

BOOK REVIEW

The Oedipus Casebook: Reading Sophocles' Oedipus the King. By MARK R. ANSPACH. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2020. Pp. xiv + 459. Paperback, \$29.95. ISBN: 978-1-611-86339-0.

This volume comprises a new translation of Sophocles' play by William Blake Tyrell (Michigan State Univ.) and a selection of previously published articles and chapters on the play and its backgrounds selected and edited by Mark R. Anspach (Independent scholar). The book appears in the series *Studies in Violence, Mimesis, and Culture*. Tyrell's translation serves to provide access to the Greek text as directly as possible, indicating textual problems and ambiguities whenever practical. The essays are grouped in three sections: the ritual background, Oedipus' roles as king and victim and the trial of Oedipus. The selection does not attempt the Sisyphean task of representing the full breadth of scholarship on the play or, as many collections do, providing a snapshot of important current trends. Rather, it limits its scope to the play's interaction with its mythical and ritual backgrounds and, within that field, focuses on approaches related to Girard's lens of mimetic violence. Anspach assumes familiarity with Greek drama and myth criticism, omitting introductions aimed at the general reader, so the primary audience seems to be that of the advanced student. For those who teach the *Oedipus* in courses in Western Civilization, theater or comparative literature, this volume offers an additional approach to set beside evergreens such as Knox and Segal.¹ The scholar of Sophocles, tragedy or mythology is likely to be familiar with the selections already, though a few, such as those by Terry Eagleton or Michel Foucault, may suggest new directions to explore.

Tyrell's translation may be characterized as "writerly," in that it avoids smoothing over difficulties in the text, often offering a literal representation of problematic passages discussed in the essays following. On facing pages Lloyd-Jones and

¹ Knox, B. 1957. *Oedipus at Thebes*. New Haven: Yale University Press; Segal, C. 2001. *Oedipus Tyrannus: Tragic Heroism and the Limits of Knowledge*. 2nd ed. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wilson's Greek text is presented.² One feature of the Greek text and translation is slightly distracting: irreparable textual problems are signaled by printing the Greek and its corresponding translation in lighter print, for example (420):

βοῆς δὲ τῆς σῆς ποῖος οὐκ ἔσται λιμὴν,

What harbor will not receive your cry?

adverting to Blaydes' likely but unconfirmed correction of λιμὴν for the codices' Ἐλικῶν; the convention is explained in the endnote on line 360, but the emphasis seems outsized for a work whose primary purpose is not philological. The intent is reasonable, to signal where the translation is tentative, given that the essays sometimes turn on close reading, but the explanation is not prominent and none of the cruxes so marked is referenced in the essays, so relegation to the endnotes might have been less distracting. Elsewhere Tyrell's translation does anticipate the discussions later in the volume. Thus, when the Jocasta asks the Corinthian who sent him to Thebes, Tyrell translates his response (935-6):

Io. τὰ ποῖα ταῦτα; παρὰ τίνος δ' ἀφιγμένος;

Αγ. ἐκ τῆς Κορίνθου. τὸ δ' ἔπος οὐξερῶ—τάχα

Jo. And what would that be? From whom have you come?

Cn. From Corinth. As for what I will say,

emphasizing the inconcinnity of Jocasta's παρὰ τίνος with the Corinthian's ἐκ τῆς Κορίνθου, anticipating Ahl's exploitation of the mismatch to build his case for the Corinthian as an unreliable narrator later in the volume. This fits Tyrell's general approach to the translation, that it is intended to give access to the construction of the Greek text as much as possible. Similarly, for example, at 494 Tyrell indicates the lacuna with an ellipsis, but heals the English syntax by adding the needed participle ("starting"). The translation does not attempt to represent the meters of the original but does preserve a line-to-line correspondence, so that references to the Greek in the essays are readily referred to the translation. Tyrell provides stage directions where these are clearly implied by the text; the endnotes

² That is the Oxford text of Lloyd-Jones, H. and N. G. Wilson, eds. 1990. *Sophocles Fabulae*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, not the slightly updated Loeb of Lloyd-Jones, H., ed., trans. 1994. *Sophocles*. Vol. 1. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press.

tend to be unobtrusive and explain the translation in the sense of noting textual problems, expand mythological references and add probable details of staging. Altogether the translation is eminently readable and well suited for its role in this volume.

A detailed summary of the essays is neither practical within the scope of this review nor necessary, since most of the articles and chapters are familiar to scholars of tragedy and mythology. The essays address three related topics: the background of the scapegoat ritual, Oedipus' dual role as king and victim and the problem of Oedipus' guilt. On the first topic, Burkert and Bremmer's classic essays need little comment; they are complemented by Delcourt's earlier (1944) (abridged) chapter on the convergence of the mythic themes of the exposed infant and physical deformity that makes Oedipus a model scapegoat; Delcourt's chapter is translated into English for this collection. On Oedipus' role as king and victim, Girard's chapter looms large, placing Oedipus as the paradigm for his approach, taking mimetic violence to be the core of tragedy; Anspach's introduction to Girard is helpful for those first encountering the French critic here. The chapter by Eagleton contributes to a diversity of views, both as representing a materialist perspective and as a scholar that is less familiar in Classical studies, but widely recognized in literary and cultural studies. The final section takes up the thread beginning with Greene's classic article, focusing on how the question of whether one or many killed Laius is never resolved, so the related issue of Oedipus' guilt also remains open. The further essays in this section naturally favor Anglo-American approaches that emphasize close reading and ambiguity, though these are balanced by a long excerpt from Foucault.

Altogether, this volume makes an attractive contribution to the teaching arsenal on Sophocles and Greek tragedy generally. That the approaches represented in the essays focus on ritual, mimetic violence and courtroom drama means that this work complements rather than replaces well-known studies using historical and psychological approaches. The essays and chapters are thoughtfully chosen: the authors represent a variety of backgrounds, some representing more traditional philological voices, but the majority branching out into more theoretical perspectives, achieving the sense that interest and debate around Sophocles' text continues to be lively. Tyrell's translation is well suited to the volume, focusing on representing the Greek text directly with its shiftiness and ambiguity as well as its balance and power. The target audience is advanced undergraduates and beginning graduate students, not only in classics, but also theater, literature and

cultural studies. Scholars of Greek tragedy and mythology will find little that is novel, but those teaching the play in non-specialized settings will find this book a useful resource to broaden traditional approaches.

PAUL OJENNUS

Whitworth University, pojennus@whitworth.edu