Tragedy and the tragic
Greek theatre and beyond

M. S. Silk

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General Introduction

The essays that make up this book are new. They are the work of classical scholars, largely though not exclusively. They centre on Greek tragedy and the qualities that make Greek tragedy what it is; at the same time, they bear on tragedy as a whole and the qualities that make tragedy as a whole what *it* is. There is a good deal here about more recent drama, from Shakespeare to Beckett (but especially Shakespeare). There is much reference to theory, and much discussion—and use—of theoretical perspectives, from Nietzsche to Heidegger, from the Romantics to the post-structuralists, from Vernant to Northrop Frye, from Carol Gilligan to René Girard, from Aristotle to Brecht (but especially Aristotle). There is an outward-looking spirit to the discussions, individually or in their cross-relations, which explains the subtitle of the book: Greek Theatre and Beyond.

For all its many contributors and its many topics, the book asks to be read as a coherent volume. It also bears witness to a notable event. The event was a conference entitled 'Tragedy and "The Tragic"', which was held at King's College London on 22–5 July 1993 and brought together around two hundred delegates from twenty countries and six continents. These facts are worth recording, if only because the scale of the event is reflected in the book, and the character of the event too. By this I mean above all that the conference brought together a diverse group of speakers and listeners, not all professional classicists by any means, to address the common question: how best to define or understand Greek tragedy in particular and tragedy in general. It was not so much, though, that a theme or topic served as a point of departure for a series of individual discussions; rather that discussion was dialogic and cumulative, the more so because not only were all sessions plenary, but the majority of them involved a pair of papers, in which the second was a prepared response to the first.

Of the contributors to the book, most were speakers at the

conference, though (for one reason or another) several conference contributions could not be represented here: papers by Gregory Sifakis, Froma Zeitlin, and David Bain, and theatrical presentations and discussions by John Barton and Salli Goetsch.[1] On the other hand, four additional papers are included in the body of the work—those by Halliwell, Silk ('Tragic Language'), Seidensticker, and Ewans, of whom the latter two were to have participated in the conference but in the event could not. Within the book, the editorial arrangement into three sections, the order of the papers within the sections, and the separate short editorial introductions to those sections were not features of the conference; but overall the conference's predominant pattern of argument and counter-argument is preserved: that is, of the twenty-nine papers that follow this introduction, eighteen involve pairs of papers in which the second is a response to, and positions itself with reference to, the first. In these and other parts of the book, however, everything that began as part of the conference (including this general introduction) has been substantially revised in the interests of greater overall coherence—without prejudice, though, to the requisite self-containedness of each paper, or pair of papers, and without prejudice, again, to the diversity of reference and perspective which characterized these debates from the outset.

'Tragedy and the tragic', 'Greek tragedy and tragedy as a whole', 'Greek theatre and beyond': these conjunctions presuppose a set of propositions that deserve to be spelt out.

First: what we know as tragedy, centring on what Frye has called 'the two indigenous developments of tragic drama in fifth-century Athens and seventeenth-century Europe',[2] subsumes some of the most admired and most affecting works in Western literature, the attempt to come to terms with which has animated generations of scholars (classical and other) and has generated a host of theoretical accounts of tragedy—from thinkers as different as Aristotle and Nietzsche and from playwrights as different as Racine and Brecht—which have influenced, and continue to influence, the general understanding of tragedy, Greek and other. Second: in the wake of the theoretical discussions just referred to, 'the tragic' is a concept of central concern to anyone who wishes to come to terms with tragedy, Greek or other. Third: any definition or general

[1] On Sifakis and Barton, however, see below pp. 185–6 and 356–7.

[2] *Anatomy of Criticism*, 37.

understanding of tragedy as a whole depends first and foremost on an understanding of Greek tragedy in particular. Indeed, for theorists of tragedy, from Aristotle to our own century, Greek tragedy has been one of the few constants, since virtually all other forms or relatives of tragedy have at one time or another been queried or dissociated from the tragic canon; and to illustrate the point one need only recall Samuel Johnson's remark in his *Preface to Shakespeare* (1765) that Shakespeare's plays are not 'in the rigorous and critical sense' tragedies at all.[3] Fourth: any substantial understanding of Greek tragedy presupposes an understanding of Greek tragedy in its particular cultural context. Fifth: any substantial understanding of Greek tragedy presupposes an understanding of other kinds of tragedy, or non-tragedy, in contrast or comparison with which its particularities take on their particular significance; the tragicness of Greek tragedy can be illuminated by comparison or contrast with the tragicness of non-Greek tragedy; and the feasibility of any theoretical discussion of 'tragedy as a whole' must depend on comparison or contrast of this kind. And sixth: despite, or because of, the wealth of discussions, past and present, under these various headings, there is no current consensus among interested parties on which of these propositions, if any, deserve to be privileged over which. That is, there is no current consensus on how, precisely, tragedy should best be defined or understood, or indeed on how, precisely, *Greek* tragedy should best be defined or understood. Hence the motivation for the present volume, which presents something close to the spectrum of ways in which tragedy in general, and Greek tragedy in particular, *is* currently defined and understood, and offers a series of new interpretations and new readings to help move the process of definition and understanding forward.

Probably the most obvious issue on which consensus is lacking is whether, or how far, to privilege the understanding of Greek tragedy in its own, very particular, cultural context. An emphasis on cultural interpretation brings together important representatives of two otherwise very different positions or clusters of positions: on the one hand, 'traditional' empirical historicism; on the other, positions that tend in the classical world to be vaguely thought of as 'structuralism', but which would more plausibly be

[3] Raleigh, *Johnson on Shakespeare*, 15. Cf. Steiner below, p. 540.

described as a species (with various subspecies) of sociological neo-historicism, except that the neo-historicist label has been appropriated on behalf of one of the particular subspecies in question.[4] At all events, historicists and (if I may use the term with an unconventional breadth of application) neo-historicists tend to agree on two things: positively, to keep their 'tragedy' (and their 'tragic') Greek; negatively, to take a sceptical, or at least cautious, attitude towards engaging with any cross-cultural version either of 'tragedy' (with an imaginary capital T) or of that defining set of qualities by virtue of which tragedy, notionally, is tragedy—that is, 'the tragic'. In the words of one of the contributors to this volume, any such engagement threatens to involve a 'circular wild-goose chase';[5] and the awkwardness of the imaginary capital T and the inverted commas that (in English usage, at least) are never far away from 'the tragic' (and which indeed figured in the original conference-title) might well sum up, for many, the problematic nature of this particular 'chase'.

Both historicism and neo-historicism are well represented in this volume: both have their distinctive and necessary contributions to make to the debate. There are no plausible grounds for allowing either version of historicism to exclude the other; but then again, there are no plausible grounds for allowing either version of historicism to exclude other perspectives, including the many perspectives of the cross-cultural. Nothing can come of nothing: everyone must start from somewhere: what matters is where you get to and, especially, where you get *others* to. However, in saying this, one inevitably commits oneself to something more than a relativistic tolerance. One commits oneself to an essentially diaological standpoint, from which it seems neither right nor wrong to privilege cultural context in the first instance, but right to insist on the legitimacy, and in the last resort the necessity, of confronting 'tragedy' and 'the tragic' without contextual restrictions—just as one can also, of course, confront 'tragedy as a whole' through specific, contextually grounded, comparisons between *this* phase or type of tragedy and *that*. The illumination to be gained from both

[4] On which, see e.g. H. A. Veeser (ed.), *The New Historicism* (New York 1989).

[5] Richard Buxton, p. 42 below. On the other hand, *some* neo-historicist ('structuralist') discussions do engage, however briefly, with matters tragic and even Tragic: see e.g. Vernant on 'Le Sujet tragique: Historicité et transhistoricité', in Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, *Mythe et tragédie*, 79–90.

kinds of confrontation will, I trust, also be clear from various of the papers that follow. For the time being, a few further theoretical reflections may be helpful.[6]

While caution in confronting the cross-cultural is as proper as caution anywhere else, I would argue that, for the reasons schematized in the six propositions above, the whole conceptual-perceptual apparatus through which any of us beholds Greek tragedy is inevitably, and productively, influenced by a sense of 'tragedy as a whole'—by knowledge of both the tragic practice and the tragic theory that comes after, and in part looks back to, the tragic age of Greece; also, conversely, that any productive discussion of Greek tragedy, whether purportedly 'contextual' or not, inevitably contributes to the wider understanding of 'tragedy as a whole'. None of this makes tragedy (or Tragedy) a fixed, cut-and-dried thing, which it never was, even in its Greek heyday, as a glance at the career of Euripides, or indeed any one of the three tragedians, serves to show.

Wittgenstein's theory of family resemblances reminds us that the specific instances that answer to a generic name like 'tragedy' are wont to show recognizable traits or affinities in the manner of members of a family. The whole set of members will resemble one another in varying degrees, so that in the case of distant relationships the points of resemblance shown by any two members need not be the same as those shown by some other two. One cannot assume that possession of a common name guarantees some fundamental affinity. In a case like drama, certainly, with various sets of variously similar and variously different instances, what tends to happen is that we do (or do not) detect such resemblances as seem to imply a fundamentally 'tragic' affinity and on the strength of that *we decide* (or not) to ascribe the common name, 'tragedy', to the instances in question.

In our endeavour to decide what counts as tragedy, we naturally start with Greek tragedy as the common source and the common point of reference for whatever follows, in the expectation, no doubt, that here at least identification is culturally given and (therefore) unproblematic. Yet consideration of even the seemingly straightforward task of identifying Greek specimens of

[6] Part of the argument that follows is developed more fully in my article, 'Autonomy of Comedy'.

'tragedy' serves to show how, here as elsewhere, wider perspectives are, and must be, brought to bear.

Within the dramatic corpus of ancient Greece, we would commonly say we *know* what counts as tragedy. We *know* that Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* 'was' a *tragôidia*, hence 'is' a tragedy. With (say) *Phèdre* by Racine, we count it as a tragedy on several grounds: because its author called it by another derivative of the Greek name *tragôidia* ('tragédie'); because the play is variously evocative of the tradition that goes back to Greek tragedy; and because, above all, *we* perceive that the play resembles Greek tragedy directly. *We* detect affinity. With (say) Shakespeare's *King Lear*, most of us, like most of our nineteenth-century predecessors, are happy to speak of tragedy on the grounds of perceived affinity, ultimately with Greek tragedy, even though we recall that to (say) an eighteenth-century spokesman like Johnson such a play was a hybrid, and even though we may note that this particular 'tragedy' was apparently not at first so labelled, but was first listed as a 'history'.[7] With (say) Chekhov's late plays, we note awkwardly that there is something of 'the tragic' here, because *we* perceive something of the requisite affinity—even though their author insisted on the label 'comedy',[8] and even though in most visible particulars these 'serious dramas' derive from the tradition of Greek New Comedy.

By comparison, the identification of Greek tragedies is in practice less controversial, because we do tend to rely on the testimony left to us by the Greeks themselves, and at least there seems little doubt that the Greeks in all periods knew, or thought they knew, what tragedy (*tragôidia*) was. For Aristophanes at the end of *Frogs*, tragedy is what Aeschylus once epitomized and what Euripides has now corrupted. For Aristotle in the *Poetics*, tragedy is an entity which has shown variations over the course of time, and an entity whose specimens present marked variations, even in their 'developed' form, but nevertheless an entity whose specimens pose no problem of identification, and an entity which can be defined—as a *mimêsis* of an action, and so on. In the first instance, we might wish

[7] In the Register of the Stationers' Company (26 Nov. 1607): 'A book called Master William Shakespeare his history of King Lear . . .'.

[8] See e.g. Stanislavsky's testimony about *The Three Sisters*: 'after the reading . . . our impressions . . . amazed Chekhov. . . . He had written a . . . comedy and all of us had considered the play a tragedy and even wept over it': C. Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art*, trans. J. J. Robbins (London 1924) 371.

to say, the Greeks identified tragedy (*tragôidia*) by its immediate festal context: a tragedy is a new play (or, equally, a new performance) at a given Attic festival associated with the god Dionysus, and such plays (or performances) were sooner or later listed in inscriptions and elsewhere on that basis. But then, this is clearly not a sufficient means of identification: partly because new tragedies were sooner or later performed on other occasions elsewhere; partly because old tragedies were sooner or later repeated everywhere; but above all because in the very heyday of fifth-century tragedy the spectator at the tragic festival in Athens would witness, and would expect to witness, not only tragedies, but also satyr-plays.

In the heyday of fifth-century tragedy, tragedies and satyr-plays were commonly presented in a set sequence—three tragedies followed by one satyr-play—and in this sequence, one could argue, the contextual identification of the two types was and remained unambiguous and thus, in a sense, the contextual identification of tragedy is itself maintained. However, the day dawns at the tragic festival, at least as early as the year 438 BC, when a Euripides frustrates, or at any rate complicates, the expectations of his audience by producing a sequence of three tragedies followed by an *Alcestis*, which is certainly not a satyr-play, but is rather a sort of tragedy, or an eccentric tragedy, or a hybrid drama, and is discussed as such by scholars of later antiquity.[9] And their identification (whatever it might be), like our identification (whatever *that* might be), is necessarily founded not, or not primarily, on festal context, but on text: that is, on the perceived affinities, or perceived lack of affinities, of this play with tragedy proper. And if we accept *their* identification, we do so in the knowledge that we make a decision to do so, and not simply in passive acknowledgement of a given. And whether we do accept their identification, or offer one of our own, we are unquestionably, and quite reasonably, influenced by our sense both of what 'tragedy' and 'tragic' mean in Greece and of what they mean beyond Greece as well. We are, that is, likely to hesitate to see *Alcestis* as a tragedy *tout court*, and our hesitation will very likely be prompted by the way *Alcestis* prepares, but

[9] See above all the 'Aristophanean' Hypothesis (pp. 34–5 in Diggle's OCT [1984]), whose various characterizations (*κωμικωτέραν*, *σατυρικώτερον*, etc.) seem to derive from different sources (cf. A. M. Dale, *Euripides, Alcestis* [Oxford 1954] pp. xxxviii–xl).

averts, a catastrophe. In thus averting catastrophe, *Alcestis* only does what is notoriously done by some Euripidean 'tragedies' (or *tragôidiai)* of a later vintage: *Helen, Ion, Orestes*. We may, some of us, hesitate to call those *tragôidiai* 'tragedies' either, but the Greek label and, in general, the pressure of Greek context probably force our hand. With *Alcestis*, in default of that pressure, we—plausibly—allow our sense of affinity at its widest to determine our response. We sense that *Alcestis* stands with *Helen* and the other 'problem' plays,[10] and stands apart from *Bacchae*, from *Oedipus Rex*, and also from *Phèdre* and *King Lear*, and our hesitation is confirmed. Thus, when we proclaim our right to decide which plays from the seventeenth or later centuries count as 'tragedy' on the grounds of perceived affinity, we are actually only doing on a larger scale what we do even with fifth-century drama itself. In fact, whenever we respond to any play, *tragôidia* or not, as a 'tragedy', we must always be taking such a decision. The process is often tacit. It may involve only a subliminal confirmation that, yes, such-and-such a historical label is just. But the process must take place, and each time it takes place we confirm or modify *our* sense of 'tragedy', and equally of the quality or qualities that make tragedy 'tragic', irrespective of whether, in doing so, we consult the now extensive tradition of theorizing about tragedy as a whole.

Irrespective also—it may be helpful to add—of whether our sense of 'the tragic' is specifically of some quality or qualities central to tragic drama, or of a view of life best embodied in tragedy, or of such a view of life with a characteristic metaphysical dimension. The tragic in that first sense is already familiar to the Greeks. It is what, for instance, Aristotle assumes when, at one point in *Poetics* 13, he suddenly puts aside his composite definition of tragedy (*tragôidia*) as an 'imitation of action'. *That* definition is visibly a definition of *all* tragedies. However, Aristotle now tells us, one might argue that Euripides is 'the most tragic' of the poets (*tragikôtatos*) and his plays are 'the most tragic' of plays (*tragikôtatai*), on the grounds that Euripides favours plays with a certain kind of catastrophic end. Clearly, if some tragedies or tragedians are in any sense *more* tragic than others, it can only be that 'tragic'

[10] Thus (e.g.) A. P. Burnett's *Catastrophe Survived: Euripides' Plays of Mixed Reversal* (Oxford 1971) offers a series of discussions of (first) *Alcestis* and (then) *IT*, *Helen*, etc., without any particular acknowledgement that there is anything noteworthy in associating the earlier 'pro-satyric' play with the other group.

is understood with reference to some central defining quality or qualities—something in this instance to do with catastrophic ends—which not all tragedies possess.[11] There are good grounds for arguing that 'the tragic' as a view of life, and even as a metaphysically defined view of life, also has its Greek antecedents, namely in the philosophy of Plato.[12] Understandably, though, 'the tragic' in these senses is especially associated with the German nineteenth century, where it reflects both the special importance ascribed to tragedy by so many writers and thinkers of that age and their preoccupation with large, ultimately existential, issues.[13] Within that century 'the tragic' is associated most of all, no doubt, with Nietzsche, and it is pertinent to cite, as a representative comment on that whole epoch, Nietzsche's retrospective gloss on his own celebrated explorations of Greek drama, and much else, in *The Birth of Tragedy*. That first book of Nietzsche's appeared in 1872. Sixteen years later, in 1888, looking back at his first book, Nietzsche claims that in it he had at long last 'found the concept of "the tragic" and at long last knowledge of the psychology of tragedy'. And he goes on to summarize this 'psychology': 'saying *yes* to life even in its strangest and hardest problems: the will to life rejoicing over its own inexhaustibility even in the very sacrifice of its highest types'.[14] In this existentially accented and (as some may think) lurid late-Nietzschean formula, the metaphysical is implicitly excluded. 'The tragic' as a metaphysical construct is nowhere more apparent than in that earlier book, where Nietzsche argues that tragedy is incomprehensible in Aristotelian terms as a mere 'imitation of nature'; it is rather (he proposes) that with its creation and destruction of individuals, tragedy offers us a presentiment, terrifying yet uplifting, of that 'primordial unity' which underlies the 'world of phenomena'.[15] This metaphysic—essentially Schopenhauerian and distantly neo-Platonic—is then rejected, along with others, by the anti-metaphysical evangelist of the death

[11] For a different view of this passage, see A. M. van Erp Taalman Kip, p. 132 below; but then again, note also B. Seidensticker's conclusion, p. 393 below, that a sense of the tragic is implicit in Aristotle's notion of *peripeteia*.

[12] See the discussion by Halliwell, pp. 332–49 below; and for a different argument in favour of ascribing a sense of 'the tragic' to Aristotle, see Seidensticker, pp. 377–96 below.

[13] See Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, 225–331.

[14] In *Ecce Homo* ('The Birth of Tragedy', §3): Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, 125.

[15] *The Birth of Tragedy*, §22.

of God, to whose all-too-human universe belongs the later formula for the tragic just quoted. 'Saying *yes* to life, even in its strangest and hardest problems': for the late Nietzsche those 'strangest and hardest problems' include quite precisely the problem of existence in a world devoid of metaphysical consolation or meaning. The point is worth making, then, that here, at the very apex of modern theorizing about 'the tragic', this elusive 'tragic' itself, though unquestionably associated with a view of life, is specifically dissociated from the metaphysical.

Some of what I have just argued is controversial. Some of it would be challenged, on one ground or another, by various of the contributors to this volume. I hope at least, though, that what I have said helps to clarify the *coherence* of a collection of essays which variously discuss 'tragedy' or 'the tragic' with or without reference to metaphysics or a view of life, and Greek tragedy with or without explicit reference to later tragedy or later theory. Other variations—in perspective, in theme, in conclusion—can speak for themselves or are better dealt with in the separate introductions to the three sections that follow. Those sections, it will be seen, move from specific readings and contextual discussions to the 'beyond'. To forestall any possible misconceptions, let me stress that this is in no sense an ascending sequence, but simply what I take to be the appropriate disposition of material in line with the subtitle and the spirit of the volume.

Four practical points. First: authors have been encouraged to cross-refer to each others' papers, where, but only where, particularly appropriate; the indexes at the back of the book should allow a reader to compare different positions on common or related topics without undue difficulty. Secondly, in the notes to this introduction and the chapters that follow, various modern works are cited in abbreviated form; full details are to be found in the Bibliography. Thirdly, in confronting the familiar problem of the style of representing Greek proper names ('Oedipus', 'Oidipous', and so on), I have not imposed a uniform style on the whole volume. This is because the variation between Grecizing ('Oidipous') and Romanizing ('Oedipus') now has an established ideological significance related to the issues, discussed above, concerning historicism, which it is not for an editor to conceal or distort. Most readers will be used to the variants. In the indexes Greek names are

usually listed in Romanized form, with other spellings cited alongside. And fourthly, the use of the Greek language itself. In the text, all Greek is accompanied by an English translation (the contributor's own, unless otherwise specified), with the exception of a few single words in general currency in books on Greek literature or culture which will be familiar to anyone likely to read this book, notably: ***polis***, 'city state'; ***oikos***, 'household'; ***genos*** 'family, kin'; ***dêmos***, 'the people', 'the democratic assembly'; ***logos***, 'language', 'argument', 'discourse', 'story'; ***muthos***, 'story', 'myth', and also, in Aristotle's terminology, 'plot', versus ***êthos***, his term for 'character'; ***peripeteia*** and ***anagnôrisis***, Aristotle's terms for 'reversal' and 'recognition'; and ***mimêsis***, his term for 'imitation', 'version', 'representation'; ***psuchê***, 'spirit', 'life'; ***daimôn***, 'god', 'divine power', 'fortune'; ***thiasos***, 'company, group of revellers'; ***kômos***, 'revel', 'procession of revellers'; ***kommos***, a sung antiphonal 'lament'; ***agôn***, 'contest'; ***rhêsis***, 'speech'; ***skênê***, the tragic 'stage'; ***orchêstra***, the 'dance floor' on which members of the tragic chorus (***choreutai***) performed; ***stasimon***, 'choral song', and specifically one of the 'stationary' songs that followed the ***parodos***, the chorus's 'entrance song' (compare the ***parodoi***, the 'wings' through which the chorus made their entrance); ***chorêgia***, the institutionalized system of 'defraying the expense' of a chorus; ***pathos*** (a scene of) 'suffering' (to be distinguished from 'pathos'—without italics—in the modern sense). Greek quoted in the text is usually in Greek script, but in some essays there have been particular reasons for preferring transliteration.

Finally, it remains to express my gratitude to all those—speakers and other delegates—at the 1993 conference who helped to generate this book; to those who generously gave me help and advice at various stages of the project, notably Pat Easterling, Bernard Gredley, Edith Hall, Marsh McCall, Oliver Taplin, and Michael Trapp; to Yumna Khan for assistance with the indexes; to Hilary O'Shea and the Oxford University Press for their positive and flexible attitude to the whole enterprise, and equally to the staff of the Press for their meticulous attention to detail; above all, to the contributors to the volume for their forbearance and their willingness to engage in dialogue both with each other and especially with their interventionist editor.

M.S.S.

March 1995

PART I

Greek Tragedy: Readings

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

In this opening section five pairs of readings and counter-readings of Greek tragedy yield ten very different approaches to particular plays.

We begin with Calame, Buxton, and *Oedipus Rex*, partly because, from Aristotle to Nietzsche and beyond, this is for so many admirers of Greek tragedy the model play, partly because the Calame–Buxton debate serves to introduce a series of central issues, from theoretical perspective to the status of tragedy as a theatrical medium, from the importance of mood ('pathos') to the relation between human and divine, from the distinctive role of knowledge to the special importance of the individual's isolation once in a state of knowledge in this tragedy and—ultimately?—in tragedy as a whole. Using as points of reference both Aristotle's *Poetics* and the ideas of the sophist Gorgias, Calame sees in the *Oedipus* a drama which calls into question the premises of dramatic spectacle. The self-blinding in particular is interpreted as the 'annihilation of identity' at the moment of knowledge, as well as the negation of theatrical logic. Buxton's qualifications to this argument lay particular stress on the elusive significance of the 'blind mask', on the problem of knowing what constitutes real knowledge in *Oedipus Rex*, and on the complex meaning of the final gesture of separation in the play.

What *Oedipus Rex* is to Aristotle and Nietzsche, *Antigone* is to Hegel, and the treatments of this play by Foley and Trapp reflect the sense of the centrality of conflict that engendered Hegel's special interest in this tragedy above all others. For Foley the tragic conflict between Creon and Antigone involves not only competing obligations, but competing versions, or articulations, of moral choice, male and female. Quite apart from the clear implications of this argument for contemporary gender-studies (which Foley

herself makes explicit), the argument serves as a fresh exemplification of the Vernantian principle that Attic tragedy problematizes civic values and discourse, by undermining Creon, spokesman of the political (that is, male) mode of morality. For Trapp, on the other hand, problematization is indeed of the essence, but what is problematized is moral deliberation as such. Accepting Foley's demonstration of Antigone as would-be persuader (against Creon's 'monotone absolutism') and as representative of the 'morality of care' (against Creon's abstractions), he suggests nevertheless that (more disturbingly than Foley allows) Antigone's moral mode and, for good measure, all other available moral modes, are challenged too.

Lee and Arnott confront the very different conflict, or at least contrastive representation, of Ion and Creusa in one of Euripides' challenging dramatic hybrids, *Ion*. Lee's analysis sets out to reveal the many movements and redrawings of mood in a play which seems at one moment dark, at another humorously light, and at another elusively ironic, and relates these modal shifts to son and mother's contrasting sense of time and, behind that, to their separate struggles with ignorance and knowledge wherein he locates the 'tragic dimension' of the play. *En route* Lee notes the use *Ion* makes of a 'realist' emphasis on the specificities of life. The significance of this emphasis is reconsidered by Arnott, who offers the double argument that, whereas realism activates or intensifies audience involvement in the tragic, in this play, as in Euripides' later plays in general, the disjunction between 'reality' and 'the haloed glories of myth' constitutes an incipient tragic conflict of its own. By way of qualification, though, Arnott points to the 'divine frame' within which the human suffering is placed as at least one significant feature of the play which links it to the bleaker world of *Hippolytus* or *Trojan Women*.

Van Erp Taalman Kip and Garvie focus on our sole surviving connected trilogy, Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. Van Erp Taalman Kip argues that specific contradictions between Clytemnestra's position as presented in *Agamemnon*, on the one hand, and in *Choephori* and *Eumenides*, on the other—its comparative defensibility in the first play as against its total indefensibility in the others—creates a 'dividing-line' between *Agamemnon* and the rest of the trilogy. *We*, however, are predisposed to ignore this division because of our *modern* interest in tragic insolubility, which leads us rather to associate *Agamemnon* and *Choephori* (which offer problems) and play down *Eumenides* (which offers a solution) or else to reaffirm the 'unity' of the trilogy on thematic or other grounds. Central to her argument is an insistence on the special importance of a cluster of related issues to the whole of the trilogy: moral responsibility, guilt, innocence, and divine compulsion. Garvie confronts this thesis directly, reasserting the more orthodox position that *Agamemnon* and *Choephori* do indeed stand together as a coherent sequence of morally and insolubly complex tragedy, but then argues that, for all the Athenian 'solution' of *Eumenides*, the logic of the trilogy as a whole remains essentially unresolved and in that sense a 'tragic' unity. Against van Erp Taalman Kip, he insists too that modern notions of 'the tragic' are not anachronistically 'modern' and that most Greek tragedies do in fact bear them out.

Like Calame and Buxton, Segal and Easterling bring to the fore several of the issues that recur over the whole volume: catharsis and audience response, ritual and the lament, the individual and the collective, and (like Garvie) the question of closure. In a discussion that ranges over a number of plays from *Hippolytus* to *Ajax*, but that (again like Calame's) comes to rest on *Oedipus Rex*, Segal makes use of Aristotle's concept of 'catharsis', which he interprets, or reinterprets, as a collective response of emotional release that is mirrored, above all, by certain kinds of tragic closure. His particular concern is with closures involving ritual lamentation on-stage which serve as 'inclusive gestures for the audience'; such emotional resolution, however, is seen as compatible with intellectual uncertainty, though often in tension with it. Easterling seeks to clarify Segal's terms of reference by a scrutiny of closure, ritual, and catharsis in *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Ajax*, and Segal's own example, *Oedipus Rex*. Noting that the association of closure and shared weeping in a ritual context holds good only for a limited set of Greek plays, and insisting that the norm in any case is 'incomplete rituals' or 'sketches of ritual', she proposes, in place of Segal's 'ritual sharing of tears', an alternative and more comprehensive model of communal response: witnessing. On her reading, it is above all the witnessing chorus, always present at the tragic closure, which gives the audience its emotional and intellectual cues.

These particular readings raise—as any purposeful reading must—large questions of various kinds. One question for any

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apart from its public performance in the context of the cult of Dionysus. Indeed, it makes of tragedy a modern literary text, cut off from its enunciative context.

What appears as an exclusion becomes a paradox when Aristotle takes up the problem of vision in his discussion—no longer in the descriptive but now in the normative mode—of the emotions which tragedy is meant to engender.[2] The essence of the poet's art is to arouse fear and pity in the audience, not by means of spectacle, which is, in the end, simply a problem of staging (*chorêgia*), but rather through plot. Aristotle sees in the story of Oedipus as told by Sophocles the model for a plot capable of arousing the emotions as tragedy should—for an audience which Aristotle imagines as auditors, not as readers! It is thus paradoxical that the tragedy Aristotle chooses as a model (oral!) text should be *Oedipus Rex*, a work which is, as many modern readers have pointed out, entirely concerned with the problem of vision.

ARISTOTLE AND SPECTACLE

We must start by returning to Aristotle's text, where we find that the hierarchy of six elements distinctive to tragedy is part of a larger semiotic division at the heart of his reflections on the poetic art. At the beginning of his treatise, the critic posits that every poetic expression can be defined as a product of representation (*mimêsis*). The mimetic procedure can then be divided into three aspects (1447ª13–18): means employed (*en hois*), object represented (*ha*), and mode of realization (*hôs*).[3] In the case of tragedy, diction and song belong to the category of means employed; plot, character, and thought to the object represented; and spectacle to its mode of realization. Aristotle goes on to conclude that, as a mode of tragic representation, the visual aspect encompasses all five other elements! Thus, if spectacle is not part of poetics, this is simply because—in the Aristotelian perspective—it is a technique of a different order. From Aristotle's essentialist point of view, the tragic text itself must be distinguished from its relation with the theatre, that is, from its ritual and dramatic execution.[4]

While the conclusion of this chapter devoted to defining the specificity of tragedy thus excludes the visual aspect of tragic representation from the poetic art, the visual is none the less that mode which best 'seduces the spirit' (*psuchagôgikon*). At this point, then,

Aristotle's theory brings the effect of tragedy under scrutiny through representation. Indeed, Aristotle's whole attempt to define tragedy through its distinctive elements is guided by the themes of representation (*mimêsis*) and effect, which is elsewhere associated with the term *katharsis*. On *katharsis*, central to the essence of tragedy, we note here only what Aristotle himself has noted: by evoking fear and pity, tragedy purges these emotions in the audience. This proposition, object of much commentary on account of its synthetic character, is clearly taken up and developed when the time comes to define the aim of tragedy and the means by which it attains its effects. While emphasizing the role of plot—and in particular, plots in which great men such as Oedipus fall from happiness to misery—Aristotle cannot deny that fear and pity arise as much from the spectacle itself as from the orchestration of the dramatic action. At the same time, however, Aristotle excludes the visual from the poetic art and, as we have mentioned, imagines a rendition of the story of Oedipus the mere listening to which would cause shivers of pity and fear.[5] However, vision makes a surreptitious reappearance in the last chapter of the long discussion devoted to the role of plot, when Aristotle asserts that the aim of a correct orchestration of the story-line is, finally, to 'place before the eyes' by means of linguistic enunciation, that is, to transform the listener into a spectator. The images called into being by words should thus coincide with the representation on stage, or, more specifically, with the emotions evoked by the gestures and performance of the actors (1455ª22–3).[6] In the *evidentia* (*enargestata*) assigned to the art of poetry, it is clearly impossible to overlook sight.

THE VISUAL ENQUIRY

From Aristotle's reflections on the paradigmatic nature of *Oedipus Rex* as tragedy, we turn now to the tragedy itself. We begin (as others have before) with the observation that the entire prologue of the tragedy plays on the theme of sight. The priest opens by inviting King Oedipus to observe with his own eyes the miserable state in which the epidemic has left the city of Thebes (15 and 22). The priest addresses Oedipus as a god from whom divine intervention is required, as indeed Oedipus has intervened in the past to help the city (47–8 and 52–3). In this passage, he evokes the knowledge

of the current king of Thebes, knowledge which depends on 'the voice of a god' or the 'vision of a man' (40–5), 'knowledge' (*oistha*) which we may trace etymologically to the root *wid-* designating sight; finally, knowledge which, by the same token, Sophocles' text links to the name 'Oedipus' (*oidi-pous*, 8, during the king's introduction).[7]

In the tension between past and present—between Oedipus' past acts of salvation upon arriving at Thebes and the city's current state of desperation—the theme of vision undergoes two simultaneous narrative transformations operating at the level of the plot as Sophocles has reformulated it.

From Linguistic Knowledge to Visual Knowledge

In the past as in the present of the drama, Oedipus is faced with the task of solving a riddle—that is, he is asked to interpret enigmatic language. In Proppian terms, the test or trial which has made him 'first among men' (33 and 46; cf. 507–11) and that which, by saving the city, should confirm his reign (46–51), both depend on the decoding of speech. However, these oracular pronouncements are of very different origins.

The first was made by the Sphinx, a singer, even a poetess, but also a 'rough-voiced bard' (36), a woman of 'cunning song' (130), a 'bitch of rhapsody' (391), a young 'prophetess with pointed claws' (1199). Independent of the iconography of the day, which represented the Sphinx as a monster with the wings of a bird and the body of a lioness, the text quite plainly portrays the Sphinx in animal terms: while her voice, like that of all bards, can deceive, it is not through its sweetness or charm but by its throaty, beast-like barkings. However, in contrast to literary tradition, which represented the Sphinx as pure monster who devours raw meat and ravages men, Sophocles brings more ambiguous qualities to her poetic voice.[8] It is a voice which contents itself with posing enigmatic questions, a feminine voice usurping the generally masculine role of bard or singer, a voice, indeed, which takes on the deadly qualities of the songs of Homer's Sirens.

By contrast with the bestial voice of Oedipus' first trial, the second trial involves a divine voice, the voice of Apollo, god who reveals (77), god whose arrival strikes the sight (81), god who gives clear orders (*saphôs*, 106). Unlike the voice of the Sphinx, the voice of the god asks no questions; rather, it answers an interrogation.

Furthermore, contrary to its own custom, this voice, now clearly oracular rather than poetic, makes direct reference to knowledge based on visual observation. Without employing his usual enigmatic language, Phoebus the Brilliant orders 'in broad daylight' (*emphanôs*) that the land be rid of the evil which is sullying Thebes (96–8). Creon, questioned by an Oedipus 'eager to know' (*eisomestha*, 84), has no trouble identifying this evil as the murder of the previous king of the city, Laius.

Oedipus, of course, is in a most peculiar position with regard to the experiential knowledge referred to so clearly by the god of Delphi. A newcomer to Thebes, he knows of his predecessor only through hearsay; he has never actually seen him (*exoid' akouôn; ou gar eiseidon ge pô*, 105). Unfortunately, we cannot enter into all the details of this rich passage here. What is important at this point is to notice that the entire search which Oedipus conducts on Apollo's orders, as well as the (transparent) oracle of his own fate and that (equally transparent) given to Laius (711–14), all elaborate on the theme of visual knowledge.[9] On the one hand, we find Jocasta stating that the contradictions which she has discovered in Apollo's pronouncement might prevent her henceforth from 'seeing' the oracular statements (851–8; cf. already 720–5). On the other hand, the revelations of Oedipus' origins by the Corinthian shepherd are understood by the king as signs revealed 'in broad daylight' (1050 and 1058–9). Later on, the Theban shepherd, from whom Oedipus demands an answer, looks him straight in the eye (1121) and draws on knowledge which the king recognizes as superior to his own because based on sight (1115–16). As Creon has stated already (119), he is the only one capable of 'showing what he has seen' (*eidôs phrasai*). It is thus doubly ironic when Oedipus himself concedes that 'no one sees the one who has seen' (293). Finally, we may recall Oedipus' conclusion upon hearing what he has been seeking from the shepherd, sole eyewitness to the fateful events:

> Alas, alas, everything becomes evident [*saphê*].
> O, light of day, would that I could see [*prosblepsaimi*] you today for the last time,
> I, shown up [*pephasmai*] as son of those whose son I should not have been,
> Companion of those whose company I should not have kept,
> Killer of those I should not have killed.
>
> (1182–5)

Here we see, then, a narrative reversal expressed on a double level: first, human knowledge, directed by the questions of a creature simultaneously divine, bestial, and feminine, is replaced by divine knowledge, which becomes the object of human questioning; secondly, knowledge based on words is replaced by knowledge founded in sight. Not only does Creon claim that the deceptive songs of the Sphinx have prevented the Thebans from looking 'at their feet', that is, at what was clearly before them, tempting them rather towards the invisible (*ta aphanê*, 130–1); Oedipus himself also declares that the solution to the riddle posed by the Sphinx was merely a matter of language (*dieipein*, 394). Rejecting as mere language this riddle (which, incidentally, Sophocles declines to cite in its well-known formulation), Oedipus provides the backdrop for the pun on his own name which he makes on the same occasion: *ho mêden eidôs Oidipous*, 'Oedipus who knows | has seen nothing' (397). However we are to interpret this pun, it is clear that the episode of the Sphinx, unnecessary to the narrative logic of the plot, serves to show up by negative example the nature of true knowledge.[10]

On Vision and Blindness

It is precisely this narrative reversal between linguistic knowledge (required by the riddle) and visual knowledge (divine in origin) which brings us to the second narrative transformation on which the drama of *Oedipus Rex* is based.

Let us re-examine here the famous confrontation between King Oedipus and Tiresias, the soothsayer. While recognizing the necessity of what has been made manifest (*exephênen*, 243) in the oracle, and while protesting against Tiresias' prior refusal to reveal his truth (*xuneidôs ou phraseis*), Oedipus himself refuses to see as soon as he is confronted with the truth as the soothsayer finally formulates it. However, no sooner has Tiresias made his revelation (*ekphênô*, 329; cf. 343) than we are taken from the realm of the visual back to the linguistic: the coincidence between 'polluter' and 'Oedipus' is merely a matter of words (*rhêma*, 355; *logos*, 359); it is nothing more than a riddle (439)! Tiresias is also hiding behind words (358, 360, 362, 364, etc.). Oedipus not only takes at face value the soothsayer's blindness; in his anger he then accuses the old man of deafness; it is, in fact, Tiresias' sanity which is put in question (*nous*, 370–1). This echoes the reference to *phronein* which Tiresias had claimed for himself in his first pronouncements at 316–18 and 326–9, as well as, in a *Ringstruktur*, in the last words he utters at 462. The soothsayer has no further reason to withhold the truth. It is not he, spokesman for Apollo, who is blind, but his questioner who 'sees without seeing' (*kai dedorkas k'ou blepeis*, 413) the house he lives in and the people he lives with, who does not know (*oistha*, 415) what parents he is born of. Note that Tiresias' claim is symmetrical with the statement by Oedipus at 1182–5 which effects the play's first narrative transformation. It follows that the voice of the soothsayer announces the outcome of the second narrative transformation which structures the plot of *Oedipus Rex*: he who now can see the light of day will see only darkness (419), the man of sight will become blind (*tuphlos ek dedorkotos*, 454).[11] It is now that Oedipus is revealed (*phanêsetai*, 453 and 457) to be of genuine Theban origin and not a 'metic foreigner', as formerly supposed (*logôi*, 452)—brother and father of his own children, son and husband to his wife, incestuous rival and murderer of his own father.[12]

Thus the transition from linguistic knowledge to visual knowledge orchestrated by the plot causes, in a kind of figurative chiasmus, the material transition from vision to blindness. The vision of mortal men who think they can see through words is replaced by the belief of the blind, whose mutilation puts them in contact with real visual knowledge, that of the gods. It is necessary, therefore, that Oedipus become a new Tiresias so that his literal blindness may be transformed into metaphorical vision, so that the text may move from the domain of supposition (*gnômê*, 398) to that of truth (*alêtheia*, 356 and 369). To rephrase this transformation in the words of the chorus that mark the end of this scene, Oedipus' simple skill (*sophia*) for solving the Sphinx's riddle becomes true knowledge about the affairs of men, comparable to that possessed by Zeus and Apollo (*eidotes*, 497–511).

The Elimination of Sensory Powers

The moment he possesses true knowledge, Oedipus, in one destructive movement, blinds himself. Just as the text, by employing the term 'ankles' (*arthra*), seems to suggest a relation between feet pierced at the moment the child is exposed (1032–6; cf. 718) and the eyes of an adult pierced by two golden hooks (1270), so Oedipus' blinding of himself can be interpreted as the annihilation of an identity, or rather as its substitution. In blinding himself,

Oedipus renounces an identity associating him, through his name, with knowledge and vision (*eidôs*, 397), and takes up instead the identity of a child 'of chance', Oedipus of the pierced feet, Oedipus the Swollen-Foot (1036 and 1080).[13] Readers have, of course, attempted to go further. Thus, paralleling the suicide of Jocasta, this self-mutilation can be seen as expiatory self-destruction consequent on the unspeakable act of incest. Others have associated it with Oedipus' desire to exile himself (1436 and 1452) on Cithaeron, in turn interpreted as the expulsion of the scapegoat. And if we abandon the text altogether for the symbols of which psychoanalytic criticism holds the secret, feet and eyes become signs for the penis and Oedipus' act signifies self-castration, that is, a means of inflicting upon himself the punishment which follows from parricide and incest.[14]

Nevertheless, prudence requires that we return from theories of expiatory suicide, expulsion of the *pharmakos*, and symbolic castration, to the text itself. From a simple narrative point of view, Oedipus' self-blinding provokes an ironic reversal of the initial situation. This king who, from the beginning of the tragedy, insists on his desire to know (*tach'eisomestha*, 84), who wants to conduct his enquiry face to face (1118–20), and who finally submits to the obvious (1182), can, upon his return to the stage, be heard only as a voice emerging from the shadows (1313–15), a voice which sounds strangely like that of Tiresias (1323). Oedipus' voice is also accompanied by heightened auditory perception (1325–6). However, like the soothsayer on his first appearance (324–33), the dethroned king, reduced to a simple voice, refuses—from this point on—all face-to-face encounters. Revealed now in his polluted state, he can no longer look into the eyes of his own parents, whom he expects to join in Hades soon (1371–2), nor can he bear to see his own children (1375–6), nor the city, nor the statues of the gods (1377–9 and 1384–5, in a 'ring structure'). After this rejection of vision (in language bristling with terms denoting sight) the king then expresses his wish to deprive himself of the sense of hearing as well (1386–9). Oedipus the Blind and the Deaf, in his desire to be hidden, rejected, even killed, calls down upon himself a misery far greater than the punishment inflicted on Tiresias: from this point on, he insists that he be seen and heard by no living person (1436–7). This demand confirms, in fact, his refusal of all light at the moment of self-recognition (1183–5).

Deprived of sight, refusing to hear, Oedipus' only link with the outside world is now tactile (1413); it is touch which substitutes for sight when, in the last scene, Oedipus tries to communicate one last time with his daughters (1464–70, where the verb for touch appears three times!): 'Si je les touche, je les verrai', in the translation of André Bonnard. It is also by touching the hand of Creon that Oedipus solicits his protection for Antigone and Ismene (1510). In this way, the blind man, still speaking, accomplishes his last act on stage.[15]

We thus see a progressive self-deprivation of all sensory capacities, ending with the sense of touch. Accompanying this deprivation is an emotional responsiveness clearly activated as soon as Oedipus realizes the truth of his fate. This emotion is apparent not only in the exclamations which punctuate Oedipus' speech (*iou iou*, 1183; *aiai aiai*, 1307; *iô*, 1313 and 1321; *oimoi, oimoi*, 1316; *pheu pheu*, 1324); it is also felt in the use of melic rhythms in the second kommos, and in particular in the melic anapaests (1307–11) and dochmiacs (1314–15 and 1322–3) which mark a part of Oedipus' responses. Indeed, Oedipus can no longer speak of his fate except in melic rhythms as an accumulation of 'misery' and 'suffering' (*kaka, pathea*, 1330).[16] Nothing is left to Oedipus, beyond perception by touch, but to cry over his lot. This is what he declares at two points (1467 and 1486; cf. 1515), at the moment when he becomes aware, through touch, of the presence of his two daughters, also in tears (1473). His own destiny perpetuates itself in the destinies of his daughters, and Creon will twice be called on to take pity on their tragic lot. Furthermore—whether or not the verses are authentic—it is clearly this lesson which the chorus draws when it concludes sententiously that no mortal can 'see' (*idein!*) himself happy unless he is capable of 'seeing to it' (*episkopounta*) that his life comes to its final days without meeting with suffering (*pathôn*, 1530). These are also the play's last words. When the hero of the tragedy deprives himself of his faculties of perception and communication with the outside world, we are left with a residue: the 'pathemic'.[17]

SPECTACLE AND THE PURGING OF THE EMOTIONS

The *pathos* imposed on the hero as the plot unfolds is not without effect on those interacting with him in the tragic fiction