Wading into the debate surrounding the presence of *Chaoskampf* within the Bible, Robert Miller II approaches the question from the perspective of “comparative mythology,” seeking to explore the “genetic relationships” between myths (1). As Miller reads them, these relationships do not always follow the straight line patterns of influence or parallels but can be seen in the way that the various elements can be separated from each other and repurposed. Miller refers to these elements as mythemes, suggesting that these individual elements can be combined into “constellations of figures, images, and motifs of a myth,” which help to “situate the myth in a long-term continuum that has a potential for meaning” (5–6). However, Miller is also clear to point out that he is uninterested in “seeking the Urmyth” or argue for one particular myth as the “original” dragon-slaying myth (4). This methodology leads him to find the dragon-slaying motif in many passages of the Old and New Testaments, over against scholars such as Rebecca Watson and David Tsumura. But Miller also avoids the pitfalls of Gunkel’s model, which tends to view the *Chaoskampf* motif as a singular myth and elide similarities and differences.

The book is divided into four major parts, two of which deal with mythical material from outside of the biblical canon, then a lengthy one for the Old Testament and a much shorter one for the New Testament. The first section deals with examples of the dragon-slaying myth from India, Proto-India-Europe, and Iran, with the question in the background as to the degree to which these early examples identify the dragon-slaying
myth as “global.” Miller starts his exploration with India, not because the texts are the oldest, but because the narrative of the myth is more easily reconstructed from the early hymns (12). He identifies Indra as an early example of a dragon-slaying storm god (13) and his adversary as a monstrous serpent whose death “somehow releases pent-up waters” (15). Through this victory, Indra comes to be crowned king of the gods (16). Miller seems to be in agreement with interpreters who have found cosmogonic elements in the myth, though he does not view creation as the myth’s sole or primary purpose (18-19). Miller notes that Indra is not revered in later myths; while Indra is “victor over chaos” (23), the myth is updated as “royal power in India” becomes “tempered by Brahminic power” (23).

Chapter 2 turns to the manifestations of the dragon-slaying myth among Proto-Indo-European cultures. Miller suggests that “there may have been multiple dragon-slaying myths among Proto-Indo-Europeans” (33), rather than a single source that spread from this culture to all others. Even so, Miller argues that this tradition forms the basis of the dragon-slaying myth that makes its way from here into Iranian and Hittite culture, then into the ancient Near East. The question of whether this myth has its origins in the Proto-Indo-European tradition or whether it is a “global myth” is the subject of chapter 3. In this understanding of the myth’s origins and trajectory, the myth “is shared by all modern human beings, as a result of diffusion, although it is a far older diffusion than the Indo-European migrations” (40). Instead, the myth “goes back to the emergence of human beings out of Africa” (40). Miller, however, does not subscribe to this model, noting that Egypt’s dragon-slaying myth “in its earliest form … has almost nothing in common with the dragon-slaying myths to which this study is devoted” (45). However, early examples of Japanese dragon-slaying myths share many similarities with the Proto-Indo-European form, indicating that it is a question of the lines along which the myth diffused, rather than a single myth permeating all cultures. The final chapter of this first section explores the myth’s presence within Iranian religious traditions, finding the examples to demonstrate clear evidence of Proto-Indo-European descent (63).

In the second section, Miller moves into northern traditions, including Hittite, Hurrian, Ugarit, and Mesopotamia. Miller sees the Hittite tradition as being part of the Anatolian branch, which split from the Indo-European family at a relatively early date (67). Miller identifies two variants of the Illuyanka Myth but sees them as representing different locations for the celebration of the Purulli festival, rather than earlier or later traditions (71). In this myth, Miller sees a continuing of the tradition in which the storm god battles a dragon at sea and becomes “the primal victor over chaos” (79). Miller’s chapter on Hurrian discusses the Kumarbi Cycle, in which the storm god Teshub does battle with a variety of world-threatening gods (including one identified as the sea) and requires help from the other gods to combat the menace (86–90). Due to the fragmentary nature of many of the texts and the lack of iconographic evidence, Miller concludes, “We will not
be able to unpack specific social or ideological functions of the myth within Hurrian or Mitanni society” (93). Turning to Ugaritic mythology, Miller argues that Yam and the Tunnan are to be identified as the same character (100-101, 117) but is also careful to note that this battle does not come within the context of creation (103). However, Miller does not take this to mean that Yam cannot represent chaos; he still reads Yam as a threat to the ordered world, with Baal (and hence the king) assuming “the role of guarantor of stability in creation” (118). Here Miller also introduces the idea of the mountain as symbolic of this stability, a motif that will become important in the remainder of the monograph. This section ends with a discussion of the well-trod Enuma Elish, though Miller does an expert job of summarizing previous scholarship and weighing the evidence to provide a careful and balanced treatment that still maintains connections with Gen 1. Miller finds the most enduring element of the myth to be “the defeat of chaos” (128) and finds it to be a narrative both about creation and the establishment of the king’s authority. Miller, however, is careful to point out the unique elements of the myth as well, noting, for example, “It is not clear that Tiamat even is a serpent or a dragon” (131), although later iconography will identify her as such. Throughout this chapter in particular Miller is insistent on maintaining the uniqueness of the myth while still exploring connections with the larger constellation of dragon-slaying myths.

This leads into the lengthy third section of the book, covering both the Old Testament and noncanonical Second Temple Jewish texts. The opening chapter explores possible connections between Israelite religion and the religious traditions discussed in previous sections. The chapter concludes with a succinct overview of his thesis for the remainder of the book. He sees “two distinct strategies” at work by the biblical authors when employing the dragon-slaying myth. “One of these strategies is to make Yahweh the dragon-slayer” (155). In this strategy Yahweh is able to replace Baal, Marduk, and the other dragon-slaying gods. The second strategy “takes what is the greatest mythological accomplishment of a foreign deity and makes it a task of no great difficulty for God” (156). Miller next turns to the Psalms, finding the influence of the previously discussed myths in not only the most obvious places (such as Pss 72, 89, and 104) but also in places where Yahweh appears as a storm god, particularly when his home as the temple is foregrounded. Miller also reads psalms in which Yahweh expresses power over the sea, such as Pss 29, 42–49, and 65–68. In Miller’s discussion of Ps 29, he argues for an explicit Chaokampf motif (over against scholars such as Rebecca Watson), suggesting a key difference between Israel’s adaptation of the dragon-slaying myth and the employment of the myth at Ugarit: “for Israel, the Chaokampf was a creation myth, and the sea that is defeated is, at least for several biblical texts, the same as the primordial chaotic sea before Yahweh’s creation of order” (161, emphasis original). This is the general approach Miller will take through the remainder of the monograph: he argues for an expansive use of
Chaoskampf in the biblical texts but remains sensitive to how particular elements have been adapted and repurposed by the tradition.

In his reading of Gen 1, Miller finds “chaos water” but no Chaoskampf. “Creation occurs without opposition” (201). Still, he finds that Gen 1 was likely “a rebuttal” to “many of the ideas promoted in Enuma Elish” (202, emphasis original). Yahweh needs no violence to create the world, and the dragon “shrinks to a fish” (201). Miller also finds significant use of the dragon-slaying mythemes in Gen 2–3. In the figure of the serpent Miller does not find Satan but does find Yam or any of the other number of chaos dragons (with the exception of Tiamat, since “the gender is wrong,” 204). Miller understands Gen 3:15 to refer to a future battle between the dragon and “one promised masculine individual human,” although the victor is unclear (207–8). Hopefully, this section of Miller’s work will generate a fruitful debate.

Chapter 12 considers “The Rest of the Old Testament,” although Daniel gets its own chapter later on. Miller finds in Exod 15 a clear echo of Yahweh’s battle with the sea. “Taken out of the context of vv. 4–5 and 9–10,” Miller notes, “vv. 6–8 seem to make the sea, Yamm, the enemy of Yahweh—not Egypt” (211). He then reads 15:16 as the “creation of the people” (212). Brief discussions of Isa 27 and 51, as well as several chapters of Ezekiel and Job, summarize the scholarly consensus of these passages as repurposing mythical material. Chapter 13 turns to Greek texts written within the same general time frame as the biblical texts described in the previous chapters. In the various stories of Typhon’s battle against Zeus and the other gods, Miller finds many familiar elements, including the dragon “who is a threat to the gods and the entire world,” and the storm god’s victory on a mountain. Turning to the Dan 7, Miller finds the “beasts from the sea” to have precedence in the Psalms. Hence there is little need to posit Dan 7’s direct dependence on Enuma Elish, as did Gunkel (with the possible exception of 7:2’s description of the sea as “stirred up,” which Miller notes has parallels in Enuma Elish but not in the Bible, 236–37). Miller reads the “one like a son of man” as an image of the divine dragon-slayer. Arguing against John Collins, Miller finds no direct dependence from the Ugaritic Baal Epic, although he suggests that the mythemes “have travelled to Daniel through Israelite channels, channels we see in Psalms and Isaiah” (241). This is a plausible explanation to Miller even though mythemes appear in Daniel that are absent from the Psalms and Isaiah: “the myth as a whole as it existed in a given culture would have included a larger set of mythemes than appear in any single text of that culture” (242). The section concludes with brief summaries of a handful of passages from noncanonical Second Temple Jewish texts.

The final section (comprising a single chapter) is devoted to the dragon-slaying myth in the New Testament. Before turning to Revelation, Miller takes a brief tour through the
gospels and Paul. Miller notes several passages (Luke 22:67–69; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Matt 26:64) in which the “Son of Man” language clearly echoes Dan 7, which Miller argues places them in the tradition of the dragon-slayer. Following the argument of Kratz and Schackenburg, Miller also sees dragon-slaying in Jesus’s calming the sea and walking on its surface. In Paul’s writings, Miller finds the dragon-slaying motif most clearly in Rom 16:20 and 1 Cor 15:23–26, both of which employ the visual of Christ crushing enemies under his feet. Miller concludes this chapter with a reading of Revelation, focusing on the Drachenkampf of chapter 12.

Miller has provided a great service to biblical scholars. He has assembled a great deal of evidence from within and without the Bible and clearly has a strong command of the literature. Rather than a simplistic search for parallels, he identifies the component aspects of the mythic material, then locates these mythemes in a wide variety of texts. Through this, he is able to argue for the presence of the dragon-slaying myth without suggesting wholesale borrowing or complete dependence. While scholars who see little to no Chaoskampf material in the biblical text are unlikely to be convinced by all of his examples, the volume of evidence and the care that Miller takes to employ his arguments will help to continue what has been a healthy, lively debate for over a century.