

BOOK REVIEW

Euripides' Electra: A Commentary. By H. M. ROISMAN and C. A. E. LUSCHNIG. Oklahoma Series in Classical Culture. Norman, OK: Oklahoma University Press, 2011. Pp. xvii + 366. Paper, \$32.95. ISBN 978-0-8061-4119-0.

What a pleasure it was to see this commentary arrive on my desk. Having used the Roisman–Luschnig commentary on the *Alcestis* in my middle-level Greek class for years, I was delighted to see I would have another Roisman–Luschnig work for my students to use. This commentary is, as the authors say, designed for students at various levels in their reading of Greek tragedy. It provides basic information for those reading the *Electra* early in their Greek studies, and both review and guidance for the more advanced student. In their Introduction Roisman and Luschnig include common grammatical and literary terms, and the standard abbreviations for Greek authors and their works. They then offer basic information about the three tragedians, the myth that forms this play, and the form and conventions of Greek drama production in ancient Athens, including three line-drawings of the Greek theater. Graduate level students could use these pages for refreshers and then turn to the straightforward presentation of meter and prosody; note that metrical analyses for the odes and monody are given in Appendix I. Roisman and Luschnig conclude the Introduction with a discussion of the play's date, presenting both sides of the issue and tentatively favoring (I myself am happy to note) a post-Sophoclean date of composition.

The Greek text is based on Murray's 1913 edition and Diggle's 1981 text, with readings from Cropp's 1988 edition, as well as the earlier texts of Denniston and Paley. The Greek is printed in easy-to-read italics. I mention this benefit because it is a definite plus for all who have peered intently at the very small print of the standard Oxford texts. Some might miss the formal app. crit. at page bottom; the authors explain (24) that they have noted any substantial changes from Murray and Diggle in the Commentary.

What makes this book exceptional are the pages which follow the Greek text. The Notes and Commentary are wonderfully inclusive. Roisman and Luschnig give line-by-line information that is far more than mere notes. History,

geography, and mythic references are explicated, grammar and alternate readings are noted along with scholarly debate on theme and meaning. Students who turn to these will often find a translation for the more difficult passages, guidance in translating more straightforward phrases.

Appendix 2, "Discussions," reviews the three *Electra* plays. The authors do not do this in the usual Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides presentation but rather set out the material by characters and theme: Electra's plots, Orestes' tokens, and how the major characters are portrayed, e.g., Orestes' purposeful return in Sophocles' play, his hesitation in Euripides' script. The role of the divinities in the various plays is also discussed: how Aeschylus' Orestes is god-directed, that deities do not appear until the end in Euripides' play. Appendix 2 concludes with a discussion of two post-classical versions of Euripides' play. Jean Giraudoux's *Électre* was staged in 1937 Paris. Here the playwright wrote his script as a sort-of detective story focused on the ambiguity of the myth itself, and in which *Électre* is another one of Giraudoux's exceptional young women. Michael Cacoyannis' created his film *Elektra* in 1962. Film allows all action to be seen and Cacoyannis takes full advantage of his medium, allowing the visual to largely replace the verbal.

Roisman and Luschnig's edition is a user-friendly text, for its appendices make it possible for a reader to need to have only one book on hand. In Appendix 3 they offer an Index of Verbs in the forms and lines in which they appear in the text. Such a listing makes such a difference to the student who cannot recognize the more unusual forms of a Greek verb. Appendix 4 is a Review of Grammatical and Rhetorical constructions. Here one can find clarification of crasis, the use of the objective clause after a verb of fearing or an example of anastrophe; again, all this information is offered line by line.

Appendix 5 permits readers to leave their LSJ on the shelf: here is a very complete vocabulary of words used in the text; those appearing more than five times are printed in bold face—an obvious encouragement for the early student to learn these words. A nine page bibliography rounds out the book followed by an inclusive index that covers themes, loci, and names mentioned in the commentary.

In sum, Roisman and Luschnig's commentary on Euripides' *Electra* is a masterful work and (as I have said before) after its publication "there will be no need for another commentary [on this play] for decades." Finally, I must report that the authors kindly let me use their book in its nascent form when I was teaching the *Electra* in my final graduate seminar on Greek Tragedy at the University of

Florida. So I can verify that my students found this book truly useful for their reading and understanding of Euripides' *Electra*.

University of Florida, karelisa@ufl.edu

KARELISA HARTIGAN