not only prefigures the later portion of the tragedy, but also embraces in a single whole various conflicting interests and goals that have to be pursued in the same spot on a single day.

Further than this, as G. is aware, in plays of this kind, although the general issue of the action is familiar, the skilful management of the plot and the ferociousness of the contrasting passions can obscure any guesswork about the exact manner of the conclusion, thereby heightening the excitement of suspense. G.'s response to the challenge of this heavily suspenseful text is restrained and illuminating. She avoids both fake modernistic interpretative ventures and self-indulgent naive explications; above all, she avoids excessive irony. Take for example the famous scene with Orestes and Pylades, which has become a byword of human fragility in the face of impenetrable destiny. As Orestes begins to falter and to second-guess his decision to kill his mother after her breast-bearing, G. argues, the resulting images of doubt and regret reassert their hold on the imagination of the audience; in fact, the realisation of the chasm between the actor's male gender and his female role brings out with emphatic force more questions, all of them in plangent discord with the overt moral dilemmas of the pre-Aeschylean mythical stories. The probing reaction to this play that G. prescribes for the audience is to stay to some degree emotionally uninvolved with the characters in order to appreciate in full the self-referentiality of the action. Much as one would stand unconvinced by G.'s metatheatrical, almost at times 'Brechtian', take on a complex scene, there is something to be said about this stimulating exposition of conflicting motives and purposes laid bare for all to see through the startling interposition of Pylades as a male companion par excellence in stark contrast with the accentuated femininity of the Clytemnestra actor.

The detailed discussion is followed by a brief but helpful chapter summing up the central topics, and the book concludes with a useful English summary and an index of ancient Greek passages, which constitutes a serviceable guide to the many thought-provoking arguments contained in this meticulously documented work.

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GREEK DRAMA AND MYSTERY CULTS

BARZINI (L.) *Mystery Cults, Theatre and Athenian Politics. A Reading of Euripides'* Bacchae *and Aristophanes'* Frogs. Pp. xiv + 260, map. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. Cased, £85, US$115. ISBN: 978-1-350-18732-0.
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The multiple similarities between the *Bacchae* and the *Frogs* have long intrigued scholars and inspired theories about the intertextual relationship of the two plays. In this book, based on his doctoral dissertation at the University of Exeter, B. pays small attention to the imaginative hypotheses that argue for direct influence of one work on the other, assuming that Aristophanes had access to a pre-performance script of Euripides' tragedy. B. takes for granted, perhaps too readily, that the two plays were presented almost contemporaneously in Athens, the *Bacchae* having been staged at the Great Dionysia of 405 BCE, two months after the *Frogs*. On this basis, he views both works as reactions

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to the grave socio-political crisis of civic division and constitutional tensions, which plagued Athenian public life at that time, on the eve of the defeat of Athens in the great war.

An initiate of R. Seaford's school, B. lays emphasis on the interaction between mystic rituals and civic experience. His central thesis is that the *Bacchae* and the *Frogs* share a common political purpose: the poets propose that reconciliation of the opposing factions in the *polis* will be achieved through the ethical and social values of the Eleusinian and Dionysiac mystery rituals, which are endorsed by the citizen population. The choruses of the two plays, the Eleusinian *mystai* of the *Frogs* and Dionysus' Maenads in the *Bacchae*, represent on stage the *thiasoi* of the initiates of the mysteries, which constitute all-inclusive and egalitarian communities with shared religious and moral beliefs and, as such, provide an ideal model for the equality-centred democratic state. The application of the mystic ideology to the internal crisis of the *polis* will help solve the conflicts, ensure political harmony and transform the divided city into a well-ordered community, blessed with the serenity and cohesion of a band of initiates.

This interesting idea might have furnished the core of a good article. B. undertook to turn it into a full-blown dissertation, filled with multifarious information on mystery rituals and *Realien* of the ancient theatre. More than half the book (Chapters 1–6) is dedicated to factual and cultural aspects of the Eleusinian mysteries and the dramatic festivals of Athens: their structure, procedure, emotional experience, ethical and ideological values, musical and choral elements, and the role of mystic rituals in Athenian political history. Amidst much data drawn from standard handbooks, B. examines some interesting issues and propositions. Using ethnographical findings, he explores the relation between ancient Greek mysteries and initiatory rituals of other traditional cultures. He compares the mystic visions described by ancient authors, such as Plato and Plutarch, with those reported by the survivors of near-death experiences; their analogies point to a repertoire of eschatological commonplaces inherent in the collective psyche of our species. B. also investigates the intersection between the theatrical audiences of classical Athens and the demography of the Eleusinian initiates, although the nature of the available evidence ultimately renders it impossible to statistically determine how many initiates would have watched the *Frogs* and the *Bacchae* and how great their influence on the outcome of the dramatic competition would have been.

The main defect of B.'s discussion is his tendency to detect mystic symbolisms in various kinds of poetic and historical discourse that seem too general and better suited to a more straightforward interpretation. He reads the *Oresteia* as a dramatic parable, which advocates that mystery rituals are models of civic coherence and provide the solution to the political disorder of Athens (Chapter 5.2). It is well known that Aeschylus' trilogy was a response to the turmoil caused by Ephialtes' radical reforms; but B. fails to uncover anything particularly relevant to the mysteries in the structure and poetic texture of the plays. He singles out two very broad elements, the recurrent imagery of light and darkness and the theme of deliverance from evil, as emblematically mystic motifs. However, the former may simply be a poetic commonplace (albeit magisterially handled by Aeschylus), while the latter is a widespread religious tenet.

The same fallacy runs through B.'s survey of the role of mystery cults in Athenian political history (Chapter 6). The showpiece is the scandal of the parody of Eleusinian rituals on the eve of the Sicilian expedition, which is well narrated. B. also successfully highlights the contribution of the Eleusinian *keryx* Cleocritus, who appeased the opposing factions of the citizens after the fall of the Thirty with a conciliatory speech emphasising their shared religious background. The other cases assembled in this chapter have no specific links with mystery cult. Epimenides was called to perform purification ceremonies; there is

no indication that he instituted a mystic ritual and had the Athenian people initiated (κατοργιάσας in Plut. *Sol.* 12.9 is used metaphorically). Solon's *eunomia* is not an exclusively mystical value and need not be compared with the visions of eschatological orderliness reported by Plato and Plutarch. Miltiades' sacrilege consisted, strictly speaking, in attempted theft from Demeter's sanctuary and desecration of its holy space, not in any offence regarding the mysteries. The quest for mystic overtones in these cases reminds the reader of the obsessed heroes of Umberto Eco's novel *Foucault's Pendulum*, who strive to discover an occult background in every major event of history.

In the second part of the book (Chapters 7–10) B. concentrates on the *Frogs* and the *Bacchae* and treats a selection of interpretative and comparative questions, mostly concerning their thematic and ideological similarities. The main argument is set out with some repetitiveness: the two plays are read as manifestos for the application of mystic ritual values to political life, with a view to achieving order and harmony in the *polis*. There is no in-depth analysis of the two poets' political attitudes, such as may be gathered from their total oeuvres. Euripides is called, somewhat simplistically, a democrat, who criticises tyranny in the person of Pentheus. Aristophanes is said to have had aristocratic views, but nonetheless focuses on social and political equality in the parabasis of the *Frogs*. There is also no comment on the glaring difference between the two plays with regard to the portrayal of religious experience. The rituals of the *Bacchae* consist in manic frenzy and ecstasy, sometimes manifested through raw, uncontrollable violence, but include no hint at eschatology and afterlife. The *Frogs*, vice versa, pictures a blissful eschatological state in entirely positive terms, without any reference to trance phenomena. B. misses this significant dichotomy.

B. displays a cavalier attitude towards the principles of historical and philological research. Discussing the trial of the generals after Arginusae, he makes no serious attempt at *Quellenkritik* to justify his arbitrary preference for Diodorus Siculus' version, at the expense of the account given by Xenophon, a contemporary witness of the events (pp. 100–5). His argument that *Bacchae* 775–7 should be assigned to the messenger and not to the chorus (p. 135), against manuscript evidence, is not only unmethodical but also contrary to common sense. The messenger, a servant of Pentheus, addresses his king, many times throughout his speech, in the second person with the respectful term *anax*. It would have been both abrupt and reckless of him to suddenly refer to Pentheus in the third person and call him *tyrannos* in his final words.

Apart from several misprints, there are also factual errors. Demosthenes' opponent, the son of the initiation priestess who used to help his mother with her rituals (*De Corona* 257–60), was not Ctesiphon (p. 19), but Aeschines. Callias of the deme of Angele (Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 34.1), the *eponymos archon* of 406/405 BCE, is not to be identified with Callias the son of Hipponicus, hereditary *dadouchos* and patron of the sophists, who came from the deme of Alopeke (J.K. Davies, *Athenian Propertied Families* [1971], p. 256). In any case, the *Bacchae* and the *Frogs* could not have been selected for the dramatic festivals by the same mystically inclined *archon* (pp. 39–40): the former, a tragedy at the Dionysia, would have been approved by the *archon eponymos*, while the Aristophanic comedy was produced at the Lenaia and would therefore have been chosen by the *archon basileus* (Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 57.1). The practice of collective dancing and singing is called *choreia*, not *choraea* (p. 62). Nestor was not the *mantis* of the Achaeans (p. 84); in spite of his loquacious wisdom, the old king of Pylos never coveted the job of Calchas.

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