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A Mythological Dictionary
The Gentleman and Lady's Key to Polite Literature

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Abstract

An investigation on the nature and sources of *The Gentleman and Lady's Key to Polite Literature* (London: J. Newbury, ca. 1761), a dictionary of mythology that results to have been a hasty compilation mainly based on Pierre Chompré's and André de Claustre's French dictionaries, and from Ainsworth's *Thesaurus*.

Keywords: Dictionaries of Mythology, Mythology in 18th-century France, Translations from French into English in the 18th Century, John Newbery

We do not know the exact date of publication of the book entitled *The Gentleman and Lady's Key, to Polite Literature; or A Compendious Dictionary of Fabulous History: Containing the Characters, and principal Actions, ascribed to the Heathen Gods, Goddesses, Heroes, &c. and the manner in which the Ancients represented the Deities & Heroes, Virtues and Vices, in their Paintings, Statues and Gems; Together with some Account of their Poets, and References to the principal Places mentioned in their Works. Intended for the Assistance of those who would understand Mythology, Poetry, Painting, Statuary, and Theatrical Entertainments; and particularly adapted to the use of Latin and French-Schools*, which was printed in London for J. Newbery, at the Bible and Sun in St. Paul's Church Yard.[1] The first known edition bears no year indication in the title page or elsewhere; subsequent editions, or reprints, were printed for John Newbery's successors in 1776, 1780, 1783, 1788, and then until the beginnning of the 19th century.[2] The *Key* was already listed in the catalog of children's books attached to *The*

[1] ESTC N7922; Roscoe 1966, 27-28; 1973, 121-22, J145. Thanks to the courtesy of Giovanni Iamartino, I have consulted the digital copy in the collection ECCO (*Eighteenth Century Collections Online*), from an original kept in the Houghton Library, Harvard University (GEN Class 7047.96.5*), as well as the copy of the Bodleian Library (17573.f.4), digitally available in *Google Books* (<https://books.google.it/books?id=3GQDAAAAQAAJ&newbks>, 11/2024). Since the book is unpaginated, we shall quote passages from the four pages of the *Preface* without any further indication, and when quoting from the body of the dictionary we shall refer to the entries.

[2] The main editions and reprints until 1788 are reported in Roscoe 1973, 121-22. A "fifth edition, considerably improved" was printed in London for G.G. Robinson and J. Robinson, J. Scatcherd, W. Bent, G. and T. Wilkie, M. Pote, and E. Goldsmith in 1796; and a "sixth edition, corrected", for J. Walker, J. Scatcherd, W. Bent, G. and J. Robinson, G. Wilkie, C. Law, T.N. Longman and O. Rees, and M. Pote and T. Williams in 1802. A pirated edition, under the title *The Arcana of Polite Literature*, had been printed in Dublin, by W. Gilbert, in 1789; and still in 1803 an apparently unauthorized version of the *Key*, entitled *A Mythological Dictionary*, was printed in London for B. Crosby and Co. and J.F. Hughes.

Newtonian System of Philosophy, printed for Newbery in 1761, and was reported to have been "lately published" at the end of another book issued under the imprints of Newbury in the same year, *The Art of Poetry On a New Plan*; it figured among the Christmas and New Year's gifts for 1762-63 (e.g. in *London Chronicle* vol. 13 [1763]: 20), while the first reviews known to me date back to 1763 (*Critical Review* vol. 15 [1763]: 328 and *Monthly Review* vol. 28 [1763]: 240). Sydney Roscoe suggested that the dictionary was published in "1761 or before" (1966, 27; 1973, 121), and 1761 is indeed the most likely date; but even 1762 would be a possible alternative, if we suppose that the 1761 announcements just anticipated a forthcoming publication.

Be that as it may, the *Key* was part of a wider program launched by the well-known publisher John Newbery (1713-67), who in those years produced a whole series of books specifically addressed to children and young people, thus intending – as John Dawson Carl Buck appropriately said – "to make polite letters available to an audience who had not been brought up on such a diet": these books are therefore presented "as instructive works, and literature in them is seen at least as much as a vehicle of upward social mobility as it is an intrinsically delightful pastime" (1972, 303).[3] In particular, in 1753 Newbery had published a handbook of mythology, Samuel Boyse's *New Pantheon: Or, Fabulous History of the Heathen Gods, Heroes, Goddesses, &c.*, that according to the *Preface* aimed at providing young people with "some acquaintance with the heathen Gods and the ancient fables", which was considered as "a necessary branch of polite learning" (iv); while in the already mentioned *The Art of Poetry*, at page 382, it was suggested that "some knowledge of apologue, or the fables of antiquity, is absolutely necessary to every one who is concerned in poetical compositions", and to this purpose the perusal of Boyse's book and of the *Key*, "which, being printed in the manner of a dictionary, and in a small pocket volume, may be more portable and commodious to the student", was recommended.

The advertisements inform that the price of the *Key* was set at 2 shillings, the daily wage of a labourer in London (Gilboy 1934, 255). What was John Newbery selling at this price? The title offers a clear enough answer. The term *Key*, as the Latin *Clavis*, often recurred at the time in the titles of books that had a somehow introductory character. Also the reference to the "Gentleman and Lady" is not rare in 18th century booktitles, and Newbery appears to have been especially fond of this formula, to the point of making it a sort of trademark;[4] it conveys the idea of readers aspiring to a higher rank or quality, and suggests that these, by buying and consulting the book, would be "raised above the vulgar" – to quote a contemporary definition of "Gentleman" in Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary*. As for the second part of the long description that occupies the title page of the *Key*, it bears a strong resemblance to the title of another dictionary that had been published 30 years before: *A Compendious Dictionary of the Fabulous History of Heathen Gods and Heroes: Design'd for the more ready Understanding of Poets, Paintings and Statues. To which are Annex'd, References to the several Authors, from which their Characters are deduc'd. Peculiarly Adapted to the Use of Latin and French Schools, And to Persons who Read, or Attend Theatrical Entertainments* (London: Printed for J. Clark in Duck-lane, L. Gilliver at Homer's Head, and F. Cogan at the Middle Temple Gate in Fleet-street. 1731). This volume, which seems to have had some diffusion in its time but is quite rare today, bears no author indication.[5] Its real character is revealed by an advertisement published in *The Grub-Street Journal* for the year 1730 (no. 19 [May 14, 1730]: 4; no. 20 [May 21, 1730]: 4; no. 21 [May 28, 1730]: 4), where the *Compendious Dictionary* is said to be "done from the French of the learned Sieur P. Chompre" (Goldgar 2002, vol. 1): it was the translation of a French dictionary that had been issued four years before, and was destined to become a best- and longseller, the *Dictionnaire abbregé de la Fable, pour l'intelligence des poetes, et la connoissance des tableaux et des statues, Dont les sujets sont tirez de la Fable* (Paris, Chez la veuve Foucault, 1727) by Pierre Chompré (1698-1760), a schoolmaster who had devoted his life to the instruction of youth and was the author of several educational books.[6]

[3] On John Newbery and his publishing activity see, i.a., Welsh 1885; Buck 1972; Roscoe 1973; Townsend 1994; Branch 2006, 135-74; Granahan 2010.

[4] See the list of titles in Roscoe 1973. The same author observes that it is not clear, in Newbery's production and in the advertising lists he drew, where the dividing line between books for "Children" and books for "Young Gentlemen and Ladies" lay (12). In fact, Newbery's educational program consisted in teaching "even little children to become polite gentlemen and ladies", to quote the words describing the activity of Master Hiron in Lilliput at page 34 of *The Lilliputian Magazine: or, the Young Gentleman and Lady's Golden Library*, originally published by Newbery in 1752, and reprinted in 1765 (Roscoe 1973, 166-70, J219). As for the "Ladies", Newbery's ideas about the education of women are revealed by Charles Allen's *The Polite Lady: or, A Course of Female Education. In a Series of Letters, From a Mother to her Daughter*, published in 1760 (43-44, J8).

[5] Thanks to the courtesy of Giovanni Iamartino and Paige Roberts, I had access to digital reproductions of the copies kept in the Bodleian Libraries, Oxford (Weston Library, Vet. A4 f.967) and in the Oliver Wendell Holmes Library, Andover (Sp Col 292 C73). A copy of this dictionary was owned by Samuel Johnson, who annotated it (Fleeman 1984, 15, no. 59); for its use in American schools see Littlefeld 1904, 298-301 (who seems to identify it, erroneously, with Pomey's and Tooke's manual, for which see below).

[6] In this first edition the title page did not report the name of the author, which was however indicated in the privilege; in the subsequent editions mentioned below Chompré's name appeared after the title. On Pierre Chompré and his educational publications see, i.a., Michaud 1843-65, vol. 8 [1854]: 197-98; Colombat 1999, 153-55, 657-58 and *passim*; Furno 2005, 167.

Chompré's dictionary drew heavily on the great French scholarly tradition in the field of antiquarianism, from Louis Moréri to Pierre Bayle, and was influenced by the cultural climate of 17th- and early 18th-century France, in which the study of ancient myths had flourished, becoming a model for the whole of Europe (for instance, François-Antoine Pomey's Latin handbook *Pantheum Mythicum, seu Fabulosa Deorum Historia*, first published in Lyon in 1658, had gained a wide success, and had been translated into English by Andrew Tooke in 1698).[7] In 1728 the famous historian Charles Rollin insisted on the importance (and difficulty) of studying ancient mythology, and expressed the hope that a "histoire de la fable" would be published for the instruction of young people: reviewing the most recent works, he observed that Pierre Gautruche's *L'Histoire poétique pour l'intelligence des Poëtes et des Auteurs anciens* (1682) was too brief, while Antoine Banier's *Explication historique des fables* (1711) was too learned for scholastic use; as for Chompré's dictionary, which had just been published, it could be very useful for self-instruction, but was no continuous history (Rollin 1728, 276). Chompré, on his part, after explicitly quoting Gautruche and Banier in the *Avertissement* at the beginning of his work, expressed the conviction that ancient mythology was just a collection of bizarre fantasies, and that therefore in dealing with ancient myths not so much a history as a dictionary was needed, since the latter could help to find easily what for its irrational nature tended to escape memory.

Hence the merely utilitarian and compilative character of Chompré's *Dictionnaire abbregé*, which had no "philosophical" ambition.[8] As any compilation, it was not totally accurate, and only a part of the mistakes present in the first 1727 edition was corrected in the subsequent, and variously improved, ones (nine at least up to 1760: 1733[2], 1740[3], 1745[4], 1749[5], 1752[6], 1753[7], 1756[6], 1760[9], some with various reprints; many others followed in the following years, until the 19th century, not only in Paris but also in other French cities, with the granting of reprint rights through the so-called "permission simple" or by pirated copies). The very number of these editions shows the fortune of this dictionary, that has been defined a "very popular – and lucrative – work" (Dawson 1992, 447).[9] The book was successful not only in France, but throughout Europe, being translated into Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian.[10] Although no English translation is typically recorded in bibliographies, an analysis of the 1731 Compendious Dictionary reveals that the author of the advertisement in the Grub-Street Journal was entirely correct. Starting from the preface, this book was just a very faithful and literal translation of Chompré's work, and one of the first testimonies of its circulation outside France.

In sum, the idea of publishing at an affordable price a pocket dictionary that could be useful for understanding the references to ancient mythology in literature and arts originated in France; and already in 1731 an English publisher had chosen to translate a French model, thus offering the reader help in interpreting, in particular, theatrical pieces, and aiming at providing a tool for school teaching, at the relatively cheap cost of 2 shillings and 6 pence. That knowledge of mythology should be required for interpreting classics in "Latin schools" needs no further explanation. As for "French schools" – a definition that has not been properly understood by some scholars[11] – they were private schools, mostly established by Huguenot refugees and usually attended by the children of craftsmen and businessmen, where the teaching of French received special attention; in London, many of them were grouped in St. Paul's Churchyard, where also the chief booksellers lived and worked.[12] Therefore, by referring to French schools, the publisher of the *Compendious Dictionary* meant that some knowledge of mythology was useful not only for the happy few that could afford a classical education, but also for people who aspired to a more "modern" culture, in order to attain a higher social position – an audience with which he must have had some familiarity.

[7] See, i.a., Manuel 1959; Feldman, Richardson 1972; Boch 2002.

[8] It is curious that Pierre's brother, Étienne-Maurice Chompré, published a booklet entitled *Apologues ou Explications des Attributs d'un certain nombre de Sujets de la Fable, par rapport aux Moeurs & à la Religion; selon l'ordre alphabétique, pour servir de Supplement au Dictionnaire de la Fable écrit par son frère* (Paris: F.-G. Mérigot, 1764; then Paris: Couturier fils, 1769 and 1770, with a slightly different title) in which very elementary moral reflections, often aiming at comparing Greek myths to sacred history and sometimes inspired to rationalistic and allegorical interpretations, were appended to some entries of his brother's dictionary, as if to integrate what was felt to be missing.

[9] More generally, on the "permission simple" and the fortune of Chompré's *Dictionnaire* see Dawson 1992, 243-44, 446-47 and *passim*. Diderot seems to have had Chompré's work in mind when he mentioned a *Dictionnaire de la fable* as the example of a successful and profitable book in his *Lettre historique et politique adressée à un magistrat sur le commerce de la librairie* (1767).

[10] On the Portuguese and Castilian translations see Kemmler 2005, 2010; the history of the various Italian editions (since at least the *Dizionario delle favole in compendio* published in Turin, "nella Stamperia Reale", in 1742) would deserve a full reconstruction.

[11] According to Brewer "the reference to Latin and French schools is odd, though the anonymous preface refers to standard French mythographical authorities, and with the usual contempt in such books for other mythographers. The reference to theatre seems unique" (2002, 27).

[12] On French schools see, i.a., Lambley 1920, 128-52; Sumillera 2014, 83; an interesting witness of the contrast between Latin and "modern" French schools in the 18th century can be found in the pamphlet *A Letter to his Grace the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury: Containing, a proposal for the improvement of Latin schools*, printed in London for J. Clark in 1748.

Thirty years after, John Newbery could only share such a program, and it is not strange that in the title of the *Key* he takes up the idea according to which mythology proves useful for training young ladies and gentlemen, both in Latin and French schools, and for better understanding and appreciating the subjects of liberal arts, and especially of theatrical works. Therefore, it is not entirely out of place to say that the 1731 dictionary was an "ancestor" of the *Key*;[13] and judging from the similarity of the titles, one would imagine that the compiler (or rather compilers: it is possible that they were more than one) of the *Key* knew, and used, the 1731 translation of Chompré's dictionary. Matters are, however, more complicated. As we shall see, there is no doubt that also the *Key* depended heavily on Chompré's *Dictionnaire abbregé*. Nevertheless, the entries derived from Chompré which are found both in the 1731 *Compendious Dictionary* and in the *Key* exhibit different translations from the French; moreover, the *Key* contains several entries missing in Chompré's first French edition (and consequently in its 1731 translation), but present in the subsequent ones. This leads to the conclusion that the compilers of the *Key* made use of an improved and augmented edition of Chompré's work; judging from a sample of entries – one of which will be examined below – they seem to have consulted one among the second, third and fourth editions (resp. 1733, 1740, 1745). In other words, when they decided to repeat the choice already made by their predecessors in 1731 and to translate a French source for the benefits of pupils and young people, they consulted the model in a more update version.

As a result, out of ca. 1,600 entries in the *Key*, a good half is little more than a translation of the corresponding entries in Chompré's dictionary. As for the rest, it should not be thought that they are original additions; the *Preface* itself does not encourage this conclusion, when it says:

> It is not pretended that this is an original performance, for the best dictionaries, and such other authorities have been consulted as were most likely to enable us to execute our contracted plan, without leaving out any thing material to the main design.

It is not difficult, indeed, to single out a second source that was widely exploited by the compilers of the *Key*. It is another French dictionary of mythology, the *Dictionnaire de Mythologie, pour l'intelligence des Poetes, de l'Histoire Fabuleuse, des Monumens Historiques, des Bas-Reliefs, des Tableaux, &c.*, which had been published in Paris, "chez Briasson", in 1745 and whose author was the *abbé* André de Claustre.[14] In comparison to Chompré's, Claustre's dictionary, which consisted of three volumes, was larger and more ambitious in its contents: the iconographic descriptions were much more extended, and some space was devoted to the fortune of the mythical themes in modern art and literature; above all, the author paid a special attention to the origin and the interpretation of the meaning of myths. Thus, while Chompré in the *Preface* to the third edition of his *Dictionary* (1740) had written, not without irony, that "the origins of so many pitiful tales" remained outside of his projects (all the more so because those who had investigated them had arrived at very different conclusions), Claustre, on the contrary, did not refrain from recurring to rationalizations of the most incredible features, and even to allegorical and euhemeristic explanations.[15]

That the compilers of the *Key* made use of Claustre is shown, first of all, by the *Preface* to the *Key*, which for a large part is little more than an abridged translation of Claustre's preface. But apart from the *Preface*, the compilers made a wide use of Claustre in order to integrate the material present in Chompré. As an illustration of the dependance of the *Key* from both Chompré and Claustre, we may take an example from its very first page, and particularly from the two first entries:

> Aba´dir, the name of a stone which Ops or Rhea, the wife of Saturn, wrapt up in swadling cloths, and gave to Saturn instead of her son Jupiter, who was just come into the world; because it was the custom of Saturn to devour all the male infants for fear of being dethroned. *Priscus. Soph.* (Italics in original)

[13] This is suggested in the bibliographic record of the *Compendious Dictionary* in *The Grub Street Project* (<https://www.grubstreetproject.net/publications/T185415/>, 11/2024).

[14] André de Claustre (or Declaustre), whose birth and death dates are not known, between 1768 and 1769 was the protagonist of a scandal that attracted the interest of Voltaire: see Sgard 1999. Also Claustre's dictionary achieved good popularity, and was translated into Italian, but was very harshly judged by Otto Gruppe: "ein trauriges Denkmal von Unwissenheit und Flüchtigkeit, die dadurch nicht entschuldigt werden, daß der Verfasser mehr für Dichter und Künstler als für Gelehrte schreibt" (1921, 92).

[15] It is characteristic that most of these more "philosophical" observations were eliminated in the second edition of Claustre's dictionary, published in 1765 for Briasson under the title *Dictionnaire Portatif de Mythologie, pour l'intelligence des Poëtes, de l'Histoire Fabuleuse, des Monumens Historiques, des Bas-Reliefs, des Tableaux, &c.*: in the *Avis* (probably written by François Richer, to whom this second edition is usually attributed), they are defined as uncertain "conjectures historiques".

ABA´DIR, was also the name that the Carthagenians gave to their most considerable Gods, to distinguish them from the less; for this word in the Phenician language signifies *magnificent father*. (Italics in original)

In Chompré's first edition (and, as a consequence, in the 1731 *Compendious Dictionary*) there was no entry ABADIR. It was only in the second edition of 1733 that such an entry was added; and it was reprinted, with only some slight variants in the interpunction and orthography, in the third and in the fourth editions (resp. 1740 and 1745). In the fourth edition it read so:

ABADIR. C'est le nom de la pierre qu'Ops ou Rhée, femme de Saturne, emmaillota lorsqu'elle mit Jupiter au monde, pour la présenter à son mari qui dévoroit tous ses enfans mâles, de crainte qu'ils ne le détrônassent. *Priscus. Soph.* (Italics in original)

In the fifth edition of 1749 the text remained unaltered, but the reference to the ancient source was emended: instead of the mistaken "*Priscus. Soph.*" (evidently derived from the erroneous expansion of an abbreviation) the correct "*Priscianus. Soph.*" (i.e. the grammarian Priscian of Caesarea) was introduced, while in the subsequent editions the name of the source was omitted, and the entry was modified.

Also in Claustre's dictionary two entries ABADIR were to be found:

ABADIR ou ABADDIR, c'est le nom d'une Pierre que Saturne dévora, au lieu de l'enfant que sa femme avoit mis au monde. Cette Pierre devint célébre dans la suite, & fut adorée comme une Divinité sous le nom de Dieu Terme. voyez *Terme*, *Bétyle*, *Rhéa.* (Italics in original)

ABADIR étoit aussi un nom appellatif, qu'on donnoit chez les Carthaginois aux Dieux plus grands & plus considérables, pour les distinguer du commun des Dieux. Car *Abaddir*, sont deux mots Phéniciens, qui signifient Pere Magnifique. (Italics in original)

Just like in the *Key*, Claustre's former entry is about Saturn's stone, but its formulation is different from those of Chompré and the *Key*, which are very close to each other. The latter entry, on the contrary, is very similar to the second entry in the *Key*.

We may, therefore, conclude that the compilers of the *Key* took the first entry ABA´DIR from Chompré (and precisely from one among the second, the third and the fourth editions, where the erroneous reference to "*Priscus. Soph.*" could still be found), and the second one from Claustre. This is not the only case in which we can see with vivid immediacy how the compilers added entries from Claustre to those present in Chompré. There are, indeed, many entries in the *Key* (ca. 300) that are clearly taken from Claustre; and it is noteworthy that their distribution seems to be concentrated in the first part of the dictionary, which could confirm the presence of more than one compiler, each of whom behaved differently.

Claustre is not, however, the only source used by the compilers of the *Key* to integrate Chompré. The title of the *Key* explicitly says that the dictionary will comprehend an account of the "Poets, and References to the principal Places mentioned in their Works", and the promise is kept: the *Key* contains a huge amount of entries on ancient writers and places that are found neither in Chompré nor in Claustre – *et pour cause*, since they have little to do with mythology. For these entries the compilers appear to have drawn on some repertoires of ancient anthroponyms and toponyms, and the main source is likely to have been Robert Ainsworth's *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae compendiarius: Or, a compendious Dictionary Of the Latin Tongue, Designed for the Use of the British Nations*, first published in London, for J.J. and P. Knapton and many others, in 1736, and then republished several times.[16] This dictionary contained an appendix on proper names, where most of the entries and explanations present in the *Key* appear just in the same wording; as we shall see, it is probable that the compilers of the *Key* made use of an exemplar of the third edition in two volumes, printed in London in 1751. For a few entries that cannot be traced back to Ainsworth, other repertoires may have been used: a probable suspect is the *Index of Persons and Things* appended to the fourth volume of the English translation of Banier's *Explication historique des fables* (*The Mythology and Fables of the Ancients, Explained from History*, (vol. 4, 1740, London: Printed for A. Millar), from whence, for instance, the entries ADES, ADOD, NINUS were possibly copied.

[16] On Robert Ainsworth (1660-1743) see Smith 2004; on his *Thesaurus* and its position within the history of English-Latin and Latin-English dictionaries, Starnes 1954, 325-40 (esp. 337 for the proper-name section, based on Adam Littleton's *Linguae Latinae Liber Dictionarius quadripartitus* [1673] with changes and improvements).

Thus far we have seen, in the light of some examples, that the compilers of the *Key* added a number of entries derived from Claustre, Ainsworth or other sources to the series already present in Chompré. In some cases, however, they behaved differently, inserting passages taken from the other sources within the entries taken from Chompré (or vice versa). These additions may be tacit, but there is a number of entries in which the insertions from another source are marked by formulas like "as others say" (e.g. ORPHEUS, PYRENÆUS, SCAMANDER, TITAN): in these cases, the juxtaposition of multiple sources is especially evident.

In sum, the compilation was not totally slavish and uncritical. It was, however, certainly hasty. On the one side, several mistakes present in the sources went unnoticed, while new mistakes were generated as a consequence of mistranslations from the French sources, or even of erroneous transcriptions from the English ones. On the other side, the combination of different sources produced typical confusions and redundancies. Some examples will be illuminating.

The entry "A´CAË, an island in which Ceres made her abode" is taken from Chompré's dictionary, where, since the first edition, an analogous entry "ACAE´, Isle où Circé faisoit sa demeure" appeared. ACAE´ was, however, a ghost-name: the island were Circe dwelt bore the name of *Aea* or *Aeaea*/*Aeaee*, and *Acae* is clearly the result of an *e* misread as *c*. The compilers of the 1731 *Compendious Dictionary* seem to have realized this, since they omitted the entry. On the contrary, the compilers of the *Key* did not notice the fault, and added a misspelling of their own, transforming "Circe" in "Ceres" – either a phonetic or graphic mistake: both types of error find several parallels in the *Key* (e.g. "Corsira" for "Corcyra", or "Lysia" for "Lycia"; while a confusion of letterforms may explain, for instance, the *monstrum* TERIFRUS, under which lies Claustre's TENERUS).

In many cases, the compilers of the *Key* appear to have encountered difficulties in transposing into English the ancient names that their sources had reported in French guise. Sometimes they failed in repristining the original Latin diphthongs, which in the case of less-known names was indeed far from easy (we shall see some examples in what follows). Other mistakes involved the terminations of the names. For instance, the *Key* has two entries ABDE´RA: one, dedicated to the Thracian town of Abdera, is derived from Chompré, who reported the name in the French form ABDERE, while the second is taken from Claustre, who wrote "ABDERE, jeune homme ami d'Hercule, & son compagnon d'armes", which the *Key* slavishly translates as "ABDE´RA, a young man a friend of Hercules, and his companion in the wars". Needless to say, this friend of Hercules was called Abderus: both Latin *Abdera* and Latin *Abderus* give *Abdère* in French, but in English the two forms should have been differently rendered. Another example is the form PALLANTUS, for Pallas, erroneously derived from Chompré's PALLANTE; and many other instances might be quoted.

There are also cases in which the ambiguity of the French forms produced, or at least favoured, a deeper misunderstanding of the text of the source. A curious example is the entry "ETHE´TA, the wife of Laodicæus. She obtained of the gods, the power of becoming a man, to bear her husband company in his adventures without fear, and was then called Ethetus", which is a literal translation of an entry that, in the second edition of Chompré's dictionary, read so: "ETHETA ou ETETUS, femme de Laodicée. Etant avec son mari, elle obtient des Dieux le pouvoir de devenir homme, pour l'accompagner partout sans crainte, et fut nommée Etetus". It is not immediately clear who this strange character really is. In fact, Chompré was taking up, from an intermediate source, the amazing story, narrated by the Greek author Phlegon of Tralles (*Book of Marvels,* ch. 9), about Aitete, a woman from the Syrian town of Laodicea, who changed her sex and was renamed Aitetos. In the *Key*, this "femme de Laodicée", properly a "woman from Laodicea", underwent a further transformation, becoming "the wife of Laodicaeus". It is rather funny, however, to see that the compilers were in good company, for the same Chompré (or perhaps a revisor of his dictionary?) was not able, from a certain point on, to understand what he had written: since the third edition, the entry was emended – or rather corrupted – into "ETHÉTA ou ETÉTUS, femme d'un certain Laodicée, inconnu dans la fable; étant avec son mari, elle obtint des Dieux le pouvoir de devenir homme, pour l'accompagner partout sans crainte, & fut nommée Etétus". Once a man called Laodicée/Laodicaeus had been erroneously created, the silence on him in any other mythological source became a source of amazement!

Also the English sources did not escape the fate of being misunderstood or corrupted. It is hard to imagine, for instance, what exactly is meant by "ANACREON, a Lyric Poet; whose life and poems are still extant": maybe an ancient biography of Anacreon, of which unfortunately nothing more is known? The right answer is to be found in Ainsworth's dictionary, where the following sentence appears: "Anacreon [...] A lyrick poet, whose life, as well as poems, which are still extant, was very lascivious". The compilers of the *Key* abridged this sentence too hastily. There are other cases in which Ainsworth's text was poorly summarized. The entry on Athamas begins thus: "A´THAMAS, a King of Thessaly, and son of Æolus, by his wife Nephele; he had two children Phryxus and Helle". Nephele, however, was not Athamas's mother, but his wife. The fact is that in the third edition in

two volumes of Ainsworth's *Thesaurus*, published in 1751, the entry on Athamas had "*A king of Thessaly, son to Æolus*. By his wife Nephele he had two children, namely Phryxus and Helle": the compilers of the *Key* altered the interpunction of the model, with momentous consequences.[17]

The genesis of the *Key*, compiled from different sources, explains, finally, many perturbations in the alphabetical order and the presence of several doublets (also favoured by the difficulty in repristinating the original Latin forms): to give only some examples, Cæstus (from Chompré) and Cestus (from Claustre); Ceix (Chompré) and Ceyx (Claustre); Ægeria (Claustre) and Egeria (Chompré); Ægesta (Claustre) and Egesta (Chompré); Menæceus (Chompré) and Menœceus (Ainsworth), Palæmon (Ainsworth) and Plæmon (Chompré). Cases like these may confirm that there were various compilers at work, or at least point to the absence of a serious revision work.

Many other examples could be cited. A thorough analysis of each and every entry, inappropriate here, would perhaps not be entirely without interest, and could probably lead to a more accurate picture. The entries examined above are, however, sufficient – we believe – to shed light on the *modus operandi* of the compilers, and show that they variously exploited the different sources in order to put together a richer text, and thus place a more attractive product on the book market, but the result was not entirely accurate and organic.

As for the general principles that guided the choices of the compilers of the *Key*, it must be observed, first, that in accordance with the title and the preface, and in the wake of their sources, they actually gave some space to iconographic descriptions. In absence of illustrations, however, one wonders whether the *Key* could really be useful for identifying the subjects of paintings and statues. For this purpose, Chompré had inserted entries such as, for instance, "Ailes *sur la tête, aux talons. V.* Mercure. Persée. Calaïs", which were, however, eliminated in the *Key*.

A problem that any author of schoolbooks on ancient mythology had to face was the intrinsic immorality of the tales. As for the *Key*, grosser obscenities were avoided, in the wake of the French models (characteristic in this sense is the entry Priapus), and euphemisms appeared here and there ("to be great with", for instance); but otherwise quite explicit terms such as "incest", "adultery", "to violate", "to abuse" were freely used throughout the dictionary. In sum, the compilers showed no special concern for protecting the morality of young students; that is why the reviewer for the *Monthly Review* could comment, from his Nonconformist point of view, that the *Key* had been compiled "for debauching the minds and morals of youth in our public schools, with the help of such classic impurities as are to be found in Horace, Ovid, and other obscene Wits of antiquity" (vol. 28 [1763]: 240).

A similar attitude can be observed in the compilers' approach to the meaning and interpretation of ancient myths. As Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richardson noted, handbooks on mythology in the late 17th and early 18th centuries often displayed a "serenely Euhemerist" perspective, occasionally leaning "more toward simple allegory" (1972, 130-31). As we have seen, especially Claustre, more than the pragmatic Chompré, indulged to rationalism and allegory. As for the compilers of the *Key*, they show little or no interest in discussing the origins or the meaning of myths. Some traces of rationalization, for the most part slavishly inherited from Claustre, appear, like a sort of residue, in a small number of entries (e.g. Acacallida, Amphitryo, Castor and Pollux, Hercules, Lamie); but generally the allegorical or rationalistic explanations present in Claustre (and much more rarely in Chompré) were simply eliminated.

We can conclude that the compilers of the *Key* were not especially interested in either moralizing or rationalizing the ancient myths, and limited themselves to providing the reader with a tool by which some essential data could be easily found. The gods, goddesses, heroes and heroines of ancient mythology, in spite of the immoralities and the absurdities characterizing most of the tales of which they were the protagonists or supporting actors, had not ceased to be represented on the scenes, or in painting. Therefore, the capacity of recognizing and understanding them remained an essential part in the culture of a polite gentleman and lady; and the members of those classes who could not afford a fuller classical education but aspired to a higher position, and to social recognition, had to gain some acquaintance with the "fabulous history" of the Greeks and Romans. For only

[17] More precisely, while the other editions of Ainsworth's dictionary, since the first, read (in the wake of Littleton) "*A king of Thessaly, the son of Æolus*. He had by his wife Nephele two children, Phrixus and Helle", this sentence was reformulated as "*A king of Thessaly, son to Æolus*. By his wife Nephele he had two children, namely Phrixus and Helle" in the third edition in two volumes, with additions and improvements by Samuel Patrick, printed in London by C. and J. Ackers, for W. Mount and T. Page, W. Innys, R. Ware, J. and P. Knapton, T. Cox, T. Longman, C. Hitch, A. Millar, J. Pote, J. Hodges, J. Oswald, E. Wicksteed, J. and R. Tonson and S. Draper, J. Davidson, J. and J. Rivington, J. Ward, W. Johnston, M. Cooper, and the Executors of Mr. J. Darby, in 1751. The same modified form is to be found also in the fourth edition, printed in London by H. Woodfall and C. Rivington, for W. Mount and T. Page, C. Hitch and L. Hawes, B. Barker, J. Pote, C. Bathurst, H. Woodfall, A. Millar, J. and R. Tonson, J. Buckland, G. Keith, J. Beecroft, W. Strahan, J. Rivington, R. Baldwin, W. Owen, W. Johnston, J. Richardson, S. Crowder, T. Longman, B. Law and Co., E. Dilly, C. and R. Ware, J. Coote, and M. Cooper, in 1761. Yet, due to the probable datation of the *Key*, it is more likely that its compilers consulted the 1751 edition.

two shellings, the *Key* (as well as its 1731 ancestor, and the French models) somehow responded to this need. Its quality, indeed, was far from excellent, and one wonders whether it could really be useful within Latin schools; but it certainly gave the pupils of the "French schools", and the aspiring "gentlemen and ladies", the possibility of getting a smattering of classical culture at a rather affordable cost; and thus, offering a "key" to literature, theatre, painting, and statuary, it promised to ensure an easier access to liberal arts and an introduction to cultivated society.

In a sense, it is just the utilitarian and compilative nature of our dictionary, founded as it was mainly on French sources which summarized a great scholarly tradition, that makes it an example of the democratization of culture in the Enlightenment era. As Joel Mokyr wrote, "knowledge revolution in the eighteenth century was not just the emergence of new knowledge; it was also better access to knowledge that made the difference" (2016, 322); and translated compilations, insofar they were easier to produce and could be sold at a cheaper cost, took a relevant part in this process (Donato and Lüsebrink 2021). This may explain the fortune of the *Key*, in spite of its rather mediocre quality. On the one side, we have already seen that it went through several reprints and new editions, and there are also traces of its success outside the English-speaking world.[18] On the other side, its entries found their way into various dictionaries and encyclopedias until the beginning of the 19th century, which testify to the fact that it remained a ready-to-consult reference tool.[19]

And thus, the *Key* was not immediately and totally superseded by more sophisticated products like John Lemprière's *Bibliotheca Classica; Or, a Classical Dictionary, Containing A full Account of all the Proper Names Mentioned in Ancient Authors*, whose first edition was published in Reading (and printed for J. Cadell in London) in 1788 and then remained a standard reference book into the 19th century and beyond.[20] A general repertoire of ancient proper names mainly intended for the use of schools, the *Bibliotheca Classica* reserved ample space for mythological names; and in the *Preface* Lemprière displayed a profound knowledge of the literature on mythology and antiquity, mentioning authors like Charles Etienne, Nicholas Lloyd, John James Hoffman, Jeremy Collier (who had translated Moréri's *Grand Dictionnaire Historique*), Antoine Sabatier de Castres, and, of course, the *abbé* Banier. In fact, also his dictionary was little more than a compilation, not always accurate; and yet it proved more precise and reliable than the *Key*: the names were reported in their Latin forms (with the quantity of the penultimate syllable), the explanations were more detailed, and the ancient sources were exactly cited (not simply "Ovid" or at most "Ovid *met.* l. 8", as in Chompré and in the *Key*, but, for instance, "Ovid *Met.* 8, v. 306"). All this implied, of course, a more specialized audience, and a different purpose – Lemprière's work "was too voluminous for the pocket", as was noticed in the *Preface* of the 1803 reprint of the *Key* (the *Mythological Dictionary* that we quoted above), in a desperate attempt to assert the latter's merits against a dangerous competitor.

In any case, Lemprière's *Bibliotheca Classica* shared with the *Key* the merely utilitarian character, and the disinterest in the interpretation of myths. A very different kind of dictionary was published in the last decade of the century: William Holwell's *A Mythological, Etymological, and Historical Dictionary; Extracted from the 'Analysis of Ancient Mythology'*, printed in London, for C. Dilly, in 1793. It was, so to speak, a theory-laden dictionary, in fact a sort of reasoned index and facilitated entry to Jacob Bryant's *A New System; or, An Analysis of Antient Mythology* (1774-76), an ambitious work in which, according to an old tradition but with the addition of a great deal of new daring etymological combinations, Greek mythology was derived, via the Egyptians, from the Bible, and in all ancient myths, once freed from their inconsistencies and obscenities, traces of an original truth were found. I do not know whether this curious dictionary had some wider fortune, in schools or with the general public; it is perhaps no coincidence that it was consulted and exploited by an extravagant genius like Edgar Allan Poe.[21]

[18] A curious example is Friedrich Weise's *Deutsches und englisches mythologisches, genealogisches und historisches Real-Lexicon*, published in Brunswick in 1798 and then variously reprinted, where the text of the *Key*, integrated with additions fom other sources, is reproduced and translated into German. Captain Weise had served as auxiliary, among the Brunswick troops, in the American Revolutionary War, thus coming into contact with British officers and soldiers (Elster 1901, 418). He is also reported (Hamberger and Meusel 1796-1806, vol. 10 [1803], 807) to have translated an English comedy entitled *The Masquerads* (*sic*; maybe Charles Johnson's *The Masquerade*?).

[19] In particular, the *Key* appears to have been the main source for the supplements on heathen gods, goddesses and heroes appended to some of the late-eighteenth-century English dictionaries recorded in Domínguez-Rodríguez, Rodríguez-Álvarez 2018, 82-84.

[20] On John Lemprière (ca. 1765-1824) see Smail 2004. Stray 2015, 86-87 offers a balanced assessment of the *Bibliotheca Classica* and some hints on its never-ending fortune, on which see also Edelman, 2015.

[21] On William Holwell (1725/26-1798) see Sambrook 2004; on Jacob Bryant (1715-1804), Feldman, and Richardson 1972, 241-48 and Kidd 2016, esp. 111-30. For Poe using not Bryant's work but Holwell's dictionary, see Corcella 2018/19, 83.

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