Book Review

R. Lauriola, K. N. Demetriou (eds.), *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Sophocles. Brill's Companion to Classical Reception, Volume 10,* Leiden, Boston 2017.

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This book offers a complex research on the influence, the reception and the appropriation of all extant Sophoclean plays from antiquity up to modernity, across cultures and civilizations, with multiple perspectives: literature, intellectual history, visual arts, music, opera and dance, stage and cinematography. In particular, the volume aims, as stated by R. Lauriola and K. N. Demetrious' Preface and Acknowledgements (VII–X), to fill a gap in the reception studies, being useful both to students and to researchers. The collection is organised in three parts with a thematic organization over a sequence of essays arranged according the dubitable chronological order of the tragedies:

1. The Tragedies of War (*Ajax* and *Philoctetes*);
2. The Tragedy of Destiny (*Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus*);
3. The Heroines' Tragedies: Sisters, Daughters, and Wives (*Antigone, Electra,* and the *Women of Trachis*).

There is also an appendix, titled *Not Only Tragedy: The Fragmentary Satyr Play*, which is devoted to the best preserved ancient satyr drama, after Euripides' *Cyclops*, that is the fragmentary play the *Trackers*. Each chapter treats a specific play, which is analysed with regard to one area of reception; so it is articulated in texts related to the reception of the play in *Literature, Fine Arts* (divided where possible into *Visual arts, Music* and *Dance*) and *Stage and Screen*. In addition to the cited bibliography, each chapter is also supplemented by two 'resource' paragraphs, one providing information on the scholars' works about the reception of the specific drama, whereas the latter offers a selection of further readings.

E. Magnelli's introduction (1–24) concentrates on how ancient and medieval readers appreciated, depicted, or even imagined Sophocles and his poetry.[1] Indeed, the essays in this section show how not a single century in the history of Greek literature appears

[1] About this topic, see Easterling (2006); Wright (2012).

to have been oblivious to Sophocles. In fact, Sophocles' glory did not fade in the Late Antiquity and in the Byzantine age, even though, for the average reader, Sophoclean drama consisted only of the seven plays that have come down to us.

M. Treu (27–76), who studies *Ajax*, introduces the first section; this play, at first sight, appears less popular than other tragedies, but has had a reception history full of surprises.[2] Treu offers a complex essay, focusing on those case studies which show the extraordinary variety of themes and tones, including parodies and burlesque, with allusions to comedy and satyr drama. In particular, his contribution underlines how Sophocles' *Ajax* influenced important Italian authors, like Ugo Foscolo *On sepulchres* (1807) section 4,215–225, until recently the great cartoonist Giorgio Rebuffi (1928–2014), who created the first Ajax in comics (*Ajax the Ghost*). Also with respect to the visual arts, the images of Ajax extend in space and time across centuries throughout the Mediterranean area, and their specific focus differs from one to another. So, the iconographic questions are difficult, because we have to study a wide area and a long chronological period. In addition, specific attention is dedicated to demonstrating how the image of Ajax was transformed on stage; indeed Treu emphasises that the first example of a new era is a controversial adaptation of Sophocles' *Ajax* by the American director Peter Sellars, based on the script by Robert Auletta and produced by the American National Theater (1986/87). The adaptations are also an important theme of E. Dugdale's chapter (77–145) about *Philoctetes*. Since the hero was the protagonist of dramas by all three great tragedians, the essay underlines analogies and differences between the different versions[3], focusing on the mentions of Philoctetes in Greek and Roman literature. This analysis is functional to reconstruct the history of the play. In fact, from around the 5th century AD onwards, western Europe became cut off from the Greek-speaking eastern Mediterranean and no longer had access to Sophocles' *Philoctetes* for over a millennium. *Philoctetes* would have been known, if at all, through Latin sources. However, in the Greek-speaking Byzantine empire, the seven plays of Sophocles that survive today continued to be copied. So, the text was preserved and it was studied by the Italian humanists in the 15th century. Dugdale offers a detailed list of the editions and the translations, starting with the first printed edition of Sophocles' works, which was published by the Aldine Press in 1502. Particularly, the scholar insists on the dramatic adaptations, although Sophocles' *Philoctetes* was rarely staged before the 19th century. In this regard, the essay stresses that the most recent adaptations of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, which was performed when Athens was in the midst of a bitter Peloponnesian war against Sparta, have focused on Philoctetes' identity as a veteran and victim of the brutality of war.

[2] Concerning this, see Chatterjee (2015).

[3] Regarding this comparison, see Gantz (1993) 459, 589–590, 635–637; Woodruff (2012) 127; Schein (2013) 3–7.

The second part starts with R. Lauriola's excellent contribution (149–325), the longest essay of the book, which examines *Oedipus the King*, that is the Oedipus most familiar to all, also 'thanks' to Freud's appropriation. Lauriola tries to reconstruct the myth of the hero[4] from the very first *debut* of Oedipus on the literary stage, i.e. Homer *Iliad* 23.677–680 and *Odyssey* 11.271–278. Aeschylus most likely put all the major components of Oedipus' tragic story on the stage before Sophocles, but, beyond any doubt, *Oedipus the King* is the tragedy that has imprinted its identifying sign on the survival of Oedipus' character and tale. Neither Aeschylus' tragedy nor Euripides' *Oedipus* did survive. So the chapter underlines how Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* might still be the model on which the following artists have re-written their versions, especially because Aristotle said that Sophocles' play was to be seen as the exemplary tragedy. In her detailed essay on allusions, translations and adaptations, Lauriola stresses that a real rereading to Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* occurs beginning from the Renaissance with vernacular and Latin translations, which made the masterpiece of the Greek theatre accessible both to common and to erudite readers. A further interesting feature of the essay is the analysis of recent productions of *Oedipus*. In the so-called 'Inter-War' period, approximately between 1920 and 1930, there was a real epidemic of 'Oedipus'. The same holds true of the '60s and '70s; in fact, in spite of the slight crisis which Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* undergoes in the Western world, rewritings of Sophocles' play with a distinct political nuance, aiming either at a delayed or at a current reaction to specific historical and socio-political events, surface in Europe and the U.S. as well. Oedipus has had an enduring and pervasive presence on film as well, starting from the beginning of the 20th century. In this respect, Lauriola offers a detailed focus on Pasolini's *Edipo Re* (1967), which is the story of Pasolini's complex relationship to paternity. Oedipus' story is also the subject of E. W. Scharffenberger's paper (326–388) which deals with *Oedipus at Colonus*, whose reception[5] starts with an anecdotal story: in the last years of his life, the poet was accused by his son Iophon of senile dementia and he either read or recited the beginning of the Chorus' first stasimon of the play to the court in order to demonstrate his mental competence. Scharffenberger emphasises that music was an essential feature of *Oedipus at Colonus* in its original production at Athens' Theatre of Dionysus and in the revival productions in Athens and elsewhere during the fourth century BC and later. In the modern era, Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* has inspired some theatrical productions which are often musical, such as Mason's *Caractacus* (1776), Sacchini's *Oedipe à Colone* (1786) and *Arvire et Évélina* (1788), Rossini's *Edipo a Colono* (1817), Mendelssonhn's *Ödipus in Kolonos* (1845), Enescu's *Oedipe* (1936) and Lee Breuer and Bob Telson's *The Gospel at Colonus* (1985). Telson's "Gospel", the best-known

[4] About this, see De Kock (1961); Cingano (1992); Bettini/Guidorizzi (2004) 230; Bizzarri (2014); Davies (2015).

[5] Scharffenberger underlines her debt to Markantonatos (2007) 231–255, who provides an indispensible discussion of the reception of *Oedipus at Colonus* in many different media from antiquity until recent times.

modern reception of Sophocles' play, is also one of the most controversial adaptations, as Scharffenberger points out, because it uses Christian concepts like sin, redemption, salvation, and divine benevolence to interpret Oedipus' story.

The third section is opened by M. de F. Silva's essay (391–474) which analyses Sophocles' *Antigone*, studying how the Sophoclean version of the Antigone myth gained huge popularity. A first sign of this can be found in Greek theatre as early as 409 BC, with Euripides' interest in using the same motif in his *Phoenician Women*. In addition, Euripides also wrote a tragedy, now lost, entitled *Antigone* (ca. 410 BC) of which not much is known. The paper presents a detailed list of the works inspired by Sophocles' *Antigone*, starting from antiquity until recent times.[6] The report deserves credit for highlighting the importance of Antigone's myth for 19th century philosophy, especially for German Romanticism, as a consequence of G. W. F. Hegel, F. Hölderlin and F. W. Schelling's meeting on the occasion of the Tübingen theological seminar in the last decade of the 18th century. The courses taught there created a new hermeneutical reflection on the subtle meaning of Sophocles' play, leading to new interpretations which dominated the 20th century. In that vein Silva examines Bertolt Brecht's *Antigonemodell* (1948) which deals with class struggle and fights for economic interests. Of six of the Sophoclean tragedies that are complete no other tragic treatments from the classical period survived the end of the ancient world. *Electra*, to which P. J. Finglass' chapter (475–511) is dedicated, is an exception to this: there are different extant versions from the 5th century, i. e. Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers* and Euripides' *Electra* and *Orestes*. Nevertheless, Finglass tries to reconstruct the reception of Sophocles' *Electra*, underlining its popularity until the 21st century. So, we can read a complete history of allusions, translations, editions and adaptations with a specific focus on the Latin sources[7] which are based on the Sophoclean drama. In fact, the play had an impact on Latin dramaturgy, as we can infer from Pacuvius' *Dulorestes*, from Atilius' *Electra*– about this drama and its connection with Sophocles' play, see Cicero *On the ends of good and evil* 1.4–5 –and from Seneca's *Octavia*. With regard to the visual arts, the essay stresses that, in the modern period, most artistic representations of Electra are not linked to Sophocles' play in any particular way, nor indeed to Euripides' *Electra* or Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers*: Electra appears in paintings as a standard figure of Greek mythology, without specific associations with any particular ancient Greek text.

S. Mills (512–557) examines the *Women of Trachis*, which is itself already a 'reception', in that the play is a reworking based on fifth-century concerns and interests of older tales; indeed, a lot of the stories to which the *Women of Trachis* allude have a substantial pre-Sophoclean history.[8] The paper points out that the paradoxical combination of Heracles' fame and the relative obscurity of the *Women of Trachis* marked the reception of the

[6] Concerning this list, see Belardinelli/Greco (2010); Duroux/Urdician (2010); Fornaro (2010); Mee/Foley (2011).

[7] About this topic, see Holford-Strevens (1999) 221–227; Nervegna (2014) 178.

[8] Concerning this, see Levett (2004) 115.

play, suggesting two reasons for this paradox. First, Heracles was usually regarded as a strong moral exemplar; so the broken, violent, and ambiguous Heracles of Sophocles' tragedy was quite unappealing in that respect. A second reason is the tendency for moral allegorization: episodes in Heracles' live believed less fitting for a famous hero (as the one with Deianeira) were treated less often than others more becoming of a hero. Recently, the *Women of Trachis* has found an intriguing new reception through Bryan Doerries' "Outside the Wire" group, a theatre company that addresses public health and social issues through drama, such as veterans' post-war experiences. In his adaptation of the *Women of Trachis* (2001) Doerries uses Heracles' agony to reflect upon issues related to end of life care.

Finally, S. Beta's excellent appendix (561–572) deals with the best preserved fragmentary satyr play, that is Sophocles' *Trackers*, whose plot stems from the *Hymn to Hermes* attributed to Homer. However, to this mythical material Sophocles added the elements that are regarded as the fundamental ingredient of the dramatic genre called 'satyr play', namely the chorus of satyrs led by their old father Silenus[9] Due to the fact that *Trackers*, like the great majority of the satyr plays, fell into oblivion, it is not possible, Beta notes, to say if this version of the story had a reception of its own. For a long time only brief quotations from the play were known, but the destiny of the play changed with the discovery and the subsequent publication of P. Oxy. 1174, a papyrus written in the 2nd century AD which contains the first 458 lines of the play. The story of the stage productions of the *Trackers* begins in 1913, just one year after the publication of the papyrus. Beta's article focuses on the production of the play in the classical theatre of the Sicilian town of Syracuse during the 1927 season, when Ettore Romagnoli used his own translation of Sophocles' *Trackers* and Euripides' *Cyclops*, the only other extant satyr play. This production, like the other adaptations in the 20th century, had to face one major problem, namely the missing end of the satyr play which resulted in individual solutions. Beta points to the solution of Tony Harrison's play *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* (1988) which follows the Greek original until the end of the fragments. In the finale the satyrs destroy the papyrus from which they had been born again after centuries of oblivion.

This collection is a wonderful volume, because it presents a complex approach, studying the reception of Sophoclean plays up until recent years. The book is useful for researchers, interested in a specific topic, but it is particularly useful for beginners, because all the papers analyse their materials, sources and adaptations exhaustively, without omitting arguments and ideas that are essential. Furthermore, the *Index Locorum* (573–584) the *Index of Modern Adaptations* (585–591) and the *Index of Subjects* (592–594) provide a resource which allows the readers to navigate through the chapters with ease.

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9 About this pre-Sophoclean history, see Maltese (1982).

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