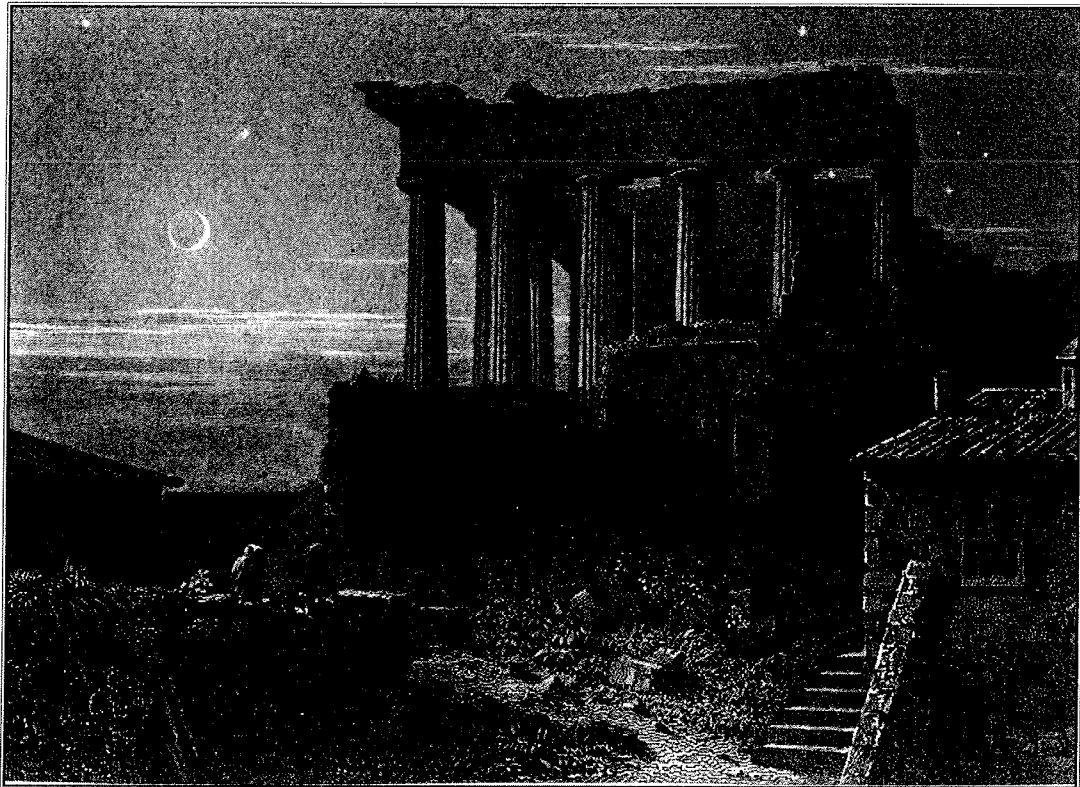


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CLASSICAL TRADITION

MYTHICAL TALES OF THE EVERYDAY WORLD, by Mercedes Aguirre, tr. by Richard Buxton
Éride Ediciones Madrid (2010) p/b 258pp [no price given]
(ISBN 9788415160120)

This is a brilliant collection of modern short stories using the narrative patterns of Greek mythology. The bilingual edition (the Spanish found not on the facing page, but by flipping the book over) is a collaborative effort: A. and B. are experts on myth, working in Madrid and Bristol respectively. Each story ends with an extract from a Greek author, though guessing the myth is easy (often helped by *noms parlants*), so discussion I hope will not mar readers' pleasure.

A. echoes Euripides and Ovid by putting credible ordinary people into bizarre stories, deliberately juxtaposing myth and modernity. Panos Karnezis in *Little Infamies* did something similar, but the 1950s Greek village he described was still a face-to-face traditional society; here we are in an aggressively urban and cosmopolitan landscape, with hostages and terrorist atrocities. The first story presents an amnesiac Agave arriving at a London hospital with her son's severed head in a plastic bag. The second has a cuckolded Madrid photographer making his wife and her lover a public exhibition like Ares and Aphrodite. The third, about family conflict among restaurateurs in Bilbao, moves to a cannibal conclusion reminiscent of Roald Dahl as well as Thyestes; contrasting narrative voices eerily express a split (or absorbed) personality. The fourth presents Admetus as a journalist captured in the Philippines; his wife and would-be rescuer returns (in a scene echoing *The Winter's Tale* as well as Euripides) after being herself rescued by a kindly Heracleian priest, whom by an innovative twist she finally prefers. The fifth and longest has Perseus as a children's entertainer: there are ingenious touches (dispatching cardboard monsters in his act, the Graiae as lawyers), though this quest perhaps rambles excessively. A tauter treatment in the sixth story movingly gives us Atalanta as a PE teacher and breast cancer victim, here unusually with direct allusion to the myth (via a painting in the Prado). In the seventh a middle-aged writer looks back to his formation by a mentor who was both a platonic Zeus to his Ganymede and a Platonic Socrates.

The book would be a treat for bright sixth-formers or their teachers.
John Taylor - Tonbridge School