

BOOKREVIEW

*Colloquial Expressions in Greek Tragedy: Revised and enlarged edition of P. T. Stevens's Colloquial Expressions in Euripides.* By CHRISTOPHER COLLARD. Stuttgart, DE: Franz Steiner, 2018. Pp. 255. Paperback, \$58.00. ISBN 978-3-515-12055-5.

This is a revised expansion of Stevens 1976, itself a revision of Stevens 1937.<sup>1</sup> The former collected roughly 113 Euripidean colloquialisms under nine headings (such as “exaggeration: emphasis,” “understatement: irony”). Collard covers about 275 items. References are updated to recent standard editions and newer scholarship is included. Extensive use is made of notebooks left among Edward Fraenkel’s papers and an unpublished Oxford dissertation by J. Waś (1983).<sup>2</sup> Collard also offers some analysis of raw counts of items, concluding, e.g., that Euripides does not consistently use colloquialisms to differentiate status: Peleus in *Andromache* uses many, whereas the Farmer in *Electra* uses few (cited 196, 210). Finally, there are many useful indices, including a 24-page *index locorum*.

At issue here is a fundamental question about the meaning of “colloquial.” For Stevens, there were four kinds of language: poetic, prosaic, neutral and colloquial. “Colloquial” was “the kind of language that in a poetic or prosaic context would stand out however slightly as having a distinctively conversational flavour” (1976, 4). A 1976 reviewer already noted the insufficiency of this definition on linguistic grounds<sup>3</sup> and modern linguists have largely abandoned the word “colloquial” as covering “too wide a range of different linguistic phenomena to remain a classificatory term”.<sup>4</sup> Collard admits that “no precise specification is possible” (23). Without an objective basis to identify colloquialisms, there is an element of subjectivity here. Collard repeatedly exhorts readers to “judge for themselves” (38, 94, 220), following Stevens’s caveat: “This procedure may seem rather arbitrary, but it illustrates the fact that no precise specification is possible and each instance

<sup>1</sup> P. T. Stevens, *Colloquial Expressions in Euripides*. *Hermes Einzelschriften* 38, Franz Steiner: Wiesbaden. 1976. *Idem*, “Colloquial expressions in Euripides,” *CQ* 31 (1937) 182-91.

<sup>2</sup> J. Waś, *Aspects of realism in Greek Tragedy*. Unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1983.

<sup>3</sup> H. Thesleff, Rev. of Stevens 1976, *JHS* 98 (1978) 173.

<sup>4</sup> J. Clackson, “Colloquial language in linguistic studies,” in E. Dickey and A. Chahoud, eds., *Colloquial and Literary Latin*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2010. 7-11. p. 9.

must be considered on its merits,” (1976, 8). It is possible to choose a narrower, less subjective definition of the colloquial (Dickey 2010, 65 suggests several),<sup>5</sup> but this book does not, and this ultimately limits its utility.

In terms of format, each item appears in bold, followed by comparanda from comedy, then Herodotus, Plato, Xenophon and the orators, then papyri and Hellenistic authors, then Euripides, Aeschylus and Sophocles, and finally, any negative evidence. An index lists twenty-four authors cited, but the range of sources is well over fifty authors, from Homer and Pindar to Callimachus and Ezekiel. Stevens believed there were “hardly any writers of whom we may be sure they would never admit a colloquial expression” (1976, 7). Accordingly, a word like *mai/a* counts when spoken by Phaedra to her nurse or to Alcestis by her child, because Odysseus uses the word eleven times to Eurykleia. This may indeed be the real conversation of the upper classes (Nausicaa calling Alcinous *pa/ppa* surely is), but its numerous appearances are hard to take as dips in the epic register in every case. If almost any author can furnish examples, then genre, form, and associated registers are no guide to the colloquial.

Comparanda include parallels from Latin and modern languages. Stevens used these “because they may offer slight confirmation of colloquial character” (1976, 7) and Collard adds more from Fraenkel, who followed Hofmann’s practice.<sup>6</sup> But Hofmann cited Greek models for Latin colloquialisms that appeared to be translations or imitations (cited 33). This does not apply in reverse, or to French or Italian examples. Even for modern Greek examples, there is no explicit claim of continuity and not all match well: modern *dēladē*/, “that is to say,” is acceptable in both conversation and formal writing, and differs in sense from ancient *dēladē*/ (“of course, naturally”). *Si tibi videtur*, found in Plautus and Cicero’s letters, seems a close parallel to *ei (soi) dokei*/ (156-7), but Bagordo argues that the Greek is probably, and the Latin certainly, a politeness formula (“please”), with the latter carrying possible legal overtones.<sup>7</sup> Collard concedes that commentators do not take the former as colloquial. Items also have different frequencies. Some are attested too many times to cite; others are only attested twice. Occasionally, no Euripidean example is accepted (e.g., 157 *ei/pō ti*). Examples are intended to be illustrative, not exhaustive, and most serve this purpose well. There are some odd

<sup>5</sup> E. Dickey, “Preliminary conclusions,” in E. Dickey and A. Chahoud, eds., *Colloquial and Literary Latin*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2010. 65-68.

<sup>6</sup> J. B. Hofmann, *Lateinische Umgangssprache*, C. Winter: Heidelberg 1951.

<sup>7</sup> A. Bagordo, *Beobachtungen zur Sprache des Terenz, Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der umgangssprachlichen Elemente, Hypomnemata* 132, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen 2001. pp. 116-18.

omissions, e.g., for *pro tou=* (168), Collard cites *Eccl.* 730, but not *Eccl.* 221-8, where it is repeated nine times in a list joke, with the register dropping steadily and the final items certainly being offensive (a possible definition of “colloquial”).<sup>8</sup> This can complicate the reader’s task of judging for themselves.

One of Steven’s reviewers sought more contextual information, arguing “it is only when we know the context of any colloquial expression that we can move with some confidence to the more risky task of determining... its significance for the development of colloquial Greek”.<sup>9</sup> Collard indicates whether items are found in stichomythia, dialogue, rhesis or lyric, but provides no further information. In many cases, dramatic context strongly supports the claim. For example, Electra uses *bre/chesthai*, “be soaked,” i.e. drunk (*me/thēi de brechtheis El.* 326, discussed 43) of Aegisthus, in anger, in a cluster of expressions that fit other criteria Collard uses to identify colloquialisms (*gauroutai* 322, *ho kleinos* (ironic) *en-thrōiskei ta/phōi* 32). It is much harder to assess an item from indeterminable context, e.g., fr. F279 m.1 *Adesp. Trag., A/pollon*, indicating “surprise or alarm” (114).

The scholarship is carefully consulted, though heavy use of Fraenkel and Waś skew the work toward older methodologies. Given the relatively scarcity of work on the colloquial Greek, this book fills a void. It is clear about which items are more likely to be colloquial and which less and its curated list of comparanda are useful points of departure.

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<sup>8</sup> Dickey, 2010, 65.

<sup>9</sup> T. A. Tarkow, Rev. of Stevens 1976, *CW* 71.3 (1977) 196-7.