The
Finnish Institute
at Athens

Inaugural Lectures
21–22 May 1985

Edited by
Maarit Kaimio
Contents

NILS OKER-BLOM: Foreword 3

MAARIT KAIMIO: Understanding Greek tragedy 5

METROPOLITAN JOHN OF HELSINKI: Some traits concerning the relations of State and Church in Byzantium according to the tradition of the Ecumenical Councils 13

HENRIK LILIUS: The Greek revival in Finnish architecture around 1800 17

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 32

Printed by Amer-yhtymä Oy Weilin+Göös
Espoo 1986

The Foundation for the Finnish Institute at Athens wishes to express its gratitude to Amer-yhtymä Oy Weilin+Göös for the grant that made this publication possible.
Greek tragedy presents to modern man two very different sides at the same time. On one hand, when seeing a tragedy by Aeschylus, Sophocles or Euripides on stage, or when reading it ourselves, we often feel an immediate appeal, a sense of familiarity and truth, a delight in the manner of presentation, as if we were confronting something basic and universal, which it is easy to appreciate. It may be that this spontaneous feeling of understanding really reflects the basic similarity of human nature and thought through different ages and cultures, or it may be that it contains more insight into ourselves than into the Greeks. On the other hand, we may find the plays in many respects odd and old-fashioned, with strange conventions, like their formal structure and the presence of the singing and dancing chorus. This sense of temporal and cultural distance which is often felt by the general public is more than shared by the classical scholar, who is acutely aware of the fragmentary and uncertain character of the evidence available to explain the differences between that world and our own. This sense of distance can be productive: every generation must see the past through its own eyes, and the past responds to new approaches of study with new visions. But a scholar must always strive to reject his inherited system of values and his way of looking at life in order to understand better the ancient world. In the following, I shall discuss some approaches to Greek tragedy which, I think, have been especially prominent during the last few years. I shall deal with questions concerning the stagecraft, the characters, the portrayal of women, the influence of ritual, and the language of tragedy.

Greek tragedy belongs to the theatre. A modern production of a Greek play in the theatre is – and must be – quite free to understand, emphasize and interpret the play in the way the director and the actors wish to. In fact, there have always been changes in the text and shifts of emphasis ever since the period of the great tragedians themselves. There is no sense in trying to reproduce on the modern stage the likeness of the first performance of a tragedy in fifth-century style. Scholarly study is another matter. It cannot be denied that the Greek plays have often been interpreted by the scholars mainly as texts, as something to be read from a book, not as something to be seen in theatre. Partly this is an inheritance from Aristotle, who in his Poetics concentrated on other things than opsis, the visualisation of the play. But even he demanded that the poet, when composing his drama, should try to imagine everything happening before his eyes. This is an exercise adopted recently by several scholars with considerable success.

In this approach we need of course all possible help from the archaeologists to understand the concrete surroundings for which the poets wrote their plays. But for
an attempt to understand the plays as

dramatic performances, the evidence

 supplied by archaeological material is not

enough: the main source is the texts of the

plays. This poses several problems, as the

original editions had no stage directions

like modern plays, indicating the en-

trances and exits of the characters, their

movements on the stage and so on; mostly

not even the names of the speakers were

given, change of speaker being indicated

only by a stroke between the lines. A

careful reading of the texts, however, does

make it possible to conclude that every

significant action taking place on the stage

is, in one way or another, indicated by the

poet in his text.

On the basis of the poet’s words we can

conjure before our eyes, in the form it was

performed in Aeschylus’ time, the memo-

rable scene from Agamemnon where Cly-

temnestra meets her victorious husband

and orders the maids to strew his path to

the house with purple garments; how he,

after yielding to her will, takes off his shoes

and walks unknowingly to his doom along

this path of ominous red. Probably

the garments are then gathered away, which

makes the same approach to the house

made by the second murder victim, Cäs-

sandra, stand in outward contrast to Aga-

memnon’s, just as Cassandra’s clear con-

sciousness of her own doom and of the

whole house’s past and future woes con-

trasts implicitly with Agamemnon’s in-

comprehension of the situation. Thus, we

can detect many stagecraft effects used by

the playwrights which greatly enhance the

force of the text itself.

The question of the character of the

heroes of Greek tragedy has risen much to

the fore in recent research. The characters

of tragedy have earlier — with the excep-
tion of a few scholars — been interpreted

as psychologically explicable personalities,

whose actions are governed by conscious

motives and subconscious drives which

can be seen in the poet’s text or, if they

cannot — as often happens — can and

should be deduced from the actions of the

play. It is true that Aristotle had already
demanded that the characters — êthê — of

the dramatic persons should have consist-

tency and probability. Moreover, we are

used to many-sided character portrayals in

our literature. And naturally, many of the

heroes of Greek drama make upon us the

strong impression of a clearly cut charac-
ter. Who could forget for instance the

powerful impact made by Clytemnestra in

Aeschylus’ Agamemnon, that woman

“with a mind of a man” (androbolon

kear), who after all her deceitful speeches

of welcome stands there beside her hus-

band’s corpse, weapon in hand, exulting

in the blood that sprinkled her in the act of

murder? But are we justified in probing

deeper into her psychology — in stressing

as her motive her hate of her husband, or

her love for her paramour, or her envy of

the male dominance in the society? It is,

I think, more true to the Aeschylean dra-

ma to see her rather as a part of the whole

drama than as an individual portrayed in

her own right. Her perverted ideas of

sexuality, parenthood, power and justice

are a part of the picture of perversion and

injustice which is portrayed by the whole

of the play, by all its characters and, in no

small measure, by its language and meta-

phors, and this picture again is a part of

the dramatic whole of the trilogy, at the

end of which the perversions give way to

justice, health, and prosperity. In this

discussion of the character of a Greek

hero, I believe that rather than subject the

characters to modern psychoanalysis we

should study them as moulded by the

dramatic action and by their speeches,

which often are more determined by rhet-

oric, means of persuasion and argument,

than by psychology.

A separate problem is the presenta-
tion of female characters in Greek drama. This

is a problem of interaction between society

and drama. The question of the position

of women in Greek society has recently re-

ceived much attention.
being a fashionable subject, it is also certainly a worthwhile subject. The women of tragedy have sometimes been used as evidence for the existence of a more independent and esteemed position of women in Athenian society than is allowed for by the traditional picture, where women are seen as strictly confined to their house, without any freedom of movement or speech in the male world.\textsuperscript{18} Many women of tragedy seem to contradict this picture – think of Antigone acting courageously against the orders of the ruler, listening only to her conscience and defending her view freely in public; or Medea, taking the law into her own hands and contriving security for herself, revenge on her husband and destruction to her enemies. But the peculiar character of the art-form must be taken into account. These women are women of mythology, and their actions are for the most part determined by the myth.\textsuperscript{19} Moreover, all writers of Greek tragedy were men, all actors were men, dressed as women for the women’s roles – it has been argued that these aspects, together with the public character of Greek tragedy, may account for the fact that many women in tragedy behave like men and support male values. For instance Medea and Antigone both have a fear of losing their honour by being humiliated by the laughter of their enemies – a typically masculine trait in Greek literature.\textsuperscript{20} I think that future research will have much to say about the tragedians’ attitude to the role of women in Greek society.\textsuperscript{21} Several of their plays show that they were conscious of the social and emotional problems of women and had an understanding of the woman’s point of view, too.

Another aspect for which the social and mental environment of fifth-century theatre must be taken into account when trying to understand the composition and effect of Greek tragedy, is its connection with religion and ritual. The institution of the theatre in Athens as such was born in connection with the cult of Dionysus, and even before the organization of the Dionysiac festivals, the early forms of tragedy apparently grew up from various ritual practices. The existing tragedies may contain features which still reflect these practices, and can help in explaining the much-discussed problem of the origins of tragedy.\textsuperscript{22} But more relevant to the understanding of Greek tragedy, such as it stands before us in the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, is its relation to the cults and religious feeling of its own day. The tragedies themselves had not much to do with Dionysus – this fact was proverbial in those days – but nevertheless the gods actually appeared on stage, and many rituals, such as purification from pollution, sacrifice, supplication, were central to the actions of the plays. If we want to understand how the tragedy was felt and understood by its fifth-century public, we must take into account the cult practices and their relevance to the men of that time also outside the theatre.\textsuperscript{23}

But the influence of religion and ritual goes deeper: it shapes the tragedy, it is the formative factor in the development of the action in many scenes.\textsuperscript{24} It may be the central theme of the tragedy, as in Sophocles’ Antigone, where the whole drama is built upon the question of the right of performing burial rites. It is felt also at the level of language: for instance in Aeschylus’ Oresteia, the actual sacrifice of Iphigenia at Aulis, which is described in the first choral song, is reflected throughout the trilogy in the metaphorical use of sacrificial language, in connection with every murder committed or described in the plays. This metaphor of corrupted sacrifice is a part of the central idea of the Oresteia, the idea of divine justice perverted by man.\textsuperscript{25}

The study of the meaning of ritual in Greek tragedy and also, more generally, the meaning of the myths forming the subject matter of the tragedies, has benefited much from the findings of modern anthropology and history of religion in
cultures widely distant in time and space from the ancient Greeks. Such research can bring insights into the feeling of the basic relevance of Greek tragedy to ourselves. I mention especially the structuralistic approach to myth and ritual. This method developed from structural linguistics, which presupposes the existence of general, unconscious structures common to all speakers of a language, and even universal ones common to all languages. These structures are realized in speech in different individualized forms. A structural pattern much used in the interpretation of myth and ritual is the pattern of binary opposition. Such structures of opposition, for instance of life and death, tame and wild, raw and cooked, appear also in the form of myths and rituals whose function is to overcome this opposition by showing a mediating factor between the opposites. Thus, myths telling of hunters and their prey may act as mediators by giving expression to killing on one hand and the providing of food, necessary for maintaining life, on the other. Such structures can also be realized in other codes in addition to myth and ritual, for instance in the codes of language or food, and they can be used to interpret Greek tragedy, too, from many viewpoints. The structuralistic models used in the interpretation of Greek tragedy may stress too much the binary oppositions functioning as their starting point, and result sometimes in interpretations which are too schematic, but the approach has nevertheless focused attention on many points which have previously passed unnoticed. I have spoken about some ways of approaching Greek tragedy which take into account a larger frame of reference than the text itself – the stagecraft, the society, the religion and ritual. However, we could say that the study of the text has become even more important with the development of these other approaches. I would like to point out two approaches to the language that have in recent years yielded results which have greatly contributed to the understanding of Greek tragedy. Firstly, many conventions of the language of Greek tragedy which seem odd and undramatic to the modern reader and spectator are seen to have special force. I take as an example the line-to-line dialogue between two actors, the questions and answers usually comprising exactly one line each. These scenes mostly occur at moments of great dramatic tension, as for instance the many recognition scenes. But the tension is not expressed by a life-like imitation of the meeting of two people, but roused to a high pitch by the very formalism of the rapid dialogue, which the public of the theatre knew to belong to the tradition of such scenes.

Secondly, the images and metaphors used by the dramatists have received attention, not just as elements of language, but as elements of the whole drama, underlining the significance of the action of the play. I have already mentioned as an example the imagery of sacrifice in Aeschylus’ Oresteia. The Aeschylean images develop during the play, they undergo changes of meaning and acquire new associations, and their whole force can often be realized only at the end of the drama. This brings about a problem of criticism: should we interpret the imagery from the point of view of the modern reader who has the possibility of reading and re-reading the text, or start from the experience of the spectator of the drama, who can follow the development of imagery only along with the development of the events of the play? And this brings us back to the question whether we should approach Greek tragedy trying to analyze the experience it offers especially to the readers of our time, or whether we should seek the way in which the ancient Greeks understood the theatre of their own day.

It is clear that no approach can alone give satisfactory results. But it is this very fact that makes the study of tragedy such a rewarding experience – and not only to the
scholar, but to the wider public of readers, spectators, actors, modern writers, and other artists. The study of tragedy is only one example of the study of cultural characteristics, of cultural heritage, of cultural interrelation, which, I hope, will form part of the work done in the Finnish Institute at Athens. I have chosen this example partly because Greek tragedy is dear to me, partly because it is this place in the world where it sprang up, but mainly because in trying to understand Greek tragedy we are compelled to try to understand both ourselves and the foreign, faraway elements of our world, and this is perhaps the most human task of the study of the humanities.

Abbreviations

AJP = American Journal of Philology
AU = Der Altsprachliche Unterricht
BICS = Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies, University of London
CB = Classical Bulletin
CP = Classical Philology
CQ = Classical Quarterly
CW = Classical World
G&R = Greece and Rome
GRBS = Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies
HSCP = Harvard Studies in Classical Philology
JHS = Journal of Hellenic Studies
PCPS = Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society
PP = Parola del Passato
TAPA = Transactions of the American Philological Association
YCS = Yale Classical Studies

Notes


2 Aristot. Poet. 1455a23ff.


4 See O. Taplin, "Did Greek dramatists write stage instructions?", PCPS n.s. 23 (1977) 121–32.


6 See O. Taplin, PCPS n.s. 23 (1977) 129ff., idem, The stagecraft of Aeschylus, 28ff.


10 The most famous attack against the concept of a consistent, psychologically explicable character in drama is found in Tycho von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Die dramatische Technik des Sophokles* (Berlin 1917).

11 The psychological view of dramatic characters is by no means lacking in recent studies, either, as is made clear by the debate expressed e.g. in the studies cited in n. 9. Tragedy has been read also in the light of modern psychoanalysis – two heroes particularly susceptible to this kind of treatment are Euripides' Hippolytus and Pentheus of the *Bacchae*, see e.g. W. Sale, "The psychoanalysis of Pentheus in the *Bacchae* of Euripides", *YCS* 22 (1972) 63–82, A.V. Rankin, "Euripides' Hippolytus: a psychoanalytical hero", *Arethusa* 7 (1974) 71–94, J.J. Smoot, "Hippolytus as Narcissus: an amplification", *Arethusa* 9 (1976) 37–51, C. Segal, "Pentheus and Hippolytus on the couch and on the grid: psychoanalytic and structuralistic reading of Greek tragedy", *CW* 72 (1978) 129–48.

12 Aristot. Poet. 1454a16ff.


15 See below p. 8 and n. 32.


18 The most important exposition of this view of women in tragedy is A.W. Gomme, "The position of women in Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.", *CP* 20 (1925) 1–25 = *Essays in Greek history and literature* (Oxford 1937), 89–115.

Grèce ancienne (Paris 1972).
26 Cf. e.g. G.S. Kirk, Myth: its meaning and function in ancient and other cultures (Berkeley 1970), W. Burkert, Structure and history in Greek mythology and ritual, Sather classical lectures 47 (Berkeley & Los Angeles & London 1979).
29 An important contribution to the structuralistic approach to Greek tragedy is C. Segal, Tragedy and civilization: an interpretation of Sophocles (Harvard 1981).
Dramen des Euripides (Heidelberg 1968), B. Seidensticker, "Die Stichomythie" in W. Jens, ed., Die Bauformen (see n. 30), 183–220.

32 A. Lebeck, The Oresteia: a study in language and structure (Cambridge, Mass. 1971); see also the articles on imagery cited in n. 16 by Peradotto, Zeitlin, Scott, Gantz, and S. Goldhill, Language, sexuality, narrative: the Oresteia (Cambridge 1984); R.F. Goheen, The imagery of Sophocles' 'Antigone': a study of poetic language and structure (Princeton 1951); other recent works on Sophoclean imagery are mentioned by Buxton in his survey of Sophoclean studies (see n. 9), p. 11 n. 10, 11, 16; S. Barlow, The imagery of Euripides (London 1971).

33 P. 7 with n. 25.

34 See especially the work by A. Lebeck cited in n. 32.