

BOOK REVIEW

A Commentary on the Rhesus Attributed to Euripides. By VAYOS LIAPIS. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. Pp. lxxviii + 364. Hardcover, £90.00/\$185.00. ISBN 978-0-19-959168-8.

Commentaries, like readers, come in all sorts. Vayos Liapis' commentary on *Rhesus* is of the kind I prefer, for he dedicates it not only to explicating the text, but also to advancing an argument. "In order to establish whether *Rhesus* can or cannot be Euripidean, and (more importantly) in order to lay the groundwork for a proper appreciation of this idiosyncratic play, nothing less than a full-scale commentary is required" (v). Production meets the usual standards of the press: typographical errors are few enough;¹ binding is adequate; the reproduction of Diggle's OCT text leaves a little to be desired. Liapis translates each lemma into English. End matter includes indices *Graecitatis*, *Nominum et Rerum Potiorum*, and *Locorum Potiorum*.

This is effectively a book about dramaturgy and authorship. Liapis' introduction, now required reading for anyone working on *Rhesus*, thus introduces the main interpretative issues ("The Mythical Background," "Dramaturgy and Stagecraft," "Character-Portrayal," "Language and Style; Metre," "The Authenticity Question," and "The Text") and also outlines the argument: the *Rhesus* attributed to Euripides was composed by a man of the theatre imitating the style of the old master with limited success, probably in the fourth century, possibly for performance in Macedon.

Liapis does force the issue at times. At p. xxix, despite citing Pickard-Cambridge's caveat on the matter, Liapis maintains that "*kothornos*-boots" on Apulian red-figure vases are "a tell-tale sign of theatrical influence." Kenneth Dover (*Aristophanes: Frogs* (Oxford, 1993) ad 47) and, more recently, Rosie Wyles (*Costume in Greek Tragedy* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2011) 25) affirm that

¹ xxii: "n.*". xlv n. 126: "n.*" (twice). lxxvii with n. 226: Liapis repeats (not verbatim) an earlier assertion (p. lvi with n. 175) about the poet's lax approach to interlinear hiatus. 57: παρέμβολήν [sic]. 62: "or later hypotheses-collection[s] were falsely attributed." 70: references to both "Popp" and "H. Popp." 102: ὄτι [sic]. 110: "Fraenkel;". *passim*: the editor of tragic fragments is sometimes "Radt," sometimes "R."

classical *kothornoi*—to be distinguished from post-classical *cothurni*—were not a synecdochic icon for tragedy.

On the one hand, *Rhesos* supposedly demonstrates its poet's incompetence. On the other, while arguing for a fourth speaking actor in the Alexandros scene, Liapis claims that "no half-competent playwright" would have risked the failure of a very fast costume change (xliv). On that note, Liapis is very dismissive of the possibility of a fourth actor at *Khoephoroi* 886–90, calling it a "specious" example (xliv) and thus implying that the case is open-and-shut.

Due to the play's depiction of Odysseus and Diomedes, we are told, "one is bound to conclude that the playwright is manifestly unsympathetic to the Greeks" (li). The most one can conclude is that the poet's *portrayal* is manifestly unsympathetic.

To my mind, a concentration on minor, unnamed characters is anything but paradoxical (liii) in a drama which owes so much to Euripidean style.²

I resist any assumption that "late" stylistic features are necessarily *late-Euripidean*, and I am thus wary of the conclusion, "That one and the same play can combine metrical and linguistic features both from early and from late Euripides can mean one thing, and one thing only: *Rhesus* is the work of a later imitator" (lvii).

Nevertheless, Liapis' sensible and cogent argument has real explanatory power. I, for one, am persuaded. Moreover, Liapis' commitment to his argument (if not his author) also supports the other goal of the commentary—to understand *Rhesos* as a piece of theater. He meticulously unpacks the play, *qua* verse drama, such that even a reader convinced of Euripidean authorship should still come away from the book enlightened about how *Rhesos* works or does not work, as the case may be.

I was gratified to discover that Liapis and I came independently to the same conclusion regarding the staging of *Rhesos*: neither the stage-building nor its door(s) represent anything, and Hektor sleeps not in a Homeric hut (κλισίη) but in a bivouac (69–70).³ On a related note, Liapis makes astute observations on Odysseus and Diomedes' entrance to an empty stage (xxxvii–viii). Further, I approve of Liapis' forthright approach to the problem of the chorus, and now

² See now F. Yoon, *The Use of Anonymous Characters in Greek Tragedy: The Shaping of Heroes* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

³ S. Perris, "Stagecraft and the Stage Building in *Rhesus*," *GeR* 59 (2012) 151–64.

agree entirely that “The chorus’ identity as soldiers on guard duty proves to be an exceedingly bad idea” (xli).

As his own entries in the bibliography illustrate, Liapis has spent some years now working on *Rhesos*, and in the commentary proper we reap the fruits of that labor on points of detail as well as wider issues. See, for example, the exemplary treatment of the *Rhesos*-poet’s (ab)use of the word ἄντιξ (instances of which may be found in the index Graecitatis); the explanation of λῦσον βλεφάρων γοργωπὸν ἔδραν (*Rh.* 8); or the lucid account of the Hypotheseis to the play. On the other hand, I strongly disagree that “it is doubtful ... that [δαίμων] is ever used as a mere synonym for ‘god’” (87). Compare, for example, *Bakkhai* 22, 417, 498, et cetera.

Rhesos is probably our only extant fourth-century tragedy and, some would say, the weakest extant tragedy. Perhaps the most refreshing thing about this book, then, is that Liapis implicitly stakes a claim for the play’s importance without apologizing for its (lack of) quality. This excellent commentary deservedly takes its place as the standard reference work on *Rhesos* for scholars and graduate students alike.

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