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978-0-521-87974-3 - An Introduction to Greek Tragedy  
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## AN INTRODUCTION TO GREEK TRAGEDY

This book provides a brief and accessible introduction to Greek tragedy for students and general readers alike. Whether readers are studying Greek culture, performing a Greek tragedy, or simply interested in reading a Greek play, this book will help them to understand and enjoy this challenging and rewarding genre. *An Introduction to Greek Tragedy* provides background information; helps readers appreciate, enjoy, and engage with the plays themselves; and gives them an idea of the important questions in current scholarship on tragedy. Ruth Scodel seeks to dispel misleading assumptions about tragedy, stressing how open the plays are to different interpretations and reactions. In addition to general background, the book includes chapters on specific plays, both the most familiar titles and some lesser-known plays – *Persians*, *Helen*, and *Orestes* – in order to convey the variety that the tragedies offer readers.

Ruth Scodel is currently D. R. Shackleton Bailey Collegiate Professor of Greek and Latin in the Department of Classical Studies at the University of Michigan. Her most recent books are *Epic Facework: Self-Presentation and Social Interaction in Homer* (2008) and *Whither Quo Vadis? Sienkiewicz's Novel in Film and Television* (2008). She is also the author of numerous articles on Greek literature.

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## P R E F A C E

This book is intended for speakers of English who want or need to know about Greek tragedy. It tries to perform several jobs: to provide background information about Greek tragedy; to help its readers appreciate, enjoy, and understand the plays themselves; and to give readers an idea of what questions professional scholars have been asking about tragedy. It also seeks to dispel assumptions about tragedy that seem still to be standard in high schools. I deliberately chose to write chapters about some of the tragedies that are most familiar but also a few that are less well known – *Persians*, *Helen*, and *Orestes* – in order to provide a broader sense of what a tragedy can be.

I have tried to be honest. There are many scholarly debates about tragedy. Where I have strong views, I have put them forward – the opportunity to express them was my main inducement to write the book – but I hope I have not been unfair to those who disagree. At the end of each chapter is a brief section of “Sources and Suggestions.” The “Suggestions” are suggestions for further reading. I added “Sources” because I have also used this space to locate what I have said in ongoing controversies where I thought it would help a reader to place my views on the large continuum.

Not everything I cite in order to be honest will be accessible to the Greekless reader, but I tried to distinguish such references from those that readers are likely to want to pursue. I have tried to refer to works in English that do not quote untranslated Greek, but I have occasionally broken this rule to clarify an influence or to show with whom I am debating. The list of “Works Cited” includes several collections of

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articles, and I have not listed the individual articles separately there, but I do cite them with author's name in "Sources and Suggestions," with information about the original publication if the article was originally published in a journal. Sometimes, the original publication did not translate Greek, but since many such articles are available online through libraries (for example, in JSTOR), I gave these references so that the reader, referring to a translation as needed, can read them even without access to the reprint.

I have also, occasionally, mentioned that the text is uncertain, though I have not discussed textual issues or pointed to every problem. This, again, is a form of honesty. A translator usually had to decide what the Greek should be and then translate it; sometimes the translator can add notes that explain where there have been difficult decisions. But often these decisions are invisible, and I want my readers to realize that we do not always know what the poets actually wrote. Throughout, I have assumed that my readers are intelligent people who want both information and ideas that will help provoke their own responses.

Translations are my own and have no claims to convey the glories of the Greek. I have not recommended translations, because different versions are good for different purposes, and because new ones appear so often that my advice would be quickly dated. I have generally used the Latin forms of Greek names, although this is not fashionable, because they look a little more familiar, and tragedy is hard enough.

There is an immense scholarly literature about tragedy. I have not come remotely close to reading as much as I should have, and I have read a great deal. In this book, along with the bias toward English, I have introduced a strong bias toward recent work, especially because the nonspecialist is likely to find it hard to distinguish what is still valid from what more recent research has shown to be false. Still, although some older work is truly outdated, much is not, and I hope my readers will not imagine that valuable contributions to the understanding of Greek tragedy only began in the 1970s.