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P. E. EASTERLING

From repertoire to canon

This is a chapter about change: the complex and largely irrecoverable process whereby Athenian tragedy transformed itself into an international art-form which became familiar and influential throughout the Greek-speaking world, was translated and imitated by Roman playwrights, mutated into various types of balletic and operatic performance, and as a select corpus of classical texts helped to shape the educational system, and inform the culture, of later antiquity. The small group of plays that survived into the Byzantine period and beyond have of course had a continuing history of reception, which in recent times has once more become a history of performance (see Chs. 10–12 below). But even for the history of tragedy in the ancient world, the range of space and time covered is too vast, the evidence too diverse and uneven, and the phenomenon itself too elusive for a comprehensive account of this momentous process to be written.[1] As one element in what became an elaborate entertainment industry, tragedy cannot easily be studied in isolation from other dramatic media: in terms of performance and organisation it needs to be considered alongside comedy and (increasingly) alongside musical performance and pantomime. And since the language and iconography of theatre in general invaded the life of later antiquity in innumerable ways, its deeper cultural influence is to be found almost anywhere one cares to look.

The best approach, perhaps, is to pick out some examples that will illustrate trends or at least suggest tendencies. The period of interest – between the dates of our latest surviving plays (last decade of the fifth century BC)[2] and the end of pagan antiquity[3] – is an unmanageably long

[1] For important surveys of different types of evidence see Green (1994) and Csapo & Slater (1995).

[2] The two plays transmitted from later times are *Rhesus*, traditionally attributed to Euripides but likely to date from the fourth century (see Fraenkel (1965) reviewing Ritchie (1964)), and the *Exagoge* of Ezekiel, a Hellenistic Jewish version of a tragedy on the story of Moses.

[3] Theatre as such had a longer life still: see Müller (1909) for the period between Constantine and Justinian.

one. Not surprisingly, we have to deal with changes of location, funding, organisation, artistic form, performance and ideology, but from the beginning to the end of this long period it is probably safe to assume that mention of a title like *Medea* or *Agamemnon* would prompt generic expectations that would have at least something in common. The terms 'tragedy' and 'tragic' may have been many times redefined, as the form itself went through progressive transformations, but they never disappeared from Greek or Latin usage, and certain stories, along with a certain stylistic range, both verbal and iconographic,[4] could be identified as belonging to this artistic domain. The ability to recognise such signals was no doubt one of the identifying features of Graeco-Roman culture; the presence of tragedians among the canonical 'best authors' is further proof that tragedy went on being important.

For the modern interpreter the picture is badly distorted by the almost total loss of play texts from later than the fifth century BC.[5] Everything we know about the Attic theatre down to the replacement of the democracy by Macedonian-influenced oligarchy in 322 suggests that the fourth century was a period of great dramatic activity and productivity. Very large sums continued to be spent, and valuable prestige to be won, by *chorēgoi* sponsoring events at the dramatic festivals, and there was no shortage of poets wishing to compete or winning favour with audiences. Some of them were famous enough to be mentioned by Aristotle in the same breath as the great 'classic' tragedians of the fifth century, and some of their works went on being copied and replayed in later generations.[6] Scholars have been too ready to take Aristophanes literally when at *Frogs* 71–2 (405 BC) he claims that all the good tragic poets are dead. If tragedy had simply 'wilted' at that stage, it would be much harder to explain the continuing importance attached to it in the fourth century,[7] and indeed later: competitions for new plays went on being organised throughout the Hellenistic period (with a single official, the *agōnothetēs*, rather than *chorēgoi* in charge after some time between 318 and 307 BC).[8] It is true that the fourth century was also

[4] Cf. Green (1994), esp. ch. 5, on the iconography of tragic and comic masks and its range of symbolic significance.

[5] There is no shortage of brief quotations (see *TrGF*) but what is missing is complete plays; New Comedy has been better served by papyrus finds.

[6] Astydamas' *Alcmeon*, Carcinus' *Thyestes*, and Theodectes' *Lynceus* and *Tydeus* are all mentioned in the *Poetics*. Cf. Xanthakis-Karamanos (1980) 18–20; p. 216 below on Astydamas. The inscription from Tegea mentioned below (n. 37) records third-century revivals of plays by Archestratus and Chaeremon as well as by Euripides.

[7] Cf. Easterling (1993a); 'wilting' is borrowed from Green (1994) 5, but later (50–1) he gives good evidence for thinking that scholars underestimate the popularity of fourth-century tragedy.

[8] See Pickard-Cambridge (1988) 91–3; Csapo & Slater (1995) 143, 156–7.

the time when the development of a 'classic' repertoire was given its most influential impetus, and there does seem to have been a significant shift in perceptions, reflected in the fact that remembrance of the great traditions of the past was now formally institutionalised. It may not be an exaggeration to suggest that the single most important date in the history of fourth-century tragedy was 386, the year when an official contest in revived 'old' plays was instituted at the City Dionysia, and the individuals responsible for the mounting of these productions were the tragic actors themselves (*tragōidoi*).[9] But the actors' interest in replaying old masterpieces need not be taken as a sign of artistic fatigue: it may rather be the confirmation of an important trend towards the formation of a repertoire.

This was a development, after all, of a habit that had already been establishing itself at the dramatic festivals in the demes of Attica, the Rural Dionysia,[10] and by the end of the fifth century it would not be surprising if actors were being invited to take successful productions to other cities. Other cities were certainly extremely interested in sharing the Athenian experience, as we know from the evidence for where playwrights and actors came from,[11] not to mention the vase-paintings showing scenes from drama, or the theatres that were built outside Attica, in the fourth century.[12]

That the Athenians were eager to keep their own festivals distinctively Athenian is shown by legislation forbidding non-citizens to perform as chorusmen or to serve (at the City Dionysia, at any rate) as *chorēgoi*.[13] But there was no ban on foreign playwrights or actors, and outside Athens the choregic system was not the only way of putting on shows: in the fifth century the tyrant Hiero of Syracuse had invited Aeschylus to compose plays for festivals under his patronage, and the same arrangement must have applied when Euripides wrote the *Archelaus* for the King of Macedon.[14] Any individual or group that could find the resources could invite a poet or artist to accept a commission, and if the system worked for lyric poets and sculptors why not for dramatists and actor-directors? Given the relative ease of travel and communications between the Greek-speaking communities, the opportunities opening up for enterprising leading actors

[9] Evidence in *TrGF* I (DID A I 201).

[10] Evidence in Pickard-Cambridge (1988) 42–56; Whitehead (1986a) 212–22.

[11] Playwrights from outside Athens: cf. Ch. 1 p. 4 above; for actors see Ghiron-Bistagne (1976) 306–64; Stephanis (1988).

[12] See Taplin (1993), esp. 1–39; Green (1994) ch. 3 and (1995).

[13] See MacDowell (1985); Csapo & Slater (1995) 351–2, 358–9. This suggests that there were other centres in which such performance skills were developing.

[14] Cf. Easterling (1994).

were immense, and the power of the theatre to influence mass audiences must have been a strong element in its appeal.[15]

A fragment of one of the most valuable inscriptions recording Athenian theatrical history, the so-called *didaskaliai*, which happens to survive for the years 341–339, can be used to illuminate some of the important trends of the times.[16] From what survives we can see that the pattern in the mid-fourth century was to list the year (by Eponymous Archon), and to give details as follows: first a satyr play by author and title, then the same information for an old tragedy, with the addition of the actor who put it on, then the three poets who competed with new tragedies, giving their names, the titles of their plays, and the names of the protagonists who acted in them, concluding with the name of the winner of the prize for the best actor. Although many lines of the text are preserved only in part, scholars have been able to supply some of the missing names from other sources.

Here is the restored text for the years 341 and 340 (the text for 339 is much more damaged):

341 [The *archōn*'s name and the record of the satyr play are missing; the *archōn* is known to have been Sosigenes.]
With old <tragedy>: Neoptolemus with *Iphigeneia* of Euripides

Poet <victor>: Astydamas	
with *Achilles*	Thettalus acted
with *Athamas*	Neoptolemus acted
with *Antigone*	Athenodorus acted
Euaretus second	
with *Teucer*	Athenodorus acted
with *Achilles*	Thettalus acted
with [title missing]	Neoptolemus acted
Aphareus third	
with *Peliades*	Neoptolemus acted
with *Orestes*	Athenodorus acted
with *Auge*	Thettalus acted

Actor: Neoptolemus was victorious

340 In the archonship of Nicomachus
With satyr <play>: Timocles with *Lycurgus*
With old <tragedy>: Neoptolemus with *Orestes* of Euripides

[15] Cf. ps.-Plato, *Minos* 320f, in which tragedy is described as the branch of poetry 'most delightful to the mass of the people and most powerful in its appeal to the emotions' (*dēmoterpestaton* and *psuchagōgikōtaton*).

[16] For the whole inscription (*IG* II^2 2319–23) see Pickard-Cambridge (1988) 107–20; Csapo & Slater (1995) 41–2.

Poet <victor>: Astydamas	
with *Parthenopaeus*	Thettalus acted
with *Lycaon*	Neoptolemus acted
Timocles [or Philocles?] second	
with *Phrixus*	Thettalus acted
with *Oedipus*	Neoptolemus acted
Euaretus third	
with *Alcmeon*	Thettalus acted
with [title missing]	Neoptolemus acted

Actor: Thettalus was victorious

This is a richly informative inscription, though we are not always certain how to interpret its implications. First, it clarifies the programme of events. Evidently by the mid-fourth century there was no longer a competition for three tragedies plus satyr play as in the early days (see Ch. 2 above, pp. 39–40); the proceedings began with the performance of a single satyr play, which was followed by a revival of an old tragedy put on by one of the leading actors (*tragōidoi*), and then came the competition for new plays. The significance of the new order may have been that it suggested continuity with old tradition while actually offering something different: a satyr play to start with might recall the style and atmosphere of the contests of earlier times, and the revived tragedy would have the appeal of a classic favourite as well as providing a well-tried vehicle for the display of talent.[17] That Euripides was the chosen playwright for the revival (also in 339, though the title is missing) is not surprising for the period; there is plenty of other evidence which shows that he was posthumously one of the most popular and influential of the fifth-century tragedians. The titles of the new tragedies are typical, too, of what we know of fourth-century plays in that they still deal with heroic subjects and (probably) familiar myths. There is certainly no suggestion here that the traditional source-material was felt to be exhausted; but with only the titles surviving we can do no more than guess at the kinds of meanings now given to the old stories.[18]

Secondly, the text brings out the importance of the actors. By this date[19] the competition was so regulated that each playwright was allocated a different actor for each tragedy and thus competed on exactly equal terms

[17] The leading actors who are identified as 'acting a play' are always to be understood (at any rate in the context of the Athenian dramatic contests) along with their supporting troupe, two speaking actors and a number of mutes. Cf. Sifakis (1995).

[18] See Xanthakis-Karamanos (1980) for a review of surviving fragments from fourth-century tragedies.

[19] Sifakis (1995) 17 implies that this had been the practice since the competition for best actor was instituted; see Pickard-Cambridge (1988) 93–5 for a different view.

with his rivals. Actors now played on an international circuit, and it is tempting to guess that the reason why there were three playwrights competing in 340 but only two actors is that a third (Athenodorus?) had broken his contract in favour of a better offer from elsewhere. We know from contemporary evidence (e.g. Aeschines, *Embassy* 19) that fines were levied 'by the cities' on actors who failed to keep to their commitments, a rule which would not have been needed if there had not been serious competition between festival organisers and patrons in different places.

Most of the individuals named in the inscription are interesting for one reason or another. The winning dramatist Astydamas the younger was highly popular in the fourth century (he composed 240 plays and had a good record of first prizes);[20] he is mentioned familiarly by Aristotle and is one of the few tragedians whose dates are recorded on the *Marmor Parium* (*FGrHist* 239). His *Parthenopaeus* in 340 was so much admired that the Athenians put up a statue of the poet in the theatre (which is recorded because it occasioned a notoriously arrogant reaction on his part).[21] Some of his plays seem to have had lasting fame: an 'old' satyr play put on at the Lenaea in 254, the *Hermes*, was probably his, and scholars believe that his *Hector* was still being read in the third and second centuries BC.[22] One very telling fact about Astydamas is that he was a relative of Aeschylus and therefore a member of one of the most remarkable theatrical families in Attic history (his father Astydamas the elder, his grandfather Morsimus, and his great-grandfather Philocles, nephew of Aeschylus, were all tragedians, as was his brother Philocles the younger). Family networks – often (as in this case) including actors as well as dramatists – were an important aspect of the whole system, particularly before it became thoroughly professional, and *xenia* (long-distance guest-friendship) networks, too, must have been significant as poets and actors became more and more mobile, and before they had their own international organisation (for the actors' 'trade union', the Artists of Dionysus, see p. 224 below). It seems very likely that the actual preservation of the scripts of plays depended a great deal on family archives in the early days; the best evidence for this is the fact that dramatists' descendants are known to have competed with productions of plays left unperformed at their relatives' deaths (Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, for example, was put on in 401 by his grandson, about five years after he died).

Of the three actors involved in the events of 341–340, Neoptolemus and Thettalus were especially famous and successful. Star status guaranteed actors invitations from powerful people – to perform, to visit as guests, and to use their speaking skills as diplomats. There was also a great deal of money to be earned: lavish dedications by actors, on a scale normally outside the range of private individuals, are attested by inscriptions.[23] For wealth and glamour actors could now be compared with famous performers of other kinds: athletes, rhapsodes and musicians, who had long been able to count on lucrative commissions and appearances all over the Greek-speaking world.[24]

Neoptolemus, who was responsible for the revivals of Euripidean plays in 341 and 340 and won the prize for best actor in 341, was an incomer to Athens from Scyros[25] – hence, no doubt, his stage name, after the son of Achilles who was brought up on the island – and he must either have been granted Athenian citizenship or at any rate have enjoyed high standing at Athens, where he became extremely wealthy: according to Demosthenes (18.114) he was honoured for his donations when overseer of public works, and he claimed (5.8) that he expected to have to perform further liturgies there. He had enormous popularity as an actor (5.7) and acquired influential friends, particularly Philip of Macedon. Like his colleague Aristodemus of Metapontum, who was actually appointed an ambassador by the Athenians along with Demosthenes and Aeschines, he reported very favourably to the Athenians on Philip's policy towards them after the fall of Olynthus in 348 (Dem. 19.315), and they liked what he said, though Demosthenes saw him as positively injuring Athens by acting as Philip's agent. After the peace settlement in 346 he sold his Athenian property and went to live in Macedonia (Dem. 6.8).[26]

As well as illustrating the scope for actors to acquire wealth and influence along with their fame, some of the stories told about Neoptolemus have great symbolic interest, bringing out the particularly close analogies between theatrical and political power and the way in which drama and life, particularly the lives of famous people, were felt to interact and to shape one another.

[20] He is credited with 15 victories, several of them at the Dionysia and at least one at the Lenaea: we cannot compute the exact number of tragedies involved, but he may have been victorious with *c.* 40. For testimonia on Astydamas see *TrGF* I 60.

[21] The statue base has been found (*TrGF* I 60 T 8b); for his boastful epigram see *TrGF* I 60 T2a and b.

[22] See *TrGF* I 210–14 for the evidence.

[23] Examples in Csapo & Slater (1995) 237–8; cf. Athenaeus 472c for Neoptolemus' dedication of gold-plated cups on the Acropolis.

[24] See Kurke (1991).

[25] Demosthenes 5.6 with schol. 2.

[26] See Ghiron-Bistagne (1976) 156–7, 345 for the ancient sources.

Diodorus' account (16.92–3) of the assassination of Philip in 336 is worth quoting in full:

> Great numbers of people came pouring from all directions to the festival, and the games and the marriage were celebrated at Aegae in Macedonia [Philip's daughter Cleopatra was being married to her maternal uncle, Alexander of Epirus]. Philip was crowned with golden wreaths by individual persons of note and also by most of the important cities, including Athens. When the award of the Athenian crown was announced, the herald ended by saying that if anyone were to plot against Philip and take refuge in Athens he would be liable to extradition. It was as if the routine expression was being used by divine providence to give a sign of the imminent plot against Philip. There were other remarks giving advance warning of the king's death which seemed to be similarly inspired. For example, at the royal banquet Philip ordered the *tragōidos* Neoptolemus, outstanding for his vocal power and popularity, to perform some successful pieces from his repertoire, particularly anything relevant to the campaign against the Persians [Philip had already begun the preparations for this campaign, as elected leader of the Greeks; 89ff.]. Neoptolemus chose a piece which he thought would be taken as appropriate to Philip's crossing [to Asia]; he had in mind to belittle the wealth of the Persian king and suggest that, although now it was notoriously vast, chance could obliterate it one day. This is how he began:
>
> Your thoughts now reach higher than the air
> You dream of farm lands in great plains
> You plan buildings, surpassing the buildings <of the past?>
> Foolishly projecting your life into the future.
> But there is a swift-footed one who captures <travellers>:
> He goes by a dark path
> But suddenly, unseen, he catches up,
> And makes away with the far-reaching hopes
> Of mortal men: he is Hades, source of woe.[27]
>
> He continued with the rest of the song, all of it relating to the same theme. Philip was delighted with what it said and was totally absorbed by the idea of its relevance to the defeat of the Persian king. He also recalled the Pythian oracle,[28] which (he thought) bore a similar meaning to the words quoted by the *tragōidos*.
>
> In due course the drinking was over, and as the games were due to start the following day the crowd hurried to the theatre while it was still dark. At daybreak the procession began. Philip's display was lavish in all its details, including statues of the twelve gods, which were artefacts of outstanding workmanship decorated with dazzlingly rich adornment. Along with these a thirteenth statue was paraded, representing Philip himself in a style befitting a god – so the king displayed himself as a throned companion of the twelve gods.
>
> When the theatre was full Philip came in wearing a white cloak; he had given orders to his bodyguard to stand back and follow at a distance, eager to demonstrate to the public that he was protected by the goodwill of all the Greeks and had no need of a bodyguard. At such a high point in his success, when everyone was praising and congratulating him, the unexpected happened: the revelation of a completely unforeseen plot against the king, a plot that meant death. [Diodorus then interrupts his narrative to sketch in the events that led up to the plot, resuming at 94 with an account of the assassin, Pausanias, rushing at Philip as he entered the theatre unprotected, and stabbing him to death.]

27 Text in *TrGF* II 127; The last three lines are quoted in a slightly different form by Philodemus (*De morte* 4) as 'well known', but the author's name is not given. For textual problems see Gigante (1983) 206–8.

28 Diodorus (16.91) reports Philip's favourable interpretation of the ambiguous oracle.

So Philip, as presenter of a spectacle, playing – in the theatre itself – the role of beloved leader of the Greeks, even the role of a divine power, ultimately becomes the central figure in a new and typically 'tragic' spectacle, the fall of a tyrant. The theatrical emphasis in this narrative is matched by an interest in the way the actor's words, intended by him to have a layer of meaning other than that of their original context and to be heard as a flattering prediction of success for Philip against the Persians, turn out to have another layer again, a true prediction, this time, of an event which the spectators watch instead of a dramatic show, the assassination of their king.

The story seems to have become emblematic of the vulnerability of rulers and the theatrical character of their power. Many centuries later Neoptolemus is quoted in the *Florilegium* of John of Stobi (in a section on the brevity and anxiety of life) as replying to someone who asked what he admired in the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles or Euripides, 'Not anything of theirs, but what he himself had witnessed on a greater stage: Philip in procession at the wedding of his daughter Cleopatra and hailed as thirteenth god, and the next day murdered in the theatre and thrown out' (98.70). When the Emperor Gaius was murdered on leaving the theatre at Rome in AD 41, the story of Philip and Neoptolemus was recalled: according to Suetonius (*Caligula* 57), one of the 'omens' seen in retrospect as marking the approach of his death was the fact that on that very day the pantomime Mnester 'danced the tragedy which the actor Neoptolemus had once acted at the games at which Philip, King of the Macedonians, was killed'. Josephus, writing a generation before Suetonius, has a version which differs in interesting details: for him (*Jewish Antiquities* 19.90–104) the day was the anniversary of Philip's murder (95), and Gaius saw two shows which

entailed the shedding of a great quantity of artificial blood, a mime in which a chieftain was caught and crucified, and a performance by a dancer of 'a drama *Cinyras*, in which Cinyras himself and his daughter Myrrha were killed' (95). By combining these two pieces of evidence scholars have concluded, perhaps too readily, that *Cinyras* was the play put on at Philip's theatrical games at Aegae in 336; but there is no means of telling whether it has any connexion, either with the aria sung by Neoptolemus at the banquet or with the play that he and his troupe would have acted if Philip had not been assassinated.[29] What is interesting here is the way in which theatre and life become metaphors for one another: the words and actions of plays could prefigure (or seem to evaluate) events, and rulers were only as 'real' as the roles played by actors. Philip on the 'greater stage' was playing the part of the thirteenth god, but his fall was more like that of a tragedy tyrant.

There are other questions that these stories help us to explore. The actor becoming more prominent or carrying more weight than the poet – Diodorus names Neoptolemus, but not the author of the piece he performs – this is a trend that Aristotle already mentions in the *Rhetoric* (1403b), and it should not surprise us. Once actors had their own individual repertoires and did not have to rely on the poets chosen for a particular dramatic festival to provide them with new material, there was plenty of scope for change and development. One kind of change was clearly formal: if the actor could be invited to perform at a patron's drinking party as well as in the theatre, and if all he needed was his expertise as a soloist, it becomes easier to understand how the artistic medium could diversify, and how actors could have greater influence over it. Much of the evidence for 'tragedy' in later antiquity is for solo performances of one sort or another: in addition to full-scale productions of plays old and new, with chorusmen and troupes of actors, we hear more and more of solo performances by *tragōidoi*, particularly of sung performances. Here in Diodorus, it is clear from the metre of the passage quoted that Neoptolemus is singing. By the time of Caligula in the first century AD at Rome there is no doubt that 'performing a tragedy' typically meant solo performance either by a singer (*cantor*) or by a dancer (*saltator*, *pantomimus*). Mnester is described as a *pantomimus*: he 'danced (*saltavit*) the tragedy which Neoptolemus had acted (*egerat*)'.[30] Once the performance of the pantomime could be described as 'tragedy', a crucial artistic move had been made, since this was

[29] Csapo & Slater (1995) 235 wrongly attribute to Josephus (94) the remark that Philip was murdered when he was entering the theatre to see a play called *Cinyras*.

[30] Suetonius, *Caligula* 57. This medium seems to have become dominant despite the long and distinguished tradition of full-scale tragedy performance at Rome in the Republican and

an essentially balletic and musical performance in which the soloist danced and mimed the dramatic action while a chorus or musicians provided backing. The common elements between this and traditional tragic drama might be no more than the mythological story and perhaps some features of verbal style.

It thus becomes extremely difficult to be precise when we look at references to performance in later antiquity.[31] But even allowing for great heterogeneity of form we can find something of interest in the continuity of subject matter. One of the reasons, surely, for the persistence of performances based on the stories of Thyestes or Medea or Hector was their potential multivalence: if songs or speeches composed for one dramatic situation could be made to apply tellingly to another, the medium could be used politically, for flattery, for subversion, for both at once, and the close link between theatre and power was not lost on patrons and performers. It is a pity we know nothing about *Cinyras*, except the myth from which it presumably came, the story of a king who was tricked into committing incest with his daughter. (One can see why incest on the part of a ruler might be a good subject for a show in Caligula's time; but in Philip's the marriage, for dynastic reasons, of a niece to her uncle would hardly have raised eyebrows.) Tacitus[32] is full of anecdotes which can be compared with that of Diodorus; but perhaps the best known of all is Plutarch's account of the performance of part of the *Bacchae* (or lyrics from the play) for the Parthian king, with the defeated Crassus' head substituted for Pentheus' (*Crassus* 32–3). The fact that this is most unlikely to be a true story only enhances its significance: it brings out yet again the sense in which drama and life are felt to interconnect. (Cf. Ch. 1, p. 11.)[33]

Plutarch sets the story in the context of celebrations in Armenia marking the engagement of the daughter of Artavasdes the king of Armenia to the son of Hyrodes (Orodes) the king of Parthia, explaining that both these monarchs were familiar with Greek culture, and Artavasdes 'was actually the author of tragedies, speeches, and histories, some of which have been preserved'. He continues, 'At the moment when Crassus' head was brought to the door, the dining tables had just been removed, and an actor of tragedies named Jason, from Tralles, was singing the Agave scene [lit. 'the

Augustan periods: cf. Rawson (1985); Beacham (1991) ch. 5. On pantomime see Kokolakis (1959); Jones (1991).

[31] There is some help to be got from papyri which seem to provide actual scripts for performance. See Turner (1963); Di Gregorio (1976).

[32] See esp. Bartsch (1994) ch. 3 for the interaction between actors and audiences in Republican and Imperial Rome.

[33] See also Polyaenus 7.41. For the motif of the severed head displaced at a banquet see Paul (1991).

things about Agave'] in the *Bacchae* of Euripides.' This is not unlike the context described by Diodorus for Neoptolemus and Philip, but here Plutarch includes a chorus, one of whose members is given the dummy head (i.e. the mask) of Pentheus to hold when the actor picks up Crassus' real one and sings some of Agave's frenzied lines. There is a scuffle over the head when one of the spectators, Pomaxathres, the soldier who killed Crassus, intervenes on hearing the chorus's question, 'Who killed him?' and Agave's response, 'The prize is mine.'[34] Plutarch rounds off the story with a comment that brings out the point, the way in which the life of Crassus mimicked art: 'The king, who was delighted, presented Pomaxathres with the traditional Parthian decorations and gave Jason a talent, and such, it is said, was the finale (*exodion*) with which Crassus' Asiatic command ended, just like a tragedy.'[35]

Plutarch's reference to the dummy head takes us back to the 'artificial blood' mentioned by Josephus and Suetonius in their accounts of the shows preceding the assassination of Caligula (in Suetonius the blood is a special feature only of the supporting mime). There is plenty of other evidence for a more explicit display of violence in Hellenistic and later theatre than in earlier times, which scholars have usually interpreted as sensationalism and therefore as a symptom of artistic decline. But we should allow for the possibility that such changes were perceived as marks of modern sophistication, like ever more ambitious effects in film and television nowadays, and reports of performers who were noted for their brilliant expertise, like the actor Timotheus of Zacynthus who specialised in the role of Ajax falling on his sword[36] or the athlete-actor from Tegea who was admired for his strong-man parts,[37] might even be evidence for theatrical vitality. The ancient sources for the story of post-classical dramatic production, particularly from the imperial period, tend to be influenced by moralists or satirists, and there are real difficulties in trying to capture the style and reception of performances that went under the heading 'tragic' in later antiquity.[38]

A passage from a late pagan author, the sophist Eunapius of Sardis

[34] This is a loose quotation of *Ba.* 1179.

[35] Plutarch's use of theatrical language and motifs is interesting: cf. de Lacy (1952); Mossman (1988); Jones (1991).

[36] See schol. on *Ajax* 864: 'The audience must believe that he falls on his sword, and the actor must be strongly built so as to make them imagine Ajax, as is said of Timotheus of Zacynthus, who so captivated and enthralled the spectators with his acting that they called him Sphageus [the Slayer].' This was the word used by Ajax of his sword (815). For the use of stage swords with retractable blades cf. Achilles Tatius 3.20.

[37] *SIG*³ 1080 (= *TrGF* I DID B 11); cf. Csapo & Slater (1995) 200.

[38] For discussion of different types of evidence see Beacham (1991) ch. 5; Jones (1993); Roueché (1993); Bartsch (1994).

(fourth century AD), might give some sense of what a *tragōidos* might hope his performance would achieve, though this comes out only incidentally, and the larger context of our fragment is unclear.[39] Eunapius tells the story of an unnamed *tragōidos* in the time of Nero, who decided to leave Rome and go on tour because at Rome he was the object of the emperor's professional jealousy. He went 'to display his vocal powers' to half-barbarian audiences, to a city which had a theatre but evidently had not had visits from tragic performers before. At first the spectators were terrified at the sight of him, but he took aside some of the local elite and explained the nature of the mask and the platform-soled boots that increased his height,[40] and then tried another performance. The role he was acting was that of Euripides' Andromeda. This time he gradually accustomed the audience to his vocal range, but the weather was extremely hot, and he suggested they should wait till the cool of the evening. By now, however, they were wildly enthusiastic for him to carry on, and he let himself go in a passionate rendering of his part. 'This untrained audience was unable to respond to most of the features of tragedy: the majesty and grandeur of the language and style, the charm of the metre, the clarity of the character-drawing, most finely and compellingly designed to move the hearer, and in addition they were unfamiliar with the plot, but even stripped of all these advantages he enthralled them with the beauty of his enunciation and his singing.' The story ends with a grotesque scene: a week later the city was hit by an epidemic, and the whole population lay in the streets suffering from violent diarrhoea, 'singing (or 'crying out') as best each one could the melody [presumably of Andromeda's famous monody] without managing a very clear rendering of the words: Andromeda had had a dire effect on them'. As well as telling us something about the aspirations of a performing artist the passage suggests the way in which tragedy might be seen as a defining feature of Greek culture, even if its effects were not always beneficial.

One very important development illustrated by the games at Aegae, as by many other pieces of evidence, is that even as early as the fourth century BC the religious context of drama was changing fast. No difficulty, it seems, was felt in attaching dramatic shows to festivals in honour of other gods than Dionysus or to more personal celebrations. The Macedonian kings were particularly influential here, but there must always have

[39] Eunapius fr. 54 in *Historici graeci minores*. There is a suspiciously similar story in Lucian, *How to Write History* 1, set in 'Abdera at the time of King Lysimachus'; cf. Philostratus, *Vita Apoll.* 5.9, set at 'Ipola' in Baetica, but with no mention in Philostratus' case of *Andromeda* or the epidemic.

[40] For the high boots and exaggeratedly stylised masks of Hellenistic and later theatre see Bieber (1961); Green (1994).

been scope for local variations: the theatre at Syracuse, for example, which goes back to the early fifth century, was in a precinct of Apollo. The Tegean inscription mentioned above (p. 222 and n. 37), which records the victories of the actor who specialised in strong-man roles, illustrates the range of festivals and presiding deities familiar in the third century BC: the Great Dionysia at Athens, the Soteria at Delphi (Apollo), the Ptolemaia at Alexandria (though here the actor was competing as a boxer), the Heraia at Argos, the Naia at Dodona (Zeus), 'and 88 victories at the dramatic contests in the cities, at festivals of Dionysus or whatever other festivals the cities celebrated'.[41] Although the Dionysiac iconography of masks, satyrs and maenads remained definitive for drama in visual terms, the occasions themselves had a far more diverse religious character than in the early days at Athens. This too must have had a profound effect on perceptions.

Yet the Dionysiac connexion always persisted, through a new type of organisation, the exceptionally powerful actors' unions, based in many different centres, which represented the performers' interests wherever they travelled.[42] The name these groups gave themselves was *technītai Dionusou*, which is usually rendered 'Artists of Dionysus', though 'craftsmen' might be more inclusive. Alongside lead actors for tragedy and comedy we find supporting actors and chorusmen, musicians of different kinds, rhapsodes, and also poets, suggesting that professional troupes with their own script-writers were now being formed. These official organisations, with centres in different parts of the Greek world, are well attested from the third century BC onwards by inscriptions which demonstrate the wealth and prestige of the performers and the extraordinary privileges that went with their status. The fact that performance (including tragedy in its different guises) was so elaborately institutionalised at an international level shows just how tenacious its hold was on audiences all over the ancient world; in this sense Dionysus triumphantly transcended the specific context of his cult, in which tragedy had first been generated.

TEXTS

If the process of change in terms of performance was as complex and elaborate as this sketch has tried to suggest, it is hardly conceivable that any complete tragedies from the early days could have survived to be transmitted to the Middle Ages and beyond through the performance tradition alone. Clearly some works acquired canonical status, and out of the thousands of new plays produced from the fifth century onwards a (fluctuating) selection became classics with a book life of their own. The popularity of particular plays must have been influenced by their familiarity in the repertoire, and the demand for texts must often have been related to the demand for revivals, but it is hard to see the transmission of whole plays continuing as it did without the intervention of scholars.[43]

An unbroken history of scholarly interest in tragedy can be traced from the time of Aristotle and his pupils at Athens to the Alexandrian researchers who took over the methodology of the Peripatetics and collected, emended, classified and analysed texts on a heroic scale.[44] These scholars set a pattern of commentary writing which was to be carried on for centuries, giving the plays that were singled out for such attention a much greater chance of long-term survival. There are many things to be learned from the remnants of these commentaries that survive in the marginal scholia of a fair number of the manuscripts of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. Typically these are only a brief sample of notes picked out at different times in late antiquity from much more extensive commentaries, but they help us to understand the process of canon formation, which had been officially recognised in 386 BC (see p. 213 above), showing how 'the ancients' became paradigms of tragic excellence. Even Euripides, who had been much ridiculed, as well as much appreciated, in his own time and was quite often criticised by scholars,[45] was still one of the essentially unassailable masters, and indeed it was he who was more often revived in performance, more often used as a model by later imitators (or Roman translators), and more often quoted, than any other tragic dramatist.

The evidence of the scholia does not stand alone: there are papyrus fragments of passages from new and old plays and of schoolboys' exercises in tragic style, which along with quotations from tragedy in anthologies and rhetorical handbooks make clear how much the educational system itself used and imitated tragic texts. A group of inscriptions from Aphrodisias in Asia Minor, dating from the second century AD and reporting honours given to C. Julius Longianus, a tragic poet, shows that we must allow for repeated cross-fertilisation between performance and the production of texts. One of the inscriptions, a copy of an honorary decree

[41] For festival locations see e.g. Csapo & Slater (1995) 186–206.

[42] See Pickard-Cambridge (1988) ch. 7; Stephanis (1988); Roueché (1993) ch. 4; Csapo & Slater (1995) 239–55, 418. Places especially associated with the Artists were Athens, Corinth, Thespiae, and the island of Teos.

[43] There is a famous piece of evidence for legislation in the fourth century to guard against the wholesale alteration of texts by actors (Plutarch, *Lycurgus* 841f). On interpolation see Hamilton (1974); Csapo & Slater (1995).

[44] See Pfeiffer (1968) and for a brief survey *CHCL* I, ch. 1.

[45] Hostile comments crop up regularly in the scholia; cf. e.g. on *Hec.* 254; *Phoen.* 388.

probably issued at Halicarnassus,[46] includes the following revealing details: Longianus had evidently made a visit to the city in the course of which he had given

> demonstrations of poems of every citizen among us without payment, being both a good man and the best poet of our times.

Bronze statues of Longianus were to be put up

> both in the most notable places of the city and in the precinct of the Muses and in the gymnasium of the ephebes next to the ancient Herodotus; it has also been voted that there should be public presentation of his books in the libraries of our city, so that the young men may be educated in these also, in the same way as in the writings of the ancients. (trans. C. M. Roueché)

If we take this example as a cue to ask questions about the wider impact of Greek tragedy on the culture of antiquity, there is an immensely complex story waiting to be told which can only be adumbrated here under the most provisional headings.[47] The fact that in the Latin-speaking world Greek tragedy had a new lease of life in translation and adaptation is hugely important, both for the culture of Republican Rome, which was deeply influenced by the plays of Ennius and Accius and others, and for the long-term impact of Seneca's tragedies, one of the most significant of all literary legacies. Greek literature of the Roman period, too, shows many traces of the 'theatricalisation' of ancient culture: historians like Diodorus and Plutarch, novel writers like Heliodorus, and essayists like Lucian use the imagery of the theatre, including tragedy, to express views of human experience that they could expect their readers to recognise and share. This intense penetration of the language and literature of antiquity gave tragedy a special imaginative status that did not ultimately depend on performance traditions for its survival. The task of capturing in detail the reverberations of tragedy in later antiquity is one of the most interesting challenges for contemporary critics.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Two recent publications have made the whole field of ancient dramatic history more accessible. These are: (i) Green (1994), which makes systematic use of the visual evidence, such as theatre buildings, vase-paintings, terracottas and mosaics, taking account of their distribution at different periods and in different parts of the Graeco-

[46] For text, discussion and translation see Roueché (1993) 223–7.

[47] See Bibliographical Note for references.

Roman world, and considering the more general contexts in which theatrical iconography was used. This work builds on the evidence set out in T. B. L. Webster, *Monuments Illustrating Tragedy and Satyr Play*, 2nd edn, *BICS* Suppl. 20 (London 1967). Green is also responsible for a detailed bibliographical survey (1989) 7–95 and 273–8. (ii) Csapo & Slater (1995) provides translations, with analysis, discussion and detailed bibliography, of much of the ancient epigraphic and literary evidence for drama, its origins, organisation and performance. This can be used as a companion to Pickard-Cambridge (1988). Further documentation in Mette (1977) and *TrGF* I.

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P. E. EASTERLING
Regius Professor of Greek in the University of Cambridge

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