

SHIPTON (M.) *The Politics of Youth in Greek Tragedy. Gangs of Athens*. Pp. vi + 196. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. Cased, £85. ISBN: 978-1-4742-9507-9.

doi:10.1017/S0009840X18003165

S. has written an engaging introduction to the topic that moves the emphasis away from family interactions and proposes other frameworks for understanding age-based dynamics in tragedy. After a broad methodological introduction, the book presents a series of case studies in a broadly chronological framework covering approximately 50 years. Chapter 2 analyses youthful figures in *Prometheus* as a ‘product of the general Athenian imaginative and political milieu of the mid-fifth century’ (p. 41). S. then develops the theme through chapters on Sophocles’ *Antigone*, Euripides’ *Heraclidae*, Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* and Euripides’ *Orestes*. Chapter 7 examines Euripides’ *Iphigeneia in Aulis* and *Bacchae* as narratives reflecting a contemporary Athenian social crisis.

Although this is explicitly the product of a dissertation, the book has been stripped of unnecessary academic debate, allowing S. to develop his own arguments and entertain more whimsical ideas, such as ‘Could Helenus’ prophecy in *Philoctetes* have been “forgotten”?’ (pp. 106–7). In some places, the lack of supporting argument is frustrating. It would be a striking element of the *Heraclidae*’s soundscape if the play’s vocabulary of youth did indeed reflect ‘open exhortations or rallying calls to the defence of Athens by young men’ at the start of the Peloponnesian War (p. 85), but without any historical contextualisation this remains speculation, and the reader is expected to take this on trust. A similar problem relates to the broader theme of exploring tragic figures through a prism of anthropological work on modern gang activity. The parallels are thought-provoking in some chapters, particularly on Euripides’ *Orestes*, but brief references to Thucydides do not sufficiently establish that the socio-historical phenomenon of *hetairiai* was a significant point of reference for tragic myth. S. himself says that this book is only an ‘initial foray’ into the material, and we may explain limitations to individual arguments by the need to reach a wide audience. When we evaluate the whole project, we see that S. frames the work as a challenge to ‘the prevailing categorization of an undifferentiated “troublesome youth” that is so often used by classical scholars, reflecting an unquestioning use of this stock character by Aristophanes’ (p. 144). This formulation is problematic. It is not clear that there is such an unthinking ‘prevailing characterization’ in scholarship, and Aristophanes’ own work is far more complex than S.’s brief comments suggest.

The neat historical trajectory of the book flattens a number of points that could have nuanced the analysis, such as the issue of gender in *Heraclidae* or the literary interactions between comedy and tragedy in the late fifth century. S. deliberately avoids lengthy discussion of the terminology for youth, as he notes, correctly, that it does map neatly onto English terminology. However, much of the argument relies on linguistic detail and would have been strengthened if S. had been more explicit in defining the parameters of the work. There is a considerable body of evidence from the fifth century which has informed recent socio-historical work on ancient age categories relevant to the analysis of dramatic characters. While there is a lot to interest readers in this book, the issues of definition must be addressed if S. and those who follow him are to be successful in establishing ‘Youth Studies’ as a new field of scholarship.

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