

## ANACHRONISM IN GREEK TRAGEDY

ANACHRONISM-HUNTING has been out of fashion with scholars in recent times, for the good reason that it can easily seem like a rather trivial sort of parlour game. But given that Greek tragedy draws so heavily on the past, a close look at some examples may perhaps throw light on a far from trivial subject, the dramatists' perception of the heroic world.

So long as anachronism was treated as an artistic failing the debate was bound to be unproductive; one can sympathise with Jebb's view (on Soph. *El.* 48 ff.) that Attic tragedy was 'wholly indifferent' to it. And one can see why later scholars have objected to the very idea of anachronism as irrelevant and misleading. Ehrenberg, for example, wrote in 1954: 'It is entirely mistaken to distinguish between mythical and thus quasi-historical features on the one hand and contemporary and thus anachronistic on the other. There is always the unity of the one poem or play, displaying the ancient myth, although shaped in the spirit of the poet's mind and time.'<sup>1</sup> Knox made a similar point in *Oedipus at Thebes*: 'The contemporary reference in all Attic tragedy is so obvious and insistent that the term "anachronism", often applied to details of the tragic presentation of the mythical material, is completely misleading; in Attic tragedy of the fifth century anachronism is not the exception but the rule.'<sup>2</sup> These critics were of course quite right to stress the unity and autonomy of the plays, and to see the limitations of the traditional approach to anachronism, but there may be something to be gained from looking further into the techniques used by the dramatists for combining material from different periods.

A thoughtful pointer in what seems to be the right direction was offered by David Bain in 1977. The tragedians, he suggested, were 'for the most part attempting imaginative recreations of the Homeric world' and were in fact noticeably more sensitive to anachronism than the Elizabethan dramatists.<sup>3</sup> Now it is well known that there are things in Shakespeare that have no parallel in Greek tragedy: striking clocks in *Julius Caesar*, references to (e.g.) Turks, and Nero, in *King Lear*, Hector in *Troilus* mentioning Aristotle.<sup>4</sup> Even so, we have to recognise that Shakespeare's imaginative effort to evoke antiquity deserves to be taken very seriously: his Romans are now seen to be far more than just 'Elizabethans in togas', and recent scholarship has tended to confirm the view put forward long ago by M. W. MacCallum that along with 'complete indifference to critical research' Shakespeare nonetheless showed 'a pious regard for the assumed facts of History'.<sup>5</sup> If Shakespeare is to be given serious attention, *a fortiori* the Greek dramatists demand it.

I shall be assuming that Bain's approach is essentially correct, that the tragedians had a strong sense, based on their knowledge of Homer, Cyclic epic, and lyric poetry, of the kind of world the heroes inhabited, and this they tried carefully to recreate, at the same time as dramatising the issues, problems and attitudes of their own contemporary society. Clearly they were not writing 'period drama' in the modern sense, trying to capture the atmosphere of, say, the Argonautic expedition, so as to render it with historical precision and a sharp awareness of the differences between that generation and the generation of the Trojan war. Of course not; but it would be wrong to jump to the opposite conclusion, that there were no principles at all determining the way in which the heroic past and the modern world should best be combined.

<sup>1</sup> V. Ehrenberg, *Sophocles and Pericles* (Oxford 1954) 15 f.

<sup>2</sup> B. M. W. Knox, *Oedipus at Thebes* (London 1957) 61. Cf. R. C. Knight, *Racine et la Grèce* (Paris 1950) 404: 'L'anachronisme est la condition même de tout art vivant qui veut choisir ses sujets dans le passé, puisque l'artiste ne saurait bien rendre que des gens qui ressemblent un peu à ceux qu'il a observés et des sentiments qui ressemblent un peu à ceux qu'il a

éprouvés'.

<sup>3</sup> D. Bain, *Actors and audience* (Oxford 1977) 209.

<sup>4</sup> *Julius Caesar* II i 192; *King Lear*: 'the Turk' III iv 92-3; Nero III vi 6; *Troilus and Cressida* II ii 167.

<sup>5</sup> M. W. MacCallum, *Shakespeare's Roman plays and their background* (London 1910) 86. See J. W. Velz, 'The ancient world in Shakespeare: authenticity or anachronism?' in *Shakespeare Survey* xxxi, ed. K. Muir (Cambridge 1978) 1-12.

In fact there seem to have been advantages of all kinds to be gained from the distance, dignity and adaptability of the heroic setting, and we can see indications that the dramatists took a positive interest in responding to the challenge of creating it, rather than merely playing safe and taking care to avoid introducing anything that would seem jarringly modern. For example, Fraenkel draws attention to Aeschylus' evident awareness that the society he was portraying in the *Agamemnon* was different from his own. When Iphigenia is described as singing the paean after dinner in her father's hall (242 ff.) and Clytemnestra as attending Agamemnon in the bath (1382), these are features of heroic life, not of the life of fifth-century Athens. All this is very different from slavish historicism, but our modern preoccupation with period detail makes it hard to appreciate the quite different sort of finesse shown by the Greek tragedians.

Aeschylus' *Supplikes* makes a convenient starting point. In this play heroic Argos is represented as an ideal society in which Pelasgus and his people jointly decide what is to happen to the suppliant women. Admittedly Pelasgus is the only Argive who appears on stage, and the people are very obliging about supporting his point of view: we are told (607 f.) that the air 'bristled with right hands' as they accepted his proposal to give the suppliants Argive protection. And admittedly there were good dramatic reasons for insisting, as the play so pointedly does, on this sharing of responsibility by king and people: the rest of the trilogy seems to have shown how much it cost them to take in the suppliant women.<sup>6</sup> But there is no denying that the play explicitly discusses the issues of political power and responsibility. The Chorus, brought up in Egypt, and therefore familiar with the model of the Eastern potentate, assume that Pelasgus can do as he chooses without consultation; but Pelasgus insists that the people be involved, and it becomes clear, when at length he has arrived at a decision, that the issue is not settled until the people have ratified it. The argument is quite pointed: 'You are the city,' say the Chorus at 370 ff., 'you are the people (σύ τοι πόλις, σὺ δὲ τὸ δῆμιον), a magistrate subject to no scrutiny (πρύτανις ἄκριτος) you have power over the altar, the hearth of the land, with your sovereign ('single-voting') nod (μονοψήφοισι νεύμασιν σέθεν), and you fulfil everything, seated on a throne of sole authority (μονοσκήπτροισι δ' ἐν θρόνοισι).' This is an interesting combination of the language of monarchy (thrones, nods) and the language of Athenian democratic institutions: the idea of the εὐθυνα is close to the surface in πρύτανις ἄκριτος, and in the near-oxymoron μονοψήφοισι νεύμασιν we have the notion of voting, a prominent theme all through the play. In other passages, too, scholars have noted the expression of Athenian democratic consciousness—in such phrases as δήμου δέδοκται παντελῆ ψηφίσματα (601), δήμου κρατούσα χεὶρ (604) and τοιαύδε δημόπρακτος ἐκ πόλεως μία | ψῆφος κέκρανται (942f.).<sup>7</sup>

There seems to be no doubt, then, that the importance of democratic institutions is strongly stressed, and this must reflect contemporary Athenian political awareness. (Whether it also makes reference to the affairs of contemporary Argos is a quite different and highly controversial question.)<sup>8</sup> What is interesting is the careful way in which Aeschylus naturalises the non-traditional features, setting them in a familiar heroic context which prevents our feeling any jarring incongruity. As Lloyd-Jones has pointed out,<sup>9</sup> there is a clear analogy here with Homeric assemblies in which king and people—δῆμος often in Homer too—meet to discuss important issues, and Pelasgus' reluctance to court public disapproval can be compared with Hector's unwillingness to be censured by the Trojans. Lloyd-Jones goes on to suggest that the added importance of assemblies in the poet's own time may have led him to 'lay special emphasis on the powers of the epic demos, . . . but in doing this he is not guilty of anachronism'. But this is to overlook the matter of *voting*, which was not a feature of heroic assemblies: ψῆφος, ψήφισμα, ψηφίζεω have no place in Homer, and when we meet ψῆφος in Pindar (*N.* 8.26) it refers to

<sup>6</sup> See A. F. Garvie, *Aeschylus' Supplikes: play and trilogy* (Cambridge 1969) 153, 197–9; R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Studies in Aeschylus* (Cambridge 1983) 67.

<sup>7</sup> See especially V. Ehrenberg, 'Origins of democracy', *Historia* i (1950) 517–22.

<sup>8</sup> See Garvie (n. 6) 150–2 and H. Friis Johansen and E. W. Whittle, *Aeschylus, the Suppliants* (Copenhagen 1980) 28 f. for bibliography.

<sup>9</sup> 'The *Supplikes* of Aeschylus: the new date and old problems', *AC* xxxiii (1964) 359 f.

judicial voting and not to voting in the assembly. Historians tell us that the institution of voting procedure was a crucially important step in the history of democracy—the shift from response by acclaim to a process whereby each individual citizen had a means of registering his opinion and getting it counted.<sup>10</sup>

But if voting in the assembly is an anachronistic import into the heroic world, Aeschylus' use of language makes it seem comfortably at home. *ψηφος* was not just a modern prose word like *χειροτονία* / *χειροτονεῖν*; it had been used by Pindar (*N.* 8.26) to tell the story of the award of the arms of Achilles: Odysseus rigged the voting, which was by secret ballot.<sup>11</sup> This story is referred to in passing by Sophocles at *Ajax* 449, 1135,<sup>12</sup> and for all we know the epic source or sources (*Cypria*, *Little Iliad*) may have used similar language, even if they cast no suspicion on Odysseus.<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting that the scholiast on Euripides *Or.* 432 says (though without citing any authority) that the vote was one of the many inventions of Palamedes. So Aeschylus' use of language here in describing the more recent phenomenon of *voting in the assembly* would not have struck a too disturbingly modern note. I conclude that this is part of the imaginative design by which the Argos of *Supplikes* is made to seem heroic and homogeneous while at the same time reflecting the present-day concerns of contemporary Athenians. Perhaps we should be thinking of an artistic challenge to the dramatist to find language that will fitly accommodate things undreamed of in the world of the epic heroes.

This leads to the more general consideration that the heroic world was not at all a constraining medium for the tragedian who knew how to handle it. As Paul Stapfer remarked in the context of Shakespearean tragedy, 'Liberty is an imperative necessity for the poet's imagination, which is miserably cramped and straightened by the vulgarities of the present and by its paltry and circumstantial details.'<sup>14</sup> Take the figure of the king in Greek tragedy: there was no one, on the face of it, less relevant to the experiences and problems of fifth-century Athenians than a hereditary monarch. But the tragic king was most conveniently chameleon-like, available now as a model of all that was un-Greek, the oriental absolute ruler like Xerxes in the *Persae* (while Darius in the same play could represent the most solemn religious authority), now as an ideal first citizen who typified all that the Athenians most valued about themselves and their traditions (Theseus most commonly fills this role, but Pelasgus is a close variant),<sup>15</sup> now as an odious tyrant, the personification of everything they most abhorred. Incidentally, if we should be tempted to see anachronism of a simple or crude kind in the use of Theseus as champion of the democracy, we must remind ourselves that among Athenians of the fifth century it was widely believed that in some sense he *was* its founder; even Thucydides credits him with the crucial act of *συνοικισμός* (ii 15.2). And although *τύραννοι* were not an institution of the heroic age, usurpers certainly were; and the tragic tyrant *par excellence* is one who wades through slaughter to a throne, like Aegisthus or Lycus.

The use of writing in tragedy is a complex and in some ways rather unusual case, but it does illustrate some typical features of the dramatists' procedure. Most scholars, on the evidence of the

<sup>10</sup> What mattered was the counting; it was less important whether the vote was taken by show of hands (*χειροτονία*) or by ballot (*ψηφος*). (Both systems were in use in the Athenian assembly.) In *Supp.* *ψηφος* and cognate words are repeatedly used for a decision which is taken by show of hands: cf. Friis Johansen–Whittle (n. 8) on 7, 601, 604. See A. L. Boegehold, 'Toward a study of Athenian voting procedure', *Hesperia* xxxii (1963) 366–74.

<sup>11</sup> This seems to be the natural interpretation of the passage, despite the doubts cast by N. O. Brown, 'Pindar, Sophocles, and the Thirty Years' Peace', *TAPA* lxxxii (1951) 15 n. 23. He rightly detects chicanery in *κρυφίαισι* and *θεράπευσαν*, but does not consider the possibility that this lay in giving Ajax's

peers the opportunity to vote against him anonymously instead of openly. Corinna offers a parallel (*PMG* 654.19–22), but the date is quite uncertain.

<sup>12</sup> This is noted as an anachronism by Eustathius on *Il.* ii 852 (*ψηφίζειν γὰρ οὐπω εἶδισαν ἥρωες, ἀλλὰ μεταχρόνιον τὸ τῶν ψήφων εὔρημα*). But it seems to be an isolated comment; so far as I know judicial voting was not seen as anachronistic by scholiasts.

<sup>13</sup> For the Cyclic epics see J. C. Kamerbeek's edition of *Ajax* (Leiden 1963) 1–5.

<sup>14</sup> P. Stapfer, *Shakespeare and classical antiquity*, trans. E. J. Carey (London 1880) 117.

<sup>15</sup> On Pelasgus see G. Grossmann, *Promethie und Orestie* (Heidelberg 1970) 148–53.

*Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, would say that Homer's heroes were illiterate. There is no reference in either poem to writing or written texts apart from two famous passages in the *Iliad*, the first teasingly ambiguous, the second most easily interpreted as evidence for illiteracy. At vi 168 ff. Glaucus tells of the 'dire signs', *σήματα λυγρά*, which Bellerophon all unwittingly carried in a folded tablet from King Proetus to his father-in-law, and the burden of Proetus' signs was 'kill the bearer'. This can hardly be taken as unequivocal evidence for the heroes' familiarity with writing: it comes in a brief and allusive story belonging to two generations before the main action of the *Iliad*; Proetus' father-in-law is a Lycian,<sup>16</sup> not a Greek; and—for whatever reason—the 'signs' are treated as something mysterious. One can take it either way: the Alexandrian scholars evidently disagreed over it, and some modern critics suspect that it represents a dim memory of Linear B.<sup>17</sup> The other passage, in Book vii,<sup>18</sup> is easier to evaluate: nine of the Achaean leaders scratch marks on lots, to decide who is to face Hector in single combat, and when Nestor has shaken the helmet a herald carries round the winning lot for each man to scrutinise in turn, the implication surely being that they were using private marks of some kind, not the letters of a shared alphabet.

When we turn to tragedy we find a remarkable state of affairs. The tragedians are quite uninhibited about allowing the use of writing into their supposedly heroic world. They mention it—and writing materials—quite explicitly in many contexts, for example in *Supplices*, where at 946 ff. Pelasgus contrasts a secret message conveyed in a letter with his own openly expressed promise as follows: 'These words are not inscribed in tablets [the Greek format] or sealed up in folded sheets of papyrus [the oriental format] but you hear them plainly from a mouth that speaks freely.'<sup>19</sup> In *Prometheus Bound*, Prometheus tells the Ocean Nymphs that one of the gifts to human beings was 'the putting together of letters (*γραμματῶν συνθέσεις*), the means of remembering everything, a worker who is mother of the Muses' (460 f.). In *Trachiniae* we hear of a tablet on which Heracles wrote down the text of an oracle given to him at Dodona (157 f., 1166 f.), and of course there are several plays in which a written text—a tablet bearing a message—is a stage prop of the greatest importance: Phaedra's lying letter which destroys Hippolytus, Iphigenia's letter which effects the recognition of brother and sister in *I.T.*, the different letters which represent Agamemnon's changes of purpose in *I.A.* And in the lost *Theseus* of Euripides (*fr.* 382 N<sup>2</sup>) an illiterate herdsman described the appearance of the letters of the alphabet making up the name 'Theseus'.

Moreover, in the imagery of tragedy, early tragedy in particular, the 'tablets of the mind' have a prominent place, as Pfeiffer pointed out: 'The image of scribe and reader had apparently caught poetic imagination as well as the imagination of the vase painters for the first time [from the seventies of the fifth century onwards]. It can hardly be by chance that all the great poets began to use the new symbol of the *written* word for the mental activity of "recollection", or *μνήμη*.'<sup>20</sup> So in *Olympian* 10 Pindar bids the bystanders read the name of the victor where it is written in his mind (*τὸν Ὀλυμπιονίκαν ἀνάγνωτέ μοι . . . πόθι φρενὸς ἐμᾶς γέγραπται*, 1 ff.), and the tragedians say such things as 'write this in your mind' (Aesch. *Cho.* 450), 'place my words in the tablets of your mind' (Soph. *fr.* 597 P and R). As a scholiast points out on *Philoc.* 1325, there is a Homeric model: *σὺ δ' ἐνὶ φρεσὶ βάλλεο σῆσι* (*Il.* i 297), whereas the tragedian says *γράφου φρενῶν ἔσω*. The nuance conveyed by the image of the written text is that of a permanent record (Deianira spells it out more explicitly, *Trach.* 682 f., when she tells how she kept the Centaur's instructions safe in her memory 'like the writing on a bronze tablet which is hard to erase').

Then there are the more awesome tablets of Zeus, in which an eternal record is kept of the

<sup>16</sup> See L. H. Jeffery in *A Companion to Homer*, ed. A. J. B. Wace and F. H. Stubbings (London 1962) 555.

<sup>17</sup> See A. Heubeck, *Archaeologia Homérica* iii X (1979) n. 714 for references (and a critique of this view).

<sup>18</sup> 175 ff. The relevant terms are *ἐσημήναντο* (175), *ἐπιγράψας* (187), *σήμα* (189).

<sup>19</sup> See Friis Johansen–Whittle (n. 8) on 946 and 947; R. Pfeiffer, *A history of classical scholarship* i (Oxford 1968) 26 n. 4. *βύβλων* here must mean 'sheets of papyrus' not 'books' as LSJ have it.

<sup>20</sup> Pfeiffer (n. 19) 25 f.

doings of men, with Dike in a famous fragment of Aeschylus as the ‘recording angel’ (*fr.* 530 Mette);<sup>21</sup> there is also the idea that the law is something recorded in writing, used metaphorically in such passages as Aesch. *Supp.* 708 f., ‘This is the third precept written in the ordinances of Dike greatest in honour’.<sup>22</sup>

How are we to account for this striking contrast between tragedy and its Homeric model? Not, surely, in terms of simple, thoughtless anachronism, for at least three reasons.

(i) As modern readers we have access to little besides the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* when we try to form an impression of the heroic world, but of course for writers of the fifth century the epic tradition was much more extensive and varied, and the lyric poets’ version of the heroic world must surely have contributed a good deal to the overall picture. So that if a story or a motif or an institution had been memorably treated in one of the Cyclic epics or elaborated by a lyric poet it was available for the tragedians as part of a ‘genuine’ heroic past. And the embarrassingly large number of candidates proposed by the Greeks of the fifth century and later as inventors of the alphabet all belonged to the heroic age or earlier. For our purposes there is no need to try to evaluate these stories; what matters is that they are ascribed to the right era. I have already mentioned Prometheus as *πρῶτος εὐρετής*, according to the author of *P.V.*; Stesichorus (*PMG* 213), Euripides (*fr.* 578 N<sup>2</sup>) and Gorgias (82 B 11a.30 DK) agreed that this was Palamedes (and we know that at least the story of his death featured in the *Cypria*); Hecataeus (*FGrH* 1F20) claimed that Danaus brought the alphabet from Egypt; whereas Herodotus (v 58–61) favoured (but did not originate) the view that Cadmus brought it from the Phoenicians. Other candidates canvassed in antiquity<sup>23</sup> included Musaeus, Cecrops, some unnamed Cretans, and of course the Egyptian Theuth or Thoth on the strength of Plato’s *Phaedrus*. The significant point in the light of all this is that after all there was nothing anachronistic in putting writing into the heroic age; and in fact there is no trace in the scholia on such plays as *Trachiniae* or *Hippolytus* of any objection to references to written texts.

(ii) We cannot be sure that the tragedians read the two notorious passages in the same way as we incline to do. Evidently there was a lively debate, at least from the Alexandrian period onwards, between those scholars who thought writing existed in the *Iliad* and those, including Aristarchus, who denied it. We catch a few echoes from the scholia<sup>24</sup> of a controversy over the *σήματα λυγρά*: were they letters, or some kind of picture, *εἰδωλα*? Perhaps they were like the hieroglyphs (*ἱερά ζώδια*) of the Egyptians? Behind the debate there seems to lie the Aristotelian notion of what was fitting: those who believed in writing said surely the inventors of all skills would be literate, while their opponents quoted the ‘divine Plato’ to prove that illiteracy was not a sign of lack of education. And over the lot-taking passage in *Iliad* vii some said that the heroes must not have been able to read, or the herald could have identified the marks on their lots; others objected that the marks would be *ἔθνικά*, in local script. So we cannot be sure that even if the tragedians worried over the Homeric passages they took the view that the heroes had no writing, and in any case, whatever may have been true of those *σήματα*, there is no disputing the existence of Bellerophon’s *tablet*.

(iii) Despite the free use in tragedy of references to writing and writing materials there is no mention of *books* in the extant plays.<sup>25</sup> This, no doubt, is where the dramatists drew the line: writing itself was acceptable, and so were writing tablets, but books would be intrusive, too sharply suggestive of the modern world. So even in places where the tragedians are plainly talking about literature as opposed to messages or letters they do not use *βιβλίον* or *βύβλος*.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Eur. *Melanippe* (*fr.* 506 N<sup>2</sup>); F. Solmsen, ‘The tablets of Zeus’, *CQ* xxxviii (1944) 27–30.

<sup>22</sup> This passage no doubt refers to the Unwritten Laws, but that very concept depended on the existence of written law codes.

<sup>23</sup> A long scholion on Dionysius Thrax gives a résumé: J. A. Cramer, *Anecdota Graeca* (Oxford 1837) iv

318 f. Cf. Josephus, *c. Ap.* i 10–11, and see Jeffery (n. 16) 545–7, Pfeiffer (n. 19) 19–22, Heubeck (n. 17) 146–8.

<sup>24</sup> See the scholia on *Il.* vi 168, 169a, 176b, 178 and *Il.* vii 175, 185a, 187, in H. Erbse, *Scholia graeca in Homeri Iliadem* ii (Berlin 1971).

<sup>25</sup> *Supp.* 947 refers to a papyrus document; cf. n. 19 above.

'Tablets' or 'muses' seem to be the correct terminology.<sup>26</sup> For example, when a character in a fragment of Euripides' *Erechtheus* (369.6 f. N<sup>2</sup>) says δέλτων ἀναπτύσσομαι γῆρυν, ἀν σοφοὶ κλέονται ('I unfold the utterance of tablets that poets make famous'), the δέλτων γῆρυν clearly refers to literature and not to a message. Similarly at *I.A.* 796 ff. the chorus, recalling the story of Leda, speak of ἐν δέλτοις Πιερίσιν μῦθοι: presumably it would have been felt to be grotesque to give the Muses βιβλία. Comedy, by contrast, could happily accommodate them (*Frogs* 1114 is a famous example).

This seems to me exactly comparable with the vague way in which the tragedians allude to their own medium, the theatre. There are many instances of self-reference in Greek tragedy, but there is no explicit use of play-imagery or of words which have an unequivocal reference to contemporary institutions: words like τραγωδία, θέατρον, δράμα would be too 'modern', just the kind of anachronism that is studiously avoided.<sup>27</sup> Instead the dramatists (notably Euripides) talk of 'tales', 'muses', 'bards', 'song' (μῦθοι, μουσαι, αἰδοί, αἰοιδή—all good heroic words), and leave τραγωδία to comedy. After all, anachronism is potentially funny: in the incongruous mixture of different periods there is the raw material for comedy and burlesque, and there is no surer way to reduce the dignity of a solemn mode than to bring in details from the contemporary world, which are liable to seem uncomfortably trivial and banal.

Another example, less complex than the use of writing, is that of coinage. Coined money was not, of course, a feature of heroic society, and it is probably safe to guess that this was as true of the Cyclic epics as it is of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. But the Homeric heroes owned and valued precious metals, and their world knew traders and the exchange of goods. We need only think of the Achaeans in *Iliad* vii bartering bronze, iron, hides, cattle and slaves for wine from Lemnos (472–5). In general terms tragedy respects this picture: in the many passages where such favourite topics as money, mercenary motives, and corruption are discussed the words used are suitably vague and dignified ones like 'gold', 'silver', 'gain', 'reward'; not 'obols', 'drachmas' or 'staters', which—like βιβλίον or θέατρον—would disrupt the heroic atmosphere. For example, when Hippolytus in his tirade against women suggests that men should have been able to get children by buying them in the temples (*Hipp.* 618–23) he uses a type of expression closely modelled on Homer: he says ἢ χαλκὸν ἢ σίδηρον ἢ χρυσοῦ βάρος, echoing Homer's χαλκός τε χρυσός τε πολύκμητός τε σίδηρος (*Il.* vi 48). As Barrett points out, Euripides, unlike Homer, means to differentiate the metals according to the wealth of the purchaser: the poor man gives bronze or iron, the rich man gold, but anything more precisely suggestive of coinage would be out of place in the heroic setting. In *Antigone* when Creon attacks Tiresias for his mercenary motives we see a similar technique at work. 'Go on,' he says, 'make your profits; do your trading if you like in the electrum of Sardis and the gold of India' (1037–9). There is an ultimate Homeric model—Achilles' rejection of all the wealth of Egypt (*Il.* ix 381 ff.)—and the choice of electrum and gold gives Creon's words an appropriately heroic feeling, but the reference to Sardis must owe something to the theme of Lydian luxury made familiar by the lyric poets.<sup>28</sup> As usual, the tragedians are doing more than simply reproducing Homeric phrases in a mechanical

<sup>26</sup> At *Hipp.* 451 f. the ambiguous term γραφαί may refer to books: ὅσοι μὲν οὖν γραφάς τε τῶν παλαιτέρων / ἔχουσιν αὐτοὶ τ' εἰσὶν ἐν μουσαῖς αἰεὶ ('those who know the writings of earlier generations and are themselves always occupied with the Muses'). But there is quite a strong case for taking γραφαί as 'paintings' (γραφῆ is used in this sense at *Hipp.* 1005; cf. *Ag.* 242 and (probably) 1329, *Eum.* 50, *Ion* 271, *Tro.* 687). Barrett *ad loc.* rejects this interpretation with the question 'what old paintings would there be in a private household of Euripides' day?' But it may be wrong to think specifically of Euripides' own time, and this may be a studiously vague way of saying 'those who know stories from the past, whether from paintings or from

poetry'. At first sight αὐτοὶ τε seems to demand the closest possible link in sense between the two clauses, but since εἰσὶν ἐν μουσαῖς has to mean 'occupied in reading' not in writing, the two lines would then become tautologous. The sentence is more effective if γραφαί means paintings; on this interpretation the τε . . . τε would be illogically placed (as Barrett notes), but this would not present a difficulty.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Bain (n. 3) 209 f. Veiled and ambiguous references to the theatre are not of course ruled out.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. D. L. Page, *Alcman, the Partheneion* (Oxford 1951) 69. *Ant.* 1038 seems to be the first reference in poetry to India as a source of wealth.

way: they make variations of their own, with details culled from less distant sources, but always observing a certain heroic vagueness.

In their use of metaphors from coinage they seem to be less inhibited. One of Aeschylus' most brilliant and famous images, Ares the gold-changer (*Ag.* 438–44), is most likely to be based on the figure of the ἀργυραμοιβός or banker, though the idea of the god with his scales no doubt also recalls Zeus in Homer weighing the fates of heroes in his golden scales (*Il.* viii 69–74; xxii 209–13) and therefore has a heroic as well as a modern analogue. Words like παράσημος and κίβδηλος and χαρακτήρ seem more unequivocally to evoke the world of coin making and faking, as when Orestes in Euripides' *Electra* asks the Old Man why he is scrutinising him so closely 'as if looking at the stamp on silver' (ὡσπερ ἀργύρου σκοπῶν / λαμπρὸν χαρακτήρα, 558–9): the idea of true and false coin is important for our understanding of the context, which has much to do with questions of true value and worth. As with 'tablets of the mind', so here, a post-Homeric institution provides the poets with a powerful source of imagery, and we should be the losers if their purism had prevented them from making use of it. Even the scholiasts seem to have let such imagery pass, though the nature of the language chosen must have been crucially important, and anything too specifically modern would no doubt have been noted and castigated. For example, when Euripides (*fr.* 542 N<sup>2</sup>) makes a character remark that silver and gold are not the only currency (νόμισμα), there is also virtue, νόμισμα is a sufficiently general word, meaning also 'institution', 'thing currently observed', to avoid making the incongruous effect that a word which could only mean 'coinage' would create. And we find no adverse scholarly comment on a similar passage in *Antigone*: οὐδὲν γὰρ ἀνθρώποισιν οἶον ἄργυρος / κακὸν νόμισμ' ἔβλαστε (295 f.).

So far I have not made much direct use of the ancient scholia, but since they do from time to time draw attention to anachronism it is worth taking some samples, to see what sort of detail is noticed, and with what justification. Often the scholiasts seem to have been industriously chasing paper tigers, but there are occasional illuminating observations to be found mixed in with the absurdities.

The earliest reference to anachronism seems to be in Aristotle's *Poetics* (1460a31), where in a list of instances of improbability (ἄλογον) which should not be allowed within the action of a play we find ἐν Ἡλέκτρα οἱ τὰ Πύθια ἀπαγγέλλοντες, which must be a rather loose way of referring to the Paedagogus' account of the Pythian Games in the Sophoclean play. There is no mention here of anachronism as such, but the scholia on the relevant passages of *Electra* explicitly make the accusation, pointing out that the Pythian contest was established after Orestes' time (ἀνῆκται δὲ τοῖς χρόνοις on 47,<sup>29</sup> τοῖς χρόνοις ἀνῆκται: νεώτερος γὰρ Ὀρέστου ἐστὶν ὁ Πυθικὸς ἀγὼν on 49, οὐπω ἦν ἐπὶ Ὀρέστου ὁ Πυθικὸς ἀγὼν on 682). Scholars have tried to think of other sorts of improbability that might be at issue in the Aristotelian passage, such as the unlikelihood that the people of Mycenae should have had to wait for the arrival of the Paedagogus to hear the news of Orestes' death at a famous event like the Pythian Games;<sup>30</sup> but anachronism seems to be the most plausible charge, and if we investigate the background we can suggest why.

In the Hypothesis to Pindar's *Pythians* there are two distinct versions of the history of the Games. One ascribes the foundation of the Games to Apollo and names the following heroic victors in the first athletic contests: Castor stade race, Polydeuces boxing, Calais long-distance race, Zetes race in armour, Peleus discus, Telamon wrestling, Heracles pancratium. The other gives part of an account which appears also in Strabo (ix 3.10) and Pausanias (x 7.4–5), to the effect that the contest was originally confined to music, and the athletic competitions were instituted as late as 586 BC when the games were reorganised after the Sacred War. Pausanias implies that chariot races were not introduced until 582 (x 7.6). Now it is true that in the list of

<sup>29</sup> The text of the rest of the note is corrupt: ἐπὶ Τριπολέμου γὰρ φασι γενέσθαι Πυθικὸν ἀγὼνα ἔξακοσίους ἔτεσι πρότερον, which Michaelis wanted to

emend to ἐπὶ Τρωικοῦ πολέμου γὰρ φασι γενέσθαι Ὀρέστην Πυθικοῦ ἀγώνος κτλ.

<sup>30</sup> See Gudeman *ad loc.* for examples.

legendary heroes no name is given for a heroic victor in the chariot race (though one would like to know more about the story told at Trozen and reported by Pausanias, ii 32.2, that Diomedes was the first to celebrate the Pythian Games in honour of Apollo). But as to the more sober historical account, how much of this information can we suppose was actually current in the fifth century, and how much was the fruit of Peripatetic scholarship? When one learns that Aristotle himself, in collaboration with Callisthenes, did research in the archives at Delphi and produced a list of Pythian victors<sup>31</sup> one may begin to feel suspicious. Maybe Aristotle, fresh from his work on the records, was particularly sensitive to such unhistorical procedures as the misdating of the Pythian chariot race? All the more likely if Pfeiffer is right in suggesting that Aristotle's list of victors was prefaced by an introduction on the foundation of the Games and a refutation of legendary accounts such as the one in the Hypothesis to the *Pythians*. Perhaps we have here the remains of a scholarly controversy, as Jacoby also suspected on the basis of other scraps of evidence.<sup>32</sup>

So Sophocles may well not have known that he was being unhistorical, but even if he did he had several good reasons for using the motif of the chariot race. As Kaibel pointed out (on *El.* 680), Orestes was living in Phocis, and competing in the games was the right sort of thing for a prince to be doing; it made a likely story for the Paedagogus to tell. And whatever may have been true of Delphi in historical times, there were after all chariot races in Homer: part of the exquisite irony of the speech in *Electra* is precisely that it is so closely modelled on the story of Antilochus in *Iliad* xxiii.<sup>33</sup> Besides, the image of Orestes as charioteer is prominent in *Choephoroe* (1022 f., cf. 794–6) and could be used by Sophocles in *Electra* as one of the many significant links between the two plays.

There are other places in the scholia where remarks on anachronism seem to bear the traces of learned polemic. Oddly enough, games and related matters crop up quite often: there is a long and rather jumbled scholion on *Hecuba* 573 about *φυλλοβολία*; the distinction between riding horses and racing horses was evidently a matter for debate;<sup>34</sup> and Euripides was taken to task (on *Hipp.* 231) for giving Hippolytus Enetic horses. The commentator notes that 'the Greeks did not yet use Enetic horses. For the Enetai<sup>35</sup> originally lived in Paphlagonia and later migrated to the Adriatic. It was Leon the Spartan who first won a victory with Enetic horses in the eighty-fifth Olympiad [440 BC] as Polemon records', and he goes on to quote the inscription (a remnant, no doubt, of Polemon's *περὶ τῶν κατὰ πόλεις ἐπιγραμματῶν*): 'Leon the Spartan won the victory with the Enetic horses of his father Anticleidas.' Whatever the true historical facts,<sup>36</sup> the scholiasts seem to have been unduly fussy in their critique of Euripides: it was surely enough for him and his audience that 'Enetic' appeared in early poetry in suitable contexts. In the Catalogue of Ships there is a reference to the 'wild she-mules' of the Paphlagonian Enetoi (*Παφλαγόνων δ' ἡγείτο Πυλαιμένεος λάσιον κῆρ, | ἐξ Ἐνετῶν, ὅθεν ἡμιόνων γένος ἀγροτεράων, Il.* ii 851–2), and although mules are not the same as horses this reference and the equally mysterious *κέλης Ἐνετικός* in Alcman fr. 1.50 f. *PMG* may have made the adjective 'Enetic' seem quite comfortable in a heroic setting. Perhaps the scholar who quoted Polemon had an axe to grind.

This passage is noted by Eustathius (on *Il.* ii 852) as an example of what the ancient commentators called an undesirable sort of anachronism (*οὐκ εὖζηλον*, 'not in good style'). He contrasts it with some instances in Sophocles which he describes as *εὐμέθοδοι*, presumably a term of commendation, which makes this the only place known to me where the use of anachronism actually wins approval. The passages (*Ajax* 1285–7, *Trach.* 1, *Ajax* 449) all have in common the fact that they do not name names: for example *Ajax* 1285–7 is a covert reference to

<sup>31</sup> Pfeiffer (n. 19) 80.

<sup>32</sup> *FGrH* iiiB (Notes) p. 140 n. 24.

<sup>33</sup> There may be a rather similar irony in the story of the False Merchant in *Philoctetes* (546–8). He supplies wine to the Greeks at Troy, echoing *Il.* vii 467, but there the wine comes from Lemnos itself.

<sup>34</sup> See Eustathius on *Il.* xv 680–7.

<sup>35</sup> *Ἐνέται* in the scholion, but Barrett argues that the correct form of the masculine is *Ἐνετοί*.

<sup>36</sup> See Page (n. 28) 87 f.; R. Devereux, 'The Enetian horses of Hippolytos', *AC* xxxiii (1964) 375–83; 'Homer's wild she-mules', *JHS* lxxxv (1965) 29–32; 'The Enetian horse of Alcman's Partheneion', *Hermes* xciv (1966) 129–34.



the story of Cresphontes, who because he was eager to lose when drawing lots put a lot made of a clod of earth into the urn; it disintegrated and he duly lost. Cresphontes was a great-great-grandson of Heracles and therefore Ajax's junior by three generations, but the important point (not made explicitly by Eustathius) is that he is not identified by name. Sophocles merely says of Ajax, drawing lots to see who is to fight Hector: 'For the lot he cast in was not one to skulk behind, no lump of moist earth, but such as would be the first to leap lightly from the crested helmet.' This is a great deal more careful and discreet than Shakespeare, who allows a character in *Coriolanus* to speak of 'the most sovereign prescription in Galen' (II i 117).

Most of the strictures we meet in the scholia are at a tedious level of triviality, but there are occasional comments on Euripides which seem to point the way to something more important. Not that the scholiasts are sympathetic: they find fault with him for 'combining his own period with that of the heroes and mixing up the times' (καὶ ἐστὶ τοιοῦτος ὁ Εὐριπίδης, περιάπτων τὰ καθ' ἑαυτὸν τοῖς ἥρωσι καὶ τοὺς χρόνους συγχέων on *Hec.* 254, where Hecuba criticises Odysseus for the value he attaches to slick persuasive rhetoric), but at least they are drawing attention to a striking feature of his dramatic technique. Similarly on *Hipp.* 953, where Theseus takes exception to Hippolytus' eccentric beliefs, the note runs τοιοῦτός ἐστιν αἰεὶ, τὰ ἥρωικὰ πρόσωπα εἰσάγων φιλοσοφούντα. In fact Euripides refers to Pythagoreanism and Orphism in thoroughly discreet and appropriate language (καὶ δι' ἀψύχου βορᾶς / σὶ τοῖς καπήλευ' Ὀρφέα τ' ἄνακτ' ἔχων / βιάκχευε), but the scholiast has seen the main point, that he mixes past and present in a remarkable way. But whereas the ancient commentators disapproved, we might be more receptive to the idea that these startling and ironic effects are part of the dramatic strategy. We can see them as offering the audience different perspectives on the heroic action, to 'shock them out of their complacency', as T. S. Eliot said he intended in *Murder in the Cathedral* when he juxtaposed the knights' speeches, cast in the jargon of contemporary politics, with the dignified poetry of the rest of the play.<sup>37</sup> This is not to suggest that Euripides ever drops the heroic manner altogether or simply guys it—even he draws the line at words like θέατρον or ὄβολος; but he does draw attention to the mixture of old and new in novel and subversive ways.

In Euripides' *Suppliants*, when the Theban herald asks for the king of Athens, Theseus roundly rejects the idea that the city is ruled by a monarch: 'You're wrong: this city is not ruled by one man but is free. The people is ruler, with yearly succession of office (διαδοχαῖσιν ἐν μέρει / ἐνιαυσίαισιν), not giving the greatest share in government to the rich; the poor man, too, has an equal share (404–8).' The idea of yearly magistracies sits oddly with that of heroic kingship; one cannot help feeling that Euripides is going beyond the traditional presentation of Theseus as champion of the democracy and is inviting his audience to notice the mixture of old and new and perhaps to think critically about the city's institutions. Similarly in the debate between Theseus and the herald on the relative merits of democracy and tyranny the herald's picture of the mob deceived by glib demagogues (412–25) evokes an atmosphere far removed from that of the heroic world. One is reminded of the extraordinary passage in *Orestes* (493–504) where Tyndareus suggests that Orestes ought to have used due legal processes against Clytemnestra after the murder of Agamemnon, as if the whole story of Orestes and the first murder trial were not still to come.

We can see a similar strategy at work in Euripides' covert references to the technique of other dramatists: the most famous is of course the recognition scene in *Electra*, but there are other, less elaborate references elsewhere like the throwaway remark in *Phoenissae* (751 f.), which is clearly directed against the shield scene in the *Septem*.<sup>38</sup> All these subversive devices complicate the effects of the heroic stories by reminding the audience of the clash between the time of the story and their own present time, suggesting, often enough, that they should look closely at the disturbing implications of the heroic tales and not allow themselves to be anaesthetised by their glamour or by their familiarity on the Attic stage. In a way it would have

<sup>37</sup> From 'Poetry and drama', in *Selected Prose* (Harmondsworth 1953) 78.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. R. P. Winnington-Ingram, 'Euripides: *poiētēs sophos*', *Arethusa* ii (1969) 129.

been easy for Euripides to abandon the heroic world altogether and to follow the direction taken by Agathon in his *Antheus* with its wholly fictitious characters, but the fact that he went on taking trouble to maintain it suggests that the power of its imaginative appeal was very great.

This, perhaps, is the most important point that emerges from an inevitably rather desultory survey:<sup>39</sup> for all the tragedians, even Euripides, the world created by the epic poets exercised a powerful hold on the imagination, offering them a stimulus and challenge rather than any sort of restriction on their creativity, and we should not be surprised to find that they devised ingenious and often subtle ways of suiting it to their contemporary purposes.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> A comprehensive study would have to be much lengthier. Other features of tragedy which are not prominent in epic include hero cult, Trojans seen as barbarians and orientals, Athens and Corinth as important cities.

<sup>40</sup> This paper is based on the Gaisford Lecture given at Oxford in 1981. I am grateful to Constantine Valakas for helpful criticisms and suggestions.