

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

PHILIP WHALEY HARSH (1905 – 1960)

The death of Philip Whaley Harsh on August 15, 1960, represents a sad loss to both classical scholarship and Stanford University.

His career was distinguished, and characterized by a remarkable singleness of aim. Born in Nashville, Tennessee, he, like many Southerners, came north for his education; first to Wayland Academy in Wisconsin; then to the University of Chicago where he secured his A.B. in 1928, his A.M. in 1930 and his Ph.D. in 1933. At Chicago, Phil Harsh became a classicist and indeed acquired that interest in Plautus, in Latin metric and in the Greek drama which lasted throughout his life. To the teaching of such men as Buck, Beeson, Ullman, Prescott and Shorey - the men of the Chicago Classical Department in its Augustan age -- he responded in his characteristically modest, painstaking and original way, quickly winning both admiration and respect. Prescott was his particular mentor and inspiration and it was under Prescott's direction that he wrote his Ph.D. thesis on "Dramatic Preparation in Roman Comedy." In this is to be found that special combination of meticulous accuracy and original insight which was to be the hallmark of all of his later work: other men have been as great masters of detail; other men have been as capable of broads general views; few have been both to anything like the same degree.

Phil Harsh wrote, beside his doctoral dissertation, an interesting work on the insulae, or apartment houses of Ostia (fruit of a Fellowship at the American Academy of Rome) and two books on the drama: A Handbook Of Classical Drama (1944) and Iambic Words and Regard for Accent in Plautus (1950). Both were published by the Stanford Press. The first is still the best general survey of the entire classical drama. It gives the facts and the state of scholarly opinion on each play with an accuracy and completeness as yet unequalled in any similar work. But in it also are to be found his own views, set forth with great modesty but with a soundness of Judgment that in many cases almost imposes assent. His more specialized monograph on Plautine metric and accent was a pioneer work in a most difficult fields yet it has gained wide support among his colleagues.

Toward the end of his life, he continued his work on early Latin metric (indeed reviewing the whole field in a meticulously complete monograph in Lustrum) and in Greek and Latin comedy (spending his last working summer in preparing a "path-opening" review of the newly-discovered papyrus of Menandex's Dyscolus); but he also found time to write two brilliant articles (in many ways his best and most original work) on Sophocles' Oedipus Rex and Philoctetes (the galleys of the latter arrived only two weeks before his death). Here his loss will be most felt, for he had it in him to write a book on Sophocles such as few other scholars could or will produce.

He had taught at Allegheny and Iowa State Teachers Colleges and at the Universities of West Virginia and Oklahoma before coming to Stanford in 1937 where he became full professor in 1945 and was head of his department from 1953-1958. He also did some summer teaching,

notably as Visiting Lecturer at Harvard in 1946. As a teacher he showed the same qualities that he revealed in his writing: accuracy humor, and insight, modesty and authoritative command of his subject. His numerous professional honors (he had been e.g. President of the Classical Society of the American Academy in Rome, of the Philological Association of the Pacific Coast, an Associate Editor of Classical Philology) testify to the respect in which he was held by his colleagues. He was married twice, to Virginia Wenner in 1941 and to Elizabeth Etienne Usigli in 1958, and left three children: Virginia, Philip and Marjorie.

Phil Harsh belonged and belongs to the very small group of authentic scholars of the Humanities. No one, certainly who has ever been connected with Stanford, stands above him in this respect. But he will be missed also and greatly as a teacher and as a man.

Brooks Otis, Chairman
George Sensabaugh
Joseph Oliphant