

## BOOK REVIEW

*Aeschylus Libation Bearers*. By ANDREW BROWN. Aris & Phillips Classical Text. Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2018. Pp. x + 486. Paperback, \$39.95. ISBN: 978-1-786-94099-5.

Stimulating and even, at times, provocative, the Aris & Phillips *Libation Bearers* by Andrew Brown is a commentary no serious reader of the *Oresteia* will want to be without. Far from confining himself to general observations, Brown engages repeatedly with the latest currents of textual and interpretive work on both the play itself and on Aeschylean tragedy more broadly—indeed, the detailed arguments make the work seem at several junctures more of an updated version of Garvie’s thorough-going *Libation Bearers* (Oxford 1986) than what many readers may have come to expect from the Aris & Phillips series.

Brown situates himself firmly in the grand tradition of British scholarship on Aeschylus, mentioning both lectures he attended by the redoubtable Sir Denys Page (editor of the [1972] *OCT* of Aeschylus) and direct conversations with Alan Sommerstein (AHS in the introduction/commentary) while stressing his appreciation of West’s and Sommerstein’s rather radical departures from Page (and Garvie). It is perhaps not too much to say that some current editions of Aeschylus are the least conservative we have seen in generations, a development with which Brown is in great sympathy (44–46). For him, the undeniable textual corruption of the play is a warrant for renewed efforts at conjecture and emendation; those of his own are not always as eyebrow-raising (exhilarating?) as West’s wholesale composition of “missing lines,” but decidedly in the same key (one easily compares Kovacs’ Loeb editions of Euripides in this regard). This will mean, however, that the reader will want to keep Page, Garvie, Sommerstein, West and Brown open (as this one did) to keep tabs on the different directions the texts seem to be moving. Whether such a movement necessitates a graduate or even professional audience, I will address below.

In his introduction, Brown in many ways updates Garvie’s treatment of the pre-Aeschylean material; particularly welcome is the incorporation of current work on Stesichorus (that of Finglass *inter alios*). Also considered in some detail is

what we know of performance conditions in Aeschylus' day and how roles might have been assigned, especially if Aeschylus was acting in one of them himself: Brown is not afraid to speculate, imparting in a personal voice how he believes Aeschylus built up expectation in the original audience for his own appearance on stage in the role of Agamemnon himself.

As regards Aeschylean dramaturgy, it can be said that Brown has quite a strong view of what is plausible or not in the realm of interpretation, a tendency that occasionally seems overly restrictive. For instance, in discussing the curious case of Cilissa, Orestes' nurse, Brown asserts, "the Nurse is used *simply* as a messenger to fetch Aegisthus, a task that any servant could have performed" (4, emphasis added). This, however, misses or at least doesn't engage with what others (indeed some included in the bibliography offered by Brown) have seen as a characteristically cruel move on the part of Clytemnestra to select the *one* servant who acted *in loco matris* for Orestes from the time he was a child. Similarly, Brown judges *Eumenides* to be a problematic play in which the manifold solutions offered "do not logically fit the problems" (37)—an unhelpfully terse and sweeping assertion amidst so many different views of the matter.

In the commentary itself Brown offers a great deal of help to beginners. There is continuous concern for the larger themes of the trilogy, generous consideration of evidence from vase-painting and other representations and many a foray into the realm of textual criticism. In this latter endeavor, Brown favors the more "vigorous" (319 ad 574; the more "forceful" 193 ad 93-5) and "less feeble" (353 ad 690) constructions throughout—though the translation may include "wretched English [that] cannot be helped" (e.g., the "Ah me!" of 353, line 691). Such a mode of commentary presents a departure from the older repertoire of this series, in which notes once offered predominantly cultural/historical information and less textual discussion. It is in this sense that Brown offers a Garvie-like commentary on the "new" text of *Libation Bearers* as it develops out of the efforts of West and now Sommerstein (the latter's edition is deemed at once to be the "least conservative" and also "closest to what the poet actually wrote"), and, not least among them, Brown himself (who occasionally appears in the apparatus).

Due to the composite nature of the commentary, at once aimed at undergraduates but also containing material requiring higher-order training, it makes for something of a conundrum as it will certainly be a bit much for most undergraduates and perhaps not quite enough for the graduate seminar (Brown concedes that "a scholarly and responsible edition would have many fewer emendations"). Compounding the problem, as Brown also admits early on, is that readers should have

worked through *Agamemnon* before *Libation Bearers*—no mean feat even in the graduate seminar these days!

The quality of production is high; the few errors I noted were “230” printed for “300” on page 100, a superfluous “who” in the translation of lines 255-6 on page 97 and *plou=ton* twice incorrectly accented, first as *plo/uton* in the apparatus ad 819 and then as *plou/ton* in the note *ad loc.* (383). Surely due to proximity of publication date, C. W. Marshall’s performance-centered companion to *Libation Bearers* (Bloomsbury 2017) did not make the bibliography—a pity given Brown’s interest in the staging of the play.

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