

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The term “fabrication of history” is a bit strong to describe *The Persians*, but the use of names contained in the character clusters in the play, along with the appearance of Darius’ ghost, indicate that the tragedy cannot be considered a “history play” in the traditional sense of the word.

The tragedy is carried in the pathos of the language used in the play. An analysis of the names exemplifies the fact that “the tragic” is associated with the human, and has to do with the response evoked from the audience.

5.1 Chapter overview

The introduction looked into the problems of reading and understanding Greek drama. The main reason for this is to be found, ironically, in the means used to preserve it. The shift has moved from a spectacle and listening experience to a reading exercise. Further reasons include the vast drama theoretical differences and the existence of various approaches to drama and stage productions. The theoretical framework Aeschylus produced *The Persians* in was different to the theoretical criteria Aristotle used to describe forms of tragedy. *The Persians* was an experimental play before the genre became more standardised.

The second chapter therefore considered **the historic context of the drama**. Traditionally *The Persians* is categorised as a history play. This assumption is questioned, and is found to be wanting. To open the way to understanding the nature of the Persians, the concepts “history” and “myth” are investigated. Distinction is made between the drama analysts’ approaches to these concepts. Reference is made to their relations to Greek tragedy and to the period Aeschylus lived in.

The third chapter pertains to **stagecraft production and drama theory**. Attention is drawn to the importance of diction as communicator of more than mere story. The text (script) is concentrated on, as this is, ironically, the only means we have to appreciating

the play. Aristotelian theory is considered as a possible means to approaching *The Persians*, but is found to be insufficient in many respects. Modern theories have been found to be too dependent on Aristotelian theory, and do not consider the play on its own right. Thus, a close study of the play is requested to see what its dramaturgical mechanics are. This is done in chapter 4.

Chapter 4 uncovers the dramatic contribution of **the names** and name clusters to the appraised reception of the tragedy. The names and interpretation of the names need to be understood in a historic context and in their linguistic functions. It is seen how they are integrated into the structure and mood of the play, and how they function similar to set dressing, being descriptive, and at the same time also emotive in their intention and reception.

5.2 Testing the hypothesis

The hypothesis proposed in the introduction has been found to be useful to understand *The Persians*. The hypothesis stated that the play is a tribute to the victory at Salamis, emphasised from the perspective of the enemy's defeat, but with a vital moral undertone. Furthermore, the play has been found to be very balanced in its attitude towards the battle, and thus it is not a human tribute, but a reminder that Fate was on the side of the Greeks. The Persians did not deserve to win. The play thus employs a mythologisation of contemporary history with a didactic substructure, being instrumental in patriotic upliftment and emphasising the mortality of man at once: "Do not misinterpret the gods or anger them, or be rash, or be other than one's nature". The structuring of the name clusters, with their inherent characterisation of the Persian nation and classic allusions (especially the place clusters), promotes this understanding.

Understanding the name clusters and the references to Greek deity help to appreciate the play better in its intention, presentation, reception, and the assumed reaction it received - based on its winning the prize. Furthermore, it is found that the play falls outside the scope of Aristotelian drama theory as it is understood in terms of later interpretations. This does not render Aristotelian theory as obsolete. Rather, a close reading of the *Poetics* is proposed, to understand it within its own right, and not under influence of later theories of drama. It has been found, through the analysis of other ancient drama theories, that the essence of Aristotelian theory is true to ancient drama analysis.

5.3 Answering the problems

Therefore, where the tragedy, *The Persians* by Aeschylus, cannot be understood in terms of later interpretations of Aristotelian drama theory, the criteria mentioned in the *Poetics* is still a most useful tool. Where the play does not conform to the requirements for the tragic hero, character, plot nor structure a comparison between more ancient witnesses helps reconstruct a plausible drama theory applicable to Aeschylus, which is sufficiently universal in nature to encompass Aristotelian theory. Tragedy is found to be a tradition that has many facets to it.

The second identified problem relates to the nature of the tragedy. It is concluded that the play uses history as an instrument, and has modified it for its own purposes. To the first audience *The Persians* was real, not because of its historic correctness, which it is not, but because of the way it was presented, addressing issues of the day.

The third problem this study investigates, is how to appreciate the emphasis on the names of the enemy. Not one name of a Greek is mentioned - but references to Greek islands abound. The play is orientated towards Greek religious experience. The names of the enemy soldiers are Hellenised in their pronunciation and form compounded Greek adjectives. They contribute to the tragedy's impact, sounding at once foreign and noting a cord of differing significance. The names help in building the tragedy's pathos in conjunction with the reference to the Greek islands. The reaction to the names determines the mood.

Lastly, the historicity of the names is not disputed. It is contended that they take on a further significance in terms of their etymological potential, as expressed in their dramatic adaptation as compounded Greek adjectives. Aeschylus thus chose the names carefully and places them strategically to generate what is known as Greek balance. The reaction evoked from the audience is thus controlled. They applauded, and it was suggested that *The Persians* be preserved, in written format, for later generations also to appreciate.

5.4 The way forward

In conclusion several areas for further research sprouting from this study can be identified: a comparison in the Homeric and Aristotelian Legal systems to better

understand divine justice and justice in general in Greek tragedy; a differentiation between oratory and rhetoric skills in Greek tragedy; a close study of the various lamenting “sounds” in *The Persians*; a contextualisation of the various Heraclitian fragments traced in the tragedies of Aeschylus; a more in-depth study of the various themes in *The Persians*; rereading Aristotle’s *Poetics* in relation to his metaphysics, ethics and politics and to Plato, especially considering the term “elevated”; differentiating between semantic-linguistic, philosophical-esthetical and practical art appreciation of a tragedy; time in *The Persians*; a study of the messengers in the play; a study of the different stages: on-stage, off-stage and meta-stage.

Where the name clusters and use of names in *The Persians* are found to contribute significantly to appreciating the play’s historical and dramatological aspects, this study has served to open the way to further study in Greek tragedy.