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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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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likely to receive if presented in articles like those he has recently published for *Orestes* itself and a few other plays. The index (devoted exclusively to the textual discussions) will only help readers who have first been drawn to the book.

H. provides a virtual running commentary on the first half of the play, with a focus on the long second episode (348–728). In this part of the book, he treats a variety of issues with broad learning and even-handed consideration of others' views. He argues that in starting with a pitiable Orestes and adding a hostile Tyndareus and a treacherous Menelaus, Euripides follows a recipe for a genuinely moving tragedy—up to line 1098, the play's acknowledged turning point. Once Pylades counsels revenge, and Orestes and Electra follow him, the principals lose our sympathy and never win it back. As H. discusses these events, he begins to concentrate more narrowly on advancing his own thesis. He shows that older scholars, determined to arrive at an evaluation of Orestes' character that could constitute the play's unity, were forced to downplay either the sympathetic early scenes or the chaotic and morally offensive later ones. Then he turns to the currently popular view that Euripides recreated an old-style tragic conflict for a diminished, modern protagonist unable to measure up to the heroic ideal. H. counters that the thought-world of the play pointedly excludes any alternatives Orestes should have preferred. He concludes that character-centered interpretations fail, and the play of ideas shows that it is the heroic code itself, not Orestes, that cannot measure up.

H. supports his case against character-centered interpretation with well-known pronouncements from Aristotle's *Poetics*. The *Habilitationsschrift* from which the *Orestes* portion of his book arose included a long chapter on Aristotle which he published separately as *Paideía oder Paidiá* (Stuttgart, 2000). H. next incorporates enough of that discussion to help him consider whether the *drame à thèse* he takes *Orestes* to be can provide the pleasure Aristotle thought proper to tragedy. His answer is that it cannot. Moreover, since Euripides' whole point, according to H., is that tragedy cannot show a way out of Orestes' ethical dilemma, it also cannot have been his aim to instruct his fellow citizens in any narrow sense—though H. is ready to admit a broader didacticism, in the sense of subjecting the audience's beliefs to searching criticism.

It is at first sight surprising that H. devotes three of his four sections on *Bacchae* to characters (the chorus, Pentheus, and Dionysus) rather than scenes or issues, but it soon becomes clear how this choice suits his reading of *Bacchae* as another dramatization of the ethics of revenge. He first aims to show that the experience and (low) level of self-awareness of the chorus bear certain resemblances to those of the principals in *Orestes*, so that they are to some extent the play's 'tragic heroines'. Next, he argues that Pentheus does not deserve the prominence he has in many interpretations, particularly psychological ones. Although he becomes an object of pity, Pentheus is important mainly as the attacker of the god and his followers. The third section spiritedly advances the unlikely-sounding thesis that the god Dionysus is also part 'tragic hero'. Although the success of his revenge is never in doubt, it does cost the lives of several of his family members, and his aunts renounce his worship, Agave even to his face. Yet not taking revenge was not an option for the god, whose very divinity was at risk. Finally, H. takes up (to qualify or reject) sundry meta-theatrical readings before offering his own variation: for his last word on revenge, Euripides fittingly dramatized the theatre god's own failure to understand the ethical problem it posed throughout fifth-century tragedy. In a final irony, an uncomprehending public awarded the posthumous production first prize.

In focusing on ethical choices of 'tragic heroes' and touching only lightly on topics

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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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