really helpful commentaries by scholars on the Latin of, say, a single episode of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, or a single satire, or a battle-scene from one of the historians, works which would be helpful to the tiro in approach as well as in price.

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THE CONTEXT OF TRAGEDY

B. GOFF (ed.): *History, Tragedy, Theory: Dialogues on Athenian Drama*. Pp. x + 228. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995. $35. ISBN: 0-292-72779-8.

In the past decade, literary criticism and cultural history in a number of disciplines have refined, qualified, or challenged the 'deconstructive turn' of the late seventies and early eighties in order to re-establish and debate the importance of 'history' and 'context' for the interpretation of literary texts. This collection of essays represents an attempt to assess the implications of these recent developments in cultural and literary theory for the study of Greek tragedy.

G.'s introductory essay outlines and discusses the methodological lineaments of the 'New Historicism', with sensitivity to its competing deconstructive, feminist, Foucauldian, and Marxist ancestries. She usefully stresses that this is no monolithic or homogeneous school of thought, since the notion of what 'history' is has become highly contested. And classicists cannot afford to misrecognize new versions of historicism as amounting to the traditional philologist's 'untheorized' use of history as context. G. sets up the battleground on which many of the subsequent essays stake out their positions. To put it (too) simply, there are two areas of controversy. The first involves the extent to which the use of history or 'contexts' in interpretation should involve 'closed' readings or a denial of a tragedy's 'questioning' quality, its plural meanings, dissolved oppositions, or unresolved ambiguities. The second involves the hermeneutic status of notions of 'context'. Contexts are themselves 'texts' and always open to interpretation. How do we go about contextualizing tragedy? And how far is our selection and interpretation of historical frames for tragedy conditioned, not by some objective ahistorical standpoint but by our own position in space and time—our own histories and contexts?

In her essay, Michelle Gellrich makes a useful distinction between Derridean approaches to structuralism and history and what she calls 'post-structuralist socio-criticism' as represented by J.-P. Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet and refined by critics such as J. Winkler, F. Zeitlin, H. Foley, and S. Goldhill. For some commentators (including Seaford in this collection) these critics are too ready to emphasize the 'questioning', 'ambiguous', or 'open' texture of tragedy at the expense of its conformity to a dominant ideology—a conformity which only emerges when we do a better form of historicism. For Gellrich, on the other hand, they do not go far enough because they argue that the structural oppositions of thought and ideology which form the context of tragedy are tested, challenged, and problematized by tragedy but not actually dissolved. To my mind, Gellrich unjustly paints all 'post-structuralist socio-criticism' in Bakhtinian colours. Her brief account of the tragic Dionysus as a figure who transcends or dissolves the logic of binary opposition is interesting and provocative. But Gellrich fails to demonstrate that her (potentially fruitful) deconstruction of structuralist assumptions is anything other than a product of a late twentieth-century desire to free Greek tragedy from ideology.

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Peter Rose picks up a theme raised in G.'s introduction, namely the rôle of Athenian ideology in the mediation of class tensions and inequalities. Sophocles' *Ajax* grapples with class tension through a positive representation of the protagonist's status as an aristocratic *stratêgos* and an implied denigration of the capabilities and stature of the *dêmos*. Ajax validates the aristocratic, militaristic, and paternalistic tendencies of Athenian society. The play exhibits internal contradictions and structured silences but any plural meanings are the product of a struggle for class supremacy and a need to reconcile Athens's cultural hegemony with its imperialist ruthlessness rather than a product of the nature of representation itself. Despite his nuanced definition of 'ideology' and some excellent analysis, one suspects that R. is simplifying the impact of this play on an Athenian audience. The competing egalitarian and hierarchical aspects of Athenian ideological projections must have made for differing and complicated responses among the citizenry depending on their own particular histories and social positions.

David Rosenbloom takes the development of the Athenian Empire as a frame for reading the tragedies of Aeschylus, arguing that their plots and narrative are driven by the paradigm of the Persian wars and the empire's generation of a moral contradiction between 'freedom at home' and 'domination abroad'. While Rosenbloom is perhaps rather too keen on a specific Aeschylean 'agenda', his account of the *Eumenides* is persuasive and offers a fresh approach.

Where it is now commonplace to read Athenian drama in terms of 'democratic ideology', Helene Foley offers a reading of Sophocles' *Antigone* which seeks to expose the pitfalls of reading the nature and workings of that ideology too simplistically. Taking issue with recent workers on the play, she argues that *all* its main characters in some sense 'speak' democratic ideology *and* depart from crucial aspects of it by over-emphasizing some of its tenets at the expense of others. F. offers compelling evidence from oratory and the historians to challenge other 'limited' readings of Athenian democratic ideology which cast Antigone as an unequivocally 'good' or 'bad' character. My only reservation is that an Athenian audience may themselves have deployed a range of 'limited readings'. Did 'Athenian ideology' entail a *single* frame through which all Athenians viewed a play?

Froma Zeitlin identifies and investigates a heightened relationship between late Euripidean tragedy and the development of the graphic and plastic arts in late fifth-century Athens. For Z., plays such as *Iphigeneia at Aulis* and the *Ion* examine and contest the representation of the past by juxtaposing the memory systems of epic with newer and more complex notions of visual representation as media for transmitting *kleos*. Z. shows that tragedy crucially informs intellectual and aesthetic developments in the fifth century. A reminder here that Greek drama contributes to Athens's intellectual and discursive 'history'.

Bernd Seidensticker attempts an all-encompassing account of the representation of women on the Greek tragic stage, arguing that tragedy's women are not primarily transgressive. Their apparent trangressive behaviour is motivated by male disruption of the female domestic sphere. In contrast to many of the other contributors, S. sees the tragic representation of conflict going hand in hand with symbolic resolutions. S. does not use 'history' very much here and one suspects that the approach of Foley is much more useful for the determination of what would constitute 'trangression' or 'resolution' for an Athenian audience.

Richard Seaford's contribution is polemical and original. He takes issue with critics who read tragedy as a genre marked by ambiguity, ambivalence, and resistance to 'closure' or resolution. As an example of his 'historicism' S. uses evidence for the

operations of aetiological myth and ritual to claim (*contra* Vernant) that the ending of the *Eumenides* subordinates ambivalence to collective cohesion. The aetiological frame is clearly important. But the complexities of the *Oresteia* and its ending are just not reducible to an aetiological myth or ritual, and S.'s argument *does* imply this reduction. He is right to suggest that we need to historicize tragic ambivalence more carefully rather than simply 'fetishizing' it. But for S., this entails the privileging of one framework of historical 'evidence' over others which merit attention and would disturb his reading. Tragedies' meanings depend on what contexts we choose to emphasize. One critic's emphasis can look like a fetish to another.

This problem of emphasis is at the heart of current disputes over tragedy's rôle and meaning. Goff's brief account of recent productions of tragedy indicates that critics (even Marxists) need to be more aware of the academy's permeability to politics and history. Different 'schools' of criticism produce different views of tragedy. G. could have said more about the way in which these 'schools' are themselves products of wider historical and political conflicts. Critics of Greek tragedy frequently gesture to their own partial position in history as a limiting condition of their reading. The considerable achievements of this book *and* its occasional shortcomings suggest that gestures are not enough. We all need to give greater consideration to the impact of recent history on the way in which we debate and read tragedy. And because of its sustained insistence on the complexities of using 'history' to read tragedy, everybody who works on Greek drama should read this collection.

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THE IDEA OF TRAGEDY

M. S. SILK (ed.): *Tragedy and the Tragic: Greek Theatre and Beyond*. Pp. x + 566. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996. £50. ISBN: 0-19-814-951-4.

This collection arises from a 1993 conference held at King's College London. Conference and volume alike set out to advance the definition and understanding of the nature of tragedy in general and of Greek tragedy in particular. These definitions are notoriously controversial and elusive, and it would be unfair to expect conclusive advances; it is disappointing, however, that the contributions of so many modern scholars fail to avoid the characteristic pitfalls of such an enquiry: the exclusion from attempted definition, either by silence or by question-begging narrowing of criteria, of the fairly numerous extant Greek texts, coming under the generic banner 'tragedy', whose anomalous nature makes their assimilation to a general pattern most difficult. The tragedies that typically recur, as examples or test-cases treated to detailed examination, might be termed 'obvious' (*Oresteia*, *O.T.*, *Antigone*, *Ajax*, *Medea*, *Hippolytus*, *Bacchae*); of the 'problematic' tragedies (if *Eumenides* is discounted) only *Ion* receives much beyond a passing mention. One expects the former to predominate; but a theoretical inquiry of this type is seriously flawed by widespread failure properly to grasp the nettle of the 'exceptions' and their implications for definition. There are many thought-provoking ideas and potentially fruitful 'leads' offered, but unless those implications are confronted, any definition of 'tragedy and the tragic' will remain broken-winged.

To illustrate this objection, take S. Halliwell's contribution, forming a transition into the final section's attempts at wider definition of 'tragedy as a whole'. H. offers a

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