

Malcolm Heath, *The Poetics of Greek Tragedy*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1987. Pp. vii+211. Hardcover, \$ 32.50.

The Poetics of Greek Tragedy originated in a 1983 Oxford University doctoral dissertation of which this book is a slightly revised version. The originating publisher in Great Britain was Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd. The American edition bears all the marks of a densely written thesis and will be readable only by those who are willing to spend the time and effort to decipher the author's redefinition of Greek tragedy in terms of the pragmatics of performance. The first part of the thesis contained methodological prolegomena to the material presented here but apparently remains unpublished. The five thickly written chapters are called (1) «First Principles»; (2) «Meaning and Emotion»; (3) «Person and Plot»; (4) «The Tragic Text»; (5) «Sophocles: *Ajax*». The terminology used challenges traditional ways of interpreting Greek tragedy. Malcolm Heath, who is Fellow of Hertford College, Oxford, aims to lay the foundations for a poetics on Greek tragedy, including an examination of «the general shape or structure of tragedy's *meaning-potential*» (p. 2).

Much of the book stresses what Heath calls «emotive hedonism» or giving the audience «aesthetic pleasure through the excitation of an intense emotional response», «typically horror, anxiety, fear, and pity, but can embrace much more, including joy. Heath insists that gratification of the audience by legitimate means was central to a legitimate view of tragedy and that the main point of tragedy was not to present moral or metaphysical instruction. For Heath, «Tragedy has intellectual (moral, theological, metaphysical) *content*» (p. 71). In rejecting what he calls the didactic theory of others who insist on a moral purpose for tragedy, Heath claims instead that tragedy «portrays agents and actions which have moral qualities and which, explicitly or implicitly, are subject to moral evaluation» (p. 87), which do, of course, influence audience response. In terms of a distinction between analytical plausibility and theatrical conviction, Heath finds that it is theatrical conviction that should be of real interest for the interpretation and criticism of tragedy. In defining tragedy in its most basic terms, Heath would present his own definition of tragedy alongside Aristotle's and Wilamowitz's, admitting its limitations but believing in its basic inherent accuracy:

«A Greek tragedy is (a) narrative in dramatic form (b) treated seriously and with dignity in an elaborated poetic manner (c) of painful events (d) in the careers of men of high status and fortune (e) drawn from heroic legend (f) told to evoke in the audience painful emotions such as fear and pity (g) for the sake of the pleasure which accompanies such emotional excitation under fictively and aesthetically controlled conditions» (p. 124).

Heath prefers to call «heroes» «focal figures», with whose feelings the audience is intended to identify and which (who) can change during the course of a play. Heath examines a wide range of Greek plays to test his hypotheses, from Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. He devotes a substantial portion of his book to Sophocles' *Ajax* (pp. 165-208), analyzing it in the closest of details in terms of the sequence of events and the patterns of emotional response.

To summarize Heath's own summary: his fundamental tenet is his *emotive-hedonist* theory. The emotional experience is the primary pleasure of tragedy, which is the source of *ancillary pleasures*. These ancillary pleasures are subject to certain *restraints*. The principles of *coherence*, *conviction*, and *dignity* need to be taken into account because tragedy is a *serious and elevated form* that involves *weighty events* and *persons of high status*. Such persons and events are drawn from *heroic legend* and

the narrated worlds of tragedy have a *certain structure*. The wisdom of the *polis* is embodied and transmitted in these legends. The play as narrative depends on a core of *praxis* (a series of narrated events), which must satisfy the requirements of *continuity* and *closure*. The narration of the *praxis* is done in formal acts in which the verbal text is predominately spoken. Both act and intercalary matter must be understood as words written to be delivered in particular ways within special visual contexts. Because the primary pleasure of tragedy depends so much on emotional engagement with the persons involved in the *praxis*, a scene will generally be designed to evoke from the audience a system of sympathetic attention on one or more focal figures, in relation to whom the role of the other characters in emotive economy of the scene is defined. The focus is mobile and should be used as a criterion for unity.

Much of this is derived from the author's intensive study of the *Ajax* developed to support his foundational theory for all of Greek tragedy.

The Poetics of Greek Tragedy is a meaty book for the specialist with many insights for the student of Greek tragedy. It is strongly recommended that the reader study the author's summaries first before trying to read the main text. Once that is done, the reader should be prepared to spend a great deal of time in pondering (not just reading) the author's abstruse analysis and intricate supporting textual details.

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Cynthia R. Gardiner, *The Sophoclean Chorus: A Study of Character and Function*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1987. First Edition. Pp. x+205. Hardcover, \$ 22.50.

The Sophoclean Chorus is not a book for the general reader; it is a detailed study of the character and function of the Sophoclean Chorus for those who know the Sophoclean Greek text intimately because it is Cynthia Gardiner's aim «to reconstruct, as much as possible, the original performance as Sophocles produced it, to examine his dramatic techniques and attempt to determine in each instance the dramatic effect at which he was aiming, the particular response that he sought to elicit from his contemporary audience» (p. 10). Gardiner, who received her Ph. D. from Princeton and taught at the University of Iowa, is currently president of B.A.R. Associates in New York City and believes her book to be a corrective to so many other studies that stress the lyric role of the chorus: «This investigation attempts to redress the existing imbalance between the study of poetry and the study of character by analyzing the role of the chorus in each of Sophocles' extant tragedies and determining the extent to which he meant the audience to perceive the chorus as a character in the play» (p. 5). The seven extant plays are dealt with under three general headings: (1) «Men at War» (*Philoctetes* and *Ajax*); (2) «Men at Home» (*Antigone*, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Oedipus Coloneus*); and (3) «Women» (*Trachiniae*, *Electra*). The book also contains an Introduction, a Conclusion («The Choral Character»), a Selected Bibliography, and Index. It is not easy reading.

In the *Philoctetes* Gardiner sees political implications. The chorus of soldiers, closely related to Odysseus and yet personally sympathetic to Philoctetes, follow the demagogue and accept the principle of expediency offered to them, concerned as