

Stieber, M. 2011. *Euripides and the Language of Craft* (Mnemosyne Supplements, 327). Leiden/Boston: Brill. xxvi, 494 p. €162.00. ISBN 9789004189065.

This is a rich (and big), thoughtful, and very well-documented book; it is also a testament to the value of interdisciplinarity (in this case, between literary criticism and archaeology). Stieber sets out to find “signs in the plays that suggest that the visual arts have influenced the playwright [Euripides], and consequently, that inspiration as well as information flowed as regularly from artwork to poet as in the opposite direction” (x). The book thus serves as a useful complement to work utilizing the reverse approach, i.e. the strand of scholarship which probes contemporary art for signs of the influence of Greek drama.¹⁾

In her preface, Stieber remarks that her aim is not so much to offer a compendium of passages where Euripides uses the “language of craft”, but an analysis of what such instances reveal about his “craft of language” (xvi). In the end, she gives us both: the book is as good as exhaustive in discussing Euripidean passages which in some way feature (or are influenced by) the visual arts, but it also has a great deal to say about Euripides’ ability to turn a phrase. Stieber paints a portrait of Euripides as a playwright very much “alert to the rich vocabulary and complex realities of fifth-century visual culture”, and explores the ways in which he placed this “technical and practical knowledge at the service of his poetry” (xvi). One of the guiding premises of the book, in fact, is that Euripides drew heavily upon the visual arts in shaping his language, to an extent far surpassing that of Sophocles and Aeschylus. Stieber thus underwrites a dominant discourse setting Euripides apart from the other two tragedians by his concern for ‘modernism’ and ‘realism’ (xvi-xvii, 430-3, and *passim*). I am generally hesitant about taking such distinctions too far, but with respect to the visual arts at least, Stieber amply demonstrates that Euripides really was doing something different.

If the book proves one thing, it is that one ought really to be an art historian and archaeologist (or at least well-versed in the disciplines) in order to adequately assess Euripides’ use of technical vocabulary from the visual arts. Stieber is; I am much less so, and I will accordingly refrain from commenting on archaeological issues (which Stieber occasionally delves into).

The book is organized primarily by ‘sphere’ within the visual arts: the first chapter is concerned with architecture (though a focus on *Trojan Women* is a secondary organizing principle here), chapter two with sculpture, chapter three with painting. The final two chapters take a slightly different tack, chapter four by focusing exclusively on a single play (*Ion*), chapter five by looking at more general terminology and at the language of art criticism. A brief epilogue concludes the book. I found chapters one and four particularly instructive for their treatment of specific plays (*Tr.* and *Ion*); yet they are all worthwhile, particularly when it comes to the discussion of individual Euripidean passages.

That the book quacks like a compendium means that an extensive discussion of each chapter would be well beyond the scope of this review. By way of example, however, a fuller treatment of a single one may elucidate Stieber’s approach and method. I have chosen the chapter on architecture, which encapsulates everything that the book has to offer (including

¹Exemplified most recently by Taplin, O. 2007. *Pots and Plays: Interactions between Tragedy and Greek Vase-Painting of the Fourth Century B.C.* (Los Angeles, CA).

the few aspects which I found to be weaker). The chapter begins with a general view of the role architecture plays in *Tr.*, arguing that “the physical destruction of Troy is one unifying theme” of the play (p. 11). Stieber next zooms in on Troy’s walls, and walls in general, discussing the central role these played in Greek cityhood and their symbolic value in literature. Walls will feature prominently also at the end of the chapter, but before we get to that point, we are taken on a tour of virtually all of the “architecturally inflected” language in the Euripidean corpus. This survey moves from foundations (Stieber discusses the playwright’s use of such terms as κρηπίς, βάθρον, ὀρθοστάτης), to columns (στῦλος, κίων, σταθμός, and such epithets as περικίων, εὐκίων, εὖστυλος), to superstructures (θριγκός/θριγκώ, ἐπίκρανον, γεῖσον, τέραμνα, παστάς, τρίγλυφος, ἔμβολον, κρήδεμνον). We then return to walls, for a discussion of the term τεῖχος/τοῖχος, a treatment of Euripides’ favoured epithet “Cyclopean”, and of the verb πυργόω.

Such a list already demonstrates the variety of technical terminology that Euripides employed (much of it occurring elsewhere only in inscriptions), a variety which Stieber would ascribe to the depth of Euripides’ artisanal knowledge and his desire for precision. But as a bare list, it does little justice to the value of Stieber’s survey (or that of similar surveys in the following chapters), which lies in her discussions of the individual Euripidean passages treated along the way, many in great detail. These discussions are in some cases certainly open to debate, but always sensible. I offer a selection of personal highlights:

- 24-7, on the death of Priam at *Tr.* 16 (πρὸς δὲ κρηπίδων βάθοις): Stieber argues that “architectural precision is part of the intended effect”, heightening the pathos as we see Priam hewn down “as he was negotiating ... the steps of the altar.”
- 26, on the metaphorical use of κρηπίς at *HF* 1261-2 (ὅταν δὲ κρηπίς μὴ καταβληθῇ γένους // ὀρθῶς, ἀνάγκη δυστυχεῖν τοὺς ἐκγόνους): Stieber suggests that κρηπίς in this case may refer to the leveling-course (*euthynteria*) of a building, and vividly pictures “columns (sons?) teetering on an imperfectly horizontal platform.”
- 33-5, on the controversial meaning of ἐνηλάτων βάθρα in the description of Capaneus’ ladder at *Ph.* 1179 (κλίμακος ... ξέστ’ ἐνηλάτων βάθρα): in a neat discussion, Stieber follows Mastronarde in rendering “rungs”.
- 58-9, on the simile/metaphor about precision in roofwork at *Hipp.* 468-9 (οὐδὲ στέγην γὰρ ἦ κατηρεφεῖς δόμοι // καλῶς ἀκριβώσαις ἄν): Stieber offers a sensible reading, and notes that “when Euripides needs a model for the very idea of precision, he turns to the art of building.”
- The previous point is itself part of an overarching discussion (55-66) about the escape-route taken by the Phrygian slave at *Or.* 1370-2 over “cedar beams” and “Doric triglyphs” (κεδρωτὰ παστάδων ὑπὲρ τέραμνα Δωρικάς τε τριγλύφους): Stieber well argues (against Willink) for a literal reading, showing again how Euripides uses architectural precision for literary effect.
- Reading literally also proves possible at *IT* 113-4, a textually problematic passage which features Orestes and Pylades contemplating furtive entry into the temple through an empty space in the structure (ὄρα δέ γ’ εἴσω τριγλύφων ὅποι κενὸν // δέμας καθεῖναι). Stieber argues (66-73) that Pylades is suggesting lateral entry through a damaged portion of the building; this has consequences for the tone of the speech.

- 107-8: Stieber offers a subtle reading of ἐπύργωσας at *Tr.* 843-4 (in the Ganymede ode).

The chapter concludes with a compelling case that the architectural language in *Trojan Women* is part of the “very architecture of the play”, and that “the cityscape enlists the audience’s sympathy, both as a metaphorical template for the human travails played out in its midst and as a visible, tangible report of a once thriving urban metropolis having gone to ruin” (113-4).

My selection of highlights above should make clear that Stieber deals interchangeably (but in my view equally well) with metaphorical and literal uses of architectural terms (as well as with cases which could or should be read both ways). It may also demonstrate my one main concern about the book, which I might sum up as a lack of ‘user-friendliness’. That we have discussions of passages wrapped into longer discussions of other passages (wrapped into ...) is perhaps a natural result of the way Stieber has constructed her book, but it does not always make for great readability.²⁾ User-friendliness would also have been improved by more restraint shown in the scholarly apparatus: the footnotes are very numerous and very long (with references given in full both in the notes and in the bibliography), and sometimes lead off into tangential discussions which strike me as unnecessary (e.g. at 106-7, n. 353, on the Greek attitude towards messengers); later chapters, incidentally, are more measured in the use of notes. I also sorely missed an index of Greek terms, which would have made the book much better navigable: as it is, one can follow up an individual passage via the *index locorum* (and future readers of Euripides are highly recommended to do so), but should one want to know more about Euripides’ use of, e.g., κρηπίς or γραφή (“painting”), one is left scanning the book’s many pages, with only few subheaders to go by.

But these complaints should in the end be taken as minor, detracting not too much from an otherwise impressive and very useful achievement.

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² Even Stieber occasionally appears to get lost in the intricacy of her argument: in one very extensive discussion at 41-8, for example, she speculates that Euripides’ use of the adjective εὐστύλων at *IT* 129 may have been influenced by a meeting with the purported inventor of the Corinthian order of columns, Callimachus — a meeting which she elsewhere points out could only have occurred sometime between 408 and Euripides’ death (but *IT* is normally dated to ca. 413).