

conduit of Pindar's literary and scholarly reception, manifesting not only Pindar's status as a canonical poet but also the processes conducive to this canonization. The issues tackled in this chapter, and the stress laid on how scholarly commentaries can initiate, affect and shape the reading experience, are perceptive, and cast light on a fascinating area that has not heretofore received adequate attention.

All in all, Phillips' approach to Pindar's poetry is novel and thought-provoking, which makes his book a welcome addition to Pindaric scholarship. Even though I am not convinced by all his interpretations in the close readings he offers in the second part of the book, and although on several occasions I found his arguments to be somewhat strained and forced, such reservations do not detract from the value of the book. The issues that Phillips comes to grips with throughout, the various angles from which he attempts to approach his subject matter and the sophistication of his readings are stimulating and trigger a host of fresh and intriguing questions, not only on Pindar's *Nachleben* and the way he was read in antiquity but also on how we read his poetry today.

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VAN NORTWICK (T.) **Late Sophocles: The Hero's Evolution in *Electra*, *Philoctetes*, and *Oedipus at Colonus***. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015. Pp. xiii + 148. \$65. 9780472119561.

doi:10.1017/S0075426918000174

In this monograph, Van Nortwick examines the later phase of Sophocles' career as a tragedian. He focuses in particular on the three plays mentioned in the title in order to support his argument that Sophocles created 'a reimagining of the tragic hero' (vii). Although the author admits that the *Electra* date is in dispute, he accepts that favoured by scholarly opinion, namely 410 BC, thus placing the three plays within five years of each other.

The introduction offers an overview of Van Nortwick's ideas and goals for the volume. The allusion to the Iliadic Achilles is inevitable (and appropriate) in any discussion on heroism, heroic temperament and the hyperbole surrounding 'traditional' heroic notions as seen in epic and early Sophocles. The juxtaposition between 'old'

and 'new' heroism is a well-known *topos* in classical scholarship, as is the argument that tragedy was used as a tool to reflect on late fifth-century socio-political matters and question the usefulness of classical myths (often leading to the reimagining of stories and characters). The author draws our attention to these matters effectively in the introduction, setting the scene for his subsequent analysis in the main body of the book.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to the *Electra*. Van Nortwick points out the distance created between the heroine and the revenge plot, as Sophocles keeps her outside the palace waiting for her brother to emerge after the murder of Clytemnestra. She is branded 'a woman who waits', an addition to a long line of tragic heroines in similar positions of waiting for the male hero to act. The author rightly focuses on the physical and emotional distance between the siblings in order to argue that Electra's grief is peripheral to the revenge plot and is seen as a disruptive element by the male avengers. Arguably, his aim is to support his earlier argument that the pre-existing story does not offer a satisfactory explanation to the issues brought to the fore by Electra's unsettling character, which explains her status as 'an inconvenient hero' (40), a rather appropriate title for such a disturbing, intense character as the Sophoclean Electra.

The next chapter is on the *Philoctetes* and the author mentions the unsettling effect created by the presence of Odysseus, thus aligning himself with the long tradition of juxtaposing Odysseus' cunningness with more conventional heroism, a notion already present in antiquity. He argues convincingly that Sophocles places Philoctetes at the centre of the heroic plot, assigning a secondary role to Neoptolemus and thus challenging audience expectations in the same way he does in the *Electra* and engaging in the contemporary debate on excellence. The parallel drawn between Philoctetes and Electra as 'immobilized, lacking the physical agency we usually associate with Greek heroes' (79) is convincingly argued, along with their portrayal as traditional heroes. They are juxtaposed with the characters of Neoptolemus and Orestes respectively, who, while actively pursuing their heroic quest, at the same time embody the political debates taking place in fifth-century Athens.

Chapter 4 is on *Oedipus at Colonus*, often seen as the epitome of Sophocles' engagement with questions about life, heroism and human limitations. The immobility of the central character is

pointed out once more, creating an obvious parallel with the protagonists of the two plays considered previously. The decision to pass on the curse to his son Polyneices, Van Nortwick argues, turns the latter into a Neoptolemus as seen in the *Philoctetes*, a ‘carrier of the self-destructive persona of tragic hero’ (111).

The final chapter begins with a brief discussion of Sophocles’ take on late fifth-century Athenian politics, followed by concluding remarks on the similarities and personality traits of Electra, Neoptolemus and Oedipus. The well-known ancient polarity between *logos* and *ergon*, a recurrent theme throughout this analysis, is brought to the fore again, as is the objectification of the heroic body and its central position in all three plays.

The monograph presents the plays in chronological order and the analysis of each play follows a linear approach, building the argument around the evolution of events. There are useful endnotes supporting the argument and offering further information to the reader. Overall, the argument seems familiar at times, but it is presented in a thorough, convincing and competent manner, drawing attention to similarities between the plays and the major themes emerging in late Sophoclean tragedy. Van Nortwick’s work is certainly useful to specialists, offering extensive interpretation of and insight into three most important plays. At the same time, however, it presents the reader with enough information on the tragic, mythical and socio-political backgrounds to be accessible to the non-specialist who is looking for an introduction to late Sophoclean tragedy.

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RINGER (M.) **Euripides and the Boundaries of the Human**. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016. Pp. 377. £75. 9781498518437.

doi:10.1017/S0075426918000186

In this beautifully produced and highly readable introductory volume to Euripidean drama Ringer offers an insightful lengthy survey of the 19 surviving plays ascribed to Euripides (the often supposed as spurious *Rhesus* and the only complete extant satyr-drama *Cyclops* are included), devoting a chapter to each play with occasional references to the fragments of the lost dramas. This synthetic study of the Euripidean

dramatic corpus, as well as coming in the wake of large-scale generalist guides to Euripides in both English (J.M. Walton, *Euripides Our Contemporary*, Berkeley 2009; D.J. Mastronarde, *The Art of Euripides: Dramatic Technique and Social Context*, Cambridge 2010) and German (K. Matthiessen, *Die Tragödien des Euripides*, Munich 2002; M. Hose, *Euripides: Der Dichter der Leidenschaften*, Munich 2008), not only serves as a valuable addition to an enormous amount of research produced by a cohort of eminent scholars in recent decades on the dramas of Euripides, but also continues in the most creative and stimulating way possible a long and honoured humanistic tradition of Euripidean scholarship remarkably encapsulated and distilled in Desmond Conacher’s emblematic reading of Euripides, *Euripidean Drama: Myth, Theme and Structure* (London 1967).

Much as the writing of an introductory book to Euripidean drama imposes upon the author multiple limitations and, most important, the imperative need to paint with a rather broad brush, Ringer uses these constraints to his own advantage by keeping the critical focus trained upon what is in fact essential and important about each play, thereby providing a good grounding for both Hellenists and the general public to explore crucial scholarly controversies and profound issues of interpretation. It should be noted that on no account does this intense concentration on those fundamental interpretative topics showing the vitality and development of Euripidean drama, as well as its dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation, hinder the author from expressing his personal views freely and at times confrontationally. In fact, it is often the case that Ringer challenges readers to rethink their assumptions, and therefore to sharpen their answer to hotly debated questions that lie at the heart of his critical reading of each play. It is not surprising, therefore, that he leads off his perceptive inquiry with a distinctly polemical discussion of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, arguing rather provocatively in a sweeping statement that ‘[o]ne of the greatest barriers to the appreciation of all Greek Tragedy is the misuse of Aristotle’s *Poetics*’ (6). Although there are all too many critics who may voice disapproval of Aristotle attempting to theorize about the tragic genre at a significant remove from the fifth-century theatre, Ringer’s harsh critique of those misconceptions stemming from an overwhelmingly broad assortment of explications of the *Poetics* over so