

I do not want to end on a negative note; overall this is a very good collection, and the editors are to be congratulated on eliciting such fine essays from seventeen very different contributors.

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METATHEATRE IN ANCIENT DRAMA

PAILLARD (E.), MILANEZI (S.) (edd.) *Theatre and Metatheatre. Definitions, Problems, Limits*. (MythosEikonPoiesis 11.) Pp. x + 308, colour ill. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2021. Cased, £100, €109.95, US\$126.99. ISBN: 978-3-11-063741-0.

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The term ‘metatheatre’ has become widely, if not completely, accepted as a theoretical model. It denotes a self-reflexive tendency in which the text of a drama clarifies its status as a dramatic production through references to costumes, props and other dramatic devices, recognition of the audience’s presence, the *mise en abyme*, and any means that break the dramatic illusion. Since this concept was coined for modern theatre by Lionel Abel in 1963, a number of contemporary scholars have explored it in ancient theatre, the most notable being C. Segal (*Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides’ Bacchae* [1982], *Euripides and the Poetics of Sorrow. Art, Gender and Commemoration in Alcestis, Hippolytus and Hecuba* [1993]), M. Ringer (*Electra and the Empty Urn. Metatheater and Role Playing in Sophocles* [1998]) and N.W. Slater (*Plautus in Performance: the Theatre of the Mind* [1985], *Spectator Politics: Metatheatre and Performance in Aristophanes* [2002]).

The volume under review deals with aspects of metatheatricality in Greek and Roman, but in fact mainly in Greek, drama. It contains eleven contributions, the quality of which varies from the first-rate that clearly add to our knowledge to the unconvincing. Despite the claim that ‘It is high time to rethink what we include under the terms “ancient Greek theatre”, “paratheatre” and “metatheatre”’ (p. 7), I did not find any rethinking of what we mean by the terms, but rather noteworthy discussions of certain passages pertaining to the concepts. Given the diversity of the volume’s content, I will concentrate on the chapters that I found particularly valuable.

The introduction by the two editors contains a useful overview of the terms *thea*, *theatron* and *drama* in classical and Hellenistic Greek (pp. 2–7). Chapters by O. Taplin and A. Giannotti contribute to this discussion and provide a helpful overview of the gradations of performance and the pre-performance ceremonies, when the playwright/director of a tragedy could tell the potential audience the theme of the forthcoming play and the changes made as part of this new version of an ancient myth. Under the term ‘diffused performance’ Taplin subsumes creative intimations, rehearsals, festival rituals, pre-play ceremonies, discussions, re-performances and various receptions across genres and times. By ‘core performance’ he understands an event set in the time and place of theatre and thus distinct from the everyday world. Giannotti analyses the pre-play ceremonies and their sources and concludes that spectators may have played an important

role. Their visual memory must have recalled and recognised the ceremonies when theatrically evoked at that very moment.

M. Skotheim's contribution is not directly connected to the rest of the volume's content, but is nonetheless fascinating. Skotheim applies J. Grotowski's definition of 'paratheatre' to premodern performance categories, including those of the ancient Greek theatre. It pertains to more informal or less sophisticated forms of performance, such as puppetry, magic tricks, pantomime, burlesque and circus arts, which span a wide range of historical periods and geographical regions, and point to activities, including rituals, related to theatre and not associated with the performance of drama, but responding to rituals and practices depicted in theatre productions. By examining the different facets of street performers and performances, Skotheim arrives at a definition of 'paratheatre' or 'paratheatrical entertainment' as any genre in which *thaumatoποιοί* ('wonder-makers') performed. The concept is in turn important for the act of watching, as 'spectator' and 'actor' lose their separative meaning, and both action and creation become a collective responsibility.

E. Ruch examines Euripides' scenes of recognition (*Electra* 509–81, *Helen* 566–92, 622–59, *Iphigenia in Tauris* 795–7, 837–40, 900–3, and *Ion* 516–30, 1338–55) as a key to understanding certain aspects of Euripides' metatheatre and innovative dramaturgy. Through these scenes the playwright illustrates his awareness of dramatic art and his concern for innovation not only in the construction of the tragic plot, but also in his dramatic music and *tableaux scéniques*. Euripides' metatheatrical approach enables the audience to experience theatrical performance in all its richness and to adopt willingly a new kind of dramaturgy more focused on πάθος and surprises – a kind of dramaturgy that is, in a word, more spectacular.

P. Brillet-Dubois reveals metatheatrical connotations in the prologue and final *kommos* of Euripides' *Troades*. She shows how the Aegean context, in which Athens plays a mediating and oppressive role, is mixed into Euripides' tragic plot. The fall of the city of Priam recalls the destruction inflicted by the Athenians on the Melians, the need to demand purification for their crimes and the need for caution in the dangerous Sicilian expedition that was to contribute to the fall of Athens. Euripides' play is not only a universal and poignant portrayal of the effects of war on a community, but also a highly topical work set before an audience made up of the Athenians, their allies and, very probably sitting in the front rows, the Egean ambassadors who arrived in Athens at the end of winter. Troy enters Athens, and the Athenian audience becomes Trojan. Brillet-Dubois points out that in this play, more than in others, Euripides prevents the audience from giving in to the distraction of the performance or forgetting the reality behind the mask.

L. Di Virgilio provides a new and subtle analysis of the well-known passage from Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae* 877–1111, in which the tirade of the young woman representing the genre of comedy could be an appeal to the audience to explain the change from the monody sung by the old woman representing lyrics to the duet in which both characters participate and that is actually sung. In this metatheatrical scene Aristophanes asks the audience to appreciate the poetic choice and to regard it, as he does, as amusing and appropriate for this comedy. Through the voice of the young woman Aristophanes assures the audience that what will happen in the scene is τερπνόν τι καὶ κωμωδικόν (889). Di Virgilio argues that κωμωδικόν (the word is attested very few times in Aristophanes: in *Vesp.* 1020 and 1047 it pertains to the 'comic verses' of Aristophanes; in *Amphiaraios*, fr. 31 PCG, it refers to a theatrical mask; in *Eccl.* 371 it is an attribute for a chamber pot) requires attention. The meaning of the word is not only 'typical of the genre of comedy', but more precisely 'specifically admitted and used in a comedy as a means of expression' (p. 230). This is why it is used for verses, masks, objects and probably also songs.

However, I missed passages such as Cratinus' *Archilochoi*, fr. 6 PCG, where a model of two competing poets, the epic against the lyric, works according to the model of the early version of the *Certamen*, a model that may well have been developed later in Aristophanes' *Frogs*. In the old *Certamen*, it was traditionally Homer versus Hesiod, as epic poet versus epic poet, while Aristophanes used the model for tragedy, pitting Aeschylus against Euripides, as tragic poet against tragic poet. Cratinus, on the other hand, may have switched the pattern to 'genre versus genre' by pitting Homer against Archilochus as 'epic versus iambic', and Aristophanes does likewise in the *Ecclesiazusae* passage discussed by Di Virgilio. Many scholars have speculated on the possibility that this play dramatises a contest between Archilochian and epic poetry, perhaps represented by two semi-choruses, the followers of Homer (and perhaps Hesiod) against the followers of Archilochus.

A. Duncan excitingly explores the metatheatrical impact of the unmasked female performers of pantomime on the audience. She discusses the 'Charition mime', found in Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 413 (approximately dated to the second century BCE), and the 'jealous mistress mime', on the other side of this papyrus. Duncan highlights the logic of masked drama in antiquity and asks how a genre that was also open to female performers, the *mimae*, could draw attention to the conventionalised artificiality of the 'traditional' Greek masked, male-only genres. Male viewers of mime performances assumed that the women performing were as promiscuous and immoral as the stereotypical adulteresses they played unmasked. The fact that the actress did not wear a mask would have encouraged the impulse to associate the actress with the role, as it gave the audience the illusion of authenticity, naturalness or genuineness. Duncan points out that actresses also used their stage names as masks outside the performance space. The names of the *mimae* helped to blur the boundaries between reality and illusion, self and other.

The strength of the book does not lie in the methodological effort to make explicit their precise definitions of 'theatre', 'paratheatre' and/or 'metatheatre'. The definitions are not clarified and probably should not be. Rather, the strength lies in the individual contributions I have highlighted, which analyse specific textual pieces and discuss metatheatricality in relation to them. The volume's various discussions of the theatrical mask – obviously a central theme for metatheatricality – do not, however, mention recent research into the use of masks in ancient Greek dramatic performance, and the implications of this use, or how and why these powerful 'tools of the mind' were able to evoke deep emotional responses in those who saw them in performance (e.g. P. Meineck, 'The Neuroscience of the Tragic Mask', *Arion* 19 [2011], 113–58; 'Mask as Mind Tool: a Methodology of Material Engagement', in: M. Anderson, D. Cairns and M. Sprevak [edd.], *Distributed Cognition in Classical Antiquity* [2019], pp. 71–91; A. Duncan, 'The Familiar Mask', in: M. Telò and M. Mueller [edd.], *The Materialities of Greek Tragedy: Objects and Affect in Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides* [2018], pp. 79–95).

It remains to express appreciation for this useful editorial initiative. The result is an insightful overview of developments in the analysis of metatheatrical aspects of ancient performances, advancing research in the field. This is a useful resource for students of theatre studies and classical philology.

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