

volume achieves this balance between overview and detailed discussion, from the treatment of the myth before Aeschylus to the chapter on the play's reception, enabling the reader to gain a much deeper understanding of the play without being overwhelmed.

Hesk's discussion of *Ajax* engages the reader in the debate over Ajax's heroism in a sophisticated but accessible discussion. In his chapter on the Prologue, Hesk lays out different interpretations of Athena's and Odysseus' behaviour, explains (without fully supporting) a meta-theatrical reading, discusses the Chorus' identity, status and attitude towards Ajax, and explains how this scene highlights themes (vision/knowledge/madness; reciprocity; bigness vs smallness; being too late; the nature of *sôphrosunê*) that will recur throughout the play. Other highlights include a fine analysis of Ajax's relationship to spoken language and readings of both Tecmessa and Teucer as interesting characters in their own right. Hesk's chapter on the deception speech is absolutely first rate: it steers the reader through the intractable staging problems, the ambiguous, riddling language of the speech, and the tortuous scholarly debates with admirable clarity and good sense. The chapter on the play's ending makes a compelling case for its coherence with what went before, for its interest, relevance and quality, while emphasizing its lack of a final single answer on Ajax's heroism.

Mills has an engaging writing style and a way of conveying the larger issues at stake in scholarly debates with grace and clarity. Her treatment of *Hippolytus* provides a clear discussion of the evidence for the two different *Hippolytus* plays by Euripides, as well as detailed chapters on critical views of the play and on the afterlife of the play. She elucidates the ethical/moral/sophistic dilemmas of the play's plot and language, highlighting many scenarios and characters where the sophistic 'making the worse argument the better' applies, with explanations of wordplay in Greek (e.g. *sôphrosunê*). Mills's treatment of *Bacchae* devotes a crucial chapter to critical views of the play, which she handles adroitly: she breaks down critical perspectives from the last century into four basic camps and takes the reader through each camp's arguments, noting strengths and weaknesses. Then she provides a section on scholars' reductivist tendency to make Dionysus into a symbol because they are uncomfortable with treating him in this play as an incarnate, real god. Following that, she discusses various schools of interpretation used on this play (structuralist, political, psychoanalytic, meta-theatrical). One thing I missed in this volume was a discussion of the 'palace miracle'.

Michelakis's treatment of *IA* is fascinating for an advanced reader, clear and engrossing for a beginning reader. His discussion of Iphigenia's character, and scholarly reactions to her abrupt change of heart, is a highlight of the volume. Another highlight is his final chapter on the play's reception. He begins it, interestingly enough, with *IA*'s textual history, then discusses the (probably) interpolated prologue and epilogue, and

uses the debate over the authenticity of the epilogue as a brilliant transition into the play's reception: what can this tacked-on *dea ex machina* tell us about ancient, post-fifth-century readers and audiences of this play? The only reservation I have about this volume is that it might be somewhat advanced for introductory students, since it presents some rather sophisticated ideas, although very clearly. For example, one of its recurring theses is that *IA* is set in a self-conscious, post-heroic world where characters cannot control their lives or the myths they inhabit, where the gods are remote and human institutions are unreliable. This is such an interesting approach to a difficult play, however, that I think, if anything, it might persuade students to give *IA* a second chance.

The Duckworth 'Companions to Greek and Roman Tragedy' is an excellent set of textbooks for those who teach Greek and/or Roman tragedies, in the original or in translation. Classicists specializing in drama, as well as scholars of later periods of drama, will find much in these volumes that is useful, stimulating and challenging as well.

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BUSHNELL (R.) *Ed. A Companion to Tragedy*. (Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture 32). Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005. Pp. xii + 556. £85. 9781405107358.

Rebecca Bushnell's *Companion*, a project undertaken in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, is founded on the premise 'that in Western culture the meaning of tragedy is inseparable from history'. It also acquires a cohesive focus from B.'s introductory proposition that 'tragedy can be dangerous, as much as redemptive'. The volume begins with, and at regular intervals revisits, the scene in Aristophanes' *Frogs* in which Aeschylus and Euripides compete in Hades for the throne of the greatest tragic poet. The recurrent invocation of this contest, together with the emphasis in Part I (by Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood and Richard Seaford) on the origin of tragedy in the cult of Dionysus, establishes as a central theme tragedy's Dionysian duality, that is, its capacity to legitimize and critique, its value as a medium for both self-definition and subversion.

The volume, which comprises twenty-eight chapters by scholars from multiple disciplines, is divided into seven parts under two main headings: 'Tragic Thought' and 'Tragedy in History'. Parts I to IV are devoted to ancient tragedy, its origins, development and major modes of interpretation. Parts V to VII document crucial phases in the vibrant *Nachleben* of ancient tragic theatre.

The second part is an effective survey of the most important philosophical and theoretical framings of

tragedy, namely Aristotelian, Hegelian, Nietzschean and Freudian approaches. Mark W. Roche provides a particularly lucid explanation of Hegel's brilliant but very exclusive typology of tragedy as the conflict of two goods. In Part III, Deborah Boedeker and Kurt Rauffaub examine tragedy in its civic context, its broadly political nature and educative function within an intensely dialogic culture. Hugh Grady explores Materialist thought and its recent shift towards a more appreciative relationship with the tragic, while Victoria Wohl traces the evolution of feminist treatments of Greek tragedy.

Part IV, 'Tragedy in Antiquity', is the longest section in the volume. It opens with a discussion by Alan H. Sommerstein of Athenian tragedy's innovative exploitation and renewal of received myth and ends with Alessandro Schiesaro's potted history of the Romanization of Greek tragedy. In between are chapters on tragedy's epic foundation (Ruth Scodel); its performance context (Michael R. Halleran); the role of the tragic chorus (Claude Calame, translated by Dan Edelstein); the role of women in tragic drama (Sheila Murnaghan); and the interaction between tragedy and Old Comedy (Ralph M. Rosen). In the last, Rosen argues that, because of its freewheeling dynamism, Aristophanic comedy compensated for tragedy's own lack of self-reflexivity.

Part V deals with English Renaissance and Spanish Golden Age tragedy, Part VI with neoclassical and romantic tragedy in France, Britain and Germany. Part VII is in some respects the least satisfying. The three contributions it contains – Gail Finney, Brenda Murphy, and Timothy J. Reiss on how tragedy has been reconceptualized in modern European, American and post-colonial contexts – are interesting in themselves, but collectively they fail to do justice to the extraordinarily rich reception of Greek tragedy from the Modernist period onwards. One notable omission is any mention of the impact of Hofmannsthal's *Elektra* of 1903, the first psychoanalytic interpretation of Greek tragedy ever staged. One might also have expected to find in this section a more profound consideration of the current proliferation of reception scholarship centred on classical tragedy.

The Blackwell Companions series is intended to orientate the beginning student in new fields of study while providing the graduate and experienced undergraduate with current and new directions. The present volume serves these objectives well, although I would argue that *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, edited by P.E. Easterling (1997), is a slightly more accessible, if less comprehensive, handbook for novices. Certainly B.'s edition gives the reader a sense of the scope and fertility of the most current scholarship on the genre. And it is largely successful in its ambitious attempt at interdisciplinary intelligibility and non-specialist appeal. Inevitably, albeit infrequently, some theoretical jargon rears its ugly head. But this minor deterrent does not detract from the book's principal asset: its admirable

exposition of the extraordinary polyphony characteristic of the tragic genre and of critical and creative responses to tragedy from late antiquity to the modern era.

As B. states in her introduction, the volume is driven by a shared conviction that tragedy matters. A concluding chapter on the important place and continual reconfiguration of Greek tragedy in the early twenty-first century might have reinforced this conviction or given it greater urgency. Nevertheless, many of the individual contributions persuasively demonstrate both the necessity and the transformative power of tragedy, calling to my mind the observations of two classically inspired modern poets. Robert Frost said of education, it 'doesn't change life much. It just lifts trouble to a higher plane of regard'. Expanding this notion, Seamus Heaney, himself a translator of Sophoclean tragedy, has commented that Greek tragedy gives us 'recognition of something analogous. Recognition is movement, a change. If the plane of regard has shifted, then something has happened.'

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ROTHWELL (K.S.) *Nature, Culture, and the Origins of Greek Comedy. A Study of Animal Choruses*. Cambridge UP, 2007. Pp. xiv + 326, illus. £45. 9780521860666.

The literary evidence for animal choruses in Greek comedy is not copious, but it is sufficient to tantalize, especially when considered in conjunction with the striking depictions of (what appear to be) animal choruses that we find on certain vases from the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. Humans, after all, often find primal, 'wild' or 'natural' versions of themselves in animals, and approach them with a mixture of fascination and fear. It is not surprising, therefore, to hear Kenneth Rothwell confess at the end of this impressive and elegant book that he had begun his study of animal choruses in comedy by assuming that they were 'rooted in some primitive fertility cult', or embodied 'the antithesis of humanity or reveal[ed] a subversive animal world latent in human beings' (183). What he found turns out to be far more complex and diverse, and sometimes quite the reverse of what he had assumed.

In efficient and engaging prose, R. exhaustively collects virtually all the known evidence pertaining to Greek animal choruses, both literary (poetic, historical and philosophical) and visual (iconographic and plastic), and analyses them with just the right mixture of caution and speculation. This is a most welcome project, since the last monographic study on the topic was G. Sifakis's 1971 book, *Parabasis and Animal Choruses*, which was concerned more with the parabasis and had no pretensions to offering a full-scale study of animal choruses. In the intervening years not only have there