

synopses of all the plays for readers not familiar with them, the full rewards of the reading experience require a quite thorough acquaintance with Euripides' plays. A discussion of Euripides' verbal style would have made an interesting – and important – adjunct to the treatment as a whole.

*Sanna-Ilaria Kittelä*

GARY S. MELTZER: *Euripides and the Poetics of Nostalgia*. Cambridge University Press, New York 2006. ISBN 978-0-521-85873-1. XI, 266 pp. GBP 45, USD 80.

The scholarly tradition has long held a view of Euripides as a sophist and a radical because of how his dramatic techniques differ from other tragic poets, namely Aeschylus and Sophocles. This point of view has been supported by texts of Euripides' contemporary writers, the archetypal locus of "Euripides the Sophist" being Aristophanes' *Frogs*. In this book, Gary S. Meltzer engages in a new strand of discussion in this area, arguing that in spite of Euripides' use of the new, sophistic, techniques of argumentation, a fundamentally conservative character underlies his plays. Although Euripidean dramas can be loaded with piercing scepticism and cynicism, they also express a yearning for moral codes of the heroic past, where the truth was unchangeable and transparent, and justice authorised by gods, as opposed to relativist truths gained by sophistic argumentation. Meltzer sees Euripides' plays as reflecting the cultural change in contemporary fifth century Athens: the social and political life torn by the ongoing Peloponnesian War, the anxiety that people felt when faced with the new, written book culture that was encouraged by the sophists who boasted the Protagorean claim that with the right arguments one can make the weaker case win over the stronger. The writer parallels the Athenian situation with modern Western, especially American, change in social and cultural conduct, the war on terrorism and the rapidly emerging change from written book culture to the information age.

The book is divided into seven parts: introduction, five main chapters and an epilogue. Meltzer presents as his starting point the opposing arguments on truth in the agon of Polyneices and Eteocles in the *Phoenician Women* (469–72; 499–502). Whereas Polyneices sees the word of truth as single and transparent while the unjust argument of many words needs to cover itself cleverly, for Eteocles "good" and "beautiful" are relative concepts and language is just a convention manufactured by humans. Thus, according to Eteocles, all words can have different meanings for different persons. This opposition Meltzer sees as central in Euripidean drama, and in the first chapter he continues to analyse this through deconstructionist theory based on the writings of Jacques Derrida. In the next four chapters he further investigates how questions related to this opposition are posed and answered in four extant plays, *Hippolytus*, *Hecuba*, *Ion* and *Helen*, including in his discussion also interpretations based on feminist theory. The focus of Meltzer's literary analyses is the idea of nostalgia in Euripides' tragedies: "whether it finds expression as a resonant motif in individual speeches, as an element of the plot, or as pervasive mood, nostalgia provides an important thematic and dramatic focus in the four plays under study in this book" (p. 20). Along with the texts of Euripides, the writer considers the poet's contemporary writers, especially Thucydides (Pericles), Plato and Aristophanes.

Meltzer's discussion is detailed and it engages well with earlier research on the topic. However, sometimes the argumentation suffers from rather a one-sided point of view: the

writer claims that although there are sophistic elements in Euripides' texts, one cannot take them to mean that the poet himself was a sophist. On the other hand, he uses the same argument on behalf of his own claim of Euripides' conservative character – the poet was a conservative because his texts hint in that direction (amongst many other things!) (p. 14–15). Yet Meltzer makes interesting and fresh observations on the reception of these dramas in the modern world, especially when he parallels fifth century Athenian culture with modern Western culture. A particularly fascinating example is Meltzer's comparison of Helen's loss of her identity to the phantom image in *Helen* with the threat of identity thefts in a virtual environment through the Internet. This book raises some interesting new perspectives on Euripidean drama and its reception. With its detailed bibliography and indexes, and quotations in original Greek with translations, this book is valuable for scholars of ancient drama as well as for those studying early philosophy.

Sanna-Ilaria Kittelä

*Brill's Companion to Thucydides*. Edited by ANTONIOS RENGAKOS – ANTONIS TSAKMAKIS. Brill, Leiden – Boston 2006. ISBN 978-90-04-13683-0. XIX, 947 pp. EUR 259, USD 368.

*Brill's Companion to Thucydides*, edited by Antonios Rengakos and Antonis Tsakmakis, is the first comprehensive collective work on Thucydides for several decades. The volume on Thucydides in the *Wege der Forschung* series of the Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft was published as early as 1968. During the years intervening these two books there have been developments in the study of ancient historiography. New methodological ideas and approaches in modern literary criticism, inspired by phenomenological, hermeneutical and structuralist ideas, have found their way into the study of classical literature as well. The somewhat positivistic approach, typical of the classical scholarship of the twentieth century, has given way to a kind of study that calls the very nature of the text into question. As for the study of historiography, there has been a shift of focus from the reliability of the text as a historical source to a closer analysis of the narrative structures, the ways in which the text forms meaning and how it relates to the reality it deals with.

These new approaches are widely represented in *Brill's Companion to Thucydides*. The book consists of thirty-two articles written by leading Thucydidean scholars from all over the world. The book is divided into four parts. The first part, "Author, contexts, ideas", contains eight articles which deal with the author himself and the social and cultural background as well as the literary models for his work. While the first part deals with the external relations of Thucydides, the articles of the second part, "The art of Thucydides", consider the inner qualities of the work. Five articles of a more general character analyzing narrative techniques and devices as well as the historical methodology of Thucydides are followed by five more specific articles which discuss the ways in which Thucydides deals with certain themes (topography, warfare, religion, individual characters and "power politics"). The heading of the third part, "Wie es eigentlich gewesen?" refers to Leopold von Ranke, one of the pioneers of academic historiography in the nineteenth century. This may serve to underline the fact that not even the questions and approaches of the traditional study of ancient historiography have been neglected. These are indeed still important and certainly deserve to be taken into account in a wide-