

L.P.E. PARKER, *Euripides Alcestis, Edited with Introduction & Commentary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, ISBN 978-0-19-925467-5.

Let me begin with a confession. Even before I opened the book, I was disconcerted by the declaration on the back cover that "... apart from D.J. Conacher's student text, no annotated edition [of *Alcestis*] in English has appeared for more than fifty years." Two have: one by J. E. Thornburn, Jr. (without the Greek text of the play) in 2002, the other by myself and Cecilia Luschnig (with the text) in 2003<sup>1</sup>. In writing this review I have made every effort to rise above my wounded vanity.

The book consists of an Introduction; a Greek text of *Alcestis*, with a full and clear critical apparatus based on Diggle's; and a detailed commentary, which takes up some two thirds of its pages. Consistent with the genre, the commentary includes information that can be found in previous commentaries and then adds a good deal more. It is an erudite and informative book, with many virtues.

Parker's fortes are her detailed linguistic notes and her meticulous scansions and metrical analyses. In note after note, her discussion of terminology is enriched by references to other uses of the word or grammatical form in the play, elsewhere in Euripides, and in other ancient Greek works. She expands on the associations and precise nuances of terms that cannot be adequately conveyed by any single translation. She suggests why particular terms or forms rather than others are used in the context. On occasion, she asks what the meaning of the term can

<sup>1</sup> J.E. Thornburn, Jr., *The Alcestis of Euripides, with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 2002; *Euripides' Alcestis, with Notes and Commentary* by C.A.E. Luschnig and H.M. Roisman, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003 (Oklahoma Series in Classical Culture, vol. 29).

be in the context and lets the reader follow as she works out her answer (e.g., ἀπότομος in 982-3n). Where the exact meaning of a term is in dispute, she supports her own reading both by marshalling uses of the word elsewhere in Greek literature and by seeking the best fit for the lines under discussion.

Meter is treated in both the Introduction and the Commentary. “The Metres of *Alcestis*” in the Introduction offers an excellent basic account, geared to students, of an important but difficult subject. Parker moves from some essential generalizations about Greek prosody to a brief discussion of the three modes of delivery (speech, song, and chanting) and the metrical conventions of each, and from there, to explanations, supported by examples from *Alcestis*, of the various meters and rhythms found in the play, as in other Greek tragedies. The Commentary contains sections devoted to detailed scansions and metrical analyses of all the songs and choral odes. These should be a metrician’s delight and also please those who are concerned with variant readings, as Parker often brings her scansion to bear on this matter.

The book has other virtues as well. “The Transmission of the Text” in the Introduction begins with the salutary reminder that very little is known of books and readers in fifth-century Athens and proceeds with a succinct, methodical discussion of the fragments and manuscripts that have come down to us. In the course of this discussion, major issues of transmission are treated, including copying errors, interpolations, and multiple sources, and the consequent efforts in modern times to establish an authentic text. The dedicated bibliography that precedes this section should be appreciated by scholars with a particular interest in the transmission.

I personally found the section entitled “*Alcestis* and the Poets,” which examines the treatment of the heroine and the reception of the play from Roman times to the end of the twentieth century, highly informative. Its overview is at once thorough, covering all the major post-Euripidean literary adaptations of the myth, and fittingly succinct. Its detailed footnotes are welcome. Its guiding idea, that Euripides did not shirk difficult questions in writing *Alcestis*, is thought provoking and contributes to one’s appreciation of Euripides’ achievement. Similarly, the discussion of the early critiques of the play (from Charles Perrault in 1674

through the Brownings in the latter half of the nineteenth century) in the section entitled “*Alcestis* and the Critics” opens worlds that are not readily accessible or well known, despite Parker’s previously published article on the subject<sup>2</sup>.

For all the book’s merits, though, I have serious reservations. The first is with regard to its intended audience. In the Preface, Parker explains that the book is intended for adult students who know ancient Greek well enough to read the text without parallel translation but not well enough to understand all its nuances, discern all the possible meanings of all the words, or cope adequately with the complexities of the syntax. It seeks to enable such students to engage in close reading of the text and serve them as “an introduction to the serious study” of it (pp. v-vi). To this end, Parker says, she has tried to produce a compromise between a scholarly edition and the currently popular type of student edition with a parallel translation but no linguistic notes. She thus provides well-targeted sections on meter and transmission in the Introduction and, in the Commentary, literal translations of some 75% of the text together with rich linguistic discussion.

Yet I wonder. How many undergraduates will have the knowledge of eighteenth-century Classicism and nineteenth-century Romanticism that Parker assumes? How many will be able to follow her discussion of the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns, as she does not clearly define what this is from the outset? And how many will follow her allusions (e.g., Theophrastus’ *δειλός*, p. li)? Some of them will also need information about the conventions and structure of Greek tragedy, which Parker does not provide although it is standard nowadays in commentaries for students<sup>3</sup>.

In the line-by-line notes, students will appreciate the translations she gives of examples from other texts, but may be overwhelmed by the sheer detail and volume of her readings,

<sup>2</sup> “*Alcestis*: Euripides to Ted Hughes,” *G&R* 50, 2003, 1-30.

<sup>3</sup> It is also noteworthy that the large swaths of French in the Introduction, which are important for following the argument are untranslated, although the German all through the book, even in short clauses, is.

explanations, and examples. Parker seems to be aware of the problem, and suggests that readers can pick what they want and skip what they don't (p. v). In an effort to accommodate readers of different levels, she sets off material that is more likely to interest graduate students and scholars in square brackets. This is useful, but picking and choosing remains difficult, as Parker tends to run her points seamlessly one into the next. In addition, undergraduates may be bewildered by the dozens of commentaries that are referred to only by last name and abbreviated title (e.g., 10n: Dodds on *Ba.* 370), without being referenced in full anywhere in the book<sup>4</sup>.

Parker's extensive discussions of particles will be very useful to students, as they are often nuanced by their context and have no exact English equivalent. Thus for example, she translates line 64 to read, "Nonetheless, you *shall* comply, excessively cruel as you are," and goes on to explain that ἤ μὲν as used here, "introduces a strong and confident assertion...with, not infrequently, a touch of menace." There is, however, little if any discussion of the many polysemous words in the play (e.g., κακός, σοφός etc.).

The abundant literal translations that fill the notes are problematic. Parker offers these translations as a way of helping the student over the hurdles of Greek syntax and of shortening their way to understanding the precise meaning and color of the vocabulary. As Parker points out, translations in notes have the advantage of better reflecting the Greek syntax and lexicon than the more natural sounding translations that are found in parallel

<sup>4</sup> Among the commentaries thus presented which are not mentioned in any of the bibliographies, I found the following (not a complete list): 12-14n: Jebb on *Aj*; 58n: Jebb on *Phil.*; 162n: Collard on *Supp.*; 218-20, 391n: Bond on *Her.*; 345-7n, 872n: Seaford on *Cyc.*; 392-415n: MacDowell on *Wasps*; 428-9n, 1159-63n: Kannicht on *Hel.*; 512n: Garvie on *Cho.*; 526n: Sommerstein, *Frogs*; 626-7n: N.J. Richardson on *Il.* 23; 639n: Sommerstein on *Thesm.*; 752n: Hainsworth on *Il.* 9. 409; 800-2, 912n: Stevens on *Andr.*; 835-6n: Jebb, on *Ant.*; Mastronarde on *Phoen.*; 915-17n: Bond on *Her.*; 925n: Mastronarde on *Med.*; 946-47n: Dover on *Clouds*; 1088n: Arnott, on Menander's *Epitrepontes*; 1147-8n: Gildersleeve on Pindar, *Pyth.* I; 1153n: Porson on *Orestes*; Lobeck on *Aj*; 1156n: Dunbar on *Birds*.

texts. They are not, however, quite the help to students that Parker makes them out to be. In the first place, there are far too many of them. Parker translates about three quarters of Euripides' text. Many of the translated lines are quite straightforward (e.g., 12-4, 619-20, 747-50, etc.) – well within the capacity of undergraduates. Moreover, the thorough and often illuminating explanations that follow most of the translations make many of them superfluous. Much of the help with syntax and vocabulary she offers can be provided without translating. The sheer abundance of the translations is an encumbrance – more material in already crowded notes for students to wade through. In the Preface, Parker states that readers can take what they want and skip what they don't, but this is easier said than done. Moreover, the student's job is to learn the Greek, to struggle with it. Parker does not do them a favor by translating so much for them. At the same time, there are some problematic lines that Parker chooses neither to translate nor adequately explain (e.g., 10, 207-8), which makes one wonder about her criteria for selection.

The ample scansion and metrical analyses that run through the notes are potentially useful in helping students and others to navigate the complexities of Greek prosody. Parker's application of metrics to the consideration of variant meanings is sometimes fascinating. On the whole, though, her treatment of meter strikes me as better suited to advanced graduate students and scholars than to undergraduates struggling with the language. Greater consideration of the connections between meter and meaning might have made her discussions more relevant to undergraduates.

The bibliography also is poorly suited to students. Too many of the listings are on specialized subjects. There are too few references to basic works on Greek tragedy and Greek theater and insufficient listing of interpretive studies of *Alkestis*.<sup>5</sup> In

<sup>5</sup> The following, in my view, are sorely missing:

F. Ahl, "Admetus Deuteragonistes," *Colby Quarterly* 33.1, 1997, 9-25.

Buxton, R. G. A., "Euripides' *Alkestis*: Five Aspects of an Interpretation", *Papers given at a Colloquium on Greek Drama in Honour of R. P. Winnington-Ingram*. Lyn Rodley (ed.), London: Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies, 1987, 17-31.

footnote 122 of the Introduction, Parker refers the reader to Waterfield et al's *Euripides, Heracles, and other Plays* for

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Gregory, Justina, "Euripides' Alcestis", *Hermes* 107, 1979, 259-70.

Hartigan, Karelisa V., *Ambiguity and Self-Deception: The Apollo and Artemis Plays of Euripides*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1991.

Luschnig, C.A.E., *The Gorgon's Severed Head: Studies of Alcestis, Electra, and Phoenissae*, Leiden: Brill, 1995.

—"Interiors: Imaginary Spaces in *Alcestis* and *Medea*", *Mnemosyne* 45, 1992, 19-44.

—"Playing the Others: The Mythological Confusion of Admetus", *Scholía* n.s. 1, 1992, 12-27.

—"Euripides' Alcestis and the Athenian οἶκος", *Dioniso* 60, 1990, 9-39.

Michelini, A., *Euripides and the Tragic Tradition*, Madison, WI, 1987, 387.

Padel, Ruth, "Making Space Speak", in John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin, eds, *Nothing to Do with Dionysus*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, 336-65.

Padilla, Mark, "Gifts of Humiliation: *Charis* and Tragic Experience in *Alcestis*", *AJP* 121, 2000, 179-211.

Rabinowitz, N. S., *Anxiety Veiled: Euripides and the Traffic in Women*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993.

Schein, Seth L., "Φιλία in Euripides, *Alcestis*", *Metis* 3, 1988, 179-206.

Segal, Charles P., *Orpheus: The Myth of the Poet*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.

—"Cold Delight: Art, Death, and the Transgression of Genre in Euripides, *Alcestis*", in *The Scope of Words: In Honor of Albert S. Cook*, edited by P. Baker, S. Webster Goodwin, and G. Handwerk, New York: P. Lang, 1991, 211-28.

—"Euripides' *Alcestis*: Female Death and Male Tears", *CA* 11, 1992, 142-58.

— *Euripides and the Poetics of Sorrow: Art, Gender, and Commemoration in Alcestis, Hippolytus, and Hecuba*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993.

Stanton, G. R., "Φιλία and ξενία in Euripides' 'Alkestis'", *Hermes* 118, 1990, 42-54.

Thury, Eva M., "Euripides, *Alcestis* and the Athenian Generation Gap", *Arethusa* 21, 1988, 197-214.

Zeitlin, F., "Playing the Other: Theater, Theatricality and the Feminine in Greek Drama", in John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin, eds, *Nothing to Do with Dionysus*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, 341-74.

further secondary studies of *Alcestis*. However, a commentary for students shouldn't send them to hunt out other bibliographies; and, if it does, it should provide its recommendations in a more user-friendly location.

It may be that the British students whom Parker taught as a Fellow and Tutor at Oxford will not be so daunted by the above matters, I am not familiar with the English educational system at first hand, so cannot say. If Parker has indeed identified and written for a previously neglected readership, she has done a valuable service. Yet, even if this is the case, the book remains problematic—even for an audience of scholars. Its overall approach, writing style, lack of contemporaneity, and referencing all leave much to be desired.

My major objection to the book is its trenchant, combative approach and its imperious and supercilious disparagement of one writer after another. This feature of the book is most salient in the Introduction, but infects the Commentary as well. Thus, for example, the fourth section, “*Alcestis* and the Poets,” is marred by Parker's incessant criticism of every writer who, in her view, shirked the difficult issues (e.g., the father's obligations to the son) that Euripides tackled. Instead of offering a sympathetic understanding of how writers in different times and places adapted the story or Euripides' play to their own purposes, she criticizes them for their departures from the spirit of the original. Parker's treatment of scholars from the late nineteenth century onward in the section entitled “*Alcestis* and the Critics” is positively poisonous. There is also constant grading. “Lattimore is one of the very few critics to have noticed that there is a problem with the final scene” (p. xlv). Lloyd is also commended for noting that the interpretations of the Pheres scene “reflect the radically different views which have been taken of the play as a whole and particularly of the character of Admetus” (p. xlvi). More often, scholars are denigrated. Wilamowitz is guilty of “conjecturing events outside the play to support his view of what is said within it” (xlv). “It is in his treatment of Pheres that Lesky distances himself in some degree from the text” (xlvi). Burnett's reading is “manipulative” (xlviii). Rosenmeyer employs “a combination of invention and distortion,” which makes “[o]ne...wonder at the insouciance of publishers and the

vagaries of academic promotion” (p. lii). Kitto, like others, has “happy moments,” but “is a member of the authoritarian school of criticism” (liv). It is true that in most cases the disparagement is supported by argumentation, some of it quite lengthy, but this raises the question of why Parker bothers so much with views to which she so objects.

Instead of offering her own comprehensive reading of the play, Parker uses the scholarship as a platform from which to launch her views on various matters of contention. To take only some of the many examples: She disputes Lesky’s contention that the play sees to it that Pheres is to be condemned, arguing that Pheres’ conduct would have been acceptable in the mores of the time. She tears apart Burnett’s view of Admetus as a blameless character in furtherance of her view that he was deeply flawed. She refutes Dale’s claim that Alcestis’ last speech bolsters audience sympathy for Admetus’ hard lot as the survivor so as to say that it doesn’t. Arguing against Rosenmeyer’s and van Lennep’s view that Alcestis is drawn as an unsympathetic figure and Rabinowitz’ contention that Alcestis does not die because she is ‘in love’ with Admetus (pp. lii–liii), she puts forth her own view that Alcestis is a loving wife and sympathetic character. In principle, her decision not to offer an independent reading of the play is legitimate in a book whose stated aim is to enable others to make their own close reading. But with her supercilious and sometimes nasty criticism of one scholar after another, she reads like a sniper taking pot shots at those unlucky enough to be in her purview, without, heaven forbid, exposing herself.

Parker, in fact, allows herself many liberties that she denies to other scholars. For example, she bases her claim that Admetus was faced with instant death while Alcestis’ death was postponed (p. l) more on the folktales from which the story derived than on the text itself, and then uses this claim, poorly established as it is, to argue that Admetus hoped that “in the intervening time the gods might be persuaded to relent, that some way out would be found” (pp. l–li). In support of the latter claim, she points to the sacrifices that were offered to the gods. But couldn’t these sacrifices be made in anticipation of Alcestis’ imminent death? Parker here conjectures events outside the play in support of her views about events in it no less than Wilamowitz does. In

discussing van Lennep's treatment of Alcestis, she criticizes him for making the mistake of thinking of her as a real person with "unavowed motives" (pp. li-lii). But doesn't Parker do much the same with respect to Admetus when she claims that he must have asked his parents and his wife to die in his stead because he *thought* that if he prayed to the gods they would relent and let them live (p. l)? She pans Bumoy for not having "an atom of evidence" for his view that the ancient Athenians believed that the old ought to die to save the young (xxix); but she doesn't do a very good job of substantiating her own argument that Admetus should not be viewed as a coward because "[i]t is inappropriate, aesthetically wrong, for a king from the heroic age, a major tragic character, to be cast in the role of Theophrastus' δειλός" (p. li). Earlier in the Introduction, she had marshalled a slew of arguments, some of them quite cogent, against the view that Alcestis is a pro-satyrical play. But she never actually lays out the case for its being a full-fledged tragedy. Nor does she consider the possibility that Euripides, a notably iconoclastic poet, might well have been deliberately undercutting the heroic assumptions of tragedy, though in n 256-7 she observes "the strange oscillation between tragic and non-tragic which characterizes the play" (p. 109).

In the line notes Parker is occupied with narrower matters, but remains harshly judgmental. Conacher, we read, "*appositely* cites..." (70-1n, my italics); "Kovacs' translation of *σχετλίω* ('unfeeling') is right; Conacher's ('the wretches') is wrong" (470n). She is also unnecessarily biting, as in the comments: "The text has suffered from the tendency of scribes ignorant of metre to bring words in the same case together" (80-4n) and "[e]ven this useful study, however, suffers in some degree from the tunnel-vision induced by the feminist approach" (285n). Even if the points have validity, they could have been made with more grace and less venom. In particular, Parker's panning of Burnett goes well beyond the pale. For example, on page l she says: "... Dale, though a much more honest critic than Burnett...", in note to 614-738, p. 179, she launches an attack on Burnett's alleged psychology: "But Burnett's breezy 'Pheres is ripe for death' makes the blood run cold, or ought to. The critic has drifted unawares into the

world of the psychopath<sup>6</sup>”, By what right does Parker speak this way of anyone? Nor is her substantive point beyond dispute. As Parker herself acknowledges, the phrase she finds objectionable originated not with Burnett but with Heracles (“Your father is ripe, if he is gone” 516).

In the commentary itself Parker also reverts to the practice of disparaging scholars without naming them. For example, she writes that although it is not entirely clear that the Chorus is comprised of old men, “it is over-literal to deduce from 473–4 below that they are young bachelors” (p. 68), without indicating who has offered this interpretation. She takes issue with unnamed “modern critics [who] like to tell us that Admetus was a kind master” (10n). She observes that “some critics would wish” (280–392n, p. 113) that the audience would forget the difference between Admetus promising to do something and actually doing it, but doesn’t trouble to name them. She writes that “When Admetus says ἄρτι μανθάνω at 940 below, it is without irony, and there is no such implication” (669n), without even a hint of what scholar, if any, claimed that the term was ironic. She disputes unidentified “[c]ritics of the later nineteenth century” (809–19n) who tried to rearrange the lines to make them more logical. She refutes anonymous “commentators” (903–6n) who identified the father mentioned in the lines in question as Anaxagoras. In failing to name the critics and commentators to whom she refers, Parker makes it difficult for her readers to check the opposing views for themselves.

Toward the end of the “*Alcestis* and the Critics” section of the Introduction, Parker writes that “[r]eaders may notice a tendency in my commentary not so much to interpret as to stress the limits of possible interpretation” (p. lvi). The statement is both something of an apology for not offering her own interpretation of the play and an indication of what the

<sup>6</sup> Burnett’s full statement in “The Virtues of Admetus,” *CP* 60, 1960, 248, is: “When he [Pheres] arrives on the scene one fact and only one is known about him, but it has been stated four times over: Pheres, though ripe for death, refused to exchange his life for his son’s” (16, Apollo; 290–2, *Alcestis*; 338–9, Admetus; 468–70, Chorus).

reader is to expect in the commentary. Yet in emphasizing the limits of interpretation, Parker rules out too much on rather shaky grounds. For example, in 1061-3n, she refuses to see any ambiguity in Admetus' addressing the unknown woman Heracles brings by the word γυναί. She acknowledges that the audience may enjoy the woman / wife irony but argues that since the word was the common way that a man addressed a woman in all circumstances, it doesn't say anything about Admetus' state of mind, as he really had no choice in the address. She further argues against the idea that other occurrences of the word γυνή in the scene are ambiguous. She calls the idea "an English-speaker's over-interpretation" and claims that "[i]n a language where the word for 'woman' is commonly used to mean 'wife', the two meanings are almost always automatically distinguished by the linguistic context." But isn't this the point? It is precisely when a word has two meanings that such play is possible.

Another example is in 1147-8n, where Parker claims that when Heracles tells Admetus that "for the future, being righteous, treat visitors with honor" (Parker's translation), Heracles "does not mean that Admetus is to change his behavior," but "[r]ather is endorsing just those qualities and ideals on which his friend legitimately prides himself." She supports her claim by citing Pindar's exhortation to Hieron of Syracuse in *Pythian* 1.85-6 (actually she translates 86 alone): "Do not pass by noble deeds. Guide your host with a just rudder. Forge your tongue on an anvil of truth," and pointing out that Pindar is "not suggesting that his patron has hitherto been a negligent, tyrannical liar." Even if Pindar will often use imperatives in exhortations to good behavior without seeming to imply that previous behavior has been bad, doesn't the difference in genre caution against the comparison? Heracles is not an encomiast. Furthermore, his utterance is ambiguous: "for the future" certainly seems to point toward a change in behavior from the past. Shouldn't one allow ambiguity here?

Parker's writing is at times inordinately difficult to follow, especially but not only in the Introduction. To begin with, there is a decidedly unhelpful disjunction between some of the section headings and their contents. The opening section, misleadingly entitled "Alcestis in Myth and Legend," deals with the play's

folkloric origins. The third section, titled “Euripides and Alcestis,” focuses on refuting the notion that *Alcestis* is a pro-satyrical play. Difficulties are also caused by Parker’s tendency not to define her terms. For example, on page iv she writes that “the folkloric origins of Euripides’ plot remain at the heart of the problems of the play,” and on page xxiii that the *agôn* between Admetus and Pheres “tackles the problem at the heart of the play”; but nowhere does she explicitly state what the main problem or problems are. She tells the reader that “[t]he Chorus perform multiple functions, some of which in Renaissance and post-Renaissance drama would devolve upon minor characters” (p. xxiii), without ever saying what those functions are. It is hard to know how much to attribute such truncated, cryptic utterances to negligence or to clubbiness – to the sense that those the book addresses should know such things without being told.

On occasion, it is unclear where Parker is heading. For example, in the section, “Euripides and Alcestis,” Parker marshals one argument after another to refute the notion that *Alcestis* is a ‘pro-satyrical’ play. The arguments are cogent and make it necessary for those (including myself) who hold this view to mentally reconsider or rebut. However, as one reads, one wonders why she is making this negative argument at all. It is several pages before one realizes that the point she is leading to is that *Alcestis* must be viewed as a full-fledged tragedy – a claim which she never develops or supports in a positive way.

The connections between points are very loose. A prime example here is in the references to Gilbert Murray in the section “Alcestis and the Poets.” A brief quotation from Murray appears under the section heading, set off from the text (xxiv). The next time Parker mentions Murray is two pages later, following a survey of the reception of the story in Roman times and in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance. She refers to him in the middle of a paragraph, right after her account of John Gower’s treatment of the story, to say that: “The pertinence of Murray’s observations begins to become clear” (xxvi), and then three pages later toward the end of the first paragraph on page xxix: “... but Hardy takes the other escape route imagined by Murray: Admetus knows of Alcestis’ offer, but does his best to dissuade her.” Since Parker had not elaborated on the quotation, though, I had no cause to

remember it and had to hunt for Murray's observations. Then she evokes Murray again in the last paragraph of the section, in the statement that he "does not reveal whether the observation from which I began sprang from his reading, or his own literary instinct. It is, however, demonstrably correct" (xxxv). It is only here that I finally realized that Murray's view, stated in the opening quotation, that what made Euripides special was that he "did not elude the awkward question" about Admetus' character, served Parker as the main basis for selecting the points she made about the many renditions of the story over the ages. Up until here, I felt inundated by what often seemed to be disconnected or only loosely associated details. My appreciation improved on a second reading – but should one have to struggle so hard to follow a scholarly text?

In much of the next section, "Alcestis and the Critics," there is no apparent organizing principle at all. The first few pages are organized chronologically. But once Parker passes Wilamowitz's writings in the early twentieth century, the thread becomes twisted. From Wilamowitz, she jumps over sixty years forward to Lattimore (1964), then back to Lesky's 1925 monograph, before she gets to his 1964 *Greek Tragedy*. Then, she briefly mentions Lloyd (1992) and Murray (1946) before taking on Burnett's (1975) defense of Admetus, but then backtracks to Dale's 1954 introduction to the play before finishing with Burnett. Nor is the material organized by topics, such as the various scenes, debates, characters, etc., or by critical approaches. The movement from one writer to another is determined by the points that Parker wants to make, but the line of argument itself remains poorly delineated.

The writing in the line notes is somewhat less daunting, only because they are relatively short. But here too Parker fails to chart a course for the reader. There is an opening section labeled "The Hypotheses," a section labeled "Prologue," and another section labeled "Parodos," but no further division into episodes and stasima and no prefaces to them either. The only subsequent subsections contain the detailed metrical analyses of the songs.

Some of the notes are clogged with an abundance of information whose relevance is difficult to discern. The clearest instances of this are the numerous lengthy comparisons to Shakespeare (e.g.,

248-9n, 746-860n, 1006-1158n), Browning (e.g., 280-392n, 477n, 641n, 1006-1158n), and Ted Hughes (e.g., 55n, 1116n). These shed little light on Euripides' text, while persons interested in the later authors, who might find the comparisons enlightening, would not look for them in a book on *Alcestis*, and certainly not in the line notes.

The book is already dated. Although it was published in 2007, the scholarship of the last third of the twentieth century is seriously underrepresented. The various bibliographies are quite up-to-date on matters such as manuscript transmission, meter, linguistic issues, theater, cultural history, but not on literary interpretations of the play. More recent interpretative works would have been welcome.

In the discussion of the criticism in the Introduction, only two scholars are mentioned from the 1990s, none from the 2000s. In consequence, Parker fails to relate to matters that are discussed in the recent scholarship, including *Alcestis*' speech to her marriage bed, her first exchange with her husband (244-79), their relationship with their children, the scene between the servant and Heracles, *Alcestis*' return, and whether the play's ending is really a happy one. The same tendency to ignore recent criticism mars the notes. One glaring instance here is that while she engages heavily with the reading of Dale (*passim*), she only rarely refers to Conacher's interpretations. The notes on 70-1, 153, 1070-1 are among the rare exceptions.

By way of justification, Parker states, with her characteristic disdain, that "It would be impossible to consider individually here the large number of assessments and interpretations of *Alc.* which have appeared within the last forty or so years.... While many offer interesting aperçus and valid judgments, there is also much evidence of negligent or manipulative reading..." (p. lvi). This is unacceptable. A commentary cannot ignore recent scholarship. Where readings are negligent or manipulative, it is the commentator's responsibility to explain why. It is hard not to wonder why Parker privileged the earlier putatively negligent and manipulative readings over the later ones. Was it because she ran out of space after spending almost six pages on the older critiques and then almost twelve quarreling with the scholarship from the late nineteenth through mid-twentieth centuries? Or

was it because she wrote about the scholarship she knew best and didn't trouble with the rest?

Incidentally, it is not just the bibliographies that could do with some updating. A case in point: "Two world wars have made us sensitive to the death of the young in a way that the Greeks were not" (on 614-738). Only the world wars? And how sensitive to the death of the young are we really?

Parker's referencing<sup>7</sup> is inconsistent and confusing and the indexing should have been more detailed<sup>8</sup>. And although the weaknesses in referencing and indexing do not detract from Parker's erudition, they do make for a careless looking book. Also

<sup>7</sup> On the one hand, there are many works that she lists in her Select Bibliography and then references in full when she refers to them in the Introduction or Commentary: E. Holzner 719-20n; C. Sourvinou-Inwood, 743n; Thomson, 313-4n; Hübner, 1119-20n; L. Battezzatto (*BICS*), 1125n; E. Forberg (almost full), 1153n. On the other hand, some works are not listed in any of the book's bibliographies, and then not referenced in full or referenced erratically when they are mentioned. An example here is P.T. Stevens' "Euripides, *Electra* 567-8, and *Alcestis* 1126-7," *CR* 60 (1946). In 1127n, it is cited as *CR* 60 (1946) and in the 1128n as "loc. cit. on 1127". Nowhere is the title of the article given. In n 946-7 we find "Diggle on Theophrastus, 26.4 (p. 473)"; but a full reference appears only in 969-72n. Conversely, N.J. Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Oxford, 1974) is referenced in full at its first mention in 173n, but only as 'Richardson' in 1070-1n, with no back reference to the earlier citation. Since it's not listed in any of the bibliographies how is the reader to identify it? I could find no full reference at all to Jäkel, *Menandri Sententiae*, mentioned in 782-5n, or to Wieland or Yourcenar, mentioned in 1006-158n. In the notes to 954-60 and 1006-158, there are no page references to the quotes from Burnett. Finally, neither I nor the interlibrary loan services I consulted could find the F. Nenci, (Naples, 2003) edition of *Alcestis* listed on p. 288.

<sup>8</sup>The book has two indexes to the notes. "*Index I: English*" is a useful list of proper names, grammatical and metrical terms, and key topics. However, one misses the many references to scholars, who are mentioned both in the Introduction and in the Commentary without being included in any of the bibliographical lists. "*Index II: Greek*" lists the Greek words explained in the notes. It is noteworthy that σόφρων and ἄφρων are not mentioned, even though Parker refers to them in the Introduction (p. xlix), where she pans Burnett's renditions of the terms, which have no exact equivalents in English. It would have been helpful to include in this index also the discussions of words of the Introduction.

giving an impression of hurry and offhandedness is her abbreviation of the play's name to "*Alc.*" throughout the Introduction. A good copy-editing would have been welcome<sup>9</sup>.

All in all my feeling is that, with her wealth of knowledge and analytic ability, Parker could have written a much better book than she has. I will keep the book on my shelves for reference, and urge other scholars and advanced graduate students to do the same. I also think that the book has a place in college and university libraries wherever Classics is taught. Nevertheless, I can't help feeling that Parker made poor use of the opportunity she had in this book to convey to her readers her obvious love of the play and admiration for the playwright. In the Introduction, Parker observes that a great play "offers a spectrum of possibilities" (p. lvi). In practice, she rejects almost all the understandings of other poets and scholars and greatly constricts the range of interpretations she allows her readers.

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<sup>9</sup> Here are the errors I noticed:

In the Introduction, p. xix unitalicized *Alcestis* when it refers to the play.

In the "Commentary," the lines that constitute the Parodos (p. 68) are indicated in the subhead; those that make up the Prologue (p. 49) are not.

381n has "Time will sooth you" instead of "soothe".

614-738n, p. 179, 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph, we find "an old *men*".

392-415n, p. 131, shouldn't *Alcestis* be abbreviated, as it is elsewhere?