THE MYTHOLOGIES
Fulgentius's chief work is the series of *Mythologies (Mythologiae)*, in three books, each with a prologue; the first is lengthy and autobiographical, the other two, short and merely introductory. Then there are, respectively, 22, 16, and 12 chapters, each summarizing a classical legend and imposing on it an allegorical interpretation, mostly in terms of ethics and turning on etymologies of the names of the principal characters involved. The surviving manuscripts variously introduce the work as "Three Books of Mythologies," whence the usual modern title, as "Fulgentius on Fables explained from moral considerations (de fabulis moraliter expositis)," or as "Fifty Fables explained according to moral philosophy"—adequate titles even though they probably postdate Fulgentius. A few copies add that the work was written "for Catus priest of Carthage"; one substitutes "Cantia priest of Carthage," but Catus or Cantia has not been identified. Once fifty legends have been dealt with on a strictly selective basis and without much sign of schematization, the work ends abruptly without benefit of an epilogue.

The opening prologue is a highly personal, whimsical, digressive, and distended affair, which only gradually achieves its introductory function, a process not helped by the prolixity of the language and the obscurity of the allusions. A summary of what Fulgentius seems to be saying may assist. He begins with apologies to his master for taking up an unpractical and old-fashioned theme in a severely commercial age: at any rate it will not exploit erotic elements, but keep to the philosophical method of Cicero. The writer has been separated from his master through retirement to the country, which he hoped would give him peace and quiet for the task. But even there troubles dogged him: business affairs and tax demands pursued him, and occupation of the property by enemy troops was only just ended. As he walks the neglected and overgrown fields of his farm he turns to rest under a tree, and the birds inspire him to invoke the Muses in verse. They appear before him in a kind of daylight vision; and Calliope in particular encourages him, telling him of her past experiences, first in Athens, then in Rome, now cut off by war, finally in Alexandria, where less serious pursuits than epic have
engaged her, horrified though she was at the bloodthirsty activities of the medical school of Galen. The two reach his home, where the friendly Calliope prepares to stay. Fulgentius is obliged a second time to disclaim any intention of writing erotically: his aim is to strip the Greek tales of their fiction and seek allegorical significances, and he hints at a Christian motive. The Muse offers him the help of Philosophy and Urania, heavenly inspiration, also Satire, but he rejects the latter as likely to cause trouble with his wife in the home. The onset of night inspires some inflated hexameters, at which Calliope indignantly bursts in upon him, tall and gloriously adorned, reminding him of his serious purpose and urging him to heed her serious philosophical explanations. So he proceeds to a preliminary account, an Egyptian story of the first idol, typifying the superstition and credulity which have led men to reverence hollow tales and forms.

The way is now open for the Greek myths, and these follow, retold and interpreted succinctly and selectively in a loosely planned order, mostly using Roman names for the personalities involved. Book one includes the children of "Pollus," that is Uranus, the four major Olympians who represent the elements, ending with Pluto as earth; then the associates of Pluto, that is Cerberus, the Furies, Fates, Harpies, Proserpine, and Ceres; then Apollo and his attributes, horses, the crow, the laurel, the Muses, Phaethon; then Mercury and his attributes; finally a miscellaneous set, dealing with Danaë, Ganymede, Perseus, and Alcestis. Book two covers successively the three goddesses judged by Paris, various stories involving Hercules, Venus, and Ulysses, then again a miscellany, this time Midas, Minerva, Dionysus, Leda, Ixion, Tantalus, and Endymion. Book three collects a number of tales involving pairs of characters, namely Bellerophon and Pegasus, Perdix and Daedalus, Actaeon and Diana, Hero and Leander, Attis and Berecynthia, Cupid and Psyche, Pelcus and Thetis, Myrrha and Adonis, Apollo and Marsyas, Orpheus and Eurydice, Phineus and the Harpies, and Alpheus and Arethusa. There is no attempt, in the short apologetic prologues to books two and three, or at the close of book three, to revive or conclude the elaborate framework situation of the opening prologue. Calliope is treated as impersonally as the rest when she appears among the Muses in 1.15, and she is not mentioned in connection with her son Orpheus when he is dealt with in 3.10; it is natural for his age that Fulgentius seems quite unaware of the irony involved in having Calliope, a creature of myth, guide him in explaining myth away. In fact, as in his Content of Virgil and Ages of the World, the more imaginative aspect of the work is soon allowed to fade.
The little that Fulgentius does say in the opening prologue about his chosen subject and his attitude toward it is reasonably consistent with his methods when he comes down to cases. The myths of antiquity are a safe subject because they are too remote to be questioned or censored by the prevailing spirit of materialism and arbitrary rule, but the erotic approach of Anacreon and Ovid, or that of satire and comedy, is to be firmly avoided. He writes:

What I wish to do is to expose alterations away from the truth, not obscure what is clear by altering it myself. . . . I look for the true effects of things, whereby, once the fictional invention of lying Greeks has been disposed of, I may infer what allegorical significance one should understand in such matters.

He is thankful to belong to a later age which has at least emerged from paganism and can be objective and philosophical about its legends and superstitions. Each fable is summarized, that is, retold shortly with just those details and names felt capable of allegorical interpretation, the summary being at times so condensed or selective that it would mean little to anyone without prior knowledge (the story of Orpheus [3.10] is, for instance, scarcely told at all). Sometimes a preliminary, generalized remark on a point of morality to be brought out in the allegory is prefixed to the fable, an aphorism rather in the style of the openings of Bacon's Essays, though less pointed or effectual. This is done, for instance, with the stories of Alcestis (1.22) and the judgment of Paris (2.1), the latter being elaborate enough to constitute a miniature moral essay in itself. The mood is detached and rationalistic: what could one expect of the Greeks except such fantasies which have no value in themselves, but are of value only when they hide universal truths? So the Olympians of book one are the elemental forces: Jove, fire; Juno, air; Neptune, water; and Pluto, earth. In the rest, the cycles of growth and decay, greed and lust, figure prominently: the Furies are the stages of a quarrel; the Fates, those of man's life; the Harpies, those of theft; the Muses, both the organs of speech and the steps to be taken in the acquiring of knowledge; the Bacchae, the progress of intoxication; and so on. The rejection of superstition does not prevent the occasional inclusion of scraps of folklore and antiquarian learning. The interpretations tend to vary with the occasion: Juno is first air (1.3), but later the symbol of the active life (2.1); Apollo is loss by heat in 1.12, but wisdom in 1.22; Erichthonius in 2.11 and Attis in 3.5 are each given two variant explanations or etymologies, while Antaeus in 2.4 and Anteia in 3.1 have to share the same one. And although
the explanations are set out categorically, the prologue to book two allows room for alternative theories, for Fulgentius there says to his patron, "You at least have from my efforts an arena in which you can exercise your own mental talents."

As well as the names and deeds of the mythological figures, their physical features and conventional trappings frequently come in for interpretation. Fulgentius constantly alludes to the traditional visual aspect as encountered in classical art and sculpture, emblems, and other material attributes such as Saturn's scythe; Neptune's trident; Pluto's scepter and watchdog; Ceres' torch; Apollo's chariot, crow, and laurel; Minerva's helmet, shield, breastplate, and owl; Venus rising naked from the waves; and so on. Here, too, a prior knowledge of mythological conventions is assumed. Though the allegory is normally a moralizing one, the categories of natural explanation and demythologizing or euhemeristic rationalism are not neglected: thus Mercury as a planet is dealt with in astronomical terms (1.18); Ganymede carried off by Jove's eagle is a prisoner of war, with the eagle as the enemy's battle standard (1.20); and the Centaurs originated as a cavalry troop (2.14). When no convenient etymology suggests itself, some more famous names are denied this method of explanation: Agave (2.12), Tantalus (2.15), and Endymion (2.16), in addition to Jove, Neptune, and Minerva, are left undissected. Some parade of learning is attempted, but it is mostly traditional rote, and as in other works of Fulgentius the details given of authorities frequently fall under suspicion of being secondhand or invented. Errors occur: Pandora is used for Pandrosos in the story of Minerva, Vulcan, and the birth of Erichthonius (2.11); and Maro replaces Macris as the nurse of Dionysus (2.12). The severely moral tone is somewhat vitiated by the touches of satire, the plays on names (as with Venus, 2.1, and the Centaurs, 2.15), and by the tendency, however natural to Fulgentius's day, to interpret in terms of lust and licentiousness—a tendency also to be found in the *Ages of the World*. Perhaps one can concede a certain grudging admiration for the persistent, if not remorseless, allegorical searching, equally part of his age, and for the endlessly optimistic assertion of hidden morality; one soon feels that however unpromising the particular name or legend, Fulgentius will not fail to find some curious gem in the soil, and his most congenial association is with those medieval interpreters of Scripture who uncovered endless jewels of allegory. In Fulgentius's *Content of Virgil*, essentially the same technique is applied to a popular work of literature; and in the short work *On the Thebaid*, we seem to have a later Fulgentius, mining and sifting just as industriously as ever.
The question now arises, How much of the *Mythologies* may be considered original to Fulgentius, and How much follows tradition or may be traced to specific sources and influences? It is, in the first place, highly unlikely that Fulgentius is translating from any Greek work of mythology, known or unknown. Numbers of known Greek writers are named as authorities, but they are regularly associated with unknown or unlikely titles, and only Homer’s *Iliad* is at all frequently cited in the original. This practice and the etymologies of Greek names indicate some knowledge of the language, but Fulgentius more often prefers to explain the Romanized forms of mythological names, and some use of Latin sources and Roman attitudes to myth is far more probable.

Some indebtedness seems likely to the encyclopedic writer Marcus Tarentius Varro (died 27 B.C.) whose voluminous works of scholarship survive only in fragmentary form. In his first prologue Fulgentius refers admiringly to Varro’s *ingenia* or scholarship, and in the *Explanation of Obsolete Words* he names him several times as an authority. In particular, what survives of Varro’s *De lingua Latina* provides a more orderly treatment which, in details, method, and philosophical interests, parallels Fulgentius. The etymologies of names and places in Varro’s book five and his explanations of obscure words of the poets in book seven are less extravagant, to modern views, than those of Fulgentius but often in the same uncritical style. The very occasional overlap may be accidental: Proserpine for both authors is *serpens*, “creeping,” or *proserpens*, “creeping forward,” Varro’s 5.68 and *Mythologies* 1.10; and Juno is from *iuvare*, “to help,” in 5.69 as in 2.1. The lost works of Varro perhaps known to Fulgentius included similar word studies such as a *Quaestiones Plautinae*, hard words in the plays of Plautus, also a favorite source for Fulgentius’s *Explanation*.

If Fulgentius approves of Varro, he disapproves but is well aware of the manner of Ovid with mythology—the “lamp-light performances” of the *Heroides* as he calls them in the opening prologue of the *Mythologies* with reference to their erotic concern. Yet, in his way, Fulgentius is as occupied as Ovid with lust and its sadness; and in this long prologue especially, the affected and diffuse language may owe something to Ovid’s elaborate style. Then, too, the situation as Fulgentius “turned aside, anticipating the benefit of a shady tree,” followed by birdsong and a vision of the Muses, may well owe something to Ovidian passages such as *Amores* 3.5.3–4, 7: “At the foot of a sunny hill was a grove thick-standing with ilex, and in its branches was hidden many a bird. . . . I was seeking refuge from the heat beneath the branches of the trees.” This is followed by a vision of a white heifer, a
bull, and a cow. Later Fulgentius is visited by the resplendent Muse Calliope as he sleeps; much as in *Amores* (1.5.9-10), the poet sleeps after a sultry day, "when lo! Corinna comes, draped in tunic girded round, with divided hair falling over fair, white neck." The *Heroïdes* deals in full with the Hero-Leander story (18, 19) featured by Fulgentius (*Myth.* 3.4), and a number of the mythological stories and figures of Fulgentius have appeared in the *Metamorphoses*. Fulgentius shares Ovid's general air of disbelief in the legends and divinities he is describing. Ovid, it is true, is concerned with stories illustrating transformations and is different from a handbook; Ovid keeps to a kind of chronology, and his order of stories is not the same as that of Fulgentius. He covers many more legends than Fulgentius selects; but his use of the colors of rhetoric is reminiscent of the more imaginative passages in Fulgentius, particularly the long opening prologue. One wonders whether Fulgentius was aware of the sixth-century grammarian Lactantius (or Lutatius) Placidus, who turned Ovid's work into a set of prose summaries (and perhaps also produced a summarizing commentary on Statius's *Thebaid*), possibly for the use of schools.

A reasonable case may be made also for the indebtedness of Fulgentius to Cicero's philosophical works, particularly the dialogue *De natura deorum*, for some specific names and explanations as well as for the general tone of detachment and suspicion of superstition. In his opening prologue Fulgentius pays tribute to Cicero's *Republic* and the appended *Dream of Scipio* as models of philosophical approach, and later speaks admiringly of Cicero's "stern invective." A possible debt to Cicero's *Timaeus* is noted below for *Myth.* 3.5. The resemblances to the *De natura* particularly affect books one and two of the *Mythologies* together with a few entries in the *Explanation of Obsolete Words*. In the opening prologue, Fulgentius describes his work as "a tale, wrinkled like the furrows of an old woman, which I have just concocted . . . , performing by night lamp," and as "dreamlike nonsense," though not to be put on the same level as Ovid's "lamp-light performances." There is some resemblance to *De natura* 1.34: "For your authoritative Epicurean theories are so much moonshine and are unworthy of the vaporings of old hags as they work by lamplight." Comparable details include items from Cicero's interest in etymologies of the names of mythical beings, for instance, Saturn-Chronos (2.25); Juno, "derived from the verb *iuvare*, 'to aid'" (2.26); Pluto for "the rich" (2.26); and especially the connection between *sol* and *solus* for Apollo (2.27):

But Apollo's name is Greek, and the Greeks look upon him as the sun (*sol*), and identify Diana with the moon (*luna*). Now the word *sol* is related to *solus*,
either as being the "only one" of his huge bulk among all the celestial bodies, or because when he rises the rest are thrown into obscurity and he "alone" can be seen.

Compare Myth. 1.12: "For the sun (sol) is so called either because it is unique (solus) or because it habitually (solite) rises and sets each day." Other points of comparison include the name Hippocentaur (2.2) with Fulgentius's *centippi* in the same context (2.14); the cycle of Stilbon, the star of Mercury (2.20), with 1.18; the use of the quotation from Terence in connection with Bacchus and Venus (2.23), compare 2.1; and the association of the creative principle of fire with the teachings of Heraclitus of Ephesus (3.14), compare 1.3 and the *Content of Virgil*, para. 3. In Fulgentius's *Explanation of Obsolete Words*, Tages as an Etruscan authority on divination, sections 4 and 48, is also found in Cicero's *On Divination* 2.23 (and in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 15); and the Locri and Cottina mentioned together in section five of the *Explanation* could be a confusion of Locri and Crotona, both places in the southwest corner of Italy and both involved in the battle of the Sagra river, around the year 580 B.C., referred to in Cicero's *De natura* 2.3.

What Fulgentius most clearly continues from antiquity is the Roman tradition of the *ars* or compendium, the means whereby much earlier Greek lore was preserved into the Middle Ages in condensed form—the encyclopedic tradition of Cato the Elder, Cicero, Varro, Pliny the Elder; and in the silver age, Cornelius Celsus, Pompeius Festus, Nonius Marcellus, Chalcidius, Macrobius, and Martianus Capella. Capella's *De nuptiis* with its ornate proemium provided a model for the mixture of verse and prose, the so-called Menippian style, seen in Fulgentius's opening prologue, and for Fulgentius's habit of listing authorities which often could have been only names to him; the esteem with which Capella's turgid style was later received is evident in the three extant Carolingian commentaries we have on his work, by John Scotus Erigena, Remigius of Auxerre, and a writer variously identified as Dunchad or Martin of Laon. It is no surprise that Fulgentius was favorite reading in the same period. Reminiscences of antiquarian detail are frequent also between Fulgentius and Macrobius's commentary on Cicero's *Dream of Scipio*, for instance, the interest in Pythagorean number theory as applied to music (Myth. 3.9–10); Fulgentius's visions of Calliope and of Virgil as venerable persons from antiquity are a kind of *χρηματισμός*, or *oraculum*, very much in the tradition of Macrobius.

Fulgentius's *Mythologies* has been traditionally associated with the mythographer Hyginus, whose *Fabulae* (or *Genealogiae*) and *Poetica astro-
nomica are usually assigned to the second century A.D. No safe identification of Hyginus has been made; his Fabulae, in particular, were written before the year 207, but the surviving text, as well as gaps and inconsistencies, seems to contain additional matter, including details from Servius on Virgil, as late as the fourth century. Fulgentius clearly postdates him and in a general sense belongs to the same mythographic tradition. There is, however, little sign of Fulgentius's direct interdependence, except from some coincidental overlap of details and the general affinities of two compilers working over the same traditional material and adopting the same euhemeristic and rationalizing approach in which the divinity and religious associations of mythical personages are no longer accepted. Hyginus's Fabulae is a retelling of classical myths in summary form, at once more commonplace and more elaborate and comprehensive than the Mythologies, which was based on a lost Greek compilation of the later Alexandrian age and contained many misunderstandings due to a faulty knowledge of Greek—a more faulty misunderstanding than Fulgentius exhibits. The style of Latin, like the treatment, is bare and dry, with none of Fulgentius's flights of fancy or elaborate turns of phrase, with only sporadic interest in etymology or allegorical interpretation or the naming of classical authorities, and with a predilection for catalogues, such as genealogies of the gods, lists of place-names, categories of those gods who were most wise, most chaste, involved in fratricide, and so on, which are more suggestive of a reference book. Fulgentius's liking for punning and for antiquarian details, origins of folk customs, scraps of popular lore, particularly Egyptian, does reappear. In a few chapters the two books are sufficiently similar to imply a common source: the summary treatments of the stories of Alcestis (Fab. 51, Myth. 1.22), Tiresias (Fab. 75, Myth. 2.5), and Marsyas (Fab. 165, Myth. 3.9), have a general resemblance; Polus or Pollus as the son of air and earth is shared (Fab. preface and 140, Myth. 1.2); Hermes is the "interpreter" in both (Fab. 143, Myth. 1.17); Isis replaces Io (Fab. 145, Myth. 1.20); Eriehthonius has the same etymology (Fab. 166, Myth. 2.11); the Chimaera is similarly explained (Fab. 57, Myth. 3.1); and Stilbon or Stilbos for the planet Mercury (Myth. 1.8) reappears in Hyginus's Astronomica (2.42). But these are mostly traditional rather than special resemblances, and they are outweighed by the contrasts in style, selection, and attitude. Fulgentius is not writing a comprehensive textbook but an allegorical interpretation in terms of ethical concepts. In this respect his interest in lust and its details, while not incongruous in the Christian teaching of his times, contrasts strongly with the modest avoidance of this theme in Hyginus.
One work of antiquity clearly not known to Fulgentius, and one which had he taken to heart its commonsense view of authorship might well have caused the abandonment of his literary labors, is Quintilian's *Institutes of Oratory* from the first century A.D. Two passages in particular castigate extravagances to which Fulgentius and his age are especially prone. In 1.7.32, Quintilian deals as follows with the excesses of etymological enthusiasts:

I now turn to minor points concerning which enthusiasts for etymology give themselves an infinity of trouble, restoring to their true form words which have become slightly altered: the methods which they employ are varied and manifold: they shorten them or lengthen them, add, remove, or interchange letters and syllables as the case may be. As a result perverseness of judgment leads to the most hideous absurdities.

A little later (1.8.21), he takes aim at the overfanciful interpretation of authors and the inventing of authorities which often accompanies it:

Such abuses occur chiefly in connexion with fabulous stories and are sometimes carried to ludicrous or even scandalous extremes: for in such cases the more unscrupulous commentator has such full scope for invention, that he can tell lies to his heart's content about whole books and authors without fear of detection: for what never existed can obviously never be found, whereas if the subject is familiar the careful investigator will often detect the fraud.

In both places, Quintilian nicely anticipates modern suspicion and rejection of Fulgentius's methods; but in the historical view, the restraint and responsibility implicit in Quintilian's position are far from representative of Fulgentius's age, and would then be found only in exceptional authors such as Boethius and Cassiodorus. One can, in fact, say in Fulgentius's defense what Sir Francis Bacon said of himself—that some part of the blame, at least, lies in the *vitia temporis*, the excesses of his times. In the use of what one would now call extravagant and arbitrary etymology to bolster allegorical interpretations, Fulgentius is typical, not unique. The tradition goes back to Plato's *Cratylus*, and lived on, by way of Aristotle, the Stoics, and the later Alexandrians, throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Before Fulgentius, in addition to the works of Varro and Cicero already mentioned, a similar handling of etymology appears for example, in the little *Sketch of Greek Mythological Traditions*—written in Greek by Cornutus, the first-century Stoic philosopher who served as mentor to the Roman poets Persius and Lucan—and in the Latin *Origo gentis Romanae*, attributed to the historian Aurelius Victor. As to the use of hearsay authorities and the juxtaposition of known names with invented titles, a precedent is found,
and most likely Fulgentius found his precedent, in the *De nuptiis* of Martianus Capella. Fulgentius sins in good company.

It remains to outline something of the remarkably wide and persistent influence exercised by Fulgentius's *Mythologies*, more than his other writings, for many centuries after his time. The earliest traces of borrowing are probably to be found in the compilation of the so-called Vatican Mythographer I, most likely of the seventh century, who, *inter alia*, drew upon Servius's commentary on Virgil and on Isidore of Seville. From Mythographer I much mythological material is borrowed word for word by Mythographers II and III, and all three follow Fulgentius in their emphasis on the hidden meanings of the classical myths. To the seventh century may also be tentatively assigned the anonymous text known as the *Liber monstrorum de diversis generibus*, possibly of English provenance and itself, intriguingly, a possible source for the monsters of *Beowulf*. The compiler appears to have made some use of Fulgentius and other early mythographers. For example, he includes Midas and Orpheus among his *monstra*: Midas no doubt for his asses' ears and Orpheus possibly because, as well as the tradition of his dismemberment and the use of his head as an oracle, he shares with Midas Fulgentius's allegorical account of music in *Myth*. 3.9-10. Similarly the Gorgon is identified with stupor, and Fulgentius three times (1.21; 2.1; 3.1) alludes to her as the symbol of paralyzing terror.

In what may loosely be called the Carolingian period, from the eighth through the tenth centuries, Fulgentius's text had perhaps its greatest popularity. In a thorough study, the late M. L. W. Laistner assembled an impressive array of evidence. Both the allegorical interpretations and the exotic language contributed to the appeal. For the *Mythologies* Laistner cites echoes in the commentaries on Martianus Capella already mentioned. The opening sentence is borrowed by Paschasius Radbertus for his *Epitaphium Arsenii*; minor figures influenced include Ermenrich of Ellwangen in his epistle to Grimold and the tenth-century author Gunzo of Novara. The poets Engilmodus, Sedulius Scotus, Milo, Hucbald, various anonymous versifiers, particularly the early-tenth century author of the *Gesta Berengarii*, and compilers of *scholia* to poets such as Heiric on St. Germanus of Auxerre, all tend to pick their rare words and elements of high style from Fulgentius. A few additions are possible even to Laistner's copious material. Something is owed to Fulgentius's work by Carolingian *scholia* on the *Aratea* of the emperor Germanicus. Prudentius, bishop of Troyes in the ninth century,
reassured John Scotus Erigena in a letter that Fulgentius was a master of Greek: "If you are unaware or deny that he had knowledge of the Attic language, read those books of his which are called *Mythologies* or *Content of Virgil*, and you will find he possessed the highest skill in that tongue." A Fulgentius is mentioned by Alcuin as one of the authors available in York library of the later eighth century, but to judge by the echoes in Alcuin's controversial tracts and in Anglo-Saxon writers such as Bede, this was the bishop-saint of Ruspe rather than our author. The Fulgentius entered in the extensive ninth-century catalogue of the library at Lorsch in Hesse is quite likely to be the mythographer. Three copies of the *Mythologies* are recorded from Bobbio and two from Fulda, all from tenth-century catalogues. Extant manuscripts go back to the last years of the eighth century and include one localized at Lorsch of the earlier ninth. By the ninth or tenth century a copy of the work may have been available in England; and a *Mithologiae Fulgencii* listed in the fifteenth-century catalogue of St. Augustine's, Canterbury, may well have been deposited there long before. Walahfrid Strabo gives the nickname Fulgentius to his friend Gottschalk, with likely reference to their mutual interest in the mythographer.

As the Middle Ages advanced, a number of spurious works, with such titles as *De imaginibus deorum*, *Fabulae*, *De gestis Romanorum*, *De naturis rerum*, *De ficticiis poetarum*, *De secretis Virgilii*, *De ornatu civitatis*, and the like, were fathered upon Fulgentius, with particular reference to his authorship of the *Mythologies* and the *Content of Virgil*; and his name was more than once applied to the general category of mythographic writing, much as Donatus was to that of grammar.

From the late eleventh century comes an admiring tribute to both the *Mythologies* and the *Content*. In his *Liber de scriptoribus ecclesiasticis* 28, the Belgian chronicler Sigebert of Gembloux (died 1112) writes:

> Certainly every reader can feel awe for the acumen of mind in him who interpreted the whole series of fables in terms of ethics (*philosophia*), relating them either to the order of things [i.e., natural phenomena] or to the moral life of men . . . and who, referring the whole work of Virgil to natural considerations (*ad physicam rationem*), sought as it were a vein of gold in a lump of mud.

Once again Fulgentius is being hailed as one who helped make pagan lore and literature palatable to Christian views.

From the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries, Manitius records borrowings from the *Mythologies* in the verse of Dudo of St. Quentin (died ca.
1017); the De vita Christophori of Walter of Speyer (died 1031); the allegorical commentary on Theodulus by Bernard of Utrecht (later eleventh); the commentary on Boethius by William of Conches (early twelfth); and the Corrogaciones Promethei of Alexander Neckam (died 1217). The twelfth century also saw a lengthy versification, over one thousand lines, of parts of the Mythologies by Baudri, abbot of Bourgueil (died 1130).

The fourteenth century is the age of Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Chaucer, all of whom are reminiscent to some degree of Fulgentius. Petrarch's library of ancient authors included the Mythologies, and his statement of the purpose of poetry in his Coronation Oration, echoes the Fulgentian technique:

I could readily prove to you that poets under the veil of fictions have set forth truths physical, moral, and historical. . . . Poetry, furthermore, is all the sweeter since a truth that must be sought out with some care gives all the more delight when it is discovered.

A specific echo of Fulgentius's allegory of the judgment of Paris (Myth. 2.1), with the three goddesses standing for the three kinds of life, is heard in the opening paragraph of Petrarch's De viris illustribus of 1338:

A twofold choice of paths, both equally rash, is open to men, that of greed and that of pleasure. . . . For not only Venus, but also Juno carried off the prize in the opinion of their judges; only Minerva is neglected.

Around the year 1340 a French friend and admirer of Petrarch, the Benedictine Pierre Bersuire (Berchorius, died 1362), included in his Reductorium morale a translation of the Ovide Moralisé and appended to it a commentary, book fifteen, entitled De fabulis poetarum. The Reductorium was popular enough to be given an early printing, by Colart Mansion of Bruges in 1484. In his comments on the tales of Ovid, Bersuire concentrates largely on their ethical interpretation, saying in his prologue that he intends "very rarely to deal with the literal meaning, but to work predominantly on the moral and allegorical exposition"; appropriately, therefore, he names and draws upon Fulgentius's Mythologies among other sources.

Boccaccio in his encyclopedic collection of myths, the Genealogy of the Gentile Gods in fifteen books, a widely popular handbook for early Renaissance poets and artists and drawn on extensively by later Renaissance mythographers, makes constant use of Fulgentius, sometimes reproducing more or less literally his account of particular legends. The use he does make of
Fulgentius is not uncritical. Sometimes he is satisfied to accept Fulgentian etymologies and allegorical explanations; and he speaks once of

no less a person than Fulgentius, the Catholic doctor and pontiff; the fact is proved by his book which he himself has named the *Book of Myths*, and in which he recounts and explains the fables of the poets in a highly finished style. He favors the allegorical approach, the search for meanings *sub cortice*, as he says, and the methods of etymology; and at one point he speaks longingly of retirement to the country in terms reminiscent of Fulgentius's opening prologue. He repeats some of the Fulgentian authorities and scraps of antiquarian learning. But elsewhere he voices suspicion of our author's extravagance, prolixity, and inept handling of legends, or simply dismisses his explanations as incorrect.

It is more difficult to prove what have been called "obvious reflections" of Fulgentius in the poems of Chaucer. It was long ago suggested that the comic anticlimax in the *Franklin's Tale*, 1016-18, had a forebear in the hexameters of the opening prologue to the *Mythologies*, but the resemblance is more likely to be coincidence. Likewise with the moralizing comment in the *Merchant's Tale*, 1375-76.

There nys no thyng in gree superlatyf,
As seith Senek, above an humble wyf,

once traced back through Albertano of Brescia, not to Seneca, but to Fulgentius's account of Admetus and Alcestis, *Myth.* 1.22, which begins:

As there is nothing nobler than a well-disposed wife, so there is nothing more savage than an aggressive one. For a prudent one offers her own soul as a pledge for the safety of her husband, to the same degree (*quanto . . . tanto*) that a malevolent one counts her own life as nothing compared with his death.

But the notion is perhaps too commonplace for special sources to be required. It may be possible to detect some influence of Fulgentius, even if very occasional and derived through unspecified intermediary sources, in Chaucer's allusion to the Alcestis story in the *Legend of Good Women* (510 ff.) and in the *Knight's Tale*, particularly the series of brief allusions to classical legends which tend to bring in the mythological trappings and, as it happens, recur in much the same order as they are found in Fulgentius: for instance, Mercury with wand and helmet, lines 1385 ff. (*Myth.* 1.18);
the statue of Venus, “naked, fletynge in the large see,” 1955 ff. (2.1); the
death of Actaeon, 2065 ff. (3.3); and Vulcan surprising Venus and Mars at
their illicit love, 2383 ff. (2.7). In the Knight’s Tale, 1945, “Turnus, with
the hardy fiers corage” is reminiscent of how he is interpreted in Fulgen-
tius’s Content of Virgil as “furious mind.” The shorter description of Ve-
nus’s temple in The House of Fame, 130–39, with the goddess again “naked
fletynge in a see,” lists her attributes as red and white roses, a comb, and
doves, all but the white roses and the comb to be found in Mythologies 2.1.
It seems possible that one or two of Chaucer’s minor additions to his source
material in the Man of Law’s Tale reflect at least the Fulgentius tradition:
his chronicle Ages of the World and of Man is not evidenced as having ac-
quired the continuing popularity of the Mythologies or the Content, but in
its dependence on Eusebius and Orosius it could be classified among the
“olde Romayn geestes” rather mysteriously mentioned in this tale (1126);
it does, for instance, supply a detailed background and an Old Testament
connection for the passing allusions to Semiramis (339), David (936 ff.),
and Judith (939 ff.). Likewise Chaucer’s use in the Knight’s Tale of astro-
logical interpretations of the pagan gods, a tradition which goes back to the
Astronomica of Hyginus and is echoed in the Allegoriae poetarum of Al-
bericus of London, may owe something to Fulgentius on Mercury (Myth.
1.18).

The voluminous poet John Lydgate (died 1449/50) brings an interpre-
tation of classical myth in terms of moral allegory into such works as the
Troy Book, Resoun and Sensuallyte, and into the Assembly of Gods, which
is very possibly his. Here, as with Chaucer, Fulgentius may be no more than
a distant source, and one of many; but Lydgate’s approach to antiquity ac-
curately reflects the long tradition of which Fulgentius is an important
pioneer.

Around the year 1430, a generation after Chaucer’s death, John Ridevall
(or Ridewall), an English Franciscan, composed what he called a Fulgentius
metadoralis, a mythological treatise purporting to be a sequel to the Mythol-
ogies, in fact drawn from a medley of sources, Biblical, classical, postclas-
sical, and patristic, with little but the name and reputation borrowed directly
from Fulgentius. Fulgentius’s plan, however, is followed to the extent
that Ridevall’s opening prologue also deals with the origins of idolatry, and
thereafter each pagan god or goddess is taken to personify some virtue; the
separate myths then become texts for a homily, with extracts from Fulgen-
tius and others turned into verse as a mnemonic device.
Popular Renaissance mythologies by Italian authors—such as Lilio Giraldi's *De deis gentium varia et multiplex historia*, published in Basel (1548; repr., Lyons, 1565), the *Mythologia* of Natale Conti, or Natalis Comes (Venice, 1551), and Vincenzo Cartari's *Le Imagini colla Sposizione degli Dei degli Antichi* (Venice, 1556; repr., 1587)—retain much of the interest in philosophical interpretation and etymologizing of names that may be traced from Fulgentius. A little before, Fulgentius is part of the first wave of Italianism to reach Spain. In *Los Doce Trabajos de Ercules*, Enrique de Villena (died 1433) follows the legends of Hercules with a moral allegory in which Fulgentius is occasionally cited; the Marqués de Santillana (died 1458) names Fulgentius in his catalogue of authorities and his epicedium on Villena.

A number of scattered echoes of Fulgentius or his tradition are furnished from English writings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by Douglas Bush in his study of Renaissance mythology. In most cases the probability is, of course, that the tradition of Fulgentius, rather than his actual text, is being drawn upon. In Thomas Peend's version of Ovid's *Pleasant Fable of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis* (1565) reappears the allegorical interpretation given Actaeon in *Myth. 3.3*. E. K.'s gloss to the March eclogue of Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender* (1579) brings back the old physiological notion of the heel being linked by veins and sinews to the genitals, as in *Myth. 3.7*. The *Third Part of the Countesse of Pembrokes Ivychurch* (1592), by Abraham Fraunce, includes a derivative handbook of mythology with "philosophical explications," and there the story of Hero and Leander is handled in distinctly Fulgentian terms (*Myth. 3.4*). In his *Ulisses and the Syren* (1605), Samuel Daniel interprets the episode as in *Myth. 2.8*. Fulgentius is cited among the many authorities in the "repository of allegorized myth" which George Sandys added to a later edition (1632) of his translation, *Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished*, the work which still held interest for Keats and Leigh Hunt. Shakerley Marmion reproduced in verse *A Morall Poem intituled the Legend of Cupid and Psyche* (1637), complete with the Fulgentian allegory (*Myth. 3.6*). Sir Edward Sherburne, in the notes to his translation of Colluthus (1651), is aware of Fulgentius on Peleus and Thetis (*Myth. 3.7*). Finally, there is the intriguing possibility that when Milton places Hercules and Antaeus beside Christ and Satan in *Paradise Regain'd* (1671) (4.560 ff.), he is aware of Fulgentius's view of them, in *Myth. 2.4.*

Manuscripts of Fulgentius continued to be copied through the sixteenth century. The *Mythologies* reached print in 1498, the *Consent of Virgil* in
1521, the *Explanation of Obsolete Words* in 1565, the *Ages of the World* in 1694; and, thereafter, editions appeared regularly until the eighteenth century. In his *Historia* already mentioned, Lilio Giraldi, like Boccaccio before him, permits himself a mild expression of doubt concerning Fulgentius: "This author does not seem to me entirely reliable, either for factual accuracy or for propriety of expression." Here, perhaps, we see the tide of acceptance and popularity at last beginning to turn. In collections of antiquarian mythology of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Fulgentius holds his place; but in the nineteenth, he begins to be dismissed as essentially trivial and wrongheaded.

One isolated seventeenth-century drawing on Fulgentius is to be found in Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) 3.2.3, with reference to the story of Psyche and Cupid; but this is a legend more conducive than most to allegorical interpretation, and one not found in the classical writers of myth before Apuleius and Fulgentius. It may possibly restore some confidence in Fulgentius’s higher seriousness that his methods with classical myths found one other seventeenth-century disciple, if an unwitting one with no reputation except for solid and sober learning. When Sir Francis Bacon compiled his small treatise *De sapientia veterum* (1609, translated as *The Wisdom of the Ancients* by Sir Arthur Gorges in 1619), he made no reference to, and apparently had no knowledge of, the mythographer whose basic approach coincided with his; but the mantle of Fulgentius’s *Mythologies*, minus only its farfetched elements, dubious authorities, and etymological adornments, descended squarely upon him. Bacon’s treatment of thirty-one fables, taken from Ovid, first summarized and then explained, follows his theory outlined in the *Advancement of Learning* that "the secrets and mysteries of religion, policy, or philosophy are involved in fables or parables," though his intellectual honesty leads him to admit that "the fable was first, and the exposition then devised." His interpretation of the fables he selects is in Fulgentius’s preferred terms of moral or political allegory: the Cyclops are ministers of horror who deserve destruction; Perseus is war and the methods of conducting it; Endymion, the court favorite; Actaeon, the inquisitive man; Orpheus represents learning; Bacchus, the passions (compare *Myth.* 2.12); Prometheus, human nature; Proserpine, the spirit; the Sirens stand for man’s passion for pleasure; and so on. In this unexpected place we may see a brief recrudescence of the old Fulgentian way. But where Fulgentius runs to excess, Bacon is firmly undogmatic. In his preface to the *Wisdom*, Bacon, in fact, may well be alluding to such excess when he writes:
Many may imagine that I am here entering upon a work of fancy, or amusement, and design to use a poetical liberty, in explaining poetical fables. It is true, fables, in general, are composed of ductile matter, that may be drawn into great variety by a witty talent or an inventive genius, and be delivered of plausible meanings which they never contained. But this procedure has already been carried to excess; and great numbers, to procure the sanction of antiquity to their own notions and inventions, have miserably wrested and abused the fables of the ancients.

These words might have served as the last judgment on the reputation of Fulgentius, had Bacon not had something of a successor in the Mythomystes (1632) of Henry Reynolds, who applies moral philosophy to the interpretation of individual classical myths as part of his general notion that all myth serves as a repository of hidden truth. Thus, heroes like Hercules, Ulysses, and Aeneas are patterns of the virtues; evildoers like Ixion, Midas, and Tantalus represent such heinous crimes as murder and the effects of lust and greed; Ganymede is man’s rational faculty; Proserpine is the cycle of vegetation and the seasons; Orpheus saves truth from barbarity; Jove in his cruelty to Semele is the crushing of grapes for wine; the adultery of Mars with Venus is the alloy made with iron and copper. Reynolds ends such “Physick, as well as Ethick meanings” with a few theological proposals: Rhea and Pandora are types of Eve, and Bacchus stands for Noah. Such notions, and the accompanying disparagement of Bacon as one who hedged in his allegorical views, along with some displays of extravagant etymologizing in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, bring Reynolds in well nigh full circle back to the spirit of Fulgentius.

Bibliographical Note

The Latin text of the Mythologies is available in T. Muncker, Mythographi Latin, 2 (Amsterdam, 1681), with much antiquarian commentary, largely reproduced by A. Van Staveren, Auctores mythographi Latin (Leiden, 1742; repr., 1747), pp. 593–734. Earlier editions include those by J. B. Pius, Enarrationes allegoricae fabularum Fulgentii (Milan, 1498; repr., Venice, 1500?), and Paris, n.d.; "Philomusus" (Jacob Locker or Locher, d.1528), Fulgentii in mythologiis scholia paraphrastica (Augsburg, 1521); the anonymous Fulgentii mythologiarum libri tres (Basel, 1536; repr., 1543); Hieronymus Commelinus, Mythologici Latin (Heidelberg, 1589; repr., 1599); those included with Hyginus’s Fabulae (Basel, 1535, by J. Myciillus; repr., Leiden, 1608; also Basel, 1539, 1549, 1570, 1578, and Geneva, 1608); and the reprint of the Psyche-Cupid chapter, 3.6, in the anonymous Apuleius serio castigatus (n.p., 1624). The only modern edition is by R. Helm, Fabri Planciadi
Fulgentius the Mythographer

Fulgentii opera, Bibliotheca Teubneriana (Leipzig, 1898), pp.3-80, followed in the present work, though limited in apparatus and lacking a full introduction. A list of modern studies of Fulgentius is appended to the general introduction, above.


Particular authors and periods: (1) Late classical to the tenth century: A. Mai, Classici auctores e Vaticanis codicibus, III (Rome, 1831); G.H. Bode, Scriptores rerum mythicarum Latini tres e Vaticanis codicibus (Cellis, 1834; repr., Hildesheim, 1968); Hyginus, Astronomica, ed. B. Bunte (Leipzig, 1875); Servius, ed. G. Thilo, H. Hagen, Servius grammatici qui feruntur in Vergilii carmina commentariis, 4 vols. (Leipzig, 1881-1902); M. Manutius, "Beiträge zur Geschichte des Ovidius und andere römische Schriftsteller im Mittelalter," Philologiae, Supplementum 7 (1899) : 725-68; R. Schultz, De mythographi Vaticani primi fontibis (Halle, 1905); S. Hellmann, Sedulius Scotoes, Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters, L1 (Munich, 1996); F. Keseling, De mythographi Vaticani secundi fontibis (Halle, 1908); Isidore of Seville, Etymologiae, ed W.M. Lindsay (Oxford, 1911; repr., 1957); M. Schedler, Die Philosophie des Macrobius und ih


1. Abbreviated reference is made, here and in subsequent notes, to authors and titles listed more fully in the bibliographical note appended to this introduction. For editorial variation in the numbering of sections or chapters in the Mythologies, see 1, prologue, note 1 below. Fulgentius on occasion shows himself aware of traditional number symbolism: allegorical use is frequent for sets of three in the Mythologies, and in the Content of Virgil, paras. 12-13, seven and nine are similarly treated. The editor of the Mythologies followed below, R. Helm (1898), is no doubt right in restoring its total of chapters to the round number 50, for the traditional significance of which see Curtius (1953), pp.501-9.


3. Ibid., p.335. Another possibility is apoc. 2 (4) Esdras 9:26 ff., in which the prophet in a flowery field has a vision of a woman weeping and wailing.


5. Ibid., p.252.


7. Commentary 1.3. For such "oracles," as Chaucer calls them in the House of Fame 2.11, see C. S. Lewis, The Discarded Image (Cambridge, 1964), p.64.

8. For Hyginus, see the modern editions by B. Bunte, Hygini astronomicus (Leipzig, 1875), and Rose (1934), also Grant (1960), an annotated translation of the
10. Ibid., pp. 155, 157.


12. For these three anonymous compilations, see the editions by Mai (1831) and Bode (1834), and the commentaries by Schulz (1905), Keseling (1908), Schanz-Hosius-Krüger (1920), pp.196-205, Elliott-Elder (1947), and Bühler (1968). Their manuscripts date from the 10th century. Mythographer III, who uses source material of the 9th and 10th centuries, is later than the other two and in manuscripts is associated with the 13th-century Englishman Albericus ‘Magnus’ of London and with Alexander Neckam (died 1217); see further Rathbone (1941), and Seznec (1953), pp.170-79. The detailed correspondences with Fulgentius are given in the footnotes to Helm’s edition (1898): in *Myth.* book one alone, details from chapters 2, 5, 7-9, 12-16, 21, 22 are detected in all three Vatican compilers, chapter 17 in Mythographer II, chapters 1, 11, 17 in Mythographer III, and chapters 18, 20 in II and III together.


20. For these *pseudo-Fulgentiana*, see Liebeschütz (1926), pp.115-16; P. Lehmann, *Pseudo-anitke Literatur des Mittelalters*, Studien der Bibliothek Warburg, 13 (Leipzig, 1927), pp.20-23, 100; Smalley (1960), pp.220-31. The title *De gestis Romanorum* falsely associates Fulgentius with the famous *Gesta Romanorum* of the
later Middle Ages, a work for which, as for Fulgentius, strained allegorical interpretations, in terms of morality and religion, were no bar to widespread popularity.


23. Poem 216, a fragment of 1177 lines, ed. Abrahams (1926), pp.273-303, with notes, pp.303-16; see also Manitius, 3.892.


27. See Seznec (1953), pp.93 (where the prologue is cited), 174-76; also Ghisalberti (1933); Smalley (1960), p.262; D. Van Nes, ed., Ovidus moralizatus (Utrecht, 1962).

28. Edited by Romano (1951); preface and books 14, 15, in English by Osgood (1930); see the studies by Schück (1857), Horris (1879), Köring (1880), de Nolhac (1892-1907), Schöningh (1900), Hauvette (1914), Coulter (1923), and Landi (1930).

29. For instance, Genaeology 1.1.3 (Andreaus); 6.22 (Paris); 10.27 (Pegasus) and 12.25 (Perseus), see Mary Lascelles, "The Rider on the Winged Horse," Elizabethan and Jacobean Studies presented to F. P. Wilson (Oxford, 1959), pp.189-191; 11.2 (the Muses); 12.1 (Tantalus); 12.52 (Thetis and Achilles), see Scarnes-Talbert (1955), p.62. The Polus who appears in Gen. 1.6, as "the heaven, child of Demogorgon," is claimed by Coulter (1923), pp.337-38, to be taken from the Protopainos of Pronapides, but is more obviously the Pollus of Fulgentius, Myth. 1.2.


34. For instance, the quotations from "Appollolannes comicus," 8.1, compare Myth. 1.2, and "Porphirius in epigrammate," 3.23, compare Myth. 2.1; and the description of the veins leading from the Achilles tendon, 12.52, compare Myth. 3.7.

35. For instance, Gen. 4.24, Fulgentius amplissimam et meo iudicio minime opportunam uerborum effundens copiam; 11.7, where he speaks of leaving Fulgentius "as he goes soaring off into the sublime," posuissem Fulgentii expositionem, sed quomiam per sublimia uadit, omisi; and 13.58.

36. For instance, Gen. 4.30, 10.10, 13.58.


41. Koonce, p. 92.


43. The work has importance for Renaissance art; see Seznec (1953), pp. 94-95; the full study and edition by Liebeschütz (1926); and the discussion by Smalley (1960), pp. 110-18, 353-58 (citing extracts), who shows that Rivevall's classicizing interests were shared by such figures as Robert Holkot in his *Moralia*, and especially John Lathbury the elder (died 1362), who anticipates Rivevall in his concern with the mythological art and sculpture. For Holkot, see J. B. Allen, "The Library of a Classicizer: the Sources of Robert Holkot's Mythographic Learning," *Arts Libéraux et Philosophie au Moyen Age, Actes du IVe Congrès International de Philosophie Médiévale* (Montreal and Paris, 1969), pp. 721-29.

44. See the detailed study by Seznec (1953), pp. 224 ff.

45. Bush (1963), respectively pp. 313-14 (Peept), 93 (Spenser), 123-124 (Fraunce), 226 (Daniel), 354 (Sandys), 241-42 (Marmion), 249 (Sherburne), 295 (Milton). Bush adds as an Italian instance a work known to Milton, the *Adone* of Giambattista Marini (1623), which alludes to the active, contemplative, and voluptuary ways of life as encountered in *Myth*. 2.1. Echoes of Fulgentius in Daniel may also include his *Complaint to Rosamond* (1592); see I. Clark, *Renaissance Quarterly* 23 (1970): 152-62.


