# **Instances of Death in Greek Tragedy, Sorana-Cristina Man, Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2020 h/b p. 261 9781 527547285 £60.00**

This survey of Greek tragedy deals with a wide range of material from an anthropological, psycho-analytical and philosophical standpoint. Sorana-Cristina Man is qualified in Classics and Philosophy by the University of Bucharest. She has translated several books of philosophy from Latin and English and has published articles on cultural studies. The book has its origin in a PhD thesis and some of its chapters have already been published elsewhere. What binds it all together is a close concentration on the surviving Greek tragic texts which are all used to provide examples and arguments throughout. She covers not only the usual ones but many more texts that are less often read; so as well as Electra, Orestes, Oedipus, Antigone and *Bacchae*, we look at the daughters of Danaus, Phaedra, *Persians*, *Seven against Thebes* and *Phoenician Women* and many others. The treatment is thematic and draws on many different examples for each discussion. There are chapters on collective and ritual violence, violent madness, the killing of children and of young people in sacrifice, responsibility, free will and determinism. Finally, the question of the female in tragedy and the idea of the nobility of the tragic heroine has its own chapter.

The approach is mythical with a concentration on the psychological aspects of the characters and their motivations. The anthropological theories of Vernant and Vidal-Naquet are invoked as is the philosophy of Heidegger, and Man also occasionally uses Christian theology to illuminate and discuss the Greek tragic texts. Greek is quoted extensively but is always translated into English, which is the language of the entire work, and only French quotations are left untranslated. There is a good range of reference to mainly English-language scholarship but there are also extensive references to German thinkers and French scholars, and most interestingly, to Romanian publications which are going to be less well-known to many readers. There are Romanian translations of some major texts quoted with their introductions, as well as critical texts which show how the tradition of Classical Studies is as grounded in Romanian culture as much as in other European countries.

There is plenty of material for Man to examine as Greek tragedy is not short of instances of death. Her approach is to take an abstract theme such as ritual violence and to discuss it with multiple examples drawn from the entire range of surviving texts. Such a discussion, briefly drawing from many sources, can lead to occasional lack of clarity as to which play is actually being discussed at a given moment. In addition, quotations from the plays are mostly referenced by line number only, where a complete reference with author, title and line number would be more helpful to the he reader. There are four main chapters dealing with: first, violence (collective, ritual, and induced by madness); secondly, psychological and philosophical aspects of the myths retold in the tragedies; then, symbols and predictions of death; and finally the female character in relation to death. The last chapter has helpful summaries of the positions taken in the separate chapters.

The discussion on violence is largely anthropological drawing on ritual elements of sacrifice and scapegoating mainly in Aeschylus’ *Suppliants* and Euripides’ *Bacchae*. She also draws on psychoanalysis (Freud and Jung) and the “determinations” and “existentials” of Heidegger in her examination of family relations and the prolongation of life through children, particularly in *Medea*. This psychological approach is not able to include questions of dramatic performance or social and historical context, but the section on symbols and predictions does have room for discussion of the red-carpet scene in *Agamemon,* and the question of death always occurring off-stage is treated elsewhere. The question of disguise or travesty (cross-dressing) is also discussed, most notably in *Bacchae* which gets an interesting section involving the “doubleness” of the tragedy (masculine/feminine, young/old, Greek/barbarian). The most successful chapter, which seems freer from consciously “academic” writing, is the final one on women in tragedy. Here the author builds on the feminist theory of Foley and others to offer more personal and original critical comment in more extended treatments of individual plays. The sections on *Medea* and Phaedra are persuasive: Phaedra in Euripides’ *Hippolytus* is interpreted as being honourable in seeing her wish to preserve her reputation as more important than her betrayal of Hippolytus, and an attempt is made to see the terrible acts that Medea carries out from her own point of view. This is all contained in a discussion of the position of women in the surviving tragedies and how and why they have such prominent roles in the dramatic productions of their time.

This is a broad survey of Greek tragedy containing many valuable insights into individual plays. It is written in language that is scrupulously correct, but which contains a few strange uses of English (immolate for the more normal sacrifice, epopee for epic and antipode for opposite). Readers looking at the wide psychological and anthropological aspects will find interesting material among the examples; those looking at individual plays will have to use the index to research them one by one but they will also find much thought-provoking critical comment.

John Bulwer