like politics, ritual, gender, and theatricality, H.'s book may appear old-fashioned; at any rate, it stands outside the main currents of anglophone tragic criticism (but note A. P. Burnett's *Revenge in Attic and Later Tragedy* [Berkeley, 1998], whose methods and conclusions are worlds apart from H.'s). It should not for this reason be ignored. H. is an intelligent and hard-working reader with appreciable strengths as a textual and literary critic, and his passionate attack on the current near-orthodoxy that the revenge motive was ethically unproblematic for Athenian poets and audiences deserves attention.

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HERACLIDAE AND *SUPPLICES*

D. MENDELSOHN: *Gender and the City in Euripides' Political Plays*. Pp. xviii + 257. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. Cased, £45. ISBN: 0-19-924956-3.

Mendelsohn's book is the second to pair *Heraclidae* and *Supplices* as 'the political plays of Euripides' (the first, by G. Zuntz, appeared under that title in 1955). Gender, the first word of M.'s title, is crucial to their differences—and indeed fuller consideration of gender issues accounts for many important changes in critical method and language over the last fifty years.

Using an eclectic set of theoretical tools to produce 'a broader, more symbolic feminist reading of Greek tragedy' (p. 27), M. argues that these plays are organized around complex linkages of gender and politics. The result is an engaging study that successfully reappraises two largely and unfairly disparaged dramas. The book is divided into a substantial introduction, in which M. locates his approach in relation to (mostly) recent scholarship, long chapters on each of the two plays, and a brief conclusion. The argument is subtle and complex; a brief summary can present it only in outline. For M., almost everything in these plays reflects ideologically charged relations between male and female. This involves the theatrical space itself, through the gender implications of repeated spatial dislocations, particularly the marked violation of conventions of female invisibility, but also in more figurative terms. M.'s demonstration of the influence of the Eleusinian setting of *Supp.* throughout its course is revelatory.

In M.'s reading of both plays, women's presence in the gendered space of tragedy transgresses gender boundaries, but in ways that allow the renegotiation of those boundaries and thus test their meaning. The unnamed daughter of Herakles, who offers her life as a sacrificial victim (*Hcld.*), and Theseus' mother Aithra, who convinces her son to accept the suit of the suppliant mothers (*Supp.*), are positive examples of women who appropriate elements of heroic male identity and thereby transform men. The Maiden's self-conscious eruption into the public arena 'becomes a model of correct and appropriate civic "boldness" ' (p. 93), but Iolaos, the children's protector, is rendered 'stricken and utterly helpless' by the sacrificial crisis and the Maiden's decision to resolve it by her own death. He has himself hidden in his garments, a veiled concealment that 'recalls the gestural vocabulary of young Athenian virgins' (p. 107) and makes him literally unrecognizable as the once doughty companion of Herakles. Just when he seems most passive and useless, however, he unexpectedly reclaims his place as heroic warrior. M. shows carefully and convincingly the extent to which

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Iolaos' decision to enter the fray and even his notorious rejuvenation are predicated upon the Maiden's 'masculine' example. Similarly, Aithra employs masculine traits by intervening to correct her son's decision to withhold aid from wronged (female) suppliants, and 'softens her son's outlook' (p. 170) by convincing him to integrate feminine perspectives into his political reasoning and action.

In M.'s view, although both these decisive actions by women successfully challenge and alter faulty male choices, implicit in them is an overstepping of boundaries felt as dangerous. And indeed these positive models are followed by negative ones in which the danger is made explicit. The feminine intrusion of Alkmene (*Hcld.*) to wreak angry vengeance on Eurystheus, subverting Athenian law, reveals another face of women's unrestrained boldness, as does the unexpected and uncontrollable eruption onto the stage of Evadne (*Supp.*), who rejects paternal authority to proclaim an arete defined in terms of female erotic incontinence, which she then acts upon by jumping to her death on her fallen husband's pyre—leaving her father, Iphis, distraught and bereft, to play the rôle of Demeter! But M. sees (correctly, in my view) that the multiple forms of 'playing the other' in these plays, the doublings and repetitions with their attendant effects of 'oscillation, conflict, equilibrium, negotiation' (p. 232), do not come to rest either in reaffirmation of patriarchy or in straightforward advocacy of some sort of feminism. They are, rather, precisely because of their conflicts and contradictions, complex dramatic investigations of political values in the democratic *polis*.

Inevitably, not everything in M.'s argument carries equal conviction. To me, at any rate, M.'s insistence on his schema sometimes seems to obscure dramatic nuance and pointing. A couple of examples must suffice here. M. is quite right to see that the decision of the Maiden of *Hcld.* to sacrifice herself 'symbolically enacts the principle of prohairesis' (p. 45) by choosing her civic community over her own life, but his insistence on Iolaos' and Demophon's failure to make the same choice significantly distorts the nature of their decisions. M. reads Iolaos' choice to save his life by leaving his city (see ll. 14–15) as a sign of his disdain for the *polis* and its institutions, even calling to witness proleptically the shade of that dubious democrat, Socrates, who preferred to stay and die (p. 84 n. 63). But in the drama, Iolaos' self-sacrifice would have entailed the death of the children he had vowed to protect, and in those circumstances surely no Athenian would have faulted him for fleeing a city ruled by his worst enemy. M. treats Demophon's refusal to sacrifice his own or another Athenian child to save the suppliants as reenacting Iolaos' failure, but in doing so neglects the explicit political context of the king's decision: 'If I do this, civil war will soon break out' (ll. 418–19). This hardly suggests a lack of concern for the welfare of the *polis*.

Similarly, in order to draw a close parallel between Evadne and Athena, who appears *ex machina* at the end of *Supp.*, as exemplifying the 'heroized female', M. insists that this 'warlike, man-like goddess' fully endorses 'the vengeful and self-interested ethos and spirit of vengeance that has brought ruin' (p. 221) and that will now continue into the next generation. It seems to me, at least, to make far better sense of Athena's appearance to understand her not as a partisan advocate but rather as the voice of history, acknowledging what the play has shown to be the result of human vengefulness and self-interest, prophesying the next round of violence that these impulses will engender, and urging Theseus to safeguard his land against future betrayals.

M.'s book began as a Princeton dissertation of 1991, but it has been revised to take account of work through the later 1990s. I noticed few errors, but I cannot resist

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mentioning the misattribution of my work at p. 162 n. 46. And on the following page, the lines of *Supplices* translated 'For in the eyes of women it is merely fitting that everything be done by males' might be rendered more precisely 'For it is proper for women who are wise to do everything through males'. The slightly different emphasis in the Greek is germane to M.'s overall argument.

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ALCESTIS

C. A. E. Luschnig, H. M. Roisman: *Euripides'* Alcestis. With Notes and Commentary. (Oklahoma Series in Classical Culture 29.) Pp. xv + 284. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003. Paper, US$24.95 (Cased, US$49.95). ISBN: 0-8061-3574-3 (0-8061-3458-5 hbk).

This annotated edition targets undergraduates whose desire for sophisticated literary analysis combines with limited Greek. The authors imagine third or fourth semester students. Thus they include review of irregular forms and syntactical structures such as conditionals; a basic vocabulary list (highlighting multiply used words) appears at the end. Students may consult an online translation by Luschnig, and there is a useful bibliography.

Classical undergraduates certainly need the text's reminders to think of staging. Following line-by-line notes, lengthy discussions appear, to be read after students have formed their own opinion. These sometimes juxtapose contrasting interpretations of the two editors, as indicated by initials. Other sections of explication or interpretation do not bear attribution, and so I found myself wondering whether these passages reflected consensus.

At the outset, the authors direct readers to keep in mind two criteria: 'Does it fit the text?' and 'Does it make sense on the stage?' While these are important, experience teaches that students also need historical context in order to evaluate what they are seeing. I miss reference to Csapo and Slater's survey, which situates beginners in the world of Greek tragedy. True, we moderns constitute an 'audience', and our instinctive response matters, but an unmediated and (as is common with undergraduates, strong) personal reaction should mark the beginning of a learning curve. The authors justly observe (p. 164) that there is no one 'answer' to the play, but surely some interpretative approaches lead to better readings than others.

So what kind of interpretative readings feature here? For example, if one wishes to address the question of why Alcestis chose to die, the notes ad loc. (p. 98) mention her 'love' for her husband and concern for the children. They also mention concern for the house, but without making clear that this is a case where cultural context must shape our reading. As A. Michelini (*Euripides and the Tragic Tradition* [Madison, 1987], p. 327) observes, there are two relevant Greek words for love (*eros* and *philia*), and confusion between them has led scholars to misread Alcestis' sense of her marital rôle. Michelini further observes

> Euripides did not have to explain to the audience what was part of their background knowledge about life: young women, once widowed, would ordinarily return to their fathers'

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