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# Rosetta

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**Vayos Lapis and Antonis K. Petrides (eds.), 2019. *Greek Tragedy After the Fifth Century: A Survey from ca. 400 BC to ca. AD 400*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Pp. XIV + 415. £90.00 (Hardback). \$100.00 (e-book). ISBN: 9781107038554 (Hardback) / 9781108679770 (e-book).**

Reviewed by Sonia Francisetti Brolin

This volume provides a comprehensive study of the evolution of Greek tragedy after the age of the three great tragedians, trying, as stated by A. K. Petrides' *Introduction* (pp. 1-21), to challenge the idea that post-classical theatre was plagued by crisis.<sup>1</sup> The collection is organised into three sections:

- Part I (*Texts*, p. 23) focuses on the textual evidence for postclassical Greek tragedy.
- Part II (*Contexts and Developments*, p. 147) considers elements that characterize the development of Greek theatre after Euripides' death.
- Part III (*Reception and Transmission*, p. 295) presents some aspects of the tragedies' *Nachleben* in the Imperial Period and reconstructs the history of ancient tragic scholarship.

The first section is opened by V. Liapis and T. K. Stephanopoulos (Chapter 1 - *Greek Tragedy in the Fourth Century: The Fragments*, pp. 25-65), who consider the evidence for fourth century tragic texts. This includes fragments of the most famous playwrights of the fourth century, but also of less important figures. Liapis and Stephanopoulos compare these fragmentary versions of myth with earlier tragedians' interpretations of the same myth. Since fourth-century dramatists experimented with all the essential tragic elements, the overall picture is too complex to allow us to identify any general developments in the fourth century.

A. Fries' chapter 2 (*The Rhesus*, pp. 66-89) offers a useful re-examination of the *Rhesus*, generally not considered to be of Euripidean authorship, for which external evidence favours a date between ca. 390 and 370 BCE. Since this is the only tragedy surviving complete from the fourth century, this chapter attempts to place it within the history of the

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<sup>1</sup> See the bibliography in Xanthakis-Karamanos, 1980.

genre. Fries notes that its plot, which concerns the Trojan War, may have been well suited to the period of restoration after the Peloponnesian War, although the tragedy appears to have been successful enough to last beyond this. After analysing its initial popularity, the essay ends with a section on *Rhesus*' reception in antiquity.

Chapter 3 (*Hellenistic Tragedy and Satyr-Drama; Lycophron's Alexandra*, pp. 90-124), by S. Hornblower, focuses on the Hellenistic period, when Greek drama flourished on a massive scale.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, our idea of Hellenistic tragedy derives from indirect sources and the few surviving fragments, which are characterized by excess of pathos, but also by metrical conservativeness. Hornblower's study concentrates on the *Alexandra*. After refuting the possibility of extensive interpolation, the chapter focuses on content, genre, authorship, dates and politics. Hornblower argues that the Lycophron credited to this work is not Lycophron of Chalcis, but a namesake living in the time of Flaminius.

Hellenistic tragic drama is also analysed by P. Lanfranchi. His paper (Chapter 4 - *The Exagōgē of Ezekiel the Tragedian*, pp. 125-146) considers the question of whether the *Exagōgē* can be called a tragedy. Ancient sources characterized it as such, but scholars have doubted this definition,<sup>3</sup> because the unities of places and times are not respected. However, Lanfranchi demonstrates that there are several elements which allow us to regard the *Exagōgē* as part of the evolution of the tragic genre. He additionally speculates about possible performance contexts.

The second part begins with B. Le Guen's remarkable contribution (Chapter 5 - *Beyond Athens: The Expansion of Greek Tragedy from the Fourth Century Onwards*, pp. 149-179) concerning the expansion of tragedy after the fifth century. The author reviews literary, archaeological and inscriptional documents, in order to explore the contexts in which tragic performances took place. She demonstrates that tragedy became a widespread phenomenon and cities used theatrical events to honour famous figures, as well as for political debate.

Chapter 6 (*Theatre Performance After the Fifth Century*, pp. 180-203), written by A. Duncan and V. Liapis, starts from an examination of the so-called Astydamos' manifesto,<sup>4</sup> in which Astydamos attempts to take on the canon of the Big Three tragedians. The scholars delve into post-classical tragedy, focusing on the theatrical environment and

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<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Fantuzzi – Hunter, 2003; Sens, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> See Jacobson, 1983; Bryant Davies, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> See Webster, 1954: 306.

equipment, but especially on the actor himself. Finally, Duncan and Liapis discuss the issue of the chorus in postclassical tragedy, demonstrating, once again, that we have no evidence of the decline of the dramatic chorus.

Even M. Griffith (Chapter 7 - *Music and Dance in Tragedy After the Fifth Century*, pp. 204-242) argues the question of the chorus in post-classical production. This innovative paper concentrates on music and dance in later tragedy in relation to dialogue scenes. He emphasizes that, although the chorus was less involved and the practise of inserting *embolima* spread, tragic drama continued to be a musical event. Indeed, the essay underlines the harmonic, melodic and choreographic developments in Greek music and dance between the fifth century BCE and later periods, as well as in revivals of classic plays.

Chapter 8 (*The Fifth Century and After: (Dis)Continuities in Greek Tragedy*, pp. 243-293) differs from other essays in the book. F. Dunn studies developments in surviving late-fifth century dramas, analysing whether they carried over into tragedy of the following period. He begins with elements of song and plot in late classical tragedy, and continues to its developments in naturalism, self-consciousness – which can take many forms: choral self-reference, metatheatre and allusion – and ethical contingency,<sup>5</sup> that is the uncertainty of living in the present without any reliance on the past or confidence in the future.

D. M. Carter' s useful contribution (Chapter 9 - *Society and Politics in Post-Fifth-Century Tragedy*, pp. 270-293) underlines the continuities between fifth and fourth-century tragedy. This chapter concentrates on the political, intellectual and ethical emphases within the dramas. In particular, Carter shows that, when Athens, the town which has the role of the defender of suppliants, appears in tragedy, the Athenian democracy is only occasionally represented. Carter evidences that this insistence on the treatment of foreigners, rather than on internal political issues, derives from the international nature of the festivals where dramas were first staged.

The third section starts with chapter 10 (*Attitudes Towards Tragedy from the Second Sophistic to Late Antiquity*, pp. 297-323). R. Webb offers us a focus on the various attitudes towards tragedy in the first centuries CE. Analysing several sources from the second and third centuries CE, Webb studies the survival of the tragic genre as both a

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<sup>5</sup> See also Dunn, 2007: 65-110.

performance and an authoritative text. Tragedy survived despite the opposition of the Christians and a lot of forms of the genre (new and old dramas, sung extracts or musical choruses) were still performed. Furthermore, tragedy could be appreciated in school, as an instrument of education, at home, for private reading, and in social events, for dramatized reading. As Webb underlines, readers of tragedies in this period were active in imagining the original performance because they had familiarity with a continued performed tradition.

Chapter 11 (*Scholars and Scholarship on Tragedy*, pp. 324-349), written by J. Hanink, is an overview of ancient scholarship on tragedy, analysing the importance of this critical tradition from its beginnings in classical Athens to its peak in Alexandria, Pergamum and Rome. Hanink underlines the archival accuracy of Athens and the influences of Lycurgus' official editions of the three big tragedians on the transmission of tragedy to the following generations. The birth of scholarship is linked to Aristotle and his school, whose activities included not only archival research, but also literary history, linguistic theory and criticism. Hanink finishes with an analysis of tragic scholia and the *Lives* of the tragedians. She believes that modern scholars might use these sources more, because they give us not only practical information, but also interpretations of poetic style, dramaturgy and performance practice.

This multi-authored work is a wonderful book, presenting a complex approach to a relatively under-researched topic. In addition to its value for researchers who want to examine a specific issue in depth, the volume is also useful to students. Each essay examines its materials and sources without omitting arguments and ideas that are crucial to understand on a more basic level. Furthermore, the *Bibliography* (pp. 350-391), the *Index Locorum* (pp. 392-402) and the *General Index* (pp. 403-415) are an invaluable support to readers, especially beginners.

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