Nevertheless, such flaws are minor and these eminently readable translations have real potential for teaching.

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doi:10.1093/clrevj/bni014

A PLAIN MAN'S EURIPIDES

K. MATTHIESSEN: *Die Tragödien des Euripides.* (Zetemata 114.) Pp. 304. Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2002. Paper, €59.90. ISBN: 3-406-50310-1.

Matthiessen's book is intended for a wide audience, from professional classicists to the lay public (p. 10). Five chapters on general topics (biography, transmission and editions, scholia and hypotheses, structural elements and types of plot, dating) are followed by seventeen on the extant tragedies and one on the fragments and by three appendices on *Cyclops*, *Rhesus*, and reception. There is a full index of passages, but no subject index to help those wishing to consult the book on a particular theme or element of Euripidean tragedy.

M. sometimes lets down one or other of his constituencies. Of the two-page chapter on dating, for example, he devotes more than half to discussion of C. W. Müller's theory that a rule forbad granting a chorus to a tragedian in successive years. Rather than take the opportunity to air his views on this controversy, M. ought to have given the novice some explanation of dating by resolutions in the trimeter, the key chronological criterion, which he merely mentions. To professional readers M. advertises his attention to scholarship, particularly in German and English, since the appearance of Albin Lesky's *Tragische Dichtung der Hellenen* (Göttingen, 1972), but his coverage is in fact somewhat spotty. On *Bacchae*, for example, two of the most important contributions of the period go unnoticed: Jennifer R. March's fundamental 'Euripides' *Bakchai*: A Reconsideration in the Light of Vase-Paintings', *BICS* 36 (1989), 33–65, with Plates 1–4, and H. S. Versnel's major treatment in his *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion I: Ter Unus* (Leiden, 1990), 96–205.

M. emulates Lesky's 'beschreibende Analyse' (p. 13 n. 1) with fair success, but whereas Lesky managed within a similar compass to produce admirably objective and well-proportioned epitome, M.'s is sometimes poorly balanced; choral odes in particular often get very short shrift. He is also more prone than Lesky to give undue prominence to passages that are central to his own interpretation. Sometimes his description seems mistaken; he says, for example, that Phaedra countenances the nurse's revelation to Hippolytus (pp. 82–3), but Phaedra clearly expresses fear that the nurse will divulge the truth to him (ll. 518–20), and the chorus later speaks twice of her 'betrayal' by the nurse (ll. 591–5). The beginner will not seldom be misled by M.'s analytic description, and in the end one wonders whether it might have been better to dispense with the scene-by-scene approach in favour of candidly interpretative essays.

M.'s preferences in interpretation are very clear, and in many ways very old-fashioned. He criticises Nestle for constructing the thought of Euripides from verses taken out of context (p. 87 n. 1), but himself concludes from some few passages that Euripides preferred the life of the country to that of the city and the 'honest farmer' to the 'demagogue of the agora' (p. 16). He follows W. M. Calder III in doubting that in a text written for performance 'repetition outside of fifty verses at most . . . yields anything of importance for understanding' (p. 11 n. 3). It may well be true that most

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https://doi.org/10.1093/clrevj/bni015 Published online by Cambridge University Press

spectators will not have consciously registered 'Leitwörter oder -metaphern' outside that sort of limit (11), but that is no basis on which to reject the possibility that the tragedians (consciously or unconsciously) generated such things; one must weigh the merits of the individual case. M. also has a general attitude to textual matters; one may perfectly well question Diggle's decisions that *Ion* 844–58 and 1364–8 are interpolated, but to call each of those passages 'unentbehrlich' (pp. 178 n. 1, 179 n. 1) seems the exaggerated reaction of a settled conservatism.

Reluctance to admit ambiguity characterizes M.'s approach throughout. The notion that rationalist criticism of the gods is meant to prompt troubling reflection is resisted in particular, sometimes with very strained arguments. M. represents such criticism as passing doubt that is proved wrong in the end, but does not satisfactorily explain why Euripides has such frequent recourse to it. Even the *deus ex machina* scene in *Orestes* is on his view untouched by irony: 'the spectator may be aware that in the entanglements of his own life there does not always come to his aid, as is the case here, a god who cuts all the knots and frees him from his trouble, but he will hope and pray that it happens at least now and then' (p. 224). Surely even most of those who do not regard Euripides as subversively rationalist would find it hard to believe that he is eliciting such a naively anodyne sentiment as that. Here, as often elsewhere, M. fails to give an adequate impression of the alternatives to his own interpretation.

There is not much here that is both new and convincing, and some scholars will feel that M. is not in complete sympathy with his author, but as a conscientious portrait of a sort of contemporary plain man's Euripides the book is not without usefulness and merit.

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doi:10.1093/clrevj/bni015

REVENGE RECONSIDERED

J. HOLZHAUSEN: *Euripides Politikos. Recht und Rache in 'Orestes' und 'Bakchen'*. (Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 185.) Pp. vii + 340. Munich and Leipzig: K. G. Saur, 2003. Cased. ISBN: 3-598-77737-X.

While Euripides' late *Orestes* and *Bacchae* are not often compared directly, a few common themes do show up in contemporary readings of them. Each contains 'comic elements' and unsettling shifts of tone; aspects of each invite interpretation as 'meta-theatre'; and each is often seen as engaged in a kind of anxious dialogue with the entire tradition that preceded it. H. touches on such topics occasionally, but his reason for joining the plays in a single study is that they are close in date and share certain ways of dramatizing the ethical problem of revenge. In his reading, neither play answers the Aeschylean question of how to end a cycle of violence because Euripides had concluded that no credible answer existed—at least none that could be presented to the Athenian public in a tragedy. On this issue, the poet ended his career with resignation, and progress was left to philosophers.

Orestes gets two-thirds of the space, mainly because of detailed textual criticism presented in the notes. Typically, H. defends passages impugned by Diggle, Willink, and/or Kovacs—impugnacious editors all. By H.'s count, Diggle marks 114 lines for deletion, Willink and Kovacs eighty-eight each. As H. himself believes only thirteen must go (p. 21 n. 90), one would not hesitate to call him a conservative textual critic. Many of his arguments deserve consideration—which they might have been more

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