Playing (with) Fragments

Very few complete plays have come down to us from ancient Greece. Of thousands that were written and produced, over several centuries, only thirty-two complete tragedies (seven attributed to Aeschylus, seven to Sophocles and eighteen to Euripides), one complete satyr play (by Euripides) and twelve complete comedies (eleven by Aristophanes and one by Menander) have survived.[1] But the 'lost' plays have not entirely vanished, for we have the scattered fragments of at least a few of them. There is much to be learned from such fragments about the ancient drama as it was and that is the primary goal of related scholarship, but my concern here is with a different question: *what is the potential of ancient fragmentary plays for theatrical performance today*? This really involves two related questions. Firstly, how, in practical terms, can such (often scanty) vestiges be performed? Secondly, what is the broader cultural significance of the attempt to perform them?

Before these questions can be addressed we need to review the underlying issue of *reconstruction*. Fragments of 'lost' plays can be sorted into three broad groups:

1. Fragments of unknown plays – unknown in the sense that we cannot (with confidence) attribute the given fragment to any titled play we know of, although we may know its author.
2. Fragments known to come from a particular play (that is, one whose title we know), but where the quantity and quality of the fragments of a given play, together with other evidence, are insufficient to attempt reconstruction.
3. Fragments of known plays (in the same sense as in 2), where the quantity and quality of the fragments of a given play, together with other evidence, are sufficient to attempt reconstruction.

In what follows, we shall be concerned with the third of these, although in practice we may occasionally – and tentatively – want to incorporate fragments of the first sort in a reconstruction.

[1] All of these are from the fifth century BCE, except Aristophanes *Plutos* and *Ekklesiazusae*, Menander's *Dyskolos*, and possibly Euripides' *Rhesos* (in which case, of course, it cannot be by Euripides), which are fourth century. Among Euripides' extant plays, one, *Alcestis*, is called 'pro-satyric,' distinguishing it from tragedy proper, because it was performed fourth in the tetralogy, although it does not have a (satyr play defining) chorus of satyrs. As for the "complete" plays, some contain major lacunae (for example, at least fifty important lines are missing from Euripides' *Bacchae*); others suffered significant later amendment, so 'completeness' is not necessarily pristine (for example, the original endings of Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* and Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* are unknown).

The term ‘reconstruction’ refers to attempts to plot the action of the play, not, of course, to restore the text as such (though often some textual emendation or supplementation of the fragments is required). Roughly, we can classify reconstruction as minimal, medial or maximal. These distinctions imply nothing about the degree of probability that the reconstruction is correct; they refer rather to the number of levels on which it is made. Minimal reconstruction does no more than sketch out the story as this is assumed or constructed by the given play. It yields no more than a synopsis. Medial reconstruction goes a step further to distinguish between the actions that are enacted onstage and those that are reported (a significant distinction in the case of ancient tragedy). Maximal reconstruction divides the onstage action into episodes in sequence (though the content of intervening choral odes may remain unknown), resulting in a proper scenario. Maximal reconstructions with a good degree of probability are rare.

Fragments are usually distinguished as either *book* fragments or *archaeological* fragments. The former are quotations in other ancient, though naturally later, texts; they are typically short, often gnomic (hence their ‘quotability’), and unattributed in the source text to any particular speaker. The latter are papyrus or occasionally parchment documents discovered at archaeological sites (mostly since the end of the nineteenth century); they are typically longer, but they are also usually damaged, often badly. In this case too speakers are usually unidentified.

There are four kinds of problems that face the would-be reconstructor of fragmentary plays: big gaps, little gaps, speaker attribution, and sequencing. Big gaps are gaps in the plot, or action. Where we have several book fragments from a given play, there are likely to be big gaps between them. Little gaps, which are commonplace in materially damaged archaeological fragments, are gaps in the text (maybe no more than a few missing words in a line, maybe as much as several missing consecutive lines), but not enough to obscure the plot development at this point. They may however obscure other things that are important in understanding the author’s intentions. The natures of the problems of speaker attribution and sequencing are self-evident.

Reconstruction could not get far without evidence beyond the fragments themselves, or rather it would be entirely speculative. Such evidence can consist of a)

an ancient plot summary, known as a *hypothesis*;[2] b) references to the play in other ancient texts; c) works of visual art, such as vase paintings, that may depict a scene or scenes from the play; d) knowledge of the author's other works and hence predilections; e) other ancient accounts of or treatments of the same myth.

The last of these is of special theoretical relevance. In taking this kind of evidence into account, whether in the form of a different, more or less contemporary or later dramatisation of the same story or a later narrative account of the story given by a mythographer, it is necessary to understand the high degree of 'play' in the ancient dramatic treatment of myth. Especially in the competitive context of the City Dionysia (the early spring festival during which the most important theatrical competition took place), dramatists were expected to vary the given or received myth[3] (which implies that the significance of a particular play for a contemporary audience may have been partly intertextual). On the theoretical level, this gives rise to the question of what defines two *different* treatments of a story as nonetheless versions or variations of the *same* story. It must be that certain events in the story are fixed (invariant) while others are not. For example, Oedipus necessarily kills his father and marries his mother, but it is not necessary that he blinds himself (for he is blinded by a Servant of Laios in Euripides' fragmentary *Oedipus*), nor that Jokasta hangs herself (for in both Euripides' *Oedipus* and his *Phoenician Women* she lives on). Conversely, if we have a story in which X blinds himself and X's wife (or mother) hangs herself, even simultaneously, but X has not previously killed his father and married his mother, then X ≠ Oedipus.[4]

Given that in any dramatic (or other) treatment of story S, certain events are invariant, then the interest of a particular dramatic treatment of S lies partly in its construction of the events that are not invariant (and partly, of course, in how the story is staged). These variant events are of two broad kinds (which nonetheless may coincide as aspects of the same event): *conjunctive* and *interpretative*. Conjunctive events are those variables that establish story-line coherence by constructing plausible

[2] Hypotheses themselves tend to be archaeological fragments and hence materially damaged.
[3] By the 'given or received myth' I mean simply any previous versions of it, not some supposed ur-myth. But whether – and how – any particular versions became canonical through this process are open questions.
[4] It is not necessarily easy to distinguish core events from others. Actual variations in the treatments of the myths by ancient writers will naturally guide us, but these still have to be 'weighed'. For example, when Euripides, in *Helen*, presents a Helen who is faithful after all, for it was only her *eidolon* that was taken to Troy by Aphrodite while she herself was hidden in Egypt, he is probably following a parallel alternative myth with different core events rather than a varying the better known one.

progression from core event A to core event B. Interpretative events are variables that prompt the spectator or reader to evaluate the core events in a preferred way. For example, in different versions of the story of Phaidra[5], it may be Phaidra herself or her Nurse (either with Phaidra's prior knowledge or not) who reveals Phaidra's 'incestuous' passion to her stepson Hippolytos, or it may be Phaidra herself or her Nurse who, following his rejection of his stepmother's advances, conceives the idea of accusing him of attempted rape. Each event is both conjunctive and interpretative; insofar as the event is conjunctive, it does not matter who is the agent, but insofar as it is interpretative, this matters, since our attitude to or sympathy with Phaidra may vary as a result. Now, reconstruction is fundamentally concerned with sketching in likely or plausible conjunctive and interpretative events and with how these serve to frame and focus core events.

Reconstruction is necessarily tentative and uncertain. This, however, is not to be lamented, for there is a certain pleasure, as well as a point, in exploring the *range* of plausible reconstructions. Since complete certainty is out of reach, the reconstructor is liberated, not to indulge in ungrounded speculation but rather to follow through what seem to be real possibilities, in effect testing these by pushing them to their limits. There is, therefore, something intrinsically *playful* in reconstruction, a playfulness that mirrors the playfulness of the original festival in its generation of variations upon mythic themes. Understanding and tapping into this playfulness is necessary if we are to find valid ways of performing (*playing*) fragmentary plays.

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What kind of performance is possible in the case of fragmentary plays? In terms of surviving text, nearly all reconstructable fragmentary plays consist of only a single digit percentage portion of the original. Around 30% of Euripides' tragedy *Hypsipyle* survives as does possibly almost half of Sophocles' satyr play *Trackers*, and we have substantial portions of several comedies by Menander, but these are very much the exceptions. Moreover, even if a fairly large proportion (as the number of readable lines) of a play remains, it still may not amount to much in the way of coherent,

[5] A fascinating comparison of both the dramatic and the narrative treatments of this story in antiquity is given by Sommerstein and Talboy in *Sophocles: Selected Fragmentary Plays Volume 1* (Oxford: Aris & Philips, 2006) pp. 248-289.

continuous scenes or episodes. In the vast majority of cases, then, fragmentary plays are not performable even in part, at least not in a meaningful way, without the addition of new material of some kind to the actual set of fragments.

In a few cases, fragmentary plays provide no more than a starting point for authors to go on to write what can be thought of as an 'original play' within which the fragments themselves play no – or no significant – part. Examples are Timberlake Wertenbaker's *The Love of the Nightingale* (1988), Joanna Laurens' *The Three Birds* (2000) and Colin Teevan's *Alcmaeon in Corinth* (2004). In these cases the fragmentary play-as-source is no different from any other stimulus or source material; that is, the resulting play is not shaped by any encounter with its 'gapped' and incomplete nature as a fragmentary play.[6] This kind of work is of no further interest in the present context.

Here, I distinguish three basic kinds of theatre in which the fragmentary nature of the source is significant, either in the full process of play-making or in the play as product.

1. The surviving fragments of a play may be fleshed out with new or other text in a seamless way, that is, so that the audience's attention is not drawn to the difference between original and supplementary words. Examples of this are Tassos Roussos' reconstruction of Euripides' *Hypsipyle* (1997), Ilias Malandris' reconstruction of Aeschylus' *Achilleis* trilogy (2003), and Alastair Elliot's reconstruction of Euripides' *Phaethon* (2008).
2. Very differently, fragments from different plays can be combined in a theatrical montage (in which case the 'new material' added to a particular set of fragments consists of other sets of fragments). This has been done, for example, by the National Theatre of Luxemburg, under the direction of Hansgünther Heyme, using remnants of plays by Euripides (2003), by Theodoros Terzopoulos in his *Epigoni*, which used fragments from Aeschylus (2003) and by the Municipal and Regional Theatre of Agrinio, using fragments from Euripides (2009).[7] Note, then, that while the first

[6] Teevan's play makes a gesture towards the fragmentary nature of its source in an early speech in which Hera "sifts fragments" (while Laurens' play incorporates a few fragments from Sophocles' *Tereus* without drawing any attention to this fact). Another kind of gesture towards the Greek prototype is the way in which all three plays named here include a 'chorus' – but in no case does this have much in common with the Greek chorus.

[7] Kelly Copper's *Fragment* (2006) may (perhaps) be thought of as an extreme form of this approach in which the 'lost' plays disappear altogether and only fragments are left!

approach engages with what can be called the 'problem of reconstruction' but ignores the aesthetic allure of the fragmentary, this approach engages with fragmentariness but not with the problem of reconstruction.

3. The third possible kind of theatre is one which preserves or foregrounds the fragmentariness of the material on the one hand and addresses, either implicitly or explicitly, the problem of reconstruction on the other. Examples are Tony Harrison's *Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* (1988) and David Wiles' version of Euripides' *Hypsipyle* (1997).

In the remainder of this essay I will focus on the nature and the implications of this third approach, but only after making some remarks on the first two.

The approach to fragmentary plays that 'fills in all the gaps' so as to create a seamless whole (after having attributed speakers to and sorted the existing fragments into an order) easily runs into problems associated with the validity of its reconstruction. Such problems may be of mainly scholarly interest, but they also concern the wider significance of this form of theatrical practice. Tassos Roussos' (Modern Greek) version of Euripides' *Hypsipyle*,[8] for example, can be seen to be 'wrong' in certain ways, mainly because it is based on Bond's (1963) rather than Cockle's (1987) text, but this matters only insofar as *the uncertainty of reconstruction is not inscribed in Roussos' text*. In saying this, I am not making the simplistic criticism that an audience may be deceived that Roussos' play is really Euripides' play, for proper publicity could easily avert that. Rather, I am suggesting that such an approach misses the performance opportunities that arise when we understand that a significant part of the interest of a fragmentary play is that it is fragmentary.

Nonetheless, proper distinction of 'Roussos' play' from 'Euripides' play' is not like distinguishing, say, Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love* from Euripides' *Hippolytos*. What I am calling 'Roussos' Play' is not something *freely* based on a given myth, but an attempt to follow the faint outline of a given structure too. This raises difficult issues of 'authenticity'.

Two other 'seamless' reconstructions of ancient tragedies are worth comment in this context, for, like Roussos' version of *Hypsipyle*, they raise questions about the purpose of theatrical reconstruction and its relation to the problematic issue of

[8] Published by Kaktos, Athens, 1997 in the series Αρχαία Ελληνική Γραμματεία «Οι Έλληνες» No 397. Roussos version was performed at Epidaurus 12th and 13th July, 2002. It was also translated into English by Athanasios Anagnostopoulos for The Greek Institute, Cambridge, Mass., and given in a dramatic reading with costumes in Boston, Dec. 3, 2001.

authenticity. One of these is a reconstruction not just of a single play but Ilias Malandris' version of an entire trilogy, Aeschylus' *Achilleis*, consisting of *Myrmidons*, *Nereids* and *Phrygians*[9]. This was performed by the National Theatre Company of Cyprus (THOC) in the summer of 2004. Following performances in the ancient theatre at Epidaurus, the production was described by the theatre critic Spryros Pagiatakis in *Kathimerini* as "a shameless hubris" and a "distortion of tragedy"![10] A principal (though not the only) reason for this was THOC's claim, or rather imputation, both in pre-publicity and in the explicit attribution of the trilogy to Aeschylus, that what was being presented was close to what Aeschylus had originally written. The original press release quoted THOC representative Andy Bargilly as saying "We do think it is a faithful adaptation to a large extent, but nobody can say 100 percent"[11]. More subtly, the suggestion was sewn that significant new fragments of the plays had come to light, making the reconstruction possible; as a result, much of the pre-publicity was misleading. The BBC, for example, asserted: "A Greek play believed lost when the Library of Alexandria is said to have burnt down in 48 BC is to be revived after fragments of text were found in an Egyptian mummy."[12] Lastly, THOC's own description of the production claimed that Malandris has "brought to light a lost masterpiece of Greek art from the fifth century BC".[13] In reality, actual fragments of the original plays (none of which was newly discovered) make up a tiny portion of the reconstruction, while more than three quarters is taken directly from

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[9] The latter is also known by the name *The Ransoming of Hector*.

[10] Μια αναίσχυντη ύβρις... Παραχάραξη της τραγωδίας. Online at http://news.kathimerini.gr/4dcgi/_w_articles_civ_2_22/08/2004_113236

[11] 14th November, 2003. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/3269965.stm A week later than this, the Greek Embassy in Washington DC confirmed the Reuters report, quoting Bargilly (Partzillis) as saying, a little more circumspectly, "We believe that Malandris's restoration is fairly accurate for the largest part of the trilogy, but of course no one can verify that this is the case for the entire text." http://www.greekembassy.org/Embassy/content/en/Article.aspx?office=1&folder=419&article=12488

[12] 14th November, 2003. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/3269965.stm
Also: 'A Greek play is to be staged for the first time in more than 2,050 years after fragments of the text were found in Egyptian mummy cases.

'Cyprus's national theatre company, Thoc, plans to perform a modern take on Achilles, a Trojan war trilogy by the dramatist Aeschylus, known as the father of tragedy. It will be performed in Cyprus and Greece.

'Scholars had believed his trilogy to be lost for ever when the Library of Alexandria burned down in 48BC.

"But in the last decades archaeologists found mummies in Egypt which were stuffed with papyrus, containing excerpts of the original plays of Aeschylus," said the director of Thoc, Andy Bargilly.'

The Guardian, 14th November, 2003. http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2003/nov/14/arts.artsnews

It is notable that the quotation from Bargilly refers simply to "plays" without specifying which.

[13] "Ο θεατρολόγος Ηλίας Μαλανδρής ανασυνθέτει και μεταφράζει την άγνωστη μέχρι σήμερα τριλογία του Αισχύλου, φέρνοντας στην επιφάνεια ένα χαμένο αριστούργημα της Ελληνικής τέχνης του 5ου αιώνα π.Χ." http://www.thoc.org.cy/gr/archive/Production.aspx?ProductionID=314

The Iliad. The rest consists of inventions by Malandris together with some fragments from the *Myrmidones* and the *Achilles*[14] of the Roman dramatist Accius who may or may not have been closely following the Aeschylean original.[15]

All this concerns the risk, or error, of presenting a seamless reproduction as the 'real thing' and this, as I said above, is easily avoided by accurate and ingenuous publicity. However, it might be argued that such a reconstruction as that by Malandris may yet be authentic in another sense. The vast majority of the *lines* are by Homer, but perhaps the *dramatic structure* of the plays follows Aeschylus. Of course, with so few fragments remaining it is hard to see how original structure could be recovered with any degree of certainty. In this case, however, there are strong reasons to doubt that anything authentic has been established.

In the first place, Malandris rejects prevailing scholarly opinion and has Achilles speak from the very beginning of *Myrmidons,* arguing that the reference in Aristophanes' *Frogs* to the notorious silence of Achilles only indicates that it comes at the beginning of *a* play, not *which* play. True enough, but fragment 132b from *Myrmidons* certainly seems to be the moment when Achilles breaks his long silence in response to Phoenix. Malandris, however, seems unaware of this fragment – at any rate he does not use it. For Malandris, the trilogy opens with Patroclus' approach to Achilles as in Book 16 of *The Iliad*. Hence the whole of the 'Embassy' scene (Book 9) is lost. A much more fundamental problem, however, is that Malandris sets much of the action outside the tent of Achilles (which he uses as an entrance/exit), and several of his episodes require three speaking actors. The date of the *Achilleis* trilogy is not known, but it was almost certainly before, and probably well before, the introduction of the stage building (*skene*) and the third actor around 460 BCE. A reconstruction of this trilogy might have been seen as an opportunity to explore the constraints of two-actor tragedy and the organization of 'tragic space' in a theatre with no *skene*, but this opportunity has been lost.

Alistair Elliot's version of Euripides' *Phaethon* is accompanied by an essay, "Filling the Gaps," which outlines the main evidence informing the reconstruction and the phases it went through.[16] Most interestingly, having worked out a reasonably

[14] These may be the same play.
[15] The trilogy is published as *ΑΙΣΧΥΛΟΥ ΑΧΙΛΛΗΙΣ* – Μετάφραση-Μελέτη ΗΛΙΑΣ Γ. ΜΑΛΑΝΔΡΗΣ (Athens: Εκδόσεις Περίπλους, 2003).
[16] *PHAETHON* by Euripides – A Reconstruction by Alistair Elliot (London: Oberon Books, 2008) 65-75.

certain scenario based on the available fragments and knowledge of the story, and then having "filled it in by translating the fragments and inventing the rest ('translating thin air')… what I had was still shorter than any of the rest of Euripides' complete plays (68)." Then, since he had taken pains to compose scenes and speeches that were more or less typical of Euripides, at least in length, Elliot came to the conclusion that the original play must have contained at least one other scene. Such a conclusion would probably not have occurred without the actual work (the 'practical archaeology' – a concept Elliot invokes) of writing the play, for the 'missing scene' has left no trace in the fragments. Since the goal was 'completeness,' there followed a kind of secondary detective work based on surmise and guesswork, to arrive at a plausible idea of what the missing scene might have been.

In such a case something has been learnt – whether or not the missing scene has been 'correctly' imagined. Malandris, on the other hand, brings us no new insights into the lost material he was working with.

The second kind of theatrical approach to fragmentary plays (which I will deal with here more briefly) typically combines fragments from several plays in a montage. It is worth noting that this is an approach than has sometimes been taken to extant complete plays too, since many of these deal with the same saga or myth; extracts from several are combined in a new synthesis. In such a case, the extant complete plays are themselves reduced to a kind of fragmentary status within the new whole, although this need not be significant or even evident to an audience, especially if the different 'fragments' (or extracts) are connected in a linear narrative such as the story of the House of Atreus. Where a montage of actual fragmentary plays is made, however, *something other than story* is likely to be the linking factor, thus associating the practice with the 'postdramatic' tendency in theatre in which a coherent or continuous story-line is rejected.

Such an approach may (or may not) aim at highlighting the fragmentary nature of the source material and, through this, at exploring the relationship of the present to the (largely but not entirely) 'lost' past. The Municipal and Regional Theatre of Agrinio's 2009 production, *Ευριπίδου Σπαράγματα ή Απλά Μαθήματα μιας Άγνωστης Μυθολογίας* (*Euripidean Fragments: Introduction to an Unknown Mythology*), directed by Vasilis Nikolaidis, stands out here as having sought precisely this, through

a synthesis of fragments from *Andromeda*, *Cretans*, *Phaethon*, *Hypsipyle*, *Oedipus* and *Telephos*, with no "logical" connection between them, emphasizing precisely their fragmentary nature and the "lost worlds" of the plays that could never quite be grasped or completed. Music was used both to draw attention to and in a sense to 'fill in' the lost.[17]

The third approach to the 'theatricalization of fragments' necessarily explores the relationship between the present and past. Here, rather than a montage of parts from different plays, the aim is theatrical reconstruction of a single play. Now, for a fragmentary play to be performed *as a fragmentary play*, the supplementary material needs to be distinct in kind, such that the actual fragments stand out as fragments – the opposite of 'seamlessness'. This is no different from what most museums do in presenting, say, the fossil bones of a dinosaur or what remains of an ancient temple frieze. Moreover, the museum has choices as to the degree to which the 'filler' materials *approach* the authentic parts in appearance. This approach may be lesser or greater, though never to the extent of 'forgery' (*trompe l'oeil*). Such choices affect the spectator, not just aesthetically but also in the relation to the past that they 'capture' or 'locate' the spectator in.

(Parenthetically, but importantly, we should realize that any such relation to the past is also a relation to the present. What better example of this than the strategy adopted in the Parthenon sculptures gallery in the New Acropolis Museum in Athens, which opened in June 2009. The glaring white plaster of the supplements, contrasted with the sensuous honey-tones of the pollution-stained original marble, represents visually an *absence* as much as a formal – sketched – completion. The effect is one of protest. When I first saw this, it occurred to me that this effect was much more powerful and had wider, more significant cultural resonance than would be the case were all the marbles returned! As it is, the gallery allows the imagination of their

[17] "Από σκηνοθετική πλευρά, θα επιχειρηθεί μια σύνθεση των σπαραγμάτων, χωρίς «λογικό» σύνδεσμο μεταξύ τους, βασισμένη ακριβώς στον αποσπασματικό τους χαρακτήρα, τονίζοντας την έννοια των «χαμένων» έργων, των «χαμένων» κόσμων. Η μουσική θα συνδέει τις διάφορες ατμόσφαιρες, δημιουργώντας έναν καμβά, βασισμένο στον αποσπασματικό χαρακτήρα του όλου θέματος. Ο θεατής κάθε φορά θα εισδύει με κάποιο τρόπο στον κάθε μύθο, στον κόσμο του κάθε έργου, χωρίς ωστόσο να μπορεί να τον συμπληρώσει ή να τον ολοκληρώσει λογικά." Quoted from the company's Press Release of 22/6/2009: online at <http://www.in2web.gr/dipetheagriniou/page_show.php?id=67&id1=Νέα-Δελτία Τύπου>

restoration while foregrounding a raft of 'big issues' concerning the politics of cultural ownership and the truly *fragmenting* legacy of imperialism.)

In theatrical performance, the 'filler materials' can take various forms. Most obviously, a narrator can be used. A narrator has a kind of authority (which may yet be self-subverting) either to fill in parts of the story or to outline alternative stories; s/he may also move in and out of the dramatic action. Alternatively, characters/actors may take on this role in a distributed ("many-headed"[18]) way. The character/actor can step outside the fiction, either into 'neutral theatrical space' or into some parallel fiction, while keeping the 'I' of the role or exchanging it for the third person. Other kinds of actions or events may be incorporated that are obviously not original, either because they are anachronistic or because they are stylistically heterogeneous. Actual fragments can be repeated, either performed differently each time, or framed in different ways, or both. Jumps in the fragmentary text can be underscored; for example, music or percussion can be used both to fill and to signify gaps. Scenes can be incorporated in which particular fragments are seen 'in rehearsal,' as a way of bringing out their potential subtext and context. Lastly, the audience might be asked for plot suggestions, within certain given limits, which are then improvised by the actors.

Approached in this way, not only will a performed fragmentary play retain the fragmentariness of its ancient *pre-text*, but it will also inscribe a 'higher level' fragmentariness in its heterogeneity, its refusal of self-containedness and illusion.

David Wiles' strategy in his version of *Hypsipyle* is to abruptly halt the 'original play' when the set of reasonably coherent and continuous fragments runs out; at this point a 'contest,' which fills in the gap (theatrically, not dramatically) occurs, in which the immediately preceding scene is played in three different theatrical modes, ('psychological,' 'ritual' and 'rhetorical'), using different actors, and with the audience then voting on the winning style. On the one hand this mimics the competitive context of original production (even Dionysos is present!), while on the other it acknowledges that a modern audience necessarily sees ancient drama through the complex prism of its awareness of divergent theatrical styles. This kind of

[18] Used in the sense of Peter Brook's phrase defining theatre, "the many-headed story teller".

'polyvalent' ('multi-stor(e)y') theatricalization is precisely what this approach to staging fragments leads to.[19]

Something similar, but more complex, occurs in Tony Harrison's *Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*.[20] This work is too rich to do any justice to here, but certain points related to my overall theme are worth making. Although much is made of the fragmentary nature of the source material, especially at the start of the play, there is nothing equivalent to an 'abrupt halt'. Rather, Harrison's text twice 'shifts gear'. It begins in the world of the archaeologists, Grenfell and Hunt, excavating for papyrus documents at Oxyrhynchus. It then shifts into a performance of Sophocles' lost *Trackers* (not as a 'play within a play,' for Grenfell becomes the Apollo he is first obsessed, then possessed, by, while Hunt, as it were caught in Grenfell's orbit, becomes Silenus). When the fragments run out, they are briefly supplemented with a scene in which (following the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*) Apollo claims the newly invented lyre from the infant Hermes as compensation for the theft of his cattle. The satyrs, who had tracked the cattle to the cave in which Hermes is hidden, are then effectively 'dumped' by Apollo. The third phase of the play begins with Apollo's exit; the gifts of gold bars given to the satyrs turn out to be ghetto blasters wrapped in gold foil, and the satyrs themselves turn into modern 'hooligans'. They are the culturally excluded or dispossessed, at the 'lowest' end of the exploitative cultural division into 'high' and 'low'. The audience is reminded, too, that most of the papyri discovered at Oxyrhinchus (to Grenfell's 'highbrow' disappointment) are petitions from the materially dispossessed, not 'eternal' works of literature.

Through this structure Harrison draws attention precisely to the relationship of the present to the past – though the 'present,' with its deep social divisions, itself goes back a long way. The play as a whole enacts something like the satyrs' 'loss of innocence' in a way that does not allow the audience to hold the culture of the past at a convenient distance.

We encounter the past, past cultural artefacts included, from where we are now. Works of art are not 'eternal' in Grenfell's sense. To *acknowledge* this fact can make

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[19] The text of Wiles' version of *Hypsipyle* is included, with an introduction, in *Lost Dramas of Classical Athens*. Edited by Fiona McHardy, James Robson and David Harvey. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2005).

[20] Tony Harrison: *Plays 5*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2004). This contains both the Delphi and British National Theatre versions of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*. My comments here concern both versions equally, so I make no distinction between them.

a significant difference to how we understand and relate to those past artefacts. Stimulated by an encounter with fragments, Harrison's play effectively builds in that 'new understanding'. Short of this, however, it is possible to perform fragments in a way that simply *opens up the gap between present and past*.

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A comparison can be usefully drawn at this point with ancient Greek music. Probably in the fourth century BCE, two systems of notation were developed in Greece, one for vocal, the other for instrumental music, and some fragments of scores, albeit "wretchedly brief and lacunose,"[21] have been found as marble inscriptions and on papyrus. These scores contain no information about tempo or rhythm or instrumentation, but record only intervals. Nevertheless a few attempts to perform this music have been made, using instruments reconstructed mainly from artistic evidence. Of the recordings I have listened to, the closest in spirit to the third approach to the performance of fragmentary plays is by Atrium Musicae de Madrid, under the direction of Gregorio Paniagua, who writes:

> [W]e commence the record with a sonorous explosion which, in the manner of the "Anakrousis" or preludes, recreates the silence necessary to enter in contact with a music as remote and unknown as this. And then we have treated the innumerable lacunae which exist in the papyrus fragments and bits of marble in various ways: either by total silence, like the use of neutral cement in the restoration of a painting or sculpture; or, whenever the melodic line could be joined onto the next fragment, by restoring them "anti-archaeologically" deliberately colouring them with a little (but not too much) imagination; or else by filling the irreparable gap with sounds, noises and disconnected chords, painful and totally dissonant, as in the case of the Oslo papyrus.[22]

What this recognizes is that such reconstruction can never get back to the 'real thing'; it can only take us *closer* to it insofar as it acknowledges its own limits. But we should also look at this another way. Annie Bélis, in the notes accompanying the recording by Ensemble Kérylos, make a stronger claim to "authentic musical

[21] M.L. West, *Ancient Greek Music* (Oxford: OUP, 1992) p. 7.
[22] Gregorio Paniagua, Notes accompanying *Musique de la Grèce Antique*, performed by Atrium Musicae de Madrid, Harmonia Mundi HMA 1951015, 1979, 2000. Translated by Derek Yeld.

restitution,"[23] but the very pursuit of this, whatever its other musical merits, has resulted in a style of performance which is too 'full,' or 'seamless'. That is, in the Atrium Musicae recording we *hear also the loss*, but not in the Kérylos recording. Some of the ancient fragments have also been recorded by Petros Tabouris.[24] However, Tabouris has selected nine of the less lacunose fragments, with the consequence that this recording also does not inscribe the fragmentary quality of the music. The only other recording I know of which leaves the music in its fragmentary state is De Organographia's *Music of the Ancient Sumerians, Egyptians & Greeks*, but only for some of the pieces and then, it seems, more for want of a viable alternative than for aesthetic reasons.[25]

* * *

The 'allure of the fragmentary' arises when we *sense* – both in and through the fragment – something of the lost whole. The few surviving scraps of Sappho's poems, for example, take their significance from the glimpse they provide of an extended 'otherness' behind them, the (alien-familiar, historical-utopian) world of sixth-century Asia Minor in which a woman was free to sing of her apparently unconstrained sexuality.[26] This can arise in widely divergent contexts, wherever some dislocated part seems to speak of more than itself; the fossilized bone might be taken as exemplary here, in the way it can suggest, first, a skeleton, second, a musculature, third, a lifestyle, and fourth, an environment or world. But the nature of drama makes it an especially appropriate ground on which to explore this allure, for *all* script-based

[23] Annie Bélis, Notes accompanying *Musiques de l'Antiquité Grecque*, performed by Ensemble Kérylos, K617, K617069, 1996.
[24] In the two CD set, *ΜΕΛΟΣ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΝ: SACRED MUSIC OF GREEK ANTIQUITY*, ΠΑΙΑΝ, Z_1/207/92 and Z_1/208/92.
[25] This is the 2006 expanded edition (PRCD 1005). In his notes, Philip Neuman writes: "[A]s one might expect with works of great antiquity, most of the extant pieces have missing passages. Most of the fragmentary pieces recorded here have been left in their original state (nos. 12-20, 24 and 25), while the others have been 'repaired' with thematically similar melody to fill the voids. There is, of course, no perfect solution to a puzzle with pieces irretrievably lost. However, bridging the lacunae in the Oxyrhynchus fragments with plausible material is made feasible by using conventions found in the extant music, the set of rules for composing melody by Aristides Quintilianus, and the practice of making the melody agree with the tonal accents of the text…. *If the listener wishes to distinguish the original from the added material, it would be helpful to consult a collection of modern transcriptions*." (My emphasis.) In the notes to the related CD *Music of the Ancient Greeks* (1995, PRCD 1001), Neuman says that the goal was to provide "the listener with a musical experience as seamless as would have been enjoyed in the period".
[26] Page DuBois elaborates this idea throughout her *Sappho is Burning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

drama involves a kind of 'primary incompleteness:' the script, that is, is like a scaffolding – rigid, a structure, but also full of holes. Scripts, used as starting-points in theatre, are usually 'complete' – as scripts – but since such completeness is always *short of the completeness of the play*, scripts that are (*scriptically*) 'incomplete' for one reason or another, such as Goethe's *Urfaust* or Büchner's *Woyzeck*, often seem not only to be equally 'doable' but all the more inspiring to 'do'.

Scripts can even be regarded as 'over-completed,' as is implied whenever, in production, they are cut. It is in fact a very good exercise to take a script, preferably the 'wordy' kind, and to cut it, or at least a scene from it, testing how well the cut script/scene works, not once but over and over again until one arrives at the 'minimal script' for the scene in question. The principle behind this is that *text can be shifted into subtext*, which means that the verbalized can be shifted into the non-verbal levels of theatrical signification. Modern taste, from Stanislavsky on, tends to prefer this. But it raises a question: if we were to *start* from the minimal script, never having had the earlier versions, would that subtext be equally 'there'?

The same question arises in the very useful devising exercise where a small group is asked first to devise a scene, based on some idea, which should play for between three to five minutes; then, after presenting it, the group is asked to rework the same scene using only a restricted number of lines of dialogue (as few as five, perhaps as many as ten, depending on the scene and its length). The result is almost always much sharper, more dramatic and more interesting to watch; so much information that was initially verbal becomes non-verbal, with the result that the significance of what remains (or of what *has to be*) verbal is greatly enhanced. But perhaps the non-verbal 'fullness' of the scene is only there because it was initially verbalized. Relatedly, it is sometimes a good rehearsal technique (the opposite of the cutting exercise) to 'speak the subtext,' that is, to expand and elaborate the script with all that one thinks and feels and, above all, what one *really means*.

An anecdote recounted by Peter Brook pushes the key point here a step further:

> I remember working with Paul Scofield on an adaptation that Denis Cannan had made of Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory*. At the beginning of rehearsal there was a short, vital scene that was underwritten. Paul and I were very dissatisfied, for it was sketchy, like a first draft. However, it took several weeks for the author to get round to rewriting it.
>
> When eventually Scofield was presented with a vastly improved version, he turned it down. I was surprised, because

> Scofield is in no way capricious. Then I understood his actor's logic. During the period in which we had rehearsed the first version he had discovered many secret impulses that enabled him to complement the inadequacies of the text with a rich inner life…. In fact, the new text in saying more expressed less. So he stayed with the old scene, and in performance it was remarkably powerful.[27]

In hinting at a kind of 'paradox' here, Brook's point can be seen as a variation on a theme of Etienne Decroux, the distinction between 'poor text' and 'rich text'[28]. But from our point of view something Brook neglects to say is also important, perhaps more so. Scofield (and Brook too) *knew the novel*. We do not exactly know, thus, whether Scofield "discovered" the "many secret impulses" in the 'gaps' (inadequacies) in the script, in himself, or in Greene's (prior) narrative. Now, the situation of someone preparing the performance of a fragmentary play is quite closely analogous. The given text (the set of fragments) might be called 'poor,' but the hidden part of the iceberg doesn't have to be inferred from that poor text alone; other evidence exists too, at the very least a knowledge of the core events of the story.

Brook's point still stands, however, at least as a 'puzzle' worth some further thought. In particular, when he says, "In fact, the new text in saying more expressed less," he *seems* to locate the puzzle in the text itself, not in the relation between performer and text. After all, a good performer might make a shopping list interesting, possibly even gripping, but without any sense of a puzzle, let alone a paradox, arising.

Still, a fragmentary play is *so* 'poor' as text that it needs more text, it cannot be completed by non-verbal means alone. This may point us to the solution of the puzzle set by Brook: if Scofield had had to supplement Canaan's first draft with *more words* in order to make it work, Brook would not have thought the story worth telling.

* * *

[27] *The Shifting Point* (London: Methuen Drama, 1988) p. 17.

[28] Note that what I called a 'wordy' text is not necessarily rich, though a poor text will tend to be laconic; it may simply be overwritten. A rich text is one in which much or most of the significance of the play, hence of the action, is in the words, so that the actors' other means are subordinate to making this significance sharp (precise, clear). A poor text at most hints at this fuller significance and more generally provides a framework within which something fuller seems called for. But while this distinction is useful up to a point, it needs to be treated with caution. Can a text by Pinter be called 'poor,' even in a sense which implies nothing about quality? This question should at least alert us to the fact that the distinction is not quantitative but qualitative. This, of course, makes adequate definition of it much harder.

Theatre has a 'richly complex' relation to its starting-points where these are a) verbal, and b) will be (largely) preserved in the performance itself. In a perfectly general way, all performance that starts from a text (provided it does not leave that text behind) has a double aspect: it *finds things in* – it interprets – the text, and it *brings things to* – it extrapolates from or 'fills out' – the text. But these aspects are not always easy to distinguish in practice. This fact underlies the vexed question of what is 'authenticity' or 'fidelity' in production, especially in the production of old plays, or, if these terms seem too loaded, we can say instead that it generates the fuzzy distinction between 'straight' production and adaptation.[29] Now, performing ancient fragmentary plays according to the third approach sketched out earlier highlights or foregrounds this double aspect of text-based performance, although in a kind of displaced duplication of it. If the filler materials are distinct in kind from the actual fragments, then this is easily read as a *transposition* of the distinction between 'finding things in' and 'bringing things to' the given text. In this case, though, the distinction is largely exposed to view.

Given that the actual fragments and the supplementary materials are held distinct, and in some way 'signed' as such, then the fragments themselves necessarily retain something we might well call 'authenticity'. In practice we may unwittingly mistake them – attributing a fragment to the wrong speaker, for example – but their authenticity does not reside in their correct representation. It lies instead in a kind of intractability. Whatever we do with them, they remain themselves – and they remain 'just there'. For in the way they speak of the disintegration of the original, each acquires its own irreducible integrity, in a root sense implying a kind of 'untouchability'. This is to say, they remain *pure parts*, even when pressed to 'play a part' in some new whole. A fragment, *qua* fragment, is always *a part apart*. Put differently, a fragment appears as a kind of 'door' to the past, both a way in, alluringly an opening, yet at the very same time slammed shut, all there is.

If a director were uncertain, throughout rehearsals, how to direct Sophocles' *Oedipus*, or an actor were uncertain, throughout rehearsals, how to play that part, no doubt the performance would lack something and no doubt this would be unsatisfying to an audience. But the performance of a fragmentary play can – and arguably should

[29] Since this distinction is fuzzy, it implies a further category in the grey area between the two. Productions in this grey area may well be the most interesting.

– inscribe an uncertainty. Its goal is not to be definitive, but provisional. It would be unsatisfying if it 'lacked this lack'.

This approach to the performance of fragmentary plays can be yoked to Hans-Thies Lehmann's concept of *postdramatic theatre*, a term that denotes a range of contemporary theatrical practices that have gone beyond the conventionally dramatic but that nonetheless refer back to it in some way.[30] In the first place, Lehmann asserts that in *drama*, as the paradigm that has dominated western theatre for centuries, text is dominant: "Dramatic theatre is subordinated to the primacy of the text".[31] Now, in the performance of a fragmentary play, text (as the actual set of fragments) cannot dominate *in the same way*, for it lacks the ('*scriptic*') completeness, hence the self-enclosedness, that is essential to drama; nonetheless it may 'dominate' in another way, *by being a problem*. All aspects of the performance of the fragmentary play (including new or supplementary text) will ultimately refer back to that text, that is, to 'the original,' as much to something absent as to something present. Text is thus put in question in a way that it can never be in drama, its "primacy" asserted ironically through the negation (loss) of that very thing.

For Lehmann, the field of postdramatic theatre is largely demarcated by the 'freeing' of non-verbal theatrical means from their previous (dramatic) subordination to the text. This does not or need not happen in the kind of performance of fragmentary plays I am describing here, where the deficiencies of the fragmentary text will likely 'pull in' further text. Even so, it seems to me that such performance hardly belongs to 'drama' (provided it does not aim at seamlessness), even in the broad sense Lehmann ascribes to this term, and for this reason it is more usefully thought of as postdramatic.[32]

It is worth noting at this point that the very nature of fragmentary plays might well seem a stimulus to strongly visual or 'physical' treatment and that such treatment can be fully *complementary* to the gapped and incomplete text, hence not 'subordinate' to it. A fine example of this was Giorgos Zamboulakis' staging of Euripides' *Cretans* on September 11th and 12th, 2011, as part of the Ancient Drama

[30] See Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).
[31] Lehmann, p. 21.
[32] In my view, Lehmann defines the field of 'drama' too broadly, with a corresponding over-limitation of the postdramatic. But the term 'postdramatic' remains vastly to be preferred to 'postmodern theatre' as a means of orienting ourselves in recent 'theatre history space'.

Festival of Athens.[33] The surviving fragments of Cretans are few, though they include Pasiphai's remarkable thirty-five line speech in self-defence following her coupling with the bull and the birth of the Minotaur, but they are enough to provide a broad outline of the scope of the original play. Zamboulakis, in collaboration with Giorgos Sambatakakis, filled out these fragments with texts from Ritsos, Artaud, Seneca, Kane, Racine and Swinburne, but while this allowed the production to follow a coherent structure through the stages of the 'drama,' the textual dimension of the play was left 'thin' or minimal in a way that invited a visually dynamic 'physical theatre' approach to staging. What provided especially strong focus to this *extra-* (as against sub-) textual dimension of the performance was the use of masks by Thanos Vovolis. Crucially, the very strong impression was that the action, or the performance of it, somehow issued from (that is, had its point of origin in) these masks rather than from (in) the words of the text. Being acoustic masks (something Vovolis has researched extensively), they did not seem *opposed* to text (as can seem to be the case with mute full masks) but to subsume it to themselves, while simultaneously occupying the 'visual centre' of a highly energized visual field. Yet it would be wrong to say that the masks took over the traditionally dominant role of text. They did not *dominate* in this sense. Their function was more like the 'keystone' in a structure that allowed the textual level to be somehow 'distanced' – to become a series of strange echoes accompanying the vivid *presence* of performance itself.

The lacunae of the fragmentary text bring something other than the dominance or primacy of text into question, the ideal of *unity* (where, arguably, unity is more definitive of drama than is the dominance of text). Two questions are raised through this: 1) What is artistic (dramatic) unity? 2) Why has artistic (dramatic) unity been considered desirable? The second of these is, of course, a more radical question than the first.

Unity as it has been understood in relation to drama is first and foremost *unity of action* as defined by Aristotle; the action should amount to one story only, and its structure should be such that that the removal or relocation of any incident would undermine its linear coherence, the way one incident leads to another in a 'probable or

[33] The play was performed by students of the National Theatre Drama School, Athens, and developed from work done in Zamboulakis' class 'Acting with a mask'.

necessary' way. [34] This is a kind of mapping of plotting onto logical inference. But following Peter Szondi[35] we can add that the unity of a Drama (the capitalization denotes the dominant genre with which Szondi is concerned) is more fundamentally its perfect separation from anything outside itself. This is what Szondi means when he says "the Drama is absolute".[36] Lehmann, who explicitly defines drama more broadly than Szondi, makes an analogous point in asserting that a drama always implies its own world, a totality over and above the actual action to which – and *only* to which – that action asks to be referred. Moreover, "[w]holeness, illusion and world representation are inherent in the model 'drama'; conversely, through its very form, dramatic theatre proclaims wholeness as the *model* of the real."[37] A great deal of world theatre lacks unity in this demanding sense, of course, from the plays of Hrotswitha and Guan Hanqing to those of Peter Handke. But it remains a central ideal of western culture.

The deficiency of the fragmentary text is its lack of 'dramatic wholeness' and "world representation" – terms that should be seen as synonymous – not just its lack of unity of action in the form of a coherent, causally-connected, complete plot. Theatrical 'reconstruction' (performance), insofar as it confronts this fact and does not try to cover it up, is shifted from the representational towards the presentational. In the absence of the fully realized 'world' of the drama, the worlds of the theatre and of performance appear in the gaps. Stage space and stage time become referred to – or referred back to – as themselves. Actors are blocked from full identification with their parts, forced at times to shed their masks. And so on.

The point here, of course, is not just that the actual set of fragments necessarily lacks the unity of a realized work of dramatic art (which it once had), but that – *ipso facto* – the performance text in which these fragments are then embedded will also lack unity, at least if it conforms to the prescription outlined above. Its action cannot ask only to be referred to the totality – its *own* world – implied by drama, for the performance text necessarily functions on different levels, such that there is necessarily some kind of rupture between them. Thus the play has *more than one*

[34] *Poetics* 1451a29-34: conditions that many (good) plays fail to meet.
[35] Peter Szondi, *Theory of the Modern Drama*, Edited and Translated by Michael Hays, Theory and History of Literature, volume 29 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
[36] Szondi, p. 8.
[37] Lehmann, p. 22.

world – and this holds true even if it does not go so far as to inscribe *explicitly* the (real) worlds of theatre and performance.

What is enacted in this splitting of worlds is the confrontation of the present and the past. Lack of unity, thus, indexes the fact that the past cannot be confronted *in toto*.

All study of the past – whether in archaeology, paleontology, paleoclimatology or textually recorded history – is the study of fragments. The record of the past, in no matter which of its aspects, cannot come down to us 'complete'. Hence all study of the past is reconstruction. In effect, therefore, *all study of the past is a form of story-telling*. The same holds for our relationship, as individuals, to our own pasts. Autobiographical memory is made up of fragments; these *imply* a story, or various stories, but they do not in themselves *tell* any story. We, the individuals with the memories, do that. Now, what can happen in the performance of fragmentary plays is that *the story-telling appears as an action* (even, in a curious sense, as a 'dramatic action'). It can in fact become the *through-action* of the play. As such, it is an act of 'completion' that – by appearing – exposes the radically incomplete.

Of course, there is some sense in which the performance text achieves (or should achieve) its own kind of completeness and even 'unity'. But whatever this is, it does not deny the split between its different worlds. It does not project the present act of completion back onto the past, from where it may appear to us as an imaginary completeness *of* the past.