

EDITORIAL

Although the Classics are in a beleaguered state all over the world, there are encouraging signs that classical literature still has an enduring appeal. I mention two very different examples which serve to confirm this statement.

At the conference of the Classical Association held at the University of the Witwatersrand in January the main theme was "Health and disease in the Greco-Roman world", and it was amazing to see how many papers linked up with this theme. It was also remarkable that no less than four medical specialists read papers at the conference. Prof. M. Henneberg and Mrs. R.J. Henneberg discussed the health status and the dental health of Metaponto. Prof. W. Hift maintained that Heracles' attack of madness in Euripides' tragedy was really an epileptic fit, and Dr. I.J.M. Venter spoke on the Greek medical tradition. This proves that among scientists there is a greater interest in the Classics than is commonly assumed.

My second example comes from a very interesting article by Rainer Carle, "Greek tragedy's part on the Indonesian stage", published in *The dramatic touch of difference. Theatre, own and foreign* ed. by E. Fischer-Lichte, J. Riley and M. Gissenwahrer, (Tübingen, 1990). He thinks that Greek tragedy can play a remarkable role in Indonesian spoken drama which aims at the "representation of an enlarged frame of mind for the benefit of a new personality in the polis". To illustrate this he refers especially to the work of Rendra, the leading playwright and producer in Indonesia, who has already directed Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* for the third time, in addition to productions of the *Oedipus at Colonus* and the *Antigone*. Rendra's evaluation of the *Oedipus Rex* is significant. "The question of fate, and the attitude towards fate in our culture, is dealt with mystically. Sophocles on the other hand treats it philosophically, is objectively judgemental". Greek tragedy in his opinion therefore offers the idea of doing things according to reason and so helps to overcome the excess of irrational mysticism. In Sophocles' *Antigone* Carle also sees an example for Indonesia. Ismene acts as a Javanese person prefers to act, avoiding conflict and showing too much respect for the hierarchical order. Antigone, on the other hand, fulfills the demands of her conscience. "The polis needs such enlightened citizens".

Carle's conclusions are worth quoting in full:

"Greek tragedy in multi-ethnic Indonesia

- proposes concepts of given and needed essentials of the new citizen's mentality,
- intra-ethnically encourages the reconciliation of the historical faults of one's own cultural past in order to consider its where-from and where-to,
- encourages the narrowing of the distance between cultures within the national house by consideration of cultural property held in common. (Greek tragedy thus works here as an exemplary blueprint of an imaginable forum for much demanded inter-ethnic meeting and exchange),
- likewise provides patterns to symbolize a common 'nomological substructure' (Max Weber) considered necessary as complement to the mere unrooted values of Western globalism,
- recovers the statement of the so-called '1945 generation' of revolutionary artists: 'We are the true heirs of world culture, and we must perpetuate this culture in our own way'. Greek tragedy both binds with world culture and gives support to the fight for cultural autonomy."

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