THE THEBAN PLAYS

P. MEINECK, P. WOODRUFF: *Sophocles: Theban Plays*. Translated with introduction and notes. Pp. lxxviii + 223. Indianapolis and Cambridge, MA: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003. Paper, £5.95, US$8.95. ISBN: 0-87220-585-1 (0-87220-586-X hbk).

M. and W.'s *O.T.* (2000), W.'s *Antigone* (2001) and M.'s previously unpublished *O.C.* are usefully collected in one volume.[1] The powerful and largely accurate translations (intended for performance, p. lxxv) have detailed individual introductions, stage directions, line numbers for Lloyd-Jones and Wilson's 1990 OCT, associated bibliography, footnotes elucidating the text's basic meaning, and excellent endnotes on textual issues and ambiguities. However, the standard of these and their inter-relationships (especially footnotes referring to the introductions) varies from excellent (*Antigone*) to competent (*O.C.*). Most valuable is the clear indication of strophes, antistrophes, *kommoi*, actors' sung passages, and metrical changes that heighten tension or affect an episode's pace.

The front cover shows J. F. Kennedy in the Oval Office (standing—back to camera, hands on desk, head down—between flags), signalling the accessibility of the modern linguistic register and the enduring relevance of Sophocles' themes: despair in the midst of power, the loneliness of command, the weight of decision-making, and the leader's responsibility for the state. However, it masks the translators' careful attention to Sophocles' original context, leading to detailed discussions of the differences between the perceptions of modern and original, largely Athenian, audiences and Greek concepts (e.g. *turannos* and *basileus*, *deinos*, *moira*, *atē*, *philoi*/*philia*, *xenia*).

W.'s general introduction serves the purpose of 'distil[ling] for you the wisdom of the scholars without hiding my own opinions. In reporting the points on which scholars disagree, I have tried to give you the tools and the impetus to form your own judgements on the main issues' (p. viii); unfortunately, this commendable approach is undermined because not all of the scholarship adopted is identified for the non-specialist.[2] M. sites the tragedies in the ancient Greek theatre (pp. xiii–vi), invaluably referring to art to assign Oedipus a walking-stick as a permanent prop and sensibly recreating stage directions. Nevertheless some further explanation is required: M.'s choice of stage-right for 'the city' assumes familiarity with Athenian geography,

[1]The other translations of the three plays in one volume are: D. Grene, R. Lattimore (edd.), *The Complete Greek Tragedies: Sophocles I*, revised edn (Chicago, 1991) and R. Fagles (trans.), *Sophocles: the Three Theban Plays* (Harmondsworth, 1984).

[2]Unacknowledged but in the Bibliography: Antigone as a bad woman—Sourvinou-Inwood; tragedy enacting the downfall of royal families—Seaford; Thebes as an anti-Athens (or its distanced surrogate)—Zeitlin. Entirely unacknowledged: Antigone has Athens' rôle in the Seven's burial (pp. xxxiii–iv)—N. Loraux, *The Invention of Athens: The Funeral Oration in the Classical City*, trans. A. Sheridan (Cambridge, MA, 1986); *turannos* as a neutral term designating a 'self-made ruler' (pp. xlii, xlvi–xlviii), except in Thucydides (p. xlviii)—V. Parker, *Hermes* 126 (1998), 145–72; Oedipus as an example of road-rage (p. lxi)—J. Gregory, *JHS* 115 (1995) 141–5; Oedipus as the victim of a plot and his own desire to believe what he is told (p. xliv)—F. Ahl, *Sophocles' Oedipus: Evidence and Self-Conviction* (Ithaca, 1991); Oedipus as a scapegoat (p. xxxvii)—J.-P. Vernant, in J.-P. Vernant, P. Vidal-Naquet, *Tragedy and Myth in Ancient Greece* (London, 1981), pp. 63–86, or R. D. Griffith, *Phoenix* 47 (1993), 95–114.

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illustration of the three-actor rule with *Antigone* elides the difficulties *O.C.* presents (either dividing Theseus between two actors or using four), and failure to differentiate between stage and orchestra (e.g. in *O.T.* 'there is an altar centre-stage', 63) could confuse.

W.'s *Antigone* is scholarly and considered, even integrating the philosophical considerations of Nussbaum and an appendix on Hegel. The introduction (pp. xvi–xxxv) focuses on Sophocles' construction of the tragedy to give valid points to Antigone and Creon and yield the object lesson: 'leadership must be tempered by advice from those who are led' (p. xxi). The characterization is explored insightfully (especially the Athenian audience's potentially negative response to a son arguing with his father, p. xxxi), but Ismene attracts too little attention. Indeed, lines are amended (556) and reattributed (572, with full discussion) to emphasize the contrast and conflict between the sisters, rather than any agreement or mutual understanding. The immediate, powerful, and sensitive translation successfully reproduces Greek funerary ritual's terminology and the nuances of *εὐβουλία* and *δυσβουλία*, and expertly captures the military flavour of the scene between the Guard (squaddie) and Creon (commanding officer) through the linguistic register and translation of *ἄναξ* as 'Sir!', only occasionally resorting to paraphrase and 'spin' (e.g. 59–60 *εἰ νόμου βίᾳ/ψηφον τυράννων ἢ κράτη παρέξιμεν*—becomes 'if we violate a dictator's decree', cf. R. Gibbons and C. Segal, *Sophocles: Antigone* [Oxford, 2003], 'if we defy the law and flout the ruler's vote and power').

The introduction (pp. xxxv–liii) of M. and W.'s *O.T.* emphasizes Sophocles' originality, complexity and use of existing myth ('a tragedy of destiny [l–li], or a tragedy of character, or as a tragedy of complexity [li–iii]', p. xxxvii) and focuses on Sophocles' affirmation of religion, through an examination of the Greek belief in oracles and its compatibility with suspicion of human conveyers of the gods' words (p. xxxix n. 17, p. xl)—although a footnoted cross-reference at 707ff. would prevent Jocasta being erroneously perceived as impious/hypocritical. The translation is freer than *Antigone*—downplaying the prologue's supplication language, translating particular words less consistently, and familiarizing names (e.g. 'Phoebus' becomes 'Apollo')—but this is not necessarily a disadvantage as Teiresias becomes clearer and more forceful as a character (e.g. 324–5, 328–9, 332–3) and it is not indiscriminate, the reproduction of repeated words in Oedipus and Jocasta's dialogues conveying a beautiful, and rare, sense of their closeness.

W. gives a personal response to *O.C.* (pp. liii–lxxi), identifying the widespread bewilderment *O.C.* causes as due to (i) the hero's alien ability to bless and curse; (ii) its acting against our tragic expectations (p. lv); and (iii) it being 'at every moment a stage play', whose power does not survive in translation (p. liv). M.'s translation has a wonderfully smooth Creon and uses short phrases to aid understanding, often changing the order of phrases for comprehensibility. Again supplication language is downplayed (e.g. 276), but consistency and sensitivity has also decreased (e.g. *ἀρχή* is 'leadership', 66, 'rulership', 67, or 'tyranny', 451; *κληδόνος καλῆς* is '*kudos*', 258; *κάκιστοι* are, albeit consistently and with suitable vehemence, 'bastards', 418, 1353, 1354, 1385), and some words (especially vocatives), phrases, and lines (e.g. from 1735 to 1750 and the third stasimon) are omitted. This creates some difficulties (e.g. omitted *ὦ ξένε*, 937, has the chorus criticizing Theseus, not Creon; Polyneices now moves 'against his brother's regime', 1329; the chorus, no longer *ὦ γῆς ἄνακτες*, are subordinate to Theseus, 292–5) but does maintain the pace and interest.

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

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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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