modern readers, as a play 'which combines moral complexity with an overwhelming emotional impact'.

As indicated above, the wide range of material referenced makes this a valuable guide for non-specialist teachers, and suggests new details and avenues for those who have a more specialist interest in tragedy. However, this volume will be of particular interest to students studying the play and the myth of Medea, and will be a welcome addition to reading lists. It works as a comprehensive introduction to the play for those reading it for the first time, yet also suggests the depth and complexity of the issues raised by the play. This will be a powerful antidote to the malaise of students skimming the play, believing they have 'understood' it because they studied it once at school or university. A.'s account shows that this great tragic drama is both engaging and disturbing on many levels, and repays detailed attention at any stage of an academic career.

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ON GODS AND HUMANS IN EURIPIDES

C. WILDBERG: *Hyperesie und Epiphanie. Ein Versuch über die Bedeutung der Götter in den Dramen des Euripides.* (Zetemata 109.) Pp. viii + 231. Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2002. Paper, €49.90. ISBN: 3-406-48419-0.

Discussions of gods in Euripidean drama have all too often become consumed by the question (both unanswerable and irrelevant) of the poet's own religiosity. W. adeptly avoids such pitfalls: his concern is to explore the ways in which the devotion of human characters to divinity ('Hyperesie'), and the direct involvement of the gods in human action ('Epiphanie') operate as principles that set the plays' action in motion. Dramatic technique and, above all, the characters' *êthos* and *dianoia* play a central rôle in W.'s interpretative scheme.

Chapters 2–4 take on the challenging task of detecting religious motivation behind the action of plays like *Alcestis*, *Medea*, *Heraclidae*, and *Helen*, in which the gods are seemingly absent. Thus, the values to which Alcestis and Admetus subscribe (the former's wifely loyalty, the latter's hospitality) are said to qualify as 'von der Göttern symbolisierten Moralvorstellungen' (p. 28): marriage is the domain of Hera and Hestia, foreigners are protected by Zeus. As for *Medea*, W. attacks the oft-expressed view that its action is divested of religious motivation: the primary motive of Medea's murderous actions is not her uncontrolled emotionality but her overwhelming moral indignation at Jason's violation of the divinely sanctioned principle of *euhorkia*.

A major driving force behind the action of these plays is 'Hyperesie', an ethico-religious attitude whose origins W. insightfully traces to Athenian intellectual circles of the late fifth century, especially the Socratic milieu. This novel attitude consists in placing oneself, by one's own volition, to the service of divinity. A far cry from the mood of passive resignation prevalent in traditional forms of piety, 'Hyperesie' consciously promotes itself as a means of actively defending divine order. (The full impetus of the novelty can best be gauged against the background of conventional Greek *eusebeia*; necessary reading here is L. Bruit Zaidman, *Le commerce des dieux* [Paris, 2001], and the semantic studies of *ὅσιος* and *εὐσεβής* by J. C. Bolkestein, *ΟΣΙΟΣ en ΕΥΣΕΒΗΣ* [Amsterdam, 1936], and W. J. Terstegen, *ΕΥΣΕΒΗΣ en ΟΣΙΟΣ* [Utrecht, 1941].)

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W. is to be commended for detecting and contextualizing a fundamental trait of many Euripidean characters, one that distinguishes them from their Aeschylean and some of their Sophoclean counterparts: their actions are expressly meant to defend divinely-ordained principles, or rather to assist the gods, who would be otherwise unable to uphold their rights. There is, however, a danger of over-interpretation in this approach. For instance, it seems perverse to foist on the characters of *Alcestis* an ethico-religious agenda which they never spell out: should we simply assume that marriage or hospitality are to be automatically associated with Hera/Hestia or Zeus? (W. himself is suspicious of such approaches, cf. p. 142.) Furthermore, W.'s (very well-argued) foregrounding of Medea's ethico-religious agenda, rather than of her emotionality, as the fundamental motive of her actions may be thought to jar with the famous l. 1079 *θυμὸς δὲ κρείσσων τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων*. W. of course does point out (p. 59 n. 91) that *thumos* is sometimes a vehicle of divine influence (for crucial exceptions, however, cf. E. *Hcld*. 925, A. *Sept*. 52), but this extremely complicated topic would have repaid closer study on the basis of C. P. Caswell (*A Study of* Thumos *in Early Greek Epic* [Leiden, 1990]) and now B. Koziak (*Retrieving Political Emotion* [University Park, PA, 2000]).

The latter part of the book (Chapters 6 and 7) addresses the question of the epiphanies' relevance to dramatic action, and ingeniously suggests that the nature and function of epiphanic gods correspond to, and even reciprocate, the characters' perception of, and attitude to, the gods' respective domains. Thus, in *Hippolytus*, Artemis' untypical affability mirrors Hippolytus' complete devotion to her, whereas Aphrodite's cool vindictiveness is triggered by his lofty detachment from sex. In *Hecuba*, according to W.'s ingenious conjecture, Polymestor's punishment by Hecuba's 'maenadic' entourage (called 'bacchanals of Hades' in 1077) is a fitting response to his (putative) attempt to manipulate Dionysus' prophecies as a means deceitfully to enlist the god's complicity in his criminal plans—an attempt that W. reconstructs from the *en passant* reference to Dionysus' Thracian oracle in 1267. (This is brilliant and refreshingly provocative, even for those who would rather believe that the mention of Dionysus' famous Thracian oracle was merely meant to lend authority to the prophecies of a Thracian king.) Finally, Pentheus' maenadic *diasparagmos* in *Bacchae* is seen as a direct consequence of, and a fitting retribution for, his misconception of maenadism as a pretext for subversive licentiousness. Although W.'s meticulous account focuses on Pentheus *qua* individual, it may also be integrated into an interpretation of *Bacchae* that would centre on the play's affinities with the collectivity of mystic ritual. Pentheus' misconceived opposition to Dionysism which, mixed with his desire to witness the maenadic ritual, leads to his undoing may (as Seaford has shown) reflect the mystic pattern of initial reluctance, followed by the desire to become initiated, and ending in salvation—often by means of purifying punishment, as intimated e.g. in Pindar fr. 133 and in the 'Orphic' gold plates.

W.'s argumentation is honest and crystal-clear, his style extremely readable, and his theses thought-provoking, even when one is not inclined to agree. His book contributes to a subtler image of Euripides than the stereotypical one of merely a ranting critic of traditional religion, or of a secular craftsman of psychological drama. Although W.'s book will not—and is not meant to—efface e.g. philosophical or psychological approaches, it will help us better understand Euripides as a dramatist who, in the memorable words of George Seferis, 'saw the veins of humans / as a net woven by the gods'.

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