

thou nothing to do with that righteous man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him' (Matthew 27:19, American Standard Version). This one verse is enough to spark off a huge afterlife for Mrs Pilate, as McDonough calls her. The gaps are filled in, and the result is Saint Procula, one of Jesus' first followers; even Claudia Procula, daughter of the Emperor Tiberius, who, as we all know, had no daughters. We all long for a story with a beginning, a middle and an end, particularly an end; Saint Matthew's tantalising hint about Pilate's domestic life is a temptation few can resist. And the same goes for Pilate himself. The room for interpretation is immense because the gospels at no point give even a hint about Pilate's inner life.

McDonough's book, which is wittily written, and a delight to read, goes through every cinematic appearance of the Prefect of Judaea, starting with the era of silent movies. Pilate's appearances on screen are remarkably short, but Pilate certainly dominates when he is on screen. McDonough analyses Mel Gibson's treatment of the Prefect in *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) with great sensitivity. Pilate is torn between the public and the private (the latter is summed up by his wife Claudia, who is sympathetic to the plight of Jesus) and he is outplayed by Caiaphas. Pilate is also torn between conscience and duty. He is played by a Bulgarian actor, Hristo Shopov, who the year before had played the warden of a gulag. Gibson's Pilate sums up the price that has to be paid for maintaining the Pax Romana, a price that is paid not just by those who are scourged and crucified, but also by those who preside over the system that metes out such punishments. McDonough sees a strong parallel between the Pax Romana and the Pax Americana.

McDonough does not like Gibson's film, with its horrific violence; he praises *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973), though, and one agrees with this judgement. Reading the book will propel the reader to YouTube to refresh one's memory of *Superstar*, and one may well be jolted by how good it is. (I was). The Andrew Lloyd Webber musical, lyrics by Tim Rice, gives Pilate a soliloquy that establishes his character: hesitant, puzzled, a victim of circumstance, a man who simply does not understand the events into which he has been thrown. Lloyd Webber's Pilate is a figure facing an existential crisis, mystified by the Galilean, and a tragic figure too, who gets the blame for evermore for failing to handle a situation that he does not grasp.

As McDonough point out in his commentary, 'Pilate's Dream', as this sequence is called, is an anxiety dream, and Pilate sees himself as the victim of injustice rather than its perpetrator. And yet, this Pilate clearly commands our sympathy. He is no thug, no uncaring administrator: he is nuanced, human, trapped, just like the rest of us. This turning of the tables is remarkable. Jesus Christ presents a challenge to all he meets. Some pass, Pilate failed. One begins to see that of all the film versions of the life and death of Christ, *Superstar* holds a commanding position. It is an obvious 70s movie, but at the same time, anchored in that decade, it is timeless too. Unlike so many other versions of Pilate on film, it has not dated badly.

Reading McDonough, two things emerge: we are obsessed with Pilate, and we are pretty obsessed too with the Pax Romana that he represents. Yes, it was a great civilisation, but the cost was horrific. And the same is true of our own civilisation. This book is well illustrated with stills from the films, which serve to jog the memory and make one want to revisit some of these masterpieces, or often, less than masterpieces. But in the end the appeal of Pilate in his many versions lies in the realisation that, like the rest of us, he was human, all too human. Pilate, that middle-ranking blundering administrator, is a sort of Roman Everyman.

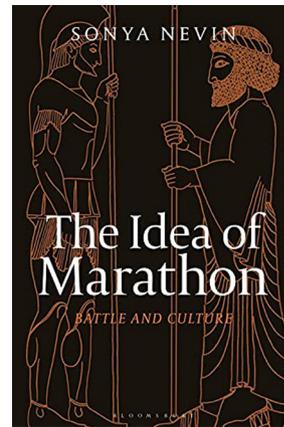
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The Idea of Marathon. Battle and Culture

Nevin (S.) Pp. xii + 236, ills, maps. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. Paper, £22.49 (Cased, £67.50). ISBN: 978-1-350-15759-0

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This is a book about the events of a single day, 'a day of blood and fire', as heralded in the introduction. Yet in a slim volume it covers an extensive timescale, from the sixth century BCE to the present day. There are 12 chapters, each divided into about six sections. The first few chapters introduce the Graeco-Persian world before the Battle of Marathon; then comes the battle and its aftermath. The second half of the book deals with Nevin's chief focus, the idea of the battle, or more specifically the ideals surrounding Marathon, as she

traces its reception and cultural legacy through the ages. The maps and line drawings and vase paintings are helpful additions, though not all of these are easy to read.

It is not, however, an account of the battle, nor is there a full chronology of events. Readers looking for either of these things are likely to be disappointed, and a degree of understanding of the events of 490 would be an essential pre-read. With this in mind, it is not immediately evident who would benefit most from reading this book. It somewhat by-passes the essential details required for OCR's A Level Ancient History, although it is certainly enriching reading for a teacher or a school student looking for extension. It would be an exciting inclusion on a university reading list, but also has an immediacy and accessibility which would appeal to the informed general reader.

Indeed, so immediately readable is the language that it sometimes belies the scholarship of the work. Nevin's style would not look out of place in a work of popular historical fiction. In many respects her writing is reminiscent of one of her key sources, Herodotus. With him she shares a fondness for anecdote, digression, drama and speculation: 'Were [the Athenians' former slaves] more comfortable socialising with each other? Was that even permitted?'. All this makes it an engaging read. Details are described with often dramatic fervour, inviting the reader's imagination and lifting the history off the page. Some readers, however, may find the style disconcertingly intimate, and may struggle, for example, to be told that 'It is time we met the Milesians' new best friends, the Persians'.

Rich insights into the Cimonid family and the Ionian Greeks can be found here, and a useful, concise introduction to Herodotus. Nevin exposes the difficulty of establishing with certainty the events of the battle. She explores the question, unanswered in Herodotus, of whether Persian cavalry fought at Marathon ('so intriguing' she writes), and offers insights from texts as diverse as Cornelius Nepos, and the tenth-century Suda, as well as drawing on later scholarship.

Another unanswerable question is whether news of the Athenian victory at Marathon was communicated to the Persians in an act of betrayal by signalling with a shield. In Herodotean manner, Nevin offers a variety of explanations and commits to none.

While the idea (or ideals) of Marathon naturally invites an Athenian focus, Nevin's approach is even-handed. Persians are given due consideration, and anti-Persian sentiment is called out, even where it comes from Aristophanes, whose crude and unnuanced portrayal of Greece's enemy is unsurprising. 'It is absurd. It is rude. It ridicules the Persians generally through an out-of-control Datis.' The single chapter devoted to the Persians, their culture and leadership, is one of the clearest and most readable introductions to Persian culture available. What appears to interest Nevin more is to expose the reception of the Persians at Marathon as the barbarian aggressor against the righteous Greek heroes. Nevin cites a childhood work of Branwell Bronte, *The History of the Young Men*, which invites comparison between the Greeks at Marathon and a small number of Europeans in Africa facing opposition from a 700-strong indigenous army. In Bronte's work, the heroic ideal of Marathon was transferred to the currently unpopular idea of colonialism. With this example, Nevin not only shows how the classical idea of Marathon has a place in 19th century English literature, but also broaches a theme which is very pertinent to contemporary scholarship.

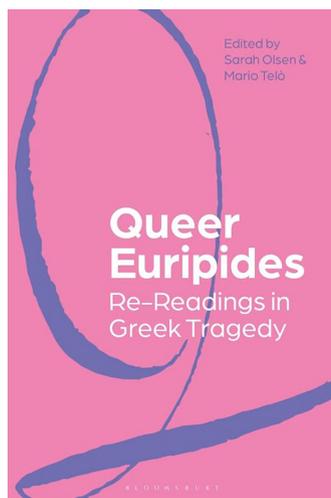
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Queer Euripides. Re-readings in Greek Tragedy

Olsen (S.), Telo (M.) (edd.) Pp. viii+276. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. Paper, £24.99 (Cased, £75). ISBN: 978-1-350-24961-5

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This fascinating book seeks to reconsider the plays of Euripides (and Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*) 'through the lens of queerness', as part of the general objective to 'valorize messiness and unruliness instead of restoration and reconstruction' (p.14). 22 scholars contribute to the volume and the variety of their approaches is itself reflective of the heterogeneity of queer reading. They are looking at far more than simply sexual behaviour and orientation: anything which amounts to

transgression of societal, generic, literary and even prosodic norms can find a welcome in the house of queerness—and Euripides is nothing if not a challenger of norms.

There are queer characters—Hippolytus has two chapters devoted to him, and Pentheus' transphobic heteronormativity makes for a compelling final chapter as the gender-bender Dionysus wreaks havoc with his mind and his body. Electra resists the identities expected of her as a woman and rubs this in with her fake pregnancy. Orestes and Pylades are pulled out of the closet in two chapters, while the figuring of Cyclops and Silenus as Zeus and Ganymede in *Cyclops* burlesques the Platonic elevation of pederasty (p. 212). Other characters show queerness in other ways: Medea is a queer woman on the Athenian stage as she is a non-Greek child-killer: she has submitted to societal expectations, having married and borne two sons to a Greek male, but by the end of the play she has exploded these same patriarchal power structures. In *Helen*, Theoclymenus is as a character underdeveloped in the binary system of Greek vs. Barbarian: he is the typical warlike tyrant as opposed to his godlike irenic sister Theonoe, while the Greek Menelaus is a barbarian in Egypt. Euripides however enjoys foiling audience expectations of barbaric tyranny, xenophobia and warlikeness by making Theoclymenus both a tyrant who kills strangers and also a host who helps his guests. *Andromache* is about the queer intimacy of polygynous marriage, with a delicious scene where Hermione (who is 'queerly attached to her natal family') accuses the Trojans of being queer for practising incest and murder (p.150). Even animals can be queer: in *Iphigenia at Aulis* we have a 'genderqueer deer' in the form of a horned doe. Monsters—the serpent of Ares and the Sphinx—in *Phoenissai* represent a 'key element informing theories of alterity' (p.182).

There are also queer plays which push at generic boundaries: *Rhesus* is a 'disobedient tragedy' with its comic elements, its night scene in broad daylight, its cross-species transformation of Dolon: *Trojan Women* is a queer tragedy whose heroines are the 'ordinary if pathetic collateral of war' (p.43) and 'objects rather than subjects', while *Heracidae* is an exercise in kitsch with its queer kinship and its fragmented plot. Sean Gurd sees the queerness of *Alcestis* in terms of its counter-intuitive elevation of failure: Apollo is oddly and happily grateful to his enslaver Admetus, while Alcestis chooses to die. There is queer rejection of 'reproductive futurism' in children being killed in *Trojan Women*, in *Medea*, in *Hecuba*: and in *Phoenissai* Antigone and Menoeceus represent the end of their family lines of Labdacids and Spartoi. Things are often queerly other than what they seem: Helen in the *Helen* was 'image' rather than reality at Troy; Ion has to pretend to be the bastard son of Xuthus, staying in the 'political closet' (p.126). In *Bacchae*, Tiresias and Cadmus cross-dress, the Maenads subvert male norms, and Pentheus' transvestite emergence on stage as a woman shows the totality of Dionysus' control.

Literary queerness is found in the 'non-binary' status (as neither tragic nor comic) of the satyr play *Cyclops*, in the unruly text of *Iphigenia at Aulis*, in the racial muddle which lies at the heart of *Ion*, even (and less persuasively) in the poet's use of antilabe and metrical resolution in *Orestes*. The heavy use of dramatic irony is read as queer 'because it plays with knowledge' (p. 139): this device allows some electric moments of drama such as the sickening mad scene in *Heracles*, the climax to *Alcestis*, the recognition scene in *Helen*, the unpicking of the truth in *Ion*, the humiliation and murder of Pentheus in *Bacchae*. Two metatheatrical scenes show this to devastating effect: where Medea disingenuously persuades Creon and Jason to grant her wishes, and where Electra 'plays at being a mother as if it were a drag performance' (p.190), faking a pregnancy to lure her mother to her death. In both scenes we see a (male) actor playing a (female) actor who is deceiving apparently powerful characters into a position of submission.

Athenian tragedians exploit mythology and Rosa Andujar shows how *Phoenissae* enhances the role of Laius in the Theban