

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA  
THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

Final Examination of  
**LAURA PAULINE JEPSEN**

B.A., State University of Iowa, 1929  
M.A., State University of Iowa, 1936

for the Degree of  
**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**COMMITTEE IN CHARGE**

Associate Professor Pitcher  
Associate Professor White  
Assistant Professor Baker  
Professor Maxwell  
Associate Professor Morton  
Assistant Professor Nybakken  
Assistant Professor Paulsen

House Chamber, Old Capitol

Monday, July 30, 1945

10:00 A.M.

## SUMMARY OF DISSERTATION

### ETHOS IN CLASSICAL AND SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY

This dissertation is a comparative study of *ethos* in the works of the most noted tragedians of three epochs, classical Greece, Senecan Rome and Elizabethan England. *Ethos*, moral character based on moral choice, is studied at its culmination in representative plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Seneca, and Shakespeare. The historical background is given only in so far as it is necessary to clarify certain ethical concepts; not for the purpose of asserting indebtedness of an author to his predecessor. The relationship of the Greeks and Seneca to Shakespeare is regarded as analogy rather than as influence.

The *Oresteia*, Aeschylus' most mature work, reveals in the trilogy a growing conception of man's responsibility for error, although Aeschylus' main emphasis is upon a moral governance of the world which ultimately punishes the guilty and exonerates the innocent. The evolution of Aeschylus' idea of *ethos* culminates in the third play of the trilogy in the demand that not only the deed but also the intention of the doer be taken into consideration and distinction made between voluntary and involuntary error.

Sophocles turned from the theme of revenge and inevitable retribution to an emphasis on the nobility of human nature encountering insuperable odds. Instead of basing his theory of tragedy upon unerring divine justice, Sophocles conceived of a poetic irony based upon a perception of the discrepancy between man's suffering and his deserts.

Euripides, in his three dramas which may most aptly be called tragedies, stressed the pathos of human suffering at the hands of capricious divinities. Euripides' characters, admirable though they sometimes are, are not able to cope with uncertain circumstances and are overwhelmed by undeserved disaster. Euripides, like Aeschylus, criticizes divine intervention, but unlike Aeschylus, Euripides emphasizes the injustice of undeserved suffering.

Since this dissertation is an attempt to relate ideas of *ethos* of several dramatists, in so far as the religious and philosophic background permits, the Senecan tragedies chosen for discussion are tragedies most comparable to those tragedies of Shakespeare based upon revenge and those based upon renunciation. Seneca's *Hercules Oetaeus* represents the Senecan conception of the stoic hero, later embodied in Shakespearean tragedy based upon Plutarch, and Seneca's *Thyestes* with its theme of revenge offers an analogy to other tragedies of Shakespeare based upon that theme.

Shakespeare's ideas of *ethos* are discussed with relation to the Greek and the Roman tragedies. Analogies are found between *Hippolytus* and *Romeo and Juliet*, between the Oedipus plays and *Othello*, and between *Hercules Oetaeus* and *Julius Caesar*. The conclusion expresses briefly the idea of *ethos* of each dramatist, and his contribution to such an emerging conception.

## BIOGRAPHICAL ITEMS

Born: October 30, 1907, Moneta, Iowa

Undergraduate Study: State University of Iowa, 1925-1929

Graduate Study: State University of Iowa, 1930-1931, summers, 1936, 1939, 1940, 1941, 1943-1945; St. Ambrose College, spring semester, 1937; Harvard University, summer, 1938; College of William and Mary, summer 1942

Scholastic and Professional Experience: Substitute teacher at Davenport, Iowa, junior high schools, 1931-1937; Instructor at Maquoketa, Iowa, high school and junior college, 1937-1939; Instructor at Rock Falls, Illinois, high school, 1939-1942; Instructor at Northrop Collegiate School, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1942-1943

Membership in Scholastic and Professional Societies: Eta Sigma Phi

## PUBLICATIONS

"Hope Glenn," *Palimpsest*, January, 1934.

"If Writers Were Really Honest," *Saturday Review of Literature*, March 11, 1944.

Feature stories in: *The Omaha World-Herald*, *The Des Moines Sunday Register*, *The Davenport Democrat*, *The Virginia Gazette*.

In preparation: Latin workbook, correlated with first-year Jenkins-Wagener Latin textbook.

## FIELDS OF GRADUATE STUDY

### *Major Subject: English*

English before 1600 (Craig)

English literature of the seventeenth century (Craig)

English literature of the eighteenth century (Craig,  
Thompson, Warren)

English literature of the nineteenth century (Thompson)

Shakespeare's tragedies (Craig)

Milton (Thompson)

Modern poetry (Hillyer)

Playwriting (John Mason Brown)

### *Minor Subjects: Related Studies*

Literary criticism (Foerster, Pitcher)

Tragedy (Pitcher)

Greek tragedy (Ruth Martin Brown)

Graeco-Roman religion (Ruth Martin Brown)

History of philosophy (Martin)

Religions of the world (Manry)

Greek art (Flickinger)

Seneca (Miller)