

## BOOK REVIEW

*Brill's Companion to Roman Tragedy*. Edited by GEORGE W.M. HARRISON. Leiden: Brill, 2015. Pp. xxii + 452. E-book, \$181.00. ISBN 978-9-004-23159-7.

This is an exciting time to be working on Roman tragedy. Whether the fragments of Naevius or the overstuffed *Hercules Oetaeus* are your pleasure, there are now many more resources for the scholar or student than there were just a decade ago.<sup>1</sup> Among this crowd Harrison's new companion is notable for its ability to offer sure guidance not only to recent controversies and findings, but also to avenues for further exploration and development. There is much to like in this volume and only a few essays come up short of the high standard.

Gesine Manuwald begins the volume with a cogent overview of the ins-and-outs and challenges of editing Republican tragic fragments. While this piece does not stress analysis of the evidence, it effectively documents the problems of deriving, attributing, editing, ordering, and reading such fragments. Petra Schierl's interpretation of Pacuvius' *Niptra* takes into account the Ciceronian context of the major fragments of that play. She shows how the didactic intent that critics read into the play is probably caused by Cicero's own appropriation of the play.

Robert Cowan's impressive chapter ruminates on how "Roman" these tragedies really are. By incorporating postcolonial theory and positioning how the appropriation of Greek culture combines "features of colonized and colonizing literature" (72), Cowan provides a fresh interpretation of Republican tragedy. His section on the tension between "domesticating" (Romanizing) and "foreignizing" (Hellenizing) translations in Roman tragedy is especially useful for positioning the tragedians' views on their own self-conscious Romanness. Mario Erasmo's chapter conflates intertextuality and metatheater in an attempt to un-

<sup>1</sup> The new Teubners of the *Tragicorum Romanorum Fragmenta*, G. Manuwald's *Roman Republican Theatre: A History* (Cambridge, 2011), A.J. Boyle's *An Introduction to Roman Tragedy* (London, 2006), *Pallas* 95 (2014) dedicated to Seneca, and certain essays from Harrison and Liapis' *Performance in Greek and Roman Theatre* (Leiden, 2013) immediately come to mind. The near-future looks bright as well with a volume of *Ramus* devoted to Senecan poetics, L. D. Ginsberg's monograph on *Octavia*, and A. Augoustakis' commentary to the *Hercules Oetaeus*.

derstand more fully the description of Hippolytus' death. Instead of concentrating on the ramifications of allusions to Accius' *Medea sive Argonautae* in this scene, Erasmo is both everywhere and nowhere, as he touches on intertextuality, the amphitheater, the multiple roles of actors, the sea monster displayed during the aedileship of M. Aemilius Scaurus in 58 BCE, *Jaws*, and more.

The following chapters focus more insistently on Senecan and pseudo-Senecan tragedy. Thomas Kohn explores what is known about publishing in ancient Rome, and how such information may help us understand the audience for these tragedies (readers? spectators? *recitatio* audience?). David Konstan's close reading of the opening of *Hercules Oetaeus* underscores the rhetorical sophistication of the poetry and the need for an active reader to make sense of its compositional density. Could this be the work of Seneca? Konstan believes it is a possible "rough draft from Seneca's own hand" (117).

George W.M. Harrison traces the motif of the fall of Troy starting in Republican tragedy and culminating in Seneca's tragedies, especially in the characterization of Hecuba and the chorus of the *Troas*. He takes the Republican fragments of Roman tragedy seriously as antecedents to Seneca's plays (as do many in this volume), and this results in innovative readings of the material, as does his insistence that the fall of Troy should not be looked at from a Greek viewpoint, "to the Romans, the Trojans were 'us' not 'them'" (141). This essay also offers a reading of *Troas*' performance conventions; the specifics of these conventions are the topic of Harrison's excellent epilogue.

P.J. Davis resurrects a political reading of Seneca's *Thyestes*, showing how such a reading links Seneca to previous Republican tragic authors. Accius' *Atreus* offers a clear example of a tragedy engaged in contemporary political issues, and Davis finds that Seneca's intertextual links to Accius help to delineate his own concerns with heredity, tyranny, and power.

The third section is concerned with the way Roman tragedy interacts with other genres. Seneca's messenger speeches conspicuously feature epic elements and Annette Baertschi describes how these elements enhance the *enargeia* of the account, possibly evoke the aesthetics of pantomime, and shape the audience's perception of the world of the play. Seneca's development of hyper-epic elements will turn "the listener (and reader) into a virtual eyewitness" (186) and "create a foil against which to contrast the subsequent events" (191), a development that Baertschi nicely ties into Seneca's larger philosophical/pedagogical project.

The importance of Republican tragedy for Ovid's elegiac works is the subject of Marco Filippi's essay, which shows the various permutations of his "re-

reading of tragic myths in an elegiac tone" (201), focusing especially on the *Heroides*. While Filippi points out many reminiscences of archaic tragedy in Ovid's works, his conclusions are often underdeveloped. Lauren Donovan Ginsberg's valuable contribution focuses on the genre of *fabula praetexta* and the complex relationship between these historical dramas and tragedy. Ginsberg asserts the importance of tragedy for the genre from its inception.

Christopher Star's consideration of Roman tragedy and philosophy shows how Roman drama from an early date engaged with philosophical concepts and Latin philosophical writers such as Cicero benefit from tragic ideas and *sententiae*. His study of self-apostrophe and self-command in Senecan tragedy is particularly assured, especially the manner in which Atreus "blurs the lines between the worlds of literature and philosophy" (252). Jean-Pierre Aygon moves from a consideration of cued and un-cued entrances in Senecan tragedy to a close analysis of the "philosophico-political meaning" of such entrances in Seneca's *Oedipus*. A particularly pregnant silence after *Oed.* 783 is evidence for "the contortions and contradictions of a tormented self" (280) and shows how performance criticism can help delineate Oedipus' characterization.

One of my favorite pieces in the collection was Niall Slater's "Roman Tragedy through a Comic Lens" which uncovers some of the biases present in Roman comedy's reception of tragedy and examines comedy's predilection for (para)tragic scenes of madness and hyperbole.

Helen Slaney begins the final section of the *Companion* with an essay exploring the reception of Seneca's tragedies in works such as Schlegel's *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, Kleist's *Penthesilea* and Shelley's *The Cenci*. Although Schlegel made Seneca the enemy of Greek sublimity, his tropes and dramaturgy can be seen behind Shelly's characters and the action of Kleist's *Hypertragödie*. Hugo Claus' adaptations of Seneca's *Thyestes*, *Oedipus*, and *Phaedra* are the subject of the next chapter. Betine van Zyl Smit pays special attention to the staging of Claus' plays in order to flesh out the way they embody Artaud's "theater of cruelty" as well as their ability to speak to contemporary concerns such as nuclear catastrophe, ecological disaster, and more. In the final essay of the reception section, Gregory Staley shows how T.S. Eliot's interest in Seneca moves beyond the famous essays "Senecan in Elizabethan Translation" and "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca" to his idea of verse drama, his conception of personal heroism, and his own vacillations between philosophy and poetry. This chapter does much to show how Eliot's reading of Seneca pushed his own dramaturgy for-

ward. I especially enjoyed Staley's characterization of Sweeny in *Sweeney Agonistes*: "Sweeny comes across as a Senecan character who has read Eliot's characterization of Senecan drama" (353).

In conclusion, this is a strong volume. One minor criticism is the seeming lack of internal cross-references, aside from Harrison's epilogue. Otherwise, the reader will find here a treasure trove of insights on Roman tragedy from a distinguished group of scholars.

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