

BOOK REVIEW

The Structure and Performance of Euripides' Helen. BY C. W. MARSHALL. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Pp. xi + 323. Hardcover, \$99. ISBN 9781107073753.

Long gone, thankfully, are the days in which scholars focused solely on the verbal elements of Greek drama. Recent books such as Melissa Mueller's *Objects as Actors* (2016) and George Harrison and Vayos Liapis's edited volume *Performance in Greek and Roman Theatre* (2013) have demonstrated the need to move beyond reading ancient texts, as they illuminate various aspects of the performance of Greek tragedy, comedy, and satyr play, from props to the theatrical space itself. Included in the ranks of such important books exploring the rich and varied extra-textual aspects of Greek and Roman drama should be Marshall's *The Structure and Performance of Euripides' Helen*. Taking as a case study two of Euripides' plays produced in 412 (both *Helen* and the fragmentary *Andromeda*), Marshall examines the manner in which the play's stagecraft, broadly defined to "whatever happened on stage" (5) from actors' physical positions and quality of delivery to the presence of props and masks (8), helps create meaning for a viewing audience.

Marshall's study is driven by the idea that attention to such performance realities—many of which are effectively unrecoverable—might yield compelling new evidence leading to alternate ways for interpreting ancient Greek tragedy beyond the surviving scripts themselves. For a book effectively focused on the ephemeral, this is a bold claim, but the book succeeds in giving emphasis to certain features which are at times overlooked in the study of Greek tragedy, such as the myriad choices available to the ancient tragic poet as *didaskalos* in the production process of a play and the potential and numerous expectations of a fifth-century audience member. A particular strength of the book is its consideration of the *Helen* alongside its sister play *Andromeda*: Marshall's reading accentuates the contrasting focus offered by each play when placed side by side, namely, the protean qualities of the *Helen* versus the relative static nature of *Andromeda*. Overall the book offers suggestive new paths towards approaching ancient performance. As a result, it should be of interest to both students and scholars of

Greek tragedy, as well as to theatre practitioners seeking more nuanced insight into the fifth-century particulars of ancient drama.

The first chapter contains a useful overview of the many limits and benefits to this particular model of performance criticism, which heavily relies on stagecraft, including the scattered nature of the evidence and the inherent heterogeneous nature of audience response. Here, Marshall outlines how a particular understanding of the *mise-en-scène* of an ancient performance may nevertheless be recovered on the basis of nine categories of evidence. Given that the first five (the plays, the physical space of the theatre, contemporaneous visual and artistic representations, theatrical anecdotes, and conventions of the theatre) have received considerable attention elsewhere, Marshall expands this traditional list to include four further categories, which, somewhat paradoxically, range from the concrete (“audience expectations” and “directorial decisions”) to the universal (“performance history” and “recycling”). In my view, this refreshingly accessible methodological discussion should be required reading for any student and scholar interested in matters of performance on the ancient stage.

Chapters 2–5 are devoted to the dramatic structure of *Helen* and *Andromeda*, as well as other features that might have informed audience expectations in 412 BC. Students in particular will profit from chapter two’s extensive discussion of the *Helen*’s structure and chapter four’s treatment of the chorus and music, both of which describe the various elements that were familiar to the ancient Athenian spectators, in turn illuminating ways in which tragedians were able to subvert expectations. In the *Helen* Euripides famously delays the first stasimon until 1107, a feat which Marshall describes in terms of ‘denying the audience its expected pulse’, creating a play that is ‘grasping for order’ and ‘deliberately disjointed’ (24–25).

Chapter three addresses Euripides’ interest in Helen specifically as a protagonist for his stage, providing her history on the Athenian stage (tragedy, comedy, satyr play) in order to suggest the possibility that *Trojan Women*, *Helen* and *Orestes* were among the first tragedies to treat her as a major character. Given the paucity of the evidence, in particular the lack of knowledge of plays such as Sophocles’ *The Rape of Helen* (*TrGF* 4 180–83) and *The Demand for Helen’s Return* (*TrGF* 4 177–80) beyond their titles, it is difficult to assess Marshall’s claim that for Euripides writing in 415 “Helen represents relatively virgin territory for a tragic playwright” (70).

Perhaps the most provocative chapters in the book are the discussion of stage directions and directorial decisions in chapters 6 and 7. Marshall argues for

the development of a specialized literacy for reading ancient texts, a manner of reading that is alert to the myriad factors and possibilities at play in any given performance. Essentially he is proposing an approach to ancient drama in which performance reigns supreme over the text, i.e. in which the meaning is not determined primarily by the script. Such an approach moves well beyond Oliver Taplin's attention to "significant actions" such as exits and entrances in his seminal *Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (1977), while also expanding on Revermann's more recent guidelines for establishing what entails stage action in *Comic Business* (2006). In short, though the focus is predominantly on a single tragedy (and one which furthermore presents certain challenges to modern notions of the ancient genre), Marshall's book is a significant and welcome contribution to the growing ranks of books exploring the extra-textual world of fifth-century Athenian drama.

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