

BOOK REVIEW

Myth and Tragedies in their Ancient Greek Contexts. By RICHARD BUXTON. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. 304. Hardcover, \$99.00. ISBN 978-0-19-955781-5.

This volume brings together eleven of Richard Buxton's articles on mythology and tragedy previously published between 1980 and 2010. In a short introduction, Buxton identifies "certain recurrent features" in these works and prefaces the corpus with the disclaimer that it is "not entirely homogeneous" (1), in responding to changes in mythological research in the past 30 years. The chapters, divided into two sections, "Themes in Myth" and "Myths in Tragedy", are not organized chronologically, but along "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" (6). Buxton also provides an envoi, an acknowledgement of previous publication details, a unified bibliography, and a comprehensive index, all of which contribute to making this compilation a success as a book. In brief, the book not only preserves the range and depth of Buxton's work on mythology and tragedy, but also presents clear examples and critiques of a variety of research methods used in myth studies.

Since these articles from which this book is derived have all been vetted, cited, and critiqued before, this review will concentrate on the advantages of their proximity and renewal in a compilation, rather than describing and critiquing each individual chapter. Buxton's spectrum, as stated above, works as an organizational schema, and, if the reader misses the progression, italicized paragraphs at the beginning of each chapter provide signposts and urge reference to themes or methods from previous chapters. This made reading the book from cover to cover a richer experience, and left the reader with the impression of experiencing a unified course of study in analyzing myth in a variety of literary and artistic contexts. Mythological characters were presented from different viewpoints in various chapters and reinforced Buxton's insistence on the consideration of context, thus the book's title, in the analysis of the components of myth.

The division of the book between mythological themes and tragedy makes sense, and the initial chapter in Part II, "Tragedy and Greek Myth", reprinted from

the *Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2007, 166–189), provides a sturdy bridge between the two halves. The essay creates an awareness of tragedy as a powerful vehicle for myth-telling, the first of many ties that binds the two halves together. Other functional aspects of the book, like the bibliography and index, make this volume a useful tool for examining Buxton's *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The bibliography is a history of mythological research on its own, and the index allows for some cherry picking of topics, like women, Zeus, wolves, or to see how Buxton interprets individual literary works.

All chapters were revised, especially useful for the earlier works, but only two chapters were treated to significant changes: chapter 3, "Mythological Names: The Case of *Melas*," was expanded from its two previous incarnations, and the argument in chapter 8, "Bafflement in Greek Tragedy" was adjusted. The revival of publications from the 80s will bring these works to the attention of younger scholars and students of mythology. One or two more recent publications are also usefully gathered here in that their original venues are not universally accessible, e.g. chapter 7, "Time, Space, and Ideology: Tragic Myths and the Athenian *Polis*," from a Spanish publication (J.A. López Férrez (ed.), *Mitos en la literatura griega arcaica y clásica* (Ediciones Clásicas: Madrid, 2002), 175–189).

The book is a worthwhile addition to the mythological collection of a university library. For the undergraduate, many chapters could supplement any number of Classics courses—Greek Tragedy, Ancient Greek Thought, Ancient Philosophy, Greek Civilization, Greek History—not just Myth 101. For the graduate student or the uninitiated scholar, this should be required reading, as a paradigm for the development of scholarly insight over a long period of time. To use an oft-quoted phrase of Buxton's, this book is 'good to think with'.

CHRISTINA A. SALOWEY

Hollins University, csalowey@hollins.edu