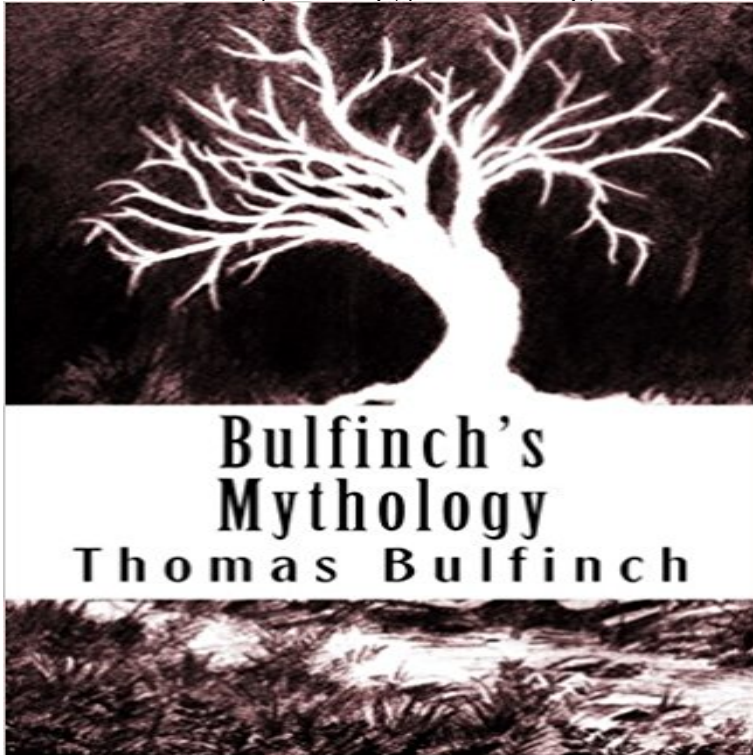


Bulfinchs Mythology: The Age of Fable



Though this book came out in 1855 it still is one of the best introductions to mythology, and doesn't seem particularly dated. Though short, the myths retain much of the vitality they no doubt had when they flourished within archaic traditions. These are not ribald or gory versions, though. Most are elaborated with small genteel details, thus are more poetic than the drier offerings of Edith Hamilton's book: *MYTHOLOGY*. Bulfinch generally gives a short explication after each fable, and often quotes stanzas of verse from such poets as Byron, Tennyson, Pope, Keats and Milton, who have elaborated upon the themes and give extra dimension to myths and/or mythic characters. Bulfinch's versions are more tame and less inventive than those of Robert Graves in his: *THE GREEK MYTHS*, where accuracy is sometimes sacrificed for the sake of (peculiar) art. While it's interesting to note the differences between versions and to see how the personality of the writer leads to different emphasis or narrative flow, I prefer Bulfinch's more straightforward renditions. It can be vaguely confusing that he uses the Latin names of the gods and goddesses more often than the Greek names: thus his Demeter is Ceres and his Persephone is Proserpina, etc. But the serious student will be familiar with these interchanges, and the casual reader will be able to sort them out with a little effort. There is an index of names in the back for easy reference. The influence of these fables and myths on Western literature was enormous, and we are still culturally and psychologically indebted to them. These gods and goddesses, though endowed with extraordinary powers, were so human in their emotions, actions and ideas that we can't fail to recognize modern situations in their allegorical activities. Myth was the carrier of traditional knowledge, moral injunction, natural and political history, as well as a forum for public opinion. Modern

literature has taken on much of the role of ancient mythology, as universal themes have been brought into the personal realm via the novel or short story. But reading is vastly enhanced if we understand the sources of modern characters and the psychological motivations for their behaviors. These myths, though simply written, are still very useful in that regard

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