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Review of The World of Classical Myth

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Carl A. P. Ruck and Danny Staples. *The World of Classical Myth: Gods and Goddesses, Heroines and Heroes*. Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1994. Pp. xiv, 366, incl. 102 b/w ill. \$29.95 (pb.). ISBN 0-89089-575-9.

This introductory text is lively/chaotic, thought-provoking/riddled with pet theories, awesomely erudite/overstuffed with information, marvelous for those who already know the myths, constantly avoiding the pedestrian, forcing the reader to question and rethink, but risky for those who do not know the myths. Theory is presented as fact. And much of the storytelling charm is lost as the authors interpret the stories while retelling them. There is constant (a) etymologizing, (b) cross-referencing with other myths or statements of equivalences, and (c) references to life paradigms such as number one "The enemy is always oneself." Notable also are the many references to special concepts and theories such as (d) under-earth rivers and their above-ground entrances or (e) "digital" (i.e., phallic?) man as well as (f) almost obsessive attention paid to entheogens, including not only standard mind-altering substances but also laurel, hyacinth, narcissus, violets, amber, the cinnamon tree, coral, the apples of the Hesperides, olives (a surrogate entheogen), snake venom, music (the better aspect of entheogens), the breath of the hydra, and the single eye of the Graiai! Myth as code rather than story.

The authors make breathtaking leaps of logic and telescope thought sequences to the point of being oracular. One could spend all semester explaining the book, a boon if you find such approaches paramount, but a burden if you prefer to explore the human connections. Consider the myth of Apollo and Daphne. The authors mention the entheogen connection (of course) and also state that Leukippos and Daphne are former versions of Apollo and Artemis. Fine as far as it goes, but what about the human connections? Is Ovid's retelling a prettification of rape? Might Daphne's turning into a tree represent sexual freeze-up after sexual abuse? What about Joseph Campbell's suggestion that, in turning down god's rape, Daphne was "refusing the call," choosing to stay fixated in childhood?

This is a fascinating, frustrating book, its statements more clearly thought-provoking than true.

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