea. The Second Part* (London, 1690), 3-75 at 45.

[4] Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art* (New York, 1953), 84-121, 263-77; Don Cameron Allen, *Mysteriously Meant: The Rediscovery of Pagan Symbolism and Allegorical Interpretation in the Renaissance* (Baltimore, 1970).

[5] Arthur B. Ferguson, *Utter Antiquity: Perceptions of Prehistory in Renaissance England* (Durham, N.C, 1993), 2.

universal harmony.[6] This narrative has been already modified by demonstrations of the continuing importance of both world harmony and myth in the thinking of members of the Royal Society.[7] Here I continue to refine Hollander's notion of demythologization by exploring the role of classical mythology primarily in philosophical and intellectual discourses surrounding the powers of music (as distinct from literary uses of myth). The genres considered here include music treatises, religious writings, mythographies, philosophical essays, and debates concerning ancient versus modern knowledge in which myth is treated as potential evidence of the powers of music.

Such breadth in source material means that I have limited my focus geographically to England, but these mythological interpretations and debates were nevertheless part of a wider European culture, influenced for example by the Italian mythographies of Giglio Gregorio Giraldi, Natale Conti, and Vincenzo Cartari in the mid-sixteenth century, or the French ancient versus modern debates of the late-seventeenth century.[8] England was hardly at the forefront of the debate around 1600. There was little innovative mythographic work by English intellectuals and Ferguson suggests that what was unique about English attitudes to mythology was their willingness to rely on such foreign sources rather than their own

[6] John Hollander, *The Untuning of the Sky: Ideas of Music in English Poetry, 1500-1700* (Princeton, 1961), 18-19.

[7] Penelope Gouk, *Music, Science and Natural Magic in Seventeenth-Century England* (London, 1999), 218, 253, 256, 267; J. E. McGuire and P. M. Rattansi, 'Newton and the "Pipes of Pan"', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 21 (1966), 108-43; Katherine Butler, 'Myth, Science and the Powers of Music in the Early Decades of the Royal Society', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 76 (2015), 47-68 at 56-62.

[8] Seznec, *Survival of the Pagan Gods*, 229-56, 279-319; Allen, *Mysteriously Meant*, 301-4; Georgia Cowart, *The Origins of Modern Musical Criticism: French and Italian Music, 1600-1750* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1981), 35-48.

critical engagement with myth, particularly before the seventeenth century.[9] Nor was there a parallel to the Italian theoretical debates concerning how the effects of ancient music might be recreated in the modern world; rather English composers were relatively slow to adopt new genres such as recitative and opera. Yet by the end of the seventeenth-century English writers were re-evaluating both classical mythology and the powers of music, in the process reaching some striking new conclusions about the values and purposes of the musical art. Moreover with hindsight it is possible to see potential roots of this thinking in the late sixteenth-century English debates in praise or condemnation of music. Occasional notes of scepticism towards music's mythical powers were already present, as were the disparaging attitudes towards common fiddlers, pipers and ballad-singers that would colour portrayals of Orpheus a century later.

My concern, however, will not be with the portrayals and meanings of any individual myth, but rather with the methods and approaches to classical mythology as a whole and the resulting effects on early modern conceptions of music.[10] While I find distinct changes in the status of classical mythology and its use in musical discourse, there was no straightforward

[9] Ferguson, *Utter Antiquity*, 10-11.

[10] For literature on the meanings and representations of musical myths (the majority of which focus on Orpheus) see for example John Warden, *Orpheus: The Metamorphoses of a Myth* (Toronto, 1982); Marchenkov, *Orpheus Myth*; Elena Laura Calogero, *Ideas and Images of Music in English and Continental Emblem Books 1550-1700*, Saecula Spiritalia (Baden-Baden, 2009); Elisabeth Henry, *Orpheus with His Lute: Poetry and the Renewal of Life* (London, 1992); D. P. Walker, 'Orpheus the Theologian and Renaissance Platonists', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 16 (1953), 100-20; John Block Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Mass, 1970); Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis, 'The Triumph and Death of Orpheus in the English Renaissance', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 9 (1969), 63-80.

process of disproving or rejecting the tales of Orpheus, Arion, Amphion, and the like in the seventeenth century. Nor is the narrative simply one of gradually diminishing belief. The status and types of knowledge contained in mythological tales had long been a matter of controversy with varied methods of interpretation employed, each with quite different implications for ideas concerning the power of music. The seventeenth century saw increasing attempts to provide rational explanations for myths and the astonishing musical effects they described. Classical mythology remained significant within musical and intellectual discourse, but the modes of interpretation were gradually adapted to suit an increasingly empiricist and sceptical intellectual culture. In doing so their musical effects were transformed from wondrous marvels into exemplars of everyday phenomena.[11] While the tradition of the powers of music was tenacious, some natural philosophers and critics of music were gradually beginning to question whether ancient music really had achieved greater effects than those seen in their contemporary music. Moreover as their expectations of music's powers declined some writers even began to question the central importance that had been given to the musical aim of moving the passions.

Interpreting Myth: The Traditions

While there was no question of treating these classical deities and heroes as real gods, Christianity was not antithetical to myth and the status given to classical antiquity in Renaissance culture (and indeed throughout the Middle Ages too) continued to credit them

[11] A tendency for the powers of music to lose their magical connotations in favour of more everyday interpretations during the seventeenth century has also been noted by Penelope Gouk, 'Raising Spirits and Restoring Souls: Early Modern Medical Explanations for Music's Effects', in Veit Erlmann (ed.), *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening and Modernity* (Oxford, 2004), 87-105 at 104; Marchenkov, *Orpheus Myth*, 75-6.

with a certain authority. Stripped of their pagan religious connotations, there was a general assumption that they contained an important, meaningful core beneath the superficial implausibility. The question was what kind of meaning, and how should it be interpreted.

There were two main interpretative methods through which classical mythology was understood in late sixteenth-century England. Both had originated in classical times and had been transmitted via the medieval period into sixteenth and seventeenth-century thought. The first was the Euhemerist or historical.[12] Named after the Greek Euhemerus who was credited with instigating this approach in the fourth century BC, this position held that the classical gods were real men whose great deeds and inventions had led their peoples to worship them and whose exploits had gradually been exaggerated by poets. This approach reduced the gods to mortals, but instead gave them a place in history. The mythical Greek musicians were typically regarded as rulers who had discovered the art of music and brought their peoples to civility, or else had invented specific instruments. Polydore Vergil's influential *De rerum inventoribus* (an English abridgement was published in 1546) suggested that Amphion, Orpheus, and Linus might all be credited with being the first to discover the art of music, while Mercury was the inventor of the harp from the sinews and shell of a

[12] Seznec, *Survival of the Pagan Gods*, 4, 11-36; Ferguson, *Utter Antiquity*, 11-45; Luc Brisson and Catherine Tihanyi, *How Philosophers Saved Myths: Allegorical Interpretation and Classical Mythology* (Chicago, 2004), 128-31, 152-4.

tortoise.[13] Greek musicians were also either equated with or placed alongside biblical ones in a universal chronology. In *The Consent of Time* (1590), for example, Lodowick Lloyd's concern was not whether these Greek musicians had a place in history, but whether they preceded the biblical inventor of music, Jubal: 'the most part of prophane histories doe greatly erre, attributing to Mercurie, to Orpheus, to Linus and to others which are read in *Genesis* in the first age found, for Propheticall histories are farre more auncient then prophane, by 2000. yeres, beside the first age.'[14]

By interpreting myths as historical, this mode of interpretation allowed them to function as evidence of the wondrous powers that music had in antiquity, against which modern music might then be judged. The question, however, was how much credence to give to their supposed exploits and the extent to which poets had subjected these to exaggeration. Experimental philosopher Robert Hooke captured the spirit of this method (in his treatise on the powers of music, c.1676) when he described how just as actors might look like kings and queens on the stage but in reality are ordinary men and women, so in fables the characters

[13] Polydore Vergil, *An Abridgement of the Notable Woorke of Polidore Vergile Conteignyng the Devisers and Firste Finders out as Well of Artes, Ministeries, Feactes and Civill Ordinaunces, as of Rites, and Ceremonies, Commonly Used in the Churche* (London, 1546), fols.xxi verso-xxv recto. Examples of accounts of music's origins influenced by Vergil include Nicholas Whight, *A Commendation of Musicke and a Confutation of Them Which Disprayse It* (1563) and Lodowick Lloyd, *The Pilgrimage of Princes, Penned out of Sundry Greeke and Latine Aucthours* (1573), fols.112v-15r.

[14] Lodowick Lloyd, *The Consent of Time Disciphering the Errors of the Grecians in Their Olympiads, the Uncertaine Computation of the Romanes in Their Penteterydes and Building of Rome, of the Persians in Their Accompt of Cyrus, and of the Vanities of the Gentiles in Fables of Antiquities, Disagreeing with the Hebrewes, and with the Sacred Histories in Consent of Time* (1590), 11.

might be 'drest up in hyperbolys & rhetoricall flourishings yet certainly they [the myths] contain many reall truths.'[15] This approach enabled one to maintain a belief in the effects of ancient music, but also allowed various degrees of incredulity regarding precisely what these powers had entailed. As will be seen below, even as people in the seventeenth century became increasingly sceptical of the incredible wonders described in myths, authors would still cling to the underlying historicity of the myths, despite rationalizing away their wonders.

The main alternative strategy for interpreting musical myths was the moral or allegorical method. From this perspective myths had no grounding in actual people or events, but were rather a repository of hidden philosophical knowledge.[16] The Renaissance inherited a rich tradition of allegory from the medieval period, especially through the numerous commentaries of Ovid, such as the *Ovid Moralisé*. Yet the medieval tendency to read myths as paralleling biblical events – equating Orpheus with Christ or Eurydice with Eve – was relatively rare in early modern England, which tended to favour moral or political interpretations instead.[17] Allegorical interpretation reached its highpoint in the late-

[15] Penelope Gouk, 'The Role of Acoustics and Music Theory in the Scientific Work of Robert Hooke', *Annals of Science* 37 (1980), 573-605 at 600.

[16] Seznec, *Survival of the Pagan Gods*, 4, 84-121; Allen, *Mysteriously Meant*; Joseph M. Ortiz, *Broken Harmony: Shakespeare and the Politics of Music* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2011), 83-8; Brisson and Tihanyi, *How Philosophers Saved Myths,* 132-5; Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (London, 1958), 17-21.

[17] *Broken Harmony: Shakespeare and the Politics of Music*, 88. A notable exception was Alexander Ross's *Mystagogus Poeticus* of 1647, which ended each collection of allegorizations for the myths of Orpheus and Amphion with a comparison of the hero to Christ: Alexander Ross, *Mystagogus Poeticus, or, the Muses Interpreter Explaining the Historicall Mysteries and Mysticall Histories of the Ancient Greek and Latine Poets* (1647), 20, 198-9.

sixteenth century, where it was presented as the height of intellectual response to mythology. Regarding Ovidian myths, for example, Abraham Fraunce suggested that the narrative and history of a myth would please those of 'meane conceit', but those with sufficient capacity would look for the moral sense, and the 'better borne and of a more noble spirit' would consider the 'hidden mysteries of naturall, astrologicall, or divine and metaphysicall philosophie' contained within.[18]

Like Euhemerism, allegory was a central method in Renaissance mythographies, including that of the English clergyman Stephen Batman, *The Golden Booke of the Leaden Goddes* (1577).[19] For Batman, Orpheus signified musical skill (of both voice and instrument) while the beasts and birds that he charmed symbolized the 'delectable mindes of the simple unlearned', and his music's appeal to beast, birds, water, trees, and mountains illustrated its effects on all social classes. Batman also drew on the tradition of distilling a moral behind the myth. Orpheus's success in charming Pluto in the Underworld followed by his subsequent failure to rescue Eurydice became a lesson that 'musique is delectable to the mynde, but carnally liked, is a hurt to the soule'.[20]

Allegorical and moralizing methods had particular advantages. They allowed mythology to be meaningful without requiring it to be literally true. Indeed allegory has been credited

[18] Abraham Fraunce, *The Third Part of the Countesse of Pembrokes Yvychurch Entituled, Amintas Dale* (London, 1592), fol.4r. Ferguson, *Utter Antiquity*, 37-9.

[19] Allen, *Mysteriously Meant*, 201-78.

[20] Stephen Batman, *The Golden Booke of the Leaden Goddes Wherein Is Described the Vayne Imaginations of Heathen Pagans, and Counterfaict Christians* (London, 1577), fol.18r-v [but misumbered: actually fol.20].

with ensuring the survival of mythology, both by attributing significant truths to what might otherwise have been rejected as bizarre or scandalous stories, and by enabling myths to be constantly adapted and reinterpreted to suit each age and context.[21] Most obviously allegory assigned a deep significance to mythology, while removing its pagan religious connotations. Some friction between Christianity and the pagan gods still existed in Renaissance England. Despite compiling a mythography, Batman condemned myths as the 'vayne imaginations of heathe[n] pagans, and counterfaict Christians' and he claims to write so that readers 'may evidently see, with what erroneous trumperies, Antiquitie hath bene nozzeled... in under what masking vysors of clouted religions, they have bene bewytched; what traditions they have of theyr owne phantastical braynes to themselves forged'. Nevertheless, he hoped that the allegorical interpretations he presented would 'yelde out such other instructions, as maye tende to sundrye Godlye purposes, and to the betteringe of manye others'.[22] This was typical of a Christian approach to myth, which sought to appropriate what was valuable in myth, while rejecting their pagan religious origins.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the status of the allegorical method had been enhanced by the support of Francis Bacon. Although better known for his championing of empirical and experimental forms of inquiry, he also suggested a continuing role for mythological knowledge in works such as *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), *De Sapientia veterum* (1609), and *De Augmentis scientiarum* (1638).[23] He came to regard myths as the

[21] Brisson and Tihanyi, *How Philosophers Saved Myths,* 1-2.

[22] Batman, *Golden Booke*, dedication.

[23] Paolo Rossi, *Francis Bacon: From Magic to Science* (Chicago, 1968), 73-134; Barbara Carman Garner, 'Francis Bacon, Natalis Comes and the Mythological Tradition', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 33

imperfectly preserved remnants of humanity's greater understanding of nature from an illiterate period soon after the Fall and therefore closest to the wisdom and mastery of nature originally possessed by Adam.[24] This was an age of fable in which myth-makers had 'sought to teach and lay open, not to hide and conceale knowledge', and was a precursor to the present age of factual record and argument.[25] The poets through whose work the myths were known (Homer, Ovid, Virgil, etc.) merely transmitted the stories without understanding their true original meanings. Now, Bacon argued, the 'certaine mysteries and Allegories' contained in these fables needed to be revealed so that they could guide modern inquiry, the wisdom they contained pointing the way to knowledge that could be verified through the observation of nature.[26]

Bacon interpreted myths as containing three kinds of allegory – natural, political, and moral – but excluded any notion of Euhemerism.[27] Nevertheless, in Bacon's approach myths were not merely suggestive allegories, but gained further authority by being positioned within this Christianized view of prehistory, in which myths recorded the lost wisdom of a distant, more perfect antiquity. For example, he interpreted the myth of Orpheus as an allegory of

(1970), 264-91; Rhodri Lewis, 'Francis Bacon, Allegory and the Uses of Myth', *The Review of English Studies* 61 (2010), 360-89.

[24] On the evolution of Bacon's mythological thought see Rossi, *Francis Bacon*, 81-96.

[25] Francis Bacon, *The Wisedome of the Ancients*, trans. Arthur Sir Gorges (London, 1619), n.p. [preface]. Bacon also recognized the potential of myth to disguise secrets as mysteries, as opposed to clarify and throw light on complex ideas. On Bacon's belief in the lost wisdom of this age of myth after the Fall see Garner, 'Francis Bacon', 276-7; Lewis, 'Francis Bacon', 378-86.

[26] Bacon, *Wisedome*, n.p. [preface]; Lewis, 'Francis Bacon', 385.

[27] Lewis, 'Francis Bacon', 375-6; Garner, 'Francis Bacon', 280-1.

philosophy itself. The two tales of Orpheus's musical powers represented the two branches of philosophy and their development: his music's effects on the infernal Gods represented natural philosophy, while the attraction of beasts and trees represented the civil or moral. The succession of stories illustrated how the ultimate goal of natural philosophy – restoring the dead to life – was found to be too great, and acceptance of the inevitability of death led to a redirection of philosophy towards human affairs of morality and governance. Orpheus's subsequent murder by the Thracian women and the scattering of his limbs signified how wars and rebellions could cause the breakdown of philosophical endeavour in a kingdom, until the scattered remains of this knowledge later resurfaced in another nation.[28]

Bacon's reworking of the traditional allegorizing method to suit his philosophical theories exemplifies the adaptability of mythology.[29] Yet the problem with Bacon's allegory from a musical point of view was that the musical element in the myth tended to disappear, merely being regarded as symbolic of a more profound concept. This was a common issue in allegorical readings of myth. Alexander Ross offered no less than fourteen different interpretations of Orpheus in his mythography, not one of which considered what the myths might mean for music.[30] Some authors recognized this problem, including Sir William Waller In his meditation 'upon hearing good music', he allegorized Orpheus and Amphion's music as merely the power of persuasion and the taming of beasts or moving of rocks and trees as the

[28] Bacon, *Wisedome*, 54-60.

[29] On Bacon's particular debt to Natalis Comes/Natale Conti see Garner, 'Francis Bacon.'; Charles William Lemmi, *The Classic Deities in Bacon: A Study in Mythological Symbolism* (Baltimore, 1933), 45, 51-2, 58-60, 67-70, 91-2, 116, 129-33. On other likely references see Lewis, 'Francis Bacon', 370-1.

[30] Ross, *Mystagogus Poeticus*, 196-9.

civilizing of barbarous people.[31] This was a widespread reading of the Orpheus myth with its roots in Horace's *Ars Poetica* in which it was common to regard the music as symbolic of wisdom, eloquence or rhetoric.[32] Yet Waller did not want to lose the musical significance of the tale and so argued that the choice of music as a symbol was in itself representative of music's influence over the nature of people in ancient society. Nevertheless the allegorical method was frequently in danger of removing the potential for myth to provide evidence about the music of the ancient world, and therefore to offer guidance or inspiration for contemporary musical culture.

In practice the Euhemerist and allegorical positions were closely intertwined. Authors did not subscribe to one method or the other, but rather merged aspects of both. Indeed sixteenth-century mythographers tended to assume a historical personage behind the myth even as they allegorized its content (Bacon is an exception here), while allegory also served Euhemeristic thinking by providing a means of explaining away the incredible elements of myths as the literary exaggerations of poets.[33] This blend of methods is exemplified by music publisher John Playford, who opened his *Brief Introduction to the Skill of Music* with a section on 'Of Musick in General, And of its Divine and Civil Uses'. Here he treated Orpheus and Amphion as historical inventors of music, but regarded their mythical exploits as allegories of their achievements as the founders of civilizations:

> the true meaning thereof is, That by Virtue of their Musick, and their wise and pleasing Musical Poems; The one brought the Savage and Beast-like Thracians to Humanity and

[31] Sir William Waller, *Divine Meditations Upon Several Occasions* (1680), 106-7.

[32] Calogero, *Ideas and Images*, 6-43.

[33] Ferguson, *Utter Antiquity*, 37-9.

> Gentlenesse; the other perswaded the rude and carelesse Thebans to the fortifying of their City, and to a civil Conversation.[34]

This combined method of interpretation simultaneously allowed myths to be used as evidence of the ancient powers of music and music's necessity in society, while allowing scope for incredulity and alternative interpretations of the more astonishing effects attributed to it.

Rationalizing Myth

This need to combine historical and allegorical modes of interpreting myth was symptomatic of what literary historian Arthur Ferguson has described as the prevalent 'half belief' in mythology in this period. A strong will to believe in the underlying truth content of myth contrasted with a growing scepticism about interpretations that belied reason and experience.[35] Even in the sixteenth century there was some uneasiness about the status of mythology as evidence within moral or philosophical debate, and authors felt the need to justify their use of it. The Humanist scholar and royal tutor Roger Ascham raised the issue following a discussion of Apollo and the Muses in *Toxophilus* (1545). The character Philologus questions the strength of a defence made by citing the ancient poets on the grounds that by doing so he has made it 'but a triflyng and fabling matter'. Toxophilus (a character who evidently represents the author's perspective throughout) responds that 'oftentymes under the covering of a fable, do hyde & wrappe in goodlie preceptes of philosophie, with the true judgement of thinges', pointing to Plato, Aristotle and Galen's

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[34] Playford, *Brief Introduction*, sig.A2r.

[35] Ferguson, *Utter Antiquity*, 2.

similar use of fables.[36] Similarly, the anonymous author of *The Praise of Musicke* (1586) admitted in the highly mythological first chapter that 'Exception may bee taken against these things as fables and fantasies of the Poetes'. Yet he challenged his readers to 'drawe the vaile aside, and looke neerer into that, which nowe wee doe but glimpse at', as he read music's ancestry from Jupiter via the Muses as indicating that music was a gift from the Gods 'ordained to good use and purpose'.[37] Both Ascham and the author of *The Praise of Musicke* put forward allegorical methods as an antidote to scepticism: the fabulous surface was a mere veil behind which deeper meaning lay. Indeed even in 1670 clergyman Theophilus Gale could regard an allegorical reading of Orpheus as the civilizer of the Thracians as a 'more rational account' than that Orpheus might have charmed animals with his music.[38]

Only a handful of authors felt that the fabulous element to myth fatally undermined its status as evidence of music's powers and value. In his *Apologia musices* (1588) John Case explicitly states his avoidance of mythical stories on the grounds that as a philosopher, 'I seek only the truth'.[39] Yet in the sixteenth century a cautious approach to myth rarely dented an author's faith in the powers of music as the scepticism of the seventeenth century would begin to do. The exception that proved the rule was the Protestant reformer and critic of music Stephen Gosson. His attacks on music in *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579) led him to an

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[36] Roger Ascham, *Toxophilus the Schole of Shootinge* (London, 1545), fol.13r.

[37] *The Praise of Musicke*, 5.

[38] Theophilus Gale, *The Court of the Gentiles, or, a Discourse Touching the Original of Human Literature, Both Philologie and Philosophie, from the Scriptures and Jewish Church* (1670), 92.

[39] John Case, *Apologia musices tam vocalis quam instrumentalis et mixtae* (1588), 2-3. Translation by Dana Sutton <www.philological.bham.ac.uk/music> Accessed 30/12/2014.

early attempt to rationalize the content of musical myths in order to disprove music's practical benefits. Gosson interpreted Chiron's appeasing of Achilles through music as telling him the duty of a good soldier, while Homer's healing of the plague was said to be achieved via a harmony of medicines, not literally music. Nevertheless, Gosson's target was specifically practical, audible music and especially the 'merrie begging' of contemporary pipers and fiddlers and the frivolous playing of 'Daunces, Dumpes, Pauins, Galiardes, Measures, Fancyes, or new streynes', so far from the 'maiestie of auncient musick'. Even he retained a firm belief in the powers of metaphysical harmony as an organizing principle of the heavens, the earth, and human society, exhorting his reader to 'shutte your Fidels in their cases, and looke up to heaven' (for the celestial harmony of the spheres and angel choirs) or to mark the concord of the seasons, the elements or the well-governed commonwealth in order to profit from the art of music.[40]

Although in 1579 Gosson's scepticism towards the powers of music was unusual, the seventeenth century saw distinct changes in attitudes to myth that would ultimately alter perspectives on music's effects too. As the seventeenth century progressed the dominance of allegorical interpretations of myth gradually declined and those new ones that were put forward became increasingly esoteric. The poet Henry Reynolds, for example, interpreted the fable of Orpheus rescuing but then losing his Eurydice as indicative of how Orpheus's mystical 'art of numbers' had been lost to the world.[41] At the same time there was a

[40] Stephen Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuse Conteining a Plesaunt Invective against Poets, Pipers, Plaiers, Jesters, and Such Like Caterpillers of a Commonwelth* (London, 1579), fols.8r-9r, 11r.

[41] Henry Reynolds, *Mythomystes Wherein a Short Survay Is Taken of the Nature and Value of True Poesy and Depth of the Ancients Above Our Moderne Poets* (1632), 36-7; Gros Louis, 'Triumph and Death of Orpheus', 79.

resurgence of concern for the historicity of myth combined with a growing tendency toward rationalization.[42]

The changing status of classical mythology could already be seen in George Sandy's edition and commentary of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1632). Although it still contained traditional allegorical readings such as the Horatian-inspired portrayal of Orpheus the civilizer of the Thracians, Sandys also include the rationalized readings of the myth attributed to the fourth-century (BC) Greek, Palaephatus. The true event, so Palaephatus had argued, was that Orpheus had calmed the rage of the Bacchides with his music, who then came down from the mountain bearing branches, appearing from a distance like a walking wood. Moreover Sandys also compared the myths to current knowledge and historical or contemporary tales, testing them against more modern experiences.[43] For example, regarding the Bacchides with their waving branches, Sandys noted that the same illusion of moving trees was used by the Kentishmen against William the Conqueror, and by King Malcolm of Scotland against the usurper Macbeth. He explained music's effects on human affections physiologically in terms of the transfer of the musical motion from the air to the bodily spirits, and drew comparison with the biblical David (who subdued the evil spirit that vexed Saul) and contemporary accounts of music's ability to cure the bite of the Apulian tarantula. He also compared the attempted rescue of Eurydice from the underworld with the story of a Bavarian gentleman

Allegorical interpretations of myth nevertheless remained in use throughout the seventeenth century and beyond, despite the emergence of new trends.

[42] Ferguson, *Utter Antiquity*, 39-40.

[43] George Sandys, *Ovids Metamorphosis Englished, Mythologiz'd, and Represented in Figures* (Oxford, 1632), 355-6; Raphael Lyne, *Ovid's Changing Worlds: English Metamorphoses, 1567-1632* (Oxford, 2001), 238-40.

whose ardent prayers supposedly caused God to return his dead wife to him on condition that he refrain from his former blasphemous cursing. (In a drunken rage, however, he cursed his servants and his wife disappeared again.)[44] Literary scholar Raphael Lyne argues that Sandys no longer treated Ovid as a source of wisdom and knowledge, but rather as a 'miscellany of marvels and curiosities' to be read in the context of modern wonders. While the additional stories of the commentary served to verify the detail of the Ovidian tales, they also reduced the status of these myths by making them comparable to those of more recent times. Indeed Lyne argues that Sandys even aimed to trump the Ovid tales with more remarkable modern anecdotes.[45]

Sandys's reduction of mythology to mere marvels and curiosities with modern equivalents reveals the beginning of a trend to naturalize myth and reduce it to the realms of reason and experience. While there had always been a certain degree of scepticism, the tendency to rationalize these myths increased. Moreover there were growing challenges to the status of classical antiquity and its authority on intellectual matters.[46] Whereas for medieval and

[44] Sandys, *Ovids Metamorphosis Englished*, 355. Sandys takes this story from the German commentary of Georg Sabinus (1553).

[45] Lyne, *Ovid's Changing Worlds*, 243, 245.

[46] Richard Foster Jones, *Ancients and Moderns: A Study of the Rise of the Scientific Movement in Seventeenth-Century England* (St. Louis, Mo., 1961), 183-268. Recent scholarship has somewhat tempered Jones' s characterization of hostility between ancient and modern knowledge, showing the continuing role of classical knowledge and mythology in seventeenth-century thought (even at the Royal Society). The majority of intellectuals still had a classical education and they held the ancients in high esteem even as they were increasingly prepared to challenge their wisdom and presumed superiority. Recent work includes: Stephen Gaukroger, *The Uses of Antiquity: The Scientific Revolution and the Classical Tradition* (Dordrecht, 1991);

Renaissance scholars referencing mythological stories or classical authorities was sufficient to prove one's argument, within the new empirical philosophy authority for one's arguments was to be drawn from observation or experiment. The status of ancient wisdom shifted, no longer being regarded as infallible doctrine but rather as opinions and observations to be tested.[47] The re-evaluation of myth was closely tied to new approaches to natural philosophy. Hitherto mythological tales and anecdotes drawn from classical sources been regarded as significant sources of knowledge about the natural word, forming an important part of what William Ashworth has called the 'emblematic world view'.[48] Within this perspective nature often blended into myth, being read as symbolic and subjected to allegorical or moral interpretation just as classical mythology was.[49] Natural phenomena were believed to point to the deeper order of the creator: the book of nature complemented the book of scripture. In the seventeenth-century, authors became increasingly concerned with sorting truth from falsehood and omitting the accreted layers of

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Michael Hunter, *Science and Society in Restoration England* (Cambridge, 1981), 148-50; Tina Skouen, 'Science Versus Rhetoric? Sprat's History of the Royal Society Reconsidered', *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 29 (2011), 23-52 at 27-9; Butler, 'Myth, Science and the Powers of Music', 56-68; Anthony Grafton, 'The New Science and the Traditions of Humanism', in Jill Kraye (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism* (Cambridge, 1996), 203- 23; Anthony Grafton, *Defenders of the Text: The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450-1800* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), 1-5.

[47] Peter Dear, 'Totius in Verba: Rhetoric and Authority in the Early Royal Society', *Isis* 76 (1985), 145-61 at 148-5.

[48]William B. Ashworth, JR., 'Natural History and the Emblematic World View', David C. Lindberg and Robert S. Westman (eds.), *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge, 1990), 303-32, at 305, 312-13.

[49] Linda Phyllis Austern, 'Nature, Culture, Myth, and the Musician in Early Modern England', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51 (1998), 1-47 at 2-3, 40; John M. Steadman, *Nature into Myth: Medieval and Renaissance Moral Symbols* (Pittsburgh, 1979) 3-4, 8, 15-7; Ashworth, 'Natural History', 305-16.

allegorical meaning that had been attached to tales of natural phenomena, in favour of knowledge that was rational, verifiable, and clearly observable in nature.[50] Thomas Sprat summarised the aims of the Royal Society in this regard as to 'put a mark on the Errors, which have been strengthened by long prescription: to restore the Truths, that have lain neglected' and to achieve this through endeavouring to 'separate the knowledge of Nature, from the colours of Rhetorick, the devices of Fancy, or the delightful deceit of Fables.'[51] The new approach to natural philosophy, then, required a reassessment and a revised status for classical mythology.

Already in 1646, Thomas Browne's *Pseudodoxia epidemica* was symptomatic of this changing approach to knowledge in its attempt to root out 'vulgar errors' in received wisdom. He argued that a 'peremptory adhesion unto Authority' was the 'the mortallest enemy unto knowledge' and saw the tendency to regard the most ancient times as those nearest to the truth as a delusion.[52] Turning to mythology specifically, he condemned the 'mendacity of Greece' which he described as 'poysoning the world ever after'. Pointing out that the Greeks themselves regarded a considerable part of ancient times to be 'made up or stuffed out with fables', he cited Palaephatus's rationalization of Orpheus's supposed power over trees (above p.17).[53] In interpreting the trees as branch-waving women, music retained its power

[50] Ashworth, 'Natural History', 319-24; Steadman, *Nature into Myth,* 11-12, 14.

[51] Thomas Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society of London for the Improving of Natural Knowledge* (1667), 61-2.

[52] Sir Thomas Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica, or, Enquiries into Very Many Received Tenents and Commonly Presumed Truths* (London, 1646), 20.

[53] Ibid., 22.

over human affections, but was stripped of its effects on inanimate things, thereby making it more credible. For Browne this was how all mythology needed to be re-evaluated.

So classical myths were not abandoned as forms of knowledge, but they gradually came to be interpreted in terms of more explicable and everyday phenomena. In his history of manual arts, for example, Thomas Powell was sceptical of music's ability to affect things without sense. The poets, he said, have strained themselves beyond 'e-la' – gone past the theoretical highest note of the gamut and beyond the bounds of musical reason – in suggesting that trees and rocks were affected by Orpheus's songs.[54] Nevertheless, he had no problem with the idea that Orpheus could tame wild beasts with his music, and assembled numerous examples and testimonies from later classical authors (such as Pliny, Strabo, Herodotus) about music's effects on animals, birds, and fish.

Despite its apparent rationality, however, Powell's approach continued to be based on assembling anecdotes from classical texts and he still gave credence to some of music's supernatural effects, accepting without question the story of Orpheus fetching his wife from Hell.[55] His mix of scepticism and credulity, reason and reliance on antiquity, was symptomatic of the transitional nature of seventeenth-century thought where traditional approaches to myth remained influential even as newer attitudes began to make their mark. Even experimental philosopher Robert Hooke managed to combine a scepticism that regarded myths as 'generally look'd upon as Poeticall fictions' with a belief that some of the effects they described might have real natural phenomena at their core. In his 'Curious

[54] Thomas Powell, *Humane Industry, or, a History of Most Manual Arts* (London, 1661), 110, 112-13.

[55] Ibid., 114-16.

Dissertation concerning the Causes of the Power & Effects of Musick' (c.1676), he combined a belief in the historicity of myth (see above pp.7-8) with a Bacon-like faith in the ability of these tales to signify natural phenomena. Hooke thought that the tale of Amphion making stones move pointed (in exaggerated form) to the discovery that inanimate objects could be made to move by music: the sound of one string being struck can cause vibrations in another string tuned to same pitch, or a glass filled with water will move if another tuned to same pitch is made to sound.[56] For Hooke, the underlying truth of classical myth could be confirmed by nature and experiment.[57]

This desire to separate the mythical and allegorical from the real and observable had an impact in the poetic sphere too. According the Kenneth Gros Louis, the humanist ideal of the philosopher-poet whose eloquent language could instil in the masses the values of rational life and a well-ordered society was in decline. Poetry was seen as increasingly distinct and disconnected from philosophy, and severing this link consigned mythology and allegory to the imaginative, fictional realm, rather than being regarded as communicators of essential truths.[58] Stylistically, interest in mythical allusion began to decline and some called for poets to leave behind old mythological tropes to find fresher modes of expression.[59] Thomas Sprat argued that 'The Wit of the Fables and Religions of the Ancient World is well-nigh consum'd',

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[56] Gouk, 'Role of Acoustics', 600-1.

[57] For more on the interaction between mythical or anecdotal, and experimental or natural knowledge in Royal Society discussions see Butler, 'Myth, Science and the Powers of Music.'

[58] Gros Louis, 'Triumph and Death of Orpheus', 67-80.

[59] Allen, *Mysteriously Meant*, 300-1, 308-9; Geoffrey Miles, *Classical Mythology in English Literature: A Critical Anthology* (London, 1999), 13, 116-7; Bush, *Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition*, 224-6, 240, 244, 247. Gros Louis, 'Triumph and Death of Orpheus', 72-3; Hollander, *The Untuning of the Sky*, 19, 332-79;

especially as he regarded these as mere fictions, whereas moral and poetic truths would better expressed through means that are 'Tru and Real in themselves'.[60] By contrast Sprat believed that the knowledge brought forth by the Royal Society's endeavours would provide poets with new material from the works of nature, which 'proceed from things that enter into all mens Senses' and will therefore be more intelligible and more apt to make deep impressions on readers.

Even men less associated with the new experimental philosophy thought that they detected a change in the intellectual temperament of readers. Writing on the ancient Greek poets, antiquarian and fellow of Corpus Christi College Basil Kennett suggested that the modern world could no longer be led to civilized and virtuous behaviour by music and poetry as they had in the world's infancy and in the time of Orpheus (whom he regarded as a historical figure). Kennett likened poets who rely on allegory and poetic artifice to physicians who try to cure with magical charms. Instead 'things must be laid down in a plain way, and the course and method of Nature exactly follow'd', otherwise the poets' words would be regarded as mere imaginative fancies.[61]

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[60] Sprat, *History of the Royal Society*, 414, 416.

[61] Basil Kennett, *The Lives and Characters of the Ancient Grecian Poets* (1697), 122.See also the similar sentiments in Saint-Evremond, *Miscellaneous Essays by Monsieur St. Evremont Translated Out of French. With a Character by a Person of Honour Here in England Continued by Mr. Dryden* (1692), 367. This is not to say that allegorical poetry was no longer an influential strand of seventeenth-century literature. Such critics represented only one viewpoint and the allegorical poetic tradition continued despite the critical voices: Kenneth Borris, *Allegory and Epic in English Renaissance Literature: Heroic Form in Sidney, Spenser, and Milton* (Cambridge, 2000), 1, 48-53.

Finally, as antiquity lost its status as a golden age of wisdom and artistic endeavour, poets also created irreverent burlesques on the lives of mythological heroes, as in 'The Story of Orpheus Burlesqu'd' printed by John Dennis in 1692 (see below, p.29). Curtis Price identified a similar irreverence towards the Orpheus myth in Restoration drama. Rather than Orpheus being the inspirational poet-musician, the myth was often unflatteringly distorted or even satirized as Orpheus was identified with ineffectual lovers and madmen, or ridiculed and murdered for his lament, while Eurydice's second death was trivialized as rape and abduction.[62] This new trend was indicative of the diminishing stature of classical myth, now open to ridicule.

Such irreverent portrayals did not remain confined to the literary sphere. As early as 1625, Bacon had included among his *Apophthegmes* a satirical comparison between Orpheus (here conflated with Amphion's moving of rocks to build the Theban walls) and a rejected lover whose musical serenades result in the lady throwing stones.[63] Bacon's writings on music show a pointed lack of reference to the classical tradition of praise for its effects, and the reduction of Orpheus's musical marvels to the unwanted consequences of an amateur's failed love song may also be an indication of his scepticism towards its legendary powers.[64]

[62] Curtis A. Price, 'Orpheus in Britannia', in Anne Dhu McLucas (ed.), *Music and Context: Essays for John M. Ward* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), 264-77. This satiricial treatment was not restricted to musical myths. See, for example, Tanya M. Caldwell, *Virgil Made English: The Decline of Classical Authority* (New York, 2008), 80-96 on parodies of Virgil's *Aeneid*.

[63] Francis Bacon, *Apophthegmes New and Old* (1625), 185-6.

[64] Andrea Luppi, trans. Elizabeth Roche, 'The Role of Music in Francis Bacon's Thought: A Survey', *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 24 (1993) 99-111 at 104. As shown on pp.11-12, he read the Orpheus myth as an allegory of philosophy not the powers of music.

At the end of the seventeenth century, such satirical use of myth emerged as typical of those sceptical of the veracity of music's claims to special powers and coloured the rhetoric of debates concerning the relative status of ancient and modern music. We have already seen Kennett begin to raise questions about the supposed ethical effects of music in a modern age he perceived to be far more advanced than the time of the mythical heroes of Orpheus and Amphion, and he was not the only one to be doing so.

Orpheus the Ballad-Singer

By the final decades of the seventeenth century, mythological interpretation was tied up with the intellectual quarrel between the ancients and moderns that was developing across the disciplines. While not a new debate, it had arisen with fresh intensity in France (initially focussing particularly on literature, though soon spreading to music). It was stirred up in England by William Temple's 'An Essay Upon the Ancient and Modern Learning' (1690), which argued that all modern knowledge was inferior to the ancient.[65] For music this debate was closely tied up with the status of mythology. Those who considered ancient music to have been greater than the modern relied on the marvellous effects described in myths as key evidence. Temple, for example, regarded the powers of ancient music as wholly lost, while modern music was mere 'fiddling' founded on the 'fancy or observation, of a poor Fryar, in chanting his Mattins'[66] (mocking the eleventh-century theorist Guido of Arezzo with

[65] Douglas Lane Patey, 'Ancients and Moderns', in Hugh Barr Nisbet and Claude Julien Rawson (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism. Vol. 4: The Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1997), 32-71; Joseph M. Levine, *Between the Ancients and the Moderns: Baroque Culture in Restoration England* (New Haven, 1999), 29-30; Cowart, *Origins of Modern Musical Criticism*, 35-48.

[66] Temple, 'Upon the Ancient and Modern Learning', 45-6.

his sight-singing method derived from the hymn, *Ut queant laxis*). As a result he chose to take the mythological tales literally, asking:

> What are become of the Charms of Musick, by which Men and Beasts...were so frequently Enchanted, and their very Natures changed; By which the Passions of Men were raised to the greatest height and violence, and then as suddenly appeased.[67]

Temple's attitudes to mythology and to music are perhaps more convenient rhetoric than a consistent position, however: in his essay 'Of Poetry' in the same volume he disregards the need for fables as evidence of the powers of music as these 'are either felt or known by all Men' while 'the Charming of Serpents, and the Cure or Allay of an evil Spirit or Possession, [are] attributed to it in Sacred Writ.'[68] Nevertheless, his attitudes suggest changes in how classical mythology could be convincingly used within musical discourse. While myths might still be used as persuasive evidence for the high achievements of the ancients, experience and contemporary observations (as well as the Bible) were now more convincing support for the powers of music as relevant to contemporary life.

Those who championed the superiority of modern music could help their cause by undermining the truth of these ancient tales of musical power. Clergyman and linguist William Wotton – writing to defend modern knowledge from Temple's criticisms – argued that if the ancients had had such perfection in music more would have been heard of it than the fabulous stories of Orpheus and Amphion. These, he claimed, 'either have no Foundation at all; or, as Horace of old understood them, are allegorically to be interpreted of their reducing a Wild and Salvage [sic] People to Order and Regularity.' In other words the musical

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[67] Ibid., 45.

[68] Sir William Temple, 'Of Poetry', in *Miscellanea.The Second Part* (London, 1690), 279-341 at 288.

effects described in these myths contain no accurate indication of the state and powers of ancient music: they are mere 'hear-say'.[69]

James Drake's *The Antient and Modern Stages Survey'd* (1699) was one of the most extreme and polemical critiques of both mythology and the powers of music. Himself a playwright (as well as a physician), Drake was responding to clergyman Jeremy Collier's condemnation of the morality of modern theatre as well as his discussion of music in *Miscellanies on Moral Subjects* (1695).[70] Nevertheless at stake was not merely a moral issue, but a broader debate over the relative status of ancient and modern knowledge. Collier had argued that it was 'past dispute' that 'the music of the ancients could command further the moderns'.[71] As far as he was concerned the only matter for debate was whether ancient musicians excelled because of the nature of their music, the skills of their practitioners, or their greater understanding of the soul and body.

Drake, however, accused Collier of 'Tale-gathering among the Antients'. He criticized Collier for giving no proof of either 'the reasonableness of his Opinion, or the reality of his Instances' despite the fact that his examples were 'monstrously, exceeding the stretch of the most capacious faith'. Whereas Collier had assumed the authority of antiquity, Drake (like

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[69] William Wotton, *Reflections Upon Ancient and Modern Learning* (London, 1694), 283-4.

[70] Jeremy Collier, *A Short View of the Immorality, and Profaneness of the English Stage Together with the Sense of Antiquity Upon This Argument* (London, 1698); *Miscellanies Upon Moral Subjects* (London, 1695). On the wider debate sparked by Collier's criticism of the stage see Anthony Rose, *The Jeremy Collier Stage Controversy, 1698-1726* (Milwaukee, Wis., 1937).

[71] Collier, *Miscellanies*, 22-3.

Browne, above) saw the paradox that ‘the vast distance of time shou'd warrant the truth of them.’[72] Drake also seized on Collier’s admission that he was not acquainted with the playhouse music that he was discussing. He was thus discredited as a judge in Drake’s eyes as his arguments were solely based on ancient authors and not his own experience.[73] Underpinning the dispute here are changing opinions regarding the foundations for human knowledge: whereas Collier was content to rely on the accounts of classical authors, for Drake knowledge gleaned from ancient authors was not sufficient – it must be confirmed by experience and reason.

Drake’s disregard for the authority of classical myth had a direct impact on his attitude to music. Demanding rhetorically to know ‘wherein consists this imaginary force of music?’ he mocked the claims of mythology by comparing Orpheus’s music to the playing of contemporary fiddlers.[74] These lowly musicians were given a mock status as ‘Harmonious Knights of the Scrubbado’ while their supposed powers draw a rustic audience likened to Orpheus’s trees:

> I must own, that I have seen at a Country Wake, or so, one of these Harmonious Knights of the Scrubbado, or a Melodious Rubber of Hair and Catgut, lug a whole Parish of as arrant Logs, as those that danced after Orpheus, by the Ears after him, to the next empty Barn... such was the power of the Melody, that even the solitary deserted Gingerbread Stalls wagged after; and all this without the help of one illegal string, and

[72] James Drake, *The Antient and Modern Stages Survey'd, or, Mr. Collier's View of the Immorality and Profaness of the English Stage Set in a True Light* (London, 1699), 96.

[73] Collier, *Short View of the Immorality, and Profaneness of the English Stage*, 278; Drake, *Antient and Modern Stages*, 98-9.

[74] Drake, *Antient and Modern Stages*, 91.

> but four very untunable ones. What cou'd Timotheus, or even Orpheus himself do more.[75]

Drake's language is as striking as his arguments. His satirical portrayal of Orpheus resembles the irreverence of 'The Story of Orpheus Burlesqu'd', a poem printed by John Dennis in 1692. Here Orpheus is a mere ballad-singer, who charms country people to leave their work and spouses, and the rustic mob is again likened to beasts and stones in nature. Furthermore Eurydice is an adulteress who dies metaphorically as well as literally and Orpheus's grief is short-lived before – having undertaken to rescue his wife from hell – he plots to damn her again.[76] In both 'Orpheus Burlesqu'd' and Drake's *Antient and Modern Stages Survey'd* classical heroes are now open to ridicule. Drake's polemical purpose doubtless inspired his extreme language, but the fact that he believed that such rhetoric towards mythology could be persuasive shows how far the stature of classical myth had diminished.

Having already undermined the supposed powers of music by illustrating the effects of even such rustic and ill-tuned music, Drake went on to argue that it was no special quality of music, but rather the festive occasion that allowed it to have such an effect. Music's powers relied on men giving themselves up wholly to their senses, abandoning all reason. Moreover it was not only music, but any sensual delights that could create such effects.[77] Drake had no time for Collier's Platonist regard for the powers of harmony, which he labels 'very

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[75] Ibid., 92. Timotheus was a Greek musician who caused controversy by adding strings to the lyre, for which he was banished by the Lacedemonians.

[76] John Dennis, *Poems in Burlesque* (London, 1692), 14-17.

[77] Drake, *Antient and Modern Stages*, 93-5.

romantick and whimsical' and more 'fancy than judgement'.[78] For Drake Orpheus was no longer a civilizer of barbarous peoples, but rather a mere fiddler who offered sensual pleasures to the uneducated masses. As in 'Orpheus Burlesqu'd', the elite, intellectual inheritance of mythical accounts of music's powers was applied to lowly and commonplace practices, and music was stripped of any marvellous powers over humanity.

The disparaging attitudes to ballad-sellers and fiddlers in Drake's rhetoric and the burlesque poem drew on long traditions of both satirical portrayals of poor minstrels and their moral condemnation by critics of music and theatre, dating back at least to sixteenth-century polemics of Stephen Gosson (above, p.16), and Phillip Stubbes.[79] Yet the relationship between mythology, elite and popular musicians, and the powers of music had shifted. Previously it had been the moralists who had condemned fiddlers and pipers, but now it was not the critic Collier who drew on this tradition, but rather the defender of modern theatre, Drake. Collier's firm belief in the powers of harmony lead him to label it 'almost as dangerous as Gunpowder', while Drake's denial of the powers of music via a comparison of Orpheus to common fiddlers was intended (paradoxically) as a form of defence.[80] By arguing that music has no exceptional effects on humanity he undermined its ability to have any especially detrimental impact. The problem was that Drake's line of argument also removed

[78] Drake, *Antient and Modern Stages*, 97.

[79] Christopher Marsh, *Music and Society in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2010), 79-82; Gosson, *Schoole of Abuse,* fols.6v-11r; Phillip Stubbes, *The anatomie of abuses contayning a discouerie, or briefe summarie of such notable vices and imperfections, as now raigne in many Christian countreyes of the worlde* (1583), sigs.[O4]v-[O6]r.

[80] Collier, *Short View of the Immorality, and Profaneness of the English Stage*, 279.

any potential for music to have any virtuous influence. By denying the ethical effects of music he had essentially reduced all music to the level of the sensual entertainments of ballad singers and fiddlers.

While Drake represents an extreme, even more level-headed intellectuals were re-evaluating Orpheus's mythical feats. One of these men was John Wallis, a Fellow of the Royal Society and Savilian Professor of Geometry at Oxford. His response to a letter asking him to explain the difference in the powers reported of ancient and modern music was printed in the *Philosophical Transactions* in 1698. Wallis took it for granted that the myths were 'highly hyperbolical, and next door to fabulous; according to the humour of those ages'.[81] For Wallis music's effects depended to a large degree on the listener. He rationalized the fables by arguing that in mythical times music was comparatively rare and that the 'rustics' on whom music was said to have its effects, would not have heard the like before. On such people music could indeed work great feats (an argument previously made in Francis North's *Philosophical Essay of Musick,* 1677).[82] Like Drake (though with less polemical intent) he drew comparisons with the fiddlers and bagpipers of his own era who could make the country people dance and skip. The tales of music moving beasts, stones, and trees were surely nothing more than what was seen daily in country towns when boys, girls, and

[81] John Wallis, 'A Letter of Dr. John Wallis, to Mr. Andrew Fletcher; Concerning the Strange Effects Reported of Musick in Former Times, Beyond What Is to Be Found in Later Ages', *Philosophical Transactions* 20 (1698), 297-303. For a full discussion of Wallis's musical views and their context in wider debates in the Royal Society see Butler, 'Myth, Science and the Powers of Music', 60-6.

[82] Wallis, 'Concerning the Strange Effects', 298-9; Francis North, *A Philosophical Essay of Musick Directed to a Friend* (1677), 35.

country people ran after a bagpiper or fiddler?[83] Wallis saw both his less-educated contemporaries and the country peoples of mythological times as particularly susceptible to music's sensual effects. He therefore regarded the myths as having emerged from the exaggerated re-telling of such ordinary occurrences.

Wallis's prejudices of class and urban versus rural culture – like those of Drake and 'Orpheus Burlesqu'd' – are clearly apparent. Unlike Drake, however, Wallis recognized the consequences of downgrading the powers of music in this way. If moving the passions was what any common fiddler or ballad-singer could do, then it was not such a worthy aim for those aiming at the height of musical art. Instead Wallis presented the difference between modern and ancient music as like that between cooks and physicians, contrasting 'a Cook's mixing a Sauce to make it Palatable; and that of a Physician mixing a Potion for curing a particular Distemper, or procuring a just Habit of Body'.[84] According to Wallis, ancient music was simple – comprising of a single voice or instrument – but broad in encompassing poetry and dancing. Such arguments had been common since the late-sixteenth century, when Italian writers had used them to propose new genres of monody and recitative.[85] Wallis agreed that ancient music's simplicity of musical ingredients was the best means to arouse a particular passion or to have a specific effect on the body, yet he took a new direction when he suggested that modern music was superior in its 'sweet Mixture of different Parts and

[83] Wallis, 'Concerning the Strange Effects', 299, 301.

[84] Ibid., 302.

[85] Ibid., 299-300. For late-sixteenth century versions of this argument see for example: Galilei, *Dialogue on Ancient and Modern Music*, pp.lix-lx, 198-226; Claude V. Palisca, 'Theories of Monody and Dramatic Music', in *Music and Ideas in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Urbana, 2006), 107-30.

Voices with just Cadences and Concords intermix'd, [through which] a Grateful Sound is produced to please the Ear'. Furthermore this was musical pleasure for the educated listener of good taste as 'only the judicious Musician can discern and distinguish the just Proportions'.[86]

So whereas Orpheus had represented the civilising power of the highest musical artifice, he was now was allied with the ill-trained, common minstrel satisfying the passions of ill-educated, rural crowds, while the modern, contrapuntal composer assumed the role of master of musical harmony for the appreciation of elite listeners. Significantly, Wallis used the cook versus physician metaphor to present the distinction as one between pleasure (aiming to make a palatable and enjoyable music) and utility (aiming for a particular musical cure or effect). Wallis's choice of image released modern music from the ethical imperatives which had underpinned its justification and defence since the sixteenth century. Wallis was sure that modern musicians were capable of moving the passions just as successfully as the ancient was reported to have done (barring the hyperbole of myth), but for modern music providing intellectual pleasure, not moving the passions, was to be its worthiest purpose.

Wallis was not alone in moving in this general direction. We have already seen that Basil Kennett questioned whether music still had civilizing potential in modern times (see above, pp.23-5), while Drake had regarded music's supposed powers as merely the result of people abandoning themselves to sensual pleasures. Wotton too concluded his assessment of modern versus ancient music by agreeing with Temple that music's powers to enchant, tame, and civilize men and beasts were indeed lost (if indeed they had ever existed), as well

[86] Wallis, 'Concerning the Strange Effects', 301-2.

as arguing that the more sophisticated techniques of modern music nevertheless made it more perfect. For the skilful listener unravelling this complexity was the source of pleasure: 'the greater this seeming Confusion the more Pleasure does the skilful Hearer take in unravelling every several Part, and in observing how artfully those seemingly disagreeing Tones joyn'. [87] Yet Wotton ended more equivocally than Wallis by questioning whether modern music was more pleasurable to an unskilled audience who could not comprehend its complexities. These authors had lost faith in the wondrous powers of music described in classical mythology and questioned the relevance of myth as inspiration for modern music-making: the educated modern listener was believed to be less susceptible to its effects and modern music to have its own superior techniques and intellectual rewards.

Conclusion

Traditional regard for classical mythology and the affective powers of music declined slowly, and by the end of the seventeenth century these re-evaluations of classical myth had not yet become the norm. Debates on the relative status of ancient and modern knowledge continued to have vocal supporters on both sides, and both allegorical and historical understandings of myth persisted well into the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, by the end of the seventeenth century a re-evaluation of classical mythology and its status as evidence for music's wondrous powers had begun to take place across English intellectual culture: in genres as diverse as natural philosophy, morality literature, theatrical debate, music treatises, and books on ancient poets, and by men as diverse as a mathematician, a

[87] Wotton, *Reflections*, 286, 288-9; Maria Semi, *Music as a Science of Mankind in Eighteenth Century Britain*, trans. Timothy Keates (Farnham, 2012), 115-6; Butler, 'Myth, Science and the Powers of Music', 64-5.

playwright and physician, a clergyman linguist, and an antiquarian. The kind of thinking represented by Drake, Wallis, and others not only challenged the status of mythology but also reduced expectations concerning music's powers and effects on humanity. This laid the foundation for a reconsideration of the aims of music-making and its appeals to different kinds of listener, as seen most clearly in Wallis.

In the late-seventeenth century, this reassessment was still based more on reason than experience. None of authors above drew on personal observations of particular performances, preferring to draw instead on commonplaces and stereotypes of country music-making. Nor are their arguments necessarily fully in line with contemporary musical practice: despite Wallis and Wotton's emphasis on the sophisticated combination of multiple parts as defining the superiority of modern music, complex polyphonic genres such as the instrumental fantasia were becoming old fashioned and simpler melody and accompaniment textures were prevalent in song, opera, and instrumental dance genres. As a result, such arguments had more impact on musical thought than practice. As the musical effects described in myths shifted from the realms of the marvellous to the ordinary, this downgrading of the powers attributed to music via classical mythology reduced the emphasis on the functionality of music. Music no longer needed to be justified by its potential to tame nature, civilize unruly passions, inspire devotion and courage, or have a moral influence – it could simply be intellectually pleasurable. Moreover the values beginning to emerge here are similar to ideas that will later underpin the eighteenth-century development of notions of fine art and aesthetics: valuing music less for its utility, sensuality,

or diversion than for its beauty and contemplative pleasures.[88] The re-evaluation of classical mythology and the resulting modified perspectives on the powers of music were an initial step towards these new ways of thinking about music and aesthetics.

[88] See for example: Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History* (Chicago, 2001), 80-8, 140-5; Semi, *Music as a Science of Mankind*, 116-8, 130; Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and the Arts: Collected Essays* (Princeton, 1990), 189-212; Peter Le Huray and James Day, *Music and Aesthetics in the Eighteenth and Early-Nineteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1988), 1-2; Bonds, *Absolute Music: The History of an Idea*, 79-89, 108-9.