Theatre Performance After the Fifth Century

Anne Duncan and Vayos Liapis*

The Formation of a Canon and the Emergence of a Repertory Tradition

In 340 BC, the tragic playwright Astydamas the Younger won first prize in the tragedy competition at the Great Dionysia with *Lycaon* and *Parthenopaeus*, the latter a play about the son of Atalanta who was one of the Seven against Thebes. This was Astydamas' second victory in a row at the Dionysia; in 341, he had won with his *Achilles, Athamas* and *Antigone*.[1] It is a mark of Astydamas' popularity that the people of Athens voted to set up his portrait statue in the Theatre of Dionysus. (All that remains of the statue is the base, with only the first four letters of Astydamas' name legible.[2]) Reportedly, Astydamas composed an inscription for his own statue, but it was so self-congratulatory that the Athenians refused to have it inscribed on the statue.[3] In the inscription, Astydamas complained that the only reason he is not considered the equal – or superior – of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides is that they all lived before his time, and are thus immune to the 'envy' of Astydamas' contemporaries. Astydamas' epigram seems to have become a byword for extravagant self-praise, as suggested in a fragment by the fourth-century comedian Philemon: "You're praising

---

* The sections on 'The formation of a canon and the emergence of a repertory tradition', 'Innovation in later tragedy', 'Canonization and Lycurgus', 'Architecture of the theatres', 'Theatrical machinery', 'The rise of the actor', 'Acting style', 'Standardization of masks' and 'Conclusion' are by Duncan. The rest of the chapter is the work of Liapis. Both authors have read and commented on each other's sections but remain responsible only for their respective contributions.

[1] *IG* ii² 2320 = Millis and Olson 2012: 65; see Pickard-Cambridge 1988: 107–9.

[2] See *TrGF* I, 60 T 2a; Papastamati-von Moock 2014: 23–34; Scodel 2007: 148; Pickard-Cambridge 1946: 135–6. Astydamas' statue must have been erected shortly after his victory in 340 BC; Papastamati-von Moock (*l.c.*); Hanink 2014b: 51–2, 183–8, 198.

[3] For sources and discussion see Snell 1971: 152; Page 1981: 33; Papastamati-von Moock 2014: 28–31; Scodel 2007: 148; most recently, Hanink 2014b: 183–8.

180

yourself like Astydamas, woman!"[4] Whether exaggerated by comic poets or not, Astydamas' conceitedness does not diminish the significance of his back-to-back victories in the tragic competition, nor, indeed, the boldness of his self-promotion. One prominent scholar of the Greek theatre, T. B. L. Webster, has called Astydamas' inscription 'a manifesto' for fourth-century tragedy.[5] To understand why, it is helpful to note that in the years 341, 340 and 339, i.e., at the time of Astydamas' victories, three 'old tragedies' by Euripides were also revived at the Great Dionysia: *Iphigenia*, *Orestes* and a third play whose title has not been preserved.[6] By this time, the works of Euripides had become canonical, along with those of Aeschylus and Sophocles. By praising himself as the equal (at least) of the 'Big Three,' Astydamas was challenging the canon, and implicitly questioning the valuation of fifth-century tragedy over contemporary, fourth-century tragedy.

Fourth-Century Tragedy and the Tragic Canon

It is during the fourth century that we see the crystallization of a tragic canon, in which the three great tragedians of the fifth century have pride of place. Their dramatic output becomes part of a body of texts considered authoritative and magisterial: they are generally acknowledged as paragons of literary creativity for subsequent generations to aspire to and to draw inspiration from. This is a development that seems to begin already in the late fifth century. The three contestants seriously considered in Aristophanes' *Frogs* for the distinction of being brought back to the upper world are Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles.[7] And a few decades later, in the mid-to-late fourth century, Heraclides of Pontus, a pupil of Aristotle's, could write a treatise entitled simply *On the Three Tragic Poets* (Περὶ τῶν τριῶν τραγῳδοποιῶν), evidently on the assumption that the identity of the 'Big Three' needed no further specification.[8] More important, as early as 386 BC, performances of 'old tragedy' – i.e., a tragedy by one of the canonical

---

[4] fr. 169 KA. See Hanink 2014a: 205–6; 2014b: 183–8; Scodel 2007: 148; Capps 1900: 41–2.
[5] Webster 1954: 306.
[6] See *IG* ii² 2320, col. ii (= *TrGF* I, DID A 2), 2–3, 18–19, 32–3 = Millis and Olson 2012: 65 (ll. 3–4, 20–1, 34–5). Cf. Pickard-Cambridge 1988: 99–100. See Duncan 2015; Nervegna 2007: 15; Xanthakis-Karamanos 1980: 21. Vahtikari 2014: 172 and Taplin 2007a: 149 argue that the Iphigenia play was more likely *Iphigenia in Tauris* than *Iphigenia in Aulis*.
[7] See Pfeiffer 1968: 204. Further on Aristophanes as both reflecting and fostering the canonization of certain tragic poets see Rosen 2006.
[8] Heraclid. Pont. no. 17 (36) in Schütrumpf 2008: 66–7.

fifth-century tragic dramatists – were introduced into the Great Dionysia, though as an *hors concours* event rather than as part of the regular contest.[9] This explains the aforementioned performances of Euripides' plays in the Dionysia of 341–339 BC (see n. 6 earlier in this chapter), with contemporary actors, one of whom was the famous Neoptolemus of Scyros,[10] being responsible not only for starring in but also apparently for organizing and producing the revivals.[11] This is presumably the general context in which the Athenian orator Aeschines (ridiculed as a third-rate actor by his political rival Demosthenes) performed in revivals of Euripides' *Cresphontes*, *Oenomaus* and *Hecuba*, as well as of Sophocles' *Antigone*, no doubt in the third quarter of the fourth century.[12] In about the same time, between 336 and 324 BC, the statesman Lycurgus passed a decree whereby the Athenian state was to set up bronze statues of the three great tragic poets in the Theatre of Dionysus and to have official copies of their tragedies deposited in the state archive and read out to actors by a state official.[13] This measure was reportedly intended to prevent actors from inserting interpolations into the authoritative texts of the canonical tragedies; however, it was also as an act of cultural appropriation asserting a vision of the recent Athenian past as an era of memorable greatness.[14] The Athenian city thus granted official recognition to the canonical status of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, and also took it upon itself to

---

[9] See *IG* ii² 2318, col. 8 (= *TrGF* i, DID A 1), 201–3 = Millis and Olson (2012) 40 (l. 1009–11) with 56, n. on 1010–11. Recently, Hanink (2015) argued that the introduction of reperformances of fifth-century tragedies in 386, with its manifest evocation of Athens' golden era, was part of a broader state-sponsored effort to revive notions of Athenian cultural supremacy as a means of bolstering anew (unsuccessfully, as it turned out) Athenian imperial claims in the context of the opportunities offered by the Peace of Antalcidas (spring of 386 BC). The ancient tradition according to which the Athenians, as an exceptional token of respect for Aeschylus' memory, decreed that anyone wishing to produce plays by Aeschylus should be granted a chorus automatically (presumably already in the fifth century) has been forcefully questioned by Biles 2006/2007.

[10] On Neoptolemus see, e.g., the second Hypothesis to Dem. 29; Dem. 5.6 with schol. *ad loc.*; D.S. 16.92; Ghiron-Bistagne 1976: 156–7, 345; Stephanis 1988: no. 1797; Easterling 1997: 218.

[11] In the inscription cited in n. 9 earlier in this chapter, the phraseology (παλαιὸν δρᾶμα πρῶτο[ν] παρεδίδαξαν οἱ τραγ[ῳδοί]) suggests that the tragic actors themselves were responsible for 'producing' (παραδιδάσκειν) the old plays; cf. Millis and Olson 2012: 56, n. on 1010–11. According to Pickard–Cambridge 1988: 124, 'παρεδίδαξαν must imply that [the 'old tragedy'] was an "extra"'; cf. Nervegna 2007: 15 with n. 7 (with further bibliography).

[12] Dem. 18.180, 267 (*On the Crown*, 330 BC) with Wankel 1976: ii.891–2; Dem. 19.246–7 (*On the False Embassy*, 343 BC).

[13] On the monument of the Three Tragedians (cf. *TrGF* I, 60 T 8a) see further Papastamati–von Moock 2007: 312–24 (with Figs. 7 and 8 on pp. 308–9) and 2014: 35–60; Hanink 2014b: 74–83.

[14] [Plut.], *Vit. Dec. Orat.* (=*Mor.* 841F); see further Scodel 2007: 130, 149–52.

guarantee the authenticity of their texts.[15] On this topic see further 'Canonization and Lycurgus', later in this chapter.

The Influence of Euripides and Aeschylus on New Tragedy

If the three great tragedians of the fifth century become undisputable paragons of tragic dramaturgy in the fourth century, it is Euripides who (at least on the strength of the evidence available) stands out as a particular favorite with audiences in that era and later. We saw earlier that, between 341 and 339, the 'old tragedy' performed at the Great Dionysia was consistently a play by Euripides; what is more, as has been recently pointed out, Aphareus, one of the contestants in 341, entered the contest with three tragedies whose titles (*Peliades*, *Orestes*, *Augē*) are also attested as titles of Euripidean plays.[16] And in the second century BC (some time between 190 and 170),[17] a dedicatory inscription from Tegea in Arcadia by an unknown actor commemorating his victories in various dramatic contests mentions performances of three Euripidean plays (*Orestes*, *Heracles*, *Archelaus*), the last two repeated twice in different venues.[18] Literary sources also provide evidence for repeats of Euripidean plays in the fourth century (or somewhat later).[19] It is therefore unsurprising that echoes from Euripides should appear in the sparse remains of fourth-century tragedy (see further Liapis and Stephanopoulos, this volume).

More generally, on the basis of the little that remains from their considerable output, it would appear that fourth-century tragic authors staked their own claim on excellence by vying with the canonical playwrights of the previous century (as we saw earlier in this chapter in the case of Astydamas), but also with the canonical author *par excellence*: Homer. This tendency may perhaps be exemplified in the comparatively large number of fourth-century tragedies that draw their plot from Homer

[15] See further Hanink 2014b: 192, 230, 245 and in this volume. For a detailed account of revivals of fifth- (and fourth-) century drama in later times see Nervegna 2007. The canonical status of fifth-century tragedy is also implicitly highlighted by its being treated as paradigmatic of the tragic genre in fourth-century comedy: see Hanink 2014a: 191–200.

[16] See Stephanopoulos 2014: 200.

[17] For the date see Le Guen 2007e: 98–104 with earlier bibliography.

[18] *IG* V(2), 118 = *TrGF* i, DID B 11. See Ghiron-Bistagne 1976: 102; Revermann 1999/2000: 462–5; Le Guen 2007e; Nervegna 2007: 19.

[19] For example, Euripides' *Trojan Women* after 367 BC (Plu. *Pel.* 29.9); his *Andromeda*, after 306 BC (Luc. *Hist. Conscr.* 1); and unspecified Euripidean tragedies 'sung' in Asia after 330 BC (Plu. *De gen. Alex.* 5 = *Mor.* 328D). For accounts of the reception of Euripides in antiquity see now Lauriola and Demetriou 2015. See also: Schmid 1940: 823–32; Easterling 1994; Revermann 1999/2000; Mastronarde 2010: 1–9; Nervegna 2014: 162–3, 165–6.

rather than from the epic cycle, as was commonly the case in the fifth century. Characteristically, at least five plays of that period (including tragedies by such major authors as Astydamas and Carcinus) took Achilles as their principal character,[20] and at least some of them must have done so in a bid to outperform each other in recasting Homer into tragic molds. By contrast, we know of only three fifth-century tragic works with Achilles as their subject, most notably Aeschylus' Achilles trilogy (*Myrmidons*, *Nereids*, *Phrygians*).[21] As Taplin (2007: 254) remarks, it was evidently important for a new fourth-century tragedy 'to set itself against earlier versions of the story, both reflecting and rejecting them' – although, remarkably, Aeschylus' undisputable primacy in the fifth century seems not to have led to a corresponding number of revivals of his plays, at least in mainland Greece.[22]

Much as fourth-century tragedy seems to have evolved under the sign of the canonical authors of an earlier era (Homer and the three great tragedians, particularly Euripides), it would be rash to dismiss it as merely derivative. As Taplin (2014: 141–2) has recently reminded us, there is unmistakable, if rather sparse, evidence suggesting that such fourth-century tragedians as Chaeremon, Theodectas and Astydamas were highly esteemed; indeed, they were popular on the stage, they were as memorable and quotable as, say, Euripides, and they could be evoked in serious critical

---

[20] We know of Achilles tragedies by: Astydamas (*TrGF* I, 60 T 5); Carcinus Junior (70 F 1d); Cleophon (77 F (3), unless it is a mistake for Iophon, 22 F 1a); Evaretus (85 T 1); and Diogenes of Sinope (88 F 1a). Cf. Michelakis (2002) 13–16. Chaeremon's *Achilles Slaying Thersites* (71 F 1a–3) will probably have relied on non-Iliadic (cyclic) material; Sophocles' *Lovers of Achilles* is thought to have been a satyr-drama. A recently published musical papyrus from the third/second century BC (Pöhlmann and West 2001: 22–5, no. 5) bears the subscription '*Achilles* by Sophocl[es]'; but this must be the younger Sophocles (*TrGF* I, 62): see West 1999: 43–4. Of unknown date and authorship (but possibly postclassical) is an Achilles tragedy published in 1987 from a 150–100 BC Köln papyrus (*P. Köln* 6.241 = 1711.01 Mertens-Pack³ = *Trag. adesp.* fr. 640b, published in *TrGF* v/2, p. 1131–4). Its scant fragments contain a dialogue commenting on Achilles' intransigence and on efforts by his circle to persuade him to rejoin the battle (cf. *Iliad* 9); they also preserve a report of a Trojan attack which forces the Greeks to start hauling their ships to the sea to prevent the enemy from setting them on fire (clearly, a reworking of *Il.* 15.300–746).

[21] Fifth-century dramatic production also includes an Achilles-tragedy by Aristarchus of Tegea (14 F 1a), now known only through the fragments of Ennius' *Achilles* (cf. Nervegna 2014: 185, with earlier bibliography).

[22] For the scanty evidence on Aeschylus' performance reception in fourth-century theatre see Scodel 2007: 130–3 and now Nervegna 2014: 166–76 and Vahtikari 2014: 153–63, 175–81, Appendix III. Scodel has pointed out that the rarity of Aeschylean reperformances seems predominantly a phenomenon of mainland Greece; West Greece presents a different picture, and South Italian vases suggest that Aeschylus was considerably more popular on South Italian stages (Nervegna 2014: 172–6).

discussion as masters of the tragic art.[23] The canonization of fifth-century tragedy by no means implies that fourth-century tragic production was somehow of lesser quality or vitality.[24] As we saw earlier, Astydamas enjoyed incomparable success in his time, and had public honors lavished on him. Chaeremon was, alongside Euripides, among the authors whose plays secured victorious performances for the anonymous actor of the Tegea inscription mentioned earlier in this chapter, including n. 18); he is also quoted, together with Aeschylus, Euripides and the fourth-century Carcinus Junior, in Menander's *Shield* and also in other authors; and he is mentioned or parodied (a sign of general recognizability) by Eubulus and Ephippus. Carcinus produced, among other things, a startlingly innovative version of the Medea myth, in which the heroine did *not* kill her children; and his *Aëropē* was apparently a classic in its own right. Finally, passages from plays by fourth-century tragic authors – including not only those mentioned earlier in this chapter but also, e.g., Dicaeogenes and Antiphon – are brought to bear on topics discussed by Aristotle in his *Poetics* and in his *Rhetoric*, and not only in disparaging ways at that (though see the next section on 'Innovation in later tragedy').[25]

Innovation in Later Tragedy

As we saw earlier, the development of the repertory tradition of fifth-century 'old tragedies' during the fourth century by no means suggests that 'new tragedy' was in the shadow of 'classic,' canonical tragedy: the momentum, during the time of Astydamas' back-to-back victories, seems to have been on the side of 'new tragedy.' It can be difficult to appreciate this state of affairs, between the almost complete absence of any preserved fourth-century tragedies and the tremendous influence of Aristotle's *Poetics*, which sometimes may seem to value 'old tragedy' over the tragedy of Aristotle's

[23] As observed by Ceccarelli (2010: 118–19) and Hanink (2014a: 204–5), Aeschines' *Against Ctesiphon* 34 (330 BC) suggests that, on at least one occasion, the proclamation of public honors at the City Dionysia was reserved for the time-slot before the contest of 'new' tragedies (τραγῳδῶν γιγνομένων καινῶν) rather than before the revival of the 'old' tragedy, which suggests that the former were thought to be more prestigious or popular than the latter.

[24] See further Easterling 1993: 562–9.

[25] For references and further discussion see Liapis and Stephanopoulos, this volume; cf. Hanink 2014a: 201–2.

own time.[26] In the *Poetics*, Aristotle compares modern tragedy, sometimes unfavorably, with what he sees as the best of fifth-century tragedy, plays like Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* and Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians*. He says that modern tragedy often lacks ἦθος (1450a15),[27] that modern tragic characters speak more like rhetoricians than like statesmen (1450b23),[28] and that modern tragedies do not treat the chorus like a full character (1456a19–20). He implies that many modern tragic playwrights rely too much on spectacle (1450b28),[29] that their plots are often episodic rather than organically connected, partly due to pressure from actors (1451b11), and that they occasionally cave in to the sentimentality of the audience by rewarding the 'good' characters while punishing the 'wicked' ones (1453a4). To be fair, Aristotle, who has very precise ideas about what the perfect tragedy should look like, applies these criticisms to some fifth-century playwrights and plays as well; and his reservations do not, in any case, amount to a wholesale dismissal of the tragedy of his time, nor are they necessarily representative of audience opinion, which surely will have varied. Furthermore, some of the attributes he seems to associate principally with fourth-century tragedy can actually be detected already in the fifth century (see Carter, this volume).

It may be helpful for our purposes to read the *Poetics* not as the prescriptive text it often is (i.e., a set of guidelines for producing the best kind of, mainly, tragedy), but rather, descriptively, as evidence for the ongoing changes and developments in fourth-century tragedy. We do not have to subscribe to Aristotle's judgments about 'the best kind' of tragic plot, or his teleological view of tragedy's development, to discern a vibrant, active theatrical culture during the period when he was writing. Reading between the lines of the *Poetics*, it seems that playwrights were experimenting with different sorts of diction, plot, character, and structure from what was common in fifth-century tragedy, and that they may have catered to popular tastes by ceding to actors' demands.[30] The competitive festival context in which plays were performed in Athens made it highly likely that playwrights would respond to audience

---

[26] See Webster 1954: 307. See, however, Carter, this volume, for the view that, for Aristotle, the fourth century represents no meaningful landmark since he considered tragedy to have remained essentially unchanged since the early career of Sophocles.

[27] See Schütrumpf 1970 and 1987; Held 1985.   [28] On this issue see further Carter, this volume.

[29] See Petrides 2014: 102–7.

[30] Cf. Aristotle's famous remark (*Rh.* 1403b33) that 'actors nowadays have greater power than playwrights', and his reference to a famous actor's trick for capturing audience attention (*Pol.* 1336b27–31); cf. Hanink 2014b: 214.

pressures. At the same time, and in the same festivals, audiences enjoyed non-competitive performances of 'old tragedies,' which continued to influence new tragedy. Presumably the performances of 'old tragedies' were also due to popular interest, which suggests a sort of push-and-pull: pressure on contemporary tragedians to differentiate themselves from 'classic' tragedy, and, at the same time, an interest in keeping 'the classics' alive in a repertory tradition. This push-and-pull may explain Aristotle's observation that most tragedies in his day concerned the same few mythological cycles of stories (1453a17–22); tragedians might try to differentiate themselves, but within a narrower range of material, as Carcinus did with his *Medea* (on which see Liapis and Stephanopoulos, this volume).

The only extant fourth-century tragedy is the *Rhesus*, formerly attributed to Euripides (see Fries, this volume). From the point of view of performance history and staging, it is a fascinating play. Set entirely during nighttime, with possibly four speaking actors, it includes one goddess impersonating another and a Muse singing a dirge over her son Rhesus' corpse while on the *mēkhanē*.[31] The play's plot, lyrics and unusual staging features provide a glimpse into the state of fourth-century tragedy: an interest in finding new aspects of familiar material, an emphasis on spectacle and the heavy influence of the 'classic' canon, especially Euripides.

The *Rhesus* may have been written in fourth-century Macedon, possibly at the royal court, for a Macedonian audience.[32] We might consider other experimental tragedies from the fifth century onwards as evidence of the genre's flourishing and adaptability to different venues and markets. Although tragedies on non-mythical subjects were not unknown in the fifth century (cf. Phrynichus' *Sack of Miletus*, Aeschylus' *Persae*), it is in the fourth century that this subgenre seems to acquire new vitality. We know of several historical tragedies written during the fourth century, including Theodectes' *Mausolus* and Moschion's *Themistocles*.[33] In the *Poetics*, Aristotle notes in passing that 'the poet should lay out the whole story for both

---

[31] See Parry 1964; Wiles 1997: 156; Battezzato 2000; Walton 2000; Liapis 2012.

[32] Liapis 2009b; *contra* Fries 2014: 18–21.

[33] On *Mausolus* see Gel. 10.18.5; cf. Xanthakis-Karamanos 1980: 17. On *Themistocles* see Hornblower, this volume, who also discusses historical tragedies by Philiscus (*Themistocles*) and Lycophron of Chalcis (*Cassandrians*).

traditional tales *and made-up ones*, and then expand the episodes,' which suggests that he took it for granted that playwrights of his time might invent their plots;[34] indeed, elsewhere (*Po.* 1451b19–23) he refers to Agathon's *Antheus* or *Anthos*, a tragedy in which both plot and characters were entirely made up, and Aristotle's language here suggests that he knew of other similarly made-up tragedies. He does not mention in which circumstances playwrights might work with invented plots, but creating works on commission for powerful patrons is one plausible reason. Moving past the fourth century, we see further evidence of the ever-expanding market for tragedy in Ezekiel's *Exagōgē*, a Hellenistic Greek tragedy about the Exodus of Moses and his followers which was most probably composed in Alexandria, Egypt,[35] and a tragedy by an unknown author about Gyges, the sixth-century BC ruler of Lydia, whose story was most famously recounted by Herodotus in his *Histories*.[36] All of these historical tragedies can be thought of as evidence for the flexibility and variety of postclassical tragedy. They can also be thought of as the forerunners of Roman historical tragedy, *fabula praetexta*, which dramatized significant events and 'great men' from Rome's legendary early days and its more recent history.

Canonization and Lycurgus: Why 338 BC?

Given this picture of fourth-century tragedy's flourishing, it might seem surprising that just a few years after Astydamas' portrait statue was erected in the Theatre of Dionysus alongside statues of the fifth-century war heroes Miltiades and Themistocles, the politician (and, for lack of a better term, 'financial overlord'[37]) Lycurgus set about fixing the canon of 'old tragedy', which apparently had already been crystallizing since 386 BC (see the section on 'Fourth-century tragedy and the tragic canon' and n. 9). As discussed earlier in this chapter, he had bronze statues of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides made and placed in the Theatre of Dionysus,

---

[34] τούς τε λόγους καὶ τοὺς πεποιημένους δεῖ καὶ αὐτὸν ποιοῦντα ἐκτίθεσθαι καθόλου, εἶθ᾽οὕτως ἐπεισοδιοῦν καὶ παρατείνειν: Arist. *Poet.* 1455a34–b1 (emphasis added).

[35] See Lanfranchi 2006, and in this volume.

[36] Hdt. 1.8–12. Some scholars, such as Lloyd-Jones 1966: 24–31, have argued for an early fifth-century date for the Gyges tragedy, others for a post-fifth-century date; see Travis 2000: 330–1 and n. 2. On the Gyges tragedy see also Kotlińska-Toma 2015: 178–85; Hornblower, this volume.

[37] Bosworth 1994: 850.

ordered that the texts of their tragedies be deposited in the state treasury for safekeeping and mandated that actors not deviate from the official text in public performances. This canonization process was not simply a matter of enshrining the theatre-going public's current tastes in bronze; it was more a matter of fixing the list of Great Playwrights, those whose work *ought* to be remembered and respected. The canonization process is also evident in the visual record; Csapo has calculated that 'Aeschylean, Sophoclean, and Euripidean plays account for close to 75 percent of all tragedy-related vase-paintings.'[38] The move to canonize the 'Big Three' suggests that the culture's heritage is envisioned as having already peaked, despite the constant production of new plays. It is a nostalgic move, at some level. Along with fixing the tragic canon and the canonical texts, Lycurgus also undertook the work of replacing the wooden walls, seats and buildings in the Theatre of Dionysus with stone ones – another move toward prestige, permanence and fixity.[39]

What prompted this impulse to canon-formation, celebration of the 'classics' of fifth-century tragedy, and textual (and theatrical) fixity at this moment in Athenian history, just a few years after Astydamas' statue was erected as a celebration of 'new tragedy'? Why did the Athenians, under the direction of Lycurgus, look back to their past at this moment? In 338 BC, Athens, together with several other Greek city-states, rose up against the control of Philip II of Macedon, who was expanding his rule outside of his home territory. The Athenians and their allies fought Philip's army at the Battle of Chaeronea, and were crushed. Philip treated Athens more mildly than he did the other city-states that had defied his control, because of Athens' political and cultural importance, but he did set up Lycurgus, an Athenian politician, as financial administrator of Athens. The year 338 marked a turning-point for Athens: the city already had been stripped of its empire at the conclusion of the Peloponnesian War in 404, but it had continued as an autonomous, sovereign city-state after its loss to Sparta.

---

[38] Csapo 2010: 39.

[39] On the Lycurgan Theatre of Dionysus, see Hanink 2014b: 92–125; Papastamati-von Moock 2014; Pickard-Cambridge 1946: 134–74. Papastamati-von Moock demonstrates that Pericles seems to have begun the rebuilding of the seats in the Theatre of Dionysus in stone, but was interrupted rather quickly by wartime exigencies, and that work on the western section of the parodos retaining wall and *theatron* must have begun under Lycurgus' predecessor Eubulus and then finished during Lycurgus' tenure. Hanink (2014b: 99) notes that the restructuring did not simply replace wooden seats with stone ones, but significantly expanded the theatre's seating capacity, which must have been desirable for accommodating more foreign spectators. Lycurgus embarked on a building program to improve and monumentalize many of Athens' most important public spaces; see O'Sullivan 2009: 14–15; Bosworth 1994: 851.

Now, the political autonomy of Athens was gone, and all that was left of its former greatness was its cultural legacy, in which tragedy had pride of place. New Greek tragedies continued to be written and performed for centuries after the 330s BC, but once the impulse to canonize the 'Big Three' of the fifth century was institutionalized, there were two sets of tragic texts: the 'classics,' and everything else. Despite the painstaking work of generations of ancient scholars and editors, most of the latter set of texts has not survived.

The Theatrical Environment and Equipment

Drama as an International Art Form

Another major development in fourth-century tragedy was the spread of drama beyond the confines of Attica to other Greek (and later even non-Greek) cities, as a result of which tragedy became a Panhellenic and later an international medium of high prestige and recognizability. True, already in the fifth century major Athenian tragic playwrights were invited to produce their plays outside Athens – for instance, Aeschylus at Syracuse, or Euripides at the court of the Macedonian king.[40] At that era, however, Athenian drama, for all its Panhellenic appeal and prestige, is predominantly an Athenian cultural product, even when produced outside Athens: it is composed to a very large extent by Athenian playwrights, even when performed before non-Athenian audiences, and carries with it the allure of its perceived birthplace, the sophisticated cultural metropolis that was Athens. By contrast, from the fourth century onwards, drama, and especially tragedy, gradually sheds its associations with its Athenian origins to become a truly international medium, spreading not only throughout the Greek peninsula but also as far as South Italy and Sicily, the Black Sea or the Middle East.[41] The recent survey of 116 sites outside Athens in Csapo

[40] On the spread of Athenian tragedy outside Athens already in the time of Aeschylus, and on a fairly significant scale from the last half of the fifth century onwards, see Easterling 1994: 73–80; Taplin 1999; Dearden 1990 and 1999; Allan 2000: 149–60 and, with the *Heraclidae* as a case-study, 2001. Especially on Aeschylus at Syracuse see Bosher 2012b and Smith 2012: 129–33; on Euripides at the court of King Archelaus (and on his homonymous play) see Harder 1985: 129–31; Duncan 2011; Moloney 2014: 236–40.

[41] The spread of theatre around the Greek (and non-Greek) world, on which see further Le Guen in this volume, is a vast topic, whose history remains to be written; a major undertaking in this direction is the University of Sydney project 'The Theatrical Revolution: The Expansion of Theatre Outside Athens', implemented by E. Csapo, J. R. Green, S. Nervegna, E. G. D. Robinson, and P. Wilson. See now Csapo and Wilson 2015, which is by far the fullest survey so far of the diffusion of theatre in Attica and beyond (116 sites in South Italy and Sicily, Isthmus and Peloponnese,

and Wilson 2015 (see n. 41) demonstrates both that Athens had no clear or longstanding monopoly on drama and that performance of drama continued to grow, exponentially, in the Greek world and beyond even before the spread of Greek culture through Alexander's successors bolstered the dissemination of dramatic performances even further.

This is evidenced first of all by the international spread of the professional associations known as 'the Artists (*Tekhnitai*) of Dionysus' – a network of guilds comprising actors, directors/producers, musicians, dancers and other related experts, and intended to protect the safety, considerable privileges and prestige of theatre professionals internationally.[42] Such experts now come not only from Athens but also from Boeotia, Thebes, Thespiae, Sicyon, Argos and other parts of the Greek world, including Asia Minor, and the cities of South Italy and Sicily.[43] Fourth-century developments in the acting profession in particular are especially instructive. As Taplin points out, whereas in the fifth century Athens seems to have had an almost total monopoly in outstanding actors (the only noteworthy exception being, apparently, Mynniskos of Chalcis in Euboea), in the fourth century there is a more sizeable specimen of actors of non-Athenian origin who rise to superstardom, amass great wealth and enjoy international fame and the patronage of powerful figures; these include Aristodemus of Metapontum, Neoptolemus of Skyros, and Polus of Aegina.[44] There seems to be a comparable (though perhaps less sharp) disparity among tragic authors too: we know of at least ten

---

Aegean Islands, mainland Greece, Asia Minor, Hellespont, Propontis, Black Sea, and Africa) down to ca. 300 BC, the more so as it takes an inclusive view of the evidence (inscriptions, historical and literary texts, theatre architecture and art). There is also a considerable body of work on specific aspects, such as, e.g., Greek theatre in Macedonia (Revermann 1999/2000; Moloney 2014; cf. Liapis 2009b and 2014: 290–4); the crucial role of Alexander the Great in spreading theatre in the Middle East, West Asia and Egypt (Le Guen 2014); Greek theatre in the Black Sea region (Braund and Hall 2014); Greek theatre in South Italy and Sicily (Bosher 2012a) and its reception by native (non-Greek) populations (Robinson 2014), etc. See also the recent survey of scholarship in Csapo et al. 2014: 1–10.

[42] On the *Tekhnitai* see now principally Le Guen 2001 and Aneziri 2003; cf. Nervegna 2007: 18–21; full annotated catalogue in Stephanis 1988. Cf. also Le Guen, this volume. See also Lightfoot 2002 on the different local union branches as evidence of the continued spread of performance culture in the Hellenistic period, on pay scales for comic vs. tragic actors and for protagonists vs. other actors, and on the higher prestige of tragedy vs. comedy.

[43] See Taplin 1999: 35 n. 6, on the basis of the ethnic designations of 'Artists of Dionysus' catalogued in Stephanis 1988: 530–56.

[44] For the ancient sources and some modern literature on Mynniskos, Aristodemus, Neoptolemus and Polus see Stephanis 1988: nos. 1757, 332, 1797, and 2187, respectively.

playwrights from the fourth century who certainly originated in regions outside Athens (including, again, Asia Minor and Magna Graecia)[45] as opposed to some four from the fifth century.[46]

The significance of vase paintings (and other artifacts) from South Italy and Sicily as evidence for the spread of theatre in those areas has been a hotly debated topic during the last decades. For a considerable number of scholars, such artifacts are potentially a treasure trove of information on the ways in which theatre was disseminated beyond Athens, and a crucial tool for contextualizing Greek drama within a performance-oriented frame of reference. This approach – pioneered by Webster and given a new impetus thanks to the studies of Taplin, Green, Csapo, Revermann and others – has led to all-important discussions and analyses of a wide range of vase-paintings, sculptures, terracottas and mosaics as tools with which to explore the reception of drama in Magna Graecia and its place in and interactions with local populations.[47] The degree to which such artifacts reflect a viewer's experience of actual theatre performances will be open to debate, but at least in some cases it is practically certain that the depictions reflect or are inspired by actual stage productions of tragedies or comedies. A case in point is the famous 'Würzburg Telephus' vase, which undoubtedly testifies to a performance or performances of Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* in South Italy in the early fourth century.[48] More germane to this volume's concerns is the 'Cleveland Medea' calyx crater, a Lucanian

---

[45] Spintharus of Heraclea in Pontus (*TrGF* I, 40); Apollodorus of Tarsus (64); Theodectas of Phaselis in Lycia (72); Dionysius I the tyrant of Syracuse (76); Achaeus II of Syracuse (79); Mamercus the tyrant of Catane (87); Diogenes of Sinope (88); Philiscus of Aegina (89); Sosiphanes of Syracuse (92); and Phanostratus of Halicarnassus (94). To these may be added, perhaps, Patrocles of Thurii (58), unless he is the same person as Patrocles of Athens (57); Carcinus of Acragas (235; cf. Suda κ 394), unless he is to be identified with Carcinus the Athenian (70); Heraclides of Pontus (93), who is said to have passed off his own tragedies as Thespis'; Python of Byzantium (or Catane), who is credited only with the satyr-play *Agen* (see Hornblower, this volume); and Polyidus of Selymbria (78), who may not, however, have produced tragedies. Non-Athenian tragedians from the early third century include Homerus of Byzantium (98) and Sositheus of Alexandria in the Troad (99). See also Le Guen, this volume.

[46] Aristarchus of Tegea (*TrGF* I, 14); Neophron of Sicyon (15); Ion of Chios (19); and Achaeus I of Eretria (20). Cf. Taplin 1999: 35.

[47] See Webster 1960, 1961 and 1962, followed by second and, in some cases, third editions (see bibliography); also, Trendall and Webster 1971; cf. Trendall (1959). See further the studies of Taplin 1987, 1993 and 1997; Green 1991 and 1994. For a book-length study of theatre-inspired vases, and of the (not always straightforward) interplay between theatre and the visual arts see Taplin 2007; important insights in Csapo 2010: 1–82. For recent contributions on the subject see Taplin 2012 and 2014; Dearden 2012; Green 2012. On comic figurines from Boeotia, Corinth and Cyprus as evidence for regional theatrical activity in the fourth century (a topic which is only now beginning to receive the attention it deserves) see Green 2014.

[48] See Csapo 1986; Taplin 1987; further bibliography in Nervegna 2007: 16–17 nn. 19–20.

vase dated to ca. 400 BC and depicting scenes from Euripides' *Telephus* on one side and from the same author's *Medea* on the other.[49] Nonetheless, this category of evidence is problematized by the possibility (however remote) that theatre-inspired images may not reflect directly the experience of performance but may be mediated by various renderings of myth, ranging from written dramatic texts or funerary declamations to mythic oral traditions.[50]

Expansion of Theatres Across the Greek-Speaking World

The spread of the theatre in the fourth century is further exemplified by the proliferation of stone theatre buildings both in continental Greece beyond Athens and in non-mainland Greek cities. Indeed, it is only from the second half of the fourth century that Greek cities invest in the construction of theatre buildings from durable materials, as opposed to the predominantly wooden structures found in the fifth century. And by contrast to their rarity in fifth-century non-Attic theatres (e.g., Argos, Metapontum), stone buildings mushroom all over the Greek world during the fourth century: almost throughout the Peloponnese, at Thebes, in Acarnania, in Thessaly, on Euboea, in Asia Minor (Ephesus, Priene), in Pontus (Olbia, Heraclea), on Cyprus (Paphos), and of course in South Italy (Locri, Metapontum, etc.) and Sicily (Catana, Morgantina, etc.).[51] Indeed, it is in the second half of the fourth century that two important innovations in the architecture of theatre auditoria are introduced: namely, the construction of horizontal passageways dividing the auditorium into

---

[49] See Revermann 2005 and 2010.

[50] See Small 2003 (arguing for a variety of sources, including oral narratives, that merely happen to coincide with myths dramatized in tragedy); Giuliani 1996 (arguing for mythic matrices influenced, inter alia, by drama, and even embedded into funerary declamations); 2001: 33–4; 2013: 243–5 (on tragic myth as conveyed by written texts rather than by performances of tragedy). The latest contribution to the 'anti-theatrical' interpretation of such vases is by Todisco 2012, who argues, improbably, that the meaning of drama-related vases was explained by the ceramic artists themselves to native South-Italian populations, who could not follow the Greek of the dramatic performances. For a survey of the debate see Liapis, Panayotakis and Harrison 2013: 11–13. Add now Carpenter 2014, who argues for 'some sort of performance of tragedies at Ruvo di Puglia' (quotation from p. 266).

[51] The bibliography on Greek theatre buildings is vast. An excellent starting point is Moretti 2014, who offers a thoroughly documented survey of Greek theatre architecture in the fourth century. Especially on the stone theatres of Sicily, whose remains date from the mid–fourth century, see Marconi 2012 with an exhaustive catalogue of ancient sources and modern literature; on the newly excavated theatre at Montagna dei Cavalli (ancient Hippana) in West Sicily see Vassalo 2012.

several sections, and (in conjunction to this) the provision of outside access to these passageways and to the upper part of the auditorium. These innovations must have arisen from the need to accommodate large audiences, and thus attest to the growing popularity of the theatre outside Athens in that era.[52]

Architecture of the Theatres: The Innovation of the Raised Stage in Hellenistic Times

In the fourth century, the Theatre of Dionysus in Athens was renovated and expanded, its front rows of seats constructed of marble.[53] The stage building (*skēnē*), which was a temporary structure made of wood during the fifth century, was converted to a permanent stone structure, with one central door and perhaps two other doors flanking it on either side. Some scholars believe that the stage itself was raised a bit higher during the fourth century than it had been during the fifth century, which suggests that the actors needed to be more visible to larger audiences,[54] and may provide indirect evidence for the 'rise of the actor' in this time period. Hellenistic and Roman-era theatre buildings came to have multiple stories, multiple doors and windows, architectural details such as columns, alcoves, and niches, and an even higher stage.[55]

Theatrical Machinery

There is some evidence for changes in other physical properties of dramatic performance after the fifth century. An interest in special effects, such as the thunder-machine (*bronteion*), appears in the evidence for this period.[56] Aristotle, Demosthenes, Plato and other fourth-century sources suggest that the crane was a popular theatrical device during their lifetimes;[57] in

---

[52] See Moretti 2014: 117–22 (esp. 120), citing Papathanasopoulos 1986.

[53] Csapo and Slater 1995: 80; Pickard-Cambridge 1946: 134–74.

[54] Csapo and Slater 1995: 258 estimate the fifth-century stage at the Theatre of Dionysus as approximately one metre off the ground. Most scholars believe that the archaeological evidence points to the Theatre of Dionysus in Athens being one of the last stages to be raised considerably higher: see Petrides 2010: 96 and n. 72.

[55] Csapo and Slater 1995: 81–8; Bieber 1961: 54–73; Pickard-Cambridge 1946: 175–264; see also Mastronarde 1990: 254.

[56] See Vahtikari 2014: 212–14; Scott Smith and Trzaskoma 2005 and the reply of Griffith 2008. See also Csapo and Slater 1995: 261 (translating Cramer, *Anecdota Parisiensia* 1.19).

[57] See Mastronarde 1990 and the *testimonia* in his Appendix 1 VII.

fact, the phrase 'the god from the machine,' which has come to us through its Latin translation *deus ex machina*, seems to have hardened into a cliché during the fourth century due to its use (Aristotle would say over-use)[58] in Athenian tragedy and its parody in comedy beginning in the fifth century.[59] Vahtikari estimates that more than half of the fifth-century tragedies performed outside Athens in the late fifth and fourth centuries used the crane.[60]

Performance

The Rise of the Actor

The fourth century is often referred to by theatre historians as 'the rise of the actor.' The art of acting acquired, in essence, official approval in 449 BC, when a separate prize at the Great Dionysia was instituted for the best actor, as distinct from the best play.[61] The fourth century saw the emergence of superstar actors like Theodorus, Neoptolemus and Polus, who commanded hefty fees for their performances and donated equally hefty amounts to public works, and who were sometimes entrusted with diplomatic missions because of their speaking ability, stage presence and fame.[62] By 275 BC at the latest, actors and dramatic musicians had formed a union, the Artists of Dionysus (see earlier in this chapter).[63] As actors began to attract attention for their skills, tragedy began to change to showcase those skills. Aristotle notes this ruefully in the *Poetics*, when he laments the contemporary (i.e., fourth-century) trend of 'vulgar

---

[58] Arist. *Po.* 1454a37–b6.

[59] See Ley 2007: 273–4. For examples of the use of the crane in fifth-century tragedy and (parodically) in comedy see Mastronarde 1990: 40–2. For the cliché 'god from the machine' in the fourth century cf. Alexis fr. 131.9 K.-A; Men. *Theophor.* fr. 5 Sandbach; fr. 213 K.-A; Com. Adesp. fr. 1089.12 K.-A; [Dem.] 40.59.

[60] Vahtikari 2014: 213.   [61] Slater 1990; Dearden 1999: 225; Easterling 2002; Csapo 2004.

[62] In 363 BC Theodorus donated 70 drachmas toward the rebuilding of the temple of Apollo at Delphi, far more than any other individual donor and more than some city-states; see Csapo and Slater (1995: 231–8) for further ancient evidence of payouts to actors. On actors (Aristodemus, Ctesiphon, Neoptolemus) serving as ambassadors in inter-state relations in the era of Philip II and Alexander the Great see the second Hypothesis to Dem. 19 (I.3, p.397–8 Fuhr); Dem. 19.315 (with MacDowell 2000: on §12); ancient Hypothesis to Aeschines' *On the False Embassy* (2 Arg. §1, p.8 Dilts); Aeschin. 2.15–19; Dem. 18.21 (with Yunis 2001 *ad l.*); Dem. 5.6–7.

[63] Some scholars are willing to date the beginning of the Artists of Dionysus to the fourth century rather than the early third century: see Webster 1954: 294 and n. 3.

overacting', although he does indicate that overacting began in the last decades of the fifth century with Kallippides.[64] We have already discussed Aristotle's comment that actors sometimes pressured contemporary playwrights to change the plots of their plays. Presumably, actors wanted playwrights to give them scenes that would garner them positive attention: big entrances, challenging songs, highly emotional speeches or intense arguments.

Another sort of evidence for the rise of the actor is the evidence for private performances. There are many accounts of actors being employed outside of the theatre in small-scale performances, usually at drinking-parties (*symposia*) hosted by members of the elite. In these performances, we most often hear about actors performing famous songs from tragedy: for example, Philip II had Neoptolemus perform some of his most famous lines and sing a tragic ode at the symposium Philip hosted the night before his assassination in 336 BC.[65] Philip's son Alexander the Great performed a portion of Euripides' *Andromeda* from memory at a symposium he hosted the night before he slipped into a coma in 323 BC.[66] Climactic scenes were another favorite excerpt from tragedy; there is a famous story in Plutarch's *Life of Crassus* that the Parthian king responsible for Marcus Licinius Crassus' military defeat and death had an actor perform the recognition scene from Euripides' *Bacchae*, in which Pentheus' mother Agave realizes that the 'lion's head' she is displaying proudly is actually the head of her own son whom she killed in a Bacchic frenzy. In the Parthian performance, according to Plutarch, the actor actually held Crassus' severed head instead of a prop (or mask) of Pentheus' head. The story may or may not be true; what is significant for tragedy's enormous spread and prestige at that era is Plutarch's assumption that a foreign king would want a tragic scene performed at an important banquet in the first century BC.[67]

Some scholars have concluded that dramatic performance eventually came to include these private performances of 'highlights' as much as, or

---

[64] Arist. *Po.* 1461b26–62a1. On elite prejudice against performance see Csapo 2002; Hunter 2002; Green 2002. On Aristotle's vexed efforts to defend theatre against Plato's attacks by arguing that there was a 'right way' to do acting and spectacle see Petrides 2010: 89–91.

[65] Diod. Sic. 16.92; see Easterling 1997: 217–20; Moloney 2014: 243–4.   [66] Ath. 12.537d–e.

[67] Plut. *Crass.* 33.2–4. The actor was Jason of Tralles. For the appeal of Greek drama for autocrats (in Sicily, Macedon, Black Sea and elsewhere) see now Csapo and Wilson 2015. On private performances of tragedy see also Easterling 1997: 217–24. It is, of course, a favorite trope of Plutarch's *Lives* to present historical narrative as real-life drama, or as the real-life equivalent of a tragedy performance. See de Lacy 1952: 159–71; Mossmann 1988: 83–93. Specifically on the *Life of Crassus* see Braund 1994: 468–74; Zadorojniy 1997: 169–82.

more than, large-scale public performance in theatres – although exactly when this shift occurred is a matter of debate. Other scholars have argued that the fashion for a single actor performing 'highlights' at private functions had existed alongside traditional, large-scale dramatic performance for hundreds of years.[68] Whether it was prevalent or not, this sort of performance suggests that wealthy individuals sought the services of famous actors to impress their friends (or their courtiers, in the case of kings); the prestige of tragedy, combined with the exclusivity of a small audience, meant that an actor's private performance became a status symbol.

Acting Style

Fourth-century tragedy saw a continuing interest in 'realism,' which began in the late fifth century with the later works of Euripides and Aristophanes (see also Dunn, this volume). 'Realism' in this case means a wide range of acting styles (including gesture and delivery) and of vocabulary, as well as an interest in vocal mimicry, all of which combined to give the effect that there were many different kinds of 'people' (that is, characters) on stage.[69] Aristotle notes that the late-fifth-century tragic actor Kallippides was nicknamed 'The Ape', and Csapo argues this was not for his over-acting but for his amazing range of mimicry, including mimicry of 'low' people, such as poor women.[70] Anecdotes about fourth-century actors suggest that there was a great deal of audience interest in virtuosic vocal mimicry: Plutarch notes that the tragic actor Theodorus and the comic actor Parmenon were both renowned for their ability to imitate the sounds inanimate objects made;[71] and Aristotle mentions a fourth-century tragedian named Cleophon whose tragedies used a 'low' diction with 'common' words.[72]

The ancient scholia (comments by scholars) on tragic texts provide further evidence for the development of acting trends in fourth-century

---

[68] Csapo 2010: 168–204 discusses the history of 'private' theatrical performance in the ancient world, beginning with complicating the distinction between 'private' and 'public.' Nervegna 2007 argues against the 'highlights' theory, claiming that it was only schoolteachers, students, and musicians who engaged in this practice, while actors still performed entire plays in theatres for public performances.

[69] See Csapo 2002, who mostly discusses the late fifth century; Green 2002; Csapo and Slater 1995: 262–4.

[70] Arist. *Po.* 1461b34–5; Csapo 2002: 127–30.   [71] Plut. *Mor.* 18c.   [72] Arist. *Po.* 1458a18.

tragedy, as do actors' interpolations (lines usually made up and inserted by actors).[73] Some scholia on tragic texts can be dated with reasonable confidence to the Hellenistic period, and they are valuable for the light they throw on Hellenistic performances of 'classic' tragedy. Some scholia condemn contemporary (i.e., Hellenistic) performance culture for its emphasis on spectacle and emotion, while others claim that lead actors reassigned lines to themselves that were originally supposed to be spoken by other actors or by the chorus.[74] Interpolations also may shed light on tastes and trends in fourth-century and later acting, insofar as they are *ipso facto* evidence for a play's popularity in later times, and may even allow a glimpse into actors' efforts to increase the appeal of a play to audiences. The text of Euripides' *Orestes*, for example, has a relatively large number of suspected actors' interpolations, at least some of which have been attributed to the actor Neoptolemus, who is known to have performed in the play in Athens in 340.[75] Regardless of who authored them, it seems reasonable to take the interpolations in *Orestes* as evidence of the play's ongoing popularity after the fifth century.[76] Indeed, *Orestes* combined many elements that fourth-century audiences must have enjoyed: a novel treatment of a familiar myth; use of stage space such as the roof of the stage building; and characters ranging from highborn Greek princes to singing Phrygian eunuchs.

The taste for 'realism' in acting, the scholia and actors' interpolations provide evidence that supports Aristotle's general picture of fourth-century tragic performance in the *Poetics*. Playwrights experimented with different sorts of diction for their characters, even as they stuck to a few famous stories for their plots. Professional actors sought to give virtuosic displays of their speaking and singing abilities, sometimes by rearranging or rewriting the play text. Audiences were interested in displays of intense emotion and exciting ways of staging scenes. None of this is, properly speaking, a break with fifth-century tragedy; rather, it is a heightening of tendencies that were already present at the end of the fifth century (see also Dunn, this volume).

Standardization of Masks

Theatrical masks changed over the course of the fourth century, gradually developing into standard 'types.' The tragic mask developed the *onkos*

---

[73] On the scholia see Hanink, this volume.   [74] See Falkner 2002.   [75] See Kovacs 2007.
[76] See Vahtikari 2014: 56, 190–1.

(ὄγκος), an elongated tower of hair on the top, for all of the important characters.[77]

One reason for the standardization of masks may have been philosophical. Aristotle's *Poetics* describes the tragic hero as someone better than the average person, but not morally perfect. This heightened moral stature ensures that the audience cares about what happens to the hero, while the hero's imperfection explains his reversal of fortune.[78] Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* provides a typology of character in its discussion of 'the great-souled man', where Aristotle lays out not only the moral qualities but also the actual behaviors of his type: the great-souled man engages in few but significant endeavors, would prefer to render a favor than to benefit from one, and conducts himself with honor as his only point of reference. He walks slowly, with dignity, and speaks in a deep voice, whereas the 'vulgar man,' his opposite type, trots hurriedly and speaks shrilly.[79] We might be tempted to consider Aristotle's rather generic 'great-souled man,' who has all the behaviors and tastes of the elite ('He likes to own things that are beautiful and useless') without any individuality, to be consistent with the stock tragic hero. The 'great-souled man's' generic traits (high social position, concern for his honor) make him easily represented by the mask of the young tragic hero, visually marked as youthful, aristocratic, and male, but devoid of any individuality.

Contemporary art may also have influenced the standardization of masks. Conventionally, fifth-century sculpture and vase-painting depicted human and divine faces as perfectly symmetrical, beautiful, and virtually expressionless, even in the midst of violent action. Fifth-century tragic masks seem to have been similarly beautiful and bland. In the fourth century, however, artistic ideals and theories began to change. In Hellenistic sculpture, with its statues of drunk old women, satyrs, and children, we see an interest in representing emotions and bodies that do not meet the classical ideal.[80] Mask-makers began to make tragic masks with emotional states represented, like anxiety or suffering, and the comic masks of

---

[77] See Pickard-Cambridge 1988: 193–6. According to Pickard-Cambridge (1988: 179), a statue from Mantua dating around 400 BC provides evidence for the development of *onkos* as early as the end of the fifth century. On the *onkos* of the postclassical tragic mask see Petrides 2014: 138–41.
[78] Arist. *Po.* 1452b34–53a12.   [79] Arist. *EN* 1124b6–25a16.
[80] See Wiles 2007: 65; Fowler 1989; see also McNiven 2000; Cohen 2000b.

low-status characters (slaves, pimps, cooks, parasites) were distinctly gro-
tesque.[81] The second-century AD Greek rhetorician Julius Pollux made a
list of the types of theatrical masks known to him, which has survived and
is based on Hellenistic sources, but scholars dispute Pollux's accuracy as
well as his list's applicability to earlier time periods.[82] The material
evidence is also tricky to interpret in terms of pinpointing the emergence
of stock character masks. Some scholars have argued that a set of terracotta
theatrical masks excavated in Lipari and dated to about 350 BC represent
the characters from a particular fourth-century play, or many of the mask
types from Pollux's catalogue, while others have cautioned against
attempting these sorts of identifications.[83]

Another possible reason for the standardization of masks after the fifth
century was a practical one. In an era of travelling theatrical troupes and
multiple venues for performances, having a standard set of masks that
would fulfil most or all of a company's needs would have been a more
attractive and economical option than having to create masks anew for
each new play.

The Chorus in Fourth-Century Tragedy

It is often claimed that the fourth century saw the decline of the dramatic
chorus, and that this erstwhile essential component of drama now became
peripheral to the plays' action and themes. This claim is based mainly on
Aristotle's strictures on his contemporary tragedians' use of stock 'inter-
ludes', or *embolima*, which according to Aristotle had originated with
Agathon, the late-fifth-century dramatist (*Po.* 1456a27–30). The evidence
of Menandrean papyri (but also, e.g., of the manuscripts of Aristophanes'
Assemblywomen 729, 876 and *Wealth* 322, 626, 770, 801, 1096) would
seem consistent with Aristotle's complaints: where we should have

---

[81] Neiiendam 1992: 63–93 analyzes some of the surviving visual evidence for Hellenistic theatrical
performance, such as mosaics, wall-paintings and vase-paintings, with particular attention to the
ways in which the masks depicted fit Pollux's typology of theatrical masks. See also Foley 2000.

[82] See Appendix A in Csapo and Slater 1995: 393–402 with translation and discussion of Pollux's text.
On the reliability of Pollux see mainly Green and Seeberg's introduction in Webster 1995: 1. 8–51.
See also Bernabò Brea (1981, 2000) and, for a skeptical approach, Poe 1996 (with the response by
Petrides 2014: 157–63).

[83] Xanthakis-Karamanos (1980: 169) argues that the Lipari masks include many of the characters from
Astydamas' *Hector* and 'may be related' to that play. Webster (1970: 45–96) attempts to match
archaeological and artistic evidence of masks to Pollux's catalogue. Wiles (2007: 52–5) discusses the
Lipari masks at length, noting that they lack the *onkos* and cautioning against trying to identify
them with particular characters from particular plays; Vahtikari 2014: 166, 183 and Pickard-
Cambridge 1988: 193 also urge caution.

expected a choral song, we find no more than the indication '(song) of the chorus' (ΧΟΡΟΥ or ΧΟΡΟΥ ΜΕΛΟΣ). This is usually taken to suggest that Menander (or Aristophanes in his late plays) did not compose original choral songs for his comedies, and that the chorus performed some sort of song-and-dance routine, perhaps as part of a standard repertoire (see also the chapters by Dunn and Griffith, this volume).

Whether Menander's perceived practice was also followed by other comic playwrights or not (and the latter possibility must seriously be taken into account),[84] there is no reason to assume that the *tragic* chorus underwent a process of general marginalization, as Aristotle seems to imply, or even that the development of the tragic chorus in the fourth century (and later) was a uniform one. There are a number of post-fifth-century tragedies named after what may well have been their chorus: for instance, Cleophon's *Bacchae*, Dicaeogenes' *Cyprians*, or Moschion's *Men of Pherae*. If this surmise is accurate, then it suggests that the chorus here must have been thematically important and, presumably, integrated[85] – as indeed it is in *Rhesus*, the only fourth-century tragedy to have been preserved intact.[86] Further, in a tragic *adespoton* (*TrGF* II, F 649), which surely comes from a postclassical, perhaps Hellenistic piece,[87] we find a terse three-way dialogue between Priam, Cassandra and a chorus, no doubt represented here by its coryphaeus, who speaks in what appear to be snippets of iambic trimetres.[88] It is, of course, impossible to ascertain whether in this anonymous drama the coryphaeus, let alone the chorus, functioned as 'one of the actors', as Aristotle's famous injunction has it (*Po.* 1456a25–7). And it is *a fortiori* impossible, on the basis of the meager remains of post-fifth-century tragedy, to extrapolate any kind of general trends with regard to the development of the chorus in that period.

---

[84] For cautious approaches see, e.g., Hunter 1979; Rothwell 1992.

[85] See Sifakis 1967: 113–14. However, caution is advisable here, since some of these titles may have referred to collective entities other than the chorus; in Menander's *Sicyonians* (admittedly a comedy), the title's plural obviously cannot refer to the identity of the play's chorus.

[86] On *Rhesus* see further Fries, this volume. On the chorus in fourth-century and later tragedy see Griffith, this volume.

[87] That F 649 may be a Hellenistic reworking of an earlier tragic excerpt in iambic trimetres originally meant to be recited rather than sung is argued by Ferrari 2009: 24–6. For further possibilities cf. Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004: 433): 'we may have to do rather with a brief "Singspiel", or even a bookish reconstruction of the tragic manner.'

[88] See now Kotlińska-Tomà 2015: 195–8; Liapis 2016: 77–84.

True, there are a small number of papyrus fragments in which choral songs of tragedy have been replaced, as in Menandrean papyri, by the indication 'song of the chorus'. A case in point is a second-century BC Hibeh papyrus, thought to transmit portions of *Hector* by Astydamas,[89] for which it is often presumed that Astydamas composed no choral song (hence the mere note ΧΟΡΟΥ ΜΕΛΟΣ), leaving the gap to be filled by a set piece from the chorus' repertory – no doubt the kind of stock '*entr'acte*' that Aristotle, as we saw, calls *embolimon*. This may well be right, but there are other possibilities. For instance, 'song of the chorus' may suggest that, whether Astydamas did or did not compose original lyric songs for this tragedy, the papyrus in question was meant to be used as a 'prompt-book' for a later performance, in which it was thought preferable for the chorus to perform a set piece rather than the original choral songs, perhaps because the latter would have no doubt required special training and/or virtuosity.[90] Evidence for such 'promptbooks' is admittedly sparse, but a third-century AD papyrus of Euripides' *Cresphontes* is likely to preserve the remains of precisely such a text;[91] and a ca. 250 BC papyrus of Euripides' *Hippolytus* (*P. Sorb.* 2252 = no. 393 Mertens-Pack³), which transmits lines 1–106 but omits the lyric portion 58–72, may also have been used as a 'promptbook' to aid rehearsals only of the spoken, iambic passages of the play.[92] Alternatively, it may be that the poets themselves 'simply inserted χοροῦ in the circulated texts, perhaps to ensure common adaptability on stages throughout the Greek world with their varying theatrical resources, as Attic drama was spreading significantly in the fourth century.'[93]

---

[89] *P. Hib.* ii 174 = no. 171 Mertens-Pack³. For the Astydamas fragment see *TrGF* 60 F **1h?, esp. 9–11; cf. Liapis 2016 and Liapis and Stephanopoulos, this volume.

[90] Cf. Taplin 1999: 38.

[91] *P.Oxy.* 2458 (=*TrGF* V/1, E. fr. 448a), identified as an acting copy by its first editor (Turner 1962: 75–6). See further Marshall 2004: 34–5, who also discusses extensively *P.Oxy.* 4546, of which he argues that, as it preserves (with omissions) only lines spoken by Admetus in E. *Alc.* 344–82, it must have been an actor's copy used in rehearsal.

[92] See Marshall 2004: 30, 33, who also raises the alternative possibility of 'a pared-down, non-musical version of *Hippolytus* – a "touring version", for example, when the chorus is not available' (quotation from p. 30). It is immaterial for the purposes of this discussion whether the omission in the *Hippolytus* papyrus was signalled by ΧΟΡΟΥ / ΧΟΡΟΥ ΜΕΛΟΣ (the crucial portion of the papyrus is missing); see further Barrett (1964) 438 with n. 2; Taplin 1976: 49. For tragic papyri containing the indication ΧΟΡΟΥ (ΜΕΛΟΣ) see again Taplin 1976; also, Kannicht and Snell on *TrGF* II, adesp. fr. 625.9 (from Euripides' *Oeneus* or *Meleager*?); adesp. fr. 640b.28 (published in *TrGF* V/2, p. 1132).

[93] Quotation from Revermann 2006a: 281; cf. Marshall (n. 91).

Conclusion

To return to Astydamas' 'manifesto': the vitality of fourth-century (and later) tragedy can be hard to discern in the extremely fragmentary remains of the texts and the heavy influence of Euripides. Indeed, it was hard even in the fourth century for some to appreciate their contemporary tragedy without seeing it as arrogantly comparing itself to 'classic' fifth-century tragedy. It is no wonder Astydamas sounds like he had a bit of a chip on his shoulder. 'If only he had lived' in the fifth century, as he says in his poem, we might have his tragedies to read and watch today.