

LUIGI BATTEZZATO, *Euripides, Hecuba*, Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, xi+287 pp., £23.99, ISBN 978-0-521-13864-2.

Just as Hecuba herself has become a figure emblematic of the mutability of human fortune, so too has Euripides' *Hecuba* undergone dramatic shifts in terms of popularity, literary appreciation and scholarly attention.¹ Included in the so-called 'Byzantine triad' of Euripides' tragedies, *Hecuba* was his most widely read work from antiquity to the Renaissance, but fell out of favour as opinions shifted on its perceived lack of dramatic unity and the questionable morality of Hecuba's revenge. As the wheel of fortune turns, however, the text has come back into critical and cultural focus, and the appearance of this volume by Battezzato (B.) is to be warmly welcomed by scholars and students alike. As a new critical edition by a philologist whose engagement with *Hecuba* now spans several decades, B.'s text and commentary will henceforth be an important resource for scholars working on the play;² as an addition to the Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics series, whose primary intended audience is upper-school pupils, undergraduates and graduate students, the volume succeeds in making this absorbing tragedy newly accessible to an Anglophone student readership.³

B.'s introduction contains ten sections, covering a lot of ground in a rather brisk manner: (1) an overview of Euripides' life and works; (2) evidence for the dating of *Hecuba* (B. concludes that 424 BC is "a very likely, but not certain, date"); (3) aspects of staging and production; (4) the myth; (5) the central themes of *charis*, *xenia* and *philia*; (6) the morality of Hecuba's revenge; (7) the play's reception; (8) the transmission of the text; (9) the presentation of the text in B.'s edition; and (10) tragic metre and language.

The more discursive sections provide a good indication of the qualities of the work as a whole. B.'s expert knowledge of the play is distilled throughout

¹ In this review I refer to the following editions: S. G. Daitz, *Euripides: Hecuba*, Leipzig 1973; J. Diggle, *Euripidis fabulae. Tomus I*, Oxford 1984; C. Collard, *Euripides: Hecuba*, Warminster 1991; D. Kovacs, *Euripides: Children of Heracles, Hippolytus, Andromache, Hecuba*, Cambridge Mass. and London 1995; J. Gregory, *Euripides: Hecuba. Introduction, Text, and Commentary*, Atlanta 1999; K. Synodinou, *Euripides: Hekabe*, 2 vols, Athens 2005; K. Matthiessen, *Euripides: Hekabe*, Berlin and New York 2010 (an expanded version of K. Matthiessen, *Euripides: Hekabe*, Berlin and New York 2008).

² B.'s research on *Hecuba* goes at least back to his 1990 Pisa thesis (published as *Il monologo nel teatro di Euripide*, Pisa 1995), and includes an Italian translation with extensive introduction (*Euripide: Ecuba*, Milan 2010) and numerous articles.

³ The last edition with a Greek text and English commentary aimed at students was Gregory 1999, which B. now supersedes.

into very succinct summaries of the main points. For example, in section 3, after outlining the stage action that he reconstructs from the text, B. makes the excellent observation that the highly uneven use of the *eisodoi* — the one leading to the Greek camp is used throughout, the one leading to the seashore only twice — has a wider thematic relevance: to drive home the sense of Greek domination of the scenic space. B. offers some brief elaboration of this point, but it clearly offers scope for much wider analysis. Sections 5 and 6 will be the most useful for students starting to think about the play's themes and interpretative issues. In section 5, B. provides an overview of how the characters in *Hecuba* engage with the cultural concepts of *charis*, *xenia* and *philia*, the negotiation and manipulation of which are central to the play's key social interactions. Here, B. incorporates discussion of the relationship between Greeks and barbarians; this major theme of the play could have filled a section on its own. Section 6 very briefly sketches changing trends in interpreting the morality of Hecuba's revenge; B. then considers a few ancient texts that have been proposed as parallels for Hecuba's actions, but argues that in each case they do not provide sufficient justification for viewing her acts as morally acceptable. Section 7 is heavily skewed towards ancient reception and provides a good overview as far down as Seneca; everything following that is summarised in just three short paragraphs.⁴

One wishes throughout the introduction that B. had been a bit more expansive in laying out his thoughts on the play's themes and interpretative issues. Although a somewhat crude comparison, B.'s 28 introductory pages look especially brief when set against the corresponding sections of other recent commentaries on tragedy in the same series: Griffith's *Antigone* (68 pages), Mastronarde's *Medea* (80, excluding the Introduction to Language and Style), Allan's *Helen* (85), Schein's *Philoctetes* (59), or Sommerstein's *Suppliants* (46). As noted above, the theme of 'Greeks and barbarians' could have filled a section on its own, but so could (for example) that of freedom and slavery, or discussion of the play's dramatic structure, or its representation of gender and sexuality, or its presentation of the politics and ethics of human sacrifice, or the recurring themes of sight, spectacle, and voyeurism; any and all of which would have been of interest to students.

As is standard for this series, the text is presented with a minimal apparatus criticus, which B. explains is intended "to give the reader a sense of the complexities of the tradition by reporting readings from a selected group of pre-thirteenth century manuscripts (HMBO), supplementing them, when necessary, from other more recent ones" (25). The series aims to provide the reader with the linguistic help needed to understand the text as literature, without excessive use of jargon, technical excursuses, or long lists of parallel

⁴ For a fuller account of the reception of *Hecuba*, one can consult H. P. Foley, *Euripides: Hecuba*, London 2015.

passages. In this sense, B.'s commentary is well pitched. The notes contain abundant linguistic help that ranges from the fairly basic to the advanced, although discussion of individual points of grammar and syntax tends to be brief. B. usually offers the minimum information required in order to grasp the text at hand, and students will then need to be able to navigate the references to Kühner-Gerth, Denniston, Smyth etc. to gain a better understanding. B. often translates the line or phrase to illustrate the meaning. Full metrical analyses, with discussion, are provided for all lyric passages. Each section of the play is prefaced by a short overview that lays out some of the main interpretative issues.

Since assessing the whole commentary in detail is beyond the scope of this review, I focus on evaluating some examples where I found B.'s discussion either particularly insightful or lacking, or where B. offers a new conjecture/deletion, or where his text differs in a significant way from the other editions that students are most likely to consult (Diggle and Kovacs).

(90–1) Most modern editors generally recognise that Hecuba's first monody contains a number of interpolations that were added to anticipate certain details of the plot, and B. offers succinct justifications for accepting the deletion of lines 62–3, 73–8 and 92–7 on grounds of metre and dramatic sense. He follows Wilamowitz in transposing lines 90–1 (in which Hecuba describes her dream of a doe being torn from her knees by a wolf) after line 78, but not in finding them inauthentic. In retaining 90–1 but deleting 92–7, B. takes the opposite stance to Diggle and Kovacs, who both regard 92–7 as the more suspect lines.⁵ In his note on 90–1, B. offers a compressed but persuasive argument that the slaughtered deer signifies not just Polyxena — which seems the most natural interpretation — but also Polydorus and the children of Polymestor; his case is well supported by noting the numerous ways in which the details of Hecuba's dream are echoed elsewhere in the tragedy. B. notes that deeming 90–1 spurious “requires the intervention of two different interpolators” (84), but it would have been helpful briefly to outline the other arguments that have been put forward against these lines. For example, in his analysis of the metrical scheme B. notes that dactylic hexameters are not unusual in lyric, especially when relating prophecies and forebodings (80), but there is no comment in his note on lines 90–1 that other editors have objected to the hexameters here (e.g. Collard 1991, 134 finds them “intolerably intrusive”).

(367) B. emends the text to ἀφίημι ὀμμάτων ἐλευθέρα (ἐλεύθερον codd., ἐλευθέρων Blomfield) | φέγγος τόδ'. B.'s commentary (where he also proposes ἐλευθέρως) offers good arguments against ἐλεύθερον and ἐλευθέρων, but would have been strengthened by considering

⁵ Diggle deletes the whole passage 90–7 but writes *de* 92–7 *haereo* (cf. Collard 1991, 134); Kovacs only brackets 90–1, noting that Wilamowitz deleted 90–1 *recte* but 92–7 *fort. recte*. Other editors retain the whole passage (e.g. Daitz, Gregory, Matthiessen).

the positive case for ἐλευθέρα / ἐλευθέρως in terms of Polyxena's characterisation (e.g. it reinforces her striking sense of her own free agency even in the face of death, as at *Hec.* 550–1 ἐλευθέραν δέ μ', ὥς ἐλευθέρα θάνω [...] μεθέντες κτείναντ').

(402–4) B. is the first to propose deleting these lines; he makes a good case based on both dramatic sense and word order that future editors will need to take into account.

(531–3) In lines 529–30, Talthybius recalls how Neoptolemus had ordered him to calm the crowd before Polyxena's sacrifice and in lines 531–3 he describes himself carrying out these orders (σιγᾶτ' [...] σῖγα [...] σῖγα σιώπα). B. deletes the latter on the grounds that such orders for silence are normally given only once, or occasionally twice, but never four times, stating that they "do not here seem to serve any particular point" (146); he suggests that the lines are an actor's interpolation. B. is the first to propose this deletion, and his case is not convincing. Without 531–3 we pass directly from Neoptolemus' order to his subsequent speech without any indication that Talthybius carried out his instructions. B. adduces Eur. *Pho.* 1224 as a parallel (i.e. where we are told that a herald is ordered to call for silence, but is it not specified whether the order was obeyed), but this is not comparable: in *Phoenissae*, the messenger's primary focus is on Eteocles' words after he had already ordered the herald to call for silence (κελεύσας σῖγα κηρυῖναι στρατῶ), whereas in *Hecuba* Talthybius is recalling the sequence of events as he himself experienced and participated in them. The point of the fourfold repetition could simply be to emphasise the rapt attention of the crowd, highlighting the focus on Polyxena as the object of an intense male gaze; furthermore, Talthybius' description of how he made the army νήνεμον (533) is a significant choice of vocabulary in the light of the importance that literal 'windlessness' assumes in the latter half of the drama.

(563–5) It is surprising that B.'s commentary on this significant moment, where Polyxena offers Neoptolemus the choice of killing her by striking either her chest or her neck, does not include any discussion of the significance or implications of these two options.⁶

(798–805) Three key scenes revolve around Hecuba's attempts at persuasion — with Odysseus, with Agamemnon, and the final 'trial' scene with Polymestor — and B.'s commentary is very good, in each case, at taking the reader carefully through the speeches involved and explaining the characters' use of rhetoric and logic. Here, B. provides a helpful elucidation of this stage in Hecuba's appeal to Agamemnon, where she states that *nomos* has power over the gods, that we believe

⁶ In particular, B. could have mentioned the interpretation of N. Loraux, *Façons tragiques de tuer une femme*, Paris 1985 (tr. A. Forster, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*, Cambridge Mass. 1987), who views the two choices as gendered.

in the gods because of *nomos*, and that if Agamemnon does not uphold *nomos* by supporting her, there will be no more equality. Interpretation of this passage turns on whether we understand *nomos* as “law” or “convention”, and B. discusses the latter option before dismissing it as “linguistically possible but unlikely in the context” (178); but he aptly notes of Hecuba’s statement νόμος γὰρ τοὺς θεοὺς ἡγούμεθα that “[a]n avant-garde philosophical soundbite is cleverly inserted in a theodicy delivered by a barbarian aristocrat” (179).⁷

(805) Diggle adopts Kayser’s emendation and has Hecuba declare that if justice is not upheld, there is nothing “safe for humankind” (ἀνθρώποισι σῶν). Like most other editors, B. is surely correct to follow the reading ἀνθρώποις ἴσον (“equality for humankind”), which is found in all of the MSS and in a citation in Stobaeus (4.41.34); the line is also repeated at Eur. fr. 1048.1 (Stob. 4.1.13), from an unknown play. B. supports his decision by citing references for the link between justice and equality in ancient political and philosophical thought; this could have been reinforced by some discussion of the rhetorical aptness of equality for the situation at hand, where Hecuba, an enslaved old woman, must prevail upon her own master Agamemnon.

(824) B. keeps the transmitted reading κενόν, i.e. Hecuba wonders if bringing sex into her appeal to Agamemnon will be “ineffective”. His commentary succinctly argues against Nauck’s ξένον (“irrelevant”, adopted by Diggle) by stating that Hecuba’s argument, “if convincing, would be highly relevant” (183); the point could also have been made by considering Hecuba’s presentation of her own rhetorical competence.⁸

(847) With B.’s emendation, the line reads καινὰς ἀνάγκας οἱ νόμοι διώρισαν (he translates: “the laws determine new [or “unexpected”] obligations”) in place of the MSS reading καὶ τὰς [...] (“and the laws determine the obligations”). B.’s suggestion neatly resolves the vagueness of the transmitted text, and the sense of “new” fits perfectly with the description of the obligations that follows at 848–9: to make friends with those who were formerly enemies and make enemies of those who were formerly kindly. B. notes that “[s]everal other conjectures have been advanced” (186) but does not discuss them; he could have noted Busche’s τῆς ἀνάγκης (“and the laws of necessity determine [everything]”), which is printed by Diggle and Gregory, even if only to explain why he does not accept it.⁹

(901) B. adds a prodelided ἐς so that the line reads μένειν ἀνάγκη <ς> πλοῦν ὁρῶντας ἡσύχους (Markland: ἡσυχον codd.), i.e. “it is necessary

⁷ See also Battezzato’s review of Gregory 1999 in *The Classical Journal* 96, 223–8, at 227.

⁸ See D. Kovacs, *Euripidea Altera*, Leiden, New York and Cologne 1996, 67.

⁹ B. does discuss Busche’s emendation in the introduction to Battezzato 2010. See also D. Kovacs, *The Heroic Muse: Studies in the Hippolytus and Hecuba of Euripides*, Baltimore and London 1987, 145 n. 56; Collard 1991, 174; Matthiessen 2010, 364.

to wait inactive and look for an opportunity to sail.” B. rightly notes that the transmitted text μένειν ἀνάγκη πλοῦν ὀρῶντας (ὀρῶντες LR) ἥσυχον, which he translates as “it is necessary to wait for a quiet sailing, seeing it”, provides weak sense. However, he does not discuss the possible meanings of the text that is printed by most editors, μένειν ἀνάγκη πλοῦν ὀρῶντας ἥσυχους, where Kovacs, Gregory and Synodinou understand πλοῦν ὀρῶντας to mean “looking to/waiting to sail”, even without the preposition.¹⁰ Collard and Matthiessen instead take πλοῦν with μένειν.¹¹ B.’s attractive conjecture (anticipated to an extent by Murray’s ὀρῶντ’ ἐς ἥσυχον, in the apparatus) would remove this ambiguity and clarify the meaning “looking to”/“waiting for”; cf. Eur. *IA* [1624] στρατὸς πρὸς πλοῦν ὀρᾷ (Agamemnon speaking about the Greek army, as at *Hec.* 901).

(905–52) B.’s discussion of the third stasimon, in which the Trojan women sing of the night that Troy was sacked, stands out as an especially rich section of the commentary. Here, B recapitulates a previously published argument, in which he interprets the second and third choral odes as constructing a complex relationship between the viewpoint of the Trojan chorus and that of the contemporary Athenian audience.¹² B. argues that the description of Troy as no longer able to be counted among unsacked cities (905 τῶν ἀπορθήτων πόλις οὐκέτι λέξει) would have made Euripides’ audience think of Athens and Sparta, both of which claimed never to have been sacked in the mythical past; thus, when the chorus compare themselves to “Spartan girls” (934), the reference takes on an anachronistic relevance and suggests that Sparta may be sacked in the future. B.’s argument is thought-provoking but is presented in a rather abbreviated form, which requires some effort to unravel in order to grasp its full implications.

(1162) The first thing I did upon receiving this edition was to turn to this line, and I was delighted to see that B. prints Verrall’s brilliant emendation πολυπόδων (the Trojan women seize hold of Polymestor like “octopuses”) for the MSS’ colourless πολεμίων. Apart from Diggle, Verrall’s suggestion has not found favour with most editors, who deem it too bold and the resulting phrase unacceptably stark.¹³ B.’s discussion here is typically concise: he notes that the octopus was proverbial for its tenacity and that the metaphor is consistent with Polymestor’s use

¹⁰ Kovacs 1995, 481 translates: “we must wait at our ease, watching for good sailing weather”; cf. Gregory 1999, 152 (“It is necessary [for us] to wait calm[ly], looking out for [the chance to] sail”), Synodinou 2005, 2.340.

¹¹ Collard 1991, 105: ‘they must wait to sail, watching quietly’, with discussion at 176; Matthiessen 2010, 203 translates ‘muss man auf die Abfahrt warten und in Ruhe Ausschau halten’.

¹² L. Battezzato, “Shall I sing with the Delian maidens? Trojan and Greek identities in the songs of Euripides’ *Hecuba*”, *MD* 76, 2016, 139–55.

¹³ See Collard 1991, 193; Gregory 1999, 182; Synodinou 2005, 2.424–5; Matthiessen 2010, 403. Kovacs prints Gronewald’s πολεμίου (i.e. referring to Polymestor).

of animal imagery, and rightly argues against the transmitted text that the Trojan women cannot be “like enemies” if they actually *are* enemies; but there is no comment on the sheer visceral power of the emended line, where the evocation of numerous clammy tentacle-like arms and hands clutching at the limbs of the defenceless Thracian king is one of the most chilling and memorable of the whole play.

In summary, B.’s commentary is of a very high quality, with his extensive and deep engagement with this text evident throughout. His conjectures and proposed deletions are always clearly explained, although sometimes their literary implications could have been further explored; the notes offer comprehensive (if individually rather brief) linguistic guidance on almost every line of the play. My only complaint is at times wanting more: the discussion can feel too laconic — even within the context of this series, which makes a point of eschewing wordy excursions — and there were moments where B. might have provided a bit more support for less advanced readers of Greek without referring them on to other works, to which they may not have immediate access, and been more expansive in his treatment of literary issues. In particular, the description of the sacrifice of Polyxena, the climactic event of the play’s first half, does not quite receive the dedicated discussion that it deserves. However, the real test of the book is how it works for its intended audience, since the blurb proclaims that it should be “useful for upper-level undergraduates and graduate students, as well as of interest to scholars”. In spring 2019, I selected *Hecuba* as the set text for a second/third year undergraduate Greek language unit, with B. as the recommended textbook. My concerns that students might want more from the commentary were in fact not borne out: my class found it clear and helpful, noting that in terms of enabling them to read the play it contained “everything they needed”: elucidation of the trickier linguistic structures, plenty of help with translation, and a thorough and up-to-date bibliography. If the proof of the pudding is in the eating, then B.’s edition should be judged a success.

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