

BOOK REVIEW

Euripides: Cyclops: A Satyr Play. By CARL A. SHAW. London, UK and New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. Pp. xiv + 158. Hardback, \$114.00. ISBN: 978-1-4742-4579-1.

Shaw's short book is a well-researched, well-written companion to Euripides' satyr drama *Cyclops* and an ideal introduction to the play. Satyr drama is often relegated to the margins, so it is great to see a volume on *Cyclops* appear in a series dedicated to Greek and Roman tragedy. As the sole complete representative of its genre, *Cyclops* faces many interpretive problems, but Shaw gives a balanced discussion of the play's genre, performance, themes and literary background. Some of Shaw's discussion, especially the sections on the development of satyr drama and the *komos* (6-17 and 88-97) draws upon material from his monograph on satyr drama and comedy,¹ and this is a good thing. Much attention is paid to the precise explication of complex historical and literary issues related to *Cyclops*. Shaw's writing is clear and concise, and he glosses the technical language he introduces (*Bromios*, *aulos*, *skene*, *stichomythia*, *komast*, *sikinnis*, *xenia* etc.). As such, this book will be a very helpful guide for a wide array of audiences, from first-time readers to more experienced scholars.

Chapter 1, "The *Cyclops* and Satyr Drama," answers some of the initial questions someone might have when first meeting the play: What are satyrs? What is satyr drama? What is the mythological background behind the play? When was it performed? Where did the text come from? Shaw analyzes much of the primary evidence about satyr drama one would expect: Demetrius' description of satyr drama as "playful tragedy," the Suda's claim that satyr drama had "nothing to do with Dionysus" and Pratinas' fragmentary hyporcheme.

Chapter 2, "Viewing the Play: Plot and Performance," is no mere plot summary but rather aims to "walk the reader through the original viewing experience" (29). Shaw provides evidence for the stage scenery, the overall visual appearance

¹ Shaw, Carl. 2014. *Satyr Play: The Evolution of Greek Comedy and Satyr Drama*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

of Silenus and the satyrs, the presence of props such as Silenus' rake, the raucous and swaggering dancing of the satyrs and even the potential for changes of mask or costume phallus. This chapter is permeated with vivid and interesting insights that an inexperienced reader of the play might not detect or fully appreciate, such as the stagecraft of Silenus handling his costume phallus as if it were the rudder of a ship or the Homeric associations behind Silenus' joke about Odysseus, "I know the man (*andra*)."

Chapter 3, "Themes, Issues, and Functions," investigates how *Cyclops* engages with the contemporary world of 5th-century Athens. Shaw sees the play as quite metatheatrical and metapoetic, and he ties this self-reflective quality especially to the play's repeated connections with Dionysus, who, though he does not appear as a character, exerts an omnipresent influence. Related to these intellectual themes are the depictions of Odysseus as a cynical agnostic and of Polyphemus as a gourmand and a sophisticated contemporary Athenian philosopher along the lines of Callias from Plato's *Gorgias*. Shaw also proposes a number of plot and thematic connections with the recent failed Sicilian Expedition, but leaves it open as to what purpose or effects such an association would have.

Chapter 4, "Euripides' *Cyclops* in Its Literary Context," is a real highlight of the book since his organized presentation of the material disentangles what could be a thorny mess of intertextual relationships. On Shaw's view, *Cyclops* takes the core myth of *Odyssey* 9, blends it with the story of Dionysus captured by pirates in the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus*, coopts the food-centric portrayals of the Cyclops from previous comedies and satyr plays by Epicharmus, Aristias, Callias and Cratinus, and engages in small but meaningful ways with a cluster of recently produced dramas, namely, Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* as well as Euripides' *Helen* and *Andromeda*. Shaw evaluates the evidence for the two potential dates of *Cyclops*, favoring the mainstream view of 408 BCE but giving due credit to Matthew Wright's plausible case for 412 BCE.

Occasionally, Shaw revisits the same data with multiple interpretations over the course of the book, illustrating how the same evidence can be employed to produce different arguments. Thus Silenus' statement that he has undergone "countless troubles" (*murioi ponoi*) in *Cyclops* 1 is variously presented as Silenus' attempt to cast himself as a great hero (33), as a literary allusion to Odysseus' "many pains" in *Odyssey* 1.4 (98) and as a metatheatrical recognition of Silenus' role in countless other satyr dramas (70).

There are very few problems with this book. *Chi-raq*, the 2015 film by Spike Lee and Kevin Willmott modeled on Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, is misspelled as *Chi-*

rac (87), which misses out on the warzone imagery derived from the portmanteau of Chicago and Iraq. The interesting discussion of *Cyclops*' use of *outis* "no man" (41, 58) as a reaction to Odysseus' famous wordplay from the *Odyssey* could have been further supported with the ironic foreshadowing behind Polyphemus' boast ("Though I'm drunk, no man (*outis*) shall touch me," *Cyclops* 535). Similarly, Shaw's interpretations of particular lines in metapoetic terms could have included Silenus' address to Polyphemus ("It's been some time since strangers arrived at your house," *Cyclops* 251), which evokes the play's temporal and poetic distance from Homer. But these are very small issues. Shaw has done a great job presenting a complex play in a clear and nuanced way that all audiences can understand and appreciate.

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