BOOK REVIEW

Metapoetry in Euripides. By ISABELLE TORRANCE. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. xi + 365, 12 illus. $135. ISBN 978-0-19-965783-4.

On a scholarly scene flush with discussions of metapoetics and self-referentiality now arrives a book ambitiously surveying the corpus of Euripides, that quintessentially sophisticated and self-aware dramatist. *Metapoetry in Euripides* is wide-ranging in its interests, from the word καινός as trigger for reflexive awareness to the multiple ways in which *Orestes* revisits features of the *Oresteia*, from details of stagecraft (was the *skene* in *Iphigenia among the Taurians* adorned with skulls?) to the didactic nature of *Trojan Women*.

The book is eclectically organized. Chapter One treats metapoetry by source material, namely Aeschylus' *Oresteia* as reworked in *Electra, Iphigenia among the Taurians* and *Orestes*; the next two chapters are guided by form, considering *ekphraseis* and letters that allude to earlier works; Chapter Four is something of a catch-all, discussing allusion in plays which enact events from the Trojan War; and Chapter Five mounts the argument that metapoetry accounts for the distinctive tone of Euripidean drama.

The book is also eclectic in its understanding of metapoetry. In most cases the word, as Torrance uses it, means *allusion* to a prior work, especially by Homer or Aeschylus; in a number of places it involves *self-reference*—words or themes that draw attention to the play's status as a work of art ("metapoetry" proper); and occasionally it substitutes for *metadrama*, devices that make us aware we are watching a theatrical performance.

It follows that the interpretive frame is eclectic, sometimes addressing Euripides' attitude toward his predecessors (arguing that allusion serves to complement Homer but compete with Aeschylus), sometimes considering his pervasive self-awareness (concluding that self-reference is the source of his distinctive tone).

Because it is so eclectic, the book is not easy to summarize. It is also hard to evaluate, as discussions are of varied success. One of the longer and more interesting discussions is of ekphrasis in *Phoenician Women* and Aeschylus' *Seven*

against Thebes, where Torrance argues for a double set of allusions, the descriptions of heroes in Antigone's teikhoskopia, and those of their shields in the Messenger Speech. In the first case, the contrast between Aeschylean σήματα and Euripidean warriors implicitly claims superior craftsmanship, in the second, the shields show Euripides "capping" Aeschylus by choosing more appropriate and accurate symbols for each person.

A detailed treatment of *Andromache* argues for systematic allusion to Sophocles' lost *Hermione,* with further allusions to his *Peleus* and the *Iliad,* leading to interesting observations on the characterization of Andromache, Neoptolemus and Orestes, and the underwhelming conclusion that metapoetic devices present the play "as a double continuation, of Homer and of Sophocles, as a rival to the latter, and as a new version of this myth" (206).

Less successful is the opening discussion of *Electra.* Torrance approaches the much-studied recognition scene by teasing out self-referential terms and themes; thus the Old Man brings wine, which can symbolize poetry, he refers to the χρῶμα of the hair at the tomb, a word which may denote the texture of music, he speaks of the measure of a footprint, a term in meter, and asks about weaving, a metaphor for poetry. The claim that each is metapoetic is strained, and the conclusion—that the audience is invited to reflect on dramatic conventions—adds little to our understanding of the scene.

The eclectic nature of *Metapoetry in Euripides* should allow it to appeal to readers with a wide range of interests, both allusion and self-reference, the formal device of ekphrasis and the theme of writing, Greek drama in general and Euripides in particular.

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