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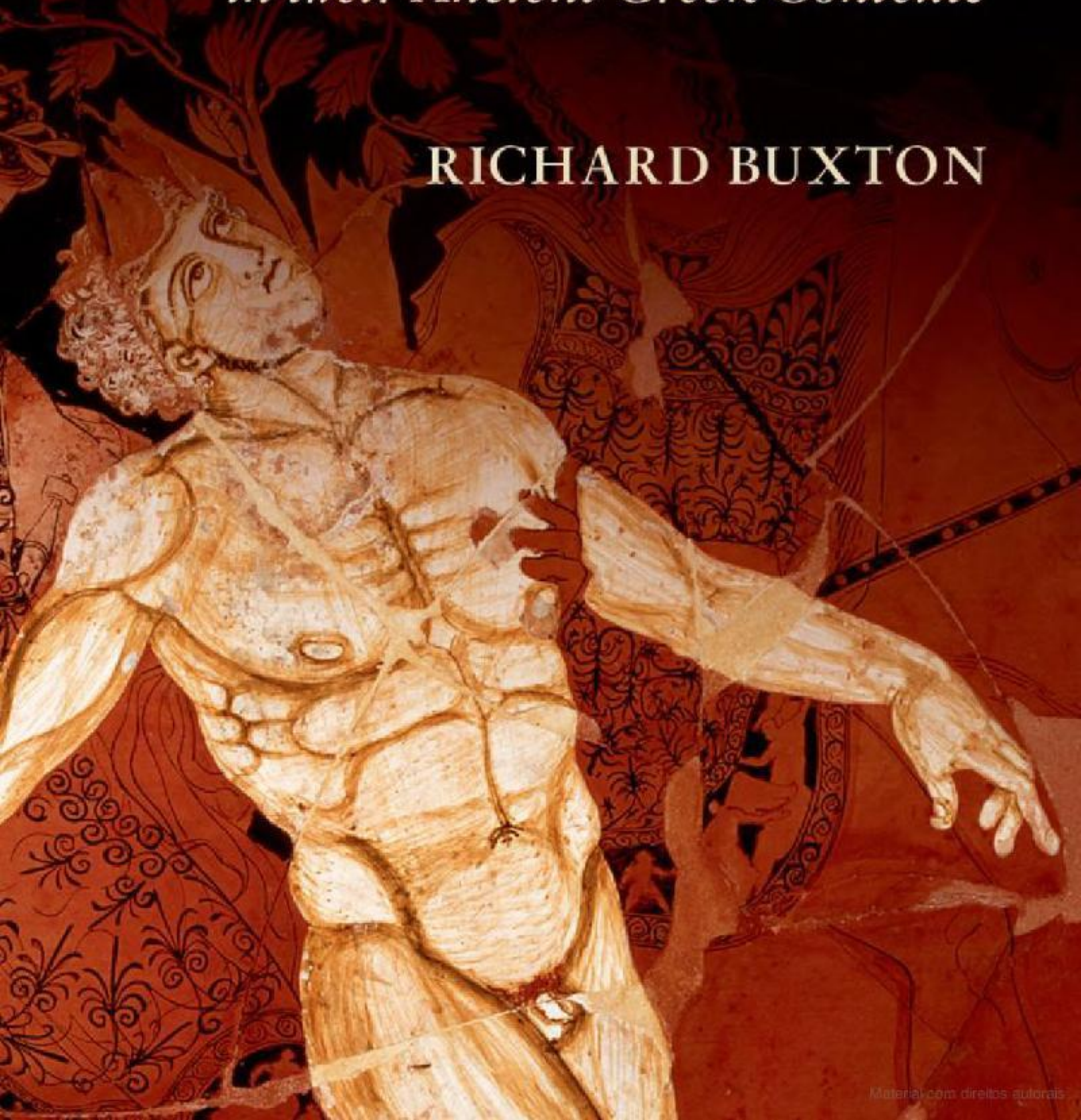
MYTHS & TRAGEDIES

in their Ancient Greek Contexts

RICHARD BUXTON



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Abbreviations

Authors and titles of ancient works are normally abbreviated according to the practice followed in the third edition of *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, edited by Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (Oxford, 1996).

AA	*Archäologischer Anzeiger*
ABSA	*Annual of the British School at Athens*
AC	*L'Antiquité Classique*
AJA	*American Journal of Archaeology*
AJP	*American Journal of Philology*
ArchEph	*Archaiologikē Ephēmeris*
BCH	*Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique*
Beazley *ABV*	J. D. Beazley, *Attic Black-figure Vase-painters*, Oxford, 1956
Beazley *ARV*^{2}	J. D. Beazley, *Attic Red-figure Vase-painters*^{2}, Oxford, 1963
BICS	*Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*
BMCR	*Bryn Mawr Classical Review*
CA	*Classical Antiquity*
CFC	*Cuadernos de Filología Clásica*
CP	*Classical Philology*
CQ	*Classical Quarterly*
CR	*Classical Review*
CW	*Classical World*
Daremberg/Saglio	C. Daremberg and E. Saglio, *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines d'après les textes et les monuments*, Paris, 1877–1919
DK	H. Diels and W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 6th edn, Berlin, 1951–2
FGrH	F. Jacoby (ed.), *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, Berlin and Leiden, 1923–58
FHG	C. Müller (ed.), *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum*, Paris, 1841–70
GGM	C. Müller (ed.), *Geographi Graeci Minores*, Paris, 1855–61
G&R	*Greece and Rome*
GRBS	*Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*
HSCP	*Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*
ICS	*Illinois Classical Studies*
JDAI	*Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts*

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JHS	*Journal of Hellenic Studies*
KRS	G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 2nd edn, Cambridge, 1983
LfgrE	*Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos*, Göttingen, 1955–2010
LIMC	*Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, Zurich and Düsseldorf, 1981–2009
LSAM	F. Sokolowski, *Lois sacrées de l'Asie Mineure*, Paris, 1955
LSCG	F. Sokolowski, *Lois sacrées des cités grecques*, Paris, 1969
LSJ	*Greek-English Lexicon*, compiled by H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, revised by H. S. Jones, 9th edn, Oxford, 1940; revised *Supplement* by P. G. W. Glare, 1996
MD	*Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici*
MDAI(A)	*Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Athenische Abteilung*
MH	*Museum Helveticum*
OLD	*Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. P. G. W. Glare, Oxford, 1982
PCG	R. Kassel and C. Austin (eds.), *Poetae Comici Graeci*, Berlin, 1983–
PCPhS	*Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*
PLF	E. Lobel and D. L. Page (eds.), *Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta*, Oxford, 1955
PMG	D. L. Page (ed.), *Poetae Melici Graeci*, Oxford, 1962
Praktika	*Praktika tēs en Athēnais Archaiologikēs Hetaireias*
QUCC	*Quaderni urbinati di cultura classica*
RA	*Revue Archéologique*
RE	G. Wissowa et al. (eds.), *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Stuttgart, 1894–1980
REA	*Revue des Études Anciennes*
REG	*Revue des Études Grecques*
Roscher	W. H. Roscher (ed.), *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*, Leipzig, 1884–1937
TAPA	*Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*
ThesCRA	*Thesaurus Cultus et Rituum Antiquorum*, Los Angeles, CA
TrGF	B. Snell, R. Kannicht, and S. Radt (eds.), *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta,* Göttingen, 1971–2004
WS	*Wiener Studien*
ZPE	*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*

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Introduction

The chapters of this book have their origins in eleven papers written over the past thirty years or so. During that time, approaches to Greek myth and Greek tragedy have undergone a number of shifts of emphasis—not, I think, 'paradigm' shifts, but shifts nonetheless. No one writes in a vacuum, and I have inevitably been affected by these successive interpretative trends, whether they have acted as stimuli to explore further where others have gone before, or as provocations to disagreement. Herein lies one reason why the corpus of work here presented is not entirely homogeneous: it reacts to developments in research over the past generation.

Yet the reader will soon discover certain recurrent features of my own approach, features which, while I hope they have not congealed into *idées fixes*, have characterized at least a considerable part of my writing. Whether such features constitute a distinctive contribution to the field is not for me to say, but it may in any case be worthwhile to spell out what, to their author at least, seem to be the central concerns addressed in these chapters.

1. The first concern is with *structure*. Given that several of the chapters deal with tragedy, it will be no surprise that occasionally I refer to aspects of *dramatic* structure; this is especially true in Chapter 11 on *Bakchai*. But that is far from being the predominant sense of 'structure' which I use. Rather, I work with an idea whose origin lies in the structuralist movement, and whose ramifications extend far beyond drama, and indeed beyond texts of any kind.

Although the impact of the structuralist habit of thought on Hellenic studies dates back well over a generation, that habit retains even now the propensity to generate powerful and fruitful interpretations of (among many other things) the stories, texts, and images surviving

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from classical antiquity. Structuralism makes its presence felt most explicitly in Chapter 9, where I sketch out ways in which the opposition between blindness and sight works as a contrastive pair of terms within what I describe as the 'language system' of Greek myth. Chapter 1 is also concerned with structure; it seems to me incontrovertible that a mountain can be defined only in opposition to what it is not, whether that opposite be (for example) the plain or the *polis*. Indebted to structuralism also is the notion that boundary-crossing is a major aspect of Greek myths and tragedies. I examine this idea in Chapter 4, since the bronze giant Talos literally embodies the crossing of several different boundaries. Tragedy too generates countless instances of boundary-crossing: in Chapters 10 and 11 I discuss this point in relation to the boundaries between, respectively, inside/outside the house (*Alkestis*) and male/female (*Bakchai*).

One more leitmotiv in several of these studies may be traced back to structuralism, in the form of that movement associated with Claude Lévi-Strauss. The idea that an aspect of the empirical world around us may become a tool of thought—making it, in the overused but still valuable cliché, 'good to think (with)'—is an idea I continue to regard as productive. It recurs in several places in Part I, notably in Chapters 2 and 3.

2. A second pervasive feature is a search for *context*, a perspective which I deliberately highlight in my title. Throughout the period when I was working on the original versions of these papers, one of the most influential trends in the study of classical antiquity involved the investigation and theorization of 'reception'—that is, the taking-over/incorporation of the classical world by later cultures. While I recognize the enormous potential of this perspective, it has not been the driver of my own research. Rather, I have sought to replace the material which I am analysing *within its ancient Greek contexts*.

I take it as self-evident that we cannot begin to understand myths which relate in some way to, let us say, a part of the landscape, without considering not only other 'non-mythical' representations of landscape, but also the real ancient landscape itself. Such a deployment of the word 'real' used to be regarded by some as an intellectual solecism: the world of antiquity is (one sometimes heard it suggested) nothing but a text. But the tide has turned, and in any case I have no hesitation in regarding some awareness of ancient real-world contexts as an absolute prerequisite for the kind of research which interests me.

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The landscape is one such context; another is the world of fauna, which I investigate in Chapter 2.

Context is relevant in other ways too: not just in real-world terms, but within representational media. To define 'genre' is an apparently simple but in fact fiendishly difficult task; nevertheless, appropriate reference to generic context is crucial if we are to gain access to the horizons of expectation shared by, on the one hand, artists working with words or images, and, on the other hand, their respective publics.[1] In Chapter 6 I isolate some of the features which distinguish tragic versions of myth from versions generated within other contexts. More generally, with tragedy as with myth, I aim to highlight the ancient contexts of the texts. I thus find entirely congenial a comment by Rush Rehm on modern attitudes to, and re-performances of, Greek tragedies: 'To reconnect with the radical nature of Greek tragedy . . . we must . . . engage with tragedy's differences from our own theatrical forms, aesthetic principles, and sociopolitical organisation. We must grapple with unfamiliar cultural assumptions and the peculiarities of foreign dramatic conventions, in order to see our own society and its artifices from a new perspective.'[2]

But the search for context is not an enterprise that goes without saying. That the analysis of context is a gambit, which itself requires contextualization, has been demonstrated by Peter Burke, in an article that discovers ancestors for and exemplars of contextualizing approaches in scholars as diverse and formidable as Marc Bloch, Bruno Malinowski, Edward Evans-Pritchard, and Quentin Skinner.[3] Burke also stresses the role of the interpreter as the ultimate arbiter of what, for any given phenomenon, should be taken to *count* as the context(s). In spite of reservations and qualifications, however, Burke suggests that there is nothing to be gained by rejecting the term 'context'; rather, we should retain it, while being sensitive to its multiple usage. I agree, and would simply reiterate an observation which I recently made in relation to Greek stories about metamorphosis: 'My aim throughout . . . has been always to take notice of the context, but to do so *appropriately*. It is for the reader to judge whether this objective has been reached.'[4]

[1] Genres and their complexity: Genette (1986); Conte (1994) 105–28; Fantuzzi (2004); Mastronarde (2010) 44–62.

[2] Rehm (2003) 37–8.

[3] Burke (2002).

[4] Buxton (2009) 251; italics in original.

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3. If 'structure' and 'context' are slippery terms, a third feature common to several chapters is if anything even more elusive: 'theme'. Indeed I am tempted to say that I don't know what a thematic approach is, but I can recognize one when I see it. Within ancient Greece the kinds of themes I have in mind are cross-generic and evidenced from a wide range of historical periods; beyond Greece, they are trans-cultural, offering rich possibilities for comparative analysis—which, however, I hardly need add, needs to be drastically tempered by culture-specific, that is, context-specific considerations.[5] Among earlier practitioners of a thematic approach to the Greek world I would mention R. B. Onians; among contemporaries, three scholars who come to mind are Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones on veiling, Silvia Montiglio on silence and wandering, and Jan Bremmer on numerous themes, though I think especially of his article on walking, standing, and sitting.[6] If we range more widely, I have learnt much from such thematic analyses as those practised by Michel Pastoureau and Theodore Ziolkowski.[7] In so far as I have been able to develop a style of thematic analysis myself, it can be found in any of the chapters in Part I (mountains, wolves, names, (in)vulnerability, movement/stillness), as well as in some chapters in Part II, for instance in the discussions of blindness in Chapter 9, veiling and silence in Chapter 10, and feminization in Chapter 11.

4. Another, related concern is with the *porosity* of myth. One of my main aims in *Imaginary Greece* was to show how the idea of 'myth' was, so far from being neatly circumscribed, in fact integrated in countless ways into the thought and practice of the ancient Greeks.[8] The same objective underpins many of the chapters which follow. Data about the mountains and wolves of mythology must, I argue, be understood in the light of what we know about perceptions of these same themes in 'non-mythical' contexts; the same goes for blackness/whiteness (Chapter 3) and movement/stillness (Chapter 5). Some readers may occasionally feel that the paths I go down in search of the 'non-mythical' are digressive—when, for instance, I look to the

[5] My angle of approach is thus to be sharply distinguished from that of, for instance, Mircea Eliade, whose concerns were above all with themes in their archetypical universality; e.g. Eliade (1954) and numerous other works.

[6] Onians (1954); Bremmer (1991a); Llewellyn-Jones (2003); Montiglio (2000) and (2005).

[7] See for example Pastoureau (2001), (2009a), and (2009b); Ziolkowski (1983).

[8] Buxton (1994).

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Hippokratic treatises for help with understanding Talos's vulnerable ankle. Yet I make no apology for such gambits, since, in the words of Louis Gernet: 'One tale leads to another; similarities exist which we should not dismiss because of some a priori fear that connections are arbitrary.'[9]

5. A less pervasive feature of the book, but one which surfaces now and then, might be called, through an appropriately teasing parenthesis, *the (un)certainty principle*. A major trend in research in the humanities over the past generation shelters under the umbrella of 'deconstruction'. To have been impervious to this intellectual movement would have been to adopt the politics of the ostrich. Nevertheless, I remained unpersuaded by the extreme 'infinite play of significance' view of meaning. Instead, it seems to me, we need to differentiate. In some cases, to be sure, we need to allow room for interpretative doubt, indecision, or even bafflement; but in other cases judicious research and reflection can help us reduce our uncertainty to such an extent that we can confidently express a view about probable meanings. These two strategies, apparently contrasting but in reality intertwined, underpin several chapters, but particularly two chapters devoted to tragedy. In Chapter 8 I stress that some elements of that genre—for instance, the causation of events—must remain, on the best evidence before us, simply inexplicable, indeed baffling; in such cases interpretative *aporia* is entirely appropriate. In Chapter 11, on the other hand, I argue that, if we take care to discriminate between the phenomena under review, we can *reduce* our uncertainties and thus understand some aspects of the drama more closely and accurately. In regard to the limits of interpretation, one size emphatically does not fit all.

6. One last common thread is worth mentioning. As its title states, this book is about myths *and* tragedies. What does that 'and' mean? It should not be taken to imply a dichotomy. Virtually without exception, Greek tragedies are retellings of myths: in that sense they *are* myths, or at least versions of myths. So there is something artificial about my division of the book into two sections: 'Themes in Myth' and 'Myths in Tragedy'. Often in Part I the reader will find discussion of mythical themes as explored in tragedy (notably in my account of mountains, but in several other places too). Conversely, several

[9] Gernet (1981) 78; cf. below 97.

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chapters in Part II highlight themes found not just in tragedy but also elsewhere in Greek myth. What differentiates Parts I and II is no more than a change of focus, a change which the reader is free to downplay as appropriate.

A further comment about the ordering of the chapters might be useful. This ordering has nothing to do with the original dates of composition of the essays which lie behind each chapter (for the record, those dates are, in chapter order: 1992, 1987, 2010, 2002, 2010, 2007, 2002, 1988, 1980, 1985, 2009). Instead I have wanted to suggest, very broadly and loosely, a spectrum of interpretative emphases, ranging from the cross-contextual analysis of myths at one pole to the analysis of individual literary works at the other. Emblematic of this spectrum is the positioning of the opening and closing chapters. Chapter 1 analyses a mythical theme cross-contextually, yet it also incorporates an account of that theme in specific literary works; Chapter 11 takes as its main focus the dramatic/literary analysis of a single feature of a single tragedy, yet it also explores a mythical theme cross-contextually.

* * * * *

I hesitated for some time about whether or not to update these papers in the light of subsequent scholarship and my own second thoughts. In the event I decided that I *would* make revisions, above all, for obvious reasons, in the case of the less recent publications. Countless small modifications will be found in the footnotes and bibliography, and very many also in the main text. Nevertheless—doubtless under the delusion of vanity—I have seldom felt it necessary, even with the benefit of hindsight, to overhaul the main arguments. To this there are two main exceptions. First, Chapter 3 is, in the form in which it appears here, not so much a reworking of an existing paper as a new one: it is twice the length of the original, since I have added a section on the history of the onomastic interpretation of mythology. Second, I have rewritten some parts of Chapter 8 in order to try to remedy what I now believe to have been defects in the argument.

One final, more cosmetic change is worth mentioning. Since this book aspires to be of interest to non-Hellenists, I have almost entirely eliminated quotations in the Greek alphabet, and proportionately increased the quantity of transliterated (and translated) text. Greek myths and Greek tragedies are too important to be left exclusively in the hands of those able to read them in the original.

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ascents, as when Philip V of Macedon went up Haimos.[27] Fire-signalling from beacons on the *oros* was developed with enormous ingenuity.[28] Clearly, though, this is all peripheral to the main issue: fighting. The *oros* was a territory which could be exploited by light-armed troops, but which was wholly unsuited to the hoplite phalanx. It was a place for deception, for ambush, for night combat—witness the tactics of Thracian and other peltasts.[29] Given the strong ideological component in the divide between hoplite and non-hoplite,[30] and given the pervasive rules of appropriateness underpinning Greek warfare,[31] it is surely comprehensible that mountain warfare is as relatively infrequent as it is.[32] It is comprehensible, too—indeed, it is part of the same framework of ideas—that the *oros*, a space which is simultaneously not the city and not the plain, should in some parts of Greece form the backdrop to the military education of the adolescent male, at the stage when he was neither (yet) a full member of the community nor (yet) a hoplite.[33] The *oros* could be an initiatory space (one may compare the wolf-men of Lykaion).[34]

We hear sometimes of what may be described as touristic ascents: at Etna visitors (at any rate in the time of Pausanias) threw valuable objects into the crater, the aim being to be lucky enough to have the gift accepted.[35] Then there were those bent on 'enquiry'. Pliny the Elder writes of people who, in order to do research on plants, 'scoured also pathless mountain peaks, remote deserts, and all the bowels of the earth'.[36] Theophrastos and Philo preserve accounts of persons

[27] Livy 40.21–2. [28] Polyb. 10.43–7.

[29] See Pritchett (1971–91), Part II, 170.

[30] Cf. Ducrey (1985) 110–14.

[31] This has been repeatedly shown by Pritchett in his great study (1971–91).

[32] The absence of a developed mountain strategy in Greek warfare is discussed by Gomme (1945) 10–15.

[33] Cf. Vidal-Naquet (1986a) 108, with particular reference to Crete.

[34] Cf. my remarks at 45–8 below.

[35] Paus. 3.23.9. In his commentary (1898 ad loc.) Frazer's comparatist approach is at its most beguiling: he turns up the propitiatory flinging of tufts of grass (amongst the Masai) and the hurling of 'vast numbers of hogs' (Hawaii) into the relevant volcano. One may compare the anecdotal 'death' of Empedokles, who plunged into the crater of Etna (Diog. Laert. 8.69). For fascinating observations on this story, see Kingsley (1995), index s.v. 'Etna'.

[36] Plin. *HN* 25.1. Much plant-gathering, however, will have had more to do with everyday needs than with 'research': Theophr. *Hist. pl.* 9.10.2–4 (black hellebore best from Helikon, white from Oita).

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However, notwithstanding these qualifications, Zeus' statistical pre-eminence on the *oros* looks unchallengeable.

It should be mentioned finally that, in addition to divinities who were *associated* with a mountain, there were others who were apparently *identified* with one. But in spite of Korinna's poetical evocation of the song contest between Helikon and Kithairon,[45] and in spite of Wilamowitz's speculations about Atlas and other potential mountain-Giants/Titans,[46] Greek belief (as opposed, for example, to Cappadocian)[47] preferred the model of association to that of identification.

3. IMAGINARY MOUNTAINS

This is not the place to argue in detail the heuristic merits of various definitions of 'myth'. I simply set out baldly two working assumptions. (1) By 'a Greek myth' I shall mean one of the stories related by (some) Greeks about the deeds of the gods and heroes and their interrelations with mortals. (2) The territory of Greek mythology is not hermetically sealed. Many kinds of story ('historical' anecdote, comic plot, etc.) may incorporate patterns of thought analogous to those present in tales about gods and heroes; this material will be raided where appropriate.

To begin with a partial truth: myth 'reflects'. Mythical herdsmen, like real ones, live on mountains. The Euripidean Cyclops had his home on Etna; Paris and Anchises dwelt on Trojan Ida; Apollo was out on the slopes of Pieria when Hermes came to rustle.[48] Herdsmen in myth practise transhumance, like the two in *Oidipous Tyrannos*: 'We herded as neighbours three times', recalls the Corinthian, 'for six months from spring to the rise of Arktouros'.[49] A myth ascribed by

(Hermes). For the 'Mother', cf. Hdt. 1.80, Paus. 5.13.7; *Der Kleine Pauly* (1964–75) iii. 383–9, s.v. 'Kybele' (W. Fauth).

[45] The text is very fragmentary, see Page (1953) 19–22 and D. A. Campbell (1992) fr. 654, but Huxley (1978, 71–2) seems to be right in observing that Korinna 'comes close to identifying [the god Helikon] with the mountain'.

[46] Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1931–2) i. 93–5.

[47] See Huxley (1978).

[48] Eur. *Cyc.* 114; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.12.5; *Hymn. Hom. Aphr.* 53–5; *Hymn. Hom. Herm.* 69–70.

[49] Soph. *OT* 1133–7.

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> year during which all wolves bring forth their young. The reason for this, they say, is found in a fable, which alleges that it took twelve days to bring Leto from the land of the Hyperboreans to Delos, during which time she had the appearance of a she-wolf because she was afraid of Hera. Whether twelve days really was the time or not has not yet been definitely established by observation; that is merely what is asserted. (*Hist. an.* 580[a]14)

It may be added that the situation is identical today: we know nothing about the exact birth-periods of European wolves; but it is zoologically certain that there will be a restricted period for birth, and *it is unlikely that this will be more than 2–3 weeks.* As with Antipater's assertion mentioned above, the coincidence between myth and empirical observation is notable; and so too is the ability of Aristotle to set himself apart from the tradition and to reflect critically upon it.

A few conclusions may be drawn from the material presented in this section. (1) Sometimes Greek perception of the wolf directly reflects the facts of human and lupine existence: humans compete with wolves for food, so wolves appear in myth as cruel foes. (2) In other respects traditional thought works on reality by selective emphasis and 'clarification': wolves share a kill *equally*; they are *all alike.* (3) The tradition is not uniform: in different contexts different aspects of the wolf are stressed, though within the broadly similar image shared by all. (4) Aristotelian zoology represents a marked contrast to the mythical tradition. But the distinction between folklore and zoology is not rigid: we find excellent zoology in anecdote, and mythological patterns and concerns in zoology.

2. THE WEREWOLF OF ARKADIA

Having tried to give a general overview of the place of the wolf in Greek thought, I turn now to one particular aspect of the subject: the cult and myth of the Arkadian werewolf. This complex of religious practice and belief constitutes the single most striking instance of the wolf as 'good to think with' surviving from ancient Greece.

We begin with a point of terminology. It seems sensible to distinguish between werewolfism and lycanthropy. The former may be defined as the belief that people are able to turn into wolves; the latter denotes a psychotic disorder according to which one believes that one

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has oneself turned into a wolf.[22] Compared with the enormous number of werewolf and lycanthropy cases recorded for medieval Europe,[23] evidence for such phenomena in antiquity is rare. (We are of course at liberty to wonder how representative our sample is, but all we can do is to operate with what information we have.) Instances of lycanthropy are few and late, but Markellos of Side significantly reports that sufferers experienced their symptoms at night (in February) and in cemeteries, i.e. in a context removed both temporally and spatially from that of normal life—we recall that the Petronian werewolf metamorphosed by moonlight and on a road beside some grave-markers.[24] Stories of ancient werewolf belief are again scarce, although there is this time a certain amount of material from Greece. Once more we should note the typical geographical remoteness, as with the Neuri, adjacent to the Scythians in Herodotos' narrative: 'The Scythians, and the Greeks settled in Scythia, say that once a year every one of the Neuri is turned into a wolf, and after remaining so for a few days returns again to his former shape' (Hdt. 4.105). That the Neuri are located by Herodotos next to the Androphagi is wholly logical: in accordance with a pattern of thought common in Greece and in a vast number of other cultures, marginal peoples are perceived as behaving in ways inverse to those favoured by the 'central' people.[25] Whether the story about the Neuri is entirely a product of this sort of inverse projection, or whether an actual ritual lies behind it, is impossible to decide; but the existence of an initiatory *rite de passage* is perfectly plausible, either on the assumption that the participants literally adopted wolf-disguise[26] or on the view that one who temporarily withdraws 'outside' is metaphorically wolfish.

[22] Lycanthropy is not unknown to modern psychiatry, although it is very rare: see Rosenstock and Vincent (1977); Garlipp et al. (2004).

[23] Ronay (1972) 15 gives a figure of 30,000 cases of lycanthropy investigated by the Roman Church between 1520 and the mid-seventeenth century. On werewolf belief in early modern Europe, see Harf-Lancner (1985). Sconduto (2008) sketches developments from antiquity to the Renaissance; see also Otten (1986); Pluskowski (2006) 172–92. Summers (1933) may still be consulted, though with great circumspection.

[24] Text of Markellos in Roscher (1896) 79–81. Petronius: *Sat.* 61–2. Ancient lycanthropy: Piccaluga (1968) 57–64; Ullmann (1976); Burkert (1983) 89 with n. 28. Burkert rightly states that lycanthropy is culturally determined, but his view that it 'no longer plays a role in modern psychiatry' needs rephrasing as 'a *significant* role'; cf. n. 22 above.

[25] Cf. Wiedemann (1986). On the 'other' in Herodotos, see Hartog (2001a); on perceived cultural differences between 'same' and 'other', see Todorov (1982).

[26] Cf. Meuli (1975) 160.

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before reaching conclusions about their signification.[52] No signifier has an intrinsic meaning, only a meaning in context.

Against this background I want now to examine the meaning (or lack of meaning) of some mythological names involving *melas*.

First, three general points need to be made about Greek names. (1) As I said earlier, a name, or part of a name, might not *necessarily* have been felt to be significant. In *Poetics* Aristotle observes: 'In the word "Theodoros", *to dōros ou sēmainei* (the [element] *dōros* doesn't mean anything)' (1457[a] 13–14). The example Aristotle chooses is a curious one, since in principle there would seem to be nothing objectionable about interpreting the name 'Theodoros' as 'god-*given*'.[53] But what is relevant to us is Aristotle's general point: not every part of a name need be felt to carry meaning. (2) The interpreter, ancient or modern, has a crucial role to play in reading significance into a name. We need look no further than Plato's *Kratylos*, the subject of which is precisely the appropriateness of names in relation to the character of their owner. At one point (395b) Sokrates talks of the name 'Atreus': the form of his name is, Sokrates observes, slightly 'deflected and hidden', but the connection with stubbornness (*to ateires*) and fearlessness (*to atreston*) and ruinousness (*to atēron*) is clear *to those who understand about names*. In other words, the significance of a name does not go without saying. (3) The degree to which a name might have been felt to be meaningful varies not only according to the interpreter, but also according to the context within which the name appears. A name, or an element of a name, might spring into semantic life in one context, but remain dormant in another.

Guided by these considerations, I shall address two questions relating to names involving *melas*. First: is the component *melas* significant in a particular name in a particular context? Second: if it is significant, *what* might it signify?

I begin with a sister-and-brother pair from the *Odyssey*: Melantho and Melanthios, children of Dolios. Melantho is Penelope's maid who sleeps with the suitor Eurymachos and insults Odysseus; Odysseus

[52] For a cross-cultural perspective, see also Pastoureau (2009a) 197 n. 44: whereas the light/dark opposition is 'natural', the white/black opposition is 'totally cultural'. As Pastoureau demonstrates, there are many cultural contexts—medieval heraldry for one—in which the contrast between white and black is far less marked than it is in the ancient classical world, and emphatically *not* aligned with positive/negative.

[53] See Lucas (1972) ad loc.

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structure may be seen as parallel to the structure implicit in that institution. What makes Vidal-Naquet's analysis relevant to the present inquiry is the fact that the characteristic of 'being *melas*' is common to several of the myths which he discusses.

Melanion *is* the Black Hunter. Vidal-Naquet introduces him by quoting a *muthos* sung in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* by the chorus of old men, who recall a story they heard in childhood (781–96):

> Once upon a time there was a young man called Melanion, who fled from marriage and went into the wilderness and lived in the mountains; and he hunted hares and wove nets and had a dog, and never came back home again, because of his loathing. So much did he abhor women, as we sensible fellows do, no less than Melanion did.

For Vidal-Naquet, Melanion is an ephebe *manqué*, a lone hunter who goes out into the wilds on an exploit, but who does *not* return to the community afterwards. He is thus *partly* parallel to another '*melas*-hero' discussed by Vidal-Naquet: Melanthos, the mythical opponent of Xanthos.[58] Melanthos uses trickery to outwit his opponent in a border zone between Boiotian and Athenian territory, sometimes named as Melainai (or Melania). In some accounts, Melanthos' victory is ascribed to the intervention of Dionysos Melanaigis ('of the black goatskin').[59] Unlike the Aristophanic Melanion, however, Melanthos does successfully make the transition back from his marginality: he becomes king of Athens. The stories of both Melanion and Melanthos illustrate, for Vidal-Naquet, the negative quality of 'being *melas*' during a period spent in the wilds, segregated from civilization. Taken together, they stand as a kind of composite mythical prototype of the historical Athenian ephebe, whose period of military service on the confines of society preceded his eventual reintegration into the adult community.

Is all this convincing? This is not the place to go into the broader question of the institution of the Athenian *ephebeia*. I restrict myself to a discussion of the two mythical figures Melanthos and Melanion, and, in particular, to the signification of their names.

[58] For the varied and mostly fragmentary sources (which sometimes give the alternative names Melanthios and Xanthios), see Vidal-Naquet (1986a) 123 n. 15.

[59] Cf. *Suda* s.v. *Μελαναιγὶς Διόνυσος*, reporting that Dionysos was worshipped under this epithet at Eleutherai (in the border area between Attica and Boiotia); Nonnos, *Dion.* 27.301–7, with Vian (1990) nn. on 27.301–3 and 304–7.

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meeting with Jason at which she can confer on him the power which will make him temporarily invulnerable. But, though not static, she is in control: she puts up her hair, which had previously been loose (829); she holds the reins and whip to control the mules (871–2); and, whereas previously her eyes were perpetually darting here and there, now it is the people of the city who turn their eyes aside to avoid meeting Medea's (886).

But it is a constant in the character of the Apollonian Medea that, whenever she is not focussed strictly on practising magical control, the turmoil generated by the conflicting claims of *erōs* and family removes all fixity, and condemns her to oscillate. While waiting for Jason, she plays games with her maidservants, games which Apollonios evokes through a broken, anacoluthic syntax that Malcolm Campbell rightly saw as enacting Medea's fidgety state of mind (949–51).[4] But it is the games played by her eyes to which the narrator gives greater emphasis: 'Nor could she keep her eyes fixed on the crowd of maidservants, but constantly turned her face away and peered into the distance along the paths' (951–3). Just for an instant, when she and Jason meet, the narrative brings Medea to a halt beside him, and, through a simile, it seems as if the equivalence between Medea's domestic conflicts and her restless motion is going to be undermined (967–70):

> The pair then faced each other, silent, unable to speak, like oaks or tall firs, which at first when there is no wind stand quiet and firmly rooted on the mountains

However, even within the vehicle of this simile, the pause is immediately followed by an evocation of continuous oscillation:

> like oaks or tall firs, which at first when there is no wind stand quiet and firmly rooted on the mountains, *but afterwards stir in the wind and rustle together ceaselessly.* [emphases added]

And sure enough, when the main narrative resumes, Medea begins to move to and fro: under Jason's flattery, she first turns her eyes aside, then looks into his face (1008–10). Even as she hands over to him the drug of invulnerability, the sign she lives under is not that of control but that of mobility, a mood which affects Jason too (1022–3):

[4] M. Campbell (1983) 66.

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> The goddess Hera caused the wind to blow so strongly that Aiaian Medea should reach the Pelasgian land with all speed, to bring disaster upon the house of Pelias.

Medea resumes her characteristic state of anguish and movement—because the competing presences within her of Kolchis and Greece have surfaced once again: her brother Apsyrtos has appeared with a force of pursuing Kolchians. Will Medea deploy against him the same techniques which lulled the serpent to sleep? In fact she opts for a different method. Apsyrtos is enticed into an ambush by means of gifts, above all a robe, a robe such as that which Deianeira, in Sophokles' *Women of Trachis*, sent to Herakles in order, she thought, to reawaken his love (but which turned out to be impregnated with murderous poison). It is the same erotically charged robe which Hypsipyle gave to Jason as his going-away present; originally the Graces had woven it for Dionysos, and he and Ariadne had lain on it while they made love; to enhance its effect still further, Medea now sprinkles drugs of enticement into the air. But what follows this interlude corroborates my main point: whenever her mind is torn between Kolchis and Greece, Medea cannot remain still. As Jason leaps from ambush and stabs Apsyrtos, Medea averts her eyes, while her brother's blood spurts over her veil and robe (4.465–7).

This grubby little murder drives Medea-the-controlled-and-controlling sorceress yet further out of narrative view. When the *Argo* puts in to the coast where Medea's aunt Circe dwells, in the hope that she will grant Jason and Medea absolution for the killing of Apsyrtos, the movement of Medea's eyes mirrors the failure of their quest: first she looks downwards in shame, then she raises her eyes, then she covers her eyes with her robe in shame once more (4.697–8; 726; 749–50). Nor does the next port of call, the Phaiakian kingdom of Alkinoos and Arete, bring her rest (4.1061–5):

> In her breast her aching spirit whirled like a spindle turned in the night by a toiling woman whose orphaned children cry all around her; her husband is dead, and as she weeps at the awful fate which has seized her, tears drip over her cheeks.

There is an all-too-glaring contrast between the rootless, childless, spindle-less Medea and the labouring, widowed mother to whom the simile compares her; but what the two women have in common is not only suffering but also constant, repetitive motion.

In Phaiakia, Medea's relationship with Jason is consummated (which is why Alkinoos agrees not to surrender her to the pursuing

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torment (his name means 'Forethought'), refuses to defer to his tormentor, or to his tormentor's lackey (999–1006):

> *Hermes*: Bring yourself, rash fool, at last
> To think correctly in face of your present anguish.
> *Prom*: You exhort me in vain, as if you were talking to the waves.
> Never convince yourself that I, in fear
> Of Zeus' intent, will become feminized in my mind,
> Begging my greatly hated enemy, with hands
> Upturned in womanish supplication, to free me from these bonds.
> No, never.

One aspect of the cosmic power-struggle dramatized in *Prometheus Bound* is the clash between two successive generations of gods. The same is true of the *Oresteia*, though here the climactic struggle is fought not over the fate of humanity as a whole, but over the fate of a single individual. Orestes' act of matricide is defended by the 'younger' god Apollo and attacked by the 'older' Furies, the goddesses whose primordial authority to punish kin-murderers long pre-dates the coming to power of the Olympians. When Apollo's side of the argument is confirmed by the casting vote of his fellow Olympian Athene, the Furies' resentment is couched in terms of generational conflict (*Eum.* 778–9):

> You younger gods, you have ridden down
> The ancient laws, and torn them from my hands.

Seniority was not the only reason for a divinity to assert a claim to honour, or to resent the behaviour of a fellow god. Differences in spheres of operation between deities also held ample potential for clashes of interest. In *Hippolytos*, the conflict between Artemis and Aphrodite works itself out through the lives and deaths of the family of Theseus; the goddesses themselves merely frame the action by appearing in the prologue (Aphrodite) and in the finale (Artemis). When the young hunter Hippolytos prefers the chaste pursuits associated with the virginal Artemis to the world of sexuality presided over by Aphrodite, his agonizing death at the hands of the goddess of love leads Artemis, at the end of the play, to locate the action firmly within the context of the eternal rivalry between the two goddesses. As she says to the dying Hippolytos (1417–22):

> Let be. For, even when you are under the dark of earth,
> Aphrodite's zealous anger shall not fall upon you

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> Unavenged; your piety and noble spirit deserve requital.
> I, by my own hand, with these unerring arrows
> Shall wreak vengeance on the mortal she holds dearest.

The time of gods is not the time of mortals. Human lives may come and go, but Artemis and Aphrodite will forever embody antithetical perceptions of sexuality.

(2) In tragedy the gods' use of power can be openly criticized, yet at the same time that power must be acknowledged, because it is omnipresent and unavoidable

One feature of ancient Greek religion which can be particularly difficult to comprehend for a modern observer—especially one from a morally polarized monotheistic background—is its readiness to tolerate overt criticism of the gods' behaviour. In few works of Greek literature is the conduct of a god placed under more intense scrutiny than in Euripides' *Ion*. The plot narrates the consequences of the god's rape of Kreousa, an event which she recollects in an aria of extraordinary bitterness (887–901):

> You came with hair flashing
> Gold, as I gathered
> Into my cloak flowers ablaze
> With their golden light.
> Clinging to my pale wrists
> As I cried for my mother's help
> You led me to a bed in a cave,
> A god and my lover,
> With no shame,
> Doing a favour to the Cyprian.
> In misery I bore you
> A son, whom in maternal terror
> I placed in that bed
> Where you cruelly forced me.[30]

[30] Adapted from translation by R. F. Willetts, in Grene and Lattimore (1958). The other translations from tragedy in the present chapter—which make no claim to literary merit—are my own.

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'Concerning the gods, I have no way of knowing either that they exist, or that they do not exist, or what form they have: for there are many things which prevent knowledge, (namely) the unclarity (*sc.* of that which is to be known) and the fact that human life is short' (fr. 4 DK).[71] Man might be the measure of all things, but his insight was, at least in one respect, severely limited.

In so far as he, too, stressed the limitations of humanity, Sophokles might at first glance seem to exhibit an affinity with Protagoras; but nothing could be further from Protagorean scepticism about the gods than the world of Sophoklean drama. In fact, if we want a closer parallel to the Sophoklean attitude to limits, it can be found, not in the developments of speculative thought at Athens, but in the utterances of the oracle at Delphi. The characteristic Delphic response—a good instance is the reply given to Kroisos about crossing the river Halys (Hdt. 1.53; 91)—was ambiguous, turning the questioner back upon himself, beguiling his aspiration towards clear vision, denying him salvation.[72] The oracle *sēmainei* ('gives signs') (Herakleit. fr. 93 DK), but offers no guarantee that fallible humanity will interpret the signs correctly. (It is Zeus' will, says Phineus at Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 2.314–16, that the clues offered to mankind by divination shall be *imperfect*.) Delphi starkly confronts man with his frailty. The plays of Sophokles and the pronouncements of Delphi alike convey a sense of the inscrutability of the gods, and of man's inability fully to grasp their will in time to avert disaster.[73]

In a way, then, Sophokles is merely filling out the implications of the mythical structures which we examined earlier, structures which express the importance of the gulf between men and gods. Yet that 'merely' already feels uneasy, and it certainly glosses over much that is essentially Sophoklean. For, at the same time as making his audience aware of human limits, Sophokles makes them aware also of what humans can achieve within and in spite of those limits. Just because the gods are remote, human character and human choices acquire greater significance.

[71] See C. W. Müller (1967). Only with Plato was the unclarity of everyday experience reconciled with the notion of an eternal and unchanging truth, a truth to be approached through the trained mind of the philosopher. In the simile of the cave in the *Republic*, the identity between ignorance and blindness and between knowledge and sight was used to affirm, not the weakness, but the transcendent power of man's vision. On philosophical aspects of visibility/invisibility see Schuhl (1953); Gernet (1981) 343–51.

[72] Sabbatucci (1965) 187–8.

[73] Cf. R. Parker (1999) 17.

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This point is rather important, and it may be worth illustrating it briefly with reference to some of the plays. The first scene in *Aias* leaves us in no doubt of man's inferiority to the gods in respect of power—Athene spells this out with brutal clarity at 127–33; but the rest of the play shows us that, in spite of the limitations of our mortality, we do have the power to make fundamental moral choices. We can aspire to be fair and just, like Odysseus, or loyal, like Teukros; or we can be mean-spirited, like Menelaos and Agamemnon. And such choices *matter*. In *Elektra* we have, early on, a reference to the (much-debated) Delphic injunction upon Orestes to commit matricide; yet thereafter it is the *human* aspects of the action, such as the conflicts between Elektra and Chrysothemis and Elektra and Klytaimestra, and the impact upon Elektra of Orestes' 'death', which occupy the centre of the drama. *Philoktetes* is played out against the background of references to prophecies by the Trojan seer Helenos; yet the main significance of the play is created by the complex and shifting pattern of human choices, hesitations, and decisions enacted by Neoptolemos, Odysseus, and Philoktetes. *Oidipous at Kolonos* might at first glance seem to be an exception, in that Oidipous' passing apparently suggests that the limits of humanity are not as inflexible as all that. But we must beware of convincing ourselves that the play ends in a glorious apotheosis. After all, the voice which summons Oidipous is strange, allusive, and enigmatic, and gives no inkling of a majestic or godlike existence for him after his death.[74] In fact, as is usual with Sophokles, what is more to the point than the reaction of the gods is the reaction of the humans: and it is upon the behaviour of Oidipous towards his sons and daughters, their behaviour towards him, and the contrasting postures of Kreon and Theseus, that the dramatic weight falls.

Once we recognize that it is the *individual moral consequences* of the limitations of our common humanity which Sophokles invites his audience to ponder, we can see that he is not 'merely' reproducing a theme offered to him by the mythical tradition. Certainly, the basic nature of the relation between men and gods was built into the structures of Greek myth; but the delineation of character and the ascription of motive—in a word, the placing of the moral accent—all this lay with the dramatist.

[74] See Linforth (1951) 180–4.

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