

BOOK REVIEW

Enraged: Why Violent Times Need Ancient Greek Myths. By EMILY KATZ ANHALT. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017. Pp. 280. Hardback, \$30.00. ISBN 978-0-300-21737-7.

At a time when violence and democracy are frequently in the headlines, this book uses Greek mythology (as seen in Homer, Sophocles and Euripides) as a way to explore contemporary issues and anxieties about civil society. I am not sold on all of Anhalt's arguments, but in the main I found this book a lively and enjoyable read and I suspect that students and a more general audience would feel the same.

Anhalt presents Greek myth as a valuable tool for engaged modern citizenship, and her explorations of these stories make a convincing case. The book goes well beyond the idea of rage and violence, however, and is deeply concerned with what Greek myths can show or tell us about the democratic process more broadly. The heart of Anhalt's argument about the enduring importance of Greek myth is that "[i]f a story is not your own, you can assess its participants more objectively" (130). This idea of critical distance is a thread that runs throughout this book, as it deftly moves the reader closer and farther from these texts, positioning them both as a member of an ancient audience and then again as a modern reader, showing them exactly how Greek myths can be an effective tool for thinking about rage, empathy, reason, democracy and justice.

I would have liked to see more explicit engagement with the idea of Greek exceptionalism—Anhalt is in the uncomfortable position that many classicists now find themselves of wanting to put Greek literature forward as a particularly good tool for examining contemporary American culture while recognizing the flaws and limitations of "classical exceptionalism." One need not think that Greek mythology (as found in a particular selection of Greek literature) is *uniquely* able to prompt an examination of rage and democratic society to think that these texts are a very useful tool. I wish she would have framed her argument in those terms, since this is a book aimed at a popular audience and this might well be the only one on the topic that some of her readers will read.

This is not to say that I did not enjoy the book. On the contrary, I enjoyed reading this book a great deal and I think it could be a very useful tool for teaching. Anhalt provides an extremely accessible treatment of Homer's *Iliad*, Sophocles' *Ajax* and Euripides' *Hecuba*. Each chapter (the *Iliad* is split into four chapters: *Iliad* 1, *Iliad* 6, *Iliad* 9 and *Iliad* 10–24) begins with a summary of the text, followed by an analysis of the themes, with a particular emphasis on those with modern salience. Anhalt's interest is in how democratic systems deal with rage, which can be seen in the themes she chooses to highlight in each text. At times, her retellings emphasize different aspects of these stories than I would have chosen – while this may sound like a critique, I actually found this to be a great strength. The summary portions seemed like they would be less useful, since I am quite familiar with all the texts in question, but her retellings caused me to think differently about parts of these myths. The greatest strength of these retellings, however, is that they are vivid and gripping – for readers unfamiliar with the original texts, Anhalt provides all the necessary details of the plots while also situating the reader (of her book) as a particularly nuanced reader of Homer. At the same time, these retellings replicate the experience of a student reading the *Iliad* for the first time and encountering the strangeness of this ancient world: “Hera reminds Zeus that if he saves Sarpedon, other gods will want to save their own sons and feel resentment. Evidently, many warriors are sons of gods, but they are still mortal” (82). Though a small thing, by including “evidently” Anhalt replicates the discovery process that accompanies a reader's first encounter with Greek mythology.

The thematic analysis builds nicely on these summaries, though her analyses sometimes diverge from my own. I did not expect the *Ajax* to be presented as a story about risks of a democratic system, but Anhalt does a nice job of tracing that element throughout the story. Similarly, she frames the *Hecuba* as a story about the potential failures of a democratic system when it veers into mob rule. However, these readings work, and these close readings of the texts blend nicely into a discussion of the modern world. Upon reading that “on some level we recognize that there is a difference between procedural justice and, well, *justice*” (132), the reader cannot help but recall verdicts of court cases that did not seem to advance the cause of justice and see the modern relevance of the *Ajax*.

Finally, though I do not generally prefer end notes, I appreciated the use of end notes here because the scholarly support and further reading was distinct from the discussion of the texts. This made the text more immersive and a more

enjoyable read, which is helpful in a book aimed at a more general, non-specialist audience.

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