

## IMAGINARY GREEK MOUNTAINS

### I. APPROACH

It is hardly controversial to assert that recent work on Greek mythology is methodologically diverse.<sup>1</sup> However, there is one body of writing which seems to have become a reference point against which scholars of many persuasions—not excluding orthodox positivist philologists and adherents of psychoanalysis—feel the need to define their own position. I mean structuralism. G.S. Kirk and, later, W. Burkert have conducted their dialogues with it;<sup>2</sup> C. Segal and more unreconstructedly R. Caldwell have tried to accommodate Lévi-Strauss and Freud under the same blanket;<sup>3</sup> a glance at bibliographical citations in studies of tragedy over the last twenty years will show how J.-P. Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet have moved from the periphery to the centre (much as Finley did some time ago in ancient history). The polemical attitudes being struck by M. Detienne (from within the movement) and C. Calame are directly generated by over-confident structuralist attempts to map out the mental territory they claimed as their own.<sup>4</sup>

It will, I take it, be widely (though not universally) accepted that the influence of structuralism on classical studies has resulted in significant advances in understanding, especially in relation to the mapping of ancient *mentalités* and the analysis of interrelations between different registers of thought and behaviour. Equally, many will share the writer's view that one of the weaknesses of *some* structuralist writing has been the tendency to obscure contextual differences; at this point we may cautiously approve the deconstructionists' obsession with 'difference', while refusing to laugh at their jokes. In this article I analyse a small area of *la mentalité grecque*, highlighting what can be gained from using the notion of significant contrast, yet emphasising too some variations between contexts. I also raise issues relevant to the current, fruitful debate about myth-and-ritual; and I investigate—with (I hope) due awareness of the pitfalls—what I believe to be the potentially important distance between the 'imaginary' world of mythology and the world of social life.

A final introductory word, this time about the subject matter. One aspect of the Greeks' mental landscape was constituted by their perception of the various elements of their spatial world: rivers, plains, cities, caves, springs, cross-roads, meadows, mountains. There are signs that interest is beginning to focus on this area. We have A. Motte's valuable study of meadows, and writings on tragic 'space' are appearing.<sup>5</sup> The present paper is designed to be a contribution to this enquiry. In so far as it aspires to draw conclusions about the whole of Greek mythology, it leaves itself open to a charge of superficiality. But the risk seemed worth running since, at least on imaginary Greek mountains, it is possible to see the trees but miss the wood.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the variety of approaches to be found in the collections by J.N. Bremmer, *Interpretations of Greek mythology* (London 1987) and Lowell Edmunds, *Approaches to Greek myth* (Baltimore 1990). The enigmatic state of contemporary mythological studies is typified by the Sphinxes displayed on the dust-jackets of the collections by Bremmer and by C. Calame (*Métamorphoses du mythe en Grèce antique* [Geneva 1988]), as I noted in a review of Calame's book, *CR* n.s. xl (1990) 324-6. That was before I saw a copy of Edmunds (another Sphinx).

<sup>2</sup> G.S. Kirk, *Myth: its meaning and functions in ancient and other cultures* (Cambridge/Berkeley 1970); W. Burkert, *Structure and history in Greek mythology and ritual* (Berkeley 1979).

<sup>3</sup> Charles Segal, 'Pentheus and Hippolytus on the couch and on the grid: psychoanalytic and structuralist readings of Greek tragedy', in Segal's *Interpreting Greek tragedy: myth, poetry, text* (Ithaca 1986), 268-93; Richard Caldwell, *The origin of the gods* (New York/Oxford 1989).

<sup>4</sup> See M. Detienne, *L'invention de la mythologie* (Paris 1981); Calame (n.1) 7-14, and his article 'Illusions de la mythologie', *Nouveaux actes sémiotiques* no. 12 (1990).

<sup>5</sup> A. Motte, *Prairies et jardins de la Grèce antique* (Brussels 1973); A. Bernand, *La carte du tragique* (Paris 1985); I. Chalkia, *Lieux et espace dans la tragédie d'Euripide* (Thessaloniki 1986); and the essays by Zeitlin ('Thebes') and Padel ('Making space speak') in John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin (eds), *Nothing to do with Dionysos?* (Princeton 1990).

## II. EIS OROS

At the outset we have a terminological problem. A mountain is in the eye of the beholder. The Greeks were agreed that, for example, Olympos, Cretan Ida, Parnassos, Helikon, Pelion, Kithairon and Lykaion—which on our reckoning range from about 2900 metres to about 1400 metres—were ὄρη. But so, according for instance to Strabo, was ‘Mount’ Kynthos on Delos—a stiff walk if you have a ferry to catch on a hot day, but with the best will in the world only 113 metres above sea level; while at Olympia τὸ ὄρος τὸ Κρόνιον, as Pausanias calls it, can manage a mere 123 metres.<sup>6</sup> An *oros* is not, then, to be defined simply in terms of physical height. Instead we should look to what, in our sources, is contrasted with an *oros*. An *oros* is not the plain (where you grow corn and fight in phalanx), nor is it the city or the village (where you live). The oppositions between *oros* and plain, and *oros* and city, are found in Greek thought of many periods and many contexts. Take the words spoken by Arrian’s Alexander to his troops: ‘Philip gave you cloaks to wear instead of hides, brought you down from the mountains to the plains..., made you into *polis*-dwellers, and equipped you with good laws and customs’.<sup>7</sup> But if an *oros* is not a plain and not a city, neither is it an acropolis, that fortified height, often also religious centre and symbol of political power, *within* the city.<sup>8</sup> An *oros* is a height outside inhabited and cultivated space—outside the *polis*, the *astu*, and the *komai*.<sup>9</sup> We might add that, in a specifically Egyptian context, *oros* may signify the desert (near or far) in contrast with the fertile and cultivable Nile valley.<sup>10</sup> Height is once again only part of the story: a contrast with the area of cultivation is equally important.

## III. USING MOUNTAINS

What was an *oros* used for?<sup>11</sup> Firstly, for pasturage, particularly (bearing in mind the practice of transhumance) during the summer heat.<sup>12</sup> The inscriptional evidence, meagre enough,<sup>13</sup> tends to concern either the avoidance of damage by flocks to religious property, or

<sup>6</sup> Kynthos: Str. x 5.2. Kronion: Paus. v 21.2; vi 20.1 (altitudes taken from A. Philippson, *Die griechischen Landschaften* [Frankfurt am Main 1950-9]). Fluid meaning of *oros*: C.D. Buck, *A dictionary of selected synonyms in the principal Indo-European languages* (Chicago 1949) 23; W.K. Pritchett, *Studies in ancient Greek topography* i (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1965) 66. For an apparently anomalous, Argive use of *oros* see W. Vollgraff, ‘Novae inscriptiones Argivae’, *Mnemosyne* xlii (1914) 330-54, at 333; J.L. Caskey and P. Amandry, ‘Investigations at the Heraion of Argos, 1949’, *Hesperia* xxi (1952) 165-221, at 218. For *oros* in Strabo see R. Baladié, *Le Péloponnèse de Strabon* (Paris 1980) 124ff.

<sup>7</sup> Arr. An. vii 9.2. For the plain/*oros* opposition see Thphr. HP i 8.1 and iii 11.2. For plain/non-plain contrasted in warfare see R. Osborne, *Classical landscape with figures* (London 1987) 144, with reference to Plb. xviii 31. ‘Plainsmen’ and ‘men from beyond the hills’ form two political constituencies in the time of Peisistratos: Hdt. i 59; Aristot. Ath. Pol. 13.4 (with Rhodes’ commentary *ad loc.*).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. R. Martin, *L’urbanisme dans la Grèce antique*<sup>2</sup> (Paris 1974) 32. Like the *oros*, the acropolis may be contrasted with the plain: Aristot. Pol. 1330b (an acropolis is ‘oligarchic’ and ‘monarchical’; level ground is ‘democratic’).

<sup>9</sup> One of JHS’s referees made the interesting comment that ‘in English the nearest corresponding word [sc. to *oros*] is probably not “mountain” or “hill” but “moor.”’ But the connotations of ‘moor’ are essentially non-Mediterranean; the same goes for ‘heath’.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. H. Cadell and R. Rémondon, ‘Sens et emplois de τὸ ὄρος dans les documents papyrologiques’, *REG* lxxx (1967) 343-9.

<sup>11</sup> See A.S. Pease, ‘Notes on mountain climbing in antiquity’, *Appalachia* cxxxii (1961) 289-98; D.Fehling, *Ethologische Überlegungen auf dem Gebiet der Altertumskunde* (Munich 1974) ch. 2 (‘Fernsicht’).

<sup>12</sup> See S. Georgoudi, ‘Quelques problèmes de la transhumance dans la Grèce ancienne’, *REG* lxxxvii (1974) 155-85; J.E. Skydsgaard, ‘Transhumance in ancient Greece’, in C.R. Whittaker (ed.), *Pastoral economies in classical antiquity* (Cambridge 1988) 75-86.

<sup>13</sup> The data are reviewed by L. Robert in *Hellenica* vii (1949) 152-60 and x (1955) 28-33, and in *AC* xxxv (1966) 383-4. See also Whittaker (n. 12).

disputes between cities over pasturage rights<sup>14</sup>—in other words, cases where the affairs of herdsmen impinged on the wider community. The voice of the herdsman himself is occasionally heard—we have, for instance, a goatherd's votive inscription found on the slopes of Mount Elias on Aigina, and a dedication by another goatherd in the cave at Vari on Hymettos<sup>15</sup>—but such cases are exceptional. Nevertheless, herding was clearly of greater significance than the evidence of our city-oriented sources implies, and will have been the principal activity which drew men to stay in the mountains for long periods.

Mountains were a source of raw materials. Sometimes this is stone or metal (Hymettos and Pentelikon; Pangaion); usually it is wood. Scholars have differed over just how much afforestation of mountains there was in ancient times,<sup>16</sup> but that one of the reasons for going to an *oros* was to get timber is not in doubt. A man mentioned in one of Demosthenes' private orations had a farm in an outlying deme and kept six donkeys permanently busy sending wood down to the city.<sup>17</sup> We hear occasionally of wood-cutters, whom Theophrastos calls mountain-smiters (ὄρεοτόποι).<sup>18</sup> Like shepherds, they are silent men; though a funerary inscription from classical Athens records the proud boast of a Phrygian: 'By Zeus, I never saw a better wood-cutter than myself'.<sup>19</sup> Wood, hence charcoal: like shepherds, charcoal-burners might, from the city-dweller's perspective, be felt to be outsiders. Such an attitude is implicit in a fragment of Andokides: 'May we never again see the charcoal-burners and their waggons arriving in the city [of Athens] from the mountains'—apparently a reference to the consequences of the occupation of Attica during the Archidamian war.<sup>20</sup> Obviously, charcoal-burners came into the city now and again to sell their fuel; it was the *permanent* residence of these outsiders that rankled. As always, of course, the coin of marginality has another side to it, and we glimpse this in the nostalgia of Dikaiopolis in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* (33-6), when the comic hero, 'hating the *astu*', longs to be back in his own 'charcoal' village, which did not cry 'Buy charcoal!', because it had no need to. Indeed so vigorous is the comic portrait of the Acharnians, with their splendid 'Muse of Fire' (665), that charcoal seems to dominate not just their own community but the wider Athenian state too. This is Aristophanic exaggeration; but the play serves as a reminder that the central/marginal distinction has to be used with discretion and elasticity.

Shepherds, wood-cutters and charcoal-burners dwelt on or regularly visited mountains out of economic necessity. Others visited the *oros* more occasionally, in order to hunt. Not all hunting was done on mountains, but most of it was.<sup>21</sup> Xenophon notes that traps for deer and

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Georgoudi (n. 12) 180-1; M. Sartre, 'Aspects économiques et aspects religieux de la frontière dans les cités grecques', *Ktèma* iv (1979) 213-24.

<sup>15</sup> Aigina: *IG* IV 127, with Robert (1949) (n.13) 154-5. Hymettos: *AJA* vii (1903) 292-3 = *IG* I<sup>2</sup> 778. Although in both cases some scholars have read a proper name instead of 'goatherd'—i.e. Αἰπόλου for αἰπόλου (Aigina) and ἡΑἰπόλος for ἡαἰπόλος (Vari)—the locations of the finds are at the very least consistent with the sense 'goatherd'.

<sup>16</sup> See e.g. Georgoudi (n.12); P. Halstead, 'Traditional and ancient rural economy in Mediterranean Europe: *plus ça change?*', *JHS* cvii (1987) 77-87, at 79-80; Oliver Rackham, 'Ancient landscapes', in O. Murray and S. Price (eds), *The Greek city from Homer to Alexander* (Oxford 1990), 85-111.

<sup>17</sup> *D.* xlii 5-7; Gow on Theoc. 13.25f.

<sup>18</sup> Thphr. *HP.* iii 3.7; iii 12.4, etc. For wood-cutting on Mount Ida see Theoc. 17. 9-10, with Gow *ad loc.*

<sup>19</sup> *IG* I<sup>2</sup> 1084 = P.A. Hansen, *Carmina epigraphica graeca* i (Berlin 1983) no. 87; cf. N. Himmelmann, *Über Hirten-Genre in der antiken Kunst* (Opladen 1980) 62.

<sup>20</sup> *And.* fr. 4 Blass. See further W.K. Lacey, *The family in classical Greece* (London 1968) 53 and 256 n. 13. For a modern example of the charcoal-burner's marginality one may compare the dissident, radical charcoal-burners of the Mount Pelion area in 1921-2. (I owe this information to M. Llewellyn Smith.) Note also the clandestine movement in 19th century Italy whose members styled themselves *i carbonari*.

<sup>21</sup> On the question of the 'space' in which hunting was conducted see A. Schnapp, 'Représentation du territoire de guerre et du territoire de chasse dans l'oeuvre de Xénophon', in M.I. Finley (ed.), *Problèmes de la terre en Grèce ancienne* (Paris 1973) 307-21.

boar are set in the mountains; up there, as opposed to in the plain, you can catch deer by day as well as by night.<sup>22</sup> According to Pausanias, 'The whole of Taygetos provides excellent hunting for [wild] goats and for boar, and an ample supply of deer and bear'.<sup>23</sup> We do know of a case where circumstances imposed hunting as a full-time necessity, as with Dio Chrysostom's story about shepherds working for a rich Euboean, who were forced to resort to hunting when the Romans killed the man's beasts.<sup>24</sup> But as a rule hunting was part-time. The *oros* was where groups of men went out to pit themselves against beasts, and then return to the city.

Another use of mountains was for travel. In spite of steep gradients and narrow passes, mountain paths were used by both individuals and armies. In a famous article on Greek mountain terrain, A.R. Burn concluded: 'I have shown, I hope, how the chief significance of Helikon in history is as a *route*'.<sup>25</sup> Pausanias tells us often enough of routes that take a direct line across mountains: from Lilaia to Delphi you cut across Parnassos; one road from Mantinea to Orchomenos went via Mount Anchisia; there were two paths over Oita; and so on.<sup>26</sup> It might be risky: a simile in the *Iliad* begins,

'As when upon the peaks of a mountain the South Wind  
scatters thick mist, no friend to the shepherd,  
but better than night for the robber...'

and a millennium later Lucian reports the story of a wealthy Theban murdered by brigands on Kithairon.<sup>27</sup>

Mountains played various roles in warfare. In time of extreme need the *oros* could function as a kind of temporary acropolis, a refuge for those with no prospect of winning a pitched battle and no safe settlement to which to withdraw. Thus the Phokians fled the Persians by climbing Parnassos; the Messenians sheltered from the Lakonians on Eira and Ithome.<sup>28</sup> We hear occasionally about reconnaissance ascents, as when Philip V of Macedon went up Haimos.<sup>29</sup> Fire-signalling from beacons on the *oros* was developed with enormous ingenuity.<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> Given the strong ideological component in the divide between hoplite and non-hoplite,<sup>32</sup> and given the pervasive rules of appropriateness underpinning Greek warfare,<sup>33</sup> it is surely comprehensible that mountain warfare is as relatively infrequent as it is.<sup>34</sup> 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)

<sup>22</sup> X. *Cyn.* 9.11; 9.17; 10.22.

<sup>23</sup> Paus. iii 20.4.

<sup>24</sup> D.Chr. *Or.* vii 11.

<sup>25</sup> 'Helikon in history: a study in Greek mountain topography', *ABSA* xlv (1949) 313-23, at 322 (italics in original). This and 'Thermopylae and Callidromos' (in *Studies presented to D.M. Robinson* i 480-9) are described by W.K. Pritchett as 'the two best articles ever published on Greek mountain terrain' (Pritchett [n. 6] iv 207).

<sup>26</sup> Paus. x 33.3; viii 12.8; x 22.8.

<sup>27</sup> *Il.* iii 10-11; Lucian *D.Mort.* 22.2.

<sup>28</sup> Hdt. viii 32, cf. viii 27; Paus. iv 17.10; iv 24.6.

<sup>29</sup> Livy xl 21-2.

<sup>30</sup> Plb. x 43-7.

<sup>31</sup> See W.K. Pritchett, *The Greek state at war* ii (Berkeley 1974) 170.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. P. Ducrey, *Guerre et guerriers dans la Grèce antique* (Paris 1985) 110f.

<sup>33</sup> This has been repeatedly shown by Pritchett in his great study (n. 31).

<sup>34</sup> The absence of a developed mountain strategy in Greek warfare is discussed by A.W. Gomme at pp. 10-15 of his commentary on Thuc. i.

a full member of the community nor (yet) a hoplite.<sup>35</sup> The *oros* could be an initiatory space (one may compare the wolf-men of Lykaion).<sup>36</sup>

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.<sup>37</sup> Then there were those bent on 'enquiry'. Pliny writes of people who, in order to do research on plants, scoured 'culmina quoque montium in via et solitudines abditas omnesque terrae fibras'.<sup>38</sup> Theophrastos and Philo preserve accounts of persons who observed the heavens from mountains. One such, according to Philostratos' life of Apollonios of Tyana, was the philosopher Anaxagoras, and we have similar reports about Eudoxos and Pythagoras.<sup>39</sup> But to the average Greek village- or city-dweller such eccentricity was irrelevant. What was far more important was the final use of mountains which I want to mention: their role as locations for sanctuaries of the gods.

Zeus was pre-eminent. In A.B. Cook's monumental study of the god there are references to nearly 100 mountain cults.<sup>40</sup> More recently, in a review of the evidence for mountain-tops as locations for sanctuaries of Zeus, Merle K. Langdon has concluded that, while occasionally these are explicitly dedicated to Zeus as god of rain (e.g. Zeus Ombrios on Hymettos), in most cases no specific divine function of this or any other kind can be identified with certainty.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless the association between Zeus and the *peak* is worth noting as an example of differentiation in the religious topography of the *oros*.<sup>42</sup> May one go on from this to posit a structuralising opposition between Zeus, god of the summit of the *oros*, and Athene, goddess of the acropolis, Athene as Polias or Poliouchos, in which role she appears in many cities?<sup>43</sup> I think the answer is 'yes', provided we acknowledge certain facts which soften the rigidity of the schema. For example, Athene herself may be worshipped on the *oros*—on Pentelikon, on Pontinos near Lerna, on a mountain above Kleitor in Arkadia.<sup>44</sup> Nor is Zeus a stranger to the acropolis: he had temples on the citadels of Argos and Akragas, and an altar at the highest point of the Athenian acropolis.<sup>45</sup> Again, Zeus is not the dominant power on every *oros*: Helios, Artemis, Dionysos, Demeter, Pan, Apollo, Hermes and the variously-named 'Mother' goddess of Asia Minor all have mountain sanctuaries.<sup>46</sup> 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

<sup>35</sup> Cf. P. Vidal-Naquet, *Le chasseur noir* (Paris 1981) 154, with particular reference to Crete.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. my remarks in Bremmer (n. 1) 60-79.

<sup>37</sup> Paus. iii 23.9. (In his commentary *ad loc.* Frazer's comparatist approach is at its most beguiling: he turns up the flinging of tufts of grass [amongst the Masai] and the hurling of 'vast numbers of hogs' [Hawaii] into the relevant volcano.) For Etna one may compare the anecdotal 'death' of Empedokles, 'luckily' accepted by the crater (D.L. viii 69).

<sup>38</sup> *NH* xxv 1. Much plant-gathering, however, will have had more to do with everyday needs than with 'research': Thphr. *HP* ix 10.2-4 (black hellebore best from Helikon, white from Oita).

<sup>39</sup> Thphr. *Sign.* 4; Philo *Prov.* ii 27; Philostr. *VA* ii 5; Petron. *Sat.* 88 (Eudoxos); Iamb. *VP.* 3.14-15 (Pythagoras). N.B. also Hadrian's ascent of Etna 'ut solis ortum videret arcus specie, ut dicitur, varium' (*SHA, Vit.Hadr.* 13).

<sup>40</sup> *Zeus: a study in ancient religion* (Cambridge 1914-40) i 165.

<sup>41</sup> Merle K. Langdon, 'A sanctuary of Zeus on Mount Hymettos', *Hesperia* Supp. xvi, esp. 81, to be looked at in conjunction with H. Lauter, *Der Kultplatz auf dem Turkovuni, MDAI(A) Beiheft* xii, esp. 134ff.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. also F. Graf, *Nordionische Kulte* (Schweizerisches Institut in Rom 1985) 202-3 on Zeus Ἰππίας.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. W. Burkert, *Greek religion* (Eng. tr. Oxford 1985) 140.

<sup>44</sup> Paus. i 32.2; ii 36.8; viii 21.4.

<sup>45</sup> Paus. ii 24.3; Polyain. v 1.1 (see Cook [n.40] i 122-3); W. Burkert, *Homo necans* (Eng. tr. Berkeley 1983) 136 with n. 2.

<sup>46</sup> Some examples noted by Pausanias: iii 20.4 (Helios); ii 24.5, ii 25.3, viii 13.1 (Artemis); iii 22.2 (Dionysos); viii 10.1 (Demeter); viii 24.4, viii 36.8 (Pan); ix 23.6 (Apollo); viii 17.1 (Hermes). For the 'Mother' cf. Hdt. i 80, Paus. v 13.7; *Der kleine Pauly* s.v. 'Kybele'.

poetical evocation of the song-contest between Helikon and Kithairon,<sup>47</sup> and in spite of Wilamowitz's speculations about Atlas and other potential mountain-Giants/Titans,<sup>48</sup> Greek belief (as opposed, for example, to Cappadocian)<sup>49</sup> preferred the model of association to that of identification.

#### IV. 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 *Kyklops* 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.<sup>50</sup> 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'.<sup>51</sup> A myth ascribed by Antoninus Liberalis to Nikandros tells of a herdsman who, when helpfully advised by Pan to take his flocks down from Mount Othrys on account of the impending onset of a harsh winter, declined the advice, and for good measure insulted the Nymphs. The flock disappeared in the snow, and the rash herdsman turned into a beetle.<sup>52</sup>

Mythical mountains are a source of wood: again myth reflects the real world. Timber for the Argo came from Pelion; the Trojan horse is of mountain pine; wood for Patroklos' pyre came from the spurs of Ida.<sup>53</sup> Lykos sent servants out from Thebes to gather wood on Helikon and even Parnassos in order to incinerate Herakles' family.<sup>54</sup> Wood-cutters put in rare appearances in myths, as in the oracle recorded by Eusebios about nine woodcutters who were stunned ὑλήεντα κατ' οὐρεα near Miletos when they heard Pan singing.<sup>55</sup>

As in life, so in myth, men hunt on mountains. Teiresias was hunting on Kithairon when he saw Athene; so was Aktaion when he made an analogous mistake; Endymion hunted by moonlight on Latmos, and was loved by Selene; Peleus and Akastos hunted on Pelion.<sup>56</sup> In Bion's *Lament for Adonis*, the crying of the young man's hounds was echoed by the Oreads (18-19).

Mythical mountains could be used for travel, as when one of Ida's shepherds describes the march of Rhesos.<sup>57</sup> Where there are lonely travellers, there you find robbers: the mythical

<sup>47</sup> The text is very fragmentary (D.L. Page, *Corinna* [London 1953] 19-22), but G.L. Huxley seems to be right in observing ('ΟΡΟΣ ΘΕΟΣ [Maximus Tyrius 2.8], *LCM* iii [1978] 71-2) that Korinna 'comes close to identifying [the god Helikon] with the mountain'.

<sup>48</sup> *Der Glaube der Hellenen* (Berlin 1931-2) i 93-5.

<sup>49</sup> See Huxley (n. 47).

<sup>50</sup> *E. Cyc.* 114; *Apollod.* iii 12.5; *Hom. h.Ven.* 53-5; *Hom. h.Merc.* 69ff.

<sup>51</sup> *S. O.T.* 1133ff.

<sup>52</sup> *Ant. Lib.* xxii; cf. Ph. Borgeaud, *The cult of Pan in ancient Greece* (Eng tr. Chicago 1988) 61-2.

<sup>53</sup> *E. Med.* 3-4; *E. Tro.* 534; *Hom. Il.* xxiii 117.

<sup>54</sup> *E. HF* 240ff.

<sup>55</sup> *Praepar. Evang.* v 190A (Migne *PG* xxi); cf. R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (Harmondsworth 1988) 131-2.

<sup>56</sup> *Call. Hymn* v 75 (Teiresias); *Apollod.* iii 4.4 (Aktaion); *schol. A.R.* iv 57-8 Wendel (Endymion); *Apollod.* iii 13.3 (Peleus, Akastos).

<sup>57</sup> *E. Rh.* 282ff.

brigand Autolykos lived on Parnassos.<sup>58</sup> Mythical mountains also provided a refuge. Megaros escaped Deukalion's flood by taking refuge on Mount Gerania; the better-known refuge on the same occasion was Parnassos.<sup>59</sup> In Aratos' *Phainomena*, when Dike abandoned humanity after rebuking it during the Silver Age, she too sought refuge in the mountains.<sup>60</sup>

Even the use of fire-beacons is reflected in myth, in the famous account of the mountain-to-mountain relaying of signifying flame from Troy to Argos in Aischylos' *Agamemnon* (281ff).

Lastly, the presence of sanctuaries has its mythical counterpart, since many of the gods in the traditional tales can be found on mountains. Zeus' birth and upbringing, his functions as god of rain and lightning, and his supremacy on Olympos all focus his power on the *oros*.<sup>61</sup> The Olympians' foes the Titans fought from Mount Othrys.<sup>62</sup> You find the Muses on Helikon, Pan on mountains everywhere, especially Arkadia; likewise the Nymphs.<sup>63</sup> Artemis loved the heights: the simile in *Iliad* vi depicts her on Taygetos and Erymanthos; in *Trojan Women* she is ὄρεστέρα.<sup>64</sup> And in the *Bakchai* Dionysos, god of Nysa and Tmolos, sharer of Parnassos with Apollo, comes at last to Kithairon.

Myths, then, 'reflect'. But they also refract, transforming the world by a process of selective emphasis and clarification and exaggeration. In the present case, myths present an image of mountains which is both more extreme and more consistent than that of everyday life, paring down that wide range of uses which men actually made of the *oros*, and coming back again and again to the same few, symbolically productive characteristics.

For the Lele the forest (opposed both to the village and to the grassland) is the location of spirits, a place of good luck and danger; for the Asante, a visit to the bush (opposed to the village) risks encounters with uncanny powers, and necessitates rituals of transition on one's return; for the Dinka, the homestead (*bai*) is opposed to the wilds (*roor*), which contains harmful anti-social powers, so that Lienhardt speaks of a 'distinction between the uncontrolled life of the wilds, without human order and reason, and the orderly and rational domesticated life of men and beasts in society'.<sup>65</sup> Such anthropological 'parallels' could be multiplied almost indefinitely.<sup>66</sup> They do not prove anything, but they may at least encourage us to look with new attention at existing data, provided we recognize that each individual cultural situation will have its own configuration.

In Greece there are three main aspects to the mythical image of the *oros*. First and most obvious: mountains were outside and wild. Centaurs lived on mountains, as indicated by Nestor's words in *Iliad* i about an earlier generation of heroes: 'They were strong, and fought against the strongest, the beast men living in the mountains'.<sup>67</sup> The Sphinx—called an οὔρειον τέρας in Euripides' *Phoenician Women*—lived according to Pausanias on a mountain near Onchestos.<sup>68</sup> An *oros* was a place of wild violence too: on Pangaion, Lykourgos was done to

<sup>58</sup> Paus. viii 4.6.

<sup>59</sup> Paus. i 40.1 (Megaros); Apollod. i 7.1, Paus. x 6.2 (Parnassos); cf. Paus. iv 34.10 *re* Asine.

<sup>60</sup> Arat. *Ph.* 127.

<sup>61</sup> Birth and upbringing: see below. Zeus and the *oros*: cf. Burkert (n. 43) 126.

<sup>62</sup> Hes. *Th.* 632. Cf. Apollod. i 6: the combat between Zeus and Typhon moves from Kasios to Nysa to Haimos to Etna.

<sup>63</sup> Hes. *Th.* 1 (Muses); Hom. *h.Pan* 6-7, D.Hal. *Ant.Rom.* i 38.1 (Pan); Hom. *Il.* xxiv 614ff, Hom. *h.Ven.* 257-8 (Nymphs).

<sup>64</sup> *Od.* vi 102-3; E. *Tro.* 551.

<sup>65</sup> Mary Douglas, 'The Lele of Kasai', in D. Forde (ed.), *African worlds* (Oxford 1954) 1-26, esp. 4-6; M.D. McLeod, *The Asante* (London 1981) 20-40; G. Lienhardt, *Divinity and experience: the religion of the Dinka* (Oxford 1961) 63.

<sup>66</sup> For some Biblical material see Thomas B. Dozeman, *God on the mountain* (Atlanta 1989) 13 n. 48.

<sup>67</sup> *Il.* i 267-8. Cf. Apollod. ii 5.4 (Centaurs on Mounts Pelion and Malea).

<sup>68</sup> E. *Ph.* 806; Paus. ix 26.2. Apollodoros locates the Sphinx on Mount Phikion (iii 5.8); cf. J.-M. Moret, *Oedipe, la Sphinx et les Thébains* (Geneva 1984) 69 with n. 1.

death by wild horses;<sup>69</sup> on Kithairon, Aktaion was torn by wild dogs, Pentheus by wild aunts. Being outside, mountains are for outsiders. In the discussion of correct naming in Plato's *Kratylos*, Sokrates praises the name 'Orestes' as appropriate since it expresses τὸ θηριώδες τῆς φύσεως καὶ τὸ ἀγριὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ ὀρεινόν... One who commits matricide belongs outside.<sup>70</sup> It is revealing that Menander's *Dyskolos*, whose prologue is spoken by Pan, should be set in a mountainous area of Attica on the slopes of Mount Parnes. The misanthrope withdraws up-country.

Being perceived as wild, mythical mountains are the ideal place to expose unwanted offspring: Oidipous on Kithairon, Amphion and Zethos near the same mountain, Asklepios on Titthion, Paris on Ida, Telephos on Parthenion.<sup>71</sup> But exactly what sort of refraction is taking place here? The reality of ancient abandonment is an enormously problematic subject. One starting-point for discussion is now John Boswell's study, which has implications for classical Greece even though it focuses on late Roman antiquity and the Middle Ages.<sup>72</sup> Boswell raises the central issue of how far the *topos* of abandonment—rightly distinguished by him from 'infanticide'—was like the modern cinematic motif of 'death by quicksand', i.e. basically an 'unrealistic' fictional ploy.<sup>73</sup> Asking the same question about ancient Greece is no less legitimate and important, but the matter is unlikely to be settled while there is so much controversy about what constitutes proper comparative demographic evidence.<sup>74</sup> Notwithstanding this uncertainty, we can, I think, maintain the following: in depicting abandoned infants as male,<sup>75</sup> as always *found*, and as always surviving to experience some notable fate, Greek myths were selecting from the real world in order to construct an *extreme* image of abandonment; in particular, they were representing the *oros* as a place for extraordinary luck (which is not, of course, necessarily to say *good* luck.)

Secondly, mountains are before. They were believed to be humanity's place of first habitation. In the *Laws* (677b-c) Plato's Athenian speculates about a time after a prehistoric flood, when life was preserved on the tops of mountains among herdsmen, since the cities near the sea and in the plains had been destroyed. The same story-pattern applies to Deukalion and Pyrrha on Parnassos, and to the Trojan ancestral hero Dardanos, who left Samothrace to avoid the flood, drifted in a leather bag, and landed on Mount Ida.<sup>76</sup> Before also, in that they are the location of the early lives of gods: Hermes (born on Kyllene); the Muses (born in Pieria, a little below Olympos); not to mention Zeus (born on Cretan Ida or Dicte, reared on Lykaion and Ithome, etc).<sup>77</sup> If birth is before, so in a different way is adolescence. Jason was brought up

<sup>69</sup> Apollod. iii 5.1.

<sup>70</sup> Pl. *Crat.* 394e.

<sup>71</sup> S. *O.T.* (Oidipous); Paus. i 38.9 (Amphion/Zethos); Paus. ii 26.4 (Asklepios); Hom. *h.Aesc.* 3 gives another version: '...in the Dotian plain'; Apollod. iii 12.5 (Paris); Apollod. ii 7.4, iii 9.1 (Telephos).

<sup>72</sup> *The kindness of strangers* (Harmondsworth 1988).

<sup>73</sup> Op. cit. (n. 72) 6-7. Along the way B. makes some fascinating observations, e.g. 97, where he questions the fictionality of the *topos* of being saved by a shepherd: 'it is worth noting that there was actually legislation in the later empire prohibiting the upper classes from "handing their children over to shepherds".'

<sup>74</sup> Cf. the disagreement between D. Engels, 'The problem of female infanticide in the Greco-Roman world', *CPH* lxxv (1980) 112-20, and M. Golden, 'The exposure of girls at Athens', *Phoenix* xxxv (1981) 316-31. See also C.B. Patterson, "'Not worth the rearing": the causes of infant exposure in ancient Greece', *TAPA* cxv (1985) 103-23. Boswell himself reviews discussions of the Greek evidence, from Glotz onwards, at op. cit. (n. 72) 40-1, n. 96.

<sup>75</sup> This applies to foundlings in mythology, but not to those in romance (compare Chloe in *Daphnis and Chloe* and the Queen of Ethiopia's daughter in *Aithiopika*) or New Comedy. If it is true, as is often taken for granted, that abandonment of female infants was in real life commoner than that of males, it may be that we should see romance and New Comedy as extending mythical patterns in 'realistic' directions (though in each case within a highly artificial framework).

<sup>76</sup> Apollod. i 7.2 (Deukalion); schol. Hom. *Il.* xx 215-16 (Dardanos).

<sup>77</sup> *H.Merc.* (Hermes); Hes. *Th.* 53-62 (Muses). For Zeus' Cretan birth see Frazer's Loeb edn. of Apollodoros, vol. i pp. 6-7, n. 2; Cook (n. 40) i 148-54. Paus. viii 38.2 (Lykaion), iv 33.1 (Ithome).



on Pelion by Cheiron, before descending, aged twenty and clad in a leopardskin, to claim his rights in Iolkos (Pindar *Pythian* 4). Also socialised by Cheiron on the same mountain were Achilles, Asklepios, Aktaion and Aristaios.<sup>78</sup> Paris was a young herdsman on Ida before being recognised and accorded his true name and status in Troy.<sup>79</sup> These pairings of Pelion-and-Iolkos and Ida-and-Troy—to which may be added Kithairon-and-Thebes and Oita-and-Trachis—illustrate a common motif, the symbiosis of city and neighbouring mountain. In tragedy in particular, *oros* and *polis* often constitute two of the significant spaces in terms of which the action is oriented: later we shall look at some examples.

Thirdly, a mountain is a place for reversals. Things normally separate are brought together, as the distinctions of the city are collapsed.

The divine and the human come together on mountains. Hesiod meets the Muses on Helikon; Philippiades meets Pan on Parthenion.<sup>80</sup> Any hunter or herdsman on an imaginary Greek mountain will probably meet a god. Sometimes such an encounter is momentary and disastrous (Aktaion, Teiresias), sometimes it is briefly prolonged in sexual union (Endymion and Selene, Anchises and Aphrodite). Occasionally, there is the prospect of an extended relationship: Thetis and Peleus marry on Pelion.<sup>81</sup> But the distance is unbridgeable: in the *Iliad* they are living apart.

Metamorphosis entails a collapsing of distinctions: and metamorphoses often take place on mountains. Teiresias saw two snakes copulating on Mount Kyllene, struck them, and turned into a woman.<sup>82</sup> On Mount Thornax near Hermione in the Argolid, Zeus turned into a cuckoo and fluttered into Hera's affections;<sup>83</sup> the changing of Aktaion into a stag on Kithairon, and Lykaon into a wolf on Lykaion, are familiar enough.

Social relationships and normal social behaviour may be reversed on imaginary mountains. In real life, hunting is for men; although Xenophon in an afterthought praises the virtues of the chase as applying to women as well as men, no mention is made in his treatise of real-life female hunters.<sup>84</sup> Yet myths regularly speak of female hunting, both individual (Atalanta, Prokris, Kallisto; Kyrene in Pindar's 9th *Pythian*) and collective (maenads hunt down Orpheus on Pangaion<sup>85</sup> and Pentheus on Kithairon). For real-life women to be out on a mountain at all—let alone out hunting—is anyway unusual: observing three striking females, Lucian's Paris remarks to Hermes that 'being so beautiful they are not suitable ὄρεσπολεῖν'.<sup>86</sup> The presence of women on the *oros* can even be seen as a symptom of madness. Euripides portrays Phaidra's wish to follow Hippolytos out onto the mountain as the very essence of her mania;<sup>87</sup> the maddened daughters of Proitos run out into the Aroanian mountains of Arkadia.<sup>88</sup> To behave outside the norm, or outside oneself, is to belong on the *oros*, and in a way to belong to it. Here as elsewhere myth sharpens the boundary between *oros* and settlement, a boundary which in everyday life will have been blurred; the livelihood of shepherds, and of charcoal-burners

<sup>78</sup> Apollod. iii 13.6 (Achilles); Pi. *Pyth.* iii, Apollod. iii 10.3 (Asklepios); Apollod. iii 4.4 (Aktaion); A.R. ii 509-10 (Aristaios).

<sup>79</sup> Ida/Troy: E. I.A. 1283ff, with T.C.W. Stinton, *Euripides and the judgement of Paris* (London 1965) 29ff; Apollod. iii 12.5. On Ida see further W. Elliger, *Die Darstellung der Landschaft in der griechischen Dichtung* (Berlin 1975) 263ff.

<sup>80</sup> Hes. *Th.* 22ff; Hdt. vi 105.

<sup>81</sup> Apollod. iii 13.5.

<sup>82</sup> Apollod. iii 6.7.

<sup>83</sup> Paus. ii 36.1f.

<sup>84</sup> The afterthought is the concluding sentence of *Cyn.* (= iii 18).

<sup>85</sup> Cf. *TrGF* iii (Radt) pp. 138-40; M.L. West, 'Tragica VI', *BICS* xxx (1983) 63-71.

<sup>86</sup> *Dearum iudic.* 7.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. the Nurse's reaction at 232-8.

<sup>88</sup> Paus. viii 18.7.

like the Acharnians, depended, after all, on the constant crossing of the divide. Such sharpening is an example of the selective emphasis and clarification of which we spoke.

#### V. RITUAL

So far I have assumed that it is meaningful to separate 'life' from 'myth'. However, it is clear that myths feed back into the perceptions of everyday life, even if the level and extent of this process are hard to pin down and virtually impossible to quantify. (That our ordinary perception of motorway hitchhikers and microwave ovens is at some level and in some contexts affected by their sinister folklore connotations, is as certain as it is difficult to prove.)<sup>89</sup> In the case of Greece, however, there is one aspect of social behaviour into which myths fed back in an unmistakable and literally dramatic way.

In many regions, on certain ritual occasions, the city came to the mountain. The manner of the approach was various: the Plataeans carried wooden images to the top of Kithairon and burnt them for Zeus and Hera; there was a werewolf cult on Lykaion; the Muses received sacrifice on Helikon; and so on.<sup>90</sup> From this variety—for there is no single pattern—I want to pick out two rituals, which will enable us to develop points already made about mythical mountains and to highlight characteristic similarities and contrasts between myth and ritual.

'On the peak of the *oros* there is the so-called "cave of Cheiron", and a shrine of Zeus Aktaios. At the rising of the Dog Star, the time of greatest heat, those among the citizens who are most notable and in the prime of their lives, having been chosen in the presence of the priest, climb up to the cave, clad in thick new fleeces—so cold is it on the mountain.' The mountain is Pelion; the source, the Hellenistic geographer Herakleides.<sup>91</sup> His comment about the cold hardly squares with the time of year: the wearing of fleeces has symbolic rather than practical significance. But what is the nature of the symbolism? Are the participants assimilating themselves to Zeus the Ram God?<sup>92</sup> Or to 'fleecy' clouds in a weather ceremony?<sup>93</sup> Or to the sacrificial *victims* of Zeus?<sup>94</sup> Or is this 'an ancient religious custom whose real meaning we may never know'?<sup>95</sup> The first two guesses embody assumptions which have ceased to be as persuasive as they once were; the third is currently more fashionable, with its emphasis on sacrifice as the semantic heart of the drama;<sup>96</sup> the fourth is clearly the safest. But there is perhaps an alternative. To wear animal skins, whether from cow, goat or sheep, *can* be a mark of 'outsiderdom'. To the Arrian passage quoted earlier (cloaks:hides::city:mountain) may be added Pausanias' reference to Pelasgos, 'who invented sheepskin tunics, which poor people still wear around Euboea and in Phokis'; only at a subsequent stage of civilisation do spinning and weaving make an appearance, thanks to Arkas.<sup>97</sup> But, more specifically, the use of animal skins for clothing is associated with herdsmen. Eumaios puts on a hairy goatskin to keep out the North Wind, and at Odysseus' prompting gives him some extra sheep- and goat-fleeces;<sup>98</sup> in Theokritos' 5th *Idyll* a goatherd and a shepherd argue about the respective merits of the fleeces

<sup>89</sup> See J.H. Brunvand, *The vanishing hitchhiker* (New York 1981).

<sup>90</sup> Paus. ix 3 (*daidalos* on Kithairon); for Lykaion, *cf.* n. 36; Paus. ix 29.6 (Muses).

<sup>91</sup> The fragment from which the passage comes is listed under *Dikaiarchos* in Müller FHG ii, p. 262; for the attribution to Herakleides see *RE* viii (1913) col. 484, and the edn. with commentary by F. Pfister, 'Die Reisebilder des Herakleides', *SAWV* ccxxvii (1951) 1-252, at fr. 2.8 (p. 208).

<sup>92</sup> Cook (n. 40) i 420-1.

<sup>93</sup> Cook (n. 40) iii 31-2, qualifying his scepticism expressed at *loc. cit.* (n. 92).

<sup>94</sup> Burkert (n. 45) 113-14.

<sup>95</sup> Langdon (n. 41) 83.

<sup>96</sup> But there is something over-elaborate about Burkert's attempt to link the Pelion ritual with the story of Aktaion (*loc. cit.* in n. 94, following Pfister [n. 91] 209-12).

<sup>97</sup> Paus. viii 1.5, 4.1.

<sup>98</sup> *Od.* xiv 530-3, 518-19.

of their own animals. I believe, then, that the Pelion ritual may be read as follows. Once a year the citizen-group turns, through its representatives, into a community of shepherds, which practises what may be described as a one-day ritual transhumance. The highest turn into the lowest, the most prominent citizens into shepherds: for this is the *oros*, where, in ritual as in myth, metamorphoses and reversals take place. And yet this is ritual, not myth: the reversal of the everyday is itself reversible. After the ceremony, the sheepskins are doffed, herding retires from centre-stage to the periphery, and from Outside and Before (shepherds; Cheiron's cave) a return is made to the Here-and-Now.

A still more striking ritual is repeated with variations in many places. The women of certain cities ran 'raving' on the *oros* for Dionysos either at an annual festival, or at the trieteric festival every second year; best known perhaps is the case of the Thyiades, Athenian women who went out onto Parnassos with their Delphic counterparts.<sup>99</sup> A good deal of research has been done in recent years on the ritual aspects of Dionysiac *oros*-cults.<sup>100</sup> Here we need add only that in the mountain-dance for Dionysos the *oros* once more stages a reversal of normal values, as the women wander free, thanks to a temporary legitimation of 'madness'. But this is ritual not myth: the women commit no crime, tear no nephew, behead no poet; and return afterwards to their looms. Through ritual the wildness of the mountain (and of women) is both acknowledged and controlled.

The ritual for Zeus on Pelion and the mountain-dance for Dionysos exploit as part of their symbolic drama the contrast between mountain and community. Both, as part of that drama, promote to a focal position social groups which are normally marginalised: herdsmen (on my reading) and women.<sup>101</sup> It is not without interest that in the symbolism of Greek religion we occasionally find an overt equivalence between these two groups. A second-century A.D. inscription from Physkos in Lokris records a cult law about a *θείσος* whose male participants were called 'cowherds' and the females 'maenads',<sup>102</sup> and there are several cases of Dionysiac associations whose members were known as *βουκόλοι* or *βουκολικοί*.<sup>103</sup> Again, when drunken, mythical shepherds killed Ikarios, the Athenian countryman who introduced them to wine, they did so in 'a maenadic frenzy', as Nonnos puts it in his *Dionysiaka*.<sup>104</sup> Of course the ceremonies for Zeus and Dionysos differ in that, whereas on Pelion a marginal social group (again on my reading) is only *symbolically* central to the ceremony, in the *oreibasia* women *in fact* play the central role. But there is also a fundamental similarity: during the ceremonies, normal social relations are inverted; afterwards, when pseudo-shepherds and women have descended from the *oros*, herding and femaleness resume the marginal positions which they occupied before, and from the perspective of the city the *oros* itself recedes into the distance for a year or two.

<sup>99</sup> Paus. x 4.3.

<sup>100</sup> A. Henrichs, 'Greek maenadism from Olympias to Messalina', *HSCP* lxxxii (1978) 121-60, and 'Changing Dionysiac identities', in *Jewish and Christian self-definition* iii (ed. Ben F. Meyer and E.P. Sanders) (London 1982) 137-60; Richard Seaford, 'Dionysiac drama and the Dionysiac mysteries', *CQ* xxxi (1981) 252-75; J.N. Bremmer, 'Greek maenadism reconsidered', *ZPE* lv (1984) 267-86; J.-P. Vernant, 'Le Dionysos masqué des *Bacchantes* d'Euripide', in J.-P. Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet, *Mythe et tragédie* ii (Paris 1986) 237-70.

<sup>101</sup> Let us admit that, although marginality is a useful analytical tool, it can be (and has been) overdone. See the wise remarks of H.S. Versnel, 'What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander: myth and ritual, old and new', in Edmunds (n. 1) 25-90.

<sup>102</sup> F. Sokolowski, *Lois sacrées des cités grecques* (Paris 1969) no. 181; discussed by Henrichs 1978 (n. 100) 155-6.

<sup>103</sup> See Dodds on E. *Ba.* 654-5.

<sup>104</sup> xlvii 117.

## VI. TRAGIC MOUNTAINS

Hitherto I have drawn on data from a variety of periods and contexts to produce a largely synchronic picture. There are, however, many differences and variations. Not all mountains are always perceived as wild: Pausanias reports that ‘the people who live near Helikon say that no herb or root on the mountain can harm human life’.<sup>105</sup> Plain and mountain are not always opposed: in Euripides’ *Helen* the Mountain Mother is assimilated to the figure of the grieving Demeter to give a picture of all nature—cornfield and mountain—mourning together.<sup>106</sup> Pasturage may take place in the plain as well as in the mountain, in myth as in the real landscape.<sup>107</sup> Then there are differences according to genre. Homer’s landscape is not the landscape of Theokritos. Even within one genre, and at one historical moment, the language of Greek mythology can make subtly different statements about the ‘same’ matters. To illustrate the point I shall discuss three plays and two mountains.

Euripides’ *Bakchai* depicts the dangerousness of the *oros*, which invades, seduces and threatens to overturn the *polis*. Dionysos has arrived at the city of Thebes, but his power extends also over that which is not the city: he has established his dancing among the fields of Lydia and the plateaux of Persia as well as the walled towns of Baktria and the cities of Western Asia Minor (13-20). Above all, his authority is rooted on the *oros*, to which the maddened daughters of Kadmos, and all the Theban women, have been driven. The voluntary maenads too are associated with mountains: they have come from Tmolos (55, 65); they praise the mountain worship of Kybele (78-9) and celebrate the joy of following Bromios on the *δρεα* (140); later they suggest Nysa, Parnassos and Olympos as possible locations for their god (556ff). Not the least of the play’s paradoxes is the fact that, while part of the city has gone to the mountain, mountain folk are in the heart of the city.<sup>108</sup>

Thebes is a human construction, a place of gates and houses (e.g. 170-2). Yet the power of Dionysos creeps into surprising places: Teiresias and Kadmos—the *οικιστής* himself—are wearing ivy, that parasitic subverter of walls.<sup>109</sup> When Dionysos and Thebes come into conflict, the constructions of the city collapse.

Two narratives characterize Kithairon. From the Cowherd’s first words it is clear that the mountain, ‘where the bright shafts of snow never cease’ (661-2), is perceived as belonging to Dionysos, god of the winter *oreibasia*. It is a place of *δεινά* and ‘more than *θαύματα*’ (667): women of all ages in uncanny harmony with nature, miraculously able to turn the *oros* into a source of refreshment and sustenance. On the advice of a man from the city, the dwellers on the *oros* (such as the narrator) are urged to hunt the Bacchants. The result is a ‘catastrophic’ reversal of the norm: a hunt conducted by women, who behave like animals (by tearing apart their prey) and like males (in raiding as an army).

In the eyes of the second narrator the mountain becomes a place of initiation: Pentheus, transformed into a woman, sees the mysteries of Dionysos. As befits an initiatory space, the *oros* is ‘other’, though its otherness changes as the speech develops.<sup>110</sup> At first Kithairon is a

<sup>105</sup> ix 28.1.

<sup>106</sup> 1301ff.

<sup>107</sup> *H.Merc.* 491-2; S. Hodkinson in Whittaker (n. 12) 35-74.

<sup>108</sup> See J. Gould, ‘Mothers’ Day: a note on Euripides’ *Bacchae*’, in *Papers given at a colloquium on Greek drama in honour of R.P. Winnington-Ingram* ed. L. Rodley (London 1987) 32-9, at 37.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Pliny *NH.* xvi 62 (‘sepulchra, muros rumpens’). For this reference I am indebted to John Gould, who in an unpublished paper discusses the role of ivy in *Bakchai*.

<sup>110</sup> Here I differ from Jan Bremmer (n. 100) 276, who observes that ‘in the *Bakchai*...the mountain appears as a lush place where it is very pleasant to be.’ The portrayal of Kithairon in fact varies subtly with different narrators, as I have sought to demonstrate in ‘News from Cithaeron: narrators and narratives in the *Bacchae*’, *Pallas* xxxvii (1991) 39-48.

*locus amoenus* (ὕδασι διάβροχον, πεύκαισι συσκιάζον, 1051-2), though a note of menace is perhaps already present in its steep rocks (ἀγκος ἀμφί κρημνον, 1051)—just the landscape in which Pentheus' flesh will be scattered ὑπὸ στόφοις πέτραις (1137-8). Perhaps all initiations involve negative as well as positive imagery.

On returning to the δώματα of Thebes (1149), Agaue reports that it was Kithairon that killed the lion-cub (1177-8), and calls out the male residents of the καλλιπυργον ἄστυ to see her spoils (1202). But the spoils are her son: the examples of Aktaion and now Pentheus show Kadmos' Thebans how dangerous their *oros* can be (1291-2). In the *polis* the fragmented body of Pentheus and the fragmented consciousness of Agaue are made whole again; but for the living the city can provide only a temporary resting place: father and daughter must leave forthwith. Agaue's last sentence includes the wish never to see Kithairon again; but apparently she is not to see Thebes again either.<sup>111</sup> The invasion of the city by the mountain has had irreversible consequences: Agaue, unlike the real-life practitioners of Dionysiac ritual, has left her loom for ever.

The space of *Oidipous Tyrannos* is more complex than that of *Bakchai*. The action extends beyond Thebes to Corinth and Delphi. In addition, two locations outside the polis have shaped Oidipous' destiny: a cross-roads and a mountain.

At first the focus is on the sick *polis* of Thebes. Except in Teiresias' allusion to Kithairon echoing with cries (421), the *oros* comes into prominence only after the arrival of the Corinthian messenger. On learning that he was a foundling, Oidipous counts himself a child of good luck (1080-1). It seems that the effect of the *oros*' invasion of the city has been beneficial: is the king, speculates the chorus, a love-child of Pan, or Apollo, or Hermes, or Dionysos? He is, at all events, a lucky find (1107). Tomorrow, the chorus is confident, their king will celebrate Kithairon as his πατριώταν...καὶ τροφὸν καὶ ματέρ' (1090-1), as if, extraordinarily, Oidipous' social identity within *oikos* and *polis* originated upon a mountainside.

The truth is revealed by the Corinthian's former comrade in transhumance, who saved the baby out of pity. But in tragedy mountain luck can be double-edged; and so it proves. Oidipous' reaction to disaster is to wish at all costs to leave Thebes. At first this wish is generalised in ἐκτόπιον (1340), then expressed as a threefold possibility:

Ἐξω μέ που  
ἐκρίψατ', ἢ φονεύσατ', ἢ θαλάσσιον  
καλύψατ'

(This time it is the sea which represents 'wilderness'.) Kreon's response is to confine Oidipous not just within the *polis* of Thebes, but within Oidipous' own *oikos*, to prevent his pollution from infecting the world outside. Oidipous then makes his request more precise: 'Let me live on the mountains, where this place of mine called Kithairon is situated' (1451-2). The last fifteen lines of the play are of course the subject of dispute, but an interpretation which is at least defensible is that we are to imagine Oidipous being obliged to leave the stage not in the direction of the *oros*, but back into the palace.<sup>112</sup> If so, having abandoned his second (Corinthian) foster-mother, and seen his real mother hanged, he is denied a last hope of escape—a return to his original foster-mother.

*Oidipous Tyrannos* overturns assumptions which seemed rock-solid. A citizen, one would have said, is not a stranger; a single brigand does not equal several; that which you leave on the mountain does not return to haunt you in the city. This is a tragedy about the disastrous

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Dodds' edn., pp. 243-4.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Dodds' edn., pp. 243-4.

failure of attempts to keep things separate.<sup>113</sup>

The contrast between *oros* and *polis* appears differently again in *Trachiniai*. This is partly because the city of Trachis is relatively insignificant in the drama. Herakles is not a Trachinian: he is in exile, staying with a *xenos* (40). It is his own *oikos* that his fate predominantly affects; and even then only a few members of it are directly touched by what happens, since most of his children are in Thebes or Tiryns (1153-4). Partly, too, the distinctive quality of the *oros/polis* contrast in *Trachiniai* stems from Herakles' nature: he belongs in the wild in a way that neither Pentheus nor even Oidipous does.

Although Oita only comes into prominence at the end of the play, it is referred to earlier. When the messenger tells Deianeira that her husband will soon be home, she thanks Zeus τὸν Οἴτης ἄτομον ὃς λειμῶν ἔχεις (200). This uncut meadow, a precinct sacred to the god, is one aspect of Zeus' connection with Oita. Another is the violence which he can unleash upon it: when urging Lichas to tell the truth, Deianeira swears by Zeus 'who sends lightning down the topmost glen of Oita' (436-7). Both aspects recur after Herakles' arrival. Before he knows the truth about Nessos' deception, he begs Zeus to thunderbolt him (1086); afterwards, more calmly, he asks to be taken to his father's sacred precinct on the mountain—on the *summit* of the mountain (1191), a suitable location for the final exploration of Herakles' proximity to, or distance from, the world of the gods. The wild Herakles will be restored to the wild territory where he belongs, burned on a pyre made partly from wild olive (1197), at a moment predicted by the Selloi, those mountain-dwelling priests of Zeus at Dodona (1166). There is a sense of appropriateness about the ending of *Trachiniai*, even if (as usual in Sophokles) it is an appropriateness free neither from bitterness nor ambiguity.

*Bakchai* and *Oidipous Tyrannos* present a Kithairon which is threateningly close to the world of human habitation. What of *Trachiniai*? It seems to me to follow a different pattern. To be sure, the forces that disrupt Herakles' *oikos*—Love, monsters—are 'wild'; to that extent we are back with the familiar tragic counterpoint of nature and culture. But it is a poor sort of interpretation that reduces every play to the same common denominator. In the case of *Trachiniai*, the point towards which the action moves is, I suggest, a *separation* of mountain and city, a separation created through the emphasis on the formalised, ritual aspects of Herakles' death. The oath which Hyllos is made to swear; the detail that Hyllos has sacrificed often on Oita (1192); the specifications for the pyre; the procession which ends the play: all this establishes the mountain as a place both distant and characterized by ceremonial order. Why is it this that is stressed, rather than destructive invasiveness? Maybe because Zeus is not Dionysos. The play ends with the affirmation that 'there is none of these things that is not Zeus'. That is (perhaps): there is an order in the relations between gods and men, an order of which Zeus is the guardian. But, as the action of the drama has demonstrated, this order is desperately hard to decipher: Zeus remains for ever distant, κατ' ἄσπρα (1106).

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

(1) Myths rework, pare down, clarify and exaggerate experience; to say that they 'reflect' experience is quite inadequate. (2) Clarification is not only not incompatible with ambiguity, but can actually bring it into sharper relief (*cf.* mountain 'luck'). (3) Perceptions reworked in mythology feed back into ordinary life, even if the way in which this happens can be hard to specify. (4) In ritual, behaviour is articulated through symbols with a comparable 'selectivity' to that found in myths. The two symbolic languages contrast with and complement each other. (5) Overwhelmingly, our evidence, both mythological and non-mythological, bears the stamp

<sup>113</sup> I borrow the useful notion of 'separation' from Th.C.W. Oudemans and A.P.M.H. Lardinois, *Tragic ambiguity* (Leiden 1987).

of the city or village. Mountains are unsettling, for those in settlements; they are to be viewed from afar, visited only to be left again. To this extent, at least, the structuralists are right: we should investigate *contrasts* between the symbolic terms deployed in myths. The *oros* needs to be seen in the light of that which is not the *oros*. (6) Useful as oppositional analysis may be, it must not be allowed to override the nuances of individual texts. Greek mythology speaks with an astonishing range of voices; reductivism is the surest way of muffling them.<sup>114</sup>

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