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SUBJECT REVIEWS

Greek Literature

Geoffrey Bakewell[1] finds in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* 'an invaluable perspective on Athenian attempts at establishing their own identity in the late 460s BCE'. The play presents a 'displaced self-portrait of Athens', and the 'ambivalent welcome to exotic immigrants' and 'wariness towards outsiders' makes that portrait 'not entirely flattering' (ix). I am not sure whether this judgement is meant to express a modern perspective, or that of Aeschylus' audience. Bakewell claims that metics 'by their very nature constituted an existential threat to the democratic city and its self-understanding' (8), and that they were perceived as 'threatening' (19), but provides no supporting evidence. To illustrate Athenian attitudes to metics he appeals to the Old Oligarch (not, perhaps, the most representative of witnesses), citing his frustration at not being allowed to assault foreigners; there is no mention of Dicaeopolis (*Ach.* 507–8). It is, of course, true that in *Suppliants* Argos is imperilled by the refugees' arrival: but that is because they are pursued by an army determined to enforce a legal claim on them, which Athenian metics typically were not. The view that tragedies gave spectators a 'mental license to think through a pressing issue in an extended way, and at a safe remove' (123) is widely held, and may be right. But its application ought not to depend on disregarding crucial features of a play's distinctively tragic scenario.

A. J. Bowen's commentary on the *Suppliants*[2] makes mention of Bakewell's metics in a section of the introduction on 'dating by contemporary events'. As a dating criterion, that seems like scraping the bottom of the barrel, but Bowen does not attach particular significance to it ('*Supplices* was clearly not meant to address the problem', 15). The Aris & Phillips series has grown in its ambitions over time, and this volume is one of the most ambitious and substantial. In particular, the problematic state of the text has gained the commentator a licence to give more than customary attention to textual criticism. Though the result may prove challenging to the target audience of the series, this play will never be less than challenging; the assistance that Bowen provides, however demanding it may be, will provide courageous newcomers with invaluable support. Experts, too, will need to take account of it. The publisher's blurb fancifully describes the translation as 'vibrant and lyrical'. Bowen is more realistic: it 'is meant to be helpful to readers with little or no Greek. It is not meant for performance' (35). In a series that

[1] *Aeschylus' Suppliant Women. The Tragedy of Immigration*. By Geoffrey W. Bakewell. Madison, WI, University of Wisconsin Press, 2013. Pp. xii + 209. Paperback £24.50, ISBN: 978-0-299-29174-7.

[2] *Aeschylus. Suppliant Women*. Edited with translation and commentary by A. J. Bowen. Aaris & Phillips Classical Texts. Oxford, Aris & Phillips, 2013. Pp. ii + 374. Hardback £50, ISBN: 978-1-908343-78-9; Paperback £19.99, ISBN: 978-1-908343-34-5.

has not always lived up to the highest standards of presentation, credit should be given for the handsomely printed text and apparatus.

Angeliki Tzanetou,[3] like Bakewell, approaches suppliant tragedies as reflections on Athenian attitudes. But, though she gives approving mention to his interpretation of Aeschylus' *Suppliants* (16), her own focus is on attitudes to empire, using three plays set in Athens (*Eumenides*, *Children of Heracles*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*) to 'document the progressive evolution of Athens' hegemonic ideology in the course of the history of the empire' (129). Tzanetou has executed her project with care and acute intelligence, and has many good things to say; the book is well worth reading. But the project itself is worryingly fragile. Three data-points spread across six decades of complex political and diplomatic history, much of the detail of which is invisible to us, cannot provide robust support for the significance of the trajectory that is plotted with their aid. That would be true even if the readings on which the construction is based were plain to see: in fact, they involve a high degree of interpretative effort, which Tzanetou recognizes ('closely probed…') but promptly displaces onto the text ('…the plays differentiate Athens' hegemonic image from the empire's forceful tactics of domination', 130). I'm worried, too, by the way in which she frames the ideal that is placed in tension with the reality of empire. Demophon's reluctance to order a human sacrifice 'reveals the discrepancy between ideal and practice and the limits of Athens' generosity' (88); 'the scrutiny to which Oedipus is made subject undermines confidence in the strength of Athens' ideals' (107); there is a 'contradiction between Athens' claims to piety and openness against the realities of foreigners' exclusion from civic participation' (113). Did Athenians ever regard the naturalization of foreigners as an obligation of piety? Was indiscriminately embracing potential sources of pollution part of the Athenian ideal? If Demophon had sacrificed his own daughter, would interpreters be celebrating his generosity as an expression of the Athenian ideal? An ideal framed on the assumption of unqualified, unlimited, no-questions-asked commitments is surely too artificial to constitute one pole of an interesting dialectic.

David Slavitt's translation of Sophocles' 'other plays'[4] has two and a half pages of preface that are worse than useless. 'It is in the four plays presented in this volume that we see Sophocles' experimentation and his daring departures from what Aristotle, taking *Oedipus Rex* as his model, described as the proper pattern of tragedy. In Aristotle's model, the protagonist dies at the end' (ix). Aristotle does not prescribe the protagonist's death as part of the proper pattern of tragedy (indeed, in *Poetics* 14 he expresses a preference for tragic plots in which imminent violence is averted); and the protagonist of *Oedipus Rex* is still alive at the end of the play (unlike the protagonist of *Ajax*). As for the translation itself, '*xaire*' for χαῖρε is perverse (*Aj.* 91), and 'oh my, oh me, oh, no. No, no' for ἰώ μοί μοι is mildly risible (385). Slavitt can, to be fair, do much better: 'From darkness measureless time brings forth all things / for darkness to repossess. Nothing endures; no solemn oath or steadfast purpose can last / but time must

[3] *City of Suppliants. Tragedy and the Athenian Empire*. By Angeliki Tzanetou. Austin, TX, University of Texas Press, 2012. Pp. xvi + 206. Hardback £37, ISBN: 978-0-292-73716-7; paperback £16.99, ISBN: 978-0-292-75432-4.

[4] *The Other Four Plays of Sophocles. Ajax, Women of Trachis, Electra, Philoctetes*. Translated by David R. Slavitt. Baltimore, MD, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013. Pp. xiv + 254. Hardback £32, ISBN: 978-1-4214-1136-1; paperback £13, ISBN: 978-1-4214-1137-8.

overwhelm it' (646–9). Note, though, how 'all' has been de-emphasized by its displacement from the initial position; 'darkness', which usurps that position and is further emphasized by repetition, is not in the Greek, and imports distracting connotations. Later in the same speech one trips over the bathetic reflection that enemies' gifts 'have strings attached' (665); and, though Ajax undertakes to 'bow my head to Atreus' sons' (667), the gods in the preceding line have been ignored. The speech's last word, 'saved' (σεσωσμένον), is also suppressed, which renders the following outbreak of celebration by the chorus (or, here, three solo choristers) inexplicable. At the beginning of *Philoctetes,* Slavitt writes: 'This is it, Lemnos, the deserted island of the kind of we talk about' (1–2). That last phrase baffles me. But 'the deserted island' unambiguously says what the original does not: there, it is the shore that is deserted.

Seth Schein, in his Cambridge Green and Yellow commentary,[5] gets that right ('it is the shore, not the island, that is "untrodden by mortals and not inhabited"', 116), unlike T. B. L. Webster in his 1970 contribution to the same series. But Schein goes on to say that Sophocles 'seems to have made the entire island uninhabited'. In a note on a line which fails to describe the island as uninhabited, that is a perplexing thing to say – doubly perplexing when Schein adds that this 'departs strikingly both from the mythological tradition and from the real condition of the island, which would have been well known to an Athenian audience'. The note casts no further light on this point: there is only a reference to the unique parallel for ἄστιπτος ('untrodden') in Synesius; a flurry of 'cf.'s relating to a cognate word (ἀστιβής), of the kind that excites the suspicion that investing effort in cf.-ing would be unprofitable; and a feeble paradox ('the land "untrodden by mortals" is home to the στίβος…of Phil.'.). Enterprising readers who consult the index under 'Lemnos' will turn to page 6, where an ambiguously worded sentence may mislead them into believing that Dio Chrysostom says that Sophocles' Lemnos is uninhabited. If they avoid that error, they will have to conclude that Schein *propria persona* cites line 2 as if it described the island as 'untrodden and uninhabited', in apparent contradiction to his note *ad loc.*; the explicit reference to that note on page 7 will do nothing to dispel their confusion. In a helpful commentary, the note to line 2 would refer us to line 221; it would explain whether we are to imagine the audience foreseeing line 221 from the outset (and, if so, how) or retrospectively revising its initial assumptions (and, if so, what the point of that was); and it would note that the evidence of 221 is indecisive (Jebb's fairly helpful note meets the first and third of these criteria). By that standard, this does not qualify as a helpful commentary. That is not at all to say that it is a *bad* commentary: it is packed full of philological scholarship, and is unmistakeably the fruit of long and careful thought about the play. But it seems to have been written without any clear conception of what it is trying to do, or what its potential readers need; the selection and presentation of material consequently lacks a guiding principle. Though his commentary was certainly due for supersession, Webster did at least try to keep 'the main single aim of the series' in mind: 'to provide the student with the guidance that he [*sic*] needs for the interpretation of the book as a work of literature'. Schein, working on

[5] *Sophocles. Philoctetes*. Edited with a commentary by Seth L. Schein. Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. xii + 375. Hardback £60, ISBN: 978-0-521-86277-6; paperback £22.99, ISBN: 978-0-521-68143-8.

a scale perhaps three and a half times larger than Webster, has much more to offer, but offers it much less well. Like the Aris & Phillips commentaries, the Cambridge series has experienced mission-creep over the years: the gains have been undeniable, but the attendant risks should not be overlooked.

One series that has kept consistently to its mission is the Companions to Greek and Roman Tragedy, formerly of Duckworth and Bristol Classical Press, and now entirely assimilated to the Bloomsbury imprint. Niall Slater writes lucidly on *Alcestis*,[6] achieving particular success in the chapter on reception, which is difficult to do well and is often the weakest part of this kind of book. Slater's account of 'the afterlives of an afterlife' covers a lot of ground, but dwells long enough on selected examples to avoid degenerating into a superficial catalogue. Other chapters cover context, action, and themes. Slater has a particular interest in the audience's prior 'frame of expectations' (5) and the first-time audience's 'linear experience of the play as it is performed' (8). That general approach is one for which I have a great deal of sympathy. On particular points, needless to say, we often disagree. The idea that the absence of satyrs was a protest against restrictions on comic freedom of speech (6–7) strikes me as far-fetched; and I cannot see how Athenian war-orphans (54–5) can be relevant to the children in this play, whose father is still alive. A final word for the publisher: a new page layout, presenting (to my eyes, at least) a cleaner and clearer appearance, is no compensation for an act of mindless vandalism – the page headers which used to make it easy to move from a page of text to an associated endnote have been replaced by a single running header, 'Notes'. How many readers need help in recognizing notes? Help in locating them is what we need.

When the first volume of Robert Fowler's *Early Greek Mythography* was reviewed in this journal (*G&R* 49 [2002], 264–5), the reviewer found it 'a little disappointing that vol. 2, the commentary, could not appear at the same time', though observing that 'this first volume of texts gives us every reason to think that the whole will be an outstanding work of scholarship', and expressing 'the hope that volume 2 will contain translations'. The appearance of the commentary volume,[7] though it leaves that reviewer's hope unsatisfied ('a translation of selected fragments, with brief notes' is envisaged, however), amply confirms his prediction. The introduction proceeds from an evocative opening to enlightening reflections on what Fowler's selected authors were doing. The commentary comes in two parts. Part A, the 'Mythological Commentary', is organized topically, from 'Theogony' to 'The Migrations' (and miscellaneous 'Other Fragments'), the discussion in each section ranging across the whole corpus: the relentlessly reasonable scholarship, spiced with flashes of unobtrusive humour, with which Fowler picks his way through a morass of conflicting, and imperfectly preserved, variants is a source of wonder. Part B, organized by author, addresses standard philological issues. The volume closes with addenda and (given the complexity of the work, surprisingly few) corrigenda to its predecessor, fifty-seven pages of bibliography, and indexes of the fragments and other passages cited, of Greek words, and of names and subjects.

[6] *Euripides. Alcestis*. By Niall W. Slater. Companions to Greek and Roman Tragedy. London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013. Pp. x + 141. Hardback £50, ISBN: 978-1-7809-3472-3; paperback £16.99, ISBN: 978-1-7809-3473-0.

[7] *Early Greek Mythography, II. Commentary*. By Robert L. Fowler. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. xxii + 825. Hardback £148, ISBN: 978-0-19-814741-1.

This is, indeed, an outstanding work of scholarship. I note that the first volume was reviewed under the heading of Religion; twelve years later, the second volume has been assigned to Greek Literature. But, for a reason that will be apparent from the publication data, I did not feel moved to protest.

There has, in fact, been no dedicated Religion review since 2009 – a symptom, no doubt, of the relentless advance of secularization. But a Religion review might have provided a more appropriate home for the translation of the Orphic hymns by Apostolos Athanassakis, first published in 1977 and now 'revisited and rejuvenated' (vii) in collaboration with Benjamin M. Wolkow.[8] The hymns are basically 'catalogues of religious epithets' (xviii). That format might well have been cumulatively powerful in liturgical use (as the translators argue in their introduction). But, as literature, these texts leave me cold. To take a random example, the tenth hymn elicits grudging admiration for the dexterity with which it reaches line 28 (of 30) without the aid of any verb; read off the page, however, a stream of epithets and adjectival phrases does not grip the attention. The translation sacrifices the dexterity of the original, supplying enough verbs to make tolerable sense in English: but the result is no more gripping. It is curious, too, that line 29 is translated twice, both times without the syntactically necessary τάδε, while line 30 is not translated at all. The accompanying notes are informative, though often under-referenced (for example, 'one obscure writer calls Pan "celestial"', 95).

At first glance, Robin Hard's translation of Epictetus[9] gave a worryingly stilted impression. But that was merely a faithful reflection of the stiltedness of Arrian's prefatory letter. As soon as I turned over the page, I found Epictetus addressing me with bracing immediacy. Hard's crisp, clear, and lively rendering is a joy to read. Christopher Gill, who provides an introduction and excellent notes, describes Epictetus' style as 'forceful, direct, and challenging' (vii): those characteristics come across amazingly well in this translation. Epictetus is clever and subtle, too: you will need to keep your wits about you when you read this book.

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Latin Literature

Anyone who has ever taught or studied the *Aeneid* will be familiar with student gripes that the protagonist, Aeneas, does not meet their expectations of a hero: stolid, boring, wooden, uninspiring, lacking in emotional range. Likewise, students of Lucan's *Civil War* often find it hard to get a handle on the figure of Cato, and his hard-line heroics

[8] *The Orphic Hymns*. Translated with an introduction and notes by Apostolos N. Athanassakis and Benjamin M. Wolkow. Baltimore, MD, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013. Pp. xxiv + 255. Hardback £21, ISBN: 978-1-4214-0881-1; paperback £12, ISBN: 978-1-4214-0882-8.

[9] *Epictetus. Discourses, Fragments, Handbook*. Translated by Robin Hard, with an introduction and notes by Christopher Gill. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. xxxvi + 355. Paperback £9.99, ISBN: 978-0-19-959518-1.