ACTA CLASSICA LX (2017) ISSN 0065-1141

Van Zyl Smit, B. (ed.) 2016. *A Handbook to the Reception of Greek Drama*, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell. Pp. xviii + 601. ISBN 978-1-118-34775-1. US$195.

This survey of the reception of ancient drama arrived not long after *The Oxford Handbook of Greek Drama in the Americas* and *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Euripides*[1] and not long before further Brill volumes on Aristophanes, Sophocles, and Aeschylus. Unsurprisingly, one finds between these covers yet another wide-ranging, data-rich introduction, written by experts and aimed at specialists and non-specialists alike, to a big subject – the worldwide performance reception of Greek drama from antiquity to the recent present. Yet this *Handbook* is unique in at least one respect. Since Flashar's *Inszenierung der Antike* (1991; second edition 2009) and the then-revelatory inclusion of chapters on reception in the *Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (1997), there have been studies of the reception of specific plays, studies of the reception of specific tragedians, and studies of the reception of ancient drama in specific geographical areas or specific time periods.[2] Never yet has a single multi-authored volume compassed the diachronic global performance reception of all five extant ancient Greek playwrights. On that score at least, the editor and her contributors are to be congratulated. Indeed, the list of contributors includes big names, established figures, and younger scholars; I note a stellar opening lineup on reception in antiquity and the middle ages and (to continue with the cricketing metaphor) an impressive lower order as well.

Scope and coverage are crucial to any handbook or companion, and there are major omissions, as I see it, in terms of media.[3] According to Van Zyl Smit's introduction (p. 2), the main spheres of interest here are translation, performance, stage adaptation, opera (one chapter), and film (one chapter). Performance looms large throughout; adaptation and translation come and go. There is almost no mention of poetry, fiction, orchestral music, dance, musicals, artworks, graphic novels, video games, and so on. It may be hair-splitting, but still, do these things not also belong to 'the reception of Greek drama'?

The diachronic scope is complete: from antiquity and the middle ages through the early modern era right up to the present. The geographical scope – across six continents – is almost as comprehensive. Where the Brill Companions are single-playwright focused, this *Handbook* revolves mostly around regional traditions, which makes it a good complement to that series. On the other hand, Africa and the two Americas are kept to one chapter each, with Biglieri's discussion of South America (Chapter 18, 'Antigone, Medea, and Civilisation and Barbarism in Spanish American History', pp. 348–63) tightly focused on Antigone and Medea. Japan effectively stands in for the whole of Asia (Wetmore, Jr., Chapter 20, 'The Reception of Greek Tragedy in Japan', pp. 382–96). Including sections on antiquity, then, some three-fifths of the book covers reception in continental Europe. This is to be expected and presumably reflects both the distribution of expertise in reception studies and the historical role of the classical tradition vis-à-vis European education and imperialism. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that this is in effect a book about Europe first and everywhere else second.

Before previewing the contributions, Van Zyl Smit's brief Introduction (pp. 1–10) harks back to Hardwick's seminal book *Reception Studies*[4] and its role in opening up a new field of scholarship. Because 'there is currently no handbook suitable to introduce

[1] Bosher, K., Macintosh, F., McConnell, J. & Rankine, P. (edd.) 2015. *The Oxford Handbook of Greek Drama in the Americas.* Oxford; **a**nd Lauriola, R. and Demetriou, K. N. (ed.) 2015. *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Euripides*. Leiden.

[2] Flashar, H. 2009[2]. *Inszenierung der Antike: Inszenierung der Antike: Das griechische Drama auf der Bühne*. Munich; Easterling, P.E. (ed.) 1997. *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*. Cambridge.

[3] The table of contents may be found on the Wiley website: http://www.wiley.com.

[4] Hardwick, L. 2003. *Reception Studies*. Oxford.

students to the area and to give them an overview of the field', this *Handbook* 'aims to provide an introduction to *the study of* the reception of Greek drama from antiquity to the present' (p. 1, my emphasis). This, then, is to be an introduction to the field, fulfilling the promise of Hardwick's earlier work, intended for students. Yet the reception-focused approach, revolving around national traditions and taking in multiple playwrights and plays, renders these essays reasonably hard going for anyone who does not already know the titles, plots, and composers of the extant Greek plays; few are what I myself would call *accessible*. Moreover, none of these essays includes a list of works discussed, though the very useful sub-headings in Meineck's essay on North America (Chapter 21, 'Greek Drama in North America', pp. 397–421) fulfil much the same function, as does the list of recordings in Ewans's essay on opera (Chapter 24, 'Greek Drama in Opera', pp. 464–85, at 482–3). Nor is there an appendix or index of works discussed for the book as a whole. (Contrast, say, the 'List of Modern Adaptations' appended to *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Euripides*.[5]) All in all, then, it is not entirely clear to me quite which students this book is for, beyond graduates already active in the field – or else 'students' of classical reception in the etymological rather than practical sense.

Theatre historians and classicists, however, whether traditional philologists or reception studies specialists, should find this *Handbook* uniquely useful, not least because of the focus on regional traditions in specific eras. The overall standard is high, the error rate well within acceptable limits.[6] (One error is egregious: David Stuttard is listed in the 'Notes on Contributors' despite not having contributed.) All chapters present valuable data, while some are genuinely top-notch.

Revermann (Chapter 1, 'The Reception of Greek Tragedy from 500 to 323 BC', pp. 13–28) presents the reception of Greek tragedy in classical Greece as a model of reception *tout court* by drilling down into four case studies. Without any overarching narrative of, say, the spread of tragedy throughout the Greek world, or of the Lycurgan recension, or of audiences and theatres in the fourth century, or of what remains of fourth-century tragedy (e.g. *Rhesos*), this chapter demands more of its readers than do others. I note in passing that the story of Euripides' death in Macedon (p. 18), though the *communis opinio*, is not universally accepted. Nevertheless, it is good to reflect on the place of tragedy as the Athenian genre par excellence and the concomitant place of tragedy at the heart of reception studies today.

Given our limited evidence for theatre performance in the Hellenistic era, Miles (Chapter 3, 'Greek Drama in the Hellenistic World', pp. 45–62) makes a virtue of necessity, focusing instead on the stamp left by tragedy on literary history. The chapters by Sommerstein (Chapter 2, 'Greek Comedy and its Reception, c. 500–323 BC', pp. 29–44) and Brown (Chapter 4, 'Greek Comedy at Rome', pp. 63–77) are characteristically lucid, sensible, and accessible. Manuwald (Chapter 5, 'Roman Tragedy', pp. 78–93) reads Roman tragedy *qua* reception in a reference-rich survey possessing the same virtues as the author's own *Roman Republican Theatre* (2011).[7]

Kenward (Chapter 9, 'The Reception of Greek Drama in Early Modern England', pp. 173–98) works outward from the incisive observation that Early Modern English drama,

---

[5] Lauriola, R. and Demetriou, K. N. (edd.) 2015. *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Euripides*. Leiden. pp. 621–36.

[6] In case there is to be a reprint, I suggest a few corrigenda: *passim*, there are font issues with macrons on italicized 'ō'; on occasion, *Dionysus in 69* is incorrectly rendered *Dionysus in '69*; the list of 'References' for Chapter 1 (Revermann) omits the designation 'eds' (used elsewhere) for some edited collections listed; p. 26, 'Hall (2007)' should read 'Hall (2006)'; p. 42, Bosher (ed.), *Theater Outside Athens* lacks publication details; p. 57, 58, Ezekiel's '*Exagogue*' should read '*Exagōgē*' or '*Exagoge*'; p. 404, 'in habitats on ['of'? '*sic*'?] old Gotham'; p. 418, 'Euripides, [and] Aristophanes (and Menander)'; p. 462, the chronological order of Goff's bibliographical entries appears muddled; p. 538, the bibliography duplicates Revermann (2010); in the back cover blurb, 'focuses at [on?]'.

[7] Manuwald, G. 2011. *Roman Republican Theatre*. Cambridge.

even before the humanist 'rediscovery' of Greek texts, had a fair bit of ancient *myth* worked into it (pp. 174–75). By way of discussions of Shakespeare and Hecuba (and *Hecuba*), the conclusion is reached that Greek tragedy is both ubiquitous and invisible in Early Modern English drama, and that we are to read the point(s) of reception here vis-à-vis cultural intersections between specific theatrical events and wider audience knowledge of Greek myths.

Bierl's discussion of reception in the German-speaking world (Chapter 13: 'Germany, Austria, and Switzerland', pp. 257–82) explicitly excludes adaptations, referring us to Flashar's *Inszenierung der Antike* (p. 258). But what about, say, Christa Wolff's *Medea: Stimmen* (1996)? Or theatrical adaptations since 2009?

Macintosh (Chapter 16, 'Conquering England: Ireland and Greek Tragedy', pp. 323–36) adopts an effective conceit, namely excavating the Irish–Greek conquest of the London stage by writers such as Shaw and Heaney. In so doing, she offers a convincing explanation of a well-worn theme – Irish writers carry the torch for Greek tragedy in part because of Irish funerary rituals and Hiberno-English.

Meineck's chapter on North America (Chapter 21) is a good example of what can be done by scholars of reception with high-quality thick description of well-chosen examples. Meineck concludes with pertinent criticism of scholastic reviews of performances of Greek tragedy in the USA: 'One might hope for a future where, like those of Shakespeare, the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes (and Menander) will be both studied as ancient texts by scholars and performed as contemporary theater works by artists' (p. 418). Indeed.

Mackinnon's idiosyncratic, elliptical account of realism (or rather realisms) in filmed tragedy (Chapter 25: 'Filmed Tragedy', pp. 486–505) neither systematically surveys the field nor offers an especially clear argument, and Michelakis's *Greek Tragedy on Screen* (2013) remains the first port of call for those new to the subject.[8]

A number of chapters are invaluable partly because they deal with material that is inaccessible or unknown to many in the target readership – material, say, in languages such as Dutch, Japanese, or Arabic. This is in fact one of the volume's great strengths. Monaghan (Chapter 22, 'Greek Drama in Australia', pp. 422–45), for example, gathers a wealth of hard-to-reach Australian data in a promising preview of a planned monograph.

The standout contributions are those of Symes and Ewans. Symes (Chapter 6, 'Ancient Drama in the Medieval World', pp. 97–130) takes on the prevailing view that Greek tragedy died in the medieval era, concluding that Greek tragedy was *not* killed off by asceticism; that it *did* survive, in spirit, in other cultural forms; and that it *did* survive, in reality, in the form of reading texts. This is a not uncontroversial argument, and Symes cogently restates it (p. 121) for the sake of those, like myself, who are not in the least insulted by summaries, reviews, and the like. Overall, her essay is clear and argumentative without indulging in insider baseball: just what the editor (presumably) ordered.

Ewans (Chapter 24) walks us through the history of opera (which was after all a genre of music drama developed in view of tragedy) and of operas based on Greek drama, all without dumbing down the analysis or alienating non-musical readers. He is refreshingly unequivocal about what which operas, composers, and recordings are worth listening to (Gluck, Cherubini, Wagner, Strauss, and Szymanowski). And he sustains a clear argument about the centrality of emotion to tragedy and opera: 'Any modern version which presents Greek tragedy as an austere, remote, and archaic form of theater, and distances the spectators from the action, is a betrayal of both the letter and the spirit of the original' (p. 479). The discussion of Strauss's *Elektra* is exemplary: Strauss enfolds Hofmannsthal's 'tragedy of modern emotions', with all its 'Dionysian power', in a 'coherent musico-dramatic structure', thereby applying modernist aesthetics to the fundamentals of Greek tragedy (p. 476).

[8] Michelakis, P. 2013. *Greek Tragedy on Screen*. Oxford.

So, as an introduction to the 'reception of Greek drama' broadly construed, aimed from the outset at students new to the field, this volume does not *quite* fit the bill. As a data-rich diachronic survey of performance reception worldwide, however, and with some translation and adaptation added for good measure, it more than suffices. Even among the fast-growing ranks of companions and handbooks to classical reception, Van Zyl Smit's *Handbook* manages, just, to stand out.

Simon Perris
Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand