

BOOK REVIEW

Cheiron's Way: Youthful Education in Homer and Tragedy. By JUSTINA GREGORY. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019. Pp. xxiii + 313. Hardback, \$90.00. ISBN: 978-0-19-085788-2.

Gregory offers a thoughtful examination of education as depicted in Homer and in various Greek tragedies. Noting the close relationship between tragedy and the Homeric poems, she argues for seeking continuity among the works in terms of their theories of education. Gregory uses Achilles' educational development in the *Iliad* as a template for the growth in wisdom of several tragic figures, while noting that the pattern is varied more often than not.

In the Introduction and the first chapter ("Cheiron the Centaur"), Gregory looks at archaic and classical attitudes towards education. Traditional teaching of the young relies primarily on nurturing *habitus* (internalization of values) through personal association and offering verbal instruction in the form of *hupothēkai* (injunctions), *gnōmai* (maxims) and *paradeigmata* (exemplary stories). Despite the good intentions of teachers, their instructions are often ignored or forgotten by students. Gregory also examines the popular debate in antiquity over the relative value of *phusis* (nature) and *nomos* (instruction). Nature is emphasized by the aristocratic element, while instruction is stressed by those who are less traditional. However, Gregory shows, the distinction is a matter of emphasis not exclusivity. Cheiron, the tutor of several Greek heroes including Achilles, represents the traditional element. The great Centaur is wise, but he has his own apparent failures in education, including Asclepius, Actaeon and his own daughter, Hippo.

In Chapters 2 and 3, Gregory focuses on the *Iliad*, a poem "not only about heroic war but about heroic education" (57). Education is carried out by fathers and foster-fathers who tend to be benevolent, instructing through verbal guidance and the inculcation of *habitus*. In the third chapter, Achilles becomes the major focus.

In support of her claim that the epic is concerned significantly with Achilles' education, Gregory cites the frequent references to his youth and his education before the war, reminders that "invite reconstruction of Achilles' childhood and education" (87). Achilles has been well trained in the tradition, but, when faced with Agamemnon's humiliation, he suffers a "Crisis of Disillusionment" (90). Achilles comes to question the heroic code, eventually concluding that it does not take into account "death's leveling effect" (96). After Patroclus' death, Achilles' pain is not immediately assuaged by the brutality he exercises upon the Trojans. Still, he seems slowly to be gaining wisdom, which Gregory sees in his sardonic comment to Lycaon (21.106-13), his actions in Book 23 and his eventual generosity to Priam. The latter is occasioned by his "Crisis of Empathy" (103), in which he comes to understand his enemy's sorrow. In her treatment of Achilles' growth, Gregory sees a pattern in which the hero first appears as one raised in the convention, then grows disillusioned and eventually becomes empathetic and didactic. Gregory's final chapter on Homer examines the *Odyssey*, and especially Telemachus, whose education does not show the full development that we see in Achilles. Telemachus does not enjoy the usual paternal instruction and encounters little cultivation of *habitus* and *sunousia* (camaraderie). Although Athena gives him a crash course on his way to adulthood, Gregory contends that his fatherless upbringing limits his ability to empathize and so acquire the compassion of Achilles.

In the remainder of the book, Gregory focuses primarily on tragedy, connecting dramatic education with the patterns she finds in the Homeric poems, especially the development seen in Achilles' character. Gregory begins with Sophocles' *Ajax*, in which the titular hero possesses elements of his own Homeric characterization as well as that of Hector and Achilles. Gregory rejects the assertion that Ajax is impious, instead seeing him simply as proud and susceptible to being slighted. She finds some of Ajax' intransigence as coming from his father, who seems more demanding and less affectionate than the typical Homeric model. Though Ajax, like Hector in the *Iliad*, loves his wife and son, he fails "to attain the imaginative identification with another human being" characteristic of Hector and Achilles (152). Gregory regards *Philoctetes* as the "most complete account in extant tragedy of a young person's moral education" (167). In this play Neoptolemos follows somewhat the Achillean pattern of learning. He becomes disillusioned by the treachery of Odysseus. He also has empathy for Philoctetes, although Gregory argues that it is shame more than pity that causes him to rebel against Odysseus. Perhaps for this reason Neoptolemos' decision to support

Philoctetes might be precarious, Gregory suggests, were it not for the intervention of Heracles. Moreover, Heracles' warning against excessive vengeance during the Trojan War foreshadows Neoptolemus' future savagery.

Chapter 7 discusses Hippolytus in Euripides' play of the same name, with some treatment of Ion as a figure of comparison. Gregory sees Euripides' emphasis on the youth of Hippolytus as a sign of the author's focus on education. Gregory also notes the importance of *sōphrosunē* in the play. With young persons, *sōphrosunē* legitimately entails chastity, but unfortunately Hippolytus does not think about other aspects of the concept, such as consideration of others. Unlike Ion, a comparably chaste person, he cannot easily develop empathy for others. Hippolytus' *hamartia* is intolerance; he understands *sōphrosunē* too one-sidedly as modesty. Hippolytus experiences justifiable disillusionment when he hears the Nurse's seduction speech, but he proves unable to acquire Achillean empathy until too late. It is in the *Iphigenia in Aulis* that we see the full Achillean template realized in the characters of Iphigenia and Achilles, who, in their mutual ability to empathize and teach, "complete each other's education" (241). Iphigenia has been raised gently and taught to be a devoted wife, and we see Achilles as a worthy pupil of Cheiron, who is referred to periodically during the play. But traditional education will not be enough for the pair. Both suffer disillusionment through the treachery of Agamemnon, although both retain their goodness. Throughout the play Iphigenia is characterized by "affection and attentiveness" (230), and Achilles, though not immediately empathetic, becomes so when he talks briefly with Iphigenia. As the two speak, they show empathy and console each other in a didactic manner. Achilles proves worthy of his Iliadic self and Iphigenia shows that Gregory's template is not restrictive in terms of gender (220).

The book ends with a Coda concluding that in epic and tragedy the educational process is "turbulent and precarious" (244), without guarantee of success. Advice is often ignored and experiential education can be dangerous, despite its ability to produce kindness and wisdom. Regardless of the challenges, education cannot be abandoned and, when it is successful, it brings glory for the pupil and the teacher.

Gregory's work is well researched and sensitive in its interpretations. Some readers may feel that she speculates too much in explaining actions in terms of heroes' earlier education, but there is always some textual basis for her suggestions. Her paradigm for educational progress works well for the Iliadic Achilles and offers a useful template for the tragedies she discusses. Although she does not

attempt to show that Sophocles or Euripides intentionally follow the Iliadic pattern, she does demonstrate its effectiveness in displaying how some characters grow through their tragic sufferings while others do not.

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