

the most inspiring Oxford tutors of his generation, and is much missed. Comber devoted himself whole-heartedly to his students, and showed an intellectual energy and love of literature which is all too rare. C. A. J. Littlewood's book provides one example of Comber's lasting influence on the lives and work of his pupils.

University of Pennsylvania

EMILY WILSON

A. SCHIESARO, *THE PASSIONS IN PLAY. THYESTES AND THE DYNAMICS OF SENECAN DRAMA*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Pp. 284. ISBN 0-521-81801. £45.00.

Schiesaro presents a *Thyestes* driven forward by passion and the yearning for revenge, in thrall to the charisma, the genius of its Atreus, and where those characters who might be expected to offer an effective ethical alternative are each as feeble as the other.

Who, it might be asked, were Medon and Strophius, Tisamenus and Penthilus? According to Pausanias 2.16.7 and 2.18.6, they were the children of Electra by Pylades and of Orestes by Hermione and Erigone. That we may forgive ourselves our ignorance of this fact is testimony to a key characteristic of the Pelopidae: it is precisely to their zeal for bloodshed and revenge that they owe their vitality in myth and in literature; the device at the close of the *Eumenides* whereby Athena brings an end to the family struggle also denies all future generations any claim on our attention. In the *Thyestes* of Seneca, that vitality is vested in the avenging Atreus and in the Fury who drives the ghost of Tantalus on stage in the prologue; the eponymous hero, by contrast, is a broken man, mouthing useless platitudes, and unable to foresee the traps into which he is led or resist the temptations to which he is exposed. S. analyses this schema in terms of metadrama and identifies both the Fury and Atreus as surrogates for the playwright, each figure bringing the creative energy necessary for the realization of the tragedy. This is a critical move which will be familiar to students of Lucan, whose Caesar has been analysed in very similar terms, most notably by Jamie Masters, and it is one which is amply justified by the language of composition, iteration, and emulation apparent at Sen., *Thy.* 1-4, 54-7, 260-77. Likewise, the concept of the 'aesthetic allegiance' of the audience to Atreus (121-2) has much in common with the audience's 'simpatia artistica' for Lucan's Caesar asserted by Tandoi, *SIFC* 35 (1963), 87 n. 2, and which goes back at least as far as Thierfelder and Malcovati.

Other characteristics of the study are more surprising. S. argues against a crudely political or historical reading of the play at pp. 4-6 and is indeed most impressive when evoking the specific sources of the rage of Atreus in his brother's seduction of Aerope and the attendant insecurity over the paternity of Menelaus and Agamemnon. The analyses of the grove as a surrogate for the womb of Aerope (87-90) and of the murder of the children as a quasi-extispicy and pursuit of irrational knowledge (98-105) are particularly powerful, though for the latter one wonders how Manil. 1.93-4 might affect the argument. S. makes much of Freud and of the Freudian critic Francesco Orlando, and the effect is far more powerful than the straightforward reading of Atreus as exemplary tyrant to which the history of plays on this topic at Rome might direct us. Another distinctive feature is the attempt (20-1) to sketch out an alternative to the standard terms in which the relationship between Senecan tragedy and prose is discussed. S. seeks a third way in preference to the alternatives of fundamental ideological solidarity or tragic subversion of prose dogma, and it is certainly refreshing to read an account of this issue which resists the obvious hierarchy of treating the prose treatises as works which either help explicate the message of the tragedies or against which those tragedies rail. Moreover, when S. does engage with the *De Clementia*, and therefore with the political content of the play (151-76), he does so very well. Finally, the identification of *On the Sublime* as a key text for the literature of the Neronian and Flavian period (127-32, 226) is welcome and convincing, and it is to be hoped that other scholars will follow this path through.

This is by no means an easy book and the interconnection of individual sections is not always obvious. The extended ch. 3 'A Craftier Tereus' (70-138) appears at first to be a sustained analysis of the relationship between *Metamorphoses* 6 and the *Thyestes*. This is indeed one of the things which S. does in the ensuing pages, but Tereus, Procne, and Philomela become ever less substantial presences as the chapter moves on. Nor does S. always take the time to make the obvious points: 'Thracium fiat nefas | maiore numero' at Sen., *Thy.* 54-7 is agonistic in the sense that two children rather than one will enter the pot, just as it is essential to Statian *aemulatio* that the Hopleus and Dymas scene in *Thebaid* 10 should close with the bodies of four young lovers

where its Vergilian model presents only two. Likewise, the analysis of Thyestes' abrupt acceptance of the throne at Sen., *Thy.* 533–4 (108–9, 149–51) might make the obvious point that, the next time we actually see Thyestes, is as he gorges himself and burps at ll. 908–11: for all his protestations, this Thyestes is as subject as he ever was to the *epithumia* which marks out the tyrant and his soul. It is also unclear whether any of the scenes analysed under the heading 'Allegories of Spectatorship' (235–43) really contribute as much as S. suggests to the problem of the Stoic spectator so cogently set out immediately before (228–35).

The standard of the scholarship is high and errors relatively few. Some minor points: p. 28 n. 4 on 'transcriber' would benefit from reference to the technical usage of the verb identified by Serv. at Verg., *Aen.* 5.750; p. 59 n. 83 on Sen., *Thy.* 885–7 as a model for *Titus Andronicus* 2.1.1–4 would find a much closer imitation at Jonson's *Sejanus* 5.1.7–9; p. 136 should refer to the 'servus callidus' not the 'servus currens'; p. 185 'Amphytrion' should read 'Amphitryon'; the p. 201 identification of two separate choruses in the *Troades* may derive from the anxieties expressed by Fantham regarding the content of Sen., *Tro.* 371–408, but Boyle at Sen., *Tro.* 67–163, Tarrant at Sen., *Ag.* 586, and Ferri at [Sen.], *Oct.* 877 all assume that there is but one chorus in this play; p. 203 mistranslates 'falsa quid vates agor?' as 'What have I, false prophethess, to do?'

It is impossible for a review of this length properly to engage with the full richness of this study. Readers will find a good deal to disagree with, rather more to baffle them, and far more still to admire and endorse. A fine work indeed.

*St Anne's College, Oxford*

MATTHEW LEIGH

T. MURPHY, *PLINY THE ELDER'S NATURAL HISTORY. THE EMPIRE IN THE ENCYCLOPAEDIA*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. Pp. 323. ISBN 0-19-926288-8. £53.00.

Pliny's *Natural History* is a peculiarly useful book, a key source of information for historians on aspects of ancient culture from art history to zoology. Trevor Murphy's excellent new book is one of a series of recent studies that attempts to re-evaluate the *Natural History* as a text in its own right, to be read as well as used. M. makes encyclopaedism and empire central to his reading of the *Natural History*, arguing that the pursuit of total power and the pursuit of total knowledge are inextricably linked. Pliny's *Natural History* organizes the whole Roman world from a perspective of centralized authority at Rome: on a practical level, the information it contains is made available by the spread of the Roman Empire and is available to be used by imperial interests; on a symbolic level, the *Natural History* becomes both map and triumphal display of the Roman world.

M.'s book is not the first to see links between empire and encyclopaedism in Pliny's work. SORCHA CAREY's recent book, *Pliny's Catalogue of Culture: Art and Empire in the Natural History* (2003; reviewed below), discussed the *Natural History* as a project to catalogue the Roman Empire, and used this insight to explore Pliny's discussion of art in relation to the text as a whole, and in relation to wider imperial culture in the first century A.D. VALÉRIE NAAS, too, discusses the question of empire and encyclopaedia in her book, *Le projet encyclopédique de Pline l'Ancien* (2002), but both Carey's and Naas's work seems to have appeared too late to be taken into account by M. M.'s work goes further, however, in focusing systematically on the text itself as 'an artefact of empire', and presents a compelling new reading of the structure and the intellectual politics of the text, as well as using the ethnographical and geographical material in the work to explore the cultural politics of the Roman Empire in the first century A.D.

The book falls into two distinct sections: in the first, M. engages with the text as a whole, while the second consists of new readings of Pliny's treatment of barbarian ethnography and geography. This second section makes a valuable contribution to recent studies of the politics of Roman representations of geography, pioneered by Claude Nicolet in *L'Inventaire du monde: géographie et politique aux origines de l'empire romain* (1988), and provides an interesting exposition of how Pliny's representation of far off places and peoples reflects the concerns of contemporary Roman culture.

It is M.'s treatment of the *Natural History* as a whole, however, that is the most innovative aspect of the book. M. presents a careful reassessment of the structure of Pliny's *Natural History*, and argues that the book has a playfully digressive structure which privileges antithesis and metaphor as means of linking its information. At the centre of M.'s approach is the idea that the *Natural History* has a literary aesthetic, which it shares with the work of Aelian, Ovid, and