

LEXIS

Poetica, retorica e comunicazione nella tradizione classica

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Euripides, *Hecuba*, ed. by Luigi Battezzato (Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 296; ISBN 978-05--2113-864-2; £ 23.99.

Hecuba was a popular play in Antiquity, and in the Middle Ages too, as we can infer from the sheer number of manuscripts that contain it – more than for any other play that survived into the Byzantine period. During the Renaissance, it was regarded as «perhaps the outstanding piece in the Greek tragic corpus¹. It does not quite have that status today, however; perhaps symptomatic of this has been the absence of a major commentary on the drama in either the Oxford Euripides series or in “Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics”, the famous ‘Green and Yellow’ series. The latter has now filled this gap with Luigi Battezzato’s commentary, which will be an immense boon for students, teachers, and scholars too.

After a few pages of *Acknowledgements*, *Abbreviations*, and *Key to metrical symbols*, the twenty-eight page *Introduction* is divided into ten sections: *Euripides: life and works*, *The date of ‘Hecuba’*, *Production*, *Myth*, *Characters and reciprocity: ‘charis’, ‘xenia’, ‘philia’*, *Hecuba’s revenge*, *Reception*, *Transmission of the text*, *Presentation of textual evidence in this edition*, *Metre and language*. A list of *Symbols, sigla, and abbreviations used in the edition of the Greek text* then leads into the text of the play, which is printed with an apparatus at the foot of the page. The Commentary that follows is over 180 pages long; the book is then concluded by a list of works cited (divided into *Editions and commentaries*, *Main editions of ‘Hecuba’*, and then works cited by author name and date), a subject index, and a Greek index.

The *Introduction* is throughout an excellent, readable guide to the play and its reception, especially in Antiquity, but not neglecting the Middle Ages and Renaissance. There was only one omission of any significance: the account of the Polyxena myth (p. 8) moves straight from the epic *Sack of Troy* and *Nostoi* to Ibycus without mentioning a certain poet in between. For Polyxena’s sacrifice was very probably depicted in Stesichorus’ *Sack of Troy* (probably first half of the sixth century), given that it features on the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina* (Stesichorus fr. 105 Finglass) whose claim to depict «The Sack of Troy

¹ M. Heath, ‘*Jure principem locum tenet*’: Euripides’ *Hecuba*, BICS 34, 1987, 40-68, at 40.

according to Stesichorus» should be provisionally accepted. Moreover, among the papyrus fragments of the poem we may note the reference at fr. 119.3 F. to ‘Achilles the hero’, whose main function in myth is to demand Polyxena’s sacrifice, and the text πολυξε[at fr. 118.5, which could well be Polyxena’s name. (For all we know, the sacrifice was mentioned in Stesichorus’ *Nostoi* too.). At 1279n. Battezzato contrasts how Euripides and Sophocles have Agamemnon killed with an axe, in contrast to Homer and Aeschylus who despatch him with a sword; this too omits Stesichorus, whose Agamemnon is almost certainly killed by an axe (see fr. 180.1 F. with n.), and also the visual arts, where a sword is used. The influence on tragedy of earlier poetry was not limited to Homer, or even to epic; missing details like this may cumulatively obscure broader patterns of influence, especially given Stesichorus’ considerable influence on tragedy.

The text is thoughtful and independent; rather than relying on any previous editor, Battezzato thinks through problems for himself (see e.g. 415-22n., explaining why he does not adopt a transposition printed by Diggle in the Oxford Classical Text). In particular, he is not afraid to delete lines which he believes to have been inserted by later actors and producers, and justifies these decisions in the commentary; as well as giving a clearer picture of what Euripides himself actually wrote, these notes open windows onto reception history and dramatic reperformance in antiquity. The apparatus is rightly shorter than what we might expect in an *editio maior*, though Battezzato still finds room to mention (e.g.) good conjectures which he nevertheless does not print in the text; in an edition aimed primarily at ‘upper-level undergraduates and graduate students’ (thus the back cover) that is perhaps unnecessary, though might be justified on the ground that, given the lack of any big edition of the play, Battezzato’s book will often be a first recourse for scholars too.

In the main part of the book, Battezzato’s strengths as a Hellenist and as a commentator are everywhere apparent. He writes with a clarity and economy that puts us native speakers of English to shame, explaining complex phenomena in terms that students will be able to follow. His command of the relevant bibliography is second to none, familiar as he is not just with the literature on *Hecuba* and Euripides, but on tragedy and indeed classical Greek literature (and history: see e.g. 8n. on Athenian relationships with Thrace) as a whole. His note on 904 is a model of the good sense of his exposition: he gives a lucid account of his preferred staging, before (in a new paragraph) raising an alternative staging advocated by a recent scholar and showing (without polemic) why that staging is implausible, on the basis of characterisation, language, and dramatic parallels. The reader of the note will come away with an idea not just of what actually happened on stage, but of how the evidence for such a question can be most effectively weighed. His note on 43 is a masterpiece of compression, showing the significance of fate within the play and pointing the interested reader to three (and only three – no bibliographical deluge here) modern discussions. At 836-40n. he brings out the meaning of Hecuba’s desire that all her body parts should have a voice to strengthen her appeal to Agamemnon, rightly rejecting modern interpreters’ of the move as grotesque and seeing it in the context of related rhetorical strategies in tragedy and epic. This is commentary writing of a high order. Perhaps sometimes there could have been a slight rebalancing towards more literary interpretation; notes on, for instance, matters of orthography, or the finer points of Porson’s Law, could have been dropped (I say this reluctantly, because no-one expounds these matters better than Battezzato does) in favour of explaining why Euripides uses certain forms and expressions. So at 20n. we are told that «young people are often compared to growing plants», with a brief list of references, when we could have done with an explanation of what, if anything, this comparison contributes to the passage in question. But this is straining to find room for improvement in a work of exceptional quality and accessibility.

The volume is accurately printed², and a joy to use. The other two plays of the Byzantine triad, *Phoenissae* and *Orestes*, still lack a commentary in this series, and indeed a modern scholarly edition suitable for classroom use; if they are not already assigned, it would be a further tremendous service to scholarship if Battezzato were to take one – or both – of them on.

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² I noticed only «Ployxena» at p. 143, the absence of bold font at the opening of the Greek lemmata to 534 and 929 f., and «Dugale» (for 'Dugdale') at p. 264. At 946-7n. the lemma begins with an unstressed particle, something better avoided.

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