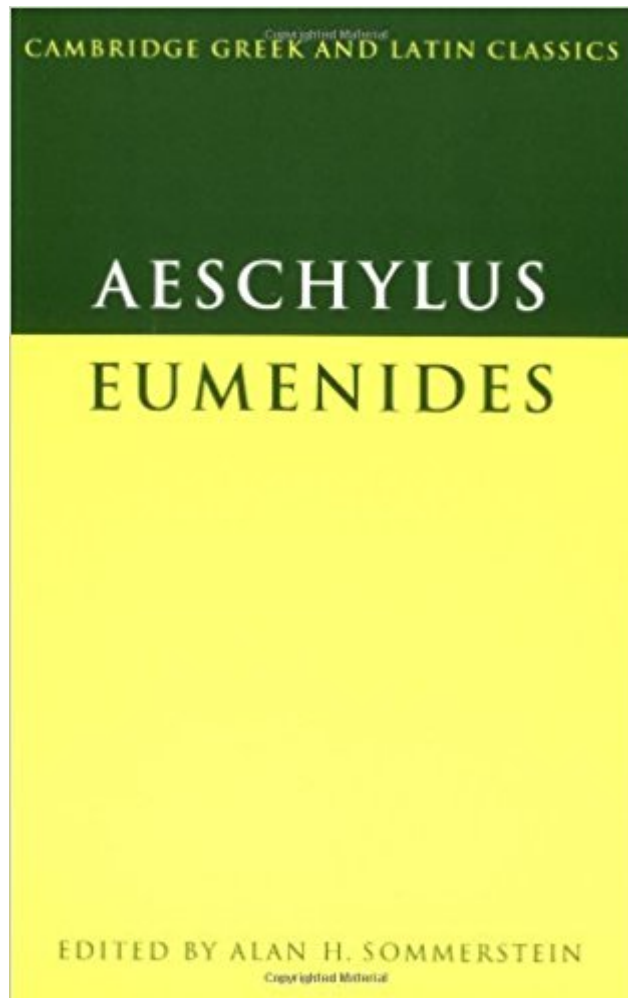




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Aeschylus: Eumenides (Cambridge Greek And Latin Classics)



Synopsis

Sommerstein presents a freshly constituted text, with introduction and commentary, of *Eumenides*, the climactic play of the only surviving complete Greek tragic trilogy, the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus. Of all Athenian tragic dramas, *Eumenides* is most consciously designed to be relevant to the situation of the Athenian state at the time of its performance (458 B.C.) and seems to have contained daring innovations both in technique and in ideas. The introduction and commentary to this edition seek to bring out how Aeschylus shaped to his purpose the legends he inherited, and ended the tragic story of Agamemnon's family in a celebration of Athenian civic unity and justice. The commentary also pays attention to the linguistic, metrical and textual problems to be encountered by the reader.

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Customer Reviews

Text: English, Greek (translation) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A text, with introduction and commentary, of *Eumenides*, the climactic play of the only surviving complete Greek Trilogy, the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus, and the one most relevant to the Athenian state at the time of its performance.

(Note: just in case you don't know this: this edition is in ANCIENT GREEK, not English. The only English is in the [voluminous] notes, not a translation.) I found this edition of the third play of

Aeschylus' *Oresteia* very fine and very complete, and I was able to read all of the *Eumenides* with it -- and I am only in my second year of Greek (although my dedication may be above average). Sommerstein hits all the notes and remains balanced. The emendations are eminently well-defended; the meters are clear; the notes are thick and well-written. The historical overview of the years leading up to 458, when the play was produced, is unusually thorough for a book like this and deserves to become the standard for all such introductions. The cross-referencing with lines from other Greek literature is exhaustive and complete; much of the cross-referencing to different articles and works by modern authors impresses as well, with one caveat below. Depending on which kind of an *Oresteia* scholar you are, you may become frustrated with this book. In his notes, Sommerstein evades many of the gender issues that are seen by some as essential to the play. This is done with the utmost in skill, though, so if you didn't know (or couldn't read or think) you might think there were no gender issues in the play. Hand-in-hand with this fact, he ignores important American writing on the *Oresteia* (done by Froma Zeitlin in her bold, some might venture to say excessive, but nonetheless important 1977 article "The Dynamics of Misogyny," for example) and does subscribe to a view of the *Oresteia* with which I have great sympathy, but that some may find naively progressive. To wit, Sommerstein believes the *Oresteia* to be about joy, triumph, cooperation in Athens, and a new era. Overall, regardless of these matters this book is very fine. I would certainly use it were I to teach a reading class on the play.

The notes and commentary are excellent.

I find this Greek tragedy very relevant today! What is law? What is judgment? What is punishment - today or 5000 years ago.

This is a review of Alan H. Sommerstein's commentary for the Cambridge green and yellow series on Aeschylus's "*Eumenides*". This play is the third in Aeschylus's "*Oresteia*" trilogy and depicts the final resolution of Orestes' struggle to rid himself of the Erinyes (i.e. Furies) who are pursuing him to avenge his killing of his mother Clytemnestra. This is achieved through a remarkable trial that takes place in Athens which is presided over by the goddess Athena at a newly established court on the Areopagus. Without spoiling too much of what happens in the play, it is enough to mention that this text offers noteworthy insights into Athenian views on the nature of justice, on whether and to what extent justice can be achieved through a city's legal system, on the relationship between the Olympian gods and older, more chthonic deities, and on the symbiotic relationship that exists

between gods and humans. At 1047 lines of Greek text, "Eumenides" is substantially shorter than "Agamemnon", the first play in the trilogy, and is comparable in length to the second play, "Choephoroi/The Libation Bearers". I was surprised to discover that "Eumenides" is a much less difficult play to read in Greek than either of the preceding plays. A large part of this must certainly be credited to the commentator, who has provided a smooth text that prioritizes restoring coherence and readability to those places in the text where problems in transmission have occurred. At the same time, the commentator provides a fairly extensive apparatus criticus, leaves a few "daggers" in the printed text, and discusses textual problems in detail in the commentary, so it is certainly possible for the reader to follow and evaluate his choices in establishing the text while enjoying the fruits of textual conjectures. In addition to the Greek text, this edition also includes a 36 page introduction, just over 200 pages of commentary, a limited 3 page bibliography whose latest entry comes from 1987, a brief metrical appendix, and two indexes (one of subjects, one of Greek terms discussed). The introduction consists of a number of mini-essays on 8 separate topics: an overview of the Orestes-myth and its major literary manifestations, a discussion of the nature of the Erinyes-Eumenides-Semnai (which yields the interesting observation that the identification of the Erinyes with the Eumenides appears to postdate Aeschylus, along with the play's current title), a historical account of the Areopagus court, a survey of Aeschylus's life and work, a very provocative argument that the "Eumenides" has overt topical references and relevance to the political situation of Athens in 458 BC, a discussion of the staging and production of the play, and a brief treatment of the play's textual transmission. It is well to mention that this introduction (and the book in general) seems to be pitched to an audience that is already very familiar with the general contours of the Oresteia and the fundamental conventions of Greek Tragedy. For example, there are no plot summaries, histories of the genre of Tragedy, or instructions on how to scan meter and identify Doric forms to be found anywhere in this commentary. That being said, the commentary is written and structured in such a way that a reader with 2-3 years of Greek should be able to read the "Eumenides" without too much frustration with syntax and vocabulary, provided he or she makes frequent reference to the LSJ dictionary. For more advanced readers, I would say that in terms of being able to anticipate the reader's difficulties, this is among the best commentaries on a Greek tragedy that I have encountered. Virtually every time I had a question about unusual syntax or unusual diction, I turned to the back and found a concise and helpful note that addressed it. The major commentaries on the "Agamemnon" and "Choephoroi" are not nearly as geared towards helping the reader progress efficiently through the play as this commentary is, and besides the edition of "Prometheus Bound" in the same series, I do not know of any other affordable

commentary on a tragedy of Aeschylus that succeeds in making one of his plays so immediately accessible. In addition to help with diction and syntax, the commentary also frequently cites verbal and thematic parallels in other Greek dramas, identifies and delineates connections between the "Eumenides" and the two previous plays in the trilogy, and, where relevant to interpretation, attempts to reconstruct the logistics of staging (entrances and exits, the use of "special effects" and props, etc.). At several points, the commentator also incorporates short essays into the commentary that analyze (among other things) character presentation and development, the legal argumentation deployed by each of the characters in the play, and the philosophical/religious/political implications of various aspects of the trial. These essays run in length from one to several pages, and as a whole they constitute a comprehensive and judicious explanation of what this play might have meant to its original audience. Overall, this is a very rich and useful commentary that makes a notoriously difficult author much more accessible, and it does so by presenting a wealth of detail while highlighting the information that a non-specialist reader needs to progress through the play at a swift and efficient pace.

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