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# Tragedy in Athens: Performance Space and Theatrical Meaning

*David Wiles*

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## TRAGEDY IN ATHENS



*Performance space and  
theatrical meaning*

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**David Wiles : Tragedy in Athens: Performance Space and Theatrical Meaning** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Tragedy in Athens: Performance Space and Theatrical Meaning:

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Best critical tool for unlocking tragedy so far written By Thomas De Voe Worthen First let me state that this book is NOT for a person untutored in Greek tragedy. You have to know the plays well to begin to fathom the exquisite sense Mr. Wiles' analysis lends to an often mysterious performance-art form of which we have remaining only text. That done, I will content myself and the discerning reader with a single extended quote: "The Greek spectator did not leave his real physical environment behind and through his imagination

somehow enter into a fictional universe where all spatial relationships are relative and the dramatic action is a closed structure. Fellow spectators were inescapably part of his visual field. So was the sun. His sense of absolute rather than relative space depended, above all, on the sense of the east, the direction of the sunrise which was near enough due east at the spring equinox when the City Dionysia took place. The temple of Dionysus and sacrificial rituals in the sanctuary faced east in accordance with standard Greek practice."From this resolution the author takes up in detail issues, sometimes controversial sometimes unexplored, drawn from scenes from almost every play in the corpus of Greek tragedy. In an amazingly learned tour de force he shows how the space of performance was organized along dual axes: up-down, east-west, inside-outside. The audience was at once outside and inside the performance.

This book examines the performance of Greek tragedy in the classical Athenian theatre. Whilst post structuralist criticism of Greek tragedy has tended to focus on the literary text, the analysis of stagecraft and the theatre has been markedly conservative in its methodology. David Wiles corrects that balance, exploring the performance of tragedy as a spatial practice specific to Athenian culture, at once religious and political. Athenian conceptions of space were quite unlike those of the modern world. After reviewing controversies and archaeological data regarding the fifth-century performance space, Wiles turns to the chorus and shows how dance mapped out the space for the purposes of any given play. The book shows how the performance as a whole was organised and, through informative diagrams and accessible analyses, Wiles brings the theatre of Greek tragedy to life.