

Cropp, M.J.

Euripides: Electra. Second edition, with introduction, translation and commentary (Aris and Phillips classical texts). Oxford, Oxbow Books, 2013. vi, 281 pp. Pr. £19.99 (pb). ISBN 9781908343697.

Distilo, N.

Commento critico-testuale all'Elettra di Euripide (2 vols.). Padova, S.A.R.G.O.N. Editrice e Libreria, 2012. xlv, 765 pp. Pr. €50.00 (pb). ISBN 9788895672182.

Work on Greek tragedy seems to come out in twos these days: we have recently had two commentaries on the *Rhesus* and two companions to Sophocles (with a pair of Euripides-companions lying in wait). Scholars working on Euripides' *Electra* have gone one better: within the space of a little more than two years, three new commentaries on the play saw the light. This review will treat two of them: the reason for not discussing the third—Roisman, H.M., Luschnig C.A.E. 2011. *Euripides: Electra. A Commentary* (Norman)—apart from constraints of space, is that my review would feel like piling on. I could add, in the details, to the problems identified by Cropp and Kovacs in their reviews elsewhere,¹ but with regard to their overall verdict on the book—Kovacs calls it a “serious mistake”—my contribution would change nothing.

Cropp's 1988 *Electra* commentary was, to my mind, among the finest of the Aris & Phillips Euripides-series (now nearly complete), and had lost little of its relevance even in light of the prolific work on the play of intervening years. Nevertheless, this completely revised edition is a welcome addition. There are changes on every page and in every note (the previous edition is thus made largely obsolete), and in most cases the changes are definite improvements. Nowhere is this more so than in the printed Greek text: for the new edition Cropp has prepared his own, which in itself stands as a significant contribution to the textual criticism on this play. It also prevents instances (occurring with some regularity in the first edition, in which Diggle's OCT text was reprinted) where the commentary argues against readings printed in the text.

Cropp's text is closer to that of Basta Donzelli's Teubner edition than to Diggle's, but plots its own course in several places. The changes with respect to Diggle's text are numerous, both great and small, and to my mind nearly always for the better. To cite a selection of examples: with Basta Donzelli, Cropp leaves 59 in place (with 57-

¹ Cropp's review in BMCRev 2011.08.28, <http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2011/2011-08-28.html>. Kovacs's review in JHS 132 (2012), 186-187.

58 taken as a parenthesis),² leaves Orestes' speech at 367-400 intact, ignores Diggle's unfortunate κακῶς at 1015 (Cropp exercises *damnatio memoriae* here, never mentioning the emendation), and properly fixes the order and attribution of 1292-1300 (leaving 1295-1297 in place). His text diverges from Basta Donzelli's in enforcing stichomythia in 677-682 (but not in 671-672 and 674-675), and in reversing speaker attributions at 959-966 (with a lacuna before 967): about both these passages I remain unconvinced,³ and for this reason Basta Donzelli's text edges Cropp's for me,⁴ but only very slightly, and all of Cropp's choices are very sensibly defended in his notes, which also provide ample bibliography for readers wanting to chase up individual discussions.

Cropp's introduction covers, mostly, the same ground as that of the first edition,⁵ but has been extensively rewritten, with full reference to recent bibliography.⁶ There are a few significant additions: a fuller discussion of the *deus ex machina* (11-12), a new discussion of the chorus (14-15; vastly improved), an expanded section on thematic motifs (18-19), and a much-elaborated section "Euripides and the *Oresteia* tradition" (20-31), including completely new discussions of Euripides' handling of the Orestes-figure in other plays. Throughout the introduction, there are also many subtle tweaks of phrasing, often indicative of nuanced developments in Cropp's thinking, particularly on characterization. Both editions, for instance, align themselves, however carefully, with "denials (...) of the rehabilitation of Clytemnestra often detected in this play" (1988, xxxii n. 9; 2013, 4 n. 6)—rightly in my view. But in the new edition Clytemnestra appears as a "more ambivalent and vulnerable figure" (2013, 4): thus, Cropp no longer foregrounds (as at 1988, xxxii) the extent to which the Chorus's sympathy for Clytemnestra at her death (1168, 1186-1187) is undercut by their earlier wish for Clytemnestra's death (485-486), and there is generally more scope for Clytemnestra as "a pathetic figure" (2013, 5). There are similar shifts of tone on Electra herself, particularly in the early scenes: the first edition was a forceful and much-needed statement against readings which see her hatred as "frivolous or

² Cropp has changed his mind here, adopting a reading which he had called unconvincing in his 1996 review of Basta Donzelli's edition (BMCR 96.7.3, <http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/1996/96.07.03.html>). Similarly, he adopts the attribution of 1226 and 1232 to the Chorus rather than Electra, an attribution to which he had objected in the same review: "the single lines given to the Chorus are rather abrupt, and 1232 reads better as a continuation (in apposition) of 1231 than as a separate sentence": in this case I would agree with Cropp's position in 1996 rather than his new one.

³ For my own view on the latter passage, see my contribution *The Tutor's Beard* in this journal, vol. 68 (2015) 543-568.

⁴ As for misprints in Cropp's text, I have found very few: at 334 for φρήν read φρήν, 778 and 779 are reversed, and at 970 for ἦδε read ἦδε.

⁵ Barlow's 'General Introduction to the Series' is not reprinted.

⁶ One awkward omission: Cropp does not mention Mossman, J. 2001. *Women's Speech in Greek Tragedy: The Case of Electra and Clytemnestra in Euripides' Electra*, CQ 51.2, 374-384, an article of which he was clearly aware (cf. his review mentioned in n. 1), and which would have added to his discussion at p. 10 and to several of his notes on the fourth episode (880-1146).

unreasonable”, and this is still the position adopted in the new edition (1988, xxxv; 2013, 9). But, again, Cropp’s views have become more complex with time. There is, for instance, a subtly different sense of the relationship between the claims of Agamemnon and justice and Electra’s personal grievances about her exile: in 1988 the latter were presented as an “integral element” of the former (xxxvi), phrasing which has disappeared from the new edition. And whereas, for Cropp in 1988, the “genuineness of these grievances *is guaranteed* by the sympathy with which they are received [by the Peasant and the Chorus]”, in 2013 that same sympathy merely “*suggests* that these grievances are to be taken seriously” (1988, xxxvi; 2013, 9; *italics mine*).

Such nuanced shifts of tone can also be detected in many notes in the commentary, e.g. on the Peasant’s giving ‘permission’ to his wife to fetch water (77-81). In 1988, Cropp wrote (ad 77-78):

There is some humour as the Peasant brings El.’s hardships into perspective, but this reflects on his unimaginativeness too, rather than simply undercutting her view of the situation (...). The nature of her labour is more important than the amount of it, both to her (...) and to the Peasant (objecting to her demeaning herself; his objection shows that her own attitude is not frivolous).

Cropp’s new note (ad 77-79) has different emphases:

The Peasant brings Electra’s hardships into perspective, both undercutting her complaints and displaying some lack of empathy. The fact of her labour is more important than the amount of it, both to her (...) and to him (he too dislikes her humiliation).

(Gone is the Peasant’s “unimaginativeness”; so too the explicit mention of the non-frivolousness of Electra’s attitude.) A still clearer example is provided by the notes on 968, Electra’s reaction to Orestes’ hesitation before the murder. 1988:

In A. *Cho.* 900 Pylades’ first and only answer is a reminder of Apollo’s will. Here El.’s main appeal (970) concerns vengeance; she sees Or.’s hesitation as due to pity (*oiktos*, often a sign of weakness in Greek eyes) rather than filial feeling.

versus 2013:

A harsh question. Electra ascribes Orestes’ hesitation to pity (*oiktos*, the ‘weakness’ of sensitive men that he commented on earlier, 294-6) rather than to *aidôs* as he himself does in *Choephoroi*. She insists on retribution (970, 982-4), whereas Pylades’ first and only answer reminded Orestes of

Apollo's will (*Cho.* 900-2). In Greek eyes pity was rightly felt only for someone suffering undeservedly (»» Konstan 2006.201-18), and Electra refuses to allow that her mother's death will be undeserved.⁷

It will be clear that, taken cumulatively, such changes leave Electra slightly worse for wear. In its own increased ambiguity, the book better reflects the profound moral complexities of the play; at the same time it is, perhaps, a somewhat less crisp statement of the case against (still all too prevalent) readings which see Electra as simplistically 'self-centred'.

The note on 968 cited above is also a good example of the increased fullness and depth of the commentary, which remains a model of how to do many things well in little space, treating linguistic, textual, cultural/historical and interpretative matters with equal deftness and expertise. There are more references to other passages in *Electra* and other texts, and key pointers to a quarter century's worth of new scholarship. More attention is paid to issues of text and language (many such technical discussions are now set apart in bracketed sections at the end of individual notes).⁸ Whether the book by itself could be used by undergraduates tackling the original Greek—to be fair, not a central aim of the series—is open to doubt, since grammatical help is sometimes given (e.g. on οὐ μή + fut. ind. at 383-385), but just as often is not (e.g. on the 'tragic' aorist at 248 and 1168).⁹

Apart from revisions there are many additions: several points which in the first edition had no bibliographical support have now been supplied it (e.g. ad 799-802, on imperfects in the messenger speech), and some lines which earlier received no comment at all are now given very fine notes (e.g. ad 1084-1085).

Further improvements in the translation, a bibliography which (in spite of its explosive growth) is more accessible and better organized, and a more detailed index all add to a fine book. Cropp's commentary deserves to be the first point of call for anyone, student or scholar, working on the play.

A book which appeared just in time for Cropp to take into consideration is Distilo's two-volume textual-critical commentary. It is also the only book in Cropp's bibliography for which he supplies an authorial comment (2013, 247):

⁷ The reference is to Konstan, D. 2006. *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks* (Toronto).

⁸ I must admit, however, that the system used to determine which points end up in those sections was often unclear to me.

⁹ I cannot resist an anecdote here: I used the book for an undergraduate course in Amsterdam in 2013, and was unaware of the appearance of a second edition when ordering it for my students. My ignorance persisted until one student asked me whether I had chosen this text because I was named in the preface (I had not remembered that, and found it strange that my work should be mentioned in a book published when I was five). In any case, the commentary worked very well for the course, and was appreciated by students; I did, however, provide grammatical notes separately.

“Comprehensive but erratic.” The first adjective can hardly be in doubt, given the scale of Distilo’s book (over 800 pages); the second is equally correct, even if the book offers much that is worthy of consideration.

The book is the (apparently unchanged) published version of Distilo’s 2011 Padua dissertation. It consists of three parts: an introduction on the manuscript tradition, an extensive philological commentary, and a new text (without apparatus) arising from Distilo’s discussions.

The introduction offers full discussion of the manuscripts L and P. Its main aim is to disprove Zuntz’s widely accepted hypothesis¹⁰ that, for the alphabetical plays, P is an apograph of L, copied when L had undergone a first round of corrections by Triclinius (Zuntz’s Tr¹) but before that same scholar had made other rounds of changes to L (Tr² and Tr³). Distilo argues, instead, that L and P are *gemelli*, sharing a common ancestor Λ (from which P was copied, according to Distilo, probably via an intermediate ms. π). Similar objections to Zuntz’s thesis had earlier been posited with respect to the *Heraclidae* by Magnani,¹¹ and Distilo cites various other doubters (xl n. 105).

The core of Distilo’s argument is that there are too many places in which P gives a reading which cannot derive from LTr¹ and also cannot be attributed simply to scribal error (Distilo, in fact, often prefers P’s readings over L’s). A list of such instances is given at xxxvii-xxxviii (with n. 99). Cumulatively, and combined with the work of Magnani and with other arguments gathered by Distilo at xxxix-xlv, these cases cast doubt on Zuntz’s theory, but the case is, to my mind, far from proven conclusively. Many of Distilo’s examples are open to objections (some representative instances must suffice here):

- xxx, ad 42: Distilo presents P’s original reading πότε (before correction to τότε) as a given, but elsewhere (in her note ad loc.) must admit that it is ‘fort.’ (even if P had πότε, a scribal slip is an easy explanation); her claim that “la prima lezione di P è corretta” is highly doubtful.
- xxxi, ad 192: It is certainly not “chiaro che P [χάρισε, with –αι written over ε] sta leggendo una fonte diversa” than L (χάρισαι). This smacks of a simple confusion of αι and ε,¹² and P’s χάρισε is more nonsensical than L’s χάρισαι.
- xxxii, ad 391: “ὁ τ’ οὐ P: οὐ τ’ οὐ L (P è corretto)” (accents *sic*): certainly, but any copyist, even one of P’s inferior skill, could have made that change.
- xxxv, ad 981: Distilo claims that P’s οὐκ ἔν is correct, but this is certainly not guaranteed. Some have defended L’s οὐδ’ ἔν, some would read οὐ τᾶν.

¹⁰ Zuntz, G. 1965. *An Inquiry into the Transmission of the Plays of Euripides* (Cambridge).

¹¹ Magnani, M. 2000. *La tradizione manoscritta degli Eraclidi di Euripide* (Bologna).

¹² For which cf. Zuntz 1965, 136.

Even if οὐκ is taken as right, it may be a ‘correction’ down to luck or accident.

- xxxv, ad 989: P’s τυνδαρεύου is indeed not identical to L’s τυνδαρούου or Tr¹’s τυνδαρέου, but that is hardly sufficient reason to assume that P derives this (unmetrical) reading from a different ms.

Matters are certainly not helped by the fact that Distilo’s treatment throughout is marred by typos, particularly glaring in a book of precise textual criticism. Thus, in the section of the introduction under discussion, the note on 122 (p. xxx) makes a mess of breathings (ἄιδαι or ἄιδαι?), the note on 989 (p. xxxv) makes no sense with Tr¹ being reported as –πέυ (rather than –πέου), and the list of places at xxxvii-xxxviii confusingly cites 981 as “891”. A particularly confounding example concerns line 760, one of the few places where assuming independent status for P could actually influence what one reads in the text. Distilo goes to some lengths (xxxiii and ad loc.) to argue in favour of P’s κρατεῖν over L’s κτανεῖν (Zuntz saw this, rather, as one of P’s “horrors”: 1965, 137-138), only then to print—surely by mistake—κτανεῖν in her final text (p. 670)!

The body of Distilo’s book, her commentary, will need to be consulted by anyone interested in the text of this play. It gathers together scholarly views on all textual problems, and supplies generally intelligent discussion. Distilo is clearly a well-read¹³ textual critic, and her views on each individual crux deserve consideration. At the same time, there are few places where she offers genuinely new arguments for existing readings, and even fewer where her preferred text diverges from one of the recent major editions. One might, accordingly, wonder whether there is sufficient justification for publishing a work of this scope (rather than, for instance, a separate discussion of the manuscript tradition and notes on those places where Distilo offers something new). In the end, my own answer would be yes, on account of the sensibility of most of Distilo’s notes (*most*, not all: there are also some howlers, e.g. on 1058, cited below); in any case, the commentary format hardly allows for such discrimination.

I conclude with a somewhat random selection of notes on individual passages, restricting myself to those places where Distilo offers new argumentation or opts for unusual readings. That I mention only points of disagreement should not detract from

¹³ There are also lacunae in Distilo’s bibliography, however (see further below), and she underutilizes Cropp’s work: his commentary is cited but rarely used, and the preface’s claim that *Electra* is a play “per la quale manca un commento esaustivo dall’ottimo lavoro di Denniston” is something of a slight on Cropp’s work (it is also besides the point, given the large amount of textual-critical work on this play outside commentaries—incidentally, Distilo would have profited from paying attention to published reviews of editions). It is similarly strange to find, in a section concerning the dating of the play (1-6), only a throwaway reference in a final footnote to Cropp, M.J., Fick, G. 1985. *Resolutions and Chronology in Euripides* (London).

Distilo's work elsewhere (nor taken to mean, however, that I disagree with her only here):

ad 54-59: Distilo is right to argue against Diggle's transposition of 59, but deleting the line is a worse solution still. There is no attempt to explain the interpolation of a line which simple emendation can fix; the argument that γάρ in 60 does not work after 59 is false.

ad 300-303: Distilo's treatment of the syntax of 300-301 (τύχας is object of λέγειν) is accurate, but destroyed by the comma she prints in her text (p. 657).

ad 307-313: Distilo opts for Scaliger's duals in 312-313, printing Κάστορ', ὦ ... ἐμὲ μνήστυον (why the needless augmentless form?). The duals, for which Kovacs argued strongly, stay ingeniously close to the paradosis ὦ, but leave Electra being wooed by both Dioscuri—too ingenious, in short.

ad 357-361: with all recent editions, Distilo follows Bain in deleting 360, but to my mind this is based on a unnecessarily strict set of 'rules' concerning what must happen on stage once an order has been uttered. Distilo's supplementary argument that τεύχη cannot mean "bagagli" strikes me as weak: if the word can refer only to arms/equipment (rather than bags), why not simply assume that those are what the Peasant refers to?

ad 367-400: battle rages on over this speech. The damage done by Wilamowitz and Reeve (who left intact twelve and four lines, respectively, out of twenty-four) had been slowly undone by Basta Donzelli, Goldhill and Egli;¹⁴ Distilo, elsewhere a conservative critic, is unaware of the latter two contributions, and brutally cuts the speech back down.

ad 671-675: regardless of what one does with speaker attributions and stichomythia here, the emendation οἴκτιρον in 672 appears palaeographically unlikely. The answer lies hidden in Distilo's n. 383: in spite of Diggle's objections, Fix's οἴκτ(ε)ιρε' γ is good even without a change of speaker. I observe that Cropp has now also adopted this reading.

ad 1055-9: Distilo follows Broadhead in reading ἄρ' ἂν ... ἔρξαις in 1058, but thinks that this is (and that Broadhead meant it to be) a 'participio aoristo dorica': one is left here with serious doubts about Distilo's Greek.

ad 1060: ἀρχὴ (...) προοιμίου has been well explained by Lloyd.¹⁵ Distilo, missing that contribution, emends needlessly to προοίμιον.

ad 1292-1307: in a passage whose textual history is particularly rife with unnecessary confusion, Distilo proposes the strangest division of parts yet, with Orestes speaking both 1292-1293 and 1295 (kept in place; LP give the line to Electra). Distilo translates

¹⁴ For full references, see Cropp ad loc.

¹⁵ Lloyd, M. 1992. *The Agon in Euripides* (Oxford), 66.

1294 as “è lecito per chi non è contaminato” (a strange tease) so that Orestes can then ask whether or not this holds for him. But καί in 1295 and 1296 clearly point to a second questioner, as do μύθου and the form of address in 1295. There is nothing wrong with L’s distributions apart from missing indications in 1298 and 1303: first Orestes asks and gets permission to engage the Dioscuri, then Electra does the same, followed by a conversation which includes all three parties.

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