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CHILDREN IN GREEK TRAGEDY

G.M. Sifakis

The purpose of this paper is to examine the parts assigned to children in the extant Greek tragedies in order to draw a coherent picture of the treatment of children by Sophocles and Euripides (no children seem to have been present in the extant plays of Aeschylus).[1] In what kind of dramatic situations did children appear in tragedy? How and to what extent were they drawn as dramatic characters? Consideration of these questions should precede any attempt to deal with the question (often discussed in the past) of how and by whom the roles and stage business of children were actually managed on the stage. All the above questions are strictly interrelated and can meaningfully be discussed only in the context of Greek tragic conventions, which must be regarded and understood as a system of interdependent and interbalancing rules governing the composition as well as the production of Athenian tragedy.

1. Children in extant plays

In the *Ajax* of Sophocles Eurysakes, the son of Ajax and Tekmessa, who must be less than ten years old, is on stage from line 544 to line 595 and is addressed by Ajax in a long speech; he reappears at line 1168, is bid by Teukros to stay near the body of Ajax, and remains in view of the audience until the end of the play (that is, for about 250 lines).

At the end of *Oedipus Tyrannus* Oedipus is allowed to say farewell to his two daughters. They must be very young, for he says that he would have many things to tell them had they been able to understand him (1511–12). A number of children sit among the suppliants to Oedipus at the beginning of the same play. But neither these children nor Oedipus' daughters say anything.

The suppliant children motif occurs in three plays of Euripides: two suppliant plays proper (*Heracl.*, *Suppl.*) and a third that belongs to a mixed type (*HF*).[2] In the *Heraclidae*, Herakles' sons stay in sight of the audience through most of the play; it is not quite certain when they leave the stage (if at all) but it is possible that they are taken inside the Marathon temple by Alkmene at line 719. In *Hercules* the children of Herakles remain at the altar of Zeus from the beginning of the play until line 338, when they withdraw into the palace with their mother; they reappear at 451 in funeral attire (see 526) and are bid by Herakles to go in again at 622–625. Their bodies are shown on the ekkyklema at 1030. In the *Suppliant Women* the sons of the Argive heroes huddle around Adrastos, in front of the door of the temple of Demeter and Kore at Eleusis (see 104–107) when the play begins, while the mothers of the Seven sit with Aithra, Theseus' mother, in their midst around the altar of Demeter.

There is also a similarity of situation between the opening scenes of the *Heraclidae* and the *Suppliant Women* because Adrastos "looks after the women and boys as Iolaos looks after the sons and daughters of Herakles" (as Webster observes[3]), but the plays develop differently. In the *Suppliant Women* the mothers of the Seven form the chorus of the play, while the boys, the Epigonoi, who are present through most of the play, eventually become involved in the action and form a subsidiary chorus: at line 954 they accompany the bodies of their fathers to the funeral pyre and return at 1113 carrying the funeral urns in order to sing, in alternation with the women of the main chorus, the last choral song of the play (1123–1164).

The subsidiary chorus of boys in the *Suppliant Women* is the only group of children with a singing part in the extant plays of the three tragedians. Other instances in lost plays cannot be claimed with any degree of probability. (However, a subsidiary chorus of boys is encountered in the *Wasps* of Aristophanes.)

The relative dates of the above plays cannot be established with certainty, so we do not know whether Sophocles first used the suppliant children in *Oedipus* (soon after 430 B.C.), or Euripides in the *Heraclidae* (bottom date 424 B.C. but no top date fixed by external evidence). However, it seems likely that Euripides introduced a novelty in the *Suppliant Women* (dated later than the *Heraclidae* on the basis of metrical statistics) by making the children sing as a subsidiary chorus.

Before introducing a subsidiary chorus of boys late in the decade 430–420 Euripides had already given singing parts to single children in *Andromache* (ca. 425 B.C.) and even as early as *Alcestis* (438 B.C.). These children are respectively the sons of Alcestis and Admetos, and Andromache and Neoptolemos – as the child Eurysakes was the son of Tekmessa and Ajax in the play Sophocles named after him, produced probably a few years before *Alcestis*.

Andromache's child is silent throughout the second episode of the play (*Andr.* 309–463) while he is dragged to the stage by Menelaos, witnesses the treachery of the latter, and senses the danger threatening him and his mother; but he alternates with his mother in singing a pair of strophes (501–514, 523–536) at the beginning of the next episode, when Menelaos leads them to their death.

In *Alcestis* the two children enter with Alcestis and Admetos at line 233 and, although they are spoken of and addressed by both parents, remain silent until Alcestis dies (159 lines later, at 392); then one of them (Eumelos, according to the ancient commentators) bursts into a mourning song – two strophes (mostly dochmiac) separated by two iambic trimeters spoken by Admetos.

There are more children in the plays of Euripides – the sons of Polymestor in *Hecuba*, Astyanax in the *Trojan Women*, the children of Medea and Jason in *Medea*[4] – but as they have no speaking parts (except the cries for help of Medea's children that come to be articulated into four iambic lines delivered from behind the scenes, *Med.* 1271 ff.) they are of less interest to this inquiry.

2. The typecasting of children in tragedy

All children in tragedy are in a state of great misfortune, which has struck their parents and thus involves them directly. They are often in great danger and may lose their lives (*Med.*, *Hec.*, *HF*, *Tro.*) or, alternatively, be delivered from calamity by a defender who either appears unexpectedly (S. *Aj.*, E. *Alc.*, *Andr.*) or is appealed to for help (*Heracl.*, *Suppl.*).

All are typecast as helpless persons of very young and tender age (see p. 77 I), whose predicament, as they cling to their mother (or other protector) in fright (p. 77 II), is described and illustrated (by Euripides in particular) by the classic metaphor of the chick taking refuge under the wings of its mother:

> τί μου δέδραξαι χερσὶ κἀντέχῃ πέπλων,
> νεοσσὸς ὡσεὶ πτέρυγας ἐσπίτνων ἐμάς;
>
> Why have you clutched me and cling to my robes
> like a young bird fleeing under my wings?

So Andromache to Astyanax in the *Trojan Women* (750–751).

> ἦ καὶ νεοσσὸν τόνδ' (sc. κτενεῖς), ὑπὸ πτερῶν σπάσας;
>
> Will you kill even this little bird, tearing it from beneath
> my wings?

Andromache to Menelaos in *Andromache* (441). Other passages are quoted at p. 78 III.

Children cannot comprehend fully what is happening about or to them (p. 78 IV), let alone have any responsibility for it (p. 78 V). Yet they are often in grave danger, for in the eyes of their enemies they embody the threat of future vengeance. "It is a great folly", Menelaos declares in *Andromache* (519–522, p. 78 VIb. 1), for instance, "to spare enemies, offspring of your enemies, while you can kill them and remove the fear from your house". Menelaos in *Andromache* and Lykos in *Hercules* (p. 78 VIb. 2) are only restating a belief with general currency in antiquity (see p. 78 VIb. 4). From the opposite point of view, the children embody the hope of revenge for the wrong done to their fathers, and mythology afforded examples of sons who actually grew up and avenged their fathers, Orestes being the most famous. Such a hope is expressed by Ajax in the play of Sophocles and by the Epigonoi themselves in the *Suppliant Women* of Euripides (p. 78 VIa).

3. The language of children

So far there seems nothing out of the ordinary in the conception and typecasting of children in tragedy, or with the language and imagery used to describe their predicament and their relationship to other characters. But a problem arises when we consider that the children themselves, when they speak and refer to their own situation, use precisely the same language and imagery as their elders. It is one thing to have Andromache, for instance, say: "Why have you clutched me and cling to my robes like a young bird fleeing under my wings" (*Tro.* 750–751, p. 78 III.5), and quite another to have the child of Alcestis himself say (*Alc.* 402–403, p. 78 III.1): "*καλοῦμαί σ' ὁ σὸς ποτὶ σοῖσι πίνων στόμασιν νεοσσός*" (I, your little bird, cry out to you and seek your mouth).[5] Andromache's child, in the play named after her, also cries: "*μᾶτερ, μᾶτερ, ἐγὼ δὲ σῇ πτέρυγι συγκαταβαίνω*" (mother, mother, under your wing I am going down with you; 504–505, p. 78 III.3). In fact, in both *Alcestis* and *Andromache,* in the words of the late A.M. Dale, "the child sings the sentiments its elders feel for it".[6] And the same is true of the children in the *Suppliant Women.*

There is little doubt that Grube is wrong in his criticism of Euripides as "not very happy in his presentation of children" because the boy in *Alcestis* "is far too much a miniature adult".[7] The answer lies in the direction to which Dale and P.T. Stevens have pointed, namely that "childishness on the stage, in anything approaching a realistic sense, would be unthinkable within the Greek tragic convention",[8] and that "to blame Euripides [. . .] as 'not very happy in his presentation of children' is to underestimate the conventions of Attic tragedy within which he worked."[9]

4. The question of how children were represented on stage

All this is true, but is not perhaps the whole truth. Another question is an integral part of the same problem and, although discussed many times in the past,[10] has not yet found a definitive answer: how and by whom were children represented on the stage?

The conception and drawing of dramatic characters can hardly be separated from their representation on the stage. This is true even of modern drama, in which the dramatist often relies heavily on the ingenuity of the producer; it is certainly more true of classical drama, in which the playwright was in most cases the producer of his own plays. When therefore Euripides wrote the song for, say, Alcestis' son, he must have known exactly how and by whom it would be performed in the theatre: one of the three main actors, an adult actor of small stature, a real child, or a combination of a child miming the part and one of the actors (or the chorus-men) singing the words from behind the scenes or even from his position before the audience?

These possibilities – and I think they are just about all one can imagine – have all been put forward at one time or another and supported with various arguments. It will not be profitable to discuss the arguments for or against each of these theories in detail, but instead we should concentrate on the problem that lies behind them: how can our young and helpless *neossoi,* who use – when they do – the language of adults, be represented on the stage in accordance with the way the dramatist has conceived and drawn them as dramatic characters?

5. Conventions of Greek tragedy

(a) Convention and originality

It is clear that the answer lies in our understanding of the conventions of Greek tragedy and, more important, of the fact that it is the same set of conventions that governs both the drama and the theatre, the text and the performance.

This may sound like a statement of the obvious; but because we are used to greatly divergent interpretations and productions of the same plays (both classical and modern) in contemporary theatre, we tend to dissociate the stage production from the play as text, which nowadays has an independent and sometimes wide circulation in printed form. Also, because contemporary art and aesthetic put such an emphasis on originality – the criterion *par excellence* of modern art – we tend to regard the conventions of the ancient and other conventional arts as restrictions on the imagination and the creativity of the artist. This is an anachronistic view.

(b) Conventions as artistic rules

In earlier times conventions were traditional artistic rules, gradually established and willingly or unwittingly adhered to by the artists. To the extent that they demarcated the bounds and charted, so to speak, an artistic medium (by regulating, for example, in the case of tragedy, the range of subjects, the general structure of the plays, the language and metre to be used in various parts of them, the use of music and dancing, the use of masks, the number of performers, and so on) they restricted the individuality of the artist but by no means his creativity. Indeed, at a time when these two notions did not coincide or overlap to the extent they do today, the conventional rules of art enhanced the creativity of the artist by offering him a number of forms to choose from, to vary, to combine and to modify in order to suit his purpose.[11]

If I may now restate the problem, the convention regulating the representation of children on the tragic stage is that they are conceived, typecast, and shown as miniatures of adults. Our task is to understand the convention itself and to visualize its consequences on theatrical praxis. But to understand an artistic convention – or a rule of social behaviour, or a rule of a game, for that matter – we have to regard it in its context, to see it as part of a whole. In fact, setting a convention in its context is tantamount to understanding

To begin with, we might widen our view by observing that the convention of representing children as miniature adults is not confined to tragedy but applies equally to visual arts throughout the archaic and classical period. In fact, children are shown realistically as children only in Hellenistic art.[12]

(c) Tragic action and mythical archetypes

Let me now quote once more from A.M. Dale's masterly introduction to her edition of *Alcestis*. In answering the modern critics who have been discussing and variously evaluating the play by trying to interpret the psychology of its characters – a seemingly impossible task in a situation where the self-sacrificing heroine praises herself and demands recognition of her sacrifice, while Admetos and his father vie in mutual accusation of cowardice and shamelessness – Dale writes: "Of course the Greek, like every serious drama, involves 'characters', whose part in the action, and therefore whose words, to some extent reflect their several natures. But in Greek tragedy their speeches, and the interplay of their dialogue, can rarely be interpreted as *primarily* or *consistently* expressive of their natures, and whenever we find ourselves trying to build up some elaborate or many-sided personality by *adding up* small touches gleaned from all parts of the play we can be pretty sure of being on the wrong lines. It usually means that we are not allowing enough for two considerations always very important to Greek dramatists, the trend of the action and the rhetoric of the situation" (p. xxv).

But why does the trend of the action override its agents? Or, to put it in Aristotelian terms, why is it that "without action there cannot be a tragedy but there can be without character" (*Poet.* 1450 a 23)? Given Aristotle's definition of *ethos* or character as what reveals *proairesis,* that is, choice or purpose,[13] it follows that in a tragedy without character the plot and action do not issue from the interplay of the *ethos* of the *dramatis personae* – something that would be unthinkable in modern drama or cinema.

The answer is, in fact, quite simple. The subjects of Greek tragedies were traditional and derived from mythology. Myth (as well as folktale) *is* characterless in so far as the action does not issue from the *proairesis* of its human agents, because human will is always overridden by divine purpose and intervention. In myth both the action and its agents are shaped according to archetypal patterns of human and social images and behaviour. Its *dramatis personae* are therefore highly idealized abstractions, single-hearted and single-minded, one-sided and almost one-dimensional. When these figures began to appear on the tragic stage in the fifth century, they had already been shaped by the tradition – oral legends, epic poetry, visual arts. They were not created by the dramatists in the same sense as, for instance, Hedda Gabler was created by Ibsen or Uncle Vanya by Chekhov. To compose their plays, the fifth-century tragedians isolated a portion of the legend and by selecting and combining elements from various versions, and by rejecting, modifying or inventing others, they constructed their own version – which was also a new interpretation – of the myth. In looking closely and critically at the myth the playwrights brought into focus the interrelationship between divine power, law or arbitrariness, on the one hand, and human will, purpose and responsibility, on the other. So the human factors of the legend were seen more or less as real people and dramatic characters invested with a specific *ethos* emerged from the mythical archetypes.[14]

Let us be as clear as possible about this. Mythical archetypes do have specific personalities, but they are one-sided; only one aspect matters with respect to the action, be it strength in battle, wisdom in council, cunning, foolishness, beauty, faithfulness, or some other. On the other hand, the characters of modern realistic literature are individuals created for the first time and unique in their psychological complexities, drawn, coloured and highlighted by what they do and every single word they utter in the course of the play or a novel in which they appear. The characters of classical tragedy, like their counterparts in classical sculpture and painting, lie in the middle, between the two extremes. They are neither psychologically studied portraits of individuals, nor bloodless, colourless stereotypes, although their archetypal origin is never forgotten because myth never ceased to be the stuff from which tragedies were made.

(d) The uniformity of tragic diction

In addition to the trend of the action Dale considers the "rhetoric of the situation" the other important factor that overrides the unity of character. When writing a set speech or even the parts of a dialogue, she suggests, the Greek dramatist did not try to simulate what his characters would be likely to say, according to their nature, in a given situation. He tried, like a skilful *logographos* promising to do his best for each of his clients in turn, to write for them the speeches that would help them to gain a point, to move and persuade their hearers, to prove their theses, to convey information lucidly and vividly. To the extent that rhetoric is not devoid of character, the skilful speech-writer also took it into account, but his dominating consideration was what *points* could be made in each situation. We shall properly understand this aspect of Greek drama if we remember how important was rhetoric in Athenian life as a whole – in the assembly, in the law courts and on other public occasions.[15]

All this is true, but, again, it is not the whole truth. I find the comparison of dramatic poet to *logographos* very ingenious but I am not convinced that the rhetorical aspect of drama can be explained only with reference to the fact that the Athenian audience was used to, and appreciated, good oratory in real life. First, another fact needs to be explained in relation to rhetoric in drama, namely the uniformity of tragic diction. All characters in a Greek play, no matter whether male or female, old or young, freeborn or slaves, kings or common folk, gods or mortals, speak the same language. All use the Attic dialect in trimeter and tetrameter parts, the Doric in lyric parts. All use the same metres, practically the same vocabulary, imagery and figures

of speech, that is, the same stylistic level or register. The Greek dramatist, unlike his modern counterpart, did not exploit language to portray his characters. It is as if *he* speaks for them all.

This is, of course, one of the most significant conventions of Greek tragic poetry that ought not to be difficult to explain. To what has been said so far about simple, one-sided archetypes and complex, many-sided individuals, representing the two ends of the gamut of possible literary characters, it should be added that specific dialects or speech styles may be used in various kinds of literature to indicate origin, class, education, profession, and so on, and thus to relate a character to a group or to mark him out as a representative type.

Aristotle, for instance, recommends in *The Art of Rhetoric* (1408 a 25–32) the use of ἠθικὴ λέξις, that is, language appropriate to, and revealing, the character of the speaker according to his γένος, class (defined on the basis of age, sex, place of origin), or ἕξις, disposition (due, for instance, to education or the lack of it). However, there is a world of difference between tragedy and the art of the orator, who is an ordinary person speaking in prose on his own behalf and trying to be as persuasive as possible to his fellow citizens.

More idiosyncratic language, with personal mannerisms and overtones, may be employed successfully to highlight the character portraits of individuals in contemporary literature – indeed it may be the chief means of characterization in modern psychological novel and drama. But in Greek tragedy language is not used to differentiate character because the level of idealization in both action and *dramatis personae* is so high as to be incongruous with the degree of particularization of characters and verisimilitude of story that would result from any differentiation of speech styles.

What tragedy loses in flexibility of speech styles it gains in richness of poetic means. As it was not pressed into the service of characterization, tragic language was free to develop its intricacy of forms, variety of rhythms, and complexity of structural patterns in both the episodes and the lyric parts. However, it must be stressed that the "poetry of Greek tragedy", to borrow Lattimore's phrase,[16] is not just rich in merely decorative devices (what Aristotle would call ἡδυσμένος λόγος, embellished language, *Poet.* 1449 b 25) but is organically related to the dramatic function of speech. When, for instance, a tragic hero bursts into song at a moment of terror, great sorrow, or any other emotional climax, the function of his song is to express (in highly articulated forms) the unspeakable depth and intensity of his emotion – not to offer us the pleasure and relief of musical interlude. Or when the tragic heroes exchange bits of dialogue in one-line or half-line measures they are not likely to converse on trivialities but rather to express themselves in an elevated style suitable to the gravity of the dramatic situation. In other words, the elevated and stylized expression corresponds to idealized (hence not particularized) thoughts and emotions, which in turn correspond and belong to the idealized heroes of Greek tragedy with their obvious archetypal origins.

6. The conventional representation of children

After this very sketchy and necessarily incomplete attempt to describe and explain some of the major conventions of Greek tragedy, we may return to our distressed children and ask whether we can now understand a little better their presence and behaviour.

Children are present in the plays we have surveyed because they are important to the respective legends. Myth usually spans more than one generation and children are links joining the generations. In tragedy, children, like all other characters, are highly abstracted and idealized. That is why they are, as we have seen, typecast as very young and helpless, and compared to chicks. Because of their immaturity, and their subsequent lack of responsibility and initiative (or their lack of *proairesis* according to Aristotle, *EN* 1111 b 5) they cannot be active participants in the action, which is, as far as its development and articulation are

concerned, as idealized as its agents and stripped to the essential turns of events and incidents. That is why children do not take part in the dialogue and usually remain entirely silent. However, they are swept by and into the course of events, and Euripides has allowed them in a few cases to express their sentiments, always at moments of emotional climax, always in song.

Stevens is certainly right in regarding these cases as examples of the introduction by Euripides of *οἰκεῖα πράγματα*, familiar things.[17] Euripides does represent, in comparison with Sophocles, a later stage in the development of drama from its very formalistic early phases towards a more empirical and reasoned, that is to say "realistic", representation of human life. But judged by modern standards his work is strictly stylized and conventional. So his children, with the exception of one word, *μαῖα*, apparently a child's word for mother (in *Alc.* 393), use the same dialect (the Doric of tragedy) and the same elevated style as everybody else in the lyric parts of tragedy. And this is exactly what we should expect.

We still have to consider the theatrical, the visual, aspect of the treatment of children by the tragedians. Children who are idealized and drawn in the manner we have seen, yet who do not speak like real children, must absolutely *look* their very young age. The cardinal point here is size, and it is significant that in painting what differentiates children from adults is also no more than size. We may therefore eliminate at once the possibility of imagining the children in tragedy as being played by adults (regular actors or extras) or adolescents, unless the latter were very short indeed.

7. The question whether boy actors sang their parts

Children must have been represented on the stage by children, and this is the view taken by Dale and Stevens in their editions of *Alcestis* and *Andromache* respectively, as well as by the late Professor Webster in *The Tragedies of Euripides* (1967).

Then why is Dale (though not Stevens) unable to accept that the child actor in *Alcestis* sang his lines, and would have us believe that the boy merely mimed the part while his lament was actually sung by the actor who had played Alcestis until her death and was at the moment lying on her couch? And why does Webster extend Dale's theory to *Andromache* and the *Suppliant Women,* where he must assume that the actor playing Andromache, and the chorus of suppliant women, had to alternate with themselves in singing their own parts and the parts of the boys?[18] In fact, Dale herself suggested that the supplementary chorus in the *Suppliant Women* (1123 ff.) "could have been a choir of boys selected from the performers [of dithyrambs] at the year's Dionysia" but considered boys as unsuitable to perform the solo parts, which required much skill and, "in that great theatre, a powerful voice".[19]

It seems to me that Dale exaggerates the technical difficulties, for Greek theatres were indeed large but are also famous for their acoustics, and boys do have very loud voices. Skill and training is another matter and there lies the crux of the problem. Were boys unable to sing a musically complex solo or to act and sing a part that was not childlike at all in terms of words and music? It seems to me that the answer to the latter part of this question is what has bothered scholars all along. H. Devrient, for example, at the beginning of the century, flatly denied that the roles of children could have been entrusted to children, as they would have been completely unable to cope with the demands of the tragic situations.[20]

8. Demands and conventions of Greek acting

But what kinds of demands did the roles make on the actors who played them? Certainly not those imposed upon the modern actor by the requirements of realistic, "slice-of-life" drama, as systematized by Stanislavsky in his famous "Method" in the early twentieth century and popularised in the West by Lee Strasberg after the second world war. According to these great teachers of theatrical art, actors must be capable of "reincarnation", so to speak, of total identification with their roles by means of constant training, in which the concept of "affective" memory, defined as a reliving of past experiences when an analogous situation recurs, is of great importance. In our time acting is recognized as a creative art and achievement, and Strasberg writes that "it is quite proper to speak of a [dramatic] character as if he were the actor's creation – of John Gielgud's 'Hamlet' for example, or John Barrymore's".[21]

None of this applies to ancient theatre. This is not the place to go into details but I hope it will be granted that since drama finds its fulfilment in performance (despite Aristotle's refusal to discuss the ὄψις in the *Poetics* – but then he was concerned with poetics rather than with dramatics) the conventions governing the acting and other aspects of Greek theatre production must accord with and correspond very closely to the conventions governing the construction of plots and the delineation of characters.

The most important acting convention, in direct correspondence with the high degree of abstraction and idealisation on the plane of character drawing, is the use of masks. This again may sound self-evident, yet it cannot be overstressed, because it has been repeated so often that the masks of Greek theatre originated in the Dionysiac rituals and never quite lost their religious associations that we tend to consider them as relics of the Dionysiac past of drama, unnecessary and impedimental to its performance, and not as pivotal elements of an acting style entirely different from that to which we are used in Western theatre but entirely suitable to classical plays. In such a style elimination of facial expression deprives the actor of his chief means of approaching his role from within, of creating a character in the modern sense. His personal, fortuitous and, in the last analysis, irrelevant features are replaced by the ideal features of the mask.

As we learn from Far Eastern parallels – the Japanese Noh drama or the Peking Opera – the masked actor relies on stylized movement and symbolic gesture, as well as on skilful manipulation of voice, and we know from ancient sources that the Greeks paid great attention to voice management and delivery on the part of the actors. It can be gathered from Aristotle that Greek actors are likely to have developed a system of voice management to express the various emotions – by skilful control of the volume of sound, the modulation of pitch and the rhythm of delivery (*Rhet.* 1403 b 28). It is conceivable that their system of expression extended beyond delivery of speech to movement, attitude and gesture.

Greek actors had to perform several roles in the course of the same play – particularly the secondary actors, the deuteragonist and tritagonist. But that was much less of a feat than it sounds because these parts were not creative character studies but skilful impersonations of typical characters that recurred – with variations, to be sure – from play to play (see pp. 76–77 below on Elizabethan acting). The same point is illustrated by the well known motif of dramatic poet represented in a number of marble reliefs as contemplating the masks (that is, the characters) of the play he is about to compose.[22]

That is not to say that each play did not present the players, and above all the protagonist, with new problems of interpretation; but the solution depended upon tradition and convention as much as did the drawing of characters themselves by the poets. As soon as we rid ourselves of the notion of the actor who probes the soul of the character he plays and develops a personal, psychological affinity with him that borders on fusion of his personality with that of the fictional character, we are free to accept that boy actors could indeed perform the typical and single-sided roles of children in tragedy, provided that they had been adequately trained in some of the basic traditions and skills of Greek acting, and mainly in singing, the most conventional part of voice management. Were there such boy actors in fifth century Athens? It seems to me that there were; there *must* have been.

9. Evidence for boy actors in later times

We have no direct evidence for boy actors in classical times, although we know of boy comedians and boy tragedians in Roman imperial times. They won victories in various festivals (though we do not know in what events) and one of them, a comic actor by the name of Sarpedon from Akmonia in Phrygia, was honoured by the city of Ephesos on the occasion of his victory at the festival of Artemis, for his virtue etc., and his experience and skill in acting (*τῆς περὶ τὴν ὑπόκρισιν ἐμπειρίας*).[23] Perhaps these boy actors were virtuosi who displayed their skill in solo performances.

If we turn to archaeological evidence, three categories of dramatic monuments show child-size figures in representations of tragic or comic scenes: South Italian vases of the fourth century with tragic subjects; some Hellenistic and Roman mosaics with comic scenes; and a number of wall-paintings from Pompeii with both tragic and comic scenes.[24] Of these, the first category is obviously the most important to our discussion but it is also the most problematic, for vases with tragic subjects, both Athenian and South Italian, tend to confuse the mythological story with its stage representation. Although they are sometimes good evidence for stage costumes and certain peculiarities of plot, they can, by themselves, tell us very little about the possible presence of child actors on the fourth century tragic stage.

A certain amount of information about child performers in the theatre of Hellenistic and Roman times could be extracted from mosaics and wall-paintings. But a detailed discussion of these monuments, which come from a period of great expansion of the theatre arts and professional organization of the artists, would sidetrack us from the main line of inquiry without throwing any direct light on the classical period. Therefore, as the evidence that can be gathered from later sources will not enable us to work backwards from Greco-Roman to classical times, we must approach the problem by an indirect way and apply to it a deductive method.

10. Professionalism and tradition in Greek theatre arts

I should like to state two presuppositions which, if they can be shown to apply to fifth century theatrical conditions, will make the presence of boy actors in Athenian tragic performances much easier to accept. The first is the development of professionalism very early in Greek theatre; the second is that the theatrical professions were traditional – like other arts and crafts in ancient Greece – and remained so throughout antiquity.

We can be sure that there were no schools for acting and other theatrical professions in ancient Greece, but a high degree of professionalism was developed very early indeed. This is contrary to a widespread view that theatre in fifth-century Athens was an art of amateurs because performances took place only in the festivals of Dionysos and there would thus be no work for professional actors during most of the year. Aeschylus is regarded as the noble amateur *par excellence,* as his epitaph speaks of his valour at Marathon and not of his achievements in the theatre. Yet it is clear that Aeschylus was a competent all-round theatre artist, who devised poses and figures for his chorus-men, took upon himself the whole management of the production, and acted in his own plays. In spite of his own mastery of dancing he also employed the great dancing master Telesis or Telestes also an inventor of many figures, who could illustrate the sense of what was spoken by motions of his hands, and "when he danced the *Seven against Thebes* he made the action clear simply by dancing".[25] But Aeschylus was by no means exceptional: his predecessors – Thespis, Pratinas, Phrynichos – were equally competent masters of tragic dancing, and Phrynichos boasted that "As many figures Dance gives me as baleful night makes waves upon a stormy sea".[26]

These references to dancing mean that tragedy very early incorporated and made use of the achievements of the art of dancing and also, we can assume, of music and other arts that the theatre uses for its own ends.

Inscriptional records of the professional guilds of theatre artists date from Hellenistic times, but in the fourth century individual actors toured the Greek world and achieved great fame – real stardom in the modern sense of the term. But already in the fifth century Athens exported its drama; not only did Aeschylus and Euripides travel to produce plays in Sicily and Macedonia respectively, but such theatres as those in Corinth and Eretria, both dating from the fifth century, must have been visited by Athenian actors who, in any case, must have been busy in Athens itself for several months – up to six months a year, including time for rehearsals.

So much for professionalism. Now as regards our second presupposition, it is well known that in all traditional arts and professions there is no formal schooling. In the traditional societies of ancient and medieval times aspiring members of all professions demanding technical skills learned by actual practice; they began to learn very early in life and spent a long time as apprentices under the guidance of a master. Very often traditions and skills were handed down from father to son and in many cases ran through several generations of a family.

All this is so well known that it hardly needs documentation, but we might as well remember that many *didaskaloi,* that is, dramatic poets-producers, including Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Philemon, and others, were succeeded by sons, grandsons, and nephews, who were *didaskaloi* and/or actors in their own right. We also know of many actors who had either a father-and-son or a master-and-apprentice relationship.[27] It may be added here that Menander, his contemporary Ameinias, also a comic poet, and most probably Aristophanes, were "given choruses" while they were still *epheboi,* which is to say that before the age of twenty they were accomplished masters of dramatic art. Menander is known to have spent a long time as apprentice of Alexis, although the tradition that he was Alexis' nephew was probably invented to suit a general model.

What has happened in other theatrical traditions is not evidence for Greek theatre. But it may be suggestive that, for instance, in the Japanese Noh and Kabuki theatres families and dynasties of dramatists and actors are the rule rather than the exception, and the entrance of children into the profession at a very young age is amply documented.[28]

But in searching for parallels one perhaps should not look further than the Elizabethan theatre, with its boy companies and the numerous boy actors who played the roles of women in the adult companies.[29] Boy actors in children's companies began their acting careers at the age of about ten. In adult companies boys began their apprenticeship at about the same age; after some years of training, during which they played minor roles, they were entrusted with leading parts (although technically they were still apprentices) but "their value as actors depreciated sharply when their voices broke".[30] A most interesting case is that of Salathiel or Salomon Pavy, who joined the Children of the Chapel at the age of ten and died at thirteen, having been for three years "the stages jewell" (in the words of Ben Jonson's epitaph), specializing in roles of old men.[31] Of course the Chapel Children, like the members of all other children's companies, played all the parts and not merely those of women.

The evidence for boy actors playing major roles in the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre is overwhelming yet scholars have often puzzled over the question of how these young actors could sustain adequately their demanding roles. The answer has been sought in the same direction as that outlined in section 8 above, namely in the unrealistic and highly conventional character of Elizabethan acting. As R. David writes in a fundamental paper (see note 30), "Every evidence goes to show that the Elizabethan actors' technique was very much more automatic than anything we know today. Between players of their experience and training, a scene would quickly fall into a 'routine' (I use the word in no derogatory sense) and play itself" (pp. 46–47). The technique of the Elizabethan player was based largely on his familiarity with, and training in, the art of rhetoric.[32] "The age pullulates with books on rhetoric", says David (p. 47), and "rhetoric training had a part in every school curriculum" (p. 48). "The orator was trained not only to modulate his voice according to the nature of the sentiments he was expressing, but to accompany his words with appro

movements of the body and especially of the hands [. . .] This then was the training that fitted the boy player to undertake the representation of a mature woman, this the context that made a skilled representation rather than any 'reliving of the part', acceptable. Indeed no actor, however mature, could have sustained the gruelling work imposed on the Elizabethan player unless he had been able to carry it largely on technique" (pp. 47–48).

11. Postscript on comedy

The reader who remembers the daughters of Trygaios in the *Peace* of Aristophanes, or the supplementary chorus of boys in the *Wasps,* and has missed a reference to the possible participation of boy actors in the comedy of Aristophanes, is entitled to an explanation.

It will be recalled that the first aim of this paper was to examine the presence of children in tragedy from the dramaturgical point of view, that is, to examine the situations involving children in tragedy and the way in which they were drawn as dramatic characters by the poets. The question of how the child roles were performed on the stage and, consequently, the question of availability and employment of boy actors in the fifth century was subordinated to, and made to depend on, the results of the first part of the inquiry. The existence of boy actors in classical Athens was postulated not so much on the basis of the much later external evidence for child performers as on the requirements of the plays themselves, and the assumption that, given the traditional and conventional character of classical theatre arts (including acting) and the high degree of professionalism that can be claimed for them, there is no reason why boy actors could not be available to the dramatist as soon as he needed their services.

The same kind of reasoning may also apply to comedy. Before trying to answer the question of whether boy actors played the roles of children in the productions of Aristophanes and his fellow comedians, an investigation into the child characters and the comic situations involving them should be made, in connection with the conventions of the dramaturgy of Old Comedy. Such an investigation clearly falls outside the scope of this paper.

List of Greek Passages

I. Youth and tenderness of children

1. *Med.* 1074–75: Μήδεια: . . . *ὦ γλυκεῖα προσβολή, ὦ μαλθακὸς χρὼς πνεῦμά θ' ἥδιστον τέκνων.*
2. *Andr.* 722: Ἀνδρομάχη: . . . *ἕρπε δεῦρ' ὑπ' ἀγκάλας, βρέφος.*
3. *Tro.* 757–58: Ἀνδρομάχη: *ὦ νέον ὑπαγκάλισμα μητρὶ φίλτατον, ὦ χρωτὸς ἡδὺ πνεῦμα.*

II. Children in fright grab the robes of their mother (or protector)

1. *Alc.* 189–90: Θεράπων: *παῖδες δὲ πέπλων μητρὸς ἐξηρτημένοι ἔκλαιον.*
2. *Heracl.* 48–49: Ἰόλαος: *ὦ τέκνα τέκνα, δεῦρο, λαμβάνεσθ' ἐμῶν πέπλων.*
3. *Tro.* 750: see under III.

III. Compared to chicks

1. *Alc.* 402–403: Παῖς: *καλοῦμαί σ' ὁ σὸς ποτὶ σοῖσι πίτνων στόμασιν νεοσσός.*
2. *Heracl.* 239: Δημοφῶν : *θακεῖς νεοσσῶν τήνδ' ἔχων πανήγυριν.*
3. *Andr.* 441: Ἀνδρομάχη: *ἦ καὶ νεοσσὸν τόνδ'* (sc. *κτενεῖς*), *ὑπὸ πτερῶν σπάσας;*
   compare 504–505: Παῖς: *μᾶτερ, μᾶτερ, ἐγὼ δὲ σῇ πτέρυγι συγκαταβαίνω.*
4. *HF* 71–72: Μεγάρα: *οἵ θ' Ἡράκλειοι παῖδες, οὓς ὑπὸ πτεροῖς σώζω νεοσσοὺς ὄρνις ὡς ὑφειμένη.*
5. *Tro.* 750–51: Ἀνδρομάχη: *τί μου δέδραξαι χερσὶ κἀντέχῃ πέπλων νεοσσὸς ὡσεὶ πτέρυγας ἐσπίτνων ἐμάς;*

IV. Do not comprehend the situation

1. *Ajax* 552–53: Αἴας: *καίτοι σε καὶ νῦν τοῦτό γε ζηλοῦν ἔχω, ὀθούνεκ' οὐδὲν τῶνδ' ἐπαισθάνῃ κακῶν.*
2. *OT* 1510–11: Οἰδίπους: *σφῷν δ', ὦ τέκν', εἰ μὲν εἰχέτην ἤδη φρένας πόλλ' ἂν παρῄνουν.*
3. *Med.* 47–48: Τροφός: . . . *μητρὸς οὐδὲν ἐννοούμενοι κακῶν· νέα γὰρ φροντὶς οὐκ ἀλγεῖν φιλεῖ.*
4. *Andr.* 754–55: Ἀνδρομάχη: *γέροντα μὲν σ' ὁρῶντες, ἀσθενῆ δ' ἐμὲ | καὶ παῖδα τόνδε νήπιον.*
5. *Tro.* 749: Ἀνδρομάχη: *ὦ παῖ, δακρύεις· αἰσθάνῃ κακῶν σέθεν;* (next two lines quoted under III).

V. Have no responsibility

1. *Med.* 116–17: Τροφός: *τί δέ σοι παῖδες πατρὸς ἀμπλακίας μετέχουσι;*
2. *Andr.* 498–500: Χορός: *μητρὸς λεχέων ὃς ὑπερθνῄσκεις οὐδὲν μετέχων οὐδ' αἴτιος ὢν βασιλεῦσιν.*
3. *HF* 206–7: Ἀμφιτρύων: *παῖδας δὲ δὴ τί τούσδ' ἀποκτεῖναι θέλεις; τί σ' οἵδ' ἔδρασαν;*
4. *Tro.* 764–65: Ἀνδρομάχη: *ὦ βάρβαρ' ἐξευρόντες Ἕλληνες κακά, τί τόνδε παῖδα κτείνετ' οὐδὲν αἴτιον;*

VIa. Embody hope of revenge

1. *Ajax* 557, 559: Αἴας: *δείξεις ἐν ἐχθροῖς οἷος ἐξ οἵου 'τράφης.* [. . .] . . .*μητρὶ τῇδε χαρμονήν* (compare Hom. *Il.* 6. 479–81).
2. *Suppl.* 1144–45: Παῖδες: *ἆρ' ἀσπιδοῦχος ἔτι ποτ' ἀντιτάσσομαι σὸν φόνον – εἰ γὰρ γένοιτο – τεκνῶν;*

VIb. Have to die so as not to grow up and avenge their fathers

1. *Andr.* 519–22: Μενέλαος: . . . *καὶ γὰρ ἀνοία μεγάλη λείπειν ἐχθροὺς ἐχθρῶν, ἐξὸν κτείνειν καὶ φόβον οἴκων ἀφελέσθαι.*
2. *HF* 168–69: Λύκος: *οὔκουν τραφέντων τῶνδε τιμωροὺς ἐμοὺς χρῄζω λιπέσθαι τῶν δεδραμένων δίκην.*
3. *Tro.* 723: Ταλθύβιος: λέξας *ἀρίστου παῖδα μὴ τρέφειν πατρός.*
4. *Cypria,* fr. xxv Allen (quoted twice as a proverb by Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1376 a 6, 1395 a 16): *νήπιος ὃς πατέρα κτείνων παῖδας καταλείπει* (compare Hdt. iv. 69).

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NOTES

This is a revised form of a paper read at the Institute of Classical Studies on 26 April 1978. I am grateful to Professor E.W. Handley for his kind invitation and to Mr J.M. Murphy for editing and correcting my English style.

1. On children in Greek literature in general see R. Kassel, *Quomodo quibus locis apud veteres scriptores Graecos infantes atque parvuli pueri inducantur describantur commemorentur*, Diss. Mainz 1951, Meisenhein am Glan 1954; for tragedy see S. Melchinger, *Das Theater der Tragödie*, Munich 1974, pp. 174–5.

2. See T.B.L. Webster, *The Tragedies of Euripides*, London 1967, p. 102.

3. Ibid., p. 124.

4. For lost plays see C. Heym, "De puerorum in re scenica Graecorum partibus", *Diss. Halenses*, vol. xiii, 1897, pp. 240 ff.

5. It is noteworthy that Richmond Lattimore adjusts the style register of the boy's lament to a more childlike tone by eliminating the chick image in his translation of *Alcestis* (originally published in *The Complete Greek Tragedies* of the University of Chicago Press): "I your little one lean and kiss your lips, and cry out to you". The chick image is also eliminated in P. Vellacott's Penguin translation.

6. *Euripides, Alcestis*, Oxford 1954, p. 85.

7. G.M.A. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides*, London 1941, p. 136.

8. Dale, *Euripides, Alcestis* p. 85.

9. Stevens, *Euripides, Andromache*, Oxford 1971, on lines 504 ff.

10. Heym, op.cit. (note 4), pp. 217–295; H. Devrient, *Das Kind auf der antiken Bühne*, Weimar 1904; C.F. Russo, *Aristofane, autore di teatro*, Florence 1962, pp. 226–7; A.W. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*^{2}, pp. 144–5, 151–2.

11. See G.M. Sifakis, "Ὁ παραδοσιακὸς χαρακτήρας τῆς ἀρχαίας ἑλληνικῆς λογοτεχνίας καὶ τέχνης", Ἐπιστημονικὴ Ἐπετηρὶς Φιλοσοφικῆς Σχολῆς Πανεπιστημίου Θεσσαλονίκης, 12 (1973) 451–470.

12. The validity of this general statement will be verified by even a cursory look at the pictures (mainly vases) collected by F.A.G. Beck in his *Album of Greek Education. The Greeks at School and At Play*, Sydney: Cheiron Press 1975. See also Webster and Trendall, *Illustrations of Greek Drama*, London 1971, pp. 68, 75, 86–87, 97, 104, 111 (South Italian vase paintings of tragic subjects). There are, however, some exceptions to the general rule: they are mostly choes showing children playing, see G. van Hoorn, *Choes and Anthesteria*, Leiden 1951, figs. 7, 17, 24–25, 66–67, 79–80, 86, 93–94, etc.; Pickard-Cambridge, op.cit., figs. 4–6, 10; Beck, op.cit., pls. 54–56, 58–61, 64, 67. The significance of children as subjects of this class of Athenian vases is due to the participation of children in the Anthesteria and to the fact that many of the choes were intended for the special use of children. These vases (as well as a few white lekythoi and the mostly unpublished group of marble *arktoi* from Brauron) show that when the classical artist focused his attention on the child he could represent it as child, whereas children as peripheral characters in compositions concerned chiefly with adults were invariably and conventionally shown as miniature adults.

13. *Poet.* 1450 b 9, see 1454 a 18, *EN* 1111 b 5 ff., 1139 a 31 ff.

14. See Arist. *Poet.* 1454 a 34–36: χρὴ δὲ καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἤθεσιν ὥσπερ καὶ ἐν τῇ τῶν πραγμάτων συστάσει ἀεὶ ζητεῖν ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον ἢ τὸ εἰκός, ὥστε τὸν τοιοῦτον τὰ τοιαῦτα λέγειν ἢ πράττειν ἢ ἀναγκαῖον ἢ εἰκός.

15. Dale, op.cit., p. xxvii.

16. R. Lattimore, *The Poetry of Greek Tragedy*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press 1958 (Harper Torchbooks 1966).

17. *Andromache*, on lines 504 ff.

18. *The Tragedies of Euripides*, pp. 119, 127.

19. *Alcestis*, p. xx. For *Andromache* she suggests that the actor who was to appear as Peleus in the next scene must have sung the boy's part off stage. Oddly, she finds no difficulty in this arrangement, while a little later she points out that the voice of the actor who had played Alcestis and was immediately to sing the boy's part "would proceed from very near the right spot".

20. Op.cit. (note 10).

21. *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* 15th ed., 1976, vol. i, p. 59A.

22. T.B.L. Webster, "The Poet and the Mask" in M.J. Anderson (ed.), *Classical Drama and Its Influence: Essays Presented to H.D.F. Kitto* (1965) pp. 3–13; compare E.W. Handley, *JHS* 93 (1973) 106.

23. *Ancient Greek Inscriptions in the British Museum,* iii. 606. On other evidence for boy actors in Roman times see E.J. Jory, *BICS* 14 (1967) 84 ff.

24. For the South Italian vases see Webster and Trendall, *Illustrations of Greek Drama* (note 12); mosaics: Webster, *Monuments Illustrating New Comedy*^{2}, *BICS* Suppl. 24, nos. NM 1–2, YM 2, 6–8; L. Kahil and R. Ginouvès, *Les Mosaiques de la Maison du Ménandre à Mytilène, Antike Kunst,* 6. Beiheft (1970) nos. T6, T7, T8; paintings: Webster, *Greek Theatre Production,* pp. 122–24.

25. On Aeschylus' dancing mastery see Athenaeus 21e–22a, quoting Chamaileon and Aristocles; the translation here is that of C.B. Gulick in the Loeb edition of Athenaeus.

26. Bergk, *Poetae Lyrici Graeci*^{4}, iii, p. 561, fr. 3 (quoted by Plutarch, *Mor.* 732 f.; Loeb translation by E.L. Minar).

27. See J.B. O'Connor, *Chapters in the History of Actors and Acting in Ancient Greece,* Chicago 1908, nos. 64, 457; 141; 198, 342; 275–278; 312; 331, 432, 435.

28. "Zeami [1363–1443, the legendary actor, playwright and theorist of the Noh drama] says, 'Training in this art should begin about the age of seven'. Children sometimes appear in the *kokata* (child) parts at an earlier age, but a Noh actor begins the actual training of his own sons at about the age of seven", Yasuo Nakamura, *Noh, the Classical Theatre,* translated by D. Kenny, New York and Tokyo: Walker/Weatherhill 1971, p. 155.

29. On boy companies see E.K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage,* Oxford 1923 (repr. 1974), vol. ii, pp. 1–76. I have been unable to consult H.M. Hillebrand's book on *The Child Actors,* Urbana 1926.

30. See Richard David, "Shakespeare and the Players" in Peter Alexander (ed.), *Studies in Shakespeare: British Academy Lectures,* Oxford 1964, pp. 44–5 (the quotation is from p. 37). David, writing on boy actors, acknowledges his debt to T.W. Baldwin, *The Organization and Personnel of the Shakespearean Company,* Princeton 1927.

31. On Pavy see Ben Jonson's Epigram 120, Chambers, op.cit., ii, p. 332, David, op.cit., p. 44; for other boy actors see David, pp. 44–5.

32. B.L. Joseph, *Elizabethan Acting*^{2}, Oxford English Monographs, 1964 (cited by David, op.cit., p. 47). It should be recalled in this connection that Aristotle, writing from the opposite viewpoint, that of rhetoric, compares oratorical delivery to acting and suggests that the art of the actor, the *hypokritike,* is equally relevant to oratory and greatly affects the success of a speech (*Rhet.* 1403 b 20 ff., compare 1413 b 9 ff.).