
So much has been written on Greek tragedy in recent years that anyone wishing to write another book on the subject has to find a new ‘angle’ by which to approach it. In some cases, the new angle is not enough to hide the fact that in essence the new book wasn’t really worth writing. This charge cannot, however, be made against Barbara Goward’s book. Although it does, at least in principle, attempt to come at tragedy with a new angle, and although much of what Goward covers has been said before in different ways, her account is nevertheless often perceptive and, with its wealth of detail, reveals interesting layers and interconnections within the tragic texts which can at times reinvigorate them. There is, of course, especially in the opening chapters, a good deal of the ‘jargon’ of contemporary literary theories, so that this is certainly not a book for the average undergraduate. The ‘jargon’ is, however, relatively penetrable (although occasionally the refusal to call a spade a spade can become irritating), so that serious students of Greek drama could derive considerable benefit. A bonus for some would be that all Greek is transliterated and/or translated.

Goward’s approach is based on so-called ‘narrative theory’ which she applies to a wide range of narrative patterns and specific scenes from tragedy. Part I establishes the theoretical basis. We are reminded that while there are ‘narrative’ elements in Greek drama, in another sense all Greek drama is ‘narrative’, and Goward explores the relationships between narrator and narratee as these operate both within the fictive world of the drama, and also between playwright and audience as mediated by the performing actors.

Useful insights are offered into tragedy’s ‘continuing concern with the problem of gaining knowledge’ (13), the temporal complexity of tragedy, the concept of ‘gaps’ left in the narrative for the audience to fill, and the phenomenon of outcomes posed as alternatives which in the event merge into one outcome. Good points are also made about time-frames associated with the chorus, and the chorus’ different levels of reliability as ‘narrators’ of the past and of the future. I was, however, a little puzzled by the statement (23) that ‘the chorus [in *Oedipus Tyrannus*] are mistaken when
they describe Laius’ murderer as a bull in the wild... he is of course the king within their own city’. They don’t know for certain (despite Teiresias) that the murderer is their king, but the information has been brought that he’s in the city, and the bull metaphor surely just images his ‘real’ social and spiritual isolation.

Other interesting discussions focus on the role of ‘proleptic narratives’ such as dreams and prophecies, also on the role of ‘message narratives’, a more inclusive term sensibly preferred to ‘messenger speeches’. Part I concludes with a most helpful survey of narrative deceit which, making good use of the Detienne/Vernant link between dolos and metis, presents the idea of an essentially deceitful, agonistic relationship between the narrator and narratees. One conclusion is that (52) ‘Sophocles’ innovative skill is to allow doloi to persist past the closing lines of these plays’.

The rest of the book (Parts II, III and IV) deals with the three tragedians in turn. First of all, a general account is given of the techniques used by Aeschylus for his ‘narrative shaping’, which is then illustrated by good studies of the Septem contra Thebas shield scene and the Agamemnon Cassandra scene, and a less useful look at the Prometheus Vinctus Io scene. The section on Sophocles is built around the concept of the narrative ‘loop’, defined (87) as that part of a narrative ‘when Sophocles makes a temporary deviation from a plot line, rejoining it again later at the point of exit’. This is well illustrated in the discussion of Trachiniae 180-496 and Philoctetes 541-627, but the briefer, very generalised look at Ajax 646-865 never gets to grips with the particular challenges of this Sophoclean sequence and is, dare I say it, a bit ‘loopy’. The groundwork laid earlier in the book on dolos is then applied to the Sophoclean Electra.

I found the final section, on Euripides, the least satisfactory, partly because theoretical frameworks seemed to have dropped somewhat from view. Thus the discussion of Euripides’ narrative strategy appears to go over old ground, such as prologues and endings and the operation of Tyche, in a more or less traditional way, while the study of recognition in Iphigenia in Tauris and Helen is heavy going and not especially enlightening. Better is the final discussion, on gods as prologue-speakers, which emphasises the ambiguities and gaps operating even in these contexts, and which contains the nice ‘Euripidean’ statement (150) that
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'Euripides conceals dolos in clarity'. But the book then just fizzles out, with a very brief and perfunctory ending tacked on.

Overall, this is a very well-written, thought-provoking and richly (too richly?) footnoted book which does, however, betray clear signs of its origins as a doctoral thesis. I noted very few misprints, but a number of spelling inconsistencies (e.g. the hybrid Oedipus Tyrannos [43 and 46], but Oedipus Tyrannus elsewhere). At 155, line 13, read 'Artemis' for 'Aphrodite' (I think). It may be of interest too that in the comprehensive bibliography there are only five German titles. This may provide a clue to the reason for the presence of 'dreigesprach' (sic: 16 and 96).

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