BOOK REVIEW

Sophocles and the Language of Tragedy. By Simon GOLDHILL. Onassis Series in Classical Culture. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. Pp. 296. $35.00/£22.50. ISBN: 978-0-199-79627-4.

The title of this book, as befits its interest in the slipperiness of words, uses the word "language" in two senses, as "philology" and as "*langue*." The first section contains literary studies, while the second part is concerned with theory, German idealism in particular, but also feminist studies and what Goldhill refers to as the new "orthodoxy." Somewhat confusingly, the first section's readings all support this new orthodoxy to a degree. In his "coda," Goldhill reveals that he wavers between rejecting German Idealism outright and using it for his own purposes.

In his opening chapter, "Undoing: *Lusis* and the Analysis of Irony," based in part on his 2009 article in *TAPA* (much of this book consists of reworked earlier essays), Goldhill looks at Sophoclean examples of the Greek word "release," in all of which he finds a second ironic sense. This irony creates "edgy, flickering uncertainty" (36) that undercuts the audience's confidence, unlike conventional Sophoclean irony. One example is Electra's use of λυτήριον in lines 1489–90, where she urges Orestes to kill Aegisthus immediately, "for this is the only *release* for me*.*" She means that she will no longer have to endure seeing him, but it is possible (though not all agree) that the audience will realize there is no "release" in this story. The chapter concludes with several examples of other words that possess this flickering irony.

The third chapter, "Line by Line," is concerned with stichomythia. In the exchange of Creon and Haemon (*Antigone*, 726–64), Goldhill observes "the twists of reason into extremism" (58–63). This seems to support the new orthodoxy, but Goldhill's language reveals a complex view of character: "even if Haemon may seem … to have the moral high ground, his position is also veined with a self-destructive and self-defeating extremism" (63).

In his fourth and fifth chapters, "Choreography" and "The Chorus in Action," Goldhill examines lyric versus iambic lines in specific contexts, and concludes that the chorus is "more complex and nuanced … and far more

dramatically involved than many generalizations about the chorus have allowed … ” (131). This is convincingly demonstrated by a discussion of several passages in the *Philoctetes*.

In the book's second section Goldhill is mainly concerned with German Idealism, which "takes tragedy from the sphere of literary genre and establishes it as a means to comprehend the self as a political, psychological and religious subject" (149). This has led to simplistic views of "tragedy" itself and of the nature of the chorus. The political plays, such as *Suppliants* and *Herakleidai* of Euripides, are not "tragic" in their terms and so have been overlooked. (Hegel's early interest in *Eumenides*, observed by Steiner, *Antigones* [1984], esp. 25–8, is ignored here.)

In his seventh chapter, "Generalizing about the Chorus," Goldhill states that Schlegel first describes the chorus as the "ideal spectator," and that little is said by idealist philosophers about "any specific chorus." (179) Nietzsche and Wagner's view of music is also limiting; it emphasizes the enthusiastic and leaves no room for the use of lyric in deliberation. Goldhill concludes with accounts of performances of Reinhardt and others where the chorus embodies this enthusiasm to the detriment of its dramatic role.

In his eighth chapter, Goldhill shows that in nineteenth-century England there was "a remarkably uniform picture of Sophocles and his *Electra*" as being pious, which comes from "the German idealism of Schlegel" (216–7). Then he considers the "dark" reading, in which the Sophoclean hero is extreme and self-destructive, which began with Rohde's *Psyche* in the 1890s and was popularized by Hoffmannstahl's insane Electra of 1903. Sheppard in a 1927 article was one of the first scholars to reflect this view. By the 1960s there was no consensus concerning the two readings but "by the end of the twentieth century … the so-called 'dark' reading … has become orthodoxy" (225).

In his final chapter, "Coda: Reading with or without Hegel," Goldhill clarifies his view of his antithesis between German idealism and the new orthodoxy: "I want to keep both trajectories—the trajectory of value and the trajectory of historical self-consciousness, the trajectory of the general and of the specific—in play, not least because I think it represents most accurately the state of contemporary criticism" (261–2). That is, he does not want to refute German Idealism. Rather, he wants to keep idealist views from obscuring other aspects of tragedy, such as uncertainty, complexity, and verbal play.

Goldhill sometimes criticizes Hegel as one of the German Idealists, but at other times approves of him and even seems to be influenced by him. For in-

stance, consider this passage: "the power and subtlety of this self awareness within tragedy" (has been overlooked), "the dynamic between generalization and the messy, specific, self-interested turmoil of human activity." Goldhill here is talking about the dialectical structure of the real world, a key Hegelian concept. The Hegelian connection reveals itself in Goldhill's vocabulary: "self awareness," "dynamic," and "activity," and "self-interested."

Goldhill's critical discussion of the historical and philosophical origin of several key concepts of Sophoclean tragedy is of great interest. His presentation of the relationship of ethics and tragedy is somewhat thin, however, and it is in ethics that philosophy concerns itself with the conflict of the ideal and the real and with the self in dialogue with itself. He makes no reference to Steiner's emphasis on the importance of Hegel's ethics, especially the *Phenomenology*, or to contemporary literature on ethics and literature, such as Nussbaum's linking of ethics and tragedy (although *Fragility of Goodness* [1986] is in his bibliography, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* [1990] is not, nor is Gill's *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy, and Philosophy: The Self in Dialogue* [1996]).

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