

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.

St. John's College, Cambridge

JON HESK

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

well-argued and finely tuned account of Plato's view of 'the tragic', as a pessimistic philosophy of life which he repudiates and whose psychological effects when expressed in dramatic performance he deplors. The view of tragedy and its values suggested by Plato's critique is, however, admitted to be partial (p. 346), and I am uneasy at the circularity of H.'s willingness to defend this by separating out a 'tragic vision' from 'tragedy', and of his subsequent acceptance that not all members of the genre 'tragedy' need reflect that vision. Have we any right to privilege as 'tragic' any one component of the world-view(s?) represented in Greek tragedy, while the (admittedly more difficult) possibility remains that there *may* be a concept of 'the tragic' to which all our dramatic specimens might relate?

Editorial summaries of the papers introduce each of the volume's three sections: Sections I (on readings of particular Greek plays) and II (on the particular contextual features of Greek tragedy) follow the conference's 'dialogue' pattern of paired papers, while the third (tragedy as a whole) offers mostly individual discussions. Section III is generally least successful. There is some excellent work on specific passages and plays (M. Silk on 'tragic language') and some valuable new insight into specific issues such as 'fate' (M. Ewans on '*moira* taking shape' in plays by Sophocles and Shakespeare, E. Mogyoródi on freely chosen complicity in necessity relative to Sophocles' *Antigone*) or irony (T. Rosenmeyer on its various guises). But it is the generalizations at which the section aims that fall short. Both Silk and B. Seidensticker fail to demonstrate the particularity to tragedy of the aspects they foreground: Silk's central components of 'compulsion, excess, and identity' (p. 465) and Seidensticker's definition of 'tragic dialectic' in Euripides, as related to Aristotelian *peripeteia*, could equally apply to certain Molière comedies (*Le Misanthrope* and *L'Ecole des Femmes* respectively). F. Macintosh's loosely argued exploration, in Greek and modern Irish drama, of the 'big speech' (= last words before death?) and lament as crucial components of tragedy requires more detailed scrutiny of the particularity to these contexts of her posited defining characteristics. Seidensticker and Ewans fall back on question-begging reference to 'true', 'high', or 'classic' tragedy, excluding other texts without properly argued justification; G. Steiner, passionate and coherent, propounds more fully a view of 'pure tragedy', but a definition of tragedy that excludes most of the plays written under the heading (pp. 542–3) should surely give pause as to whose fundamental criteria are at fault. Lack of fully rounded argument is also evident in Mogyoródi (whose account of *Antigone* virtually ignores the rôle of Creon) and in N. J. Lowe's definition of specifically *tragic* irony as arising from the embodiment in fifth-century dramatic plots of the *Iliad*'s highlighting of 'the gap between individual and cosmic value' (p. 524)—interesting, but a sole demonstrative example (*Ajax*) does not make a case. For the rest, a besetting fault is lack of detailed and comprehensive illustration (I. Lada, whose sensible and useful contribution on Greek tragedy's interplay between emotive and cognitive response wants better argumentation; Macintosh; Rosenmeyer), or sometimes of argument of any sort (R. N. Mitchell-Boyask, taking Girardian theoretical models of 'mimetic desire and scapegoating' [p. 428] absolutely for granted in examining Shakespeare and Greek tragedy).

The papers of Section I set out largely to offer readings of individual plays, although with some moves towards generalized principles: the value of contributions on both fronts varies. H. Foley's article on *Antigone* is among the volume's best: a sensitive treatment of the Antigone–Creon clash as one between two *modes* of moral deliberation and argumentation (Creon's commitment to dispassionate, universalized principle; Antigone's greater responsiveness to the demands of a specific and personalized context), providing a study unusually sympathetic, despite its vindication

of *Antigone*, to *both* protagonists and to the range of problems raised by the play. The modifications to her position offered in M. Trapp's response are attractive but less well-argued. K. Lee and W. G. Arnott supply the honourable exceptions in concentrating detailed attention beyond the 'obvious choices'. L.'s study of *Ion* grapples with what might be tragic about this clearly atypical tragedy (suggesting that it explores themes of 'lost time'), but disappoints in its lengthy lapses into unremarkable retelling of the play. R. Buxton's reply to C. Calame on *O.T.* underlines the advantages of the 'dialogue' format by its lucid exposition of some of the more glaring problems with C.'s argument about 'visual knowledge' in the play.

On wider questions, A.M. Van Erp Taalman Kip and A. Garvie, in adopting opposing views on the moral complexity of the two last instalments of the *Oresteia* trilogy, both raise the problem posed by Greek tragedy's diversity to theories of 'the tragic'. V.E.T.K. flatly denies the utility of such theories; G. argues that the correspondence of the majority of the extant corpus with modern ideas about the tragic vindicate the notion. Although G.'s conclusions on the *Oresteia* are more compelling and well-rounded than V.E.T.K.'s, this volume's overall quest is not well-served by his passing definition of 'problematic' plays as simply anomalous (with well over 90% of Greek tragedy lost, a 'majority' argument is always doubtful). C. Segal's more broadly based piece on the importance of the 'communal weeping' response as embodied in concluding scenes of formal lament involves a welcome reinstatement of the centrality of emotional response (against modern obsessions with fictional self-consciousness), but again highlights the drawbacks of generalizing from selective evidence (not all plays end this way)—a problem recognized (p. 174) in P. Easterling's intelligent and helpful rejoinder, with its amended concept of 'communal witnessing'.

Section II explores the definition of Greek tragedy in terms of certain specific contextual characteristics: tragedy as defined against comedy, the rôle of the chorus, the Dionysiac element, and the political context. O. Taplin seeks to establish some defining distinctions between tragedy and comedy, in terms of predominant mood, the chorus, on-stage gods, and closures; but his article is afflicted by sweeping generalization, especially on the chorus. B. Gredley's response corrects some of T.'s oversimplifications but adds a few of his own, notably on the 'sense of inevitability' (p. 210; again, the 'problem plays' are omitted from consideration). The remaining six pieces all in various ways engage with currently fashionable issues of Greek tragedy's civic/political dimension. The honours here go mainly to J. Gould and S. Goldhill, in their attempts to define what sort of 'collective voice' the chorus might represent. Both question the oversimplifications of the Vernant model of the chorus as representing the (democratic) 'collective of the audience' (p. 244), offering more nuanced alternative views; both recognize the difficulties of applying a single formula to the diverse range of choruses—Gould admits 'exceptional cases' into discussion (esp. p. 223 and nn. 27–30), although without pursuing their implications, Goldhill suggests vital questions for further research on variations and exclusions in choral dramaturgy. Limitations remain in both cases, but directions in which progress might be made have been identified.

In stark contrast are the breathtaking generalizations of R. Seaford's argument that Dionysus' rôle in tragedy is as 'the civic god who [. . .] presides over the self-destruction of the ruling families of the mythical past, to the benefit of the *polis*' (p. 291). Until his contentions can be shown to extend to more tragedies than the few S. can make—or stretch—they to fit, they remain grotesquely reductionist. Alarming loose treatment of evidence is also apparent in E. Hall's piece on the

absence from Aristotle's *Poetics* of the civic dimension, especially in her own definition of the civic element in Greek tragedy, where she talks of the 'Athenocentrism' (pp. 299, 301) of tragedy's subject-matter and perspective. R. Friedrich, despite a lucid, ironic, penetrating critique of various approaches to 'the Dionysiac' in tragedy, also makes drastic oversimplifications on the individual/*oikos/polis* issues. P. J. Wilson, on the other hand, examining the implications of reference to tragedy in fourth-century oratory, is unusual in the exemplary scrupulousness of his handling of evidence.

If this selection of current classical scholarship is representative, there are elements here to celebrate, but also elements to cause disquiet—mostly in the area of overarching theory. In his introduction, Silk defends the validity and necessity of such far-reaching, cross-cultural theoretical investigation as this: with that I have no quarrel. But this volume provides both positive and negative evidence to strengthen conviction that the way forward *must* lie in commitment to channelling theories and ideas through disciplined and comprehensive engagement with textual evidence.

Oriel College, Oxford

SUSANNA PHILLIPPO

PERSONAL SPACE

A. W. BULLOCH, E. S. GRUEN, A. A. LONG, A. STEWART (edd.): *Images and Ideologies: Self-Definition in the Hellenistic World*. (Hellenistic Culture and Society, 12.) Pp. viii + 414, ill. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993. Cased. ISBN: 0-520-07526-9.

In April 1988 a conference was held at the University of California at Berkeley, entitled 'Images and Ideologies: Self-Definition in the Hellenistic World'. The purpose was a noble one: to provide a context for discussion between specialists in *different* fields of Hellenistic research, for there are quite a few. And secondly, and somewhat more prosaically, to reveal new perspectives in Hellenistic study. In this volume we see the original papers in revised and, often, in expanded form. The title comprises a theme which concentrates on an aspect of Hellenistic culture that traverses all disciplinary boundaries and is cardinal to them all. The conference was divided into five panels on history, literature, art, philosophy, and religion, each with two speakers and a respondent. The same format is retained for the book, which ends with a select bibliography, a list of distinguished contributors, and a general index. The volume, as one might expect from the University of California Press, is beautifully and richly produced.

The discussion of the history panel revolves around the premise that Hellenistic kingship was on the one hand anathema to the Greeks in relation to its monarchical nature and on the other hand a necessary institution to govern non-Hellenic nations in the post-Alexandrian era. Bringmann in a concise and clear exposition (pp. 3–24) examines the rulers' benefactions to the cities and the advantages gained by the kings from these gifts. Koenen in a scholarly but overlong piece (pp. 25–115) looks at the fact that the king's power, although it rested on a Hellenic élite, needed the assent of the ruled, and in this he cleverly exploits the religious syncretism which was produced between Greek and Egyptian, and the finding of a place for the Egyptian élite, notably