

A HANDBOOK ON AESCHYLUS

BROMBERG (J.), BURIAN (P.) (edd.) *A Companion to Aeschylus*. Pp. xx + 572, ills. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2023. Cased, £135, US\$185. ISBN: 978-1-405-18804-3.

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Blackwell's multi-authored volume on Aeschylus is the first of its kind: no other comprehensive handbook has been published on the first Greek tragedian with such a variety of contributions, ranging from literary analysis to applied theatre, and from philology to performance history. Parts 1–3 centre on the ancient world ('Aeschylus in His Time'; 'Aeschylus as Playwright'; 'Aeschylus and Greek Society'), while Part 4 focuses on the reception of Aeschylus ('The Influence of Aeschylus'), from antiquity to present times, with a few final chapters (P. Meineck and R. Mitchell-Boyask) on practice-based approaches to Aeschylus' plays, in and out of the classroom. As I hope will emerge from this review, Bromberg and Burian's editorial endeavour has considerable merits that go well beyond providing the scholarly world with the first all-Aeschylean companion.

Part 1 discusses Aeschylus' 'impact' on the geography of the places he was active in (M. Bell), the tragic genre, and intellectual and literary histories as much as it addresses the context (Athens and Sicily) of his time influencing his creations and beliefs. It moves between Aeschylus' critique of 'upper-class domination', as it emerges from his plays (and his change in the meaning of the Areopagus in *Eumenides*) (R.W. Wallace), to the influence of lyric and epic poetry (notably Stesichorus) on Aeschylus' writing and innovations in the tragic genre (P.J. Finglass). It also examines the breadth of Aeschylus' reach within the literary milieu of his time, drawing from 'didactic poems', 'gnomic poetry', the 'paraenetic traditions' and the presocratic world of thinkers, ultimately portraying Aeschylus as an all-round intellectual (Bromberg).

Part 2 features chapters on individual plays (A.F. Garvie: *Persians*; I. Torrance: *Seven Against Thebes*; R. Futo Kennedy: *Suppliants*; D.H. Porter: *Oresteia*; Burian: *Eumenides*; K. Ormand: *Choephoroi*, in comparison with the other two Electra plays; I. Ruffell: *Prometheus Bound*; A. Podlecki: the fragmentary works) as well as chapters addressing a single aspect of playwriting and stagecraft. While the first type offers good introductions, up-to-date bibliographies and – in some cases – glimpses into the reception history of the play and their appeal to modern audiences (Torrance, Futo Kennedy); the second type surveys Aeschylus' dramaturgy (including his satyr drama techniques: C. Shaw) and explores how they dialogue with and/or innovate upon previous dramatic works, literary history and mythopoiesis. Visually compelling readings of Aeschylus' dramaturgy (A.C. Duncan; E. Stehle) stand alongside philological explorations of music and metre (N. Weiss) and analyses of linguistic and stylistic choices across plays that draw from comedic, religious, lyric and metaphorical registers (R.B. Rutherford). A study of the rules that regulate Aeschylus' complex storytelling techniques as he creates anew (A. Park) is also included.

Part 3 explores the connections between Greek society and the plays themselves, examining how they developed, changed and interacted with well-known societal tropes. Religious ritual offers a lens for reading Aeschylus' *Oresteia* as a recuperation of ritual for the whole *polis* (R. Seaford). Examinations of the supernatural (particularly in the *Persians*) (A. Shilo), race (especially in *Suppliants* and *Persians*) (S. Derbew), justice (through the recurrent image of writing) and the means of communication across cultures (especially in *Suppliants*) (E. Baragwanath) open new avenues for rethinking Athenian

history, politics and the justice system, while also complicating the often binary understanding of race and cultural interactions in tragedy. A few chapters focus on Aeschylus' engagement with contemporary legal (F.S. Naiden) and military (S. Roy) matters to reflect on and critique contemporary practices. The last chapter in this section focuses on the mechanics of tragic suffering as it projects Athenian suffering onto non-Athenian characters (D. Rosenbloom).

Part 4 hinges on the better-known and more developed themes of Aeschylean scholarship, its reception. (Two collections on the reception of Aeschylus' plays have been published in recent years: S.E. Constantinidis [ed.], *The Reception of Aeschylus' Plays through Shifting Models and Frontiers* [2017]; R.F. Kennedy [ed.], *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Aeschylus* [2018]). Following a somewhat unusual (but welcome) opening chapter on the main trends in Aeschylean scholarship from the nineteenth century to the present (particularly strong on twentieth-century 'isms', less so on reception) (M. Griffith), Chapters 30 (C.W. Marshall) and 31 (M. McCall) retrace the afterlife and appreciation of Aeschylus in theatre (especially in comedy) well into the fourth century and discuss the plays' textual transmission (from Alexandria to Byzantine scholarship and manuscript migration to the West). The *Oresteia* stands out as the main focus of this section. It features prominently in the chapter on translation (which limits itself to anglophone works), and its themes are central to significant engagements with tragedy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in Germany (Hegel, Wagner, Nietzsche) and Russia (Vyacheslav Ivanov) (A. Lecznar). Chapters 35 and 36 tackle landmark adaptations of the *Oresteia* (its myth and dramaturgy) by Eugene O'Neill, T.S. Eliot and Jean-Paul Sartre (V. Liapis), as well as significant theatre productions (including Stein, Hall and Mnouchkine, with the addition of Koun to the now thoroughly researched triad) (H.R. Marshall). *Prometheus* is given a solo chapter that interweaves different time periods (ranging from antiquity to the 2010s) and various media (from art to philosophy and from poetry to novel-writing), mainly in England, Germany and France (T. Ziolkowski). Chapter 37 (H.P. Foley) records the increasing theatrical interest in the 'four less-performed plays', including (among others) the beginnings of the Delphic festival in 1927 with *Prometheus*, the *Persians* during the Greek Civil War and the invasion of Iraq, Prometheus as a socialist hero and *Seven Against Thebes*' renewed grip on audiences from Arrufat (1968) to Will Power (2001–2008). Foley also includes Moni Ovidia's groundbreaking production of the *Suppliants*, reimagined as a 'grande cunto' (Sicilian dialect for 'grand song', but also 'story') sung by a Sicilian Aeschylus (who speaks in Sicilian dialect). The last two chapters address the increasing interest in practice-based approaches to Classics (and Greek drama in particular); Meineck discusses community-theatre projects carried out by NYU-based Aquila Theatre's applied-theatre programmes (*Hear Our Call* with a group of teenage refugees and *The Warrior Chorus* with the veteran community) and the potential of ancient drama to 'promote a social cause'. Mitchell-Boyask offers examples of performance-based teaching practices focused on Aeschylus' *Oresteia*.

In the epilogue Bromberg makes a compelling case that ours is the century of Aeschylus: the rocketing number of theatre productions and adaptations, as well as new translations, are a testament to the paradigmatic shift that has repositioned Aeschylus (and his *Oresteia* in particular) at the top of the Greek tragedy podium since the 1960s, and increasingly so within the global and transnational context we live in. This handbook is further proof of the appeal of Aeschylus, as it substantiates the ways in which 'Global Aeschylus' has earned that title.

If there is one critique that can be levelled at this otherwise groundbreaking collection, it is its predicated 'global approach' to Aeschylus throughout the volume when only a few

of the 37 contributors are not US-educated and/or currently working in American institutions. Nonetheless, the merits of this handbook are numerous: not only does it offer compelling overviews of Aeschylus' plays, both fragmentary and complete, but it also provides cutting-edge and innovative approaches to Aeschylus' stagecraft and dramaturgy, as well as to his works in the classroom. It will be an incredibly useful tool for generations to come as they grapple with (arguably) the hardest and most complex of the Greek tragedians.

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