Tragic Troy and Athens: heroic space in Attic drama
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5. Heroic space in tragedy: conclusion

This book examined the physical presentation of the heroic world in tragedy, in particular that of Troy and Athens. Its main aim was to evaluate the supposed ‘Homeric character’ of the tragic world, a view accepted among classical scholars. The investigation, using the theory of Memory Studies, has shown that this view must be considerably modified. The heroic world of the tragedians turns out to contain many innovative and contemporary elements (places, buildings, and objects), which demonstrates that the influence of Homer is limited.

In my conclusion I will compare the presentation of Troy and Athens, explain their similarities and differences, and show the limited influence of Homer by means of two questions. What spaces do tragic Troy and Athens contain? And what do spaces in tragedy look like?

What spaces do tragic Troy and Athens contain?

Tradition
The depictions of Troy and Athens are strongly influenced by tradition. For the presentation of both cities the tragedians make use of canonical spaces – places and objects that already figured in stories of earlier poets. Although the epics of Homer are part of this tradition, they appear to be of limited influence: only a small number of canonical spaces is also found in Homer.

Canonical spaces can be divided into two categories:

1) Some spaces are intrinsically connected to Troy or Athens and continuously return in the tradition (Homer included). They are, in other words, characteristic of these cities. Examples of such spaces are the Scamander and Simois for Troy and the palace of Erechtheus for Athens. By conforming the image of Troy and Athens to the tradition, the tragedians legitimise their constructions of the past. Their predecessors had already created an image of these cities, which had become authoritative within the Greek community. Had the tragedians not taken account of this tradition, their constructions would differ too much from what the community believed about the past (2.1). That some canonical spaces are present in Homer as well as in tragedy need not imply that the tragedians have imitated Homer; it is also possible that Homer and the tragedians each followed the same canonical traditions.

2) Some canonical spaces are connected to canonical events. When the tragedians refer to such events, they also present the related setting. Examples include the tomb of Achilles, where the sacrifice of Polyxena takes place, and the olive tree, which is the location of the contest between Athena and Poseidon. The
presentation of canonical events adds to the legitimacy of a poet’s construction. Thus, events that have received authority repeatedly return in constructions of the past (2.1). Many canonical events presented in tragedy, such as the sacrifice of Polyxena, derive not from Homer but from other poetic traditions.

Canonical spaces are not only presented in tragedy to legitimise the construction of the past, but also have a dramatic function in the plot. This function can be thematic, symbolic, characterising, or psychologising. For example, the olive tree is a canonical element of the Athenian acropolis and, at the same time, symbolises the divine favour that Athens receives.

Some canonical spaces are present in the actual landscape as lieux de mémoire: the tomb of Achilles was pointed out in the Troad and the olive tree of Athena was present on the Athenian acropolis. These places supported the memory of the heroic traditions connected to them. The tragedians more frequently refer to Athenian than to Trojan lieux de mémoire. This does not imply that Athens contained more lieux de mémoire than Troy (for Trojan lieux de mémoire see e.g. Strab. 13.1.33-7), but instead is due to the Athenian context of tragedy. The tragedians and their audience were better acquainted with places that were deemed heroic in Athens than in Troy.

Innovation

The tragic construction of Troy and Athens also contains innovative spaces – spaces that were not yet part of the tradition. Examples of such spaces are the gymnasium and sacred groves in Troy (E. Tr.), as well as the cave of Ion and the Eleusinian cliffs in Athens/Eleusis (E. Ion, Supp.). Like canonical spaces these innovative ones have a dramatic function in the plot (thematic, characterising etc).

The presentation of Troy shows a higher degree of spatial invention than that of Athens. In other words, tragic Troy is filled with spaces that are sprung from the tragedians’ imagination (e.g. gymnasium and sacred groves), while tragic Athens is filled with innovative elements that are adopted from the real, actual landscape (e.g. the cave of Ion and the Eleusinian cliffs). Thus, the actual landscape has a greater influence on the construction of the past in the case of Athens than in the case of Troy. This may relate again to the Athenian context of tragedy: the tragedians and their audience were more familiar with the Athenian than the Trojan landscape. Had the tragedians modelled heroic Athens more according to their own imagination, as in the case of heroic Troy, the tragic city would contrast too much with the real city that the audience knew.

By using places of actual Athens for heroic stories, the tragedians themselves make these places lieux de mémoire for their stories. The tragedians have thus contributed to the creation of a ‘landscape of memory’ in Athens. This landscape not only supported the memory of the heroic stories but also the ideological connotations inherent in them (4.1, 4.3). For example, the cave where Euripides lo-
icated the exposure of Ion may have reminded the Athenians of their autochthonous and divine origins.

**What do spaces in tragedy look like?**

*Projection*

The process of projection, modelling the past on the present, is of paramount influence on the construction of Athens and Troy. In chapter 3 I demonstrated that buildings and objects in tragedy do not resemble those in Homer but those of the fifth century. Buildings and objects that in themselves are adopted from the tradition are given a contemporary design, the result being a stone temple of Athena in Troy (E. Tr.) and a *peripteros* temple of Athena in Athens (E. Erech.). The design of these temples stands in contrast with that of Homeric temples, which have only a stone foundation (but no stone walls or columns) and a thatched roof. Innovative buildings and objects, such as the gymnasium and the *agyieus* altar in Troy, are also projections of the fifth century.

In chapter 1.2 I set out that modern scholars generally call contemporary elements ‘anachronisms’ (e.g. Stricker, Easterling). In chapter 2.1 I demonstrated that the Greek heroic world is dynamic and subject to constant revision, using the example of the changing characterisation of the heroic king Theseus. Since anachronism presupposes a fixed (static) world to which later inaccurate elements are added, I argued that this concept should not be used of the Greek heroic world. Moreover, scholars show little understanding of the function of contemporary elements, qualifying them as ‘incongruous’ or ‘dramatically inappropriate’ (e.g. Stevens, Lee). Throughout this book I have demonstrated that contemporary spaces, just as much as traditional ones, contribute to the construction of the tragic world and that both have a function in the plot.

*A look of antiquity*

The presence of contemporary buildings and objects does not mean that tragic Troy and Athens are simple ‘copies’ of their actual, fifth-century counterparts. The tragedians also give their heroic cities an archaic patina, a ‘look of antiquity’. This archaic patina is created in two ways:

1. The landmarks adopted from the real, actual landscape, such as natural places and graves erected in the past, are always of ancient origin. Examples include the Long Rocks and the olive tree of the Athenian acropolis as well as the Bronze Age graves in the Troad, which were ascribed to the Trojan heroes.

2. Specific modern buildings from fifth-century Troy and Athens are not adopted in the evocation of the heroic past. For example, the tragedians do not refer to the sanctuary of Cybele, which was present in Troia VIII (archaic-classical Troy), or to the Parthenon in classical Athens. They never refer to specific, unique elements,
but only to common features of fifth-century buildings. Thus, buildings in tragedy have a generic contemporary design. In chapter 4 I argued that identifications of tragic buildings with specific equivalents in classical Athens do not hold (contra e.g. Collard, Cropp). We might thus conclude that the fifth-century Greeks considered that buildings in the heroic past had the same general design as those in the present, but that the specific buildings of their own time were too modern for it.

In chapter 1.2 I summarised Grethlein’s view that the Greeks saw no qualitative differences between past and present. I would like to refine this view to a small degree. Although buildings and objects in tragedy have a contemporary design, which corresponds to Grethlein’s view, the above analysis also shows that the tragedians attempt to create an archaic patina for the heroic world. For example, the Athenian acropolis in tragedy qualitatively differs from its fifth-century counterpart in the sense that it contains only the natural elements of the actual acropolis, not specific fifth-century buildings, such as the Parthenon and the Erechtheum. The tragic acropolis also accommodates a palace of which only the ruins were visible in the fifth century.

I began this book with a discussion of Walt Disney’s movie Hercules, released in 1997. I stated that the contemporary elements in this movie, such as the Walk of Fame, billboards, and energy drinks, were probably added to amuse the modern (adult) spectator. This comic effect is enabled by his knowledge of the modernity of these elements: it is their incongruity in the past that raises amusement. Contemporary elements in tragedy arguably did not have a comic effect on the original Greek audience, not only because tragedy did not intend such an effect, but also because fifth-century Greeks did not regard these elements as incongruous at all, but rather as a real part of the past.