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R. P. WINNINGTON-INGRAM

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University of London (King's College)*

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TO MY WIFE

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PREFACE

In this book I have assembled most of my previously published work on Aeschylus – and have added to it. All the extant tragedies are covered, and I trust that what emerges, from the old and the new taken together, is a fairly comprehensive interpretation of Aeschylean tragedy as it touches the god-given destinies of individual, family and city, and of the whole human race. The core of the book consists of five chapters on *Oresteia*, where alone we encounter at its height the majesty of the poet's art and the profundity of his thought. But there was a problem here. Chapters 5–8 all deal with distinct and, to some extent, separable themes; and it seemed desirable that in each case the full evidence and argument, without need of constant cross-reference, should be before the reader; the texture of the trilogy being, however, so close, some repetition was unavoidable; I have endeavoured to reduce it to the minimum.

The bibliography of Aeschylus is vast, but fairly accessible; and I have sometimes referred to works which are strong in this line. (*The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, Vol. 1, will include an extensive bibliography.) I have myself made no attempt at a comprehensive or well balanced list: my Bibliography of Short Titles has a strictly practical aim, being limited to works which are referred to on a number of occasions. I have made one exception: there has been such a proliferation of books and articles dealing with *Septem* (and the role of Eteocles) that it seemed more convenient to the reader, in chapter 2, to retain and update the existing bibliographical note from *Yale Classical Studies* rather than scatter the references in a general list. In the text, the reader will observe that, in a controversial field, space is only given to the exposition and discussion of variant interpretations where this is directly relevant to my argument: otherwise the book would have been much longer and not, I fancy, more

useful. As in my recent book on Sophocles, Greek – untranslated or unparaphrased – has been kept out of the text so far as possible, in the hope that the book may be of interest to some Greek-less readers.

My debts are manifold but not always easy to define. My love of Aeschylus goes back to the early 1920s, when in the Sixth Form at Clifton I read *Agamemnon* with that gifted teacher C.F. Taylor and by him was introduced to a great tradition of Aeschylean interpretation, that of Walter Headlam; and I share the debt we all owe to my old friend and contemporary George Thomson for the publication and continuation of Headlam's work. The 1930s were for me, where Aeschylus is concerned, a period of continuous excitement which led to prototypes of chapters 1, 6 and 7. After the Second World War came important works by Reinhardt, Solmsen and Kitto, and Fraenkel's great edition of *Agamemnon*, which resumed with massive scholarship a long tradition of work on Aeschylus and added his own insights, sometimes fallible but often acute. Fraenkel in Oxford and Page in Cambridge were potent influences. From the quiet seclusion of the metropolis it was possible to view the work of these two outstanding scholars with some detachment, absorbing here and rejecting there. It is partly no doubt to their influence that we owe the welcome efflorescence of Aeschylus studies in this country in the work of Garvie, Dawe, Taplin, Griffith and other younger Aeschyleans, among whom I mention with sadness the late Colin Macleod. The flow of valuable work continues, and there are recent publications of which I have been unable to take account in this book.

For permission to reprint published articles I am grateful to the Council of the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies, to the Director of the University of London Institute of Classical Studies, to the Classical Journals Board and the Oxford University Press. I wish to thank a number of friends for their encouragement and for help of various kinds: Mrs P.E. Easterling, Dr Oliver Taplin, Mr Ewen Bowie, and especially Mr Edward Whittle, who performed the ultimate service of reading my proofs. In the Press, I am greatly indebted to the skill and consideration of Ms Pauline Hire and Ms Susan Moore.

When friendly reviewers of my *Sophocles* used the term 'old-fashioned' of my critical approach, it was not, I fancy, in disparagement. Of course all authors like to think that their work is, if anything, in advance of its time, but there is one respect in which I am bound to admit the soft impeachment. Towards more fashionable lines of interpretation I have no hostility in principle, but merely a certain reserve (due partly to ignorance)

and a strong conviction that the possibilities of a more conventional approach are by no means exhausted; that it is still possible to say helpful things about society without being a Marxist, about sex without being a Freudian, and about structure without being a 'structuralist'. Indeed the more one is concerned with structure in the sense of form, the further 'structures' seem to retreat into their subliminal fastnesses. For structure is something imposed by the artist, deliberately, upon his material; and the greater the rational control, the more sense it makes to ask what the artist 'meant'; and, with a poet and dramatist, patiently to study his text in the hope of discovering what he 'meant'. 'Polysemic' interpretation may be all very well in certain fields of criticism, but in the case of the Greek tragedians, who combined an unrivalled power in the depiction and evocation of emotion with a strong rationality, it may be little better than evasion of choice. Literary criticism need not end, but should begin, with the attempt – desperate though it may be – to enter into the mind of the author. Such an attempt is made in this book.

London, February 1983

R. P. WINNINGTON-INGRAM

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