BOOK REVIEW

Emotion in Action: Thucydides and the Tragic Chorus By EIRENE VISVARDI. *Mnemosyne* Supplements 377. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015. Pp. x, 287. Hardcover, \$ 149. ISBN 978-90-04-26929-3.

visvardi's monograph can be placed firmly within the recent "emotional turn" in classical scholarship: Athens is no longer a city of words, it has become 'a culture of passions' (3). At the same time, she makes a claim to innovation with her focus on collectives—on how that culture of passions can be seen working not at the level of the individual, but through the collective institutions of tragedy (both the chorus and the audience) as well as in the narrative of collective actions in Thucydides' *History*. This focus also draws Visvardi's book into the ambit of recent work in cognitive narratology, notably Alan Palmer's analysis of "intermental" or 'social' minds (see especially his *Social Minds in the Novel* (2010)), though Palmer is not cited by Visvardi. On the other hand, she does make use of more overtly political theorists such as Sharon Krause's *Civil Passions* (2007) as well as of the South African Truth and Reconciliation commission (140-141).

The structure of Visvardi's work is clear. She lays out the terrain in an introduction on 'Choral Emotions and Collective Passions'. There follows a chapter on collective psychology in Thucydides, which re-visits familiar texts such as the Funeral Oration, the plague, the *stasis* at Corcyra, and the battle in the Great Harbour at Syracuse as well as the broader thematic opposition of *orgê* and *gnômê* that runs through the account of Pericles' leadership (and has already been the subject of detailed study, before the current focus on the emotions, by scholars such as Edmunds, whose 1975 monograph *Chance and Intelligence in Thucydides* is cited by Visvardi, and Huart, whose 1973 *Gnômê chez Thucydide et ses contemporains* is not). The chapter on Thucydides is followed by a chapter devoted to Aeschylus (*Eumenides, Supplices, Seven against Thebes*) and then a chapter devoted to both Sophocles (*Philoctetes*) and Euripides (*Bacchae*). The choice of plays is controlled by Visvardi's contention that they all display 'emotion in action'. A short coda draws the results together.

The basic premise of Visvardi's work is hard to contest. In line with much recent work on the emotions (and with Aristotle), she breaks down the barriers between emotion and reason. More ambitious are her attempts to look to tragedy for positive responses to some of the issues concerning collection emotion that are raised by Thucydides. On the one hand, she argues that "since emotional engagement incorporates affect and cognition, in enacting and theorizing pity and fear the tragic chorus can be seen ... as enabling a pleasurable access to both the affect and beliefs that constitute these emotions while consolidating the audience in the very experience of empathizing with choral emotion" (30). On the other hand, she moves beyond this assumed analogy of chorality and spectatorship to make the suggestion that both the choruses in tragedy and Thucydides "reflect and offer diverse approaches to ... a vital preoccupation in 5th c. Athens": "how to cultivate, or even sublimate, collective emotion in the democratic state in order to channel its motivational power into judicious action and, therefore, render it conducive to social cohesion and collective prosperity" (37).

Visvardi's readings of individual tragedies flesh out the implications of this provocative claim. The *Philoctetes* is said to make the case "for the cultivation of pity as an emotional disposition that enhances attachment, develops trust, and leads to concerned and concerted action" (212, cf. 241), while the *Bacchae* is even seen as one possible response to questions raised by Thucydides: 'collective emotion in (voluntary) choral action' is seen as fulfilling a need "to devise ways and (aesthetic) practices to render collective emotion reflective and sensible" (238). Visvardi does not (one assumes) mean that the *Bacchae* is literally a response to Thucydides: rather, Thucydides' work is read as an informed reflection on, and participant in, a broader debate important to the workings of the Athenian democracy.

Visvardi is moving here to some thought-provoking and provocative claims which offer a new approach to debates on the social function(s) of tragedy. With its diversity of voices and its diversity of ways of experiencing and practicing social and political participation, tragedy is read as offering "paradigms of affective participation to be taken outside the theatre, into the courts and the political assembly" (248). These are interesting claims, but they could do with rather more fleshing-out than is possible in the Coda to this book. The preceding chapters have offered much solid and worthwhile analysis of the separate plays, but they contain little that will surprise those used to relevant literature. And while 'Thucydides and the tragic chorus' is a bold sub-title, Visvardi has not done much to make its two components speak to each other in the course of the monograph. It

is to be hoped, then, that Visvardi takes her investigations further in the future. For now, there is much interesting material for students of the relevant authors as well as of ancient (and modern) democracy to ponder.

TIM ROOD

St Hugh's College, Oxford, timothy.rood@st-hughs.ox.ac.uk