

NOTHING TO DO WITH DEMOCRACY: ATHENIAN DRAMA AND THE *POLIS**

Abstract: A fashionable approach to the interpretation of Athenian drama concentrates on its context in performance at Athenian festivals, and sees both the festivals and the plays as products of the Athenian democracy. In this paper it is argued that, whereas the institutional setting inevitably took a particular form in democratic Athens, that was an Athenian version of institutions found more generally in the Greek world, and even in the Athenian version many features do not seem distinctively democratic. Similarly in the interpretation of particular plays themes have often been said to be democratic which are better seen as concerns of *polis*-dwelling Greeks in general, and the notion that plays questioned Athens' democratic values because the democratic ethos of Athens consciously encouraged the questioning of Athens' democratic values is far from certain.

J. GRIFFIN begins a paper on 'Sophocles and the democratic city' by referring to his and my generation's encounter with Athenian tragedy at school, through editions whose main function was to identify and label grammatical usages (such as 'ethic dative') and to pronounce on the views of learned Germans about the correct reading of the text. Then came undergraduate study at Oxford, and the reading of books which did attempt literary criticism of a straightforward kind. 'All that was in the 1950s; it seems now as remote as the 1850s... Since then, what a change there has been! Clio, Muse of history, has moved massively into the territory of her tragic sister Melpomene.'¹

In the last fifteen years or so, many people have been critical of the study of Athenian drama as 'literature', and have insisted that it must be understood as a performance which took place at a festival – and in our irreligious age the festival has been seen less as a religious festival than as a civic festival, as in an early and influential collection of papers in this vein, entitled *Nothing to Do with Dionysos*?² Recently S. Goldhill in a forceful defence of this approach has written:

That the event of the fifth-century drama festival in Athens is political (on the broadest understanding of that term) and that its specific rituals and language are integrally democratic is a starting point of much recent writing on tragedy. This does not mean that plays follow some naively conceived democratic party line, but rather that the festival itself, in organization and structure, despite earlier origins and later development, is in the fifth century fully an institution of the democratic polis, and that the plays constantly reflect their genesis in a fifth-century Athenian political environment.³

E. Hall has pointed out that the fullest ancient study of drama, Aristotle's *Poetics*, 'goes against the grain of all previous discussions of tragedy in virtually excising from the genre not only the Athenian democratic polis, but also the very abstract notion of a polis, and of the civic context, consciousness, and function of tragic drama'. She claims that 'in almost every text

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Those who study drama and the polis have been inspired by the work of J.-P. Vernant and scholars associated with him; in Germany the issues have been addressed in a somewhat different way by C. Meier; but the debate in which I intervene here is one that has been conducted largely in the English language, and I shall limit myself to citation of work in English. Meier treats

the festivals, including some aspects of them which I discuss, in *Die politische Kunst der griechischen Tragödie* (Munich 1988) 54-74 = *The Political Art of Greek Tragedy*, tr. A. Webber (Cambridge 1993) 44-61 chs 3-4.

¹ J. Griffin, in *Sophocles Revisited: Essays Presented to Sir Hugh Lloyd-Jones* (Oxford 1999) 73-94 ch. 5 at 73-4.

² J.J. Winkler and F.I. Zeitlin (eds), *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?* (Princeton 1990). One school of thought had seen the festivals as essentially dramatic entertainments which had 'nothing to do with Dionysus' (e.g. O. Taplin, *Greek Tragedy in Action* (London 1978) 162); the contributors to this volume responded by claiming for Dionysus a variety of civic interpretations.

³ S. Goldhill, *JHS* 120 (2000) 34-56 at 35.

where tragedy is discussed or quoted in fifth- and fourth-century Athens, including works by Aristotle other than the *Poetics*, such specificity [about the context to which tragedy belongs] is taken for granted'; and she argues that 'the *Poetics*' near-total displacement of the *polis* from tragedy seems to me to be an astonishingly original innovation, which adumbrates the incipient and future status of tragedy as an international art form... Tragedy was about to lodge a petition for divorce from the Athenian democratic *polis*.⁴ Her contrast is at any rate over-stated: there is a good deal of treatment of tragedy by Aristophanes, for instance, in the *Frogs* and elsewhere, which focuses on matters other than its civic context,⁵ and the view that the only legitimate way to study drama is to study it in its civic context is one for which it is hard to claim ancient support.

I believe, and both Griffin and Goldhill believe, that to make sense of Athenian drama we need to see it in the correct, or at any rate a correct, context. Each of them regards the other's context as incorrect; I can see merits in both; but in this paper I wish to take issue with one particular feature of the context invoked by Goldhill and others in his camp. I am very happy to see as one aspect of Athenian drama that it was produced for and conditioned by the *polis*; but I am much less happy with the emphasis which we frequently encounter on the democratic *polis*.⁶ The point is an important one: if we associate the festival, and the plays performed at the festival, too intimately with the democracy of Classical Athens, we risk not only misunderstanding the plays and the festival by seeing them in too narrow a context but also misunderstanding the significance of democracy in Athens and of Athens in the Greek world.

Now of course in an obvious sense Athenian drama does belong to the democratic *polis*. Even if, as I prefer, we should regard the reforms of Ephialtes in 462/1 rather than those of Cleisthenes in 508/7 as the defining stage in the creation of Athenian democracy,⁷ nearly all our surviving tragedies and all old comedies were written and performed in a democratic Athens. There are some occasions when a play clearly does allude to Athens and/or to democracy. Democratic ideas, and perhaps the emerging concept of *demokratia*, can be found in Aeschylus' *Supplikes*, probably of 464/3;⁸ his *Eumenides*, of 459/8, focused (with whatever intent) on the council of the Areopagus shortly after Ephialtes' removal of powers from that body. Euripides in his *Supplikes*, probably of the late 420s, has a defence of democratic Athens under the legendary king Theseus.⁹ And of course it is the democratic Athens in which they lived whose institutions and politics are among the subjects treated by Aristophanes and the other writers of old comedy.¹⁰ At that level the link between drama and democratic Athens is unproblematic.

But it is a more fundamental link that is claimed by those who view drama as a product of the democratic *polis*. Griffin quotes a number of recent pronouncements, including:

⁴ E. Hall, in M.S. Silk (ed.), *Tragedy and the Tragic* (Oxford 1996) 295-309: quotations from pp. 296, 297, 304-5.

⁵ I do not, of course, deny that one strand in Aristophanes' comments on drama is the usefulness to the *polis* of drama in general and his own plays in particular.

⁶ My point is different from that of M. Griffith, *CSCA* 26 = *CA* 14 (1995) 62-139, who argues 'not that there was no such democratic ideology ... but there were other, competing ideologies too' and that one important function of tragedy was 'to negotiate between conflicting class interests and ideologies within the *polis*' (109-10). But a similar line to mine is taken briefly by P. Goggans, *Polis* 18 (2001) 168-73 at 170, in a review of S.S. Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements: Athenian Politics and the Practice of Democracy* (Princeton 2000).

⁷ Cf. P.J. Rhodes in *CAH* 5² 87-92.

⁸ N.B. *demou kratousa cheir* in l. 604. But S. Scullion proposes to challenge the current consensus, based on *P.Oxy.* 20.2256 *fr.* 3, and return to an earlier date for the play (*CQ* n.s. 52 (2002) 81-101 at 87-101).

⁹ Eur. *Supp.* 395-462. What Theseus defends is indeed clearly democracy, though C.B.R. Pelling comments on the play, 'Despite Theseus' rosy picture of democracy in action the audience must find much that is uncomfortable' (in Pelling (ed.), *Greek Tragedy and the Historian* (Oxford 1997) 213-35 at 233-4): what he contrasts it with is not oligarchy but tyranny.

¹⁰ It seems reasonable to believe that the kind of public criticism of institutions and public figures which we find in old comedy was more easily tolerated by a democratic state than by states of other kinds: Arist. *Poet.* 1448a 31-2 links comedy with democracy in Megara.

The play-festivals of Dionysus ... served further as a device for defining Athenian civic identity, which meant exploring and confirming but also questioning what it was to be a citizen of a democracy. (P. CARTLEDGE)

Tragedy ... must be viewed as reflecting the aims and methods of the democracy. (N.T. CROALLY)¹¹

What this school of thought maintains is, first, that the institutional framework within which Athenian drama was performed was essentially a democratic framework, to such an extent that the whole dramatic experience was bound up with the democracy and its ideology, and would have been fundamentally different if fifth-century Athens had not been democratic; and, secondly and consequently, that the ideas and attitudes which the plays presuppose and encourage, including the questioning that they presuppose and encourage, are distinctively democratic. And it is at this level that I am worried.

One thing we must do is be clear about what we mean when we apply the label 'democratic'. Some phenomena and themes are distinctively democratic, in that they are found in Athens and in other democratic states but not in non-democratic states. Others are most familiar to us from democratic Athens, because it is from democratic Athens that most of our evidence for the Classical period comes, but are in fact attested for other kinds of states as well – but comparison between Athens and other states is difficult, because we have so much more evidence for Athens than for other states. Some we are inclined to label democratic or undemocratic because they fit or do not fit our own understanding of the egalitarian principles of democracy, and these may or may not be found in democratic Athens and may or may not be found elsewhere. I shall be particularly concerned with phenomena and themes which are found in democratic Athens but are not limited to Athens or to democracies.

* * *

First I consider the institutional framework. The early stages in the development of the Great Dionysia and of tragedy are extremely uncertain. There is no text which directly dates the establishment of the Great Dionysia, but the festival seems to have become important in the sixth century, in the time of the tyrant Pisistratus;¹² the first dramatic performance by Thespis was placed Ol. 61 = 536-532 by the *Suda*, apparently between 538 and 528 by the Parian Marble, and other texts point to the time of Pisistratus.¹³ The Lenaea, the other city festival at which plays were performed, was an older festival, but there is no evidence for the performance of plays at it before c. 440.¹⁴ W.R. Connor, starting from the fact that the dating of Thespis' first performance is uncertain, has argued in a paper entitled 'City Dionysia and Athenian democracy' that the institution of the festival would make better sense at the end of the sixth century, after the overthrow of the tyranny and the reforms of Cleisthenes, as a celebration of Athens' liberation and democracy – but, even if drama and dramatic festivals subsequently came to be intimately associated with

¹¹ Griffin (n.1) 74-5: P. Cartledge in P.E. Easterling (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge 1997) 3-35 at 6 – but at 21 Cartledge stresses, 'Nor, on the other hand (to correct any possible misunderstanding of what follows), was the fundamentally questioning, risk-taking sort of tragedy by any means the only sort staged, even in the undoubted crisis of the Peloponnesian War'; N.T. Croally, *Euripidean Polemic: The Trojan Women and the Function of Tragedy* (Cambridge 1994) 3. D. Feeney in a review of the *Cambridge Companion* suggests that 'the undeniable gains of the "democratic moment" approach will leave

their stamp on any future consensus, but one feels that this Companion shows the current consensus just before it begins to crack' (*TLS* (29 May 1988) 11).

¹² A.W. Pickard-Cambridge, rev. J. Gould and D.M. Lewis, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens* (Oxford 1968) 58.

¹³ *Suid.* (θ 282 Adler) Θέσπις; Marm. Par. *FGrHist* 239 A 43 (but ἐν ἄστει, 'in the city', is a phrase very insecurely introduced into the text by Boeckh). See M.L. West, *CQ* n.s. 39 (1989) 251-4; S. Scullion, *CQ* n.s. 52 (2002) 81-101 at 81-4, is sceptical on all pre-500 dates for the Dionysia and drama.

¹⁴ Pickard-Cambridge (n.12) 40.

democracy, to postulate that they must have originated in a celebration of democracy is a very large assumption.¹⁵ Others have been able to argue, with equal plausibility or implausibility, that

the purpose of the new festivals was to foster and display the power of the unified state, centered politically upon the city and ultimately upon the tyrant himself, and to promote a common cultural identity and a system of values consistent with the new political reality.¹⁶

R. Osborne has shown that Athens had a very large number of festivals involving competition, some ancient, many apparently instituted or reorganized in the late sixth or early fifth century; he argues that, while competition could be disruptive, democratic Athens found ways of maximizing the civic benefits while minimizing the civic dangers – but he remarks that ‘the interests of the tyrants were not in fact very divergent from those of the freed city after 510’.¹⁷ This need to encourage but also to harness competition was surely a need of the *polis*, not only of the democratic *polis*. Certainly it was not only democratic régimes that could adapt festivals to political purposes: among the measures attributed by Herodotus to the tyrant Cleisthenes of Sicyon are the ending of recitations of Homer, because of his references to Argos and the Argives, and his reorientation of a festival towards the Theban Melanippus and (for ‘tragic choruses’) Dionysus instead of the Argive Adrastus.¹⁸ The best we can do here is accept that the evidence is far from good, but it is likely rather than unlikely that the Great Dionysia, and the first dramatic performance, are earlier than the ending of the tyranny.

Goldhill and others emphasize the institutional details associated with the performance of drama at Athens. I quote a catalogue of points to which he thinks Griffin fails to do justice:

... the funding of chorus or festival: the choregia as a specifically democratic system; the selection of judges and chorus and actors by democratic procedure; the possibility of tribal seating, and the certainty of seating according to political position in the democracy (e.g. the seats for the *boule*); the procedure for getting tickets via inscription on the deme roll; the dating of the innovation of the pre-play ceremonies; the assembly in the theatre to discuss the theatre – indeed the whole gamut of performances which are instituted by democracy, and function as signs and symptoms of democracy in action.¹⁹

The list is an impressive list, and of course I do not wish to deny that the various institutions took the particular form they did in fifth-century Athens because fifth-century Athens was democratic; but how far is it true that they were distinctively democratic institutions, rather than *polis* institutions which took a particular form under the democracy?

¹⁵ W.R. Connor, *C&M* 40 (1989) [publ. 1993] 7-32; this and accompanying papers published also as a separate book, W.R. Connor *et al.*, *Aspects of Athenian Democracy* (C&M Diss. 11, Copenhagen 1990), same pagination. Doubts about Connor’s interpretation of the Dionysia are expressed by C. Sourvinou-Inwood in *Ritual, Finance, Politics ... D. Lewis* (Oxford 1994) 269-90, esp. 275-6; K.A. Raaflaub in *Polis and Politics ... M.H. Hansen* (Copenhagen 2000) 249-75 at 255-60; A.P. Burnett in *Gestures ... A.L. Boegehold* (Oxford: Oxbow, forthcoming). Cartledge, in the *Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (n.11), while expressing sympathy for Connor’s theory, at any rate as explaining the origin of the Dionysia and tragedy as we know them (23-4), accepts the traditional view that tragedy began under Pisistratus – but stresses that Pisistratus’ tyranny was ‘relatively benign and populist’ (3, *cf.* 22).

In the same spirit as Connor, J.M. Hurwit has argued for the dating of buildings to the years after the overthrow of the tyranny: ‘Between 508 and 490, the democracy deliberately and thoroughly put its stamp upon the religious spaces of Athens’ (*The Acropolis* (Cambridge 1999) 121-5, *cf.* 132: quotation at p. 121).

¹⁶ E. Csapo and W.J. Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama* (Ann Arbor 1995) 103-4.

¹⁷ R. Osborne in A.H. Sommerstein *et al.* (eds), *Tragedy, Comedy and the Polis ... 18 - 20.vii.1990* (Bari 1993) 21-38: quotation at p. 36.

¹⁸ Hdt. 5.67.

¹⁹ Goldhill (n.3) 38, criticizing Griffin, *CQ* n.s. 48 (1998) 39-61 esp. 47-50. *Cf.* the list in Croally (n.11) 3.

I take Goldhill's points in order, beginning with 'the choregia as a specifically democratic system'.²⁰ Wilson, in a book in which he is eager to see the institution as democratic,²¹ admits that 'there is a little evidence suggesting a centralised *khoregia* already under the tyrants'; warns that it should not 'be too hastily assumed that this system was necessarily an invention of the Athenians'; but nevertheless insists that 'the Kleisthenic moment was perceived as a major historical rupture in Athenian culture in general and Dionysiac performance in particular'.²² He collects early instances of non-democratic *choregia*, including Alcman's Sparta;²³ sixth-century Aegina, following Epidaurus, where he accepts a liturgical function;²⁴ the sixty-day festival of choral paeans at Rhegium, which must have required some kind of civic organization and funding;²⁵ a *daphnephorikon* written by Pindar for Thebes, which shows members of the family of the Aeolidae sharing in the duties of choral leadership.²⁶ The *choregia* was a device by which competition among the élite was harnessed for civic purposes; as I remarked above,²⁷ the need to do that was not limited to democracies; but in Athens payment by the rich to support performance by the (comparatively) poor could, for instance, lead the 'Old Oligarch' to say that 'the rich perform *choregiai* while the *demos* benefits from *choregiai*'.²⁸ As far as we know competitions in drama were in the fifth century peculiar to Athens;²⁹ but competition as such was certainly not peculiar to Athens or to democratic states. As for procedures, nomination of *choregoi* by tribes (for dithyrambs, and by the time of *Ath. Pol.* for comedies) need not be distinctively democratic, though I dare say Athens' particular mechanism was; and again appointment by the archon (for tragedies, and at first for comedies) need not be distinctively democratic, though I dare say the rule that he was to appoint the richest men who could not claim exemption was.³⁰ It is true that Aristotle disapproved of liturgies (as a means of milking the rich, and as useless activities which the rich should not be allowed to engage in even if they want to),³¹ and it seems likely that it was Demetrius of Phalerum who replaced competing *choregoi* with single *agonothetai* – who still had to dip into their own pockets, and who were retained under subsequent régimes including democratic régimes.³² That should not lead us to associate *choregoi* too closely with democracy: the Athenian *choregoi* were part of that interaction of mass and élite³³ which took a distinctive form in Classical, democratic Athens; but they are a particular instance of a much wider phenomenon.

The poets, incidentally, when they wished to compete applied to the archon, 'asking for a chorus'; he selected, in what way we do not know, the correct number of poets for the competition, and 'granted them a chorus';³⁴ the poet who won the first prize received a crown of ivy leaves.³⁵

²⁰ On the *choregia*, the institution through which rich citizens were given responsibility including financial responsibility for a chorus competing in a festival, see in general Pickard-Cambridge (n.12) 86-90; Csapo and Slater (n.16) 139-57.

²¹ P. Wilson, *The Athenian Institution of the Khoregia* (Cambridge 2000): democratic, e.g. 7.

²² Wilson (n.21) 13; 312-13 n.7, cf. 279-302; 13.

²³ Wilson (n.21) 113-14, 280; Alcman. *PMG* 1 (the word l. 44).

²⁴ Wilson (n.21) 281-2; Hdt. 5.83.

²⁵ Wilson (n.21) 279-80; Aristoxenus *fr.* 117 Wehrli, with M.L. West, *CQ* n.s. 40 (1990) 286-7.

²⁶ Wilson (n.21) 280-1; Pind. *fr.* 94b Snell and Maehler.

²⁷ P. 107, above.

²⁸ χορηγοῦσι μὲν οἱ πλούσιοι, χορηγεῖται δὲ δῆμος; [*Xen.*] *Ath. Pol.* 1.13. In Wilson's book (n.21), a chapter on 'Aristocratic style' (ch.3, 109-43) is followed by one on 'Khoregia and democracy' (ch.4, 144-97). Leisure and

nearness to the city are likely to have been two factors making it easier for people to perform; the audience included the poor (cf. pp. 110-11, below), but it was not simply an assemblage of the *demos* but included non-citizens.

²⁹ Wilson (n.21) 282.

³⁰ *Ath. Pol.* 56.3.

³¹ *Arist. Pol.* 5.1305a 4-5, 1309a 14-20, 6.1320b 2-4, 1321a 31-5.

³² Wilson (n.21) 270-6; P.J. Rhodes with D.M. Lewis, *The Decrees of the Greek States* (Oxford 1997) 41-3.

³³ This expression is prompted by J. Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens* (Princeton 1989).

³⁴ Pickard-Cambridge (n.12) 84-6; Csapo and Slater (n.16) 105, 108-9; *Ar. Knights* 513, Cratinus *PCG* 17, *Arist. Poet.* 1449b 1-2. (For the dithyrambic competition the *choregoi* in an order determined by lot chose their poet. Pickard-Cambridge (n.12) 75-6; *Ar. Birds* 1403-4, *Ant. 6 Chor.* 11, *Dem.* 21 *Mid.* 13.)

³⁵ Pickard-Cambridge (n.12) 98; Csapo and Slater (n.16) 108, 119; e.g. Plut. *An Seni* 785b, *Ath.* 6. 241f.

We know only from a passage in Aristophanes' *Frogs* and a scholium on it that in the last years of the Peloponnesian War the competing poets were also receiving some kind of stipend from the state, which was or was in danger of being reduced:³⁶ that, certainly, is patronage of a kind appropriate to Athens' highly institutionalized democracy, but other régimes, including tyrannies, offered patronage to poets in their own ways.

Next 'the selection of judges and chorus and actors by democratic procedure'. We have seen that competitions – often requiring judges – occurred all over the Greek world from an early date. For the judges of the dramatic and other poetic contests at Athens, the emphasis was on randomness. The council drew up tribal short lists of candidates, by a process of which we know only that the *choregoi* were present and could influence the selection; the list for each tribe was kept in a sealed vase; at the beginning of the contest the archon drew one name from each; the ten men thus selected wrote down their order of merit on tablets which were placed in another vase; finally the archon drew out five of the ten tablets, and the result was decided on the basis of them.³⁷ We could see better how democratic the process was if we knew on what basis the short lists were drawn up; equal representation of the ten tribes is a major feature of post-Cleisthenic Athens, but provision for that kind of equality is not limited to democratic states. Allotment tends to be associated with democracy, and it is certainly true both that democratic Athens made considerable use of it while oligarchies made less, and that Plato and Aristotle regarded it as a characteristically democratic form of appointment;³⁸ but it can be seen more generally as a way of choosing between candidates who are considered equally eligible, and for that reason was not totally rejected by oligarchies: for instance, considerable use of allotment was envisaged in the 'future' constitution proposed in Athens in 411.³⁹ For judges of contests, it is enough to note that the *hellanodikai* who were responsible for the Olympic Games were likewise picked by lot from a short list.⁴⁰

Choruses were recruited by the *choregoi* on the basis of their knowledge and connections.⁴¹ Winkler has argued that the tragic choruses consisted of ephebes:⁴² he seems to me more successful at arguing that that would have been appropriate than at arguing that it actually happened; but even if he were right, the *choregoi* would still have made a choice from those eligible. That practice can hardly have been peculiar to democracies. The principal actors, it seems, were at first the actual playwrights or were chosen by them; perhaps from a date in the fifth century but perhaps not until the fourth, a list of leading actors was drawn up – including the previous year's winning protagonist – and these were assigned by lot to the tragedians; by 341 each tragedian was assigned a different one of the three for each of his three plays.⁴³ Here, as in the appointment of judges, randomness was clearly thought to be important, but I am not sure that it is a randomness which non-democratic states would have rejected.

³⁶ Pickard-Cambridge (n.12) 90: Ar. *Frogs* 367-8 with schol. 368. The poets are not discussed by Goldhill; the stipend is mentioned by Croally (n.11) 3.

³⁷ Pickard-Cambridge (n.12) 95-9; Csapo and Slater (n.16) 157-65. The principal texts are Lys. 4 *Wound* 3; Isoc. 17 *Banker* 33-4; Dem. 21 *Mid.* 17-18; Plut. *Cim.* 8.7-9.

³⁸ E.g. Pl. *Rep.* 8.557a; Arist. *Pol.* 4.1294b 7-9; but at 4.1300b 1-3 Aristotle classifies the appointment 'of some from some by lot' as oligarchic.

³⁹ Detailed information for states other than Athens and Sparta is hard to find; but Anaximenes of Lampsacus in his *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* (18, p. 16 Fuhrmann) thought oligarchies should use allotment for most

appointments though not the highest. For the 'future constitution' of 411, see *Ath. Pol.* 30.

⁴⁰ J. Oehler, *RE* 8.155-7 at 156: 'also a universal Greek procedure' (M.I. Finley and H.W. Pleket, *The Olympic Games: The First Thousand Years* (London 1976) 59).

⁴¹ Pickard-Cambridge (n.12) 76, 90-1; Csapo and Slater (n.16) 75-80.

⁴² Winkler in *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?* (n.2) 20-62 (an earlier version in *Representations* 11 (1985) 26-62).

⁴³ Pickard-Cambridge (n.12) 93-5; Csapo and Slater (n.16) 85-6; allotment: Hes. (v 286 Latte), Phot., *Suid.* (v 170 Adler) νεμήσεις ὑποκριτῶν; earlier and later allotment systems: *JG* II² 2319 contr. 2320.

'The possibility of tribal seating, and the certainty of seating according to political position in democracy.'⁴⁴ The argument for tribal seating depends on statue bases of the second century AD, set up in the theatre by some of the tribes, on lead tokens which may have been theatre tickets – and on practice elsewhere in Greece.⁴⁵ If there were blocks of seats for the different tribes in the Classical period, that would certainly accord with the importance of the ten tribes in Athenian public life, but I see no reason why the organization of a large body of spectators in this way should be associated particularly with the democracy; and in any case Csapo and Slater comment that 'there is ... no reason to think that this division was ever strictly maintained or even voluntarily observed for drama' (where the competition was not between tribes). More certainly, front seats were assigned to various Athenian officials and foreign visitors, and blocks of seats to the council and (perhaps only from the 330s) the ephebes.⁴⁶ Again, that cannot have been distinctively democratic. Front seats for distinguished individuals, and a reserved block of seating for the council, are anything but egalitarian: we may think of the segregated seating at Rome for the senators and *equites*.⁴⁷ What was democratic about the council at Athens was its method of appointment, and its comparative lack of power *vis-à-vis* the assembly (though in the fifth century members of the lowest property class were probably excluded from that as from all offices);⁴⁸ but the council was very important although it was not the embodiment of a ruling class, and giving it special seats in the theatre should not be seen as a democratic feature.⁴⁹

'The procedure for getting tickets via inscription on the deme roll.' Most of our information about admission to the theatre comes from scholiasts and lexicographers.⁵⁰ It appears that originally admission was free, and spectators would both arrive early and fight for places; it was therefore decided to charge for admission; arrangements were in the hands of a contractor, an *architekton*; apparently tickets could be bought by foreigners as well as citizens.⁵¹ Eventually the theoric fund was introduced, to provide grants to citizens to cover the cost of theatre tickets at the major festivals (and it was the payment of these grants, not the selling of tickets, that was based on the deme registers).⁵² There are texts attributing the theoric grants to Pericles in the fifth century and to Agyrrhius in the 390s, but each was responsible for introducing another kind of state payment (Pericles jury pay, Agyrrhius assembly pay), and the silence of Aristophanes on the theoric fund is surely significant, so it is better to follow the texts which attribute it to

⁴⁴ Cf. J. Ober and B.S. Strauss in *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?* (n.2) 237-70 at 238: 'The seating in the theater was egalitarian, as it was in the Assembly and in the people's courts.'

⁴⁵ Pickard-Cambridge (n.12) 268-70; Csapo and Slater (n.16) 298-301; the statue bases: *IG* II2 3287. The weakness of the argument is noted by D.M. Pritchard, *Ancient History: Resources for Teachers* 30 (2000) 104-18 at 115.

⁴⁶ Pickard-Cambridge (n.12) 268-9; Csapo and Slater (n.14) 289; priest of Dionysus: *Ar. Frogs* 297; successful generals: *Ar. Knights* 573-7, 702-4; foreign envoys: Aeschin. 3 *Ctes.* 76, Dem. 18 *Crown* 28; council: *Ar. Birds* 793-6, cf. *Peace* 887-908; council and ephebes: schol. *Ar. Birds* 794, Poll. 4.122, Hes. (β 926 Latte) βουλευτικόν, *Suid.* (β 430 Adler) βουλευτικός.

⁴⁷ Csapo and Slater (n.16) 306-12; senators: Liv. 34.44.5, 54.4; *equites*: Plut. *Cic.* 13.2-4, *Cic. Phil.* 2. 44.

⁴⁸ P.J. Rhodes, *The Athenian Boule* (Oxford 1972) 2: cf. *Ath. Pol.* 7.3-4.

⁴⁹ Similarly, the distribution of sacrificial meat at the Panathenaea was not egalitarian, but various officials (including the *prytaneis* but not the rest of the council, and including the senior military officials) received their

own, different, special allowances, and the distribution to the ordinary citizens, like the distribution of the theoric grants (below), was made through the deme assemblies: *IG* I³ 224.A.17-21, II² 334.8-27; cf. L. Deubner, *Attische Feste* (Berlin 1932) 25-6; H.W. Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians* (London 1977) 46-9.

⁵⁰ Pickard-Cambridge (n.12) 265-8, 270-2; Csapo and Slater (n.16) 287-9, 293-7.

⁵¹ Schol. Dem. 1 *Ol.* 1 (no. 1f, p. 16 Dilts); attested also Dem. 18 *Crown* 28 (if Demosthenes had not made arrangements, the envoys from Philip of Macedon in 346 would have had to sit in the 2-obol seats) and inscriptions, e.g. *IG* II² 500.20-36. Wilson, in Pelling (n.9) 81-108 at 97-100, doubts the usual assumption that the charge for admission predates the theoric grants, and argues that the grants are better seen as subsidies for citizens *vis-à-vis* non-citizens than as subsidies for the poor; in *The Athenian Institution of the Khoregia* (n.21) he suggests c. 420 (p. 167: not supported by any evidence) or the time of Pericles (p. 265).

⁵² [Dem.] 44 *Leoch.* 37. D. Whitehead, *The Demes of Attica* (Princeton 1986) 110, argues from this passage that the payments were made at meetings of the deme assemblies.

Diophantus and Eubulus, and to date it to the 350s.⁵³ There is in fact no evidence on when the charge for admission was introduced; indeed, there is no fifth-century evidence for the charge at all, if we discount the texts ascribing the theoric fund to Pericles.⁵⁴ Sommerstein has assumed that the charge existed from the time of our earliest tragedies and that it will have deterred the poorer citizens from attending; finding signs of right-wing bias in plays in the late fifth century but not earlier, he speculates that about the middle of the fifth century the charge was increased and this changed the balance of the audiences.⁵⁵ All that need be said here is that a charge was introduced at some time in the fifth century or the first half of the fourth, that a charge for attending part of a festival was most unusual, and that it is not something we should have expected to find in democratic Athens.

‘The dating of the innovation of the pre-play ceremonies’ of the Great Dionysia. The strictly religious side of the festival began with the *eisagoge apo tes escharas* (‘bringing-in from the hearth’), a re-enactment of the alleged original bringing of Dionysus to Athens from Eleutherae; the *pompe*, a procession leading to the sacrifices in the precinct of Dionysus; and the *komos*, a ‘revel’ about which not much is known.⁵⁶ But Goldhill is more interested in preliminaries of a more political kind:⁵⁷ the passing-out parade of the orphans of the war-dead, who had been brought up at the state’s expense; the handing over of the tribute brought by the allies, in the time of the Delian League; the proclamation of honours voted to distinguished foreigners and Athenians; other items of public business; and (mentioned in his detailed discussions but not in this list) the libation offered by the generals. For him the fact that these ceremonies occurred at the Dionysia and the fact that plays were performed at the Dionysia are intimately connected, but I am not sure that all the things which occurred at the festival were necessarily connected through a single view of what the festival was about.

State responsibility for war orphans was attributed to Solon by Diogenes Laertius and is attested by Thucydides; the parade is mentioned by the orators, and seems to have been a thing of the past by 330.⁵⁸ We do not know when state responsibility or the parade were in fact introduced; but we cannot be confident that Aristotle was wrong to regard this as an innovation of Hippodamus in Miletus – probably before that city had a democracy imposed on it by Athens – and I see the state’s responsibility and the parade as representing the *polis*’ pride in those who have died fighting for the *polis*, not as distinctively democratic.

The public handing-over of the tribute can have taken place only between 453, when the tribute was first collected in Athens, and 404, when the Delian League ended with Athens’ defeat in the Peloponnesian War. Goldhill has written of this:

Thus, it can be instituted that the tribute of the allies should be paraded, ingot by ingot, in the theatre before the plays were performed at the Great Dionysia, a grand statement of the power and prestige of the polis, but, in turn, Isocrates can see this ritual as a way of the democratic state becoming more hated by the allies.⁵⁹

⁵³ E.g. P.J. Rhodes, *A Commentary on the Aristotelian Athenion Politeia* (Oxford 1981) 514; *The Athenian Boule* (Oxford 1972) 105, was less certain. Pericles: e.g. Plut. *Per.* 9.1, 34.2; Agyrrhius: e.g. Harp. (θ 19 Keaney) θεωρικά; Diophantus: Hes. (δ 2351 Latte), *Suid.* (δ 1491 Adler) δραχμῆ χαλαζῶσσα; Eubulus: e.g. Aeschin. 3 *Ctes.* 24-5 with schol. 24 (65 Dilts). Just. *Epit.* 6.9.1-5.

⁵⁴ Or even early fourth century: *IG II²* 1176 (Piraeus), cited by Pickard-Cambridge (n.12) 266 with n.6, as early fourth century, is of 324/3 (*Agora XIX L 13*).

⁵⁵ A.H. Sommerstein, in Pelling (n.9) 63-79 at 65-73.

⁵⁶ Deubner (n.49) 139-40; Parke (n.49) 126-8; Pickard-Cambridge (n.12) 59-63.

⁵⁷ Discussed by Goldhill in *Nothing to Do with*

Dionysos? (n.2) 97-129 at 98-114 (earlier version *JHS* 107 (1987) 58-76 at 59-68), and again in (n.3) 43-7 (where he explores ‘how the notion of *difference* is inscribed within social performance’). See also Parke (n.49) 133-4.

⁵⁸ Solon: Diog. Laert. 1.55; state responsibility: Thuc. 2.46.1; parade: *P.Hib.* 1.14. *a-b* = Lys. *fr.* 6.1-2 Gernet and Bizon, Isoc. 8 *Peace* 82, (past) Aeschin. 3 *Ctes.* 154. Directly or indirectly, this parade was replaced, apparently at the beginning of their second year so not at the Dionysia, by a parade of the *epheboi*: *Ath. Pol.* 42.4.

⁵⁹ Goldhill in S. Goldhill and R. Osborne (eds), *Performance Culture and Athenian Democracy* (Cambridge 1999) 1-29 at 8-9, citing Isoc. 8 *Peace* 82.

In fact the allies brought coins, not ingots (Isocrates says 'by talent', but only the highest payers paid several talents), and Isocrates in this passage says nothing about democracy. The Great Dionysia took place about late March, when the seas had become navigable after the winter,⁶⁰ the allies could be expected to bring their tribute, and the festival provided a good opportunity for the display of Athens' civic pride in the presence of a large audience of citizens and visiting foreigners.

The same explanation applies to the proclamation of honours in the theatre. Aeschines notoriously alleges that Ctesiphon when he proposed that his crown for Demosthenes should be proclaimed in the theatre was breaking a law intended to put a stop to such proclamations;⁶¹ elsewhere he includes proclamations among honours which used to be rare but are now frequent.⁶² Arguments from silence are dangerous, but the first such proclamations which are attested are from the last decade of the fifth century, for foreigners, and the first attested epigraphically for citizens is from 303/2;⁶³ in the Hellenistic world the practice is attested in various other places as well as Athens.⁶⁴ The occasion was used also for public announcements of manumissions.⁶⁵ The first Athenian decree for Methone invites Methone and Perdicas of Macedon, if they cannot reach agreement, to send envoys to the council and people in Athens ἐξ Διονύσια (probably just an indication of time);⁶⁶ for the annual renewal of the alliance made between Sparta and Athens in 421 the Spartans were to go to Athens for the Dionysia – and likewise the Athenians were to go to Sparta for the Hyacinthia.⁶⁷ The 'customary libation to the god' offered by the generals is known to us from the story in which, after their libation, the archon invited Cimon and his fellow generals to take the place of the normal judges, and they awarded the first prize not to Aeschylus but to Sophocles.⁶⁸ We know nothing about that beyond what we read in this story; Csapo and Slater say, 'It is of some interest to see that the libation was poured out not by the priest of Dionysus or any other sacred office but by civic heads of state', but there is nothing in the story to suggest that only the generals made libations; libations by the generals are political, but could have occurred in any state in which generals were important officials.

None of this is particularly relevant to drama: plays were also performed at the Lenaea, in the winter, when the Athenians were alone and 'the foreigners are not yet present; the tribute and the allies have not yet come from the cities';⁶⁹ and as far as we know civic business was not included in that festival. The Great Dionysia, which attracted a large audience at the beginning of the summer, was a suitable occasion for civic business and civic display, but there is no reason to think that this use of a festival was distinctively democratic, and I suspect that, while it was important that the festival was a civic occasion attended by large numbers and was therefore appropriate for civic business thought deserving of publicity, the connection between this civic business and the performance of plays which followed it was accidental rather than essential to the nature of the festival. (Some plays, it has been put to me, are concerned with war, and could

⁶⁰ Cf. Theoph. *Char.* 3.3.

⁶¹ Aeschin. 3 *Ctes.* 32-48, Dem. 18 *Crown* 120-2: see in particular W.W. Goodwin, *Demosthenes on the Crown* (Cambridge 1901) 313-16; W.E. Gwatkin, *Hesp.* 26 (1957) 129-41; H. Wankel, *Demosthenes Rede für Ktesiphon über den Kranz* (Heidelberg 1976) 2.643-50. I suspect that Aeschines and Demosthenes were both citing valid laws, and that the procedure which was intended to eliminate conflicts between the laws had failed to do so.

⁶² Aeschin. 3 *Ctes.* 178.

⁶³ A.S. Henry, *Honours and Privileges in Athenian Decrees* (Hildesheim 1983) 28-36: ML 85 = *IG* I³ 102 tr. Fornara 155.12-14 (410/09); uncertain restoration in *IG* I³ 125.23-9 (405/4); but *IG* II² 2.b (with Addenda p. 655) is perhaps to be dated 382/1 (M.B. Walbank, *EMC* 26 = n.s. 1 (1982) 259-74, cf. *SEG* 32.38); first for a citizen,

IG II² 492.27-9 (303/2). Crowns were also, though apparently less often, in the fourth century proclaimed at the Panathenaea, a festival which did not include performances of plays: *IG* II² 212 (= Tod 167 tr. Harding 82) 24-33, 492.27-9, 557.15-18.

⁶⁴ Examples in *SIG*³ include 381.29-30 (Delos), 402.20-3 (Chios), 410.30-2 (Erythrae), 545.31 sqq. (Delphic Amphictyony), 645.69-71 (Calchedon) (the last second century, the others third century).

⁶⁵ Aeschin. 3 *Ctes.* 41.

⁶⁶ ML 65 = *IG* I³ 61 tr. Fornara 128.23-7.

⁶⁷ Thuc. 5.23.4.

⁶⁸ Plut. *Cim.* 8.7-9; Pickard-Cambridge (n.12) 96; Csapo and Slater (n.16) 107; Goldhill, *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?* (n.2) 100-1 = (n.57) 60.

⁶⁹ Ar. *Acharn.* 502-8.

prompt the audience to make a connection with the war orphans who had previously been paraded – but that is a particular function of the theme of the play in question, not a general function of the incorporation of certain kinds of public business in the festival.)

Goldhill's catalogue of 'the whole gamut of performances which are instituted by democracy, and function as signs and symptoms of democracy in action' ends with 'the assembly in the theatre to discuss the theatre'.⁷⁰ Demosthenes quotes a law prescribing an assembly in the sanctuary on the day after the Pandia (which, at any rate in his time, immediately followed the Great Dionysia), at which the sacred business with which assemblies always began was to be followed by *probolai*, complaints of misconduct in connection with the festival; that law did not exist in the time of Alcibiades, in the late fifth century (but this does not exclude the possibility that some law prescribing a review of the festival existed earlier).⁷¹ In fourth-century inscriptions the council is praised for attending to good order in the theatre, and *epimeletai* appointed to attend to good order thank the priest of Asclepius; an inscription honouring an archon of the 280s reports that among other things he attended to the procession to Dionysus and was voted a crown by the assembly in the sanctuary of Dionysus.⁷² Now holding an assembly, and an assembly at which any citizen could raise a complaint in a *probole*, was certainly a democratic way of reviewing a festival, so this is one of Goldhill's stronger points. Unfortunately we lack comparable evidence on other states in the Classical period, but it would not surprise me if they had their own ways of reviewing their festivals and the conduct of those responsible for them.

Plays were performed at festivals which were religious festivals and festivals of the *polis*; they were, therefore, performed in a setting which was deeply embedded (as people say) in the institutions of the *polis* – and, until the emergence of a modern western society in which religion is sidelined as an optional extra for those who like that sort of thing, this would have seemed totally unremarkable. This applies also to the transaction at the festivals of some kinds of public business – which need have no connection with the fact that some of the festivals involved the performance of plays. When Athens was democratic its institutions were democratic, and so the interplay of *choregoi* and citizens, the assembly reviewing the festival, and so on took forms that they would not have taken in a non-democratic *polis*, and to that extent the institutional setting is indeed a democratic setting. But it is a democratic version of settings which could have been found in other versions, some democratic and some not, in other cities; and we have found some institutional features which do not look as if they were distinctively democratic at all: recruitment of chorus-members by the *choregoi*; special seats for distinguished members of the audience, and tickets that had to be bought by ordinary members. I believe that the democratic details are comparatively unimportant, that it is much more important that the institutional setting is a *polis* setting than that it is a democratic setting: that what we have here is the *polis* in action, rather than especially democracy in action.

* * *

What about the actual plays? My concern here is not with the undeniable direct allusions in some plays – the democratic idea in Aeschylus' *Supplikes*, the Areopagus in his *Eumenides*, the defence of democracy in Euripides' *Supplikes*, the treatment of contemporary politics and institutions, along with other contemporary topics, in old comedy – but with what might be called the ideological underpinning of fifth-century drama, particularly tragedy, which is not anchored in the here and now as old comedy is, an underpinning which has led to the claim that, regardless of the particular allusions in particular plays, the drama as such is a product of the democracy. I shall not become entangled in high-level arguments concerning what particular plays 'are really

⁷⁰ Pickard-Cambridge (n.12) 64, 66, 68-70; Parke (n.49) 135.

⁷¹ Dem. 21 *Mid.* 8-9; (Alcibiades) 174.

⁷² *IG* II² 223, B.7-9 (343/2); 354.15-19 (328/7); *Agora* XVI 181.10-19 (archon of ?283/2).

about'; civic concerns are more obviously relevant to some plays than to others;⁷³ but, as before, I shall limit myself to asking how far we can accept the claim that certain features or themes which have been identified in plays are distinctively democratic.

Croally at the beginning of his book *Euripidean Polemic* says that 'Greek tragedy is a discourse of the fifth-century Athenian polis'; a little later he makes the remark which, following Griffin, I quoted earlier in this paper, 'Tragedy ... must be viewed as reflecting the aims and the methods of the democracy.'⁷⁴ It is on that basis that he argues that tragedy was a didactic medium. After the Introduction, democracy does not figure prominently in his book; but we have an example of the slippage which is found so frequently when he writes of the expression *es meson* ('into the centre'): 'It is especially true of democratic Athens that this was used to convey the idea that when one spoke in public one spoke from the centre: one walked *es meson* as a precondition of discourse.' In the footnote attached to this sentence he cites a series of passages from Herodotus – of which none refers to Athens, one is used in the argument for democracy in the Persian debate, three are used of the substitution of constitutional government for kingship or tyranny in different places, and those which are used of discourse refer to discussions among leading Persians – and then for comparison he cites passages from Euripides, of which only one refers to discourse in the setting of democratic Athens.⁷⁵

H.P. Foley gave the title 'Tragedy and democratic ideology' to the chapter which she contributed to a book on *History, Tragedy, Theory*.⁷⁶ In this chapter she studies interpretations of Sophocles' *Antigone* by C. Sourvinou-Inwood and by L.J. Bennett and W.B. Tyrrell, and she alternates between the expressions '*polis* ideology' and 'democratic ideology' as if they were interchangeable. She insists that 'much depends on our using our knowledge of democratic ideology and practice to ask the right question, or at least an answerable question, about a play'. For the *Antigone* she emphasizes particularly 'those points at which conflicting obligations to *oikos* and *polis* come into conflict', and says, 'Obedience to the *polis* and its laws – just or unjust – was an important part of democratic ideology, even if it meant sacrificing family to city'⁷⁷ – but this conflict will not have been peculiar to democratic *poleis*. It could, I think, be argued that Classical Athens went further than other states in giving a high priority to the community over the family (*cf.* below), and in that case there will have been a distinctively Athenian way of perceiving the conflict, but I am not sure that this emphasis on the community is a product of the democracy.

Sourvinou-Inwood⁷⁸ refers to democracy from time to time, but she refers mostly to the *polis*, and some of her references to democracy are unfortunate: in connection with 'the *kerygma* [proclamation] of the general', she writes of 'the terminology of democratic Athens', but the parallel which she cites is a passage in Thucydides which reports the *kerygma* of the Spartan Brasidas at Amphipolis;⁷⁹ she refers to the quotation from the *Antigone* in Demosthenes 19 as 'the epitome of democratic patriotism', but in fact Demosthenes there says nothing about democracy;⁸⁰ and in remarking on the fact that 'the polis had ultimate jurisdiction over funerary discourse and practice', she adds 'as is shown by the funerary legislation issued by various poleis'.⁸¹

⁷³ *Cf.* Cartledge (n.11).

⁷⁴ Croally (n.11) 1, 3.

⁷⁵ Croally (n.11) 165 with n. 9: Hdt. 3.80.2 (Persian debate); 3.142.3, 4.161.3, 7.164.1 (substitute for monarchy or tyranny); 1.206.3, 3.83.1, 7.8.δ.2 (discussion among leading Persians); (other passages from Hdt. not relevant); Eur. *Supp.* 439 (*es meson* in Theseus' defence of democracy).

⁷⁶ In B. Goff (ed.), *History, Tragedy, Theory* (Austin 1995) 131-50.

⁷⁷ Foley (n.76) 142-3; 134 (where she expresses more pithily what is said by C. Sourvinou-Inwood, *JHS* 109 (1989) 134-48 at 144).

⁷⁸ *Esp.* Sourvinou-Inwood (n.77).

⁷⁹ Sourvinou-Inwood (n.77) 138 with n.24: Soph. *Ant.* 8, Thuc. 4.105.2.

⁸⁰ Sourvinou-Inwood (n.77) 139: Soph. *Ant.* 175-90 with Dem. 19 *Embassy* 246-50. (In fact, when Demosthenes does mention democracy, he frequently identifies it with freedom from external domination: *cf.* P.J. Rhodes, *LCM* 3 (1978) 207-11 at 209-10.)

⁸¹ Sourvinou-Inwood (n.77) 137. Foley in Sommerstein *et al.* (n.17) 101-43 at 105, says, 'Regardless of the original reasons for funerary legislation and other shifts in funerary practice, however,

Bennett and Tyrrell⁸² examine the *Antigone* in the light of Athens' public funerals and funeral orations for the war-dead, and say, for instance, 'To create a democratic, that is, public funeral, the *demos* appropriated rites of aristocratic funerals which its legislation had been continually restricting since Solon.'⁸³ The oration, at least, seems to have been a uniquely Athenian institution;⁸⁴ but how far was Athens' treatment of its war-dead distinctively democratic? Pritchett has shown that different states provided for their war-dead in different ways, and that simple generalizations are not justified by the evidence;⁸⁵ archaeologists have shown that in the lessening elaboration of private burials until the late fifth century, when greater elaboration returned, Athenian practice was consonant with wider Greek practice.⁸⁶ Devoting a public ceremony and a speech in Athens to the war-dead was one way in which the Athenians went far in the direction of privileging the *polis* over the family, but was that necessarily democratic? It has often been claimed that the austerity of fifth-century Athenian casualty lists derives from the ethos of democratic Athens,⁸⁷ but P.A. Low stresses that fifth-century casualty lists from oligarchic Boeotia are equally austere:⁸⁸ the ethos underlying these lists is that of the *polis*, but not specifically that of democratic Athens. Again, H.S. Versnel has shown that Athenian religion is firmly anchored in the *polis*, but not specifically in the democracy.⁸⁹

There are no doubt things which are said in the *Antigone* which would not have been said in exactly the same way if Sophocles had not been writing in and for democratic Athens – as with the institutional setting, we are dealing with an Athenian intellectual context which is a particular version of a wider Greek intellectual context – but it seems to me that the major issues of the *Antigone* are not distinctively democratic issues. The conflict between human law and divine law; the right of the duly appointed authorities in the *polis*, whoever they may be, to issue orders in general and to control funerary practices in particular; the claims of the *polis* on its citizens and of the *oikos* and the head of the *oikos* on its members: these are surely matters of general Greek *polis* ideology, not particularly Athenian democratic ideology.

Democracy has been invoked in recent studies of Aeschylus' *Persae*, a play written as early as 473/2. E. Hall in the Introduction to her edition of the play writes,

Athenians of the fifth century would almost certainly have interpreted such changes in death rituals as conforming to and supporting the ideology of the democracy – but would they, if they knew that there were similar laws in other *poleis* too? On funerary practices, *cf.* below.

⁸² L.J. Bennett and W.B. Tyrrell, *AJP* 111 (1990) 441-56.

⁸³ Bennett and Tyrrell (n.82) 444.

⁸⁴ So, at any rate, the Athenians claimed: Dem. 20 *Lept.* 141.

⁸⁵ W.K. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War* 4 (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1985) 94-259, esp. 249-51.

⁸⁶ I. Morris in A.L. Boegehold and A.C. Scafuro (eds), *Athenian Identity and Civic Ideology* (Baltimore 1994) 67-101.

⁸⁷ E.g. ML 33 = *IG* I³ 1147, beginning and end tr. Fornara 78. For association with democracy, see for instance N. Loraux, *The Invention of Athens*, tr. A. Sheridan (Cambridge, MA 1986) 15-76 ch. 1 ('The funeral oration in the democratic city') at 22-3 ('The list-

ing of the dead by *phylai* may not have been a specifically Athenian feature, but the democratic city was particularly careful to stress the closeness of the bond between the citizen and his tribe'); Goldhill, *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?* (n.2) 110-12 = (n.57) 66-7 ('The values of democratic collectivity and the primacy of the city were stressed in a new form of memorial'); R. Osborne, *P&P* 155 (1997) 3-33 at 29 ('Democratic Athens took its opposition to claims based on lineage so far as to suppress patronymics on public monuments to the war dead').

⁸⁸ *IG* VII 585 (Tanagra), 1888 (Thespiae); P.A. Low, *World Archaeology* 35 (2003) forthcoming. A version of this paper was read to British Epigraphy Society, 11 November 2000; I am grateful to Dr Low for discussion and references.

⁸⁹ H.S. Versnel, in W. Eder (ed.), *Die athenische Demokratie im 4. Jh. v. Chr. ... 3-7.viii.1992* (Stuttgart 1994) 367-87, with comments on Goldhill at 375-7. *Cf.* also M.H. Jameson in I. Morris and K.A. Raaflaub (eds), *Democracy 2,500? Questions and Challenges* (Dubuque, IO 1998) ch.9, 171-95.

This interpretation – that the play is as concerned with celebrating the Athenian democratic system, with its hard core of citizen-rowers, as with taking a position on the contemporary manoeuvrings of élite politicians – is supported by the manner in which it constructs the Persians and their empire as deficient in precisely those qualities which the Athenians like to think characterised their Athenian democratic system: freedom of speech, lack of hierarchical protocol, accountability of magistrates, and protection of the individual under the laws.⁹⁰

Freedom of speech is something to which the Athenians certainly laid claim (though of course for this we are reliant on the literary evidence, and for the Classical period the literary evidence is overwhelmingly from Athens); but we must remember that the claim may first have been made in connection with the overthrow of the Pisistratid tyranny.⁹¹ Lack of hierarchical protocol was not distinctively Athenian or democratic, but was common to all Greek states. So was the accountability of officials, though scholars too often write as if it were peculiar to democracies:⁹² Athens had some form of accounting system from a very early date; and from Sparta we have a whole series of kings and other commanders called to account in the fifth and early fourth centuries.⁹³ And again protection of the individual under the laws was common to all Greek states under constitutional government as opposed to tyranny.⁹⁴

A similar line is taken in a book on the *Persae* by T. Harrison, which has a chapter entitled ‘Democracy and tyranny’.⁹⁵ At the beginning of the chapter Harrison claims that, whereas for Aristotle Athens’ naval victory over the Persians at Salamis facilitated the development of democracy, ‘what the *Persians* gives us is the reverse proposition: that it was due to Athens’ democratic values that she survived and triumphed, and that the same values will ensure her future success’.⁹⁶ He then concentrates on two specific points. The first is one of those made by Hall, that the Persian King is an absolute, unaccountable ruler, whom his subjects revere as a god (or are thought by the Greeks to do so); and this he sees as contrasted with what he calls ‘the

⁹⁰ E. Hall, *Aeschylus Persians* (Warminster 1996) 12-13; cf. earlier her *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition Through Tragedy* (Oxford 1989) ch.2, 56-100, esp. 97-8.

⁹¹ Herodotus uses *isegoria* at 5.78, when the Athenians’ victory over the Boeotians and Chalcidians c. 506 leads him to remark how much stronger they were with *isegoria* than under the tyranny. On Athenian *isegoria*, see especially G.T. Griffith, *Ancient Society and Institutions ... V. Ehrenberg* (Oxford 1966) 115-38 (after 462?); A.G. Woodhead, *Hist.* 16 (1967) 129-40 (result of Cleisthenes’ reforms and council of 500?); M. Ostwald, *Nomos and the Beginnings of the Athenian Democracy* (Oxford 1969) 157 n.2 (perhaps with *isonomia* a slogan used in Cleisthenes’ propaganda). Perhaps both terms were at first used by all opponents of the tyranny but Cleisthenes tried to appropriate them: cf. P.J. Rhodes in R. Brock and S. Hodkinson (eds), *Alternatives to Athens* (Oxford 2000) 119-36 at 122 with n.14. The stronger *parrhesia* is first found in Euripides (*Hipp.* 421-3, *Ion* 670-2, both associating it with Athens; *Bacch.* 668, *Phoen.* 391) and Aristophanes (*Thesm.* 540-1, the women’s assembly).

⁹² For this Hall refers to G.E.M. de Ste Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (London 1981) 285 with 601 n.11. However, the passages which he cites from Arist. *Pol.* do not include 4.1297b 35-1298b 11, which implies that accounting procedures were widespread under régimes of various kinds; and that accounting procedures were not limited to Athens or to democratic states is stressed by L. Rubinstein, paper read

to Triennial Conference of Greek and Roman Societies, 26 July 2001.

⁹³ Early Athens: C. Hignett, *A History of the Athenian Constitution* (Oxford 1952) 203-5; R. Sealey, *CP* 59 (1964) 11-22 at 18-20 = his *Essays in Greek Politics* (New York 1967) 42-58 at 52-4. Sparta: e.g. Hdt. 6.82 (Cleomenes); Thuc. 1.95.3-5, 131.2 (Pausanias: in the latter passage, accusation by ‘whoever wishes’); Xen. *Hell.* 3.1.8 (Thibron supplanted and punished), 3.2.6 (Dercylidas inspected and reappointed), 3.2.12 (Dercylidas inspected again?) – passages which suggest that, while kings and regents were called to account only when their conduct provoked it, other Spartan commanders may have been called to account regularly. The Boeotian federation as revived in the 370s (which is too often and too easily labelled democratic): Boeotarchs of 370 prosecuted because they were not in Boeotia at the end of their year of office, when they were probably expected to undergo *euthynai*: Plut. *Pel.* 24.2-3, 25.1-2, *Se Ipsum Laud.* 540d-e, cf. *Praec. Ger. Reip.* 817f, *Nep. Epam.* 7.3-5, *App. Syr.* 212-18, cf. J. Buckler, *The Theban Hegemony, 371 - 362 BC* (Cambridge, MA 1980) 141.

⁹⁴ In Aesch. *Pers.* 242 the Athenians ‘are not the slaves or subjects of any mortal’; but see, e.g., Hdt. 7.104.4 (Demaratus of Sparta), Pl. *Polit.* 294a-303d (good forms of constitution in accordance with laws), Arist. *Pol.* 3.1287a 10-b 36.

⁹⁵ T. Harrison, *The Emptiness of Asia* (London 2000) ch.8, 76-91.

⁹⁶ Harrison (n.95) 77: Arist. *Pol.* 5.1304a 22-5.

democratic institution of *euthunai* [accounting]’, or perhaps ‘the ethos *underlying* the institution of *euthunai* rather than the institution itself’.⁹⁷ Harrison’s second point is that Darius eventually

believes the oracles he had previously dismissed with wishful thinking. Here again a political contrast is surely pointed between democratic Athens and Persia... Themistocles’ interpretation of the wooden wall oracle was adopted by the Athenian people in preference to that of the specialist interpreters in the course of an assembly meeting.⁹⁸

How far the details of Herodotus’ story can be trusted, I am not sure; but it was not only Athens or democratic states in which decision-making bodies had to pronounce on the meaning of puzzling oracles: interpretations are said to have been decided, for instance, by the assembly in Thebes at the end of the sixth century (whatever the membership of that body was), and by ‘the *polis*’ in Sparta *c.* 400.⁹⁹

I could give more examples, but this should be enough to show how in interpretations of particular plays the notion of democracy has been insinuated into what are better seen as the presuppositions and the concerns of the constitutionally governed *polis* in general. More generally, Prof. Hall has put it to me that the kind of argumentation engaged in by the characters in the later tragedies, and in the case of Euripides not only by upper-class characters,¹⁰⁰ is a feature that has grown out of the Athenian experience. There is something in this – in particular, I doubt if Euripides would have extended the range of speakers as he did if he had been writing in a less democratic context – but even here we must beware of attributing too much uniqueness to Athens. The sophist Gorgias, whom Plato represents as teaching ‘how to persuade by words jurors in a jury-court and councillors in a council-house and assembly-men in an assembly, and in every other kind of gathering which is a civic gathering’,¹⁰¹ and the speech-writer Lysias were both Sicilians. The sophists did not teach only in Athens, and all constitutionally governed *poleis* will have had fora in which men argued cases. The similarity between speeches in later tragedies and speeches in Thucydides has been remarked on,¹⁰² and Thucydides’ speeches are not limited to Athens or to Athenians.

Democracy has also been invoked at another level of criticism. As long ago as 1963 Arrowsmith wrote in an article on the kind of questioning that is elicited by Euripides’ plays:

The Athenians regarded the theater, not as entertainment, but as the supreme instrument of cultural instruction, a democratic *paideia* complete in itself.¹⁰³

On one particular theme, Zeitlin in *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?* claimed that

If tragedy can be viewed as a kind of recurrent masculine initiation, for adults as well as for the young, and if drama, more broadly, is designed as an education for its citizens in the democratic city, ... the self that is really at stake is to be identified with the male, while the woman is assigned the role of the radical other... Drama tests masculine values only to find that these alone are inadequate to the complexity of the new situation.¹⁰⁴

On her particular point about masculine and feminine values, Griffin has commented that

⁹⁷ Harrison (n.95) 78: Aesch. *Pers.* 211-14.

⁹⁸ Harrison (n.95) 87: Aesch *Pers.* 739-41, contrasted with Hdt. 7.142-3.

⁹⁹ Thebes: Hdt. 5.79-80; Sparta: Xen. *Hell.* 3.3.3-4 with P. Cartledge, *Agasilaos and the Crisis of Sparta* (London 1987) 111-12.

¹⁰⁰ This is what is alluded to when in Ar. *Frogs* 948-52 Euripides claims to have been acting democratically.

¹⁰¹ Pl. *Gorg.* 452e 1-4.

¹⁰² J.H. Finley, Jr, *HSCP* 49 (1938) 23-68 = his *Three Essays on Thucydides* (Cambridge, MA 1967) ch.1, 1-54.

¹⁰³ W. Arrowsmith, *Arion* 2.3 (1963) 32-56 at 32-3.

¹⁰⁴ F.I. Zeitlin in *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?* (n.2) 63-96: quotations at pp. 68, 86 (an earlier version in *Representations* 11 (1985) 63-94).

Long before the Attic theatre (and any ‘new situation’) the poems of Homer taught a rather similar lesson... There is therefore nothing startlingly new, and certainly nothing peculiar either to tragedy or to democratic Athens, in a message of that sort.¹⁰⁵

Goldhill has claimed for democracy the fact that tragedy not only inculcates values but questions them. In *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?* after arguing that the ceremonies which preceded the plays at the Great Dionysia – the parade of the war orphans and so on – make it ‘fundamentally and essentially a festival of the democratic *polis*’, he continues:

Both tragedy and comedy, in their transgressive force, in their particular depictions and uses of myth and language, time after time implicate the dominant ideology put forward in the preplay ceremonies in a far from straightforward manner; indeed the tragic texts seem to question, examine, and often subvert the language of the city’s order.¹⁰⁶

After looking particularly at Sophocles’ *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*, and at the Athenian ephebate, he ends by stressing ‘the connection between tragedy as a didactic and a questioning medium and the affirmation of the duties and obligations of a citizen’.¹⁰⁷

The Sophoclean hero [like Ajax or Antigone], with fierce demands for his or her individualism, his or her commitment to his or her own needs and demands in the face of society or social pressure, is scarcely a figure who would sit easily in a democratic ideology¹⁰⁸

– but would he or she sit easily in Spartan ideology, or the ideology of any Greek state which had the institutions and the corporate feelings of a *polis*? Again,

Neoptolemos’ involvement in the *Philoctetes* dramatizes a conflict between moral and social values and a commitment to the collective need of the Trojan expedition¹⁰⁹

– but is it only in democratic Athens that that conflict would be meaningful? And was it an integral part of Athens’ democratic, civic ideology that on civic occasions the democratic, civic ideology should be questioned in this way?

Griffin’s comment on this is:

That the citizen of a democratic state has a duty to question its values may be what is believed by liberal thinkers in a modern democracy; it was perhaps maintained by Socrates; but one would like to see some positive evidence that the Athens of Aeschylus actually wanted to inculcate a duty of that kind.¹¹⁰

On the other side, Pelling says, ‘Part of civic ideology, in fact, was to feel worried about civic ideology, in the right place and the right setting. And the tragic theatre was the right place.’¹¹¹ And Goldhill says, ‘It is hard to see why Griffin finds the combination of irony and didacticism and questioning so difficult to imagine in a city which was the stage for Gorgias, Thucydides, Plato, and the other sophists, as well as Socrates.’¹¹²

¹⁰⁵ Griffin (n.19) 46.

¹⁰⁶ Goldhill, *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?* (n.2) 114 = (n.57) 68. Cf. Cartledge, quoted p. 106; but against this view that tragedy contributes to civic discourse by subverting it, see R. Friedrich, in Silk (n.4) 257-83, esp. 263-8; M. Heath, in Griffin (n.1) ch.8, 137-60, engaging particularly with Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, and on pp. 151-5 with Goldhill’s treatment of it, cited below.

¹⁰⁷ Goldhill, *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?* (n.2) 125 = (n.57) 75.

¹⁰⁸ Goldhill, *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?* (n.2) 115-16 = (n.57) 69.

¹⁰⁹ Goldhill, *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?* (n.2) 122 = (n.57) 73.

¹¹⁰ Griffin (n.19) 49.

¹¹¹ Pelling in (n.9) 213-35 at 235.

¹¹² Goldhill (n.3) 40.

I do not find that combination difficult to imagine in Athens; but this brings me back to my particular worry. Pelling writes of civic ideology, not of democratic ideology. Goldhill invokes Gorgias, a Sicilian Greek who once visited Athens; Thucydides and Plato, neither of them a lover of democracy; the other sophists, many of whom questioned all current orthodoxies, including democratic orthodoxies; Socrates, who seems to have believed that government like other aspects of communal life should be entrusted to experts. Athens did indeed provide a stage for these, and for plays which asked uncomfortable questions; notoriously there was more freedom to criticize Athens in Athens than to criticize Sparta in Sparta.¹¹³ Now it is undeniably true that Athens was the intellectual centre of Greece in the fifth and fourth centuries as it was not earlier or later; and it is possible to argue that whatever it was in the intellectual atmosphere of fifth-century Athens that was conducive to the development of democracy was also conducive to, and tolerant of, radical questioning of various kinds, including questioning both of widely held Greek values and of more specifically democratic values. It is as hard to envisage our more thought-provoking tragedies in Sparta as to envisage the sophists in Sparta. We must add, however, that the democracy was not always tolerant of radical questioning: even in the fifth century men could be criticized and perhaps prosecuted for impiety;¹¹⁴ in the fourth century Athens, which was still democratic, seems to have taken fright over where the questioning might lead, and to have been more interested in finding new ways to affirm old certainties.

It is, of course, even harder to work out what 'the Athenians', collectively, saw as the point of their dramas and dramatic festivals than to work out what a particular writer saw as the point of a particular thing that he had written. But it seems to me that there is a substantial jump from believing that some plays prompt uncomfortable questions (as I am sure they do) to believing that 'the Athenians', or a significant body of them, saw the prompting of such questions as the point or a major point of their dramatic festivals, and that they saw this and we should see it as bound up with the fact that theirs was a democratic city. Given that the democracy was not always tolerant of questioning and dissent, given that many of the presuppositions in the plays seem to me to be *polis* presuppositions more than democratic presuppositions, given that the institutional framework within which the plays were performed seems to me to be a *polis* framework more than a democratic framework, I am reluctant to make that jump. My title, 'Nothing to do with democracy', is an exaggeration; but I see Athenian drama as reflecting the *polis* in general rather than the democratic *polis* in particular.¹¹⁵

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¹¹³ Dem. 20 *Lept.* 106.

¹¹⁴ Recent studies have rejected many of the stories, but the prosecution of Socrates may not be unique: see K.J. Dover, *Táλαντα* 7 (1976) 24-54 = his *The Greeks and their Legacy* (*Collected Papers* 2, Oxford 1988) 135-57(-8); M. Ostwald, *From Popular Sovereignty to the Sovereignty of Law* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1986) 528-36; R.W. Wallace in A.L. Boegehold and A.C. Scafuro (n.86) 127-55.

¹¹⁵ Notice the remarks of R. Seager at the beginning and end of an article on 'Xenophon and Athenian democratic ideology': 'A number of the basic principles ... are not exclusive to Athens or to democracy' (*CQ* n.s.51 (2001) 385-97 at 385, *cf.* 396); and of J.K. Davies in P. Derow and R. Parker (eds), *Herodotus and His World: Essays from a Conference in Memory of George Forrest* (Oxford 2003) 319-35 at 325, 'The Greek world which Herodotus describes as that of his own past and present shows, with striking uniformity, six basic institutions, and does so long before there was any talk of *demokratia* or

theory.' Goldhill himself in the final sentence of one of the articles which I have cited writes of 'the festival which both lauds the *polis* and depicts the stresses and tensions of a *polis* society in conflict': *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?* (n.2) 129 = (n.57) 76.

After I had written this paper I saw L. Kurke in Morris and Raaflaub (n.89) ch.8 155-69: she uses a comparison of Pindar and Aeschylus to suggest that 'much that we take to be peculiar to Athenian democracy and the cultural production it fostered is more generally characteristic of the *polis* as such and of publicly performed poetry that negotiates civic tensions' (p. 163), and she represents the *choregos* as an élite rather than a democratic figure. D. Boedeker and K.A. Raaflaub (eds), *Democracy, Empire and the Arts in Fifth-Century Athens* (Cambridge, MA 1998) is a book which does not take for granted but explores the connection between democracy and the arts in Athens: *cf.* the review article of L.J. Samons, II, *Arion* 3rd series 8.3 (2000/1) 128-57, esp. 138-40.